What to teach or how to teach?
A survey on the consequences a less detail-controlled curriculum has on English teachers’ choice of English-language literature

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Abstract

This essay aims to examine which consequences a less-detail controlled curriculum has on English teachers’ choice of English-language literature. With support from the literature review, this essay argues that an unofficial, tacit school canon of English-language literature mainly composed of ten literary works seems to have been established in Swedish upper-secondary schools, despite the Swedish National Curriculum not naming specific literary works educators in Sweden are required to use in their teaching. Thus, this essay answers the following questions: 1) Which English-language literature do English teachers in Sweden use in their teaching? 2) Does a less-detail controlled curriculum contribute to English teachers in Sweden being more inclusive in their choice of literature in teaching? The results support the hypothesis; that despite the ten literary works found in the unofficial, tacit school canon might be vulnerable to the same criticism aimed at the “Western literary canon” and a “prescribed” curriculum. Yet, no evidence was found which would illustrate that a less detail-controlled curriculum does not contribute to English teachers in Sweden being more inclusive in their choice of literature in teaching since the inclusive classroom is not only a matter of what is being taught but also of how it is being taught. Additionally, the study shows that there are countries in the Western world that name literary works as a teaching requirement for educators that “silently” marginalize and privilege some voices. Despite educators not being able to influence what is being taught, educators have developed strategies and methods (critical literacy/pedagogy, and intersectionality) on how these literary works are taught to learners with the aim to make room for a spectrum of voices when being required to teach from a “prescribed” curriculum.

Keywords: Swedish National Curriculum, less detail-controlled, English-language literature, critical literacy, critical pedagogy, intersectionality, Half of a Yellow Sun, Swedish Cultural Canon of Literature,
Acknowledgment

For Cecilia Björkén-Nyberg

With boundless gratitude, I wholeheartedly dedicate this essay to you.
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1. Introduction

In the summer of 2022, the Swedish National Government issued a motion on a political level deciding that a Swedish Cultural Canon of Literature is to be established. However, as expected, the debate in Sweden is synonymous with several challenges since debaters, politicians and scholars are far from reaching a consensus. As a result of this, a number of pertinent questions will arise and remain unanswered, Will the Swedish National Government be responsible for creating and establishing the Swedish national canon of literature? Is the canon intended with a specific target population in mind? What is the purpose of creating a Swedish canon? Is the canon intended to be implemented into the Swedish National Curriculum and thus make its items a teaching requirement for educators in Sweden? Furthermore, as Madeleine Petersdotter Svensson and I wrote in our Swedish degree project, “Mening och Meningslöshet: en analys av Albert Camus romaner Främlingen och Pesten som underlag för samtal om psykisk ohälsa” (Meaning and Meaninglessness: an analysis of Albert Camus novels The Stranger and The Plague as a basis for conversation about mental illness), we have throughout our five-year education for upper-secondary teachers in Swedish and English at Halmstad University had the privilege and pleasure of working with literature (Andrijevic & Svensson 5). At the heart of our literature seminars, we have been taught that there is richness in all literary works and that literature can be a useful tool when we aim to understand ourselves and the world around us. In addition, we have been taught that literature can be used to help learners develop human qualities that harmonize well with democratic values and principles in democratic societies as well as the broad assignments of schools in Sweden: According to Claes Nilholm in Skolutveckling i teori och praktik (School development in theory and practice) there are seven broad assignments of schools in Sweden:


In connection to the broad assignment of school in Sweden, Nilholm claims that there are four educational ideologies present in the Swedish educational system:
Den akademiska ideologin uttrycker en traditionell syn på undervisning och lärande där kunskap som är utvecklad i de västerländska akademiska disciplinerna mer eller mindre ska överföras till eleverna. Den elecenterade ideologin syftar till att eleverna först och främst utvecklas som individer. Den effektivitetsorienterade ideologin fokuserar å sin sida på färdigheter vilka ligger nära arbetsmarknadens behov. Den rekonstruktionistiska ideologin, slutligen, innebär att utbildningen syfte främst är att bidra till utvecklingen av ett mer demokratiskt och rättvist samhälle [...]. (Nilholm 28)

As previously mentioned, there is richness in all literary works. Deborah Appleman claims in *Critical Encounters in Secondary English: Teaching Literacy Theory to Adolescents*, that we have been taught to view:

literature [...] as a public celebration of human advancements, the apex of our linguistic accomplishments, and the most beautiful expression of our sentiments. Dominant societies created images of themselves by publicly recognizing what they thought to be the best representations of their arts and sciences. Featured among these representations were literary masterworks thought to capture the essence of who we were and what our societies stood for at various points and places in the past. (Appleman 88)

Yet, she continues:

in time, however, it became clear that the images created within our national literatures provided less than a complete understanding of our history and our heritage. Only those people who had historically participated in the construction of our cultural imagination found themselves fairly represented, and their voices were predominantly White, male, and of the upper social classes. Members of racial and ethical groups [...] found themselves and their cultures represented from the outside. (ibid.)

The passage by Appleman raises several points that are relevant in connection to the current canon debate in Sweden. It could perhaps be argued that the establishment and processes of canon formations are synonymous with several challenges and problems. For instance, the literary works part of the “Western literary canon” and a “prescribed” curriculum have oftentimes been criticized for being white and heteronormative as well as being predicated, upholding, and promoting values and principles that do not harmonize well with values in democratic societies and the broad assignments of schools in Sweden.
In some cases, there are countries in the Western world that do not have the freedom and privilege to teach literary works of their own choosing. The curriculum in these countries name specific literary works educators are required to use in their teaching. Many of the literary works named as a teaching requirement by these “prescribed” curricula have often been characterized as belonging to “the Western literary canon” (i.e., largely sharing the same canonical works). In contrast to other countries in the West (e.g., England, France, Denmark, and Norway) educators in Sweden have no support at all when it comes to choosing what literary works to teach. An explanation to this might be that the Swedish National Curriculum wants to make sure that the reading is inclusive of many different voices in the aim to prevent individual teachers from prioritizing certain voices and marginalizing others. However, with reference to the establishment of an official cultural canon of literature in Sweden, educators might soon be restricted and limited in their freedom and privilege to select literary works of their own choosing, provided that the Swedish National Curriculum is successful in establishing and implementing the cultural canon into the curriculum. A consequence of this might in practice mean that the Swedish National Curriculum inadvertently might name literary works as a teaching requirement that could ‘silently’ marginalize and privilege some voices: race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, sociocultural/economic identities, social status, and class to name a few. In relation to this, the question is then, how will educators in Sweden handle and respond to such challenges and pedagogical dilemmas that might soon arise in their teaching profession? Is the question on how something is being taught more important than what is being taught when educators, teachers and facilitators do not have the power to influence the latter? Questions such as these are paramount and urgent to address; since the establishment of a cultural canon will most likely be seen as an important historical event that could lead to fundamental changes in our educational institutions.

In light of this, the aim of the essay is to examine which consequences a less detail-controlled curriculum has on English teachers’ choice of English-language literature. To this end, two research questions were formulated:

1. Which English-language literature do English teachers in Sweden use in their teaching?

2. Does a less detail-controlled curriculum contribute to English teachers in Sweden being more inclusive in their choice of literature in teaching?
In relation to the aim and research questions, this essay will argue that the inclusive classroom is not only a matter of what is being taught but also of how it is being taught. Initially, the essay will introduce the literature review on what is being taught and how it is being taught. Second, the literature review will be followed by the theoretical framework on critical literacy and critical pedagogy. Third, the material and method section will provide a comprehensive and detailed explanation on the aim and outline of the qualitative and quantitative survey. Fourth, the results from the survey will be presented, compared, analyzed, and discussed in connection to several student essays/surveys found. Fifth, the results/analysis will be concluded with a qualitative textual analysis on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s postcolonial novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* with emphasis on the voice of Ugwu. Sixth, this essay will present a discussion on the main findings in this essay and a concluding discussion on how the strategies/methods (critical literacy/pedagogy and intersectionality) by Bender, Tatum et al., Ervin and Woodard could be used didactically in relation to *Half of a Yellow Sun* with emphasis on the voice of Ugwu. Finally, this essay will be concluded with a brief suggestion on future research within the topic of a Swedish Cultural Canon of Literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Swedish literary canon

As mentioned in the introduction, the Swedish National Government has issued a motion on a political level deciding that a Swedish National Canon of literature is to be established. At the moment, the Swedish National Curriculum is less detail-controlled and as a consequence does not name which Swedish and English-speaking literature educators in Sweden are required to use in their teaching. The decision to implement a Swedish national canon of literature in the Swedish National Curriculum, Lars Brink argues in “Canon Consensus? Canon Image and Subject Perception of 75 Literature Teachers” would mean that teachers in Sweden in relation to educators in countries such as Denmark, Norway, France, the United Kingdom, and certain parts of the United States could be mandated to use and teach specific literary works in their educational practices (149-152). Furthermore, while Sweden has never had an official list of literary works up to the present moment, Brink sought to examine in “Gymnasiets Litterära Kanon, Urval och Värdering i
Läromedel 1910-1945 (“High School Literary Canon, Selection and Values in Teaching Aids 1910-1945) whether Sweden had an unspoken or spoken literary list of reading in upper-secondary schools between 1910-1945. According to Brink, the results suggest that an unofficial list seems to have been established; “the books give a strong impression of consensus and continuity. The literary canon of senior high school is mainly composed of eighteenth and nineteenth century literature” (Brink 302).

2.2 Unofficial, tacit school canon of English-speaking literature

As mentioned above, the Swedish National Government has decided on a political level that a Swedish Cultural Canon of Literature is to be established. However, Brink has provided textual evidence that there has in fact existed an unofficial list of reading in Swedish schools, despite the Swedish National Curriculum not naming specific literary works educators are required to use in their teaching. Moreover, while researchers have been interested in which Swedish-speaking literature Swedish teachers use in their teaching, there is limited research available on which English-speaking literature English teachers in Sweden use in their teaching. In connection to the latter, four student essays have been found. In brief, the essays used mixed methods (interviews and questionnaires) in a Swedish school context and took place in different geographical locations in Sweden between 2013, 2016, 2018 and 2020.

In “Canon VS No Canon: Which English Literature is Used in Swedish Upper Secondary Schools?” Emy Arnekull and Makrina Pesa received one hundred answers using a questionnaire. According to the authors, the literary works most popular among the respondents were *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (Mark Haddon), *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* (Alexie Sherman), *Holes* (Louis Sachar), *Animal Farm* (George Orwell), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee), *1984* (George Orwell), *Of Mice and Men* (John Steinbeck), *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelly), and *The Great Gatsby* (F. Scott Fitzgerald) (13-21).

In connection to Arnekull & Pesa, Emma Johansson in “The School Canon: A Study about a Possible School Canon of English Literature at Swedish Upper Secondary Schools” received a literature list by some schools and those that failed to provide her with a list, she visited and interviewed. Thus, she was able to use the information provided by the respondents to construct a literature list. According to Johansson, two conclusions were found. *First*, an unofficial, tacit school canon seems to have been established (compare to
Brink’s findings). Second and last, the unofficial, tacit school canon was mainly comprised of the following literary works: *Of Mice and Men* (John Steinbeck), *Stone Cold* (Robert Swindells), *The Hunger Games* (Suzanne Collins), *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley), *Holes* (Louis Sachar), *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (Mark Haddon), *Animal Farm* (George Orwell), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee), and *The Great Gatsby* (F. Scott Fitzgerald). (5-51)

Correspondingly, in “One Goals is to Understand the World Better: A Thematic Analysis of Upper-Secondary School Teachers Choice and Use of Literary Texts in EFL” Emma Sjödin was able to construct a list of literary works by interviewing six educators. According to Sjödin, the titles being taught by the educators were the following literary works: *1984* (George Orwell), *Animal Farm* (George Orwell), *Of Mice and Men* (John Steinbeck), *The Fault in Our Stars* (John Green), *The Great Gatsby* (F. Scott Fitzgerald), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee), *Stone Cold* (Robert Swindells), and *Holes* (Louis Sachar) (9-32).

Furthermore, in “EFL and the Literary Canon: Attitudes and Practices in Swedish Classrooms” Gösta Larsson was able to construct a literature list by interviewing six educators. According to Larsson, the literary works most mentioned by the educators were *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard III*, *Hamlet* (William Shakespeare), *Oliver Twist* (Charles Dickens), *The Canterbury Tales* (Geoffrey Chaucer), *Animal Farm* (George Orwell), *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *The Old Man and the Sea* (Ernest Hemingway), *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Charlotte Perkins Gilman) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee) (4-8).

**2.3 What to teach or how to teach?**

As previously mentioned, there are countries in the West where educators do not have the freedom and privilege (as Swedish teachers) to teach literary works of their own choosing. The curriculum in these countries name specific literary works educators are required to teach in their educational practices. As a result, the educators in these countries are absolved of the responsibility of having to choose which literary works to teach. Instead, they are able to focus on how the learning material is to be delivered to the learners. According to Williams (“Voices of the Establishment or of Cultural Subversion? The Western Canon in the Curriculum” and Bender (“Things (Don’t Quite) Fall Apart: Exploring the Diversity Insertion in the Secondary ELA Canon”) the literary works in a “prescribed” curriculum have often been characterized as belonging to the “Western
literary canon”. What constitutes, defines, and characterizes literary works part of the “Western literary canon” is beyond the scope of the essay and will not be discussed (further information on the subject can be found in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of Ages* by Harald Bloom). Furthermore, William & Bender claim that the literary works part of the “Western literary canon” are synonymous with being white and heteronormative. In addition, Williams claims that literary works part of the “Western literary canon” have been heavily criticized since it is seen as being predicated, upholding, and promoting values and principles that do not harmonize with values in democratic societies. Despite the criticism aimed at these literary works, Williams argues that these “literary works” can be used to challenge and problematize the very thing they are being accused of upholding and promoting. Williams writes “many texts of the Western literary canon rather than being vehicles of establishment values are critical of these values. Teaching these texts allows educators to challenge the interest of those who hold power in society as well as conventional sexual morality and gender stereotypes” (1).

In the student essays previously mentioned (Arnekull & Pesa, Johansson, Sjödin and Larsson), much emphasis was placed on which English-speaking literature English teachers in Sweden use in their teaching, but not on how it is being taught to learners. In contrast to the student essays, Larsson was interested in examining how the literary works named by the educators were being taught to learners. In brief, the educators, Larsson argues, were using these literary works to *challenge* and *problematize* topics such as child labor, the living condition of women through a feminist lens in the nineteenth century, technological surveillance in a dystopian world, historical events, and social injustices (9-15). In connection to Larsson, Stålhberg ("Using Literature in the Upper Secondary EFL Classroom") by the same token was interested in how literary works are being taught to learners. According to Stålhberg, educators saw value in using a hybrid of literature, part of the literary canon and popular fiction in the EFL classroom. By using a hybrid of literary works, educators considered literature to be a powerful tool in helping learners develop *literacy skills*, *promoting global awareness* and *seeing the world through multiple viewpoints*.

Furthermore, in “Adolescents and Texts: Scaffolding the English Canon with Linked Text Sets” Tatum et al. claim that “teachers typically expect their secondary students to read texts from the English canon because these texts offer opportunities for meaningful reflection on essential questions” (88). Yet, the authors continue: “students often do not or will not read
these texts because they find them boring or reject the directive manner in which teachers present the text to them” (ibid.). A solution to this challenge, the authors claim, is the implementation and usage of **Linked Text Sets** (henceforth LTS). In brief, there is a core text that is meant to be used in an educational context. In relation to the core text, there are other print and nonprint text that the educator can use in aim to add **depth** and **breadth** to the core text. According to the authors, there are several criteria educators should consider when selecting LTS. **First**, “students should be able to identify with and know more about those who live within and beyond their own borders. Thus, LTS represents characters, people, and events from different cultures and global communities with varied perspectives” (89). **Second and last**, “students should be given choice in what they read to enable them to become more independent and motivated readers” (ibid.).

Moreover, in her article (“Critically Reading the Canon: Culturally Sustaining Approaches to a Prescribed Literature Curriculum”) Jennifer Ervin recalls how she had the privilege to teach literary works by her own choosing. However, after moving to a new district, she had to accept the fact that the district she was situated in used a “prescribed” curriculum which named specific literary works she was required to use in her educational practices. The problem with a “prescribed” curriculum, Ervin argues, is that “required text lists can “quietly” promote some sociocultural identities over others” (321). A similar experience was reported by Jennie Woodard in her article “Hearing the Marginalized Voice in the Great Books Curriculum”. According to her, she taught literary works as part of the “Great Books Curriculum” in a higher educational institution. At the end of her course, learners were encouraged to provide constructive criticism. Woodard was disappointed: “students wanted more women, more texts produced by people of color, more non-European male narratives, more attention paid to the class system. In short, students wanted more than the white Western European male narrative” (15).

In brief, Erwin and Woodard concluded that the inclusive classroom is not only a matter of what is being taught but also of how it is being taught. Thus, motivating and inspiring them to sharpen their **pedagogical and didactic tools** in their educational practices in aim to make room for a spectrum of voices. For instance, Woodard writes “I had always strived to make my honors classroom a space for intersectional learning and, with each passing year, have constructed a set of pedagogical tools that encourage students to hear voices in the texts that otherwise might be silenced” (16). Ervin, by the same token writes “I present strategies aligned with critical literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogies that teachers have
used to validate students’ social, cultural, and racial identities while teaching from a prescribed text list that privileges Eurocentric perspectives” (323). The strategies presented by Ervin include teaching through critical theories, pairing texts, and counterstorytelling. Moreover, Ervin and Woodard use critical literacy in relation to the teaching of literature. However, Ervin uses a hybrid of critical literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Woodard uses a similar approach. However, unlike Ervin, she uses a hybrid of critical literacy, intersectionality and problem posing education.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Critical Pedagogy
The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire expounded on his personal philosophies in his controversial book Pedagogy of the Oppressed. While Freire was concerned with oppression in general, his concerns and criticism are mainly aimed at the traditional educational system (the “banking concept of education). According to Freire, in the banking concept of education there is much emphasis on what is being taught and how it is being taught to learners: “four times four is sixteen; the capital of Pará is Belem. The student records, memorizes, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what four times four really means, or realizing the true significance of ‘capital’ in the affirmation ‘the capital of Pará is Belem,’ that is, what Belem means for Pará and what Pará means for Brazil” (71). The problem with the banking concept of education, Freire claims lies in what is being taught and how it is being taught to learners, and is according to him, synonymous with several problems: First, the educator is seen as the active subject whereas the learners are seen as passive objects. The educator’s aim is to “deposit” and “fill” the learner with information (hence the term “banking”). While the educator is lecturing the learners, they remain passive, accept the information deposited to them, without interaction and questioning what is being taught, how it is being taught and why. Second, the educator is seen as all wise whereas the learners are seen as not possessing any knowledge of their own (teacher teaches and learners listen). Third, the educator is the producer and director behind what is being taught and how it is being taught, without permitting learners to voice their opinion on the matter. Fourth and last, the traditional model of education does not view learners as being historical creatures and as a result fails to account for their social and cultural backgrounds (73-84).
In connection to the banking concept of education, Freire argues that “the solution is not (nor can it be) found in the banking concept” (73). However, a solution to the banking concept of education, Freire claims is libertarian education, which he uses interchangeably with problem posing education. According to Freire education must first and foremost “begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (72). Freire elaborates: “problem-posing education [...] breaks with the vertical patterns characteristics of banking education, can fulfill its function as the practice of freedom [...]. Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teacher. The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (80).

In contrast to the banking concept of education, libertarian education can be used as an antidote to the problems associated with the traditional educational system. First, the educator and the learner are both seen as active subjects. The learner is no longer seen as a mere object waiting to be “filled” with information by the wise educator. Instead, while the educator is lecturing the learners, they are active in the learning process, do not “blindly” accept the information “deposited” to them, but rather interact and question (critical thinking) what is being taught, how it is being taught and why. Second, the educator and the learners are both seen as possessing valuable information. Thus, both participate in the production of knowledge through dialogue with each other (teacher teaches learners and learners teaches teacher). Third, the educator is still the producer and director behind what is being taught and how. However, the educator permits and encourages learners to voice their opinion on the matter (81). For instance, the educator poses a problem (hence the term “problem-posing” education) to the learners that he or she does not have a “correct” answer to, but rather the educator and the learners engage in dialogue in aim to find a solution to the problem posed. As a result, Freire claims “students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” (ibid.). Fourth and last, while the banking concept of education fails to account for the social and cultural background of its learners, Freire argues that “problem-posing theory and practice takes the peoples historicity as their starting point” (84).
3.2 Critical Literacy

Freire’s libertarian education (problem-posing education) is a form of method and pedagogy that helps learners develop critical thinking and a critical mindset. In relation to Freire’s libertarian education, critical literacy works in the same way and is a useful pedagogy, method, and approach when learners are immersed into the realm and world of literature. According to Ervin “critical literacy is a pedagogy that allows the reader to question all types of texts [print and non-print] and the perspectives they present” (Ervin 322). Moreover, the point of implementing and using critical literacy as a pedagogy and method within an educational context is the same as using problem-posing education: learners are taught not to accept information deposited to them without interaction, questioning (critical thinking), problematizing, and challenging what is being read and heard. Thus, learners are taught by educators to view print and non-print texts through a critical lens and mindset (i.e., questioning, and challenging information deposited to them). Initially, this is done by encouraging learners to use their own experience and bank of wisdom as a frame of reference in aim to “question the position of the author and how that position impacts the narrative, and read to connect understandings of power, equity, oppression, and social positioning” (Ervin 322). According to Ervin “in their review of 30 years of literature on critical literacy, Lewison et al. (2002) name four common dimensions of this work: disrupting the common place, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action toward social justice” (Ervin 322). In connection to the four dimensions highlighted by Ervin, critical literacy is a useful pedagogy and method to use when reading literary works since it provides learners with the chance to “speak back to dominant narratives and uncover implicit messages about what is valued in our society. A critical interrogation of viewpoints in literature can recenter perspectives and identities that have been marginalized” (323). Hence, critical literacy is a useful pedagogy and method when educators aim to help learners develop (individual and social transformation) characteristics and skills that harmonize well with values and principles in democratic societies as well as the broad assignments of schools in Sweden (Nilholm 26-28).

4. Material and Method

This essay aims to examine which consequences a less detail-controlled curriculum has on English teachers’ choice of English-language literature. In an attempt to seek an answer to
the aim, two research questions were formulated and a qualitative and quantitative digital survey (questionnaire) with two questions was constructed (see appendix 3).

4.1 Ethical Considerations

Before the questionnaire could be distributed, I created a digital consent letter. I followed the ethical guidelines established by the Swedish Research Council. First, I had to introduce myself to the participants and explain what I was going to examine (see appendix 2). Second, I had to inform the participants that the information received from the questionnaire would be published in my essay, which would be accessible through a database on the internet. Third, I asked for the participants' consent to use the information in my study. Finally, I informed the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they would remain anonymous (Swedish Research Council 8-16).

4.2 Context and Procedure

The online questionnaire was constructed by using Google Forms. The link to the digital questionnaire was attached to the consent letter and distributed to a selection of high schools and upper-secondary schools in the County of Halland. In order to ensure anonymity for the participants, I could not address teachers directly, and therefore, I sent my consent letter to forty-one principals, asking them to forward it further to their English teachers.

5. Results and Analysis

5.1 Please list for each of your classes (high-school/upper-secondary school) any English language literature that you use or have used with students in your teaching.

Responding to the first question in the questionnaire, a total of nine answers were received. From these nine answers, the material was sufficient since the participants listed thirty-five literary works (see appendix 1). The results from the respondents are that the authors were mainly from the United States (sixteen authors) and the United Kingdom (thirteen authors). Twenty-two authors were male, and eleven were female. Two authors were African American (Amanda Gorman & Angie Thomas) and one Indigenous American (Alexie Sherman). In the list put together as a result of the survey, some literary works were named twice and thrice: The Curious Incident of a Dog in the Night Time x2 (Mark Haddon), The Perks of Being a Wallflower x2 (Stephen Chbosky), Looking for Alaska x2 (John
Green), *The Giver* x2 (Lois Lowry), *Kite Runner* x2 (Khaled Hosseini), *Matilda* x2 (Roald Dahl), *The Absolute True Diary of a Part Time Indian* x2 (Alexie Sherman) and *Of Mice and Men* x3 (John Steinbeck).

5.2 As a teacher, do you think that the Swedish National Curriculum provides clear guidelines when it comes to choosing what literature to use in the classroom and how it should be used? Why or why not?

*Responding to the second question in the questionnaire*, all nine participants claim that the Swedish National Curriculum fails to provide clear guidelines when it comes to choosing what literature to use in the classroom and how it should be used. Still, a few respondents claim that since the guidelines are vague and non-transparent, they feel free in their profession. For example, the participants claim that they could choose which literature they deem fit for teaching since the Swedish National Curriculum does not dictate what literature they are required to teach. Furthermore, the same respondents express that it would be problematic if the Swedish National Curriculum implemented “an acceptable book list” that teachers would be required to teach, thus removing their freedom. In fact, one respondent claims that a great deal of the responsibility is to find and implement appropriate literature in the classroom is transferred to the teacher since the responsibility is not specified.

5.3 Unofficial, tacit school canon of English-language literature

In connection to the list put together as a result of the survey, an additional list has been put together (see below) in relation to the student essays highlighted in the literature review by Arnekull & Pesa, Larsson, Sjödin and Johansson. In brief, the essays used mixed methods (interviews and questionnaires) with the aim to examine which English-language literature English teachers in Sweden use in their teaching with in a school context and was executed in different geographical locations in Sweden between 2013, 2016, 2018 and 2020. Included in the list, are literary works most frequently recurring in all surveys, including my own from 2022: *Animal Farm* (George Orwell), *1984* (George Orwell), *Mockingbird* (Harper Lee), *Of Mice and Men* (John Steinbeck), *The Great Gatsby* (F. Scott Fitzgerald), *Holes* (Louis Sachar), *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelly), *The Fault in our Stars* (John Green), *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Mark Haddon), *Hunger Games* (Suzanne Collins).
As mentioned in the introduction, the Swedish government has decided on a political level that a Swedish Cultural Canon of Literature is to be created. However, as expected the debate is far from unproblematic and several questions remain unanswered. For instance, is the canon intended to be implemented into the Swedish National Curriculum and thus making it a teaching requirement for educators in Sweden? At the moment, the Swedish National Curriculum is less detail-controlled and as a consequence does not name which Swedish or English-speaking literature teachers in Sweden are required to use in their teaching. As mentioned by one of the respondents in the survey, a great deal of the responsibility is to find and implement appropriate literature in the classroom is transferred to the teachers since the responsibility is not specified in the curriculum. However, as previously mentioned, the implementation of a Swedish national canon of literature in the future could shift the responsibility from the teacher to the Swedish National Curriculum.

The decision to implement a Swedish national canon of literature in the curriculum would mean that teachers in Sweden, similarly to educators in countries such as Denmark, Norway, France, England, and certain parts of the United States could be mandated to use and teach specific literary works in their educational practices (Brink 149-152). As reported by some of the respondents in my survey, many teachers would be worried about being bound to “an acceptable book list” or that the government steps in and starts dictating which literature teachers must use. Interestingly, while Sweden has never had an official list of reading up to this point, Brink sought to examine whether Sweden had an unspoken or spoken Swedish literature list of reading in upper-secondary schools between 1910 and 1945. According to Brink the main findings suggest that an unofficial list seems to have been established: “the books give a strong impression of consensus and continuity. The literary canon of senior high school is mainly composed of eighteenth and nineteenth century literature” (Brink 302).

5.4 What is being taught and how it is being taught

As previously mentioned, there are countries in the West where educators do not have the privilege to teach literary works of their own choosing. The curriculum in these countries name specific literary works educators are required to teach in their educational practices. As a result, the educators in these countries are absolved of the responsibility of having to choose which literary works to teach. Instead, they are able to focus on how the learning material is to be delivered to the learners. Many of the literary works named as a teaching requirement by these curricula have often been characterized as belonging to the “Western
literary canon”. According to William and Bender the literary works part of the “Western literary canon” have primarily been synonymous with being white and heteronormative. However, the “Western literary canon” also deals with questions that transcend race and heteronormativity (for example gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, social issues etc.). According to Williams some of the criticism aimed at the literary works part of the “Western literary canon” is that the literature promotes and upholds power and authority, the abuse of women, displaying traditional gender roles, the lack of inclusivity, racism and colonial literature promoting a Eurocentric viewpoint (865). Despite the criticism aimed at these literary works, Williams argues that these literary works can be used to challenge and problematize the very thing it is being accused of upholding and promoting, or as he puts it “many texts of the Western literary canon rather than being vehicles of establishment values are critical of these values. Teaching these texts allows educators to challenge the interest of those who hold power in society as well as conventional sexual morality and gender stereotypes” (1).

Furthermore, as explained earlier Larsson sought to examine which English-language literature teachers in Sweden use in their teaching. A similar approach, as previously mentioned, was adopted by the student essays (Arnekull & Pesa, Sjödin, Johansson and Andrijevic) highlighted in the literature review and beginning part of the results/analysis. Unlike the student essays, Larsson also investigated how the literary works named by the educators were being taught to students. According to Larsson educators saw value (compare with William’s criticism highlighted in relation to the “Western literary canon”) in using “classics and canonical literature in the classroom” (Larsson 9). The educators, Larsson claims, were using these literary works to challenge and problematize topics such as child labor, the living conditions of women through a feminist lens in the nineteenth century, technological surveillance in a dystopian world, historical events, and social injustices to name a few (9-15). In connection to Larsson, Stålhberg by the same token, as explained earlier, examined how English teachers in Sweden use literature in their educational practices. According to Stålhberg, educators saw value in using a hybrid of literature, part of the literary canon and popular fiction in the EFL classroom. By using a hybrid of literary works, the educators considered literature to be a useful tool in helping learners develop literacy skills, promoting global awareness and seeing the world through multiple viewpoints.
In connection to Williams, Larsson and Stålhberg, educators seem to see value in using literary works part of the “Western literary canon” in their educational practices. The value educators see is not only a matter of what literary works are being taught but also of how it is being taught to learners. For instance, Tatum et al. claim that “teachers typically expect their secondary students to read texts from the English canon because these texts offer opportunities for meaningful reflection on essential questions” (88). However, the authors continue; “students often do not or will not read these texts because they find them boring or reject the directive manner in which teachers present the text to them” (ibid.). A solution to this challenge, the authors claim, is the implementation and usage of LTS. In brief, there is a core text that is meant to be used in an educational context (for example _Half of a Yellow Sun_). In relation to the core text, there are other print and nonprint text that the educator can use to add depth and breadth to the core text (for example a visual representation of a speech in “The Danger of a Single Story” by Adichie and a print text of _Life Magazine_ reporting on the civil war in Biafra). According to the authors, there are several criteria educators should consider when selecting LTS. _First_, the aim is to implement and use texts that promote global awareness, which allow students to delve deeper into print and nonprint texts that transcend their national borders, thus promoting multiple perspectives and viewpoints (for example historical events, different cultures and people across the globe). _Second and last_, the educator should personify democratic principles and values by allowing and encouraging learners to have a say in what should be read (Tatum et al. 89).

### 5.5 Critical Pedagogy & Literacy

As previously mentioned, there are countries in the West where curricula name specific literature that educators are obliged to use in their educational practices. In her article, Ervin recalls how she went from a curriculum where she had no support to a “prescribed” curriculum that dictated specific literary works she was required to use in her teaching. The problem with a “prescribed” curriculum, Ervin argues, is that “required text lists can ‘quietly’ promote some sociocultural identities over others” (321). A similar experience was reported by Woodard. According to her, she taught literary works as part of the “Great Books Curriculum” in a higher educational institution. At the end of her course, learners were encouraged to provide constructive criticism. Woodard was disappointed: learners wanted more diverse literature (15). In brief, Ervin and Woodard concluded that the inclusive classroom is not only a matter of what is being taught but also of how it is being
taught. Thus, the educators were motivated to sharpen their pedagogical and didactic tools in their educational practices in aim to make more room for a spectrum of voices in the classroom. For instance, Woodard writes “I had always strived to make my honors classroom a space for intersectional learning and, with each passing year, have constructed a set of pedagogical tools that encourage students to hear voices in the texts that otherwise might be silenced” (16). Ervin, by the same token, writes “I present strategies aligned with critical literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogies that teachers have used to validate students social, cultural, and racial identities while teaching from a prescribed text list that privileges Eurocentric perspectives” (323).

Moreover, Ervin and Woodard use critical literacy in relation to the teaching of literature. However, Ervin uses a hybrid of critical literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogy (seeing the cultural background of the student as an asset and not a deficit).

In light of this, the strategies presented by Ervin include teaching through critical theories (applying a critical lens to the reading of literature), pairing texts (see LTS), student discussions (learning occurs in a sociocultural community) and counterstorytelling (providing a voice to the voiceless, challenging and problematizing how “things” are represented in a story or narrative). Furthermore, Bender claims that “a frequently proposed solution to the problem of the traditional canons iron grip on the ELA curriculum entails teaching students to speak back to its power” (369). Bender continues: “Bissonnette and Glazier (2016, 689) likewise advocate reading against the canonical grain through the use of ‘counterstories’ created by the students ‘to elucidate the exploitation of persons identifying as nonwhite’ by giving one or more marginalized characters in a narrative voice through writing assignments that center them to reimagine the tale” (Bender ibid.)

Furthermore, Woodard uses a similar approach. However, unlike Ervin, she uses a hybrid of critical literacy, intersectionality and problem posing education. According to Woodard “intersectionality encourages us to widen the frame to provide students tools they need to critique a text through different lenses of analysis” (19). A few strategies presented by Woodard include:

First, Students should not expect a marginalized author to write a marginalized hero. [...] students should recognize that authors are products of their society and might have to find subtler ways to write about characters of their identity group. Second,
tell students from the outset of the semester that they should look for missing voices. Who is not represented in the text and why might that be? This question will give them a way to examine the historical power structures from the text's time period. *[Fourth],* ask students to consider their experiences with a text prior to class. Have they heard of the text before? What have they heard, seen, or read about the text? *[Fifth],* encourage students to challenge the representation. For example, when an author represents women in a certain way, does this mean that is how women were? *[Seventh and last],* Students might also ask questions about the authors. Who were they? Why did they write what they did? What do their perspectives, likely privileged in some manner, say about those in society who may be oppressed? Might the author have experienced both privilege and oppression? How does that complicate the narrative? (Woodard 19-20)

In relation to the strategies mentioned above, Woodard provides concrete examples on how she has used literary works in her educational practices:

> we begin with a discussion of what each person learned about slavery in high school and then move on to what voices they did and did not hear in their past education. We ask why there are not more slave narratives written by women, why we do not discuss the sexual or psychological abuse experienced by slaves as readily as physical abuse, and whether sexual abuse and mental health are only now breaking out of the taboo space they once occupied (17)

Questions such as these, Woodard claims lie at the heart of *problem-posing education*. As mentioned in the *theoretical framework*, the educator (Woodard) poses a problem (i.e., the questions above) to the learners that he or she does not have a “correct” answer to, but rather the educator and the learners engage in *dialogue* in aim to find a solution to the problem posed. As a result, Freire claims “students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” (Freire 81). Using critical literacy as a pedagogy and method within an educational context is the same as using problem-posing education: learners are taught not to *accept information* deposited to the without *interaction, questioning (critical thinking), problematizing,* and *challenging* what is being read and heard. Hence, these characteristics taught to learners harmonize well with values
and principles in democratic societies as well as the broad assignments of schools in Sweden (Nilholm 26-28).

5.6 *Half of a Yellow Sun* with emphasis on the voice of Ugwu

*Half of a Yellow Sun* is a postcolonial novel authored by the famous Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and was first published in 2006. Adichie, as well as most authors in Africa write about imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, culture, and ethnicities. To sum up, Adichie’s novel is about the aftermath subsequent to the United Kingdom withdrawing their former colonies (i.e., Africa/Nigeria). The United Kingdom’s withdrawal from those colonies left a fertile ground for power struggles between the remaining indigenous population (Igbo/Hausa). In turn, this power struggle led to a civil war which left hundreds of thousands of people dead and on the brink of starvation. In Adichie’s novel the reader follows three characters (Ugwu, Kaininie and Richard) in their quest for survival before and during the civil war.

There are three reasons Adichie’s postcolonial novel will be used; *first*, as the subheading implies (see above) the focus will be on the voice of Ugwu. The reason for this is that Ugwu correlates in relation to the theoretical framework. At the beginning of the novel, Ugwu has no legal voice or agency. However, throughout the novel, his master (Odenigbo) understands that education is an important tool to help Ugwu break free from the shackles of oppression. As a result, Odenigbo uses libertarian education (problem-posing education) instead of the banking concept of education (see the first example highlighted on page 24-25) in aim to learn Ugwu not to accept information “deposited” to him without interaction, questioning (critical thinking), problematizing and challenging what he is hearing and reading. As a result, Ugwu becomes an important symbol of voice to all the oppressed voices in Nigeria who were never fortunate enough to tell their tale. In addition, Ugwu is also an important example, and a reflection of what educators should encourage their learners to become throughout their education with the help of libertarian education: active participants in democratic societies that can use their voice for the sake of good in this world.

*Second*, Adichie’s postcolonial novel will be used for the reason that none of her short-stories and novels were found in the unofficial, tacit school canon. As previously mentioned, the Swedish National Curriculum is less detail-controlled and as a consequence does not dictate which literature educators are required to use in their teaching. Therefore, it can be useful for educators to share their own experience of literature they have read and
used in their educational practices. However, while it is true that it sometimes can be a daunting task for educators to implement and use literature that is unfamiliar to themselves and their learners; Adichie’s novel can be turned into a heartening adventure as well as a chance for educators to expand their own personal canon of literature. Third and last, the postcolonial novel will be used in relation to the theoretical framework and in connection to the broad assignments of schools in Sweden (Nilholm) with the aim to help learners develop values and principles (human qualities) that harmonize with values in democratic societies (see the last exercise highlighted at the end of the discussion concerning the tragic fate of the young woman).

Before I proceed with the textual analysis, I would briefly like to address how Adichie’s novel could be read and used within an educational context (see the end of the discussion for a comprehensive step-by-step explanation and exercises). Admittedly, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a lengthy (433 pages) novel and can therefore be challenging to incorporate and use within a classroom if educators do not have a longer period of time at their disposal. Simply put, the educator alone knows how much time each lesson can be spent in relation to the reading of the novel. As previously mentioned, the reader follows three characters (i.e., Ugwu, Kainine and Richard) throughout the novel. In each chapter, one of these characters is at the center of attention. The passages I will use and highlight in the coming section, can be used by the educator and the learners as a basis for conversation. Furthermore, the educator can use the postcolonial novel in relation to LTS and Pairing texts in connection to Adichie’s speech and Life Magazine. In turn, these print and non-print texts (multimodal) as well as the questions, methods and approaches proposed by Tatum et al., Woodard, Ervin and Bender can add depth and breadth to the core text with the aim to aid learners in comprehending the novel and the complexities of the themes it deals with.

At the beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to Ugwu. In brief, Ugwu is an adolescent working as a servant boy for professor Odenigbo. At the beginning of their first encounter, Odenigbo tells Ugwu: “you are my houseboy, Master said. If I order you to go outside and beat a woman walking on the street with a stick, and you then give her a bloody wound on her leg, who is responsible for the wound, you, or me?” (10 Adichie). The passage highlighted, illustrates that Ugwu in contrast to Odenigbo has no legal voice or agency. He is merely seen as a servant boy being oppressed by an oppressor who himself has been the victim of oppression (the consequences of imperialism and colonialism in Nigeria). However, a page later, Odenigbo continues:
did you go to school? Standard two, sah. But I learn everything fast. Standard two? How long ago? Many years now, sah. But I learn everything fast! Why did you stop school? My fathers crops failed, sah. Master nodded slowly. Why didn't your father find somebody to lend him your school fees? Sah? Your father should have borrowed! Master snapped, and then, in English, “Education is a priority! How can we resist exploitation if we don’t have the tools to understand exploitation? I will enroll you in the staff primary school, Master said, still tapping on the piece of paper with his pen. (Adichie 10-11).

Although it is true that Odenigbo is actively engaging in the role of an oppressor, he understands that education is an important tool to break free from this oppression. Odenigbo uses what Freire would call libertarian education (problem-posing education) with Ugwu. For instance, Odenigbo says: “there are two answers to the things they will teach you about our land: the real answer and the answer you give in school to pass. You must read books and learn both answers” (Adichie ibid.). The passage illustrates that Odenigbo wants Ugwu to become an active subject and not a mere object waiting to be “filled” with information by educators. He wants Ugwu to not accept information “deposited” to him without interacting and questioning (critical thinking) what he is reading and hearing.

Furthermore, Ugwu does not have an educational background. His lack of knowledge, his subordinate and oppressed situation, as previously mentioned, makes him voiceless. In light of this, Ugwu proceeds to acquire knowledge in what Freire would call the banking concept of education, thus going against Odenigbos libertarian education. Ugwu picked up his exercise book [...]. He read the verse, which he had copied so carefully from the blackboard that it looked like Mrs Oguikes handwriting and then closed his eyes and recited it. He opened his eyes and scanned the verse to make sure he had missed nothing. He hoped Master would not remember to ask him to recite it because, although he had memorized the verse correctly, he would have no answer when Master asked, What does it mean? Or, What do you think it is really saying? (Adichie 84-85)

Moreover, Ugwu throughout the novel becomes increasingly motivated to learn, and therefore spends devoted time, reading, learning, and engaging in meaningful discussions with people in his vicinity. Ugwu’s progress is noticed by Olanna (Odenigbos wife). Like Odenigbo, Olanna is educated and understands that education and knowledge is an
important tool to break free from oppression. At the height of the war, Olanna decides to open a school: “We will teach mathematics, English and civics every day, Olanna said to Ugwu and Mrs Muokelu a day before the classes began. We have to make sure that when this war is over, they will all fit back easily into regular schools. We will teach them to speak perfect English and perfect Igbo, like His Excellency. We will teach them pride in our great nation” (Adichie 291). However, Olannas decision to appoint Ugwu to be one of the educators, is seen as problematic by some: “Is this one a teacher? she asked Olanna. Yes. Is he not your houseboy? Her voice was shrill. Since when has a servant started to teach, bikokwa? If you do not want your child to learn, take her home, Olanna said” (Adichie 292). The passage highlighted is important since Ugwu goes from being voiceless and having no agency to being a voice in an educational system.

Later in the novel, Ugwu meets Richard (a white Western from the United Kingdom engaging in a relationship with Olanna’s sister Kainenie). Richard met Ugwu after he had been rescued from a group of armed rebels. Ugwu tells Richard about his experiences:

I found a book at our camp. I was so sad and angry for the writer. What book was it? The autobiography of a black American called Frederick Douglas. Mr Richard wrote something down. I shall use this anecdote in my book. You a writing a book. Yes. What is it about, sah? The war that happened before, and how much should not have happened. It will be called “The World Was Silent When We Died”. Later Ugwu murmured the title to himself: The World Was Silent When We Died. It haunted him, filled him with shame. It made him think about that girl in the bar, her pinched face and the hate in her eyes as she lay on her back on the dirty floor (Adichie 397).

A few pages after Ugwu had told Richard about his experiences, Richard was looking for Kainenie, and instead finds Ugwu sitting underneath a tree. Ugwu tells Richard: “Aunty Kainene is not back”, Ugwu said, before Richard asked. You’re sure she didnt come back and then go off somewhere else? Im sure, sah. But I expect she will be back soon. Richard was amused by the formal precision in the way Ugwu said expect; he admired Ugwus ambition and his recent scribbling on any paper he could find” (Adichie 406). Like Olanna, Richard is impressed with the progress Ugwu has made in relation to his speech. However, Richard later becomes surprised that he also has made progress in his writing (Richard and Fredrik Douglas motivated Ugwu to write a book). Richard says: “This is fantastic, Ugwu. Mr. Richard looked surprised. Olanna told you about the woman carrying her childs head
on the train? Yes, sah. It will be part of a big book. It will take many more years to finish it and I will call it “Narratives of the Life of a Country” (Adichie 424).

At the end of the novel, Ugwu curiously asks Richard: “Are you still writing your book, sah? No. “The World Was Silent When We Died”. It is a good title”. Richard paused. “The war isn’t my story to tell, really. Ugwu nodded. He never thought that it was” (Adichie 425). As a result, Ugwu decides to write a book about Nigeria and dedicate it to his Master: “Ugwu writes his dedication last: for Master, my good man” (Adichie 433). The passage highlighted illustrates that Ugwu at the beginning of the novel had no voice and agency. However, throughout the novel, Ugwu develops voice both in speech and writing. Thus, he becomes an important symbol of voice to all the oppressed voices who never got to tell their story. In turn, his voice will be used to tell the world about their experiences during the Biafra war.

6. Discussion
In relation to the aim and research questions there are several findings worth looking closer at and discussing. First, despite there being limited research available on which English-language literature English teachers in Sweden use in their teaching, four studies (i.e., Arnekull & Pesa, Johansson, Sjödin and Larsson) were found. These studies were executed in different geographical locations in Sweden between 2013-2022. The main findings from these studies seem to indicate that there exists a pattern. For instance, Brink found an unofficial, tacit school canon of Swedish-language literature in 1910-1945 (302). A similar result was found by Johansson in relation to English-language literature in 2013. Meanwhile, I carried out a survey in 2022, which in connection to the other studies seem to imply that an unofficial, tacit school canon of English-language literature has been established in Swedish upper-secondary schools, comprising ten literary works, despite the Swedish National Curriculum not naming specific literary works educators must use in their teaching: Animal Farm (George Orwell), 1984 (George Orwell), Mockingbird (Harper Lee), Of Mice and Men (John Steinbeck), The Great Gatsby (F. Scott Fitzgerald), Holes (Louis Sachar), Frankenstein (Mary Shelley), The Fault in our Stars (John Green), The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (Mark Haddon), Hunger Games (Suzanne Collins).

Second, in relation to my own survey, as previously mentioned, all nine respondents claimed that the Swedish National Curriculum fails to provide clear guidelines when it
comes to choosing what literature to use in the classroom and how it should be used. As a result, the respondents expressed feeling free in their profession, and would be worried about being bound to an “acceptable book list”. The educators claim that a great deal of the responsibility to find and implement appropriate literature in the classroom is transferred to the educator since the responsibility is not specified by the Swedish National Curriculum. Yet, all the educators who participated in the student essays and, in my own survey, as previously mentioned, have the freedom and privilege (a less detail-controlled curriculum) to select literary works of their own choosing. However, the educator’s freedom to choose, seems paradoxically to have resulted in the establishment of a “book list” in the form of an unofficial, tacit school canon. Simply put, educators in Sweden seem to share the same canonical works in their educational practices.

Third, there are countries in the West where educators have no support at all when choosing what literary works to teach and children may well go through their whole education without having been introduced to quality literature. In comparison to other countries in the West, Sweden stands out for not having a curriculum that specifies any literary works (i.e., less detail-controlled). In contrast to Sweden, the curriculum in countries such as England, France, Denmark, and Norway name specific literary works educators are mandated to use in their educational practices (Brink 149-152). The problem with much of the literary works named as a teaching requirement by these countries “prescribed” curricula is that it has oftentimes been seen as belonging to the “Western literary canon”. In turn, the “Western literary canon” has been criticized for being predicated, upholding, and promoting (for instance power and authority, the abuse of women, displaying traditional gender roles, lack of inclusivity, racism and colonial literature promoting a Eurocentric viewpoint of the world) values and principles that do not harmonize with values in democratic societies (William 865 & Bender). While it is true that the ten literary works found in the unofficial, tacit school canon might be vulnerable to the same criticism aimed at the “Western literary canon” and a “prescribed” curriculum. Yet, no evidence was found which would illustrate that the ten literary works found in the unofficial, tacit school canon would suggest that a less detail-controlled curriculum does not contribute to English teachers in Sweden being more inclusive in their choice of literature in teaching, since most of the student essays/surveys highlighted provide information on what is being taught, but not of how it is being taught to learners.
Continuing in line with the third finding, in the student essays/surveys (Arnekull & Pesa, Johansson, Sjödin and Larsson) much emphasis was placed on which English-speaking literature English teachers in Sweden use in their teaching. However, the survey by Larsson, Stålberg and Andrijevic went a step further and investigated how the literary works named by the educators were being taught to learners. While the respondents in my own survey claimed that the Swedish National Curriculum fails to provide clear guidelines when it comes to choosing what literature to use in the classroom and how it should be used, Larsson and Stålberg concluded that educators saw value in using literary works characterized as classic, canonical, and popular fiction in the educational practices. For instance, the educators in Larsson’s survey were using these literary works to challenge and problematize topics such as child labor, the living condition of women through a feminist lens, technological surveillance in a dystopian world, historical events, and social injustices. And the educators in Stålberg’s survey considered literature to be a useful tool in helping learners facilitate literacy skills, promoting global awareness and seeing the world through multiple viewpoints. Despite the criticism aimed at these literary works (compare to William and Bender) two main findings could be said were found in relation to what is being taught and how it is being taught to learners: First, it seems that “teachers typically expect their secondary students to read texts from the English canon because these texts offer opportunities for meaningful reflections on essential questions” (Tatum et al. 88). Second, “many texts of the Western literary canon rather than being vehicles of establishment values are critical of these values. Teaching these texts allows educators to challenge the interest of those who hold power in society as well as conventional sexual morality and gender stereotypes” (William 1).

Fourth, while it is a well-established fact up to this point that Sweden in contrast to other countries in the West stands out for not having a curriculum that specifies any literary works (i.e., less detail-controlled), the current canon debate in Sweden could soon lead to fundamental changes in our educational institutions. For example, if the Swedish National Government is successful in establishing and implementing the official cultural canon in the curriculum and thus making them a teaching requirement, Sweden will no longer stand out as not having a curriculum that specifies literary works (hence making the Swedish National Curriculum more detail-controlled). A consequence of this would in practice mean that the responsibility to find and implement appropriate literature in the classroom is transferred from the teacher to the curriculum.
Furthermore, while there is undoubtedly richness in all literary works, I would argue on a more personal note that it would be rather naive to think that the establishment of a Swedish Cultural Canon of Literature will not be synonymous with several problems. I would argue that there might be a well-thought of reason that educators and facilitators in Sweden have no support at all when it comes to choosing what literary works to teach. The reason, behind this decision, might be that the Swedish National Curriculum wants to make sure that the reading in Swedish schools is inclusive of many different voices as well as preventing individual teachers from prioritizing certain voices and marginalizing others. However, with reference to the establishment of a cultural canon, educators in Sweden might soon be restricted and limited in that freedom. A consequence of this could in practice mean that the Swedish National Curriculum might inadvertently name literary works as a teaching requirement that could ‘silently’ marginalize and privilege some voices: race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, sociocultural/economic identities, social status, and class. In turn, educators in Sweden will have limited impact on what is being taught; yet educators in Sweden will be able to influence and decide on how these literary works are going to be taught to learners: a privilege, responsibility, and freedom the curriculum can never restrict. Thus, educators in Sweden could soon have to handle and respond to such challenges and pedagogical dilemmas in their teaching profession. In relation to this, I strongly believe that educators in Sweden can look to William, Bender, Tatum et al. Ervin and Woodard as inspirational sources since these educators have developed pedagogical and didactic methods/strategies in their educational practices with the aim to make room for a spectrum of voices when being mandated to teach from a required text list that “quietly” promotes some sociocultural identities over others [...] and privileges Eurocentric perspectives” (Ervin 321-323). At the heart of the educator’s strategies/methods lie critical literacy, critical pedagogy (libertarian/problem-posing education) and intersectionality. The educator’s methods/strategies perfectly illustrate that the inclusive classroom is not only a matter of what is being taught but also of how it is being taught. As a means of a concluding discussion, I will in the coming section apply a few strategies/methods mentioned by Bender, Ervin, and Woodard in aim to discuss how these strategies hypothetically could be used didactically in relation to Half of a Yellow Sun with the emphasis on the voice of Ugwu.

In brief, Half of a Yellow Sun is a postcolonial novel that is an antidote to a Eurocentric perspective. While it is undoubtedly true that Adichie is a prominent author, her literary works might be unexplored by learners (e.g., none of her literary works were found in the
unofficial, tacit school canon). Moreover, Adichie’s literary works oftentimes deal with topics such as imperialism, colonialism and post-colonialism that might be difficult topics for learners to comprehend. In relation to this, the educator can help learners establish a context by using Woodards seventh and fifth step.

ask students to consider their experience with a text prior to class. Have they heard of the text before? What have they heard, seen, or read about the text? students might ask questions about the authors. Who were they? Why did they write what they did? What do their perspectives, likely privileged in some manner, say about those in society who may be oppressed? Might the author have experienced both privilege and oppression? [...]. (19-20)

Second, in aim to help students learn more about the author and the postcolonial novel, the educator can use LTS and Pairing Texts in relation to Adichie’s speech and Life Magazine. These print and non-print texts will add depth and breadth to the core text. Third, the educator can introduce the novel using Woodards first and second step.

students should not expect a marginalized author to write a marginalized hero. [...] students should recognize that authors are products of their society and might have to find subtler ways to write about characters of their identity group. Tell students from the outset of the semester that they should look for missing voices. Who is not represented in the text and why might that be? This question will give them a way to examine the historical power structures from the texts time period. (19-20)

Fourth, before the learners are immersed into the novel, Woodards questions act as a blueprint in preparing learners to use critical thinking and a critical mindset in the form of interacting, questioning (critical thinking), problematizing, and challenging what is being read (Life Magazine) and heard (the speech by Adichie). Moreover, it may be argued that Adichie’s decision to write Half of a Yellow Sun is a method Ervin and Bender would call counterstorytelling. The educator and the learners can look at some of the passages highlighted in the result/analysis section in relation to the voice of Ugwu. For instance, it could perhaps be argued that Adichie and Ugwu share some similarities: both have grown up in circumstances, places, groups (Igbo in Nigeria) that in some shape or form have been the victim of marginalization. Despite this, it could be said that Adichie and Ugwu have been successful in developing their voice and agency in the sense that both write a book about Nigeria. Furthermore, a concrete example on how educators can use one of the passages highlighted in the novel is to look closely at when Ugwu tells Richard about his
experiences after being rescued from the rebels (see page 24-25 in this essay). As Ugwu is speaking to Richard, it might become evident to the reader that Ugwu and the rebels have forced themselves on a young woman. At the end of the novel, the reader is never told what happened to the woman, except for rumors and speculations that Ugwu hears. If educators in Sweden are to help learners develop human qualities (democratic values and principles) that harmonize well with the broad assignment of schools in Sweden (Nilholm 26-28) a useful method seems to be teaching learners to view literature through a lens of critical literacy/pedagogy: “interrogating multiple viewpoints […] and taking action towards social justice” (Ervin 322-323). In relation to this, the tragic fate of the young woman is a perfect example that should not be neglected but rather discussed, challenged, and problematized with learners. According to Woodard, discussions such as these, lie at the heart of problem-posing education: “we ask why there are not more slave narratives written by women, why we do not discuss the sexual or psychological abuse experienced by slaves as readily as physical abuse, and whether sexual abuse and mental health are only now breaking out of the taboo space they once occupied” (17).

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Ugwu writes a book about Nigeria in the end of the novel. Yet, the reader is never revealed what is written in the book. Thus, the educator can use Bender as an inspirational source in aim to construct two exercises with the learners: “Bissonnette and Glazier (2016, 689) likewise advocate reading against the canonical grain through the use of ‘counterstories’ created by the students ‘to elucidate the exploitation of persons identifying as nonwhite’ by giving one or more marginalized characters in a narrative voice through writing assignments that center them to reimagine the tale” (Bender 369). In relation to Bender, the educator can construct the following exercises: first, as previously mentioned, the reader is never revealed what is written in Ugwu’s book. Hence, the educator can encourage learners to take the pen in hand in aim to allow the learners to become the author for a moment. In turn, the learners are given the power to write a few pages in Ugwu’s book in relation to what they think he has written, or alternatively they can retract, add, or include certain parts that they believe should be included in the postcolonial novel. Second, if the educator and the learners are to hold Adichie true to her word that there indeed is Danger in a Single Story, I would argue on a more personal note that the educator and the learners have a moral obligation to voice the tragic fate of the young woman. For instance, the woman and Ugwu could be said have both been victims of marginalization. Yet we are told about Ugwu in depth and not the woman. However, Adichie offers us a blueprint on the tragic fate of the woman. In turn, we should continue
to voice what happened to her. Thus, the educator can encourage learners to “reimagine the tale” (Bender 369) with emphasis on the woman.

7. Conclusion

7.2 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the essay was to examine which consequences a less detail-controlled curriculum has on English teachers’ choice of English-language literature. To this end, two research questions were formulated: 1. Which English-language literature do English teachers in Sweden use in their teaching? 2. Does a less detail-controlled curriculum contribute to English teachers in Sweden being more inclusive in their choice of literature in teaching?

In relation to the aim and research questions, four conclusions were found. First, the results seem to indicate that an unofficial, tacit school canon of English-language literature mainly composed of ten literary works has been established in Swedish upper-secondary schools, despite the Swedish National Curriculum not naming specific literary works educators are required to use in their teaching (i.e., educators in Sweden seem to share the same canonical works in their educational practices). Second, while there might be some truth that the ten literary works found in the unofficial, tacit school canon might be vulnerable to the same criticism aimed at the “Western literary canon” and a “prescribed” curriculum. Yet, no evidence was found which would illustrate that a less detail-controlled curriculum does not contribute to English teachers in Sweden being more inclusive in their choice of literature in teaching since most of the academic literature found provide information on what is being taught but not on how it is being taught. However, despite there being limited research available within this topic, three conclusions were found in relation to what is being taught and how it is being taught. First, the results seem to indicate that “teachers typically expect their secondary students to read texts from the English canon because these texts offer opportunities for meaningful reflections on essential questions” (Tatum et al. 88). Second, “many texts of the Western literary canon rather than being vehicles of establishment values are critical of these values. Teaching these texts allows educators to challenge the interest of those who hold power in society as well as conventional sexual morality and gender stereotypes” (William 1).

Third, in comparison to other countries in the West, Sweden stands out for not having a curriculum that specifies any literary works (i.e., less detail-controlled). In contrast to
Sweden, the curriculum in these countries name specific literature educators are mandated to use in their educational practices. As a result, the educators in these countries are absolved of the responsibility of having to choose what literary works to teach. Instead, they are able to focus on how the learning material is to be delivered to learners. The problem, Ervin argues, is that the curriculum in these countries might name literary works as a teaching requirement that “‘quietly’ promotes some sociocultural identities over others [...] and privileges Eurocentric perspectives” (Ervin 321-323). Interestingly, Sweden has been more careful to not name specific literature educators must use in their teaching with the aim to make sure that the reading is inclusive for all and to prevent individual teachers from prioritizing specific voices and marginalizing others. However, this is now under threat, provided that the Swedish National Government is successful in establishing the national canon into the Swedish National Curriculum. A consequence of this might be that the Swedish National Curriculum inadvertently does that which it aims to prevent (i.e., marginalizing and privileging some voices). In relation to this, educators in Sweden will not be able to influence what is being taught; however, the result show that educators have developed strategies and methods (i.e., critical literacy, critical pedagogy, and intersectionality) for how to teach these literary works to learners in aim to make room for a spectrum of voices when being required to teach from a “prescribed” curriculum. **Fourth and last,** the result of the present inquiry tends to show that the method of delivery of the teaching is more significant than the content or the literary work used.

### 7.3 Further Research

As mentioned in the introduction, the Swedish government has issued a motion on a political level deciding on the establishment of a *Swedish Cultural Canon of Literature* of literature in Sweden. Despite this, several questions remain unanswered. **Due to the lack of current research within** this topic, I suggest further research in relation to the *Swedish Cultural Canon of Literature.*
8. Works Cited


Kevin Williams, Voices of the establishment or of cultural subversion? The Western canon in the curriculum, Journal of Philosophy of Education, Volume 55, Issue 4-5, August 2021, Pages 864-877,


Appendices 1, 2 and 3

Teachers choice of literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title being taught</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Fisherman and His Soul</td>
<td>Oscar Wilde</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Curious Incident of a Dog in the Night-Time X2</td>
<td>Mark Haddon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Big Mouth and Ugly Girl</td>
<td>Joyce Carol Oates</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Fault in Our Stars</td>
<td>John Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Perks of Being a Wallflower X2</td>
<td>Stephen Chbosky</td>
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<tr>
<td>Looking for Alaska X2</td>
<td>John Green</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Giver X2</td>
<td>Lois Lowry</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Kite Runner X2</td>
<td>Khaled Hosseini</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fahrenheit 451</td>
<td>Ray Bradbury</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Hate U Give X2</td>
<td>Angie Thomas</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Drop of Midnight: A Memoir</td>
<td>Timbuktu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oliver Twist</td>
<td>Charles Dickens</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Christmas Carol X2</td>
<td>Charles Dickens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frankenstein</td>
<td>Mary Shelley</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Hill We Climb</td>
<td>Amanda Gorman</td>
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<td>Matilda X2</td>
<td>Roald Dahl</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walkabout</td>
<td>Donald G. Payne</td>
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<td>Diary of a Wimpy Kid</td>
<td>Jeff Kinney</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian X2</td>
<td>Sherman Alexie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goodnight Mr. Tom</td>
<td>Michelle Magorian</td>
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<td>(Un)arranged Marriage</td>
<td>Bali Rai</td>
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<td>Dash&amp;Lilly's Books of Dares</td>
<td>Rachel Cohn &amp; David Levithan</td>
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<td>Ruby Tanya</td>
<td>Robert Swindells</td>
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<td>Because of you</td>
<td>Eve Ainsworth</td>
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<td>Shadow Girl</td>
<td>Sally Nicholls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Of Mice and Men X3</td>
<td>John Steinbeck</td>
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<td>About A Boy</td>
<td>Nick Hornby</td>
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<td>Holes</td>
<td>Louis Sachar</td>
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<td>Charlie and The Chocolate Factory</td>
<td>Roald Dahl</td>
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<td>The Graveyard Book</td>
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<td>Room</td>
<td>Emma Donoghue</td>
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<td>Bridget Jones' Diary</td>
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<td>Animal Farm</td>
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<td>To Kill a Mockingbird</td>
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<td>K-Pax</td>
<td>Gene Brewer</td>
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Samtyckesblankett & Enkät

Hej,

Mitt namn är Valentin Andrijevic och jag studerar till ämneslärare i svenska och engelska på gymnasienivå vid Högskolan i Halmstad. I nuläget håller jag på att skriva mitt examensarbete i engelska och jag vill undersöka vilka konsekvenser en mindre detaljstyrd läroplan har på lärarens val av engelskspråkig litteratur.

Information

Enkätsvaren kommer att användas som underlag i mitt examensarbete och kommer endast delas med min handledare och examinator. Svaren och informationen i enkäten kommer att tas bort när examensarbetet har blivit godkänt. Alla som väljer att delta kommer att förbliva anonyma. Du behöver ge ditt samtycke (se första frågan i enkäten). Ditt deltagande är frivilligt och du kan när du så önskar välja att inte delta. Resultatet kommer att presenteras i mitt examensarbete inom engelska och kommer att finnas tillgängligt på internet.

Klicka på länken för att komma till enkäten

https://forms.gle/v4VkU92bbArFR9gn7

Har ni frågor och funderingar, kontakta mig gärna: Valand18@student.hh.se

Härmed ger jag mitt samtycke till deltagande i undersökningen (se första frågan i enkäten).

Vänligen, Valentin Andrijevic (D+Mb+V)++++
Questions in Questionnaire

1. Please list for each of your classes (High-School/Upper-Secondary School) any English language literature that you use or have used with students in your teaching.

2. As a teacher, do you think that the Swedish National Curriculum provides clear guidelines when it comes to choosing what literature to use in the classroom and how it should be used? Why or Why not? (D+M+b+V)++++