



# Høgskulen på Vestlandet

## Engelsk 3, emne 4 - Masteroppgave

MGBEN550-O-2024-VÅR2-FLOW assign

### Predefinert informasjon

**Startdato:** 01-05-2024 09:00 CEST  
**Sluttdato:** 15-05-2024 14:00 CEST  
**Eksamensform:** Masteroppgave  
**Termin:** 2024 VÅR2  
**Vurderingsform:** Norsk 6-trinns skala (A-F)  
**Flowkode:** 203 MGBEN550 1 O 2024 VÅR2  
**Intern sensor:** (Anonymisert)

### Deltaker

**Kandidatnr.:** 107

### Informasjon fra deltaker

**Antall ord \*:** 29501

**Egenerklæring \*:** Ja

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# MASTER'S THESIS

Promoting intercultural competence through picturebooks:  
An exploration of Phil Bildner & Jesse Joshua Watson's  
*The Soccer Fence* and John Marsden & Shaun Tan's *The  
Rabbits*

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Submission Date: 15.05.2024

# Acknowledgements

After completing five years of studies at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, I am marking the end of a significant chapter in my life, which ended so much sooner than expected. Now I am looking forward to teaching career, but I will always remember the memories of this period. Writing my master's thesis has been a long, hard, as well as an educational process that has brought me knowledge that I will carry with me in the future.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Ingrid Galtung for the excellent guidance and support this year. Your thorough feedback and encouragement helped me immensely and made it possible for me to continue the hard work throughout the year.

I would also like to thank my fellow MA students at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL), for their support and encouragement throughout the writing process, as we navigated the highs and lows together. I am grateful for all my friends at the reading hall at HVL that I spent time with during this writing process, and I do not think I could have done it without all of you. Over the past five years, you have contributed to creating an unforgettable student experience for me in Bergen

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and parents at home who believed in me so that I would be able to do my very best and complete this master's thesis.

Bergen, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Emilie Loe Hestad

## Abstract

The primary focus of this master's thesis is to explore how the two picturebooks *The Soccer Fence*, written by Phil Bildner, and *The Rabbits*, written by John Marsden, might help promote intercultural competence in English language teaching in upper elementary school. Both picturebooks contain narratives addressing cultural topics such as colonial invasion, grief, power dynamics, and racial segregation. These narratives are explored in the context of theories like theory of mind and empathy, tolerance of ambiguity, as well as skills of interpreting and relating, knowledge, and attitudes. To analyze the chosen picturebooks, I have used a combination of elements from narrative theory, described by Nikolajeva (2003), Nikolajeva & Scott (2006), along with insights from *social semiotics* as described by Painter (2018, 2019).

The findings of the study suggest that these picturebooks are complex training grounds that have the potential for intercultural learning in English language teaching. They provide opportunities for learners to empathize with the characters and put themselves in the characters' shoes. The books may invite young learners to gain the knowledge and attitudes they need to have when living in a diverse and multicultural society. Regardless of how the stories are told, the books offer stories that may help promote intercultural competence through their intercultural encounters. The books serve as valuable tools that can be used for educating young learners about different cultures and how to behave in the world when encountering others, as well as the personal development in terms of becoming interculturally competent. In an educational context, this also relates to the core elements in the English subject (ENG01-04), titled *Working with texts in English*. Here, the curriculum specifically clarifies that different English texts, should be used to develop intercultural competence.

The lack of an explicit definition of the term intercultural competence in the curriculum, as well as a lack of a method for implementing the term into teachers day-to-day teaching, makes this master's thesis about intercultural competence and literary texts important in the research field. This thesis has provided an insight into what intercultural competence is, and it could facilitate teachers with a selection of suitable materials that could inspire them to work with literary texts that deal with cultural topics in the English subject to develop intercultural competence.

## Sammendrag

Hovedfokuset til denne masteroppgaven er å utforske hvordan de to bildebøkene *The Soccer Fence*, skrevet av Phil Bildner og *The Rabbits*, skrevet av John Marsden, kan bidra til å fremme interkulturell kompetanse i engelskfaget på barneskolen. Begge bildebøkene har fortellinger som tar opp kulturelle emner som kolonial invasjon, sorg og maktforhold, ved å bruke teorier som følelser og empati, tvetydighetstoleranse, ferdigheter i tolkning og relasjon og kunnskap og holdninger. For å analysere de valgte bildebøkene har jeg brukt en kombinasjon av elementer fra fortellerteori i barnelitteraturen, beskrevet av Nikalojeva (2003) og Nikslojeva & Scott (2006), sammen med innsyn fra *social semiotics* beskrevet av Painter (2018, 2019).

Funnene fra studien tyder på at disse bøkene er komplekse læringsarenaer som har potensiale for interkulturell læring i engelskfaget. De gir muligheter for elever til å kunne vise empati for karakterene og putte seg selv i karakterenes sko. Bøkene kan invitere elever til å oppnå de kunnskapene og holdningene de trenger for å bo i et mangfoldig og flerkulturelt samfunn. Uavhengig av hvordan fortellingene er fortalt, tilbyr bøkene fortellinger som kan bidra til å fremme interkulturell kompetanse gjennom deres interkulturelle møter. Bøkene fungerer som verdifulle verktøy som kan bli brukt for å lære elever om ulike kulturer og hvordan man skal oppføre seg i verden når man møter andre. Samtidig som de bidrar til personlig utvikling med tanke på å bli interkulturelt kompetent. I en skolekontekst, relaterer dette også til kjerneelementene i engelskfaget (ENG01-04), kalt *Møte med engelskspråklige tekster*. Her presiserer læreplanen spesifikt at ulike engelske tekster skal bli brukt til å utvikle interkulturell kompetanse.

Mangelen på en tydelig definisjon av interkulturell kompetanse i læreplanen, samt mangel på en metode for hvordan man kan implementere begrepet i lærernes daglige undervisning, gjør denne masteroppgaven om interkulturell kompetanse og litterære tekster viktig i forskningsfeltet. Denne masteroppgaven har gitt innsikt i hva interkulturell kompetanse er, og kan gi lærere et utvalg av passende materialer som kan inspirere dem til å jobbe med litterære tekster som omhandler kulturelle temaer i engelskfaget som fremmedspråk for å utvikle interkulturell kompetanse.

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## List of Abbreviations

CC: Communicative Competence

EFL: English as a foreign language

FLT: Foreign Language Teaching

HVL: Høgskulen på Vestlandet (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences)

IC: Intercultural Competence

ICC: Intercultural Communicative Competence

LK20: Kunnskapsløftet 2020 (The National Curriculum 2020)

# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Relevance of the Study

The growing cultural globalization of the world enriches our society, including Norway's. To get a better understanding of our society, we need to gain an intercultural understanding and be able to introduce children to topics that involve intercultural understanding. In 2022, I was an exchange student in Durban, South Africa. This is where I got the inspiration to write my Master's Thesis about intercultural competence. Intercultural competence can be defined as "The process of developing the attitudes, skills and knowledge required for constructive communication and behavior when interacting across difference" (Heggernes, 2021, p. 9). I believe Norwegians can take some inspiration from South Africa because of their openness about diversity in the post-colonialism era. Even though it was inspiring to observe how the population coexisted together, this was not the case in the height of apartheid before Nelson Mandela was elected as president in 1994. That was 30 years ago, and the remains of apartheid are still visible today. It is something that South Africans will always carry with them. I also visited Australia in 2019 and got to live with Aboriginal Australians. This was both very inspiring and devastating to experience because I could see how generations of Aboriginal Australians are still affected by The Stolen Generation assimilation policy in Australia. This ended in 1967 with the national referendum act (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.).

I believe it is important that Norwegian children understand that democracy is something that should not be taken for granted and that they get knowledge about the lack of democracy in the world today and in the past. In today's society, we are also facing terrible tragedies and wars that are threatening the world's democracy. The ongoing war between Israel and Palestine has gotten a lot of recognition in the media for being the modern world's apartheid. In March of 2022, the United Nation's special rapporteur on the situation of The Human Rights council, Michael Lynch, concluded that Israel's 55 year-long occupation of Palestine, is apartheid (United Nations, 2022). Israeli apartheid implies the institutional regime of systematic regime of oppression and discrimination of Palestine (Iversen, 2024). This is relevant to this thesis as conflicts marked by lack of understanding and respect for cultural differences and where human dignity is disappeared, are prevalent in the media that students encounter.

Although Norway is committed values such as democracy, human rights, tolerance, respect, and equality, the rights and identities of certain minorities have also faced challenges within the country. One oppressed group is The Sami People, the indigenous people of Norway and Scandinavia. In 1997, King Harald V of Norway made a public apology to The Sami People, during the opening of the third Sami Parliament. He apologized for the Norwegianization of The Sami and the assimilation of the Sami culture (The Royal House of Norway, 1997). Since then, a newer case, The Fosen case has been brought up in the media. In 2020, the wind turbine-farms on the Fosen Island were built and finished. These windmills are set up on the area that belong to the Sidaa Sami where they have their reindeer husbandry. According to the UN, this strikes against the UN-convention for civil and political rights (Danbolt, 2023). Sami activists have been striking and demonstrating outside the Norwegian parliament, because of the lacking action in the matter, and it is still an ongoing protest.

Australia's Indigenous people also got a formal apology for the oppression of The Stolen Generation. This happened in 2008, by the then prime minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd. The apology was on behalf of the nation at Australian Parliament House and acknowledged that "The laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments had resulted in the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians" (Parliament of Australia, 2008). This National Apology is considered a milestone step towards settlement between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. However, indigenous population still struggle with the aftermath of the colonization process.

The new curriculum, LK20, wants to prepare young learners for living in this world, train them to become citizens in a world of uncertainty and conflict, and provide insight into diversity and our shared humanity (Kunnskapsløftet, 2017). This is written in the core value "Identity and cultural values" in the core curriculum of LK20 and resonates with the content of the historical picturebooks chosen for this thesis. Several of these aims resonates with the concept of intercultural competence and intercultural learning, which Heggernes (2021, p. 9) refers to as the process of developing the attitudes, skills and knowledge required for constructive communication and behavior when interacting across difference.

Intercultural competence is also highly relevant within the English subject, where students

enter into a foreign language, and engage with other cultures. Intercultural competence is relevant to the competences in English after year 7, which state that “Students shall investigate ways of living and traditions in different societies in the English-speaking world and in Norway and reflect on identity and cultural belonging” (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019c). I have chosen the competence aims for after year 7 because they align with the age range for the picturebooks I am working with. The aim about ways of living and traditions in the English-speaking world, is related to the topic of being culturally aware and being able to reflect on other identities and cultures around the world, such as the identities and territories treated in this study, in Australia and South Africa. The term “Intercultural understanding” is used in the relevance and central values section of the English subject curriculum and states that “English shall help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns” (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019a). The students are not only asked to reflect on other identities and cultures, but also mindsets, ways of navigating and being in the world, and ways of coexisting with each other.

The core elements of the English subject, have a section titled *Working with texts in English* (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019b). Here, the curriculum specifically clarifies that different English texts in particular, should be used to develop intercultural competence. The interesting part about this aim, is that it does not say which genre of literary texts is more suitable for intercultural learning. Reading and working with a text replaces or is considered equal to a cultural meeting. In this thesis the books equal a cultural meeting because both books are written within a certain cultural context. With no insider-knowledge of this context we need to decode the text and using our pre-knowledge. This resonates with what we would do in an intercultural meeting.

Literary texts stage and invite us into a cultural context, ask us to interpret storylines, symbols, characters’ actions, reactions, and settings. Meanings might be ambiguous or multiple and we might have to revisit textual details several times in order to understand, as in a real-life cultural meeting. The curriculum encourages us to have an exploratory approach to culture and cultural understanding. Here, literary texts seem like valuable learning resources. When reading the section on working with texts, the different elements mentioned here align well with definitions of intercultural competence in relation to knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This aligns with why I believe intercultural competence and literary texts work great together. It emphasizes that working with texts can establish the groundwork for recognizing

both their own identity and of others, within a multicultural framework.

References to "cultural knowledge", "cultural understanding" and "cultural competence" are scattered throughout the English subject curriculum. There are even instances where these words are used interchangeably. This can be seen in the curriculum core element, *Working with text in English*:

By reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of texts in English, the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society. Thus the pupils will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns. They shall build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others' identities in a multilingual and multicultural context" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019b).

The term "competence" is more complex than the term "understanding". The curriculum does not present a set definition of intercultural competence, and how the different elements that make up this competence relate to one another. However, due to its strong presence in the curriculum, it is important that teachers understand the concept and implement it in their teaching. This thesis aims to contribute to this by showing how two historical picturebooks might promote intercultural competence, and the importance of intercultural competence in English language teaching.

Democracy and citizenship is one of the interdisciplinary topics in the Norwegian curriculum. This is a new topic for the curriculum and was implemented only four years ago, in 2020. Because of this, teachers might still be trying to learn how to implement democracy and citizenship into different subjects. In relevance to the English subject, democracy and citizenship plays a role when talking about intercultural competence. This is displayed in the aims in the statement of "knowledge of self and other". This is a part of Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, which this thesis will get into later. Democracy and citizenship in the curriculum is presented like this:

The teaching and training shall give the pupils knowledge and skills to face challenges in accordance with democratic principles. They shall understand dilemmas that arise when recognizing both the preponderance of the majority and the rights of the minority (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017).

## 1.2 Aims and Research Questions

The topic I wish to explore in this thesis is to what extent picturebooks is a suitable genre for facilitating the development of intercultural competence and what the potential for literary texts are in the EFL-classroom and English language teaching. I want to discuss how the picturebooks *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014) and *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 2010) might help promote intercultural competence in English language teaching. The term “intercultural competence” is emphasized in the new curriculum, but many teachers might not know what the term means or how it should be approached in the classroom. The aim of this thesis is to provide the teaching profession with tools that can be useful to be able to teach picturebooks with an historical and cultural context in order to develop intercultural learning. LK20 encourages developing intercultural competence through working with texts in English, and picturebooks are a potential learning resource into the field. Picturebooks open the opportunity of multimodal learning by looking at both picture and text and their interactions. This thesis will focus on intercultural competence, and I will analyze two picturebooks introduced above and find out to what extent the two books are suitable for using to foster and develop intercultural competence in English language teaching.

### 1.2.1 Research Questions

Based on the background for the thesis in the introductory chapter, I have formulated this following research question: *How might the picturebooks The Soccer Fence and The Rabbits help promote intercultural competence in English language teaching?*

In order to answer the primary research question, I have conducted three sub-research questions related to the main research question:

1. How are the intercultural encounters portrayed through text and pictures and their interactions?
2. What is the potential for intercultural learning?
3. What is the relationship between intercultural competence and literary texts?

## 1.3 Material

Studies have shown that picturebooks are a great tool to use for English language teaching



because they tell stories through both pictures and words, and open the doors to different learning opportunities, such as literacy skills, verbal skills, and ways of meaning (Birketveit, 2021, p. 17). Ways of meaning refers the fact that literature can be open to multiple interpretations and the approaches by which meaning can be conveyed or understood. Picturebooks may challenge learners and give them a helpful input into both language and culture (Birketveit, 2021, p. 17). This can be both beneficial and challenging for the learners. Based on Birketveit's research, I believe that picturebooks are a valuable resource for enhancing intercultural competence. They offer significant learning opportunities within the context of EFL-learning, facilitating an exploration of diverse cultures through words and pictures. The complex combination and relationship of text and images in picturebooks demands a lot of the reader, challenging the cognitive, linguistic, and aesthetic capacities of the reader (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2018, p. 1). These abilities are crucial for children to understand the meaning of picturebooks and the specific story that is told in the books.

I have chosen the picturebooks *The Soccer Fence* (2014), written by 2014 by Phil Bildner and illustrated by Jesse Joshua Watson and *The Rabbits* (2010), written by John Marsden and illustrated by Shaun Tan. Both books align with the moral values that I want to teach my students as a future teacher. Some of these moral values are inclusivity, democracy and appreciation of diversity. These values are presented through the storytelling of the chosen books. The stories of the books are presented quite differently, and the reader's imagination is invited to respond different ways, because of the different relationship between text and pictures. Both books bring up the difficulties of a challenged democracy and human rights, and the road to gaining it again, as well as the ways in which the road forwards depend on intercultural understanding.

### *1.3.1 The criteria for the chosen material*

The material for the thesis is mainly chosen because of my background interest for the thematic concepts in the picturebooks, as well as the way they portray intercultural meetings. Both books portray intercultural meetings, and through literary and artistic means invite the reader's response to such meetings. They differ from each other with their different story telling and use of multimodality, with realistic illustrations that construct a recognizable world in *The Soccer Fence* versus stylized, surreal illustrations in *The Rabbits*. The books also present different mindsets of positivity and hope. They also contrast in their portrayal of a

successful intercultural meeting post-apartheid in *The Soccer Fence* versus portraying the still devastating effects of colonialism in *The Rabbits*. In other words, the books' different approaches, lead to different learning opportunities. Picturebooks about historical events, like these books, may stimulate students' interest and way of thinking about the causes and effects history still has on the world today, and how we can learn to respect each other and the world around us.

#### **1.4 Previous Research**

Previous research and studies have shown that interactions with texts can foster intercultural learning. Heggernes (2021) show in her PhD that picturebooks have great potential for intercultural learning in EFL-classrooms. This thesis provides theoretical insights by examining the similarities between art appreciation and intercultural learning in the context of picturebooks. Additionally, it offers empirical insights into a less-explored area of English language teaching. Furnes & Birketveit (2020) have a study that examines the capacity of fifth-grade students in a Norwegian English as a Foreign Language class to demonstrate decentering, an aspect of intercultural competence. In this study they are also using the picturebook *The Soccer Fence* by Phil Bildner. The findings demonstrated statistical significance, suggesting that the capacity for decentering increased following the intervention.

Both studies examine how picturebooks can foster intercultural learning. However, no studies have specifically analyzed and compared *The Soccer Fence* and *The Rabbits* to explore their collective potential for promoting intercultural learning. This is the reason I opted for these specific picturebooks, to get a different view on and explore the diverse opportunities for intercultural learning in English language teaching.

#### **1.5 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter one presents the background, relevance of the study and the research question with sub-research questions. Chapter two presents the theoretical framework that will be used in order to answer the research questions. It presents the different dimensions of intercultural competence, theory on the genre of picturebooks, as well as insights into why literary texts may lend themselves well to working with intercultural competence.

Chapter three introduces the thesis' methodology, explaining the terminology and concepts that will make up the analytical tools used in the analysis. The chapter uses a multimodal framework of analysis which draws on the analytical tools; narrative theory, described by Nikolajeva & Scott (2006) and social semiotics, described by Painter (2018, 2019). Chapter four presents the analysis of the chosen picturebooks and summarizes the findings.

Chapter five discusses the findings in the light of the three sub-research questions, through the lens of the theories presented in the theory chapter. The final chapter, chapter six, presents the conclusions of the thesis, answers the main research questions, and reflects on how the thesis can improve the English subject, as well as a proposal for future research in the field.

## 2.0 Theory

This section of my thesis will present the theoretical framework that I will be using in order to answer my research question(s). This will be the foundation for the analysis of *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014) and *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 2010). I will firstly present different definitions of intercultural competence, then I will explain why literary texts, such as picturebooks, lend themselves well to working with intercultural competence. Lastly, I will give an account for what a picturebook is, as well as the way in which picturebooks may invite working with intercultural competence. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, LK20 brings up the concept of intercultural competence. In this chapter, I will investigate if the definition in the curriculum aligns with the definitions by the scholars presented in this chapter, in order to provide a thorough understanding of what this concept entails.

### 2.1 Intercultural Competence

The term “intercultural competence” has been present in the scholarly discussion of English didactics in Norway throughout the last couple of decades. Lund (2008) brought up the issue intercultural competence in the classroom over a decade ago, where she wrote about the prior Norwegian national curriculum LK06, and how the concept intercultural competence was already then being integrated to the Norwegian national curriculum. Back then, the term was not explicitly used in the curriculum, and not many people or teachers understood what the term meant. According to Simensen (2003, in Lund, 2008, p. 1), the main challenge when it comes to bringing intercultural teaching into the EFL-classroom, is the lacking understanding of what the term means in practice. This is one of the reasons I believe it is important to address the issues of understanding the term, and of implementing it in teachers day-to-day teaching in the EFL-classroom. According to Lund (2008), intercultural competence is important to be able to manage and understand the cultural encounters and challenges that everyone experiences (p. 2). This is a term and skill that is very relevant for young learners to acquire because it is something that is useful not only in school, but outside of school throughout their whole life, in our highly globalized world with diversity both within or country and classrooms.

This thesis will be using the term “intercultural competence” as its main theoretical consideration. The first word *intercultural* consists of two different words. *Inter* means

between and among, while “culture” is defined variously by many different scholars and a more complex term to define (Heggernes, 2022, p. 145). One definition of culture is “relation to the shared products, perspectives, and practices of a group” (National Standards for Foreign Language Education Project, 1999). This definition may seem simple and as mentioned earlier, does not highlight the complexity of what a culture is. Intercultural competence is used and defined by many different scholars. The three scholars I have chosen to focus on are Magne Dypedahl & Ragnhild Elisabeth Lund’s research on intercultural learning and Michael Byram’s model of Intercultural Communicative Competence. In the language teaching context, intercultural learning is also a highly relevant term. Heggernes (2021, p. 9), defines it as “the process of developing the attitudes, skills and knowledge required for constructive communication and behavior when interacting across difference”.

### *2.1.1 Culture and Identity*

In this chapter, I will present Byram’s *Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence* (1997) and how it has affected EFL-teaching. Today, one cannot mention Byram’s model without mentioning the critique it also has received throughout the years. One of the main issues with his ICC-model is how the concepts of culture and identity are presented. This is because Byram associates “culture” with the word “country” (Hoff, 2020, p. 58). This is in today’s globalized world, a very simplified concept of the term “culture”. Many people do not define their culture with the country they live in (Hoff, 2020, p. 58). Dypedahl & Bøhn (2020, p. 92) refers to that other ways of understanding culture and cultural belonging. They emphasize learning about other social contexts to help the development and understanding of other people’s references. This could be the collective memory of people and refers to the aspects that play a role in people’s lives, such as the differences of the celebration of the constitution day in The United States versus Norway (Dypedahl & Bøhn, 2020, p. 92). This knowledge is needed to understand the different mindsets of cultures around the world.

Likewise, the definition of the term “identity” has also been criticized. This is a complex term because how we identify ourselves is complicated in itself, and there are many things to take into consideration, as well as being able to grasp the idea of intercultural interactions (Hoff, 2020, p. 58). This is not something that Byram presents as an issue of concern. It is also claimed that the migration in today’s world has made it more difficult to determine people’s cultural identity (Hoff, 2020, p. 59). This is one of the reasons why both terms can be hard to

define.

Because of the critiques of Byram's definitions of culture and identity, I have chosen to use Dypedahl & Lund's more nuanced and fluid definitions. In order for Byram's model to work, we need more complex definitions of the terms. There are many definitions of culture out in the field and many nuances of the term to take into consideration. Dypedahl (2019) defines culture as "dispositions or tendencies with regard to how members of a group tend to think and behave as a result of socialization" (p. 101). This definition does not take into account geography, national borders or nationality. This is because there are many different factors that go into culture, including upbringing and family, interests, personal characteristics, religion, sexuality, gender age, profession, and education (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 17). This is where Dypedahl differs from Byram's ICC model, which will be presented later in this chapter.

Culture is looked at from many different directions and nuances. One might look at culture as "my culture", "our culture" and "their culture" (Dypedahl, 2020, p. 61). This is an attitude we want to avoid, both inside and outside of the classroom. One should be careful not to use someone's cultural background to anticipate behavior in specific situations (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 18). Exposure of and knowledge about diversity, will hopefully make learners get a broader picture about culture and not be left with a stereotypical impression about the world and our society. The goal is to avoid stereotyping at all costs. The previous Norwegian curriculum (LK06), although it did not mention IC directly, brought up a highly relevant point, namely "a deeper understanding of others and of oneself" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2010). This lies within the concept of intercultural competence and the aspect of knowledge of others is key to avoid cultural stereotyping. This is no longer mentioned in the current curriculum (LK20), but the point underpins what the current curriculum, and also many definitions of intercultural competence tend to stress.

The dangers of static and simplified definitions of culture are cultural stereotyping. Habegger-Conti & Brown (2017) proved this in their study about English textbooks in Norway. This is a study about representations of indigenous peoples, where it was proven that a static view of minorities can be dangerous (Habegger-Conti & Brown, 2017). The issue of some textbooks in the English subject in Norway is that they often only offer one side of the story and one side of a country or culture, which can lead to cultural stereotyping. It is usually one famous

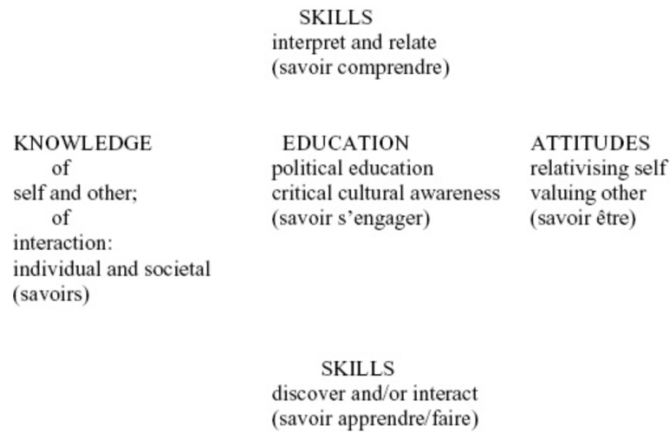
person represented from each country or timeline, like Nelson Mandela during the Apartheid in South Africa, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King Jr., during the civil rights movement in the United States. It is worth emphasizing that it is difficult to offer EFL-education materials that take the full complexity of cultures into account. One way to create a dynamic approach to culture, might be to supplement the English textbooks with other teaching materials. In this thesis, I want to show that literature and specifically picturebooks is a great approach for achieving a dynamic picture of culture in the classroom.

### 2.1.2. *Intercultural Communicative Competence*

When writing about intercultural competence, Michael Byram must be mentioned. Byram is a scholar that developed the most influential model of intercultural competence in the field, which is called *The Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)*. Byram introduced his model in 1997 and has since then been influential in the field. The model has had a significant impact on foreign language teaching (FLT) and curriculums throughout schools in Europe and countries outside of Europe (Hoff, 2020, p. 55-56). One of the main reasons for this is because it was created to accompany the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001)*. This was developed in the late 1990s and the ICC-model was a basis for the work on the project (Hoff, 2020, p. 56). The model came as a response to communicative competence (CC) because Byram thought CC was missing the ability to use language correctly in relation to context and purpose (Hoff, 2020, p. 56). *The Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)* is an answer to what communicative competence was lacking at that time. This would mean the qualities of what it took to be an intercultural speaker (Hoff, 2020, p. 56). The model revolutionized the field of foreign language education, but as mentioned earlier, was also criticized.

Byram's model consists of five elements that he calls *saviors*, which is French and translates to "knowledge" or "knowing":

- Attitudes (savior être)
- Knowledge (saviors)
- Skills of interpreting and relating (savior comprendre)
- Skills of discovery and interaction (savior apprendre/ faire)
- Political education: Critical cultural awareness (saviors' engager) (Byram, 1997).



*Figure 1: Dimensions of Intercultural Communicative Competence (retrieved from Byram, 2021, p. 31)*

The first savior, *attitudes*, involves the attitudes towards other people (Byram, 1997, p. 34). This can consist of negative attitudes, which can lead to stereotyping and prejudice. According to Byram (1997), there are also positive attitudes that can lead to stereotyping and restrain mutual understanding, therefore these attitudes “need to be attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others’ meanings, beliefs, and behaviors” (p. 34). This means meeting each other with openness and curiosity. Decentering, an element in the savior attitudes, entails the readiness to set aside one's own interpretations, beliefs, values, and actions, and to examine them from the perspective of others one is interacting with (Byram, 2021, p. 32). This is pivotal for gaining insight into different cultures.

The second savior, *knowledge*, revolves around the importance of the knowledge that people have when entering a conversation with someone from another country or with a different cultural background (Byram, 1997, p. 35). This knowledge can be about social groups and cultures within one’s country, as well as different interactions. This was the problem with the prior curriculum, LK06, that Norwegian learners were supposed to only learn about specific English-speaking countries like The United States and The United Kingdom. It is challenging to provide learners with knowledge about a culture, when the term «culture» is so complex. The question of kind of culture should be taught and how teachers can ensure that the cultural elements we teach are up to date and representative for the whole world, is highly relevant in this context.

This is not to say that the curriculum only allows for these countries, but they are the ones that



are often mentioned specifically in the textbooks. The knowledge attitude should rather focus on cultural traits in general (Lund, 2008, p. 3). Cultural traits can be language, social structure, cuisine, clothing, religious beliefs, values and norms, customs and rituals. This makes it easier for children to learn about how to communicate with whomever they encounter, no matter their language, nationality, or culture. This again, can contribute to their knowledge of different cultures.

The third savior, *skill of interpreting and relating*, brings up the ability to interpret the information one gets across. This is relevant and a crucial factor in not only in the classroom, but when reading media, texts or any information learners come across (Byram, 1997, p. 37). This dimension really depends on prior knowledge and the skill to be able to critically translate the information presented. The prior knowledge will make the learner capable of drawing connections between their prior knowledge and new information (Byram, 1997, p. 37). Prior knowledge refers to knowledge of the other and one's own culture, country, and identity, interpreting culture of the other by relating it to one's own and how to respond in interactions with different individuals. This is a valuable tool to be able to gain new information.

The fourth savior, *Skill of discovery and interaction*, becomes relevant when the learner is lacking or has no prior knowledge of the subject. This means that the learner must build up new knowledge and understanding of behaviors, meanings, and beliefs that they may encounter. This can happen through either information or exchanges between people (Byram, 1997, p. 37-38). This also means highlighting that people must be able to activate their knowledge, and to learn new things about the other in real-life communication. Byram claims that one discovery of knowledge comes through interactions and exchanges with other people. This may apply through people with different cultures and identities and making the relationship work, no matter the differences. This is what Byram calls "The intercultural speaker" (Byram, 1997, p. 38). The fifth and last savior, *Political education: Critical cultural awareness*, involves that students not only have the skills to be interculturally competent, but can also question their own understanding around the topic (Lund, 2008, p. 4).

As mentioned earlier, being critically aware is very important to be able to draw one's own meaning of the subject, and for avoiding prejudice and stereotyping. According to Byram (1997), being critically aware is "an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit

criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (p. 53). This is related to critical thinking and to question one's own background and being able to consider how our backgrounds shape our ways of understanding each other. This suggests that "intercultural speakers" need to consistently engage in critical self-reflection, questioning their own cultural values as well as those of various cultures, and recognizing and embracing the differences. Byram has a limited definition of culture, and that using and drawing on his model would involve an updated understanding of "culture", which is supplied by Dypedahl (2020).

### 2.1.3 Intercultural Learning

As previously mentioned, Byram's model of ICC has affected the Norwegian curriculum throughout the past decades by its challenge of *Communicative Competence (CC)* and the new component of the intercultural speaker (Hoff, 2020, p. 56). This change has made intercultural competence a central part of the Norwegian curriculum LK20. Within the English subject, intercultural competence is particularly emphasized in the section "Relevance and central values" and "Working with texts in English» under the core elements, as well as to the interdisciplinary topic of "Democracy and citizenship" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017, 2019b). According to Dypedahl & Lund (2020), intercultural competence, is being able to "develop the general ability to interact with others" (p. 18). Another, more specific definition of intercultural competence, is "the ability to relate constructively to people who have mindsets and/ or communication styles that are different from one's own" (Dypedahl, 2019, p. 102). This is directly linked to the democracy and citizenship aim in LK20 with the example from LK20 "They shall train their ability to think critically, learn to deal with conflicts of opinion and respect disagreement" (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017).

In relation to intercultural competence, learners are expected to be able to be self-aware and reflect on intercultural communication (Dypedahl & Lund, 2020, p. 22). Intercultural learning in the EFL-classroom will not automatically make learners interculturally competent, but working with texts such as intercultural picturebooks, can change learners' mindsets, perspective thinking, communication patterns and their own reflection (Dypedahl, 2020, p. 60). Byram and Dypedahl & Lund's definitions match with the aims of the Norwegian curriculum, by looking at the world with openness and curiosity to prevent prejudice. This is specifically mentioned in the relevance and central values of the English subject in LK20

(Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019a).

The term “intercultural encounters” is defined by the Council of Europe as “an experience you had with someone from a different country, or an experience with someone from another cultural background in your country” (Council of Europe, 2006-2020). It might not only be real-life encounters, but also meetings with text and media. Dypedahl & Bøhn (2020, p. 82), claim that our mindsets are strongly affected by different socialization processes, through meetings and the media. Here, we are influenced by different attitudes, values and beliefs that affect our moral compass of what is right and wrong. Dypedahl (2020), describes intercultural encounters and human interactions as something complex and that the intercultural encounters are more about asking the right questions rather than knowing the right answers (p. 147). Nevertheless, intercultural competence may help learners know how to speak and behave in certain situations and encounters with people and with texts. It may also spark their curiosity and engagement for different types of encounters.

## **2.2 Why Literary Texts Go Well Together with Intercultural Competence**

The reason I find literary texts to lend themselves well to working with intercultural competence is because the literary texts I have chosen provide factual information and knowledge about a historical events that may help foster intercultural competence. This relates to Byram’s (1997) savior knowledge and that knowledge should focus on cultural traits in general (Lund, 2008, p, 3), which the chosen books offer.

As well as factual information, literary texts offer fictional characters and stories which appeal to the reader on an emotional level and inspire the readers to empathize with the characters. Moreover, they present intercultural encounters in a fictional world. Heggernes (2022), argues that “critical engagement with multimodal texts can enrich ELT in Norway and promote intercultural learning” (p. 143). This aligns with my hypothesis and research question on why picturebooks are suited for intercultural learning. According to Fenner (2020), introducing literature into foreign language curriculum during the 1990s was motivated by the recognition that language encompassed not only communication but also served as an expression of culture (p. 243). Literary texts can represent the personal voice of a culture, and make learners interpret the literary text according to their own culture or another (Fenner, 2020, p. 243). In Byram’s ICC model (1997), these qualities are related to the notion of *the*

*intercultural speaker*. The intercultural speaker is a phenomenon in which Byram use to describe people involved in intercultural communication and interaction (Byram, 1997, p. 38). This can also be transferred to the notion of reading intercultural texts.

Byram's third savior of his ICC-model, *skills of interpreting and relating* (Byram, 1997, p. 37), is relevant when reading a text. Especially when reading a text that portrays an intercultural meeting. When learners are reading any type of text, including a picturebook, they need to be capable to pick up the new information and translate it into their own understanding. This also includes the fourth savior, *skills of discovery and interaction* (Byram, 1997, p. 38). This savior encourages the learner to discover and gain new knowledge about a setting or culture. This is not only relevant in real-life communication, but also when reading a literary text. The skill of discovery and interaction is applicable when the learners know little to nothing about the subject on beforehand. Literature encourages discovery and interaction because unfamiliar cultural artefacts are portrayed, as well as unfamiliar ways of interactions between characters, and unfamiliar references that need to be decoded. This can also create a spark and curiosity within the reader (Byram, 1997, p. 38). Overall, these components can foster the learning opportunities for using literary texts with intercultural encounters in the classroom. This may consist of getting insight into a culture or a historical event and being able to understand, interpret and relate to it, which shapes the intercultural reader.

### *2.2.1 Intercultural Encounters in Literary Texts*

According to Hoff (2016, in Hoff, 2019, p. 447), literary reading can improve learners' intercultural communicative skills if done the right way:

If literary reading is to contribute to learners' ability to handle complexity, conflict and ambiguity in intercultural communicative situations, the aim cannot be for them to express empathy with the literary characters that they are reading about, but also to explore feelings of confusion, tension and ambivalence that they may experience during reading, and to reflect on the reasons why they react the way they do.

This means that in order for learner's to gain ability in intercultural competence, their ability to reflect on their different reactions and emotions must be in place (Hoff, 2019, p. 456). This could be to critically explore their emotions and ask questions why they feel this way. This is

important to avoid prejudice and stereotypical attitudes. Learners' encounters with literary texts and different characters might give them the tools they need to empathize with literary characters and put their own view into perspective (Hoff, 2022, p. 171). This can be understood as a form of intercultural communication with guidelines. In this way, learners can more easily let the text shape their emotions. This chapter will later go into the different emotions that learners may be exposed to in picturebooks.

### **2.3 Picturebooks**

Bland (2013, p. 86), suggests that introducing the literary text picturebook as a first material for EFL-teaching is a good idea. There are numerous definitions of what a picturebook is out in the field. According to Birketveit (2021, p. 19), a picturebook is a book that has at least one picture on each spread. If it does not have that, it is categorized as an illustrated book. The amount of verbal text varies, from wordless picturebooks for very young learners to picturebooks for adults with more verbal text (Birketveit, 2021, p. 19). In a picturebook, the pictures and verbal text are just as important, and together they create the meaning of the text. This makes it a great as a tool for learning in the classroom, because of the interaction between text and picture and the learning opportunities this presents (Nikolajeva & Scott (2006, p. 6). These learning opportunities are the possibility of visualizing, supporting, and adding details to the text. In relation to intercultural competence, it lets us see and gain knowledge of cultural circumstances, as well as the characters' emotional reactions.

Hallberg (1982, in Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 6) differentiate between different types of picturebooks. One of these are symmetrical picturebooks, with two mutually redundant narratives and complementary picturebooks, with words and pictures filling in each other's gaps (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 12). It can be important that the words and pictures do not translate each other fully and leave gaps, to let some the translation up to the reader. This relates to what Hoff (2016, in Hoff, 2019, p. 447), says about the intercultural reader, and the need to face complexity and uncertainty. Although, this might be important for the older learners in upper elementary school, it may not be relevant for very young learners that have just learned to crack the reading code and need the symmetrical connection to understand the story and context. For older learners in elementary school, complementary picturebooks can contribute to making the learner less passive in the reading process and make the learners think, ponder and response to the book in their own pace and way. This is the landscape that

this thesis works with and is related to the counterpoint between text and picture and the narrative of the story.

The dynamic interplay between text and image within contemporary picturebooks, offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of narrative construction. The counterpoint between text and picture may be free to choose either of the two aspects of the iconotext to carry the main load of the narrative. Iconotext is defined as a form of document consisting of text and images that complement each other (Hallberg, 1982, in Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 6). With contemporary picturebooks, the relationship between text and images may not consistently be symmetrical. Instead, it can lead to complex relationships, resulting in more challenging reading experiences (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000, in Serafini 2005, p. 61). The process of reading may be seen as a parallel to intercultural encounters, which is also complex in many ways. This is where the teacher's role comes in, and their ability to lead good discussions that encourage the learners to be critical readers and participate, investigate the challenges of the book, and understand the material. This relates to Byram's third savior, skill of interpreting and relating (Byram, 1997, p. 37), where the learners are supposed to critically translate the information presented to them, and to Hoff's point about facing complexity. This is a useful skill when reading picturebooks.

Picturebooks and multimodal texts in an educational setting look at the relationship between text and pictures. According to Serafini (2005), "readers and teachers require to be alike to navigate the non-linear structures of these texts, generate and negotiate interpretations, and investigate the relationships between images and written text, in order to make sense of these stories" (p. 61). This also relates to Byram's third savior of *skill of interpreting and relating*. This leads to an investigation process that can help learners to eventually develop competence in how to understand the material, and in this case, foster and develop intercultural learning in the English language teaching. As mentioned previously, it is mentioned specifically in the core curriculum of LK20, and in this thesis I will show how relevant literary texts and especially picturebooks can be for English language teaching. Picturebooks have the potential for engaging students' learning in many ways, such as their critical thinking skills, imagination, multimodality, and cultural awareness.

### 2.3.1 Tolerance of Ambiguity

Heggernes (2020), talks about how picturebooks can be used in the classroom, and that they can both strengthen one's own identity and be the source of knowledge and empathy for other people, as well as contribute to intercultural learning. This is the main reason that I want to use *The Soccer Fence* and *The Rabbits* in my research. She also talks about the tolerance of ambiguity, which is the ability to accept uncertainty, and the ability to adapt to different situations that you are not used to (Heggernes, 2020, p. 117). Meek (1988, in Serafini, 2005, p. 60), defines the tolerance of uncertainty as the ability to refrain closure in order to see what happens as the story progresses. This means that the learners must be patient with the beginnings of the stories and understand that they are engaged in a process of being able to understand the book. This can especially be relevant to picturebooks where there can be gaps where the complete meaning of the book is up to the reader to interpret. This is related to the relationship between text and pictures and how they complement each other. It can be discouraging for learners not to completely understand the story, and that is why teachers should support learners in the process of tolerating ambiguity.

Serafini (2005) also brings up the importance of ambiguity in EFL-learning and explains it as: "An important asset for second language studies, as well as the study for open, ambivalent literary texts" (Serafini, 2005, p. 62). Learners need to understand and accept the challenges that these books may provide (Serafini, 2005, p. 60). She continues to state that the more learners are presented to these kinds of texts and books, the more their interpretive skills will improve (p. 60). The importance of interpretative skills is also present in Byram's (1997) savor, *skill of interpreting and relating*, the ability to interpret the information you get across. This will also improve the learners' critical thinking by getting their thought process starting and doing their own analysis of the book. Nikolajeva (2018), states that the ambiguity that is created by the relationship between text, image and iconotext, often makes the learners more accepting of the ambiguity in the book. When learners are reading something unfamiliar, images often help the learners and capture their attention (p. 113). This can help the learners find something familiar in the unfamiliar and be more relatable than unknown text. In well written picturebooks, image and text should be able to fill the gaps of each other (Nikolajeva, 2018, p. 113).

### 2.3.2 Historical Fiction Picturebooks

Text and images can be read differently with different lenses based on learners' cultural

knowledge, which is why I think it is important that learners have some knowledge of the history of South Africa, Australia and colonialism before reading the books, which also makes it easier to enter into the story. Both picturebooks I am going to use in this thesis are books that are set in a post-colonial context. This makes them historical fiction picturebooks. Especially *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014), combines both factual history and a fictional story in the book. There can be difficulties with teaching historical events by using fictional picturebooks. If the books are not historically accurate, they may be invaluable tools for teaching.

According to Wadham, Garret & Garret, historical picturebooks can present limitations as teaching materials due to age issues, topic coverage, and authenticity (2019, p. 65). Therefore, it is important that the picturebooks are carefully chosen and accurately portrays the historical aspects. Children also do not have the background knowledge to navigate the historical context portrayed in the picturebooks, and by that misrepresentation can be damaging (Wadham, Garret & Garret, 2019, p. 65). This relates to Byram's (1997), second savior, *knowledge*. Knowledge does not only relate to communication and conversations, but also to gaining knowledge from different texts. Historical fiction picturebooks can be a way of gaining the knowledge learners need for becoming an intercultural speaker and learning about other cultures. The way these books portray intercultural encounters is in great relation in terms of intercultural competence. We can learn from the past in terms of intercultural meetings and these books portray both successful and less successful ways of encountering and engaging with foreign contexts.

One of the chosen books, *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014) is filled with contextual information about real historical events, while the other one, *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 2010), is more abstract and leaves room for the reader to interpret the fictional narrative that is presented. It can be challenging for young learners to understand the difference between history and fiction because of their lack of background knowledge. However, the most important thing to take into consideration is that the picturebooks are age appropriate while still doing the history justice. In this thesis, I want to investigate and compare the different takes on historical settings that these picturebooks portray. I will look at their learning opportunities and the strengths and weaknesses of both books as teaching materials.



### *2.3.3 Emotions in Picturebooks*

Emotional and personal involvement, such as empathy, is essential for the development of the intercultural reader (Byram, 2021, p. 45). Nikolajeva (2018) suggests that picturebooks can enhance children's emotional literacy (p. 110). Picturebooks often create anticipation with the page turning of the picturebook. This is the anticipation of something unfamiliar to the learners (Nikolajeva, 2018, p. 113). This may create an engagement with the learners. The learners' curious self might be preparing looking for something familiar or unfamiliar. Whatever details, text, or images they encounter, the reader is encouraged to either stay on the spread and examine it more thoroughly or go to the next page. Either way, this creates a spark of emotion in learners, which can involve making connections, activating the imagination, or triggering memory (Nikolajeva, 2018, p. 113).

Theory of mind and empathy are two emotional skills that Nikolajeva (2018) highlight. According to Nikolajeva (2018), theory of mind revolves around the ability to understand how other people think. On the other hand, empathy revolves around the understanding of how other people feel (p. 114). Both emotional skills are very important in everyone's day-to-day life and most people can recognize these emotions every day. These emotions are also relevant when reading picturebooks, and the learners being able to recognize how the characters in the book think and feel. These skills are also developed over time, and picturebooks are a great tool to practice and train on recognizing the emotions (Nikolajeva, 2018, p. 114).

Picturebooks convey strong emotions because they use both text and image to promote a message. The text is often a small part of the spread, which means that the text has to be concise and to the point. Emotions are often described with metaphors and other figures of speech. Since the text in picturebooks is often a small part of the spread, it is the images that are the main source of conveying emotions in the picturebook. Images can also represent emotions that the learner is not as familiar or experienced with, at least not when it is described (Nikolajeva, 2018, p. 115). This means that learners can experience new real-life emotions through picturebooks, which is a great way of learning new things. The images and characters can engage emotions with the learner that feels like real like real emotions (Nikolajeva, 2018, p. 115). This goes hand in hand with the emotional skills like empathy and theory of mind. This also resonates with intercultural competence in understanding how

people think and feel, as well as Byram's (1997) first savior, *attitudes*. Attitudes involve being able to analyze the viewpoint of others (Byram, 1997, p. 34).

Social emotions are a concept that involve more than one character (Nikolajeva, 2018, p. 115). Both picturebooks I have chosen for my thesis portray meetings between two parties; two individuals and two groups, which make this concept of emotions highly relevant to my thesis. Social emotions are related to emotions such as empathy, love, hate, guilt, shame, jealousy, envy, embarrassment, and pride (Nikolajeva, 2018, p. 115). Intercultural encounters with two characters also may portray social emotions, because they involve interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds and arise in response to interpersonal relationships. These are emotions that can be difficult to explain with words, but that can be portrayed in the images of the characters in the book, and that are communicated visually. These are feelings that learners can translate by looking at the emotions of the characters in the book. This can also create a development of empathy toward the characters in the book.

It must be mentioned that empathy and the ability to empathize is an ability that children develop over time and continues to develop until puberty (Nikolajeva, 2018, p. 115). Therefore, picturebooks are recommended not only for young children, but also for older children in upper elementary school (Nikolajeva, 2018, p. 115). Here, the learners can read multimodal texts and be challenged by and recognize different social emotions that are presented to them. By highlighting that picturebooks can aid emotional development, Nikolajeva (2018), supports my hypothesis on why picturebooks a highly useful tool to use for intercultural learning in English language learning.

## 3.0 Methodology

This chapter will describe the different methods used to answer the research question: *How might the picturebooks *The Soccer Fence* and *The Rabbits* help promote intercultural competence in English language teaching?* In this thesis, I will be investigating picturebooks by doing a literary multimodal analysis of the data presented. To do so, I have chosen a multimodal framework of analysis which draws on narrative theory, as described by Serafaini & Reid (2022), Nikolajeva (2003) and Nikolajeva & Scott (2006), as well as social semiotics described by Painter (2018, 2019). This chapter will introduce terminology and concepts that will make up my analytical tools in the chapters to come. I have chosen to combine these frameworks because they each have a slightly different approach. Whereas the literary framework involves the visual, textual, and graphic elements, the social semiotics goes into detail and draw on the composition of the different modalities. Rather than utilizing distinct elements, the frameworks each focus more closely on certain elements. These methods combined propose that scholars and educators can grasp the complexity of picturebooks and their significance in educational contexts only by orchestrating a variety of analytical frameworks (Serafaini & Reid, 2022, p. 1). The frameworks I have chosen combined encompass all the aspects necessary to cover a multimodal analysis.

### 3.1 Method of Analysis

Lewis (1990, in Serafaini & Reid, 2022) has a quote that states: “Readers read the words through the pictures and the pictures through the words” (p. 6). This forms the foundation of a multimodal analysis, which is the method I will be using in this thesis and explains the general workings of multimodality. This term involves the visual, textual, and graphic elements in a text and how they interplay with each other (Serafaini & Reid, 2022, p. 2). The field of multimodality is something many scholars have been interested in in modern times research has increased significantly over the years. In terms of picturebook research, multimodal analysis consists of analyzing the different aspects of a picturebook and how they work together. Serafaini & Reid (2022) explain it as an analytical framework as structured and crafted to explore textual, visual, and multimodal occurrences across diverse sociocultural contexts and environments (p. 4). In other words, multimodal analysis is a tool for understanding and interpreting the complexity of a picturebook. Stefani & Reid (2022, p. 2), highlight picturebooks as a textual, visual, cultural, and multimodal experiences, which will

be highlighted in this thesis' analysis. A multimodal analysis examines the interaction of text and image and other elements within a picturebook, and this will be further explained in this chapter.

### *3.1.1 Multimodal Analysis*

Multimodality is a complex field, and Stefani & Reid (2022) have organized multimodal analysis in three different categories; semiotic frameworks, literary frameworks, and artistic frameworks (p. 4). In this chapter, I will be using the semiotic and literary frameworks as categories to organize the analysis presented later in this thesis. I will not be using artistic frameworks because it is not as relevant to my research question and chosen picturebooks. These frameworks may help, and guide learners understand the content and context of the picturebooks in an educational setting, and help the readers understand the potential that the books have for intercultural learning.

## **3.2 Analytical Frameworks**

### *3.2.1 Literary Frameworks*

The literary frameworks highlight and consider the picturebook in its entirety, considering all components and their interrelationships, rather than analyzing them as separate elements, when analyzing the text (Serafini & Reid, 2022, p. 11). The framework is interested in the complexity of a picturebook, including text, image, and other elements of the multimodal text (Serafini & Reid, 2022, p. 11). The literary frameworks emphasize that the various modalities play different roles, and when they interact with each other, as they form both a narrative and a meaning (Serafini & Reid, 2022, p. 11). Every element of the picturebook adds to the meaning of the text, which is why the picturebook should be analyzed as a whole and how the modalities converge, correspond, and disagree with each other (Serafini & Reid, 2022, p. 13). This resonates with Hallberg's concept of the iconotext (Hallberg, 1982, in Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006) introduced in the theory chapter, which points to an assemblage of text and image which constitutes a whole. This relates to the literary frameworks because the iconotext looks at the picturebook in its entirety, where all aspects of the picturebook are considered and together present a meaning.

### *3.2.2 Narrative Theory*

Narrative theory consists of multiple different features. According to Nikolajeva (2003), the concept of narrativity includes composition, characterization, and perspective (p. 6). This is a way of looking at well written pedagogical children's literature, that examines all the different characteristics of children's literature, and in this case, picturebooks. Nikolajeva (2003) suggests that narratology investigates how narratives are influenced by the interactions among the perspectives of the author, narrator, characters, and readers (p. 10). Narratology provides different tools to analyze a text, and the most important ones for the analysis of this thesis will be presented below.

### *3.2.3 Point of view and Narrative voice*

The term "point of view" is used in picturebook analysis and in narrative theory. According to Nikolajeva & Scott (2006), the point of view can be described as "who sees" in the picturebook (p. 117). This is to describe the position of the narrator, the character(s), and the implied reader (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 117). The point of view is often laid upon us by the author and the illustrator who have written and illustrated the book. The point of view is mainly carried by the pictures, although the verbal text also can convey a point of view (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 117-118). The point of view rarely corresponds with the main character's first person perspective, and we hardly see from the perspective of a first-person narrator. This would mean that the protagonist is never to be seen in the narrative. Pictures cannot express direct speech, which is why it is considered the point of view. Young learners can have the same role as the child protagonist, as they are just as inexperienced and unaware (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 11). Picturebooks most often have children as protagonists, but in modern picturebooks this may not always be the case, as for one of my chosen picturebooks. Children often experience the same things in life at the same time as they read it. This is why it is interesting for teachers to read with young learners, to see their interpretation and understanding of the book, and read the book through their perspective. In many cases, the point of view zooms in on the child protagonist.

The term "narrative voice" is in contrary to "point of view", described as "who speaks". Here, the verbal text is the main carrier of the meaning of the book and narrative voice (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 117). The narrative voice differs in different types of narrations, and the narrative voice can either be a personal character or an impersonal voice (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 11). The impersonal voice refers to the third-person narrator voice. As will be shown in the

analysis that follows, both books operate with a first-person narrative voice, their narratives being told either through a personal character or a collective group.

#### *3.2.4 First-person Narrative*

The first-person narrative is the most common perspective among picturebooks for young learners. A first-person narrator in a picturebook, implies that we share the narrator's point of view, but never see them in any picture (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 125). There is also a difference between the "objective" and "subjective" perspective in the first-person narrative. The "objective" perspective is often the adult perspective, while the "subjective" perspective is the child perspective. Sometimes, the meaning may only be identified by the adult coreader (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 129). This may be the case in both of my chosen picturebooks where background knowledge of history is needed to understand the whole story and meaning of the picturebooks. Young readers might not draw the strings or make the connection of the book if their background knowledge is lacking.

#### *3.2.5 Plot*

In children's literature, the plot and temporal structure are important aspects of the story. Most children's books do not begin in "in medias res", but follow the exposition, complication, and climax-rule (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 6). The plot of the story also often ends with a happy ending, but this is not the case with one of my chosen picturebooks. *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 2010), ends with a question and an open ending. This is a so-called ambiguous ending, where the ending is up to the imagination of the reader. This is something that a traditional ending would not do (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 7).

#### *3.2.6 Characterization*

The characterization and narrative devices used by writers to reveal a character, are also important aspects of a children's book. The characteristics of the characters of a book are important to the story, but in children's books characters are often more simply portrayed than in adult books. According to Nikolajeva (2003), the characters offer multiple subjectivities, as well as different experiences to a book (p. 8). Although the characters also are important, children's literature is more focused on the plot than the characters themselves. This is what we call action-oriented (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 8). This is not to say that all children's books are

like this. Some contemporary children's books do have more complex characters and are more character-oriented narratives. For young learners, it can also be easier to understand fictional characters, than real people (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 9). Here, they can use their own imagination and make up their own scenarios about the characters portrayed in the book.

In children's books and especially picturebooks, illustrations are an important factor of the characterization of the characters. Illustrations facilitate our first observation of the characters and can complement or contradict the textual descriptions of the characters (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 9). Characters are described by appearance, social class, intelligence, manners, and temporary feelings, as well as their actions (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 9). All these descriptions contribute to the whole picture of the character. Also, when the reader looks at the characters' reactions and actions, they can draw their own conclusions to their own understanding (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 9). This also relates to the characters' personalities. When considering picturebooks, particularly in interpreting the emotions conveyed through illustrations, the interpretation largely up to the reader. Characterization relates to my thesis and intercultural competence because intercultural competence is all about relations to other people, and how they act and appear as characters in a book. All features of a character shape how they act and react in intercultural meetings.

### *3.2.7 Temporality*

Temporality in narrative theory, consists of when, where, and how long the action of the story takes place (Nikolajeva, 2003, p. 12). In children's books, the events are often presented chronologically because it is the most suited for young learners and their understanding. This is also the case for picturebooks and specifically the two chosen picturebooks in this thesis. This makes it easier for them to follow along in the narrative. Both plots in my chosen picturebooks, follow chronological events over a longer period of time, which is a deviation from most narratives. The duration of the chosen picturebooks is presented in different manners, where one specifically states the dates and years, while the other one does not.

### *3.2.8 Setting*

Nikolajeva & Scott (2006) describe the setting in a picturebook as something that defines the environment and context within which the story unfolds, shaping the world in which the

events occur (p. 61). In picturebooks, the setting can be portrayed through both pictures and words, which can both describe and show the setting (Nikolajeva & Scott, p. 61). When the setting is portrayed and showed through pictures, the reader is allowed more freedom of interpretation (Nikolajeva & Scott, p. 62). The portrayal can also vary in text-picture interactions when reading the book in its entirety. There are different elements to the setting of a picturebook, which may consist of negative space and framing (Nikolajeva & Scott, p. 62). These elements shape how the book is portrayed.

Setting is of educational importance when discussing historical events, foreign contexts, and intercultural competence because the specifics of the setting can provide insights into locations and historical periods that extend beyond the young reader's familiarity. This is achieved subtly, offering an understanding of unfamiliar customs, values, and the cultural context in which the story unfold (Nikolajeva & Scott, p. 63). Both picturebooks in this thesis, offer the perspective of cultural values and realities of colonial Australia and South Africa during Apartheid. These aspects are important to get the full back story of the historical context of the books.

### *3.2.9 Paratextual Elements*

The paratextual elements of a picturebook are relevant to look at when analyzing a picturebook. The term “paratext“ involves elements such as format, fonts, illustrations, title page, covers, and endpapers (Birketveit, 2021, p. 27). These elements have the potential to evoke the reader's expectations and influence the process of obtaining a meaning (Birketveit, 2021, p. 27). The paratextual elements are there for captivating the reader and form the reader’s first impression of the book. The front cover is the first thing that catches the reader’s attention of the book. This is what create the initial expectations the reader has for the book (Birketveit, 2021, p. 27). The back cover also holds significance as it frequently includes written information about the plot and the author (Birketveit, 2021, p. 27). This also says something about what expectations the reader can have of the book. Endpapers are also an important element that often reinforce and emphasize the theme of the story (Birketveit, 2021, p. 27). All elements combined, make up the meaning of the picturebook and invites the reader in through various avenues. In this part of the methodology chapter, I have written about the different aspects of a literary analytical framework. I will be moving on into the social semiotic frameworks, which is a more detail-oriented variant of multimodal analysis.



### **3.3 Social Semiotic Frameworks**

#### *3.3.1 Multimodal Social Semiotics*

The second analytical framework I will be using in this thesis, is a social semiotic framework. This perspective is relevant to my work because it studies the finer details of picture-text relationships. Serafini & Reid (2022) highlight the social semiotic perspective as the interrelationships between the different elements in a picturebook (p. 6). Many scholars have written about social semiotics. Halliday (1978 in Serafini & Reid, 2022, p. 9) was the first scholar to develop “the systemic functional theories”. His systematic functional theories include Ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions as a model for understanding visual and multimodal occurrences in text-image assemblages in general (Serafini & Reid, 2022, p. 9). His model has been used and further developed in picturebook research by other scholars. Different scholars have adapted the framework of systemic functional theories to understand the multimodal narrative. One of these is Painter (2018, 2019). I will be borrowing and using her approach in this thesis.

#### *3.3.2 The ideational and Textual Metafunction*

According to Painter (2018), social semiotics are examined in three different contexts in metafunctional terms: The ideational, the interpersonal and the textual meaning (Painter, 2018, p. 425-426). I will focus on the interpersonal metafunction but will also briefly explain the other metafunctions to gain a comprehensive understanding of the entire framework. Social semiotic frameworks are used to inform the explorations of different visual materials (Painter, 2019, p. 35). This is the reasoning for why I picked this framework for this chapter, and why it fits well with analyzing picturebooks. It does so in a very detailed and systematic manner, which might make it a good companion to the literary framework and focuses on narrative structures and the text as a whole.

The ideational meaning revolves around the content of the text, story, and image. This refers to whatever is portrayed, which can be characters, actions, objects, as well as things and settings that can be described in the picture, and involves the settings, events, and characters (Painter, 2019, p. 25). The textual meaning, links and organizes the ideational and interpersonal meaning. This contributes to making a meaning of the whole text. The textual metafunction is there to organize the ideational and interpersonal meanings in the narrative of

the book (Painter, 2019, p. 33).

### *3.3.3 The Interpersonal Metafunction*

This chapter will specifically focus on the interpersonal metafunction because it is the one that is most relevant to the chosen picturebooks in this thesis. The interpersonal metafunction consists of the interactive connection with the ones who receive it. This implies for both the verbal text as well as images (Painter, 2019, p. 25). The interpersonal metafunction can be presented as feelings and emotions, in communication between characters, portrayed both visually and verbally (Painter, 2019, p. 25). In other words, this metafunction deals with the relationship between the book and the reader and the relationship between the characters. Such meaning potentials can be the readers' view on the story and the characters' view on other characters within the story. This is often the metafunction that hooks the readers' attention into the content of the book. Examples of these meaning potentials are social distance, power and power relations, ambience, affect and force. These will be further explained later in this chapter.

The hook on the reader's attention can be done through the involvement with the characters that young learners can empathize with or become enchanted by (Painter, 2019, p. 31). This involvement can draw the reader in, making it more enjoyable to follow the story. The visual and verbal aspect of the story can make the readers feel like they are in the characters position, by the focalization, or feel like they are watching them from outside the story, by the point of view (Painter, 2019, p. 32). Focalization is "the character gaze and alignment, or not with the reader's gaze, as well as focalization via sourcing of perceptions and thoughts" (Painter, 2019, p. 32). The emotional tone and view can make the learners feel like they are a part of the story, or they may relate to it in their own life.

In the interpersonal metafunction there are a few meaning potentials that are particularly relevant. Social distance can include the shot size and the naming choices and endearments by the narrator and is relevant for the relation between the reader and characters, as well as the relation between the different characters in the book (Painter, 2019, p. 32). Power and power relations describe how the characters are presented in relation to each other (Painter, 2019, p. 32). This can portray the power relations in the story. Another meaning potential, visual graduation, is in the verbal text about the way different meanings and feelings are amplified

or reduced (Painter, 2019, p. 32). Visual graduation in images can mean presented out of scale, different color choices or extremely exaggerated in size (Painter, 2019, p. 32). All these aspects contribute to how the reader interprets the story.

#### *3.3.4 Interpersonal Metafunction and Intercultural Meetings*

The interpersonal metafunction in a narrative, is the communicative interaction, infused with different feelings and emotions (Painter, 2018, p. 420). The intriguing aspect of the interpersonal perspective is its compatibility with intercultural encounters, coming from the relationships between the reader and the book, as well as among the various characters within the book. This allows for a deeper and more detailed analysis of the relationship between the reader and the content of the book. In intercultural meetings there is a desire for emotional relations with the characters to be able to relate to the characters and emphasize with what they are going through in the story. This includes the ability to consider their choices and reactions, while trying to understand why they act and feel like they do. As mentioned earlier, this may engage the reader to become a part of the story world. This is an important aspect in the picturebooks chosen for this thesis and may make the young learners able to put themselves in the characters' shoes.

#### *3.3.5 The Meaning Potential of Image and Language*

The meaning potential of image and language is an approach to understand the visual meaning in a picturebook analysis (Painter, 2018, p. 423). It requires aligning the potential meanings of verbal and visual systems, acknowledging that their unique characteristics correspond to similar areas of meaning rather than identical sets of options (Painter, 2018, p. 423). In order to conduct a multimodal analysis effectively, it is important to establish a systematic connection between visual analysis and verbal analysis (Painter, 2018, p. 423). The different meaning potentials are modes made to explain and guide the understandings drawn from analyzing a picturebook. The different meaning potentials are shown and further explained in table 1.

#### *3.3.6 Complementary Interpersonal Meaning Systems Across Image and Language*

In this thesis, I will be borrowing table 40.2 from Painter (2018, p. 424). This table looks at how the interpersonal metafunction may be analyzed in multimodal texts. I will be using this

table to analyze the two picturebooks in the next chapter of this thesis, in tandem with the literary framework introduced previously in this chapter. The following analytical tool kit from Painter ties in with the previous framework and looks at the specific meaning potentials and the interplay between the visual and verbal text, focusing on the specifics and details when it comes to interpersonal relations in a picturebook. While the literary framework is relevant for analyzing the nature and development of the narrative structure as a whole, Painter’s table is useful when studying the interpersonal aspects of the text in detail. The table invites us to consider how meaning is shared out between the verbal and visual modalities. This involves examining the entire spectrum of a picturebook and analyzing the various meaning potentials in detail.

*Table 1: Interpersonal Metafunction*

<b>Interpersonal Metafunction</b>		
Meaning potential	Visual realization	Verbal realization
<b>Affiliation</b>		
Focalization	Character gaze and alignment (or not) with reader’s gaze	Focalization via sourcing of perceptions and thoughts
Power and power relations	Vertical angle of viewing	Reciprocity vs. inequality of linguistic choices between characters
Social distance	Shot size	Nature of naming choices, endearments, etc. by narrator
Proximity	Relative proximity/ touch of depicted characters	Nature of naming choices, endearments, etc. between characters
Involvement	Horizontal viewing angle of reader	Solidarity via specialized vocabulary, slang, range of topic choice by narrator
Orientation	Horizontal angle between characters	Solidarity via specialized vocabulary, slang, range of topic choice by narrator
Visual graduation	Depicted out of scale in size, color choices or exaggerated	Feelings amplified or reduced
<b>Feeling</b>		
Ambience	Color choices of relative, warmth, vibrancy, etc.	Atmosphere created through tone and elaboration of circumstantiation
Affect	Emotion on depicted faces, and body stance	Attitude via evaluative language
Force	Exaggerated size or angle, repetitions, proportion of frame filled, etc.	Intensification, repetition, etc.

### 3.4 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

In a multimodal analysis the limitations of the study should be discussed considering personal bias, reliability, validity, and generalization. Reliability is defined by Kvale (2007, in Krumsvik, 2014, p. 158) as it relates to the reliability of a research account. The reliability of this analysis shows in the reliable multimodal framework of analysis from Serafaini & Reid (2022), Nikalojeva (2003), Nikolajeva & Scott (2006) and Painter (2018, 2018), which underpins and strengthen my chose of method for analyzing the picturebooks.

Silverman (2010, in Krumsvik, 2014, p. 159), defines generalizability as the degree to which something observed in one context can be applied more generally. This thesis provides a single perspective on the opportunities for intercultural learning in historical fiction picturebooks. This implies that the findings cannot be generalized to all picturebooks or to every individual who analyzes them. In other words, no reader is completely neutral, and it is impossible to make the analysis entirely objective.

My pre-knowledge of the historical aspect, as well as of the countries depicted in both picturebooks, will affect the position I analyze the books from. Moreover, my residency and visits to both countries might contribute to a personal bias in my interpretation and analysis of the cultures depicted in both books. This relates to what Gadamer (2010, p. 302) says about our prejudice, which is about the pre-knowledge we bring into the interpretation and understanding of the books, in a hermeneutic process.

Validity is about whether one has examined what one intended to examine (Krumsvik, 2014, p. 120). In the analysis I have picked a selection of spreads from the books, which indicates that the findings could have turned out differently if I had chosen different spreads. I used my own judgement to pick out the most fitted spreads for intercultural learning and for the portrayal of intercultural encounters, in order to answer the research question(s).

## 4.0 Analysis and Findings

This chapter will analyze the selected picturebooks using a combination of elements from narrative theory, described by Nikolajeva (2003) and Nikolajeva & Scott (2006), along with insights from social semiotics as described by Painter (2018, 2019). While the overarching narratological categories will be used to structure the analysis, Painter's model will be used throughout the chapter to tend the interpersonal dimension of the narrative. This chapter will study these texts potential for intercultural learning, focusing on the portrayal of intercultural encounters and interpersonal relationships and how these engage or involve the reader. These picturebooks will be analyzed in relation to the research question and sub-research questions: *How might the picturebooks *The Soccer Fence* and *The Rabbits* help promote intercultural competence in English language teaching?* Essentially, the analysis centers on the picturebooks' potential to promote intercultural competence.

Sub-research questions:

1. How are the intercultural encounters portrayed in *The Soccer Fence* and *The Rabbits* through text and pictures and their interactions?
2. What is the potential for intercultural learning?
3. What is the relationship between intercultural competence and literary texts?

### 4.1 The Soccer Fence

#### 4.1.1 Plot

The first picturebook I will be analyzing is *The Soccer Fence* (2014), written by Phil Bildner and illustrated by Jesse Joshua Watson. *The Soccer Fence* is a picturebook about Hector, a young black boy living at the height of apartheid in Johannesburg, South-Africa. Hector tries to join the soccer game of a group of white boys in a park, but he is not allowed because of his skin color and race and the way apartheid has inflicted South Africa. When apartheid is coming to an end, he is finally allowed to join the soccer team on the other side of the fence. The picturebook is a touching story about a boy who wants to be included in the sport he loves the most. The book portrays the consequences apartheid had for a young child and how the black population were segregated and separated from the rest of the society.

The story culminates with Hector being introduced to the blonde boy Chris, who later invites

him to play soccer together with him and the rest of his team. The title *The Soccer Fence* may be an obvious choice by the author and invites the reader to think about a regular fence outside a soccer field that separates the game from the outside world. In this book, the fence is just not a regular fence, but one that portrays the divisions of apartheid, showing who is invited to be part of the team and play the game in South Africa socially, economically, and politically. In other words, the fence gradually becomes a symbol for the institutional racial segregation that separated people on the basis of race. The fence is repeated in various forms or shapes throughout the included spreads, and the exclusion is also portrayed through the fence. One type of fence that is found in Hector's part of town is the barrier fence they are supposed to stay inside of. Here, we are included in his team, on his side of the fence, and the reader is invited to engage in the game described above. This establishes the framework for the reading process. The meaning potentials social distance and involvement are portrayed in spread 1, through the use of shot size and viewing angle of the reader. The angle of Hector, looking up at him, makes the reader feel like we are a part of the soccer game. It is almost like he is kicking the ball towards the reader.

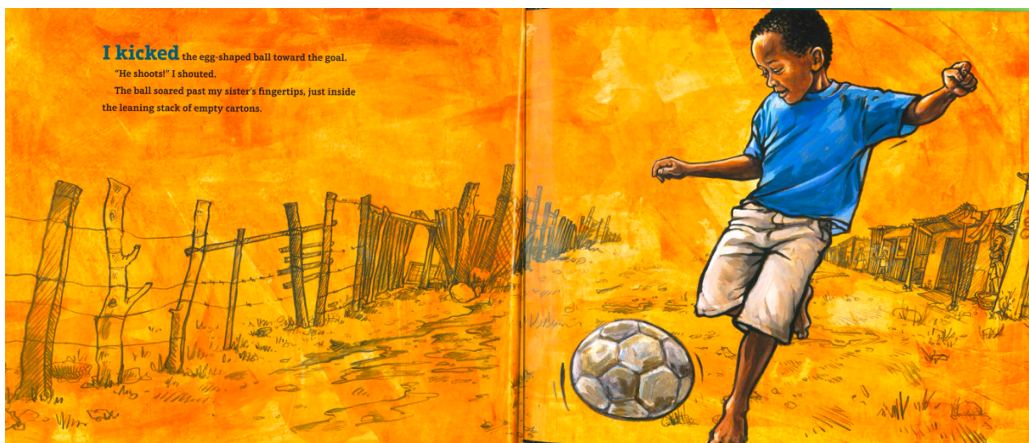


Figure 2: *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 1)

#### 4.1.2 Paratextual Elements

The story's plea to the reader to join in on Hector's story is highly present in the paratext. The paratextual elements of the book consist of the front cover, rear cover, and endpapers. The book depicts a multitude of emotions, which are firstly presented on the front cover. The under title of this book says: "A story of friendship, hope and apartheid in South Africa" (Bildner & Watson, 2014). This provides the reader with a clear idea of what to expect from the content of this book. Hope of acceptance and inclusion are attitudes that both the main

character acknowledges, as well as given to the reader through the modalities. Through text and illustrations, the book also invites the reader to share in on this feeling. The front cover of the picturebook portrays the main character Hector, holding a worn-out and tattered soccer ball. He is standing in front of the nice-looking fence, looking directly at the reader with a serious face. In the background, on the other side of the fence, the blonde boy Chris and another boy from his team are playing soccer together with a ball with much better quality than Hector's ball. They are looking the other way, with a happy grin on their faces. The meaning potential in the front cover is involvement and horizontal viewing angle of the reader. Hector is looking straight at the reader, almost as if he is making direct eye contact with us. This indicates that it is his story we are going to read and that the hope of acceptance belongs to him.

Endpaper 2 depicts a typical looking township. The town is drawn with a grey pencil, and the houses look like small sheds with tin roofing and clothes hanging on lines between them. Even though it looks like the people of the township does not have much in material terms, it looks like a peaceful place.

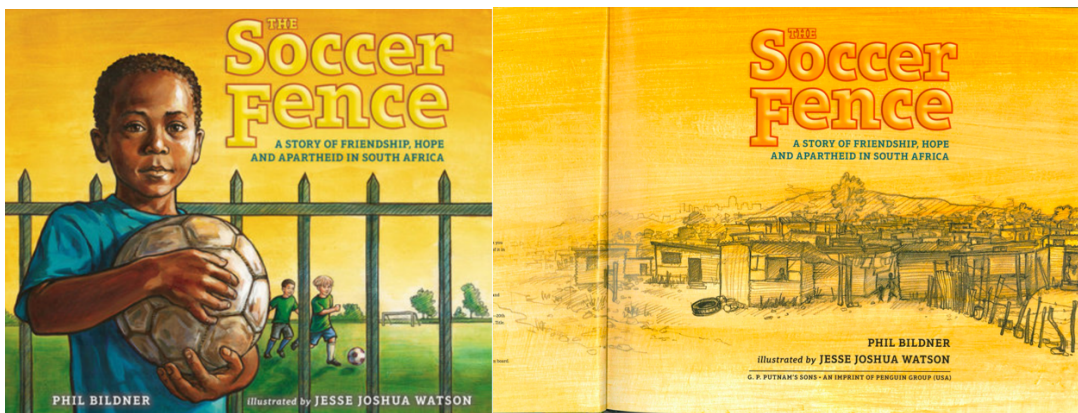


Figure 3: *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014, front cover and endpaper 2)

The rear cover is in contrast to the front page, in a blue color. In the middle of the cover is a circle with the same illustration of Hector as in spread 1 on the book. Under the illustration it says: “In a country struggling with acceptance, hope can come in many different forms” (Bildner & Watson, rear cover). This quote signals the essence of the book, which is the hope for a change. The pages before the last endpapers present the factual history of apartheid and the historical timeline of apartheid of the racial segregation the country faced from the late 1940s to the early 1990s. For young learners who do not have much background information



on South Africa's history, this can be a very useful resource to encounter before reading the book. The factual text can help the young learners get a better picture of the core message of the book. And in turn, the fictional story might help them understand the historical period better. The apartheid timeline in the book goes from 1910 to 2010 and explains every historical event in a way that can be grasped by learners in upper elementary school.

Some of the historical events, such as the release of Mandela, election of Mandela and the African Cup of Nations also appear in the fictional narrative, inviting us to experience the events alongside our main character. In this specific book, the endpapers are extra interesting to look at. They portray the different-looking fences in the story. The endpaper after the front page is the fence from the township depicted as an old and homemade fence, made with different types of wood, secured with barbed wire. The background color is orange, which is the color choice for representing the township in the book. This is an introduction to the township where Hector lives. The endpaper at the end of the book portrays the fence from the nicer part of town, a better-looking and factory-made fence that looks more expensive. The background color is a fresh, bright blue, like the blue of cloudless skies. A blue sky may represent a happy place but might also be a sad color in other contexts. The blue setting represents the nicer-looking part of town throughout the book.

#### *4.1.3 Setting*

The story takes place in Johannesburg, South Africa during the height of apartheid in the late 1980s to early 1990s. The story switches between the township where Hector and his family live and the white-populated and nicer part of Johannesburg. A township is an underdeveloped racially segregated area, created to segregate the white and colored population of South Africa (Cambridge University Press, n.d.a.). The meaning potential ambience and color relates to the whole book, because we see that the ambience is portrayed through the images, giving the reader a clear idea of the differences between the two different parts of town, clearly signifying where the setting is. The setting noticeably differs between the different parts of town by switching from a dull yellow background in the township to a bright green color on the other side of town where his mother works. The dull yellow and orange colors suggest dryness and fatigue. This can also represent lack of water, few growths and lack of resources and money. However, these are also warm colors, which are repeated in the sense of togetherness and joy through the main character we follow. This setting is not

depicted as a situation where they complain about circumstances. In contrast, the blues and greens associated with the white part of town are clean and cool colors, and they suggest resources through the green lawn has been watered and cared for. The blue sky might suggest a sense of having no worries.

The setting is communicated through both words and images. In comparison to *The Rabbits*, the setting is not mainly communicated through images, but conveyed through each modality. The verbal text conveys the information from Hector's point of view, while the visual image provides the information that Hector does not tell us, as well as portraying himself in the images. In spread 2, Hector describes the township and the fence in words, making it extra clear to the reader what this setting is and what the fence is intended to do.

One important aspect to the setting is the change of quality of the fences on the different sides of town. In the township, the fences are made from different types of wood which are old and broken, made from barbed wire. While on the other side of town, the fences are made from steel and look new and shiny. The differences of the two fences are clearly portrayed in spread 8. The fences also have different purposes. In the township they are supposed to separate the township from the rest of Johannesburg. In the nicer part of town, the fences are there to protect the town and children playing soccer. The fences symbolize the racial segregation implemented by the government, leading to differential treatment. The colors and the visual elements of the fences show the reader that we are dealing with two different contexts. The way in which this setting, created by politics of segregation, is portrayed indicate to the reader that this is a world in which intercultural meetings are strongly discouraged and rarely happen. This adds to the verbal text "hope" mentioned in the title, which is a hope that intercultural togetherness will be possible, and that there will be an opening in the fence. This is a foreshadow for how the book is going to end.

The depiction of the different teams playing soccer in spread 8 is intriguing. We can observe the evident joy on the faces of all the boys. At first glance, we may believe that this is an intercultural encounter. Although it looks like they are playing on the same field, they are playing on opposite sides of town. Despite them playing the same game, the illustrator captures the distinctions between the two groups. These differences are portrayed through the meaning potential ambience and color choices. The colors on the left side of the spread with the black boys playing, is a vibrant orange color, while the color on the right side of the

spread is a mellow green color. In this spread, we can also clearly see the difference between the two different fences, soccer balls, their clothing, and the environment that they are from. The double setting signals to the reader the differences they still need to overcome to be able to play with each other.

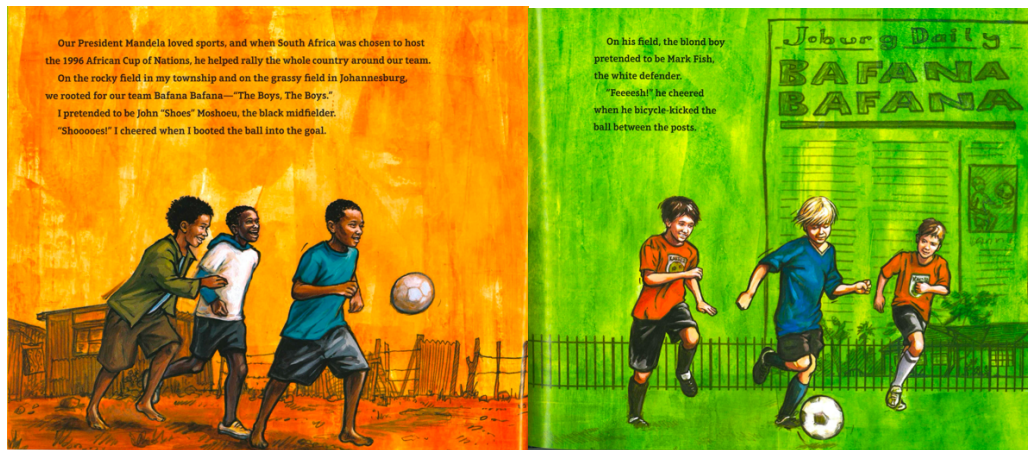


Figure 4: *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 8)

#### 4.1.4 Characterization, Point of View, and Narrative Voice

In this part of the analysis, I will look at the characterization, point of view and narrative voice in spreads 1-3. While the global narrative elements mentioned will steer the analysis, Painter's model will serve in analyzing the specific ways in which interpersonal relationships, between characters, and between character and reader, are created. I will trace Hector's intercultural journey and focus on the main character's encounters and the development of how modalities of text and image are used to engage the reader emotionally and interculturally. The main character Hector carries the narrative first person voice, and it is his story that we are let in on.

As the story progresses, we can see that Hector's feelings are hurt. We know that he is most likely born and grown up in the township community, with the apartheid regime implemented in him. Even though it is the only thing that it is familiar to him, he finds it unfair that he has to watch them play from the other side of the fence. He keeps his hope that he will join them one day. We see that he finds it unfair in spread 3, where Hector stands on the outside of the fence, looking at the white boys playing soccer. The unfairness plays through the meaning potential affect, with emotion on depicted faces and body stance. Hector's body stance signals that all he wants is to join the game, but he is stuck outside the fence, only able to watch them

play. The point of view is important here because it is the only time where we are situated on the inside of the soccer fence and see Hector on the outside.

The feeling of unfairness is implied in the verbal text in the spread: “Hey! I called. Hey! But not a single boy ever looked my way as they raced up and back along the green carpet” (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 3). This verbal text signals the institutionalized racial segregation between the two groups. The white boys do not even acknowledge that Hector is standing there. The last sentence on the spread depicts the hope that Hector always has: “One day, I whispered, I am going to play on a field just like that. One day real soon” (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 3). This hope points forward to what will happen later in the storyline of the book, and the justice he has always been hoping for. This is to be seen in the last spreads and will be explained further later in this thesis.

Even though the unfairness shines through the visual image, his perception and thoughts through the verbal text stay positive. The verbal text and visual image signals two different things in this spread. The meaning potential in the verbal realization in spread 3 is focalization via sourcing of perception and thoughts. The perspective of this spread is portrayed and interpreted through the perceptions and thoughts of Hector. This allows the reader to view Hector’s perspective, offering a deeper understanding of the story. Even though we are on the inside of the fence in terms of point of view, we get to be in both places at once. We are made part of the group that does not acknowledge Hector, but through the text we hear his voice. Spread 3 is a rich spread in the light of intercultural competence and calls for an intercultural perspective.

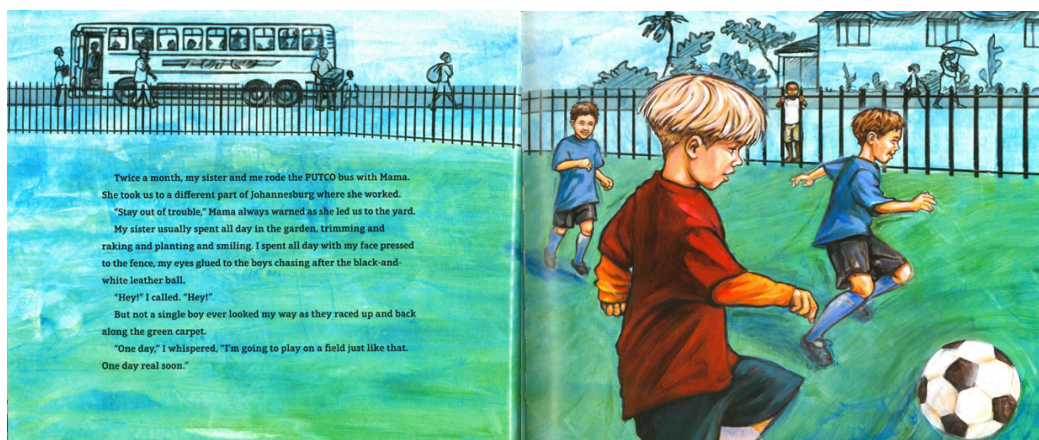


Figure 5: *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014, Spread 3)

The blonde boy, later in the story introduced as Chris, is depicted in the beginning of the story as a typical white boy during the apartheid. The regiment was probably implemented through his childhood as well, where black and white people should not mix nor play with each other or be friends. This portrays through spread 3, where he does not respond to Hector's "Hey". After the 1994 election, the black and white boys are finally able to play together. We do not know what changed Chris' decision, but we can imagine that the change in the country made him change his opinion as well, as well as the shared pride in the national soccer team. Chris also recognizes Hector at the African cup and raises his fist towards Hector. This is a sign of recognition and acceptance. As has been shown in the above analysis, the point of view of the story underscores the importance of soccer, both when it comes to characterization of Hector, and the intercultural encounters; everything happens through the game.

#### *4.1.5 Temporality*

The temporality of the story is very interesting because in contrast to most other picturebooks, this story goes over a few years and deals with multiple different real historical events. The book is written in a chronological fashion, which makes it easy to follow along the story and understand the importance of the historical events and the reason the dates have significance for the story in the book. Spread 4 depicts multiple newspaper front pages, indicating the end of apartheid and that Nelson Mandela is finally freed from prison. In the front of the newspapers are Hector and his family smiling and cheering. At the end of the spread the verbal text reads: "We are going forward". "The march towards freedom and justice is irreversible" (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 4). This indicates that a new era in South Africa is beginning. The newspaper clippings are repeated three times throughout the book, indicating different changes in the story, both in the book and in real time. The historical changes affect the intercultural encounters. As these historical changes occur, Hector is allowed to join the white boys, watch the match, and do things he has not been allowed to do earlier. This can be seen in the verbal text: "the march was slow», as seen in spread 5.

The book covers several years, starting from before Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990, spanning through South Africa's first open election in 1994, the Cup of Nations in 1996, and the years following Bafana Bafana's victory. This implies that the book covers around 10 years, while the intercultural relationship between the boys only goes from around 1996 and until the end of the book. Spread 7, portrays South Africa's first open election, where Nelson

Mandela is elected as the first black president in the country. The parallel between politics and soccer comes through by Hector being able to participate in the first open election and in the democracy, while in the same time period being able to participate in the game.

In spread 7, which covers the election of Mandela, the meaning potential ambience with warmth and atmosphere is applicable. The warm orange color, which is repeated throughout the book, creates a vibrant ambience on the page. The ambience is also communicated by the verbal text, with the atmosphere and tone of the celebration depicted on the page. This celebration is portrayed through the verbal text: “Today we celebrate liberty!” (Bildner & Watson, spread 7). This opening sentence creates a sense of victory and progress in the right direction in the storyline of the book. The verbal text and the illustrations in the newspaper clippings invites us to become a part of the historical timeline and the intercultural aspect of being able to vote for anyone in the country, no matter their race or skin color. It is almost as we are invited to join the line of people queuing up to vote, where the characters that stand in line are drawn in color. The last newspaper clipping on the far-right symbols the victory of the first black president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. The verbal text and visual images both portray a united nation, and a beginning of a new South Africa, depicted through a child’s eyes.

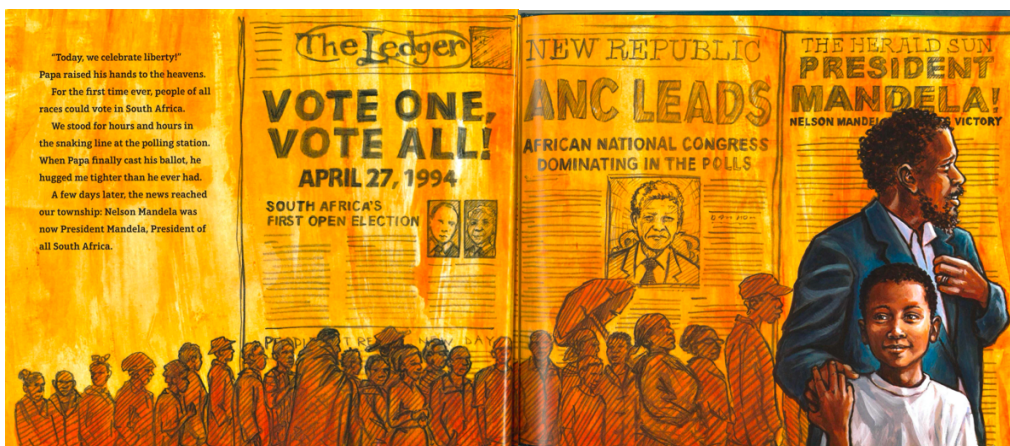


Figure 6: *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 7)

#### 4.1.6 Intercultural Encounters

The intercultural encounters in this book are significant to the story and to the thesis. As the story unfolds, the intercultural encounters are depicted through Hector and Chris, and how the nation and the boys can put their differences aside and live happily alongside each other. An

important intercultural encounter is depicted in spread 11, at the FNB soccer stadium, where the blonde boy Chris acknowledges Hector and raises his fist to him. This may be argued to be the turning point in the book. This intercultural encounter is powerful because Hector has experienced getting rejected from him and his friends earlier. This is the first time Chris acknowledges Hector first. Their relationship evolved at the same time as the country evolved.

The meaning potentials used to describe this spread is power and power dynamic. The vertical angle between Hector and Chris is powerful and represent a new dynamic in the book. Hector is the one standing on top of the tribune, looking down at Chris. We are standing with Hector and behind him, as a part of this group. Chris looks up at us as well. In this spread, there is finally no fence, and one setting is shared. The team wins on behalf of all and consists of players from both sides of the fence, no matter race or skin color. The fists are raised, signaling a shared victory. The power dynamic is changed to the opposite of what it was earlier in the book. The verbal text reads: “Standing on my seat, I spotted the blonde boy standing on his seat in the next section. He saw me and raised his hand first. I raised it back” (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 11). The verbal text is also related to the meaning potential power and power relations. The inequality is removed between the two characters when the reader gets to know that it was Hector who raised his hand first, and not the other way around.



Figure 7: *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 11)

#### 4.1.7 Interpersonal Relationships through Soccer

Sport and soccer are a big part of the intercultural encounters in the book. The game develops alongside historical events, and the interpersonal relationships develop through soccer. This is

a story about a game and who gets to be included, about being a team player, rooting for the same team, both in personal and political terms. This reflects on the solidarity and unity that sport brings to people. The national soccer team “Bafana Bafana” is a great example of how sport can bring people together. Soccer is something that in this story not only symbolizes a sport, but something that works on many different many different levels. It brings up joy in two different contexts. By the shared game that brings the boys together, and by a game that brings the nation together in team spirit.

Spread 14 is a great example of showing the companionship that soccer creates. Similarly to spread 7, this spread depict the united feeling of celebration. This is the celebration of the victory of the national team “Bafana Bafana”. The meaning potential involvement and horizontal viewing angle of the reader, creates an engagement between the reader and the characters. It feels like we are a part of the victory with the characters. In the background of the spread we can see people cheering. Here, the characters are of all races are gathered together. This is an important intercultural meeting because earlier in the book, this was something that we did not see. Overall, the spread symbols the progression and removal of the institutional racial segregation. Hector and Chris are depicted as happy with their hands in the air. Chris is holding South Africa’s flag, which is a symbol of the united nationalism, and their pride of being a part of the winning team of the African Cup of Nations. This event marks a turning point in the story, symbolizing a unified celebration among South Africans. This engages the reader interculturally and wants us to get our facts right. This also brings a relationship between a fictional and a factual historical timeline.

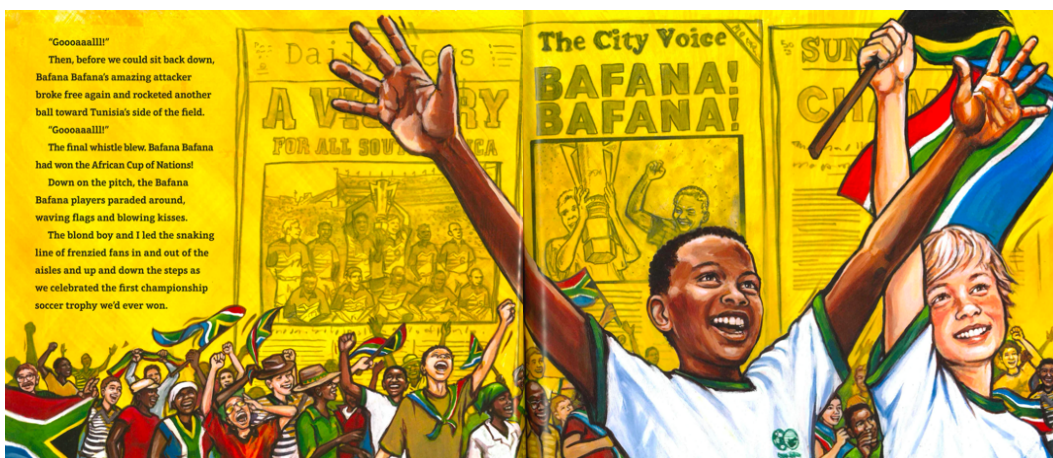


Figure 8: *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 14)



Emotions shared between characters and readers in *The Soccer Fence* progresses throughout the story. We get to know the main character and his thoughts and feelings throughout the timespan of the apartheid timeline. This reflects on Hector's depicted emotions and the reader's empathy towards the character. This is represented in multiple spreads throughout the book, and we as reader's get to follow the storyline of both Hector's journey and the country's journey. From the first spread where Hector is playing soccer by himself in the township, to the last spread where Hector and Chris run together on the green soccer field on the nicer side of town.

Spread 15 is also important to mention when it comes to interpersonal relationships. In this spread we can clearly see that the boys are significantly older than Hector is in the first spreads, which signals the long journey Hector has been on to be able to get to where he is now. The last sentences in the spread states "He opened the gate. I stepped through the soccer fence" (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 15). Here, the gate is finally open. The boys replicate the national team that will grow up to be the national team, in terms of both sports and citizenship. These findings might help promote intercultural learning because we can see that the day he had been waiting for, and the long march he talked about earlier in the story is finally here. In the last spread, Hector crosses the fence, enabling him to join the team he has admired from afar since childhood.



Figure 9: *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 15)

The analysis this far has shown that the power relations in the book coexists with the concept of apartheid and institutionalized racial segregation. The power relation is in the first half of the book relates to the fences, separating the black population in the township from the white

population in town. As the story progresses, the racial segregation is removed, and Hector is finally able to play with the other team. This leads to Hector and Chris playing soccer with each other, just like the national team. The book ends in the nicer part of town, where Hector was earlier in the story not invited to play with the other boys. After the release of Nelson Mandela, the first open election, and victory of the African cup of Nations, South Africa as a country has progressed. This leads to Hector finally being invited by the other players and stepping through the soccer fence and plays soccer fence with the white boy, Chris, just like their national soccer team.

The last spread, spread 16, symbolize a happy ending. Both for the boys, and for the country. This is depicted through the meaning potential focalization, character gaze and the alignment with the reader's gaze. The alignment with the reader's gaze creates a sense of connection between the characters and the reader. In this spread, we are watching them run away from us, continuing the story side by side. From spread 3, we have shared Hector's thoughts of wanting to join the game, and when he is finally able to join Chris, it creates a sense of empathy towards him.



Figure 10: *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014, spread 16)

## 4.2 The Rabbits

### 4.2.1 Plot

The second book I will be analyzing is *The Rabbits* (2010), written by John Marsden and illustrated by Shaun Tan. *The Rabbits* is about the Aboriginal Australians and the history of the British settlers of colonial Australia. The book offers a rich and valuable perspective on

the effects of the settlers on the indigenous environment. The book is an allegory, portrayed with animals as the main characters, which are symbolic representations of British colonialists and Aboriginal Australians. They also carry ideas and ideologies from the British colonialists and Aboriginal Australians, which appear throughout the book. An allegory is a narrative, where the author constructs characters, actions, and settings to make logical sense at the literal level of meaning, while simultaneously conveying a second, related level of significance (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, p. 8).

The rabbits represent the British colonialists, and the nameless marsupials, which one can argue are closest looking to numbats or possums, represent the Aboriginal Australians. The book is fictional but presents the history of British colonialization from the late 1700s to early 1900s. Additionally, it raises awareness to The Stolen Generation, which was going on until the late 1960s (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.). The Stolen Generation refers to the Australian government's forceful separation of Aboriginal children from their families from the 1910s to the 1970s (Australians together, 2024). This resulted in enduring trauma and grief that Aboriginal Australians families and individuals still suffer from today (Australians together, 2024). It is still an unresolved issue today, as reflected by the book.

The verbal text only consists of a few sentences per spread, and it is mainly the illustrations that carry the story of the book. The illustrations are detailed and set the mood for the book with changes of color throughout the book, which affect our perception of the colonizing process. From spread 12, the usage of color in the book changes from bright colors to black, white, brown, and grey colors, that portray the sad effects of the colonization process. The book ends with an open, philosophical question, and not on a happy note, like *The Soccer Fence* does. This is also an invitation for readers to reflect on what they are reading and for contemporary Aboriginal Australians who continue to fight for recognition today. The title is simple and says something about the main characters in the book, "the rabbits". Before reading the book, we do not know who the rabbits are, but after a few spreads, we understand that the rabbits are the invaders and an analogy for the European colonizers. This requires some background knowledge of the historical aspect of colonialization, which this analysis will bring up later.

#### 4.2.2 Paratextual Elements

The paratextual elements of the book consist of the front cover, rear cover, and endpapers. The front cover is very powerful, depicting a huge ship and Napoleon-like creatures. On the front cover we can see that the animal characters are human-like, dressed up in European clothes and big coats from the colonial period, with accessories such as hats, weapons, and a flag with a clock on top. The flag represents the British flag, and the clock represents a ticking time, and a schedule of colonizing the country. Flags represent a country and a nation and is in the book used to portray authority and for the rabbits to mark “their” territory. By consistently using flags as a symbol, Tan portrays the power relation the rabbits have over the marsupials. The rabbits are all looking in the same direction, pointing towards their goal. In the far background, one can see two small marsupials sitting with two spears. It looks like they are trying to protect their own land, but situated in the far background of the image they look small and powerless compared to the rabbits.

The front cover represents an encounter between the two groups and their first intercultural meeting. Tan has worked to achieve certain effects of the visual modality to help see the effects of the image, such as power and power relations, social distance, and proximity. These meaning potentials are prominent in the front cover with the use of shot size. The ship on the front cover is depicted as huge and foreign looking, and the rabbits are huge in comparison to the marsupials in the background. The ship has sharp lines, a pointy bow and is exaggerated in comparison to how we would imagine a regular sailing ship. This also says something about the power relations between the two groups, and the superiority the rabbits have. The ship is big that it looks out of proportion and to the extent that it is intimidating. From our point of view, we are seeing it from the ground below. Proximity is prominent in the physical distance between the characters since the marsupials are watching the rabbits from afar. All these meaning potentials symbolize the notion and concept of the book, which is a thought-provoking allegorical fable about colonization and the effect the settlers had on both the Aboriginal Australians and the environment.

The rear cover of the book provides yet another image of the colonizers’ sailing ship. It looks huge in contrast to the small rowing boats on the water in front of the ship. The ship has several red flags on it, representing the British flag. On the left side of the rear cover, it is written “A rich and haunting allegory for all ages, all cultures” and “The rabbits came many grandparents ago. They built houses, made roads, had children. They cut down trees. A whole continent of rabbits” (Marsden & Tan, 2010). “The rabbits came many grandparents ago” may

be a way for the Aboriginal Australians to describe the passing of time, as they did not have a western standardized clock or schedule of time as the Europeans did. This could be their way of counting years, period of time and the cycles of life. It is a contrast to the clock on the front cover, highlighting the fact that two different ways of life are clashing, and a culture crash.

The second endpaper is on a half-page and is more abstract than the previous endpaper. This endpaper also depicts a map of some sort which may indicate a plan for colonization. The background is in a brown color and the unreadable written font is shaped in the same shape as the red and white cross in the British flag. In the middle there is a square and a figure with an Aboriginal arrow and a European weapon crossing each other. On top of that there is some kind of symbol that may represent the European settlers. There are also drawings of birds, mountains, a map and building supplies that the European settlers have brought with them.



*Figure 11: The Rabbits (Marsden & Tan, 2010, front cover and endpaper 2)*

#### 4.2.3 Setting

The story takes place in Australia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the English settlers came by sailing ships to colonize the Australian continent. The beginning of the story portrays a setting of the first ship of Englishmen coming to Australia, and how that effected the native Aboriginal Australians already living there. The land is essential to discuss, because of how important it is to the marsupials. It is their home which is gradually taken away, exploited, and ruined by the colonizers. The images are abstract with unconventional imagery and storytelling

technique, with a structure that can be open to multiple interpretations. This includes the strange details that are exaggerated, characters and objects that at times are out of proportion and an unconventional storytelling technique. It is an unconventional storytelling technique because it contains a surreal and abstract storytelling, an open ending, and an allegory with animals as main characters. The book relies on the pictures to convey the mood and emotion, with a few sentences on each spread, unfolding the story in interaction with each other.

The second spread conveys an untouched landscape, which belongs to the marsupials. Here, the rabbits are introduced to the marsupials, and one can see the first intercultural encounter between the two groups. The meaning potential ambience is represented through the colors, which are bright orange and blue. The orange landscape represents the Aboriginals' soil, and the bright blue sky represents the clean air, before the rabbit's caused pollution to the air with their modern machines. The beauty of the land is highlighted in this spread, with color play in sand and rocks, beautiful random shapes and forms, and the landscape is foregrounded. The figures are small, and in the landscape, we see something that almost resembles an abstract work of art. It consists of organic patterns and beautiful colors. The birds and small animals are moving freely, and the natural, organic landscape is gradually lost. This spread foreshadows what the marsupials are going to lose.



*Figure 12: The Rabbits (Marsden & Tan, 2010, spread 2)*

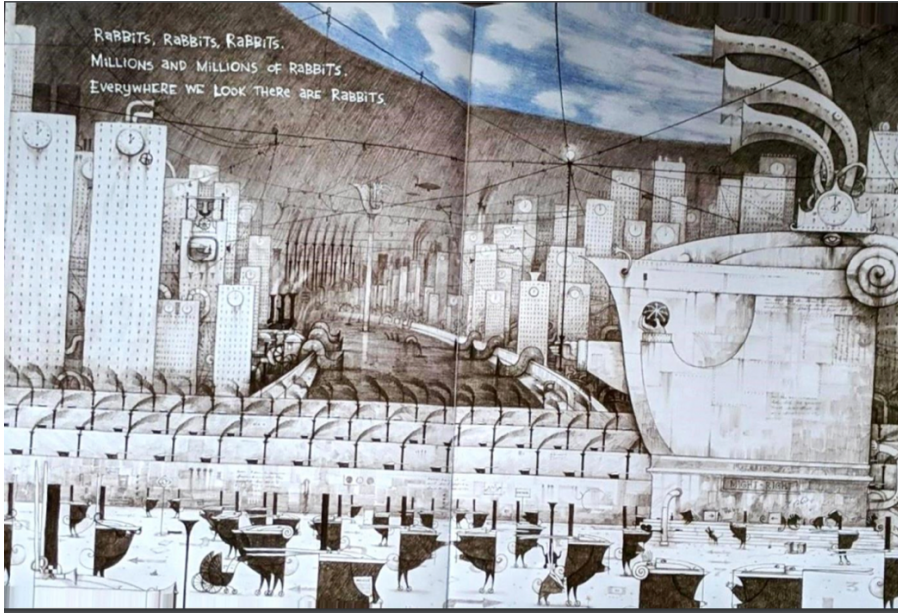
As the narrative progresses, the setting evolves, becoming increasingly serious and darker in tone. The land is continuously getting colonized, exploited, and changed, while the nature is

gradually taken down. The verbal text tells us that the rabbits are all about doing. The verbs “chopped”, “ate”, “spread”, “scared away”, “stole” culminates the process in spread 12. The verbal text: “No mountain could stop them; no dessert, no river” (Marsden & Tan, 2010, spread 7), tells us that there is nothing the marsupials can do to stop them.

The colonizing process continues in spread 12, in which the natural landscape has disappeared. Tan uses black, white, grey, and brown colors to depict the marsupials’ feeling of hopelessness. Here, the feelings of depression and hopelessness are evident both visually and verbally. The verbal text: “Rabbit, rabbits, rabbits. Millions of rabbits. Everywhere we look there are rabbits” (Marsden & Tan, 2010, Spread 12) implies that the rabbits have now taken over their land and made modernized it to their own liking, without respecting the marsupials. The rabbits have now outnumbered the marsupials and made their own cities with tall buildings in their land. This also implies an industrialized society, as if they are somehow exploiting natural resources. The spread indicates a network of power lines and pipes that pour out smoke. The rabbits are occupying, exploiting, and polluting the land. The great pipes are almost swallowing the blue sky. The buildings are tall, square, ordered and identical. The buildings are a complete contrast to the previous spread, which focused on the earth, and organic random beauty.

The clocks are displayed to signal effectiveness and order. This is a setting which runs according to mechanical time, rather than a natural landscape of cyclical time, and electrical light rather than sunlight. The Aboriginal Australians did not know the western concept of time until the European settlers introduced it to them. It was the European settlers that had control over the Aboriginal Australians and decided when, where and what was going to happen to Australia. They had all the power and control over the Aboriginal Australians’ time and lives. The clocks also often include an eye, which may be understood as the rabbits are always watching over the marsupials and deciding everything regarding their own land and country. The clock, which is also shown in other spreads, is placed on top of each building, signifying that the marsupials are always being watched. The same goes for the eye, which is often included with the clocks. In this spread, we can also see baby carriages and rabbits with children. This signals that the rabbits have been there for a while, and that they are planning on staying there permanent, with a new generation of rabbits. This is in contrast to the marsupials’ loss of children which is depicted later in the book.

The meaning potential represented in spread 12 is force. Both verbally and visually, repetition is used as a tool. The verbal text repeats the word “rabbits” five times, and the visual pictures repeats the tall buildings with clocks and pictures of the rabbits standing next to pipes. The repetition indicates that the rabbits are slowly but surely taking over the marsupials’ land.



*Figure 13: The Rabbits (Marsden & Tan, 2010, Spread 12)*

The setting is of great importance considering the historical events that the book is trying to portray. The setting portrays a natural landscape, a landscape untainted by western civilization, as well as landscape that is gradually occupied and manipulated by the rabbits. However, the land is not in focus, but what humans can make of and build on land. This can be seen in both spread 2 and spread 12. The spreads portray a period of time when the Europeans decided to take and steal land that were not theirs to begin with. This is in relation to colonization several hundred years ago, but can also be related to present day issues, like racial and cultural topics, both in Australia and generally in the world. These are issues related to indigenous peoples and native populations who are still not in control of their land and traditional livelihoods in several parts of the world, including Norway.

#### *4.2.4 Characterization, Point of View, and Narrative Voice*

The characterization and characters of the book are quite different from *The Soccer Fence*. The main characters of the book are all depicted as animals with human traits. Marsden (20110) states that “the analogy between the animal invaders, the weed invaders and the



human invaders seemed that obvious to him, as he drove on, along that lonely country road” (Marsden & Tan, 2010). This quote describes the complex nature of the rabbits, both within the narrative and in terms of Australian history and culture. The rabbits represent all foreign invaders to Australia, because they were the ones that brought them to Australia. The problems with rabbits in Australia came about during the colonizing process, when they were introduced by the settlers to be hunted for sports. The rabbits destroyed Australia’s indigenous flora and fauna (National Museum Australia, 2022). This may be the reason Marsden has portrayed the British settlers as rabbits. The invasion of rabbits can be seen in spread 12, in the verbal text “Rabbits, rabbits, rabbits”. Overall, rabbits are an obvious choice for representing the colonizers because they are not native to Australia. While “the rabbits” are the titular characters we never hear them speak or see their point of view, as they are the group that the book muses about and tries to understand.

The point of view is from the nameless marsupials, and we do not know much about them. However, in visual terms, one could argue that the reader is situated amongst the marsupials and see what they see. This is because through their eyes, our familiar industrialized western ways of life are made strange, and defamiliarized, as shown in the previously discussed spread 12. Through their eyes, the rabbits, and their actions and traditions, are new, previously unseen, incomprehensible and we are positioned to see their strangeness. Some features are the insistent focus on clocks and eyes. We do know is that they are the ones that are native to Australia, and have lived there for generations, without interruptions from the western world. The pictures seem to tell us something about their connection to their land, and the simple way they have been living before western civilization occupied their land. Their response to the newcomers is portrayed with grief and sorrow, grieving the loss of their traditional way of life and land.

The narrative voice belongs to the colonized and this makes the reader follow the verbal story from their perspective. We only gain an insight into the marsupials’ feelings regarding the rabbits invading their land. The narrative voice is in 1st person, plural form, collective “we”, which is not common for children’s picturebooks. As well as the fact that there is no single character that we follow in the story. Their portrayal of the newly arrived rabbits makes the reader emphasize with the narrative voice and root for the marsupials. It is an issue of the rabbits versus the marsupials, where the marsupials have no chance against the power of the rabbits. Even though we have no individual character to follow, we get an insight into their

feelings as a collective group. This indicates unanimous agreement on the intensity of their feelings.

The feeling of injustice and empathy towards the marsupials is as mentioned earlier, depicted several times throughout the book. The feelings are depicted through the interplay of both the visual and verbal modalities. The spread that portrays the multimodal interplay and may bring out the most feelings in the reader, is spread 11. The spread is powerful and use different literary devices to convey its message. The spread conveys four large rabbits, dressed in black suits, top hats, and glasses. Their eyes are red and orange, and they are looking away from the young marsupials. Their peacock feather pens are dripping with red blood, used as the ink for the certificate, which indicate legal documents of some sort. This blood may represent the betrayal of removing the Aboriginal children. The rabbits are holding a certificate with one word each, which states: “And stole our children” (Marsden & Tan, 2010, spread 11). The verbal text uses the device visual graduation, to make the feelings in the verbal text amplified. The word “stole” creates a feeling of injustice towards the marsupials, because even young learners know that stealing is not fair. The visual graduation work to emphasize the meaning of the word “stole”.

The intercultural encounters are represented through the power dynamics and the way the rabbits are treating the marsupials. This can be seen in spread 9, where the land is filled with British flags which are a sign of power and identity and part of their ways, as well as some marsupials are taken captive by the rabbits. This represents the end of a lost fight. The rabbits are depicted as white creatures, superior to the marsupials, while the marsupials are portrayed as inferior to the rabbits, with no power of stopping them. This is also seen in spread 9, where the representation of power dynamic is noticeably present. The authors show this to us verbally with the sentence “We lost the fights”. Together with the dark and black colors, and the marsupials chained together, they are expelled from the surface of their land, and it creates the dynamic of power versus powerlessness and the grief of not being able to do anything about it. The meaning potentials represented in spread 9 is affect, with the emotions depicted both visually and verbally.

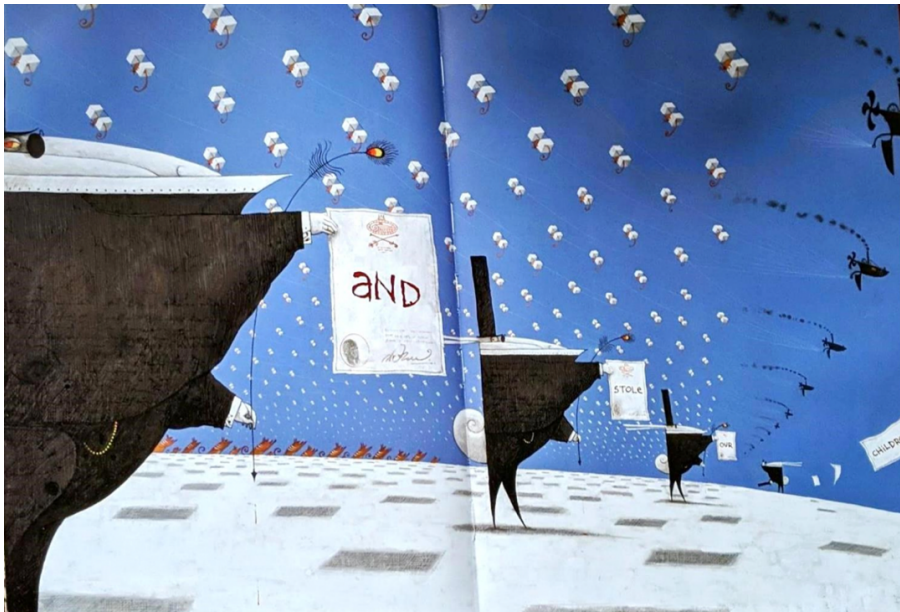


Figure 14: *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 2010, spread 9)

The verb “to lose” is what dominates the experience of the marsupials. Loss of children, loss of culture, and loss of a future is depicted throughout the book. The topic of *The Stolen Generations* brings up a great loss and is still just as relevant, as Aboriginal Australians are still suffering from their violent history and institutional racism (United Nations, 2023). However, the book makes to attempt to explain the context of this spread to understand the importance of the events. By having the knowledge of what happened to Aboriginal Australian mothers and children during *The Stolen Generation* period, the spread can trigger anger in the reader. The visual image in spread 11 might be even more shocking than the verbal text. In the bright blue sky, there are hundreds of kites, with baby marsupials inside, detached from their landscape, which is their home. They are being pulled by strange looking black airplanes, with grey exhaust coming out of them. On the ground, there are many marsupial mothers, standing with their arms raised up towards their children, looking like they are desperately trying to get their children down from the kites. Two of the meaning potential devices the spread uses are visual graduation and force. The visual graduation is visible in the images that are depicted out of scale and exaggerated in size. The first rabbit on the left page of the spread is huge and takes up half the page. The other rabbits are also huge in comparison to the marsupial mothers in the back. This is also a device to portray the power relations between the rabbits and the marsupials.

The rabbits are always the ones in control. The meaning potential force is relevant to the

literary device “repetition”. This says something about the scale of this and the share number of children that have been taken away from their parents. The rabbits are repeated three times standing with the certificates. The marsupial children are repeated hundreds of times in the air, as well as the marsupial mothers standing on the ground. The realization of repetition, is a tool that can make the learner become engaged, participate, and comprehend the material represented, and say something about the massive scale of these events, including the fact that this has happened over and over again.



*Figure 15: The Rabbits (Marsden & Tan, 2010, spread 11)*

#### *4.2.5 Temporality*

The temporal aspect of this book is intriguing because we are given few context markers and it is not specifically stated when, where or for how long the action takes place. The images in the book imply that the story takes place in the Australian continent during the beginning of the colonization in late 1700s. This is implied from spread 1 in the book, where we can see a big brown rock, as well as a few sculptures, laying on top of each other, looking like carved snakes from the rocks on the ground. This setting can be interpreted to look like the outback in the rural inland of Australia. The outback is recognized as a remote, vast landscape where Aboriginal Australians have lived for the past 50,000 years (Cambridge University Press, n. d.b.) The land is dry and red and is far away from towns and cities. This kind of landscape is depicted in the first half of the book, before the colonizers invaded the marsupials’ land. The narrative brings up the history of colonization, spanning from the arrival of the colonizers and

the establishment of settlements on indigenous lands, to the era of the Stolen Generations in the mid-1800s, and ultimately raises questions about the implications of these events. These are all important historical events in the timeline of the colonization of Australia and Australia today.

The passing of time is expressed through the visual text. The rather extensive timeline that the book covers is conveyed in complex and effective ways, such as in spread 5. The temporality in this spread is particularly thought-provoking because of the three different frames in the spread. We can say that the spread has three different moments of time at the same time, and the moments take place in three different locations. The top of the spread is depicted in a light blue color, with a greyish tree in the middle, with ten marsupials sitting on one branch of the tree. This is the untouched world, prior to colonization. The frame below is depicted with a deeper blue color, representing the rabbits' making of the new buildings and cities in Australia. This frame has many details worth mentioning, including the white buildings, where the edges of the buildings are shaped as puzzle pieces, and the rabbits use the puzzle pieces as building blocks. The frame which looks like a real picture frame, depicts the building plan and how it will look like in the future. It is interesting that the building blocks are puzzle pieces because it indicates a very pre-planned way of making something new.

The color inside the picture frame is yellow and orange like a sunset, which shines over the buildings with red flags on top. On top of the picture frame, there is a clock with an eye in the middle. This clock looks like it is watching over the marsupials, almost in control over them. There are two larger rabbits facing the frame, looking like they are presenting the finished product. As well as two other larger rabbits, facing the other way, looking like they are protecting the new buildings. On the far-right corner of the spread, there is a rodent eating a gecko, as well as a gecko that also has been killed by the wheeled display of the finished buildings. This can be a symbol of the foreign pests and diseases the colonial ships brought from Europe to Australia. The temporality is signaled through the rabbits' timeline and their control of time, including when, where and how they utilize the land.

The verbal element to the spread suggests that the two groups have a totally different lifestyle and way of living. The marsupials live in the trees, while the rabbits make their own houses and speak a different language. The verbal text is symmetrical with what the image is trying to imply. The meaning potential force can be applied to the spread in relation to the

proportion of frame filled. We are asked to look directly at this image, and briefly notice the dead native animals, who are made small and insignificant. Because there are three different frames in the spread, the reader gets an insight into three different events at the same time. This signals that the temporality and the marsupials' way of living is in change.

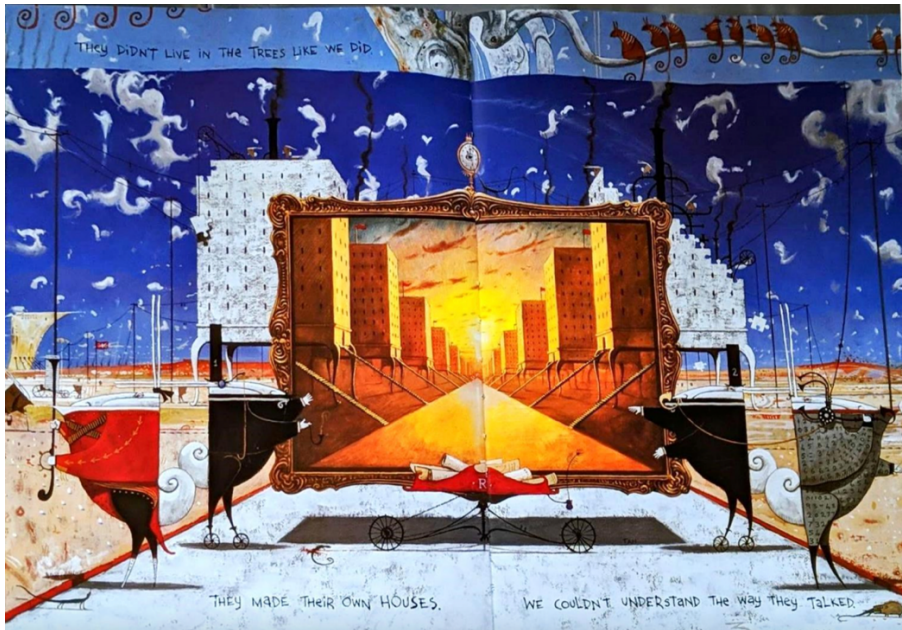


Figure 16: *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 2010, spread 5)

Spread 1 indicates the aboriginal and completely different way of thinking about time. The reader is introduced to the arguably original way of thinking about the day, month, year, and time. It is a matter of the aboriginals' time versus the colonizers time, which are being introduced as clocks later in the book. The meaning potential orientation is applicable in this spread. The specialized vocabulary and slang: "The rabbits came many grandparents ago", portrays the aboriginals' way of thinking and living in rural Australia prior to colonization. One may say that the different types of lifestyles ended up in a culture clash for the marsupials, because they were isolated from the rest of the world and did not know anything else rather than what the generations before them had done.

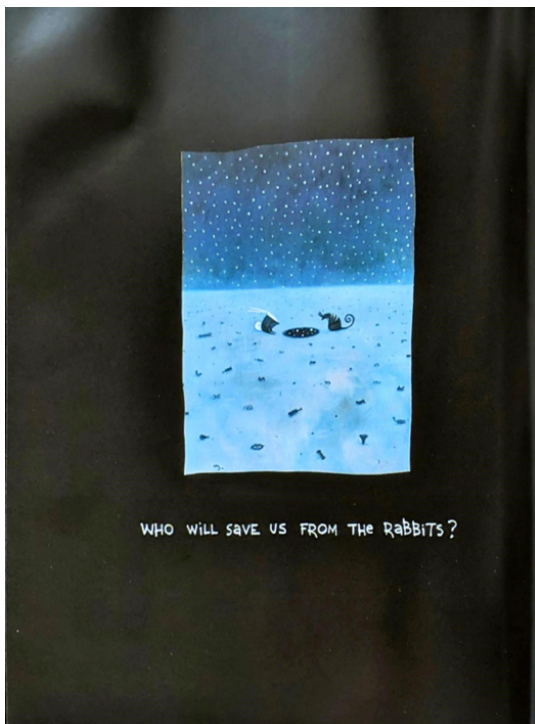


Figure 17: *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 2010, spread 1)

#### 4.2.6 Interpersonal Relationships through Colonization

The last spread. Spread 15, signals the change in the book and is in great contrast to the first spreads. This intercultural encounter is also distinctively different to the ending in *The Soccer Fence*. The meaning potentials here, focalization in the verbal text, focuses on the perception and thoughts that comes from the question from the marsupials. The question is asked directly to the reader, which makes the reader reflect and ponder after finishing the book. Another meaning potential force, is applicable with the proportion of frame filled. The frame takes up half the spread is pitch black. Inside the frame, there is a rectangular picture of a dark blue sky, and one rabbit and one marsupial, sitting right towards each other looking down at a black hole in the middle of them. On the sand around them, there are lots of waste and trash, most likely from the rabbits' building supplies. This is a symbol of the environmental degradation the colonialists did to Australia and the aftermath of the colonization, as well as a general loss of many things such as culture and ways of life. The usage of dark colors in the spread, sets the mood for the verbal text and question, which is dark, sad, and irreversible. The relationship between the two groups seems different here. It is pitch black and there are two separate frames. This can indicate a complete lack of dialogue and neither of the characters are able to answer the question. The question is also posed to the reader and not the rabbits, which signals the unresolved and ongoing fight for recognition by the marsupials and the Aboriginal Australians.

The interpersonal aspect, concerning emotions shared between characters and readers, aligns with the theme of injustice and unfairness. The authors have written and drawn this book in a way that creates a feeling of empathy towards the marsupials. They have manipulated their perspective modalities in a way to trigger our empathic reactions by using the nameless marsupials as the protagonist and narrative voice, which provides the reader an insight into the thoughts through the we-voice. While the analysis this far has shown encounters in terms of power relations and proximity, the interpersonal relations, between characters, and between character and reader, take on a different quality in the final spreads.



*Figure 18: The Rabbits (Marsden & Tan, 2010, spread 15)*



## 5.0 Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings in relation to the three sub-research questions, exploring their connections to the theory outlined in chapter 2. The objective of this master's thesis is to explore how the picturebooks *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014) and *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 2010) might help promote intercultural competence in English language teaching. Firstly, I will look at how the intercultural encounters are portrayed through text and pictures and their interactions. Next, I will examine the potential for intercultural learning in the picturebooks. Lastly, I will comment on the relationship between the aspects of intercultural competence and the nature of literary texts, and their complex training grounds.

### 5.1 Sub-Research Question #1: How Are the Intercultural Encounters Portrayed Through Text and Pictures and Their Interactions?

Sub-question #1 relates to the relationship between intercultural competence and literary texts. The picturebooks depict intercultural competence through intercultural encounters, presented both visually and verbally. Culture is depicted in *The Soccer Fence* through the notion of a shared culture despite differences. Conversely, *The Rabbits* portray cultures with little in common. Similarly to the depiction of culture, the intercultural encounters in *The Soccer Fence* are portrayed with a successful encounter eventually, due to shared culture where one team is formed. While in *The Rabbits*, a culture clash is illustrated due to the inability to relate to the other, as well as seeing oneself from the outside, with devastating effects. This is shown through the texts and pictures and their interactions.

#### 5.1.1 Intercultural Encounters

Intercultural encounters are in great relation to Byram's (1997) intercultural communicative competence, and his savors *skills of interpreting and relating, knowledge and attitudes* are relevant to the chosen picturebooks. In both books, we are presented with intercultural encounters and the way the two groups in each book coexist with each other. Dypedahl's (2020) definition of intercultural encounters defines it as something that is complex and is more about asking the right questions rather than knowing the right answers (p. 147). This idea is central when presenting the two picturebooks, and relates in particular to *The Rabbits*, which is a book where we can ask a lot of questions. On the other hand, *The Soccer Fence* is a

book where most questions are answered, but at the same time may spark some curiosity among the readers. Intercultural encounters are presented throughout the picturebooks in relation to the historical timeline in the books. The intercultural encounters appear in *The Soccer Fence*, through the second half of the book, by the shared game that brings the boys from the two different teams together, and that simultaneously brings the nation together. In *The Rabbits*, the intercultural encounters appear from the beginning throughout the ending of the book. The difference in this book is the strong unequal power dynamic that the rabbits have over the marsupials, and the complex relationship they have with each other which is depicted through the evolution of their relationship. Initially, it is characterized as a curious and safe one, to transitioning into an invasive and derogating relationship.

*The Soccer Fence* invites us to join Hector's cultural journey through the apartheid timeline in South Africa. Soccer is an important symbol and metaphor in the book, allowing the reader to share his love for the sport, and a metaphor for the way of living in the country. It represents not being allowed to play on the team, as well as separate playing fields in all realms of life. Soccer is the main interest of the two boys in their separate fields, and is a very important sport to the nation, as well as to Nelson Mandela. The authors use the soccer interest of the two boys, and their intercultural encounter through soccer, to portray the development of the nation and the forming of one team.

The book takes us through different settings where it changes from the township in Johannesburg to the nicer part of town in Johannesburg. The findings show the intercultural encounters through the text and pictures, allowing us to be in Hector's shoes and see the world through his eyes. The strong use of symbolism, including the fences that represent the physical barriers that literally prevent intercultural encounters, as well as a clear use of colors to signal separate contexts and resources, signals the message of togetherness despite differences, explicit and direct. In other words, it is hard to miss out on. The text and images portray the experiences of being on the outside, and not being allowed to participate in the game, very clear. The historical timeline scaffolds our reading process of the fictional story, while the text and images tell the same story.

Hallberg (1982, in Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006) talks about complementary picturebooks and how they can contribute to make the learners think, ponder and response to the book in their own pace and way. This relates to the complementary relationship between the main

characters in the book, as they fill in each other's gaps to portray the whole picture of apartheid. On one hand, we are on the outside of the fence, in Hector's shoes looking into the green field of the white boys playing soccer. On the other hand, the findings show the white boys playing from within the fence, suggesting that they are naive of the situation and implemented with the mindset of racial segregation from a very young age, preventing both groups from intercultural encounters.

The chronological timeline, historical scaffolding, symbolism, and colors in *The Soccer Fence* leave the reader left with little room for interpretation. There are no gaps in the text, and we cannot be mistaken about the trajectory of the intercultural relationship in this book. There is no doubt what kind of attitudes the book creators want the readers to adopt. The book aims to teach us something very specific, about the apartheid timeline. It scores high in terms of historical accuracy, while on the other hand low in terms of ambiguity. This can be seen in the findings, in both the newspaper clippings and in the historical timeline. This is a world where the main character is not allowed on the other side of the fence, and where we can see his yearn for being a part of the team with Chris and the other white boys. For him it does not matter what skin color they are, it is the sport that counts, as well as the notion of a shared team and joining forces together.

Throughout the book we are invited into a story of a young boy and his challenges, who represent his marginalized group in South Africa. He has much in common with young, same-aged readers, which draws on learners' pre-knowledge. However, what we eventually get is a story about a country and their intercultural timeline, portraying intercultural and political challenges at large through intercultural encounters between two individuals. In other words, this is another way in which the authors simplify things for the reader. The findings illustrate that two different teams are playing the same sport, but on separate fields located on opposite sides of town. This tells the reader that we are between two settings, that in the future is to be merged into one. The findings indicate that with almost no other information than the characters' skin color and love for soccer, the characters are like "stand ins" for their group in their society and country, during the apartheid period. Looking at the findings, we may believe that the white boys are not mean and malicious, but a result of the institutionalized racial segregation in the country. At the end, they also go along an intercultural journey to find their right path.

The findings show that the portrayal of intercultural encounters differs significantly between the two books. On the one side, *The Soccer Fence* begins with two segregated groups of people within the same country, and the book ends with them all being together in a democratic multicultural society. On the other hand, *The Rabbits*, portray the marsupials' peaceful land and way of living in their country by themselves in the beginning, followed by the interruption and invasion by the rabbits when they invade their country. Here, we can see the differences of intercultural encounters and how they can either be successful, when done correctly, or unsuccessful when being handled incorrectly. The two groups in *The Soccer Fence* have a shared culture, which is soccer, that unite them despite differences. On the other hand, the two groups in *The rabbits* do not have a shared culture. Here, it is more difficult to establish a connection, particularly when the invaders lack the ability to decenter. This is in relation to Byram's (1997) savior attitudes with openness and curiosity about the other. In other words, this relates to an unsuccessful intercultural meeting, which we can clearly see in the findings of the latter book.

While it may be more pedagogical to teach *The Soccer Fence* to young learners, due to its happy ending and solved solution, it does not portray the reality of today's situation in South Africa. One can argue that it portrays a false positive reality of the situation in South Africa today. However, *The Rabbits* portray a more realistic picture of the situation today of what the world looks like after the remains of the colonization, specifically in Australia. Intercultural encounters are either way portrayed in both books and show the hardships that some groups of people have had to go through and overcome to be in the situation they are in the world today.

### 5.1.2 Culture

The complexity of the term "culture" underpins the storyline of both picturebooks. Byram (1997) was the first scholar to introduce culture in relation to an educational setting. His definition has been criticized because of his simple definition and association of "culture" with the word "country" (Hoff, 2020, p. 58). This is one of the reasons Dypedahl & Lund (2020, p. 17) highlight a nuanced perspective and emphasize the complexity and that there are many factors that goes into the term. There are no national borders and different cultures can exist within the same country, as well as be extended across several groups (Dypedahl & Lund (2020, p. 17). This statement can be understood as a term used to encompass culture from various perspectives, not limited to a single country. The chosen picturebooks depict

multiple cultures within a country. The books convey that multiple different cultures exist within one country, and the challenges that arise in handling them without complications. The books communicate how two groups with two different cultures can create an aspect of power relations, and how intercultural encounters can be handled in different ways.

### 5.1.3 Culture in *The Soccer Fence* and *The Rabbits*

The culture in *The Soccer Fence* centers on soccer, and the shared love for the game in both groups. This is what they have in common in this book, which draws them together, and facilitates the encounter and its success. This is the one strong cultural trait in the book, as it is presented as a glue to makes change possible. It portrays culture through the main character Hector's eyes. From the beginning of the book, we are introduced to the fact that black and white people should not coexist together, which hinders him from playing with the other boys. They have a shared culture, but they are hindered by politics to be able practice the intercultural encounters.

On the contrary, the depiction of culture in *The Rabbits*, before the invasion, appears homogeneous, as the marsupials lack prior experience with intercultural encounters. Here, culture is portrayed through the marsupial's eyes, and how the colonizers are destroying their own culture right in front of their eyes. The book also portrays the differences between the two cultures, and how their cultural traits do not match. This is shown in the findings, where we can see their different lifestyles and ways of living. This includes that the marsupials live in trees, while the rabbits make their own houses and speak their own and unfamiliar language, as well as their different way of thinking about time. The marsupials tell time, year, and date like they did in the olden days. The rabbits introduce clocks as a way to tell time to the marsupials, which is a western and modern invention that symbolize a different culture. These different ways of living may suggest a type of culture clash, that we can see throughout the book, which is conveyed through the power relations between the two groups.

Even though the different ways of living suggest a culture clash, Byram (1997) suggests that one should be intercultural speakers to consistently engage in critical self-reflection, questioning our own cultural values as well as those of various cultures, and recognizing and embracing the differences (p. 53). This is something that does not happen in *The Rabbits* and did not happen in the colonization process in the 1700s. It is crucial for learners to be able to

reflect on this aspect after reading the story, as will be discussed in the next section.

#### *5.1.4 Power Dynamic and Relations*

In both books, the relationship between the different groups is characterized by unequal power relations, which pose a challenge to successful intercultural encounters. As shown in analysis, the strong symbolism of fences, and the clear use of colors underscore the inequality between the two groups. In other words, the portrayed power relations create a sense of “my culture”, “our culture” and “their culture”. Dypedahl (2020), states that this is something that should be avoided, and through the picturebooks we learn that it is also something that the protagonists of the stories want to avoid as well. This is depicted in *The Soccer Fence* through Hector’s yearn for wanting to join Chris’ soccer team, as well as in *The Rabbits*, through the marsupials losing control over their own land and children. Byram’s (1997) savior *attitudes*, also resonates with power relations and the want of removing stereotyping. Dypedahl (2020) emphasizes that cultural stereotyping, including “my” and “their” culture should be avoided, but might be hard to avoid because textbooks often only include one side of a country or culture. By using picturebooks as a tool in EFL-education, cultural stereotyping can be prevented by reading about different nuances of cultures within a country.

### **5.2 Sub-Research Question #2: What Is the Potential for Intercultural Learning?**

Sub-question #2 explores the potential for intercultural learning in the chosen books. Earlier in this chapter I have explained how the intercultural encounters are portrayed through the verbal and visual text in the books. In this section, I will be going further into how intercultural competence can be divided into multiple different aspects. Here, I will explain the intercultural learning potential of the books and how these narratives of intercultural encounters might help promote learners’ intercultural competence. I will be explaining how and to what extent these books invite the theoretical concepts. Byram's (1997) model of *intercultural communicative competence (ICC)* is particularly relevant, with a focus on *attitudes, knowledge, and skills of interpreting and relating*.

#### *5.2.1 Intercultural Competence*

To get a reminder of what intercultural competence is, we need to revisit what the term implies. Heggernes (2021, p. 9), defines it as “the process of developing the attitudes, skills

and knowledge required for constructive communication and behavior when interacting across difference”. The first word *intercultural* consists of two different words. *Inter* means between and among, while “culture” is a more complex term which has been defined by many different scholars. Culture can be defined as “relation to the shared products, perspectives, and practices of a group” (National Standards for Foreign Language Education Project, 1999). Exploring the essence of the term, *inter* or between, it refers to being able to go between and navigate situations across different cultures, between people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This is exactly what the chosen picturebooks *The Soccer Fence* and *The Rabbits* invite the reader to do. We as readers are invited to move between the different perspectives that the books stage and portray the complex training grounds for intercultural learning.

### 5.2.2 Skills of Interpreting and Relating

*Skills of interpreting and relating*, relates to our pre-knowledge which is important in both books in different aspects. Byram’s (1997) savior of *skills of interpreting and relating* brings up the ability to interpret the information one gets across (p. 37). In *The Soccer Fence*, readers are invited into the story through soccer. We use our pre-knowledge of the game, and maybe our love for the game, or our knowledge of a team sport in general to enter the story. What we know become a door into the unknown, which makes it easier for the reader to relate to the story. Conversely, in *The Rabbits*, the reader might relate more to the colonizers rather than the colonized. Even though we relate more to the colonizers’ way of living, such as following a standardized time and living in modern houses and buildings, we realize through the marsupials’ eyes that the invasion of modern technology was not the correct way of handling the situation. This invites the reader to learn about the consequences of the colonization and the western invasion, and influence us to become more culturally aware, which can lead to intercultural learning.

### 5.2.3 Attitudes

Even though both books contain the attitudes of openness and curiosity, it is portrayed in two completely different ways. Byram’s (1997) savior *attitudes*, involves the attitudes towards other people (p. 34). This is evident in the findings which highlight the learning opportunities in the books and that the learners can be formed by working well with these books. The findings show that the books have contrasting trajectories when it comes to the attitudes of

openness and curiosity. *The Soccer Fence* begins in the township, where Hector is segregated from the rest of Johannesburg. In contrast, *The Rabbits* begins with the marsupials having a curious and open mind towards the rabbits. Both perspectives change throughout the stories. Throughout the storyline in *The Soccer Fence*, the country opens up for intercultural encounters and the country becomes an integrated country. This is clearly portrayed through the fence opening for Hector, which is a metaphor for the country opening up for Hector and the rest of the black community.

Whereas, across the narrative of *The Rabbits*, the marsupials become less and less open towards the rabbits. The book goes from being depicted with happy and bright colors, to sad and dark colors. This is because the intercultural encounters are not successful, and we are left with the feeling that the openness is broken and the attitudes towards the rabbits have changed. The differentiation of the portrayal of attitudes in the books creates two different invitations to the possibility of intercultural learning, as well to work with our own attitudes. It really depends on what the teacher wants their students to learn. *The Soccer Fence* is a feel-good-story where they all live happily together in an integrated country, while in *The Rabbits*, the two groups live together, but the marsupials are still wondering what they are going to do with the rabbits. In *The Soccer Fence*, we are told what attitudes to adopt or cherish, while the open-ending in *The Rabbits* leave us to ponder about what the way is forward.

By learning from past encounters and real historical events in the book, we ask ourselves if it is too late to start to learn from each other or if we can start now. These questions are important to keep in mind, and it is not to say that the attitudes should only be positive, it is also important that students learn to be critical thinkers and reflect on the stories, and this might be more relevant in *The Rabbits*, which also leaves the opportunity for intercultural learning. In other words, the books invite us to work with our attitudes.

In *The Soccer Fence*, it is quite obvious what kind of attitudes we are invited to adopt. It is one of team-spirit and togetherness despite differences. We are invited to see what we have in common with the boys. The soccer metaphor might make it quite easy to work with attitudes, because we can recognize the rules from the game, maybe even from subject physical education or from playing it in recess. It symbolizes a kind of fair play, where everyone on the team has a part to play. In *The Rabbits*, we experience the invasion of a group with clocks and modern technology, which has similarities to our own culture. This challenge our view that



our culture is the center of things. We see what can happen if openness, as well as curiosity about the other is lacking. This savoir deals with the ability to decenter, which the book adds by seeing the perspective from the marsupials' and colonized eyes. This is a more indirect invitation to work with attitudes than in the *The Soccer Fence*. We must discover ourselves and realize that we have things in common with the invaders. We might even see that we have had a similar relationship in Norway to our own native population, The Sami People. Here, we get to see ourselves, and that it is not only the colonizers who rob people of heritage and resources.

#### 5.2.4 Knowledge

The findings in my chosen picturebooks show that the portrayal of the different cultures in the books, can enhance the young learners' knowledge about cultures in South Africa and Australia. The savior knowledge revolves around the importance of the knowledge we have about ourselves and about others, when entering a conversation or encounter with someone from a different country or with a different cultural background (Byram, 1997, p. 35). Even though the knowledge from the picturebooks is little in comparison to all the cultures we can find in the world, it shows that if teachers find the right books for specific cultures, it can be a great way for students to learn about a new culture. Knowledge also aligns with the interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship in LK20, which is important when discussing intercultural learning in an educational setting in the Norwegian classroom. This is related to skills of facing challenges with democratic principles (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). In *The Soccer Fence* we mostly learn about the role of soccer in South Africa in terms of their culture and history. On the other hand, we might learn more about the Australian cultures in *The Rabbits*. Here, we learn about the differences between the two world views, ways of life, and ways of being in the world. Even though we might get a better insight into the culture in *The Rabbits*, we get to be in the main character's shoes in *The Soccer Fence* through the apartheid timeline, which can also lead to intercultural learning.

The aspect of a timeline versus no timeline is interesting to discuss in relation the findings, as well as to the potential for intercultural learning. On the one side, *The Soccer Fence* goes over a few years and portray multiple different real historical events from the history of Apartheid in South Africa. Also, the fact that the book is written in a chronological order, can arguably make it easier for young learners to follow along the timeline of the story. A timeline provides

facts and details about the context of the fiction, and the fiction illustrates, as well as makes the history come alive. This entails that the book mentions specific dates, and historical events. The findings show that this is portrayed through the newspaper clippings that portray real historical events. On the other side, *The Rabbits* does not have same portrayal of a historical timeline. We are given few context markers, and it is not specifically stated when, where or how long the action takes place. It might be easier to understand the context of the book for a native reader, as they have more pre-knowledge about the subject. However, in a Norwegian educational context some detective work is needed, as well as some teacher scaffolding. At the same time, the fact that few context markers are given allow us to engage with the story in various ways. We might see ourselves and our national story in what portrayed. Through *The Rabbits* we discover the fact that the treatment of native populations is similar in many places in the western world, like Norway.

*The Rabbits* is an allegory which not only portrays the conflict in Australia but can be applied to present time conflicts, like the treatment of the Sami people in Norway. Since the setting in this book is not as obvious as in *The Soccer Fence*, it can be more difficult for intercultural learning of one specific historical event. Based on the findings, we can see that the book effectively addresses colonial invasion, grief, environmental degradation, and cultural erasure, through its text and pictures. The intercultural encounters are portrayed from the beginning of the book, where the marsupials' land has not been touched by the rabbits yet. Here, the land is depicted with bright and light colors and the verbal text is imbued with curiosity. However, the end of the book depicts something completely different, with black, grey, and dark pictures, and sad and depressing verbal text. This indicates the grief and suffering the rabbits inflicted upon the marsupials, and how their intercultural meeting was far from positive nor successful. The findings show that the gaps and openness of the book creates a learning opportunity that learners can take from the book, in which we need to learn from the past, to not do this again.

To enable young learners understanding of the historical elements in the books, it is crucial to address the teacher's role in encouraging the process, thereby fostering learners' achievement of intercultural learning. Since the picturebooks portray an historical event, at the same time as being fictional, it be hard for young learners to comprehend the content of the books. Therefore, it is important to discuss the teacher's role in teaching the chosen picturebooks and figure out if the books are appropriate in the EFL-classroom in upper elementary school.

Nikolajeva (2003) states that adult coreaders are crucial in the classroom, where the teacher takes a part in making the learners understanding the story of the picturebook and leading by example in good conversations regarding the content of the book. This is especially important in EFL-learning, where the students are learning another language and gaining new vocabulary and knowledge (Nikolajeva, 2003, p.6). What matters, is the approach and adaptation the teacher has on the material.

The findings align with the idea that teacher scaffolding and adult coreaders are needed to fully understand the meaning of both books. Especially *The Rabbits*, may be interpreted a different way than what is intended if background knowledge of Australia, the effects of colonialism and the stolen generation is lacking. The same goes for *The Soccer Fence*, where background information about apartheid and Nelson Mandela is needed. This background knowledge can be supplied by the teacher in the classroom, or by working with the contextual information in the book. However, the negative side of needing an adult coreader is the fact that the books need to be read in an educational setting and that the teacher also needs to be educated in the subject before teaching the books to their students. This implies that the teacher has to be prepared and have a plan for how to present the material.

#### 5.2.5 Tolerance of Ambiguity

The findings show that ambiguity is very present in *The Rabbits*, but not as present in *The Soccer Fence*. Heggernes (2020), brings up the tolerance of ambiguity, which is the ability to adapt to accept the uncertainty, and the ability to adapt to different situations that you are not used to (p. 117). The endings of both books portray the differences in the presence of ambiguity. *The Rabbits* ends with an open, philosophical question, while *The Soccer Fence* ends with a happy ending. The open ending in *The Rabbits* opens up for a gap where the reader can interpret the ending themselves. This invites us to see the complexity of the situation. The fact that there is no final ending implies that the ending is only the continuation and is still going on today. It also signals the question of how we can learn from the past, as well as how to move forward. It invites us to provide answers and asks for active responses, which can be a valuable tool in an educational context.

Conversely, the closed and happy ending in *The Soccer Fence*, may portray a false positive hope, as we know it is not how conflicts are resolved, especially in such a short period of

time, as well as the problems still linger today. The ending may indicate the resolution of Hector and Chris's friendship, rather than representing the entirety of South Africa. Nevertheless, if we interpret the ending of the book in relation to the apartheid storyline, it may create a failure to see the entire, and more complex picture.

Ambiguity is also depicted in *The Rabbits* through the lack of information of traits in both the marsupials and the rabbits, and the fact that it is an allegory where the main characters are animals, which may arguably give more interpretation up for the reader. However, in many ways we get more facts about the characters and their ways of life and their culture, in this book than in *The Soccer Fence*. Here, we only know where they live and that they love soccer. This gives the reader little information to grab or hold on to the story. Nevertheless, *The Rabbits* keeps the reader on their toes because we know so little about the characters, and it sparks some curiosity, as we want to figure out ourselves who these animal creatures are. This is something that *The Soccer Fence* lacks. Because we are presented with all the information we need to know to comprehend the story, the feeling of curiosity towards the characters is not as strong. Either way, the ambiguity prompts readers to form assumptions and reassess them. This learning potential aligns with Hoff's (2016 in Hoff, 2019) notion of effectively navigating complexity, conflict, and ambiguity in intercultural encounters.

### 5.2.6 Empathy

Since we experience the story in *The Soccer Fence* from Hector's perspective, we are consistently provided with insight into his emotions and thought process throughout the book's storyline. Nikolejeva (2018) discusses how picturebooks can enhance children's emotional literacy. This includes theory of mind and empathy. Theory of mind involves the ability to understand how people think, and empathy revolves around the understanding of how people feel (p. 114). Byram (2021) also mentions empathy as something essential for the development of the intercultural reader (p. 45). The use of language in picturebooks is also important in picturebooks, to convey a message and encourage the implied reader.

The enhancement of children's emotional literacy aligns with the findings in the chosen picturebooks, and the emotions portrayed include the feeling of injustice and unfairness. Both books portray the emotions through the relationship between text and image. These emotions are presented in a way that can spark the feeling of empathy towards the reader. In *The Soccer*

*Fence*, empathy is encouraged through the feeling of unfairness. In the findings, we can see that Hector is hindered from playing with other boys because of his skin color and the apartheid regiment. This happens in the book through the use of symbolic fences and point of view and the way in which the reader is positioned. Again, this notion of being invited into the game from the first spread and onwards, makes us empathize with Hector, making the experience of unfairness even stronger. In turn, this might affect the readers' attitudes.

Many children can relate to the feeling of exclusion, and *The Soccer Fence* invites the reader to be in Hector's shoes. Through depicting Hector's exclusion from joining the other side of the fence, both theory of mind and empathy is relevant. *The Rabbits*, also encourage the feeling of empathy. Here, the findings show that repetition is used to engage the learner. An example of this is the general representation of "loss". Throughout the book we can see lots of repetition, of not only of their home, but specifically of children. In other words, this is a repetition and reminder of the marsupials' loss. This engagement captivates the reader to reflect and ponder over the textual and visual elements, which again can lead to empathy towards the marsupials, and the way they are treated in the book. What makes us emotionally engaged is the feeling of exclusion, injustice, and loss.

The difference in the narrative voices is an important factor to explore when discussing theory of mind and empathy. Theory of mind and empathy correspond with Byram's (1997) intercultural reader and is depicted in the findings through the visual and verbal text by inviting the reader to be in the shoes of the colonized in *The Rabbits*, and the oppressed people of color in *The Soccer Fence*. The narrative voice in *The Soccer Fence* belongs to Hector and is told from a 1<sup>st</sup> person point of view. From the findings we can see that this makes us emphasize and relate to the main character. On the other hand, the narrative voice in *The Rabbits* belongs to an unknown plural we but is also told from a 1<sup>st</sup> person point of view. The difference is that we are told the story from a plural we, from the marsupials who are telling the story. This is important to highlight because we do not get as close relationship with the marsupials as we do with Hector. This affects the way we are invited into the character's shoes and the way we empathize with the characters. Put differently, these books train our capacity for empathy and our capacity to understand other people.

### **5.3 Sub-Research Question #3: What is The Relationship Between Intercultural Competence and Literary Texts?**

Sub-question #3 brings up the relationship between intercultural competence and literary texts. This section discusses why it is a good idea to use literature for intercultural learning. In this part of the discussion, I will be doing a comparison of the two chosen picturebooks and look at their different portrayal of and relationship with intercultural competence, as well as look at their complex training grounds.

Based on the findings, different feelings occur when reading the picturebooks. Hoff (2016, in Hoff, 2019) states that literary reading can improve learners' intercultural communicative skills if done the right way. This implies to explore feelings of confusion, tension and ambivalence that may occur when reading (p. 456). The findings support this claim, and these specific books show that intercultural encounters can be portrayed through picturebooks that can lead to intercultural learning. The interesting thing about these two books is that the portrayal of intercultural encounters is so different. Reading a literary text engages our knowledge, emotions, language abilities and critical awareness. In other words, it requires us to reread and go back and adjust our assumptions. At the same time, it makes us engage with our pre-knowledge about the content and makes us revise our knowledge. All these aspects are also part of what we define as intercultural competence. As mentioned in the introduction and theory chapter, the core elements of the English subject have a section about working with texts in English, where the curriculum specifically mention the development of intercultural competence (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019b). In essence, these aspects collectively contribute to why intercultural competence and literary texts go well together.

#### *5.3.1 Complex Training Grounds*

The findings and earlier discussion in this chapter have led to the clear connection between intercultural competence and literary texts. The interesting aspect in terms of the two books is that the relationship can look completely different from each other. What the books have in common is that they are complex training grounds for young learners in terms of intercultural competence. These complex training grounds relate to intercultural competence and Hoff's (2016 in Hoff, 2019) idea about how literary reading can improve learners' intercultural competence in terms of feelings of confusion, tension, and ambivalence.

On the one side, *The Soccer Fence* offer a happy ending with the readers' questions answered. On the other side, *The Rabbits* offer an open ending with the feeling of ambiguity and an uncertainty of what happens next. The question of whether the books are age appropriate, suitable, or beneficial for English language learning really depends on the adult coreader and the teacher presenting the learning materials. The relationship between intercultural competence is clearly there. However, it is worth mentioning that the texts are complex, and the learners needs to be presented with background information of the historical context to be able to fully comprehend the meaning of the texts.

Regardless of how the stories are told, the books offer stories that can help promote intercultural competence through their intercultural encounters, emotions, empathy, tolerance of ambiguity, skills of interpreting and relating, knowledge, and attitudes. The books serve as valuable tools that can be used for educating young learners about different cultures and how to behave in the world when encountering others. They not only provide educational content, but also contribute to personal development in terms of becoming interculturally competent. Additionally, the books' complex training grounds and different approaches might help develop readers' intercultural competence.

## 6.0 Conclusion

The main research question for this thesis is: *How might the picturebooks *The Soccer Fence* and *The Rabbits* help promote intercultural competence in English language teaching?* After having discussed the sub-research questions in the previous chapter, this chapter will aim to answer the main research question, based on the analysis and discussion. The analysis and discussion provided several answers as to how the chosen picturebooks may function as complex training grounds for intercultural learning.

In this thesis, I have analyzed the chosen picturebooks *The Soccer Fence* (Bildner & Watson, 2014) and *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 2010) to discuss their potential for intercultural learning. To guide the analysis, I have used a combination of elements from narrative theory, described by Serafini & Reid (2022), Nikolajeva (2003) and Nikolajeva & Scott (2006), along with insights from social semiotics as described by Painter (2018, 2019). Both picturebooks have narratives that tackle cultural topics such as colonial invasion, grief, power relations and racial segregation in the light of theories such as theory of mind and empathy (Nikolajeva, 2018), tolerance of ambiguity (Heggernes, 2020), as well as skills of interpreting and relating, knowledge and attitudes (Byram, 1997). Both books include both a fictional and factual historical view on the effects of the colonial invasion in South Africa and Australia. The analysis confirms that the chosen picturebooks are complex training grounds that are suitable for promoting intercultural competence in English language teaching. *The Soccer Fence* provides complex training grounds for intercultural encounters by presenting a blend of fictional and factually accurate events that culminate in a successful intercultural meeting, and what attitudes to adopt and cherish. On the other hand, *The Rabbits* depicts an unsuccessful intercultural encounter with an unresolved conclusion, evoking feelings of ambiguity and uncertainty of what happens next. Both books highlight the importance of how to behave in the world when encountering others.

With a growing cultural globalization and complex world, this thesis provides insights in material that one might need to gain an intercultural understanding to be able to get a better understanding of our society. The portrayal of the different historical events and intercultural encounters in the books, may enhance young learners' knowledge about cultures in South Africa and Australia. Even though this is little knowledge in comparison to all the cultures we



can find in the world, it shows that if teachers find the right books for specific cultures, it can be educational for students to learn about a new culture.

## 6.1 Implications for English Language Teaching

This thesis has looked at two books through the lens of intercultural competence and has provided insight into their potential as learning materials for teachers in English language teaching in upper elementary school. This study could inspire teachers in English language teaching to use picturebooks in Norwegian classrooms in the English as a foreign language subject to develop intercultural competence. Moreover, the study does not only give an insight into how to use these specific picturebooks, but generally children's books that deal with historical events and intercultural encounters. The readers may work on and be challenged to develop intercultural competence as they read the books.

It is important to look at literary texts and intercultural competence in relevance to the Norwegian National Curriculum. The core elements of the English subject, have a section about *working with texts in English* (kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019b). Here, the curriculum specifically clarifies that different English texts in the classroom should be used to develop intercultural competence. This thesis has shown that literary texts, and picturebooks in particular, seem to be a very good choice of genre. If we can choose between all kinds of texts as teaching materials, this thesis has argued for the use of picturebooks, as shown in the above of how the books are complex training grounds for intercultural competence

The different elements mentioned in the English subject curriculum align well with Byram's (1997) *Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence*. *Inter* or *between*, refers to being able to go between and navigate situations across different cultures, between people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Heggernes, 2022, p. 145). This is exactly what the chosen picturebooks *The Soccer Fence* and *The Rabbits* invite the reader to do. We as readers are invited to move between the different perspectives that the books stage and portray the complex training grounds for intercultural learning. This resonates with why intercultural competence and literary texts work great together and is shown in the findings through the intercultural encounters the books offer the reader. Byram's (1997) *savoir knowledge* also aligns with the interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship in LK20 (kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017), which is important when discussing intercultural learning in

an educational setting in the Norwegian classroom. This is related to skills of facing challenges with democratic principles.

Intercultural competence is mentioned in the curriculum, but not defined explicitly. Nevertheless, it seems to be an integral part the subject curriculum, and therefore, it is important that we understand what the concept entails. This is why studies like this about intercultural competence and literary texts are important in the research field, and that teachers understand the importance of implementing the term in their day-to-day teaching. Furthermore, this thesis has provided an insight into on what intercultural competence is, and facilitated teachers with a selection of suitable materials that could inspire them to work with literary texts that deal with cultural topics. This is a term and skill that is very relevant for young learners to acquire because it is something that is useful not only in school, but outside of school throughout their whole life, in our highly globalized world with diversity both within or country and classrooms.

## **6.2 Limitations of the Study and Proposal for Future Research**

One of the limitations of this study is the fact that the study has only analyzed and looked at the intercultural learning potential of two different picturebooks. Therefore, future research should explore the learning potential in additional historical picturebooks to determine if they share similar features. This would provide teachers with a more comprehensive understanding of the field and other potential learning resources. Another limitation in this study is that my findings are based on my interpretation of the books, which means that the interpretation and findings cannot be generalized. A proposal for future research would be to test out the picturebooks in a classroom with learners in upper elementary school. A classroom-based research project would carry out the analysis in practice and test the validity of the analysis and my hypothesis regarding how the books engage young learners and promote intercultural competence. This could give further insight into how the study works in practice, as well as how the books invite students to intercultural learning in a classroom setting. Another proposal for future research is working with the books in an interdisciplinary fashion and include other subjects than English, such as social science, which is relevant to the historical aspect of post-colonialism in both books.

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