

ZÁPADOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V PLZNI

**FAKULTA PEDAGOGICKÁ
KATEDRA ANGLICKÉHO JAZYKA**

EMPATIE A FIKCE

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Specializace v pedagogice, obor Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání

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Plzeň 2020

UNIVERSITY OF WEST BOHEMIA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

FICTION AND EMPATHY
UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

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Pilsen 2020

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracovala samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

V Plzni, 30. června 2020

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor William Bradley Vice Ph.D. for his time, helpful advice and understanding.

ABSTRACT

Hejhalová, Simona. University of West Bohemia. June, 2020. Empathy CQ and Fiction.

Supervisor: William Bradley Vice Ph.D.

The aim of this thesis was to examine the connection between reading fiction literature and CQ and empathy. This work provides theoretical background on cultural intelligence, empathy and fiction. It describes the requirements a work of fiction should meet in order to help with increasing CQ and empathy and in the second part an examination of three works that meet these requirements. The last part discusses the usefulness of reading fiction in the classroom.

Key words: cultural intelligence, empathy, fiction, reading

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to explore the relationship between reading fiction literature, CQ and empathy. For many people, reading is an inseparable part of their lives, it makes them happier, offers an opportunity to relax after a long day, but there is a lot to learn from books, and not just textbooks or scientific publications, but from fictional stories as well. Sometimes, these kinds of books are the ones that have the most impact on people's lives, they can inspire them to change, to be better. After finishing a good book, one should feel like his life has changed at least a bit and a really good book will be with the reader weeks after he finished it, always at the back of his mind. The potential to learn from fictional stories, to learn more about other cultures, other people and at the same time more about oneself is the topic of this work.

The first part is theoretical background, necessary to discuss before diving deeper into the issue. We describe CQ – cultural intelligence and its key components, to get the idea of what it actually means and why is it important to have it and how can we increase it. CQ Knowledge is one of four basic components of CQ and it is the one most important for this work, it basically means how much does one know about other culture, how much information he has. This knowledge is usually acquired through taking culture or history courses or reading some expert literature, but this thesis hopes to prove that the knowledge can also be gained more naturally, sometimes without even realizing it, by reading fiction. Of course, not all fiction stories can be used to broaden CQ Knowledge, but there are many that can even when one might not expect them to.

Further in the thesis, we focus on EQ – emotional intelligence and its vital element, empathy. Empathy can be often confused with sympathy, but there is a major difference, empathy is the ability to feel what the other is feeling, as if it were happening to you personally, but sympathy is more like our reaction to what others are feeling - when someone is sad, we feel sorry for him. This is important to know before talking about empathy and why it can be harder for us to express. After that, we explore the term fiction and its relation to empathy, if there are any conditions a story should meet in order to help increase empathy as well as CQ. We also discuss why fiction can have more influence on the reader than non-fiction and whether or not does the genre of the story matter in relation to CQ and empathy – if some genres serve this purpose better than others.

In the second part of this thesis, there are three works of fiction with the potential to boost empathy and CQ, which will be discussed. When choosing these works, it was of course taken into consideration whether they meet the requirements previously set in the thesis, if they are well known and if from my personal experience, they have some emotional effect on the reader. These three works were also chosen to be as diverse as possible, each of them deals with entirely different topics, to bring variety into this work. That is why *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Missing Out* by Leila Aboulela were chosen. The first one takes place in a dystopian society and is considered a work of science fiction, the second one is an old English classic and the third one is a short story about moving into another culture and offers two distinct points of view. I feel like each of these works has much to offer and can be beneficial to the reader in the area of CQ as well as empathy.

At the end of this thesis the benefit of using stories when teaching a second language is discussed, how reading can be helpful to children, again when dealing with culture and empathy, but also other areas and how it could help them to build a more positive attitude towards learning. Overall, this thesis should answer whether or not there is a connection between reading fiction and increasing our CQ and empathy and also under which conditions it would be possible – what the story has to have and what the reader must do in order to achieve this.

WHAT IS CQ AND EMPATHY

1.1 WHAT IS CQ

CQ or cultural intelligence is “the capability to function effectively in a variety of cultural contexts”. (Livermore, 2011, p. 4) It is our ability to adapt in various cultural situations that we may come across during our lives. Today’s world is much smaller than the world people lived in one hundred years ago, travelling to the other side of the world is now the matter of hours, not months. The power of the internet allows us to connect with people from all around the globe. On one hand, technology has made our lives easier, but on the other hand, also more complicated. There are many more opportunities and many more obstacles. One of the ways we can better ensure our success in this world is to improve our cultural intelligence.

CQ is not about learning about all the rules and customs of every culture in the world, that would be impossible, neither is it about always behaving perfectly in every situation imaginable, it is about acquiring a set of skills that will help us to better understand, accept and relate to people with significantly different views, beliefs and experiences than our own. Livermore (2009) says that CQ is:

Multidisciplinary approach that draws from anthropology, sociology and psychology as well as literature from the fields of business, missions and education. As a result, cultural intelligence is a metamodel, which proves as a coherent framework for dealing with the array of issues involved in crossing various cultures-often many cultures at the same time. (p. 45)

CQ also takes into account that not everyone is the same, even people who come from the same cultural and social backgrounds will have different experiences with cross-cultural meetings, depending on who we are as an individual. Whether a person is an introvert or extrovert, their previous history with different cultures and their personal views will all affect this. And while for example our IQ – intelligence quotient is something we are born with and it cannot be changed, our EQ – emotional intelligence as well as our CQ can be improved over time with effort.

To improve our CQ first we need to understand its four fundamental parts which are – CQ Drive (motivation), CQ Knowledge (cognition), CQ Strategy (meta-cognition) and CQ Action (behaviour).

CQ Drive (motivation) is the desire and motivation to learn how to function effectively in culturally diverse situations. Multicultural encounters pose many challenges and without the drive, we may give up at the sight of the first obstacle in our way, it is important to remember why we are trying and what we want to achieve.

CQ Knowledge (cognition) is the knowledge about the differences between cultures. Again, we are not expected to know about every culture in the world, instead we should learn to recognize some key cultural values and how they are similar or how they differ in other cultures and how that affects us and other people.

CQ Strategy (meta-cognition) is our personal understanding of the culturally diverse experiences and how to use the knowledge we have acquired. We need to evaluate our thought processes, evaluations and assumptions about others to manage the complexity of cross-cultural situations.

CQ Action (behaviour) is the competence to alter our behaviour according to what the current cultural situation requires. This involves high level of flexibility in social situations, being able to alter our behaviour and responses while still remaining honest and authentic to ourselves. (Livermore, 2011, pp. 6-7)

These four factors together combine the overall cultural intelligence quotient, they make us more aware of our behaviour in different cultural settings. Instead of being afraid of others', or indifferent to others' perspectives, we can take interest in them and even learn from them to become the better versions of ourselves.

Apart from these four factors, there are some other cultural dimensions we might want to take into consideration. They can help us to better define and understand some key differences between cultures and also determine important cultural values to look for. Livermore (2013, p. 23) talks about "Low vs High Power Distance" which compares how cultures view authority, power and status – it basically means the level of inequality that is considered standard within one culture. Some cultures aim to diminish the differences between men and women, in others these differences are considered normal part of life. In some countries parents and children are considered equal, somewhere else the rule is for children to always obey their parents, even as adults. The author also mentions "Uncertainty Avoidance" (p. 29), he explains that some cultures are more comfortable with risk and uncertain circumstances than others:

Cultures high in uncertainty avoidance structure behavior through such mechanisms as laws, religion, or customs. Vague situations are avoided in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, and group norms and rules reduce ambiguity...Cultures that are low on the uncertainty avoidance index tend to have less structure, system, and routine to how life is organized. (p. 29)

Further, Livermore (2013) describes the differences in communication “Direct vs Indirect” and how they correspond with the concept of “High vs Low Context” cultures. (p. 50)

In the cultural dimension known as low versus high context, a low-context culture takes very little for granted in communication. Things are explained explicitly and directly...In a high-context culture, communication presumes an understanding of unwritten rules... It is not necessarily assumed that people mean what they say and say what they mean. (p. 50)

Essentially, low context cultures are very direct in their communication, and they do not rely on body language, face expressions or tone of voice as much as high context cultures, where these things can be key to understand what is actually being said.

This thesis will mainly focus on the second part of CQ, the CQ Knowledge and how it can be improved by reading fiction, we will also revisit the before mentioned cultural dimensions and try to identify them in works of fiction aimed to increase CQ, consequently recognizing cultural attributes expressed through the behaviour of fictional characters within these stories. Because even though the characters we read about are fictional, their lives, experiences and stories are often based off real people and their lives or can be compared to them. Reading about the struggles and successes of a fictional person can often make us feel for them more than a brief real story in the news. While reading a book we get a look directly into someone else’s mind and we become invested into what happens to them, and if the person experiences different thing in life than we did, it can make us more aware of them. It can make us think about issues that have never before crossed our minds.

1.2 EQ AND EMPATHY

Emotional intelligence or EQ is our ability to identify, understand and control our own emotions. It is about recognizing our emotional states as well as the emotional states of others. Salovey & Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as “being able to monitor and regulate one’s own and others’ feelings, and to use feelings to guide thought and action”. (p. 189) For a long time, the importance of emotional intelligence in life has been

overlooked, and the IQ has been considered as the most important factor ensuring our success, but while high IQ can guarantee success in school, EQ will ensure your success in real life. The lack of emotional intelligence is often the reason why people, despite having high IQ, have disastrous personal and professional lives. CQ is connected to EQ, without a certain level of emotional intelligence, we cannot develop high CQ.

Empathy is a key element of Emotional intelligence. Generally, empathy is explained as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person, it is an emotional connection between individuals. However, in his book Krznarik (2007) distinguishes two kinds of empathy. First one is the before mentioned emotional connection between individuals. Feeling tears in our eyes when we see someone we love crying or wincing in pain when we see someone stub their toe, those are the signs of empathy. Empathy has probably been given to us through evolution, members of a group that care about each other are more likely to survive and parents who feel the pain of their children will do a better job taking care of them, after all and this kind of empathy is therefore essential for our survival. We are born with it and can hardly affect it, comes natural to us, but we can go deeper than sharing basic emotions and feelings.

The second kind of empathy the author defines as “The imaginative act of stepping into another person’s shoes and being able to look at the world from their perspective” and argues that this is the kind of empathy we can improve upon, he calls it “perspective taking”. (pp. 6-8) To improve our ability to see the world through the eyes of someone else we need to be imaginative, to picture in our mind what the other person feels, wants, believes, fears – what is their view of the world. Krznarik (2007) presents three ways to do this:

Learning - about their beliefs, lives and cultures from books, films, photos and other artworks and information sources

Conversation - with them that is both profound and personal, and which gets beyond superficial talk

Experience - of how they live so that you can understand what they have gone through for yourself. (p. 10)

After you try these steps of empathetic imagining, you will come to see people as unique human beings, not just a face in the crowd or a member of some group. You may start feeling obliged to take action on their behalf, if you see someone is being treated unjustly or is suffering in some way. This individual empathising may inspire other people to do the same

thing and treat each other better. Apart from this, empathising can benefit us and our lives as well, it can inspire us and help us expand our horizons, our creativity and possibilities. It can put our problems into perspective and you may realize that what we are going through is not the end of the world, people are dealing with worst things on daily basis, or it can make us see that we are not the only ones who struggle with certain things and we may even find new ways to deal with our problems. Empathising will also help us to challenge our prejudices and assumptions about others. (Krznarik, 2007)

As we can see with the first one, we come back to the focus of this thesis – “learning about their beliefs, lives and cultures from books, films, photos and other artworks and information sources”. The most informative for us are generally those works which attempt to depict a distinct viewpoint of an individual, such as first-person narratives or self-portraits. This means we are dealing with subjective experiences and opinions rather than objective facts. Krznarik (2007) states that “Although the approach of learning is ‘indirect’ in that we may never meet the individuals we hope to empathise with, it is a powerful way of opening up our minds to unknown and distant lives”. (p. 13)

The author also explains that:

Exposing ourselves to books, paintings, photographs, films, and other arts and information sources remains a vital means of discovering how other people see the world, especially those in distant places who we are unlikely ever to meet or those whose lives are so different from our own that we will never experience what they go through for ourselves. In this sense, cultural learning becomes a form of travel into the minds of others, taking our empathic imaginings into unexpected and unknown realms. (Krznarik, 2007, p. 22)

This shows us that there is an undeniable link between empathy and CQ, as we can never hope to understand people from other cultures if we do not empathize with them on some level. Without empathy, there would be no understanding, only judgement. Empathy helps us to see what we have in common and helps to understand the things we do not, we can make analogies between foreign traditions and customs and our own. Without empathy, we can learn about other cultures and their way of life, but we will not be able to truly understand them and see them without judgement. Of course, most people are born with some level of empathy, but in the course of our lives we can increase it, to help us accept not only people

who are like us, who come from the same culture, but also those who are different. Our world is constantly evolving and changing, and we need to do the same.

1.3 THE LINK BETWEEN FICTION AND EMPATHY

Fiction, by its definition, is something non-real, made up, whereas non-fiction is a literature of facts. So why do we feel more compelled by something fictional than by real events? Big part of this is how the fictional work is written, but if a book is good or bad is a strongly subjective opinion, which will differ from one person to another. To capture readers imagination and making him feel something requires a narrative – a series of related events and experiences and characters that we find interesting and that we can relate to. Because of this, reading fiction triggers emotions in us. Reading fictional narratives simulates real life experiences and social situations and by that, we learn how to behave in these situations and how to better interact with others. When we are reading we are constantly trying to predict what is going to happen, what a certain character will do, and we do this based on previous reading about their emotions and thoughts – we can imagine; If I were in his/her place I would do this because... this shows that we empathize with the character as if it were a real person.

Fiction also allows us something we do not get to experience in real life – it makes sense out of the senseless things. In reality, we do not get to read people's minds to see why are they behaving the way they do, but in reading fiction we get to understand the characters' behaviour, because we know their thoughts and their history – what are the things that motivate them, their goals. This can then help us in real life, we may be not as quick to judge someone based on their current behaviour if we think about what that person may be going through in that moment or what might have happened to them in the past to cause them behave the way they do. Reading books or watching movies, plays, tv shows are things we do every day, they are referred to as the experience of fictional narratives and they provide us with distraction from everyday life and intellectual inspiration. Fictional narratives may influence on how we feel and behave in our daily lives. It has also been suggested that fictional narratives provide personal insights, and therefore they help us to learn more about ourselves. (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013)

Research on the effects of fiction inspects whether reading fiction influences empathy of the reader “It has been suggested that people who read a lot of fiction become more empathic, because fiction is a simulation of social experiences, in which people practice and enhance their interpersonal skills”. (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013, para. 2)

Some argue that there is not causal relationship between reading and empathy and that reading fiction does not contribute to higher empathy, but people who are already more empathic than others tend to read more fiction and that is why fiction is positively associated with empathy.

1.4 THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL TRANSPORTATION

In their research Bal and Veltkamp (2013) study effects of fiction on empathy over time, using real existing stories and study the role of emotional transportation in improving empathy, their assumption being that emotional transportation is a key element in improving empathy through reading. Transportation was defined by Green & Brock (2000) as “a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative”. (p. 702) In other words, the fictional world described in the narrative becomes more “real” to the reader, than the actual world he lives in, even though the events happening in it could be impossible in reality, they somehow become absolutely believable. The reader loses track of time and what is going on around them and completely immerses or transports themselves into the story. This is considered a crucial element in actually accomplishing some changes in personality – such as higher level of empathy - by reading. Bal and Veltkamp (2013) state that:

A reader will be affected by a fictional narrative only when it creates a narrative world that is real within its context, and more importantly, when it is realistic for the reader, thereby creating an opportunity to be drawn into the story. (para. 6)

Fictional narratives present characters and events of a story in a manner that allows the reader to become transported and therefore change through the narrative. According to Oatley (1999), fiction presents a simulation of real-world problems, and therefore has real consequences for the reader. Often when reading a fictional story, we identify with the characters and we become emotionally involved in the story, which causes us to sympathize with these characters, and can feel like we experience the events of the story ourselves and by this we practice being empathic by reading fiction. As reported by Bal and Veltkamp (2013), there are several reasons why fiction reading may be related to empathic skills. The simulation of real-life experiences in fiction could be associated with processes that people use on daily basis to comprehend what happens in the world. As a consequence of this process, people obtain a better understanding of the world and how to better interact with others and also learn about the human psychology. They stated that:

When an individual reads a story, he/she predicts the actions and reactions of the characters, by inferring what they are thinking, feeling, and intending. In order to do this, the reader sympathizes with the characters in the story, through taking the perspective of the characters and to experience the events as if it is the reader's own experience. (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013, para. 7)

The sympathy a reader feels for the characters is then combined with the self-concept of the reader, which helps the reader to acquire the ability to take others' perspective and to feel empathy. Thus, sympathetic reactions to fictional characters become integrated into our response patterns in daily life, and our empathic skills are enhanced. (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013)

That means that by reading about some specific emotions or events, the same neural structures are being activated as if we were experiencing these emotions or events ourselves, which in consequence influences our empathy. So, by reading a story we imagine a narrative world which is akin to our own, and in this narrative world we imagine how it is to actually be the character in the story, we imagine and experience what they would think and feel, and by that the imaginative processes which are evoked by reading fiction make us more empathic.

1.5 WHY DOES FICTION INFLUENCE OUR LIVES?

Fiction is written primarily to evoke some emotions in the reader. To become fully immersed in the story the reader stops viewing what he is reading as fictional or not real and fully experiences the emotions of the characters. According to Goldstein (2009) we react more strongly to a fictional story, than a non-fictional, because the fictional one creates a safe space for us to fully feel emotions without the need to protect ourselves. Because the fictional events can be stopped the moment, we close a book and they don't follow us into our everyday lives, we can allow ourselves to feel strong emotions without worrying about these emotions following us into our reality. In addition, we can allow ourselves to fully sympathize with the characters of our story without feeling a sense of obligation towards them, when we are reading a news report about some tragedy happening, we feel obliged to help the victims and we feel powerless or guilty if cannot or do not want to do so.

Another reason why fiction has a stronger effect on us than non-fiction, is that often non-fiction wants to persuade the reader – commercial messages, scientific articles or studies, articles in newspapers or magazines, they are all trying to change our beliefs or opinions in some way, convince us about something. This means, that our brains process

these texts differently than fiction, the effects of these persuasive messages in our brain is only temporary, unless we are highly motivated. A smoker reading the message about negative effects of smoking on his pack of cigarettes is unlikely to change his behaviour because he feels that the message is being forced onto him, and he is not motivated to actually think about it. However, it has been shown that individuals can be strongly influenced by reading a fictional story, because while we are being critical when reading a persuasive piece of text, we are much more open to accept assertions from fictional narrative, unless we are highly motivated to reject it based on our available knowledge. (Goldstein 2009)

Lastly, one more reason why non-fiction may have much weaker effects on our empathy than fiction is presented in the theory of psychic numbing. Slovic (2007) claims that the manner in which a message, for example about victims of some natural disaster or war, etc., is presented to us determines our capability to process the information given in the message and to feel sympathy for them. It is much easier for us to feel the sympathy for one individual specific person than for an entire group of people. We can imagine what it would be like to trade places with one individual, about whom we have some information than to imagine the same about thousands of nonspecific people, that is why using statistics (e.g. thousands of people every year etc.) is not effective if we want to evoke emotional response in the reader. That is why charities trying to raise money for some cause, for example hunger in Africa, will instead of talking about numbers, choose one individual that is suffering and present information about him, which proves more effective and people will donate more money that way. This is the reason why fictional narratives can influence us to a much stronger degree than stories in newspapers which present objective facts and statistics about a large group of people which are subject to the process of psychological numbing. Because the main aim of fiction is to bring out emotional response in people, rather than to present objective facts, the effect of fiction reading on empathy is more likely the effect of non-fiction reading. (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013)

2 FICTION CQ AND EMPATHY

As we have already established, there is a link between reading fictional narratives and increased empathy, because fiction is mainly focusing on emotions and social relationships between characters, which in turn makes the reader more aware of what others might be feeling in real life situations. Fictional narratives make us more invested and awake higher emotional response than non-fiction, the role of emotional transportation is also key, the more believable the story is to us, the more likely it is it will cause any changes in our behaviour and personality.

Until now, we have used the broad term fiction, without considering the differences between the many different genres of fiction. However, fiction is not all the same, all the fictional works in the world do not have the same attributes and are not written in the same way, there are significant changes between individual genres and even between the works of the same genre. Still, we can come up with some general characteristics that would apply to most stories in a given genre, and by those we can recognize which genre the story belongs to – romance, science fiction, fantasy, horror, mystery, thriller etc, when we categorize a work into its respective genre we already have some idea about what we can expect from it. Does this consequently mean, that some genres of fiction have greater potential in evoking emotional response and personal changes in the reader than others and that if we aim to improve our social skills or empathy, we should look for works of specific genre and avoid others?

The key reasons why fiction can increase our empathy and overall improve our social behaviour are that it describes and simulates similar emotional states and social situations as we can encounter in real life, so by reading, we are mentally practicing for them. It would be logical then, to assume that literary genres that focus more on emotions, psychology and social relationships of the characters would be the ones that would be the most beneficial to us, rather than the ones who focus more on the setting and the content. This brings to mind Romance fiction, which focuses almost solely on the social relationships and emotions of the characters and opposed to it Science fiction, which is generally more focused on technology and science rather than interpersonal relationships. Or we could assume that works of fiction which depict human relationships and psychology in more realistic manner, such as dramas with serious themes would be more beneficial than romance, which can be sometimes too idealistic to mimic real life experiences. On the other hand we could argue that the genre does not play a significant role in improving interpersonal sensitivity and it

only depends on the author's capability to depict the psychology and relationships of the characters in such a manner that it evokes strong emotional response in the reader, so it would be irrelevant whether the character lives on an alien planet or in a fantasy world, as long as their feelings and relationships are described in detail, so that the reader can relate to them and relive them with the character.

In their research, Fong, Mullin, and Mar (2013) examined the role of fiction genre in predicting interpersonal sensitivity, they found out that most fiction genres, but not all were associated with better interpersonal sensitivity skills and interpersonal empathy. In Science fiction and Fantasy, there were not any conclusive results of it positively influencing interpersonal sensitivity, but Domestic fiction, Romance and Suspense/Thriller all had some positive correlation with interpersonal sensitivity. The most promising results were with the genre of Romance, which predicted greater interpersonal sensitivity, that is perhaps not so surprising, considering that as we have established fictional narratives focusing more on emotional states and relationships promise better results in increasing empathy and improving social skills. However, there is not much research done on the topic of the role of genres relating to interpersonal sensitivity or empathy, so to truly say whether some genre causes more positive changes in these factors, the results of their research would have to be replicated and other factors that may play a role would have to be explored.

We have already established that books or stories which could increase one's empathy should be focused on people, their lives and experiences should be depicted in details, so that the reader could fully immerse himself into the narrative. It is natural for most of us to choose a story that we already feel we will be able to relate to on some level. Most of us like read about characters that are at least in part similar to us, because it makes it easier to understand the characters and like the story itself. If a book is solely about people who do things we do not understand, they live in a world that we find strange and their motivations seem questionable to us we probably will not feel the need to continue reading, this may be the sign of a low CQ. And if we never try to understand and always choose narratives that are comfortably familiar to us, our CQ will never increase. However, in case that we decide we do not want to get stuck in our comfortable bubble, that we want to broaden our horizons, to learn to understand people that are different than we are, reading about them is a great start. What kind of stories can help us increase our CQ? Arguably, they should have similar attributes as the stories to increase empathy, as we have already mentioned – good characters that we can learn to relate to, captivating story to make us interested and some deeper look

into the psychology of the characters, to make us understand their motives. On top of that, naturally, the story should be set in a different culture or cultures than is our own. The narrative should give us an opportunity to come to know details about the culture, traditions, religion, the mentality of the people, even what kind of weather there is or what do the people wear, all these things can give us a better idea about the culture so we can form an informative opinion, always remembering that literature of fiction is art, and therefore is always subjective to some extent, no matter how hard the author tries to stay objective.

2.1 THE HANDMAID'S TALE

Now I will present some fiction works that could help with increasing CQ and empathy. As it was mentioned, the genre of the fiction could have a role in increasing empathy, but we have also acknowledged that the results were not always conclusive and also that works within one genre can vary majorly. The first work of fiction I would like to mention is *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood first published in 1985. This novel is set in the fictional Republic of Gilead, formerly The United States that have been taken over by a fanatic religious organization that have dismantled the Constitution and established their own laws. These laws are mostly aimed against women and their freedom, as they are not allowed to read, have careers or even listen to music and the handmaids, as they call the fertile women must bear children for the commanders and their infertile wives. The book tells a story of one of the handmaids, Offred. The oppression of women and the obstruction of freedom are two main themes of this novel but it also mentions racism and homophobia – in Gilead homosexuals are executed or brought to the Colonies to work and only white handmaids were desirable.

The lights were turned down but not out. Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrolled; they had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts. No guns though, even they could not be trusted with guns. Guns were for the guards, specially picked from the Angels. The guards weren't allowed inside the building except when called, and we weren't allowed out, except for our walks, twice daily, two by two around the football field, which was enclosed now by a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire. The Angels stood outside it with their backs to us. They were objects of fear to us, but of something else as well. If only they would look. If only we could talk to them. Something could be exchanged, we thought, some deal made, some trade off, we still had our bodies. That was our fantasy. (Atwood, 1985/2017, p. 2)

Here we can see an example of how desperate the handmaids are, and what little freedom they have. They would be willing to give their bodies to the guards in exchange for a chance to escape, even though it could cost them their lives.

I try not to think too much. Like other things now, thought must be rationed. There's a lot that doesn't bear thinking about. Thinking can hurt your chances, and I intend to last. I know why there is no glass, in front of the watercolor picture of blue irises, and why the window opens only partly and why the glass in it is shatterproof. It isn't running away they're afraid of. We wouldn't get far. It's those other escapes, the ones you can open in yourself, given a cutting edge. (Atwood, 1985/2017, p. 4)

We can see that Offred is aware that she has no chance of escaping and she is trying not to think too much about her situation, because she fears that if she lets herself, she will sink too deep into desperation and give up. At the same time, we get the sense of how strong she is – she intends to last, she is determined to fight to keep herself alive. Later in the book, we discover that she was right about “those other escapes”, as Offred finds out the handmaid that was there before her committed suicide. Although the novel is from 1985 its relevance does not seem to decline, since the cultural issues Atwood explores in it like religious fundamentalism, feminism, consumerism or environmental decline are being intensely debated in recent years, for example in the USA there has been increasing effort recently to try and control women's bodies by banning abortion clinics in several states. The book's impact is so powerful because as the author has said:

The thing to remember is that there is nothing new about the society depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* except the time and place. All of the things I have written about have—as noted in the ‘Historical Notes’ at the end—been done before, more than once. (Jadwin, 2009)

She has also said that the inspiration for the story has risen from her interest in totalitarian regimes and their different forms in various countries in the world and her study of the American Puritans. The final decision to write the book came after she visited Afghanistan in 1978 and saw the rise of Muslim Fundamentalism there – the fact that no one spoke to her directly, only to her male partner, the absence of women in the streets. When she spoke about this experience to her friends their response was ‘It can't happen here’. After that Atwood has started to gather information about fundamentalist theocracies in the world as well as in the USA and she began documenting how governments take control over their citizens. In

some cases that included the control over women's bodies, in Romania dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's government banned birth control and abortion in an attempt to increase population. (Jadwin, 2009, pp. 22-25)

“Romania, for instance, had anticipated Gilead in the eighties by banning all forms of birth control, imposing compulsory pregnancy tests on the female population, and linking promotion and wage increases to fertility”. (Atwood, 1985/2017, p. 363)

At the same time China's “one child” policy was meant to bring opposite effect, its disturbing side effect being the decrease of female population, because girls were undesirable and their families often got rid of them after birth. All of these events have inspired *The Handmaid's Tale*, so although the Republic of Gilead is fictional, there are pieces of truth in everything that happens there.

The book offers us the key elements that should help to immerse oneself into the story and consequently increase empathy – a strong lead character that the reader can empathize with, and whose thoughts and personality we get to know in detail and although the novel is considered a science fiction, because of Atwood's extensive research which preceded its writing, it pulls the reader in and makes him believe that the events taking place within the story could possibly happen, because they already did at some point in history and might happen again. As the author stated in an interview with Lisa Allardice (2019): “For a long time, we were going away from Gilead and then we turned around and started going back towards Gilead”.

This can serve as a warning, because even though we have come a long way since the book was published, recently the problems addressed in the novel – sexism as well as racism and discrimination against the members of the LGBT have been resurfacing - the criticism of the MeToo movement or the before mentioned effort to ban abortions, very recently the protests in the USA following the death of George Floyd or the creation of “LGBT free” zones in Poland. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a great well written novel that will captivate the reader but also make them think about these issues and the Historical notes at the end provide an insight into which countries and events throughout history have inspired it.

2.2 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

The next work I would like to discuss in relation to CQ and empathy is *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, perhaps her most influential work. This novel is a classic and a “must read” when talking about British literature, it can be considered part of the Britain's

cultural legacy and although it was published in 1813 it can still serve to improve our CQ even today, more than two hundred years later. After reading the novel one will become quite well acquainted with the culture and the middle to upper class society of 19th century England and realizing how it differs or what it has in common with today's English culture may be helpful with increasing CQ. We get to examine the history of the culture and how it influenced it and what changes occurred throughout time and what remained the same, which may help us to better understand it. When we take a look at *Pride and Prejudice*, we may find some current cultural stereotypes in the characters, for example Mr. Darcy could be considered a stereotypical Englishman. He is proud, posh, doesn't appear to have any sense of humour and he seems quite cold and judgemental. His behaviour shows his disdain for those of lower social status. These are all very negative of course, but they are stereotypes which people had or in some cases still have about the English, especially those of high class. A more positive stereotype people have about the British is that they are extremely polite, to the point of not showing what they really think in order not to offend anyone. This stereotype is shown well throughout the novel, as good manners are extremely important and there are strict rules on how to behave, breaking them is considered very offensive. When Mr. Collins introduces himself to Mr. Darcy first, instead of waiting if he approaches him, he breaks of the society's rules, his behaviour is viewed as absurd and he makes a fool of himself:

'You are not going to introduce yourself to Mr. Darcy!'

'Indeed I am. I shall entreat his pardon for not having done it earlier. I believe him to be Lady Catherine's NEPHEW. It will be in my power to assure him that her ladyship was quite well yesterday se'nnight.'

Elizabeth tried hard to dissuade him from such a scheme, assuring him that Mr. Darcy would consider his addressing him without introduction as an impertinent freedom, rather than a compliment to his aunt; that it was not in the least necessary there should be any notice on either side; and that if it were, it must belong to Mr. Darcy, the superior in consequence, to begin the acquaintance. (Austen, 1813/2014, p. 122)

Similar example is Mrs. Bennet who ignores the decorum and loudly discusses the prospect of Jane's marriage to Mr. Bingley to anyone who will listen and talks rudely about Mr. Darcy not caring about who can hear her. Both of these characters are judged for their behaviour and are considered foolish. Another stereotype is that the British enjoy irony and dry

sarcastic humour, great illustration of this is Mr. Bennet, who often uses his dry wits to irritate his wife, as illustrated here:

‘Mr. Bennet, how CAN you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves.’

‘You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these last twenty years at least.’

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. (Austen, 1813/2014, p. 4)

Although stereotypes may not always be true, in some cases they can help to understand another culture better as they simplify the complex cultural issues and make them more comprehensible to outsiders, and they are reflected well throughout the novel. It may also be helpful to look at some differences between the British culture depicted in the novel and the current one. If we take into consideration the concept of high vs low context culture, Britain today is regarded as a low context one but the 19th century version we see in Austen’s novel has more attributes of a high context culture, for instance in communication. Livermore (2013) says that:

In a high-context culture, communication presumes an understanding of unwritten rules and a shared narrative that informs a person of what is going on. It is not necessarily assumed that people mean what they say and say what they mean. (p. 50)

This can be clearly observed and describes exactly the style of interactions taking place in the story, where as we mentioned there are clear and strict rules of behaviour that everyone is expected to know, even though they are never spoken. Another contrast is in the Power distance which is: “The degree to which members of a society are comfortable with inequality in power, influence, and wealth. Power distance is about the amount of hierarchy and inequality that is assumed to be appropriate and normal within a society”. (Livermore, 2013, p. 23)

Again, Britain today has a low power distance, but from the definition we can already tell that in *Pride and Prejudice* the power distance between people is quite high, there is a strict hierarchy that must be maintained and inequality in power, social status and wealth between individual classes is significant. The same is true about the difference between

genders, as women are subordinate to men and they are dependent on them, the only way a woman can assure herself economic stability is to marry a wealthy man, other options of making money are almost non-existent. Another example is within families, in high power distance culture, children must obey and respect their parents and other senior family members and even adult children should always listen to them regarding big life decisions. In the novel parents must always approve of a marriage and the suitor must ask the father for permission to marry his daughter.

Besides the benefits the book offers to the reader regarding cultural intelligence, it may also be useful when dealing with empathy. Even though the story was written over two centuries ago, it offers themes that are universal and relevant today, such as family, social status, love, marriage. Also, the characters in the novel are portrayed realistically, they all have flaws that we can see in ourselves and others, which makes it easier for the reader to feel for them. A somewhat phlegmatic father who enjoys teasing his wife is a familiar picture in many families and who in their life has never had to deal with someone as annoying and pretentious as Mr. Collins. Nowadays most people marry for love, so it is easy to empathize with Elizabeth for wanting to do the same. Overall, her character appeals to women today because of her strong will and intelligence, her courage to stand up for herself in a world ruled by men makes her a 19th century feminist. This is not surprising given that Jane Austen herself never married and instead of relying on a man she supported herself by selling her novels, therefore breaking the norm at the time. For this and writing such progressive female characters for the time period she is also considered a feminist. I think without this aspect the story would be much less appealing to modern women. As we mentioned one of the main themes of the novel is marriage and although much has changed over time, some expectations regarding relationships and weddings still prevail. Even today women are generally more passive in relationships, usually waiting for the man to make the first move. Similar with proposals, it is almost unheard of for a woman to propose to her male partner and when she does it is considered very strange. The pressure to marry and have children is also still familiar, especially to women and not wanting these things will often result in judgement from others. The fact that we can find so many similarities between the story and our modern society demonstrates why it's still popular today and why even modern writers keep revisiting the story, sometimes with quite unusual twists like in *Pride and prejudice and Zombies* – the title speaks for itself, or in *Death comes to Pemberley* where the characters

solve murder. The *Bridget Jones* book trilogy by Helen Fielding (as well as the movie adaptation of it) is also heavily inspired by *Pride and Prejudice*.

2.3 MISSING OUT

Next, I will be discussing the short story by Leila Aboulela *Missing Out* published in 2010, it follows the journey of Majdy, a young Sudanese student living and studying in London. At first, he seems unhappy there, calling his mother every day saying he is ready to give up his studies and return home, so his mother arranges him a marriage to Samra a girl he briefly knew in his childhood. They marry in Sudan and she returns to London with him. The main plot of the story is how differently these two characters adapt to their new life in England. Both of them are Muslims and the first conflict arises when Samra discovers Majdy has not been praying for the past year he lived in London. Over the course of the story we see how Majdy becomes more and more accustomed to the western style of living, the luxuries it offers but also the quick tempo and the stress that comes with it – he has no time for daily prayers, as he is too busy with his classes and studying, at the same time he also grows lazy, not wanting to track the changing times for praying. Gradually he gets further alienated from his culture, starts to view it backwards: “He wanted her to enjoy lively, civilized London. He wanted her to be grateful to him for rescuing her from the backwardness of Khartoum”. (Aboulela, 2010, para. 4) Majdy starts to feel at home in London and wants to stay there permanently, while Samra is desperate to convince him to move back to Khartoum after his studies have ended. She is the opposite of him when it comes to the acculturation, at first, she tries to get used to her new life, but after few months the excitement dies down and she longs for the familiarity of home. Majdy is annoyed by her constant reminiscing about Sudan and they start to slowly grow apart. When talking about life in Sudan, each of the characters sees it entirely differently – Majdy only remembers the negative, while Samra romanticizes it and refuses to acknowledge any flaws, as we can see here:

And in July, rain that made silver puddles. The sun disappearing for a day, the new smell of the earth. And there would be no work that day, no school. The cars stranded islands in the flooded streets.

‘Because there are no proper gutters,’ he would tell her. ‘No drainage system and all those potholes. Remember the stink of the stagnant water days later. Remember the mosquitoes that would descend, spreading disease.’

‘Silver puddles,’ she would say, ‘under a sky strange with blue clouds.’ (Aboulela, 2010, para. 4)

Towards the end of the story Samra becomes distant, she even seems depressed, spending all days just sitting in the kitchen and staring into nothing, so Majdy suggests she flies to Khartoum for a holiday and she gladly accepts. In the end it is unclear whether or not she will return from her holiday or if she stays.

The story, although brief offers an insight into how people, even when coming from the same culture, may react differently to moving into another country. The two characters are both extremes, each of a different side of the spectrum – on one hand, Majdy becomes so acculturated that he starts to almost despise his mother country, on the other hand Samra never gets used to her new life and rather returns back home. This is useful for expanding CQ, seeing how various the responses to moving into another culture can be and also the story gives us little windows into what is life like in Sudan, using the characters’ memories:

On the main road, the students were demonstrating against the proposed execution of an opposition-party leader...They never let the students get very far; they never let them reach the marketplace where they would swell in numbers and cause a riot...Down university Road until the first roundabout and then the tear gas would blind them, send them running back, tumbling through the dust and the fallen banners on the ground. (Aboulela, 2010, para. 2)

In one short story we get to know about the suppression of demonstrations, executions of political opponents, poverty, famine, frequent power shortages, all this can make it easy for the reader to agree with Majdy, to understand how he could turn his back on his culture and why he started to view it as backwards, less civilized than England. But to improve empathy, one should also try and see things from Samra’s perspective, try to imagine how hard it must be to move away with someone you barely know into new culture, far from friends and family and be expected to abandon everything you knew. If one imagines himself in such situation, it can be easier to understand her character better and not judge her inability to accustom to her new life.

Despite each of them being very different, all three works that we have discussed could serve to improve CQ and empathy, given the reader would properly immerse himself into the story and focus on the cultural connections as well as the characters and their struggles and try to understand them.

3 USING FICTION TO PROMOTE CQ AND EMPATHY IN THE CLASSROOM

So far, we have discussed the theory of empathy, CQ and their connection to literature and ways they can be improved through it. Now, we shall focus on the usefulness of fiction in classrooms, how it can be used to improve not only the students' language skills but also broaden their cultural and emotional horizons. We have already established that stories have bigger impact on CQ and empathy than a brief article or a textbook, because they engage our brain better, they support our imagination. That is why the importance of literature in language learning is crucial. When teaching a language, the teacher should focus not only on the linguistic properties but also on the culture of the country where the language is primarily spoken. This can get a bit difficult when talking about English, but here in the Czech Republic, primary schools generally teach British English. At our school, where I teach we follow the Oxford Standard, so the students should get familiar with British culture and also be aware that the language is spoken in many parts of the world.

In my (even though short) experience as an English teacher, there is not much space for culture in the English classes, the textbooks focusing primarily on grammar and vocabulary. I found that my pupils had problems with reading in English, the pronunciation being very difficult for them as they have not really practised it before and I was unpleasantly surprised by how little they knew about Britain, even such trivial things as the capitol city or that they do not have a president. I assumed there are some basic things about British culture everyone must know, but I realized that was not true in this case. In my lessons I have tried to incorporate some basic culture information like what kind of holidays are celebrated in the UK, what are the differences between our school system and their etc. We have also dedicated a few classes each month to reading stories, the students take turns reading out loud and after each part we discuss what we have read and if they understand it. Generally, they reacted mostly positively, taking it as a nice change every one in a while from the usual classes. So far, we have read fairy tales and stories that they were already familiar with in Czech, so it was easier for them to understand and I saw improvement in their pronunciation and vocabulary as well as they became overall more comfortable with the language.

3.1 USING STORIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Sandie Mourão has described thirty reasons to use stories in the classroom, divided them into five categories that I would like to address now. First category is socio-affective, the author argues that children have positive attitudes towards stories because they are used to

from home, reading fairy tales with parents is a familiar and pleasant experience and stories help to transfer this positive approach towards school, helping them to see it as a more friendly environment. Another advantage is that stories, and fairy tales especially, have predictable patterns, which the children are already acquainted with, this encourages participation and creates positive attitude towards the language, making them more motivated to learn. Stories also help children to understand the world around them better and provide for a topic to share with classmates, creating more opportunities for social experiences – they can laugh together, be happy or sad together. Stories encourage them to learn how to share their emotions, and discussing what they have just read can also teach them how to express their opinions and disagreements respectfully, this also helps to build confidence and encourages social and emotional development.

Second category is cognitive, where stories help link with other curriculum areas, which creates continuity in learning. They teach them to focus on the content, rather than the language, there is no need to understand every single word, but it is important to grasp the overall meaning of the text. Mourão also states that “Stories develop children’s learning strategies: listening for general meaning; predicting; guessing meaning; hypothesising.” and “Different types of intelligences that contribute to language learning, in particular emotional intelligence.” (p.18) Stories practice imagination and in the process encourage children to expand their creativity and also make them invested into the narrative. They can empathize with the characters and try to interpret their actions or motivations, predicting what is going to happen with them in the story. Reading stories also encourages higher level thinking skills, so they do not only memorize something but try to interpret it as well, explain their understanding of it.

Third category of reasons is linguistic, reading broadens the vocabulary and exercises pronunciation, by reading out loud and listening to others read, they can hear the mistakes and get a better idea of the rhythm and tone of the language. They also develop better concentration and practice listening with purpose. It can also help them put some words or phrases into context when they see which expressions they often collocate with, as otherwise in the textbooks children do not generally have access to longer pieces of text where they could encounter authentic language, usually they are meant to learn some phrases, but they do not know when it is appropriate to use them. Amongst other reasons the author also states that “Stories provide opportunities for integrating the four language skills, listening and reading, followed by speaking and writing.” (p. 18) By listening to stories written by others,

children get familiar with reoccurring patterns in stories, get a better idea of what the story should contain and it can help them when writing or telling their own stories. It is also stated that “If selected appropriately, the language in stories should be a little above the level of normal production/understanding, which allows for Krashen’s acquisition-based methodology (input +1 theory).” (p. 18) Stories also add much needed variety into the English lessons and can be helpful with connecting to currently discussed topics or grammar. For example, children can be practicing the use of tenses while reading, subconsciously absorbing when it is appropriate to use which tense, learning without even knowing about it.

The fourth category of reasons are cultural, where Mourão says that the stories often deal with universal themes, it can be love, friendship, family, good vs evil, which allow children to think more deeply about issues that they find important, this can also be useful for increasing empathy. Of course, every story mirrors the author’s cultural background, which presents great opportunity for addressing cultural differences and learning more about other cultures. Illustrations in picture books are also great for presenting cultural differences – how people look, dress, what the cities and nature look like. When the children are already familiar with the story in their native language, the English version can serve as a means to compare the two cultures, as there will be differences influenced by culture in each version. They can discuss what the two renditions have in common, where they differ and what could have caused it, how each culture interprets the themes of the story and how traditions of each country are reflected in it.

The last category is aesthetic, which mainly applies to picture books. They can help develop the visual literacy and promote appreciation of art, inspire children to make their own art, using different unique styles and techniques to spark their creativity. Picture books also provide opportunities for learning more about art, understanding it and finding hidden meanings in the artwork, which can even help guess the direction of the story. Mourão also states that using picture books “children develop skills in picture reading, decoding the visuals and not just the words”. (p. 19)

Overall, the importance of reading stories at school and especially while teaching languages should not be underestimated, as it has positive influence on the students and makes them more interested, it helps them develop a more positive attitude towards the process of learning. When used while teaching a second language it makes them learn faster and master new vocabulary without them having to forcefully shove it into their brains and

reading out loud is very useful if they are struggling with pronunciation as it makes them more confident and comfortable with speaking in foreign language so they will not be afraid to use it in their future life.

CONCLUSION

This thesis deals with the connection between reading fiction, CQ and empathy. It provides theoretical information about cultural intelligence and its key components and also presents some cultural dimensions, which are later discussed through the three works of fiction chosen. It also provides some background information about emotional intelligence and mainly empathy. Further, this work discusses the term fiction, defining some key elements a work of fiction should possess in order to potentially increase cultural intelligence and/or empathy of the reader, for example the topics, characters or genre most suited for this task. Emotional transportation was also presented as a key factor in improving empathy while reading, the reader must be immersed into the story enough, to be able to fully put himself into the shoes of the characters and their situation.

In the three works chosen for analysis these elements were identified and described, focusing on cultural background of the works, finding cultural phenomenon such as stereotypes or the differences between High and Low context cultures within them. Each of the three works – *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Missing Out* were carefully chosen in order to support the argument of the thesis, they were also chosen for their variety and the fact that they should be known by any potential readers of this thesis.

In the last part of this work, the focus was on the usefulness of story reading in the classroom, especially with younger students in primary schools, the benefits of story reading were described, supported by expert sources as well as personal experience. Nowadays we can often encounter the opinion that reading is a thing of the past and that younger generations will not be interested in books, their focus shifting entirely on modern technologies and away from more traditional ways of learning, but the arguments presented in the last chapter should be enough evidence that this should not happen. Even in this modern world, reading and literature still has its place and we should guide the students to read, but not force them to read something that does not interest them, which is why many children develop a negative relationship towards books that they carry throughout their lives.

When the teacher is able to choose suitable books and stories to present to his students, he can motivate them to read more in their free time and it does not matter whether they buy printed books or read e-books on a kindle, the important thing is that they get to experience the joy of reading and consequently learning from what they read, because as we have already established, stories can help them learn new languages better but also help them

understand other people and the world around them more, can make them more compassionate and empathic and let them discover different cultures.

Hopefully, this thesis presents enough evidence on the importance and usefulness of fiction whether it be in relation to CQ, empathy or overall learning and the arguments displayed throughout are sufficient to support the claim that reading fiction can increase our cultural intelligence as well as empathy when it is chosen correctly and read carefully.

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SUMMARY IN CZECH

Tato práce zkoumá spojení mezi čtením fikce a rozvojem kulturní inteligence a empatie, lépe řečeno, zda existuje nějaké spojení mezi čtením fikce a zvýšením kulturní inteligence a empatie u čtenáře. Práce je rozdělena na tři kapitoly, první kapitola nabízí teoretický přehled pojmů, kterými se budeme v pozdějších kapitolách zabývat. Vysvětluje, co je to vlastně kulturní inteligence a proč je dobré ji rozvíjet a jaké klíčové prvky obsahuje. Dále definujeme pojem empatie a jak je možno ji čtením rozvíjet, jaké podmínky musí kniha i čtenář splnit proto, aby mohlo dojít ke zvýšení empatie. Práce se také zabývá pojmem fikce a tím, jaké vlastnosti by měla kniha nebo příběh mít, aby byla vhodná pro rozvoj kulturní inteligence a také empatie.

V druhé části se nachází rozbor tří vybraných prací, pomocí kterého je demonstrováno jak tyto konkrétní knihy a povídka můžou posloužit při rozvoji kulturní inteligence a empatie. Tyto vybrané příběhy jsou *Příběh služebnice*, *Pýcha a předsudek* a krátká povídka *Missing Out*. Každá byla vybrána, jelikož dobře slouží k podpoře argumentů stanovených v předchozí kapitole a také protože se od sebe navzájem velice liší, ať už tématem, prostředím nebo stylem psaní a nabízí tak větší pestrost pro rozbor. U každé z těchto prací je ilustrováno, jak konkrétně mohou sloužit k rozvoji kulturní inteligence nebo empatie a pomocí úryvků z textu jsou demonstrovány kulturní prvky které se v nich vyskytují, stejně tak prvky podporující empatii.

Poslední část práce se zabývá problematikou využití fikce a příběhů při hodinách, zvláště pak při učení cizího jazyka a u mladších žáků, kterým čtení ve škole pomáhá vyvinout si k ní lepší vztah a pomáhá jim také lépe se učit nový jazyk.

Klíčová slova: kulturní inteligence, empatie, fikce, literatura, čtení