From Obstacle to Opportunity

- making reading meaningful in the classroom

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Introduction

Reading is a crucial element of language learning. As I discovered during my teaching practice, many Swedish pupils find it hard and/or boring to read in a foreign language, or even to read at all. Due to this, I find it interesting to learn how I as a teacher can work with reading in different ways to promote learning for students in upper secondary school. One thing that is important when teaching literature is that the pupils understand why they need to read the text, to make them understand how the texts connect to their experience.

Although factors such as the reader's feelings and experiences are highly personal and therefore vary from reader to reader, there are other factors that differentiate groups of readers and hence their reading experience. These factors I have chosen to call categorizing factors, and are here defined as age, gender, ethnicity and class. Of course, these factors occur in many different combinations, for example black, adult, male reader; Christian, white, female reader; or Muslim, black, female reader.

The two novels I have chosen to work with in this essay, Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*¹ and Randa Abdel-Fattah’s *Does my Head Look Big in This?*² have protagonists that might be difficult for the students to identify with, since the protagonists are, for different reasons, set apart from their peers. Identification is effected through emotional connection to the text, and further influenced by categorizing factors. There are not only advantages with identification; identification can become problematic and lead to students’ resistance to reading. There are ways to deal with this resistance and turn it into something positive; when we know what makes pupils resist we can use that knowledge when planning reading tasks so that the students can attain a positive attitude towards reading. Using Oatley’s taxonomy of literary response combined with an understanding of how factors such as gender and ethnicity influence readers’ responses, reading can be better used to enhance students’ understanding of English texts.

Theory discussion

Keith Oatley, who is a professor of cognitive psychology, discusses emotions and identification in reader response in his “A taxonomy of the emotions of literary response and

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¹ Haddon 2003/2004. From now on referred to as “Curious Incident”.
² Abdel-Fattah 2005
a theory of identification in fictional narrative". According to Oatley, when we read, we are more or less affected by the text. A text can arouse different feelings which can be accompanied by physical expressions of these feelings, such as happiness with laughter, sadness with tears, and fear with heartbeats. When talking about emotional response, we must remember to differentiate between a reader that remains outside a story and a reader who enters into it. Oatley claims reading is interaction between the reader and the author or between the reader and the characters of the story. However, literary scholars are more inclined to see this as interaction between text and reader. Oatley quotes Goffman as referring to a semi-permeable membrane between the outside world and the world of the text.

The writer invites the reader to enter, Alice-like, through the looking glass, into the story world. This is like entering a particular kind of social interaction, as Goffman (1961) has shown, through a semi-permeable membrane, inside which is a world with its own history, and its own conventions from which meanings are constructed.

The membrane of social interaction is semi-permeable because a reader puts some but not all of his/her own attributes into the story. When a reader confronts a text, emotions come from outside the membrane, the real world in which the reader lives, while emotions from inside the membrane are evoked by the plot or characters in the world of the story. Thus, the reader can experience feelings that come from both the outside and the inside of the membrane. Oatley lists five different emotions of literary response; assimilation, accommodation, sympathy, memories and identification.

When talking about emotions of literary response, we must thus define the relationship/attitude between the reader and the text; is there a distance, where the reader remains outside the text, or does s/he enter the inner world of it? When a reader enters the world of the text, this is by Oatley referred to as an internal attitude, while the reader outside the text, confronting it, takes on an external attitude. Emotions of literary response result from either assimilation of schema or accommodation of schema. Briefly, the assimilation of schema entails curiosity about what will happen next, the writer presents the story(events) in a way (structure) that appeals to the reader’s curiosity, while accommodation of schema

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3 Oatley 1994
4 Oatley 54
5 New English Review 2010
7 Oatley 55
involves dishabituation, the schema does not match the reader’s expectations and so the reading is challenging and can call forth new insights.\(^8\)

Oatley points out that “Reading is not telepathy - words are the vehicle for communication.”\(^9\) The way the author writes is crucial for our conception of a text. S/he has to guide the reader through the text. Oatley claims that through the words and descriptions used in the text, the reader can experience the thoughts and feelings of the author.\(^{10}\) However, it is not only the feelings of the author that can be experienced, but also the feelings of characters and the reader’s own emotions and experiences, as I stated earlier. The text depicts characters and events so that the reader can understand things that s/he has not experienced himself/herself. This allows us to familiarize ourselves, for example, with what Amal is going through when deciding to wear the hijab. The informative descriptions in the text also help us understand what it is like being Christopher, a young boy with neuro-atypical traits. It is important to clarify that Haddon does not put a name to Christopher’s disorder, but based on the portrayal of Christopher, readers often assume that he is suffering from Asperger’s Syndrome, a form of autism. It has become customary to refer to Christopher as having Asperger’s, such as in the articles by Greenwell and Ciocia.\(^{11}\) For consistency, I will refer to his disorder as Asperger’s Syndrome, while aware that this is an interpretation and not a quotation.

### Five kinds of emotions

In this chapter, I will discuss Oatley’s five emotions that affect reader response, with examples from *Curious Incident* and *Does My Head Look Big In This?*. The five emotions, as mentioned above, are assimilation, accommodation, sympathy, memories and identification. Assimilation and accommodation are emotions of literary response on an external level, which a reader can feel when confronting a text without entering the inner world of it. The other three emotions are features on an internal level, which can be experienced when a reader enters the story world through the membrane.

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\(^8\) Oatley 57-58  
\(^9\) Oatley 56  
\(^{10}\) Oatley 56  
\(^{11}\) Greenwell mentions Asperger’s in "The Curious Incidence of Novels About Asperger’s Syndrome”, for example on page 271, and Ciocia does so too, in “Postmodern Investigations: The Case of Christopher Boone in The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time”, for example on page 331.
Assimilation and Accommodation

A text is usually either assimilative or accommodative, yet *Curious Incident* can be said to be both. Its genre, the detective genre, is traditionally based on assimilation to a plot-based schema where we identify with the protagonist. A schema in an assimilative text consists of curiosity about what will happen next, anxiety for the character, and then relief of these emotions. Most thrilling novels are purely assimilative and follow the schema, and you are not personally moved after reading the book: you will be the same person as when you started to read.\textsuperscript{12} This is where *Curious Incident* differs from its genre, because it has an extra ingredient: Christopher’s Asperger’s. Accommodation to schema appears when the habitual is made strange\textsuperscript{13}; Christopher has quite a different view of things that we normally take for granted. His unique point of view forces us to look at life from a new, radical perspective and consider what we take for granted.\textsuperscript{14} His mathematical puzzles, for example The Monty Hall problem\textsuperscript{15} are simple for Christopher but difficult for the reader, which forces us to reverse the roles\textsuperscript{16} (Christopher knows more than the reader, instead of the other way around) which makes reading challenging. Haddon has lots of tricks for keeping the reader busy: “The pictures, the equations, the digressions, the inclusion of letters the candid asides, the typography - everything keeps the reader busy”.\textsuperscript{17} All of these elements are due to Christopher’s autism. Dupuy argues that a narrator with Asperger’s Syndrome makes reading a challenge because of the limited language, it questions our notion of what a narrator should be doing and how.\textsuperscript{18} In my opinion, Christopher’s language is not something negative, it rather makes us understand how Asperger’s Syndrome is manifested and it also makes us laugh.

As we can tell from the above, the external curiosity about what will happen next is often combined with an internal mode, for example identification with a character, which in turn induces other emotions, such as anxiety for a character in trouble.\textsuperscript{19} In *Curious Incident*,

\begin{thebibliography}{19}
\bibitem{12} Oatley 58
\bibitem{13} Oatley 58
\bibitem{14} Ciocia 2009, 327
\bibitem{15} Haddon 78-82
\bibitem{16} Greenwell 281
\bibitem{17} Greenwell 281
\bibitem{18} Dupuy, 2007, 113
\bibitem{19} Oatley 57-58
\end{thebibliography}
Christopher decides to go to his mother in London, all alone. Since we know he does not like talking to strangers\textsuperscript{20}, we know this trip will be a challenge for him, and we start to get anxious for him as he starts his journey; he has to talk to strangers to find the way to the railway station.\textsuperscript{21}

I made a decision that I would have to find out how to get to the train station and I would do this by asking someone, and it would be a lady because when they talked to us about Stranger Danger at school they say that if a man comes up to you and talks to you and you feel frightened you should call out and find a lady to run to because ladies are safer.\textsuperscript{22}

Going to the train station means leaving his comfort zone and this is very hard for him, which is another reason why we feel anxious for him. Going on the train is a challenge, since the train is full of strangers, and we are anxious to see if he will make it all the way to London.

There were lots of people on the train, and I didn’t like that, because I don’t like lots of people I don’t know and I hate it even more if I am stuck in a room with lots of people I don’t know, and a train is like a room and you can’t get out of it when it’s moving.\textsuperscript{23}

Having said that in \textit{Curious Incident} emotions on an external level result from both assimilation and accommodation, we do also have to remember that there are emotions on an internal level, which can only be experienced when the reader enters the world of the story. On the internal level there are three main ways in which we experience emotions: sympathy, memories, and/ or identification. To experience these, we must enter through the membrane and make the character come to life.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{Sympathy}

Oatley argues that sympathy is the link to the reader, the reader communicates with the characters or the implied narrator rather than with the author.\textsuperscript{25} Oatley quotes Scheler (1913)

\textsuperscript{20} Haddon 45
\textsuperscript{21} Haddon 170-172
\textsuperscript{22} Haddon 170
\textsuperscript{23} Haddon 196
\textsuperscript{24} Oatley 61
\textsuperscript{25} Oatley 61
who claims sympathy is “a distinct process of fellow feeling in response to a state that we recognize in another person”\textsuperscript{26}, to feel for someone. Scheler distinguishes sympathy from empathy, empathy meaning to project the other person’s feelings onto oneself, or to feel with someone.\textsuperscript{27} If an event that is emotionally significant occurs in a text, it is likely that the reader will feel a sympathetic response. This feeling can be strong, even though the reader does not know the characters. The reader is only an observer and is not taking part in the event, and therefore her/his emotional response will mainly be sympathy for the characters that are experiencing the event.\textsuperscript{28}

The extent of the reader’s sympathy can vary between different characters.\textsuperscript{29} In \textit{Does My Head Look Big In This?} our sympathy naturally goes to Amal most of the time, since most of the story is about her struggle as a Muslim, her choices, her life, but we can also sympathize with other characters. Oatley argues that the text points the sympathy of the reader in a certain direction.\textsuperscript{30} It guides us, and can tell us who is good and bad. This is why we can have strong sympathetic feelings for characters that we do not even know, that do not, in fact, exist outside the text. In \textit{Does my head look big in this?} we are told about Tia Tamos who is Amal’s antagonist. She is described as a popular but mean girl: to her, good looks mean everything, and she loves pointing out the flaws of her classmates\textsuperscript{31}. One example of this is when Amal’s best friend Simone, who is slightly overweight, says to Amal:

\begin{quote}
“I’m always going to be fat Simone. Like Tia said the other day, I probably spend more on Big Macs than she does on her annual gym membership”\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Here, our sympathy goes to Simone (and not to Amal) as we are told about the mean things Tia does, which makes her “the bad one”. This guidance from the text may be what makes a Christian reader, like me, identifying with a character from a different religion, such as the Muslim girl Amal. The text explains to us what it is like to be a young Muslim girl and helps us see things from that perspective. When our sympathy moves from one character to another,

\begin{itemize}
\item Oatley 62
\item Oatley 62
\item Oatley 62
\item Oatley, 1994, 62
\item Abdel-Fattah 9
\item Abdel-Fattah 82
\end{itemize}
our emotional understanding increases, not only for the characters in the novel, but perhaps also for people in real life.\textsuperscript{33}

**Memories**

We can also experience emotions through memories. Oatley refers to Stanislavski (1936) who wrote a book where the director of a new play asked the actors during rehearsal to think of a situation that they had experienced themselves that reminded them of the situation in the play, in order to make the performance more alive.\textsuperscript{34} Oatley claims that it is likely that not only actors, but also audiences and readers, can experience emotions through memories.\textsuperscript{35} I believe this is something that can be applied to education. If students are having a hard time connecting with a text, the teacher can help them by asking them to try to think of a memory of when they were in a similar situation. For example, some students might find it hard to understand Amal because they are not Muslim, not girls, or not the same age as her. But if they think about a situation where they have felt bad about being different or have been teased about something, they might find it easier to connect to her. However, it is not only bad memories that you can relive through literature, it also gives us the opportunity to re-experience good memories.

**Identification**

The third emotion that Oatley lists as internal is identification.\textsuperscript{36} To experience this emotion is, according to Oatley, a psychological process where the reader takes on the characteristics of the fictional character.\textsuperscript{37} Oatley clarifies and develops the concept of identification, starting with the concept of *mimesis*. Mimesis means ‘imitation’ or ‘representation’, fiction can hereby be understood as imitating the real world.\textsuperscript{38} However, Oatley does not think this

\textsuperscript{33} Oatley 61  
\textsuperscript{35} Oatley 63  
\textsuperscript{36} Oatley 63  
\textsuperscript{37} Oatley 64  
\textsuperscript{38} Oatley 65
translation gives a fair description of the concept. Instead, he would like to translate it into simulation, a text is a simulation rather than an imitation of human actions. He explains this as follows:

The core of this simulation is identification with one or more characters: the central process is that the reader runs the actions of the character on his own planning process, taking on the character’s goals, and experiencing emotions as these plans meet vicissitudes /.../ the text of a novel is simulation just as a computer program can be a simulation; and in order to work the simulation must be run. Literary simulations run on minds of audiences or readers, just as computer simulations run on computers.

He also gives an example of imitation versus simulation: conversation. In real life, we would use incomplete sentences and short utterances such as ‘uhm’ and ‘er’, while in literature the conversation must be clearer to be understood by the reader. Thus, the dialogue in fiction does not imitate a real conversation, but is a simulation of it. This is clear in this quotation from Curious Incident:

I said, ‘Did you see anything suspicious on Thursday evening?’
He said, ‘Look, son, do you really think you should be going around asking questions like this?’
And I said, ‘Yes, because I want to find out who killed Wellington, and I am writing a book about it.
And he said, ‘Well, I was in Colchester on Thursday, so you’re asking the wrong bloke.’
I said, ‘Thank you,’ and I walked away.

As we can see in this quotation, there are no incomplete sentences or ungrammatical speech. It is a simulation of a conversation, constructed in a way that makes it comprehensible to the reader. The level of simulation differs between texts: in Does My Head Look Big In This?, I think the dialogues are perceived as closer to our own experience of speech and lack the unique traits of Christopher’s language habits. The dialogues in Does My Head Look Big In This? consist of incomplete sentences and utterances that are not really words, but they are still examples of simulation:

“Hi, guys,” he says, grinning at us. “Ready to have some fun?”

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39 Oatley 66
40 Oatley 66
41 Oatley 67
42 Haddon 48
“Yeah!” we shout. It’s like we’re ten years old again.
“You scared?”
“No!”

I think this lack of perfection makes it more convincing as a teenage language. There are other parts of the book where the language is even closer to imitation of real conversation, where Amal talks to the neighbour, Mrs. Vaselli, who speaks English with a foreign accent:

“You no mind business…but you…you annoy me wiz your question all time…huh! My son, he marry Jehovah’s Witness ten year ago. He conversion.
I no speak him since.”

This is just one example where the language portrayed in the book is closer to imitating than simulating the language used in a real conversation. In the example above, the text emphasizes Mrs. Vaselli’s role as an immigrant (she is Greek) as compared to Amal who was born in Australia. However, in order to achieve identification, it is required that simulation extends beyond dialogues.

Oatley lists four cognitive elements that are important for a successful simulation. The first one is to adopt the goals of a protagonist, for example to win against an opponent, and this is the essence of enjoying a plot-based story, as the events in the book relates the goals and plans. The second element is to create a mental model of the imagined world. To do this, the reader needs details. Oatley gives an example of a character surrounded by butterflies - it is more believable if we are also told what these butterflies look like. The third of Oatley’s elements of simulation is the relationship between the text and the reader through speech acts that stimulate the reader's conception of the characters in the dialogue. The last element is that the text must allow the reader to be integrated in the information given, in order to have a more profound experience of the text. In other words, these elements argue that from the information and clues given in the text, the reader can create the characters and their world. Finally, Oatley argues that without identification, the reader can not get a full understanding of a text. Both of the novels contain all of these elements, which should mean that the reader

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43 Abdel-Fattah 206
44 Abdel-fattah 209
45 Oatley 69-70
46 Oatley 69-70
47 Oatley 71
is given all the prerequisites needed in order to enable a more thorough understanding of the text.

My personal opinion is that the last of the elements, that the text must involve the reader in the given information, serves as a basis for the three other elements. Firstly, it is easy to adopt the goals of both Christopher and Amal, since they both give very detailed descriptions and all the information needed for me to feel involved in their stories: I want Christopher to solve the murder, to find his mum and to do the A-level maths, and I want Amal to be accepted for who she is, wearing the hijab.

Secondly, from the information Christopher gives, I can create a mental model of the imagined world of the story. Christopher even gives more information than needed:

The policeman said, ‘Okey-dokey,’ and we drove off.
The police car smelt of hot plastic and aftershave and take-away chips.
I watched the sky as we drove towards the town centre. It was a clear night and you could see the milky Way.
Some people think that the Milky Way is a long line of stars, but it isn’t. Our galaxy is a huge disc of stars millions of light years across and the solar system is somewhere near the outside edge of the disc.\(^{48}\)

Then he goes on for two pages talking about in what direction to look at the disc to see more stars and he talks about scientists and the galaxy.\(^{49}\) These facts that he gives us do not really have anything to do with what he was talking about before, so to us it may seem to be unnecessary information. However, facts like these make the story entertaining and it also shows how the mind of a person with Asperger’s might work, which makes us able to understand him.

Lastly, through the speech acts we get to know the protagonists, (as stated in the third element of simulation). We are given information about the characters of the story, for example from Amal’s dialogues, we can tell her religion is important to her, and that she is in love with a boy called Adam:

“While we’re on the subject of saliva-inducing crushes,” Simone says, “what’s the latest on Adam? Did you see how cool he was when the class was asking you about your veil?
Usually he’s so quiet and serious.”
“I know!” Eileen exclaims. “He seemed really interested.”

\(^{48}\) Haddon 11
\(^{49}\) Haddon 12-13
The fact that both the story about Amal and the one about Christopher are told by homodiegetic, not heterodiegetic, narrators may contribute to our understanding of them. The reader can identify with an individual character. In a heterodiegetic narrative we might not get as close to the character.

Greenwell argues that homodiegetic autistic narrators can be problematic, since they tell us things that are important to them, but that we might find very hard to relate to, such as their pedantry.\(^{51}\) We find examples of this in *Curious Incident* when Christopher talks about how he does not like yellow:

‘Do you like lemon squash?’
I replied ‘I only like orange squash’.
And she said, ‘Luckily I have some of that as well. And what about Battenberg?’
And I said, ‘I don’t know because I don’t know what Battenberg is.’
She said, ‘It’s a kind of cake. It has four pink and four yellow squares in the middle and it has marzipan icing around the edge.’
And I said, ‘Is it a long cake with a square cross-section which is divided into equally sized, alternately coloured squares?’
And she said, ‘Yes, I think you could probably describe it like that.’
I said, ‘I think I’d like the pink squares but not the yellow because I don’t like yellow. And I don’t know what marzipan is so I don’t know whether I’d like that.’
And she said, ‘I’m afraid the marzipan is yellow, too. Perhaps I should bring out some biscuits instead.’\(^ {52}\)

I do not see this as a problem, since it makes us laugh when we read it, which makes us enjoy the story. It is funny, even though Christopher says himself that “This will not be a funny book”.\(^ {53}\) The reason why it makes us laugh is mainly because we understand more than Christopher\(^ {54}\); he is just telling us what happened, but to us it is amusing that he does not know what marzipan is, and he does not ask what it is, he just establishes that he does not know if he likes it because he does not know what it is.
When Christopher tells us things that we might think have nothing to do with anything, that we find unnecessary, it actually helps us understand him better. We understand his difficulties and this creates sympathy for him.

“4 yellow cars in a row made it a Black Day, which is a day when I don’t speak to anyone and sit on my own reading books and don’t eat my lunch and Take No Risks.”

When Christopher tells us things like this, we realize how exposed and vulnerable he is, since he cannot affect the event of four yellow cars coming in a row. It also makes us think about our own weaknesses and obsessions, which is something with which we can identify. Christopher tells us very early that he does not like yellow, we understand this when he says four yellow cars make it a very bad day. We know he does not like this colour, which explains why he acts the way he does, for example when he adds red colouring to yellow food so that he can eat it. However, he does not tell us the reasons why he dislikes this colour until later, on page 105, where he lists the reasons why he does not like yellow (and brown):

These are some of the reasons why I hate yellow and brown.

**Yellow**

1. Custard
2. Bananas (bananas also turn brown)
3. Double Yellow lines
4. **Yellow fever** (which is a disease from tropical America and West Africa which causes a high fever, acute nephritis, jaundice and haemorrhages, and it is caused by a virus transmitted by the bite of a mosquito called Aëdes aegypti, which used to be called Stegomyia fasciata; and nephritis is inflammation of the kidneys)
5. **Yellow Flowers** (because I get hay fever from flower pollen, which is one of 3 sorts of hay fever, and the others are from grass pollen and fungus pollen, and it makes me feel ill)
6. **Sweetcorn** (because it comes out in your poo and you don’t digest it so you are not really meant to eat it, like grass or leaves)
Now that we know his reasons, we have gotten to know him even better. He always tells us his reasoning. In this list, he shows that he knows a lot about things that not everybody knows, like Yellow fever, meanwhile he (as stated above) does not know what marzipan is. This adds a comic effect to the story for us. We learn that Christopher is very clever in some areas, while he is lacking in social skills. This is typical of people with Asperger’s Syndrome, and we can tell this is what Christopher has without it being mentioned in the novel.60

Christopher’s autism is important for the story. It is what keeps the reader puzzled and entertained, and new things happen all the time. Christopher’s limited vocabulary makes the reading move at high speed61, as we can see in the quote above about the Battenberg cake. The large spacing and short chapters do also contribute to a fast read.62

Through the five elements of successful simulation, combined with Christopher’s Asperger’s, and/or Amal’s conversations, identification with these protagonists comes easily to the reader. Identifying with them helps the reader to get a fuller understanding of the text, which I think can provide possibilities to learn from reading.

How Categorizing factors affect reader response

The five emotions discussed above vary from reader to reader and make each reading unique. There are other factors that are important for the reading of a text. The factors of age, gender, ethnicity and class could be considered as what I have chosen to call categorizing factors. In this chapter, I will discuss how these four categorizing factors can affect reader response.

Age

Even before Curious Incident, Haddon was an established children’s writer.63 In an interview in 2003, he said that with Curious Incident, he had actually tried to move away from the children’s literature and had an adult audience in mind when writing it.64 Dupuy argues that Christopher does not change - the adults around him do, because of his actions. She also states that when Haddon was asked about his inspiration for the novel, he said it was Pride and

60 Greenwell 272
61 Greenwell 281
62 Ciocia 323
63 Greenwell 279
64 Ciocia 323
Prejudice - because it’s about looking at life differently, and how badly we communicate with each other.\(^{65}\) My interpretation of this is he wanted adults to reflect on their behaviour and their way of living.

However, in the end the book was a success with readers of all ages,\(^ {66}\) printed in two versions: one with an adult cover and one with a cover more suited to a children’s book.\(^ {67}\) Because of the dysfunctional adults around Christopher, there has been a debate about whether *Curious Incident* is a children’s book or not.\(^ {68}\) Ciocia argues young readers will find it hard to sympathise with the adults in the novel because of the way they behave towards Christopher, but that, at the same time, they will feel superior to Christopher, which she says will only make them enjoy the story even more.\(^ {69}\) Greenwell claims that due to its language, this novel appeals to anyone older than 13-14 years old, because teenagers like to laugh at themselves as well as adults, and because adults like to laugh at teenagers.\(^ {70}\) However, I do not agree with Greenwell that teenagers like to laugh at themselves. I believe they do laugh, not at themselves but at other teenagers, and I do not think they laugh at the same things that make adults laugh. Still, there are many passages in *Curious Incident* where teenagers and adults can actually laugh at the same thing. I believe this also applies to *Does My Head Look Big In This?*, the language in this novel is not similar to the language that Christopher uses, but both languages are distinct. Amal uses teenage language:

> “Come out for dinner with us,” my mum says as I lie on her bed watching her apply her makeup.
> “Like I really want to sit and watch you and Dad flirt with each other.” I shudder, making gagging noises.\(^ {71}\)

I think a teenager who reads this might recognize the situation and agree with Amal, while I as an adult can not only recognize the situation, since I remember what it was like being a teenager, but I can also laugh at it since it is a behaviour, a phase, that I have passed.

Another reason why both adolescents and adults like *Curious Incident* is, according to Ciocia, that it provides a spectrum of emotional and intellectual sophistication in which most readers will be able to relate to both ends; they will probably all know what it is like to face a

\(^{65}\) Dupuy 114  
\(^{66}\) Ciocia 322  
\(^{67}\) Greenwell 279  
\(^{68}\) Greenwell 282  
\(^{69}\) Ciocia 325  
\(^{70}\) Greenwell 282  
\(^{71}\) Abdel-Fattah 163
socially awkward situation, where it is hard to know how to act, or the reverse: to feel like you are in control of the situation. Christopher knows a lot about certain things, and in the other end of the spectrum, there are areas where he has a lack of knowledge. The young and adult readers can this way be considered as two different aspects of the same person. Ciocia argues that Haddon makes a balance for readers of all ages by creating passages that make the reader feel both fascinated by Christopher’s intelligence, and compassion for the problems that his disorder gives him.

However, it is not certain that all adults will enjoy this novel (but I personally believe that it could also be argued that not all young readers will). Ciocia claims young readers, as opposed to adult readers, will find it easier to relate to Christopher because of the inept behaviour of the adults in the book. She also argues that adult readers might have a problem with the fact that the text is combined with illustrations, which is very rare in adult fiction. Dupuy argues that some parents (or maybe adult readers) will disapprove of this novel because of the frequent use of rude language, but she defends this by explaining Christopher’s father’s use of swearwords as an expression of his frustration over Christopher’s autism and the impairment of the relationship between him and his son. Personally, I do not see a problem with this language since most young people are already familiar with this type of words, and the children under ten would probably not read this book.

Gender

Reader response is not only affected by the age of the reader: both young readers and adult readers are differentiated by gender. Schweickart and Flynn (1986) argue that men and women read narrative fiction differently. They quote Crawford and Chaffin who claim on there being a gender schema in which behaviour and roles proper to men and women are included. It is important to remember that this gender schema consists of a wide spectrum (women are seen as a homogenous group, and so are men, even though each of these groups are diverse) and that it is deeply rooted: the identification process starts at an early age,

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72 Ciocia 330
73 Ciocia 330
74 Ciocia 330
75 Ciocia330
76 Ciocia 325
77 My thought
78 Dupuy 110
79 Schweickart & Flynn xxv
80 Schweickart & Flynn xii
around the age of three, and the gender schema is part of this process.\(^1\) It is also important to remember that the gender schema is not biologically constructed, it is a social construction, and the degree of “sex-typing” varies from person to person.\(^2\) I understand the concept of sex-typing as a scale on how you fit the norm of your gender; as a “girly-girl” or a “manly-man”, possessing qualities from both genders, or perhaps just a bit less girly than expected. Schweickart and Flynn argue that sex-typing is important for how we remember and process information.\(^3\)

Schweickart and Flynn mention four types of readers: woman reader, lesbian reader, male reader and child reader.\(^4\) Within each of these groups there are variations due to other factors, such as race, class and sexual orientation (the lesbian reader is a variation of the woman reader, who does not recognize herself in the heteronormative texts).\(^5\) Schweickart and Flynn claim everyone (men and women) is taught to read like a man, texts have an androcentric perspective. They call this the immasculation of women.\(^6\) Studies have shown clear differences in reader response from men and women: generally speaking, women are more inclined to enter the story and experience it, while men are more inclined to see the novel as the result of someone’s actions and construct meaning and logic according to this.\(^7\) While women are used to reading male texts, men avoid reading female texts. It is not that they cannot; it is that they will not. They are resisting reading women’s texts because they believe it will not correspond to their expectations.\(^8\) My own interpretation of these facts is that women will get a wider understanding of other people and points of view, since they are exposed to more diverse perspectives.

Schweickart and Flynn also mention women reading women’s writing, claiming that the closest we can get to a female perspective is when women are reading texts written by women: this is more relaxed reading since they do not have to feel the pressure of adopting a male point of view and negate it.\(^9\) When I read *Does My Head Look Big In This?* I found it very easy to identify with Amal, since I think my time as a teenage girl was very much like Amal’s. I think it might be easier for me as a female reader to identify with her than it would be for a male reader, since Amal is, in my opinion at least, a very “girly” girl. With girly I mean her

\(^1\) Schweickart & Flynn xi
\(^2\) Schweickart & Flynn xiii
\(^3\) Schweickart & Flynn xiii
\(^4\) Schweickart & Flynn xxiii
\(^5\) Schweickart & Flynn xiii
\(^6\) Schweickart & Flynn xiii
\(^7\) Schweickart & Flynn xv
\(^8\) Schweickart & Flynn xxv
\(^9\) Schweickart & Flynn xviii-xix

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behave and interests are what is generally seen as typical for girls, such as fashion, make-up and gossiping. We learn about this from Amal’s dialogues:

Do you not understand that if you wear eyeliner and eye shadow
your eyes will be devastating with that scarf?\(^{90}\)

This is from a conversation with one of her best friends, discussing clothes and make-up as matters of major importance. Even though this “girlness” shines through throughout the whole story, I think boys could relate to Amal as well, but in a different way; though girls might relate to the parts where they recognize themselves as females, boys may relate to situations and experiences that are more specific to teenagers than to gender. An example of this could be that some adults think adolescents are mischievous and blame them for it, as does Amal’s neighbour, the Greek Mrs Vaselli:

“Hi, Mrs. Vaselli,” I call out.
“Why you keeping leave za cigarette pack on my grass?”
She has a thick accent and a voice that seems like it’s bottling up years of anger.
“I don’t smoke, Mrs. Vaselli.” The cold has obviously reached her head.
“Huh! You sure? Maybe you acting innocent to your parent. But you no tricking me!”\(^{91}\)

I also believe it is possible that male students will find it interesting and amusing to read about Amal, especially since teenagers tend to be very curious about the opposite sex. The fact that she is wearing a hijab is something that I think can evoke an interest in both female and male students, since the burqa debate is highly relevant today, especially in Swedish schools, and they might find it more interesting to read a novel about it than to study documentaries and newspapers. I also believe that many male Swedish students can relate to Amal’s struggle for her right to wear the hijab, as they themselves struggle to get to wear hats in the classroom. Of course this is not the same thing, since wearing a veil is rooted in religion, while the hat is all about comfort and/or style, but I think it could be something that could help them relate to Amal.

When it comes to child readers, Schweickart and Flynn quote Elizabeth Segel who shows that reading material for children is segregated into boys’ books and girls’ books. Segel dates this segregation to the 1850s and argues reading this way was considered a great medium for

\(^{90}\) Abdel-Fattah 49
\(^{91}\) Abdel-Fattah 53
sex-role socialization. However, this division did not stop girls from reading boys’ books. The adventure novels written for boys allowed girls some kind of relief from the pressure on them to act in an appropriately feminine way, and it taught them to understand and identify with people who were different from themselves. Segel also remarks that adults often take for granted that boys will not read girls’ books and that due to this, reading in class should involve books that both boys and girls like, and so girls’ books are excluded from the curriculum. I think Curious Incident could be considered part of this category; however, I do not think the story would be different and less appealing to boys if Christopher were a girl. This is because, in my opinion, his behaviour is not typical for one gender or the other; it is rather more influenced by his autism.

Nowadays, the views on what books to use in teaching seem to be more diverse (Schweickart and Flynn’s article, where most of my information comes from, was published in 1986). I think it is possible to use “girls’ books” in teaching, but the teacher needs to pick books that treat interesting subjects (as s/he would have had to do with boys’ books as well).

When I did my teaching practice, I saw an excellent example of this. My supervisor read a short story about a 13-year old girl (written by a woman) to the class that consisted of only four girls and about fifteen boys. The girl in the story had parents who often had a drink after work, and so, being home alone a lot, she started doing that herself to feel better and soon she was caught in the grip of alcohol and her problems just kept growing. The boys absolutely loved the story and they had lots of questions and comments that they wanted to share in the discussion that followed the reading. I think having a discussion about the text is important in order for the students to feel that reading is meaningful, an issue which I will discuss further in the didactics chapter.

**Ethnicity**

As mentioned earlier, all readers, child or adult, male or female, are further differentiated by other factors, one of them being ethnicity. Our cultural background will therefore affect our reading experience. Amal struggles with her cultural identity. On the one hand, she is an Australian girl, just like anyone else, but on the other hand she is also an Arab and a Muslim. Lampert (2006) argues that after 9/11, Muslims (who live in non-Arab countries) have had to

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92 Segel, E. As the twig is bent. Quoted in Schweickart & Flynn, xxi.
93 Schweickart & Flynn xxi
94 Schweickart & Flynn xxi-xxii
choose where to put their loyalty; being loyal to the country they live in or to their religion, since it is no longer possible to combine these cultural identities.\textsuperscript{95} Amal is rebellious, since she chooses to wear the hijab, to not blend in.\textsuperscript{96} She is going through a period of identity searching; first she has to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of wearing the veil, and then she has to be courageous enough to actually go through with it, knowing it will not be easy. Since she goes to an all-Australian school, where there are no Muslims,\textsuperscript{97} she knows everyone will question her. First her parents question her decision:

At dinner I tell my parents that I’m thinking about wearing the hijab and to my disbelief they look at each other nervously. I was expecting a cheerleader routine around the family room. Not two faces staring anxiously at me /…/

“We’re proud of you. But it’s a big decision, honey, and you’re not at Hidaya\textsuperscript{98} anymore. It’s a different environment at McCleans. It might not even be allowed /…/ “We’ll support you but you have to think this through. Are you ready to cope with such a huge change in your life?”\textsuperscript{99}

Then Amal has to see the principal, Ms. Walsh, about wearing the hijab at school. Ms. Walsh shares what I believe is a common prejudice against Muslims: that the women are \textit{forced} to cover their hair, and again Amal has to defend her decision:

“So your parents have made you wear the veil permanently now? Starting from today? Your \textit{first} day of the second semester. Couldn’t it wait until tomorrow? After they’d spoken to me?” I stare at her in shock. “My parents? Who mentioned my parents? /…/ Nobody has \textit{made} me wear it, Ms. Walsh. It’s my decision.”\textsuperscript{100}

Not only is she being questioned by the adults around her, her friends and classmates also want to know why she is wearing it.\textsuperscript{101} She experiences racism because of her decision, for example when she is asked by a fellow student to make a speech about Islam and terrorism after the Bali bombings.\textsuperscript{102} Lampert talks about the division into “us” and “them” and how this is an example of a situation where Amal is allowed to be part of “us” but at the same time she is never allowed to forget her “them”.\textsuperscript{103} However, Amal is a courageous girl who is not

\textsuperscript{95} Lampert 51
\textsuperscript{96} Abdel-Fattah 14-15
\textsuperscript{97} Abdel-Fattah 2, 6, 14
\textsuperscript{98} Hidaya was her old, Muslim school, McCleans is her new, Australian school.
\textsuperscript{99} Abdel-Fattah 23-24
\textsuperscript{100} Abdel-Fattah 39
\textsuperscript{101} Abdel-Fattah 71
\textsuperscript{102} Abdel-Fattah 255
\textsuperscript{103} Lampert 54
afraid to defend herself, so she answers she will give the speech if a Christian girl will talk about the Ku Klux Klan, so as to show that there are extreme groups in all religions and that not everyone that believes in that religion is the same.\textsuperscript{104} Even though some of her classmates are almost accusing her of being a terrorist, as in the example above, others are mainly curious about what it means to be a Muslim and want to know about what it is like to wear a veil:

“Did your parents force you?” Kristy asks, all wide-eyed and appalled.
“My dad told me if I don’t wear it he’ll marry me off to a sixty-five-year-old camel owner in Egypt.”
“No!” She’s actually horrified. /…/
“Hey! Amal!” Tim Manne calls out. “What’s the deal with that thing on your head?”
“I’ve gone bald.” /…/
“Doesn’t it get hot?” Someone asks.
“Can I touch it?”
“Can you swim?”
“Do you wear it in the shower?”
“So is it like nuns? Are you married to Jesus now?”
It’s unreal. Everybody’s asking me about my decision and seems genuinely interested in hearing what I have to say. They are all huddled around me and I’m having the best time explaining to them how I put it on and when I have to wear it.\textsuperscript{105}

I think it is good that the novel brings up all these questions, which I believe reflect what non-Muslim people think about. Through Amal’s explanations about the veil and her religion, we learn a lot and can understand her better. As stated before, girls reading both girls’ books and boys’ books thus receive training in understanding people who are different from themselves, so if we can get our students (in Sweden, Muslims are a minority, though a reasonably large one) to read about Amal, they can attain a wider understanding of people from different ethnical backgrounds. Students can also relate to the identity-seeking process, which is something all adolescents go through.

Another thing at least some students can relate to is the cultural dilemma that Amal goes through as an immigrant (even though she is born in Australia), as many students are themselves immigrants. Immigrants in Sweden probably also struggle with what culture they

\textsuperscript{104} Abdel-Fattah 256
\textsuperscript{105} Abdel-Fattah 71
belong to; they might have to screen out elements from their first culture in favor of the new, second, culture, or the reverse.

As women are considered a muted group in reading (according to Schweickart and Flynn)\textsuperscript{106} since they have to adapt to a male perspective, I believe Arabs could also be seen as a muted group, since we in the Western part of the world expects the “others” to adjust to us and our point of view. As mentioned before, Lampert discusses the difficulties with cultural identification for Arab-Western\textsuperscript{107} protagonists. Arabs have to choose where to put their ethnic loyalty, to be “one of us” or “one of them.”\textsuperscript{108} Arab-Australian Amal has to choose sides: Australian or Muslim? If it is difficult for Arabs to identify as Arabs, it could be argued that it is difficult for non-Muslim readers to relate to Muslim protagonists, but I would stress that the same problem applies to a Muslim reader trying to relate to a non-Muslim protagonist. I would like to emphasize this thought so that we future teachers can consider this: we should not take for granted that the minority will adjust to the majority, but we should help all our students to be more open-minded. The two novels I have chosen to discuss in this essay are very different, since Amal is religious and Christopher is not, but I still believe I could take Curious Incident as an example of the above; will a non-white/non-Christian be able to relate to Christopher? Ciocia states this novel has readers not only of all ages but of diverse cultural backgrounds.\textsuperscript{109} This could be seen as evidence that readers from other cultures are able to adjust to the Western culture, maybe more than the reverse. Since the Western culture is dominating, minorities are being exposed to it through media and are therefore more accustomed to having to adapt to it than what the majority is used to having to adapt to them.

**Class / Social background**

Just as there are minorities and majorities of cultures, the same applies to social classes; the middle class is a majority, literally, but also among book buyers: thus, literature tends to be written for them. Hence, identifying with a character from a different social background could be problematic, as argued in the case of cultural backgrounds. A reader who is not middle class may have a problem identifying with this majority.

\textsuperscript{106} Schweickart & Flynn xvi
\textsuperscript{107} Lampert consequently uses “West” referring to both America and Australia, even though one might argue that Australia is not "the West". Lampert 51.
\textsuperscript{108} Lampert 52
\textsuperscript{109} Ciocia 322
Greenwell describes *Curious Incident* as a “suburban comedy”. This is because it takes place in Swindon, which is described as a bland suburb of the larger, finer cities of Oxford and Bristol, and it is only famous for its railway junctions.\(^{110}\) I take it this is an indication that the people living in Swindon are mixed working- and middle class. The comic aspect comes, according to Greenwell, from Christopher’s daily life and experiences.\(^{111}\) Christopher lives with only one of his parents (his father) which Greenwell claims is a common scenario for outsiders in novels.\(^{112}\) He has no brothers or sisters and due to his autism he does not see friends outside of school. The only company he has is his rat, Toby.

The social background of Amal is similar to Christopher’s in that she is also an only child, but there are more differences than similarities; even though they both live in suburbs, Amal lives with both her parents in a trendy, middle class suburb, in a quite nice neighbourhood and she goes to a private school.\(^{113}\) She has lots of friends and when she is not with them, she talks to them on the phone or texts them.\(^{114}\)

In my opinion, the social backgrounds of these protagonists do not impede the reading experience; there is so much else that the reader can relate to, such as social situations and experiences that the reader might have experienced him/herself. However, the novel is very materialistic, and Amal’s story world is a world of consumerism. Amal and her friends spend a lot of time shopping in the mall, they have their own cell-phones and they have many activities planned in their spare time,\(^{115}\) which is something that students whose families have no money might have a hard time relating to. Child poverty is on the increase in Sweden, and those children cannot, like Amal and her friends, buy new clothes for every special occasion, and they would not be able to afford spare time activities. The children living in poverty might then have a problem identifying with Amal, whose family is solidly middle class.

### Reading in Education

So far, we have seen that a reader can identify with characters or plot, with different emotions or experiences. I have also established that factors such as the age and gender of the reader

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\(^{110}\) Greenwell 282  
\(^{111}\) Greenwell 282  
\(^{112}\) Greenwell 277  
\(^{113}\) Abdel-Fattah 5  
\(^{114}\) Abdel-Fattah 19, 48  
\(^{115}\) Abdel-Fattah 26, 87, 141
will affect the way s/he reads. All together, this means that the same text will be read differently by each reader, s/he has a unique experience. It is important for teachers and future teachers to be aware of this. It is something that we must think of when teaching literature. We must be prepared for the fact that there will be many different interpretations of the text; this should be considered when planning lessons. We must also be prepared for the fact that not every student enjoys reading.

In the chapter about gender, we can see that men are resisting readers of women’s literature. Fetterley argues that women, in the same way, can experience resistance towards male texts, since they cannot recognize themselves in the women of the story. Furthermore, she argues that the women do not believe that their thoughts and experiences count, since they are not confirmed in the texts they read, and therefore it is not surprising that women students are often shy and insecure when they are told to share their thoughts in class. However, Fetterley also claims that this resistance can lead to something positive; when women readers cannot relate to women that are portrayed in literature, they become critical towards the text and can question the male way of reading. This way they can read the text from a new, critical perspective. I think it is important to remember that this article was written in the 70’s - 40 years ago - and that this means the position of women has been strengthened. I believe reading books with an older view of the roles of men and women can teach us the importance of change in society, so that we take nothing for granted and that we do not go back to a society where women are dominated by men (more than today, that is).

Both men and women can thus resist reading. This means students of both sexes can be resisting readers. However, I believe there are many different reasons why students do not like reading, more than just the reasons that are due to gender. In order to understand students’ reluctance to read, we must find out exactly what makes them resist, when this lack of interest arose, and why. Kylene Beers (1998) talked to some students about their unwillingness to read. Their answers showed two main reasons why they chose not to read: they did not enjoy doing it since they did not think they could get anything out of it, and they did not have time to do it, they would rather do other things that were more important and meaningful to them, such as seeing friends.
In some of the interviews, students mention that one of the reasons why they do not read is that they can not find good books, as they do not know how.\textsuperscript{120} One solution to this problem could be for the teacher to find books that the students can then pick from. This is the conclusion that Beers draws as well, when she starts to examine the fact that the reluctant readers did not want to go to the library. It is not out of laziness that they do not want to go search for a book to read, it is because they do not know how. They claimed there were simply too many books and that they did not know which ones were good.\textsuperscript{121} To have the teacher pick out books for the students to choose from was something that both the uncommitted and the avid readers thought of as motivating.\textsuperscript{122} The unwilling students also mentioned in the interviews that they wanted to read books that were illustrated, and Beers first believed that this was because they were lazy and wanted the pictures to tell the story so that they did not have to read the words. However, she found out that students wanted pictures as a support for their reading, so that those who had problems imagining the story in their mind and to construct meaning from the text could better understand what they read.\textsuperscript{123} Hence, illustrated texts were something that the unmotivated\textsuperscript{124} readers advocated, but the more motivated readers thought the contrary; the images destroyed what they had imagined in their own heads as they read.\textsuperscript{125} I think a way to please both kinds of readers could be for the teacher to pick out a number of books, some with illustrations and some without, that the students can choose from. I think \textit{Curious Incident} could please both kinds of readers: it has illustrations, but they do not give away too much information. It is also a fast read, its limited language and short chapters make up for the vagueness of the information that our unmotivated students get from the illustrations.

Something that both groups of readers saw as motivating was for the teacher to read aloud from the book (if the whole class is to read the same book), with the difference that the motivated readers wanted only a few pages to be read aloud while the unmotivated readers wanted the teacher to read the whole book.\textsuperscript{126} McKeechie and Svinickie argue that students often learn more efficiently from reading than from listening,\textsuperscript{127} which is why I think it is a bad idea to read the whole book aloud. Instead, I would suggest reading a few chapters aloud.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Beers 3-4} Beers 3-4
\bibitem{Beers 20} Beers 20
\bibitem{Beers 19} Beers 19
\bibitem{Beers 21} Beers 21
\bibitem{Unmotivated} “Unmotivated” is Beers’ choice of words, and I will continue referring to \textit{non motivated} readers as \textit{“ unmotivated”}.\textsuperscript{128}
\bibitem{Beers 21} Beers 21
\bibitem{Beers 19} Beers 19
\bibitem{McKeechie & Svinicki 30} McKeechie & Svinicki 30
\end{thebibliography}
which would be a balance between the wishes of both groups of readers, and then when they had been helped to enter the story, they could read the rest of the book themselves.

There is an underlying factor that Beers presents as the main reason why students do not like to read; an interest in reading begins in childhood. Students whose parents read to them throughout their childhood years and who had parents who read themselves grew up to enjoy reading, while students with parents who did not were not motivated to read.\textsuperscript{128} Beers claims that reading during childhood creates an unconscious delight in literature, which is the basis of an \textit{aesthetic stance} toward reading. An aesthetic stance means you experience the text when you read it, with the resulting emotions and associations.\textsuperscript{129} Beers states it is important to have this kind of prior experience of reading when children start school, as these students have an aesthetic stance as their primary stance toward a text. This means they expect the reading in school to be enjoyable and meaningful and therefore they put themselves into the story as they read. In school they then learn to read efferently, which is the stance that has to do with answering questions on what you have read, studying for a test or in other ways showing what you have learned from the book. For the students who have an aesthetic stance towards literature before first grade, the efferent stance becomes their second stance and does not replace their first stance.\textsuperscript{130} The students who were not read to during their childhood started school without the positive experience of reading that the other students had, and therefore their primary stance toward reading is the efferent stance, since school time reading has an efferent purpose. They believe reading is for answering questions and finishing tests.\textsuperscript{131} An aesthetic stance can be evoked, but since these students are not familiar with that, they wait for the teacher to tell them what the purpose is, and teachers generally have students read efferently.\textsuperscript{132} The consequence of this is that students who have not learned how to read aesthetically never will, which means they will never be interested in reading and will therefore not read outside of school.\textsuperscript{133} I believe the best thing to do would be a combination of an aesthetic and an efferent stance, so that students not only look for information or enjoy reading, but combine both these elements and thereby get a wider experience of the text.

Having discussed why students might be reluctant to read and how to motivate them, I will proceed to how to work with texts, \textit{during} as well as \textit{after} reading. McKeachie and Svinicki argue that the main reason why students come to class unprepared is that they do not

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{128} Beers 16
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Beers 17
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Beers 17
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Beers 17
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Beers 17
  \item \textsuperscript{133} Beers 17
\end{itemize}
see the purpose of reading and they see it as something separate from the rest of the course.\textsuperscript{134} I believe this is because they feel that they do not have any use for what they have read and that the reading is not followed up in a good enough way. The students in Beers’ study give me reason to believe that this is in fact the case. One of them says “Why should I read? I mean what’s it going to get me?”\textsuperscript{135} and another one complains about the tasks they are given: “Reading makes me frustrated. I worry all the time ‘What’s the teacher going to ask? What am I supposed to know?’”\textsuperscript{136} This proves the importance of carefully constructed assignments. I believe it is important that the students know before reading what the goal is and how they can work with the text to achieve the goal. McKeachie and Svinicki argue that study questions are helpful for students.\textsuperscript{137} Questions that demand reflection from the reader are more helpful than factual questions and previously handed-out questions on the text facilitate learning, especially for students with difficulties.\textsuperscript{138} However, it is important that the questions encourage the students to think about the text, otherwise the questions do not promote learning but make the students focus on finding answers and not read the parts of the text that do not provide answers.\textsuperscript{139} This is a fact that Beers too discovered through her interviews:

> “Usually when I read something, it’s just to answer the teacher’s questions about it. I guess I’ve never thought about a book being something that I might think about, you know, emotionally. The teacher’s always told me what to think... [Reading] seems pretty boring, pretty useless. I just don’t feel any motivation to do it. /.../ No teacher ever asked me what I thought.”\textsuperscript{140}

Richard Mann also discovered this problem. He discusses experiential learning, which means the material that is being taught must be relevant and useful to students and be linked to their experiences.\textsuperscript{141} Through a variety of teacher roles, where the relationship between teacher and student is discussed, he shows methods through which students show their mettle and become more involved in the classroom work. The negative aspect of asking students questions (fact questions) is that the students feel their own thoughts and reflections with which they have

\textsuperscript{134} McKeachie & Svinicki 31  
\textsuperscript{135} Beers 5  
\textsuperscript{136} Beers 4  
\textsuperscript{137} McKeachie & Svinicki 32  
\textsuperscript{138} McKeachie & Svinicki 32  
\textsuperscript{139} McKeachie & Svinicki 32  
\textsuperscript{140} Beers 7  
\textsuperscript{141} Mann 278
worked in the process do not count in the end.\textsuperscript{142} This problem could be solved, not only by changing the type of questions, but also, according to Mann, by combining fact questions with assessing the students’ qualities during reading, for example through having the students keep reading journals, which will then be part of the final evaluation.\textsuperscript{143} However, according to Beers’ interviews, unmotivated students do not see journal keeping as motivating, and for the motivated students it is not at the top of the list, but comes in place five of seven.\textsuperscript{144} Based on this, I believe that different, more profound questions are better to use than combining journals with factual questions.

McKeachie and Svinicki present a number of strategies that can help students to learn more from reading. They suggest that students:

\begin{enumerate}
\item Look at topic headings before studying the chapter
\item Write down questions they would like to answer
\item Make marginal notes as they read
\item Underline or highlight important concepts
\item Carry on an active dialogue with the author
\item Comment on reading in their journals.\textsuperscript{145}
\end{enumerate}

Again, the unmotivated students from Beers’ interviews did not consider journal keeping as motivating, but as McKeachie and Svinickie give many suggestions for tasks students can do to help themselves when reading. I think students (both motivated and unmotivated) should try these suggestions themselves and then stick to the ones that work for them.

To work with \textit{Curious Incident} and \textit{Does My Head Look Big In This?}, I would read the first few chapters of the book aloud to the students, or have them listening to an audio file of the book, if possible. As stated before, this way the students will find it easier to go on reading themselves. I would have them read 50 pages a week, preferably they have two lessons a week and can then read 25 pages for each lesson, which I believe is better since it is then harder to postpone the reading and you avoid ending up with 50 pages to read the night before class. Of course, the appropriate number of pages to read each week depends on if the book is difficult to read or not. For novels that are harder for the students to read, I think maybe 30 pages a week could be enough. I would then, as suggested by McKeachie and Svinicki, construct study questions that I would give to the students each week. These

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{142} Mann 284
\textsuperscript{143} Mann 284
\textsuperscript{144} Beers 19
\textsuperscript{145} McKeachie & Svinicki 34
\end{flushleft}
questions could also be used in discussions. Before the students start to read themselves, I would tell them why we are reading this book and some facts about the author and explain why this book is so popular. I would also tell them how I will assess them. After they have read the first part, I would have them discuss what they have read in small groups, and then we will discuss it in class. I think I would assess the students partly on the oral part, which is the discussions in class, and then after they have finished the book I would give them a test including some of the questions that have come up in our discussions and then a few essay questions to choose from where they can reflection on what they have read. As I would use reading to assess both their oral skills and their reading comprehension, I think the students will feel that reading is a natural part of English instruction and not a separate element.

I think that as a new teacher, it will be hard for me to construct good questions, which is why it is good to be aware that different types of questions will present different student abilities, as stated earlier. I think it is important as a teacher, especially new teachers, to evaluate each method worked with in order to be able to improve in constructing assignments.

Conclusion

There are many factors that contribute to students’ attitude towards reading and that affect their experience of a text. Knowing these factors, we teachers have the tools to turn resistance into something positive: we can pick out texts and create tasks around them that will not only make reading joyful and meaningful, but that will also change negative attitudes towards reading so that our students value reading. By doing this, we open up a myriad of learning opportunities through reading, outside as well as inside the classroom.
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