

## KAPITTEL 1

# Enacting democracy with refugee voices through a picturebook in English language teaching

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**Abstract:** Democratic citizenship is a focus in English language teaching in Norway. Fostering democratic citizenship involves critical skills and, according to Nussbaum (2006), literature is a suitable frame. Additionally, the ability to critically analyse pictures is essential in a visually salient world. This chapter, accordingly, explores how English language (EL) teachers can foster EL pupils' critical and democratic skills through engagement with an informational picturebook<sup>1</sup> about one of the most critical refugee situations on the globe. *Hear My Voice/Escucha mi Voz* (Binford & Bochenek, 2021) documents the situation of Latinx children and young adult refugees detained on the border between the US and Mexico. Through a critical content analysis, I demonstrate how the visual features and picture-text interaction of the picturebook serve to position the reader as a detached observer of events and/or an engaged participant respectively. I argue that the direct gaze in conjunction with other features may affect the reader's engagement and willingness to act, which I link to potential for democratic engagement. Secondly, I suggest activities which may promote democratic citizenship for EL pupils.

**Keywords:** English language teaching, non-fiction picturebooks, democracy and citizenship

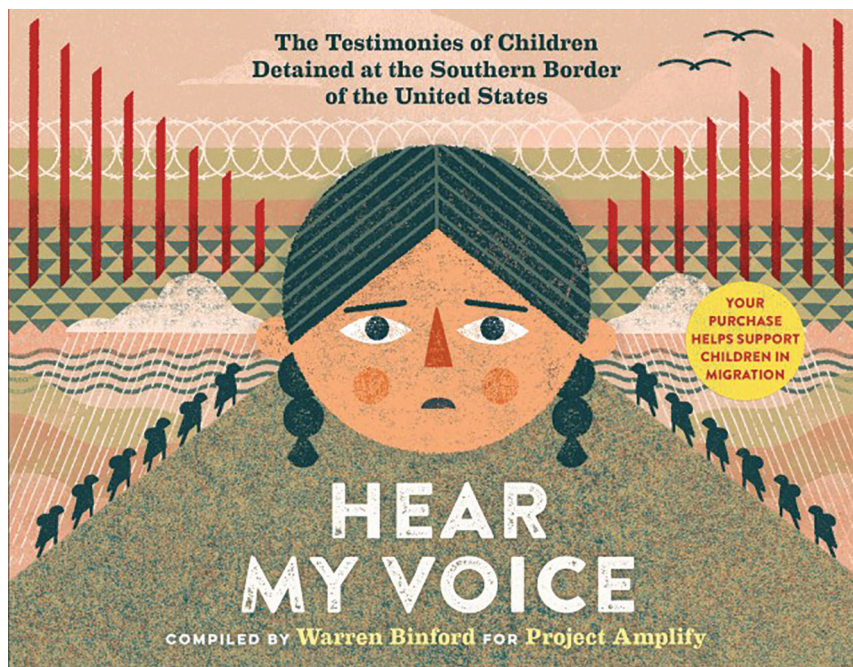
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1 According to conventions in picturebook research, picturebook is spelt in one word to underline the close connection between pictures and words (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006).

In a world where ‘human rights and democracy are “under siege”, with concurrent refugee flows (globalnews.ca, 2021), democratic citizenship is a vital part of education (Council of Europe, 2018). Understanding the world is also a part of language teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2011, p. 67), and a suitable frame for creating this understanding can be children’s literature (Nussbaum, 2006). Furthermore, the expanse of multimodal information about social, political and cultural events sparks the need for critical reading of pictures (Müller, 2008). On this background, I explore how English language (EL) teachers can foster EL pupils’ critical and democratic skills through engagement with an informational, non-fiction picturebook about one of the most urgent refugee situations on the globe (UNHCR, 2023).

*Hear My Voice/Escucha mi Voz* (Binford & Bochenek, 2021) is a bilingual picturebook in Spanish and English which documents the situation of Latinx children and young adult refugees detained on the border between the US and Mexico. The refugees made headlines when it became known globally that the Trump administration had routinely separated families and detained minors in cells under unsanitary conditions since 2017 (NRK, 2019). A team of inspectors led by international children’s advocate Warren Binford visited the Clint Detention Facility in Texas to oversee the human rights situation and interview the young refugees. Shocked by what they witnessed; they called on the public to help the children tell their stories. One of the results is this picturebook, composed of illustrations by seventeen picturebook illustrators alongside the words of the children themselves, rendered verbatim from their sworn testimonies. The book provides poignant and brutal glimpses into 61 young refugees’ experiences, fears and hopes. As 41% of all refugees globally are between the ages of 0 and 17 (UNHCR, 2022), it is particularly important to present the experiences of children. While it is a ‘children’s book’, it is, nevertheless, a book that warrants mediation by a ‘thoughtful adult’ (Binford & Bochenek, 2021, postscript).

Young people receive most of their news through multimodal media. Consequently, the ability to critically analyse pictures is essential to make sense of information (Heggernes, 2021). First, I analyse how the visual features of the picturebook serve to position the reader as a detached observer of events and/or an engaged participant (Johnson et al., 2019; Painter et al., 2013), which I link to potential for democratic engagement. Second, I suggest activities which may promote democratic citizenship for English



**Figure 1** Cover of *Hear My Voice* (Binford & Bochenek, 2021), illustration by Cecilia Ruiz. © Cecilia Ruiz, all rights reserved.

language (EL) pupils. According to the national curriculum in Norway, these pupils are to explore societies and diversity in the English-speaking world (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). As a book that provides insight into human rights issues relating to immigration to the world's largest English-speaking country, I argue that *Hear My Voice* can be used in English language teaching (ELT) to work on democratic citizenship. While my context is ELT in Norway, I believe the discussions are also relevant for other educational contexts.

## Democracy and critical thinking

There is no unanimous definition of democracy, but a shared trait of many definitions is viewing democracy as a form of government which ensures all citizens some basic rights (Biseth, 2014, p. 27). I will base my understanding of democracy on a fundamental respect for the value of human rights and human dignity (Benhabib, 2004; Nussbaum, 2016). Nussbaum (2016) holds that democratic citizens are able to 'think and choose well

about a wide range of issues of national and worldwide significance' (pp. 27–28). This ability requires critical thinking skills, which entail 'reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do' (Ennis, 2015, p. 32) and is linked to making good and wise choices (Bailin & Siegel, 2003). The situation of refugees is an example of an issue with both national and international repercussions and highlights what Benhabib (2004) refers to as the paradox of democracy: the commitment to human rights vs each democracy's right to create its own laws (p. 47). While negotiating this paradox, it is the role of education to develop democratic citizens, which Nussbaum (2016) links to equality and respect for human dignity. She affirms that language learning, art and literature, and critical thinking are crucial components of education for democratic citizenship (Nussbaum, 2006, pp. 388–391). Finally, education should encourage action to preserve and develop democracy (Council of Europe, 2018).

## **Democracy and citizenship in the curriculum**

Democracy and citizenship is one of three interdisciplinary topics in the national curriculum of Norway, LK20 (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). LK20 is influenced by the Council of Europe's *Competences for Democratic Culture* (2016). This document outlines the competences required for creating a democratic culture where citizens engage in the public sphere, express their opinions and listen to those of others. Some central 'democratic values, attitudes and practices' include the valuing of human rights, democracy, analytical and critical thinking skills, empathy, respect, and knowledge and critical understanding of the self, of language and communication, and of the world (Council of Europe, 2016, pp. 15, 35). Although these values, attitudes and practices are all essential to democratic citizenship, I will for analytic purposes focalise the valuing of and knowledge about human rights and democracy, in addition to analytical and critical thinking skills.

Primary and secondary education in Norway is mandated to promote democratic values through engagement in the interdisciplinary topic of democracy and citizenship. This is described in the English curriculum in Norway as involving an 'understanding of the cultural situatedness of our perceptions', with a focus on multi-perspectivity and the prevention of prejudice, and an aim to 'experience different societies and cultures by communication with others across the globe' (Ministry of Education

and Research, 2019). In the classroom, experiencing different cultures and communicating with others can occur through texts that broaden the pupils' perspectives (Arizpe et al., 2014; Heggernes, 2021). Furthermore, the English curriculum states that pupils should learn to read texts critically and engage with multimodal texts, including picturebooks (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019).

## Critical reading of challenging picturebooks

Critical reading involves careful reading of a text, demanding both an outside and inside perspective (Wallace, 2003). As Janks (2010) posits, no text, word or picture is neutral. Fairy tales for children, for example, often contain polarised images of good and evil, which is but one reason why education should develop pupils' analytical and critical thinking skills (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 35; Nussbaum, 2016). All texts serve a purpose, and critical reading may involve detecting unequal power relations in society (Vasquez et al., 2019). However, the aesthetic engagement with the text is equally important (Samoilow & Myren-Svelstad, 2020), which in this case involves an analysis of the visual features of the picturebook. *Hear My Voice/Escucha mi Voz* is a picturebook for children, and Nussbaum (2016, p. 36) affirms that the stories we learn in childhood affect our worldview as adults. As visual representations are never neutral (Johnson, 2019, p. 127), critical reading of pictures may reveal power imbalances and is also a democratic skill (Tørnby et al., 2023).

Challenges drive pupils' learning. According to Ommundsen, Haaland and Kümmerling-Meibauer (2022), challenging picturebooks provide cognitive, aesthetic and/or emotional challenges. The picture-text interaction leaves gaps for the readers to fill (Ommundsen et al., 2022), and through joint reflection on multiple perspectives on the picturebook, critical thinking may evolve (Bland, 2022; Heggernes, 2021). Accordingly, challenging picturebooks may be good starting points for fostering democratic citizenship, as this requires both perspectival and critical thinking (Council of Europe, 2016; Nussbaum, 2006). *Hear My Voice/Escucha mi Voz* (2021) proposes challenges through thematising human rights issues, such as the separation of refugee families on the border, the detainment of minors in unsanitary and overcrowded cells, and the lack of food and medical assistance. Seeing this treatment of children by adults may challenge EL

pupils emotionally. Further challenges for EL pupils may include making sense of the diversity of artistic styles represented in the picturebook and of the English language. Particular challenges for the EL teacher may be to move the reading beyond positioning the refugees as passive victims and highlighting opportunities for action. Consequently, this chapter explores the following research questions:

- How do the visual features of *Hear My Voice/Escucha mi Voz* (2021) serve to position the reader in ways which may impact the enactment of democratic citizenship?
- How can EL teachers foster pupils' democratic citizenship through critical engagement with the challenging picturebook *Hear My Voice/Escucha mi Voz* (2021)?

## Previous literature

Picturebooks on migration and refugees is a growing area in picturebook research (Arizpe, 2021). Studies both focalise the books' representation of the refugee experience and the positioning of the refugee and the reader (Jaques & Duckels, 2020; Tomsic & Deery, 2019), and consider how the books allow the readers to reflect on the political context and discourse on immigration (Dudek, 2018). Critical reflection on the context and on related teaching materials is required to avoid positioning refugees as 'the other' (Tomsic & Deery, 2019). However, challenging picturebooks can also provide a platform for pupils both with and without refugee backgrounds to engage and empathise with the situation of refugees (Arizpe et al., 2014; Evans, 2015; Hope, 2018; Lysaker & Sedberry, 2015). Reading Marsden and Ottley's (2008) *Home and Away*, which positions an Australian family as detained refugees, allowed 9-year-old pupils to both critically discuss the immigration debate in Britain and consider relevant human rights in Evans' study (2015). Marsden's book parallels the theme of *Hear My Voice*, and the study is but one indication of the potential of challenging picturebooks for pupils' critical engagement with issues of relevance for democracy.

Overviews of suitable picturebooks for learning about displacement are offered by Mayr (2023), who also includes *Hear My Voice* in her discussion of citizenship, intercultural and plurilingual learning, and McAdam et al. (2020). McAdam et al.'s (2020) critical content analysis of five picturebooks

advocates the need to facilitate opportunities for change, while acknowledging and resisting injustice. Detecting these opportunities allows the young readers to maintain hope in the encounter with challenging topics (McAdam et al., 2020). My study shares the concerns of the studies mentioned above in considering how pupils can critically engage with the discourse on immigration and human rights. However, while most of these studies focalise the themes and the verbal text, the focus on one single book allows for an in-depth study of how the visual features affect positioning, in addition to the picture-text interaction.

## Analytic framework

The analytic framework is inspired by Johnson et al.'s (2019) work on critical content analysis of visual images. This flexible research methodology is seen through the lens of the educator and developed for picturebooks. It includes consideration of the sociohistorical and cultural context of the picturebooks and of revealing inequities of power (Short, 2019, pp. 11–14). Central to my analysis are also the visual features, the picture-text interaction, the interaction between the characters and the potential for interaction between the reader and the text (Painter et al., 2013, p. 7).

Opportunities for active engagement are central to democratic citizenship (Council of Europe, 2018). Accordingly, I analyse how the narrative positions the reader: as outsiders observing the story from a distance or as participants who may actively engage with the situations presented (Johnson, 2019, pp. 112–113). The author/illustrator has a variety of means for positioning, for example, through different styles of illustration (Johnson et al., 2019; Painter et al., 2013). Painter et al. (2013, pp. 31–33) claim that the style of illustration, in conjoint with other features, may affect reader engagement. The minimalistic style has little detail and is often used for books providing social commentary and lessons to be learnt. An example is Robinson's illustrations in *Carmela Full of Wishes* (de la Peña & Robinson, 2018), with dots for eyes and a single line indicating eyebrows and mouths. The generic style is more detailed, for example, in Browne's (2005) *Into the Forest*. The style allows for more nuanced expression of emotions, such as more detailed facial expressions where the iris and wrinkles around the eyes are discernible. Painter et al. (2013) claim that picturebooks containing generic illustrations often invite the reader to empathise with the characters but may not necessarily engage a personal response. Frequently, serious

issues are thematised through the naturalistic style and characters are portrayed as individuals, as in *Grandpa* (Norman & Young, 1998). Painter et al (2013) argue that the naturalistic and most detailed style has the greatest potential for engaging and activating the reader in ways which may impact the enactment of democratic citizenship. This being said, in a picturebook, both pictures and words interact to convey meaning (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006). When considering the overall impact, design, words, and all visual features must be considered. For analytic purposes, however, I make a selection and focalise the gaze.

Looking at or away from somebody is an intentional action that affects interaction and, consequently, power and positioning (Painter et al., 2013). The characters can look directly at the reader (direct gaze), or in other directions, and sometimes their eyes are not visible (no gaze). According to Johnson (2019), the way the gaze is utilised may affect the reader's engagement and empathy, and spur action, all vital components of democratic citizenship (Council of Europe, 2016; Nussbaum, 2016). Clearly, many factors may influence reader engagement. While the context for reading is outside the scope of this chapter, I focus on the visual features that may influence the reader's perception of power balances, through positioning and voice, as revealing inequities in power balances is vital to the development of democratic citizenship (Janks & Vasquez, 2011; Luke, 2013; Tørnby et al., 2023).

Next, I present a discussion of how the gaze and the style of illustration of *Hear My Voice/Escucha mi Voz* (2021) may, at times, serve to position the reader as a distant observer and, at other times, as an engaged participant. On this basis, I consider in-text character interaction as well as interaction between the text and the reader. I discuss how these interactions are realised through the picture-text interaction and visual features, in particular the gaze, the use of colour and visual graduation (e.g. the exaggerated size of objects and angles (Painter, 2019; Painter et al., 2013)). Then, I address how EL teachers can foster democratic citizenship in ELT through critical engagement with human rights issues, power balances and positioning in the book.

## Analysis and discussion

*Hear My Voice/Escucha mi Voz* (2021) starts with an exposition where young refugees are presented, then proceeds to describe the background for their flight to the US, their journey, their present life at the detention centre and finally their hopes for the future. Consequently, I will briefly



describe some of the spreads (double pages) that preserve the chronology, while being illustrative of the major themes mentioned below and provide a variation in the use of visual features. Despite the difference in illustrators, the spreads address some shared themes: human rights, inequality of power, resilience, despair and hope. The illustrations challenge the viewers' emotions through a variety of visual features.

### **First and second spread: Name List (Cecilia Ruiz) and Introduction of Characters (Yuyi Morales)**

The first spread contains the heading 'My name is', followed by lists with initial letters and black 'stripes' of censored names. Then follows the text, 'I declare under penalty of perjury that the following is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and recollection.' The words can be attributed to the narrator of the refugees' stories. Another interpretation, however, is that the refugees are under oath to tell the truth 'under penalty of perjury', a clear indication of the skewed power relationship between the legal authorities and the refugees. The grey background leaves little hope.

Across the book, the gaze works in different ways, sometimes drawing the reader in and at other times creating a distance. Johnson notes that many picturebooks use the direct gaze at the beginning of the story to introduce the readers to the characters (Johnson, 2019, p. 129). It is noticeable, therefore, that the opening spread does not even contain illustrations of human beings, only a list of names. The erasure of the names serves to dehumanise the refugees. In the second spread (Figure 2), however, six children are depicted in the age range of six months to 17. Against the background of the diamonds of a fence, as in a prison, declarative sentences state the children's ages: 'I am five years old'. One of the children's eyes are closed, as if she's remembering something painful, but the others meet the readers' gaze directly and speak in the first-person voice, creating an 'equitable relationship of power' (Johnson, 2019, p. 129). The medium shot and direct angle position these young detainees at the same level as the reader. They are still nameless, but the picture-text interaction brings them close, empowers them, and invites the readers to become empathetic participants. Even if no accusations are verbalised, the statements of their young age and sad expressions can make a strong impact. It can lead readers to question how a democratic society, if any, can accept that children are routinely separated from their families and locked up in cells we later learn are overcrowded and unsanitary.



**Figure 2** Introduction of Characters, illustration by Yuyi Morales (Binford & Bochenek, 2021) © Binford & Bochenek, all rights reserved.

### Third spread: Birds in a Cage (Juan Palomino)

The third spread (Figure 3) shows the image of refugees as birds from across Latin-America. Noticeably, the birds resemble resident birds, like the Honduran Emerald, only found in its namesake country (Osborn, 2019), the Resplendent Quetzal, the national bird of Guatemala, and the Southern Yellow Grosbeak from Ecuador. This indicates that their migration is not by choice but rather by circumstance. The reader looks almost directly at the birds, behind which the big feet of a guard with boots are visible. While most birds seem lost in their own thoughts, one bird near the middle of the spread looks directly at the reader, reminding them of his existence and hence maintaining the participant positioning of the reader and the invitation to engage.



**Figure 3** Birds in a Cage, excerpt from illustration by Juan Palomino (Binford & Bochenek, 2021) © Binford and Bochenek, all rights reserved.

**Sixth spread: Separation of Families (Salomón Duarte Granados); Seventh spread: Overcrowding of Cells (Flavia Zorrilla Drago); Eighth spread: Verbal Abuse (Bayo Flores)**



**Figure 4** Separation of Families, illustration by Salomón Duarte Granados (Binford & Bochenek, 2021) © Binford and Bochenek, all rights reserved.

These consecutive spreads depict harsh and sometimes cruel circumstances, with characters looking down or away. The sixth spread (Figure 4) shows the forceful separation of family members from one another. At the centre, a girl is depicted up close, her eyes wide open in panic, tears running, while looking towards her sister. Her arms reach out towards her sister who is taken away and the hand of her father on the other side. The recto shows the same girl all alone on the floor of a cell, looking downcast and lit up by floodlights from above. The seventh spread shows the extreme overcrowding of cells, not even leaving ‘enough room for the baby to crawl’ (Binford & Bochenek, 2021, spread no. 7). All eyes are either downcast or looking towards other cellmates. No one is smiling in spread seven, and the despondent atmosphere is further underlined in the eighth spread (Figure 5). Children’s attempts to ‘complain about the conditions’ lead to insults from the guards. These quotes ‘hang in the air’ above the children. Most of the children, rendered in watercolour in a diffuse palette using pointillism, are hard to make out and gradually disappear into the shadows. Everything is blurred, which creates an image of a world that is falling apart where these children are made invisible. The only guard present is rendered as a stick figure, posing as an anonymous representative of the system. Despite his diminutive size, the positioning in the upper right-hand corner and the two objects on his waist, resembling guns, grant him power. Only five children are clearly visible, albeit with blurred edges. Two close their eyes,

two are crying, looking upwards, but one child who holds the hand of his little sister looks directly at the reader.



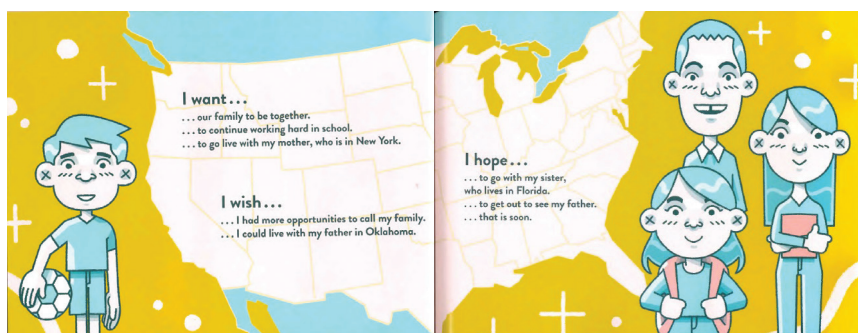
**Figure 5** Verbal Abuse, illustration by Bayo Flores (Binford & Bochenek, 2021)  
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The lack of a direct gaze may position the readers as observers. Johnson holds that as outsiders to the events, readers can gain valuable knowledge, but without being invited to act on that knowledge (2019, p. 127). While the reader may empathise, the refugees are objectivised and disempowered. The generic or minimalistic illustration style, with its lack of detail, further strengthens this effect. According to Johnson, generic illustrations invite readers to share the characters' experiences, but the lack of eye contact can preclude the potentially vicarious experience of the reader (2019, p. 119). The eighth spread (Figure 5) comes close to this description, with its minimalist depiction of children that nearly disappear into the shadows, mostly with no gaze. More naturalistic drawings can make the characters stand out as individuals and seem more real (Johnson, 2019, p. 116). Only a minority of the spreads contain a direct gaze, and all spreads utilise a minimalistic or generic illustration style, susceptible to distancing the reader. McCloud (1994, p. 39), however, posits that the more minimalistic the drawing of a face is, the more people it can represent. Following this argument, readers can place themselves in the shoes of the refugees and be positioned to engage. Furthermore, distancing can also allow time for reflection, which may be required before taking action, and in the eighth spread, the 'gaze [...] in the midst of the action is made use of, to draw the reader in' (Johnson, 2019, p. 129). This visually complex and disturbing spread contains a little boy's direct gaze. It draws the reader in to engage as a participant, rather than staying in the role of the observer. After this brief invitation to engage, the reader is again positioned to observe until the end of the book.

## Fourteenth spread: The Passing of Time (Beatriz Gutierrez Hernandez)

In spread 14, time is rendered visually, with the dark, sea-green colours of night contrasting with the warm, lighter colours of the rising sun. The verbal text accounts for the duration of the children's stay in detention: 'I have been here for twenty-one days.' The undulating lines, footprints and individuals in different positions indicate stillness and movement: sleeping, sitting, and walking. A boy in the centre is standing upright while facing the reader with a direct gaze. He is in the dark, but there is light on both sides. To the right, a seated girl gazes towards a window, where she can see birds flying across the fence, symbolising hope that she will also one day cross the fence. In the right corner, a girl is walking 'out' of the page into a new future.

## Final and sixteenth spread: Hopes for the Future (Dominique Arce)



**Figure 6** Hopes for the Future, illustration by Dominique Arce (Binford & Bochenek, 2021) © Binford and Bochenek, all rights reserved.

The final spread (Figure 6) is illustrated in a cartoonish and minimalistic style and shows smiling boys and girls looking directly at the reader. After several heart-rending pictures, the depiction of these smiling children rendered in vibrant colours provides a sense of hope, which is vital in children's literature (McAdam et al., 2020). On the background of a map of the US, the children voice their hopes for the future, such as living with their families and 'work[ing] hard in school' and that this will happen soon. Johnson holds that the direct gaze at the end of a book invites readers to engage with the overall message (Johnson, 2019, p. 129), and the intention is clearly expressed in Binford's postscript, namely to engage the

reader in action for a more socially just democracy (2021). The direct gaze of children may draw the reader in and counteract the potential distancing effect of the minimalist illustrations (Johnson, 2019). Considering the importance of representation though, the illustration does not hold up a mirror for a diverse group of readers, as it shows a group of pale-skinned children with similar facial features and sleek hair styles (Bishop, 1990; Gopalakrishnan, 2011). Is this an image of what children (dream to) look like in the promised land? Arguably, the spread depicted in Figure 6 holds up a mirror (Bishop, 1990) for the white, Western reader, rather than for the refugee child narrator.

Nevertheless, the book overall includes a diversity of appearances, much like the makeup of the populations in Latin America. The minimalistic rendering, the open, inviting looks and familiar objects, such as a school bag, a book and a football, make these characters recognisable to many young readers. The latter can serve to position readers as participants. Complemented by words that express universal wishes, such as being with family and getting an education, the spread in Figure 6 may help readers to see the world from the characters' perspective and empathise with the immigrants' feelings and hopes for the future. Arguably, the minimalistic style narrows the illustrations down to their essential meaning, voicing the hopes of the young refugees, fortifying meaning in a way not possible for realistic art (McCloud, 1994, p. 38).

It is important to note that no one visual feature positions the reader alone. The visual features and verbal text work in unison and in interaction with readers and their context. Accordingly, readers may respond differently to the same text. For analytic purposes, however, I single out a selection of features to consider the potential of texts to affect readers. *Hear My Voice* alternates between positioning the reader as a participant and an observer and draws the reader in through the use of the direct gaze at crucial points of the narrative: in the beginning, midway and at the end. The potential for engagement is strengthened through the verbal peritext (all information in the book outside of the narrative) (Genette, 1980), which provides background information about efforts to address the refugees' situation and concrete suggestions for how readers can address all children's right to be treated 'with respect and humanity' (Binford & Bochenek, 2021, spread no. 20). The following section will explore how critical engagement with *Hear My Voice/Escucha mi Voz* (2021) can foster democratic citizenship in the EL classroom.

## Pedagogic opportunities: Fostering democratic citizenship

*Hear My Voice* is an important, but also overwhelming book. How can EL teachers help their pupils to engage with the topic presented while maintaining the hope that action for change is possible? The importance of the latter is highlighted by McAdam et al. (2020), and a way forward is to focus on what we can do, rather than what we cannot do. Below, I suggest activities including critical analysis of positioning and power in *Hear My Voice/Escucha mi Voz*, along with the potential for increased knowledge of human rights issues and the enactment of democratic citizenship. Through adaptations, the activities can suit different age groups.

As a pre-reading activity, pupils can consider the setting of the book. This activity serves to contextualise the book, which is a part of critical content analysis (Short, 2019). With reference to the non-migratory birds in spread three, pupils can explore and discuss what causes people to migrate. Then they can seek knowledge about the situation at such detention facilities, because ‘people with knowledge can act’ (Johnson, 2019, p. 121). To gain an understanding of how democracy works, pupils can explore the causes for refugee streams and the lawfulness of the measures taken to address the situation. The peritext reveals that the conditions at the Clint Facility became known due to a system of inspections that are part of the US legal system and democracy.

After a shared reading, pupils can explore the picture-text interaction and the effect of the visual features on how the refugees and the reader are positioned. Consecutive group discussions, where differing views are both listened to respectfully and critically engaged with, can activate the pupils and facilitate agency (Johnson, 2019, p. 128; Vrikki et al., 2019). That is, discussion is an activity which can transform reading events from that of a unidirectional transferral of knowledge to moving pupils to take action (Johnson, 2019, p. 129).

Pupils can analyse how power balances are conveyed through character representation and visual features. For example, they may notice that the grey boots of the guard in the third spread (Figure 3) are disproportionately larger than the birds, a clear symbol of power. The striking colours of the birds, though, contrast with the bleak surroundings and may provide hope. Teachers can ask the pupils what the colours may represent. One interpretation is that the colours of the birds represent the refugees’ resources:

yellow is the colour of the sun and corn, symbolising life and nourishment. Sky-blue and green, withal, represent life and nature. Such interpretations highlight the refugees' agency.

Having discussed the power balances conveyed throughout the book, a follow-up question could be whether the refugees are positioned as agentic characters. The intention of this activity is not to conceal the blatant human rights' abuses the book reveals, but to show the refugees as individuals who take measures to amend their situation and use their voices to instil change. One way in which they have done so is through exercising their democratic right to testify about their experiences and allow their words to be printed. Several spreads show the children providing comfort to one another, the older children caring for the younger ones in the absence of adults, such as cuddling the little ones at night to keep them warm and giving away some of their food. Despite the heartrending circumstances, the young refugees' agency becomes apparent. They use their strength and courage to seek solutions. In the eighth spread (Figure 5), notwithstanding its apparent hopelessness, it is obvious that the children have used their voices to attempt to create change. As they have not been listened to, the direct gaze of one little boy at the readers can be interpreted as a challenge for them to take action. Meanwhile, the children are holding hands or hugging their soft toys. Having read and critically analysed the picturebook, the pupils can compare how newspaper reports and the picturebook communicate with the reader. What is depicted in the pictures and what information is provided by the words? How do different texts make the pupils feel? What do they think causes this response? When discussing the latter, one can consider the interaction between pictures and words and positioning. Are the refugees positioned as 'the other', as passive victims or human beings with agency?

Pupils can also consider how many human rights violations they find in the book. Already in the first spread with the censored list of names, there is an invitation to talk about democratic citizenship and human rights. In Norway, it is both a legal right and a duty to have a name (The Personal Names Act, 2021, Section 1, Section 2). Furthermore, it is a human right to be given fair and equal treatment, not to be detained without having committed a criminal offence and to seek 'asylum from persecution' (United Nations, 1948, Article 14). Did the children detained at the Clint Detention Facility in Texas enjoy the same rights as everyone else and were



they ‘act[ed] towards ... in a spirit of brotherhood’ (United Nations, 1948, Article 1)? Do their experiences count as ‘inhuman [and] degrading treatment’ (United Nations, 1948, Article 5)? Was the protection of the family upheld? Separating children from their families, as depicted in the sixth spread, is a violation of Article 16.3, which holds that ‘[t]he family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.’ The list, compiled by the pupils, could be made public, for example, in the form of an exhibition, a concrete action for change.

A final activity could be to seek knowledge about how one’s own country treats refugees and discuss whether refugee children’s human rights are protected. Norway, for example, has been found by the United Nation’s Human Rights Committee to have breached refugee children’s human rights by locking them up in prison-like conditions, a practice that has since been changed (Bjørlo Lærum, 2022). In 2023, however, suggestions have been made to increase the possibilities of interning children of foreign nationality (Tilsynsrådet for Trandum, 2023). Such activities can increase critical understanding of both one’s own and other contexts, a vital part of democratic citizenship (Council of Europe, 2018) and pupils’ knowledge of human rights issues.

These activities focalise what EL pupils can do to gain knowledge about human rights issues pertaining to democratic citizenship and the democratic paradox (Benhabib, 2004). Through a critical analysis of positioning and power (Short, 2019), they may potentially act on that knowledge. According to Freire, the combination of critique, hope and action can move us towards a more socially just world (Freire, 2014, p. 92). When working with human rights issues and young readers, it is imperative to show that there is a way forward, through engaging in action. Towards the end of the book, the refugees are to a greater extent positioned as agentic characters, who act to make the best of their circumstances and help one another. The final spreads reveal that despite the trials and tribulations, these young people have not lost hope of a better life. The bright colours, the direct gaze at the reader and verbal renderings of the children’s dreams provide a hopeful ending. These measures position the reader as a participant invited to act, an invitation which is repeated verbally through the suggestions of how ‘you and your family can help’ (Binford & Bochenek, 2021, spread no. 20).

## Conclusion

To address the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, I offer an analysis of what is depicted and the reader-text and character interaction in selected spreads. The analysis focuses on the picture-text interaction, the gaze and the style of illustration, to reveal whether the reader is positioned as a distant observer to the events or as a participant, prompted to act to protect and preserve democracy. I show that several spreads position the readers as observers through the lack of a direct gaze and minimalistic or generic illustrations. This may lead readers to empathise with the characters, but without a stimulus to act. Furthermore, the refugees can seem disempowered. Importantly, however, the use of the first-person voice throughout also gives agency and a voice to the refugees. These features help move the narrative beyond positioning the young refugees as 'the other' and as passive victims. The use of the direct gaze at decisive points, such as the beginning, the middle and the end, may also engage the reader as a participant, prompted to act for change. Additionally, the peritext encourages concrete actions to protect children's human rights and dignity. Providing a stimulus to act evidently does not equal action, but depends on many factors, such as the individual reader's response and maturity, the context in which the book is read and the teacher's facilitation.

When selecting texts for ELT, teachers need to conduct a critical analysis of both the content and positioning to reveal the affordances of the materials. Books that position readers as both participants and observers hold potential for fostering democratic and critical skills but may require different approaches. The teacher may foster EL pupils' democratic citizenship through a variety of suggested activities. These focalise knowledge and discussion of the political context and human rights' issues, along with critical analysis of the spreads. Analysing the treatment of refugees in the light of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* can increase the pupils' knowledge of democracy, but also the active engagement to uphold, protect and improve democracy is required. Critical perspectives on one's own country can promote greater insight and prevent superior attitudes to the discourse on immigration in other contexts. Learning about and speaking out against human rights violations can make a difference. Yet, there is a long way to go to give justice to the detained families and hence still a need for this book. I argue that interaction with the illustrations in this challenging picturebook can impact the reader, leading to critical

scrutiny, knowledge and the emergence of new perspectives. In this way, EL teachers can foster their pupils' critical and democratic skills and create spaces for working towards a more socially just world through a challenging picturebook.

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