

***Harry Potter* and racial hierarchies in the English language classroom**

A thematic study on racial inequality in *Harry Potter*

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the pedagogical benefits of using fantasy literature in the classroom as it relates to the Swedish school's democratic values of anti-racism and working for a just society. It examines the representations of racial prejudice, discrimination, and othering among wizards and muggles which are explicitly or implicitly present throughout the *Harry Potter* series as well as what the representations of inequality can offer in terms of inculcating democratic values and critical thinking in a Swedish upper secondary classroom. This essay also argues for the use of *Harry Potter* in the EFL classroom since the novel's complexity and popularity can work as an incentive for students to analyze the ways that the fantasy world relates to our own society. Since the focus of this essay is racial discrimination, prejudice, and otherness the critical lens is Critical Race Theory and anti-oppressive education theory.

Fantasy, Democratic values, Critical Race Theory, Racial inequality, Anti-oppression education.

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1. Introduction

It has been nearly twenty–seven years since readers of all ages read the first fantasy novel in what would become a seven-book series by J.K. Rowling now known as the *Harry Potter* series. This fantasy book series is now amongst classics that include *The Lord of the Rings*, *His Dark Materials*, and *The Narnia* series and has cemented its role as a literary and cultural phenomenon. *Harry Potter*, much like any other book, shaped the readers, influencing their views and outlook on the world. Fantasy literature can transform society through the fantastical world because it allows students to understand certain complex topics in a more digestible way. Fantasy novels intended for children and young adults often highlight various social problems euphemistically in order to recognize important issues and injustices in the real world. *Harry Potter* is one such book series that appears to be a simple tale about a heroic battle between good and evil with friendship and love triumphing in the end but turns out to be a complex story with many layers. Analyzing the book series critically shows how *Harry Potter* opens the door to a world marked by racial categories and stereotypes, and by actions and attitudes against these racial stereotypes and othering practices. Critical scrutiny raises the question whether *Harry Potter* promotes anti-racism and anti-oppression or if it strengthens certain ideologies and prejudices.

Although the book series is known by so many people worldwide not many are aware of the racial othering and stereotyping throughout the series. Race and ethnicity are often not associated with each other but in this paper the terms are interchangeable in order to explain the racial othering and discrimination portrayed in the novels. Race and othering are terms not often used explicitly in fantasy literature but that can have a deep implicit meaning to the students who read it.

In all of the *Harry Potter* books, racism and other social inequalities play a significant role throughout the plot. It is shown in the house elves who are the most easily recognizable examples of oppression to the discrimination shown to muggle-borns for not having “pure” blood. Immediately when Harry is introduced into the wizarding world, the differences in social classes become noticeable, such as the differences between Purebloods and Muggles. By providing the readers with this complex world, Rowling shows the reader a version of society, which is built on prejudices and stereotypes regarding nationality, culture, or race amongst other things. J.K. Rowling, therefore, examines the role of equality and racism in our modern society through her novels and characters. The issue of whether it promotes anti-racism or strengthens prejudice has been discussed because of the controversies surrounding Rowling.

Despite what her writing suggests Rowling has become the topic of many discussions relating to discrimination of others. According to *the BBC*, the author has been criticized by the transgender

community for her alleged transphobic tweets and comments. The tweets from 2020 referred to her views on gender identity and her concerns about allowing trans women into women-only spaces, and in some circles she was called out for being transphobic. A long essay published in *The Guardian* by Vanessa Thorpe (2020) did little to dispel the criticism. Yet, Rowling remains a popular public figure who continues working on movies, books, and computer games. The topic of inequality and social issues in the world of *Harry Potter* mirrors our society very closely and is, therefore, a topic of inquiry by numerous scholars.

The purpose of this essay is to argue for the pedagogical benefits of using fantasy literature in the classroom as it relates to Skolverket's understanding of democratic values in particular values of anti-racism and working for a just society. In this research question, I ask, what can fantasy literature and the representations of inequality offer in terms of inculcating democratic values and critical thinking in a Swedish upper secondary classroom? In this paper, I aim to explore the racial inequality addressed in the *Harry Potter* novels. Specifically, I aim to examine the representations of prejudice, discrimination, and othering among wizards and muggles which are explicitly or implicitly present throughout the series. By utilizing critical race theory and anti-oppression education theory (otherness) as well as the idea of inculcating democratic values, I will explore how *Harry Potter* provides students the tools to recognize issues such as racial and social inequality within the framework of a fantasy world and how that fosters critical thinking in the students.

2. Background and Previous Research

2.1. *Harry Potter* summary

Joanne Kathleen Rowling, better known as J.K. Rowling, started writing the *Harry Potter* books in 1990. The first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was published in 1997. The book series is an example of fantasy children's literature and portrays Harry, a ten-year-old orphaned boy, who lived in a cupboard under the stairs at his aunt and uncle's house. Harry doesn't know anything about the magical wizarding world and lives an unsuspecting life with his Muggle relatives in London until the day he receives his Hogwarts letter. His aunt and uncle (Petunia and Vernon) despise anything unnatural and magical and Harry is treated differently from his cousin Dudley who lives a spoiled life. When Harry turns eleven a whole new world is opened to him. He enrolls in Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and discovers that he is the most famous person in the magical world.

His fame is derived from being the only living person to survive the killing curse. The curse used by Voldemort to kill his parents, Lily and James Potter. Harry's time in the wizarding world is not peaceful and each year at Hogwarts Voldemort grows stronger. From his first year to his seventh, Harry

must face Voldemort repeatedly in order to prevent him from coming into power. Harry and his two best friends Ron and Hermione work together to stop Voldemort and face many different challenges along the way, such as fighting a mountain troll, a giant spider, and a three-headed dog, amongst other things. The three friends get past each of these challenges and evolve as people and wizards throughout the book series. Harry changes throughout the first book from a shy boy with low self-esteem to a boy that is popular, talented, social, and brave. His personal growth continues to increase when starts Hogwarts and can make choices on his own.

2.2. Previous research

In the book, *Creating Magical Worlds: Otherness and Othering in Harry Potter*, Marion Rana discusses otherness and identity construction in the *Harry Potter* novels. Rana sees the process of othering and the juxtaposition of ‘us’ and ‘Others’ as significant factors in Harry Potter building his identity as a courageous and brave wizard throughout the series. She highlights the issue of othering through analyzing categories of the evil Other, the subhuman Other, the uncivilized Other, the exotic Other, the conventional Other, the real-life Other, and females as Others by giving examples of characters that have been othered and are facing discrimination and racism because of them being othered. Rana identifies Muggles (non-magical people) and Squibs (non-magical people born to a wizard family) as the conventional Other. She argues that, while the discrimination of Muggle-borns (witches or wizards born to non-magical parents) is condemned, the discrimination and prejudice of non-magical Others is not condemned or reprimanded. Muggles, Muggle-borns, and Squibs are viewed as Others and not fully belonging to the wizarding world. Rana argues that “both the Muggles and the Squibs presented in the novels are morally and intellectually inferior to the wizards” and agrees with Mendlesohn, who she cites, that Muggles in particular are treated in ways that “range from contempt to at best patronizing curiosity” (59). Rana goes on to argue that only the extremist racism of Voldemort towards the Muggles is condemned but the more subtle discrimination is not questioned or remarked upon in the novels. She claims that presenting the Other in a negative light reinforces Harry’s identity, as he was raised amongst them, and that without the negative depictions of the Other Harry would be an uninteresting character. The study condemns the wizarding world as a racist system that systemically oppresses other species and ignores them. Further according to Rana, it fails to condemn the oppression of others and it encourages the reader to identify with the wizards and accept their prejudice.

Lyubansky analyzes in *Harry Potter and the Word That Shall Not Be Named* that race is more than the color of the characters’ skin in *Harry Potter* novels. He states, “no doubt, Rowling intended to comment on race by focusing on blood status and elf rights” (237). Blood status (whether Squib,

Muggle, or Muggle-born) is a major theme in the series and is something Rowling makes clear when correlating the evilness of the Death Eaters (Voldemort's followers) and their obsession with blood purity and supremacy. Lyubansky notes that "...for many white people it [race] has simply become 'the word that shall not be named'" (233). The point he is making is that it could sometimes be difficult to discuss themes such as race in the classroom, but with the use of another "world", where the same issues exist, the topic can be introduced in a neutral way before the focus is turned onto our own modern society. This way pupils will have understood the issue before they are asked to apply it in their own reality in order to see the issues existing today. Lyubansky further credits Rowling with the understanding that using fiction in the classroom can "penetrate our psychological defenses and reach our core beliefs" (233).

The social inequalities and injustices regarding blood purity are present in every book. Karin Westman compares the wizarding slur 'Mudblood', which is a derogatory term for Muggle-borns, to the highly offensive slur, the N-word: both words are highly charged and reveal the user's racist attitudes but also the attitude of the receiver as to whether the receiver accepts or challenges the use of the word. Westman further claims that being a pureblood refers not only to one's blood purity but also supports the ideology of social class segregation and the supremacy of purebloods. She compares the Quidditch World Cup's (wizarding sports tournament) riot scene in the *Goblet of Fire* to football hooligans and their riots, and the hooded wizards torturing the Muggle families to the notorious Ku Klux Klan or the British National Party and the National Front. She compares nationalist pride to "wizarding pride"; different nations gather under the idea of being wizards rather than representatives of different nations.

3. Theoretical Framework: Fantasy, Otherness, and Critical Race Theory

3.1. What is fantasy literature?

There are many theoretical works on fantasy to date that have incorporated different definitions and theoretical approaches. An early theorist is Tzvetan Todorov and his theory of the fantastic. In his book, *The Fantastic A Structuralist Approach to a Literary Genre* he explains that the fantastic refers to symbolic or narrative elements that step beyond that which is known to be "realistic" or plausible within the laws of reality as best one can understand them from known science. Todorov divides fiction that strains the boundaries of realism into three categories and only one of them is called the fantastic. Todorov believes that these conditions are most successfully met when the reader identifies so strongly with the character that both question the nature of the events together (33). The essential conditions for the fantastic to exist are

- first, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and supernatural explanation of events described.
- Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus, the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work—in the case of naive reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character.
- Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations. (33)

The definition of fantasy that will be used in this essay is Brian Attebery's definition, which refers to fantasy as a "story that encapsulates a world view and authorizes belief" (2).

Fantasy stories are often about a fictional made-up world that is filled with fantastical creatures, such as trolls, various beasts, and magic. Melissa Thomas agrees that fantasy literature as a genre often portrays the imaginative, supernatural, and heroic, and while many people believe or have viewed fantasy as a genre for children it is a widely celebrated and beloved genre by readers of all ages (Thomas 60). According to Thomas, the quest motif and the hero are particularly important in the genre of fantasy. This genre of books always has a hero (who often has a troublesome family of some sort) that is sent out on a quest of great importance and meets both wise people and evil ones (60-61). Harry Potter is one such example, and similarly to what Thomas stated Harry goes through a change throughout the series and surprises the reader with his bravery and abilities despite not knowing any magic at the start of the book series.

Fantasy literature "is an undistilled version of human imagination momentary worlds and magic that may be at odds with the rational truth, yet continue to reflect our culture and times" (63). While the genre is imaginative and based on fantastical and supernatural elements it still portrays life-like stories and events, which reflect society and the time that they were written. Harry Potter as a character reflects some of those challenges and difficulties that people face during life such as racial inequality.

Racial inequality can be defined as the unequal distribution of resources, power, and economic opportunity across racial lines in a society. Most contemporary scholars agree that racial inequalities are a product of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva refers to as a racialized social system which is a system that reproduces and maintains the status of the dominant group socially, economically, politically, and psychologically (Bonilla-Silva 10).

Additionally, it is not likely that one will encounter wizarding prejudice or fighting large spiders but reading about it may provide readers with the importance of overcoming challenges.

Several other critics believe that the genre is quest driven and connects fantasy to being “a genre about overcoming obstacles and achieving goals” (Cheyne 110) whilst also an “outstandingly valuable resource for the EFL classroom” because of its ethical issues and dilemmas, relevant topics, and narrative structure (Williams 141).

The focus on the hero’s development has been found by some critics to work particularly well in some educational settings. These types of fantasy novels follow the main character from childhood to adulthood, through growing up and creating identity, love, and friendship, through education and various other life experiences. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* is one example of a bildungsroman that exposes children to a reality similarly to ours that appeals to young readers.

3.1.1. What does fantasy literature encourage in students?

Several critics view science fiction and fantasy fiction as a vehicle that opens the door to readers and students about the so-called “what if’s”, which makes readers think beyond the rules of our society and world and imagine different alternatives for how the world could be, which further broadens their mindset (Pierce 65). One of the aims of the syllabus for Swedish upper secondary school is to encourage curiosity in language and culture as well as to work against inequality and discrimination (Skolverket 1). Aliel Cunningham, much like the National Agency for Education, discusses the topic of engaging and encouraging students by working with fantasy and language which in turns can help inculcate good humanistic values in the students (118-119). Good humanistic values refer to educating aware and competent members of society that stand up for justice and equality.

Cruz and Pollock write that fantasy literature has the ability to distort and alter reality in order to reflect the human condition. The students therefore learn racial issues by reading fantasy to be able to analyze their own reality in contrast to that of the fantasy world (185). This degree of distance is essential to convey different themes and insights about their own reality. The distance can provide a sense of safety for the students without it eliminating dangers for the characters and it also creates a sense of escapism that can be helpful in the classroom. Fantasy allows the readers a safe environment to explore the complex issues regarding race, gender, class, and various other discriminations without it feeling too close to their own world. Fantasy can create a place different from their world and the readers’ everyday lives but can also serve as a mirror to their own society (185).

The imaginative capabilities of fantasy are often particularly suited to help readers, especially children, understand more abstract and complicated life situations, such as prejudice, death, and love. According to Martha Nussbaum, literature is an important part of liberal education and helps raise good, upstanding members of our society. She describes imagination or narrative imagination as “the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself” (10-11) and argues that

using this ability of imagination when reading is something that can help with the understanding of others. Ursula K. Le Guin also commented on fantasy's ability to make readers relate to their own world by writing "the use of imaginative fiction is to deepen your understanding of your world, and your fellow men, and your own feelings, and your destiny" (43). Teachers can use fantasy novels as a powerful tool in creating empathy and understanding in their students whilst also nurturing healthy emotions and responses.

3.2. Democratic values

During students' schooling, they are educated in the fundamental democratic values and human rights. The Swedish school system has been entrusted with the task of developing democratic skills in children and young people. However, issues involving democracy and basic values in society have increasingly become public debate not least in relation to views and behavior that violate the democratic code, such as bullying, racism, and sexual harassment (Skolverket 7). Students are given the chance to develop into individuals who respect and show consideration for those who hold different views from them. The fundamental democratic education is supposed to bring people together despite their backgrounds. This diversity is an important prerequisite for fulfilling the educational system's democratic mandate. The concept of democratic values in education is primarily about attitudes, communication, and how people view one another. In school the democratic values find expression in the day-to-day working environment both in the classroom and during breaks, or in corridor and canteen encounters (Skolverket 13). Bullying and other types of abusive behavior tend to take place in informal environments, which means that democratic values cannot be viewed simply as a subject to be taught.

The Swedish education system has a two-part task which is to strengthen the new Education Act and concerning the transfer and rooting of both knowledge and democratic values. It is a matter of educating aware and competent members of society that are able to manage the knowledge and fundamental values that the Swedish society is built on and to act in accordance with the ideals of respecting human rights and equal worth of all people. Inculcating democratic citizens or civic competence is linked to the educational goals of the syllabuses for all subjects (18).

The Swedish National Agency for Education states that the national objectives for secondary and upper secondary schools should represent and impart the values of "the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity between people" and this is only achieved when the teachers foster the "individuals sense of justice, generosity, tolerance and responsibility (Skolverket 5). The Swedish upper secondary school education should, therefore, make students aware of the different social equalities, human rights, and the

fundamental democratic values that the Swedish school system lies on (6). Schools in Sweden should also “promote an understanding for others and the ability to empathise” because the students live in a multicultural society, they are taught that “xenophobia and intolerance must be met with knowledge, open discussion and active measures” (5).

Skolverket’s definitions are somewhat vague as they do not specify racial difference as a basis for inequality. I am arguing that it is an important part of what it means to have democratic values that include the equal worth of all people not just some people. Skolverket does not mention race or ethnicity in their fundamental values other than mentioning xenophobia which is the dislike or prejudice against people from other countries but that does not encompass the issue of the inviolability of human life and the equal value of all people. Race is fundamentally connected to the inviolability of human life and the equal value of all people; therefore, theories of anti-racism and othering are connected to working with “xenophobia and intolerance” in a knowledgeable open discussion. Anti-racism is a process of actively identifying and opposing racism. The goal of anti-racism is to challenge racism and actively change behaviors and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions. Anti-racism is rooted in action which is the reason it works so well with the classroom aspect of working with racism and xenophobia.

Although Skolverket clearly indicates equality between men and women it is silent about race and ethnicity. Nevertheless, we can understand Skolverket in this way the discussions on race and ethnicity have a valid and important role in the discussion beyond the point of xenophobia and tolerance. The goal is that pupils will be able to develop ethical standpoints based on knowledge, personal experiences, and democratic values. The students should be able to respect the intrinsic value of others and move against oppression and abusive behavior. The goal, is also, for the students to be able to empathize with and understand other people’s situations (10).

3.3. Race and ethnicity

In this essay I use the terms race and ethnicity as important points of basis for the understanding of my analysis. I am aware that traditionally race and ethnicity are often seen as something different. However, in this essay they are two concepts related to human ancestry and both are social constructs used to categorize and characterize seemingly distinct populations. Therefore, in my analysis of the Harry Potter series I use the terms interchangeably to refer to the same thing.

The term ethnicity is used commonly by people in their everyday lives, yet it is difficult to clearly define. Ethnicity is commonly used to refer to a social group that share a common and distinctive culture, religion, or language. It can also refer to a person’s background, allegiance, or association. One’s own construction and definition of ethnicity can, therefore, vary depending on sociopolitical

contexts (Caliendo and Mellwain 18). The terms ethnicity and race have long been complex terms to define and are oftentimes used interchangeably (18).

Race and ethnicity often appear in various public fora as interchangeable terms with significantly different meanings depending on the particular context. If one does not acknowledge power differentials, minority ethnic groups may be assumed to have equal power as the dominant racial or ethnic groups (Weiner 333). Terminology failing to capture important power differentials impedes people's understanding of racial mechanisms and processes. Weiner reports that regardless of the term used, race or ethnicity, the power to shape one's own identity and life outcomes and to control others must be acknowledged (333). Attempting to avoid race by calling groups of people "ethnic" does not diminish the consequences of oppression, racialization, exploitation, or dehumanization given the multiple ways in which ethnic minorities and groups can be racialized. Groups described as ethnic may also be subjected to social processes of racialization and can be defined as racial groups locally, nationally, and/or globally.

3.4. Critical Race Theory

Race is a category that is entangled with empirical knowledge, misinformation, and ideology, all which seek to justify and sustain certain beliefs (Orkin and Joubin 193). Race takes on a particular and disturbing meaning when it becomes intertwined with the hierarchical structures of institutional life as reflected by politics and bureaucratic procedures (194).

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva acknowledges that race like other social categories such as class and gender, is socially constructed but insists that it has a social reality. This means that race is created and it produces real effects on the individual racialized as "black" or "white" (9). In order to explain how a socially constructed category produces real race effects, Bonilla-Silva introduces the term racial structure. Race forms a social structure (a racialized social system) that gave privileges to Europeans over non-Europeans. Racialized social systems affected all societies across the world where Europeans extended their reach and control (9). Racial structures remain for the same reasons that other structures do, since people racialized as "white"—or as members of the dominant race—receive material benefits from the racial order they struggle to maintain their privileges. Those defined as belonging to the subordinate race struggle to change the status quo or become resigned in their position. The racial structures and racial inequality around the world exist because they benefit members of the dominant race—white people.

Theorists like Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Richard Delgado discuss of aspects of racial inequality that relies on the assumption that racial inequality is the result of individual prejudice

and bias. The main criticism to this idea is that they ignore how societies are often structured along racial lines which ultimately leads to social, residential, educational, and other forms of segregation. It also ignores how racism can continue to operate in a society even when overt prejudices and discriminatory practices are no longer socially acceptable. Another key term Bonilla-Silva uses is the notion of racial ideology. By this Bonilla-Silva means the racially based framework used by actors to explain and justify (dominant race) or challenge (subordinate race or races) the racial status quo. While all races in a racialized social system have the capacity of developing these frameworks, the frameworks of the dominant race tend to become the master frameworks upon which all racial individual's ground, for or against, their ideological positions (9). Racial ideologies are rooted in the group-based conditions and experiences of the races and are, at the symbolic level, the representations developed by these groups to explain how the world is or ought to be (10). The various racialized groups are based on a hierarchy and domination as the ruling ideology is expressed as "common sense" in the interests of the dominant race. Racial hierarchies explain how different racial and ethnic groups fare compared to whites and to one another. Oppositional ideologies attempt to challenge the common sense by providing an alternative frames, ideas, and stories based on the experiences of subordinated races (10). Whites because of their privileged position form a social group and they are fractured along class, gender, sexual orientation, and other forms of "social cleavage".

According to Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic two important points of CRT is racism being ordinary and a social construct. Lois Tyson explains this further when she adds that people tend to think that only visible forms of racism such as "physical or verbal attacks against people of color; the activities of white supremacist groups" tend to be recognized as racist. The term 'everyday racism' was invented to capture less violent or less organized, but equally reprehensible forms of racism (369). Delgado and Stefancic argue that race is socially constructed and therefore should not be essentialized (i.e., that there are no inherent characteristics of any racial group) (10). They claim that race is a product of social thought and social relations; there is no objective, inherent or fixed race which corresponds to a biological or genetic reality. Rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient for the dominant group (9).

CRT has for many years been criticized by various theorists and non-theorists. One criticism regarding CRT relates to the movement of straying from its materialist roots and dwelling overly on matters of concern to middle-class minorities— the microaggressions, racial insults, unconscious discrimination, and affirmative action in higher education. Another concern that some CRT critics have is that the movement has become excessively preoccupied with issues of identity, as opposed to social analysis (Delgado and Stefancic 107).

According to Delgado and Stefancic, critical race theorists can be divided into different “camps”. The first camp are called realists and they think of racism as a tool by which society allocates privilege and status. Racial hierarchies determine who gets certain benefits including the better jobs or the best schools, disfavoring the oppressed while benefitting the oppressors. The second camp is made up of idealists who believe that racism and discrimination are matters of thought, mental categorization, attitudes, and discourse (17). Race is a social construction that is created by a system of ideas, unconscious feelings, and social teachings, amongst other things.

3.5. Anti-oppression education theory

Kevin Kumashiro’s *Troubling Education: Queer Activism and Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy* challenges simplistic notions of anti-oppressive education. Kumashiro presents a four-part typology of theories and practices of anti-oppressive education: Education for the Other, Education about the Other, Education that is critical of privileging and Otherness, and Education that changes students and society. He identifies each typology’s definition of oppression and explains its theory of change and analyzes its strengths and weaknesses. In an attempt to address the myriad of ways in which racism and other forms of oppression play out in society and in schools, educators and educational researchers have engaged in two types of projects: understanding the dynamics of oppression and suggesting ways to work against it (Kumashiro 31). Kumashiro has, by turning from interpersonal interactions to the school curriculum, attempted to work against oppression by focusing on what all students—privileged and marginalized—know and should know about the Other. One primary goal of schooling is to teach and learn more knowledge, the researchers suggest that this knowledge is anti-oppressive knowledge because it is central to challenging oppression in and outside of school (31).

One of the problems with the many different approaches to teaching about oppression is that it is often conducted through education about the Other (64). Education about the Other allows the students to remain bystanders in the process of othering and it permits them to ignore the part we all play in oppressive practices and structures. It is not enough to read about the Other rather the underlying mechanisms of othering must always be central when teachers choose which texts and stories to use and share with their students. Othering is necessary for the dominant culture to remain privileged and in power and in order to change that “oppression requires disruptive knowledge” texts should, therefore, not be chosen to impart new knowledge but to disrupt what the students already believe they know (42). Kevin Kumashiro maintains that process of othering is not all bad; to make a place for the Other’s perspective, we must be able to define who the Other is (42). The solution to oppression is to not become what is oftentimes called “color-blind” ignoring the reality of oppression and the process of

othering. Because of that, it is crucial to be aware of the differences between teaching about the Other and teaching about oppression (45). Teachers must aim to identify and address the structures that create the Other without prescribing the Other a definite function outside of those structures (38). It is the structures within society that create the need for the Other that needs to be highlighted not the qualities of the Other.

Learning about this and the oppression it can oftentimes lead to entails learning about one's own privileges (Kumashiro 46). Through this realization students may be able to recognize similarities between the process of othering in the fictional society and their own society. As well as the privileges of many individuals in our society that is part of a group that subjects other minority groups to the process of othering. This will lead them towards what Kumashiro calls disrupting established knowledge and this disruption of knowledge can cause a "crisis"; that is because the students who learn about oppression will likely also become aware of their own role in oppressive structures (62-63). Using fiction to create a distance to that disruption, through the process of defamiliarization, makes it easier for students to work through the crisis because they are not asked to criticize their own participation in oppression but rather an allegory of it.

Kumashiro uses the term Other to refer to those groups that have traditionally been marginalized, denigrated, or violated (i.e. Othered) in society. This can include students of color, students from under- or unemployed families. They are often defined in opposition to groups that are traditionally favored, normalized, or privileged in society, and as such, are defined as *other than* the idealized norm (31). In terms of fantasy literature and, specifically, *Harry Potter* which is used in this study the term Other refers to people not belonging to the norm of the wizarding community. Muggles, Squibs, Muggle-borns, and others fall into this category of being marginalized or violated.

Kumashiro highlights the criticism that teaching about the Other could present a dominant narrative of the Other's experience that might be read by students as the overall experience of the Other. The students might read it as, for instance, *the* Latino experience or in this instance *the* Muggle experience. The strength of otherness and anti-oppressive theory and their approaches is that it teaches all students, not just the Othered students, "as it calls on educators to enrich all students' understanding of different ways of being". By increasing students' knowledge of the Other and perhaps helping students see similarities between groups this approach challenges oppression by aiming to develop students an empathy for the Other and for each other (42). This approach also attempts to normalize the differences and Otherness by encouraging students to think of and treat other ways of being just as "normal" and acceptable as normative ways of being and living.

4. Analysis

4.1. Race and ideology

“It’s people like you, Ron,” Hermione began hotly, “who prop up rotten and unjust systems, just because they’re too lazy...”

- *Goblet of Fire*

Throughout all seven novels of the *Harry Potter* series, there are complex themes such as racial prejudice, discrimination, and inequality. The racial discrimination and oppression blatantly seen in the later four novels are easier to discern than the name-calling in the earlier work which can be confused for bullying by people of a perceived superior class and culture. It is this very idea of racial discrimination, prejudice, and inequality in the wizarding world by the purebloods and muggles that I will be analyzing in this section of the paper. The focus will be to examine how racism and racial discrimination are portrayed and perpetuated within the book series and the world of fantasy fiction. In *Harry Potter*, race goes beyond the aspect of skin color because it refers to the social concept of a group of people (Muggles, Muggle-borns, or Squibs) who are viewed as having something in common (Lyubansky 236).

One of the central themes in the series is the fight against evil which represents the continued preservation of blood purity in the magical world. This makes the traditional racial hierarchy not based on class or appearance but on the superiority that comes with being pureblooded. Aside from the negativity and discrimination that purebloods give to those they perceive as being lesser there has also been instances where Muggles or Half-bloods have spoken ill of each other and the wizarding world.

The first mention of any discrimination is found at the beginning of the series. Harry is raised and mistreated by his aunt and uncle, Petunia and Vernon, and it isn’t until he finds out that he is a wizard that he understands the mistreatment. The abuse and mistreatment are a result of Petunia’s hatred toward the wizarding world which she finds “strange” and “abnormal” (Stone 44). Thus, when Ron Weasley meets his first connection to the world of non-magical Britain, he inquires what Muggles are like. Harry responds that they are “horrible— well, not all of them” (106). This demonstrates that wizards are not the only ones who discriminate in the series, and predictably Harry is more balanced in his assessment of prejudice and discrimination.

While the notion of race in the typical sense is constructed upon visible physical characteristics and features in the wizarding world, these distinctions are of very little consequence as it is a different feature that is used to divide people into categories. The “racial” feature is the ability (or lack thereof) to perform magic. The wizarding categorization is based on the amount of magical blood, i.e. a particular

human feature that is assumed to signify an intrinsic essence that makes people different, and some are considered better than others. This indicates that magic has become racialized by the wizarding community it is not only the abilities of the individual but also the magical abilities of their ancestors. Throughout history, there have been various citizenship laws that exclude people who do not physically conform to the dominant group and are often seen foreigners to ensure the nation's racial exclusivity. These dominant groups ensured their exclusivity by not marrying foreigners or diluting their blood with anything they considered not to be pure blooded. These nations adhered to *jus sanguinis* or the right of blood much like the differentiation based on blood purity in the wizarding community (Weiner 337). The problem that the blood categories create in the wizarding world is not based upon the distinctions as such, but on the implications and consequences which the individual categories carry with them. The wizarding society is constructed by a hierarchy that not only acknowledges the difference between them but also presents wizards as superior to Muggles solely based on one singled-out feature of their DNA. When Harry Potter meets Draco Malfoy (his nemesis) he takes an instant dislike to him as he sensed something was wrong in their initial conversation about Harry's friendship with Ron Weasley and his family:

[Draco] turned back to Harry. "You'll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you out there." (...) "I think I can tell who the wrong sort are for myself, thanks", he said coolly.
(Philosopher's Stone 108-109)

Harry is left worried after his conversation with Draco. However, it is not until later that he finds out how racist his views are. Harry shows that his decision and judgment will be made on the basis of thought and consideration— on friendship, rather than the preconceived notions that Draco has willingly accepted without challenge. When Draco refers to Ron as "the wrong sort" he is implying that he himself is the right sort. Harry infers that he is in fact wrong for referring to people as "the right or wrong sort" and that one should make their own judgment based on friendship, knowledge, and experience without prejudice.

The differentiation between wizards based on the purity of their blood is an important topic throughout the novels. This idea is introduced in the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. In this book, Draco Malfoy (a pureblood) calls Hermione Granger a "filthy little Mudblood" which is a derogatory term for a person (with magical abilities) whose parents are Muggles (Chamber 86). Hagrid, the school's groundskeeper, explains to Harry that some wizards often think that they are better than anyone else based purely on the fact that they are pureblood (88). There are a few instances in the novels where a Muggle-born witch or wizard other than Hermione Granger has been called a derogatory name. Rana writes that othering, which is what happened when Hermione is called an

offensive slur that many aren't subjected to, creates a cultural distance and alienation (15). She continues to argue that this process of isolating people into groups is created "through social discourse and serves particular interests of power" (8-9). Culturally distancing, alienating and/or subjecting people (Muggle-borns) to discriminatory language solely based on their "race" can be traced back hundreds of years. When people of color were slaves or regarded as secondary human beings there was no reason for the dominant group to think about the way in which they spoke to them or about them. This is why words such as the N-word were used blatantly much like the term Mudblood in the *Harry Potter* series (Bonilla-Silva 54). Elaine Ostry writes that "perhaps Rowling is aware that one of the worst insults levels against [Muggles] is 'mud people'" and she explains that when she says that "Mudblood is the 'N-word for the Wizarding world'" and that the term is considered extremely inappropriate but that this issue is of great importance (92).

Muggle-borns are often stigmatized due to their non-wizard ancestry and consequently many pure-bloods often discredit or do not expect Muggle-borns to be as academically efficient or magically inclined as their peers. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Professor Slughorn tells Harry that he was surprised to learn that his mother, Lily, was a Muggle-born given her exceptional talent for magic and that he "thought she must have been pure-blood, she was so good" (Half-Blood Prince 70). Harry responds that Hermione "one of [his] best friends is Muggle-born...and she's the best in our year" (70). This shows that wizards, especially pure-bloods, often do not anticipate those born to Muggles to have a lot of talent for performing magic but it also shows the implicit biases that pure-bloods have about Muggles and Muggle-borns. Raymond I. Schuck argues that this dichotomy that exists between those "who only accept 'pure' wizards and those who accept others" and that it "reaffirms a difference between blatant racism and more subtle forms of racial hierarchy" (21). Professor Slughorn falls into this category and the implicit bias that he shows are feelings and attitudes of which he is not cognizant because they are dictated by his unconscious associations and aversions (Bridges 159).

This dichotomy is evident in Draco's behavior throughout the novels. Lyubansky writes that Draco seems to have the potential to, as a racist character, denounce racism. He has proven, especially in the beginning of the series, to not be receptive to any information that contradicts his conviction of pure-blood superiority (238). This can be seen as Hermione helps Draco Malfoy with his schoolwork and he says "don't touch my hand, now. I have just washed it, you see; don't want a Mudblood sliming it up" (Goblet of Fire 298). Draco Malfoy tends to, much like many others, eliminate their discomfort by discounting the challenging information rather than engaging with the more difficult task of changing their belief system to accommodate it (Lyubansky 238). Thus, when Draco's belief in

pure-blood superiority is challenged by Hermione's intelligence, he uses racist language to invalidate her accomplishments (238).

4.2 Socioeconomic inequality and discrimination

Social factors such as wealth, class, and gender are also represented in the *Harry Potter* series but are not presented as being as important as racial discrimination and prejudice. Differences in wealth, for instance, are displayed through the differing financial situations of the characters of Draco Malfoy and Ron Weasley. Draco clearly comes from wealth and a family of great fortune. When readers are first introduced to him, he is shopping in Diagon Alley, intending to make his parents "look at racing brooms", which is a very expensive item for most wizard families (Stone 77). Another reason to assume that Draco Malfoy comes from a prominent and privileged family occurs later in the novel when he, Harry, Hermione, Ron, and Neville are in detention with Hagrid in The Forbidden Forest. When Hagrid announces that they will be going into The Forbidden Forest, Draco remarks "but this is servant stuff, it's not for students to do" (Stone, 250). Through this comment readers can assume that his family employs servants; this is not only an indicator of wealth but also shows his familiarity with a hierarchical class system.

Bonilla-Silva suggests that coming from a "very racist" family imprints some of their actions and views whether they believe it or not (136). Draco was raised by parents who worshiped Lord Voldemort and, thus, he grew up only knowing prejudice, racial and class hierarchy. This hierarchical class system is further established and maintained when the pure-blood fanaticism escalates from hurtful yet relatively small verbal threats and comments to violent physical attacks. The first violent incident that readers are confronted with in the novels is the torture of a Muggle family during the Quidditch World Cup in the book *Goblet of Fire*:

High above them, floating along in midair, four struggling figures were being contorted into grotesque shapes. It was as though the masked wizards on the ground were puppeteers, and the people above them were marionettes operated by invisible strings that rose from the wands into the air. Two of the figures were very small. More wizards were joining the marching group, laughing and pointing up at the floating bodies. (119)

Wondering about the point of such a display of violence, Harry learns from Arthur Weasley, who is an eager supporter of Muggle rights, that it's the Death Eaters "idea of fun. Half the Muggle killings back when You-Know-Who was in power were done for fun" (*Goblet Of Fire* 143). From the fourth volume on, it becomes clear that for pureblood supremacists, Muggles are not even considered human as they are mere sources of violent entertainment. During the days of Jim Crow, explicit segregation was

justified through an ideology that Whites were an inherently superior race of people, and the de jure form of racial stratification was challenged via the Civil Rights Movement, as was the ideology of inherent White superiority (Bonilla-Silva 201).

4.3. Pureblood purification

Throughout history the modern world has been plagued with racism and othering. However, according to Hermione Granger the wizarding world has had a troubled history with it too. The wizarding history often “skates over what the wizards have done to other magical races (...)” (Deathly Hallows 409). There are several racial contradictions existing in the wizarding world regarding blood purity and adhering to the rules of the racial hierarchy. Certain Pure-bloods, e.g., the Weasley’s are seen as blood traitors for befriending, marrying, and fraternizing with those of lesser blood. Ron exclaims that “[his] whole family are blood traitors! That’s as bad as Muggle-borns to Death Eaters!” and equates that to being a Muggle-born (Half-blood Prince 227). This can be connected to what Bonilla-Silva coins as “white traitors” and these traitors are often middle-class, educated, and racially enlightened whites (132). All of which the Weasley family is because they are a white, well-educated pure-blooded family.

The obsession with blood purity and lineage is not limited to wizards. In some instances, Muggles are shown to be as racist as any Death Eater. Vernon Dursley’s, Harry’s uncle, sister Marge is portrayed as someone as vile as the Death Eaters. She comments:

“This one’s got a mean, runty look about him. You get that with dogs. I had Colonel Fubster drown one last year. Ratty little thing it was. Weak. Underbred” (Prisoner of Azkaban 27).

She seems to believe in the purity of blood and endorses the protection of racial purity via selective breeding and targeted killings of those who appear to be underbred (Lyubansky 240). Lyubansky demonstrates that these attitudes are an allegory for the anti-Semitism and racial ideology of Hitler and the Nazis. The racism of the Nazis and the Death Eaters in *Harry Potter* is easily identifiable and pose a few moral questions (240). Marge’s view and opinion on racial superiority comes from her whiteness that is “embodied racial power” because “all actors socially regarded as ‘white’ . . . receive systemic privileges just by virtue of wearing [being white]” as opposed to the non-whites who are denied those privileges (Bonilla-Silva 145).

In the novels there is a tendency of placing greater weight on the purity of blood and treating Muggles, Muggle-borns, and Half-bloods as second-class citizens. This is a parallel to our own modern world’s history of oppression of black people and the obsession about interracial relationships. One character that personifies that explicitly espouse the blood superiority than Walburga Black:

“Filth! Scum! By-products of dirt and vileness! Half-breeds, mutants, freaks, begone from this place! How dare you befoul the house of my fathers... Yooooou!” she howled, her eyes popping at the sight of [Sirius]. “Blood traitor, abomination, shame of my flesh!” (Order of the Phoenix 78).

In Walburga’s racist rant the readers understand a few important ideas regarding racial differentiation and hierarchies. The reader understands that Half-bloods are considered subhuman and undesirable and that their presence threatens the purity of the wizarding world (Lyubansky 237). This view is remarkably like the beliefs held by different racial ideologies around the world. Many nations have thought that interracial unions would contaminate and dilute the blood purity of white people.

Bonilla-Silva reports that dating or marrying someone of a different race does not translate to not having racist beliefs and believing in racial equality (147). Many characters like Walburga had the same reaction to the blood contamination of witches and wizards of different racial categories marrying and having children. For this reason, many pure-bloods believe that one-drop of blood from a parent that is not pure-blood makes someone seem as less than. It can also be connected to America’s “one-drop rule” which believed that a person with even one drop of Black blood would be considered Black (Lyubansky 238).

The anti-Muggle political system that J.K. Rowling creates in her novels may remind the readers of the anti-Semitism and racial ideology of Hitler and the Nazis (Lyubansky 240). The racial and ethnic purification of people who are not considered pure-blood by Voldemort, his followers, and all the pureblood fanatics. In the great central hall of the Ministry of Magic, where there once stood a fountain with a wizard, a witch, a goblin, a centaur, and a house-elf, all happy and in harmony (Order of the Phoenix 116), there stood a statue of black stone:

“this was sculpture of a witch and a wizard sitting on ornately carved thrones (...). Engraved in foot-high letters at the base of the statue were the words: MAGIC IS MIGHT. [...] Harry looked more closely and realised that what he had thought were decoratively carved thrones were actually mounds of carved humans: hundreds and hundreds of naked bodies, men, women and children, all with rather stupid, ugly faces, twisted and pressed together to support the weight of the handsomely robed wizards. ‘Muggles,’ whispered Hermione. ‘In their rightful place. [...]’ (Deathly Hallows 198–199)

The violence against and persecution of, Muggles and Muggle-borns only occurs in individual incidences in the first six books of the series. However, in the final installment *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* Lord Voldemort takes over the wizarding society and the Ministry of Magic which escalates the Pure-bloods hatred for non-magical people in the books. The discrimination and prejudice changes from isolated incidents to systematized persecution of the Other. This normalization of the

dominant group's experiences and culture is dialectical in that it interprets and constructs minorities and "outsider" groups as the "Other". The last installment in the *Harry Potter* series rendered Muggle-borns as invisible by diminishing them and attempting to purify society.

4.4. Pedagogical implications

This section also highlights the Swedish schools focus on democratic values in relation to fostering empathy and critical thinking in the students. I discuss the pedagogical benefit of using CTR as well as anti-oppressive education by Kumashiro. Further, I discuss the classroom value of using the Harry Potter series.

There have been multiple attempts to address the ways in which racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression play out in schools. Educators and educational researchers have frequently engaged in these discussions and types of projects that understand the dynamics of oppression and suggest ways to work against it (Kumashiro 33). Oppression, as previously discussed, is not always easily recognizable and teachers have to look at (and teach about) the assumptions about and expectations for the Other that influence how the Other is treated— whether in real-life or in literature. I believe that the Harry Potter series, therefore, helps the teacher in conceptualizing the different internal ways characters think, feel, justify, prompt, and play out (and sometimes even reinforced) in their harmful treatment of the Other (33). This is certainly seen throughout the novels in the hateful rhetoric spewed by many and the discrimination, prejudice and othering experienced by those seen as less-than.

There are a few ways for teachers, like myself, to address oppression in their education and incorporate the students to make them feel safe and included. I need to make the classroom an open space that is for the students. The Swedish upper secondary classroom needs to welcome, educate, and address the different needs of the students. In order to teach and talk about the struggles, discrimination, and prejudice that the Other is subjected to the classroom needs to be a safe space without xenophobia. Teachers need to create a space where the students feel that the school is an affirming space where Otherness is embraced and to not teach about or work against the various forms of oppression as a teacher is to be complicit with them (39). When teachers and the schools embrace Otherness and value educating their students against xenophobia it is easier to teach about the democratic values as it relates to othering and racial prejudice as well as discrimination in fantasy literature and our modern society.

Students also need to understand that there is a misleading understanding of the Other that is based on stereotypes and myths and that they acquire this (biased) knowledge in and outside of school.

Kumashiro writes that this so-called “knowledge” that the students have about the Other is incomplete because of exclusion, invisibility, or that it is distorted because of the disparagement, denigration, and marginalization towards the Other (39). This means that the students are taught indirectly about the Other and that they often unintentionally carry more educational significance than the curriculum which often does not include education about the Other.

The pedagogical significance of anti-oppression education is that it teaches all students not just students who are considered “the Othered students”, because it calls on teachers to enrich all students’ understanding of different ways of being (42). By increasing students’ knowledge and perception of the Other and helping them see similarities between different groups the theory challenges oppression by aiming to develop an empathy for the Other in the students. Both critical race theory and anti-oppression education theory highlight the differences between different groups, however, it also attempts to normalize differences and Otherness by encouraging students across the world to think of and treat other people and their ways of being as “normal” and just as acceptable as normative ways of being in Sweden (42).

The complex problems of racism and othering are hard to discuss in any setting but analyzing the Harry Potter novels can make the students understand the fictional bridge between the racial prejudice and discrimination happening in the wizarding world and its connection to our own society. The Swedish Syllabus for English 6 supports the use of CRT and anti-oppression education because the students are supposed to learn about the “living conditions, attitudes, values, traditions, social issues as well as cultural, historical, political and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” and there is also a clear focus on literature, other texts, and media that highlight the use of fantasy literature and its connection to the social issues that is racism and othering (7). This is why fantasy literature is often used as a safe way of dealing with these issues in the classroom. Fantasy has been used as a tool for students to make connections between themselves and their reading because the genre is often far removed from their daily lives. Teachers can use fantasy in close readings of texts for themes and ideas that are often metaphorically described or deal with heavy topics such as alienation, racial discrimination, or ethics. When teachers use the fundamental elements of fantasy, they introduce threads capable of sparking deep conversation and analysis (Cruz and Pollock 185).

4.4.1. The classroom value of Harry Potter

There are many pedagogical benefits to using fantasy literature and the *Harry Potter* series in the English language classroom. One of the classroom values of using *Harry Potter* is that I think it

can be used to build children's competencies across multiple media forms and is a pedagogically valuable activity. Teachers can use specific literary texts to develop familiarity in their students and a sense of appreciation for books in our society which in turn encourages reading practices and changes the students' attitude about reading. As I have discussed throughout this essay, working with fantasy literature and the realm of the fantastic can help students to identify issues that are hard to discuss. *Harry Potter* and the discussion of blood purity and the hierarchy of magical beings can therefore be easier to discuss when using media. The same can be said for the discussion of different themes and topics found in literature. The English curriculum states that "concrete and abstract subject areas related to students' education and societal and working life; current issues; thoughts, opinions, ideas, experiences and feelings; ethical and existential issues" and thus students can explore the various themes from Harry's perspective and engage in activities or discussions based on identifying the problem, generating ideas, analyzing them, and finally developing a resolution. The book series gives students the opportunity to discuss and think about different themes such as friendship, ethics, and racial structures.

Another important factor in using the *Harry Potter* series as it relates to critical literacy is that it is closely connected to the discussion of ethics and social inclusion. The stories provide conversations about fairness and justice as well as the treatment of those seen as the Other. Children's literature prepares them to deal with life's difficulties and thus works as a projection or a euphemism for the real world. However, it is important to note that students will not gain any values much less democratic values simply from reading a book. Teachers need to be aware that some students might laugh or side with the antagonist instead of the protagonist of the story. In order for the *Harry Potter* series' portrayal of racist oppressive structures to promote democratic values teachers need to work on their students and build a high degree of trust in order for the students to voice their thoughts and opinions and respect each other's ideas and contributions. The classroom use of continuous dialogue and group discussions will lead to the students developing critical thinking and critical consciousness. The use of *Harry Potter* and the complex discussions on race and the inviolability of human life will, hopefully, lead the students to value human dignity, human rights, cultural diversity, democracy, justice, fairness, and equality. This openness to the Other and the experiences portrayed in the novels will lead to the students' respecting others. The discussions and critical thinking about *Harry Potter* will lead to the students inculcating democratic values of anti-racism and working toward a just society where all people are equal.

4.4.2. Critical Thinking and Democratic values

Critical thinking is an intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action (Scriven 1). David Hitchcock writes that the ideal critical thinker is someone that is “open-minded and fair-minded, searches for evidence, tries to be well-informed, is attentive to others’ views and their reasons, proportions belief to the evidence, and is willing to consider alternatives and revise beliefs” (477). As a future teacher, I want to teach students how to ask good questions, to think critically, in order to continue the advancement of what I am teaching. The information given during the lessons needs to stay alive in order to generate new questions that are taken as seriously.

Skolverket has raised awareness of the fact that due to the influx of information the students receive each day they need to develop their critical thinking skills at school, especially in the English classroom. When reading literary texts in English, such as fantasy literature, students are exposed to a wide variety of “plots, themes, and characters, which encourages critical thinking” and they are exposed to this when working with English 6 in upper secondary school (Truong 2). This process of critical thinking must be performed in stages whilst reading a text which the English 6 students do when they work with different “themes, ideas, form and content in film and literature; authors and literary periods” (Skolverket 7).

When studying literature students make use of “critical thinking and independently formulate standpoints based on knowledge and ethical considerations” and it also allows for critical awareness of oppressive structures and ideologies, and strategies to change them (Skolverket 12). Developing critical thinking skills has also proven to decrease prejudice by increasing the awareness that acts performed by certain racial groups are not acts performed by the racial group as a whole which has led to the racial group members being seen as individuals (Hjerm, Sevä & Werner 3). I believe that teaching critical thinking skills to students then leads to them challenging their stereotypes and understanding as learned constructs about other groups or group members. This should then enable students to identify stereotypes, understand their own limitations of reliance on stereotypes, and analyze their own prejudices. Skolverket calls teachers to teach in a way that promotes critical thinking in their students, and I also believe that critical thinking calls teachers to teach about oppression but to also try to change society whilst doing so.

The Swedish school’s education must establish mutual respect for human rights and impart knowledge and the fundamental democratic values that our society is based on while it emphasizes the importance of equality, integrity, individuality, and individual freedom. The education should also

promote the understanding of others and foster the ability to empathize. This is achieved by encouraging a sense of justice and tolerance amongst the students and towards others (Skolverket 5). The school environment is a critical space for developing children into productive civic actors in our democratic society. This is important because children need to be taught to strive for a more racially equitable society that reduces disparities between the different racial lines.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to argue for the pedagogical benefits of using fantasy literature in the classroom as it relates to the democratic values. I examined what fantasy literature and the representations of inequality offered in terms of fostering democratic values and critical thinking in a Swedish upper secondary classroom. I also examined the social inequalities addressed in the *Harry Potter* novels as it related to representations of racial prejudice, discrimination, and othering amongst wizards and muggles which are explicitly present throughout the book series. Lastly, I examined how *Harry Potter* provides students the tools to recognize issues such as racial inequality within the framework of a fantasy world and how that inculcates critical thinking in students.

I have demonstrated in this paper that J.K. Rowling presents a complex view of inequality and discrimination throughout her *Harry Potter* series and that in all of the books racism and other social inequalities play a significant role throughout the plot. Muggles, Muggle-borns, Squibs, Half-bloods and the occasional pure-bloods are seen as less-than, not as pure of blood, and traitors to the racial hierarchy that exists within the magical realm of *Harry Potter*. Those who do not belong or simply do not comply with the rules of the higher class and rulers of the wizarding world often find themselves rejected, ridiculed, banished, or killed for their lack of compliance and standing in the community.

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