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## **Exploring Racialization portrayed in Young Adult Fiction**

An analysis of Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* and Nic Stone's *Dear Martin* and facilitating Intercultural Competence through reading literature

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to answer how racial stereotypes are challenged in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* and Nic Stone's *Dear Martin* by informing the reader through transformative characters. This is done by analyzing both novels' portrayals of police brutality leading to an internal conflict concerning race. To investigate the novels, Critical Race Theory and the term intersectionality will be used along with narrative empathy. Furthermore, the thesis examines how intercultural competence can be facilitated through reading literature. The Core Curriculum of LK20 stresses the importance of intercultural competence in an increasingly diverse society. Empathy as a bridge between the various components of intercultural competence will be argued. Reader's empathy will therefore be essential as their immediate emotional response toward the narrative facilitates their understanding.



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# 1 Introduction and theoretical framework

This thesis will critically examine the Young Adult Fiction Novels *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas and *Dear Martin* (2017) by Nic Stone. The investigation will be centered around the novel's portrayal of racialization in a society considered to be post-racial. The books are similar in many ways, as both stories are narrated through adolescent African American protagonists going through similar conflicting notions about their place among the white majority. The novels are directed toward a youth audience where it seeks to appeal to the reader's emotions, trying to enrapture them into the narrative. While doing so, the novels address important topics surrounding racism, discrimination, and prejudice that are often neglected in conversation. This makes the novels especially suitable for an educational setting as it provides a realistic "third space" for facilitating understanding in students. (Carlsen, 2018, p.121). A fundamental thought behind analyzing the novels is to discuss how engaging in reading the novels can facilitate intercultural competence in students. Intercultural competence as a skill has gained increasing importance, which is reflected in the core values of the English subject curriculum. (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019b).

The goal of this thesis will be to address how the young adult fiction novels *The Hate U Give*, and *Dear Martin* challenges racial stereotypes by enlightening the reader through a gradual transition within characters. This gradual transition originates from the protagonist's traumatic encounter with law enforcement which establishes a more profound internal conflict concerning their racial background. The thesis will seek to answer three questions while analyzing and discussing the novels to investigate how the characters transcend their conflicting notions: Firstly, *how are racial profiling and violence against black adolescents portrayed in both novels?* Secondly, *how do the protagonists process their conflicting self-perceptions following the traumatic incident with law enforcement?* And lastly, *how can reading about situations portrayed in the novels facilitate intercultural competence in young adults?* The first two questions will be examined in the analysis of the novels in chapters 2 and 3, while the third question will be addressed in chapter 4.

The respective novels' portrayal of society's use of racial stereotypes as a form of repression will be discussed in how it could promote intercultural learning in students. For discussing this, the thesis will provide a theoretical background to explain and clarify the concepts used in analyzing and discussing the novels. Firstly, the historical context of racialization and critical race theory's ideas will be accounted for. This is needed to understand the complex relationship the United States has with race. Then, the term intercultural competence and its connection to empathy will be explained. Following, readers' empathetic connection with the narrative and character traits recognized especially in African American characters, is established.

## **1.1 Understanding Racialization and Critical Race Theory**

With the internet and the 21<sup>st</sup> century's rise of social media, we have become interconnected with people from around the globe. This has given us the ability to communicate across borders and view the happenings around the world as it takes place. Although social media has bettered our understanding across cultures, the surge of information has changed the conversation about racialization in the US. This became evident with the over-excessive use of violence toward Rodney King, one of the first video recordings of police brutality and fueled the LA Riots in 1991 (Falter & Kerkhoff, 2018, p.257). News reports often discuss videos of police brutality and shootings of unarmed black men, and the horrific death of George Floyd at the hands of the police spiked the public discussion of police reforms in the following months (Ayers et al., 2020). The extreme cases of police brutality must be discussed openly, but what about the everyday racism almost invisible to the white majority who do not experience this themselves directly? Through everyday racism, such as stereotypes and unconscious discrimination, the continuation of racist ideas is subtly fostered because there is an underlying notion of "us vs. them" (Røthing, 2020, pp.17-18). To further discuss the complex issue of diversity in the US, the thesis will briefly establish the historical context of race as a social construct. After that, the rise of ideas that make up Critical Race Theory today will be investigated.

The history of racial discrimination in the US is a deeply rooted and complex issue dating back centuries. The concepts of race as we know it today began to take shape with the



transatlantic slave trade, where hundreds of thousands of Africans were transported to the US before its abolition after the civil war's end in 1865 (Eltis, 2008, p. 348). The slavery of the Africans was justifiable on the background of race being established as a social construct where whites were superior to others. The black body was commercialized and viewed as property by the white supremacists: "the institutionalization of slavery naturalized in the social sphere the assumption of agency over the black body and everything it produced or laid claim to" (White, 2011, p.19). This view contrasts with the European racial perspective, as Delgado and Stefancic (2017) present. The Europeans had no particular beliefs or prejudices against and had a "Generally positive attitude towards Africans" before the transatlantic slave trade. (p.21). This idea of race as a social construct segregated people based on their appearance, making it easier to divide individuals into social groupings. This is where the term "racialization" becomes evident, as the term refers to how a group of people is defined based on their race. This needs to be understood not just as a sudden act but also as a process dictated by the majority group in society (Gans, 2017, pp. 341-343).

The era following the Civil Rights Act is described as "post-racial," stating that racial inequality and discrimination no longer exist. The Civil Rights Act ended the "Jim Crow" laws, which said that segregated African Americans had equal rights as whites, but this does not imply that racial inequality is eradicated. The claim that racism no longer exists is referred to as a "color-blind racial ideology" because society "no longer notices race" (Perez, 2018, p.957). Delgado and Stefancic (2000) explain that the notion of color-blindness, in reality, is because racism is "ingrained" in the culture; therefore, only extreme cases such as police brutality are visible to most and become unnatural:

Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture. Formal equal opportunity—rules and laws that insist on treating blacks and Whites (for example) alike—can thus remedy only the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice, the ones that do stand out. It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi, as cited in Gilborn, 2015)

This quote is significant because it shines a light on the implicit racial biases in society. This means that most of the racism is expressed without the individual being aware of his form of discrimination. Creating awareness of the implicit racial biases that contribute to people from minority groups feeling excluded from social unity is essential in creating an equal society.

In the post-civil rights era, Critical Race Theory (CRT) grew as a counter to continuing racial inequalities after the progress of the Civil Rights Laws. Before looking into what CRT's perspectives are today, the thesis will explain the ideas that influenced CRT into the influential field it has become. CRT grew as a continuation/rework of the established movements of Critical Legal Studies that worked to counter the biases against marginalization in the legal system (Crenshaw, 2017). Crenshaw (2017) explains that the expansion arose from conflicting perspectives on racialization: "Critical Race Theory [...] emerged from this interface as a product of ideological tension between race liberals and their left-leaning critics" (p.2299). The two opposing camps have different perspectives on how social structures like the legal system marginalized people of color. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) describe these two camps of ideologies as "Idealists" and the "Realists." The idealists state that "Race is a social construct, not a biological reality" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p.21) which is one of the central concepts of CRT today. Then, Racism is rooted in people's attitudes/prejudices toward non-whites which fuels discrimination. Idealists argue that the meaning attached to the construct of race can be changed, and consequently, their appearance is no longer a factor for marginalization. "Realists" have a contrasting view of racialization where racism is rooted in the economic structure of the capitalist system. This means that societal structures are based on premises that foster inequality in society.

Over the years, CRT has expanded and derived from the oppositional camps of defining the racial issues adapting both views amongst others into components. These components consist of various ideas meant to create awareness of the ongoing racial issues in the US, countering the idea of a colorblind post-racial society. CRT ideas state that there are five major components or tenets of CRT: First, racism is ordinary and part of the everyday lives of African Americans. Secondly, the white elite and white middle-class benefit from racism, so there is little interest in eradicating it. Thirdly, the idea of race as a social construct makes racialization possible. The fourth tenet draws attention to how all minority groups have been

exploited at various times based on which is most beneficial for the white minority. Lastly is the idea of minorities voicing stories of oppression from their perspective in the hope of reaching the white majority, also referred to as counter-narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, pp.8-11).

As CRT has expanded into recognizing marginalization towards every minority group, its discussion with intersectionality is more evident. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989, referring to how marginalization based on every social categorization is interconnected and functions together, enhancing the feeling of discrimination (Røthing, 2020, p.51). Gillborn adds that: “the term addresses the question of how multiple forms of inequality and identity inter-relate in different contexts and over time, for example, the inter-connectedness of race, class, gender, disability, and so on.” (p.278). Understanding how feelings of discrimination work concurrently and can differ depending on context are essential to understanding the internal conflicts of the protagonists in Thomas’s and Stone’s stories. The novels provide a counter-narrative of intersectionality between race, social class, and gender, giving the reader helpful insight into perspectives they might not have thought about.

Shifting the perspective toward Norwegian societies, it is helpful to view prejudices towards people from a broader perspective. Feeling prejudiced or discriminated against relates to racial background and appearance and can also be based on every aspect that deviates from society’s set norms. And through reading these counter-narratives, we are experiencing views of oppression voiced from a different perspective than through the eyes of a white majority narrator. The ability to see ourselves from the standpoint of others relates to our ability to empathize, which is an essential aspect of being interculturally competent.

When discussing diversity in Norway, Røthing (2020) argues that diversity must be regarded solely from a complex perspective and not the simple differentiating idea of viewing minority groups as “them.” (pp.17-18). The notion Røthing (2020) discusses is similar to the deeply rooted issues with race in the US. Although Norway does not have a history of enslaving people of color, the Norwegian society has a historical past of practicing discrimination

through assimilation politics suppressing cultures such as Sami, Romani, and other national minorities (Reisel, Hermansen & Kindt, 2019). There still exist implicit biases toward minority groups living in this country. Stereotypes based on a lack of knowledge, awareness, skills, and empathy foster these implicit biases and differentiate individuals based on generalizations they may not identify with. Increasing our understanding that minorities might have a different perspective of society than the majority contributes to an equal society.

## **1.2 Intercultural Competence and the role of empathy**

Globalization's rapid expansion alongside technological advancement has made it increasingly essential to enhance our understanding across cultures and internalize this understanding. The interconnection between cultures within countries and across borders obliges society to prevent fostering of prejudices and marginalization. The school system in Norway is one of society's essential social institutions responsible for combating discrimination and raising children to include all members of society, as stated in the Education Act (Opplæringsloven, §1-1). The first statement of the relevance and central values of the English subject curriculum states that: "English shall help the pupils develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019b). Therefore, the English subject has an influential role in fostering cultural and intercultural understanding, where language can work as a gateway as it is embedded in the culture. While analyzing the two young adult novels, I will be referring to the different settings of the protagonists as "cultures," which will be most visible in *The Hate U Give* as the protagonist consciously alternates between her two cultures. Therefore, before defining the entities intercultural competence consists of, I will briefly look at how the concept of culture is explained.

Causadias (2020) describes culture as a shared system created with components that change meaning concerning the situation and who is involved: "People "create culture through shared practices in places, and culture shapes how people engage in practices and build places" (p.311). By this definition, culture is a loosely defined, interconnected concept where past, present, and future, are simultaneously present through dynamic human engagement. In comparison to this, Solhaug and Osler (2018) explain culture as: "a contested concept and may be understood as 'distinct, relatively homogenous and stable,' or 'neither clearly bound,

tightly integrated nor unchanging” (Hylland & Eriksen, 2009, p.10, as cited in Solhaug & Osler, 2018). There is always an understanding of accepting the ideas that make up a culture. People identifying with a culture is not directly linked to their background, actions, appearance, and so on, but rather how we choose to identify ourselves related to these factors. Understanding how cultures are interdependent and interconnected will start to unfold with this awareness of the complexity that builds each culture. When investigating the two Young Adult Fiction novels, the knowledge of how the two contrasting cultures work together will be necessary as the settings work as intersectional conditions that modify the protagonists' internal conflict.

Dypedahl & Bøhn (2018) explain intercultural competence as simple as “the ability to communicate appropriately with people who have different mindsets and/or different communication style” (p. 158). This definition emphasizes the communicative aspect but does not say much about one’s understanding of the person’s background and how this affects their lives. The definition also leaves a lot of room for interpretation as to what is meant by “communication style,” as there are several. The intercultural scholar Michael Byram’s work on intercultural competence has influenced the works of many others. He developed a model to measure the various aspects of intercultural competence by the categories of attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness, where each category of various factors (Dypedahl & Bøhn, 2008, pp.161-162). This categorization gives a better understanding of how to grasp intercultural competence as a term and approach it in education. Since reading is a receptive skill, the discussion on facilitating intercultural competence through the young adult fiction novels will be limited to the internalized processes. When facilitating intercultural learning, understanding these categorizations is useful for teachers to ask the right questions.

Bøhn and Dypedahl (2018) refer to developing intercultural competence as “intercultural learning,” which is a helpful way of defining and understanding this process. Intercultural learning implies that the development of intercultural competence is a continual process as cultures are shared practices between people. New cultures are constantly created and interconnected with contemporary cultures. Therefore, we must continuously engage in intercultural learning to adapt to the new standards in an increasingly diverse society. Our

outcome of intercultural competence is how we express learned knowledge through communication with others. The term intercultural learning will address the acquisition of intercultural competence throughout this thesis as it refers to the process and not the outcome. Our emotional connection with the characters and situations is necessary to facilitate intercultural learning through reading Young Adult Fiction. Empathy and its connection to intercultural competence will be explained before the reader's empathy with a fictional text is discussed.

Empathy can be understood as the ability to understand others' emotions and to be able to feel with them: "In recent literature, empathy has been described as 'the immediate experience of the emotions of another person or 'the intellectual understanding of another's experience'" (Duan & Hill, 1996, p. 261, as cited in Solhaug & Osler, 2018, p. 92). Noting the phrase "immediate experience" as our initial reaction to our surroundings tells us much about our unconscious values and attitudes. Solhaug & Osler (2018) explains empathy as a "reservoir of cognitive understanding and emotional involvement," which is especially important in connection with cultural differences (p.92). Solhaug & Kristensen (2020) measured intercultural competence in Norwegian students in upper secondary school where they used empathy as a component in addition to the others found in Michael Byram's model. They found that high levels of empathy are found in those who had high intercultural competence and that girls have higher levels of empathy than boys. Empathy's role in intercultural competence is essential to understand as our immediate emotional reactions influence our actions. Therefore, empathy can bridge the components of being an interculturally competent person.

### **1.3 Reader's Empathy and African American Young Adult Fiction**

As noted, empathy is our ability to understand other people's emotions and mirror the same emotion in return. This phenomenon does not correlate directly with feelings toward real-life people's emotions as we can feel empathy towards a cause or situation. Therefore, when readers engage with a text, they can express empathy relating to the situation described.

In Suzanne Keen's work, *Empathy and the novel* (2007), she discusses a subset of narrative empathy, which she calls the "readers empathy." In her discussion of how the reader engages emotionally with the text, Keen presents several hypotheses on which the discussion of Thomas's and Stone's novels will be based. Firstly, she states that the characterization does not need to be complex or realistic to evoke empathy and can be produced by the setting of the character's introduction or chosen naming. The identification and empathetic feeling with a character or situation happen even if it is entirely different from the reader's prior experience. She also states that negative expressions of empathy are more easily provoked than positive ones. A novel's ability to evoke empathetic feelings may change over time, which is essential as the young adult novels are meant to evoke emotions in adolescents that may have different responses than adults. The empathetic response may also be increased by the story's relation to "historical, economic, cultural or social circumstances." (Keen, 2007, pp.69-81). These hypotheses help us understand our own and others' emotional engagement with a novel. Keen (2007) also discusses if reading fiction impacts people's decisions in real life. Social problem books can significantly influence people's attitudes and behaviors if this is the case.

As explained above, we can feel a connection to a setting in which we have no real-life basis of understanding through an empathetic reading. As readers feel an empathetic response toward a narrative when engaging with the text, they feel empathetic towards similar situations in the real world. Carlsen (2018) puts reading as closely connected to developing intercultural competence. There is always a mental process in which the reader strives to understand the context of the text, placing them against their values: "fictional texts challenge readers to explore different identities and perspectives on life. When we develop our capacity to understand people around us, [...], we develop a more nuanced understanding of the society we live in" (Carlsen, 2018, p.121). Exploring these different identities and perspectives is useful for adolescents to understand themselves and others. By reading stories narrated by someone vastly different from ourselves, we get a glimpse into their world's perspective, thus facilitating an empathetic connection.

African American writers as the authors of *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin*, offer a different perspective on contemporary society than a writer identifying as part of the majority. These perspectives often challenge the common perception of what society is and, therefore, function as counter-stories. Reading these counter-stories helps us understand the world through someone else's eyes. W.E.B. Du Bois coined the term "double consciousness," referring to how African Americans always must view themselves from two different perspectives:

A world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (Du Bois, as cited in Zamir, 2008, p.29)

Always being aware of being devalued by structural racism in society is almost unimaginable for someone identifying as part of the established normality of society. Therefore, reading literature can be a gate to understanding an entirely different perspective because we constantly process and try to imagine the authors meaning behind the text. (Carlsen, 2018, p.121)

In Keen (2007), she hypothesizes that: "Readers' empathy for situations depicted in fiction may be enhanced by chance relevance to particular historical, economic, cultural or social circumstances" (p.81). The hypothesis is made on the premise that the situations that evoke empathy might change over time, but the reader's feeling of empathy will remain unchanged at a fundamental level (Keen, 2007, p.81). Assuming that these factors enhance the reader's empathy toward the narrative, we can look at Thomas's and Stone's novels knowing these factors are intertwined and affect the reader. These four factors all play a role in the protagonist's internal conflicts, enhancing their feeling of not belonging. Rimmon-Kenan (2002) discusses this in his work on the characters part in the field of narrative fiction:



If a common denominator, e.g. ambivalence, emerges from several aspects, it can then be generalized as a character-trait, and in a similar way the various traits combine to form the character. A trait is sometimes explicitly mentioned in the text and sometimes not. When it is, the textual label may confirm the one reached in the process of generalization, but it may also be at variance with it, creating tension whose effects vary from one narrative to another (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, p.40).

Therefore, the protagonists' awareness of their intersectional societal positions can be generalized as a character trait. These factors constantly remind them of who they are, according to the white majority.

Until now, the thesis has described a variety of theories and ideas that will be used in analyzing Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* (2017) and Nic Stone's *Dear Martin* (2017). The novels center around teenage protagonists who are victims of police brutality and experience racialization. Therefore, the origin of how race became a social construct to discriminate by was established. Then, CRT and its ideas were investigated to understand why racial discrimination still exists in society. This is needed as a reader to comprehend and empathize with the internal conflicts of the protagonists, as will be analyzed in chapters 2 and 3. The importance of intercultural competence in today's globalized society was examined to understand and communicate across cultural boundaries. As empathy is a bridging aspect of the factors composing intercultural competence, a theoretical background of how we express empathy towards a fictional text. This will be discussed in chapter 4, related to how reading the respective Young Adult Fiction novels functions as a tool for facilitating intercultural competence.

## 2 Analyzing *The Hate U Give*

Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* from 2017 is a realistic novel with a social justice problem perspective, narrated by the 16-year-old protagonist, Starr Carter. The book, which was inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement and police brutality, provides a credible perspective on injustice and racial profiling from a teenage point of view. Throughout the novel, a string of racial discrimination experienced by the protagonist causes her to gradually transition from victim to activist for Justice in the US society. This chapter will investigate the protagonist's choices and situations that transition the protagonist into a form of self-realization. In her process, she faces her notion of double consciousness. She can view herself "through the eyes of others," realizing her position as a minority in the eyes of society's majority. A society driven by CRT's tenets which states that inherent racism marginalizes her based on racial background and not her values as a human. Starr's gradual transformation of accepting her identity impacts the young adult reader. It guides adolescents who are subjected to similar experiences and creates awareness of her intersectional position for readers who are less subjected to discrimination.

The novel starts at a party in Starr's neighborhood, Garden Heights. During this scene, the reader is immediately introduced to most of the novel's characters, stating Starr's conflicts. The scene quickly turns chaotic as gunshots are fired over gang rivalry. Starr and her childhood friend Khalil escape in his car but are pulled over by a white police officer. Being unarmed, Khalil is shot and killed right in front of Starr while reaching for his hairbrush. As a witness to the murder, Starr is initially afraid to speak up against the police. Whereas Khalil is being portrayed persistently by the media as a stereotypical drug dealer, implying he should be off the streets, she eventually realizes that she needs to fight for justice. Starr alternates between her contrasting life and identity at Garden Heights and her predominately white private school, Williamson Prep. While processing the murder of her friend, she becomes increasingly aware of her intersectional position in society. This leads to her gradual change in character, where both of her contrasting personas becomes harder to keep separate. Eventually, her world at Garden Heights collides with her life at Williamson Prep as she figures her voice can contribute to making a difference for African Americans.

The focus of this chapter will be to investigate how the novel portrays racial discrimination. As established in the theory chapter, empathy is a bridging component of intercultural competence. Therefore, the three sections of this chapter will be analyzed by the ability to promote empathy in the reader as an underlying feature. This chapter will address how Thomas's novel portrays violence against African American adolescents. Following, the protagonist's internal conflict with her two opposite identities will be investigated. Lastly, Thomas's use of characters to counter stereotypical ideas in the reader is examined.

## **2.1 "The Talk" and Police brutality**

Awareness is an essential base component in facilitating intercultural learning in students. For Norwegian readers, relating personally to police brutality and discrimination might be farfetched, but much can be learned from imagining the scenes portrayed in the novel. Keen (2007) stresses that less culturally knowledgeable readers still express empathy toward situations that are unrelated to their experiences but express "universal emotions." (p.81). Therefore, empathy plays a vital part in which an empathetic reading of the novel is needed to understand how the discrimination affects the protagonist entirely. This first section will analyze the horrific police brutality scene and how Starr unconsciously navigates her actions through the incident by being prepared by her parents. This scene facilitates intercultural learning by developing a new understanding of how African Americans engage with law enforcement.

Thomas's detailed portrayal of violence displays an inherent notion of the repercussions of being an African American. Leading up to the gruesome scene depicting Khalil's murder, Starr reflects on "the talk" she had with her parents at the age of twelve:

The other talk was about what to do if a cop stopped me. Momma fussed and told Daddy I was too young for that. He argued that I wasn't too young to get arrested or shot. "Starr-Starr, you have to do whatever they tell you to do," he said. "Keep your hands visible. Don't make any sudden moves. Only speak when they speak to you." I knew it must've been serious. Daddy has the biggest mouth of anybody I know, and if

he said to be quiet, I needed to be quiet. I hope somebody had the talk with Khalil.  
(Thomas, 2017. p. 20)

“The talk” is often described as “racial socialization” and refers to a “combination of conversations and practices that parents hope will prepare their children to live in environments where they are not always welcomed.” (Whitaker & Snell, 2016, p.304). African American parents’ need for “the talk” expresses parents’ genuine fear for their children’s lives. Whitaker & Snell (2016) stresses that the conversation is centered around avoiding the “perception of criminal behavior” and not about acts of criminality (p.304). Starr is aware of this difference as she has been raised not to fear the police but rather “to be smart around them” (Thomas, 2017, p.27). The seriousness of her parent’s tone becomes evident as they used short sentences functioning like instructions: “Keep your hands visible. Don’t make any sudden moves” and so on, which indicate that they must do everything to deescalate the situation.

In the scene where Khalil is shot and killed, he does not act according to the guidelines of “the talk,” which fuels the Officer’s inherent prejudices, who has already deemed Khalil a criminal beforehand. As the reader follows Starr’s thoughts, it becomes clear that Khalil might not have had “the talk.” Khalil immediately fails the rule of “only speak when they speak to you,” leading the officer to bring him out of the car. As Starr names him from his badge number, Officer One-Fifteen quickly reveals a prejudiced attitude by expecting to find something illegal before he starts searching him: “Okay, smart mouth, let’s see what we find on you today.” (Thomas, 2017, p.26). In failing to obey One-Fifteen’s orders and subjecting himself to them immediately, Khalil sets himself up as a criminal that needs to be off the streets from the officer’s perspective. Thus, failing to deescalate the perception of engaging in criminal activity.

Another significant factor in the scene of Khalil’s engagement with Officer One-Fifteen is the perspective of language in connection with identity. Khalil uses “slang” words often used by speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or often referred to as the

generalizing “Black English.” (Brown & Casanova, 2014, p.211). He initializes the conversation with Officer One-Fifteen with the word “Nunya,” which Starr follows by expressing to herself meaning “none of your business.” He also expresses himself through phrases like “or what” or complaining, “Man, just give me my ticket” (Thomas, 2017, p.26). Starr is aware that using “slang” portrays them as less respectable, and she confirms her awareness during her first “hearing” at the police station. During the hearing, she slips and answers “Nah” on a question about Khalil’s involvement in the confrontation at the party. In her realization, she immediately alters her appearance and code-switches: “*Dammit. Proper English. I sit up straight. ‘I mean, no, ma’am. We were talking when the fight occurred’*” (Thomas, 2017, p.99). Starr’s attention to her speech and appearance draws attention to the trial of George Zimmerman, a policeman who shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012. During the incident, Martin was on the phone with 19-year-old Rachel Jeantel, a key witness during the trial. She was deemed unintelligent and not credible by the jurors based on her appearance and speech of AAVE. (Levin, 2020, p.149). Levin (2020) further points out that the treatment of Jeantel demonstrates that “victimization of Black Americans not only occurs through physical violence towards them but also through a history of stereotyping and prejudice that marginalizes their narratives.” (p.149). Thus, drawing attention to the importance of following up on both male and female victims of police brutality.

The author deliberately challenges the complexity of the historical perspective of racial discrimination in her choice of a female narrative voice. Treva (2015) states that black women need more recognition in their historic fight against injustice as they are also subjected to “black violability.” The term reflects the components of CRT as she describes it as: “encapsulates the lived and historical experiences of Black people with state-initiated and state-sanctioned violence.” (p.234). Through Starr’s realistic perspective, the historical point of view is shifted towards what Treva (2015) refers to as “Herstorical,” where the notion of racism portrayed as black violability is “experienced by black men and boys” (p.234) is built upon to accommodate the violence experienced by women.

This notion of women being exempt from the same kind of violence black males are subjected to is contested in the novel. Thomas exemplifies this in the scene where officer one-fifteen

points the gun directly at Starr as she sits on the ground with her hands visibly in the air. The significance of this scene draws attention to how violence is directed against female African Americans. Starr's uncle, a police officer who works with officer one-fifteen, did not think that his colleague would treat Starr as a threat in that stereotypes contribute to portraying young males as criminals but not females. When Starr portrays the situation fully to her uncle, his assumptions of her just being a witness to the incident are contested: "He pointed his gun at me' [...] He kept it on me until somebody else got there. Like I was a threat. I wasn't the one with the gun" (Thomas, 2017, pp.121-122) when he realizes, he becomes speechless as he discovers that she was subjected to another layer of psychological damage by being at gunpoint. In these situations, women are often portrayed as victims of witnessing the crime but not directly impacted as males who experience physical violence. The psychological violence Starr experiences could be detrimental to her development as a human being.

The marginalization and prejudice toward black people still exist, and we are reminded through incidents of police brutality. Thomas's utilization of "the talk" that African Americans have with their children gives an incredible and robust insight into the fundamental fear of the oppression put upon black people. Learning and understanding this profound difference in their feeling of being safe in their own country can teach us a lot about how racism has affected and continues to affect African Americans' everyday lives. The significance of this scene also comes from her perspective of the incident as a witness. In Chapter 3, a scene from Stone's novel is analyzed from the victim's perspective of being brutalized. The horrific police brutality scene analyzed in this section became the genesis of Starr's path toward finding her values and identity. It also became an eye-opener to the fundamentals of her internal conflict as she associates the incident with the officer's whiteness making her recall the incident through her surroundings of white peers at school.

## **2.2 Starr's internal conflict with racialization and identity**

This section will analyze Starr's internal conflict with how the world perceives her. Her conflicting ideals become more evident after her experience with police brutality as the violence happened based on racial prejudices from stereotypes deeming all African Americans as criminals. As readers, we can learn a lot from studying the protagonist's

internal conflict with her place in society as an African American. This can help provide awareness in that we empathize with the character by seeing ourselves in their situation, which is valuable for intercultural learning.

Starr expresses a layer of internal racism suppressing aspects of her identity redeemed inappropriate in situations in which she is not entirely comfortable. This suppression of her black identity is expressed through her speech and enactment surrounding her friends at Williamson Prep. This becomes prominent when the reader experiences the first encounter with her personality at Williamson Prep. Before entering the school premises, Starr is “flipping a switch” and turning into what she refers to as “Williamson Starr,” who is confined to her boundaries of suppressing her Garden Heights identity:

Williamson Starr Doesn't use slang – if a rapper would say it, she doesn't say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her “Hood.” Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she's the “angry black girl.” Williamson Starr is approachable. No stank-eyes, side-eyes, none of that. Williamson Starr is nonconfrontational. Basically, Williamson Starr doesn't give anyone a reason to call her ghetto (Thomas, 2017, pp.73-74).

Her fixation on keeping up her Williamson persona reflects her insecurity about expressing her opposing identities to the other. Thomas' choice of having the protagonist Switch her language code and avoiding “slang” when around her peers at Williamson Prep is an essential aspect of understanding Starr as a character. Code-switching is often used as an expression of identification with more than one culture. Brown & Casanova (2014) explains how “AAVE acts as a unifier and how code-switching [...] allows [...] residents to negotiate two social worlds: that characterized by Standard English and that in which Black English predominates.” (p.215). Therefore, it is interesting that Starr switches out her entire code of language, suppressing her Garden Heights identity entirely to blend into the culture as much as possible.

In the first paragraph of the novel, the protagonist establishes this internal conflict with identity, which can be an outcome of her internal racism, which is stated by the suppression of her background. The protagonist starts by saying that: “I’m not even sure I *belong* at this party. That’s not on some bougie shit, either. There are just some places where it’s not enough to be me. Eigher version of me” (Thomas, 2017, p.1). immediately builds the reader’s empathy: Thomas’s choice of presenting the protagonist is significant for two reasons. By stating “eigher versions of me” in a short sentence lastly, instead of embedding it into the former, Thomas draws the reader’s attention towards the statement. Through introducing the different versions of herself, the protagonist references W.E.B. Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness. This refers to the internal conflicts African Americans carry through a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.” (Du Bois, as cited in Zamir, 2008, p.29). As she is hiding her Williamson Persona, she consequently looks at herself through the eyes of her Garden Heights peers, trying to call back her roots. This is based on her constant sense of inspection of her appearance at Williamson Prep from the perspective of how her white peers perceive her.

Starr’s ambivalence toward both of her opposing cultures is a common denominator of the feeling of not belonging. Thomas’s emphasis on the word “belong” is significant for this statement. The word is italicized to state that she feels like she has departed from her former self, which inhabits the culture of Garden Heights and, therefore, no longer belongs among the people she grew up with. One way Starr expresses this is by hiding her identity through her choice of clothing. In the opening chapter, during Big D’s spring break party, Starr goes to the party “in a hoodie, looking a straight-up mess” (Thomas, 2017, p.16). Some parts of her hide behind her black friends to blend in and not get noticed as the girl who goes to a white private school, while another part is based on her feeling of not belonging among the attending crowd. The reader sees this as she ponders the thought: “I’m invisible. I feel like that a lot around here” (Thomas, 2017, p.16), while her acquaintances discuss dilemmas from their local high school, which enforces her feeling of not belonging. Concurrently to feeling disconnected from Garden Heights culture, her white friends at Williamson Prep are from backgrounds vastly different from hers and instating a sense of not belonging among them either. Therefore, Starr’s feeling of not belonging “emerges from several aspects” of her life and can be “generalized as a character-trait” according to Rimmon-Kenan (2002, p.40). Her feeling of disconnect becomes increasingly difficult for her to ignore throughout the novel.



Starr's Williamson persona begins to fall apart as she processes the shooting and killing of Khalil, which leads to her breaking her set boundaries, and separating her opposing lives. Starr unconsciously starts to associate the white skin of the people at Williamson Prep with Officer One-Fifteen. The first clue is when Starr makes physical contact with her white boyfriend, Chris, and she immediately has flashbacks to the incident. The day before Khalil's funeral, a week after the incident, Starr's first profound steps toward reforming her identity happen as Chris touches her hand: "I suddenly really, *Really*, realized that Chris is white. Just like One-Fifteen. [...] Chris didn't pull us over, he didn't shoot Khalil, but am I betraying who I am by dating him? I need to figure this out." (Thomas, 2017, p.107). Starr asks herself if she is betraying her cultural background by having a white boyfriend, which is a feeling rooted in her father's hostility toward the white majority. This hostile attitude is rooted in stereotypes portraying all members of the white majority as racists. Maintaining these attitudes contributes to alienation between the cultures, making stereotypes so damaging. Thomas breaks these stereotypes by having Starr realize Chris's whiteness is not what is important but instead how he treats her as a person. Through this recognition, Starr finally lets Chris see her real self, her Garden Heights persona, and as Chris embraces her identity, it brings them closer than before. This realization of people's values being most important also influences her relationships with her friends at Williamson Prep.

Starr's two best friends at Williamson Prep, Hailey and Maya, function as contrasting characters in which Thomas explicitly teaches readers how implicit racial biases are damaging. Her realization of Hailey's ignorant and "colorblind" perspective of the world facilitates Starr's understanding of racism's ordinariness in society that the first tenet of CRT states. As Hailey makes a racist joke, Starr realizes that she has been ignorant of her contribution to implicit racial biases: "That's the problem. We let people say stuff, and they say it so much that it becomes okay to them and normal for us. What's the point of having a voice if you're gonna be silent in those moments you shouldn't be?" (Thomas, 2017, p.248) Starr's realization of racism becoming ordinary for the majority speaks directly to Delgado & Stefancic's (2000) quote about structural racism. Only when Hailey learns that Starr was a victim of police brutality does she try to make amends. This confirms Delgado & Stefancic's (2000) statement that only extreme cases of racism are visible. This contrasts Maya's

characterization of inhabiting the ability to empathize with Starr's struggles with racialization, even if she has no personal connection with these racial issues. In Maya supporting Starr in her understanding of her conflict, Thomas shows the reader how vital intercultural awareness is in communicating across cultures.

Starr's path toward finding her identity is realized when she recognizes her purpose in fighting against racial injustice. Through accepting that structural racism is an inherent part of society, she acknowledges that others will experience encounters with the police as she did. Then her focus shifts towards embracing the voice she has gained through being a witness to the killing as she states in the ending: "It would be easy to quit if it was just about me, Khalil, that night, and that cop. It's about way more than that though. It's about Seven. Sekani. Kenya. DeVante. It's also about Oscar. [...]" (Thomas, 2017, p. 437). Continuing to fight for justice is a way of honoring Khalil and all other victims of racial profiling. In shifting of focus from Starr herself to the other characters and then continue mentioning victims of real-life incidents, Thomas transcends the fictional narrative and addresses the reader directly to contribute to making a change.

### **2.3 Characters that counter stereotypes**

Thomas's novel is filled with literary devices conveying meaning and messages implicitly and explicitly. Therefore, engaging with the text becomes both deciphering the meaning in our own words and seeing the meaning from other readers' perspectives. Through the protagonist's unbiased view, Thomas characterizes the "thugs" from an impartial perspective in which their values and care for their families are depicted. In this section, Thomas's characterization of two characters, Maverick and DeVante, is analyzed in which they function against stereotypes portraying all black men as dangerous criminals. Following the two characters, the reader gets to experience their development through direct and indirect characterization, which is essential in that we see where they started from and where they end up throughout the story.

DeVante evolves tremendously as a character throughout the novel going from being a member of the King Lords to realizing his mistakes and escaping a life bound to criminality. The change in character happens through indirect characterization as the novel progresses, which is important because the reader experiences his transition through the story. Then the reader can create their perception of the character. We first meet DeVante in the first chapter, where he was involved in the shooting during the party. Later he steals money from his gang, the King Lords, and in hiding, turns to Maverick for guidance on getting out of the gang. As we get to know the character, we find out that his reason for selling drugs for the gang was to provide for his family in need. Through DeVante, we also learn that Khalil had similar reasons as he was protecting his mother, depicting that we often do not know about underlying factors. As the reader gradually experiences the positive sides of the character, it humanizes him. This works to counter the stereotypes and facilitates increased awareness that prevents prejudices in real life.

Continuing from the development of DeVante, the character Maverick provides further characterization of former gang members who turned their life around. Maverick's change as a character is both direct and indirect. The readers are told of his prior development through Starr as a narrator and experience his further development as the story unfolds. The character is also a former member of the King Lords who changed his life by helping his community and providing for his family.

Maverick breaks stereotypes of African American fathers being absent from bringing up their children. Throughout the novel, his tending to their garden symbolizes his values as a parent: "Daddy picks bunches of collard greens from his garden. He cuts roses that have blooms as big as my palms. Daddy spends hours out here every night, planting, tilling, and talking. He claims a good garden needs good conversation." (Thomas, 2017, p. 40). This simulates his attitude toward his children, who also need good conversations and guidance. Thus, showing the reader that he takes care of his family just as well as anybody. This works against immediate stereotypical thoughts as the reader mentally processes a notion that breaks them.

Maverick's transition from expressing hostility toward white people and the police into being more open-minded functions to counter stereotypes deeming all white people as racist oppressors. Initially, Maverick refuses to move their family into a safer neighborhood as it implies moving to a whiter area. Therefore, making him think that he is betraying his race and culture. When King threatens Starr, he eventually decides that their family needs to move. Maverick realizes that moving to a safer neighborhood was the right decision triggering his change in perception. In having the character transition into a more open-minded toward the white majority, Thomas sets an example that African Americans must rid themselves of their own biases to make a change for their communities; there will be a more united community fronting their fight against societal injustices.

The protagonist's introduction of Khalil in the first chapter can be seen as an allegory for African Americans' fight toward reaching their "promised land." The first description of Khalil is: "The sea of people parts for him like he's a brown-skinned Moses." (Thomas, 2017, p.15). This initial description of Khalil places him as a person of stature among his peers as the "sea of people parts for him." This foreshadows the social justice movements growing after his death, culminating with the intense riots almost destroying Garden heights. As they rebuild their broken neighborhood in the final chapter, the community finally stands up against the local gang, King Lords. Therefore, the first step on the path to equality for African Americans is to step away from their biases and be an example of how to treat each other.

## **2.4 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has investigated various forms of oppression in Angie Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give*. In the first section, we found that when Starr was twelve, her parents had a talk with her about being cautious in encounters with the police. This talk has left an impacting impression on her memory. Also, a failure to follow these instructions was fatal for Khalil in dealing with an officer that deemed him a criminal from the start. This leads to Starr being conflicted about being surrounded by her white peers at school. She starts to associate them with Officer One-fifteen because of their whiteness. Eventually, she overcomes this by realizing that people's actions and values are most important. In the last section, we examined characters working to counter common stereotypes, which is useful to discuss explicitly while

using the novels in an educational setting. Thomas' storytelling is important for providing a voice to the historically oppressed. As injustice towards African American men has gained increasing attention in public, much due to social media and increased access to information, the voice of females experiencing injustice is worth highlighting. Through Thomas' choice of a realistic female narrator, the voice of an undermined group of people who often are witnesses and victims of police brutality is put in the spotlight.

### 3 Analyzing Dear Martin

The Young Adult Novel *Dear Martin* (2017) by Nic Stone was released the same year as *The Hate U Give* with the same themes as portrayed. This reflects the need for African Americans to express their voice of oppression to the majority to enlighten the injustice. As in *The Hate U Give*, *Dear Martin* portrays detailed scenes of police brutality toward the protagonist that deeply shocks his perception of the racial issue. As *Dear Martin* and *The Hate U Give* are thematically similar, this chapter will be examined similarly to the previous. Then the thesis can discuss both similarities and differences later. Since Stone's protagonist has a vastly different perspective on his cultural background which he completely distances himself from, his similar struggles with racialization are interesting to investigate. Stone's short novel is packed with lessons of morality, and the most prominent criticism in her book is the use of violence against African Americans.

In the novel's opening scene, the protagonist Justyce is on his way to help his drunk ex-girlfriend, Melo, to stop her from drunk driving. Unknowingly from wearing a hoodie and earbuds, Justyce is followed by a white police officer, Castillo, who assumes he is up to no good. As Justyce lowers Melo into the backseat, Officer Castillo aggressively slams him on the car's trunk, arresting him by the assumption that he was searching for white girls to abuse. Never having experienced this kind of racial prejudice, Justyce is baffled by how Officer Castillo with contempt. Unsure what to think, Justyce turns to Dr. Martin Luther King jr. for advice through his reflection on what Dr. King would do in his situation. At his friend Manny's house, Justyce later finds out that Officer Castillo has been killed by a member of the Black Jihad gang from Justyce's former neighborhood, Quan Banks, who happens to be Manny's cousin. At his school, Braselton Preparatory Academy, we meet the other prominent characters, SJ, Jared, and his teacher, Doc, in Justyce's debate class, where they discuss racial equality in the US. Jared ignorantly argues how the US has become a colorblind society with equal opportunities. As the news covers several cases of young African Americans killed by Law Enforcement, he becomes increasingly distrustful of the white majority. Later in the novel, an off-duty police officer is aggravated by Manny and Justyce's rap music in their car and fires several shots at them, killing Manny and injuring Justyce. Feeling alone in a world without his best friend leads him to seek guidance from the local gang leader, Martel, where he realizes how different his societal view is from theirs and how easy it is to end up on the

wrong path in life. With everything Justyce has experienced and the continuous racialization, he realizes that the world will never view him as he sees himself. Therefore, he needs to stay true to his values.

The protagonist's self-perception is distinct from Starr's, which makes them interesting to discuss alongside each other to convey more debt to the criticism of societal structures. The most apparent difference between the protagonist is their gender. As we will look at in the next section, Officer Castillo's assumption of his intentions is partly based on his gender. This chapter will first examine the novel's portrayal of African American parents' guidance through having "the talk." Then we get to see how this has unconsciously prepared the protagonist for the situation. After this, the chapter will look deeper into the protagonist's internal conflict contrasting his initial self-perception against society's perception of him. Lastly, the chapter will examine two other characters with a significant change of perception, and following their transition helps prevent stereotypes.

### **3.1 "The Talk" and Police brutality**

As discussed in the previous chapter, African American parents understand that they have to protect their children from society's racial biases. As "the talk" is a way of preparing children for their encounter with law enforcement, it is also a way of preparing them for meeting life's challenges in the face of disparity. This section will investigate Justyce's utilization of his implicit knowledge about engagement with law enforcement, followed by an analysis of two different scenes of police brutality and hate crime. There are many similarities between the portrayal of police brutality in the respective novels, but the key difference is their gender. This makes the novels useful to discuss alongside each other in order to facilitate intercultural competence.

Unlike how Thomas introduces "The Talk" right before and foreshadows the incident, Stone portrays Justyce as not understanding why Officer Castillo prejudiced him. Justyce manages to keep calm and, in doing so, contributes to deescalating the situation that officer Castillo actively pursues to escalate. A crucial part of his success in de-escalating an almost

impossible situation is based on his remembrance of his mother's advice in confrontation with the police: "*Be respectful; keep the anger in check; make sure the police can see your hands.*" (Stone, 2017, p.8). Similar to Thomas's narration, Stone also describes these messages in short and concrete sentences that are easy to remember. However, being respectable and calm in this situation does not prevent Justyce from experiencing unjust violence.

In the first chapter, Justyce is on his way to helping Melo, whereas he chooses to wear a hoodie and earbuds. Wearing the hood in a predominantly white part of the city makes him identify as a person of interest and is therefore pursued by the officer. The officer's suspicion of Justyce might be justifiable as it is the police's job to be suspicious to prevent criminal activity. However, Officer Castillo's suspicion is overtaken by condemnation because he has already assumed that Justyce is out pursuing criminality, which sets the tone of the arrest before it happens. Officer Castillo expresses his assumption explicitly toward Justyce in response to Justyce trying to explain the misunderstanding: "Don't say shit to me, you son of a bitch. I knew your punk ass was up to no good when I saw you walking down the road with that goddamn hood on" (Stone, 2017, p.8). The officer's violent approach is fueled by intersectional prejudice as he both associates Justyce's hood with social class and his skin color with race. This contributes to Justyce being more prone to racial profiling. In this situation where Justyce is handcuffed on the sidewalk, Officer Castillo is in control and has all the power, which he reminds Justyce of by disrupting Justyce's tries at explaining: "Officer Castillo, I mean you no disresp-' 'I told your punk ass to shut the fuck up!" (ibid.). The officer's choice of referring to Justyce as "punk ass" sets the tone that voices his prejudice against young black men, and the officer's phrase "I know your kind" could be a confirmation of his bigotry. (ibid.)

As we can see from Justyce's letter in the following chapter, the officer might have been engaging to set an example for Justyce: "The craziest part is while I thought everything would be cool as soon as her parents got there, no matter what they told the cops, these dudes would not release me." (Stone, 2017, p.11). Officer Castillo was in complete control from the start and even called for backup as Justyce was on the ground in handcuffs. The over-



compensation in the display of power shows dominance, leaving a lasting impression on young adults and enforcing their fear of law enforcement.

Stone criticizes a hostile mindset between members of the white majority and the black minority by portraying both sides as contributing to violence. It becomes evident throughout the novel that the display of violence between law enforcement and the black minorities functions as a way to keep a balance between remained prejudices. Stone exemplifies this in the scene where Manny is killed and Justyce is wounded in a shooting. As Manny and Justyce are driving while playing loud music, a car pulls up next to them: “white Suburban – white dude, probably early fifties – giving him a dirty look.” (Stone, 2017, p. 117). The author uses repetition of the word “white” as a literary device to contrast the drivers’ conflicting cultures, highlighting that a situation is coming. The driver of the white Suburban demands that they turn off the music, but Manny refuses as he is “done bending over backward to appease white people.” (Stone, 2017, p.118). The driver follows by firing three shots in his anger and frustration. The reader later learns from Quan Banks that the shooter, Garrett Tison, was officer Castillo’s partner who was off-duty during the incident. As Justyce finds out, Tison watched his partner being murdered unprovoked by Quan; he reflects: “Who’s to say Garrett Tison’s quickness to pull the trigger wasn’t caused by seeing his partner killed by a black kid? It’s no excuse, of course” (Stone, 2017, p.142). Justyce’s reflection on the events leading up to the shooting tells the reader the complexity behind the issue and that both sides are contributing to further the problem.

Another criticism found in the novel is the media’s portrayal of the police officer as a victim acting to eliminate a threat. Officer Tison stated that he perceived the young adults as a threat.

Tison testified that he feared for his life, citing 27 years of law enforcement experience in support of his ability to detect a genuine threat. Though Tison's claim that the teens had a gun was unsupported by evidence, the surviving teen, Justyce McAllister's, exposed connection to known gang members, including sixteen-year-old

Quan Banks, the young man charged with murdering Tison's partner last August, cast a considerable pall over the proceedings. (Stone, 2017, p.193)

The passage above suggests that the media is more interested in making a connection between Justyce and gang members, in order to establish a persona that confides to stereotypes suppressing minority groups. Racial discrimination and biases by the media implicitly foster the racial stereotypes of African Americans being “perceived as indicting criminal activity” in the eyes of the white majority. The second tenet of CRT states that the white majority benefits from oppressing minorities. This is supported here through the media’s continuous portrayal of African Americans as criminals throughout the novel.

### **3.2 Justyce’s internal conflict with racialization and identity**

Similarly, as in the previous chapter, this section will investigate the protagonist’s internal conflict with how society views him as unequal. His struggle with society’s racialization becomes more profound after a white police officer racially profiled him. After this incident, he realizes that the officer arrested him solely based on the color of his skin, leading Justyce to feel increasing despair about society’s prejudice and discrimination. Unlike Starr, who sees her cultural background as the real her, Justyce distances himself from his former culture. This makes it interesting to analyze his path toward accepting society’s implicit racial biases alongside Starr’s.

The novel's opening scene sets the narrative's tone in which Justyce gradually accepts how he will continue to be racialized by the white majority in society. The prejudice expressed by Officer Castillo in his brutal arrest contests Justyce’s perspective on society. He views himself in higher regard than the criminal “thugs” from neighborhoods like his. In Justyce’s letters to Dr. Martin Luther King, the reader is shown his reflection in which his inner conflicts manifest. In the first letter, Justyce introduces himself in his self-perception as perceived before this encounter with Officer Castillo:

Quick intro: I'm a 17-year-old high school senior and full-scholarship student at Braselton Preparatory Academy in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm ranked fourth in my graduating class of 83, I'm the captain of the debate team, I scored a 1560 and a 34 on my SATs and ACTs respectively, and despite growing up in a "bad" area (not too far from your old stomping grounds), I have a future ahead of me that will likely include an Ivy League education, an eventual law degree, and a career in public policy. (Stone, 2017, p. 10)

In this journal passage, Justyce shows the reader how he values his accomplishment and character but devalues and distances himself from his former neighborhood. Justyce, being articulate and capable of formulating his opinions, chooses to use the word "bad" when describing the "area" he comes from. Using a general and uninformative word while using quotation marks suggests that he is not voicing his own opinion but instead describing the area as it is described "through the eyes of others."

Justyce expresses an idealistic view of his future which puts his unjust arrest in conflict with his presumption that positive outcomes are a reward for a good demeanor. His academic achievements, combined with disidentifying from his former neighborhood, have deceived him into believing himself exempt from prejudice by police and the rest of society: "I thought if I made sure to be an upstanding member of society, I'd be exempt from the stuff THOSE black guys deal with, you know? Really hard to swallow that I was wrong" (Stone, 2017, p.12). Realizing that he was wrong initializes his questioning of his self-perception. He starts to view society more critically, which leads him to question his perspective on other acts of police brutality. In trying to make sense of the unjust treatment he was subjected to despite all his efforts to be an upstanding citizen, he reflects on what Dr. King would do in his situation. Reflecting on his treatment by officer Castillo leads to him becoming progressively aware of racial profiling. In his journal to Dr. King, Justyce reflects on an incident a few days earlier where an African American adolescent, Shemar Carson, was killed by the police. His encounter with officer Castillo leads him to question this prior incident portrayed in the media further: "Before the incident last night, I hadn't really thought much about it. There's a lot of conflicting information, so it's hard to know what to believe" (Stone, 2017, pp. 11-12). As we

see from this statement, the protagonist initially had conflicting thoughts about which side to believe in, but after his encounter, he realizes that “one wrong move, and Jus might’ve been the next Shemar Carson.” (Stone, 2017, p.15). As concerning as this thought is, he reflects on what Dr. King would do, and he continues to stay true to his values and work towards building a better life.

Maintaining his values becomes increasingly challenging as he believes that both the white majority and members of his former community are trying to pull him down. Unlike the protagonist of *The Hate U Give*, who has two oppositional personas in conflict, Justyce has one persona containing his values as a human, which he now progressively struggles to maintain. While he realizes clearer that his white peers at school do not view him as equal and unconsciously break him down, it also becomes evident that his former community tries to bring him down to their position in the social hierarchy. His white peers at Braselton Prep do not view Justyce as their equal, but the characters portray an ignorant perspective, reflecting that their biases blind them. Jared made this evident in debate class after Justyce was admitted early as a student to Yale University while he was not. Jared feels discriminated against as part of the white majority because affirmative action distinguishes applicants by social and racial background factors. Jared, heated in the debate, manages to say: “All I know is that no matter what college I end up at, when I see a minority, I’m gonna wonder if they’re qualified to be there.” (Stone, 2017, p.64). He implies that Justyce is not qualified for the position based on his minority background. While Justyce has to deal with the condescending tone from his classmate, members of the Black Jihad gang from his former neighborhood confront him in a criticizing manner, claiming he is betraying his culture by trying to get ahead in life because he “needs the white man for the ride to the top.” (Stone, 2017, p.49). Having conflicting thoughts, Justyce reflects on his internal struggles in a letter to Dr. Martin:

It’s like I’m trying to climb a mountain, but I’ve got one fool trying to shove me down so I won’t be on his level, and another fool tugging at my leg, trying to pull me to the ground he refuses to leave. Jared and Trey are only two people, but after today, I know that when I head to Yale [...] I’m gonna be paranoid about people looking at me and wondering if I’m qualified to be there. (Stone, 2017, p.66)

This passage exemplifies the additional layer of obstacles minorities face in their struggle to advance in life. Being victimized and racially profiled by law enforcement changed Justyce's perception of police brutality, and as new incidents of shootings unfold on the news, he becomes increasingly distrustful of society. The media's justification of these incidents by stereotypical views contributes to Justyce losing courage and faith in himself.

Stone criticizes the media for their part in preserving social and economic marginalization. As portrayed in the novel, the media use stereotypes to place all members of a community into the same role as criminals. One example of Stone displaying this criticism is shown in the scene where the media has obtained a photo of Justyce dressed as a "thug." Jared had suggested that the group of friends dress up as stereotypes for Halloween, whereas Blake, a white friend in the group, dressed as a member of the KKK. If the media had shown the entire picture, the discussion of the setting would be entirely different. Still, they choose to display only Justyce's character to twist the conversation into characterizing him as threatening:

"We've heard about his grades, SAT scores, and admission to an Ivy League school," the anchor says, "but a picture speaks a thousand words. This kid grew up in the same neighborhood as the young man accused of murdering Garrett Tison's partner more or less on a whim." (Stone, 2017, p.148)

The news anchor's use of the word "but" to conjuncture the two opposing characterizations deviate the attention away from his established academic success. This fosters the perspective Jared established in debate class where minorities are not respectable no matter their academic success, placing them below himself as a white majority.

Events in Stone's novel draw parallels to DeVante's conversation with Starr about why adolescents become members of gangs like Black Jihad, inviting the reader to question their

biases toward people in this culture. One interesting development in Stones' story is when Justyce visits the leader of the Black Jihad, Martel, as he feels like there is nobody else who understands his inner conflict. Martel embraces Justyce and appeals to him, fronting the proudness of his ancestry, and Justyce immediately understands how easily young people are influenced into finding a purpose in this environment. The gangs express a kind of unity many adolescents are drawn to in their search for identity. They are not born criminals, but society's racist biases push them into it gradually as their lives become more arduous.

Through his reflection, he learned that controlling outside prejudice and discrimination against him is not possible. Justyce struggled immensely in his internal conflict and managed to break through his despair and work towards a purpose. He had deemed his project of reflecting what Dr. Martin would do a failure because trying to be more acceptable will never be exempt from discrimination. Later, when he thinks about what he learned from the project:

Every challenge I've faced, it's been What would Martin do? And I could never come up with a real answer. But if I go with [...] -Who would Martin BE?- Well, that's easy: you'd be yourself. THE eminent MLK: nonviolent, not easily discouraged, and firm in your beliefs. (Stone, 2017, p.202)

By realizing that he must accept that he will always experience discrimination because of him being African American, he can begin to prepare himself to handle these situations. In the end, Justyce confides in his beliefs by choosing to fight.

### **3.3 Characters that counter implicit racial biases**

This section will investigate two characters who change their perception of racialization as part of society. To combat the post-racial point of view of society as colorblind, Stone uses characters to exemplify how damaging ignorant attitudes can be.

Stone initially characterizes Jared as a stereotypical privileged white student among Justyce's group of friends at Braselton Prep. The reader is first introduced to Jared in debate class, where the Declaration of Independence is the debate topic. The students are asked to discuss if the declaration's notion that all men are created equal reflects reality in the US today. Jared takes the lead claiming that society is post-racial with equal opportunities for everyone who works hard for it. As he firmly believes the US to be colorblind, his acts of discrimination throughout the novel are done unknowingly, expressing a form of implicit racial bias. His ignorant attitude and racist jokes continue throughout the novel to the point where Manny gets in a fight with him. This makes it an interesting change when the reader is reintroduced to him in the epilogue. In this scene, Justyce casually meets Jared at Manny's grave. Jared explains that he changed his major subject to Civil Rights Law and is minoring in African American studies. This transition in his characterization shows the reader that Jared was not racist at heart, but that ignorant attitudes like he had could be just as damaging. Furthermore, it functions to counter stereotypes portraying white people as racist by showing that information to enlighten their ignorance works to prevent implicit racial biases.

Manny's characterization functions quite differently from Jared's as he shows how privileges can blind feelings of being discriminated against. Manny is Justyce's black friend from a privileged, wealthy family. His privilege has partially blinded him to racial discrimination and made him ignore the racist jokes his white friends make. He has a gradual change of enlightenment, culminating with a fight with Jared. Manny had not had the time to process the fundamentals of how the white majority has discriminated against him as he had learned to ignore them. As he has not been mentally prepared for encounters with racial discrimination, he instead acts out violently. This shows how important it is to build awareness around our own intersectional position in society. Working through the problems we face is thus a much healthier approach than suppressing them. Showing explicitly how having privileges has blinded his self-perception could be useful for Norwegian students in understanding how their own privileges affect their actions.

### 3.4 Chapter Conclusion

Similar to Chapter 2, this chapter has investigated Stone's portrayal of racialization in her novel *Dear Martin*. In section 3.1, we examined Justyce's arrest at the novel's beginning. Just like Thomas's story, *Dear Martin* begins in the middle of the plot, immediately engaging the reader as we jump so quickly into the narrative. In this scene, the officer clearly profiled Justyce deeming him a criminal long before he arrests him. This seems to be based on an intersectional combination of his race and wearing a hoodie, making the officer assume his intentions. The officer also showed an extremely hostile attitude towards Justyce, which reflects the brutality of many real-life cases of police brutality. Stone's protagonist deescalated the situation by internalizing his own "talk" with his mother. The likeness of this notion in both novels reflects the need for further discussion about this issue. Justyce struggles immensely after this incident realizing that he was prejudiced based on his race. His effort to be an upright citizen thus did not matter in the eyes of the officer who viewed him as another "thug." Unlike Starr, Justyce does not identify with the culture of his former neighborhood. In trying to advance in society, his peers criticized him for betraying his African American roots. At the same time, he feels like his peers at school try to push him down, leading him to feel more despair. He realizes that society will always view him by his race, and in doing so, he manages to navigate through the racial biases. Lastly, we looked at Stone's use of characters to challenge the view of a post-racial society. Studying *Dear Martin* and *The Hate U Give* comparatively provides a deeper understanding of the ongoing problem of racialization in the United States. This understanding helps create awareness of Norwegian adolescents' own unconscious biases. In the next chapter, both novels will be further discussed concerning how they can facilitate intercultural competence through reading.



## **4 Discussion: why are the novels important for young adult readers**

So far in this thesis, I have established the historical context and theoretical background of CRT to analyze Thomas's *The Hate U Give* and Stone's *Dear Martin*. The previous two chapters investigated how the respective novels portray racial profiling and black violability in the form of police brutality experienced by the protagonists. The notion of African Americans' utilization of "the talk" to prepare adolescents for encounters with law enforcement and racial discrimination has been discussed. Following the protagonists' traumatic experiences, the internal conflicts with racial identity and their evolution as characters throughout the novels were examined.

Building on the analysis of the novels, this chapter will be a comparative discussion between the novels concerning their portrayal of themes discussed in the previous two chapters. This will establish why these two novels are useful to read both individually and alongside each other to facilitate intercultural learning. After the novels are analyzed directly, the thesis will discuss repercussions to be aware of as a teacher before using the novels in the classroom, as the books can be viewed as controversial in their portrayed themes and topics. Following, the chapter will look specifically at the importance of reading about these themes and discusses how reading these young adult novels could facilitate intercultural competence. Lastly, the thesis will draw parallels to preventing discrimination in Norwegian societies.

### **4.1 Comparative analysis of *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin***

There are many similarities and a few differences between the analyses of the respective novels. In this section, some significant findings from analyzing the novel will be discussed in how they compare or is in contrast with each other. As portrayed early in both novels, the police's attitude toward young black men is strikingly similar and is a way of showing dominance. The harsh tone used towards these young black men increases the chance of an escalating situation because their feeling of fear overwrites their ability to think clearly. One key difference contrasting the scenes in Thomas's and Stone's novels is the law

enforcement's treatment of the protagonist following the incident. The impact on Starr from being at gunpoint is tremendous. Still, the prejudice enacted by officer one-fifteen could be overshadowed by fear in an escalated situation, and she was taken home shortly after. Justyce, on the other hand, was placed under arrest and in handcuffs on the streets for hours before the officers let him go, seemingly to set a public example for young black men like him. This is on the premise that stereotyping contributed to portraying all young black men as dangerous gang members that the police need to suppress by force.

The protagonist's struggle to find their path as minorities in a racialized society is depicted in the novels. The protagonists initially express vastly different perspectives on their position in society and how it conflicts with their values. This combats stereotypes that generalize African Americans as it shows diversity in their values. Whereas Starr fights to keep both her personas separate for her to live seemingly normal lives in both her environments, Justyce fights to find his place and purpose in his life at Braselton Prep to build a better life ahead. Both display a notion of Du Bois' double consciousness as the characters constantly see themselves "through the eyes of others." As Starr embraces her cultural background at Garden Heights and suppresses this part of her identity at Williamson Prep, Justyce distances himself entirely from the culture of his former neighborhood. Interestingly they both end up with similar concluding notions at the end of the individual stories. They come to accept that racism is ordinary and part of everyday lives for minorities, as stated in the tenets of CRT. The acceptance makes it easier for them to navigate their feeling and instead work toward bettering their lives in their communities.

The novels show the reader the importance of stable environments which provides support and guidance during difficult times. In Thomas's novel, Starr is dependent on her parents throughout the novel who provides her with a stable environment that helps her navigate her feelings after the traumatic experience with law enforcement. As both her parents are very much present in her life, she gets a sense of protection from her father and guidance in her everyday decisions from her mother. In Stone's novel, the case is slightly different. Justyce grew up without a father present and has not had this same sense of protection and guidance. As a result, he turns to a historical figure he looks up to for advice, Dr. King, and finds a

sense of grounding through his reflection of what Dr. King would do. Eventually, when Justyce is overwhelmed by the experienced discrimination, he turns to a local gang for guidance, portraying how easy it is for adolescents in a vulnerable to be drawn into a wrong environment.

One interesting contrast between Thomas' and Stone's novels is how they use characters to counter stereotyping that defines individuals based on their race. In Thomas's novel, she uses characters specifically to function as counter-stories against stereotypes. Thomas depicts characters who would be deemed as criminal thugs by the stereotypical views still infused in the white majority. By using characters that were former gang members and showing their contribution to the community, Thomas humanizes the characters and shows the reader they also have redeeming qualities. This functions as a way to tell the reader a message outside of their stereotypical idea of how people in gangs are supposed to be. In Stone's novel, she uses characters who ignore the existence of racial inequality in society. Their change into an open mind affects the reader into seeing the same perspective. Thus, with Jared, she breaks the novel's tendency to depict most white characters as ignorant of racial inequalities. Both these messages together begin to paint a clearer picture of how society should face the issue of racialization.

## **4.2 Reading controversial books**

In the US, teaching topics related to the historical past of slavery and racism has become controversial in education. This has led to CRT and its ideas being denounced in school, as these controversial topics could make students feel guilt or discomfort because of their white privilege. (Borter, 2021). *The Hate U Give* (2017) and *Dear Martin* (2017) are both books that can be viewed as controversial in that they portray various forms of racism and violence, in addition to swearing and scenes of drug intake. Before using these books in the classroom, it is crucial that the teacher knows every student well before reading and engaging in discussions. If students respond negatively to engaging with these scenes, it could be unproductive for their learning. As a teacher, when working with fiction, it is essential to be confident in discussing the various themes expressed in the novels adequately. As a teacher, scaffolding the knowledge adequately implies addressing the novel's important topics

pragmatically. Many teachers dwell on teaching novels with controversial issues and themes that are hard to talk about. Howard (2021) observed a classroom setting where *The Hate U Give* was used. The teacher lacked the confidence to address the critical topics concerning racial issues, thus preventing good opportunities for learning (p.408). Teaching topics such as racism and discrimination without addressing them explicitly might lead the students might think that ignoring these issues is acceptable, stressing the importance of being confident in discussing sensitive topics.

### **4.3 How can *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin* be useful for facilitating Intercultural Competence**

Most young adults spend a large amount of their day at school, making it a critical institution in shaping their lives. For some students, a school setting might be where they engage in most or all reading during the day. Therefore, teaching literature that might appeal to young adults while conveying useful information is crucial. As noted in chapter 1.2, the English subject has an essential role in developing students' intercultural understanding of how people have different world perspectives. Identity and cultural diversity, one of the core values of the Core Curriculum of LK20, highlights that "Insight into our history and culture is important for developing the identities of pupils and their belonging in society." (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2019a). A common denominator between these is the emphasis on the importance of students' ability to see the world through the eyes of others. Reading literature is therefore a useful exercise to facilitate these abilities in students as engaging in reading lets us experience new narratives through different standpoints than our own.

An essential part of being interculturally competent is being aware of discriminating attitudes and actions. The goal then is to teach the students about issues such as discrimination, stereotypes, prejudice, and so on, providing the tools and abilities to recognize the problems. As readers engage with the text, they imagine the issues while creating meaning, and this provides a first-hand experience. Thomas's and Stone's novels are viable options as they provide realistic depictions of the problems. Carlsen (2018) further exemplifies how books such as *The Hate U Give* and *Dear Martin* offer benefits to students' intercultural learning:

By giving voice to young people experiencing racism, violence, discrimination, or bullying, youth novels often articulate topics that are important to both young people and the larger society, some of which may rarely be discussed openly among peers in this age group. Part of the pedagogical value of such books is that they can help to demystify neglected or difficult topics, making them explicit and portraying their implications in realistic ways. (p.131)

The novels contribute to demystifying these topics, which help create intercultural awareness of existing stereotypes. Both novels have a notion of the protagonist having internalized the rules of engagement with law enforcement after their “talk” with their parents. Asking the students questions centered around why they think this preparation of African American children is necessary can function as an entrance to understanding how profoundly rooted racialization in the United States is. Reflecting on this could help students see the world from the perspective of African Americans and the novels, thus functioning as a counter-story to stereotypical notions. The characters deliberately put in by the authors to transition from stereotypical to more complex characterizations should also be discussed. In Thomas’s novel, DeVante exemplifies an adolescent being drawn into criminality at an early age. As he helps Starr through the process of understanding his and Khalil’s situation in choosing to sell drugs, the reader also comes to a similar understanding from expressing empathy with Starr toward them. This helps to humanize people in similar situations and might prevent hostile prejudice in the real world. In Stone’s novel, she shows the reader that humans are not inherently racist and therefore capable of mending their attitudes. Helping students notice by discussing how damaging stereotypes and racist jokes portrayed in Stone’s novel can be, facilitates intercultural awareness.

As both narratives start “in medias res” with a scene of police brutality, the reader is immediately thrown into the narrative. In beginning the story this way, the narrative captures the reader’s attention and sets them up to experience empathy toward the protagonist. As noted, Keen (2007) suggests that the reader experience empathy more easily towards negative emotions. By tapping into the reader’s negative emotions, the authors establish an empathetic

connection toward the protagonist before the complexity of the character is accounted for. Then the reader becomes more susceptible to the message they provide. The protagonists' gradual development of identity is an important stance for how we read the novels and a tool for intercultural learning through reading the book. As teachers, we can use the specific events that contribute to the character's gradual transition to facilitate intercultural competence in students. For example, discussing the scene where Starr has flashbacks to the encounter with Officer One-fifteen when Chris touches her hand could provide knowledge about racial dynamics. Understanding that African Americans might see the white majority in a generalizing way similar to how minorities are generalized into groups by the majority could be challenging to comprehend. Discussing Starr associating her boyfriend's whiteness with Officer One-fifteen could be a way of depicting this notion, therefore creating awareness that facilitates intercultural learning.

Discussing the context of both novels makes it possible to engage more students in reading empathetically as it broadens the portrayed perspectives. An obvious contrast is the protagonist's gender, which plays a part in the different readers' empathetic connection. Empathy is vital for connecting with the characters and our ability to see the world with different eyes. Therefore, it is crucial to address the group of students when choosing literature and how we approach it. Recalling the study by Solhaug & Kristensen (2020), they found that girls express higher levels of empathy and slightly higher intercultural competence than boys. These abilities correlate with Carlsen (2018), who writes that "girls find it easier to identify with characters beyond their own gender and age group," while boys find it more difficult with characters unlike themselves. (p.124). Therefore, reading both novels side by side might make intercultural learning for every student more accessible, as some will have it easier connecting with Justyce than Starr. Reading them side by side opens the possibility to analyze the respective protagonist's different perspectives on their cultural background as African Americans. In Thomas' novel, the protagonist's real self is rooted in her Garden Heights persona. Justyce, on the other hand, feels less connected to the culture of his former area. This displays how different every individual is and that we must look past judgment of intersectional positions.

Readers who are part of the white majority will not know the exact feeling of discrimination that minorities experience, but this does not mean that expressing empathy towards the ideas is unapproachable. Everyone has felt a sense of being feeling omitted and not belonging. We tap into these same emotions through an empathetic reading, trying to imagine the experience the text conveys. Students can be scaffolded to implicitly express and reflect on their own feeling of not belonging while reading. Making them aware of how different factors contribute to feeling discriminated against, is therefore useful. Thomas's and Stone's novel exemplifies intersectional positions concerning the character's social class, which most readers can relate to. As when Justyce is differentiated as the "guy who can't afford a Happy Meal" (Stone, 2017, p.31). Or Starr feeling omitted as her peers at school talk about their privileges: "And bam. That normal feeling? Gone. I suddenly remember how different I am from most of the kids here." (Thomas, 2017, p.79) Attracting awareness to these issues could help Norwegian students become more aware of their intersectional positions as they learn how various forms of discrimination can work together.

Young adults in Norwegian society would benefit from recognizing their own intersectional position. Recognizing the privileges they may or may not have opens up possibilities to reflect on themselves through the notion of looking at "one's self through the eyes of others." In the study by Glenn (2012), teachers expressed that by reading literature about African Americans, the reader became more aware of their whiteness. Being more aware of their own situation opens up the possibility of transferring the intercultural competence learned through reading Thomas's and Stone's novels to other parts of their lives. In today's society, we will continue to interact with new individuals with different preconditions that need adaptation, stressing the importance of accommodating new perspectives. The Norwegian society has become more diverse, making this ability increasingly important. As a society, we have a responsibility to include everyone to the best of our abilities while preserving Norway's cultural heritage, including national minorities. While interacting with people from vastly different cultures, it becomes essential to recognize stereotypes to prevent further discrimination and prejudice. As stated in chapter 1.2, intercultural competence is an ability we must constantly strive to improve. The ideas that have been discussed in this section can be seen as components in building a larger picture of intercultural competence.

## 5 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to answer how racial stereotypes are challenged in Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* and Nic Stone's *Dear Martin* by informing the reader through transformative characters. Furthermore, the thesis discussed how the novels could be used to facilitate intercultural competence in students. The main research questions I addressed initially to approach the analysis in this thesis are: Firstly, *how are racial profiling and violence against black adolescents portrayed in both novels?* Secondly, *how do the protagonists process their conflicting self-perceptions following the traumatic incident with law enforcement?* And thirdly, *how can reading about situations portrayed in the novels facilitate intercultural competence in young adults?* Analyzing the novels together establishes how strikingly alike they are in their criticism of society's racial biases and signals the further need for discussion concerning the topic of racialization.

Both novels begin in the middle of the plot, quickly developing into scenes depicting police brutality. Furthermore, the authors of both novels draw attention to the protagonist's internalized and automatic awareness of how to behave in encounters with law enforcement. This has clearly left lasting impressions on both protagonists as they vividly remember the instructions despite their thought of never being in a situation like this. In Thomas's novel, the protagonist is a witness to the police brutality expressed toward her friend. Through her perspective, the reader sees how detrimental African Americans are to be prepared for these situations. Khalil does not act according to the instructions Starr has internalized and is therefore perceived as a criminal from the officer's perspective, which turned out to be fatal in this scene. In Stone's novel, on the other hand, the protagonist is racially profiled because of his appearance. As Justyce was wearing a hoodie, the officer assumed he was out pursuing criminality. This addresses the intersectional positions of discrimination African Americans are subjected to. Engaging in reading about incidents described is important for understanding the ongoing racial problems in the United States. Through reading, we enter a "third space," as defined by Carlsen (2018) where we experience the feeling the characters express. This facilitates awareness of how African Americans feel being judged by their appearance, and we can begin to understand their situation.



The incidents of police brutality profoundly alter the protagonist's relationship with the society surrounding them. In Thomas' novel Starr has completely separated her two opposing worlds to live a seemingly normal life, trying not to experience discrimination. After her traumatic experience with law enforcement, it becomes increasingly harder for her to keep her worlds separate. She starts to associate her peers at school with the officer because of their whiteness. Through processing her internal conflict, she realizes that what is actually important is people's values and actions and not their appearance. As she realizes, she finds purpose in continuing fighting for justice. In Stone's novel, Justyce comes to a similar realization after his journey toward finding an identity. He struggles to understand the prejudice the officer expresses. He thought he was exempt from that kind of profiling based on being an upright citizen and a good student. After the incident, Justyce has an increasing feeling of despair, and he tries to reflect on what Dr. King would do to overcome his situation. Whereas he strives for a better future, he meets adversity from members of his former neighborhood and peers from his school simultaneously. Here, Stone criticizes society's majority and minorities for working against making a change. Eventually, Justyce accepts that racialization is and will be a part of society, and he has to stay true to his beliefs to make a difference. Following the protagonists' development, the reader gradually becomes more informed about how they can prevent discrimination.

Learning about situations like the ones analyzed throughout chapters 2 and 3 would be useful for facilitating intercultural learning. As noted, intercultural competence is a complex skill where many components work together to produce an outcome. Understanding how to communicate appropriately across cultural boundaries has a lot to do with our ability to recognize stereotypes and notions that discriminate. Through reading Thomas's and Stone's novels, these abilities can be facilitated directly by discussing and reflecting on various scenes where this is portrayed. Reflecting on "the talk" African Americans have with their children, and police brutality could function as an eye-opener to understanding how it is like to walk in their shoes. Through reading, we directly tap into these perspectives through the eyes of the narrator. The narrator in these novels voices the perspectives of oppressed groups of people that see the world a bit differently. This opens up for readers to become more aware of their own position and privileges. Enhancing our intercultural competence through indirectly experiencing the world from someone else's perspective will therefore help prevent stereotypes that further generalize groups of people.

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