

Using Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet* in the
Teaching of English for Second Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

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Summary: In this essay, I present ways to include fiction in the teaching of English as a second language for upper secondary school in Sweden. More specifically, I look at the novel *Out of the Silent Planet* written by C. S. Lewis and discuss various approaches that the teacher could have when teaching with the book as a basis. I suggest ways to teach using the novel, referring to the Swedish syllabuses and relevant pedagogical literature, with special emphasis on the fundamental values in the curriculum for upper secondary school. Furthermore, I give concrete examples of exercises and discussion topics that could be included when using this novel in a literature project in class. The four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking are the foundation of the activities presented in this essay, and it has been my intention to cover all of them when suggesting ways to teach English with the book as a starting point. The object of this essay is to be a source of inspiration and material for teachers who want to include literature in English teaching. I want to show that including fiction in second language teaching provides a good way of giving the learners valuable knowledge not only about the language itself but also about the fundamental values upon which our society is built.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0.1 INTRODUCTION.....	4
1.1 CHAPTER I: Pedagogical and literary background.....	6
1.2 Using literature in second language teaching.....	6
1.3 Out of the Silent Planet in the language classroom.....	9
1.4 Concluding remarks.....	11
2.1 CHAPTER II: Out of the Silent Planet and fundamental values.....	12
2.2 The portrayal of humans and human behavior.....	13
2.3 The idea of a space journey.....	15
2.4 Being an alien.....	17
2.5 Potentially problematic aspects of the book.....	19
2.6 Concluding remarks.....	21
3.1 CHAPTER III: Applications.....	22
3.2 Write an alternative ending.....	22
3.3 Debate.....	23
3.4 Writing a letter.....	24
3.5 Worksheet 1: The characters' characteristics.....	24
3.6 Listening to the novel.....	25
3.7 Writing the first chapter of a novel.....	25
3.8 Group discussions.....	25
4.1 CONCLUSION.....	26
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	27
APPENDICES.....	28
APPENDIX I: Example of a project time plan.....	28
APPENDIX II: Worksheet 1: The characters' characteristics.....	29

0.1 INTRODUCTION

A very thorough critical study of the trilogy containing the book *Out of the Silent Planet* which is the subject of my essay has already been made by David Downing, the Lewis critic, in the early 90's. His book *Planets in Peril* deals with many interesting and important aspects of the book such as the Portraits of Evil, Classicism, Medievalism and Cosmic Voyage as Spiritual Pilgrimage. In my essay, however, the focus will be on the pedagogical aspects of using the book in second language teaching for upper secondary school. I will try to answer the questions: How and why should the book *Out of the Silent Planet* by C. S. Lewis be used in English teaching for upper secondary school in Sweden? This will be done both through analytical discussions of its content and by suggesting activities that could be used by language teachers in upper secondary school. The idea is not merely to convince teachers of the benefits of using this particular book in teaching, but rather to convince teachers – or anyone interested in the subject – of the benefits of working with fiction in the manner suggested in my essay. Furthermore, my essay contains concrete examples of methods, exercises and discussion topics that will hopefully be a source of inspiration for teachers who plan to include fiction in their teaching of English as a second language.

In the first chapter, I will give a brief background containing a discussion of the use of literature in second language teaching together with a discussion why *Out of the Silent Planet* is suitable for this. Here, I will justify my choice of this book by pointing out its strengths as well as the use of literature as a tool for learning a second language. I will do this by referring to the Swedish syllabuses for upper secondary school as well as relevant pedagogical literature.

In the second chapter of my essay, I will focus on the aspects of the book that I find interesting and useful from a second language teaching point of view, such as the portrayal of humans and human behavior, being an alien, and the idea of doing a space journey. My starting

point are the goals stated in the syllabuses as well as literature in the field of pedagogics and language learning. In this chapter, I will also bring up more problematic aspects of the book, i.e. things that the teacher needs to be aware of when using this book in language teaching. This second chapter is more of a theoretical discussion about the themes and topics which I find it relevant to focus on when working with this book, whereas the third chapter is more of a concrete example of how this can be done in practice.

The third chapter of my essay contains suggestions of how the book can be used in teaching. Here I focus on exercises, methods and discussion topics that, in my opinion, would be useful to include while working with this book. This chapter is supposed to work as an example that points out the relevance of working with literature in this manner; as a source of inspiration for teachers, but not as a recipe or template to be followed blindly.

Finally, in my conclusion, I summarize what I have said in the earlier chapters, namely given reasons for using literature in second language teaching, justified the choice of my book, and answered the question in my focus.

1.1 CHAPTER I: Pedagogical and literary background

In this chapter, I will give a short background to this essay, by discussing the role of literature in the teaching of English as a second language. I refer to the Swedish syllabuses as well as relevant pedagogical literature. I will also justify the choice of the book in my focus by pointing out the benefits of using it in second language teaching.

1.2 Using literature in second language teaching

First of all, it is stated in the “Overall goals to aim for” in the information about the subject English for upper secondary school that schools should aim to ensure that students “improve their ability to read with good understanding literature in English and reflect over texts from different perspectives” (Skolverket, 2000). Furthermore, in the course plan for English A, we find that one of the goals that students should have attained on completion of the course is to “be able to read and understand simple literature and through literature acquire a knowledge of cultural traditions in English-speaking countries” (Skolverket, 2000). On the completion of English B, students should “be able to read, summarise and comment on the contents of longer literary texts” (Skolverket, 2000), and we also learn that after taking English C, students should “be able to read literature from different periods and different genres, as well as be able in their reading to reflect on textual contents and form from different perspectives” (Skolverket, 2000). Therefore, it is not the case that every teacher has a choice whether to work with literature or not, but working with literature – apart from all the advantages it might have for language learning – is clearly a goal in itself.

Secondly, even if we ignore the above, there are many beneficial aspects of including literature in language learning. In *Literature in the Language Classroom*, written by Joanne

Collie and Stephen Slater, we find four strong reasons why a language teacher should use literary texts with classes. The first aspect they discuss is that literature offers valuable authentic material, which has something to say about fundamental human issues and can speak directly to the reader. The fact that it is authentic, i.e. not designed specifically for the purpose of teaching, is important because it ensures that the material is genuine, but also simply because it is material intended for native speakers. As Collie & Slater put it:

In reading literary texts, students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers and thus they gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration, and so on. And, although it may not be confined within a specific social network in the same way that a bus ticket or an advertisement might be, literature can none the less incorporate a great deal of cultural information (Collie & Slater 4).

This means that the students are exposed to material which will give them additional linguistic familiarity as well as cultural information. The second aspect mentioned is that literature, together with movies, plays, newspapers etc. can offer cultural enrichment, perhaps inferior only to an actual visit to the country where the language is spoken. The third reason for using literature according to Collie & Slater is that it enriches the language of the students: syntax, vocabulary as well as grammar, in a context which is usually easier to remember than exercises, rules or tables. This is also important, the authors argue, at a productive level, where the students will become more creative once exposed to a rich variety of the new language. The last reason they give is that literature fosters personal involvement in students in a way that other school activities do not. Often the process of learning a new language can be fairly superficial, but literature enables learners to shift focus imaginatively beyond the mechanical aspects of the foreign language system.

I find the reasons Collie & Slater discuss very important, especially the latter. When the student gets caught up by a good book, she starts to learn many features of the language without realizing it. This is perhaps one of the most effective ways to learn something, because when pure interest and entertainment are the driving force, the chances that you get tired of what you are doing are considerably lower. Many people learn most of their English while traveling in English-speaking countries, and after that, I would argue that the most important influences are literature, music and movies. Only in third place comes school. It is crucial to remember that language learning is a life-long process. Therefore, finally, by exposing the students to literature, perhaps we can help them to develop an interest which will continue to teach them English even after the course is over. As Hedge puts it:

Involving learners in programmes of extensive reading can be a highly productive step towards autonomous learning [...]. If students have a chance to read at home or to read silently in school, they are engaging in an activity which will yield substantial possibilities for them to go on learning by themselves (Hedge 204).

When discussing the beneficial aspects of literature in language learning, it comes natural to bring up some of the challenges that the language teacher will have to accept when working with literature in teaching. Two things that I believe are among the most common reasons that make language teachers hesitate to work with literature are the fact that it is time consuming and hard to assess. About the latter, Paran claims that: “Once we introduce testing into the equation, it becomes apparent that the values implicit in the act of teaching literature on the one hand, and those values implicitly inculcated into our pupils through the examination system on the other, are in fact at odds with one another” (Paran, 2010:145). He argues that in an ideal world, there would be no need to test literature within a foreign language context, but adds that if literature is not clearly linked to assessment it might simply disappear (Paran, 2010:146). I agree that testing

literature in a sense stands in conflict with the beneficial aspects of literature mentioned above, but I realize that testing literature, as well as all kinds of testing, sometimes is a necessary evil. Time and assessment are things that need to be considered when planning a literature project in class. Naturally, the older the students get, the easier and more appropriate it is to give them more responsibility, and reading a novel is one of those things that could be extended homework that spans the entire semester. Whether this is possible to do with a class or not depends entirely on the individual group and their ability to take responsibility for their work. The other option is of course to do a shorter more intensive project spanning a few weeks, where the students get more time in school and perhaps even a plan to follow when reading at home. Regarding the assessment, the teacher needs to be creative and find good and effective ways to first of all make sure that the students really have read their books, but also to assess their ability to respond to it, and analyze its content. I will discuss this further in the following chapters of the essay.

1.3 Out of the Silent Planet in the language classroom

C. S. Lewis's book *Out of the Silent Planet* is the first part of a science fiction trilogy, but every part can be read separately as a story of its own. Even though the book, which is about a space journey to Mars, was written for adults, I still believe that this kind of science fiction story is appealing also for younger readers. This, naturally, is a crucial matter. As Collie & Slater put it when they discuss what sort of literature is suitable for language learners, one primary factor is whether the text stimulates personal involvement by “arousing the learners' interest and provoking strong, positive reactions from them. If it is meaningful and enjoyable, reading is more likely to have a lasting and beneficial effect upon the learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge” (Collie & Slater 6). Furthermore, despite the fact that the book was written over 70 years ago, there is something timeless about its story which is relevant today as well, since people at NASA

are still dreaming of, and planning for a mission to Mars.

Even though *Out of the Silent Planet* was written for adults, its simple language makes the book appropriate also for upper secondary school students. One of the major reasons for choosing this particular book is its straightforward, clear and beautiful language. David Downing, one of the Lewis critics, writes about the author and the books in the trilogy that:

His Ransom trilogy was written as “holiday fiction,” and he wrote only one handwritten draft of each fantasy, with just a few minor revisions, before sending them off to the publisher. Yet *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength* are widely praised for their evident erudition, and even unfavorable reviewers of the trilogy have remarked on the clarity and polish of the author's prose style (Downing 4).

This, I believe, is a crucial factor when it comes to finding suitable literature for second language learners. Simply by not containing too many difficult words, the book will stand a better chance in catching the readers' interest.

Another reason why this book is suitable in an English teaching context is its convenient length. With only a little over 200 pages in a small paperback format, it is more likely that the students will actually manage to get through it within a reasonable period of time. Also, for a student with no or little experience in reading in English, the mere sight of any book can seem discouraging, and even more so if it appears to be almost impossible to get through.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the story of this book includes many interesting topics and themes that could be used in the classroom. Not just when working with the book and trying to understand the story itself, but these themes can be used outside the context of the book as interesting starting points for group discussions or other exercises of various kinds. Examples of topics from the book which I will discuss further in the following chapters of the essay is the

idea of a space journey, looking at the world from outside and thinking about human behavior.

My intentions with this essay, however, is not to claim that this particular book is better than most others, but rather to present one suggestion, an example, of how a specific book can be used in the teaching of English as a second language. Any book that has the same relevant qualities as this book could be used when working with literature in a similar way. Also, I believe it is of great importance that the students should sometimes be able to choose their own literary texts to read. Partly to ensure that their interests and wishes are met, and partly because it promotes student influence over their education, which is also one of the goals to strive towards in the *Curriculum for the Non-Compulsory School System - Lpf 94*. Letting the students choose what books to read is perhaps not always possible in language teaching, but a compromise is that the teacher has a list of books to choose from, and in that case, this book could be one of others on that list.

1.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have discussed the use of literature in second language teaching, as well as argued for the particular book I have chosen for my focus. This chapter has supplied the background knowledge which is needed in order to benefit from the other chapters in my essay. The following chapter will provide a theoretical discussion about the themes and topics which I find it relevant to focus on when teaching. These themes include the portrayal of humans and human behavior, being an alien, and the idea of making a space journey. In this chapter, I also bring up some problematic aspects of the book that the teacher will need to consider when working with it in English teaching.

2.1 CHAPTER II: *Out of the Silent Planet* and fundamental values

Apart from being an exciting science fiction story about a space journey to Mars, Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet* contains many interesting themes that could easily be included in language teaching when working with this book. In this chapter, I will discuss some themes which I find relevant and that could be used both while discussing the story itself, and as a basis for more open discussions beyond the story and for speaking, writing or listening exercises. The idea is to have themes, scenarios and issues that engage and interest the students enough to make them produce both orally and in writing, because I believe that one of the major difficulties for students when they are asked to speak or write in school is lack of interest and imagination. If the students do not feel that they have anything to say about a topic, they will also find the exercise a lot harder. Furthermore, in this chapter, I will also discuss some problematic aspects of the book, or rather, aspects that could potentially be problematic if not handled correctly by the teacher.

There are many advantages in having a story as a starting point when trying to get the students to have more open discussions about a given topic; discussions which are allowed to take almost any direction. First of all, the students will have some vocabulary still fresh in their minds from reading the book, which will be useful for them when trying to express different thoughts and opinions. Secondly, having all read the same book, the students will have a natural starting point for their discussion. This will hopefully make the speaking exercises more interesting and relevant to them.

Furthermore, in the *Curriculum for the Non-Compulsory School System*, we find that apart from simply learning vocabulary, grammar and how to read, write, speak and listen, there are fundamental values that should permeate all teaching. These are values such as democracy, the inviolability of human life, the equal value of all people, the idea of a sustainable development etc. It is the teacher's responsibility to teach the students these values while teaching them the

language, and that is something I have considered in this chapter.

2.2 The portrayal of humans and human behavior

One major theme that runs through the book is that of how mankind is described by the main character “Ransom”, to the curious creatures on the planet Mars (or “Malacandra” as it is called by its inhabitants). On this planet, most of the story takes place, and the highlights of the novel are probably the many discussions that Ransom has with the various species he meets here. Particularly interesting are his discussions with one of the “hrossa” called “Hyoï”. Ransom and Hyoï become friends and the hross starts asking a lot of questions about Earth, how life is there and what the major differences are between that planet and his own. Before long, Ransom starts finding it hard to answer the hross's questions, especially concerning the motives for a lot of human behavior. Hyoï questions wars, selfishness, wastefulness, depletion of natural resources, pollution, injustice, greed, overpopulation and many other things that he learns about from Ransom. The hross's simple questions require very complicated answers and Ransom is not always sure that he knows why we do a lot of what we do. In the beginning, Ransom feels that he has to be a good representative of Earth in case this alien race will never meet another human again. He wants to talk about the great progress man has made in science, technology, medicine etc. But after a while he starts to feel ashamed of the many injustices on Earth and the fact that he can not even motivate a lot of human behavior that seem to us almost as laws of nature. These dialogues become a critique of our society and the way we live our lives, and at the same time, they are very funny. The comical effect created by this strange situation with the innocent, curious hross asking simple questions that Ransom finds hard as well as uncomfortable to answer is one of the strengths of the story. Malacandra, Ransom discovers, is a world where everyone lives in peace and prosperity, and where there are no dominant species, like that of man on Earth,

it is in a way the ultimate utopia where everyone is happy with what he or she has and does not desire more.

In the paragraph about the “fundamental values” in the *Curriculum for the Non-Compulsory School System*, it is written that “each and everyone working in the school shall encourage respect for the intrinsic value of each person as well as for the environment we all share [...]. The school has the important task of imparting, instilling and forming in pupils those values on which our society is based” (Skolverket, *Curriculum* 3). And further down in the section about the school's task it is written that:

An environmental perspective in education provides students with insights so that they can not only contribute to preventing harmful environmental effects, but also develop a personal position to major global environmental issues. Education should illuminate how the functions of society and our ways of living and working can best be adapted to create the conditions for sustainable development (6).

By using Lewis's novel as a starting point, I believe that many interesting discussions can be held, where values like these are included. The teacher could ask the students what they think is the reason why we live in a way that is not sustainable for the environment, and ask them to imagine how we could live differently to minimize the damage we do to our planet. Perhaps looking at the problem 'from outside' as in the book, will help the students to understand the problem as well as finding solutions to it.

In the curriculum, under the section about norms and values, we can read that:

The school shall strive to ensure that all pupils: further develop their ability to consciously adopt ethical standpoints based on knowledge and personal experience, respect the intrinsic value and integrity of other people,

work against people being exposed to oppression and abusive treatment and are a source of help for other people [...] (13).

I believe that also here, *Out of the Silent Planet* can be used as a starting point for discussions that include the injustices of the world, how the West is living at the expense of the Third World and how wars are fought and people are killed so that some people can have more power and wealth. The teacher could for instance ask the students if they think that Ransom gives a fair picture of humanity, and this could create a dynamic discussion, where they also get a chance to criticize the author and his ideas of the problems of the world. This will develop the students ability to think critically, reason and analyze problems while learning the fundamental values in the curriculum.

2.3 The idea of a space journey

The second theme that I would like to discuss is the idea of making a space journey. This, I believe, holds great potential and many opportunities for the teacher to develop and work with together with the students. It is not difficult to imagine that a topic like this could be a source of inspiration for the students that awakens their imagination and creativity. It could be used, for instance, as a starting point for the task of writing the first chapter of a novel. The teacher could for example give the students this task and say that the context is that the main character has just landed on an unknown planet, and that the object is to describe the surroundings and tell what happens next. The strength with having a topic like this as a starting point is that it is open enough to encourage the student to write almost anything she likes and be creative, without leaving the student completely on her own, with a lack of ideas on how to start the story. The student could choose to let the planet be inhabited by highly developed beings, with a society

very much like ours, or to let it be wild, dangerous and frightening and tell a completely different story.

Another idea is to use the topic of a space journey in a historical context and talk about the time when the book was written and compare it with today. There are clues in the book that bear evidence of the fact that the book was written over 70 years ago. One example is the description of the design of the spaceship, and another is the description of the journey through space itself. This, I believe, is very interesting to include, and let the students think about. A suitable question that could be asked is: Do you think the story would be any different if it had been written today? Another more specific question could be for instance: How is it possible to tell that the book was written in the 1930's? Working in this manner will help the students to develop a more analytical way of reading literature, where they do not only read the text, but also think and contemplate while reading. In *the Curriculum for the Non-Compulsory School System* we find that:

Education shall provide an historical perspective, which inter alia enables pupils to develop their preparedness for the future, an understanding of the relativity of knowledge as well as develop their ability to think in dynamic terms (Skolverket, *Curriculum 6*).

This applies well to the topic of a space journey. Here, the scientific and technological link is very obvious, and this, naturally, is an area that has changed and developed much since the dawn of Space Science, and which will continue to develop in the future, perhaps into something unrecognizable. Accordingly, the students could also be asked to imagine what the differences would be had the book been written in the year 2100. This will help the students to see that just like we can find primitive things now, that we perhaps smile at today when looking back historically, our descendents will look back at our time and smile at the primitive things we use today. This becomes especially clear when looking at an area changing as rapidly as technology.

Furthermore, awareness of constant changes in the models and theories that we use to explain the physics around us is another thing that I believe is included in “an understanding of the relativity of knowledge”.

2.4 Being an alien

In the book, the main character Ransom travels to another planet and encounters many aliens. Although, all along, it is really he himself who is the alien in the world of the different beings on Malacandra. This, is the third theme that I would like to discuss in this chapter. I believe that by starting from this story and Ransom's situation on the new planet, it is easy to develop good and interesting discussions between the students about the idea of being an alien in a foreign society.

In the *Curriculum for the Non-Compulsory School System* we can read that:

The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school shall represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility (Skolverket, *Curriculum 3*).

It is also stated that: “The school should promote an understanding for others and the ability to empathise” (3). How do we teach these important fundamental values? I believe that one good way of teaching values such as tolerance, justice and the ability to empathize is to ask the students to imagine what it would be like to be an alien in a foreign society. At first, the task could be to imagine what it would be like to land on a strange new planet. The teacher could let

the students discuss this in groups and give them questions to get started like: How do you think you would react if you were thrown into a completely different world like that in the book? How would you respond to the other beings on the planet? How would it feel not understanding their language? How would you feel being so far from home? etc. Then, the task could be to try to imagine what it would be like to be thrown into a different society somewhere else on Earth, where you do not know the language or the customs and culture of the people.

There are perhaps going to be students in the class who have already experienced this. Immigrants who carry the experience of having been strangers in a strange new land is of course an invaluable resource of knowledge for the class. However, the teacher has to consider the fact that these students might also be carrying difficult or even traumatic memories of being a refugee, of war or persecution which they are not yet ready to share with others. I believe that working in the manner suggested above, asking open questions without given answers, will give the students the opportunity to choose whether, and what, to tell about their own experiences without any pressure from anyone. Furthermore, using a science fiction story like this as the starting point, will create a comfortable distance to the real world, without omitting the important aspects of being an alien that the students should try to empathize with.

The object of all this is of course to try to teach some of the fundamental values in the curriculum, while practicing speaking in English. Hopefully, this will be an interesting and engaging topic that the students could feel is worth discussing, if only for the exciting idea of aliens and other planets. The ideal is when the students forget that they are actually doing a speaking exercise, and get completely absorbed by the discussion. One of the major problems for students of English in Swedish schools is the lack of opportunities to practice speaking. It is not uncommon that the student has got the tools needed for speaking like grammar and vocabulary, but feels uncomfortable doing so due to lack of experience. If the teacher succeeds in creating an

atmosphere in the classroom where the students dare to speak, much is gained.

2.5 Potentially problematic aspects of the book

The first problem to be aware of when choosing to work with this book in language teaching, is that of gender. *Out of the Silent Planet* does not contain a single female main character; in fact, the story barely contains any female characters at all. This, naturally, is a matter that the teacher needs to consider before choosing to work with this book. If, however, the teacher chooses to include this book in teaching, I believe it is of great importance that other books that do contain strong female main characters are also presented to the students at a different point during the course. Furthermore, the absence of women in the story could preferably be taken up for discussion in groups, or be part of an exercise given to the class when analyzing the story. A relevant question is of course to ask the students to look for any reasons they could find that explains the lack of women. Had the main character been a woman, would it in any way change the story? If not, why do you think the author has excluded women? This would hopefully make the students aware of gender roles and could create interesting discussions about power relations in our society. Perhaps this could also be linked to the time when the book was written, and if so, the norms and values of the 1930's could be compared with those of today.

Still, I would argue, when taking aspects like these into consideration, that the important thing is to make sure that the students are exposed to a wide variety of books including both strong male and female characters, rather than making sure that every book in itself meets this criteria. For every book has both stronger and weaker points, and the teacher's responsibility is to make the students aware of them, and not to use censorship when choosing what books to work with.

The other potential problem to consider is that of the author's personal ideology which is made visible in the story. C. S. Lewis wrote *Out of the Silent Planet* shortly after he had turned

from being a strong atheist and confessed to Christianity (Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* 228 – 229). Even though the story could not be called a description of Christianity in the traditional sense, it does clearly reflect the author's views on spirituality and, to some extent, theism; although none of this is stated explicitly. In the *Curriculum for the Non-Compulsory School System* it is stated that “Education in the school shall be non-denominational” (Skolverket, *Curriculum* 3). This, however, is not equivalent to saying that different ideologies should be avoided. On the contrary, it is also stated in the same Curriculum that the teacher shall: “openly present and together with pupils analyse different values, views and problems as well as the consequences of these” (14), and perhaps even more importantly:

As well as being open to different ideas and encouraging their expression, the school shall also emphasise the importance of forming personal standpoints and provide pupils with opportunities for doing this. Education shall be objective and encompass a range of different approaches. When values are presented, their source and status should always be made explicit (4).

From these two quotes it is made clear that simply avoiding different ideologies is not enough – it is not even acceptable. Instead it is the teacher's responsibility to make the students aware of different ideologies and values, and objectively show their source.

“Critical reading” is about viewing all texts as a product of someone's ideology. The idea when taking this perspective is that it is impossible to write a text without an underlying ideology.

As Hegde puts it:

From this perspective, texts are constructed in certain ways by writers in order to shape the perceptions of readers towards acceptance of the underlying ideology of the text (Hedge 197).

From this perspective, trying to avoid texts with underlying ideologies would be a pointless task.

Instead, we must learn to read all texts critically, which in a school context is the teachers job to make sure that the students learn.

Working with literature containing ideological values like those in *Out of the Silent Planet* is an excellent opportunity for group discussions about different faiths, beliefs and views on spirituality as well as doing interdisciplinary projects where English could be integrated with social science, religion or philosophy. When working with and discussing values like these, however, it is very important to create an open atmosphere where the students get a chance to express different ideas and feel that these differences are accepted. The teacher could for instance ask the class to discuss in groups whether they believe in a spiritual world, and make sure to let everyone have their say. This is a good way of practicing tolerance and understanding for others, which are two of the fundamental values in the Curriculum (Skolverket, *Curriculum 3*).

2.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have discussed some interesting and relevant aspects of the book that could be used in the teaching of English as a second language. The themes and topics I chose to include in this chapter were the portrayal of humans and human behavior, the idea of making a space journey and the idea of alienation. In this chapter, I have also highlighted some potentially problematic aspects of the book, that the teacher needs to be aware of when using this book in language teaching. So far, I have kept the discussion on a somewhat theoretical level. In the following chapter, however, my intention is to be more concrete when discussing examples of how to teach using this book. I will give examples of specific exercises that could be used before, while and after the actual reading of the book as well as discuss different methods for practicing the goals in the syllabuses while learning the language itself.

3.1 CHAPTER III: Applications

When choosing to work with literature in language teaching, the teacher always has to consider how this should be done in concrete terms. Some questions that the teacher has to decide upon include: Are the students all going to read the same book? How long is this project going to be? What should be done in class? and How should the project be assessed? There is no perfect model for how this should be done that will always work for every teacher with all groups of students. Teaching is complex and will depend on various factors such as the students, the teacher, the schedule, the opportunities offered by the school and the environment etc. As Hedge puts it:

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).

Nevertheless, I will in this chapter give examples of what could be included in such a project, and in the appendix I give an example of how this could be fitted in to a weekly lesson plan. This must not be followed to the letter, but different circumstances and situations call for different solutions. Still, I hope this chapter could serve as a source of inspiration and ideas for any teacher that wants to work with fiction in second language teaching.

3.2 Write an alternative ending

One good exercise that many teachers are probably already familiar with is that of writing an alternative ending to the story. This works, in my opinion, very well with *Out of the Silent Planet* since it has a clear turning point in chapter 20, which is also the climax of the novel, when

Weston, one of the other two humans who came with Ransom to Malacandra, holds his speech to the natives. The exercise could be presented to the students after they have finished reading the entire novel, or when they have just finished chapter 20, but before they reach the end. The task for the students is now to write an ending of their own choice to the story. The text does not have to be very long, but should contain all the necessary elements of a narrative chapter, which complete the story. The students could choose to write a happy ending or a sad one, and it does not have to be logical or follow the style of the rest of the story. Instead, the aim is to give the students an opportunity to be creative, and provide a chance for the students to practice their writing and for the teacher material to assess and grade.

3.3 Debate

An oral exercise that suits this book is suggested in the fifth chapter of *Literature in the Language Classroom*. The idea is that books that contain controversial issues could be used as a basis for debates in class. According to Collie & Slater “the formal structure, especially if fairly short time limits are set, is often helpful for learners expressing themselves in the foreign language” (Collie & Slater 75). Many of the aspects I highlighted in the previous chapter, such as alienation and the true nature of man, could be debated in class. For example the class could be divided in two sides, where the one side argues that man is evil by nature and the other that man is inherently good. The teacher should allow the debate to include other questions should they arise, such as: what is good and evil? and does good and evil even exist? Through this exercise, the students practice speaking and listening, while practicing the fundamental values in the curriculum. Meanwhile, the teacher gets an opportunity to evaluate the students' oral skills.

3.4 Writing a letter

Another good activity suggested in *Literature in the Language Classroom* is called “Letter in a bottle”. In the example the students read the novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, and the task is to write a letter in a bottle from the island and ask for help. Since one could hardly be more isolated than Ransom is in *Out of the Silent Planet*, this activity works particularly well for the story. When the students get to the part in the novel where Ransom lands on Malacandra, they could be asked to write a letter from his perspective, that he hopes will reach Earth. This is supposed to be a short text, not more than one page, which expresses Ransom's feelings; despair and fear, as well as curiosity and amazement. This is handed in to the teacher as a basis for assessment.

3.5 Worksheet 1: The characters' characteristics

Yet another activity that we find in *Literature in the Language Classroom*, referred to as “Worksheet 14”, is relevant to use with the novel in my focus, (the worksheet is attached in the appendix of this essay). This could be a home assignment that the students bring to class and use as a basis for a short discussion. The worksheet contains the names of two characters in the novel, e.g. Ransom and Weston, or Hyoui and Devine, and in the middle of the paper there is a box full of different adjectives. The students are supposed to decide which of the characteristics in the box belong to which character. Hopefully the students will have different interpretations and opinions about the characters, which will generate a better and more multidimensional discussion. As Inger Bergström puts it, (my translation): “Text and content can have different meanings depending on who reads the text and what prior understanding the reader has” (Bergström 55). See appendix for an example of this worksheet.

3.6 Listening to the novel

A good listening exercise for the students could be to listen to a short part of the novel in class, preferably an audio CD, but if the teacher does not have access to one, a good alternative is that the teacher reads a chapter out loud for them. Another way to do it is to let the students take turns and read the text out loud for the rest of the class, that way they practice both reading and listening. It is not necessary that all the students are exactly at the particular place in the novel which they listen to, but it is preferred if they have already read the passage they listen to, so that they understand the context.

3.7 Writing the first chapter of a novel

As I have already touched upon in the second chapter a good exercise to include when reading this book is to write the first chapter of a novel. The idea of a space journey could be the starting point for this chapter – a solid foundation to stand on, which provides the settings but allows the students to be creative in their writing, (see chapter II).

3.8 Group discussions

In the previous chapter I have already suggested that the idea of being an alien provides a good basis for discussions in small groups. With questions provided by the teacher and with the students own experiences about the topic, this activity has great potential to generate interesting and relevant discussions, which include some of the fundamental values in the curriculum. (See chapter II for a more detailed discussion of the topic). After the group discussions, one person from each group summarizes for the rest of the class what has been said.

4.1 CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have presented ways to work with Lewis's novel *Out of the Silent Planet* in the English teaching for upper secondary school. With the syllabuses and literature in the field of pedagogics as the starting point I have given examples of exercises, activities and discussion topics, which do not only teach the four skills; reading, writing, speaking and listening, but also provide a basis for teaching the fundamental values stated in the *Curriculum for the Non-Compulsory School System*. I have shown that using a novel as the basis for discussing these values could provide a comfortable distance to the issues of our world, while still making it possible to draw parallels to our society. Furthermore, I have shown that a fiction book like this could also serve as the framework for creative writing, since it provides both inspiration and vocabulary for the student when trying to produce a text of her own.

I have highlighted and discussed themes in the book which I find relevant, thus provided an example of how literature can be used in English teaching, which applies to other novels as well. In this particular novel, I found three themes which I have chosen to discuss in this essay, namely the portrayal of humans and human behavior, the idea of being an alien and the idea of a space journey. I have shown that the portrayal of humans and human behavior in the novel offers an insight into our society, and becomes a critique of our inability to keep peace and live in a sustainable way. I have also suggested that this science fiction novel offers an opportunity to discuss the concept of alienation in a broader sense, and touch upon values in the curriculum such as tolerance and the ability to empathize with others. Furthermore, the idea of making a space journey offers an inspiring and fascinating topic for creative writing which could help the students to get started, while still giving them room for creativity. Accordingly, I have argued that literature is an invaluable tool for language learning, which deserves the time and effort it takes to work with it.

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APPENDIX I: Example of a project time plan

Assuming that everybody reads the same novel. In the example the class has two English lessons (40 minutes) each week, and the students are supposed to read the novel after school hours as homework. The first English lesson week 4 is the deadline when everyone should have finished reading the novel.

Week 1

Lesson 1: Introduction + word lists & Worksheet 1 (3.5) as homework

Lesson 2: Worksheet 1 follow-up + Writing a letter (3.4) which is handed in to the teacher

Week 2

Lesson 1: Group discussions (3.8) + follow-up

Lesson 2: Writing the first chapter of a novel (3.7) + continue to write as homework

Week 3

Lesson 1: Writing the first chapter of a novel (cont.) then handed in to the teacher

Lesson 2: Listening to the novel (e.g chapter 20) (3.6) + Debate (3.3)

Week 4

Lesson 1: Written exam done individually

APPENDIX II: Worksheet 1: The characters' characteristics

In your opinion, which characteristics describe these two characters best? Fill in at least five words under each of the two names. You can use other words than the ones suggested below if you wish.

Be prepared to motivate your choices.

Ransom

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insecure unwise
 honest brave
 self-confident fair
 dishonest greedy nice
 anxious kind
 lazy selfless
 wise grave a coward
 stupid unfair
 cool worried
 ignorant mean
 bad cold
 friendly selfish
 intelligent a realist

Weston

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