



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

**Challenging the topics of interracial friendship, immigration, and racism  
by taking them into the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade classroom**

An analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Roald Dahl's *The Big Friendly Giant* and how to teach them in secondary school

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## Abstract

This thesis examines two literary works, Roald Dahl's children's fiction book, *The Big Friendly Giant*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's realistic fiction novel, *Americanah*. It explores how these books can be used to teach students in secondary school about topics such as racism, immigration, prejudiced behavior, and stereotypes, as well as interracial friendship. Kelly Oliver's theory on subjectivity and subject position is used to explain the changes that characters from both books experience in the society they find themselves in, and as they develop new friendships. By using these two books, which differ in length and level of language, teachers can more easily adapt the learning situation. The teaching methods presented in this thesis have been carefully planned with regards to the interdisciplinary topic of Democracy and Citizenship, which can be found in the Core Curriculum of LK20, as well as the English curriculum for secondary school (ENG01-04). By conducting research in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade using a variety of methods, it was possible for me as a teacher to see if these approaches were effective in the classroom. The results of the research conducted in a secondary school in Norway demonstrate how this way of teaching, with a few modifications, can be recommended for further use in the future.

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# 1 Introduction

Racism and immigration are topics that today still create issues and prejudiced behavior in several parts of the world. Since there are still issues regarding racism and immigration, it is important for the younger generation to learn about this, to prevent them from being prejudiced, and prevent them from showing racist behavior towards others. Jon Røyne Kyllingstad has written an article named “The Absence of race in Norway?” where he writes,

Norway is becoming an increasingly multiethnic society. This causes social tensions and political controversy. Immigration policy is presently among the most heated and polarized topics in Norwegian public and political debates. The Norwegian public sphere is permeated by discussions about racism, discrimination, ethnicity, national identity, social integration, cultural pluralism, and how to deal with cultural and religious differences. (1)

From time to time, we hear either on the news or read in newspapers about situations happening in Norway where racist behavior has been a factor. One example of this behavior can be found in the acts of terrorism that happened on July 22 in 2011. In their article, “22. juli: Motivene bak terroren,” Ina-Kristin Lindin, Dea Hovet and Nicolai Delebekk wrote that Anders Behring Breivik, the man behind the terrorist actions, wanted to clear the Norwegian society of immigrants. He also believed that Norway was being taken over by Muslims (Lindin, Hovet & Delebekk). Another example that happened more recently, in 2019, was the terrorist attack done by 21-year-old Philip Manshaus against a Mosque in Bærum. An article posted in a newspaper called VG (Verdens Gang), said that Manshaus posted on an online forum that he was going to perform the attack to increase the racial war (Brenna, Fraser & Hopperstad). Both these incidents among others that have happened, demonstrate that people still show prejudiced behavior towards others, and it also shows that there are racist actions happening in Norway as well as other parts of the world today. If you go to a website called “Antirasistisk senter” you will find a list of racist incidents that have happened in Norway, from years ago but also quite recently (“Antirasistisk senter”). This demonstrates how the topic of race, and racism is still an issue today.

A report done by Arnfinn H. Midtbøen and Jon Rogstad in 2012 about the ethnic minorities and their access to the Norwegian working environment revealed that if you have a foreign name, the probability of being called back for a job interview is only at 25 %

compared to those that have a “universal” name, like Emma, Philip, Joe etc., and are equally qualified with the same minority background (10). An example of this can be found in the novel, *Americanah*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, when the main character, Ifemelu, applies for a job and she and her close friend talk about it afterwards. When Ifemelu does not get the job, Adichie writes, “Later, Ginika said, ‘You could have just said Ngozi is your tribal name and Ifemelu is your jungle name and throw in one more as your spiritual name. They’ll believe all kinds of shit about Africa’” (131).

From my experience as a substitute teacher, the students in secondary school mostly learn about the topics of racism and immigration through history and situations that have happened several years ago or even centuries ago, such as the Slave Trade, Ku Klux Klan, The Civil War Era, and the Civil Rights Movements (Britannica). When I ask the students what they have learned from this, the most common answer I have gotten is; “Racism is bad.” Yes, of course racism is bad, and the students in secondary school are expected to know that by now. What I wish to demonstrate for the students at this level is how they can address these topics from other perspectives. As mentioned, we expect the students in secondary school to know by now that being prejudiced and showing racist behavior towards others is not okay. But are the students always aware of how they are acting towards others, and especially towards people that are different from themselves? The Education Act says, “Education and training must provide insight into cultural diversity and show respect for the individual’s convictions. They are to promote democracy, equality, and scientific thinking” (§ 1-1). It is therefore our job as teachers to teach students about different cultures, and how to behave respectfully towards others. By taking important topics of today such as racism and immigration into the classroom, teachers can help students become more aware of these and how to address them.

Reading literature teach students about language and increase their reading skills. But there is so much more literature can provide than just that. Although literature is an art form and are rarely based on facts, we as teachers can also use it to teach students about important topics, behavior, history among other things. With this thesis I wish to demonstrate how we as teachers can use literature to teach students about topics such as racism and immigration, and with that hopefully expand their reflections and thoughts on the topics. Race is a historically used word that has been widely discussed among critics and are still being so today. To explain how the term will be used in this thesis, I will here implement a list Hazel Rose Markus and Paula M. L. Moya has placed in their book called *Doing Race*:

Race is a doing – a dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that

- Sorts people into ethnic groups according to perceived physical and behavioral human characteristics that are often imagined to be negative, innate, and shared.
  - Associates differential value, power, and privilege with these characteristics; establishes a hierarchy among the different groups; and confers opportunity accordingly.
  - Emerges
    - When groups are perceived to pose a threat (political, economic, or cultural) to each other’s worldview or way of life; and/or
    - To justify the denigration and exploitation (past, current, or future) of other groups while exalting one’s own group to claim an innate privilege.
- (Markus and Moya 21)

By getting the students to reflect on friendship through different races and ways one should not act or ways one could act towards others that are different from themselves, might help expand their knowledge and mindset, and hopefully it will prevent them from showing prejudiced behavior. Therefore, my thesis will address the books *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *The BFG* by Roald Dahl. The students will be encouraged to use their own minds to reflect and think about different behaviors that occur in the books, the developing of friendships, the sense of belonging that the characters feel, among other aspects that will be presented later in this thesis. This will hopefully help them be more aware of the topics and expand their thoughts and mindset.

Instead of focusing only on the negative factors that race and immigration can have, I have in this thesis chosen to focus on some positive factors as well, such as friendship. Building new friendships and choosing who your closest friends are and should be is essential for students in secondary school. The evidence from a study done by Maureen Hallinan and Richard Williams in secondary schools in America on choices of friendship show, “Students are only one-sixth as likely to choose a cross-race than a same-race peer as a friend, and controls for school and individual variables account for only a third of this differential” (67). Although this study was conducted in America, I believe that in this globalized world the internet has made it much easier for the world’s population to communicate, see each other and learn about each other. For the youth, this especially applies to social mediums such as

TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat etc. where they can easily see how others around the world are living their lives. Therefore, I can imagine that the youth in Norway are not that different from youth in America, but this is just speculations from my point of view. Even though it might not be like this in Norway, one-sixth is a really low number, which shows that learning about interracial friendship is something that students in secondary school will benefit from. At least it might open their eyes and thoughts to what values and behavior they should look for when they are choosing their friends.

The findings in Hallinan and Williams paper shows that it is more unlikely for two people with different races to become friends, than for two being the same race. They found out that student characteristics plays a role when it comes to friendship choices, and the status differences that are part of the classroom policies matters. At the end of their paper, Hallinan and Williams write, “Since these factors can be modified by school personnel, they represent possible means for influencing the social relations between black and white students and for promoting interracial friendship” (77). They are talking about how we as teachers can help students have a more positive attitude when it comes to interracial friendship. Teachers can guide students in understanding that racial differences are not what matters, but instead help change the focus from what a person looks like to seeing what lives inside a person. In other words, value characteristics and personality. Interracial friendship is presented in *The BFG* between the giant and the little girl, Sophie, and in *Americanah*, between Ifemelu and Blain, but also between Ifemelu and Curt, and between Ifemelu and Kimberly. In *The BFG* race is used as a term that explains the difference between a human being and a giant, while in *Americanah* it is used to describe different ethnicities. Teaching this by using these two books might help students think differently or at least be more aware of what should matter when it comes to choosing friends.

Choosing *Americanah* and *The Big Friendly Giant*, which are in many ways two completely different books, can also help on the students’ motivation. In his article, “Reading Literature,” Christian Carlsen writes, “Our students’ motivation to work with literature will be influenced by their previous reading experiences and reading skills” (123). Using these two books which differs in both length and level of language, invites a wider range of the students to read. Some of the students might have little experience in reading, while others have read lots of books. By introducing two different books such as these, it can help motivate the students, as those that want a shorter and more easy-read book like *The BFG* can be given that book, while the rest can read from *Americanah*. Because it is difficult to estimate how long a



teacher can spend on the teaching of the two novels along with the task's afterword, it is possible to only use parts of *Americanah*, and if necessary only parts of *The BFG* as well. An example of how to teach with these two books over a short amount of time will be presented in chapter three of this thesis. Because of the difference found in these two books, it will be easier for the teacher when it comes to adapted learning in the classroom. This can help make the students feel more motivated and maybe some of them will even find pleasure in reading if it is not present already.

## 1.1 Americanah

The reason why *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was chosen for this MA thesis is because it reflects very well on the topic of immigration, and how it is to be a young woman moving from Nigeria to the US. The novel expresses cultural differences, racial challenges one might face moving to another country, among others. The novel was written in 2015 and is therefore not that old. This can contribute to students perceiving what they read as more relevant to them. One example of this is that the main character has a blog, and the people and happenings in the novel are modern. *Americanah* is a realistic fiction book written about a young woman, Ifemelu, who grows up in Nigeria but later immigrates to the US. In their paper which is about migration and realism in the novel, Mnena Abuku and Joseph Nietlong (2017) write, "In literature realism aims at the reproduction of objective reality with emphasis on the portrayal of everyday, quotidian activities and life, primarily among the middle or lower class society, without romantic idealization or dramatization" (308). *Americanah* presents the reader with ordinary every-day activities and happenings which makes it very realistic. Examples of this can be when Ifemelu goes to the hairdresser, when she takes a taxi, the train, goes to school, makes food or other. One example from the book which shows a realistic setting about eating lunch at work happens when Ifemelu are babysitting Kimberly's children. Adichie writes, "A round, flame-coloured orange that Ifemelu had brought with her lunch, peeled and quartered and enclosed in a Ziploc bag. She ate it at the kitchen table, while Taylor sat nearby writing his homework" (165). There is nothing special or unusual here. It is completely normal to bring an orange in a Ziploc bag for lunch at work.

The reader is invited to follow Ifemelu's journey from her high school years in Nigeria and further when she moves to the US to study at university. She spends 13 years in America before moving back to Nigeria. In the book we are also introduced to another character,

Obinze, which is Ifemelu's high school sweetheart. They drift apart when she moves to the US, and he later moves to Britain. Obinze also moves back to Nigeria, and they eventually reunite after being 15 years apart. *Americanah* tells about the experience of being a black immigrant in America. We as readers are invited to learn about the culture in Nigeria and what it is like living there as well. We learn what it is like for a young African woman to move to a country like the US, especially regarding other people's behavior, racism, friendships, working opportunities amongst other.

The author of *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, was born in 1977 in Nigeria. She began to write at an early age and is still writing today. She left Nigeria in 1997 to study communication in the US and kept writing there. She has written about themes such as the Biafran War, contemporary Nigeria, and Igbo immigrants in the US. Among these we find *Americanah*. According to Daria Tunca, "Her essays often express her complicated attachment to her country of origin, fiercely denouncing its corrupt political system and the hypocrisy of its religious leaders" (94-95). Adichie has received several prizes for her works. In 2007 her novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, won the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction. This novel was also a commercial success several places, and especially in the United Kingdom. It gave her the status as one of the leading figures of early twenty-first-century African literature. She often travelled back and forth to Nigeria while she was studying in the US to support local literary talent by having workshops in Lagos. After she graduated from Yale, she moved to Columbia in Maryland (Tunca 94-95). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's biography demonstrates how she has written from what she has learned by her own experience, being Nigerian and moving to the US.

## **1.2 *The BFG***

*The BFG* was chosen as the second novel because of the language and length of the book, but also because it can provide information on racism, immigration, and interracial friendships. Although this is a fiction book meant for children, and one might think it belongs in primary school and not in secondary school, the book demonstrates the topics of racism and immigration in a way which I find suitable for students at the age 13-16 just as much as students at the age of 6-10-year-olds. If we expand our minds when reading and motivate students in secondary school to do the same, we can see that these topics are easy to discover. There is more to be gained from reading *The BFG* than just an amusing story written for children. Since the book is shorter than *Americanah*, and provides a simpler language, it is a

very relevant book to use alongside Adichie's novel in the classroom. This will make it easier for the teacher to adapt the learning for the students in class, as will be discussed further in the next chapter.

*The Big Friendly Giant* is a children's fantasy book about a young girl named Sophie, who lives in an orphanage home in London. She gets captured by a giant, but he is not like the other giants, and he is not what we as readers expect him to be like. To both Sophie and the reader's surprise the giant is kind and friendly and does not eat children like the other giants. At first Sophie is terrified that the giant will eat her, but when she learns that he is not like the others, she instead wants to help him. They start developing a friendship and help each other out where they can. They, or mostly Sophie comes up with a plan to go meet the queen and tell her about the giants and the fact that they go out at night and eat children. Sophie and the giant go on a journey together where they meet the queen and explain the situation to her. The queen decides she wants to help them beat the other unfriendly giants.

The author of *The Big Friendly Giant*, Roald Dahl, was born in 1916 in South Wales to Norwegian parents, Harald and Sofie. According to Donald Sturrock, Dahl had a difficult childhood, with losing his sister in 1920 and his father dying shortly after that. He was later sent to boarding school in England, where he got bullied and abused. Roald Dahl claimed not to be interested in his ancestry, but he was proud of his Norwegian roots. After Dahl had finished his education, he went to work for an oil company in East Africa. After working for the oil company, Dahl started to work in the Royal Air Force in 1939 during World War II. This is when he started to write his stories, in his early twenties. The story he wrote about his experiences as a fighter pilot was his first published work, which got published in *The Saturday Evening Post*. He started writing children's books, and the first he wrote was *The Gremlins* which was published in 1943. Later, he wrote *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda* and *The BFG*, which are some of his most famous works. Roald Dahl was known for his dark humor and special characters. He died in 1990, leaving behind a series of timeless stories that are still beloved by readers at all ages and all around the world today (Sturrock).

### **1.3 Structural Overview**

This MA thesis will address the realistic fiction novel, *Americanah* and the children's fantasy book *The Big Friendly Giant*, and how these two books can be used in learning to teach students about the topics of racism and immigration. The second chapter of this thesis will introduce theories and theoretical background. The theory of subject position and

subjectivity by Kelly Oliver will be presented, along with an article by Kazi Hossain, which has investigated how teaching about immigration is done in the classroom today. This chapter will also talk about “Kunnskapsløftet” from 2020 and parts of this with the basic skills, competence aims, and assessments. This part will also include one of the three interdisciplinary topics, Democracy and Citizenship, along with an explanation on why this fits the topic of this thesis.

The third chapter will provide an analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel *Americanah*. *Americanah* displays interracial friendship between the main character Ifemelu from Nigeria and other characters she meets after moving to the US. The book has several passages where people express prejudiced behavior as well as racist behavior. Even though the main character experience these kinds of behavior in the book she still manages to find friends in the US and even boyfriends. She experiences both negative and positive sides when immigrating to the US, and it is these experiences that will be written about in this thesis. I suggest that using *Americanah* to teach students about immigration, race, racism, and prejudiced behavior is very clever since it is filled with remarks and experiences about this. The novel shows both negative and positive sides to immigration. Although Ifemelu experience racism and prejudiced behavior often while living in the US, she stays for 13 years.

The fourth chapter involves the second analysis concerning Roald Dahl’s fiction book *the Big Friendly Giant*. The main characters, Sophie, and the Big Friendly Giant, are from two completely different races and therefore their friendship is very unexpected. The friendship that develops between these two characters, demonstrates how one should not believe in stereotypes and show prejudiced behavior. I will argue that *the BFG* in more subtle ways than *Americanah*, shows racism and how being different from the majority of people or giants in a society creates challenges. This is presented differently in *Americanah* than in *the BFG*, with Ifemelu having a different skin color, therefore a different race by color, while the giant mainly looks different in size, therefore a completely different race. I will argue that using *the BFG* alongside *Americanah* is clever because of two reasons. The first reason is that *the BFG* is shorter and easier to read, which can motivate the students who are not very fond of reading or have some sort of difficulty when it comes to reading. It also makes it easier for the teacher to adapt the learning situation. The second reason is that it provides us with many of the same topics and issues as *Americanah* does, but with different angles.

The fifth chapter of the thesis will demonstrate the research that I have conducted in two different classes in a secondary school here in Norway, over a time of two weeks with 4 hours each week in both classes. The research that was made consisted of reading excerpts from the two books, written tasks and oral tasks, and an anonymous survey. These tasks, both written and oral were specifically aimed at the books. The questions were identical for both books, which shows why these two books can be used for the same purpose. I will explain the plan that was made, how it was conducted, and how and if the plan worked in the classroom. An anonymous survey where the students were asked for their point of views regarding this way of teaching will also be presented in this part. The sixth and final chapter will provide a conclusion on the findings from the research, and what these findings can contribute with in the classroom in the future.

## 2 Theories and Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Kelly Oliver's Theory

In her paper “Witnessing and Testimony,” Kelly Oliver talks about her theory on subjectivity and subject position. When it comes to explaining subjectivity, she writes, “By subjectivity I mean one’s sense of oneself as an ‘I’, as an agent” (Oliver 82). Oliver explains subject position this way, “By subject position I mean one’s position in society and history as developed through various social relationships” (82). She talks about how these two concepts are connected. Our subjectivity, “what we feel is us”, is formed by the roles we play in the society, and what category we belong to. These different roles and categories are our subject position. Since both *Americanah* and *The BFG* deals with immigration, identity, personal feelings, and experiences in the characters, I found that this theory was suitable to use for this thesis.

Oliver explains the function of subject position this way, “Subject positions, are constituted in our social interactions and our positions within culture and context” (82). She claims that the subject positions are determined by history and circumstance and develops through social relationships (Oliver 82). This means that the way we are positioned in the society matters as to how people think of us. Let us look at two examples, one from each book. In *Americanah* a Nigerian girl moves to the US. Because she is Nigerian, she is positioned differently than the ones that are originally from the US, because of expectations the society might have along with different stereotypes. She is also a black woman, which puts her in a different position than a white person. The stereotypes and societal expectations people have towards Ifemelu in *Americanah* will be dealt with further in the next chapter. The other example on subject position from *The Big Friendly Giant* can come from both societies that we are presented with from the book. The first involves the giant when he is in his homeplace, where he is treated differently by the other giants simply because he does not eat humans and is therefore a smaller size than the rest of them. The same goes for the giant when he visits London. Because of expectations and prejudices Sophie has, she is instantly afraid of the giant. His subject position is decided for him simply by his looks.

The theory of subject position fits perfectly if we look at *Americanah* and the main character Ifemelu. When she arrives in the U.S., people have gathered up their meaning of her before knowing her, mostly because of history and how African people were treated in the U.S. through earlier centuries. When she goes to interviews looking for work, the interviewers

or managers turns her down, every time. They ask strange questions, such as if there is a war going on in her country, and what her name means. The prejudiced behavior she is met with is most likely there because of what history has taught them. In their research paper “Discrimination in the United States: Experiences of black Americans”, Bleich et al. write, “Black adults report personally experiencing widespread discrimination across social institutions and interpersonally, including in seeking health care, unfair treatment in by the police, and being targets of racial slurs or microaggressions” (1405). This demonstrates the great factor history can have, and that your position in the society in a way relies on it. They write further, “Blacks report experiencing racial discrimination at significantly higher levels than whites, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or the racial composition of their neighborhood” (Bleich et al. 2019). The society you are placed in or get placed in determines your subject position. What has history taught them there, what are they used to? Is the culture completely different or very similar? As Oliver says, the society is of great importance when it comes to subject position. This position can change from different societies and interactions. *Americanah* shows that moving to a different society can change your subject position as well as once subjectivity, as Ifemelu suddenly becomes someone she cannot relate to. People treat her differently, she is spoken to in another way, people have other expectations to her, and finding a job suddenly seems impossible for her.

When it comes to subjectivity Oliver writes, “Subjectivity is experienced as the sense of agency and response-ability that are constituted in the infinite encounter with otherness, which is fundamentally ethical” (82). The meeting between the giant and Sophie in *The BFG* is one where both are meeting with a different race, and in that sense otherness. Oliver writes, “And, although subjectivity is logically prior to any possible subject position, in our experience, they are always profoundly interconnected” (82). It makes sense that they are interconnected because you will always have your subject position in any relation with others, whether it is someone from home or someone anywhere else in the world. Your position might change from place to place, but it will always be there regardless of who you encounter. The prior knowledge that Sophie has about giants makes her react the way she does when the giant has taken her from the orphanage home. What she has learned about giants earlier she expects to involve everyone. She finds out later in the book that this is wrong. The giants subject position starts off as something negative, and later becomes something positive when Sophie learns that he is different from the rest, and a nice and friendly giant. This encounter shows that subjectivity and subject position are closely related to each other. The evolving

friendship between Sophie and the giant is a great example in showing what Kelly Oliver means with her theory of subjectivity and subject position. Their subject positions are connected to the subjectivity in the way that the society, culture, and history has “decided” what they are “meant” to think about each other. After getting to know one another (subjectivity) their subject positions becomes different and thereafter their friendship.

After moving to the US, Ifemelu experience identity crises, where her subjectivity changes. When she talks to the student at school, Christina Tomas, she learns that because of prejudices and stereotypes Christina has towards black immigrants, she believes Ifemelu to be bad at English because of her accent. Ifemelu is actually very good at speaking English, but instead of showing this off proudly, Ifemelu starts to practice an American accent instead. This leads to her subjectivity changing as well, since she now sees herself differently. This will be further dealt with in the next chapter. Another example from *Americanah* can be when it becomes almost impossible for Ifemelu to get a job. This leads to her taking the job she initially did not want, but she feels she must take to pay for food and rent. By taking the job with the coach Ifemelu ends up depressed, and with a lowered self-esteem. This also changes her subjectivity, as she now feels different than what she did before she left for the US. The relationships she develops with Curt, Blaine, and Kimberly all matters when it comes to Ifemelu’s and their subjectivity, and how their subject positions changes during the relationships.

## **2.2 Teaching About Immigration in the Classroom**

Kazi Hossain has in his article “Immigration beyond Ellis Island” written an article where he presents “suggestions for teaching about immigration in the Now.” After years of experience in the classroom, he found that the students learned about the topic of immigration mostly from things that have happened in the past. He was himself an immigrant who moved to the US for approximately 24 years before writing his article. He believes that what the students are missing when learning about immigration, are discussions on current immigration issues, and not issues from the past such as Ellis Island. Before writing further about Hossain and what suggestions he has for teaching, a short explanation of Ellis Island will be given. Learning about the Ellis Island project is not part of the curriculum in the Norwegian schools, so there might not be many Norwegians who knows about it. I have therefore chosen to provide you with a short description, given by Judith Smith in her article “Celebrating Immigration History at Ellis Island.” She writes,



Through a series of laws passed in the 1880s and 1890s, the federal government gradually assumed control over immigration regulation, specifying the exclusion of Asian immigrants on the basis of racial criteria and establishing a federal immigration processing center on the site of an old naval arsenal at Ellis Island. By the late 1890s, examination of entering immigrants grew increasingly stringent and Ellis Island's processing bureaucracy grew more efficient." (84)

Hossain writes, "Observing the student teachers teaching these units on immigration creates the impression that "immigration" happened only in the past and thus is considered an historical event" (56). It is important for students and people in general to know that immigration is still happening today, and in some places to a greater extent than earlier. Although he finds it important to learn about immigration from recent happenings, he still thinks learning about the topic from happenings of the past is good. Talking about immigration both from the past and present time might be a good way for students to learn about the topic.

Hossain asked his students at a university what experiences they had when it comes to learning about the topic. This was done in a multicultural education course at a state university campus to see what they had learned about immigration in school. The answers he got from the students were very revealing. He writes, "In every semester for the last 12 years, nine out of ten students indicated that they learned about immigration – both at the middle and high school levels – through the Ellis Island perspectives without any discussion of current events related to immigration" (Hossain 56). Discussing present-day perspectives on immigration is something both Hossain and I believe to be of significance when teaching about it. He writes, "Very few of my college students indicated that their teachers at the middle high school have ever entertained any discussions of immigration from the present-day perspectives" (Hossain 56). To understand immigration issues in the US today, the discussions must involve current government procedures and political debates.

"Teachers need to compare the past immigrants' experiences through the Ellis Island with the immigrants' experiences of today" (Hossain 57). Learning about something that started over 100 years ago is not relatable for students but comparing it with happenings from today will help make it relatable for them. Teaching the students about the difference between legal and illegal immigrants will help prevent them from negative myths and stereotypes. Examples of stereotypical ways of thinking about immigration:

- They are taking our jobs.
- They come to use our welfare system, get free education for their children.
- Their presence has increased the crime rate. (Hossain 57)

These are all examples of myths or stereotypical ways of thinking about immigrants.

Teaching students about this as well as other present-days issues will make them more aware of these myths and stereotypes and prevent them from being prejudice towards others. As Hossain says in his article it is important that teachers frequently update their knowledge on immigration and current issues, so that the teaching always will be up to date (58). This will help students know more accurately about immigration today, prevent them from showing prejudice behavior and maybe even help them see immigration as something completely normal.

### **2.3 Kunnskapsløftet 2020**

In 2020 a new curriculum was presented for the Norwegian school, named LK20 (Kunnskapsløftet), which was going to replace the old one, LK06. The LK20 curriculum is divided into three different sections, where the first is core curriculum, the second is a distribution of subjects and classes, and the third is about educational program. Since this thesis takes place in secondary school, I will only discuss the first part, core curriculum, since the two others only apply to upper secondary school. The core curriculum is divided into new sections, where the first one talks about “Core values of the education and training”, the second one about “Principles for education and all-round development”, and the third one about “Principles for the school’s practice.” The core curriculum also explains the purpose of education where it presents Section 1-1 of the Education Act. A part of the Education Act was presented in the introduction of this thesis.

The curriculum from 2020 has put an emphasis on interdisciplinary topics and one of these is democracy and citizenship, which says,

In the English subject, the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship refers to helping the pupils to develop their understanding of the fact that the way they view the world is culture dependent. By learning English, the pupils can experience different societies and cultures by communicating with others around the world, regardless of linguistic or cultural background. This can open for new ways to interpret the world, and promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudices. (UDIR)

Through the plan of teaching presented in this thesis, the students will learn about different cultures and immigration issues that are presented in *Americanah* and *the BFG*. The students will also learn about inter-racial friendship, which are presented in these two books. The interdisciplinary topic suggests that following what is written above, can help to prevent students from being prejudiced. Reading about prejudiced behaviors that someone might have towards others who are different from themselves, might make the students more aware of the negative sides being prejudiced can have, and hopefully it will make them think twice before showing prejudiced behavior or thinking a certain way about someone.

The curriculum in English (ENG01-04) presents competence aims and assessment, core elements, relevance and central values, interdisciplinary topics, and basic skills. The competence aims are a list with what is expected that the students know after a certain amount of time. The competence aims that will be presented here are the ones for students after Year 10 in secondary school. These competence aims are for all classes from 8-10 in secondary school and explain what is expected of the students to have knowledge about when they are finished in secondary school. I have chosen six competence aims that I found suitable when learning about racism and immigration through literature:

- Ask questions and follow up input when talking about various topics adapted to different purposes, recipients, and situations.
- Use knowledge of word classes and syntax in working on one's own oral and written texts.
- Follow rules for spelling, word inflection, syntax, and text structure.
- Read, discuss, and present content from various types of texts, including self-chosen texts.
- Read, interpret, and reflect on English-language fiction, including young people's literature.
- Explore and describe ways of living, ways of thinking, communication patterns and diversity in the English-speaking world. (UDIR)

All of these are competence aims which I found suitable for the plan in teaching with the two books. The ones that start with "read" fits because the students are expected to read the two books. The other ones are suitable because of the tasks the students are given in the classroom. They are given one task where they are supposed to give longer answers to the

tasks in writing and another where they are expected to participate in a discussion about the books with fellow students.

The formative assessment and assessment of coursework are presented in the English curriculum, and they are both worth mentioning. The formative assessment says, “The teacher shall facilitate for pupil participation and stimulate the desire to learn by using a variety of strategies and learning resources to develop the pupils’ reading skills and oral and writing skills” (UDIR). The way of teaching which I am suggesting in this thesis, provides a variety in teaching strategies. The students are given various tasks that can contribute to their development of reading skills in addition to oral and writing skills. This will be demonstrated later in the fourth chapter which presents the research in the classroom and involves all three skills. Hopefully, when they are given the choice between two different books in both length and level of difficulty it can help stimulate the desire to learn. Some of the students in the classroom might be immigrants, which makes the topics even more relevant for the students. The assessment of coursework is also relevant to mention, as it explains, “The teacher shall plan and facilitate for the pupils to demonstrate their competence in various ways, including through understanding, reflection and critical thought, and in various context” (UDIR). The students will be given written assignments and assignments for discussion. These assignments invite the students to reflect, understand, and exercise critical thinking when answering. This shows that both the formative assessment and assessment of coursework, as well as the competence aims was carefully thought of when the teaching was being planned.

The basic skills in the English curriculum are oral skills, written skills, reading skills, and digital skills. The teaching presented in this thesis, involves three of these, with the excluding one being digital skills. Oral and written skills are both a part of the teaching plan through the written tasks and the discussion tasks. The curriculum explains, “Oral skills in English refers to creating meaning through listening, talking and engaging in conversation” (UDIR). The one that is of most value for this teaching plan is the reading skills, which says,

Reading in English means understanding and reflecting on the content of various types of texts on paper and on screen and contributing to reading pleasure and language acquisition. It means reading and finding information in multimedia texts with competing messages and using reading strategies to understand explicit and implicit information. The development of reading skills in English progresses from experimenting with phonemes and speech sounds, spelling patterns and syllables to

reading varied and complex texts with fluency and comprehension and being increasingly able to critically reflect on and assess different types of texts. (UDIR)

The students are presented with two books that differ in both length and level of language. *Americanah* is a longer book with a more advanced language than *The Big Friendly Giant*. It is important for the teacher to be aware of the student's level in the English language as well as their motivation for reading and their reading pleasure beforehand. With this in mind, the teacher can help the students by giving them the book which provides a higher change of increasing the reading pleasure and motivation for them. The same applies for language. If a student is advanced when it comes to the English language, giving this student *Americanah* will be suitable, while *The BFG* will be suitable for someone who is less advanced. It is important to meet the students at their level of knowledge and help them expand it from there.

### 3 *Americanah* – Analysis

*Americanah* is a realistic novel written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in 2015. In the novel we follow a 19-year-old Nigerian girl called Ifemelu on her journey from her home country to the US. Adichie invites us as readers on a journey filled with representation of prejudiced behavior, racism, and stereotypes. Ifemelu's subjectivity and subject position are being tested and are also going through changes as she moves to a country with a different language, culture, perspective on history, food, clothing amongst other. Adichie has through her novel shown that even though one might face racism and prejudice behavior when migrating to another country, friendships can occur regardless of the different cultures and background people might have. There might be a clear contrast when it comes to people's subjectivity as well as their subject position in the society, and as Hallinan and Williams writes in their study on interracial friendship it is more unlikely for two people of different races to become friends, than for two being the same race (67). Ifemelu meets lots of challenges because of her race, but she still ends up getting friends and even boyfriends while living in America. Adichie has written a realistic novel which not only presents the negative sides to immigration but shows the positive factors as well and how that has a greater impact on people. Although Ifemelu experiences racism, prejudiced behavior, and stereotypes whilst living in America, she stays for 13 years.

The word race is a bit complicated to use because it is a socialized word with lots of different meanings. Since Adichie herself uses it throughout the novel, this analysis will use the word race as well. Already on the first pages in chapter 1, Adichie uses the word race. The word is used here to describe Ifemelu's observations about how race functions in the US compared to Nigeria. Before she uses the word race, Adichie implies that the novel will categorize people after what skin color they have. Adichie writes, "A few other people were waiting on the platform, all of them white and lean, in short, flimsy clothes" (4). The word is used when we get to know that Ifemelu has a blog, because it is part of the blog's title, "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black." When Ifemelu had told people that are white the title of her blog in the past, people often responded unexpectedly, and not in a good way. One white American man had said: "Race is totally overhyped these days, black people need to get over themselves" (Adichie 4). From this quote early in the beginning, we know how race will be treated in this novel. Race is used in the novel to describe people with different skin color, such as white Americans as one race, and black Africans as another race.

While living in America, Ifemelu starts a blog about race. In their study, “Identicalness between Race and Gender in *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: A Study,” M. Robert Chandran and C. Govindaraj write, “As a woman and as a black person in the United States, Ifemelu uses her blog to explore all the aspects that shape her identity and shape her daily life. With the creation of her blog, Ifemelu is able to see ‘race’ for the first time in a society that down plays racism and the covert subjugation of black women” (79). This blog brings up important topics when it comes to race in America and tells of Ifemelu’s experience as a black woman living there. The blog becomes Ifemelu’s place where she can write about all the confusing and surreal things that she experiences. In her article which is about race in *Americanah*, Nilima Meher writes, “The blog functions as a way of giving direct critique to matters of race, without being disguised as fiction. In her blog she asserts that race is a social construct” (573). The blog is a place where Ifemelu can let out her frustration and express her thoughts on the matter. She left Nigeria not knowing the word “race,” and comes to America and is suddenly confronted with it daily.

Not a lot of time goes by for Ifemelu in the US before she is met with prejudice behavior. Without even opening her mouth, Ifemelu’s strength in English is questioned. When Ifemelu starts at Princeton University in America, she meets with a student that talks to her as though she is incapable of understanding English. Adichie provides us with a very detailed description of the student’s looks and puts emphasis on the fact that she is white. She writes, “Christina Tomas with her rinsed-out look, her washy blue eyes, faded hair and pallid skin” (132). Adichie describes her with a negative undertone. She writes further, “Christina Tomas wearing whitish tights that made her legs look like death” (132). This scene is already starting with a negative tone, which prepares us for what is coming next. The conversation between Christina Tomas and Ifemelu is presented below:

‘Yes. Now. Are. You. An. International. Student?’

‘Yes.’

‘You. Will. First. Need. To. Get. A. Letter. From. The. International. Students. Office.’

Ifemelu half smiled in sympathy, because Christina Tomas had to have some sort of illness that made her speak so slowly, lips scrunching and puckering, as she gave directions to the international students office. But when Ifemelu returned with the

letter, Christina Tomas said, 'I. Need. You. To. Fill. Out. A. Couple. Of. Forms. Do. You. Understand. How. To. Fill. These. Out?' and she realized that Christina Tomas was speaking like that because of her, her foreign accent, and she felt for a moment like a small child, lazy-limbed and drooling.

'I speak English,' she said.

'I bet you do,' Christina Tomas said. 'I just don't know how well.'

Ifemelu shrank. In that strained, still second when her eyes met Christina Tomas's before she took the forms, she shrank. She shrank like a dried leaf. She had spoken English all her life, led the debating society in secondary school, and always thought the American twang inchoate; she should not have cowered and shrunk, but she did. And in the following weeks, as autumn's coolness descended, she began to practice an American accent. (133-134)

This conversation between Christina Tomas and Ifemelu demonstrates how Ifemelu has been placed in a societal position simply because of her looks and the accent she speaks with. Because Ifemelu speaks with an accent and is a student of black color who is new to the school, Christina Tomas immediately expects her to be bad at English. The societal expectations and prejudices the student shows demonstrates what category or what subject position she thinks Ifemelu belongs to. Ifemelu thinks of herself as good with the English language, she has after all spoken English all her life and was part of the debate team in Nigeria. This is therefore an unexpected happening for her. Because of the stereotypes that circulate in the American society among white Americans, Christina Tomas responds the way she does. In her study on *Americanah*, Syed Hajira Begum writes, "This scene can be magnified to examine the symbolism that makes it more than an uncomfortable and condescending encounter between a white student and a black student. In fact, Christina Tomas symbolizes America for Ifemelu" (621). This is one of the first encounters Ifemelu has with the issue of race in America, so we can understand why this encounter with Christina Tomas has that much impact on her. The sudden insecurity and degrading feeling Ifemelu are left with, becomes the basis for Ifemelu's actions and behavior, and leads to her changing her own identity while living in America.

Ifemelu's subjectivity tells her that she is good in English, and she therefore expect others to think so as well, but her subject position can tell others something else. Because of



the subject position that is presented to her through the conversation between her and Christina Tomas, she changes the way she thinks about herself and how she believes others think of her. Not only has her subject position changed when she moved to the US, but also her subjectivity is now going through changes. Instead of speaking her accent proudly, she feels ashamed and embarrassed, and therefore starts to practice an American accent. She gives up parts of herself to become more American, to prevent herself from getting into a similar situation as this one. Jack Taylor writes in his article “Language, Race and Identity in Adichie’s *Americanah* and Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*,” “This comical yet all too realistic event shames Ifemelu and leads her to change her identity by training herself to speak with an American accent-or, as her friend Ranyinudio says before she departs Nigeria for America, she is learning to speak Americanah” (74).

Ifemelu speaks with an American accent for a while until she experiences a phone call which makes her understand how she has given up part of her identity and why on earth she did so in the first place. She realizes how she has given in to the stereotypes for people to think of her as someone else than an African immigrant, and instead someone who has been in America for most of her life. Adichie writes as follows:

Only after she hung up did she begin to feel the stain of a burgeoning shame spreading all over her, for thanking him, for crafting his words ‘You sound American’ into a garland that she hung around her own neck. Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American? She had won; Christina Tomas, pallid-faced Christina Tomas under whose gaze she had shrunk like a small, defeated animal, would speak to her normally now. She had won, indeed, but her triumph was full of air. Her fleeting victory had left in its wake a vast, echoing space, because she had taken on, for too long, a pitch voice and a way of being that was not hers. And so she finished eating her eggs and resolved to stop faking the American accent. She first spoke without the American accent that afternoon at Thirtieth Street Station, leaning towards the woman behind the Amtrak counter. (175)

This excerpt is written realistically, because Ifemelu stops speaking with the accent at a completely normal place on an ordinary day. There is nothing more to it than that, which makes it easily imaginable for us as readers. We as readers sympathize with this identity crisis that Ifemelu goes through. The insecurity she feels for something new and unexpected, and what she does to fit in to the new society she has moved to, is something many of us can

relate too. Especially for young people in middle school, who are going through cognitive changes and developments of the brain, as well as being hormonal. At some point, we all try to fit in, and in doing so Ifemelu loses parts of herself, which changes her subjectivity and ultimately leads to the change in her subject position as well. When she is changing herself to become less African and more American, people in America think of her differently, and thereby her subject position changes as well. In her paper, “Becoming a Subject: Developing a Critical Consciousness and Coming to Voice in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*”, Stefanie Reuter writes, “Her decision to speak her own accent despite the possibility to be degraded by people like Cristina Tomas shows Ifemelu’s first step to a ‘coming to voice’ as a self-defined subject” (4).

During her job interviews, Ifemelu experiences different forms of discrimination. Not long after her arrival, she goes for a job interview in South Philadelphia. After hearing her accent, the woman who interviews Ifemelu asks where she is from. When she applies that she is from Nigeria, the woman asks, “Nigeria. Isn’t there a war going on there?” (Adichie 130). The woman asks in a way that makes us think she expects there to be a war, without really knowing. She asks for Ifemelu’s name, and when Ifemelu gives two different answers, she does not really seem to care that much about it. It ends up with Ifemelu not getting the job. This experience along with others illustrate the challenges immigrants can face when applying for jobs in a new country. These challenges include stereotypes, prejudice behavior, racism, and discrimination. These can all lead to negative changes in a person’s self-esteem, and in general their well-being. For Ifemelu it gets to a point where she feels that the only job available for her is the job she takes with the sports coach. After being at his place doing the job of helping him relax, meaning giving him massages and lying next to him in bed, she ends up feeling like her pride and self-esteem are all gone. “She woke up torpid each morning, slowed by sadness, frightened by the endless stretch of the day that lay ahead. She cared about nothing. She wanted to care, but she no longer knew how” (Adichie 156). She goes to the US motivated and engaged in starting a new life, but she is met with all these unexpected encounters of racism, discrimination, prejudiced behavior, and stereotypes. Not just by people on the streets, but by job managers and people at her school. This seems to be very unexpected for her, which leads to her feeling depressed.

After this and other encounters Ifemelu becomes aware of her skin color and how being black in the US is very different from being black in Nigeria. Meher writes, “It is interesting to note that Ifemelu feels like a black and underprivileged in America and her own

country gives her a sense of security where normal processes of life matter, not perceptions of race” (570). Shortly after it is known that Barack Obama will be the next candidate for the Democratic Party, Ifemelu goes to a party with Blaine. Ifemelu has a conversation with another woman, where they talk about race in America, and Ifemelu says to her, “The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it’s a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black, and I only became black when I came to America” (290). This was a new experience for Ifemelu, and one that was very unexpected for her. She travels with the mindset of race not to have any effect as it would have in the past, thinking of the slave trade, the Ku Klux Klan, amongst other happenings from the past. It seems like she expects these attitudes towards Africans to be all gone, or at least to have a smaller impact on the society. She is after all living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In their article called “Migration and Realism in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah*,” Abuku and Nietlong writes, “Exploring how migration shapes racial identity, the novel shows how racial formations like blackness refuse to travel and translate even as they are globally mobile” (312). Ifemelu discovers that the attitude towards race is something far different than what she is used to in Nigeria. In the conversation she has on the phone with Curt after she has moved back to Nigeria, he asks if she is still blogging about race, she responds, “No, just about life. Race doesn’t really work here. I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black” (Adichie 476).

In her article “You’re black”: Transnational perceptions of race in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* and Andrea Levy’s *Small Island*,” Mindi McMann writes, “Racial signifiers such as ‘black’ are carefully avoided in America. Despite this relative silence, Ifemelu realizes that race occupies a strange place in American consciousness” (209). Instead of normalizing race, it is treated as something invisible or something that does not really exist (McMann 209). When Ifemelu arrives in Philadelphia, Ginika takes her shopping. There are two young women working there, one with black skin color, and one with white skin color. Ginika is asked by the cashier in the store which one of the two workers there helped her, and she cannot remember their names. The cashier keeps asking about the length and color of their hair until she ends up saying: “It’s okay, I’ll figure it out later and make sure she gets her commission” (Adichie 126-127). After leaving the store, Ifemelu says, “Why didn’t she just ask ‘Was it the black girl or the white girl?’ Ginika laughed. ‘Because this is America. You’re supposed to pretend that you don’t notice certain things” (Adichie 127). By choosing not to normalize skin color in situations like this, it sends an unfortunate message. The person who

chooses not to say this, is either presented as one who is prejudiced or even racist, or someone who is afraid to seem like one who is prejudiced and racist, and therefore chooses not to say anything about it at all. This only creates an awkward and unnecessary situation instead of a completely normal situation. This scene in the novel shows how history and actions of racists have made it difficult for a person with white skin color to know how to act “normal” and what “normal” really is when it comes to talking with or about people with black skin color.

Although *Americanah* presents lots of negative factors when migrating, positive factors are also present in the novel. One theme from the novel which shows the positive sides to immigration are friendship. When Ifemelu works as a babysitter she meets an American man named Curt, who happens to be the children’s uncle and who is a white American. She and Curt develop a relationship where they end up becoming boyfriend and girlfriend. When they first meet, Ifemelu does not seem interested at all. As she gets to know him, she becomes more and more interested in him. Their relationship is described as an easy and carefree relationship. Curt is a wealthy white American man, who also manages to get Ifemelu a job. Meher writes, “Curt is able to arrange and achieve things that would have taken Ifemelu more time and effort, because he is white and, therefore, privileged” (572). Going from being turned down for every job along with barely having enough money to survive in the US, Ifemelu suddenly has no need to worry about either. Adichie writes, “With Curt, she became, in her mind, a woman free of knots and cares, a woman running in the rain with the taste of sun-warmed strawberries in her mouth” (Adichie 196). Adichie paints a romanticized picture for us here, where we as readers are invited to imagine what Ifemelu is feeling, a sort of relief, stability and security she has been looking for since she came to the US. The relationship between Ifemelu and Curt demonstrates how it is not the color of your skin that matters, but instead common interests, similar hobbies, trust, and if the other person makes you laugh and smile. “She was lighter and leaner; she was Curt’s Girlfriend, a role she slipped into as into a favourite, flattering dress. She laughed more because he laughed so much. His optimism blinded her” (Adichie 196).

Even though Ifemelu seems happy and carefree together with Curt, the issue of race and racism comes up on different occasions. Throughout their relationship there are several encounters where they meet people who are sceptics and people who act racist when it comes to their interracial relationship. When they tell the children Ifemelu are babysitting that they are a couple, Adichie writes, “‘That’s disgusting’, Morgan said, looking genuinely disgusted” (194). This is not the only time during their relationship where they face this kind of hostile

attitude. This is just the beginning. When Curt introduced Ifemelu as his girlfriend to some old friends at a party, they looked surprised: “A surprise that some of them shielded and some of them did not, and in their expressions was the question “Why her?” (Adichie 292). They are surprised to see that a white, American man can be dating a black, African woman. Adichie writes further, “She had seen the look before, on the faces of white women, strangers on the street, who would see her hand clasped in Curt’s and instantly cloud their faces with that look” (292). While Ifemelu and Curt are a couple, she faces racism everywhere, and this demonstrates how people still in the 21<sup>st</sup> century struggle with the issue of race. When they went to a restaurant together the waiter asked Curt if he would like a table for one, like Ifemelu did not even exist (Adichie 294). Ifemelu becomes much more aware of race and how race functions in America during her relationship with Curt, which is the reason why she starts her blog.

The issue of race is not only present in their relationship from the outside, but Ifemelu sometimes feel that it is present inside their relationship as well. Chandran and Govindaraj write, “They are a perfect couple; there is nothing wrong with them individually. However, her racial privilege would constantly make her uncomfortable and serve as a reminder of their disparities” (79). At times she would think that Curt was only interested in her because he had never been with a black woman before and is not hiding the fact that being with one is exciting for him. Sometimes he would stand up for her when they came upon someone who acted racist or prejudiced, and at other times he would simply not stand up for her at all. This confuses Ifemelu, which for us as readers are understandable. Even though she is pleased in the relationship, it lacks something, and after they both disappoint each other, Curt by talking to a white American woman online and Ifemelu cheating on Curt a bit later, they end up going their separate ways.

Another relationship which becomes important to Ifemelu, is the one between Blaine, who works a professor in comparative politics at Yale and herself. There is a distinction between being African American, like Blaine, and an African immigrant, like Ifemelu. In their article where they talk about labelling African populations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Charles B. Agyemang, Raj Bhopal and Marc Bruijnzeels provides a description to the two terms. They write, “The term African American refers to a person of African ancestral origins who self identifies or is identified by others as African American” (1016). When it comes to the other term, African, they write, “The term African in the context of scientific writing on race and ethnicity usually refers to a person with African ancestral origins who self identifies or is

identified by others as African” (Agyemang et al. 1016). Agyemang et al., have also provided an explanation of the term ‘black’: “The term Black generally refers to a person with African ancestral origins. In some circumstances, usually in politics or power struggles, the term Black signifies all non-White minority populations” (1016). Ifemelu identifies as African, but after the conversation with Christina Tomas she tries to be someone others will think of as African American. This is because by being an African American people in America assume that you know the English language very well.

Blaine and Ifemelu first meet early in the novel on the train. They have a conversation, Ifemelu becomes interested, but after he does not answer her calls, she gives up on him and lives her life for around 8 years until they meet again. They reconnect, and Blaine explains how he had a girlfriend the first time they met which is why he did not pick up the phone when she called. When she meets Blaine at the blog convention in Washington DC, we are taken back to how she remembers him from the time they met on the train: “It would amuse him to know how much she had idealized him, how he had become a person made not of flesh but of little crystals of perfection, the American man she would never have” (Adichie 308). Ifemelu is clearly attracted to Blaine, both in the past and right now eight years later. After the convention they send E-mails and they have several phone calls, with a flirty tone or as Adichie writes, “heavy flirting during late-night calls” (309). He comes over to her, which leads to them becoming lovers. “It was as if because of their train meeting years ago, they could bypass several steps, ignore several unknowns, and slide into an immediate intimacy” (Adichie 310). The language Adichie uses when she writes about Blaine and Ifemelu’s relationship is romantic and beautiful. We feel different when reading about Blaine and Ifemelu, than we did when reading about Curt and Ifemelu. Ifemelu did not seem that interested in Curt at the beginning, and their relationship grew over time. She is instantly interested in Blaine, and as Adichie writes they bypass several steps at the beginning of their relationship. This is what we can call love at first sight. In her article on *Americanah*, Katherine Hallemeier writes, “Ifemelu’s long-term relationship with Blaine, extends the novel’s critique of the racialization of romantic love in the US to include relationships between black Americans and black non-Americans by describing a love-interest whose belief in his “goodness” extends, absolute and certain (239).

Blaine and Ifemelu share interests, especially regarding politics and social justice issues, and they have conversations on the same intellectual level, which is the reason why their relationship works well. They have a good relationship, build on trust and happiness,

until the issue of race yet again comes up to the surface with Blaine as well. This surprises Ifemelu, as she gets to meet a side of Blaine, she did not know he had. When Blaine chooses to have a protest for his friend Mr. White, an African American security guard working at the school where he works, who got accused of doing something he did not do, Ifemelu does not show up. When Blaine figures out that Ifemelu lied to him, they have a big fight. Ifemelu had a lunch with an African scholar instead, and this leads to Blaine saying, “You know it’s not just about writing a blog, you have to live like you believe it. That blog is a game that you don’t really take seriously, it’s like choosing an *interesting* elective evening class to complete your credits” (Adichie 345). Blaine is questioning Ifemelu and sees her actions as a betrayal, and at the same time he talks negatively about her identity, which is something of importance for Ifemelu. Adichie writes, “She recognized, in his tone, a subtle accusation, not merely about her laziness, her lack of zeal and conviction, but also about her Africanness; she was not sufficiently furious because she was African, not African American” (Adichie 345). After this, they remain a couple for a bit longer, but for Ifemelu the relationship has changed. She still cares for him and admires him, but she is less affectionate and romantic with him. The same as with Curt, the issue of race becomes a problem for Ifemelu in this relationship as well. The relationship ends with them going their separate ways after Ifemelu decides to go back to Nigeria.

The relationship between Kimberly and Ifemelu is one that is complicated, and sometimes difficult to understand. Their first encounter happens when Ifemelu is looking for a job and goes for a job interview with Kimberly to work for her as a babysitter. She does not get the job at first, but after a short while the job becomes hers. Kimberly’s sister Laura comes over to the house a lot, and when she is describing Laura as a character, Adichie writes, “She was as thin and straight and blonde as Kimberly” (146). Kimberly seems very kind and friendly and acts nicely towards Ifemelu. What Ifemelu, as well as we as readers find a bit odd is the way she acts towards Ifemelu about her being African and black. When Ifemelu tells Kimberly her name, Kimberly asks if it means anything, and that she loves multicultural names because of their meanings from rich cultures. In their article, “Acculturative Stress and Immigrant Trauma in *Americanah*”, Ayisha Begum and N. Jagadeswari writes, “Kimberly empathizes with Ifemelu, but sometimes Kimberly’s over appreciation of black women makes Ifemelu uncomfortable” (286). Kimberly describes every woman with black skin color as “beautiful,” which ultimately leads to Ifemelu saying, “You know you can just say ‘black’. Not every black person is beautiful” (Adichie 147). Even

though Kimberly struggles a bit with how to approach Ifemelu as a black African woman, the two empathizes with each other and develops a relationship where they both feel good.

After Ifemelu says that she can just say the word 'black', Adichie writes, "Kimberly was taken aback, something wordless spread on her face and then she smiled, and Ifemelu would think of it as the moment they became, truly, friends" (147). At the party that Kimberly and Don are throwing she presents Ifemelu as their babysitter, but also her friend. This shows us that Kimberly also sees Ifemelu as a friend. She did not have to introduce Ifemelu as a friend, she could just have said their babysitter, but this shows how the relationship matters to both Ifemelu and Kimberly. Later, when Curt announces in an amusing way that Ifemelu and himself have started dating, Kimberly responds with a hug. Adichie writes, "Kimberly laughed and then, in an act that both surprised and moved Ifemelu, Kimberly hugged her" (193). This act demonstrates how Kimberly really cares for Ifemelu, as she shows her excitement about the fact that Ifemelu and Curt has started dating, two people she obviously cares about. "Well, Kimberly said, looking a little startled by the hug herself. I just wanted to say I'm really.... Happy for you both" (Adichie 193). During the time Ifemelu babysits for Kimberly and Don, they keep their good friendship, but when Ifemelu moves and gets a new job, their friendship drifts away.

Ifemelu's subjectivity and subject position are changing and developing during all these three relationships. The way Kimberly talks to Ifemelu at the beginning makes us as readers see Ifemelu's subject position as something fragile and unfortunate. She is a black woman, and because of history and the issue that race presents in the US today, Kimberly is insecure about how to talk to Ifemelu. After Ifemelu confronts her about these issues, Ifemelu's subject position becomes different. Ifemelu is now Kimberly's friend, instead of just her employee, and therefore her subjectivity has changed as well. Their friendship leads to Ifemelu's subjectivity and subject position now being placed positively, instead of being placed in a negative setting. With Curt and Blaine, the situation is reversed. Blaine sees Ifemelu as an intellectual woman, with the same interests in politics as him, and with the same thoughts on race, and how to confront those issues. He therefore sees her subjectivity and subject position with this in mind. She as well thinks of herself this way, which makes the relationship easy at first. When Ifemelu lies about not showing up to the demonstration, the view that Blaine has on her changes, and with that her subjectivity as well as her subject position changes as she now feels more insecure both with the relationship but also with herself. Blaine's view of her in the society changes, as he thinks of her as no longer willing to



fight for all black people's rights in America, not only for Africans, but also for African Americans. The situation is similar with Curt, where she first views herself as a black woman, and can therefore never imagine herself being with a white American man. After everything she has been through in the US, regarding racism, discrimination, prejudiced behavior and stereotypes, Ifemelu is starting to understand how race works in America. When Curt shows interest and wants her to be his girlfriend, how Ifemelu sees herself changes and thereby her subjectivity changes too. Their relationship meets lots of challenges regarding their different races, which ultimately leads to Ifemelu having a subject position that is a category lower than Curt's subject position in the society. They become aware of this unbalance in their relationship, which leads to them breaking up. The relationship with Blaine and the relationship with Curt shows how Ifemelu's subjectivity and subject position has a negative development in both relationships, instead of staying positive as they both are in the beginning.

Americanah shows both the negative sides of immigration along with positive sides to immigration. Although Ifemelu faces racism and stereotypes with prejudiced behavior everywhere she goes, she chooses to stay for 13 years. If she was not happy enough or comfortable in America, she would probably have moved back to Nigeria earlier. She stays and that has got to mean that she must have thrived there. She makes friends, even a few boyfriends while living there. She also gets different jobs and takes classes at college. She worked very hard, and probably harder than someone of a different race would have, and she is therefore forced to take jobs that are not what she imagined. But all the hard work pays off, as she also gets jobs where she feels good. If she had not taken the job babysitting for Kimberly, she would most likely never have met Curt, and with that she would probably not even have started blogging about race. She would also miss out on the chance of becoming friends with Kimberly, which seems to be a good experience for Ifemelu.

The novel demonstrates how the issue of race is still an issue today. Not only with strangers, such as the lady who works at the clothing store, or the waiter in the restaurant, but also among friends such as with Kimberly, and even boyfriends as we have seen with Curt and Blaine. When race stops being an issue, and is instead normalized, immigrating to another country will be much easier. If people instead were treated equally, and rather by skills, traits, personality and other psychological traits, the world would be a much better place for everyone. Chinenye Amonyeze has written an article about liminality and bicultural identity in the novel, and writes,

Adichie's primary objective is to engender the social compact of respect and understanding and articulate minorities' strategies toward the racial phenomenon of power in the process of social evolution. The failure of the White community to interact with people of other colors on a deeper level invariably leads to misunderstanding and suspicion. Speaking with people about their cultures is vital to understand them as fellow human beings contributing to the diverse flora of humanity. Integration brings stability. (8)

It is not race that makes Ifemelu's relationship with Curt, Blaine, and Kimberly work, it is the friendly conversations, the common interests, and their behavior towards each other. Dr. Syed Hajira Begum describes Ifemelu's experience in the US very well and I am therefore concluding this analysis with a quote from her article called "*Americanah* as a Transnational Feminist Novel: A Study:" "She suffers defeats and triumphs, finds, and loses relationships and friendships, all the while feeling the weight of something she never thought of back home: race" (619).

## 4 *The Big Friendly Giant (The BFG)* – Analysis

*The Big Friendly Giant* is a children's fiction book that Roald Dahl wrote in 1982, and it is one of his most famous ones. The readers follow the journey of the orphan girl named Sophie and the Giant called Big Friendly Giant, and the development of their friendship. Although Sophie and the Giant are two completely different races, they end up becoming friends after finding out their similarities and what they like about one another. Since this is a fantasy book, the term 'race' will be used differently when talking about *The BFG*, than it would be in a realistic novel like *Americanah*. In this analysis, race is treated as a term that explains the difference between humans and giants, and is not depended on history, skin color, cultural background, or other factors. To my knowledge there is little research done on *The BFG*, and especially on the topics of this thesis, which are racism, prejudiced behavior, stereotypes, inter-racial friendship and immigration. Therefore, this thesis will not address much secondary literary research on those topics in *The BFG*, but rather the topics in general and other secondary sources suitable for this thesis. With Roald Dahl's children's book, *The BFG*, I argue that one can in close reading discover themes of racism with occurrence of prejudiced behavior and stereotypes, as well as interracial friendship. In her article called "Racism in Roald Dahl's *The BFG*: A Social Criticism or White Supremacy Tendency?" Jeanyfer Tanusy writes,

While a lot of children stories writers tend to focus on teaching children about moral lessons and therefore will try to be as clear as possible presenting the messages to the readers, some writers like to insert subtle messages in their stories – ones that are not easily understood without knowing the context and/or without critical reading on the piece. (63)

This is what we as readers can assume that Roald Dahl has done with *The BFG*. The reader can choose to focus on something else in *The BFG* than for it to only be an amusing story for children. With close reading we can see that there are bigger themes such as racism, prejudiced behavior, inter-racial friendship, and hints on immigration.

Sophie's behavior at the beginning of the book shows prejudiced behavior, and one might even say that her behavior is racist. At night, when she sees the giant through the window of the orphanage home she lives in, Dahl writes, "It wasn't a human. It couldn't be. It was four times as tall as the tallest human. It was so tall its head was higher than the upstairs

windows of the houses. Sophie opened her mouth to scream, but no sound came out. Her throat, like her whole body, was frozen with fright” (4). The reaction from Sophie might be expected from us as readers, but why is it expected? Why do we as readers as well as Sophie instantly think that a huge person walking around at night is scary and terrifying? She does not know this person and neither do we. What we as readers know about giants before reading this story, from fairy tales, myths, and other stories, makes us assume that this giant is simply not good. Therefore, we believe Sophie’s reaction to be prejudiced. Dahl further describes the giant, “There at the window, with the curtains pushed aside, was the enormous long pale wrinkly face of the Giant Person, staring in. The flashing black eyes were fixed on Sophies bed” (8). This first meeting between Sophie and the giant is an interesting one. The only truth we as readers as well as Sophie knows by now is that the person outside the window is a tall person with a pale face and black eyes. Tanusy writes, “It is clear from the description of the BFG being a lot taller than average human beings that Dahl wants to create a mental perception in the readers’ minds that the BFG is different” (65). Sophie has her reaction because the giant is a different race than her, and because of the stereotypes and prior knowledge she has about all giants.

Another example from the book that shows prejudiced behavior, is from the part where Sophie gets taken by the giant and brought to Giant Land. “*The giant is running fast, she told herself, because he is hungry and he wants to get home as quickly as possible, and then he’ll have me for breakfast*” (Dahl 11). Just because he is a giant, Sophie believes that he will eventually eat her. Tanusy writes, “She holds a certain belief or stereotype about all giants being cannibals” (66). Sophie assumes the worst when she gets taken, and she is judging the giant before knowing him. Since she believes this to be true and the story is written from her perspective, we as readers sympathize with her and believe this to be true as well. The stereotype which says that all giants are bad creatures that eat human beings makes us and Sophie think that this giant is no exception. “The narrator of the story, through the eyes of Sophie, deliberately assigns a stereotype on the BFG based only on what she thinks giants do without knowing the hard fact of it” (Tanusy 66).

The BFG experiences racism from Sophie, but also from others around him as well. The other giants in Giant Land are treating him as though he does not belong with them, because he is different. Since the BFG does not eat children, he is smaller than the other giants. “The BFG is seen as an outgroup by his own race because his actions do not reflect the stereotypes of the giant race” (Tanusy 67). Because of this they treat him horribly and bully

him, and make sure he stays an outsider in Giant Land. The BFG is the only one who is kind and friendly and does not eat children or human beings. Because of his size, it becomes difficult for the BFG to stick up for himself. When Sophie and the BFG move past the other giants, and the giants discover the BFG, they are questioning and teasing him. The Fleshlumpeater even grabs him by his hair. They start picking him up one by one and throws him to each other. “The giants were playing ball with the BFG, vying with each other to see who could throw him the highest” (Dahl 66). The BFG is being bullied by all the other giants in his home place, and because we now know that he is friendly, we sympathize with him. Before Sophie knows he is friendly and chooses to become his friend, the BFG experiences racism and prejudiced behavior both from the giants from inside his home and from people outside his home, namely Sophie. Tanusy writes, “By portraying the BFG as a non-human-eating giant, Dahl has made this character a victim of double racism as the BFG experiences negative judgment both from the ones outside his group (i.e. Sophie and other human beings) and inside (i.e. other giants)” (67).

All the bullying and exclusion that the BFG goes through with the other giants in Giant Land, makes it understandable that he feels like he does not belong there. This along with the fact that the BFG dislikes that the other giants are eating human beings, makes him want to change how things are around him. Because he now trusts Sophie after they have developed a friendship, he builds up a courage and travels to London with her to convince the queen to help them get rid of the other giants. After learning about them and the horrible things they do, the queen decides to help Sophie and the giant, and this makes the reader believe that the giant will now have a chance at a better future and a better life, living in a place where he will never get bullied and excluded. He also now has a good friend in Sophie, which he likes being with since they share laughs, interesting talks, and find each other’s companies amusing.

Although the book does not explicitly address the topic of immigration, it shows us how someone can experience aspects of immigration in their own countries or when visiting new places for a longer time, such as Sophie when the giant takes her to Giant Land. Sophie lives in London but is suddenly one night moved to a new and completely different place, called the Giant Land. It can be scary moving to a new place, thinking of different cultures, new languages, and other parts that may be new and different in a new place. For Sophie, it is scary, since she immediately fears for her life, and with good reason. In Giant Land, the BFG is the only one who does not eat children, so she is only safe while hiding around him. In this

place it is not only the culture, language, creatures, and everything else that is different. Here, she must hide in order not to get eaten. When they gather up with the queen and her army to capture the giants that eat humans and place them somewhere they cannot escape, the land becomes a place where human now can visit without having to fear for their lives. The Big Friendly Giant lives in a country where he feels like an outsider. Although they are all the same race, everyone acts different from him. The giants living there are much taller than the BFG, and they all love their lives which consist of eating children and other human beings. With the BFG being the only one in Giant Land who does not eat humans and is much smaller in size, he keeps to himself, which we understand can be lonely. His interest and curiosity in human beings is also something only he has. The rest of the giants sees them only as meals. After they have captured all the giants, the BFG moves to London. “The queen herself gave orders that a special house with tremendous high ceilings and enormous doors should immediately be built in Windsor Great Park, next to her own castle, for the BFG to live in” (Dahl 197). The book ends with him migrating to London. Although he looks very different from the humans living in London, this seems like a better place for him where he can feel at home. He learns English, reads a lot, writes essays and has conversations both with the queen and Sophie regularly.

Even though there are obvious differences between Sophie and the BFG, they end up becoming friends. In the article named “What is Friendship,” Uri D. Leibowitz explains friendship as: “A relation between two people in which each participant values the other and successfully communicates this fact to the other” (112). Eventually, Sophie sees past the fact that he is a giant, and instead focus on the personality he has. This is what allows for them to become friends. In their study “Why people make friends: The nature of friendship,” Menelaos Apostolou et al. writes, “Participants indicated that the most important ones were to receive social input, support, and someone’s good qualities” (13). Here, they are talking about the most important reasons that motivates people when choosing friends. There is nothing in their study that indicates race to be a reason for friendship or a reason not to befriend someone. The qualities that are mentioned in the study all belongs to what we find on the inside of a person. After reading several studies on friendship and studies on inter-racial friendship, I have not come across anyone that mentions race as one of the most important factors when people are choosing their friends. This applies for Sophie and the BFG as well. Even though they have great differences in their looks, they both see past that and instead focuses on their personalities and traits.

Supporting each other is according to the study done by Apostolou et al. one of the most important things when it comes to making friends. They write, “One motivational factor for making friends was to have people around to provide support and assistance, especially in times of need” (Apostolou et al. 13). Both Sophie and the BFG support each other as friends, and this is presented in the chapter called “The Great Plan.” Sophie comes up with a plan on how they can stop the other giants from eating children. When she explains the plan to the BFG, she bravely places herself in a vulnerable and dangerous position. After explaining the plan which involves the BFG giving the queen a dream where Sophie appears and where she tells the queen about the giant, she explains further, “If someone *dreams* that there is a little girl sitting on her window-sill and then she wakes up and sees that the little girl *really* is sitting there, that is a dream come true, is it not?” (Dahl 114). Sophie takes a huge risk here, since there is no guarantee that the queen will react the way Sophie thinks she will. She does all this for the queen not to be terrified and in worst case harm the giant when she sees him. Sophie puts herself on the line for the BFG, which shows how strong their friendship has become. Sophie really cares for the giant and is there for him in his time of need.

Sophie is not the only one helping a friend in need. The BFG shows how he supports and assists Sophie in her time of needs as well. In the chapter named “The Bloodbottler,” the giant the title of the chapter is named after comes over to visit the BFG. Dahl explains the giant as: “a fifty-foot giant, more than twice as tall and wide as the BFG” (47). After reading this part and knowing that the rest of the giants in Giant Land eat humans, we understand that the BFG and Sophie are in a hopeless situation which can lead to Sophie becoming the Bloodbottler’s meal of the day. The way the BFG behaves when he comes over demonstrates how the BFG has started to care for Sophie. The Bloodbottler accuses the BFG of having a human in his home, and he therefore threatens to eat it. Dahl writes, “The poor BFG was very nervous” (47). The fact that the BFG was nervous proves how Sophie has started to mean something to him. He tries to hide her and help prevent the Bloodbottler from seeing her. The Bloodbottler leaves for a bit but returns after a short while. When he is getting close to the table where Sophie is hiding, Dahl writes, “The BFG was nearly fainting with fear. Any moment, he was telling himself, Sophie would be discovered and eaten” (50). The BFG is scared for Sophie’s life and tries everything in his power not for the Bloodbottler to discover her. The BFG tries to get the Bloodbottler to eat something called *Snozzcumber* instead, which is a type of vegetable. Dahl writes, “He was thinking that if only he could get the Bloodbottler to take one bite of the repulsive vegetable, the sheer foulness of its flavour

would send him bellowing out of the cave” (51). After the Bloodbottler leaves, Dahl writes, “The BFG picked her up and held her tenderly in the palm of his hand. ‘Oh, I is so happy to be finding you all in one lump!’ he said” (54). We as readers can feel the relief that the BFG feels, and we understand that Sophie already means a lot to him.

Apostolou et al. writes about other traits of importance when it comes to friendship. The result of the study shows, “Traits such as honesty, humor, and shared interests were among the most commonly reported ones, indicating that people are motivated to make friends with individuals who have desirable traits” (15). There are several places where The BFG and Sophie have conversations they both find interesting, and places where they talk about each other. Examples of this are the BFG talking about the dreams which he keeps very secret and Sophie talking about herself and what the orphanage home she lives in is like. There are even places in the book where they both laugh and seem amused, which shows how they have similar sense of humor. They are both very interested in learning about the other. The part of the book where the BFG presents Sophie with a drink called *Froboscottle* is a great example of this. After the giant has explained to Sophie what *Froboscottle* is and does to the body, he takes a big sip of the drink and lets an explosion come out of his body which lifts him up in the air. Dahl writes further, “*Whoopie!*” he cried, when he came down to earth again. ‘Now *that* is whizzpopping for you!’ Sophie burst out laughing. She couldn’t help it. ‘Have some yourself!’ cried the BFG, tipping the neck of the enormous bottle towards her” (60). After Sophie drinks and lets out an explosion like the one the giant had, Dahl writes, “Bravo! shouted the BFG, waving the bottle. ‘You is very good for a beginner! Let’s have some more!’” (Dahl 61). This scene in the book demonstrates how they are having fun and enjoying each other’s company.

Sophie’s and The Big Friendly Giant’s relationship changes and develops throughout the novel, and therefore their view of each other changes as well. With this we can say that their subjectivity and subject position changes as we keep reading. Before he gets to know her, the giant thinks of Sophie as an ordinary little girl. Dahl writes, “I cannot help thinking,’ said the BFG, ‘about. Your poor mother and father. By now they must be jipping and skumping all over the house shouting” (30). The giant sees Sophie’s subjectivity and subject position as a little girl with parents who love her. After all, that is the most stereotypical situation to be in when you are a child. When Sophie explains to the giant that she does not have parents, and lives in an orphanage home, the way the BFG views her changes. It is from this point forward that the BFG and Sophie start getting to know each other and begin to build



a friendship. Since Sophie does not have a family, there are no one that will truly miss her. She can therefore stay longer with the BFG, long enough for them to become friendly with one another. Sophie too sees herself differently after knowing the giant. She learns that everything is not always as we expect at first. Since the giant is kind and friendly, and not the monster she believes him to be, she understands that her reaction and behavior was completely unnecessary. We as readers can think that Sophie has learned that she should not judge someone before knowing them, and therefore this changes her subjectivity.

The BFG is the character in the book that goes through the biggest changes when it comes to his subjectivity and subject position. He is very different from the rest of the giants in Giant Land, so we feel that the BFG thinks he does not belong there. It seems like he dislikes himself simply because he is a giant, and it seems as though he has a very low self-esteem when he talks to Sophie. We therefore see his subjectivity through the eyes of Sophie as a creature that feels excluded in the world and one, whom we after finding out he is friendly sympathize with. After the friendship with Sophie starts developing, we see that the BFG changes and become more secure in himself, which leads to great changes in the way he views himself and in the way we as well as Sophie views him. There are great changes in the way The BFG's subject position is presented. Since he is a giant, Sophie as well as we place him in a category where he becomes the villain, or someone who is not good. Without even knowing him, simply from his size Sophie expects him to be the kind of giant she and we as readers have learned about in the past, as one who is mean. The subject position that we have placed the giant in turns out to be completely wrong, and after Sophie gets to know him and builds a friendship with him, we understand that his subject position in the society should be something else. For us and Sophie his subject position has changed, but it has probably not changed for others in London and the world, or at least not before they carry out the plan with the queen.

The distance that existed between Sophie and the Giant in the beginning is breached as they become closer. The way they view each other has changed for the better, and both the view they see themselves in has changed. While becoming friends with Sophie, the BFG realizes that he is a good giant, and should not have to take all the negativity and bullying from the other giants in Giant Land. The friendship with Sophie has changed the way he views himself, and with that his subjectivity has changed. Sophie and the giant are two completely different races, and Dahl has through this book shown how that does not matter when it comes to building a friendship. Dahl demonstrates how the inside is what matters, and

that personality, similar interests and humor are traits of significance when it comes to building friendship

*The BFG* shows how being prejudiced almost never contributes to something good. Sophie spent all that time being terrified for her life when there was no actual reason for her to be afraid. If she had not believed the stereotypes to be true, and instead been more open minded, she would have learned earlier that the BFG was a kind and friendly giant. The topic of racism is as demonstrated also included in this book, both through the actions of the other giants, and Sophie. Tanusy writes, “Dahl manages to raise the issue of racism in this novel by subtly hinting at it so that readers who are critical enough may catch on to this while at the same time making it light enough for casual readers to find it interesting without having to relate it to the situation that happens in the real world” (68).

## 5 Research in the Classroom

What I wanted to find out with the research was if using the two books when teaching in secondary school with both oral tasks and written tasks, would enlighten students on topics such as racism, immigration, and stereotypes and prejudiced behavior. As shown earlier, the curriculum has competence aims which asks for the students to read, discuss, present, interpret, explore, describe etc. These competence aims, the formative assessment, the assessment of coursework, along with the basic skills listed in the curriculum are all carefully thought of when I chose this way of teaching (UDIR). To cover as much as possible of the curriculum I chose to give them tasks involving reading, writing, and talking/discussing. By having students work with tasks related to these topics with the books, I argue that they will learn about inter-racial friendship and be more aware of attitudes they might have themselves, but also attitudes others around them might have. To my knowledge this has not been tested in the classroom before. I wanted to see if and how this way of teaching worked in an actual classroom in secondary school. I was so lucky that two English teachers at a secondary school here in Northern Norway let me have two weeks with their students. This resulted in me getting four hours in each class, two each week. I had one class on the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level and one class on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade level. Both were given the exact same texts, tasks, and survey. The reason for this was that I wanted to see in which class the teaching was most suitable. I chose not to include 8<sup>th</sup> grade, because of the level of difficulty in language *Americanah* has, and because the topics of racism and immigration, was at the school where I conducted the research, not as much included in the teaching in 8<sup>th</sup> grade as it was in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

### 5.1 The Plan

The original plan was for the students to read the entire book of *The BFG* and to read a longer excerpt from *Americanah*. Since I only had two weeks with the students, I decided to give them a shorter excerpt from both books. This resulted in half the class receiving approximately 50 pages from *Americanah* and the other half getting approximately 60 pages from *The BFG*. The ones that received the excerpt from *Americanah*, got the chapters 13-19, apart from chapter 15. I found this chapter unnecessary for the students to read, because of length and the shortage of time, but also because of its content. The chapters 13-19 include Ifemelu's first encounter with the US after moving there, with her experiences from the clothing store, the student Christina Tomas at school, and her search for work. These chapters have passages which deals with racism, prejudiced behavior, and stereotypes, and they

demonstrate what immigrating to another country can be like in the beginning. Since they started on chapter 13 and not at the beginning of the book, they were given a piece of paper with a short description of each character and an overview of what had happened so far in the book<sup>1</sup>. The ones that were given *the BFG*, got chapters from here and there in the book, but they started with the first chapters, and did therefore only receive the excerpt.

The first time I met with the class I wrote four words on the board and discussed them with the students. These four words were race, racism, immigration, and prejudiced/prejudiced behavior. We spent a bit of time discussing these, since I wanted to make sure all the students knew the meaning of them, and that these were the topics for the next two weeks. After doing this I explained to the students the plan for the next two weeks, and that the first week they were only supposed to read the excerpts from the books that were handed out to them. The students had two hours at school to read. Those who did not finish during school had to read the rest at home. At the end of each class, I discussed difficult words or phrases from the excerpts on the board with the students. In addition to reading, I asked the students to think about the four words we discussed at the beginning while they were reading. They were encouraged to take notes, but this was not something they had to do.

After reading the first week, it was time for the classes to do some tasks<sup>2</sup>. In the first class on week two I gave the students a task that they were supposed to discuss in groups. In their research paper named “Comparing the Benefits of Small-Group and Large-Class Discussions”, Philip H. Pollock, Kerstin Hamann and Bruce M. Wilson talk about the benefits of discussions in the classroom. They write, “Studies have found that discussions improve learning; they are considered an active learning technique and are credited with promoting critical thinking and higher-order, deep learning” (2). The ones who had *The BFG* and the ones who had *Americanah* were given the same tasks. I deliberately divided them in groups of 4, where two of the students had read the one text and the other two had read the other text. According to Pullock et al., “Smaller discussion groups overall appear to be more conducive to critical thinking and higher-order learning than all-class discussions” (10). I decided to have four students on each group, with the hope of creating a great discussion which would

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B

help the students expand their reflections and thoughts, and with the hope that it would help them later when they were going to write.

After discussing in groups, I had the students answer the questions individually in writing. They were given half of the first class and half of the second class in week two. The questions were the exact same as the ones they had just discussed in groups, and they were allowed to use all their notes and what they talked about in the groups. The reason why I chose to have the written tasks in addition to the discussion tasks, was that I wanted those that might find it difficult to talk in groups to be able to say what they wanted in writing and vice versa.

## **5.2 The Discussion**

My expectations beforehand when it comes to the discussions, was that some groups would have much to say while others would be quieter. To my surprise, every group in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade class had something to say and they all discussed what they had read. Most of the students in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade participated in the discussions as well, with only a few not wanting to say as much. The students had done great reflections, and they had thought about situations and happenings/attitudes which I had not even thought of. This was very interesting and even teachable for me.

The 9<sup>th</sup> grade class ended up having five groups and the 10<sup>th</sup> grade class had four groups discussing the questions. I decided to walk around and listen to them and take notes of what they said. Since they were going to answer these questions in writing later, and since I wanted the discussions to be as natural as possible, I decided to do it this way instead of recording or using another way to gather information. During these discussions the students demonstrated good reflections and thoughts, and I will present some of their answers in the next paragraph.

To better understand their answers, I am listing the questions here:

- How do the characters feel about fitting into the community/society they are living in?
- What is your opinion on how the book displays friendship through different races and cultures?
- Are there specific scenes or places in the book that are related to prejudiced behavior or maybe even racism?

- Is there any change of behavior or change of views regarding this from some of the characters in the book?
- What do you think it would be like for you to move to a different country where you could suddenly be looked at as the one who is different from most of the people living there?
  - Imagine that you had to move to a place where most of the population had a different skin color than you, a different way of speaking, a different culture among other things

I wanted to get the students perspectives on immigration, which is why I chose to include question 4 as one of the tasks the students had to answer both orally in discussions and in writing. By having the students answer question 4, it also gives the teacher a chance to see if everyone has understood what the term means.

Examples of some reflections and thoughts the students discussed in their group after reading:

- One student said that the BFG did not feel comfortable in the community he lived in. He felt different than the other giants, mostly because he did not eat children like the rest and because he acted different than the other giants.
- Another student said he was a kind and friendly giant, while the others were the opposite. Therefore, he did not feel that he belonged there.
- Several of the students that read *The BFG* answered that the book displays friendship through different races, namely between Sophie and the giant.
  - One student said that it displays that looks or appearance is not what matters. What matters is that one is kind to one another.
  - Another student said that Sophie and the giant are not expected to be friends, but even though they are different races they still have things in common.
- Many students pointed out that Sophie clearly had prejudiced behavior towards the giant in the beginning, but after getting to know him these prejudices disappears, and they become friends.
- On the fourth question where they were supposed to reflect from a personal perspective most of the students had very interesting views and thoughts:
  - One student said that if they did not talk English or Norwegian in the country or place where he/she had to move, he/she would automatically feel left out from the rest, and it would be difficult to communicate.

- Another student said that if everything was different culturally in the new place, it would be hard to blend in at first, but it might be easier after a while.
- Many of the students that had read the excerpt from *Americanah* said that it seemed like Ifemelu did not feel like she fit into the society, because of the way people acted around her and looked at her.
- Several of the students reading *Americanah* found it quite difficult to answer question 3, because they felt like they had to read more of the book to know about her friendships, which is understandable.
- The scene with Christina Tomas in chapter 14 were mentioned, where she speaks very condescending to Ifemelu and expects her to not understand English well, even though Ifemelu has learned English from an early age in school (Adichie 133).

These are just a few of the answers that the students gave when discussing in groups. It shows how the students gave careful thoughts to what they read, as several of the answers were very reflective.

### 5.3 The Writing

The writing tasks were the same as the ones the students discussed in groups, the only difference now was that they had to do them individually and deliver them in. Since we had a short amount of time to do all this, they were told to write as far as they got on the tasks. Most of the students were not able to finish all tasks, but some did. Again, in their written answers as well, the students showed great reflections and thoughts about what they had read.

Here are examples of what the students answered:

- One student wrote that he/she feels that Ifemelu thinks that she needs to change to fit in.
- A student wrote that Ifemelu had prejudiced behavior about how people in the US would be and that she got surprised about how some things were in the US.
  - This student gave an example as well, where she wrote: The scene where her friend Ginika told her that she was thin and had the body people like girls in the US has.
- One student wrote that the BFG does not like his hometown because he is so different from the rest of the giants, and he is also a vegan. He is calm and relaxed, while the rest are aggressive. This student also wrote that Sophie does not feel like she belongs in her hometown as well, because she lives in an orphanage.

- Another student also mentioned that the BFG’s small size was a reason for why he did not feel like he belonged in Giant land.
- When it comes to friendship in *Americanah*, one student wrote that in his/hers opinion the book displays friendship bad, because the different races stay away from each other and are only with their “own kind.”
- One student wrote that the BFG displays friendship through different races and cultures as a good thing.
- Another student answered on the task about prejudiced behavior that when Sophie saw the giant for the first time, she thought he was a mean and scary giant. She was judging him before she knew him.
- One student wrote that she thought the scene were people in the US call people who have one light-skinned parent and one dark-skinned parent for “half-caste” was racist.
- Another student answered that he/she thought there was lots of prejudiced behavior and racism in *Americanah*.
  - o The example he gave was when Dike did not get sunscreen because the teacher thought he did not need it since he was African.

The students’ answers in writing were also very reflective and well-thought answers. There were plenty of good answers here, but I chose to just give some examples of their answers. The students’ answers on the writing tasks and the oral tasks shows how the students’ have understand the topics and how they are able to work with them while reading. They provided lots of examples from both books, and they were able to reflect and think about good behavior versus bad behavior, and what is important when it comes to friendship.

## 5.4 The Survey

Since I had little time with the students to go through everything I wanted too, I was not able to interview or talk to each student individually to see what they thought about the teaching that we had done during those two weeks. I also wanted the students to give honest answers, and by experience that does not always happen if they must answer the teacher orally. It might happen that the students instead answer what he/she thinks the teacher wants to hear. Therefore, I chose to give the students a survey<sup>3</sup> with a questionnaire, where they were supposed to answer anonymously. “The big advantage of questionnaires is that it is

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix C



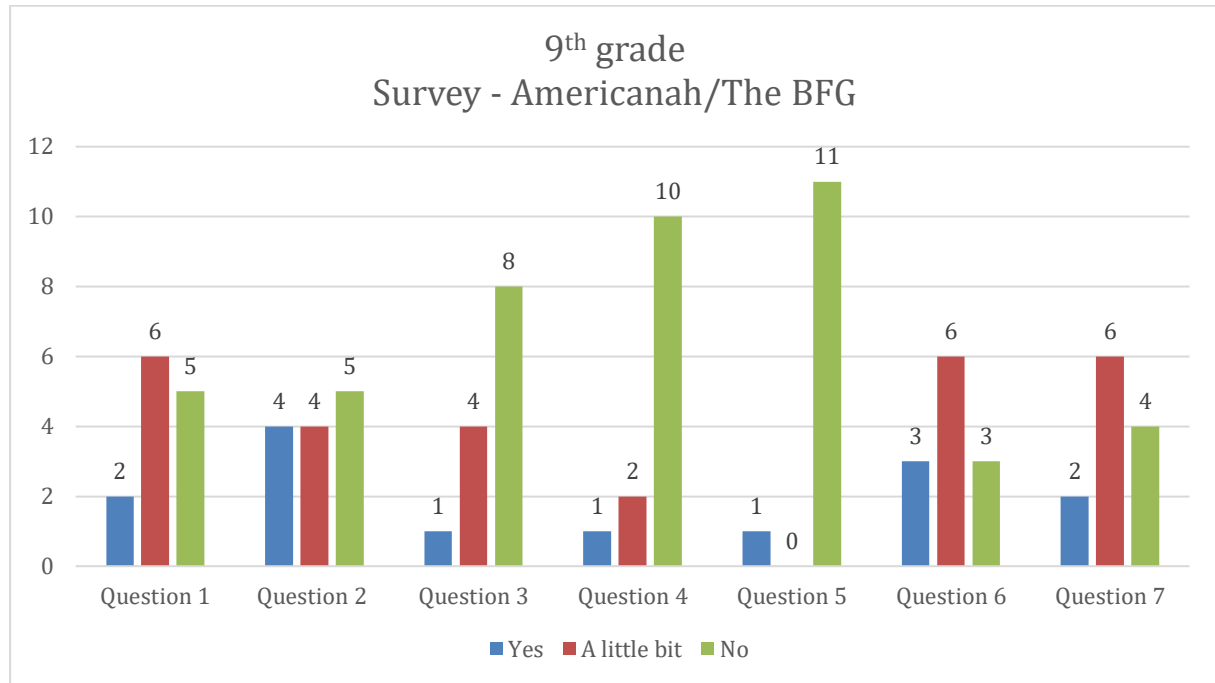
easier to get responses from a large number of people, and the data gathered may therefore be seen to generate findings that are more generalizable” (Rowley 310). Since I wanted to find out what all the students’ thought about this way of teaching, I found that using a questionnaire was a clever way to gather the data that was needed. The survey consisted of simple questions about the books that the students were asked to answer, along with questions specifically about the teaching methods. The survey had 7 questions with three options, the first being “yes,” the second “a little bit,” and the third one “no.” On each question the students were asked to write a sentence or two telling why/what they thought, or a sentence or two telling why they answered the way they did.

Beforehand, I thought this survey would only show me what the students’ thought about this way of teaching, but it turned out to be quite inspirational for me. Several of the students’ who received the excerpt from *Americanah* had complained about the difficulty in language and that they did not understand anything. To my surprise a great number of the students who had read *Americanah*, said they enjoyed reading the part of the book. On the day the students were given the survey, one of the classes had only half the students present. At first, I thought this was going to be a negative factor for my research, but then I realized that this is more closely related to reality. As a teacher, I will not always have everyone present in the classroom: some might be home ill, at the dentist or doctor, on vacation or other reasons.

In this next part I will present two charts which show what the 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and what the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students answered on the questionnaire. This part will only show if they answered yes, no or a little bit. The part where they wrote a couple sentences will be discussed later. To better understand their answers, I have chosen to list the questions from the questionnaire here:

1. Did you enjoy reading the part of the book?
2. Did you think it was difficult to read?
3. Do you have any insights or thoughts towards prejudiced behavior and racism after reading the book?
4. Do you have any new insights or thoughts about immigration after reading the book?
5. Do you have any new insights or thoughts about friendship between different races and/or cultures?
6. Did you like this way of teaching about topics such as race, racism, and immigration?
7. Is this way of teaching something you can recommend for other classes in English?

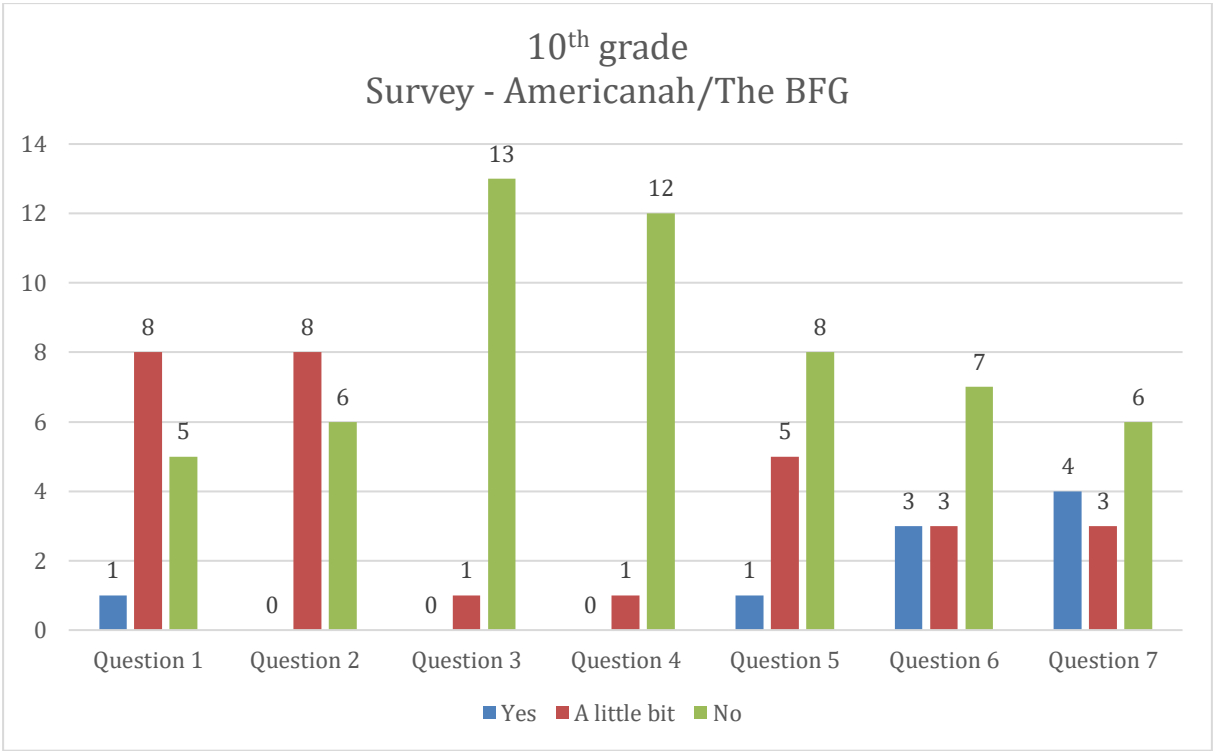
The 9th grade had only 13 students present the day they answered the questionnaire, and their answers are presented in the chart below:



On the chart the blue column represents “yes,” the orange “a little bit,” and the grey “no.” If we look at question number 1, we can see that the students’ answers were mixed, where 2 answered that they enjoyed reading the part of the book, while 6 answered a little bit and 5 did not enjoy reading it. What was a bit surprising for me was that on question 5 as much as 11 students answered that they did not have any new insights or thoughts about friendship between different races and/or cultures. This surprised me because several of the groups talked about this with examples from the books during the tasks they discussed in groups and individually in writing. This made me think if they did not understand the question correctly, if they had changed their mind when answering the questionnaire, or if they did not have anything new to add in addition to what they thought prior to reading. A study that was done by Deslauriers et al. provides evidence which demonstrates how students do not always recognize when they have learned from more active learning techniques. They write, “We find that students’ perception of their own learning can be anticorrelated with their actual learning under well-controlled implementations of active learning verses passive lectures” (Deslauriers et al. 19256). With this in mind, we understand that this can also be the reason why the students did not provide answers to these questions. This applies for question 3 and 4 as well, with the majority of the students answering no. On question 7 they were asked if this

way of teaching was something they could recommend for other classes in English. On this question 2 answered yes, 6 answered a little bit, and 4 answered no. After all the complaints about the difficult language in *Americanah* I assumed that I would get “no” from at least half the students, but instead I only received 4. The same goes for question number 2, where they were asked to answer if they thought it was difficult to read. Only 4 students answered yes on this question, 4 answered a little bit, and 5 answered that they did not think it was difficult. On question 6, 3 of the students answered that they liked this way of teaching about topics such as race, racism, and immigration, 6 of them answered a little bit, and only 3 answered no. This means that most of the class, or at least those that were present from the class that day, liked the way of teaching they were presented with.

The 10th grade class was smaller than the 9th grade class, and they had 14 students present that day. I expected the 10th grade class to have learned more and to be more positive towards the teaching than the 9th grade class, as they are one year older, but instead it turned out to be completely opposite. The chart from the 10th grade class is presented below:



If we look at question number 1, only 1 student said that they enjoyed reading the part of the book. Luckily, 8 answered they enjoyed it a little bit. This means that most of the students did like the book or parts of it, but 5 did not like reading it. None of the students in this class found the excerpts from the books difficult to read, which was great, but more than half

answered that they thought it was a little bit difficult. What was an even bigger surprise with this class than with the 9<sup>th</sup> grade class was their answers on question 3 and 4. No one answered that they had any insights or new thoughts towards prejudiced behavior and racism, and immigration after reading the book. They had plenty to say and write about this during the tasks, so this came as a big surprise for me as the teacher. But again, it might have been that the students did not understand the questions, or that they just did not have anything new to add. It could also be that the students had learned more than they were able to recognize themselves, as the study by Deslauriers et al. showed. On question 5 as well, which asked if they had new insights or thoughts about friendship between different races and/or cultures, 8 wrote no, 5 a little bit, and only 1 wrote yes. Only 3 students said they liked this way of teaching and 3 answered a little bit. As much as 7 students answered that they did not like this way of teaching. One the final question from the questionnaire 4 students answered that they could recommend this way of teaching for other classes in English, 3 answered a little bit, and 6 answered no. 7 were on the positive side about this way of teaching for other classes, while 6 were negative.

In the survey the students were asked to give a sentence or two about what they thought and about why they answered yes, no, or a little bit. Some of these answered are written below:

- On question number 1, if they answered yes or a little bit, they were asked what their favorite part was. The students' answers:
  - "It was fun seeing how Ifemelu's life was."
  - "I did like when Sophie sat in the queens window."
  - "When the BFG was being thrown around."
  - "I liked the end of the book when Sophie and the BFG saved everyone from getting eaten by the giants."
  - "When Ifemelu was on the train and met that guy."
  - "Maybe when Ifemelu stopped using her American accent."
- On question 2, if they answered yes or a little bit, they were asked why? Their answers:
  - "Because it was many words that I didn't understand."
  - "It was too much text."
  - "Some of the names were hard."

- “Because there were a few difficult words, otherwise it was completely fine.”
- “There were lots of words I didn’t quite know what really meant. And the story didn’t really make much sense sometimes.”
- On question 3, 4 and 5, if they answered yes or a little bit, they were asked to share what their new thoughts or insights were. Their answers:
  - Question 3: “The thing I’ve realized is that racism & prejudice is more serious than you might think! It can be said directly, or it can be said in between the lines.”
  - Question 4: “It’s hard to be in a country where it is so different from home. So many new people & new cultures.”
  - Question 3: “The fact that people who lives in Britain tastes so good, while people who don’t live in Britain does not taste good.”
  - Question 5: “Because Sophie and the giant got very close friends. And she was a human, and he was a giant.”
  - Question 5: “Even though somebody is different it does not mean you cannot be friends with them.”
- On question 6, they were asked why or why not? The students answered:
  - Answered yes: “I liked it but I wish we began from the start of the book, because coming in when we were in the middle is kind of annoying & hard to focus on.”
  - Answered yes: “Personally, I think this is a fun way of learning more about topics, but since I like reading in English, it might be easier for me, and harder for others.”
  - Answered a little bit: “A little bit because it was fun.”
  - Answered a little bit: “But it could have been an easier book.”
  - Answered yes: “It was fun. A new way of learning about it.”
  - Answered yes: “Yes, because we learn about the races and just know more about it.”
- On question 7, they were asked why or why not? The students answered:
  - Answered a little bit: “Because it was fun to experience something new.”
  - Answered yes: “I recommend this way of learning because it is fun, a good way to read and write, and reflect.”
  - Answered a little bit: “The book was hard to read. I did not understand it. But it was a great way of teaching.”

- Answered no: “Because Americanah was a bad book who was hard to understand.”
- Answered a little bit: “It might be more fun for the students, not just the normal, boring things.”
- Answered a little bit: “It’s fun & strategic. Just please start from the beginning. I did not understand much since we were in the middle of the book.”
- Answered yes: “A good way of practicing and the teachers would know if the students did read.”
- Answered yes: “Yes, because you can enjoy the book and learn more things and use your fantasy on it.”
- Answered no: “Personally, I wouldn’t because it can be frustrating and difficult to read.”

These are some examples of what the students answered in the survey. Unfortunately, very few of the ones that answered no wrote anything on question 6 and 7, which is why there are few examples in the list above. By giving the students the option to answer the survey with extra information gives them the opportunity to explain their answers. It also gave them a chance to speak their opinion of the teaching with more than just the words yes, a little bit and no.

It was nice to see what the students liked about the books. Some of the answers were simply about something they found amusing, such as the one who liked that the BFG were being tossed around, while others were more reflected. One student answered that his/her favorite part was when Ifemelu stopped using the American accent. This shows how the student has thought about the issue of language and keeping of one’s identity when immigrating. The answers to question number 2 show that many of the students struggled with the advanced language in *Americanah*. Their honesty on this matter is very appreciated since this gives me as a teacher a chance to rearrange the plan for further use with this in mind beforehand. The students gave answers on question 3, 4 and 5 that shows how they have thought about the topics of racism and immigration while reading. One of the students answered that they discovered prejudiced behavior in *The BFG* when it is explained that people who lives in Britain tastes good, while others living elsewhere does not. This is a very interesting discovery done by this student, as this shows how reflective a student at 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> grade level can be, especially since this example does not show prejudiced behavior as directly as for example Sophie’s reaction when seeing The BFG for the first time does. The

same applies for the student who answered that he/she had now realized that racism and being prejudiced is more serious than one might think, and that it can be said both directly and in between the lines. Some of the answers on question 6 provided same information as question number 2, but it also showed how some students found it difficult to start on chapter 13 in *Americanah*, and not from the beginning. This is also very useful for me as a teacher to know since this allows for me to see what could have been done differently and how teachers should plan this way of teaching in the future. At the same time the students answered that they enjoyed this way of teaching, which lets me know that not everything needs to be changed. The answers provided on question 7 demonstrates that with a few changes several of the students can recommend this way of teaching for other classes. These changes involve starting from the beginning of *Americanah* and spending more time with the language of this novel. Other than that, they seemed to enjoy this way of teaching, and could therefore recommend it for other classes.

## **5.5 Will This Work in the Classroom?**

The students in both the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and the 10<sup>th</sup> grade surprised me in how much they learned and were able to understand. They all read what they had to, they reflected well on what they had read, and they showed that very well in both the discussion tasks as well as the written tasks. After hearing the students discuss the tasks out loud in groups, and afterwards write them down, made me think that this seemed to work very well in both classes. They gave reflective and well-thought answers, and most of the groups were eager to talk. Therefore, I was surprised to see that so many were negative towards this way of teaching. I also found it interesting that the 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in general were more positive than the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students in their answers, as *Americanah* is a book with a language that students in middle school might find a bit difficult. I got a lot of feedback from the students about the difficult language in *Americanah*. My opinion was that this way of teaching worked very well as the students had lots of say about the two books, but not all the students agreed on this. Therefore, I think that some changes can be done to make the teaching even better.

From my point of view the biggest flaw in this way of teaching was the time laps. This was done in only two weeks, but a project like this should have more time. Some students said that they found it difficult to start on chapter 13 in *Americanah*, so instead of doing this the teacher can have them read from the beginning. With more time, the teacher can provide students with larger parts of the books, and by that have them read both books from the

beginning, and maybe even the whole book, *the BFG*. The extra time will also give the teacher a chance to explain different words, passages, and names from the books. Because of the advanced language in *Americanah*, I believe that it will be most beneficial to provide this teaching in 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

With some changes I believe that this way of teaching about topics such as race, racism, immigration, and prejudiced behavior is good for students in middle school. It covers lots of the curriculum, the students are invited to read in English, reflect and think about what they have read, and to use these reflections to answer questions about the topics both orally and in writing. This will hopefully make students in middle school more aware of their own attitudes towards racism, immigration, and prevent them from believing in all stereotypes and showing prejudiced behavior towards others. Even though the answer from the survey shows great variation, I believe this will work with more time than two weeks. It is impossible to please all students, but with this varied teaching and with more time, I believe that the majority of students will learn something about these topics in class.



## 6 Conclusion

Immigration happens daily and will probably do so for many years to come. When looking at the Statistics Norway website, we can see that by the start of march this year (2023) as many as 877 227 immigrants and Norwegians born to immigrant parents were living in Norway (SSB). That is why this is of great importance for youth to learn about in secondary school. Coming from a different culture, different race and being used to living a certain way, often brings challenges for the one migrating to another country. Not only does culture matter, but history and public opinions play a big role as well. Grandparents, parents, and others can cause children today to have a prejudiced mindset or think negatively about immigration. It is especially because of this I think it is important for us as teachers to teach students about immigration and racism in a way that might prevent them from keep having these prejudiced mindsets, and rather have a more positive view on the matter.

Having *Americanah* or parts of the novel as one of the books the students must read when learning about topics such as racism and immigration, is clever because it is filled with both negative and positive remarks on the matter. Ifemelu experience racism daily while living in the US, both subtle and direct, so there is much to talk about and write about for the students here. She experiences interracial friendships and relationships with Curt, who is a white American man, with Blaine who is an African American man, and with Kimberly who is a white American woman. All these relationships demonstrate how race does not matter when it comes to building a friendship, but rather personality and similar interests, amongst others. Since *Americanah* is written as a realistic novel, what the students read will be familiar to them and this makes it easier for them to imagine it happening in real life.

*The BFG* on the other hand, is nothing like *Americanah*. This book is a fiction book meant for children, but I have in this thesis shown how one can use it on students at secondary school to extract other details from it, such as racism and immigration. With critical reading students are invited to see how one can use a children's fiction book like *The BFG* to learn about those important topics which are part of our daily lives here in Norway, but also in the rest of the world. This thesis demonstrates interracial friendship, not only through the characters in *Americanah*, but also through the characters of Sophie and The Big Friendly Giant in *The BFG*.

By using *Americanah* and *The BFG*, I have shown students how good friendships can rise between different races and persons regardless of background, skin color, language, amongst other factors. Even though *The BFG* and *Americanah* are highly different from each other in many ways we can get much of the same from both books. Although it might not be as obvious at first with *The BFG* as with *Americanah*, I have in this thesis shown how they both present prejudiced behavior, racism, immigration, and interracial friendship. Both books demonstrate how racial difference has little meaning when it comes to building a friendship. I recommend using these two books in teaching because they differ both in length and level of difficulty in language. This helps the teacher adapt the learning situation in the classroom which is an important factor when teaching. The Core Curriculum says, “School shall facilitate for learning for all pupils and stimulate each pupil’s motivation, willingness to learn and faith in their own mastering” (UDIR). Students who are not that fond of reading or find it difficult to read long books, will see that it is possible to find the information you are looking for from other sorts of books as well. It does not have to be a book like *Americanah*, which presents the topics of racism and immigration directly, it is possible to use literature like *the BFG*, which presents the topics more subtle.

The teaching methods presented in this thesis show how we as teachers can use a variety of methods for students to learn. The mixed answers that the students gave on the survey demonstrate how this way of teaching works but needs some changes. Several students found it hard to read *Americanah* because of the advanced language, so it might help if the teacher spend more time helping the students understand and learn the language before providing them with tasks. Since this way of teaching provides a great variety of learning techniques, with reading, discussions, and writing, and because it involves as many as 6 of the competence aims in the curriculum, I suggest that teachers in secondary school allows for themselves to spend a good amount of time on this. I will conclude with two weeks being a bit too short, but with another two weeks I believe that this will work to its purpose. Because of the difficulty in language, I argue that this way of teaching will probably have more positive effect on 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, than one 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. I will therefore recommend this way of teaching the topics of racism and immigration in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, secondary school.

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## 8 Appendix

### Appendix A: *Americanah* - Characters and a short summary

Ifemelu is the main character. She moves from Nigeria to the US to study. We follow her journey in America.

Obinze is Ifemelu's high school boyfriend from Nigeria. After she moves to the US, she finds it difficult to stay with him, so they drift apart.

Aunty Uju is Ifemelu's aunt from Nigeria. She moves to the US a bit earlier than Ifemelu. She has a son named Dike. Ifemelu often visits them.

Blaine is a guy she meets on the train. They later become strongly attached.

Ginika is Ifemelu's friend from secondary school. She moves to the US earlier than Ifemelu, but they meet up when Ifemelu arrives there.

Kimberly is the woman who offers Ifemelu a job as a babysitter for her children.



## Appendix B: Task – *Americanah/The BFG*

### English

1. Discuss in groups

2. Answer in writing

From the book:

1. How do the characters feel about fitting into the community/society they are living in?
  - a. For Ifemelu it is the U.S., where she has recently moved
  - b. For The BFG it is the land where all the giants live
2. What is your opinion on how the book displays friendship through different races and cultures?
3. Are there specific scenes or places in the book that are related to prejudiced behavior or maybe even racism?
  - a. Is there any change of behavior or change of views regarding this from some of the characters in the book?

From your perspective:

4. What do you think it would be like for you to move to a different country where you could suddenly be looked at as the one who is different from most of the people living there?
  - a. Imagine that you had to move to a place where most of the population had a different skin color than you, a different way of speaking, a different culture among other things.

### Norsk

1. Diskuter I grupper

2. Svar skriftlig

Fra boka:

1. Hva føler karakterene om å høre hjemme i samfunnet de bor i?
  - a. For Ifemelu er det USA, der hun nylig har flyttet
  - b. For Den store vennlige kjempen er det stedet der alle kjempene bor
2. Hva er din mening på hvordan boka fremstiller vennskap mellom ulike raser og kulturer?
3. Er det scener eller steder i boka der det dukker opp fordomsfull atferd eller til og med rasisme?
  - a. Er det noen endring i atferd eller endret syn hos noen av karakterene i boka?

Fra ditt perspektiv:

4. Hvordan tror du det ville vært for deg å flytte til et annet land der du plutselig kan bli sett på som den som er annerledes fra flesteparten av befolkningen?
  - a. Forestill deg at du måtte flytte til et annet sted der flesteparten av befolkningen har en annen hudfarge enn deg, en annerledes måte å snakke på, en annerledes kultur osv.

**Appendix C: Survey – *Americanah*/*The BFG***

Answer only with 1 or 2 sentences!

 Circle around the answer you choose

I had the book:     *Americanah*             *The BFG*

1. Did you enjoy reading the part of the book?

Yes                     A little bit             No

- What was your favorite part?

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2. Did you think it was difficult to read?

Yes                     A little bit             No

- If you answered Yes or A little bit; Why?

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3. Do you have any new insights or thoughts towards prejudiced behavior and racism after reading the book?

Yes                      A little bit      No

- If you answered Yes or A little bit; What are your new thoughts or insights?

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4. Do you have any new insights or thoughts about immigration after reading the book?

Yes                      A little bit      No

- If you answered Yes or A little bit; What are your new thoughts or insights?

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5. Do you have any new insights or thoughts about friendship between different races and/or cultures?

Yes                      A little bit      No

- If you answered Yes or A little bit: What are your new thoughts or insights?

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6. Did you like this way of teaching about topics such as race, racism, and immigration?

Yes                      A little bit      No

- If you answered Yes or A little bit; Why?
- If you answered No; Why not?

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7. Is this way of teaching something you can recommend for other classes in English?

Yes                      A little bit      No

- If you answered Yes or A little bit; why?
- If you answered No; why not?

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Norsk:

1. Likte du å lese delen av boka?
  - a. Hva var din favorittdel?
2. Syns du den var vanskelig å lese?
  - a. Hvis du svarte ja eller litt; Hvorfor?
3. Har du fått noen nye tanker eller innsikt om fordomsfull atferd og rasisme etter å ha lest boka?
  - a. Hvis du svarte ja eller litt; Hva er dine nye tanker?
4. Har du fått noen nye tanker eller innsikt om innvandring?
  - a. Hvis du svarte ja eller litt; Hva er dine nye tanker?
5. Har du fått noen nye tanker eller innsikt om vennskap mellom ulike raser og/eller ulike kulturer?
  - a. Hvis du svarte ja eller litt; Hva er dine nye tanker?
6. Likte du å lære om temaer som raser, rasisme og innvandring på denne måten?
  - a. Hvis du svarte ja eller litt; Hvorfor?
  - b. Hvis du svarte nei; Hvorfor ikke?
7. Vil du anbefale denne måten å lære på til andre klasser i fremtiden?
  - a. Hvis du svarte ja eller litt; Hvorfor?
  - b. Hvis du svarte nei; Hvorfor ikke?

