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## **Improving Metacognition Through Utilizing Disability Literature**

A thesis focusing on the lack of invisible disability representation in literature, and why schools should utilize books such as Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* in the classroom.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to showcase how one can incorporate disability representation in literature in the classroom by teaching Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*. These novels should be utilised in schools to have disability literature represented whilst simultaneously improving pupils' metacognition. This thesis has analysed and reflected upon the lack of a diagnosis in both novels and how this impacts the story as well as the reader. Whilst examining the novels, I have highlighted how disability representation can vary from one another as the novels portray disability differently. The main focus of this thesis is to showcase how these novels have been interpreted in different ways because of their portrayal of disability. Since they were published during various time periods, it varied how much they were accepted. This thesis wishes to underline the importance of utilising disability literature in the classroom as it can strengthen the pupils' metacognition by reading literature that can differ from themselves, as well as reading literature they can relate to.



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# 1 Introduction

Visible disability representation in literature started in the 1940s. Still, it was not until the 1970s that it became common to include invisible disabilities in literature in a stereotypical sense where the characters have traits that are seen as a stereotype of the disability (Harris & Baskin). Growth in the literature about mental disabilities has emerged, and people have started to discuss representation's impact on young adults (Leininger et al.). However, cognitive, and invisible disabilities have not been discussed to the same extent for the same duration. In the past, invisible disabilities such as Asperger's and autism were not included when talking about disabilities. Cognitive disabilities have become a topic of interest for certain people, leading to more research and representation for several reasons (Loftis 4).

Several age groups could benefit from reading literary texts that include characters with both visible and cognitive disabilities. Having disability representation in the classroom could impact the pupils' knowledge and views on people with disabilities, which could further impact how they act towards people who differ from themselves (Jensen et al.). The Norwegian core curriculum includes a section that focuses on including everyone when teaching, which is why it is of the utmost importance to have a wide variety of literature that includes several characteristics in the different characters. It is mentioned in the Norwegian core curriculum that all people are to be treated equally. In addition, there are several sections devoted to strengthening the pupil's ability to understand that others might not have the same thoughts, reactions, and experiences that they have (Kunnskapsdepartementet).

Mark Haddon's novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, and Daniel Keyes' novel, *Flowers for Algernon*, have main characters that possess several stereotypical traits of a neurodiverse person and/or character. The two books are written during two separate periods, which is why the stigma surrounding neurodiverse people is portrayed differently. Haddon's and Keyes' novels have received numerous critical articles and papers with positive and negative feedback for the books. This paper focuses on the importance of cognitive disability representation in the classroom and how it can strengthen the pupils' metacognition. I will argue that Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* or Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* should be utilised in upper secondary school.

## 1.1 Structure & Thesis Statement

Throughout the first chapter of my master's thesis, different terminology will be examined regarding invisible disability representation. The history of disability literature in the classroom will be compared to the number of pupils with disabilities. It has been seen that teachers do not utilise enough disability literature compared to how many pupils with disabilities they have in the classroom as 13% of pupils have disabilities, but only 6% of literature used in the classroom have characters with disabilities (Leininger et al 8.). The first chapter is going to include a short synopsis of Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* so I can discuss them in later chapters.

In the first chapter, I have included several literary theorists that focus on disability theory, but some have mainly concentrated on visible disabilities. Davis and Garland-Thomson have made several claims regarding disability literature and how disability is represented and presented in society. Lennard J. Davis discusses how disability is often shown in the literature as a disease and is, therefore, something that must be fixed (Davis 49). Garland-Thomson agrees with this notion, as she has also explored how some disabled characters require a cure to be viewed as normal. In addition, she has examined authors have utilised elements from the science-fiction genre when presenting characters with disabilities, such as in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Garland-Thomson 9). Sonya Freeman Loftis has discussed the representation and presentation of invisible disabilities in literature and examines the relevance of various literary works (Loftis). Furthermore, I shall analyse how metacognition is a part of the Norwegian core curriculum and what this word entitles. The importance of strengthening the pupil's metacognition shall be discussed concerning my chosen literary works (Kunnskapsdepartementet).

In the forthcoming chapters, Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* published in 1959 and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* published in 2003 will be discussed and analysed. An interesting aspect of the chosen novels is that neither one of the main characters have a formal diagnosis. As the books were published at different times, the portrayal of cognitive disability varies in the two stories. Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* explores neurodiversity without stating that the main character is neurodiverse.

In Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*, emotional intelligence and being intellectual are divided into two separate parts, where one does not mean that the other is included. Whilst Charlie begins to develop metacognition, he becomes very realistic and aware of all potential outcomes of the experiment. He even sees flaws within the experiment that drives him to insanity (Keyes). How metacognition affects Charlie is going to be a point of discussion throughout this section, where I have gathered important information when reading the novel.

Why these novels should be utilised in schools is a topic of discussion in the second to the last chapter, as well as how one could potentially use the books in upper secondary school. Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* can improve the pupils' metacognition by presenting characters who might differ from themselves. Normalising disabilities can remove the alienating factor that can sometimes occur when reading about people with disabilities (Garland-Thomson 9). After discussing why and how the novels can be utilised in the classroom, I am going to have a concluding chapter that summarises my thoughts and findings throughout this process. In this chapter, I will present my final opinions and remarks regarding invisible disability representation in literature and why it should be utilised in the Norwegian classroom.

There are several questions that I intend to answer throughout this master's thesis.

1. How is cognitive disability presented in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*?
2. Why is it essential to utilise disability literature to pupils in upper secondary school?
3. How has Christopher's sense of self been impacted by having access to literature with characters on the neurodiverse spectrum?
4. How can Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* or Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* improve pupils' metacognition in upper secondary school?

## 1.2 Synopsis of the chosen novels

### 1.2.1 Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

The novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon follows Christopher John Francis Boone, a fifteen-year-old boy. Siobhan, Christopher's teacher, has recommended that he try to write a book, and he decides to write a murder mystery novel as he enjoys them (Haddon). He explains that he likes murder mystery novels as Christopher writes, "I do not like proper novels." (Haddon 5). He is rather fond of Sherlock Holmes and his detective stories, which is one of the reasons why he chose to write a murder-mystery novel. Christopher further explains to the reader that he has chosen to write a murder mystery novel about a situation that has occurred, the murder of his neighbour's dog, Wellington (Haddon).

Whilst reading the novel, it becomes clear that Christopher has a cognitive disability, and one could argue that he is on the autism spectrum. He makes different decisions throughout the text, and the reader gets to follow his train of thought and therefore gets an understanding of what he is thinking at certain times. The reader understands why he makes certain decisions. However, one might find some of his choices peculiar if one interacts with Christopher face-to-face. Early in the novel, the reader is told that Christopher's mother died a few years ago, and he is currently living alone with his father (Haddon). When Christopher is doing detective work to find out who killed Wellington, his father tries to stop him by saying, "[...] keep your nose out of other people's business", but this does not stop Christopher as he then finds other ways to do his detective work (Haddon 63).

Towards the novel's end, it is revealed that Christopher's mother is still alive, but she moved away with Mr Shears, with whom she had an affair. The reader learns that Mrs Shears moved in with Christopher and his father after the matter was public, and Christopher's father confesses that he killed Wellington in hopes that Mrs Shears would move back in with them. When Christopher finds out that his father has lied to him, he gets scared and runs away by himself to London to be with his mother, and when arriving there, he finds his mother living with Mr Shears. After arriving in London, he decides that he wants to return home to his father because he must take his A level in mathematics, and he gets an A on the test (Haddon).

### 1.2.2 Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*

In *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes, the reader follows thirty-two-year-old Charlie undergoing an experiment to make him smarter. The experiment contains a surgery that has only been tested on animals and successfully on a mouse named Algernon, making Charlie the first human test subject. The novel is structured with progress reports from Charlie where he writes about the experiment, thoughts he might have and how he is reacting to it (Keyes). The reader becomes aware of Charlie's results through writing his progress reports as his grammar improves immensely. During the experiment, Charlie's vocabulary and grammar grow exponentially, and he begins to remember critical past events. The experiment could not improve his social intelligence, so he struggles to build and maintain new relationships (Keyes).

You're feeling sorry for yourself. What did you expect? This experiment was calculated to raise your intelligence, not to make you popular. We had no control over what happened in your personality, and you've developed from a likeable, retarded young man into an arrogant, self-centred, antisocial bastard (Keyes 172)

In the quote above, Professor Nemur argues with Charlie about his intellect and personality progress. He states that Charlie was likeable when he was "a retarded young man", and he thinks he has become an unlikeable person (Keyes 172). It is apparent that the researchers were fonder of Charlie when he was compliant and did not ask any questions regarding the experiment, but they did not like when Charlie started questioning them. At the start of the experiment, Professor Nemur said that he was optimistic that nothing would go wrong with the investigation (Keyes 56). Whilst there are several characters in the novel that do not care for Charlie, the reader is presented with Alice who appears to like Charlie for him. She becomes the only person that views Charlie regardless of his neurodivergence.

Whilst Charlie became brighter, and he became aware of the flaws in the experiment. He discovered that the researchers were utilising the wrong model for their expectations, which resulted in Algernon's death. When finding his fate, Charlie begins asking the researchers questions regarding what would happen to him when the experiment's benefits wear off and their plans for him. After a discussion with Professor Nemur, Charlie learns he will be sent to Warren State Home and Training School, a place for disabled people (Keyes 156). After visiting the Warren State Home and Training School, and after Algernon has died, Charlie writes, "For the first time, I'm afraid of the future" (Keyes 180).

### 1.2.3 Comparison

Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* are novels that both have main characters that are on the neurodiverse spectrum. However, the novels portray the other characters differently and separate ways of displaying the main character's diagnosis. Whilst Charlie in *Flowers for Algernon* is heavily influenced by the conversion narrative, however, the possibility of a cure is not mentioned in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The difference in neurodiverse representation and presentation in the two novels is going to be discussed in this section of my master's thesis.

Sonya Freeman Loftis analyses the autistic representation in both Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Loftis). Neither one of the main characters is given a diagnosis in the novels, but it is speculated that both of them are neurodiverse. The novel presents the characters with various stereotypical traits, which has led people to believe that Christopher has autism or Asperger's, and that Charlie has a mental disorder called phenylketonuria (Loftis). Since the reader is never presented with a formal diagnosis, these accusations can only be made by looking at the stereotypical traits of the main characters.

At the novel's beginning, Charlie represents the typical stereotypes for cognitive disability. At the same time, at the end of the story, he is representative of the stereotypical traits of a genius autistic character (Loftis 71). However, Loftis states that when the reader is first presented with Charlie, he challenges the stereotypes of disabled people being lazy. As Charlie is writing his progress reports, it showcases how poor his grammar is, and it allows the reader to read how Charlie thinks people act around him (Loftis 72). Christopher embodies many stereotypes regarding autism, even though the reader does not get presented with an autism diagnosis. Haddon presents the different stereotypical traits in a unique way where it is Christopher's weakness and strength through utilising a first-person narrative (Loftis 125). Freeman states that Christopher represents a more significant societal issue, where his autistic tendencies are shown through the broken pieces of a postmodern family (Loftis 129).

Keyes and Haddon portray irony in their novels by making the reader aware of various situations that are happening in the novel whilst simultaneously presenting the reader with the main characters' thought processes on the situation. Thus, showing the reader how they are interpreting and misinterpreting certain situations. This creates an ironic tension throughout the novels as the reader understands the irony of the different situations, but the characters are unable to comprehend the irony. The two main characters, Charlie and Christopher differ in many ways, but they are also similar in some aspects throughout the novels. When presented with a Rorschach test, it becomes apparent that Charlie has a literal viewpoint as he states, "I told them I didnt spill the ink on them and I couldnt see anything in the ink." (Keyes 3). Similarly, Christopher writes about how he has a literal viewpoint because he sees everything when he is looking. He provides an example:

[...] The information in their heads is really simple. For example, if they are in the countryside [...] they would stop noticing anything because they would be thinking something else like, "Oh, it is very beautiful here," [...] But if I am standing in a field in the countryside I notice everything (Haddon 174-175).

In the quote above, the reader becomes aware of his literal viewpoint of the world and how Christopher might experience things differently than the reader would. When looking at different things, Christopher sees an actual scene instead of viewing the shortcuts that people have taught themselves to forget (Blackford 293). He perceives the details of his surrounding that others might not. Therefore, he embodies the characteristics of an artist in a sense as he notices the connections between the objects instead of viewing everything as one picture (Blackford 293).

Both *Flowers for Algernon* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* follow the pattern of a mother that is longed for. However, both mothers turn out to be human beings capable of failure that are replaced by kind-hearted teachers who are more capable of caring for their sons (Blackford 300). For example, when Christopher's mother finds out the truth she cries out and tries to touch Christopher when they meet again. This is significant because it shows how the mother needs connection, whilst Christopher becomes alienated and compares his mother's crying to an animal that he has viewed on a nature program (Blackford 300).

Charlie's mother is first referred to in *Flowers for Algernon* when Charlie is remembering that she argues with the principal saying "He's normal! He's normal! He'll grow up like other people. [...] He'll be *somebody*." (Keyes 50). However, as Charlie begins to remember and reflect on other happenings in his life, he remembers that his mother wanted to make him normal by going to various doctors to fix him when saying "He's going to be normal, whatever we have to do, whatever it costs" (Keyes 94). Charlie's mother has therefore defined what she views as normal and categorised her son as abnormal and someone that needs to be changed. It is apparent that both Christopher and Charlie have mothers to whom they wish to feel attached, but it becomes clear throughout the novels that the mothers are not able of caring for them in a capable manner.

In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Christopher fantasises about a world where there are only people like him left in the world. He states that it is his favourite dream where "nearly everyone on the earth is dead, because they have caught a virus" and "Eventually there is no one left in the world except people who don't look at other people's faces [...] and these people are special people like me" (Haddon 242-243). This is significant because he fantasizes about isolation and the possibility of the world changing. Simultaneously, when Charlie is touring the Warren Home, he is confronted with the disabled community that he will once again be a part of. Charlie wants flowers to be put on Algernon's grave, and similarly, Christopher wishes for his pet rat, Toby, to be buried in the garden (Blackford 301). This is symbolic because it shows a connection that surpasses human connection and highlights the main character's relationship with the animals mentioned.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework**

There are many literary theorists that comment upon the presentation and representation of disability in literature. I have chosen to mainly focus on Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Lennard J. Davis, Mark Osteen and Judith Fetterley's theories and comments on the representation of disability in literature. The theories presented in this section will be commented on further in the later chapters in regard to Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The various characters in the novels are going to be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework, as well as the depiction of disability in the novels.



*Extraordinary Bodies* by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson was published in 1997, and it is a theoretical book that discusses how disability is represented in culture, literature, and everyday reality. She states that she wishes to challenge the view on disability that is apparent today throughout the text (Garland-Thomson 6). Characters with disabilities in literature often become based on the most-known stereotypes. They are often inaccurate to the reality of a person with either a physical or cognitive disability. The reader is typically presented with a character with a few common personality traits meant to tell the reader that the character is disabled, and these traits become their entire personality. Therefore, the relationship between the reader and the character often becomes forced to a certain extent as the character is their disability. The author rarely presents any other relevant information about the character (Garland-Thomson 11). This idea will be commented on in relation to Charlie in *Flowers for Algernon* as the reader is introduced to him because of his disability, and we learn little to no other relevant information. As a result of the lack of disability literature, disabilities are often misrepresented and can take away from people's own experiences with others or with their own disabilities (Garland-Thomson 10).

Garland-Thomson explains that disability representation in literature has often utilised science fiction, where the characters are usually alienated (Garland-Thomson 9). One can argue that the science fiction genre was often used to write and talk about disability, as it was viewed as fiction and therefore did not reflect reality. Disability has been a topic that was found to be quite taboo, which is why there is hardly any literature that has included any characters with disabilities. Characters with disabilities often had a deeper underlying meaning. The reader is usually presented with a point in the story where they were transformed to either have a disability that benefited them or were cured. This idea contributes to my thesis as Charlie in *Flowers for Algernon* undergoes an experiment to become smarter, and thus getting rid of his disability (Davis 49).

Science fiction has been a typical genre to utilise when publishing literary texts that discuss uncommon and unusual topics, such as homosexuality, transsexuality, and otherness (Leitch 2065). In a research article published in 2010, it becomes apparent that science fiction was heavily utilised to write about uncommon topics such as disabilities. While researching literary works with characters with disabilities, they saw that most of the texts included a cure for the disabilities (Leininger et al. 15). Therefore, several authors published science-fiction novels that included important topics as they were not socially accepted to be writing about (Leitch 2065).

When non-disabled people see someone with a disability, they often act pitifully as if they are in a worse position than themselves. This is often a result of a lack of knowledge from the nondisabled person, who is unsure of how to act toward a person with a disability (Garland-Thomson 12). The characters in Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* both have cognitive disabilities. Therefore, their disabilities are not visible to the other characters in the novels. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson states:

[...] stigma theory reminds us that the problems we confront are not disability, ethnicity, race, class, homosexuality, or gender. They are instead the inequalities, negative attitudes, misrepresentations, and institutional practices that result from the process of stigmatisation (Garland-Thomson 32).

In the quote above, Garland-Thomson states that the stigma surrounding disabilities does not originate from the disabilities themselves. They are derived from the stigma society has surrounded disabilities with. As a result of the lack of correct representation of disability in mainstream media and society, a stigma has been created, resulting in a lack of knowledge about disabilities. Therefore, people might have negative attitudes towards people with disabilities (Garland-Thomson 32). She further discusses how "special" education can maintain a divide between neurotypical and neurodiverse people and alienate people with disabilities. Society continues to stigmatise disabilities by dividing pupils into different classes or schools depending on their neurotypicality (Garland-Thomson 15).

Lennard J. Davis published *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* in 1995, and the book discusses several aspects of disability in society and literature. One of Davis' main points is that disability only becomes visible when compared with the concept of normalcy. Throughout his book, he discusses how the problem is not the disabled person, but the problem is often the constructed idea of normal (Davis 23). He includes several arguments and statements that can challenge the reader's perception of disability and abnormality. By doing so, the reader can move on to challenge their perception of the terminologies in both literary works and everyday life. Lennard J. Davis states that:

Only when disability is made visible as a compulsory term in a hegemonic process, only when the binary is exposed and the continuum acknowledged, only when the body is seen apart from its existence as an object of production or consumption - only then will normalcy cease being a term of enforcement in a somatic judicial system (Davis 157).

In the quote above, Davis states how one can only view something as abnormal if one has a clear vision of what normal is. Therefore, one can ask who chooses what is seen, thus determining what is abnormal. One could argue that Davis implies that society has decided what is viewed as usual or binary, which further leads to the exclusion of the different. Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* explore this notion as the authors never tell the reader verbatim that the main characters are neurodiverse (Haddon). The reader is presented with the main character's thoughts throughout the novel, implying that they are neurodiverse, thus challenging the readers' view on what normality is.

Davis further discusses how disabilities only become apparent to neurotypical people through either function or appearance (Davis 11). He asks who chooses when someone is viewed as neurodiverse and questions if he should be considered disabled if he cannot do a mathematical equation. Furthermore, he states that neurotypical people often react with either pity or disgust when interacting with a neurodiverse person. The way neurotypical people react when confronted with a neurodiverse person could result from insecurity as they fear how people would treat them if they were disabled (Davis 141). In Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Christopher meets with many different people that react and act differently towards him as some are aware of his neurodiversity, and some are not. Davis' theory can be analysed in relation to Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* as there are several characters that view Charlie as abnormal, which indicates that they have defined what they view as normal. Davis discusses how society is often viewed as the norm, where disabled people can be categorised as damaged, whereas "normal" people are viewed as undamaged (Davis 14).

In Mark Osteen's *Autism and Representation*, published in 2008, he discusses the conversion narrative that is often seen in literary texts with autistic characters (Osteen 51). He states that "Autism is widely understood as a disorder of selfhood in which persons fail by virtue of their condition to fulfil their birthright of developing, disclosing and searching for an individual identify" (Osteen 51). This notion builds upon Davis' theory that people can only view a person as flawed and different if one has defined what an average person is (Davis 157). This idea is going to be further discussed in the upcoming chapters in relation to Keyes' and Haddon's novel as the reader can see how the different characters in the novel act and react towards the main characters.

Osteen discusses how empathy and pity can be present in literature with neurodiverse characters, as the other characters feel pity for them as they are different from themselves. In some literary works, the reader can also feel empathy for characters that are on the neurodiverse spectrum as they are aware of both the character's perception of the situation as well as how the neurotypical characters perceive it (Osteen 279). He discusses how the reader might view the neurodiverse character as normal as we are presented with their thought processes and how it can impact our view of the neurotypical characters in literature (Osteen 279). In Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, the reader is presented with the main characters' thought processes, thus impacting their view of the character.

Sonya Freeman Loftis discusses autism and fiction in her book *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum* published in 2015. She examines the interrelationship of autistic representation in autistic stereotypes, autistic culture, and politics with identifying disabilities (Loftis 2). In the first chapter, she explains that representation in the media that is consumed is significant as it affects how people view people with autism and how they think about their values. Literature with autistic characters can accurately depict how a person with autism acts and reacts to specific scenarios. This can further improve one's view on people that might differ from themselves (Loftis 2). In recent years, cognitive disabilities have been discussed to a more significant extent and Loftis discusses how she thinks it results from mental disabilities being portrayed in an alienated manner (Loftis 4).

Judith Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* was published in 1978 and mentioned the concept of a resistant reader. Fetterley is not a disability theorist, but I have chosen to refer to her work as it is relevant in relation to strengthening our metacognition. The concept refers to when a reader addresses a text with a critical perspective instead of believing the ideas and assumptions that are presented in the text. A resistant reader is able to approach a text by challenging different parts of it, such as ideologies and perspectives, and questioning the text's various assumptions. The main goal of resistant reading is to reveal the true meanings and speculations within a text and to uncover the different ways it challenges and reflects cultural, political, and social ideologies. It is important for pupils to become resistant readers so that they can become aware of their own presumptions and biases that affect their worldview and help them develop a more critical and nuanced understanding.

## **1.4 Background**

### **1.4.1 The Norwegian Core Curriculum & Metacognition**

The Norwegian core curriculum includes several topics that should be a part of the pupils' learning process and different interdisciplinary issues that must be included in the subjects. It states that everyone should be treated equally regardless of their differences, which means that the pupils must acknowledge each other even if they differ from one another (Kunnskapsdepartementet). This competence aim can be worked with in various ways, through literature or other activities that the teacher might arrange. If one chooses to utilise literature to work with the competence aim, there is a variety of literature one could choose. As a teacher, one would have to choose one primary topic for discussion and representation, such as mental health or disabilities (Kunnskapsdepartementet). The core curriculum states that:

Utterances that are hateful and show a lack of respect must not be tolerated in school. The pupils must be trained to act respectfully and develop an awareness of their own attitudes. [...] All pupils must learn to act responsibly in all contexts in and outside school (Kunnskapsdepartementet)

As seen in the quote above, it is stated in the Norwegian core curriculum that pupils must be able to have an understanding of other people's thoughts, feelings, and experiences. In addition, the core curriculum mentions how important it is for pupils to have an awareness of their own thoughts and attitudes towards different topics (Kunnskapsdepartementet). Pupils must be respectful towards others as it is an essential aspect of life. One has to be respectful towards people that differ from oneself and know that there are people that are different from oneself. The core curriculum further discusses how all humans shall be treated equally regardless of our differences and that no one should be discriminated against (Kunnskapsdepartementet).

In recent years, novels have started discussing several complex topics that might have been considered taboo earlier. This can be seen in literary works such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky and *It's Kind of a Funny Story* by Ned Vizzini. Authors have started discussing complex topics and including main characters who have difficulties and portraying them to the reader (Carlsen et al. 81). This can be beneficial for people who might relate to the main characters, and it can also be helpful for people who do not relate to them. Pupils who relate to the characters can feel seen, and pupils who do not relate to the characters can better understand others and further their perspective on people different from themselves (Kunnskapsdepartementet).

Christian Carlsen, Magne Dypedahl and Sarah H. Iversen state in *Teaching and Learning English* published in 2020, that they define metacognition as “*Metacognition* can be described as knowledge and understanding of one's own thinking and learning” (Carlsen et al. 88). They also state that “Metacognition [...] refers to their ability to use strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning” (Carlsen et al. 110). The pupils should be able to read a text with characters with different worldviews and issues than themselves (Carlsen et al. 88). Whilst reading literature, the pupils should be able to understand why the characters might act differently than they would. This paper will discuss metacognition concerning Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*.

Metacognition can be described as the ability to understand one's own thought process and how one thinks and learns best. It is often viewed as a term for intercultural competence, as one must know how one thinks and acts to comment on and understand how a person could be acting differently from oneself (Carlsen et al. 88). For pupils in upper secondary school, these novels could challenge their metacognition as they might have to focus on topics that differ from what they view as important and relevant (Skaftun and Michelsen 175). Working with novels that challenge the pupil's worldviews can strengthen their knowledge about others and their worldviews. Everyone should be aware that others might not interpret situations the same way as they would, and by being knowledgeable, one gets a greater understanding of how and why people do certain things (Carlsen et al. 81).

In "Metacognition Needed: Teaching Middle and High School Students to Develop Strategic Learning Skills" published in 2010, Nancy Joseph states that "[...] students can be taught to reflect on their own learning processes while they complete learning tasks. It is evident that metacognitive awareness creates self-regulated learning, allowing students to develop greater intellectual maturity" (Joseph 100). Pupils should have an awareness of their own metacognition as it can evolve into critical thinking and other important skills that they could benefit from in other subjects and in life (Joseph 100). Nancy Joseph writes about the importance of metacognition in middle school and high school as it is an evident tool when pupils develop learning and life skills. Metacognition is an important tool to utilise in schools, and it can be useful for the pupils to become resistant readers whilst simultaneously strengthening their metacognition.

#### **1.4.2 Young Adult Literature**

Young adult literature has become a widespread genre, and many authors are publishing young adult literature. As there is numerous young adult literature, teachers must choose through various literary works to find the best choice for their class. The selected novels can be classified as young adult literature, where the novels are targeted towards youth. The main characters in Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* are of different ages. Keyes' main character, Charlie, is a thirty-two-year-old man (Keyes 1), whereas Haddon's main character is fifteen-year-old Christopher (Haddon 1).

In young adult literature, the reader is often presented with a relatable and likeable main character. The reader typically follows the main character through a specific life event and is presented with their thoughts and their actions throughout the novel. As mentioned prior, it has become more normalised to include main characters who struggle with mental health or are disabled. However, books about mentally stable, cis neurotypical people and their struggles during high school are still the norm and is mainly seen in the classroom. Still, certain novels can be considered exceptions, such as the novels that will be discussed throughout this paper (Leininger et al.). The main characters represented in the two novels have quite distinctive and separate personalities, and pupils might relate to them at different points throughout the novels. Even though Charlie is a thirty-two-year-old man, he has a very young personality and resembles a child in many ways (Keyes). It becomes clear throughout the story that Charlie is not cognitively a thirty-two-year-old man through his writing and thought process. One could therefore categorise Keyes' and Haddon's novels as young adult literature, and they will be defined and referred to as such throughout this paper.

Including young adult literature is a great attempt to get the pupils to enjoy reading literature, and one can hope they will continue reading outside the classroom (Carlsen et al. 80). As a teacher, one should mainly include literature that can benefit the pupils, and literature that some pupils can enjoy. If working with disability representation in literature, Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* could be presented, and then the pupils could choose which one they want to read. It can be difficult to find literature that all pupils will enjoy, but one could give the pupils a variety of books to choose from, where the topic of discussion is similar in all stories (Carlsen et al. 81).

### **1.4.3 Disability Representation in the Classroom**

Several researchers have studied disability representation in the classroom and collected data on how often disabilities are represented in the classroom and in the chosen literature. They studied how disability was represented and presented in Newbery books. Newbery books are novels that have won an award for being one of the most brilliant children's books published in the previous year. A committee of the association chooses the books for library service to children, where they read as many relevant novels as they can and suggest them to other members of the committee (American Library Association).



Leininger, Prater, Taylor and Heath researched in 2010 how disabilities were portrayed in books and how many Newbery books had characters with disabilities in them (Leininger et al.). They commented that 13% of American pupils have a disability. Still, only 6% of the 131 literary works they looked at contained people with disabilities (Leininger et al. 8). How disability is portrayed in literary works varies as some texts have a realistic approach to disability whilst others have stereotypical characters that not many pupils with disabilities can relate to. Reading texts that stereotype disabilities can create a more significant gap between the neurotypical and neurodiverse as the people with disabilities do not see themselves adequately represented, and the neurotypical get a false understanding of disabilities (Leininger et al. 5). The disabilities commonly represented in literary works in schools were not accurate to the disabilities typically present in the classroom. The characters with disabilities were only white people of school age, and the researchers saw a vast underrepresentation of people of colour with disabilities (Leininger et al. 14). Another thing to note is that the character with a disability was more often, the supporting character rather than the main character. It can be harmful to people to see characters that resemble themselves always be the supporting character and rarely see themselves accurately represented in novels as the main focus of the novel.

When researching how disability is portrayed in the disability literature that is utilised in school, Leininger et al found that the characters with disabilities often had a cure for their disability. There should not be a need to cure the characters (Leininger et al. 15). The curing disabilities trope could result from a lack of representation and knowledge of disabilities, making it seem alienated and something that must be fixed. The ability to cure a disability can be tied together with the use of the science fiction genre when writing about complex topics. Science-fiction is a genre that has been utilised as a tool for writers to approach taboo issues, such as homosexuality and disability (Leitch 2065). The representation of a cure for disability can strengthen the stereotype and alienation of people with disabilities as they can be viewed as a person who has something that needs to be treated or cured.

## **1.5 Concluding Remarks**

In the first chapter, I have presented which theoretical framework I will be discussing in relation to my chosen novels, *Flowers for Algernon*, and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Theorists such as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Lennard J. Davis, Mark Osteen, and Sonya Loftis Freeman are going to be discussed in connection to Keyes' and Haddon's novels. I have also chosen to include Judith Fetterley's concept of resistant readers, and argument for why it is essential for pupils to be resistant readers in order to strengthen their metacognition. It is important to have cognitive disability representation in the classroom, and I have presented two novels that will give representation in the classroom whilst strengthening the pupil's metacognition.

## **2 *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon**

Mark Haddon is a sixty-year-old author British author from Northampton who has published a variety of literary works, such as graphic novels, children's novels, drama, and various fiction (Carnegie). Whilst Haddon has not specified whether or not he is neurodiverse himself, his novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* has become a critical novel to utilise for teaching about neurodiversity (Haddon). Even though Haddon has stated that he does not wish for the words autism or Asperger's to be primarily associated with the novel, he even states on his website:

curious incident is not a book about asperger's. [...] indeed he never uses the words 'asperger's' or 'autism' (i slightly regret the fact that the word asperger's was used on the cover). if anything it's a novel about difference, about being an outsider, about seeing the world in a suprising and revealing way. it's as much a novel about us as it is about christopher (Haddon).

In the quote above, it becomes clear that Mark Haddon did not wish for Christopher to be labelled as having autism or Asperger's and therefore chose mainly not to include an actual diagnosis or label. He further goes on to discuss how giving Christopher a label would not be of any help to the reader. Haddon argues that literature is about questioning and defying labels, and he wanted the novel to showcase how you should treat people regardless of any labels or diagnoses they may have (Haddon). It shows how he wants to be a responsible advocate for difference without wanting to be a spokesperson for people on the spectrum. A relevant literary theory regarding this quote is Lennard J. Davis' theory that one can only label someone as disabled if one has labelled what is seen as abled. Haddon appears to emphasize that the norms surrounding a person determine what counts as abled or disabled.

Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* received a lot of praise when first published, where it was called "a little gem of a book that illuminates a subject currently rising in the public's consciousness: autism" (Schultheis). Haddon's novel has become a literary work that is utilised for teaching about cognitive disability, but in the last ten years, some people have criticised the depiction of autism in the novel. Sara Barrett has autism spectrum disorder and has published an article "I have autism and the lack of authentic autistic voices in books angers me", where she comments on the autistic representation in literature and the lack of authenticity (Barrett). She states that the novel "[...] feels like I'm

basically being told that no one will ever love me because of my autism. [...] I will always be a problem BECAUSE I HAVE AUTISM” (Barrett). It is apparent that the novel was needed to start a conversation about autism in literature in 2003, but it is starting to receive more criticism for the depiction of autism in later years as it might not be accurate for everyone.

When publishing the novel, Haddon made a conscious choice to publish it with two separate publishing companies so it would be marketed as both children’s fiction and adult fiction (Ciocia 323). It was originally planned to be viewed as children’s fantasy fiction, but it has had huge success in both children’s fiction and adult fiction (Ciocia 322). The language Haddon uses in the novel makes it an easy read for children, whilst there are several stories that can be read between the lines that could be intended for adults. The novel can be worked with and read differently when viewed as adult fiction. There are for example several parts of the novel that could be analysed in a philosophical manner, such as the deception and dishonesty of Christopher’s parents (Haddon).

After *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* was published it was praised in the media for having a different approach to literature about our differences. When it was first published, it did not receive a large amount of negative feedback as the novel was almost put on a pedestal for having a new and unique focal point. However, as the novel has been published for twenty years, it is beginning to accumulate some critiques over the years. One of the reoccurring feedbacks is the fact that Christopher does not have a formal diagnosis or label throughout the novel. Valente commented that Mark Haddon wanted to represent and present autism and Asperger’s without being representative of the diagnosis (Valente 41). The lack of diagnosis has been criticised for being a negative aspect of the novel, but there are also several readers that have viewed this as one of the positive traits of the novel.

One of the main goals of this thesis is to showcase how Mark Haddon’s novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* can be used in a classroom setting to strengthen the pupils' metacognition by reading literature with neurodiverse characters. The focus in this chapter is the main characters' lack of diagnosis, which could further be utilised as a learning tool in the classroom. Throughout the novel, the reader is introduced to several thought processes that could differ from their own, and therefore they have to reflect on both the similarities and differences between them and the characters. I believe that the author chose not to give Christopher a diagnosis so that readers would be confronted with their stereotypical views and prejudices.

Throughout this chapter, my own thoughts, and reflections on different parts of the novel are going to be a point of discussion, and different parts of the novel are going to be a point of discussion and different parts of the novel will be seen in the light of the theoretical framework presented earlier. I will look at the importance of having disability representation in literature in light of Christopher's access and fondness of reading Sherlock Holmes. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is going to be discussed in regards to Lennard J. Davis' theory that one can only comment on what is abnormal when one has defined normality (Davis 157). I will reflect on how Rosemarie Garland-Thomson theory that people with disabilities are often pitied by others, and how this can be seen in how Christopher is treated by different characters in the novel (Garland-Thomson 10). I will comment on Haddon's choice to utilise a first-person narrative as a tool to put the reader in an uncomfortable position. Whilst simultaneously commenting on the use of Sherlock Holmes as a character that makes Christopher feel seen.

## **2.1 The Lack of a Diagnosis**

Mark Haddon's novel explores the concept of neurodiversity without giving the main character a diagnosis. However, when reading Haddon's, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* it becomes clear that Christopher is a neurodiverse child as the author gives him several stereotypical traits of a child with either autism or Asperger's. By not diagnosing Christopher, it creates a topic of discussion of what a diagnosis would imply and if the reader would sympathise differently if it were for example, stated that he has autism. Lennard Davis discussed how the abnormal could only be viewed when one has clarified what is defined as normal, thus making the reader confront their idea of normality (Davis 157). Haddon's novel will therefore make people question their own beliefs and thoughts on normality, which would further make them confront themselves with what they view as abnormal.

Throughout the course of the novel, the reader is introduced to several characters, such as different people on the train, the police, and other children at Christopher's school. Since the novel is written in the first-person perspective, the reader is presented with Christopher's views on different situations. Christopher provides the reader with a list from the letters A to R with his behavioural problems, which can be compared to typical traits that a neurodiverse person could embody. Some of the behavioural problems that he mentions are:

- A. Not talking to people for a long time.
- B. Not eating or drinking anything for a long time
- C. Not liking being touched
- D. Screaming when I am angry or confused
- [...] F. Smashing things when I am angry or confused
- [...] K. Not noticing that people are angry with me
- L. Not smiling
- M. Saying things that other people think are rude (Haddon 59-60).

One can see the contrast between how certain people interact and react with Christopher. It showcases how people might respond differently towards him when they know about his cognitive disability. During his train journey to London, he stands next to the suitcases when someone says, “Come and look at this, Barry. They’ve got, like, a train elf. [...] Perhaps we should feed him some nuts” (Haddon 206). Garland-Thomson wrote about how others can view disabled people as pitiful, as they think disabled people have it worse than themselves (Garland-Thomson 12). I believe that this can be seen in Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* as the various people Christopher meets act different towards him if they are unaware of his neurodiversity.

The strangers that he meets on his travels are unaware of his neurodiversity, which results in them not feeling pity for Christopher nor feeling a need to be nicer to him. An example is when he loses his pet rat, Toby, in the underground in London and crawls on the floor to try to find him. Whilst crawling he encounters a man with diamonds on his socks, and Christopher writes about the man’s reaction to him looking for Toby. The man reacts with anger and does not understand why Christopher is crawling on the floor on the underground, which results in violence.

And the man with the diamond patterns on his socks grabbed hold of me and pulled me and I screamed, but he kept pulling me and he pulled me up onto the concrete and we fell over and I carried on screaming because he had hurt my shoulder. [...] And the man with the diamond patterns on his socks was standing next to me and he said, ‘What the fuck do you think you were playing at?’ (Haddon 224)

In the quote above, one can see how other people can interact with Christopher. I believe that Mark Haddon utilised the first-person narrative to showcase how the different people Christopher encounters act towards him. The man on the underground is unaware of his behavioural problems and therefore acts as if Christopher is a neurotypical person messing with him. Therefore, it becomes clear that the stranger acted with anger as he does not know Christopher or his behavioural problems, and therefore he does not feel obliged to act in pity nor act in a nicer manner. Christopher is used to being in an environment where people are aware of his struggles, thus knowing how to act and what to say when uncertainty arises. Whilst this creates tension with Garland-Thomson's theory, it shows the reader how the different characters act and react towards Christopher. This specific scene makes the reader experience pity towards Christopher as we know he does not mean to aggravate the man, but the reader might also experience understanding of the man's reaction.

Siobhan is Christopher's teacher, and she is responsible for encouraging him to write a novel. Throughout the novel, Christopher informs the reader of advice that Siobhan has given him, for example when Christopher states "Siobhan understands. When she tells me not to do something she tells me exactly what it is that I am not allowed to do. And I like this" (Haddon 39). She becomes the most stable adult figure that the reader is presented to, however, she is only his teacher thus only giving him advice on scholarly matters, for example adding foot notes to his novel. Their relationship becomes a direct contrast to his relationship with his parents and the other characters he meets on his journey to London. Whilst Siobhan cares for Christopher, they are not equals as she is his teacher. Therefore, there are no characters present in the novel that appears to respect Christopher as an equal.

One could argue that Christopher's father hides the reality of his mother leaving because of his neurodiversity and the uncertainty of how Christopher would react to the truth. When Christopher's father sees Christopher with the letters from his mother, he reacts by saying "I did it for your good, Christopher. Honestly I did. I never meant to lie. I just thought ... I just thought it was better if you didn't know ... that ... that ... I didn't mean to ... I was going to show them to you when you were older" (Haddon 143). He further explains that it was easier to lie in the beginning because he did not want to be reminded of what had actually happened, and once he had lied it was difficult to take it back (Haddon 144). When uncovering the truth, Christopher reacts poorly as a result of his father lying to him as opposed to having a negative reaction to the truth itself.

Christopher's father tells Christopher the truth about everything that has been left unanswered thus far in the novel. He admits to killing Wellington and tells the truth about his mother's affair with Mr Shears. Christopher is unsure if his father is telling a joke, but when he realises that he is telling the truth he writes "And then I knew that it wasn't a joke and I was really frightened [...] because I couldn't trust him [...] because he had told a lie about a big thing" (Haddon 152-153). The reader is uncertain if Christopher is referring to his mother's death, Wellington's murder, or both when stating that his father has lied about a big thing. Therefore, it becomes apparent that Christopher dislikes being lied to and feels unsafe in his father's presence as a result of him being dishonest.

Mark Haddon portrays how the different characters care for Christopher in various ways. He shows how everyone in the novel cares for Christopher to various degrees and how the reader presumably cares for him (Osteen 285). Christopher's character appears to receive empathy from the other characters in the novel, as well as the reader. I think that he even receives empathy for his own lack of empathy, as one feels for his lack of emotions since we all lack the ability to feel all of our emotions all the time (Osteen 285). Whilst reading the novel, it is unlikely that one sympathizes with the adult characters, but one might sympathize with Christopher. Feeling pity for the main character might increase the reader's participation in the novel. Davis wrote that people often feel pity towards people who differ from what is viewed as normal and therefore damaged (Davis 14). Therefore, the reader pities Christopher because they view him as less normal than they are, which is a result of the reader often having a superiority complex in relation to characters they view as damaged, thus strengthening their metacognition as it showcases their preconceptions (Davis 15).

Christopher appears to be aware of his diagnosis, as he thoroughly explains his thought process throughout the story. Even though the reader is not presented with a diagnosis, Christopher's identity becomes based on typical traits of an autistic person, such as his sensory perception and his ability to remember situations and symbols (Loftis 125). He mentions a scene where children from other schools used to call him and his pupils "*spaz* and *crip* and *mong*" (Haddon 56). Christopher then continues saying:

"[...] sometimes the children from the school down the road see us in the street when we're getting off the bus and they shout, 'Special Needs! Special Needs!'. [...] I am going to prove that I'm not stupid" (Haddon 56).



In the quote above, it is apparent that Christopher is attending a school with pupils that he refers to as “stupid people” (Haddon 56). It becomes clear that Christopher is neurodivergent as he attends a school with pupils that differ from the societal norm and are viewed as “different”. Haddon presents the different stereotypical characteristics in a unique way where it is Christopher’s weakness and strength (Loftis 125). In her analysis in *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*, Sonya Freeman Loftis states that Christopher represents a more significant societal issue, where his autistic tendencies are shown through the broken pieces of a postmodern family (Loftis 129).

Haddon’s choice to not specify that Christopher has a diagnosis could be utilised in schools where the pupils could further their metacognition as they would be confronted with their own values throughout the novel. Why and how the novel can be utilised in school is going to be presented, discussed, and reflected upon in the fourth chapter. It is essential for pupils to gain self-awareness of their own prejudices towards people that might differ from themselves. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of understanding the varieties of neurodivergent people and how they can vary from one another.

I think Haddon’s novel does an excellent job of portraying neurodiversity without it becoming the focal point of the novel. When not mentioning a diagnosis it creates uncertainty which creates room for reflection and discussion among people. Haddon has published a text that can create a more relaxed and normalised view of people with disabilities, and he shows how they are a part of society. Joseph Valente published a paper in 2021 called “The Disability Which is Not One: Autistic Intermittency in Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*”. Valente states that the novel has had a more significant impact on people than theoretical texts, where he says that the story is being taught to people who want to work in special education schools or classes (Valente 41). He criticises the portrayal of autism in the book, stating that Mark Haddon has an inconsistent autistic characterisation of Christopher (Valente 35).

To judge from Haddon’s push-pull commentary, he wants to represent Christopher as having autism without being representative of autism; or, to push the matter further, he intends Christopher to exemplify an autism oddly consistent with its normalised other, neurotypically – thus, an autism at odds with itself, an autism that is not one, and undecided-able autism (Valente 42-43)

In the quote above, Valente claims that Mark Haddon does not want to give Christopher a diagnosis, and he discusses some possibilities as to why (Valente 42). On the one hand, Haddon could have chosen to write Christopher so as not to portray autism in one way, as it differs for everyone. However, the traits that Christopher earlier describes as his behavioural problems, can be viewed as common traits of a person with autism. Therefore, it can be thought that Haddon wants to represent autism without being representative of autism (Valente 43). The lack of a diagnosis creates a more significant opportunity for readers to develop a relationship with Christopher. To a certain extent, the reader can relate to him (Muller 122).

Vivienne Muller has published “Constituting Christopher: Disability Theory and Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*” in 2006, and she agrees with the statements made by Garland-Thomson and Davis that people with disabilities can often be viewed as pitiful (Muller 118). She wrote about the negative feedback *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* has received and how some think it romanticises neurodiversity. Some have criticised how Haddon appears to have chosen stereotypical traits of an autistic person, which could build further on the stigma of cognitive disability (Muller 122). By not including a diagnosis it could be seen as both a negative and positive choice by the author. Whilst some argue that it can be harmful to portray stereotypes of people on the spectrum (Muller 122), others argue that it forces the readers to reflect on their own prejudices which could result in further growth and understanding (Valente 42).

In the first chapter, I raised the question “How has Christopher’s sense of self been impacted by having access to literature with characters on the neurodiverse spectrum?”. Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and he is widely known for his ability to solve difficult problems in a unique way. There are several discussions about whether Sherlock Holmes’ behaviour can be compared to a person with Asperger’s syndrome or high-functioning autism, but he is never given a diagnosis that the reader is aware of (Loftis). Christopher admires Sherlock Holmes and his ability to solve detective cases appears to have inspired him to feel that he can overcome his difficulties and solve his own difficult cases and problems.

I think Christopher's fondness for Holmes can be viewed as a representation of disability in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Both Christopher and Holmes are unique in their own ways, and they use their maximum potential when given a sense of purpose when for example solving a murder. One could hope that Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* might become as impactful for someone as Sherlock Holmes was for Christopher.

Christopher mentions Sherlock Holmes throughout the novel and refers to his favourite book, *The Hound of Baskerville* (Haddon 6). Sherlock Holmes is a character that is present in detective novels narrated by his roommate Dr. Watson. Holmes has been rumoured to be on the neurodiverse spectrum, and Sonya Freeman Loftis explores how his potential diagnosis has previously been overlooked (Loftis). Some argue that Sherlock Holmes was the beginning of neurodiverse detective characters in both literature, movies and tv series (Loftis). He shows a fondness for detective Sherlock Holmes, and chapter 107 is dedicated to writing about why he likes *The Hound of Baskerville* and why he likes Sherlock Holmes. When explaining why he is particularly fond of Sherlock Holmes, he states:

I like Sherlock Holmes and I think that if I were a proper detective he is the kind of detective I would be. He is very intelligent and he solves the mystery and he says *The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance every observes* [...]. And this is like me, too, because if I get really interested in something [...] I don't notice anything else [...]. (Haddon 92).

In the quote above, it becomes clear that Christopher both idolised and identified with Sherlock Holmes. He has been presented with a character who represents him in a fictional world and is, therefore, able to associate with Sherlock Holmes' thought processes throughout his murder mystery novels. Christopher having representation of someone with a similar mindset to himself has proven to have a great impact on his mentality on himself, as he does appear to feel as though he is any different from his neurotypical peers.

## 2.2 The Effects of the Language

Christopher explains that metaphors and idiomatic expressions do not make sense to him, and he does not understand why one would choose to use one. Therefore, the novel becomes easier for children to understand as he does not include sentences such as “you are the apple of my eye” which could be difficult for children to understand. A common stereotypical trait of people on the autism spectrum is having trouble comprehending metaphoric and figurative language (Kasiser & Mashal).

I think it should be called a lie because a pig is not like a day and people do not have skeletons in their cupboard. And when I try and make a picture of the phrase in my head it just confuses me because imagining an apple in someone’s eye doesn’t have anything to do with liking someone a lot and it makes you forget what the person was talking about (Haddon 20).

However, there are points in the novel where he utilises a simile when describing the policeman such as “looked as if there were two very small mice hiding in his nostrils” (Haddon 22). He states in his footnotes that he chooses to utilise figurative language when describing the policeman as it was an accurate description that makes sense to him because it actually looked like he had mice in his nostrils (Haddon 16).

He has previously mentioned that his novel will not include jokes as he does not understand them. Christopher prefers diagrams, maps, and algorithms as they are stable, whereas language is unstable because statements can have several meanings (Osteen 274). By eliminating the possibility of misunderstanding, he creates an environment where all potential readers can understand and feel understood. Thus, it gives insight into other people’s thought processes and therefore the readers might gain an understanding of how people can react and act differently from themselves.

The novel portrays irony in the sense that Christopher is unaware of it, but the reader can find themselves comprehending social cues that Christopher does not understand. As the novel is written in the first-person perspective, it can create tension between Christopher and the reader, as the reader comprehends the irony of the situation, whilst Christopher views it as fact. Shannon Wooden comments on the use of irony by stating:

[...] it also experiments with an unreliable narrator, or more accurately, one with limited narrative ability; presents a wide array of easily interpretable concrete details; builds suspense; and uses emotionally surprises to keep readers hooked (Wooden 3)

In the quote above, Wooden comments on Christopher's limitations when understanding various details presented in the novel. There is some irony present in the novel, but Christopher does not understand the irony present in the novel, which then creates even more irony. An example is when Christopher is on the train to London and encounters a policeman that tells him that there are toilets on the train and says "[...] But I'll be keeping an eye on you, understand", to which Christopher replies "'No', because I knew what *keeping an eye on someone* meant but he couldn't look at me when I was on the toilet" (Haddon 200). The reader understands that the policemen meant to keep an eye out in case he ran away, whereas Christopher thought he was going to look at him whilst on the toilet.

The language portrayed in the novel makes the reader reflect upon the difference between the literalness of language and the figurative aspect. Christopher explains that signs such as "Be quiet" does not specify how long one has to be quiet and where one has to be quiet. He further explains that signs that state "KEEP OF THE GRASS" is not specific about where one has to keep of the grass (Haddon 38). By making the reader aware of the different ways one can comprehend language, it can improve their metacognition by having to reflect on how other signs, sayings, and sentences can be interpreted by people. When presented with the reality that people can interpret situations and sentences differently, it can create a sense of awareness of the reader's own interpretations. They might think about how certain statements can have several meanings, thus making room for misunderstandings. By understanding how a misunderstanding can occur, one can improve the statement so that there is little room for misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Early in the novel, he specified that he does not lie, and he states that it affects him physically and emotionally.

[...] makes me feel shaky and scared, like I do when I'm standing on the top of a very tall building and there are thousands of houses and cars and people below me and my head is so full of all these things that I'm afraid that I'm going to forget to stand up straight and hang onto the rail and I'm going to fall over and be killed (Haddon 24).

When the reader is presented with the letters from Christopher's mother, there is a shift in the paradigm of the novel as the reader is introduced to complex adult emotions and one gets to experience Christopher's reaction to them (Osteen 281). The contrast between Christopher's tone when reading the letters and his struggle with understanding the emotions that are mentioned in them. When Christopher's mother learns that he was told that she was dead, and he did not in fact receive her letters nor the truth of her disappearance, she makes a noise that he relates to as "a loud wailing noise like an animal on a nature program on television" (Haddon 236). He explains that he feels uneasy and as if he stands at the top of a tall building, which is what he specified earlier as a result of lying (Haddon 24). I believe the author has created this connection to showcase how it is the lying that Christopher has trouble with, he is not upset because his mother left him but because his father has lied to him.

### **2.3 The "Social Autism"**

Whilst looking at the setting of the novel, it appears as if the society Christopher lives in is neurodiverse (Osteen 279). The members of society that the reader is introduced to appear to be unable to communicate with each other, thus creating both miscommunication and a lack of communication. As Haddon has written the novel in the first-person narrative, the reader is presented with Christopher's worldview, and therefore it becomes clear that his thought process makes more sense than the other characters we are introduced to. The reader is presented with minute details that give us an insight to Christopher's thought process, such as the chapters only being prime number because "[...] prime number are like life. They are very logical, but you could never work out the rules, even if you spent all your time thinking about them" (Haddon 15). In contrast, his father lied to him about his mother's death because he could not fathom her reason for leaving, resulting in Christopher being lied to for several years (Osteen 279).

Mark Haddon wrote this novel in a first-person narrative, where the reader follows Christopher. The novel would have been very different if we followed one of his parent's thought-processes, or Siobhan's, as the reader would then understand what they are thinking about certain situations. Furthermore, we would miss out on Christopher's thoughts and ideas, which would show the reader how others perceive him and his actions. Since the reader sees how Christopher views the other characters and reacts to different situations, the reader then becomes affected by his thought processes and understands why he acts and reacts a certain way.

The pupil's metacognition is further strengthened by confronting how they would typically view the characters and situations in the novel and comparing it to Christopher's reactions. The reader is presented with an estranged perspective where the characters that would typically be viewed as normal, appear to be the ones that make questionable choices throughout the novel. For example, at the beginning of the novel when a policeman touches Christopher's arm, he writes "I didn't like him touching me like this. And this is when I hit him" (Haddon 9). Thus, creating an idea that is opposite of what one reads typically about in stories, which makes the reader reflect and think about their own view on normality.

Osteen discusses the depiction of social isolation in Haddon's novel and how it is showcased that the neighbours have minimal contact with each other and that are particularly fond of interacting with each other (Osteen 279). The reader does not receive any further information about the neighbour's extended family and is therefore to believe that they do not have any extended family and live a secluded life. Furthermore, Christopher becomes a character that appears to make the most sense in the novel as the other actions cannot be explained whereas Christopher almost always has a reason for his actions (Osteen 280). When the truth about his mother has been revealed and he is planning what to do to feel safe, he creates a mental image (see Appendix 1) and he "imagined crossing out all the possibilities which were impossible [...] And it was like this. Which meant that I had to go to London to live with Mother." (Haddon 162-163). The reader can clearly see Christopher's logic and thought process in the diagrams he provides (see Appendix 2) and writes about when trying to find the best possible outcome to the situation he is in.

## **2.4 Concluding Remarks**

To summarize my second chapter, Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* portrays cognitive disability without mentioning a diagnosis. The reader becomes aware of the main character's neurodivergence by following his thought process throughout the novel. By utilising the first-person narrative, it showcases how Christopher experiences different situations, and it gives the reader an opportunity to view the situation through Christopher's point of view. Thus, making the reader understand Christopher's actions whilst also understanding why others might react in different ways towards him. The novel includes neurodivergent representation by showing Christopher's fascination with Sherlock Holmes, which underlines the importance of having access to disability literature. The novel does a marvellous job of portraying how people are never utterly foreign to one another and that we

are all connected differently. It becomes clear that we are unique and like each other in various ways and that we can share bonds in numerous manners. Humans are all dependent on others, and regardless of if one is neurotypical or neurodiverse, one needs help from others in various ways (Osteen 284).



### 3 Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*

Daniel Keyes was born in 1927 and died at the age of eighty-six years old in 2014. He was most known for *Flowers for Algernon*, which has been translated into twenty-seven different languages and has also been made into several movies (Shaw). He spent a few years in the U.S. Maritime Service as a ship purser and a pharmacist mate, but after losing a patient, he decided that he did not want to work in medicine (Shaw). In the 1950s, he started publishing his first stories under the pseudonym Kris Daniels, and *Flowers for Algernon* was originally published in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* as a short story in 1959, and the novel won the Hugo Award for Best Short Story in 1960 (Keyes 217).

Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* is a remarkable novel for many reasons which will be discussed in this chapter. Several aspects of the novel can be viewed as problematic, which is one of the fantastic elements to the novel. Pupils will be presented with an immoral representation of characters with disabilities, and they will strengthen their ability to critique literature and presentation and representation in literary works by making them resistant readers. It is believed that Charlie has a physical disorder called phenylketonuria, which can cause intellectual disability, mental health disorder and behavioural, emotional, and social problems, among other things (Mayo Clinic Staff). There is never mentioned a clear diagnosis in the novel, and similarly to Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, the reader is presented with stereotypical traits of a neurodiverse character whilst reading without being presented with an actual diagnosis (Keyes). The relevance of the lack of diagnosis in the novel is going to be a topic of discussion in the chapter, and how it impacts the reader.

*Flowers for Algernon* follows the pattern of many disability narratives in that Charlie is "cured" of his intellectual limitations. Towards the end of the novel, Charlie writes "But the deeper I get tangled up in this mass of dreams and memories the more I realize that emotional problems can't be solved as intellectual problems are." (Keyes 141). However, the fact that he loses some emotional intelligence during this process implies that there is a difference between emotions and intellect. Additionally, he surpasses what the novel defines as normal intellectual abilities, which alters the implications of the conventional narrative of a cure significantly because he has an abnormally low intelligence quotient at the start of the novel, and he has an abnormally high IQ when he becomes smarter. At the beginning of the novel, Charlie has an intelligence quotient of 70, and towards the end of the novel it has risen to 185.

A normal intelligence quotient is between 85 and 115 (Palmgren). Furthermore, by narrating the worsening of his condition after a period of super-ability, the novel implies the thought of a cure becomes minimal as he is viewed as strange and different in both aspects of the experiment. In contrast to the typical cure plot, this novel innovates it by exploring a better-than-worse plot where Charlie becomes more knowledgeable, but this creates other implications for him.

One of the main goals of this thesis paper is to highlight the importance of Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and how it could be of importance in the classroom. Throughout this chapter, I will comment on the use of the science-fiction genre as a way to write about uncommon topics as I believe that the science-fiction genre was utilised as a tool for writing about cognitive disability. I am going to reflect on and discuss different parts of the novel in regard to the literary theory mentioned in the first chapter. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's theory that people with disabilities are often based on common stereotypes is going to be discussed in relation to Charlie and several stereotypical traits that he embodies (Garland-Thomson 10). Mark Osteen's conversion narrative will be analysed with the experiment that Charlie undergoes and the implications this has on his cognition and emotion. Throughout this chapter, I am going to discuss how the author has presented how characters react differently to Charlie inviting the reader to be aware of how they judge Charlie, thus reflecting on what they think about neurodivergent people.

### **3.1 The Use of the Science-Fiction Genre & The Conversion Narrative**

The science-fiction genre has often been used to write about uncommon topics and unusual subjects, such as homosexuality, transsexuality, and otherness (Leitch 2065). In Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*, the reader follows the main character's progress reports throughout an experiment he is a part of. The science-fiction genre is prominent in the novel as the reader learns that thirty-two-year-old Charlie has a cognitive disability and has joined an experiment that is supposed to make him smarter (Keyes 1). The surgery was only performed on a mouse named Algernon, who had terrific results. *Flowers for Algernon* was first published in 1959, and the author chose to publish it as a science-fiction novel. I believe he chose the science-fiction genre for the novel as cognitive disabilities were not written about nor talked a lot about when it was published. By publishing a novel in the science-fiction genre it makes the theme of the novel more comprehensible for the time period in which it was published as it seems like an unlikely scenario since it is science fiction and not reality.

The conversion narrative build upon the science-fiction genre as there is something that needs to be cured and something that is able to be cured. As mentioned in the first chapter, Leininger et al. found that characters with disabilities often had a cure in literary texts that would terminate the disability (Leininger et al.). *Flowers for Algernon* builds upon this notion of the person with a disability being less than a non-disabled person as Charlie undergoes surgery to become more intelligent and “normal” (Keyes 1). Osteen mentions the conversion narrative in his book *Autism and Representation* where he comments on the use of conversion from strange to normal in literary works that have characters that differ from people’s view of normality (Osteen 51). This notion is backed up by Davis’ theory on normality where one can only define abnormal when one has defined normality (Davis 157). It becomes apparent that Keyes’ novel is impacted by the conversion narrative as the main character undergoes experiments in order to become smart and “normal”. By becoming resistant reader, the pupils will be able to questions the use of the conversion narrative, thus strengthening their metacognition.

The reader quickly realises that the scientists are using Charlie, when he writes “[...] I remember Dr Strauss said do anything the testor telld me even if it don’t make no sense because thats testing” (Keyes 2). The reader feels pity for Charlie as he begins understanding that he is begin used when Professor Nemur says that he is just “an innocent bystander”, to which Charlie replies “[...] But I’m not an inanimate object,” I argued. “I’m a *person*.” (Keyes 63). He starts understanding that he is not viewed as a person but is only used for science. He becomes even more aggravated when Professor Nemur replies “Of course, Charlie. But I wasn’t referring to now. I meant before the operation” (Keyes 63). Thus, showcasing how the professor and doctor did not view him as a person before the experiment and that they are only using him for science. The reader feels pity for Charlie as they realised that the Professor and Doctor did not view him as a person earlier than he did, which is why it impact the reader more when Charlie realises that they do not care about him as a person.

I viewed Algernon as a symbol of Charlie where Algernon symbolizes the part of him that is viewed as an object that can be scientifically experimented on. It becomes the epitome of the conversion narrative where Charlie is an object that can be experimented on, where the desired outcome is that he becomes normal. When Charlie has begun to show tremendous results, professor Nemur has a presentation where he presents the current results from the experiment. Charlie has gotten tired of never being viewed as a human being but as an animal that can be experimented on, and he writes in his journal:

No one in this room considered me an individual – a human being. The constant juxtaposition of “Algernon and Charlie,” and “Charlie and Algernon,” made it clear that they thought of us a couple of experimental animals who had no existence outside of the laboratory (Keyes 111- 112)

In the quote above, it is apparent that Charlie and Algernon had a close relationship which the professor and doctor studied thoroughly both separately and together. Charlie and Algernon’s relationship is a point of observation that pupils can reflect on as it develops throughout the story. Algernon is an element that the reader can follow Charlie’s future journey through as he becomes a precursor to the outcomes of the experiment (Ulllyatt 4). When he gains knowledge of the experiment, Charlie utilises Algernon as a tool to indicate his own evolution as he understands that his journey will be similar, if not equal to Algernon’s. Charlie’s journey is therefore foreshadowed through Algernon’s journey, as the reader becomes aware that Charlie will suffer the same destiny as Algernon.

Charlie appears to be unable to move past his old memories from when he was a disabled child, as he does not have any control over the flood of memories that wash over him when he has become more intelligent (Blackford 295). When Charlie has developed into an intelligent thirty-three-year-old, he is confronted with experiences that occurred prior to the experiment. Therefore, he encounters incidents that have happened prior to his intelligence and is able to experience them with more insight and therefore a greater understanding of what happened (Blackford 296).

The novel utilises irony in a narrative perspective as the reader sees the other character’s meanness before Charlie does, which can encourage pity and self-reflection. At the beginning of the experiment, he states “I will always keep my old frens even if I can read and rite. [...] They are all good frends to me” (Keyes 19). However, the reader is aware that they are not good friends to him, thus making the reader feel pity towards Charlie as he does not understand that they are being mean to him. As the experiment progresses, Charlie becomes aware of how poorly he has been treated by the people surrounding him. During the evenings and nights, he experiences flashbacks from moments with people he thought were his friends, but he quickly notices that he was bullied without understanding it. He writes “Now I know what they mean when they say to “pull a Charlie Gordon.” which shows how he gains an understanding of how badly people treated him without comprehending it (Keyes 30).

Charlie is referred to as an object, and the doctors see him as a flawed object that must be fixed in order to be normal. Tony Ulyatt argues that all behaviour that is viewed as abnormal is seen as undesirable in society because it ruins its perception of society as a whole (Ulyatt 2). When abnormalities are included, it taints the view of a lack of diseases and that there is an abundance of wellness. Society often tries to minimize abnormalities through institutions and medical procedures, which is apparent in *Flowers for Algernon* as Charlie undergoes an experiment in order to make him smart and normal (Ulyatt 3). As the experiment progresses, Charlie begins to experience dreams with memories of what has happened in the past. In one of his dreams, he remembers his parents arguing about him, where his father says “You’re fooling yourself, Rose. It’s not fair to us or to him. Pretending he’s normal” (Keyes 52). It becomes clear that his father does not view Charlie as normal, thus treating him as if he were abnormal. Charlie has therefore been treated differently his whole life since his father views him as abnormal and says that it is unfair to treat him as normal.

*Flowers for Algernon* include several stereotypical traits of a cognitively disabled person when describing Charlie both to the reader and to the other characters. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson stated that when disability is present in literature, it is often based on common stereotypes, and Charlie possesses several stereotypical traits such as intellectual disability, social problems, and mental health disorders (Garland-Thomson 10).

Charlie is heavily defined by his diagnosis, and Daniel Keyes showcases how the other characters in the novel mainly view him as his diagnosis and distance Charlie as a person from his diagnosis. Garland-Thomson discusses how a character is often characterised by their disability, and their entire personality becomes revolved around their disability, which occurs with Charlie (Garland-Thomson 10). The reader is not presented with any other information about Charlie, we are only presented with his disability and how he can be cured of it. When Charlie converses with other characters about different topics, his disability is always mentioned in either thought or speech. His disability is mentioned several times at the beginning of the experiment, and when he has started becoming more intelligent Charlie states “I resent Nemur’s constant references to me as a laboratory specimen” (Keyes 79). Garland-Thomson’s theory comments on the notion that characters with disabilities are often only depicted as their disability, and it becomes their main characteristic.

### 3.2 Writing Style & Language

The novel is compiled by written progress reports that Charlie writes throughout the experiment, and through these entries, the reader is able to witness the effects of the experiment through his grammar and writing style. I think it was a conscious choice to structure the novel by written letters from the main characters' progress reports. It creates an evolution in relation to specific dates, where the reader can follow the time stamps of each entry to see how fast the experiment succeeds in making Charlie smarter and how fast the effects wear off. At the start of the novel, Charlie portrays poor grammar by writing things such as “progris report 1 martch 3” (Keyes 1). However, when he starts seeing the positive effect of the experiment, his language improves, which results in the novel including more advanced words such as “frightening” and “experimental psychology” (Keyes). The reader benefits from seeing the progress of Charlie’s grammar whilst he is undergoing the experiment. The grammar is utilised as a literary device for the readers' benefit as we are able to follow Charlie’s progression and decline by looking at his vocabulary and grammar throughout the novel.

The inclusion of Charlie’s reports allows readers to see changes in his grammar and spelling. This is significant because it impacts our perception of his disability and our insight into the effects of the experiment. The language utilised in Keyes’ novel is simple, which makes it easier for younger people to read. Keyes utilises grammar as a literary device to showcase the development of his cognition and create a contrast between Charlie before, during and after the experiment (Ulliyatt 3). As a result of the writing style and language present in the novel, there are several ways one could work with this novel in the classroom in regard to the time-stamped progress reports, which shall be discussed further in the next chapter.

Throughout the course of the novel, it becomes clear that Charlie has different mental ages in various aspects of his life, as he acts childish towards complex human emotions whilst he appears to act in an adolescent manner regarding sexuality and rebelliousness (Blackford 292). It is specified that the main character is a thirty-three-year-old man, which highlights the difference in his actual age and the manner in which he acts which could imply that he has a younger mental age. This could show the flaws of the experiment itself and how the doctors are not able to comprehend Charlie’s cognitive state and are therefore not able to cure all aspects of him. However, I think it demonstrates how his biggest struggle was with human emotions and connections and how his main issue was never his lack of knowledge. If

anything, his lack of knowledge is what saved him in many situations, as he could not comprehend what people truly thought of him, nor could he understand everything that was happening around him. Therefore, the novel implies that being content with human connections is what is truly important for human flourishing.

### **3.3 The Institution**

People are often recommended to visit institutions when they struggle with mental health or if they are disabled. Ulliyatt discussed that some people are pressured and intimidated by the institutions that are supposed to help them as they might eventually be dependent on the medicine. Furthermore, people are often viewed as cases, and the institutions remove their humanity by making them into objects that can be tested (Ulliyatt 3). I think it is important for pupils to read about both positive and negative experiences with the system that is designed to help us as it can have its flaws. It is important to be able to reflect on how some may have negative encounters with institutions even if they have never been confronted with it.

The institution and the doctors have had a breakthrough in science regardless of whether the experiment is successful or not. Therefore, Professor Strauss and Nemur do not have the same ambition for the experiment to be successful as Charlie does. Professor Nemur and Dr Strauss exclude Charlie when referring to the experiment and claim that “Charlie Gordon did not really exist before this experiment” (Keyes 112). Charlie has a theory that Professor Nemur is attempting to appear more intelligent than he is, acting as a “man walking on stilts among giants” (Keyes 107). Charlie may have a reversion back to his earlier mental state, and the doctors are only able to delay his regression (Ulliyatt 3). Thus, creating a future where Charlie has to live with the consequences of the experiment even if it is not successful, and as the hope of a better life is taken away from him.

Whilst reading the novel, the reader might find themselves wishing for Charlie to achieve happiness whilst being a kinder and better person. The institution, on the other hand, wants Charlie to become smarter in an intellectual way. Therefore, the reader is presented with a contrast of their own hopes and ambitions for Charlie while at the same time seeing what the people experimenting on him wish for the outcome to be. The reader can in many ways relate to Alice, as she is the character that embodies the warmth and kindness that one would hope to see in humanity. She is a character whom Charlie develops a personal relationship with and becomes a character that shares similar hopes for Charlie as the reader. She becomes a direct contrast to the cold and distant characters that experiment on Charlie. I think she was included

in the novel so that the reader would have a character to identify with, as one would hope that the readers would react and think similarly if one was in the same situation as Alice. As there are several different characters included in the novel, I think it creates an opportunity for the reader to reflect on how they would react in the specific situation in contrast to the characters in question. When the outcome of the experiment is unknown, it is bound by the possibility of failure because of the nature of the experiment itself (Ullyatt 4). The doctor and professor are of the impression that there is nothing that could go wrong with the experiment, which Charlie overhears. However, when Alice tells Charlie that she is concerned that he might get hurt during or after the experiment, he replies:

Why should I get hurt? I couldn't be any worse off than I was before. [...] "And besides," I told her, "I overheard something – Professor Nemur and Dr. Strauss were arguing, and Nemur said he's positive that nothing can go wrong. (Keyes 56)

In the quote above, it becomes clear that Charlie believes that the experiment will go according to plan and there will not be any flaws. The parabola model and the plateau model transpire to be Professor Nemur's biggest miscalculations as Charlie was not of normal health and therefore, the models become irrelevant (Ullyatt 4). As a result of Professor Nemur's error, Charlie will regress into a worse state than he was before the experiment, as the professor miscalculated his cognitive state. This showcases how alone and mindless Charlie felt, that he did not want to listen when being faced with concern regarding him prior to and during the experiment.

### **3.4 Concluding Remarks**

To conclude the third chapter of my master thesis, I have Garland-Thomson's idea of feeling pity towards characters that differ from oneself and how the reader can feel pity towards Charlie. Thus, strengthening their metacognition by addressing the preconceptions of him. Simultaneously, I have commented on Davis' idea on normality and how the reader must address what is viewed as normal in order to define what is abnormal. Daniel Keyes does an impeccable job at presenting how the characters that are working for the institution only view him as disabled and therefore something that has to be cured by having them state that he was not a person before the experiment. In contrast, the reader follows Charlie throughout the entire experiment and gets to know Charlie as a person excluding his diagnosis. Therefore, the novel includes depictions of people that only view him as his diagnosis, whilst the reader almost becomes a character that is introduced to Charlie as a person.



## 4 Why Haddon and Keyes' novels should be Taught in Upper Secondary Schools

When utilising literature in the classroom, there are many approaches to working with the texts. Teachers have a variety of literature they can choose to incorporate in the classroom, but few teachers choose literature where the main character has a disability (Leininger et al). Which literature is chosen is often impacted by others' expectations, limitations that the department might have, and teachers' own personal experiences with the literary works (Renzi 152). Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* both have main characters that possess traits which can indicate that they are on the neurodiverse spectrum. In the introductory chapter of this master's paper, I stated the importance of utilising literature that includes main characters that have a variety of different backgrounds and struggles, as it is vital for pupils to be able to identify with other characters in literature. Throughout this chapter, I will discuss why the chosen novels should be taught in upper secondary schools, as well as how one could utilise the novels in the classroom.

Whilst the novels differ in many ways, they have similar core values in the representation of invisible disabilities. The novels embody several characteristics that are mentioned in different literary theorists' papers on disability representation in literature. For example, Garland-Thomson's theory mentioned prior that disabled characters are only defined by their disability (Garland-Thomson 10). As mentioned earlier, Christopher is not defined by a diagnosis, and one can argue that this is a result of there not being a diagnosis present in the novel. Furthermore, Charlie is defined by his disability by the institution, but the reader does not define him by his disability.

Haddon and Keyes' novels are highly relevant for different age groups, where young adults and adults could benefit from reading the novel. They might sympathise with Christopher and Charlie as they understand better why some people act and react differently than themselves. If people do not relate with the main character, the story could give the reader further insight into how a person on the neurodiverse spectrum views the world and its problems. Therefore, Haddon and Keyes' novels could significantly impact pupils at different levels, but I have chosen to focus on upper secondary school.

The novels could help students improve their metacognition when reading as they would discuss how they can resemble Christopher or Charlie in some aspects whilst differing from them (Carlsen, Dypedahl & Iversen 88). Therefore, the pupils would have to be resistant readers as it requires metacognition, and the pupils must approach the novels with a critical and questioning perspective (Fetterley). It becomes evident how some situations are more impactful for certain people even though others might experience them as minor. Whilst Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* focuses on the murder of Wellington, the story of Christopher's parents could have been a separate novel (Haddon). The book could therefore be utilised to show pupils what is essential to them and make them reflect upon their behaviour and values. Keyes' novel *Flowers for Algernon* mainly focuses on the experiment, but the reader is also introduced to different aspects of Charlie's background and experiences (Keyes). Thus, pupils can look at how some of the other characters view Charlie and reflect upon their thoughts throughout the novel.

Different age groups could benefit from reading Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Adults could get a new perspective as the novel highlights the adult figures surrounding Christopher throughout the book and how they interact with and without him. Christopher's teacher, Siobhan, is an exemplary example of how a good and stable adult can impact children's lives as she gives him much great advice that positively influences his life. She showcases how a safe and reliable teacher can influence their pupils' lives and guide them to experiment with different activities, such as writing a novel.

Nancy Joseph mentions a "reciprocal-teaching activity" and "discussion about thinking" that makes pupils more comfortable with their metacognitive processes and helps them to learn how they can approach different texts (Joseph 101). These learning activities can be beneficial when working with texts such as Keyes' and Haddon's novels, as they allow pupils to strengthen their metacognition in different ways. The pupils could, for example look at the way Christopher's father acts towards him contrasts with how Siobhan performs, and the reader can see how he and Christopher's mother occasionally lose their temper.

## 4.1 Why Teachers Should Utilise Disability Literature

It is important for people to see characters similar to themselves in literature, which can result in a feeling of fulfilment and belonging. As mentioned in the first chapter, disability representation in literature has been stereotypical and based on the possibility of a cure (Leininger et al. 5). When choosing literature to utilize in the English curriculum in various classes in upper secondary school, it is important to look at the core curriculum to gain an understanding of what pupils should have learnt and gained an understanding of after having English in school. In the English curriculum ENG01-04, under “Relevance and central values”, it is stated that:

English is an important subject when it comes to cultural understanding, communication, all-around education and identity development. The subject shall give the pupils the foundation for communicating with others, both locally and globally [...]. English shall help the pupils to develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns (Utdanningsdirektoratet).

In the quote above, it is apparent that a major principle in the English curriculum is for pupils to gain knowledge and understanding of different ways of perceiving situations by gaining intercultural competence. Since Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* include main characters that are on the neurodiverse spectrum, pupils that are neurotypical would improve their knowledge and understanding of people that differ from themselves. They would have acquired insight into how people could view situations differently and their thought processes. Subsequently, they would gain a larger understanding on their thought processes and perceptions as they would be confronted with other how other people could view situations and their surroundings. Therefore, the pupils would benefit greatly from working with these works of literature in schools. Pupils that are neurodivergent would benefit from having neurodiverse characters represented in literature as it would be a representation of characters and people that differ from the common representation of neurotypical characters in literature.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Leininger et al stated that it can be harmful to work with literature that stereotypes disabilities as it can create a larger gap between neurotypical and neurodiverse people as it creates a false understanding, and neurodiverse people are not given a proper representation (Leininger et al. 5). If I was to utilise literature that includes characters that are neurodiverse, I think it is important to converse with your pupils about the lack of correct and diverse representation in literature. Making your pupils aware that neurodiversity can be different is very important and discussing how even though some people might embody the stereotypical traits, it can look different for everyone.

In *Flowers for Algernon*, the reader becomes aware of the impact the experiment has on Charlie. The reader is burdened with understanding how vicious some of the other characters are to Charlie prior to the experiment, whilst Charlie remains unaware of their unpleasantness. The reader's conscious acts in pity by seeing how clueless Charlie is at the novel's beginning, thus wanting to protect him when the experiment's effects make him realise how awful people have been to him. Even though the novel is science fiction, there are many people who experience cruelty because of their otherness. The reader's metacognition might be strengthened by reflecting on how they would act in the certain situations, and reflecting on how they would act towards a neurodiverse person. It is important to read disability literature so that the reader is presented with the reality of many people with disabilities everyday experiences.

As mentioned in the second chapter, Christopher is quite fond of Sherlock Holmes and shows how important it is to have representation of disabilities in literature. Christopher does not appear to feel abnormal and in need of changing who he is. One can think that this is because he has grown up reading literature that includes characters that think like him, thus normalising what others might view as abnormal. Therefore, it is apparent that having access to and reading literature with disability representation is essential for people with disabilities as it normalises neurodivergence in literature. Sherlock Holmes was able to be a representation for Christopher throughout his life and almost became a role model for him.

#### **4.1.1 The Importance of Science-Fiction in the Classroom**

Science-Fiction is a genre that has become more normalized to utilise in the classroom. It can be particularly motivating for pupils as they may contain many different themes and dilemmas. *Flowers for Algernon* is a particularly good science-fiction novel to include in the classroom as the pupils can reflect upon the genre itself and why the novel includes the science-fiction element. Keyes' novel allows pupils to speculate about the fictional feature of the novel and how they think it would have been received by the public if it was not a science-fiction novel. The pupil's metacognition would be strengthened by such an angle as they would have to consider people's prejudices towards people with disabilities in the 1950s since the novel was published in 1959 (Keyes).

The science-fiction genre allows for a large amount of creativity in writing as one is not limited by societal norms or constraints to the same degree as if one was to publish a fictional novel. The author can freely write about whichever topic they want to and is almost protected from negative feedback about the topic as it is science fiction and therefore allowed. As mentioned earlier, authors would typically utilise the science-fiction genre as a way to write about difficult topics that were viewed as taboo, such as for example homosexuality and disability (Leitch 2065). When working with science-fiction in the classroom it can allow pupils to explore their creativity in new ways since they do not have to follow any set norms or ideals. It is essential to allow pupils to explore their creativity by reading novels that can strengthen their desire to read. One could give parts of the progress reports from *Flowers for Algernon* to pupils and have an assignment where they would write the next progress report, which could challenge their creativity whilst strengthening it.

#### **4.2 How Haddon and Keyes' Novels Should be Taught in Schools**

There are endless possibilities for working with literature in the classroom. Personally, I would have the pupils work with either entire texts or specifically chosen parts of the texts. Since Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* are written and published during different time periods, I would work quite differently with the two texts. This is because it can vary how much the pupils engage with the texts. Various examples of how one can work with the two chosen novels will be discussed and presented during this section, as well as my own thoughts and preferences.

The two novels can be included separately in lesson plans, or one could use excerpts from both novels simultaneously. I would incorporate a lesson on the inclusion of animals in both *Flowers for Algernon* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* as it allows the reader to see the parallel between human and animal behaviour and how the characters relate to animals. This is significant because both Charlie and Christopher relate to the animals portrayed in the novels, and Christopher states “[...] I cared about dogs because they were faithful and honest, and some dogs were cleverer and more interesting than some people” (Haddon 6). Identifying with animals builds upon the notion that the characters might lack some emotions and a level of empathy (Blackford 299). Furthermore, it can build upon the notion of feeling objectified and Charlie states several times that he is considered an object to experiment on, and “No one in this room considered me an individual” (Keyes 111).

There are two versions of *Flowers for Algernon*, where one could utilise the short story, which is twenty-three pages long, or the novel, which is 256 pages long. When using the short story one can work with all of the entries in detail as it is much shorter, and one could even compare it to other texts that the class might have read. The story can be viewed as controversial in many ways and it is important to address the aspects of the novels that can be viewed as controversial, such as the stereotypical portrayal of neurodiverse traits. As the pupils are presented with an immoral representation of a person with a disability they are confronted with their ability to critique literature. It is of the utmost importance that pupils gain the ability to be critical readers, both with fiction and non-fiction. Being critical readers and resistant readers can help pupils develop into critical thinkers, which is an important trait to have. As the novel can be viewed as controversial in its presentation and representation of disabled people, it is important for the pupils to reflect upon that. An example is at the start of the novel Charlie states “If your smart you can have lots of friends to talk to and you never get lonely by yourself all the time” (Keyes 11). When they reflect on why and how it can be viewed as controversial, they can strengthen their metacognition since they must contemplate if they would have viewed it as controversial themselves.

If I was to utilise Keyes' novel in the classroom, I would incorporate the different progress report entries in a more rigorous lesson plan. One of the great things with the structure of the novel is that teachers are able to choose specific progress reports, and they can be utilised in various ways. Personally, I would choose different entries from Charlie's progress reports that are written at various points in the experiment. However, I would not include the dates nor specify during which point in the novel it is written. Therefore, the pupils would have to reflect among themselves about when they think the progress reports are dated and reflect with other pupils in their class. The pupils would then strengthen their metacognition by being confronted with their own stereotypes when discussing which entries are from early in the experiment and which are from later on.

Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* can be utilised in several ways in the classroom. There are many different approaches to how one can work with this novel in upper secondary schools. Personally, if I were to implement this novel in the classroom, it would at least be over a four-week period in order to include reflections and discussions when reading the different parts of the novel. I would work with this novel over a longer period of time to have the pupils discuss various elements of the novel, but specifically the lack of diagnosis and how they think it impacts the novel. The pupils can strengthen their ability to critique literary works with this novel as it includes several stereotypical traits of a neurodiverse character, however, the reader is never presented with a diagnosis.

Haddon's novel includes several storylines, where the main focus is when Christopher is trying to solve his murder mystery. One of the great things about this novel is the abundance of smaller storylines that Christopher does not look further into. These storylines allow for further reflection and analysis from pupils, where they could see if they understood the storyline and if they were able to read between the lines in order to analyse the story. In the classroom, one could have the pupils reflect and analyse the different storylines, such as the storyline about Christopher's mother having an affair with Mr Shears as well as the main story. Whilst reflecting upon the other characters' conflicts, pupils will also have to consider why Christopher appears to be unaware of them.

There are different ways to activate pupils in the classroom in order to strengthen their metacognition. When pupils are able to partake in an activity regarding a novel that has been read in class, they can gain a deeper understanding of its contents. An interesting way to utilise the novel is to get pupils to rewrite certain parts of the novel from another character's perspective. An example could be to rewrite the scene where Christopher's father hits him, to rewrite this from his father's perspective. In doing so, their understanding of Christopher will become distinct as they will have to reflect on how others view him and his actions, as well as embodying the other characters and their characteristics. Another way to strengthen pupils' metacognition is by having them rewrite a certain part of the novel from their own point of view, where they write themselves into the story. They could write themselves into the story as a passenger on the train to London when he is crawling on the floor as they would have to reflect on how a stranger would view that specific situation. They could also write themselves into the story as a neighbour in their street, as they might have more information about Christopher, but they would not know his thoughts and ideas.

### **4.3 Concluding Remarks**

To conclude my fourth chapter, I have looked at the importance of teaching literature with characters with disabilities. It is important to have literature with neurodivergent characters in the classroom as it can strengthen the pupil's metacognition by being resistant readers whilst they are being confronted by their own premonitions. There are several ways to work with the novels, but I think activities that engage the pupils would work best to allow them to discuss the problematic aspects of both novels with each other. The pupils can also strengthen their metacognition by listening to their peers analyse and interpret specific scenes differently than themselves as they are confronted with their view of the scene or situation.



## 5 Conclusion

Disability representation in literature utilised in schools has gained more attention in research, as can be seen in Leininger et al article “Disabilities in Newbery Books Newbery Award Winning Books 1975-2009: How Do They Portray Disabilities?”. They presented that 13% of pupils have various disabilities, whereas only 6% of the literature utilised in the classroom has characters with disabilities (Leininger et al 8). Of the 6% of literature with disabilities represented, only 13% of the novels had characters with autism, and 21% included characters with mental retardation (Leininger et al 9). Another finding was that the characters with disabilities were mainly characters included for the reader to understand the growth of the characters without disabilities (Leininger et al 10). Lack of disability representation in the classroom is a problem in many schools, which is why I have found a way to include more representation in the classroom by utilising Keyes’ *Flowers for Algernon* and Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

In my first chapter, I raised four questions that were going to be answered throughout my master's thesis. The first question was “How is cognitive disability presented in Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Daniel Keyes’ *Flowers for Algernon*?”. Cognitive disability is presented quite differently in these two novels, even though neither novel mentions a definitive diagnosis. Keyes and Haddon have presented disability in a stereotypical manner, as they have given the characters traits that are often associated with cognitive disability. Charlie’s condition is mentioned throughout the novel, and the storyline mainly follows the experiment to get him cured by his disability. In contrast, Christopher’s disability is not the main topic of the novel as it follows him trying to solve the murder of his neighbour's dog.

Throughout my thesis, I have tried to highlight the importance of the representation of disability in literature by looking at literary theorists such as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Lennard J. Davis, Mark Osteen, Sonya Freeman Loftis, and Judith Fetterley. I have commented on Garland-Thomson’s theory on disability representation in literature and how the reader is often presented with stereotypical traits of people with disabilities (Garland-Thomson 11). Davis’ idea of normality was seen in both novels, as the reader would have to define normality in order to define what is abnormal. As the authors have chosen not to include a formal diagnosis of the main characters, the readers are forced to challenge their

idea of normality when reading if they want to view the characters as normal and/or abnormal.

Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon* includes various characters as a tool to invite the reader to reflect on how they would react and act in that specific situation, whilst also reflecting on how they would act towards a neurodivergent person. It portrays the way Dr Strauss and Professor Nemur act towards Charlie by treating him like a lab rat and subsequently failing the experiment, thus starting the downfall of Charlie's cognition. In contrast to the people in the institution, Alice becomes a person that the reader can relate to when seeing how she acts and reacts towards Charlie during the experiment. Therefore, Keyes has showcased the different ways in which people act towards people with disabilities, where the reader can think about how they would act towards Charlie. By reflecting on how one would act towards Charlie, the reader strengthens their metacognition by contemplating how their actions would differ from others.

Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* utilises the first-person narrative as a way to make the reader experience Christopher's point of view in the situations that occur throughout the novel, whilst understanding why the other characters act and react a certain way towards him. The reader is confronted with how they would act and react in similar situations, thus strengthening their metacognition. Through Haddon's depiction of Christopher and the lack of an official diagnosis, he showcases how different neurodiversity can look for people. It becomes evident to the reader that the characters in the novel act differently towards and around Christopher depending on if they are aware of his neurodiversity. Christopher's teacher, Siobhan, helps him during school hours and mentors him to a degree by giving him advice on how to act and react in everyday situations. When he is on his journey to London, he encounters several strangers that act in anger towards him, thus creating a contrast between the people that are aware of his neurodiversity and act in pity, and the people that are unaware and act in anger.

Judith Fetterley helped answer the second question I raised in my first chapter, which was "Why is it essential to utilise disability literature to pupils in upper secondary school?". Her concept of a resistant reader was seen in relation to metacognition, where the pupils would strengthen their metacognition by being resistant readers. The Norwegian core curriculum highlights the importance of pupils improving their metacognition, and including disability literature can be a successful way to obtain this. I have found a way to incorporate two novels

that can include disability literature in upper secondary schools whilst simultaneously strengthening pupils' metacognition by becoming resistant readers by exploring themes that are related to disability.

In the third question I raised in the first chapter was “How has Christopher’s sense of self been impacted by having access to literature with characters on the neurodiverse spectrum?”. Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* showcases the importance of disability representation in literature as Christopher enjoys reading about Sherlock Holmes and widely agrees with his thought processes. Christopher arguably does not feel any different from his peers as he has had access to literature with characters that have similar thought processes as himself as he refers to his classmates as “stupid” (Haddon 56) but does not appear to feel that he can relate. This highlights the importance of having access to disability literature as it can make people feel more included, seen, and heard if they can relate to any of the characters. If others cannot relate to any of the characters, it can strengthen the pupil’s metacognition by being exposed to characters that can differ from themselves (Carlsen et al. 88).

The fourth and final question I raised in my first chapter was “How can Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* or Keyes’ *Flowers for Algernon* improve pupils’ metacognition in upper secondary school?”. Throughout my thesis, I have given examples of specific scenes from the novels that could be utilised when teaching. These examples can strengthen the pupil’s metacognition by making them self-aware of their thought processes as well as becoming aware of how others can have different perceptions than themselves. The novels can improve pupils’ metacognition by being presented with disability literature that can highlight the importance of having representation present, which can for example be seen in Christopher’s fascination with Sherlock Holmes.

Even though both of these novels have main characters that have stereotypical traits of disability, I think they are excellent literary works to utilise in schools as it would challenge the pupils’ view on normality, thus strengthening their metacognition. As the novels do not present an official diagnosis of the main characters, the reader is confronted with their own stereotypes when viewing the characters as disabled. The reader must therefore reflect upon their own stereotyping and views on characters that differ from what is viewed as normal, thus defining what they view as abnormal.

## **5.1 Concluding Remarks**

To summarize, throughout my thesis I have analysed two novels that are viewed as disability literature. There is a lack of representation in upper secondary schools, which is why I focused on the importance of including a variety of novels as it is important for pupils' to either read novels with characters they can relate to or read novels with characters that differ from themselves. When reading literature with neurodiverse characters, it can make the readers reflect on how they differ from them and each other. Thus, we realise that whilst we all differ, we have many similarities that connect us. We are all individuals that are simultaneously equals.

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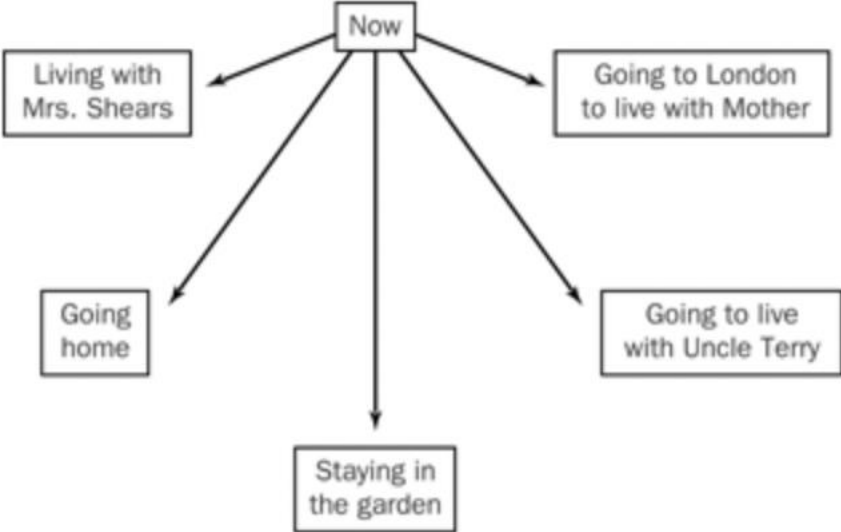
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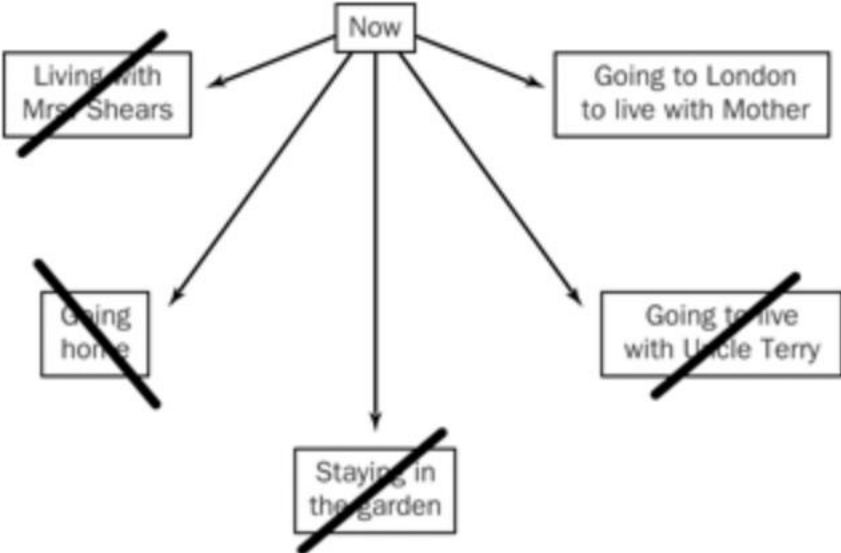
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**Appendix**



**Appendix 1:** Christopher’s table when describing how he views his options before learning that his father has lied about his mother’s death and lied about killing Wellington.



**Appendix 2:** Christopher’s table when describing how he views his options after learning that his father has lied about his mother’s death and lied about killing Wellington.

