

# MASTER'S THESIS

**Promoting intercultural competence in the ESL classroom  
using the graphic novel *American born Chinese*.**

Torunn Johansen Hegland

November 2022

Masterstudium i fremmedspråk i skolen - engelsk

Avdeling for språk, litteratur og kultur

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores to what extent the graphic novel *American born Chinese* may be used in the ESL classroom to promote intercultural competence, with special focus on the development of cross-cultural identity. Theory on intercultural competence show that identity is the result of contact with others and in the development of multiple identities, factors such as family and school play a huge part. Through the use of literature combined with task-based language teaching, the students rely on their own resources to explain and express an opinion on topics such as identity, stereotyping and prejudices. Using a graphic novel may provide the students with a motivating way to an understanding of the topic of identity, and in studying *American born Chinese*, the students may learn to understand the difficulties and the challenges of finding one's identity in between two cultures.

An analysis of *American born Chinese* show that there are various factors that influence the development of identity, and these factors are dealt with in both text and images, thus well-suited to encourage the students in participating in group discussions. A lesson plan has been developed, and a suggestion on how to implement the graphic novel into the classroom shows that the novel may be well-suited to promote IC. By discussing and reflecting upon topics that deal with identity development, the students may get an understanding of how identity is developed, with focus on bi-cultural identity. Further, by relating topics such as identity and stereotypes to the students themselves, they may gain an even larger understanding of the concept of multiple identities, thus they develop their IC.

## Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1. Background.....	4
1.2. Aim and research question.....	5
1.3. Structure of thesis .....	6
2. Theoretical Framework .....	7
2.1. Intercultural competence.....	7
2.2. Identity .....	9
2.3. Literature in the ESL classroom .....	12
2.4. Graphic novels.....	15
3. Method and materials.....	19
3.1. Materials.....	19
3.2. Method.....	20
4. Didactic framework .....	21
4.1. The novel .....	21
4.2. Analysis.....	22
5. Didactic implementation .....	32
5.1. Background.....	32
5.1.1. Learning goals.....	32
5.1.2. Target group .....	33
5.1.3. Numbers of hours/lessons .....	33
5.2. Suggestion for implementation.....	34
5.2.1. Lesson 1 .....	35
5.2.2. Lesson 2 .....	36
5.2.3. Lesson 3 .....	36
5.2.4. Lessons 4 and 5.....	38
5.2.5. Lesson 6 .....	38
5.2.6. Lesson 7 and 8 .....	39
6. Conclusion .....	40
Works cited.....	42
Appendix A - Lesson plan .....	46
Appendix B – Lesson 1 .....	48
Appendix C – Lesson 2 .....	49
Appendix D – Lesson 3.....	50
Appendix E – Lesson 7 and 8 - Final product.....	51

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

The world that we live in today is different from the world we lived in thirty to forty years ago in many ways. There has been a tremendous technological and digital development the last few decades, which has brought the world's population closer together by new means of communication. Not only can we travel between countries with greater ease, but we can also reach out to other people by communicating through digital platforms and social media. The development of technology has made it possible to travel to other parts of the world without much effort. People are much more on the move than earlier, due to educational and work opportunities, but also because of war and persecution. All this results in an increase of people migrating to other parts of the world. One of the many challenges of moving to a different culture, may be how to live and communicate across cultures, the culture of one's origin and the new one. It may prove difficult to find a balance between the two cultures and finding a way to identify with both without conflict. Developing personal identity is a continuous process which involves both social context and culture and developing a cross-cultural identity may be difficult. It is not easy to decide to which extent one wants to identify with one culture or the other, or both. Finding one's way in a new culture may be made easier if there is an understanding of the challenges this may entail. It is important to learn to accept and understand the culture of others from an early age, to avoid potential misunderstandings when communicating with others. The core elements of the Norwegian curriculum in English state the importance of developing intercultural competence so that students become better at dealing with different ways of living and thinking (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020a). Developing students' intercultural competence may help them understand the challenges and difficulties in moving to another culture., including the challenge of identification.

Due to the enormous technological development, several digital platforms have emerged, including social media. Common for social media is that the visual elements have emerged as the most prominent, while the written word has lost its position as the dominant element. This development has influenced all, especially the generation that has grown up with these media as a natural way of communicating. The increase of social media and time used online has led to a decrease in time many adolescents use on other media, for instance the printed book. Being a teacher today, one may see that this calls for a development and a change in the ways of how to teach students. Graphic novels may provide teachers with the opportunity to

introduce literature into the classroom on the students' terms, using visual elements. The use of graphic novels as a tool in education is on the rise, and it may be a way of fulfilling two purposes, namely the use of literature in the classroom and a way of meeting the teenagers in their way of communicating. Using graphic novels in education may enable the educator to meet the students in their visual world in addition to fulfilling the abovementioned core elements of the curriculum. Working with graphic novels opens a myriad of possibilities of how to promote the students' intercultural competence, due to the interplay between text and illustrations not found in text only novels. Complex issues may be easier to understand through images and text together, and difficult topics may become less frightening to discuss when text is accompanied by illustrations.

*American born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang (2006) is a graphic novel about an ethnic Chinese boy who is trying to find his own personal identity living in the United States of America. He is torn between the culture of his origin and the culture of the society he wishes to be a part of. Trying to find a balance between the two seems a difficult task.

## 1.2. Aim and research question

In Norway English is taught as a second language (ESL), and important interdisciplinary topics in the Norwegian curriculum in English are democracy and citizenship, thus the aim is "to develop their [the students'] understanding of the fact that the way they view the world is culture dependent" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020f). In addition, the curriculum states that reading as a basic skill involves both understanding and reflections on the contents of for example multimedia texts (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020c). The aim is thus that literary texts may be used in the ESL classroom to encourage understanding and reflections. This thesis will seek to explore the concept of cross-cultural identity and the use of literature and the graphic novel in the classroom. In studying *American born Chinese*, the students may learn to understand the difficulties and the challenges of finding one's identity in between two cultures. Using a graphic novel may provide the students with a motivating way to an understanding of the topic of identity.

The research question for this thesis is: To what extent may *American born Chinese* be used to promote intercultural competence in the ESL classroom, with a special focus on identity development?

### 1.3. Structure of thesis

Firstly, in chapter two, the theoretical framework includes theory on intercultural competence and identity. Secondly, the advantages of using literature in the ESL classroom are presented, with a special focus on the graphic novel. The characteristics of the graphic novel are also presented, including the relationship between text and image. The third chapter includes method and materials used in this thesis. Thereafter *American born Chinese* will be analysed in chapter four. Chapter five on didactic implementation will suggest ways of implementing the novel in the ESL classroom in order to promote intercultural competence and the concept of identity. The thesis ends with a conclusion, chapter six.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Intercultural competence

The English language has grown to become a world language, and many countries around the world have included English in their educational system as a second language. To ensure satisfactory communication across nations, it is important that students learn this lingua franca, this common foreign language. Not only is it essential to learn the language itself, it is also important to develop and acquire knowledge of the culture and society of the target language (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b). A challenging task for language teachers is to teach English through different approaches to promote cultural understanding and awareness in order to avoid misunderstandings based on stereotypes and prejudice.

Stereotyping is a way of organizing one's perceptions of for example another culture into familiar categories (Samovar et al. 2016, p. 389). It is often a subconscious way of dealing with a situation or people that are unfamiliar, and often results in overgeneralisations and oversimplified categories (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 389). Examples of stereotypes are that "all Norwegians know how to ski" and "all Asians are smart and hardworking". There are both positive and negative stereotypes, and difficulties in communication across cultures may arise when stereotypes are present (Samovar et al., 20016, p. 389), because one treats everyone as if they are the same. Further, negative feelings towards a particular cultural group are called prejudices (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 391), and may develop into unfavourable feelings and attitudes towards members of this group (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 392). Stereotypes and prejudices are often the result of limited knowledge about another culture and can lead to problems in communication with others (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 390), but can also lead to conflicting identities when someone belongs to more than one cultural group. It is important that we learn to avoid stereotyping early on to encourage positive contact across cultures (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 391).

Intercultural competence (IC) is defined as the "ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality" (Byram et al., 2002, p. 10). Only by recognising the differences between cultures and how communication happens can one communicate successfully. Also, by recognising and accepting that the individual may have multiple identities can one communicate with more ease. IC requires thus the ability to communicate across cultures. IC requires intercultural communication, which is based on

respect for the individual regardless of background and culture (Byram et al., 2002, p. 9). Bennett claims that people improve in communicating with others across cultural boundaries as they become more intercultural competent (Bennett, 2004, p. 62). In sum, IC refers to the ability to communicate with people of different cultures, with respect for the individuals and recognition of each other's cultures.

Byram et al. outline four components of IC; knowledge, skills, attitudes, and an awareness of one's own values (Byram et al., 2002 p. 11). It is important to have knowledge about the culture of one's conversation partner, in addition to knowledge of one's own culture. Even more significant is perhaps knowledge about how social groups and identities interact (Byram et al., 2002 p. 12). One also needs certain skills to avoid misunderstandings in intercultural communication (Byram et al., 2002 p. 13). The skills of interpreting and comparison are useful, because if one succeeds in interpreting and comparing events from another culture with one's own one may more easily understand why people act and react the way they do in certain situations. One also needs the skills of discovery and interaction because one cannot know beforehand which knowledge is needed when communicating with others. Therefore, one may need to discover new knowledge by asking about beliefs, values, and behaviours in the process of communication (Byram et al., 2002, pp. 12-13). Attitudes is, according to Byram et al., the foundation of IC (Byram et al., 2002, p. 11). Curiosity and openness towards other cultures are important, as well as willingness to consider one's own beliefs and values as not being the only viable ones (Byram et al., 2002, p. 12). Finally, a critical cultural awareness of one's own values and how they influence one's views of other people's values is important. One's own values may create unavoidable reactions or rejection and being aware of this may be essential in communication. However, it is important to keep in mind that cultures develop, and values change, and it may be difficult to decide what knowledge is needed and which values to consider. Therefore, one must be aware that one needs to adjust, accept, and understand other people accordingly (Byram et al., 2002, p. 11).

As classrooms and societies of today are becoming increasingly multicultural, it is highly relevant that one aims to develop IC and cultural understanding at school. A language teacher's role is not solely to teach the grammar of the language and the knowledge of a culture or country, it is also to develop attitudes, skills, and awareness of values, thus enabling students to communicate cross-culturally with respect and dignity (Byram et al., 2002, p. 13). The aim is not necessarily to change the learners' values but help them towards a consciousness about how their values may affect others (Byram et al., 2002, p. 13). It is also

important to help them understand that the concept of identity is influenced by the culture that one lives in. In their definition of IC Byram et al. include the term multiple identities. So, what then is identity and in which way can one have multiple identities?

## 2.2. Identity

Identity is a product of contact with other people, and multiple identities are developed in interaction with people, first and foremost people of one's own culture (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 256). In all cultures one can find social structures, different social institutions to which members of the culture may turn to for lessons and advice (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 69). People are interdependent and have a need to belong to a group as a way of surviving (Samovar et al., 2016, pp. 58-59), and these groups have developed patterns and "rules" of behaviour and communication to regulate norms of conduct (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 59). The institutions, for example the family or the community, can be referred to as in-groups, the "we" (Hofstede et al, 2010, p. 16), the institutions to which one belongs. In developing from being children towards becoming adults, adolescents may struggle with finding out who they are and who they want to be. Developing one's personal identity is not always an easy task, it may involve new friendships, losing old friends and gradually breaking away from family, among other things. This may perhaps be extra challenging for someone who belongs to more than one culture, finding a balance between two cultures adds to the struggle of finding one's identity.

The first group to which one belongs is the family as most people in the world are born into one (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 67). People model themselves after the examples set by the group members they grow up with (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 67), thus the process of creating a personal identity begins early. Another group to which one belongs is the community outside the unit of the family (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 70), for example school. How one adapts to school and to classmates may define one's identity, and school adjustment is regarded as the most important developmental task for children and adolescents (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 503). Research shows that students with a bicultural identity may succeed better at adapting to school and with friends (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 503). The stronger the sense of being able to belong to different groups with positive cultural identities is, the better the children will adjust (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 503).

Samovar et al. define identity as “a multifaced, abstract and dynamic concept that plays a role in the daily communication and particularly in intercultural communication” (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 243). Identity is multiple, one may have different identities depending on the situation and the role that one has in a given setting. For instance, one might have one identity as a daughter in the family, whereas one has another identity as a leader at work. Identity is dynamic, it can change according to the roles that one gains in society, and identity is created in interaction with others throughout one’s life, for example the identity as a student is different from the identity as a colleague. Some identities are gained, while some are left behind (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 245), and identities work together in combination, not one identity exists in isolation. A single definition of identity is difficult to establish due to the complexity and the abstractness of the term (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 244). However, one might say that identity is the product of multiple identities (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 247), it is the personality of an individual, the self, which is constantly in development.

Time, social context, and culture are elements that come into play in developing an identity. As one grows older new identities are acquired while others are discarded. An example is that one’s identity as a daughter is kept, while the identity as a member of the school sports team may be left behind (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 245). With time, one might also acquire an identity as a partner and that as a parent. Identity is also a product of social contact with others (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 246), one usually acquires new friends in a new and different environment, and one’s identity may change accordingly. In moving to another city, or even to another country, one must adjust and adapt to the new environment to fit in (Byram et al., 2002, p. 11). Communicative behaviours that are appropriate for the given context may be developed (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 262), and this in turn may result in the development of a new or another identity. Finally, identity is a product of culture (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 262). The culture that one was born into, the culture that one potentially migrates to, and the culture that one belongs to, all contribute to the identity that one develops, they are all part of one’s identity (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 247).

As stated, one’s identity is, in one way or another, influenced by culture. Ethnic identity, national identity and personal identities are all identities that may develop and even change when living between two cultures, they are all dynamic.

Ethnic identity, or ethnicity, refers to which ethnic group one belongs. The term refers to one’s biological ancestry, where one’s forefathers were born. It involves the shared heritage, shared history and traditional values that are important for the group (Samovar et al., 2016, p.

247). Ethnic identity involves the feelings of belonging to a group and committing to a group with which one shares values and attitudes, in addition to culture, religion, language, and place of origin (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 496). At present, different cultures increasingly coexist in communities due to migration, and to which degree these cultures influence one's identity depends on a variety of factors. In communities where pluralism is accepted and immigrants are welcomed, ethnic identity is likely to be strong, whereas hostility towards immigrants may result in ethnic identity being downplayed, or even rejected (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 494). Adolescents and children are naturally influenced by their families, and the members of the family play an active part in shaping and developing the children's identity. Symbols, culture, and ethnicity are defined and interpreted by the adults, which in turn shapes the behaviour and the identity of the child (Cheng & Kuo, 2000, p. 464). Messages conveyed from other adults in the ethnic community also contribute to influencing the child and the adolescent (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 501). There are different attitudes among immigrants as to which degree the culture of origin should be retained (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 494), and this in turn may influence the children. One has an integrated/bicultural identity when a strong ethnic identity is retained while one also identifies with the new culture. A strong ethnic identity without identifying with the new culture, may result in a separated identity whereas an assimilated identity means that one gives up one's ethnic identity and identifies only with the new culture (Phinney et al., 2001, pp. 495-496).

National identity refers to the nation of birth, but national identity may also be acquired through immigration (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 251). Where ethnic identity is a sense of belonging to an ethnic group, national identity focuses on one's identity in relation to a larger society, for instance the country in which one was born or the country to which one migrates. One's national identity may change depending on which aspects of the country one adapts to due to the attachment one feels to the birth nation or the new homeland (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 251). Someone of Chinese origin living in the US, for example, might identify as Chinese even if the new homeland is America. Or one might feel all-American, or as many people today, identify themselves as Asian American.

Developing a personal identity involves many aspects and can be a difficult and challenging task for any adolescent, and especially for an immigrant adolescent who must navigate between two cultures (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2021, p. 1126). Personal identity is made up of the characteristics that makes one different from others in one's group, it is what makes one unique, and it is how one sees oneself (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 254). One defines oneself in

terms of membership and belonging to a national and ethnic group, and one defines oneself in terms of social institutions to which one belongs, for example family and school. Both interpersonal relationships and education are important for adjusting (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2021, p. 1127) and developing personal identity. In order to avoid a separated or assimilated identity, the immigrant adolescent must define what is important for him or her in his or her ethnic culture and integrate this into the new culture to create personal identity (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2021, p. 1126). One needs to find a balance between the two cultures and the groups to which one belongs, and in doing so develop an integrated/bi-cultural identity.

People strive to find a place in their community and culture (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 17), and are members of some groups and not members of others. For instance, ethnic characteristics may define and determine if one belongs to a certain ethnic group and not another (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 16), language may define one's national and social group, and age and role one's place in the family (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 18). Humans have a basic need to classify each other and themselves into one group, either they are a part of "we" or a part of "they" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 16). There are several identities, or in-groups, to which a person belongs. One is born into some groups, such as family, nationality, and ethnic groups, while other groups one chooses to belong to, such as political groups and friends. On the one hand, identities connect people to a larger group and make them feel as part of something, gives them a sense of belonging. On the other hand, identities may exclude them from other groups (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 247), for instance if one chooses to belong to another religious community than that of the family, one will no longer belong to their community.

As stated, different identities are products of contact with others (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 256), especially the people of one's in-groups. The most common social organizations which influence our identities are family and school (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 70). We will later see how these combined create a challenging situation for the protagonist in *American Born Chinese*.

### 2.3. Literature in the ESL classroom

During the last decades there has been a large decline in time spent on reading and an increase in the time spent on the Internet (Twenge et al., 2019, p. 339). Studies from the US show that teenagers today are more engaged with technology than they were twenty years ago, and they

spend more time online, texting, gaming, and communicating through social media (Twenge et al., 2019, p. 329). From 2006 to 2016 online time has doubled, and the use of social media has become a daily activity among adolescents in the US (Twenge et al., 2019, p. 337).

Simultaneously, the number of teenagers who read a book or a magazine has dropped from 60% in 2006 to 16% in 2016 (Twenge et al., 2019, p. 338). Thus, the growing use of online time is at the expense of time spent on more traditional media, among them print media, such as books, magazines, and newspapers (Twenge et al., 2019, p. 338). Twenge refers to reading scores as being the lowest since 1972 (Twenge, 2018, p. 3). This seems to be an alarming development as there is a general understanding that to learn how to think critically and understand difficult issues one must be able to read both books and longer articles (Twenge, 2018, p. 4). Being an informed and involved citizen demands practice and experience in focus and concentration with a longer text that the students do no longer get (Twenge, 2018, p. 3), and this lack of practice may become a challenge for those attending higher education in the future (Twenge et al., 2019, p. 340). Although this is research from the United States, one might assume that the situation is the same in other countries, among them Norway. Research shows that the interest and habits of reading among adolescents have declined dramatically also in Norway (Jensen et al., 2020, p. 41). However, results from PISA (Programme for International Assessment) reading literacy test from 2018, show that competence in reading for Norwegian students have remained stable since 2000 (Jensen et al., 2020, p. 21). This may indicate that Norwegian students get satisfactory reading training at school (Jensen et al., 2020, p. 42). It seems that increasing the use of books, magazines and newspapers in the classroom may benefit students in several ways and introducing literature to the ESL classroom may increase the benefits further. The following subchapter will look at the advantages of using literature in the ESL classroom, with additional focus on the graphic novel.

There is a long list of reasons for using literature in the classroom; it develops language acquisition and awareness, it is motivational, it may help students understand other cultures, it develops the ability to interpret, and it encourages reflections (Lazar, 1993, pp. 14-15). This thesis focuses on how literature may promote IC and the understanding of multiple identities by interpreting and reflecting on texts, with special focus on the graphic novel.

Authentic literature exposes students to complex topics and if one is careful in choosing the literature to use in education the teenagers may find that the content is both meaningful and relevant (Lazar, 1993, p. 15). They may even be able to identify with the characters if the text

is applicable to their own lives. Young adult literature often has teens as main characters (Bucher & Manning, 2010, p. 68), making it easier for the teenage reader to identify with them.

Literature may reflect diversities of the world and may provide the reader with access to another culture (Lazar, 1993, p. 16). Although the text may be fictional, reading literature may encourage students to seek information about events that form the background to the story, thus develop their awareness of historical or social situations and structures around the world (Lazar, 1993, p. 17). Developing civic skills, the skills necessary to function as a responsible member of society, is stated in the Norwegian curriculum in English as an interdisciplinary topic (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020f). To develop such skills, it is important to deal with topics that concern different cultures. Also, to understand the text it is often important that the students have an awareness of the culture that is described, and knowledge about how social groups and identities interact (Byram et al., 2002 p. 12). The text may provide contexts in which the characters react in a specific way in a specific situation (Lazar, 1993, p. 17), a situation which the reader may recognise or identify with, and thus in turn develop an understanding of the character in the text.

Diving into a subject in depth by analyzing and reflecting around a topic serves the student well (Brozo et al., 2018, p. 6) and is in accordance with the curriculum in that through in-depth learning one should aim to develop the ability to reflective and critical thinking (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020e). In-depth learning may be fulfilled by for example discussions among the students.

Discussions about a topic may develop the students' ability to interpret and reflect. A literary text often includes many levels of meaning and offers an excellent opportunity for discussions among the students (Lazar, 1993, p. 19). As the students express and share their own interpretations and opinions with others, they may all be able to understand the different levels of the text and accept these differences. In this process of sharing and discussing the content of a literary text, critical awareness may also be developed. Enabling the students to develop civic skills by exploring literature may help foster social consciousness, stimulate agency, and understand different perspectives (Tavares, 2017, pp. 74-77). This may be done by exploring the values and taboos of a culture, different rules in different cultures, conflicts, and consequences (Tavares, 2017, p. 75). The goal of an educator should be, among other things, to help students become responsible citizens in a democracy and our global

community (Brozo et al., 2014, p. 9), in short, to develop IC. This will then be in accordance with the Norwegian curriculum in English which

refers to helping the pupils to develop their understanding of the fact that the way they view the world is culture dependent. [...] This can open for new ways to interpret the world and promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudices.

(Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020f)

By sharing and discussing relevant topics, the students may acquire the ability to interpret, reflect and accept that there are multiple ways of living in the world. Understanding different perspectives is an important element of IC and in working with literature this can be acquired through exploring diverse voices and viewpoints (Tavares, 2017, p. 77). Teachers wish to enable their students to be active problem solvers and critical thinkers (Halsall, 2018, p. 99), therefore they must be given opportunities to read, analyze, understand, and reflect upon relevant topics in our global world. Working with literature may include several genres and formats, one format being the graphic novel.

#### 2.4. Graphic novels

Comic books, graphic novels, sequential art narratives are various terms used for this particular format, and a distinction between them is useful, as the terms are often used interchangeably. The term comic books has traditionally been used to designate a mass-market product and has become a generic term due to “inadequate” definitions (Labio, 2011, p. 124). Comics have by many been viewed as simpler versions of text-only literature and have not always been recognized or respected as serious, or proper literature (Thompson, 2018, p. 43). Historically, they have been identified with “Penny Dreadfuls” (Halsall, 2018, p. 87), cheap, entertaining, and popular literature that were sold for a penny in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Early on comics were made for everyone, they were great stories that most people could afford to buy (Perry, 2018, p. 74). They have also been viewed as inferior reading, solely for children and equated with superhero adventures since the invention of superhero stories in the 1930’s (Brozo et al., 2014, pp. vii-viii). However, the comic has gained respectability the last couple of decades and has by many been redefined as graphic novel (Gordon, 2005, p. 185). The graphic novel may be defined as both synonymous with comic books, and an equivalent to the prose novel (Campbell, 2007, p. 13), and it has grown to be an accepted genre and a new medium (Campbell, 2007, p. 13). The graphic novel is a sequential art narrative (Brozo et

al., 2014, p. 5) and tells a story through a combination of prose, dialogue, and visual images (Brozo et al., 2014, p. 10), a medium of visual literature (Halsall, 2018, p. 87). By bringing together literature and art, and instead of seeing writing and drawing as separate disciplines, they can be combined to create the vocabulary of a comic (McCloud, 1993, p. 47), as a genre in its own right. Thus, the terms sequential art narrative, comic books and graphic novels are difficult to distinguish from each other, as they are highly related, and for many the same. One might say that the sequential art narrative is a serious story told in the form of a comic (Dardess, 1995, p. 214). In this thesis the term graphic novel will be used, leaning on Brozo et al.'s definition of the term, namely a story told by using prose, dialogue, and images (Brozo et al., 2014, p. 10).

In a graphic novel, text and illustrations come together to form “the vocabulary of comics” (McCloud, 1993, p. 47). There are many examples of graphic novels without text, however, in this thesis I will focus on the relationship between text and images in graphic novels which combine both. Pictures and text fulfill each other in a unified language when combined. The language of the graphic novel is a dynamic blend of image and word where the illustrations may enrich and extend the text (Brozo et al., 2014, p. 6). Pictures may be considered as received information whereas text is perceived information. The difference between the two is that pictures may be understood instantaneously, while text takes some learning and knowledge to understand (McCloud, 1993, p. 49). It may be argued that “reading” pictures can also be learned, however, that demands some practice. In opening the graphic novel and looking at the pictures for the first time, the student may understand what the image conveys without having learned how to analyze pictures. In combining text and images, the language of the graphic novel may become more accessible to a larger number of students, weaker readers as well as the stronger ones.

The text in the graphic novel comes in different forms. The narrative frame is often placed at the top or the bottom of the panel and explains what happens in the story. Word balloons can take different shapes and forms (McCloud, 1993, p. 134), and reflect the mood of the character. The four most common forms are speech balloons, thought balloons, whisper balloons and scream balloons. The speech balloon indicates when the characters are speaking and the thought balloon when they are thinking something. It is easy to distinguish between the two as the thought balloons are often formed as a cloud with a chain of small bubbles leading to the character, while the speech balloon has a straight line with a pointer towards the character. The whisper balloon is dotted to indicate a softer voice and the scream balloon is

jagged to visualize a louder voice. The image of the balloon thus supports and reinforces the text. The text itself can be a narrative, a dialogue, or a monologue, but text can also illustrate sound. The use of onomatopoeia is an efficient way of illustrating different sounds and are often placed outside the word balloon.

Pictures in graphic novels also come in a variety of forms. They can be photographs and drawings which can be more or less realistic, and more or less detailed in their presentation (McCloud, 1993, pp. 28-29). Pictures can also be icons and symbols, as well as patterns and backgrounds to illustrate mood and emotions (McCloud, 1993, pp. 132-133). Pictures can be black and white, or they can be colored. There are often different sizes of the panels in a graphic novel, large pictures may reflect more importance and focus, as also a repetition of the same image may do. Movement in pictures is also possible to attain to create lifelike qualities (Whitaker, 2012, p. 26).

Words and pictures in the graphic novel may be combined in various ways (McCloud, 1993, p. 152). On the one hand, the picture may be used as illustration to the text without adding anything more to the panel/story, the text is the bearer of information, in a word-specific combination (McCloud, 1993, p. 153). On the other hand, in a sequence told in pictures, the text is merely a “soundtrack” to the image, in a picture-specific combination (McCloud, 1993, p. 153). In the duo-specific combination both words and images convey the same message (McCloud, 1993, p. 153), but the most common combination is the interdependent combination of words and pictures, where text and pictures go hand in hand (McCloud, 1993, p. 155). Neither can convey the message alone, they need each other to complete the story and they support each other (McCloud, 1993, p. 156). If much is said with words, the pictures are downplayed, and in the opposite case, if much of the message is conveyed through pictures, there does not have to be much text (McCloud, 1993, p. 155).

The images in a graphic novel may fascinate young readers, and this may in turn create universal recognition (McCloud, 1993, p. 36). Young readers may easily be able to recognize and identify themselves with the characters in a graphic novel if the narrative is one of interest, especially if the character is also a teen (Bucher & Manning, 2010, p. 68). It may be easier to identify with the character if he/she is visualized rather than just described in text, but this depends on whether the illustrations invite the young readers to such identification. The readers must be able to recognize similarities with their own lives. Further, if the teenage reader identifies with the characters, he or she may better understand the potential conflicts and struggles the characters deal with.

Analyzing images in the graphic novel may encourage even more readers to understand and participate in the discussions and reflections about the topic. The weaker readers are given an opportunity to understand the topic without being dependent on a potential difficult text in an all-text novel. Using graphic novels as an additional method in education may encourage connections to current events in the world and in the learners' own lives, and invites to dialogue, which in turn inspires learning (Halsall, 2018, p. 96).

Using the graphic novel as an approach may also provide an additional opportunity to teach the students to become critical thinkers who can read the texts and understand how the texts fit into the world and to life outside school (Thompson, 2018, p. 46). This genre creates opportunities for questions and discussions, and it appeals to students taking up issues that are important to them (Halsall, 2018, p. 91), such as friendship, love, belonging and identity. This is not specific for graphic novels as non-graphic novels also deal with current events of interest to the students. However, the graphic novel provides an opportunity to work with issues with different formats to include a larger number of students in classroom discussions.

### 3. Method and materials

#### 3.1. Materials

There are several ways of going about teaching the concept of cross-cultural identity in the ESL classroom, and one of these methods includes the use of the graphic novel. Due to the complex modern world's increased use of signs, symbols and visual stimuli, new literature has emerged (Campbell, 2007, p. 13), and in this world the graphic novel has its natural place as it is "in the process of being justified as both a serious art form and an effective teaching tool" (Halsall, 2018, p. 87). Students do not usually need to be convinced to read graphic novels because they are often attracted to how easy they are to read and to the relevance to their own lives (Halsall, 2018, p. 93). The graphic novel may deal with current issues in a way that is more familiar to the students than the regular only-text novel does, and it provides an opportunity to learn through a familiar medium (Brozo et al., 2014, p. 5). The genre is likely more accessible, current, and fun to read and may encourage a further interest in literature (Halsall, 2018, p. 88). This in turn may encourage further reading and inspire discussions about the content (Halsall, 2018, p. 94).

The graphic novel provides an opportunity for all students to follow, as it encourages the use of both print literacy and visual literacy. Students that have trouble reading and understanding English would still be able to extract some information and make reflections based on images alone. *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006) is a graphic novel for young adults dealing with the concept of cross-cultural identity in a visual manner. The images are colorful and simple and should be easy to follow by all students. Further, the written text provides more challenge for students with a higher proficiency level. The aim is that students may develop an understanding of growing up in-between cultures and how that may affect one's identity, and that they in turn perhaps learn to communicate better with people of other cultures.

The Norwegian curriculum in English states that cultural understanding, communication, and development of identity are important elements of the English subject and that dealing with these topics in class may promote curiosity and reflections and help prevent prejudice (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020a). Using *American Born Chinese* in the ESL classroom may be one way to fulfill this purpose of the curriculum.

### 3.2. Method

*American born Chinese* will be analyzed in terms of the concept of identity and how the notion of multiple identities comes into play in the novel. As identity is a product of social contact, this will be a focus of the analysis. I will include topics such as avoidance, loneliness, adjusting to another culture in addition to knowledge of other cultures and stereotypes. There will be an analysis of how the images work with the written text to convey the various topics that are dealt with, for instance the topic of loneliness, avoidance and so forth. Ethnicity plays a role in the development of identity and will be discussed in relation to developing a personal identity. The main story is the story of Jin Wang / Danny, and the thesis will mainly refer to text and images in these chapters.

Following the analysis there will be a suggestion of how to implement the novel in the ESL classroom, and a lesson plan with learning goals and activities is developed and included. Methods where the students interact with each other are used widely, as this method is well suited to develop skills in explaining and expressing opinions, interpreting, and making reflections. Eight lessons are outlined and explained, and questions and tasks are provided in appendices.

## 4. Didactic framework

### 4.1. The novel

*American Born Chinese* is a graphic novel written and illustrated by American cartoonist Yang (2006). The themes of the novel are teenage identity, bicultural identity, and the realizations one must make in developing a sense of self (Pinti, 2016, p. 233). It also deals with racist stereotyping of Asians (Pinti, 2016, p. 234). The novel is structured into three apparently unrelated narratives which come together in the end, and the interconnectedness between the three stories becomes apparent as we read. There are nine chapters in the novel, three chapters on each of the narratives. It is in the last chapter that all narratives meet, and the stories are wrapped up.

The first narrative is part of Chinese folklore about the Monkey King of Flower Fruit Mountain. The Monkey King studies the art of Kung-Fu and masters the disciplines of mortality, and he is adored by his subjects. However, he does not want to be a monkey, he wants to belong to the world of gods and be the god of all monkeys. It does not matter how much he tries and fights in order to belong, he never succeeds because, as one of the guards at a party says: “You may be a king - you may even be a deity - but you are still a monkey” (Yang, 2006, p. 15). The story of the Monkey King tells the story of the struggle he must endure to accept his true self.

The second narrative is in the form of a “Bildungsroman” (Pinti, 2016, p. 234), where the protagonist, Jin Wang, goes through a psychological change from child to early adulthood. He is an ethnic Chinese who moves to a new neighborhood in America, where he is the only Chinese American. He does not want to be identified as Chinese but instead has a wish to belong to the people at school and be an American. At one point he says to the Chinese herbalist’s wife that he “- wants to be a transformer” (Yang, 2006, p. 27). All he wants is to fit in, and in this struggle, he pretends to be someone he is not, he changes his looks and gives himself a new name, Danny, thus he transforms himself into someone new. In this process he also turns away from his only friend, Wei-Chen, who is also Asian. In this coming-of-age story he eventually comes to terms with his ancestry and realizes that being Chinese is part of who he is.

In the third narrative we meet Danny and his Chinese cousin Chin-Kee. This story has the form of a television sitcom where stereotypical traits are dominant. Danny is the All-American high school student, blond, tall, handsome, and popular and he plays in the school

basketball team. His cousin comes to visit once a year and is a nuisance to Danny. Chin-Kee is loud and demanding and represents a negative Chinese stereotype. He embarrasses Danny time and again, he is everything Danny dislikes about the Chinese way to be. The stories of Jin Wang and Danny intertwine, and we realize eventually that Danny is Jin Wang, or rather everything Jin Wang wants to be. One might say that Danny is the American Jin Wang, who tries to suppress or deny his Asian identity (Pinti, 2016, p. 34).

As the two narratives interconnect, the stories of the Monkey King and Danny / Jin Wang can be seen as parallels, the monkey who does not want to be a monkey and the Chinese boy who does not want to be Chinese. In the end Chin-Kee reveals himself to Jin Wang as the Monkey King who has come to “serve as a signpost to your soul” (Yang, 2006, p. 221). Chin-Kee / the Monkey King can thus be seen as Jin Wang’s conscience (Pinti, 2016, p. 34).

In the following subchapter the story of Jin Wang and Danny will be dealt with first as this is the main story of the novel. The story of the Monkey King can be seen as a parallel to the main story and will be dealt with at the end, including parallel situations and use of images.

#### 4.2. Analysis

*American Born Chinese* is a novel that deals with multiple identities and the struggle of finding the balance between a Chinese identity in addition to an American one. Jin Wang has more than one identity and he strives with knowing which one to choose. There may be several reasons for this imbalance, but the role of the children and adults at school plays an enormous part in this struggle for identification. Identity is a product of interaction with others (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 246), and can change during a lifetime (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 245). Jin Wang identifies as a Chinese while living in Chinatown with many Chinese friends, however, when he moves to a neighbourhood and to a school with no other Asian children, he must find someone else with whom to identify. Some identities are gained, and some are left behind, which seems to be the case with Jin Wang, he tries to leave behind his Chinese identity to attain an American one. He develops prejudice against his own ethnic culture in order to belong to another.

On the front cover of the novel there is a picture of Jin Wang, or rather half of Jin Wang holding his toy, a Transformer. The other half of Jin Wang’s face is on the back cover. When looking at the two covers in isolation it is difficult to spot a difference. However, by opening the book the face becomes complete and one can see that there is a slight difference when it

comes to Jin Wang's lips. On the back cover his lips turn down giving him a slightly sad look, whereas on the front cover his lips are straight. It may be difficult to imagine what this difference may signify; it could be that Jin Wang is a bit worried or confused. However, neither of the "half-faces" show a happy Jin Wang. This may indicate that the story between the covers is about a boy who is unsure of who he is and who he wants to be. An important icon in this novel is Jin Wang's toy, the Transformer which is also present on the cover. A Transformer is an action figure that can change into different forms, and by presenting this toy on the front cover, Yang hints at its importance in the story, the fact that Jin Wang wants to be someone he is not. This is further emphasized by the clenched fists of the Transformer, indicating that the potential transformation may be a struggle. In the background of the cover there is a picture of the Monkey King being trapped beneath a large mountain of rocks, which gives the reader a hint that it may be a heavy burden not to be one's true self. Even before opening the book, one may thus understand the theme of the novel, it tells the story of a boy with a split identity who wants to transform into something else, the Transformer being a symbol of identity. When Jin Wang is asked what he plans to do when he grows up, he admits to the Chinese herbalist's wife that he wants to be a Transformer (Yang, 2006, p. 27). This incident takes place before Jin Wang and his parents move away from Chinatown and Jin Wang is merely fascinated by the "robot in disguise" (Yang, 2006, p. 28). However, the sequence is introduced to the reader after the family has moved, thus it is easy to spot the metaphor for wanting to be something one is not. The Transformer is present in several images throughout the first chapter about Jin Wang, and it is because Wei Chen also has one that the two boys eventually become friends (Yang, 2006, p. 39).

Jin Wang's struggle is present throughout the novel and is illustrated in various ways. In this struggle Jin Wang avoids Suzy who is the only other Asian person in his class, (Yang, 2006, p. 31), so not to be identified as an Asian himself. Avoidance is an expression of prejudice (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 394), and Jin Wang actively withdraws from Suzy. This is illustrated through a two-frame narrative sequence where the topic of avoidance is conveyed through both text and pictures combined. All the text is narration, and the two pictures are almost identical (Yang, 2006, p. 31). In both pictures Suzy is placed in between, slightly behind, two American boys, hinting at her being less "important" than the boys. In the first picture the text introduces her, and her eyes are open, but in the second picture she looks down when Jin Wang says, "we avoided each other as much as possible" (Yang, 2006, p.31). Small changes in the image conveys a feeling of sadness and being ignored on Suzy's part. It is Jin Wang's

decision to avoid Suzy, not the other way around. Jin Wang avoids her because she is Asian just like the other students ignore him for the same reason. Later in the story, Wei-Chen starts the same school and the two boys become friends. Jin Wang further tries to distance himself from his Chinese identity by adjusting his behaviour to be what he believes to be the “American” way. He insists that Wei-Chen speaks English when in America (Yang, 2006, p. 37) and calls him F.O.B. (Fresh Off the Boat) (Yang, 2006, p. 89), just like the American children do. Worth noticing is that Wei-Chen actually does speak English, but with an accent, so Jin Wang’s comment is purely influenced by the way the American children at his school speak to Asians.

Jin Wang’s avoidance of the other Asian students at his school results in him being alone. His loneliness at the new school is not described in words but in pictures. A repetitive image is one of Jin Wang alone on a long bench in the school yard (Yang, 2006, pp. 32-37). The frames cover the whole length of the page, and Jin Wang is placed at the end of the bench at one side of the frame, while the rest of the empty bench takes up most of the space in the frames. The image of the empty bench becomes very apparent. These images are contrasted by other images on the same page (Yang, 2006, pp. 32-33) where there are three pictures in one length, and these pictures are filled with children who play and talk. Nothing is said in these images because nothing needs to be said. The reader understands the message in the pictures, that Jin Wang is all alone. The second chapter ends with a full-page image of the bench, with Jin Wang and Wei-Chen playing together (Yang, 2006, p. 40), indicating that Jin Wang has made a friend and is not lonely anymore.

Although he befriends Wei-Chen, Jin Wang still wants to belong to the American community and does so by trying to adjust to the American way, and in time, his identity changes due to contact with the people in his new school. He develops what he believes is appropriate behaviour in the new environment, because to fit in one must adapt and adjust to the new environment (Byram et al., 2002, p. 11), as mentioned in an example above. In this attempt to be liked by Amelia, a girl in his class, he changes his looks so that he will look more “American”, he tries to transform. A way of doing this is to perm and bleach his hair (Yang, 2006, pp. 97-98). In the novel, this is not described in words, but in pictures alone. Yang conveys these thoughts and the action through images and thought balloons while Jin Wang is walking home from school. The thought balloons include a sequence of images of Amelia and, Greg, an ethnic American boy in his class who is blond with curls. The last thought balloon in the sequence is of the blond and curly hair alone, as Jin Wang has reached his

house, he has decided that the hair is the one thing that will make him more American. The next day he shows up at school with a new hair style (Yang, 2006, p. 98). No words are uttered in this sequence, but the images “speak” for themselves. However, the new hairdo does not seem to help much, and his frustrations continue to grow. Greg asks Jin Wang not to see Amelia, because “she has to start paying attention to who she hangs out with” (Yang, 2006, p.179) and he calls him a geek (Yang, 2006, p. 184). In both these sequences Jin Wang’s hair lacks its bleached colour, as if the “Americaness” he is trying to attain fades away by comments like that. Jin Wang is both ashamed of being Chinese and angry that he is unable to change the fact that he is Chinese, and he takes it out on Wei-Chen, and they fight (Yang, 2006, p. 191). In a dream about the herbalist’s wife, he transforms into what he wants to be, he transforms into Danny (Yang, 2006, p. 194). Three full page frames of Danny looking himself in the mirror (Yang, 2006, pp. 196-198) illustrate the fulfilment of the transformation. The first two pictures (Yang, 2006, pp.196-197) are almost identical, in these Danny sees himself in the mirror for the first time with a look of surprise. In the first picture he is merely surprised with his arms down by the side of his body, while in the second picture he moves his arm and hand towards his chest. This difference indicates that he needs to touch his skin to understand and verify that a physical change has occurred. Neither of these pictures include text. In the last image of the sequence (Yang, 2006, p. 198), Danny touches his face in order to ascertain that he has actually transformed, and he has a careful smile on his face because he is happy that he has finally become an American. In this image there is also text in narration boxes where Jin Wang gives his new face and identity a new name, Danny.

Racist stereotypes are dealt with in different ways in *American born Chinese*. In his first day of school Jin Wang is introduced to his class by his teacher. She gets his name wrong and thinks that he comes directly from China, which he does not (Yang, 2006, p. 30). The fact that she has not learned his name or where he has come from, may show that she has put all Asians in one “box”. She views all Asians as similar, without the knowledge of different Asian countries, and that all their names sound the same and are difficult to learn and pronounce. The sequence shows the lack of knowledge of cultures in the world and the lack of willingness to try to learn. Further, she has racist stereotypes about Chinese people, illustrated by the sequence where a boy asks if Chinese people eat dogs, and she answers: “Jin’s family probably stopped that sort of thing as soon as they came to the United States” (Yang, 2006, p. 31). She seems to think that Chinese people are uncivilized barbarians, and that the American

way is the better one. A similar scenario is repeated by another teacher when Wei-Chen arrives two months later (Yang, 2006, p. 36). Wei-Chen is introduced to the class as a Chinese, although he is from Taiwan. It seems that the teachers at the school consider Asians without distinction and have little knowledge about the different countries in Asia. It shows a lack of curiosity and interest for another culture, the teacher does not have the knowledge or the critical cultural awareness which is important in communicating with others. This lack of knowledge results in stereotyping, and the teachers have created an oversimplified category of Asians, thus they do not communicate well together. Words and pictures in the two sequences are almost identical, it may seem that the teachers have a standard formulation as to how to welcome new students because the two teachers say exactly the same. This may give a hint that there are very few students from other cultures at this school, and the teachers do not know how to deal with the situation. The teachers introduce Jin Wang /Wei-Chen to the class, and in the pictures the boys stand in front of the class. First, we see the classmates from behind, then from the front. In the last picture of Wei-Chen's introduction, Jin Wang is also present (Yang, 2006, p. 36). Another thing worth mentioning is the name of the school, which is called "Mayflower Elementary", which implies that this school is new to introducing people from other cultures, the *Mayflower* being the first and most iconic ship that transported British people to America. The name indicates that this is a school for white protestant children, and that they are favored over others.

Another, and a more noticeable way that Yang deals with stereotypes is through the chapters about Danny and his Chinese cousin Chin-Kee. Stereotyping often results in oversimplified categories of for example cultures or people (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 389), and Yang has created an overgeneralization of Asians in Chin-Kee. Positive stereotypes of Asians are often that they are smart and hardworking, however old, negative stereotypes are that they are illiterate, undesirable, and unable to assimilate (Hassan, 2018). In *American born Chinese* Yang has created a character with a combination of these traits. Chin-Kee is smart and knows many things which he is eager to show, and he is also both undesirable and does not assimilate well. Chin-Kee represents the ultimate negative Chinese stereotype and is everything Jin Wang does not want to be, while Danny is everything that Jin Wang wants to be, a blond American boy who plays on the school's basketball team. In fact, Danny is Jin Wang, which the reader discovers later when the two stories come together. What is worth noticing, is that Danny is also made into a stereotype, everything in the American culture that Jin Wang wants to identify with, ignoring the fact that being an American can be so much

more. The title page of the first chapter about Danny is a picture of Chin-Kee's face and the words "Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee" (Yang, 2006, p. 43). Chin-Kee is wearing a traditional Chinese hat and has a traditional Chinese queue, a long and braided hair style. He also has two buck teeth and a large smile on his face. This image may give the reader an idea of what the chapter is about, namely a loud Chinese boy who is inarticulate and full of himself. Further, a clap track runs along the bottom of the frame, telling the reader how to react, not unlike an American sitcom. Chin-Kee is further presented in a frame where words and picture play together to convey a message. Chin-Kee fills nearly the entire full-page frame with while he shouts "Harro Amellica!", (Yang, 2006, p. 48), the words enlarged and the letters in bold. He wears the traditional Chinese costume, and with his queue and his buck teeth he is presented in a rather humoristic way. The Chinese stereotype is further emphasized by his luggage being in the shape of Chinese take-away food boxes, and the humoristic take on Chin-Kee is emphasized by a laugh track at the bottom of this frame. The following frames of Chin-Kee are also accompanied by this laugh track, symbolizing the sitcom, telling the reader that this is something to laugh at. Yang thus presents a negative stereotypical Chinese and exemplifies the reaction such racist stereotypes evoke. One can laugh at the presentation of stereotypes like this, but the topic is in actual fact quite serious. Danny does not appreciate the presence of Chin-Kee as he ruins his life by being the way he is. Chin-Kee is an annoying student who knows everything, interrupts others and talks loudly (Yang, 2006, pp. 112-113). He eats cats (Yang, 2006, p. 114) and he pees in other people's cokes (Yang, 2006, p. 118), and is, in general, in Danny's way all the time. All that he does also contributes to the negative Chinese stereotype, and all pictures have the laugh track at the bottom to further underline that this is something ridiculous and laughable. The challenge that Danny has with Chin-Kee might be seen as the struggle that Jin Wang has with his Chinese identity. This struggle continues throughout the next chapter about Danny, until he finally decides to deal with Chin-Kee in the last chapter illustrated by him pulling his cousin by his queue out of the room (Yang, 2006, p. 204).

Ethnic and national identity is a central part of the story of Jin Wang. Jin Wang is a Chinese-American. He was born into a Chinese family in Chinatown, San Francisco, where he had many friends with the same ethnic identity as his own. It is when the family moves to a new neighborhood that his struggles begin. Hostility towards immigrants may result in one's ethnic identity being downplayed, or even rejected (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 494), and Jin Wang does meet ignorance and hostility at school, both from the teacher and the classmates

(Yang, 2006, pp. 31-33), as mentioned previously. As a result, he tries to deny his own ethnic identity because all he wants is to fit in with the all-American crowd. When Wei-Chen arrives, Jin Wang understands perhaps that they have something in common, which he does not want to admit to himself. When thinking that he wants “to beat him up” (Yang, 2006, p. 36), he feels perhaps threatened, that it will be more difficult for him to be an American when there is another Asian around. He claims that he does not need another friend and insists on Wei-Chen speaking English (Yang, 2006, p. 37). According to Phinney et al. a struggle may be whether to assimilate into new ethnic identity and give up one own ‘s culture of origin or whether it is at all necessary to give up one’s own culture to adapt to a new society (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 494). This is the case with Jin Wang, he does not know which culture he truly belongs to. Eventually, he does become friends with Wei-Chen (Yang, 2006, pp. 37-40), because the truth is that he has no one else. In befriending Wei-Chen, Jin Wang unknowingly begins his process towards accepting his bi-cultural identity. The sequence is conveyed through an interdependent combination of words and pictures, they fulfil each other to convey a message. The sequence begins with Jin Wang alone on his bench while Wei-Chen looks at him from behind, gradually approaching him. Wei-Chen makes contact and asks if Jin Wang wants to be his friend. As they talk Jin Wang sits with his back to Wei-Chen, a way of showing that he is not interested in his friendship, and he also says so directly. Wei-Chen then sits down on the bench (Yang, 2006, p. 39) with his back to Jin Wang and starts playing with his toy robot. Jin Wang is suddenly interested and starts talking to Wei-Chen. In the last image (Yang, 2006, p. 40) they face each other on the bench and in the narration box Jin Wang admits that Wei-Chen then becomes his best friend.

Adolescents and children are naturally influenced by the members of their families and their attitudes. Whether the family identifies with the new culture alongside their own or they are willing to give up their own ethnic identity will in turn influence the children (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 495-496). Jin Wang’s mother tells an old Chinese parable about a mother and son who keep moving around because the son is influenced by the environment around him. They move until he has found an activity that pleases the mother (Yang, 2006, p. 23). The parable is told in the car when the family is moving to their new home, with illustrations of a sad Jin Wang in the back seat playing with his Transformer. The following pictures tell the story of Jin Wang’s parents’ arrival in the US, working hard and their faces not visible (Yang, 2006, p. 25). This emphasises further the parable, that it is important to work hard to adjust and adapt to the new society, perhaps even assimilating and erasing one's own identity. It may seem that

the attitude of Yin Wang's parents is that the Chinese influence in Chinatown was not what they wanted for their son. They wanted to move to a place where the American influence was stronger. It is easy to understand that this may cause some confusion in a young mind and contributes to shaping the behaviour and the identity of the child (Cheng & Kuo, 2000, p. 464).

Children may also be influenced by messages conveyed by other adults in the ethnic community (Phinney et al., 2001, p. 501). A key scene in the novel is when Jin Wang admits to the herbalist's wife that he wants to be a transformer she answers that "it is easy to become anything you wish...", "... so long as you are willing to forfeit your soul" (Yang, 2006, p. 29). This tells Yin Wang that it is actually possible to change, and that he can become an American if that is what he wants. The image of the herbalist's wife when she proclaims this is enlarged, and it is only her head and face that are visible, in addition to the speech balloons. It may indicate the importance of what she is saying, it sends a message that is important for Jin Wang and his further development. This is also emphasized by the following image of Jin Wang, where he sits dumbfounded with large eyes, as if pondering about what she said while he holds his Transformer (Yang, 2006, p. 29). One can almost "hear" what he is thinking without there being any words in the frame. The herbalist's wife points out, however, that sacrifices need to be made in order for change to take place. He may change into becoming an American but only by paying a price. In Jin Wang's case he gives up his friendship with Wei-Chen, but most importantly he gives up his Chinese identity to attain a new national identity, namely an American one.

Developing a personal identity involves many aspects and can be a difficult and challenging task for any adolescent, and especially so for an immigrant adolescent who must navigate between two cultures (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2021, p. 1126). Human beings have a basic need to classify oneself into a group, a need to belong to a so-called in-group (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 16). During the four or five years that we follow Jin Wang he has trouble finding his in-group, but slowly comes to terms with his Chinese identity. He manages to define what is important for him in his ethnic culture and integrates this into his new identity. He finds a balance between the two cultures and the groups to which he belongs, and therein creates a new personal identity as Chinese American. Everything comes together in the last chapter, where all three narratives intertwine. Danny deals with Chin-Kee who transforms to his "true form", the Monkey King (Yang, 2006, p. 213), and Danny himself transforms back to Jin Wang (Yang, 2006, p. 214).

The awakening comes in the form of a fight between Danny and Chin-Kee and a conversation with his own conscience, the Monkey King (Yang, 2006, pp. 204-223), where he finally realizes that keeping his Chinese identity alongside his American identity is fine (Yang, 2006, pp. 222-223). The images of the fight between Danny and Chin-Kee are full of movement and onomatopoeia. Sounds like “thwak”, “bonk”, “thump” and “squish” dominate this sequence (Yang, 2006, pp. 208-212), and it is a fight that Chin-Kee dominates. Near the end of the fight Chin-Kee / the Monkey King / Jin Wang’s conscience expresses that he will come visit Danny / Jin Wang every year forever, the word forever repeated twice while Danny struggles against him (Yang, 2006, p. 211). This indicates that however much Jin Wang denies his Chinese identity, this identity will never disappear, and Jin Wang will not be able to escape this part of himself. The fight ends with Danny taking a swing at Chin-Kee and punches his head off (Yang, 2006, p.212) and the Monkey King appears behind the head/mask. Danny is both angry and afraid (Yang, 2006, pp. 204-205), and in the end he gives in and becomes Jin Wang, his true form. The transformation from Danny to Jin Wang is illustrated in one single frame, the picture of Danny to the left of the frame is clear, three images in subdued and faded colours mark the transition to a clear and final image of Jin Wang at the right side of the frame (Yang, 2006, p. 214). Jin Wang’s hair is no longer bleached and curly, his hair is the way he used to wear it, implying that the blond hairstyle was wrong for him, further implying that he has come to terms with his Chinese identity.

The story of the Monkey King is seen as a parallel to the story of Danny / Jin Wang and is the first narrative of the novel. The Monkey King wants to be a god and is frustrated when others remind him that he is just a monkey and laugh at him (Yang, 2006, p. 15), just like Jin Wang wants to be an American and is made fun of by the others at school (Yang, 2006, p. 33). Monkey King’s anger is illustrated in a sequence when he fights others (Yang, 2006, pp. 16-19) in images much like the images of the fight between Danny and Chin-Kee (Yang, 2006, pp. 208-211). The frames are diagonal as opposed to the rest of the frames in the book, and the text is mostly in the form of onomatopoeia.

Just like Jin Wang adjusts to the American way in order to become more American, the Monkey King adjusts to become more human or godlike. He ponders on how to get rid of his fur (Yang, 2006, p. 20), and he orders the other monkeys to wear shoes (Yang, 2006, p. 55). This is illustrated by an image of monkeys with shoes having trouble climbing trees (Yang, 2006, p. 55), implying to the readers that not all adjustments are necessarily good and reasonable ones. The Monkey King is eventually able to master the discipline of “shape shift”

(Yang, 2006, p. 58), and transforms into a bigger form of himself, just like Jin Wang transforms into Danny (Yang, 2006, pp. 196-198).

Further, the Monkey King is approached by his creator, Tze-Yo-Tsuh, who calls him a little monkey because that is exactly what he is (Yang, 2006, pp.68-69). His creator's hope is that the Monkey King will accept himself as he is (Yang, 2006, p. 81), and that he is only fooling himself by trying to be someone he is not (Yang, 2006, p. 78). This is a parallel to the conversation that the Monkey King has with Jin Wang in the final chapter where the Monkey King has become Jin Wang's conscience (Yang, 2006, pp. 221-223). However, the Monkey King is not ready to accept himself as he is, and he is buried beneath a mountain of rocks (Yang, 2006, p. 84) a metaphor for the burden it is to pretend to be someone one is not.

In the last chapter of the Monkey King, he is freed from his imprisonment when he finally returns to his own true form (Yang, 2006, p. 150), and the last image is a full-page image of the Monkey King and a monk walking towards a large star, the Monkey King leaving his shoes behind (Yang, 2006, p. 160). The abandoned shoes signify that the Monkey King is freed from his wish to become someone he is not. He walks alongside the monk, indicating that he sees himself as equal to others, his desire to be a god is no longer present, he finds balance and harmony in accompanying the monk. This is paralleled to the last image of the novel where Jin Wang and Wei-Chen have found each other again, sitting at a café (Yang, 2006, p. 233). Jin Wang's American hairstyle is gone and left behind, indicating that Jin Wang does not have the need to change how he looks to be happy. Harmony is implied in this image where Jin Wang and Wei-Chen sit opposite each other once again, both happy in having each other as friends.

## 5. Didactic implementation

### 5.1. Background

Several approaches to using literature in the foreign language classroom may be outlined. An approach is one where the literature focuses naturally on the content of the text, including the historical, political, and social background to the text (Lazar, 1993, p. 35). Another approach, literature for personal enrichment focuses on encouraging the students to use personal experiences and opinions in the work with a text which may activate the students and help them acquire the language (Lazar, 1993, p. 24). Applying these approaches seems to be a good way to go since the aim is to develop language proficiency and social consciousness through the acquisition of knowledge and personal reflections. Both methods can be applied to the use of several literary genres and formats, including the graphic novel.

A teaching method involving interaction between the students where they use the language to learn the language is task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Cook, 2016, p. 285). The primary focus of this method is meaning, and the students must rely on their own resources to explain and express an opinion (Ellis, 2009, p. 223). The defined outcome is not to learn the language, but in the process of working with the task, this may be an additional bonus.

Implementing *American born Chinese* into the ESL classroom will be done by using several approaches and methods, both written and oral. A suggestion for a lesson plan facilitates the work for both the teacher and the students (Appendix A).

#### 5.1.1. Learning goals

When bringing *American born Chinese* into the ESL classroom, the aim in this case is to promote IC, with special focus on the development of identity. Reading a text from another culture than their own may increase the students' awareness of different beliefs and social structure in another culture in an enriching way (Lazar, 1993, p. 62). This is in accordance with the central values of the English curriculum in Norway which states that English is an important subject when it comes to both cultural understanding and identity development (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020a). Further, the core elements of the curriculum include that in working with texts in English

the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society. Thus, the pupils will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns. They shall build the

foundation for seeing their own identity and others' identities in a multilingual and multicultural context. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b)

With this knowledge in hand, an English text may be introduced into the ESL classroom in order to focus on the topic of identity development in an intercultural setting. Competence aims in the curriculum include reading, interpreting, reflecting, and presenting contents from English-language fiction in addition to exploring and describing diversity and ways of living, thinking, and communicating in the English-speaking world (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020d). Breaking these competence aims down into concrete learning goals must be done to specify what the students are supposed to learn in each lesson of working with *American born Chinese*. As the levels of English is varied, the goals must also be of different levels of difficulty. Some students have trouble understanding English texts and others may have trouble expressing reflections and opinions orally in English. Thus, one goal would be to be able to present the plot of the novel, while another goal would be to discuss the themes of the novel by giving reasons for their opinion. A third goal can be to express their own opinion on the novel, but also on the development of identity. Different learning goals provides an opportunity for all students to reach at least one or two of these goals, thus experiencing a sense of achievement. A lesson plan also includes specific goals for each lesson (Appendix A).

#### 5.1.2. Target group

The students I have in mind for this particular topic are in lower secondary school. As the topic may be a challenging one to deal with, the intention is to introduce *American born Chinese* to the students in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, they are 15 or 16 years old. There is a gap in proficiency level in English, the students range from basic users of English (A1-A2) to independent users (B1-B2). One or two students may also be proficient users (C1) of the language, which are the proficiency levels defined by the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2022). The classroom is organized in groups of four or five, a suitable size for group discussions.

#### 5.1.3. Numbers of hours/lessons

In Norway the students have two lessons pr week with English, each of 60 minutes. Spending eight lessons on reading and discussing *American born Chinese* is within reach, if the students also do some reading at home during these weeks. An additional lesson may be added if needed, to complete the presentations of the final products.

## 5.2. Suggestion for implementation

Engaging the students in pre-reading activities may stimulate their interest for the text (Lazar, 1993, p. 83), and a natural place to start the first lesson is with the cover of the novel. Pre-reading activities should prepare the students for further discussions, involving as many students as possible. In the reading phase the teacher must help the students cope both with the volume of new vocabulary and the length of the novel (Lazar, 1993, p. 90). In addition, some tasks need to be given to help the students understand the plot and the characters in the novel (Lazar, 1993, p. 83). *American born Chinese* is a graphic novel, thus the students need not feel overwhelmed by a large amount of new vocabulary as the images help the reader understand what is being conveyed. This is especially important for the weaker readers, and an aim is that all students can understand the story. To cope with the length of the novel, it is a good idea to deal with one chapter at a time in the beginning. During the reading stage the students may also engage in tasks about language and style. This is a graphic novel thus the “vocabulary” consists of both text and illustrations in combination (McCloud, 1993, p. 47). Therefore, an analysis of the way the author portrays Chin-Kee may prove to be both interesting and a fun task to engage in. Post-reading activities are important in order to wrap up the story/stories and help the students understand the plot and make interpretations (Lazar, 1993, p. 84). Post-reading activities may come in many forms and can be both written and oral tasks (Lazar, 1993, p. 86), and combining the two may work well. The product at the end of the project may be the traditional written task, be it a review of the story or a text about identity. However, it can also be a group discussion about the same topics. A natural way to go may also be that the students make their own graphic story about the same topic, or that they dramatize parts of the graphic novel. A final task where the students may choose their own way presenting from a list of alternatives is perhaps the best way to proceed. In that way all students can work with the methods that suits them the best.

Regardless of the tasks, cultural understanding and the development of cross-cultural identities are dealt with in reading *American born Chinese*, and in doing so the students may gain some knowledge and awareness about this complex topic. This may help foster social consciousness and an understanding of different perspectives in the world (Tavares, 2017, pp. 74-77).

### 5.2.1. Lesson 1

Group discussions is a good way to start a new topic because some students may be afraid to speak in full class without having discussed with someone else in advance. The students may state what they see and discuss what they think the story is about, based on the title and the images on the front and back covers. This may be a difficult task and could be accompanied by various questions (Appendix B). Questions may lead the students forward in the direction towards understanding what the graphic novel is about. After the group discussion it is useful to discuss further in full class. In this way, all students may take part in the discussion, and they may learn from each other. The teacher may also guide the students further by additional questions on a handout (Appendix B). It is important for teachers to ensure the students that there may be different interpretations of a story, and that they develop confidence needed for making their own interpretations (Lazar, 1993, p. 76). At the end of this session, the students should have an idea of what the novel is about.

The next step of this lesson is to help the students understand the concept of identity. This is important because that is what the novel is about, and in order for the students to understand the topic better, the term identity should be explained. First, the students are asked what they think identity is, it is useful to use a mind-map on the blackboard for this session. The word IDENTITY is written in the middle and the teacher writes down what the students say so that everyone can see. The teacher then provides the definition which includes that identity is the result of contact with others and that one may have more than one identity.

The following task is another group work where they discuss whether it can be possible to have multiple identities and whether it can be a challenge to live in two cultures. Many of the students may well recognize the situation of living in two cultures themselves and drawing on their own experiences is useful in the process of understanding others. In this way of working before reading, their knowledge of cross-cultural identity and identity development may begin to develop. The lesson is rounded up together, and the students share their own thoughts and experiences on the topic with the rest of the class.

The first chapter, about the Monkey King (Yang, 2006, pp. 7-20), is a short chapter and an easy way into the story, so homework due for the next lesson is to read this chapter.

### 5.2.2. Lesson 2

The students have read the first chapter at home, and the lesson starts with them sharing with a partner what they have read. They talk about who the chapter is about and what happens in the story. A list of questions is provided on a handout (Appendix C), so they are guided in what they are to look for. The second chapter is about Jin Wang (Yang, 2006, pp. 21-40) when he moves to the new school and befriends Wei-Chen. The students then read this chapter alone. They read at different speed, and it is better that they can decide their own pace so they can enjoy the illustrations while they read. After they have read the first chapter, they write down who the chapter is about and what happens, before they share this information with a partner. After having read and taken notes the students make a list of characteristics so they can compare Jin Wang and the Monkey King and look for similarities and differences. The task will help the students describe and understand the characters in these chapters. When finished reading, students and teacher summarize together who the main characters are and what happens in the first two chapters, in addition they discuss whether there are any similarities or differences between the two characters.

In discussing the second chapter the teacher must draw attention to Jin Wang's toy, the Transformer, because this is an important symbol in the graphic novel. By referring to the sequence with the herbalist's wife (Yang, 2006, pp. 27-29), the teacher may guide the students in discovering that Jin Wang wishes to be someone he is not. Further, the students may try to explore the role of the Transformer and whether the toy is a symbol of identity. This can be done in full class. As this may be a more difficult topic to discuss than the plot, the stronger students can contribute, but not all the students need to. Questions to help the students reflect are provided on the work sheet they were given at the beginning of the lesson (Appendix C).

Homework for the next lesson is to read one chapter further, the chapter about Danny and Chin-Kee (Yang, 2006, pp. 43-52), and to make similar notes about this chapter as they have done on the previous two.

### 5.2.3. Lesson 3

Lack of knowledge and stereotypes about another culture are themes in *American Born Chinese*. If students are unaware of differences between cultures, it is important that teachers have some knowledge about social groups and how they interact (Byram et al., 2002 p. 12). For the third lesson, the students were to read the chapter about Danny and Chin-Kee (Yang,

2006, pp. 43-52), therefore the lesson starts with a recap of this chapter in full class. The students say who and what the chapter is about and share anything they might have noticed with this chapter. Some students may have understood that Chin-Kee is presented as a negative stereotype, hence they have an opportunity to share their discovery.

In order to understand the graphic novel properly, the students need to understand the concepts of stereotyping and prejudice, therefore this must be explained by the teacher. The students should take notes on this topic for future reference. This is followed by a brief group discussion where the students discuss negative and positive stereotypes and share if they have any prejudices themselves (Appendix D). This does not necessarily need to be shared with the whole class, as the aim is that the students develop an awareness of their own prejudices.

In finding stereotyping in the novel the teacher should first lead the students to the pages where Jin Wang (Yang, 2006, p. 30) and Wei-Chen (Yang, 2006, p.36) are introduced to their new class. The students discuss in groups whether these introductions are examples of stereotyping, and in which ways, guided by questions on the handout (Appendix D). After the group work, a summary of the discussions is wise. Knowing that stereotypes and prejudice often are the result of limited knowledge of another culture (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 390), it is important that the students become aware of these overgeneralisations and oversimplified categories (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 389). Developing this awareness in the students is also important so they can become aware of the stereotypes they themselves have. The aim is not necessarily to change the students' views but make them aware of them so they may further reflect upon what is necessary to avoid stereotyping in the future (Byram et al., 2002, p. 13). It is important to learn how to avoid stereotyping early on to encourage positive contact across cultures (Samovar et al., 2016, p. 391), and it is important to consider one's own beliefs and values as not the only viable ones in order to communicate successfully (Byram et al., 2002 p. 12).

The students have read the chapter about Danny and Chin-Kee and the class has summarized the plot together. The topic of racist stereotyping becomes very clear in the characterisation of Chin-Kee as the ultimate negative Chinese stereotype. The students may explore the images of Chin-Kee and try to write down individually in which way he is presented, and whether this coincides with their own view of Chinese people. Further, the students should make a characteristic of Danny and discuss whether he too is presented as a stereotype of the all-American boy. These characteristics could be graphic, the students can draw one person and

draw a line vertically through the body. Then they draw Danny on one side and Chin-Kee on the other side, visualizing the differences between the two.

#### 5.2.4. Lessons 4 and 5

Reading this graphic novel chapter by chapter may be a good idea in the beginning, however, some students would like to read on and finish the novel at their own speed. We have read the first three chapters together, and the students have been introduced to and reflected on the characters and topics such as identity and stereotyping. It is safe to now let them proceed individually. It is also important that they take the time to look at the pictures and enjoy the graphic novel while they read it. Giving the students two lessons in addition to homework would give them the opportunity to finish reading the novel.

Some students may have finished reading by the time lesson five is over, and the teacher should provide them with further tasks or topics for discussion. These are described in lesson six.

#### 5.2.5. Lesson 6

As the students have now finished reading the graphic novel, several topics need to be discussed to wrap up the stories. As a post-reading activity, they may, in groups, try to identify symbols and metaphors in the three narratives. Stronger readers may be able to identify these symbols themselves, but the weaker readers might need some help in identifying the Transformer, hair, and Monkey King's shoes as symbols. By discussing this in groups first gives all the students an opportunity to take part in a discussion in full class afterwards. Leading the students to look at the scene where Danny pulls Chin-Kee out of the room by his queue (Yang, 2006, p. 204) may inspire to discussion about symbols, as the queue may be seen as a symbol of the Chinese culture, and Jin Wang's hair a symbol of the American one.

The sequence where Danny and Chin-Kee fight (Yang, 2006, pp. 207-214) also deserves some attention as this can be seen as the climax of the story and this is where the stories come together. By now the students will have understood that Danny and Jin Wang are the same person, but they may not have understood the significance of this, that Danny is everything that Jin Wang wants to be and that Chin-Kee is everything he does not want to be. Guiding them towards an understanding of this is necessary for understanding that the development of

identity might be a struggle for some. Eventually, the students can discuss the development Jin Wang goes through in this coming-of-age story.

The students finally discuss in groups what they think of the novel and what they believe the theme(s) to be, explain why they think the way they do, using examples from the text. Instead of rounding up in full class discussion, the teacher could visit all groups as they discuss, supplementing with questions or explanations if necessary. In that way, all the students will be able to share their experiences of the novel, without the whole class listening.

#### 5.2.6. Lesson 7 and 8

The final post-reading activity will be a final task where the students choose one among four, which are all about cross-cultural identity (Appendix E). One task is a graphic task, another one is dramatization, a third task is a group discussion, and the last task is a written one. In that way all the students may choose the way that suits them best, because they have different ways of learning and how they work best. Working with this for two lessons in addition to working at home should give the students enough time to finish a product. The group discussions can be assessed by the teacher when the groups are finished preparing, whereas the dramatization can be assessed in a following lesson if necessary.

## 6. Conclusion

As outlined in the introduction, the topic of this master thesis has been to explore the use of the graphic novel *American born Chinese* (Yang, 2006) in the ESL classroom. The research question was:

To what extent may *American born Chinese* be used to promote intercultural competence in the ESL classroom, with a special focus on identity development?

Through a close analysis of *American born Chinese* it was shown that it is a graphic novel very well suited to promote IC and the development of identity in the ESL classroom. The novel deals with topics such as friendship, identity, stereotypes, and acceptance and is thus a story which most young people may relate to. Primarily, the topic of the novel is important as it is about the development of identity in-between cultures and stereotypes. Developing IC is important in a world that keeps expanding and people are brought closer together. Developing responsible citizens with the ability to understand different cultures is important in today's world and reading *American born Chinese* provides opportunities to develop IC by discussing topics such as stereotypes, prejudices, and identity.

The illustrations in the novel are colourful and appealing and easy to understand, and the language does not include an overwhelming amount of vocabulary. This may motivate the students to pick up the novel and start reading. By using the graphic novel, the teacher meets the students in their visual world, and it can be easier to understand difficult topics when text and illustrations are combined in a common language. For some students it may also be less frightening to discuss a difficult topic if the point of departure is an image. The use of symbols and onomatopoeia is extensive, and the use of humour is apparent, which appeals to the young readers. Although the topic is a serious one, Yang conveys the themes in an easily accessible way

Applying TBLT as the dominant teaching method, the focus has been to encourage the students to rely on their own resources and use personal experiences to activate their use of the language and to spark reflections. Group-discussions on topics such as identity and stereotyping help the students express their own opinion, which in turn may develop learning. The graphic novel opens for discussions and reflections which may further develop the students' ability to understand and identify with the topic of identity development. Living in two different cultures is something many students can relate to, and they may be able to see

similarities with their own lives. In this recognition they may better understand the difficulties and challenges in developing a cross-cultural identity, and further develop their IC.

Working with *American born Chinese* in the ESL classroom serves two purposes, to introduce the complex challenge of developing a cross-cultural identity and making use of the graphic novel to promote an understanding of this topic. The task of promoting IC with special focus on identity development is far from complete but working in detail with this novel may well contribute to an awareness in the minds of the students in their process of finding their own way in the world.

The use of graphic novels in the ESL classroom in Norway seems to be on the rise, and for good reasons. The graphic novel is a motivational format for young readers and may deal with difficult topics in a visual way. This thesis has outlined an implementation of *American born Chinese* into the classroom to promote IC, however, not all aspects from the analysis have been included in the lesson plan, due to the age of the students and the time available. Further research on this graphic novel may be to execute the lesson plan in a class, including for example interviews with the students. In this way, one may discover if the students find the novel suitable for promoting IC. Additionally, a study of the images in *American born Chinese* may be a field of interest to investigate further, as the images are complex, yet easy to understand. It may also be interesting to investigate how Norwegian graphic novels may help promote Norwegian culture for students who are new to this country. In sum, introducing the graphic novel to the ESL classroom to promote not only IC, but various topics should be seen as a valuable additional resource to traditional teaching methods.

## Works cited

- Bennet, M. (2004). Becoming interculturally competent. In Wurzel, J. (ed.). *Toward Multiculturalism: A reader in multicultural education*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 62-77. Newton, MA: intercultural Resource Corporation.
- Brozo, W. G., Moorman, G., & Meyer, C. K. (2014). *Wham!: teaching with graphic novels across the curriculum*. Teachers College Press.
- Bucher, T.B. & Manning, M.L. (2004). Bringing Graphic Novels into a School's Curriculum, *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 78:2, 67-72, <https://doi.org/10.3200/TCHS.78.2.67-72>
- Byram, M., Gribkova, B. and Starkey, H. (2002). *Developing the Intercultural Dimension in Language teaching: A practical introduction for teachers*. Language Policy Division, Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education. Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- Campbell, E., (2007). What is a graphic novel? *World Literature Today*., 81(2), 13–13. <https://doi.org/info:doi/>
- Cheng, S.H. & Kuo, W. (2000). Family socialization of ethnic identity among Chinese American pre-adolescents. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 31(4), 463–484. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.31.4.463>
- Cook, V. (2016). *Second language learning and language teaching* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Council of Europe (2022). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>
- Dardess, G. (1995). Bringing Comic Books to Class [Review of *History of the Comic Strip; Adult Comics: An Introduction; Comics & Sequential Art; Understanding Comics*, by D. Kunzle, R. Sabin, W. Eisner, & S. McCloud]. *College English*, 57(2), 213–222. <https://doi.org/10.2307/378816>
- Ellis, R. (2009). Task-based language teaching: sorting out the misunderstandings. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 19(3), 221–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2009.00231.x>
- Gordon, I. (2010). Let Us Not Call Them Graphic Novels. *Radical History Review*, 2010(106), 185–192. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2009-027>

Halsall, A. (2018). "What Is the Use of a Book... Without Pictures or Conversations?": Incorporating the Graphic Novel into the University Curriculum. In A. Burger (Ed.), *Teaching Graphic Novels in the English Classroom : Pedagogical Possibilities of Multimodal Literacy Engagement* (1st ed. pp.87-101). Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hassan, A. (2018, June 23). Confronting Asian-American Stereotypes. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/23/us/confronting-asian-american-stereotypes.html>

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, J. G., and Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind: Intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Jensen, F., Frønes, T.S., Kjærnsli, M. & Roe, A. (2020). Lesing i PISA 2000–2018: Norske elevers lesekompetanse i et internasjonalt perspektiv. *Like muligheter til god leseforståelse? (kap2)*, 21-45. <https://doi.org/10.18261/9788215040066-2020-02>

Lazar, Gillian (1993). *Literature and Language Teaching : a Guide for Teachers and Trainers*. Cambridge University Press.

Labio, C. (2011). What's in a name: The Academic Study of Comics and the "Graphic Novel". *Cinema Journal*, 50(3), pp. 123-126. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41240728>

Mastrotheodoros, S., Kornienko, O., Umana-Taylor, A., & Motti-Stefanidi, F. (2021). Developmental Interplay Between Ethnic, National, and Personal Identity in Immigrant Adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 50(6), 1126–1139. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-021-01434-y>

McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The Invisible Art*. Harper Perennial.

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2020a). *Relevance and central values*. Fastsatt som forskrift. Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet 2020. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/eng01-04/om-faget/fagets-relevans-og-verdier?lang=eng>

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2020b). *Core elements*. Fastsatt som forskrift. Læreplanverket for Kunnskapsløftet 2020. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/eng01-04/om-faget/kjerneelementer?lang=eng>

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2020c). *Basic Skills*. Fastsatt som forskrift. Læreplanverket for kunnskapsløftet 2020. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/eng01-04/om-faget/grunnleggende-ferdigheter?lang=eng>

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2020d). *Competence aims after 10th grade (Eng01-04)*. Fastsatt som forskrift. Læreplanverket for kunnskapsløftet 2020. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/eng01-04/kompetansemaal-og-vurdering/kv4?lang=eng>

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2020e). *Dybdeløring*. Fastsatt som forskrift. Læreplanverket for kunnskapsløftet 2020. <https://www.udir.no/laring-og-trivsel/dybdelaring/>

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. (2020f). *Interdisciplinary topics*. Fastsatt som forskrift. Læreplanverket for kunnskapsløftet 2020. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/eng01-04/om-faget/tverrfaglige-temaer?lang=eng>

Perry, L.E. (2018). Teaching the History and Theory of American Comics: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Graphic Novels as a Complex Literary Genre. In A. Burger (Ed.). *Teaching Graphic Novels in the English Classroom : Pedagogical Possibilities of Multimodal Literacy Engagement* (1st ed. 2018.). Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan.

Phinney, Horenczyk, G., Liebkind, K., & Vedder, P. (2001). Ethnic Identity, Immigration, and Well-Being: An Interactional Perspective. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(3), 493–510. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00225>

Pinti, D. (2016). Theology and identity in Gene Luen Yang's American Born Chinese. *Literature & Theology*, 30(2), 233-247. <https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/frw015>

Samovar, L., Porter, R., McDaniel, E., and Roy, C. (2016). *Communication between cultures* (9th ed.). South Melbourne, Vic. Australia: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning.

Thomson, R. (2018). Writing Through Comics. In A. Burger (Ed.). *Teaching Graphic Novels in the English Classroom : Pedagogical Possibilities of Multimodal Literacy Engagement* (1st ed. pp. 43-65). Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan.

Twenge, J. (August 20, 2018). Why it matters that teens are reading less. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/why-it-matters-that-teens-are-reading-less-99281>

Twenge, J.M, Martin, G.N. & Spitzberg, B.H. (2019). Trends in U.S. Adolescents' Media Use, 1976 –2016: The Rise of Digital Media, the Decline of TV, and the (Near) Demise of Print. *American psychological Association* 8 (4), 329-345.

<https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/ppm0000203>

Whitaker, W.R. (2012). *Towards a Visual Culture: An Examination of the Effect of Graphic Novels on the Relationship Between Text and Image* (Master Thesis), Hanover, New Hampshire

Yang, G. (2008). *American born Chinese*. New York: Square Fish

## Appendix A - Lesson plan

### Lesson 1

Goals	To analyse the front cover and the title in order to “guess” what the story is about. To express opinion on what you think the novel is about. To explain what identity is and reflect on the topic of multiple identities.
Material	The front and back covers of the graphic novel.
What to do	Pre-reading activity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Group discussion: Look at the picture, what is the story about do you think?</li> <li>2. Discussion in class: Go through the questions together.</li> <li>3. What is identity? Definition.</li> <li>4. Group discussion: Identity.</li> </ol>

### Lesson 2

Goals	To be able to read two chapters and talk about what you have read. To compare the two characters. To express your opinion on the role of the Transformer.
Material	Chapter 1. The Monkey King pp. 7-20 Chapter 2. Jin Wang pp. 21-40
What to do	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Talk to your partner about what you have read at home, the chapter about the Monkey King.</li> <li>2. Read the second chapter and take notes about the plot.</li> <li>3. Share with your partner.</li> <li>4. Make a list of characteristics of the two characters.</li> <li>5. Summarize in full class.</li> <li>6. The Transformer. Discuss in full class.</li> </ol>

### Lesson 3

Goals	To learn about stereotyping and prejudice. To reflect upon stereotyping and prejudice.
Material	Chapter two about Jin Wang pp. 30 + 36. Chapter 3. Danny and Chin-Kee pp. 43-52
What to do	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recap in full class about Danny and Chin- Kee.</li> <li>2. Stereotyping and prejudice</li> <li>3. Group work. Do you have and prejudices?</li> <li>4. Group work: pp.30 + 36</li> <li>5. Recap in full class.</li> <li>6. Individual work: Stereotyping of Chin-Kee and Danny. Comparison. Make a drawing</li> </ol>

Lessons 4 and 5

Goals	Be able to read and enjoy the graphic novel.
Material	<i>American born Chinese.</i>
What to do	Read the novel. When finished, start discussions and tasks.

Lesson 6

Goals	Define symbols. Express own opinion on themes and the novel.
Material	
What to do	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Group discussion: Symbols and metaphors.</li><li>2. Recap in full class.</li><li>3. Group discussion: Themes and what you think of the book.</li></ol>

Lesson 7 and 8

Goals	To express the understanding of developing cross-cultural identity.
Material	
What to do	Final work: Choose a task and present in the way you choose.

## Appendix B – Lesson 1

### AMERICAN BORN CHINESE

#### TASK:

1. Group discussion: The cover

Look at the cover of the novel and try to find out what this book might be about. Look at the questions below to give you some ideas.

*What is the toy in the boy's hand called? What does it mean to transform? Why do you think the author has included this on the front cover? What does the title mean? Where do you think the main character comes from? Where do you think he lives? Why is there only half a face on the front cover?*

*What do you think the theme of the story is?*

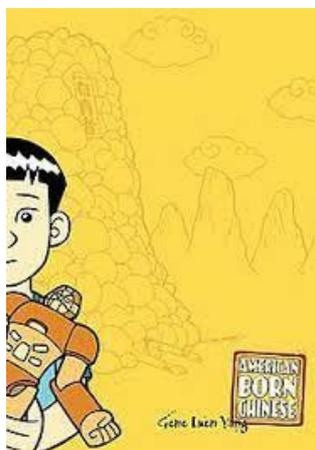
Try to explain why you think as you do by using examples.

2. Group discussion: Identity

Look at the definition of identity and discuss the following:

*Is it possible to have more than one identity? In what way? What identities can one person have? Do you have more than one identity? Explain. What has influenced your identity? Do you think it can be a challenge to live in two different cultures? In what ways? Have you experienced any challenges of having multiple identities? Explain.*

Homework: Read the first chapter about the Monkey King, pp.7-20 at home.



## Appendix C – Lesson 2

### AMERICAN BORN CHINESE

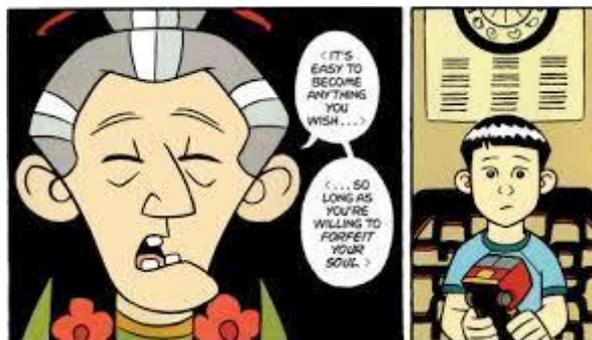
#### CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

#### TASK

1. You have read the first chapter about the Monkey King, pp.7-20 at home.
2. Share with your partner: *What happens in this chapter? Who is the main character of this chapter? What is he like? What are his wishes?*
3. Read the next chapter, about Jin Wang, pp. 21-40.
4. Take notes. *Who is the main character of this chapter? What happens in this chapter? What is Jin Wang like? What does he want to be when he grows up? Is he happy to start a new school? Who is Wei-Chen?*
5. Make a list with two columns and write down characteristics of Jin Wang and the Monkey King. *Are there any similarities or differences between Jin Wang and the Monkey King? Which ones?*
6. The Transformer. *How is the Transformer presented in the sequence with the herbalist's wife? How is the Transformer used further in the novel? What do you think the Transformer symbolizes?*

Homework: Read the next chapter about Danny and Chin-Kee, pp. 43-52 and take notes.

*Who is the main character? What happens in this chapter?*



## Appendix D – Lesson 3

### AMERICAN BORN CHINESE

#### CHAPTER 3

#### TASK

1. Group discussion: Stereotypes and prejudice

*Do you know of any typical stereotypes? What are positive stereotypes? What are negative stereotypes? Do you have any prejudices? Which ones?*

2. Look at pp. 30 and 36 where Jin Wang and Wei-Chen are introduced to their new class. Discuss the following:

*How are the boys introduced? Do the teachers know all the facts they should have? How would you like to be introduced to a new class? How should they have been introduced, in your opinion? What could the teachers have done to be more prepared?*

3. Individual work: Danny and Chin-Kee

Look at the illustrations of Chin-Kee.

*In what way does the author present Chin-Kee? In which ways does he exaggerate in the presentation? Is it in a humorous way? How? Is this humoristic in your opinion? How can this type of presentation of a culture be problematic do you think? How does Danny react to Chin-Kee? What does Chin-Kee do that is so horrible in Danny's view? What does Chin-Kee represent? Write in your book. Make characterizations of Chin-Kee and Danny and compare the two boys.*

Homework: Finish the task if you are unable to finish at school.



## Appendix E – Lesson 7 and 8 - Final product

### AMERICAN BORN CHINESE

#### FINAL TASK

Choose between the following tasks:

**1. Make a graphic story with the theme cross-cultural identity.**

Try to focus on the challenges and difficulties that may occur in growing up between two cultures. The story does not have to be long, but it must include illustrations and text.

**2. Choose at least one chapter from the graphic novel and act out the scenes.**

You have to find someone to do this task with you. Focus on the challenges and difficulties that may occur in growing up between two cultures. The viewer must be able to understand the theme of cross-cultural identity.

**3. Group discussion about *American born Chinese* and cross-cultural identity.**

You have to find someone who also wants to do this task. Talk about and analyse *American born Chinese* and discuss how the graphic novel deals with the theme of cross-cultural identity. Remember to include examples from the novel in your discussion.

**4. Written work *American born Chinese* and cross-cultural identity.**

Individual work. Give an analysis of *American born Chinese* and discuss how the graphic novel deals with the theme of cross-cultural identity. Remember to include examples from the novel in your discussion.

