



To Follow the Direction of *The Golden Compass*

How to help pupils with their search for identity through literature

"We don't need lists of rights and wrongs, tables of do's and don'ts: we need books, time, and silence. Thou shalt not is soon forgotten, but Once upon a time lasts forever."

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ABSTRACT

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Summary: The purpose of this essay is to show why and how you should use literature and in particular the novel *The Golden Compass* by Philip Pullman in the English language classroom. The fact that the novel belongs to the fantasy genre is discussed. For example how fantasy can create an opportunity to create a credible female hero thus opening a platform for discussing gender issues. The novel is examined from several different pedagogical perspectives. It is a sample of valuable authentic material and as such can be a useful tool to ensure both culture and language enrichment. The focus is on how the novel should be used to help pupils develop their identities as well as their language skills. The pedagogical theories are supported on the goals found in the national curriculum for the compulsory school forms as well as the syllabus. One of the key methods recommended is Aidan Chambers' booktalk and a classroom of "multiple voices". There are also examples of classroom activities.

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Introduction

There are many different reasons for why teachers should introduce their pupils to literature. In her book *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* Tricia Hedge explains it like this "Introducing children to books, whether in their first or a second language, contributes to the curriculum objective of encouraging critical thinking and positive attitudes towards imaginative experience." (2003:205) But there are other important goals and aims we as teachers have to reach and strive for when we choose books for our pupils to read. According to the curriculum "The school should promote an understanding for others and the ability to empathise." (Skolverket.se) This is a very general aim for the schools and there are probably many different methods of attaining it. In my opinion one of the most efficient methods is that of introducing the learners to literature. By reading a variation of different literary texts. The learner is exposed to different cultures and different individuals. If the literature is fictive it also opens up a possibility of being able to deal with difficult issues on an imaginative and hypothetical platform. According to Philip Pullman "There are certain themes, certain topics that are too big for adult literature, they can only be dealt with properly in children's literature"¹ (Engdahl:137) This is one of the reasons why I believe *The Golden Compass* is a good book to use in the English classroom. It discusses many difficult issues that can be brought up for classroom discussions. For example the novel tackles the difficulties of growing up, death and betrayal. The protagonist Lyra is almost the female equivalent of Peter Pan. She is very reluctant to grow up, not an unfamiliar feature for a young teenager.

The book was well received when it was published and has received several literary awards. One of them being the prestigious Carnegie Medal. The author has been inspired by the works of Milton and Blake. You can recognize the war with God and the transition between innocence and experience. I also think that it is worth mentioning that *The Golden Compass* in Christian circles has been judged as too controversial. I have read critical reviews where the trilogy is described as "antireligious indoctrination, disguised as an adventure for children and teenagers"² (<http://home.swipnet.se/corbie/pull.html>).

¹ My translation

² My translation

The Golden Compass is written for young adults. Despite its volume I believe it to be suitable for secondary school children. It is in the early teen years that children search for their new identity as young adults. *The Golden Compass* will work as a useful guide to help create meaning and understanding to a new adult identity. They are about to leave their childhood behind and enter that of adulthood. One of the main reasons for Lyra's wish to remain in childhood is that her Daemon will settle as she reaches puberty. This will entail a fixed form and a fixed identity. It is precisely through issues such as this that the novel will help the teacher to reach the aim found in the curriculum that the teacher should help the pupils become "open to different ideas and encouraging their expression, the school should also emphasise the importance of forming personal standpoints and provide pupils with opportunities for doing this." (Skolverket.se) My main objective with this essay is to show that *The Golden Compass* can be a valuable resource for helping pupils developing their identities in correspondence with the norms and values found in the national curriculum. Just as Lyra will get to know "what kind of person you are" (GC:147) when her daemon settles, reading *The Golden Compass* will help pupils who read it to know what kind of persons they are and what opinions and personalities they have. If you also spend some time on analysing the daemon concept you force the pupils to reflect upon their own self-image. To ensure this I have included a useful exercise in the section **Creating your own daemon**.

By creating a good booktalk atmosphere in the language classroom and providing your pupils with a topic to discuss you will put an opportunity to form personal standpoints at their disposal. Booktalk is a term developed by Aidan Chambers. In the section **Using *The Golden Compass* to help pupils develop their identities as well as their language abilities** I will discuss how you can use booktalks in the English classroom. The point of Aidan Chambers' booktalks is that the pupils should be allowed to say what they want without being evaluated by their teacher. When teachers dismiss their pupils' thoughts as being wrong or irrelevant they can quickly stamp out any will to actually want to voice personal opinions. You can also provide Swedish pupils with a valuable opportunity to overcome the difficulties, which may arise when reading the book in English. Working with the novel in booktalk sessions will hopefully also help your pupils overcome their fears of speaking English in the classroom. Everything is worth telling. By creating a good and permitting booktalk

atmosphere you empower your pupils and provide them with the right to their own reading experience. I would like to use a quote by eight-year-old Sarah to explain why we need to have booktalks. "We don't know what we think about a book until we've talked about it." (1985:138). Booktalks are also a valuable resource to "promote an understanding for others and the ability to empathise." (Skolverket.se) Along with the right to have your own opinion heard comes the respect of your fellow classmates voices. A sense of If you listen to me I will listen to you.

The Golden Compass belongs to the fantasy genre and as such it may have to face some critical voices. In the section ***The Golden Compass: Sprung from human experience*** I will show that the use of fantasy in the English classroom can be just as good for the pupils as realistic novels, if not better. For example the fantasy genre offers a solution to the credibility of a female heroine in a novel and because of that *The Golden Compass* can work as a valuable pedagogical tool to help counteract traditional stereotypic gender roles. I will develop this claim in the section **The gender aspect in *The Golden Compass***.

1: Why is *The Golden Compass* well suited to use in the language classroom?

1:1 The benefits of the fantasy genre

1:1:1 *The Golden Compass: Sprung from human experience*

I understand that the fact that *The Golden Compass* is a novel that belongs to the fantasy genre may cause some alarm. It could be argued that children have an inability to separate magic from reality. Aidan Chambers writes in his book *Booktalk* that many teachers have limiting opinions of their pupils' capabilities as critical readers. He mentions opinions that children cannot distinguish between "the real" and "the fictional". Based on this I can imagine that there will be critical voices against the choice of *The Golden Compass* because it is a fantasy/science fiction novel. In his book *Becoming a Reader* Appleyard for example refers to a study of younger children and how it showed that children do not seem to separate the magic world from "the one adults call realistic" I do not agree with Appleyard. I believe we have to help young adults on the right track in understanding reality through fantasy. Partly because it will seem less scary and also because of what Chambers says, based on his sightings, that these preconceptions of children as unable critical readers are "not simply limiting but incorrect" (1985:152)

Chamber instead argues that we should assume that children can “potentially if not actually” perform everything that we ourselves can do. If they are allowed to share their own readings they can “activate their potentials” In order for them to do this it is also important that they are given a chance to voice their own readings and “not just ours imposed upon them” (1985:152) I will give examples of how to work with this practically in the section **Using *The Golden Compass* to help pupils develop their identities as well as their language abilities**

I believe it is easier for pupils to discuss issues such as death and the difficulties of growing up as a hypothetical thing that happens to somebody else. It will create a distance that is less frightening and imposing on your personal sphere. As a teacher you have to be aware that there is a chance that pupils in your class have had difficult experiences in their childhood. It is my belief that realistic literature can remind them of painful memories more easily than fantasy. Fokin-Holmberg refers to Ann Swinfen when she claims, “fantasy, to the same extent as realistic literature, deals with peoples lives and conditions.”³ (2005:24) Furthermore she argues that all fantasy is sprung from human experience. It is this factor of fantasy as being sprung from human experience, which makes it so valuable as a pedagogical tool.

Pullman himself denies the fact that his book is fantasy; instead he claims to be writing about real people and their relationships. (Fokin-Holmberg:24). I am not sure that this claim of his really supports my argument. But I think it does support the fact that fantasy to the same extent as realism can be used in the classroom to discuss difficult issues. I agree with Fokin-Holmberg when she says that fantasy can say a lot about humans and their lives. Where realism can use symbolism to express itself fantasy has a clear foundation in reality but it has been masked by a “veil of magic”. Both however share the will to tell us something about human’s lives and conditions. (2005:26) Adults should stop being so cynical and idolize realism. Most children do eventually realise that there is no such thing as Santa by themselves. We do not need to push them and rob them of their innocence. If we were to do that we will turn in to simple gobblers. Gobblers feature in the novel as children snatchers who wish to prevent children from attracting Dust by severing them from their daemons.⁴ To me this

³ My Translation

⁴ Both Dust and daemons will be explained in detail in the following sections.

act not only speeds up the process from innocence to experience but it also prevents the child from forming its own identity.

By reading *The Golden Compass* in the English classroom you as a teacher will hopefully help the pupils to strive towards the goal that pupils should be able to “empathise with and understand the situation other people are in and also develop the will to act with their best interests at heart” (Lpo94). From this aspect Lyra is an amazing role model who seems to live by most of the guidelines in the curriculum. Through Lyra, who even though she has a clear opinion of what is right and wrong in society struggles to keep herself on the “straight and narrow”. Young adults can realise that we are all complex characters. Through her they are introduced to the concept that nobody is perfect. Telling lies and arguing with authorities is part of human nature. Lyra has a clear opinion of what is right and wrong. She does not refrain from voicing her opinions. Not only can she empathise with other people but she does “reject the oppression and abusive treatment of other people and assist in supporting them” (Skolverket.se) This manifests itself through her journey to rescue her best friend Roger from the Gobblers and also her determination to stop what the Gobblers are doing to other children. You could easily choose a realistic novel about adults who abuse children who are in their care, or about bullying. But I am convinced that *The Golden Compass* is far superior to those types of realistic novels. Both because I believe children will only see them as another example of moral pointers and also because I agree with Deborah O’Keefe when she argues that today’s fantasy can help the reader to gain strength and create an order in their personal spheres. It offers possible solutions for “the unstructurable stuff outside the self.” (2003:15)

1:1:2 *The Golden Compass*: the gender aspect

The school has a responsibility to counteract traditional roles and should therefore provide pupils with the opportunity of developing their own abilities and interests irrespective of their sexual identity.” (Skolverket.se) Based on personal experience I know it is difficult to find a good book with a female protagonist that is suitable for a wide variety of pupils. This is one of the reasons why I want to encourage other teachers to use *The Golden Compass* in the English classroom. I believe it will be a good platform for discussing traditional gender roles. Not only because Lyra is a female

main character but also because of the very different women and men who have an influence on her upbringing and how they affect both her character and her transition from innocence to experience.

To begin with the Scholars in Jordan College have raised Lyra. As she now is growing older the male scholars feel that Lyra will need female company. "no, I don't want to leave Jordan. I like it here. I want to stay here forever." "When you're young, you do think that things last forever. Unfortunately they don't. Lyra, it won't be long-a couple of years at most-before you will be a young woman, and not a child anymore." It is therefore decided that Lyra will move away to stay with Mrs Coulter. Lyra to begin with idolizes Mrs. Coulter. Lyra finds her "wonderful". She differs a lot from the other female characters that so far have been part of her life. When she first meets Mrs. Coulter she asks if she was a female Scholar "She regarded female Scholars with a proper Jordan disdain: there were such people, but, poor things, they could never be taken more seriously than animals dressed up and acting a play." At this stage Lyra herself is a holder of traditional gender roles and is relieved to find that Mrs. Coulter is not a female Scholar. It is however interesting, and a good starting point for discussion, to see how Lyra's opinion of the female Scholars changes throughout the book. The difference between the male scholastic influence and the female character of Mrs Coulter is described through Lyra's new surroundings. "She had seen a great deal of beauty in her short life, but it was Jordan College beauty, Oxford beauty-grand and stony and masculine, In Jordan College, much was magnificent, but nothing was pretty. In Mrs, Coulters' flat, everything was pretty." (GC:67) It may help the pupils question the traditional gender roles and create a new point of view.

I hope that reading *The Golden Compass* will both boost the girls' self confidence and way of seeing themselves, as well as help boys to feel respect for the girls and realise that women can manage traditional male tasks. Fokin-Holmberg ascribes fantasy novels a certain quality for allowing females the same development in novels as men. "Fantasy has the same function when it allows its protagonist to perform a magical journey to strange worlds with the purpose of developing and attaining a new identity. The fantastic tale gives Lyra an opportunity to break out of the closed room, something which realistic fiction not would have given an opportunity to do other than through the

dream or the imaginative form.⁵ (2005:51-52) Lyra is through the fantasy fiction free to break the chains of convention. She can escape the stereotypical qualities of the female protagonist and their expected behaviour. Fokin-Holmberg argues, "His Dark Materials refutes the traditional, patriarchal values." (2005:61) it also "undermines traditional conceptions of women and men" (2005:61) instead the focus is on general human values like "compassion, friendship and love".

1:2 The Golden Compass in the language classroom from four pedagogical perspectives

1:2:1 The Golden Compass as authentic material

In their book *Literature in the Language Classroom* Collie & Slater provide us with reasons for why teachers should use literature in their teaching. Firstly literature is what they call "valuable authentic material". This means that the text has not been created with the "specific purpose of teaching a language". (2009:3) It is my belief that by choosing a book that is authentic you create a sense of purpose for your pupils. It is easier for a learner to see the need to read a book in the target language if it is something that they know they will find useful in the future.

The use of authentic material, or more specifically literature, is however not an uncontroversial topic. Some teachers prefer the textbook materials provided at their schools and to be fair they often do use extracts of authentic material. The syllabus states that pupils in the end of year nine should "be able to read and assimilate the contents of relatively simple literature and other narratives" (Skolverket.se) and it is up to the teacher to interpret what simple literature means. You could argue that other authentic material. Timetables, notices, newspaper articles will match the criteria of authenticity. Literature however will provide the pupils with a world filled with excitement and moral crossroads to contemplate. This is something that no reading of bus schedules or advertisements ever will. It will also be more fun filled for your pupils should you choose a book that they can relate to, find exciting and that they know is not the old boring text book. In her book *Teaching and learning in the English Classroom* Tricia Hedge writes, "It is necessary to create an authentic reason for reading a

⁵ My translation

particular text.”(2003:207) According to Hedge teachers should ask themselves the following questions when they choose a text for their pupils to work with. “Why would we read this text in real life?” (2003:207) Collie and Slater suggest that the pupils are left to read the first section of the novel on their own even if that might provide some difficulties. The point is to take the literature “out of the classroom context” and transfer it into a situation that resembles the pupils’ normal reading situation. Simply because *The Golden Compass* is in English there is no need to construe an artificial setting. The novel is an example of “Valuable authentic material” and it must therefore be treated as such. If your intention is to find a novel that can be used in the same manner as a textbook in the language classroom I am sorry to say that you have missed the point.

The Golden Compass is valuable authentic material. It has been written for young adults and has become very popular in this age group. I also think that it does have a lot to say about what Collie and Slater refer to as “fundamental human issues”. It is a book that because of the different issues it deals with will appeal to something in most of us and particularly young adults as they in many ways are on the same route as the protagonist Lyra. One of the issues in *The Golden Compass* is that of growing up. The consequences of reaching adulthood are made visible through the concept of Dust. To fully understand what Dust is you really need to read the entire trilogy; *His Dark materials* but in short it is an intelligent elementary particle and the physical evidence of original sin. It is then up to you to decide whether it is good or bad. In the section about personal involvement I will give examples of how the reader is introduced to Dust through the book. Children do not attract Dust but adults do. Children are innocent but when they become more experienced they will attract Dust. The church sees Dust as a negative thing and tries their best to keep people innocent and ignorant. Religion being another one of the key themes in *The Golden Compass* is also an issue that can be discussed in parallel with current events.

There is also the issue of betrayal. It is already in the second chapter that the reader is informed that Lyra is going to betray somebody and that it will be an awful experience for her. “No, no that’s the saddest thing: she will be the betrayer and the experience will be terrible. She mustn’t know that, of course” (GC:29). There is also the problematic fact that Lyra is not to know what it is that she has to do and that the betrayal is vital for the fate of the world: “she is destined to bring about the end of destiny. But she must do so without knowing what she is doing, as if it were her nature

and not her destiny to do it. If she is told what she must do, it will all fail." (GC:271) I believe that this is a situation most teenagers will at least one time experience. The feeling that they stand to face some horrible event in the future, only they have now idea how to tackle it or what it means.

1:2:2 Cultural enrichment through *The Golden Compass*

Secondly Collie and Slater put forward the importance of "cultural enrichment". Here they argue that reading authentic material is the second best thing to actually visiting or living in the country of the target language. By reading literature pupils will receive a broadened understanding of cultural codes. They will learn more about the inhabitants as they are given a chance to enter their world through fiction. Your pupils will be introduced to different cultures through Lyra and her experiences of them. In the same manner Lyra is told by Ma Costa a gyptian woman that: "You en't gyptian, Lyra. You might pass for gyptian with practice, but there's more to us than gyptian language." (GC:100). The pupils will hopefully understand that there is more to a society than their language. "A reader can discover their thoughts, feelings, customs, possessions; what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave behind closed doors." (2009:4) Even though *The Golden Compass* is set in a fictional Oxford in another dimension I do believe that it will deepen the pupils' understanding of the English speaking worlds culture. Solhaug describes the setting in *The Golden Compass* in this manner "The universe we are introduced to resembles our own, though containing a somewhat archaic quality."(2008:317) Because it is fiction it is a good foundation for comparison, both with our culture and with modern British culture. And because the surroundings resemble the authentic ones it should not be too far fetched. In Lyra's Oxford the colleges are an important part of the surroundings and I imagine it could inspire pupils to find out more about the real Oxford and its function as a city of knowledge.

The Golden Compass offers what Collie and Slater describe as "a full and vivid context in which characters from many social backgrounds can be depicted" (2009:4) Lyra encounters many different social classes in the book. Lyra herself belongs to the upper registry in the social structure. That does not stop her from playing with children

who are servants or Gyptians.⁶ Fokin-Holmberg writes how the children's literature critic Roni Natov describes Lyra and her upbringing as very modest: "Lyra is ignorant of the class into which she was born. Cast out at birth and raised by a lower set of parents, she moves comfortably among various social classes" (2005:67) This gives Lyra an endearing quality and she seems to be brought up under similar values as those found in the curriculum e.g. "respect the intrinsic value of other people" (Skolverket.se) She is however proud to belong to the finest College in Oxford, Jordan College, and she "liked to boast of it to the various urchins and ragamuffins she played with" but it is not only the children's classes she is aware of, she also "regarded visiting Scholars and eminent professors from elsewhere with pitying scorn, because they didn't belong to Jordan and so must know less" (GC:31)

What I find particularly interesting about the social class division in *The Golden Compass* is that the most common denominator is that of knowledge and not so much of wealth. It seems that the cleverer you are the higher rank you have. I believe that this class division by knowledge offers some pedagogical benefits in that you as a teacher can force the pupils to reflect upon their own learning process. By comparing the class system in the book to the knowledge goals in the curriculum the pupils will be able to see the role knowledge plays in our society. The pupils will hopefully "develop a sense of curiosity and the desire to learn". (Skolverket.se) Lyra has spent most of her time at Jordan college avoiding any form of formal education and "at Jordan they had taught her in a piecemeal and disconnected way" (GC:73) Her perspective on learning changes in the book as she encounters subjects that interest her. She begins to understand that knowledge is important if you want to get anywhere. I hope that the pupils in the same manner as Lyra will be able to understand that learning is valuable.

Amongst the children the lowest on the class scale are the brick burner's children. They are described as the "perennial enemies" in the play wars of the Oxford children. All the town children can forget their own indifferences and join forces to fight this enemy. Lyra is described as belonging to both social spheres. Her best friend is Roger the kitchen boy at Jordan College. They often get up to mischief together. However she also belongs to a world of "grandeur and ritual". There is also "a connection with the high world of politics represented by Lord Asriel" her uncle and guardian. Because of

⁶ Gyptians: A nomad people who live on boats, the word alludes a similarity with the gypsies of our world.

the multitude of social backgrounds found in *The Golden Compass* and the various settings reading the book in your classroom will help you to ensure that the goal to aim for found in the syllabus to help pupils “develop their ability to reflect over ways of living and cultures in English-speaking countries and make comparisons with their own experiences.” It will also help your pupils on the way to by the end of year nine have attained the goal to “have knowledge of everyday life, society and cultural traditions in some countries where English occupies a central position, as well as be able to make comparisons with their own cultural experiences.” (Skolverket.se)

1:2:3 Language enrichment

Thirdly there is the matter of language enrichment. Not only does reading literature improve syntax and grammar but as Collie and Slater puts it “there is little doubt that extensive reading increases a learner’s receptive vocabulary” (2009:4) They also face the argument that literature might provide the learner with the wrong kind of vocabulary by saying that the teacher has to use it in the right way. If there are examples of old fashioned language the teacher should use it for comparison rather than teach it as the correct way of expressing yourself. Literature also creates a context for the words in a learner’s vocabulary. “literature provides a rich context in which individual lexical or syntactical items are made more memorable.” (2009:5) by reading literature the pupils are also exposed to a variety of Englishes. By this I mean that the language in a text can vary between what Collie and Slater describe as “sometimes elaborate, sometimes marvellously simple yet, somehow, absolutely “right”.” (2009:5) It means that the pupils will “deepen their understanding of spoken English in different situations and contexts”(Skolverket.se) which is one of the Goals to aim for in the syllabus. *The Golden Compass* is a children’s book of high quality. The language is rich and engaging. This is not only my personal opinion, Philip Pullman has received several awards for this book, amongst them the Carnegie medal. It was also the first time a children’s book received this award, which in my opinion says a lot about its quality level. Bo Lundahl describes *Northern Lights* as a “fantastic” novel (2007:84) and Deborah O’Keefe lists Pullman as a personal favourite being: “sophisticated and brilliant”.(2003:192) *The Golden Compass* is an excellent book for prompting what Collie and Slater call “oral work”. The story and its characters will provide the teacher and the pupils with ample

discussion stuff. Helping to promote the learners speaking skills. At first reading in English if it is not your first language will be difficult. But as you grow more experienced it will become easier. By reading literature we encounter both language and culture and we learn new things. When you look at the curriculum you find the following quote. "Language, learning, and the development of a personal identity are all closely related. By providing a wealth of opportunities for discussion, reading and writing, all pupils should be able to develop their ability to communicate and thus enhance confidence in their own language ability." (Skolverket.se) By letting your pupils read *The Golden Compass* you do provide them with these different opportunities. By reading the novel they will both encounter authentic English language and a variety of identities available for possible identification. By creating a good and permitting booktalk atmosphere in the language classroom you create a forum for discussion where pupils are given a chance to develop their language skills as well as their ability to form an opinion. Both goals to aim for in the syllabus since pupils should "develop their ability to actively take part in discussions (...) express their own thoughts in English, as well as understand the views and experiences of others. (Skolverket.se) In his book *Engelsk språkdidaktik: texter, kommunikation, språkutveckling*, Bo Lundahl has been inspired by Olga Dysthe and her Bhaktinian ideas of the classroom of multiple voices when he says that "In a classroom of multiple voices the pupils different voices and opinions are heard and respected. In this way it is enriched by the pupils' experiences and perspectives" (2009:113). The point is that they learn from each other. By listening to each other they should be able to create a more multifaceted picture than the picture formed in their own heads. He also continues to write "the dialogues or the interactions role are central since our language is the tool we use when learning" "Learning and meaningful language usage can therefore not be separated from each other. It is in that insight we find the main argument for the consistent use of English during English classes."(2009:13) Reading it should also help the learner with their "ability to make inferences from linguistic clues, and to deduce meaning from context" (Collie & Slater 2009:5)

1:2:4 Personal involvement

Fourth and last is the matter of "personal involvement" (Collie & Slater 2009:5). "Engaging imaginatively with literature enables learners to shift the focus of their

attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system.” (2009:5) Collie and Slater argue that as language-teaching materials often must focus on language rules and how it is constructed the way of learning becomes somewhat piecemeal. By complementing with literature the pupils will be able to construct a more complete picture of a language. There is not the same need to learn word by word what they mean. Instead it is more important to follow the developments of the narrative. Collie and Slater believe that when the reader becomes more engaged with the story than with the language it “can have beneficial effects upon the whole language learning process.” (2009:6)

The Golden Compass is a very exciting book. The readers are constantly forced to make guesses about future events. They also have to revise their predictions as they receive more information in the book. It is in the second chapter of the book that Lyra and the reader first hears of Dust, a mysterious particle that has both protagonist and reader constantly making guesses regarding its existence as well as its composition. “Something in the way he said it made Lyra imagine *dust* with a capital letter, as if it wasn’t ordinary dust. (GC:19) The reader and Lyra do not find out much more about what Dust is until Lyra goes to live with Mrs Coulter. In an attempt to “show that she did know some things” (GC:73) Lyra mentions dust. Mrs Coulter is surprised to find out that Lyra has heard of Dust. She wants to know where she learned about it. Lyra now realises that Dust is a dangerous topic and quickly tries to diminish her knowledge about it. ““Where did you learn that from?” By now Lyra was aware that there was a powerful tension in the room, because Pantalaimon had crept ermine-like onto her lap and was trembling violently. “Just someone in Jordan,” Lyra said vaguely. “I forgot who.” (GC:73-74) In chapter eleven the reader receives further clues. Lyra is observing the Aurora and is moved by it. “It wasn’t long before she found herself entering the same kind of trance as when she consulted the alethiometer⁷. Perhaps, she thought calmly, whatever moves the alethiometer’s needle is making the Aurora glow too. It might even be Dust itself.” (GC:161). As the novel progress the reader finds out more about Dust and will finally be able to piece it all together. It is my belief that because of its exciting nature the book will procure the interest of the reader and a will to continue the story until it is finished.

⁷ The alethiometer or the symbol reader is an object that tells the truth. Lyra has an innate ability to read and interpret the alethiometer. It is an ability that otherwise comes through years of studying its science. It appears the alethiometer’s ability to tell the truth comes from the presence of Dust within.

Something which Collie and Slater describe as being important in that “as long as the experience of engaging with literature is kept sufficiently interesting, varied and non-directive to let the reader feel that he or she is taking possession of a previously unknown territory.” (2009:6) If the book is interesting and exciting enough the reader should be able to overcome any possible language difficulties. I also hope that pupils will become so curious to find out more about what Dust is that they will continue to read the other two books of the trilogy.

Bo Lundahl writes that if you are reading a more difficult text you are forced to bottom up reading. That means you have to focus on the details, for example phonemes and words. If a pupil has to focus on these small details he is unfortunately also restricted in his personal reading experience. Bo Lundahl argues that you need to be able to combine bottom up and top down reading to get a complete overview of the text. It is important that the pupils must strive from getting stuck in the details and the pupils must learn to accept that they do not have to understand everything in detail if they are to learn to appreciate the reading experience. (Språkboken)

The novel immediately engages its reader with an exciting encounter of Lord Asriel’s wine being poisoned and Lyra’s rescuing him from drinking it. From the very beginning the book brings up new elements that have to be discovered by the reader and it is my belief that if the reader is sufficiently inspired s/he will have no problems overcoming the language difficulties. However it is also the teacher’s responsibility to provide the pupils with ample opportunities to discuss and analyse the problems they may encounter. Both from content point of view and language point of view. It is also the teacher’s responsibility to make sure that the pupils are provided with enough background information about the book to already be familiar with some of the more difficult concepts or words that they can read fluently. A section on how you can help to provide background information will follow. “Each learner will have different strengths to build on and different weaknesses to overcome. Therefore there can be no single, set, rigid methodology for reading. The teacher will need to focus on different goals at different times and to use a range of materials and tasks.” (Hedge:205) In order to help the pupils to “make sense of a text” (Hedge:188) it is important that you supply them with background information about the text and its context. To begin with *The Golden Compass* is a fantasy book and it is likely that there will be a number of pupils in a class who are unfamiliar with the genre. They may find it difficult to relate to at first

and will need help to be able to relate to some of the fantastic ingredients in the novel. However providing them with background information is not enough. You have to provide the pupils with an arena where they can appropriate the background information and assimilate it with their own prior knowledge and the issues in the novel. This is in my opinion the most challenging task that teachers face when teaching literature. The method I suggest is that of booktalk and a “classroom of multiple voices” I will give detailed instructions in the section called **Using *The Golden Compass* to help pupils develop their identities as well as their language abilities.**

2: From a practical aspect: Classroom activities

2:1 Providing background information and “sparking the interest”

As I have already explained background information plays an important role in the pupils’ ability to appreciate a novel and their ability to read it fluently. Collie and Slater stress the importance of a successful “first encounter”. I am inclined to agree with them when they say that a pupil who has had a bad first encounter with a novel will struggle to finish it due to lack of motivation. Warm up activities can work both as inspiration and as encouragement. The pupils need to “be convinced that the task ahead is not an impossible one” (2009:16) I also believe that it is through a successful first encounter that you as a teacher have a key role to help the pupils develop their level of “personal involvement”. I suggest that the teacher starts with an introductory lesson. By doing that the teacher will hopefully enthuse the pupils and they will leave the classroom determined and eager to read the novel. The teacher could talk about the information provided in the introduction. How the book was received and about Pullman’s inspiration. I suggest that the pupils are provided with a word list for the first couple of chapters to ensure that they overcome the initial language difficulties. Not only does this provide the pupils with a tool to enrich their language in a manner that will show immediate results since their vocabulary will be extended. It will also help them with the personal involvement as discussed in the previous section. I believe that a word list comprising the most common difficult words from the first chapters will help the reader relax and focus on a more enjoyable top-down reading. I hope that if pupils read *The Golden Compass* they will be so keen to find out what happens next that they will be inspired sufficiently by the story to be able to avoid getting caught up in the details. In

my opinion you should divide the book into quite small sections to discuss at the time. By doing that you both make sure that everybody is following the reading pace and you should avoid the risk of losing some pupils on the way.

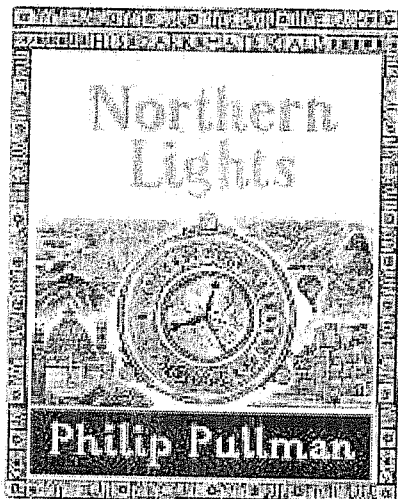
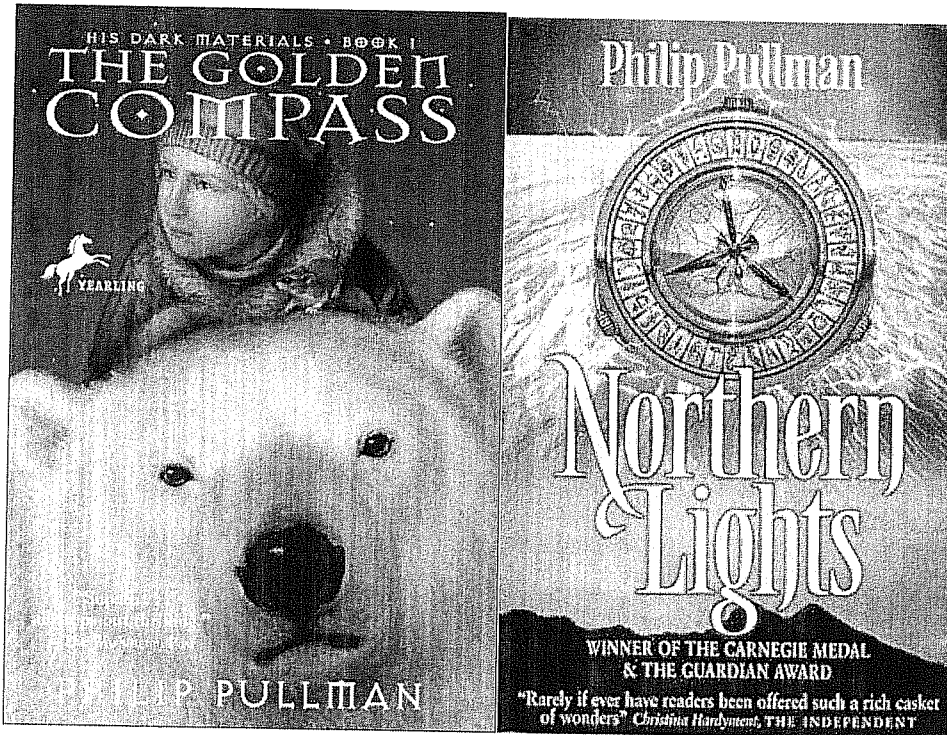
2:1:1 The cover design method

Based on Bo Lundahl's opinions about prior knowledge I think it would be a good idea to start with Collie and Slater's' warm-up exercise with title and cover designs. (2009:18-19)

“In language education the importance of the prior knowledge to reading ability has lead to the introduction of oral or written activities that prepare the pupils on the textual content. The pupils are given a taste of the textual content or the teacher tries to establish what the pupils already know about the topic that will be discussed. The pupils may review the blurb, the cover designs or the title to form an opinion about the novels story”⁸(Lundahl:2009)

You start by projecting the cover design with the title hidden and ask the pupils to speculate what they think the story is about. One of the reasons why I think that this exercise is particularly well suited to use with *The Golden Compass* is because it is easy to find more than one cover design for the same book. The different designs are also quite different from each other. This could lead to a discussion regarding which one the pupils prefer and if they would have picked one on their own from a bookshelf. The fact that they most likely will not be able to guess that the different cover designs all belong to the same book may well surprise them and show them how important the cover design is for our initial encounter with a text. I also believe that the fact that the author Philip Pullman draws illustrations for his own works can be a source of interest for some pupils. Not to mention the fact that the novel has different names in the British and the American issue. Northern Lights in the UK and The Golden Compass in the USA.

⁸ My translation



2:2 Using The Golden Compass to help pupils develop their identities as well as their language abilities

2:2:1 The teacher's role as a guide in the communicative classroom

As I mentioned in my introduction Philip Pullman believes that "There are certain themes, certain topics that are too big for adult literature, they can only be dealt with

properly in children's literature⁹" (Engdahl :137) I also believe that in order for these themes to rise up to the surface you have to discuss them properly with your pupils. You must also remember that it is the pupils' opinions that are central in the discussion, not the teacher's. In *Quotes Opening Dialogue* two different teaching techniques are explored. The view held as preferable is that a teacher should "function as stimulating students to go beyond right-and-wrong answers" (Nystrand 1997:9) It is very important that the teacher will take on the role as a guide rather than an all knowing oracle. I agree with Chambers' opinions that you first need to find a place for the teacher in the literary discussion. The teacher needs to remain the leader seeing as they usually have more literary experience than the pupils. However the teacher also needs to act like another reader with just as much right as the others to "have legitimate and valuable interpretations to offer" to the book. Both Deborah O'Keefe and Maria Nikolajeva comment on the fact that Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy is read both by children and adults. It appears that the view of children as in need of protection from difficult issues has changed. Now "the genres of adults' and children's fantasy are collapsing together" (O'Keefe 2003:13). In addition to the reasons mentioned in the section dealing with why we should use fantasy in the classroom. This is yet another reason why I believe fantasy and in particular *The Golden Compass* is a very good choice for the English Language classroom. Teachers and pupils will be able to share the reading experience on equal terms and both will hopefully enjoy it just as much. The discussion has to be a joint venture. As a result of this the pupils will hopefully become aware of the fact that a book "comprises each individual interpretation – even the author's – thereby becoming something greater than all."(1985:118) In my opinion teachers will also have a lot to gain by using children's literature in the classroom. They should also remember that children's literature is the foundation for adult literature. It is a genre that is quickly gaining support and status. If we have what Nikolajeva calls an "integrated stand point" we need to appreciate children's literature as a "natural part of the literary development" (2004:32) There is after all more research made on fantasy and children's literature today and it will increase the status of the genre. It is as Nikolajeva so wonderfully puts it

⁹ My translation

the fact that children's literature depict people in becoming, people who still have many opportunities in front of them, while modern adult literature, at least the so called quality literature, depict disillusioned, frustrated people without a future. And the readers of children's books still face their literature with an open mind.¹⁰ (2004 :33)

When you start your development towards a more communicative classroom and a more permitting atmosphere you as a teacher have to be prepared that there will be problems to begin with. The pupils have learned the school codes. That means they have learnt the normal traditional behaviour expected of them in the classroom. The teacher's role is to ask questions and the pupils' traditional role is to answer that question. The question has a right and wrong answer. I want to get away from this discourse. If you have decided that there is one interpretation of a text. This means you will end up with a classroom situation where the teacher already knows all the answers, that are the correct ones, and the pupils will have to spend time "guessing what is in the teacher's head". Rather than trying to formulate their own opinions of the text. The syllabus specifically states that the pupils should "express their own thoughts in English" as well as "give reasons for their views". Teachers who use the method previously described will therefore not only disregard pupils whose interpretation/reading of a text disagrees with the teacher's but also find themselves in conflict with the syllabus. (1985:118-119) It is not meaningful to ask pupils questions you as a teacher already know. They know you know it so why are you asking? According to Nystrand "Only authentic discourse can engage students" (1997:72) I would also like to quote the author of *The Golden Compass*, Philip Pullman when he says that "Make this the golden rule, the equivalent of the Hippocratic oath: Everything that we ask a child to do should be worth doing." In my opinion asking the pupils to try and find out what the teacher thinks about a novel is not a task worth doing.

Once you have overcome the obstacle of pupils always expecting there to exist a correct and incorrect answer to the question you have gained a lot. That's when the fun begins and you can get down to business. I expect it to be like cracking the reading code or like when Lyra learns to read the Alethiometer. At the beginning it is illusive and difficult to work out the meanings but as the pupils will become more skilled they like Lyra will become in awe by it and the power of the knowledge it can bring .

¹⁰ My translation

2:2:2 Creating your own daemon

One of the more fantastical ingredients in *The Golden Compass* is that people have daemons. This is one of the aspects of the novel that I believe is important to bring up to class discussion. Because it is a fantastic feature it may well provide difficulties for pupils who are unfamiliar with the fantasy genre. A person's daemon is an animal that is connected to them. They can touch it and speak to it. It never leaves their side. So what is a daemon? Is it only a human's best friend in animal shape? It is particularly in the daemon discussion that you have to keep Aidan Chambers advice for a successful booktalk in mind. According to Chambers one of the keys to developing a prosperous environment for booktalks is to avoid the question why? First of all is the fact that why often can be interpreted as "aggressive, threatening, challenging and interrogative" (2002:60) It is simply too big a question. Why? will most likely be met by blank stares and shrugged shoulders. Imagine that you have asked one of your pupils who dared address the subject of what a daemon is with the question: Why? I agree with Chambers that "By asking why the teacher confronts the child with the impossible. The magnitude of the task is so daunting the child gives up." (1985:155) How can you possibly explain why when you are focused with the first task at hand, namely to figure out what a daemon is. The pupil will struggle to comprise his or her opinions of the text into the answer of one question. It does not provide the pupils with a starting point. According to Chambers the teacher has to start off with a small detail that will be easy for the readers to discuss and formulate opinions about. (2002:60) To help teachers avoid the Why? Chambers instead suggests using the Tell Me method. Tell me does not appear to want to frame the child but "suggests collaboration". The teacher is asking because s/he genuinely wishes to find out what the pupil thinks. The teacher does not already know all the answers. (1985:155) The Tell Me method instead opens up a chance for dialogue and it is in my opinion well suited for the language classroom. It is dialogue the pupils need to practice in order to improve their language skills, not the ability to answer the teacher's questions of the read text "correctly". Remember that the reason you are having the discussion in the first place is that you want to help the pupils form a personal opinion and practice their English. The main objective has to be to help them reach the goals in the syllabus.

It is an important factor of the book that humans and daemons cannot be separated. There is a scene on pages 170-171 where Pantalaimon forces Lyra to go

where she herself does not wish to go by “pulling” her. This means that when Pan tries to go too far from Lyra she simply has to follow because the pain of not following is too great. “I couldn’t *believe* how much it hurt” Lyra tells him afterwards. This scene takes place before Lyra has found the severed child Tony Makarios and therefore it is important to bring up to discussion. Simply because it gives the reader clues to the awful crime committed by the gobblers. “Her first impulse was to turn and run, or to be sick. A human being with no daemon was like someone without a face, or with their ribs laid open and their heart torn out: something unnatural and uncanny that belonged to the world of night-ghasts, not the waking world of sense.” (GC:188) I think what you need to ask your pupils is what they think a human without a daemon symbolizes. In this question you need to bring with you the key concepts previously discussed namely to avoid the question why. Do not let the discussion turn into a game of “guess what’s in the teachers head.”

Lyra touches upon the subject of how important Daemons are to Humans when she has a discussion with Iorek Byrnison the armoured bear. Lyra asks Iorek “is it hard not having a daemon? Don’t you get lonely?” (GC:195) Iorek replies that he does not know what lonely means. He does however admit that he felt incomplete before he made his armour. To this Lyra replies “So bears can make their own souls” She sees Iorek’s armour as his soul and his equivalent to a daemon. When the pupils reach this section of the book I believe it would be a good idea to ask them how we make our own souls or more specifically our own identities. There is a combat between Iofur Raknison the bear king and Iorek. Lyra is looking at Iofur’s armour, which is more splendid than Iorek’s, and she feels bad about it. She does however note that Iorek’s “armour was his soul” and that he had made it to fit him. Iofur however is not content with his soul/armour but feels the need to have a daemon also. As the fight begins it is obvious that Iorek’s dented rusty armour fills its purpose better than Iofur’s gold plated armour. This section is also relevant to the discussion about in what way we are responsible for creating our own characteristics and personalities? By asking these questions you will hopefully “stimulate each pupil towards self-development and personal growth.” which is a task for the school set by the national curriculum. (Skolverket.se) You can also ask you pupils to consider how they judge others based on their appearances. By doing so you also ask your pupils to reflect to what degree our society is controlled by stereotypical preconceptions. The fact of the matter is that the existence of Daemons

makes humans more perceptible to individuals' personalities and class belonging. For example people who are servants all have daemons that are in the shape of dogs. You cannot disguise your character since as Hines interprets it: "daemons make people legible to others as well as themselves." (2005:38)

Children's' daemons change shape at will or as the mood swings. But when they reach puberty it settles. Lyra addressing her fears of growing up asks "Why do daemons have to settle? (GC:146) The answer she receives is that it has always been that way. It is part of growing up. The fisherman she is discussing the issue with goes as far as to tell her that she will be tired of her daemon changing. She will eventually want him to settle. When she argues against it she is told that there are "compensations for a settled form". (GC:147) You find out what kind of person you are as the animal form of the settled daemon will resemble your own personality. It is connection to this section of the book that I would like to suggest that the teacher asks the pupils to create their own daemons. ¹¹Doing so would have many pedagogical benefits. It would force them to reflect on their own personality and decide what kind of animal that would reflect their personality. In my opinion this exercise not only helps the pupils to develop their language skills but it is also a method to "encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals" a task set by the curriculum. I would also suggest that this is an exercise that is written down. Even though I argue that much can be resolved successfully through discussions in groups. I find it likely that if you allow this exercise to be private. The pupils will be able to explore the depths of their own personalities far better than if they had to air them to the rest of the class. Even if you have successfully managed to create a good booktalk atmosphere in your classroom I think this exercise will be far more meaningful as a private one.

The Golden Compass will work well as a class reader where all pupils have a copy of their own and the whole class work with the text together. The teacher then needs have a programme for the reading prepared. According to Hedge they should include "preparatory activity, intensive reading of extract in class for strategy training, individual silent reading in class, and private reading at home with exercises and follow-up work." (2003:215) The advantages of this method are that the teacher is more in

¹¹ Idea to exercise found at www.teachit.co.uk. I am however not a registered member and have not had access to complete article but has created the direction on my own. Therefore my interpretation of the exercise may deviate from original source.

control. The teacher can make sure that all the pupils are keeping up with the reading by planning reading activities that accompany each chapter. You also make sure that pupils who might find reading the text a bit difficult receive sufficient help to get through it. I also believe that *The Golden Compass* will work excellent as part of a class library. A selection of books that the teachers can let the pupils choose from freely or with guidance. This method gives the pupils a choice and could help create a better purpose for reading the book. It also helps the pupil to feel that they are in some control of their own learning. It also helps create a democratic atmosphere in the classroom. The teacher can avoid giving the pupils books that they are not yet accomplished enough to read. I must however argue that it is my belief that a pupil can overcome any difficulties a book may provide if they are provided with enough guidance and assistance by their teacher and fellow pupils.

Conclusion

I hope that this essay has convinced you, its reader, that *The Golden Compass* is an excellent book to use in English language classroom. Not only because it is an example of authentic material but also because it can help the pupils in their search for identity. It is a novel that can be very beneficial in a teacher's task to follow the goals set by the national curriculum and the Syllabus. Because of its high quality it will also help the pupils develop their language skills. The reading experience can be shared on equal terms between young and old. I believe that fantasy can be just as useful as realism when it comes to dealing with "fundamental human issues". Death and betrayal will be easier for the pupils to accept if it is conveyed through an exciting and engaging story. The fact that *The Golden Compass* has a female protagonist should make it a good foundation for working with an awareness of the gender stereotypes in our society. It is also a valuable source for discovering differences between our culture and others. It can help develop an understanding and respect of the cultures of the English speaking countries.

The more I read about Philip Pullman and his trilogy *his Dark Materials* the more convinced I am of what an extraordinary piece of young adult literature it is. It has so many qualities and layers that can be worked with and which also correspond with the curriculum. The only obstacles are the facts that *The Golden Compass* on its own is a

good 300 pages long and that the language is fairly sophisticated for a teenage novel. I am however convinced that by using the methods described, above all the good booktalk, these obstacles can be overcome. The reward will be so substantial it will all be worth it.

The novel will hopefully help the young reader to create his/hers new adult identity and they will not be afraid to voice their opinions regardless of the fact that they are doing so in a language different from their mother tongue. The teacher plays an important role in this identity search and it is vital that the teacher acts like a compass rather than as a GPS. It is the pupils' role to find the right way on the map that is their life, not the teacher's.

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