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SHERMAN ALEXIE’S A DRUG CALLED TRADITION AND 13/16: ASSESSING A LITERARY TEXT’S POTENTIAL FOR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN STEREOTYPE

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Kathrin Insupp
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1 INTRODUCTION

I have decided to dedicate my thesis to four fields of study that are of major concern to me, namely literature didactics, intercultural learning, stereotypes, and Native American cultures. The main aims of my thesis are to provide worthwhile theoretical information on the respective areas and to offer practical examples on how to promote intercultural competence and stereotype-free thinking through literature in the EFL classroom. In my case, I opted for two literary texts (A Drug called Tradition and 13/16) of the Native American author Sherman Alexie, who is known for his honesty, straightforwardness, irony, and gallows humour. Accordingly, I regard his literary works as particularly suitable for my purpose of fostering intercultural competence among EFL students.

The first chapter concerns itself with typical reactions to intercultural encounters. It aims at making the readers of this thesis aware of the complexity of such encounters, why it is important to develop intercultural competence, and why stereotypical thinking has to be abolished when coming into contact with others.

The second chapter discusses the vast field of intercultural learning and offers theoretical information on how intercultural competence can be achieved in the EFL classroom. Since didactic goals have experienced constant change over the past decades, special attention is given to the current concepts of the intercultural speaker, the migrant as a model for intercultural foreign language learning, and the concept of adopting the insider perspective of a foreign culture. Furthermore, the chapter draws attention to dialogic cultural competence, which aims at fostering active learner participation instead of teacher-centred teaching.

The third chapter of my thesis is dedicated to literature and how it can support and influence the teaching of intercultural competence in a positive way. Special emphasis is given to the concept of aesthetic reading and the different models for structuring intercultural learning processes. These models – evocation and interpretation, developing a positive affective response, and developing cognitive competence and perspective-taking – are crucial elements of my thesis in as much as they provide the basis for my exemplary teaching unit.
The following chapter is focused on the role of stereotypes in intercultural learning and attempts to clarify how a so-called stereotype can be defined. It concentrates on three basic principles why stereotypes form and why they are maintained, even if their inaccuracy is proven. These principles imply that stereotypes have to answer certain human needs, such as reducing the world’s complexity, saving cognitive energy, or strengthening social identity through the formation of in- and out-groups. Furthermore, the fourth chapter elaborates on how to deal with stereotypes in the EFL classroom.

The fifth chapter concerns itself with Native American cultures and offers some history-based explanations why stereotyped images of Native American people are still found in Europe. Furthermore, I want to offer a brief summary of major historical events and some, more or less, promising economic developments on Native American reservations. In the context of this thesis I consider some basic historical background knowledge as a useful prerequisite that enables people to develop a realistic picture of Native American people, their past, and their present. Also, such background knowledge contributes to a better understanding of Sherman Alexie’s texts. Thus, I focus on seven major historical approaches to dealing with Native American cultures, ranging from early post-contact history up to the present. Finally, the chapter tries to offer an answer to the question of who is officially designated a Native American person in the United States of America.

The sixth, and last, chapter addresses itself to teaching Sherman Alexie’s short story *A Drug called Tradition* and poem *13/16* in the EFL classroom. First, the author himself will be introduced, followed by concrete text selection criteria and a brief analysis of the texts’ major issues. My main focus, however, is on the exemplary teaching unit that is based on the theoretical chapters of my thesis. Accordingly, the teaching unit’s major concern is to add a practical dimension to the formerly discussed concepts and to put theory into practice.
2 TYPICAL REACTIONS TO INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

Cultures differ from each other in many respects. These differences can cause problems in intercultural encounters if not paid attention to, no matter whether they are rather insignificant or huge. Fennes and Hapgood argue that every culture has different rules, norms, moral standards, patterns of thinking, behaviour, interaction patterns, and differences in terms of relationships and roles. These small culture-based variations may lead to misunderstandings people are simply not aware of. The problematic aspect is that behaving properly within one’s own culture does not necessarily mean that this behaviour is seen as polite and adequate in another cultural context. This ‘misbehaviour’ is often due to prevailing cultural differences which are not taken into consideration. To further illustrate this argument, let me give the following example: In Austria, it is regarded as polite to maintain eye-contact when talking to someone, whereas this behaviour is very likely to cause problems if practiced within other cultural areas. The equivalent situation in India, for instance, suggests avoiding any eye contact, especially if a man talks to a woman. Nevertheless, intercultural encounters can certainly offer possibilities for development, but only if the other is not seen as a threat. Instead, one has to be aware of the possibilities and positive aspects a foreign culture may offer. Fennes and Hapgood conclude that intercultural encounters can only be fruitful if the involved cultures perceive each other as equals without any predetermined hierarchy. (1997: 25-29)

Further, Fennes and Hapgood refer to Craig when elaborating on three typical reactions that are likely to take place in intercultural encounters, and which can be linked to particular types of people. They first mention the “encapsulator”, the most common way of behaviour. “Encapsulators” do not want to adapt at all. They try to escape, reject or fight the foreign culture. The consequence of these actions is that they try to stay with people of their own culture and minimise the contact with foreigners. Another way of reacting is to love the other culture instead of fighting it. “Absconders” therefore try to have as much contact as possible with its members and lifestyle. They do not want to stay within their own cultural community and would rather be assimilated into the
foreign culture. The third, and most successful, possibility is the concept of the “cosmopolitan”. “Cosmopolitans” stand between the two other possibilities, as they do not opt for one single culture, but try to show “optimism, empathy, curiosity, interest, [and] acceptance” in intercultural encounters. They want to live and have their roots in both cultures. Fennes and Hapgood draw the conclusion that “encapsulators” will not be able to survive in a foreign culture as they will separate themselves from it. “Absconders”, however, will become part of the other culture, as they are attracted by the exotic, whereas “cosmopolitans” will find a mixture of both cultures and will therefore be able to function properly in the two different systems. (ibid: 30)

The three possibilities mentioned above are most relevant to people who move, either permanently or for a limited amount of time, to a foreign country where they find different cultural backgrounds. However, intercultural encounters can also take place in one’s own country as every state tends to become more and more multicultural, for example the Chinese restaurant around the corner, the Turkish grocery store, or the British colleague. In all of these situations, different cultures have to interact with each other. Even at work it has become necessary to cooperate with people of different ethnic origins. As Roche points out, lacking cultural empathy in general cannot only lead to economic failure, laughter or bewilderment, but also to more severe consequences like for example political dissonances. (2001: 7)

Yet, in the context of this thesis it is far too easy to come up with three distinct categories. Such categorisation must be avoided, or at least called into question. People must be encouraged to go beyond any categorised and stereotypical limitations in order to see individuals instead of a uniform and faceless group. Sherman Alexie tackles this issue in his poem 13/16 where he says “still untouched on the shelves all the commodity cans without labels – my father opened them one by one, finding a story in each” (1992: 17). Here the commodity cans without labels represent people with Native American origins, people who are not perceived as interesting individuals, but as monotonous and categorised beings. Only the one who makes an effort and ‘opens’ one of ‘the cans’, meaning coming into unbiased contact with the other, is able to create a more differentiated picture of the respective person and thus, is successful in going beyond a stereotyped and categorised image.
Summing up the above mentioned concepts, it can be argued that intercultural encounters are highly dependent on both the prior knowledge of and the attitude towards other cultures. Empathy and tolerance can only emerge if one is aware of the differences between people without treating them as insurmountable barriers. In order to achieve a positive outcome, it is necessary to find a compromise which does not favour one culture, its beliefs and conventions, but which provides the chance to profit from a new and maybe mixed cultural identity. Showing empathy towards others is not only relevant to cultures we are in direct personal contact with, but also to cultures that seem, at first sight, to be irrelevant to people living in Europe, for example, Native American cultures. Yet, if closer attention is paid, Europe is overloaded with stereotypical pictures, television series, novels, and movies about these geographically far away civilisations and thus an intercultural encounter, even if primarily one-sided, does take place. Such one-sided, and therefore often biased, relations in particular demand great intercultural competence in order to be able to develop understanding and to succeed in abolishing stereotyped thinking. Yet, in order to eventually reach this ultimate goal of intercultural competence, intercultural learning has to take place first.
In a world where migration flows and the abolishment of borders are common, for example within the European Union, a country no longer represents a single culture anymore, but its inhabitants incorporate a whole set of cultures. Different people and ethnic groups, which may not have had any relations or contact so far, move together, thus forming a sort of multicultural melting pot.

However, the concept of multiculturalism is not only applicable to European states, but can also be related to Native American cultures where, before the arrival of the European, they lived in more or less isolated tribes and family clans. Only the adamant expansion politics of the European conquerors and settlers forced the Indigenous population to close ranks and live together on small pieces of land. This development may be seen as an inalterable historical fact, but still it is of current interest as Native American cultures are struggling to survive on a ‘white’ dominated continent. They no longer exclusively live on some insular reservation, but mix, alongside with other cultures, with the ‘white’ majority population – a development Sherman Alexie refers to in his work.

In the following I want to consider why intercultural competence, the desired result of intercultural learning, is crucial in connection with multiculturalism, cultural mixing and a peaceful coexistence of cultures. Moreover, intercultural learning and understanding plays a decisive role with respect to Sherman Alexie, since intercultural learning is one crucial aspect his work promotes:

To Alexie, culture is a dynamic balancing act between cultural change and preservation. With regard to the perception of cultural 'others' in general and Native Americans in particular, this [...] approach sensitizes students to the need for negotiating between their own internal and external cultural perspectives -- a self-reflection crucial to the process of intercultural learning.

(Fitz & Gross, 2010: www.theasa.net/journals/name/amerikastudien_american_studies/3329/)

Ideally, intercultural learning and competence eventually leads to a harmonious community where no pre-given hierarchy or skin colour determines the status and worth of a person.
Thus, I want to place great emphasis on the concept of intercultural learning, because it is relevant not only with reference to cultural mixing and multiculturalism, but also with regard to Sherman Alexie. Furthermore, I am concerned with how intercultural competence can be taught successfully in the EFL classroom.

3.1 Contexts relevant to intercultural learning

Fennes and Hapgood distinguish some contexts where intercultural learning is particularly relevant. First there is the possibility of having a migrant population within a country, which has to coexist with its native population. In this case intercultural learning is not always easy to develop, as the migrant population often belongs to the lower classes of society. This means no or unprofitable work, bad housing conditions, and a constant struggle to survive. Consequently, this underprivileged situation tends to intensify people’s fight for being accepted by the majority population. Intercultural learning therefore has to be mainly, but not exclusively, directed towards the offspring of the migrant population as these children have to grow up under the influence of two different cultures. One way of supporting intercultural and social learning in this context would be to raise these children bilingually as well as to motivate children belonging to the majority population to learn the migrants’ native language. (1997: 40-41)

Secondly, the authors argue that intercultural learning is pivotal in the case of cohabitation of a native minority with the rest of the country’s population. Intercultural learning, in this case, does not only involve the integration of the native culture(s), but also the recognition of a shared history, at least part of it, and beliefs, which are often not as different from each other as initially assumed. Intercultural learning implies that native cultures should have the opportunity to maintain their cultural identity. As one possible approach the authors suggest that the native population should have the right to learn and maintain their own language(s) through bilingual education. (ibid: 40-41)

Following this idea I want to refer to an article arguing that

[a]ccording to UNESCO [...] more than 2,400 languages are in danger of extinction and 192 of these are Native American Languages. Following European colonisation and governmental policies of the mid-19th century, the USA has already lost a third of its native languages, the Alaskan language of Eyak being the most recent when its [sic] last remaining speaker Marie Smith Jones died in 2008.

Thus, Fennes and Hapgood conclude that the right to preserve one’s native language(s) is the basis for the formation of a positive cultural identity. (1997: 41) In line with this the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasises the importance of languages and multilingualism with reference to identity:

Languages, with their complex implications for identity, communication, social integration, education and development, are of strategic importance for people and the planet. There is growing awareness that languages play a vital role in development, in ensuring cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, but also in attaining quality education for all and strengthening cooperation, [as well as] preserving cultural heritage [...] (2010: www.unesco.org/en/languages-and-multilingualism/)

Furthermore, Fennes and Hapgood underline that not only the majority population of a country has the power to influence the others, but also native minorities influence the majority population in several ways. (1997: 40-41) Native American cultures, for example, have certainly left their marks on the ‘white’ majority population, their attitudes and lifestyle as a lot of cities and villages still bear Native American names, sports teams are named after tribes, native shamanism is booming and so on.

Moreover, Fennes and Hapgood argue that intercultural learning is increasingly relevant as globalisation, mass tourism, and mobility have increased drastically. With countries being more closely linked and more easily accessible than some decades ago, their populations come into intimate contact, which calls for the need to be able to deal with a great diversity of cultural ethnicities as neighbours, colleagues, friends, and so on. This is, for instance, the case within the European Union, as borders are extensively abolished. Thus, intercultural learning “in Europe will require greater cultural self-awareness, the ability to empathize, an understanding of cultural differences and how they are reflected in values [and] norms [...]” in order to ensure a peaceful and equal coexistence. Furthermore, the process of globalisation entails a more intense relationship between developing countries and industrialised countries, which is not always undemanding as, due to the inequality of the partners, exploitation is still a daily occurrence. In this demanding cultural context intercultural learning is of greatest concern, since only when cultures of developing countries are seen as equal partners, despite their different values, lifestyles and cultural beliefs, existing hierarchies can be transformed into more egalitarian structures. (ibid: 40-42)
Following these ideas, it is apparent that intercultural encounters are inevitable. Consequently, intercultural learning is a sheer necessity and without empathy, tolerance, and openness the goal of respectful coexistence will not be achieved. With the main focus of this thesis on Native American cultures it has to be mentioned that especially the coexistence of native minorities with the majority population of a country often leads to massive social differences as, in this case, Native American cultures are still not dealt with as worthwhile partners. Particularly the government and its institutions perceive these cultures more as historical, and often inconvenient, burden. With the term ‘historical’ I mean that often Native American cultures are treated as already ‘extinct species’. On the one hand their histories are more or less adequately arranged in museums or used as tourist attractions, where there is no space for contemporary depictions of Native American people. On the other hand, the government is severely neglecting the fact that Native American cultures are still struggling to survive both physically and mentally, either in ‘white’ cities or on impoverished reservations where conditions [...] are tough. More than 80% unemployment. A desperate shortage of housing – on average, more than 15 people live in each home and others get by in cars and trailers. More than one-third of homes lacking running water or electricity. An infant mortality rate at three times the US national average.


This leads me to the conclusion that intercultural learning, and eventually intercultural competence, is the first step, followed by economic and political changes, to improve a native minority’s situation. Understanding and accepting a different culture, and thus allowing its members to develop a positive cultural identity, is the basis of achieving egalitarian structures within a society.

3.2 Intercultural competence as a major aim for intercultural learning and teaching

According to Volkmann, intercultural competence can be defined as the foreign language learners’ ability and skill to know about differences between their own and the target culture, to recognise these differences in concrete situations and to develop strategies in order to be able to respond empathically to the values and traditions of the other culture. (2002: 12) Intercultural competence, however, is not achieved within a few hours or days, but requires having a command of many distinct abilities in order to
be eventually reached. Referring to Seelye and Tomalin/Stempleski, for Volkmann these sub-goals are the following:

- to develop a consciousness that every human being is affected by different norms of behaviour and thinking
- to develop an understanding of how social factors like age, sex, social class, and surroundings affect humans
- to develop a greater consciousness in respect to traditional and conventional behaviour in the target culture
- to be sensitised to cultural connotations of vocabulary and expressions in the target language
- to develop the ability to judge and classify generalisations such as stereotypes, clichés, and prejudices of the target culture
- to develop sensitivity with respect to generalisations the target culture holds of concepts inherent to one's own culture
- to develop empathy and respect for the different patterns of behaviour and values in the target culture (ibid: 43)

In the context of language learning, this whole set of sub-goals constituting intercultural competence is a rather new ambition, which has replaced the concept of communicative competence that has been the goal until recently. In modern society, communicative competence is simply not sufficient anymore as it does not take into consideration intercultural encounters, in which speakers of different cultures meet and bring in their own cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it has to be substituted by intercultural competence, a concept that does consider intercultural differences. (Bredella in Bredella & Delanoy, 1999: 89) In respect to worldwide migration, education does not only have to make aware of supposedly irreconcilable differences between cultures, but it also has to teach how to deal with these differences and how to cross cultural boundaries. (Bredella & Delanoy, 1999: 22) Therefore EFL teachers bear the responsibility of transmitting the abilities listed above and sensitising language learners, so that they finally develop intercultural competence and contribute to a peaceful coexistence of cultures within a multicultural and global society.

Next to the goals mentioned by Volkmann, there are three other areas that have to be taken into consideration since the main goal has shifted from communicative
competence to intercultural competence. These changes and new insights contribute vividly to the ‘new’ style of handling cultural differences and do not only require different teaching methods, for example working with authentic\(^1\) texts instead of schoolbook texts, but also new ways of thinking.

### 3.2.1 Native speaker versus intercultural speaker

Bredella refers to Kramsch when arguing that the rather outdated concept of the native speaker as the ideal for intercultural learning has been replaced by the intercultural speaker as the new role model. With communicative competence as the goal of the EFL classroom, the native speaker still served as a model. However, there soon arose the critical question of who exactly is a native speaker – children, managers, or even high school dropouts? The difficulty with the term and concept of a native speaker is that there are always different social classes, age groups and so on within a culture and each of these has different ways of expressing themselves. In order to achieve communicative competence, for example, culture was seen as, and reduced to, certain norms, conventions, values, and beliefs. This outdated notion of culture implied that native speakers were able to react appropriately within their own culture, no matter which educational background they had or which social class they belonged to. (Bredella in Bredella & Delanoy, 1999: 90-91)

However, the new concept of the intercultural speaker does not stick to one single group or culture, but is capable of choosing the adequate form of behaviour, which a certain context demands. At this point it has to be emphasised that it is always the members of a culture and their actions that keep a culture alive as it only provides a frame for individual actions. To be able to act properly within a culture, creativity and reflexivity as well as the competence of observing prevailing values from a certain distance are needed. (ibid: 91-92) Following these ideas I want to refer to Byram who comes up with three interlinked core competences characterising the intercultural speaker:

1. linguistic competence
2. sociolinguistic competence
3. discourse competence

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\(^1\) In this context and throughout the whole thesis the term *authentic* refers to texts that are not particularly written or adapted for foreign language learners
Linguistic competence can be seen as “the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language”. In other words, linguistic competence does not include negotiation of unfamiliar concepts or knowledge about the cultural background of the other. It is strictly reduced “to the grammatical rules of a language”. (Byram in Bredella & Delanoy, 1999: 364-365)

The second competence includes social varieties as intercultural speakers are able to “discover and negotiate new and unfamiliar meanings” (ibid: 364-365). Following the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), sociolinguistic competence presupposes that intercultural speakers are able to “interpret the social meaning of the choice of linguistic varieties and to use language with the appropriate social meaning for the communication situation”. To illustrate this explanation I offer the following example: if greeting an unknown person formally in Austria, we would most probably use the term “Grüß Gott!” whereas the appropriate greeting when meeting a friend would be “Hallo!”, “Servus!”, or something similar. Thus, the concept of intercultural speakers implies that they are capable of using appropriate behaviour and language according to the respective communicative situation. (1998: www.sil.org/lingualinks/languagelearning/otherresources/gudlnsfralnggandcltlrlnneprrgrm/WhatIsSociolinguisticCompetence.htm)

The third characteristic, discourse competence, has to be split up into two distinct abilities. The first one, textual discourse competence, “refers to the ability to understand and construct monologues or written texts of different genres”. This means that intercultural speakers have to be able to adapt their writing and speaking so that the other can understand what is expressed. Further, they are supposed to be capable of “relat[ing] these different types of discourse in [...] a way that [...] is coherent to the readers and hearers”. (SIL, 1998: www.sil.org/lingualinks/languagelearning/otherresources/gudlnsfralnggandcltlrlnneprrgrm/whatisdiscoursecompetence/whatisdiscoursecompetencetext.htm)

The second ability inherent to discourse competence is known as interactional competence. Interactional competence is applied in various communication situations and “includes, among other things, knowing how to initiate and manage conversations and negotiate meaning with other people”. Furthermore, intercultural speakers know appropriate “sorts of body language, eye contact, and proximity to other people”. (SIL,
Following Byram, all of the three above mentioned competences are clearly intertwined and linked to a certain set of attitudes and skills, which a successful intercultural speaker needs. Such speakers must be curious, open towards a foreign culture, and have certain knowledge of “social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country”. This implies that intercultural speakers have to be aware of the effects the socialisation process has on different people, cultural groups, and on themselves. Additionally, the successful intercultural speaker has to be able to “identify ethnocentric perspectives [and] areas of misunderstanding”, the task being to serve as mediator should conflicts of interpretation arise. Two equally pivotal characteristics of intercultural speakers are the skills of discovery and interaction. Such speakers must be interested in, and open to, changes within the target culture and willing to “operate [this] knowledge”. This process of integrating new insights into their existing set of knowledge allows the intercultural speaker to develop an understanding of unfamiliar information and cultural beliefs. “Critical cultural awareness” and political awareness constitute the two last characteristics mentioned in relation to the concept of the intercultural speaker. “Critical cultural awareness” can be described as “an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries”. Great emphasis has to be placed on the fact that critical thinking has to be applied to both the other and one’s own culture. Byram concludes that without sufficient awareness and background knowledge, situations cannot be assessed and judged properly and therefore may lead to false interpretations or misunderstandings. (Byram in Bredella & Delanoy, 1999: 365-370)

In respect to intercultural learning, the ideal intercultural speaker should represent a link-person between cultures, functioning as a mediator, facilitating the encounter and communication as they “will notice how two people are misunderstanding each other because of their ethnocentrism, however linguistically competent they might be”. (ibid: 368)
3.2.2 Tourist versus migrant as models for intercultural foreign language learning

Bredella, referring to Byram and Esarte-Sarries, points out that after the Second World War, foreign language education changed its aims as more and more people had the opportunity to travel. Foreign language education was redesigned, as the former goal of bringing students into contact with great works of literature and art in the foreign culture was not the most relevant aim anymore. Ancient writers were replaced by the model of the tourist who matched the population’s current needs after the war. The new task foreign language education had to focus on was to prepare students for going abroad. Consequently, educational institutions concentrated on introducing touristic knowledge, for example asking for directions or booking a hotel room. Thus, communicative competence was the declared focus and basis of every foreign language class. However, even this approach had its drawbacks, as other important skills like writing, reading, or interpreting were neglected. Moreover, this future-orientated and one-sided language teaching left students unmotivated as it was simply not relevant to that time, but only at some future point. (Bredella in Bredella & Delanoy, 1999: 93-94)

Since the tourist as a model in foreign language learning did not work properly anymore and new demands and necessities evolved, it was substituted again. The concept of the migrant as a model was the suitable substitute as society was about to undertake a great change. It was not the tourist who went abroad exclusively anymore, but it was the worldwide wave of migration that demanded a reorientation within foreign language teaching and learning. Henceforth the needs of migrants have moved into the centre of attention. Even non-migrating people have benefitted from this approach as their own culture has become a home to migrants. (ibid: 94)

The current model of the migrant incorporates a great variety of linguistic and cultural knowledge and does not only focus on survival skills as did the concept of the tourist. As seen in the previous explanations, every era has its social needs which have to be met and supported by foreign language education. Thus, foreign language education has to be vivid and changing, instead of being static and rigid in order to be adequate.
3.2.3 Adopting the insider perspective of the target culture

A vital element in acquiring intercultural competence is that foreign cultures, their members, and their actions must not be judged by the background of one's own culture. Bredella points out that, in order to understand people with a different cultural background, perspective-taking has to occur. We have to perceive the world as they do, in other words: we have to adopt the insider perspective of the target culture. The concept of perspective-taking is applied when we try to understand how the other culture and its people see themselves and others. Special emphasis has to be placed on the understanding of areas that differ from culture to culture, for example, the view of justice, emancipation, or critical faculties. Consequently, perspective-taking plays a decisive role with respect to intercultural learning, as other cultures and their members can only be judged by ‘outsiders’, if they have successfully adopted the insider perspective of the target culture. Only then can the question of tolerance be posed, as tolerance does not mean accepting something in accordance with one’s native culture, but it means accepting and tolerating values and beliefs that are not congruent. (Bredella in Bredella & Delanoy, 1999: 104; 111)

No matter how crucial perspective-taking is, the outsider perspective, one’s own perspective, must play an equally important part in intercultural learning, as every one-sided point of view is incomplete. Bredella emphasises that adopting the insider perspective enriches one’s limited point of view and allows people to gain a certain distance from themselves and their beliefs, whereas the outsider perspective is important for reaching other goals of intercultural competence, namely tolerance, meta-communication, critical faculties, and understanding. These facilitate the critical reflection of norms, values, and beliefs. (ibid: 114)

Regarding Native American cultures the above mentioned theory implies that it is not possible to understand and accept their partly different beliefs, values, world-views, and religion(s) if one does not try to apply perspective-taking, but is limited to one’s own, often rigid and biased, perception. Without perspective-taking, for example, the meaning of important Native American ceremonies and concepts, such as the (formerly
outlawed) Sundance\(^2\) or the Medicine Wheel\(^3\), might not be fully understood and they may be exclusively judged by the background of one’s own cultural background. These two exemplary traditions constitute cultural differences, which may appear strange at first sight, and without perspective-taking and open-mindedness, their spiritual and traditional meaning is not to be grasped by foreigners.

Generally speaking, no foreign culture can be understood and perceived as equally important if no perspective-taking takes place and if there is a lack of empathy for the other.

### 3.3 'Teaching' intercultural competence in the EFL classroom

The EFL classroom certainly provides an excellent place to introduce the concept of intercultural competence and to make young adults familiar with its importance. It is not sufficient anymore to have a more or less peaceful coexistence of cultures, but prevailing ethnic barriers, frequently entailing personal distance and misunderstanding, have to be overcome. Fennes and Hapgood point out that intercultural learning, and thus the abolishment of cultural barriers, requires some basic skills such as the "overcoming [of] ethnocentrism", "the ability to empathize with other cultures [and] to communicate across cultural boundaries", and of course the development of "a means of cooperation across cultural boundaries and in multicultural societies". (1997: 44) The EFL classroom is a place where teenagers come into guided contact with a foreign language and are inevitably confronted with foreign ethnicities and their histories as the English language is spoken by dozens of cultures all over the world. Consequently, the teaching must not be limited to the topics and cultures presented in textbooks. Modern education has to include the raising of intercultural awareness and the formation of intercultural

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\(^2\) "The sundance is the predominant tribal ceremony of Great Plains Indians, although it is practiced by numerous tribes today as a prayer for life, world renewal and thanksgiving. [...] Indigenous people believe that unless the sun dance is performed each year, the earth will lose touch with the creative power of the universe, thereby losing its ability to regenerate.” (Native Americans Online, 2002: [www.native-americans-online.com/native-american-sun-dance.html](http://www.native-americans-online.com/native-american-sun-dance.html))

\(^3\) "The wheel is a [stone] circle divided by a cross to create four directions--the north, east, south, and west. A forerunner to astrology, each person is represented somewhere within that circle, depending upon their birth date.” (Native Americans Online, 2002: [www.native-americans-online.com/native-american-medicine-wheel.html](http://www.native-americans-online.com/native-american-medicine-wheel.html))
competence. Transmitting this competence is as important as traditional grammar or vocabulary teaching in foreign language education.

3.3.1 Didactic goals

The most essential prerequisite for teaching intercultural competence in the EFL classroom is a well trained teacher who is familiar with the concept and with its major didactic aims. In order to make these targets more tangible and concrete, Fennes and Hapgood come up with four crucial areas of learning objectives when teaching intercultural competence in schools:

- perception and images
- awareness [and] knowledge
- attitudes
- skills and patterns of behaviour (1997: 60)

These four areas, however, are not only vital within the European context itself, but also when it comes to crossing European borders, as intercultural thinking must not stop within a particular region or continent. (ibid: 60)

3.3.1.1 Perceptions and images

Following Fennes and Hapgood, every individual has their own perception of the world. This perception is often created through stereotyped images with which people are bombarded through the media and which are widely accepted in society. For example, in order to be beautiful and attractive, women have to be slim. The question, however, is what exactly lies behind such prevalent stereotypical ideas and how they can be deconstructed. First and foremost, stereotypes may be the result of the necessary categorisation process every individual has to apply in order to make sense of the world. Yet, if the formed categories become too rigid and are not open to modification, stereotyping of other cultures or certain people is likely to develop. (1997: 60-61) An example for such categorical thinking would be the assumption that Native Americans are ‘uncivilised people living in tepees and wearing feather bonnets’, which is by no means an accurate description or image of these ethnic groups.

Intercultural learning has to start at an early stage of development in order to prevent young adults from developing stereotypes and to make possible their deconstruction. The ultimate didactic goals linked to perception and images are, according to Fennes
and Hapgood, divided into several sub-goals, all of which add to a better understanding of oneself and the other. It seems particularly pivotal that at first a good “understanding of self-perception” and one’s own culture must be developed. Foreign values and viewpoints can only be properly understood and accepted, if there is an awareness of one's own, culturally biased, beliefs. Only if one gets rid of biased perceptions mutual understanding can be developed. This step is crucial for the development of intercultural competence as an “understanding [...] of other cultures” can only be reached under the condition that the familiar is understood. Additionally, one must become “conscious of [one’s] own stereotypes and prejudices” and of one’s stereotypes towards other groups of people. The fifth step is to overcome them and eventually recognise their superficiality and inaccuracy. However, the subsequent goal combines all other sub-goals reached so far, as it is not only vital to become aware of stereotypical ideas of oneself, but it is crucial to “recognize the influence of one’s perception of [the] own culture/self on perceptions of other cultures” and vice versa. That implies that one’s culture and its perception of the other influence the target culture, and the other way round. (ibid: 61-62) To exemplify this assertion the following example can be offered: One of the common European stereotypes of Native American cultures is that they live in tepees, wear traditional regalia - as seen on more or less arranged historical images - play their drums and sing ‘awkward’ songs. This perception, however, has a certain influence on these cultures as some individuals start to behave accordingly to prevailing stereotypes in order to earn money through ‘playing Indian’, and consequently strengthen their distorted image in front of tourists. In conclusion it can be said that this is a vicious circle that has to be broken. This can only be achieved through intercultural education, and becoming aware of the interaction between the aspects stated above.

3.3.1.2 Awareness and knowledge

After having achieved the first target of understanding different perceptions and images across cultures, Fennes and Hapgood suggest proceeding with becoming aware of one’s culture, and that it is in no way global or providing the only truth. (1997: 62)

It has to be emphasised in this context that the term ‘awareness’ “is a very Western notion and thereby cultural in itself” and that “[t]his trend of thinking [...] remains part of our cultural heritage”. This means that people with different cultural backgrounds “may have very different approaches to awareness”. (ibid: 62) However, we have to
distinguish between the terms ‘awareness’ and ‘knowledge’. Following Rose, “intercultural awareness is not really [...] a skill, but a collection of skills and attitudes”. A person can acquire a lot of general ‘knowledge’ about a culture, its traditions, and beliefs, like for example ‘The Roman Catholic Church is the predominant religion in Austria.’, but this does not guarantee that he/she possesses critical cultural awareness. That is why ‘knowledge’ and ‘awareness’ have to be distinguished, the latter being “not just a body of knowledge”, but it invites the learner to compare, observe, contrast, negotiate and interpret meaning. Further, ‘awareness’ implies that one is able to accept cultural differences and to acknowledge “the legitimacy of” the other’s point of view. (2003: www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles /intercultural-learning-1)

Fennes and Hapgood argue that both knowledge and awareness play a crucial part in achieving the ultimate didactic goal of intercultural competence, since they “provide the potential for change”. Particularly in an educational context where young adults are guided through intercultural learning processes and their more or less difficult phases, it is pivotal for them to become “aware that culture is not universal, [and] that others solve the problems of everyday existence in ways that are not wrong but different”. The crucial didactic goal is not only to focus on obvious areas of cultural differences or similarities such as art, food, or dress code, but equally on more subtle areas, such as cultural values and specific concepts like time, hierarchical structures, and body language. The difficulty in transmitting these rather intangible characteristics is clearly the often wrongly held assumption that one’s own familiar concepts are valid in every other culture. The fact is that people must be aware of how their own cultural background influences their thinking and behaviour and that there are many different ways of approaching one and the same problem, whereas no approach is wrong or inferior to the other. (1997: 62)

With respect to intercultural learning within the EFL classroom Fennes and Hapgood formulate four precise didactic goals:

- to know one’s own culture, including its values, lifestyles and patterns of behaviour;
- to know other cultures (represented in a multicultural classroom, in a bilateral exchange, exchange pupil present in class, country with which there is a school link);
- to know the influence of (cultural) values on behaviour;
- to know cultural differences as enriching [...]. (ibid: 62)
It is not sufficient to achieve a satisfactory understanding of another culture, but fundamental to this step is the understanding of one’s own cultural background and the possible influences of context on one’s behaviour. Additionally the teaching of intercultural differences as well as similarities should under no circumstances result in reinforcing the feeling of being different, but should eventually lead to perceiving potential differences as enriching and complementary features.

3.3.1.3 Attitudes

Closely linked to knowledge, perceptions, and awareness are attitudes, as they “determine how a person relates to people of another cultural background”. The crucial characteristic of attitudes in connection with teaching intercultural competence is that they are not fixed patterns, but can be modified, renewed, and changed. The “notion of cultural relativism” implies that, in order to develop and maintain successful intercultural contact, it must be clear to the learners that no culture is inferior or superior to the other, as only an equal status can provide the basis for intercultural learning. (Fennes & Hapgood, 1997: 63) In line with this, the major didactic aims concerning the learners’ attitudes are:

- to be aware of own/other attitudes;
- to accept and respect cultural differences;
- to value diversity;
- to be open towards the foreign;
- to be willing to deal with conflict. (ibid: 63)

3.3.1.4 Skills and patterns of behaviour

Eventually the three preceding areas of relevant didactic goals in this context lead to the formation of certain skills and patterns of behaviour. During the intercultural learning process at school students should be able to enlarge their intercultural skills and therefore adapt their behaviour to the formerly mentioned intercultural and didactic targets. The crucial skills that should be mastered in order to be successful in intercultural learning are the ability to communicate with others, especially if there is a different cultural background, and the ability to “function effectively in a foreign environment”. (Fennes & Hapgood, 1997: 63) An important fact that must be taken into consideration when using the term communication in this context is that it does not only refer to the verbal aspect, but in equal measure to non-verbal communication, as it is
likely to differ from one culture to the other. The rudimentary didactic objectives concerning skills and patterns of behaviour can be summed up as follows:

- to communicate with others using their ways of expression, both verbally and non-verbally;
- to think critically;
- to analyse own culture [...];
- to empathize, to have sensitivity to others;
- to tolerate ambiguity in self and others;
- to adapt to changing social/environmental factors;
- to listen actively to those from a different culture;
- to be able to give – and receive – feedback interculturally;
- to adapt behaviour in another cultural setting;
- to negotiate tension and conflict that is culturally based. (ibid: 63-64)

When introducing the concept of intercultural learning in a classroom it has to be clear that not every single goal will eventually be achieved, either due to a lack of time or the general class atmosphere and attitude. It is in the teacher’s responsibility to adapt the whole set of aims if necessary as too many different targets in too short a time may lead to confusion and consequently to possible ineffectiveness of the project. (ibid: 64)

3.3.2 How to achieve these didactic goals in the EFL classroom

Achieving certain didactic goals with a group of people is highly dependent on how they relate to these aims as “intercultural learning is personal and emotional as well as factual and useful”. If students cannot identify with specific learning objectives, their positive achievement is very unlikely. (Fennes & Hapgood, 1997: 64) In line with this, Roche emphasises that the achievement of intercultural competence is a tedious process with the final goal of mediating between different perspectives. (2001: 47)

The author suggests five basic steps in order to successfully achieve intercultural competence in the EFL classroom. As a first introduction to the theme, the foreign culture should be exclusively interpreted against the background of one’s own culture. This may cause a problem in classes with a mixed ethnic composition, as there is not one single culture serving as common background. Nevertheless, cultural diversity within a group does not hinder the development of intercultural learning, but it may demand greater sensitivity on the part of the teacher. The fact is that cultural diversity within a group entails a wide range of culture-based perspectives and interpretations, and it is the teacher’s task to acknowledge and welcome them. (ibid: 50)
During this first step of interpretation, some elements of the foreign culture are identified and can function as a basis for a common code no matter how limited it might be at this stage. The teacher’s responsibility during this phase is to highlight similarities without fostering stereotypical thinking. (ibid: 50)

The subsequent second phase includes borderline experiences implying guided contact with the foreign culture. Eventually, this guided contact, always in conjunction with a sensitive and cautious approach, should lead to an enhanced awareness of both the familiar and foreign cultures. This awareness can be achieved through reading, visual impulses, or through listening to relevant materials. The stage of providing ‘input’, however, should always be followed by a discussion, at best an intercultural one, where students have the opportunity to formulate their own questions. The teacher’s task is to provide some guiding assistance, if necessary. (ibid: 50)

If students have successfully achieved the didactic goal of the second phase (enhanced awareness), they are ready to pass into the third phase. During this phase, the teacher is concerned with fostering selective understanding, acceptance and tolerance of the foreign as well as the familiar among students. They are becoming more and more familiar with certain aspects of the target culture and are experiencing the relativity of single worldviews, including their own, through comparing them. Great emphasis has to be placed on the understanding of one's own culture in this phase, as this represents the basis of acceptance or even understanding of a foreign culture. (ibid: 50)

The fourth phase is similar to the third one, but its main goal is that students adopt selected worldviews in order to achieve some kind of familiarity of the foreign. In contrast to the third phase, students do not look at certain aspects in isolation, but develop a more profound understanding through analysing and discussing, as well as receiving explicit information and drawing detailed comparisons. This phase does not primarily focus on understanding one’s own culture anymore, but fosters the understanding of the foreign. Indeed, students are invited to adopt the insider perspectives of foreign cultures. (ibid: 50-51)

After having successfully run through the single phases, the fifth phase is ideally characterised by the integration of the foreign in form of bi- or multiculturality,
implying the skill of switching between different cultural codes more or less effortlessly. (ibid: 51-52)

Nevertheless, this ideal outcome is very scarce as intercultural learning should be considered as a lifelong process. In a global world where cultural mixing is a daily occurrence, educational institutions can only provide a ‘springboard’ for the development of intercultural competence. Following the idea of cultural mixing, I want to refer to Fennes and Hapgood who claim that intercultural learning includes “social learning; [...] political education; [and] antiracist education;” and is supposed to “support migrant children in developing their identity”. Cultural mixing entails the clash of different cultural perspectives and so achieving intercultural competence is not only relevant to the native population of a country, but also to its migrants as they are “travellers between the cultures”. (1997: 55-56) Thus, the authors conclude that

intercultural learning requires new approaches and initiatives in education that are aimed at integration, that acknowledge the right to be different and that consider the language, tradition, religion and culture of migrant children in the curriculum. [...] education cannot replace politics; it can only contribute to the intercultural competence of individuals. This competence is of great value for the peaceful development of democratic multicultural societies. (ibid: 57)

On a personal level the skill of intercultural competence entails manifold beneficial effects on one’s personality as it becomes enriched by new perspectives. Critical thinking and scepticism of stereotypical ideas result in a greater sensitivity to and understanding of foreign cultures, which in turn facilitates everyday life. Adopting different perspectives allows individuals to perceive themselves more objectively, being an essential prerequisite to empathise with others. Another personal gain worth mentioning is the skill to “value human diversity”. This allows peaceful contact between cultures and one is able to see differences as enrichment rather than as a separating border. Not only does intercultural competence allow peaceful contact between people, but it also provides the outstanding chance of living successfully in intercultural surroundings and of increasing one’s “knowledge of [a foreign] country and culture”. Moreover, intercultural competence equips a person with the vital skill of becoming aware of global structures and links where differences do not constitute the centre of attention, but are understood as part of human diversity which is perceived as an enriching source of development. (ibid: 57-59)
3.4 Developing dialogic cultural competence

In his article Delanoy links the concept of dialogic cultural competence to the one of intercultural competence as it fosters the crucial development of “a foundation for dialogue in manifold cultural contexts”. Delanoy bases his concept on the hermeneutic hypothesis that human understanding is always restricted, although a “positive acceptance of one’s limitations and constructive engagement with the other can be learned” and this eventually leads to partial abolishment of one’s limitations. In other words, no human being is capable of achieving “absolute knowledge” but finds themselves in a continuous learning process. Being eager to learn more about oneself and others is the basis of dialogic cultural competence as this pedagogical approach is designed to help students “to explore for themselves their embeddedness in culture and their potential for cultural change”. Delanoy does not only focus on intercultural learning when thinking of dialogic cultural competence, but also on intracultural learning as intracultural differences might turn out to be more essential than intercultural ones. Another point to consider is that the attempt to develop dialogic cultural competence in the EFL classroom requires the right of every individual to be approached with respect that “does not stop when the other cannot be comprehended or assimilated”. Great emphasis is placed on the belief that true respect is only shown when “people are given the right to be different, even if their difference is beyond my grasp or in opposition to my interests”. The consequence of this concept is that a “large dose of frustration tolerance to accept non- and misunderstanding or disagreement as a result of intra- and intercultural communication” is required. It is not only the other who has to be questioned continuously, but also the self needs to be evaluated and questioned, which is achieved through communication where different points of view have to be “expressed, compared and (re)shaped”. (Delanoy in Graf & James, 2007: 103-105)

Moreover, Delanoy points out that dialogic cultural competence, in reference to cultural learning objectives, can be divided into three dimensions, namely “an affective, a cognitive and a language-related dimension”. The affective dimension aims at achieving a “positive acceptance of the particularity of human viewpoints, curiosity to find out more about oneself and others, respect for cultural difference, and [...] tolerance towards unresolved conflict”. The cognitive dimension eventually leads to “an increasingly
differentiated understanding of oneself and others”, whereas the language-related
dimension is focussed on

exploring and practising dialogic forms of language use [implying] growing awareness of
problematic discourse forms [and] creative language use to continuously redefine existing
concepts in the interest of a less biased and more differentiated approach to the other. (ibid:
105)

The dialogic approach is first and foremost shaped by students who have to actively
participate in order to keep dialogue and communication alive. A difficulty that might
arise in concrete classroom situations is that students are too inhibited to communicate
freely in the foreign language. Teachers are demanded to help their students to
overcome possible uncertainties. Providing enough language practice beforehand, for
example, can counteract a breakdown of communication. (ibid: 106)

Delanoy argues that special emphasis has to be placed on the assumption that dialogue
is “an ideal construct” that may not be achieved in concrete classroom situations. The
attempt of teaching dialogic cultural competence involves specific dangers. One of these
dangers is that students may feel uncomfortable “since questioning oneself and facing
the other” requires a high level of frustration-tolerance and the ability to challenge one’s
own perspective. Also stereotypes and their unconscious reinforcement may pose a
severe danger to the development of dialogic cultural competence. In this case, students’
distorted pictures of a culture may be reinforced, instead of deconstructed. Such
negative developments are not only frustrating for teachers, but also for students, as
they do not experience a motivating sense of achievement. (ibid: 106)

In conclusion it seems that achieving dialogic cultural competence in the EFL classroom
is no easy task, as it is always dependent on the learners and their willingness to
participate. It must be seen as an ongoing process, including phases of success as well
as phases of personal frustration that have to be equally accepted.
In everyday life we encounter manifold written texts – newspapers, books, comics, and many more – on a daily basis, perceiving them as a literary source either consciously or unconsciously. It is a well-known fact that the process of reading involves becoming active and using one's cognitive, affective and imaginative skills in order to make accessible other people's thoughts and feelings. Through reading, people share experiences and get the opportunity to broaden their horizons regarding perspective-taking and mutual comprehension, as one's own knowledge is always limited. Literary texts are therefore particularly suitable to give an understanding of other ways of behaviour as they invite readers to interpret their meaning. Following Bredella, a crucial element for intercultural learning through literature is that experiences depicted in literary texts can be perceived with a certain emotional distance. This is possible because readers and their lives are not directly concerned. They empathise with the characters of a story, experience their love, pain or joy, but, according to Bredella, who quotes Nussbaum, “we do not find ourselves caught up in the ‘vulgar heat’ of our personal jealousies or angers”. This so-called aesthetic distance allows an approach to literary texts that is not possible when dealing with one’s own experiences as emotional involvement prevents an objective perspective. (2002: 46) To make this point clearer, let me offer the following example: Stephanie, a young girl, reads a story where the female protagonist is desperately in love with a boy. However, the boy mistreats her and even cheats on her. Through aesthetic distance, Stephanie is able to base her judgements on objective reasons, so she is very likely to think ‘Oh, why doesn’t she leave him?!’. In real life, however, Stephanie might be in a similar situation but, due to the lack of aesthetic distance and the involvement of personal feelings, she is not able to apply this objectivity to her own situation.

In fact, reading literary texts means entering a more or less foreign world, adopting different perspectives, and learning from other people's experiences, while perceiving cultural differences as challenging, but nevertheless enriching.

With the final aim being a progress in intercultural learning, Carter & Long emphasise that the EFL classroom should provide a place to acquire “knowledge of literature”
instead of “knowledge about literature”. “Knowledge about literature means accumulating facts about literary contexts, dates, authors, titles of texts, names of conventions, literary terms, etc.”, whereas “knowledge of literature” involves reading for pleasure and "active involvement in reading particular texts rather than […] a passive reception of information about the texts". Intercultural learning through literary texts can therefore only take place if EFL students are given the chance to become actively involved in the text, for example through activities and discussions, with the aim of eventually triggering a personal response. (1991: 4)

4.1 Reasons for teaching literature in the EFL classroom

There are several obvious reasons why literary texts are a crucial part of teaching a foreign language. Firstly, these texts provide motivating and authentic material since they are not explicitly directed at foreign language learners, but primarily written for members of the respective culture. This means that students can experience a great sense of achievement through reading, and understanding, authentic literary texts, which is generally not the case when working with simplified texts in schoolbooks. Moreover, contemporary texts, be they a short story, poem or novel, comprise complex themes, characters and some kind of suspense leading to a climax. These characteristics make it possible that students get involved in the story, adding to the feeling of doing and accomplishing a worthwhile activity. (Lazar, 1993: 15)

Secondly, a border-crossing experience can take place, since literature does not know any cultural boundaries and can function as a means of bringing together different cultures and views. Literary texts offer an insight into foreign cultures and have the unique possibility to invite reflection upon all kinds of cultural backgrounds through depicting characters of diverse cultural contexts. (Collie & Slater, 1987: 3-4) Nevertheless, Lazar argues that attention must be paid to the pitfalls of authentic literary texts. Students must be made aware of the fact that they are more or less fiction and must not be understood as representative of a whole society. (1993: 16) Thomas Builds-The-Fire and Junior Polatkin, two of the protagonists in Sherman Alexie's short story A Drug called Tradition, for example, lead the fictional lives of two individual persons, and it would be wrong to conclude that every Native American teenager is still attached
to oral tradition, takes drugs, and perceives events exactly the way they do. Despite this
danger Lazar emphasises that "exposing students to literature from other cultures is an
enriching and exciting way of increasing their awareness of different values, beliefs,
social structures and so on". (ibid: 62) Furthermore, Delanoy states that teaching
literature in the EFL classroom is conducive to the formation of “complex identities”
through providing a virtual environment where students “can experiment with their
ideas and emotions without having to commit themselves to the constraints experienced
in their primary worlds”. “Complex identities” are vital insofar, as they must not be
perceived as “fixed entities”, but can be modified and redefined if necessary. The goal
of the concept of “complex identity formation” is that “human beings [are able to] try to
understand themselves, each other and the world around them within a network of
environmental forces and influences” through taking into account several major
interlinked sources of influence, “such as language, family, profession, market-
orientation, class, race, gender, age, peer-group [...]”, which affect their thinking and
actions. (Delanoy in Bredella & Delanoy, 1996: 72-73)

In addition to the aspects of motivating authentic material, cultural enrichment and the
development of complex identities, the use of literary texts in the EFL classroom may
courage language acquisition as grammar, vocabulary, and stylistic devices are not
presented in isolation but come along with a gripping text. "The reading of literature
then becomes an important way of supplementing the inevitably restricted input of the
classroom" (Lazar, 1993: 17) and students are more or less consciously familiarising
themselves with new language items embedded in meaningful context. (Collie & Slater,
1987: 4-5)

A further point to consider is that reading literary texts in the classroom helps students
to develop their interpretative abilities since "literary texts are often rich in multiple
levels of meaning, and demand that the reader/learner is actively involved in 'teasing
out' the unstated implications and assumptions of the text". This implies that active
involvement and thinking is required as interpretations are not based on explicitly stated
facts, but on implicit evidence as every text has various layers. (Lazar, 1993: 19)

Finally, I want to emphasise that the process of reading and interpreting literary texts
educates the whole person. The abilities students acquire in class do not vanish outside
the educational context but "help to stimulate the imagination of […] students, to
develop [...] critical abilities and to increase [...] emotional awareness". These newly gained intercultural skills of expressing one’s opinions and ideas, of critically analysing written information and discussing it, can henceforth be applied when dealing with and acting within “their own society”, providing a means of personal enrichment and growth. (ibid: 19)

4.1.1 Different approaches to using literature in the EFL classroom

According to Lazar, three main approaches to teaching literary sources in the EFL classroom can be distinguished, each one leading towards a different educational aim. Nevertheless, the different approaches must not be seen as incompatible and separate islands, but they may be combined according to the students’ or teachers’ needs. (1993: 23)

4.1.1.1 The language-based approach

The language-based approach mainly concentrates on the lexical, stylistic and grammatical structures of a text, rather than on its content. The literary text is seen as a prompt for further language activities, like rewriting a dialogue in reported speech or adding adjectives to a text. They are designed to help students understand the underlying principles of the language. Concerning style, for example, separate stylistic features are examined, seen in context and eventually lead to a better understanding of how a text transmits meaning. In fact, the language-based approach concentrates on the interpretation of relations between linguistic features and the literary meanings of a text in order to make the usage of certain language elements more transparent. However, this model implies clear advantages as well as obvious disadvantages, since it may lead to very “mechanical and demotivating” activities, where a literary source is not appreciated as worthwhile and entertaining, but seen as sheer accumulation of grammatical structures. In addition, cultural knowledge, such as “historical, social or political” knowledge, may get too little attention and so the text is torn out of its natural context. Despite these considerable drawbacks, the language model helps students to improve their analytical skills through identifying and relating linguistic features to the text’s meaning. Moreover, theoretically learned grammatical structures and vocabulary
are now presented in a new context which certainly helps to revise and improve one’s knowledge of the language. (Lazar, 1993: 23-28)

4.1.1.2 The content-based approach

The second possible approach, the content-based approach, is the most traditional one of the three mentioned here. The main focus of this model does not lie on lexical features, but on the literature itself and its “social, political and historical background”. Students access these fields with the help of a literary text and see it in its original context. Additionally, the literary input is meant to serve as a basis for further discussion, where students are allowed to use their mother tongue. Obviously this is the model’s most crucial disadvantage. Further, the cultural model is criticised because of its teacher-centredness, leaving too little space for active student participation. The teacher, and not the students, mainly provides interpretation and information through paraphrasing and explaining the text. However, this approach incorporates the literary text’s context, as already pointed out, which is fundamental for the understanding of certain political, social, and historical references and phenomena mentioned, explicitly or implicitly, in the text. This additional knowledge facilitates the accessibility of literary texts, giving the students a positive feeling of understanding issues of cross-cultural relevance. (Lazar, 1993: 24-25)

4.1.1.3 Personal enrichment through literature

The third model uses literary sources as a basis for personal enrichment, since students are encouraged to become personally involved in the text. Personal experiences and opinions are not ignored or unwanted, but should function as links between themselves and the text, providing an intercultural learning experience. This student-centred approach is based on their active participation, which is likely to pose a slight problem as personal and emotional responses to certain topics might overstrain the learners. In order to forestall the danger of losing students’ participation, teachers must reflect very carefully on the single tasks. For example, working in pairs or small groups might be a solution to the problem, since learners feel less inhibited in small teams. A vital point for this model to be successful is text selection, as at least some points of identification have to be found so that students can become personally involved. In line with this, the text’s linguistic demands should be within the students’ abilities - with unclear parts
explained beforehand - since “linguistic intricacies” may severely inhibit a personal response. Despite the problems that might occur, this approach is “highly motivating” as it involves the whole person and therefore provides a constructive pedagogical basis for successful intercultural learning and personal development. (Lazar, 1993: 24-25; 42-43)

In conclusion it has to be emphasised that the best way to approach a literary text in the EFL classroom is to find the right combination of all the three models mentioned above, since each one provides a different focus. A literary text should neither be reduced to its linguistic features, as it provides much more worthwhile input, nor should it be reduced to its content. It is within the teacher’s responsibility to find the right mix in order to eventually reach the desired goal. Pertaining to intercultural learning, the third model (personal enrichment through literature), in combination with the content-based approach, provide a good basis to start, because knowledge about cultural differences and similarities, and personal involvement, are basic characteristics of successful intercultural learning. Therefore, it should clearly be kept in mind that text selection is crucial to the success or failure of the project, since an unsuitable text, being too difficult or too remote from the learners’ world, may prevent any intercultural learning.

4.1.2 General text selection criteria

When looking at a text in terms of its intercultural learning potential, it is pivotal to consider several text selection criteria, since the text must meet the students’ needs and abilities in order to be suitable for classroom use. Lazar comes up with six basic areas that should be taken into consideration in order to foster intercultural learning in the EFL classroom:

1. Students’ cultural background […]
2. Age of students […]
3. Intellectual maturity of students […]
4. Students’ emotional understanding […]
5. Students’ linguistic proficiency […]

First and foremost the students’ cultural background must be considered, because if the text is too remote from their own cultural knowledge, they may not be able to comprehend it properly and consequently they will not be able to access it. This does not mean that a text must not deal with cultural differences and different perspectives,
but before working with such a demanding text, enough background knowledge must be provided for the students. The advantage of introducing a new culture with the help of literary texts is obvious: learners generally tend to be curious about new things. Unknown information affects their motivation in a very positive sense, whereas reading about familiar topics may lead to reluctance. Not only should the students’ cultural background be considered, but also their age and intellectual maturity. It is no use selecting a text that does not meet the students’ age- and maturity-dependent interests, as immaturity, or the opposite, will eventually lead to frustration and hinder intercultural learning. Connected to age and intellectual maturity is also the students’ emotional understanding which must be developed to a certain extent, so they can empathise and apply the necessary skill of perspective-taking when reading a literary text. A further crucial element in selecting a suitable text is the learners’ linguistic proficiency, but, as logical as it seems to be, this aspect is rather complex. Students’ literacy skills, for example, may differ from their oral skills and consequently the teacher must try to find a text “suitable [and accessible] for the majority of students”. This means that the source text must not be too difficult in terms of linguistic devices such as “archaisms, rhetorical devices and metaphors” or too specialised vocabulary. However, it should not be too easy either, because, if students are too advanced, the text does not provide any challenge and eventually there will be no feeling of achievement. Besides the text’s linguistic appropriateness, also the students’ literary background plays an important role when selecting a text. Often, learners have not had a proper literary education in the English language, but, nevertheless, are familiar with different types of literary genres, characteristics and interpretation strategies because of literary education in their mother tongue. It is crucial to pay attention to the text’s literary challenges and the students’ background knowledge, in order to know where difficulties will be likely to occur and where students are going to need help in order to progress with their reading. (ibid: 52-54)

Next to these six basic text selection criteria, there are several other points that must not be neglected when opting for a text, particularly its availability, length and exploitability. If there is no possibility to access or buy a certain text for all students due to budget shortage or other restrictions, this poses a serious problem and makes the best text unsuitable for classroom use. The length of the text must also be considered, as
there might be, for instance, a prescribed time limit. Furthermore, students might feel overstressed by a lengthy text, eventually causing demotivation and aversion towards it. Often the exploitability of a text is not directly proportional to its length, but rather to its content. (ibid: 54-55) This is, for example, the case with Sherman Alexie’s short story *A Drug called Tradition* and his poem *13/16*.

### 4.2 The concept of aesthetic reading

Reading a literary text aesthetically is vital for the process of intercultural learning through literature, because, as Rosenblatt argues, it is the opposite of so-called “efferent reading”. When reading in an efferent way, the “attention is primarily focused on selecting out and analytically abstracting the information or ideas or directions for action that will remain when the reading is over”. Logically, this approach to a literary text is not very instrumental in achieving intercultural competence, since this requires an additional dimension, namely the reader’s affective involvement. The process of experiencing a text triggers all kinds of emotions, involvement, reactions, images and ideas and is thus referred to as aesthetic reading. It is worth noting that this transaction between the reader and a certain text is a “never-to-be-duplicated combination”, as each individual brings in different emotions, associations, memories, personality traits, and moods. It is a natural reaction to draw on “past linguistic and life experience, [to link] the signs on the page with certain words, certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, senses”. All these different aspects highly influence the meaning of a text and what it communicates to the reader. The concept of aesthetic reading is therefore never reached through a passive reading process, but only through the reader’s active participation. Consequently, the literary text offers the reader a satisfactory experience as well as an “emotional outlet” due to the opportunity to “participate in imaginary situations” where the reader is able to collect additional information and acquire new perceptions. Moreover, literature offers an “objective presentation of our own problems”, which enables the reader to look at familiar problems from a different, more objective, point of view. (1995: 30-40)

When applying the concept of aesthetic reading to the EFL classroom, teachers must ensure that students experience a worthwhile and positive “transaction” with the text.
Following Rosenblatt, such “transaction” must be understood as “a process in which the elements are aspects or phases of a total situation [where] meaning emerges as the reader carries on a give-and-take with the signs on the page”. It is wrong to think of the reading process as simple interaction with a text, where the text impresses “its meaning on the reader’s mind”. A certain text does not only offer one correct interpretation, but instead it triggers manifold interpretations, feelings, and reactions within a group of readers due to different expectations and hypotheses. Consequently, neither the text nor the reader in isolation develop a specified meaning, it is the “transactional” and “reciprocal” process between the two that eventually creates meaning. (ibid: 26-27)

Following Bredella referring to Rosenblatt, “aesthetic reading acknowledges the subjectivity of the reader, who is not merely registering and processing information but responding to what is evoked in the process of reading”. This type of approach to literary texts in the EFL classroom includes a “reflective element”, which allows the reader to get involved with the text while being able to maintain a safe distance. Reading aesthetically, which involves subjective experiences, also means that existing attitudes and values must be open to modification and change. It is natural that a text evokes different interpretations among a group of readers, as already stated in the above paragraph and teachers should not “convey to the students the correct interpretation [of a text], but […] enable them to develop their own interpretations”. (Bredella in Bredella & Delanoy, 1996: 2-5) Additionally, students must be encouraged to communicate their emotions during the reading process, as only then the concept of aesthetic reading will lead to intercultural learning. (ibid: 12)

Although literary texts provide worthwhile input in the context of intercultural education, teachers must pay attention to some areas that may lead the project into a negative direction. Often a literary text portrays foreign cultures and its people. Here, readers tend to perceive the given fictional text as accurate information on the respective culture, which consequently may lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes. A text should not exclusively be seen as mere fiction, but the students must become aware of the fact that a literary text presents a certain culture or ethnic group from a certain point of view that is designed to give them an insight into a foreign cultural system. This insight must always be perceived critically, since it is only one aspect of the respective culture and the reading is always influenced by the reader’s own cultural
background. Furthermore, an individual’s behaviour is not always “determined by his or her culture”, as people often do not agree with some values and beliefs of their own cultural background. Consequently, students must become sensitive to the fact that there is a difference between “collective and personal identity” and must not forget each person’s individuality. (ibid: 17)

The highlights of the concept of aesthetic reading are the students’ emotional involvement, the concept’s “reflective element”, the creation of “complex impressions”, as well as the promotion of intercultural understanding “because it encourages us to see the world from different perspectives”. (ibid: 18)

4.3 Models for structuring intercultural learning processes

In this section my focus is on three main models of structuring the intercultural learning process in the EFL classroom, starting out with evocation and interpretation, followed by the model of developing a positive affective response and the model of developing cognitive competence and perspective-taking.

4.3.1 Evocation and interpretation

With this model Delanoy suggests two distinct steps in approaching a literary text: evocation, experiencing the text, and interpretation. During the evocation process, students try to build up meanings and interact with the text. However, positive achievement of the evocation stage “demands an open focus”, implying that students are willing to learn more about others as well as about themselves. Evocation itself can be subdivided into “a cognitive [...] and an affective dimension”, and four consecutive stages. The cognitive dimension involves the development of “anticipatory frameworks, sensing, synthesizing, [and] reorganizing”, whereas the affective dimension includes feelings of “approval, disapproval, pleasure [or even] shock” among students. (Delanoy in Graf & James, 2007: 109)

According to Delanoy, following Benton & Fox, evocation is a process with four distinct stages, namely:
1. “feeling like reading” (the motivation to read a text)
2. “getting into the story” (gaining access to the text’s secondary world)
3. “lost in the book” (the reader is engrossed in the secondary world)
4. “sense of an ending” (the last phase of reading)

“Feeling like reading” prepares students to start the actual reading activity. Pre-reading exercises, for example, may activate prior knowledge or engage students in discussions of linguistic or cultural barriers. This initial phase mainly serves to arouse interest in the reader and to motivate students for the project. (2002: 69-71)

The next step, “getting into the text”, determines whether the reading process will be continued. Should severe problems in understanding arise during this reading stage, students may be reluctant to carry on with the text. In order to avoid a negative outcome, Delanoy suggests the strategies of either linking “getting into the text” to the prior phase of “feeling like reading”, or linking it to “lost in the text”. Creating a link between “feeling like reading” and “getting into the text” may help to make the text more accessible to students. To name only one possibility, such a link can be achieved through providing enough background knowledge that is embedded in pre-reading tasks, for example. Secondly, Delanoy mentions the possibility of linking “getting into the text” to “lost in the text”. For example, this can be achieved through dividing the text into several segments. Splitting up a long or too demanding text into manageable pieces facilitates the reading process and prevents students from getting lost as they are not confronted with too much unfamiliar information and/or language at once. Difficult sections can now be discussed and overcome more easily so that students are motivated due to mastering challenging parts instead of facing an indomitable barrier. Logically, the breaks in the text have to be set at places where students are likely to get lost. However, teachers must be attentive to student reactions during the reading process, so they can successfully identify areas of difficulty. (ibid: 71-72)

Eventually, students get “lost in the text”. They begin to leave their primary worlds, adopt an open focus, acknowledge literature as a source of gaining new insights, reflect upon their reading and start to live through the secondary world with intense emotions. Consequently, since students are emotionally involved, the last phase of “getting out of the text” must not be ignored. It is designed to help readers leave the secondary world
and the students’ attention is directed towards the results of the reading process, providing a bridge to the subsequent interpretation phase. (ibid: 72-75)

The four phases of the evocation stage should help to create “a positive first relationship with” the text. Having completed this initial phase successfully, students are ready to move on to the ensuing phase of interpretation. The interpretation phase is designed to build upon the students’ first positive relationships with the text, eventually leading to a further development of responses. Interpretation involves discussion and modification of the students’ findings. (Delanoy in Graf & James, 2007: 109-110) Delanoy, following Nissen, distinguishes four stages within the interpretation process:

1. reporting on the evocation process (collecting responses) [...]  
2. reviewing and revising findings in the light of interpretation stimuli such as peer responses, expert opinions or teacher questions (modification) [...]  
3. summing up the main results of the preceding interpretation phases (nucleation) [...]  
4. creating a bridge between this unit and the following learning task to ensure a continuing and incremental learning process (transfer) (ibid: 110)

These four stages ensure a high possibility of success since students are not left alone but communicate their feelings and findings to their peers and teacher. During modification in particular, the teacher can go back to crucial passages and initiate further attempts of interpretation and discussion, pertaining to a “more abstract and less obvious level of understanding”, for example, underlying cultural values. Nucleation involves the process of narrowing down the students’ findings and creating a summary of the class’ findings, eventually leading to the next stage of transfer and the beginning of a new learning task. (ibid: 110-111)

4.3.2 Developing a positive affective response

As the title indicates, the aim here is to develop a positive attitude towards the text and the other. Delanoy, referring to Seletzky, points out that this positive attitude can be reached through “the discovery of positive similarities and attractive differences”. Only after having discovered the positive bonds between one’s own and the foreign culture, more “problematic issues” should be dealt with. This model therefore suggests that students are only capable of addressing areas of unattractive difference and disagreement if “a feeling of togetherness and mutual trust” is established beforehand. Nevertheless, a crucial point to consider is that sometimes people face each other,
whose cultural backgrounds or ethnic origins have been the “source of serious conflict”. In this case it is unlikely for them to be able to bracket out the separating areas and to build up a relationship of mutual understanding and trust. Here, the model of developing a positive affective response seems to reach its limitations, as often the dividing differences in particular have to be addressed, so as to eventually reach mutual acceptance, tolerance, or even understanding. (Delanoy in Graf & James, 2007: 111-112)

4.3.3 Developing cognitive competence and perspective-taking

The third model is concerned with developing cognitive competence with reference to perspective-taking. Perspective-taking can be discussed on four different levels of complexity:

1. zero perspective-taking [...]  
2. understanding one aspect in isolation [...]  
3. further single aspects can be comprehended [...]  
4. understanding interrelationships [...]  
5. understanding basic assumptions [...] (Delanoy in Graf & James, 2007: 112-113)

Zero perspective-taking can be seen as no perspective-taking at all, as the foreign “cannot be grasped because of substantial emotional, cognitive and linguistic barriers” and therefore remains foreign. Only if at least one aspect can be understood, some kind of perspective-taking is achieved, which can then lead to the next stage of understanding further single aspects. Worth noting is that those aspects are only comprehended in isolation, hence their interrelations remain largely unclear. Understanding interrelationships and basic assumptions, the two highest levels of complexity, are the most challenging learning processes. If interrelationships are perceived and taken into account, “connections between individual aspects” can be made transparent and additionally “structural relationships can be grasped”. Furthermore, this involves the ability to distinguish between foreground and background information and the skill to rank several aspects “in order of importance”. If one eventually succeeds in applying “a high level of abstraction, i.e. central motives and convictions underlying the other’s perspective become comprehensible”, they have reached the highest level of complexity, namely understanding basic assumptions. This last stage demands of people
not only to understand the foreign perspective, but equally involves “growing awareness of the limitations of one’s own views [...]”. (ibid: 112-113)

Overall it can be concluded that the three models of structuring intercultural learning processes discussed above should not be looked at in isolation, but often “overlap and intersect in concrete teaching situations”. (ibid: 114) However, the most crucial aspect when talking about intercultural learning processes in combination with literature is that teachers are aware of the several stages that students have to go through and are able and willing to assist them if problems or stagnation in the reading process should arise. They should act as guides who do not impose their opinions and interpretations on students. Rather teachers are invited to encourage them to come to their own interpretations and assist them in discovering the worthwhile and enriching skill of exploring different perspectives.
5 THE ROLE OF STEREOTYPES IN INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

5.1 Defining stereotypes

The term stereotype is omnipresent in a multicultural world where people of different origins and cultural backgrounds mix and where modern technology connects people, states, and continents. Alongside these developments, the concept of ‘holding a stereotype’ or ‘stereotyping someone’ moves into the centre of attention. According to Leyens et al., the term has its origins in 1798 and originally consisted of two separate Greek works, namely stereos and típos, the first one meaning ‘rigid’ and the latter ‘trace’. (1994: 9) However, only in 1922 the term stereotype was used in its contemporary meaning. (Eisenmann, 2004: 42) Today’s definitions of the term stereotype and the verb stereotyping are multifarious. One definition, though, is presented by Leyens et al. and reads as follows:

they [stereotypes] are shared beliefs about person attributes, usually personality traits, but often also behaviours, of a group of people. [...] the process of stereotyping individuals is the process of applying a – stereotypical – judgement such as rendering these individuals interchangeable with other members of the category. (1994: 11)

Following the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, a stereotype is “a belief or idea of what a particular type of person or thing is like. Stereotypes are often unfair or untrue.” ‘To stereotype’ is defined as “to decide unfairly that a type of person has particular qualities or abilities because they belong to a particular race, sex, or social class.” (2003: 1627) A stereotype is therefore a belief, whereas the process of stereotyping is coming into play when those stereotyped beliefs are applied to certain people or groups.

The remarkable difference between the two offered definitions is that Leyens et al.’s definition refers to a group of people rather than to a particular person or thing as it is found in the Longman Dictionary. The dictionary definition additionally attributes a clear negative notion to the term, which is avoided by Leyens et al.’s definition only implying some kind of judgement, positive or negative. They argue that, in order to emphasise negative judgements, the term prejudice should be used, because, according
to their perspective, which is based on Abound, the term prejudice includes the “derogatory judgements and discriminatory predispositions towards certain ethnic groups”. (1994: 13) Stangor also claims that the term prejudice, in contrast to stereotype, additionally “involves a negative feeling or attitude”, for example disgust, anger or hatred, against a specific group of people. Therefore he concludes that even if we stereotype people, we do not necessarily have any prejudices against them. (2000: 8)

In conclusion, the purport of a stereotype can either be positive or negative and is based on partly correct and incorrect information. Although stereotypes generalise they are not necessarily and entirely bad, whereas prejudices are burdened with negative emotions and predilections. (Leyens et al., 1994: 15-16) Nevertheless, the basic ideas underlying the two concepts are very similar, hence I am going to use the term stereotype throughout this thesis, combining both positive and negative aspects.

5.2 The origins and formation of stereotypes

5.2.1 Social categorisation and stereotype formation

The most important process associated with stereotyping is categorisation. A category is “best used to describe a perception that two or more things are the same in some way, and different from other things” (McGarty in McGarty, Yzerbyt & Spears, 2002: 17). Stangor states that social categorisation takes place when people do not think of a person as an individual, but instead ignore this individuality by thinking “of the person as a member of a [certain] group of people [...]. [P]hysical characteristics (such as skin colour, gender, or age) or other types of categories”, such as illnesses, can be seen as group characteristics. Such categorisation processes are completely natural and are applied not only to people, but also to things like plants or radio programmes in order to spontaneously reduce the complexity of the world. (2000: 2)

Allport mentions five essential characteristics linked to the categorisation process, which firstly “forms large classes and clusters for guiding our daily adjustments”. According to this characteristic, people tend to place a certain event into an existing category in order to know how to react appropriately. Nevertheless, this first classification may lead to poor results as not every situation or event is foreseeable and
can be treated in the same way. Further, “categorization assimilates as much as it can to the cluster”, meaning that people generalise in everyday life to reduce complexity of new information. Moreover, “the category enables us quickly to identify a related object” and “saturates all that it contains with the same ideational and emotional flavour”. This aspect is important for coping smoothly with new situations and for perpetuating one’s perception of the world. The example given is that if a person sees a swaying car, they automatically think of a drunken driver and consequently adjust their reaction to it. The fourth important aspect to mention in connection with stereotype formation is that every category is loaded with a certain feeling, such as love or hate, which affects a person’s behaviour and reaction towards its members. The fifth and last characteristic of the categorisation process is that “categories may be more or less rational” implying that one must have a considerable amount of information of, and experience with, a certain group to be able to judge it rationally. (Allport in Stangor, 2000: 27-28)

Social categorisation, as Stangor points out, is the first step in interpersonal encounters in order to make sense of the new information. This initial classification most often is only a first reaction, which is then followed by a closer look, being dependent on the prospective goals of the relationship. Only if the other is interesting enough, or if one is dependent on that person, the initial categorisation is overcome and the other becomes individualised. (2000: 3)

Other reasons why people tend to think in categories are their informative character and the possibility to devalue foreigners while upgrading their own personality. To explain the meaning of ‘informative character’ let me provide the following example: People seeing a man in a white coat who is working in a hospital would put this person into the category of ‘doctor’, and therefore know that he/she can help in case of an accident or illness. Logically, this type of informative character is only relevant providing that the established categories and their features are accurate. Concerning the function of valuation it can be said that everybody wants to achieve a positive “social identity” and therefore upgrades the categories and groups they belong to. This is often connected to the unfavourable judgement of other groups, so-called “out-groups”, which helps a person to feel better or even superior to the other. (ibid: 4)
Leyens et al. state that “stereotypes are generalizations based on the membership to a category”. Category formation is therefore a way to receive some kind of information about an unknown person on the basis of generalisations. (1994: 17) In line with this Stangor points out that the better a stereotype is connected to a certain social category, for example ‘Policemen are trustworthy’, the quicker it gets activated and used. This is due to the fact that stereotypical ideas are “stored in memory in cognitive representations, frequently called prototypes or schemata that contain linkages between a social category and the traits associated with it”. So if an individual is placed within a social category, they are automatically attributed with the associated traits. (2000: 5-7)

5.2.2 Three guiding principles

In order to obtain a better knowledge of why exactly stereotypes are created and used in everyday life, three interconnected guiding principles should be taken into consideration.

5.2.2.1 Stereotypes reduce complexity

Firstly, stereotypes have the important function of reducing the world’s complexity. According to McGarty et al., the human brain cannot cope with too much new information at once. Hence its response is to sieve out important information and to be inattentive towards the rest. (2002: 3) Also Kindervater notices that these ‘pictures in our heads’ help to reduce the manifold impressions humans are exposed to in order to remain capable of making decisions. This is why stereotypes only give a possible picture of the world, which allows first orientation and decision-making processes. (2007: 19) Stangor adds that “just as stereotypes sometimes supplement an information-impoverished environment, at other times they may reduce the complexity of an information-rich environment”. This statement promotes another aspect of reducing complexity, namely the role of stereotypes to add information where it is missing, because too little knowledge about a group or person can also lead to confusion and disorientation. (2000: 74)

The reduction of complexity is therefore achieved through either the adding of stereotypical information where there is too little of it, or through ignoring certain bits of information where there is too much of it.
5.2.2.2 Stereotypes save energy

The second principle in regard to stereotypes is related to the first one of reducing the world’s complexity, because by reducing complexity humans also tend to save energy. As McGarty et al. put it, stereotypes “aid explanation by saving time and effort”. Furthermore, they argue that every individual is limited concerning the taking in of new information and so generalisations and categorisations make life easier and provide an energy-saving effect, achieved through the ignorance of individual characteristics and too definite information. (2002: 3-4)

The logical drawback of this attempt to save energy and to correspond to the brain’s limited capacities is that people often “adopt biased and erroneous perceptions of the world”, which may become intransigent and warped. Interestingly enough, even if stereotypes are known to be misleading or wrong, they are often maintained in order to keep the energy-saving aspect alive. (ibid: 4-5) In line with McGarty et al., Leyens et al. point out that the very nature of stereotypes is “to say it quickly, that is economically, in a nutshell, but at the same time they want to say as much as possible, as if the nutshell was Ali Baba’s cavern”. (1994: 31)

In summary it can be said that saving cognitive energy is not less important than the reduction of complexity and so this second principle, too, follows the intention of minimising the human effort put into understanding and explaining the often complex and confusing environment.

5.2.2.3 Stereotypes as shared group beliefs

One of the most important features of stereotypes is that they have to be shared by a whole group of people – otherwise they are not expressive and helpful enough to be maintained. According to McGarty et al., stereotypes relate different groups to each other and help their members to foresee and act according to the other’s behaviour. These shared group beliefs emerge because of “a shared cultural pool of knowledge” and because members of one group tend to “coordinate their behaviour”. This coordination of behaviour is crucial for a group to differentiate itself from other groups and thus to strengthen their own intergroup stability. (2002: 5-6)
Stereotypes can also be held about groups that are unknown to oneself. Native Americans, for example, are in no direct contact with Europeans and yet, stereotypical images about those cultures exist in Europe. Such preformed stereotypes, however, are often maintained even if direct contact with the other group is made. This fact can be partly explained by the role of the mass media in modern society, such as television programmes or the internet, which provide an indirect source of information. The problem in this case is that wrongly held stereotypes of certain groups may be used by political movements to provide justification for their actions, two examples being the genocide of Native Americans after colonisation and the genocide of Jews in World War II. (Stangor & Schaller in Stangor, 2000: 68, 75)

In fact, stereotypes need to be shared by many individuals in order to become effective and, in a certain sense, useful. However, every shared belief about a group of people means to universalise information, and thus disregards the individuality of its members.

5.2.3 The creation of in-group favouritism and out-group homogeneity

The creation of in- and out-groups is very closely linked to categorisation and the belief that stereotypes are shared group beliefs. This is, because a belief can only be shared by people if they see themselves as members of the same group. According to Allport, everyone belongs to several in-groups, which can be described as “any cluster of people who can use the term ‘we’ with the same significance”, for example, a family, the members of a sports team, or an ethnic group. The perception of belonging to a certain group starts forming at the early age of five, when a child becomes aware of its allegiances to and the differences between certain groups of people. The creation of in-groups is unavoidable and necessary for every individual as it provides “the basis of [...] existence” and helps to develop positive feelings towards oneself and one’s environment. (Allport in Stangor, 2000: 31-34)

The logical consequence of the existence of in-groups is the creation of out-groups, that is, groups that a person does not belong to. As Stangor mentions, belonging to an in-group helps to strengthen social identity, because individuals tend to prefer and upgrade their in-groups, whereas out-groups are seen as inferior, less favourable and are often
looked at in a stereotypical way. This process is therefore known as *in-group favouritism*. (2000: 4)

The opposite effect of *in-group favouritism* is known as *out-group homogeneity*, meaning that members of an out-group are not seen as individuals with different characteristics, but as very uniform, even if they are not. The example given is that men are more likely to overgeneralise the out-group ‘women’ and vice-versa, whereas women or men themselves see their own group members in a more sophisticated way. The phenomenon of *out-group homogeneity* is also due to the fact that people tend to have closer contact with members of their own group and thus simply do not have sufficient information about out-group members in order to individualise them. (ibid: 12) This opinion is also shared by Sanchez-Mazas et al. who claim that a person, characterised as a member of a certain group, is more likely to become the target of stereotypes than a person who is seen as an individual. This may eventually lead, on the one hand, to bias in favour of one’s in-groups, and on the other hand to a subsequent discrimination of one’s out-groups. (Sanchez-Mazas et. al in Mummendey & Simon, 1997: 149)

In order to avoid negative outcomes of inter-group contact, Leyens et al., referring to Cook, mention several rules to be followed if good relations between (opposing) groups should be established. These recommendations are of great value as unguided contact between different groups often leads to a clash instead of ensuring the formation of a positive relationship with the other. The first important step towards achieving a positive relationship is that the groups see each other as equals where neither of them is inferior or superior in any aspect. Additionally, it is crucial that existing stereotypes of the out-group are replaced with accurate information and thus members of the out-group should be seen “as an individual rather [than] as a person with stereotyped group characteristics”. (1994: 47) Regarding the potential problems of inter-group contact Sanchez-Mazas et al. argue that the discrimination of out-groups is not the only way of reacting, since the different group interests could also be seen as complementary and enriching instead of opposing and inferior. (Sanchez-Mazas et al. in Mummendey & Simon, 1997: 151)

This leads to the conclusion that categorising the environment, including humans, is a natural process and therefore generalisations are necessary to be able to find orientation
in a world full of new information. However, these overgeneralisations may lead to stereotyped beliefs about others who are not individualised anymore, but perceived as uniform members of a certain group. Thus, the contact between different groups may, in the worst case, lead to a confirmation of prevailing stereotypes, instead of creating understanding through individualisation and gaining new, accurate information about the foreign group. Nonetheless, this worst case scenario can be avoided if several recommendations, for example the principle of equality, are adhered to.

5.3 Stereotypes in the EFL classroom

Besides having knowledge about the origins and formation of stereotypes it is also pivotal to know how they can be dealt with and, if possible, deconstructed. One of the best and earliest opportunities to bring children into contact with the problem of stereotypes and their effects is through school-based education, particularly in the EFL classroom where a new language, and therefore a foreign culture, is introduced. Bredella and Delanoy argue that it would not be acceptable if foreign language learning left the question of how to deal with stereotypes, different cultural identities, and cultural topics in general unconsidered. The EFL classroom is supposed to provide information on different aspects, such as equality or individualisation, which have to be considered to eventually reach a positive and stereotype-free relationship with the other. However, working with and trying to deconstruct stereotypical ideas does not mean to make students feel bad, because they find out that their thinking, too, includes several misconceptions, but to raise awareness of stereotypical thinking as well as awareness of its two distinct functions. On the one hand very degrading and inciting stereotypes are found, whereas on the other hand there are stereotypes that fulfil epistemological and energy-saving functions, which can be seen as natural and even helpful. (1999: 14, 25)

The treatment of stereotypes in the EFL classroom may be difficult, as often their actual status is not clear. One reason for this ambiguity is that there are two different conceptions of stereotypes. One implies that they are mere fictions, which do not represent the reality they refer to, but only say something about the speaker using them. However, there is also the hypothesis of stereotypes containing a kernel of truth. It is therefore essential to get some distance to stereotypical ideas, so that a rather neutral
position can be taken. Additionally, it is absolutely necessary to make students aware of the two opposing functions of stereotypes mentioned in the previous paragraph, as it must be clear that the preference of one’s own group does not necessarily entail the downgrading of the foreign group(s). (Bredella in Bredella & Delanoy, 1999: 106 -107)

The universal goal in the EFL classroom is to understand and respect a foreign culture without stereotyping their individual members. Bredella argues that an important step in the process of developing an understanding of the other is to become clear about the probably different hetero- and auto-stereotypes, with a hetero-stereotype being the understanding of the other group or person and the auto-stereotype representing the ideas and opinions, which everyone has of oneself. At best, the differences between self-perception and the perception others have of an individual or group are minimised and eventually a shared viewpoint can be achieved. This, however, is not easily reached as in most cases a more or less demanding negotiation process is needed in order to come to a positive and stereotype-free perception of oneself and the other. (ibid: 108) In his poem 13/16 Sherman Alexie provides a good example of failed intercultural communication due to a prevailing stereotypical image of Native Americans. The poem’s protagonist tells us about an encounter with a white boy: “A ten-year-old white boy asked if I was a real Indian. He did not wait for an answer [...]” (1992: 16). For the white boy any further conversation is of no interest, as he has already established a category into which ‘real Indians’ fit, and, consequently, each Native American he encounters is assigned to a – supposedly – whole set of preconceived physical as well as psychological traits.

In line with Bredella, Eisenmann emphasises that dealing with stereotypes in an educational surrounding is a tightrope walk. According to her, some stereotypical ideas might even be learned or fostered unconsciously at school through, for example, inaccurate depictions of ethnic groups in schoolbooks. This is due to the fact that, for students, the textbook is often the only source of getting into contact with the foreign culture. Consequently, if the textbook is not able to address the whole issue of intercultural learning and stereotype formation in a sensitive way, prevailing distorted pictures may become intensified instead of deconstructed. (2004: 37) Henceforth, the whole problematic issue of categorising and stereotyping one’s environment must not be left aside in foreign language education. Students can only overcome potentially
misleading pictures through proper enlightenment and direct contact with authentic materials, such as for example literary sources or documentaries. Teachers have to provide useful, accompanying tasks in combination with some background information on why stereotypical ideas exist, how they work and what functions they have. As already discussed, some sort of categorical thinking is pivotal in everyday life, so the central challenge in the EFL classroom is to make students aware of stereotypical ideas they use and help them to develop some kind of sensitivity towards intercultural misconceptions.

To sum up, the main aims in the EFL classroom are to reach mutual understanding and to deconstruct prevailing stereotypes through illuminating their functions and raising intercultural sensitivity among students, as another culture can only be respected and understood if one’s view is not clouded by preconceived opinions and ideas. Particularly the EFL classroom provides a suitable platform to introduce manifold aspects of a foreign culture. Texts of authors like Sherman Alexie may help to deconstruct certain stereotypical ideas about Native American cultures through showing other aspects of modern Native American life-style. This helps, on the one hand, to individualise people instead of seeing them as one homogeneous group and, on the other hand, to reach a better awareness and understanding of potential differences. Furthermore, a literary text, in addition to the textbook, may lead to the discovery of similarities that would have stayed undetected, if thinking in preconceived categories had been maintained.
6 Native Americans: A Historical Perspective

The phenomenon of finding stereotyped and distorted perceptions of Native American cultures is based on several historical events, starting out with Columbus’ arrival in the New World. Wilma Mankiller, chief of the Cherokee Nation and Native American Rights activist, claims that the media in particular spread stereotypical ideas of these cultures:

[...] movies always seemed to show Indian women washing clothes at the creek and men with a tomahawk or spear in their hands, adorned with lots of feathers. That image has stayed in some people's minds. Many think we're either visionaries, 'noble savages,' squaw drudges or tragic alcoholics. We're very rarely depicted as real people who have greater tenacity in terms of trying to hang on to our culture and values system than most people. (Lewis: http://womenshistory.about.com/od/quotes/a/wilma_mankiller.htm)

Referring to this quotation it can be argued that the ‘white’ majority considers neither the current situation of Native American cultures nor the individuality of their members. Above all else, their stereotypical outward appearance is omnipresent in Europe, reinforced by movies such as Disney’s famous Pocahontas or Columbia Pictures Company’s The Indian in the Cupboard.

In the following subchapters I will focus on history-based explanations for prevailing stereotypical images in Europe, contemporary conceptions of Native Americans in Europe, major events in recent Native American history, historical approaches to Native American cultures, and their contemporary situation in the United States of America.

6.1 History-based explanations for a stereotyped image of Native American cultures

According to Dagmar Wernitznig, Europeans started to show great interest in American Indian cultures in the 19th century, as this is the point in history where “[i]ndianness [...] commenced to signify a vanishing entity with a highly nostalgic and sentimental value”. People became aware of the fact that they had almost destroyed Native American cultures and that the Frontier era had eventually come to an end. So, as human nature wants it, Europeans tried to retrieve the lost idea of the American Old West with its myths. Not only Buffalo Bill and his Wild West Show met this sentiment, but also
writers from that period, such as Karl May and James Fennimore Cooper, dedicated their works to ‘the vanishing race’. (2007: 26) Karl May, for example, had neither seen the places described in his books, nor had he any personal experience with regard to Native American cultures. Yet, authors like him created and spread a mythical world full of Indians, cowboys, adventures, and breathtaking sceneries. Their works propagated a stereotyped conception of Native American people throughout Europe. In line with this, Vickers argues that “[t]he images that have been projected onto American Indians from the “outside” fall into two distinct categories: one “positive” (that of the Noble Savage) and one “negative” (that of the Ignoble Savage)” (1998: 4).

6.1.1 The dual conception of Native American people

Following Dagmar Wernitznig, the dichotomy of the Native American image (the noble versus the ignoble ‘savage’) had its birth soon after the Virginia Company had shipped Pocahontas (not the movie princess, but the historical figure) to England in 1616. Besides Pocahontas and her family, a certain Tomocomo, a medicine man, was sent to England as well. Powhatan, Pocahontas’ father, had instructed Tomocomo to gain as much knowledge of the British culture as possible. One of these unachievable tasks was to count the British. In contrast to Pocahontas who had converted to Christianity, was married to a ‘white’ man, and was THE token Indian princess, Tomocomo had not adjusted to ‘white’ culture and had widely remained a so-called ‘uncivilised savage’. (2007: 12-17)

This diabolical savage [...] was the antithesis to Pocahontas. [...] Tomocomo was the stubborn savage, diametrically opposed to Lady Rebecca [Pocahontas], the good Christian. The medicine man firmly refused to accept the English way of life [...] as something preferable to native existence and would not be shaken in his beliefs. This solid position and his unwillingness to make any concessions hardened the belief of supporters of a total physical eradication of savagism. (ibid: 17)

Several centuries later, such a black-and-white dichotomy still existed and the opposing images of Native American people were applied according to European needs. While Puritans spread the idea of the ‘bloodthirsty savage’ in the 17th century, this image experienced a shift towards a more positive depiction in the 18th and 19th centuries. (Kasdan & Tavernetti in Rollins & O’Connor, 1998: 122) Wernitznig argues that “[t]he concept of the ‘savage’ is almost always established as a mirror image to the ‘civilised citizen.’”. This implies that whenever Europeans needed proof of their superiority,
Native American cultures were attributed very negative traits and perceived as inferior. In times when European civilisation was criticised and “considered to be degenerated”, Native American cultures were hailed as perfect embodiments of innocence and nobility. (2003: xiv)

According to Vickers, both the noble and the ignoble image of Native American cultures have specific characteristics. He claims that the noble ‘savage’ “is representing a lost or vanishing human species”, and is perceived as “a harmless, childlike race in need of paternalistic guidance”. Furthermore, the noble ‘savage’ is described as a “subservient yet honourable character, capable of assisting the dominant culture in the fulfilment of its destiny”. Another problematic assumption is that American Indians are perceived as ‘historical artefacts’ who are “consigned to an idealized past, frozen in history [and] who ha[ve] no present political reality”. (1998: 4) To deconstruct such erroneous assumptions, chapter 6.4 offers a more realistic depiction of Native American people’s current situation within the United States.

Apart from that, the image of the ignoble ‘savage’ equalises Native American cultures with evil itself. Such a negative perception deprives individuals of possessing “any conscious or moral motivation”. Native people are portrayed as ‘primitive creatures’ that are driven by animalistic instincts. Again, Europeans consider themselves to be both morally and intellectually superior. (ibid: 5)

One obvious consequence of such generalising thinking is that Native American cultures are not seen as heterogeneous groups, which differ from each other in manifold aspects. Instead, they are perceived as a homogeneous mass. Such overgeneralisations neglect any individuality and the fact that several hundred Native American Nations can be distinguished. Thus, I want to emphasise that neither the noble nor the ignoble image is an accurate depiction as “[f]eatures, character traits, and habits become classified through the polar items good or bad” (Wernitznig, 2003: xiv). In line with this, Vickers concludes that “the use of any stereotype in the portrayal of Indians is considered here to be contributory to their dehumanization and deracination” (1998: 5).
6.2 Contemporary perceptions of Native American cultures in Europe

Stereotypical depictions of Native American cultures abound even in the 21st century. Movies, New Age movements, and a general lack of critical cultural awareness in particular play decisive roles in reinforcing overgeneralisations. It is a well-known fact that stereotypical ‘Indians’ feature several characteristic traits such as long, black hair or a stoic expression. Wernitznig argues that Native American cultures “are considered to remain exhibits of the past instead of taking part in the present or even the future” (2003: xviii). Following her, it may even occur that Europeans blame modern Native American people for not corresponding to their stereotypical images. The author goes as far as to claim that “Native Americans have to play Indian to assist European Indianness”. (2007: 141)

Against this background, the following subchapters will focus on Native American depictions in film and the New Age movement’s influence on our images of Native American cultures.

6.2.1 Indians and film: Cinematic depictions of Native American cultures

Movies portraying Native American cultures are plentiful in Europe. The most popular include Pocahontas (1995), The Last of the Mohicans (1992), Dances with Wolves (1990), and the Winnetou series (1962-1968). All of these movies share two decisive characteristics: they are not produced and/or directed by Native American people themselves, and they tend to portray Indigenous people as everything but ordinary human beings. Wernitznig claims that the “good versus bad dichotomy” is even found in films that are sympathetic to Native American cultures, such as Kevin Costner’s Dances with Wolves. In this particular case, the Sioux Nation is portrayed as an icon of nobility, hospitality, and intelligence, whereas their opponents are depicted as bloodthirsty and brutal. The latter are deprived of any stereotypical outward appearance and their eye-catching warpaint marks them as ‘ferocious savages’. (2003: xxi) O’Connor argues that “[f]or a mass audience [...] the dramatic situations should be straightforward and unconfused” and that it is important that “the audience [can] easily
decide which characters [are] good and which [are] evil”. (O’Connor in Rollins & O’Connor, 1998: 33)

Furthermore, O’Conner states that the portrayal of Native American cultures in film is often influenced by “commercial considerations”. The film industry must satisfy the needs of the audience as “[m]oviegoers [come] to expect Indians to be presented in a characteristic way”. Westerns, cartoon series, and ‘Winnetou-style’ movies in particular pay little attention to the accuracy of Native American clothing, languages, and religions. Another disturbing fact is that “[f]requently, Native American actors have been denied roles as Indians in favour for non-Indian actors whom the producers thought” to be more handsome. (ibid: 33) Such market-orientated decisions contribute significantly to stereotype formation and/or reinforcement. A problematic aspect is that films are often the only source of information as direct contact with American Indian cultures is not always possible.

This leads me to the conclusion that the only answer to unrealistic Hollywood productions lies within the hands of Native American filmmakers. Smith argues that

[a]n Indian film will star the beautiful losers, belligerent drunks, failed activists, and born-again traditionalists who make up our community. It will be brave enough to engage issues like the civil wars that tore through some communities in the 1970s, the terrible plagues of isolation, alcoholism, and poverty. It will not turn away from complex issues like debates over identity. [...] Indian film must embrace the extraordinary complexities of Indian life, in the past and the present. It must face up to both the ugliness and the beauty of our circumstances. (2009: 41)

Contemporary Native American filmmakers and authors, such as Chris Eyre⁴ and Sherman Alexie⁵, focus on up-to-date issues like Native American identity, cultural diversity, or reservation life. Cobb claims that their cinematic and literary works attach importance to the individuality of their protagonists and portray them as ‘normal’ human beings with both physical and psychological imperfections. In Smoke Signals, for example, “Eyre and Alexie depict an Indian [...] world [...] but they do not attempt to speak for all Indians everywhere or to describe every possible Native experience”. (Cobb in Rollins & O’Connor, 2003: 224-225) Such a promising development in favour

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⁴ Among other films he directed and/or produced Smoke Signals (1998), Skins (2002) and Imprint (2007) (Eyre, 2008: www.chriseyre.org/)

of Native American filmmakers, actors, and authors is one of the most important steps towards a stereotype-free and more realistic portrayal of Native American cultures.

6.2.2 The New Age movement: Native Americans as spiritual and ecological leaders

According to Wernitznig, the New Age movement of the 1980s and 1990s is worth consideration with respect to Native American cultures. European New Age activists no longer emphasised physical characteristics, but they hailed the notion of “the spiritual, wise, and prophetic Indian”. The so called “neo-noble savages” functioned as keepers “of spiritual secrets and truisms, providing remedies for any of society’s ills”. Native American people were perceived as guru-like, idealised beings. (2003: xxxiii) However, Wernitznig’s New Age theory of the “Indian as esoteric bestseller” (ibid: xx) is far from being antiquated in the 21st century. Still, Native American dream catchers, incense sticks, spiritual books, and so on are sold and bought throughout Europe. Following Vickers, specialised New Age travel agencies go as far as to sell “Indian religious experiences”. Westerners can participate in ceremonies, vision quests, and sweat lodge rituals with “little regard for either the sanctity of traditional shamanism or its ceremonial purposes”. (1998: 42)

Further, Bordewich notes that Native American people are attributed the quality of being “the original environmentalists” who have always lived in harmony with nature. However, people who romanticise Native American cultures “fail to see that the apparently flattering image of the Indian as selfless caretaker of the earth is [...] little different from” perceiving them as ignoble ‘savages’. (1996: 210) It is beyond debate that Native American cultures have different approaches to land ownership and the environment itself, but matter of fact is that some tribes do not fit into the category of being ‘ecological angels’. They exploit natural resources or allow waste disposal on reservation land, for example (see chapter 6.4.2).

Consequently, the Europeans’ tendency to satisfy their own needs through (mis)using Native American cultures must be challenged. Creating positive, but nevertheless distorted, images of American Indian cultures does not contribute to a better understanding of contemporary Native American issues. Again, it must be emphasised
that neither of the above mentioned stereotypical perceptions is helpful in imparting accurate knowledge of Native American cultures or in fostering intercultural competence.

6.3 Historical perspectives on Native American cultures

6.3.1 U.S.-Indian Relations: From treaties to self-determination

Native American cultures have been confronted with, and affected by, European and United States politics since early colonisation. In the following I want to present seven consecutive approaches to dealing with American Indian cultures from early postcontact history up to the present day. The chapter’s intended purpose is to provide some basic historical background knowledge that should eventually lead to a better understanding of contemporary problems with respect to Native American cultures.

6.3.1.1 Treaties

Treaty negotiations with America’s native population were one of the earliest official attempts to get hold of new land. This legal instrument was mainly used between 1608 and 1830, but treaty negotiations between Native American cultures and European governments were fraught with problems and misunderstandings. This was due to the fact that Native American people could not grasp the idea behind ‘signing a treaty’ or ‘selling a piece of land’ as they did not see themselves as owners of the respective land. Furthermore, the prevailing language problem must not be ignored. Often, Native American people did not understand the treaty’s content and legal consequences. (Lippert & Spignesi, 2008: 205)

6.3.1.2 Removal

In 1830 Congress passed The Indian Removal Act with the aim of expanding the United States territory. Treaty negotiations were outdated and seen as hindrances to ‘white’ progress and expansion. The new Act’s core purpose was to remove South-eastern tribes from their land so it could be opened for ‘white’ settlement. (Lippert & Spignesi, 2008: 207)
According to Bordewich, the removal period’s tragic culmination was the forced removal of thousands of Cherokee to Oklahoma in 1838. “[F]our thousand Cherokees, 25 percent of the population, died en route from illness and exposure during the grueling winter march that has come to be known as the Trail of Tears.” The shocking truth is that the removed Cherokee were among the first Native American Nations to adopt a ‘white’ life-style, government, and religion. (1996: 40; 47)

Now, in less than a generation, they had self-consciously redefined their nature as Indians, electing their own legislature, establishing a free press, inventing an alphabet in which they had begun to print their own literature, and cautiously beginning to trade their traditional religious practices for Christianity. (ibid: 40)

Moreover, they readily abandoned their traditional Native tribal structures and went as far as to ‘possess’ black slaves. In short, the Cherokee counted as a completely assimilated tribe. Yet their assimilation efforts did not save them from ‘white’ expansion politics and greed. (Lippert & Spignesi, 2008: 207)

6.3.1.3 Reservations

Implemented in 1850, the reservation system was only to last for about twenty years. Reservations were originally intended to be

a country adapted to agriculture, of limited extent and well-defined boundaries; within which all, with occasional exceptions, should be compelled constantly to remain until such time as their general improvement and good conduct may supersede the necessity of such restrictions. (Lippert & Spignesi, 2008: 208)

In other words, the U.S. government wanted to get rid of the Native population, so the land and resources could be sold to ‘white’ settlers. Consequently, small pieces of land that seemed unappealing to ‘white’ purposes were declared as reservation areas.

The reservation system was declared a failure in 1871, after no progress in, or solving of, the ‘Indian problem’ had been achieved. (Lippert & Spignesi, 2008: 208)

6.3.1.4 Assimilation

The subsequent concept, assimilation, was far from being a positive restart with respect to U.S. – Native American relations. Between 1871 and 1928 assimilation meant to cut existing reservations into even smaller pieces and to send indigenous children to far away boarding schools. (Lippert & Spignesi, 2008: 208)
The first established boarding school was the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania and its slogan (“Kill the Indian and Save the Man”) became a nationwide doctrine. The school’s primary purposes were to eradicate Native American traditions, languages, and beliefs. “To that end Indian students had their hair cut, their blankets and clothes taken away and replaced by military uniforms. Corporal punishment was administered, Bible reading and vocational skills were emphasized.” Ultimately, the children should become ‘civilised’ members of American society. (Nies, 1996: 291)

In 1928 the so-called Meriam Report illustrated the unbearable conditions on reservations and boarding schools and denounced the United States government’s obvious failure. (Lippert & Spignesi, 2008: 209)

6.3.1.5 Reorganisation

A legal answer to the Meriam Report was The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. According to Lippert & Spignesi, the Act’s purposes were

- To conserve and develop Indian lands and resources
- To extend to Indians the right to form business and other organization
- To establish a credit system for Indians
- To grant certain rights of home rule to Indians
- To provide for vocational education for Indians (2008: 210)

Reorganisation was one of the most important milestones in Native American and United States history as it was the first step towards self-determination and independence. Native American people were granted more rights and children received better education in local public schools instead of being sent to boarding schools. (ibid: 210)

6.3.1.6 Termination

The subsequent termination policy, inaugurated after World War II, was a change for the worse. Many of the formerly achieved reforms were reversed, simply due to budget cutbacks. One of the major problems was that “over a third of America’s mineral sources lay under Indian reservations”. Consequently, the United States government decided to “dismantle the reservation system entirely”, so ‘white’ American citizens could profit from the discovered mineral sources. Moreover, “[t]ermination meant that tribes lost federally recognized status, and lost federal annuities and services.” It is not surprising that the termination period is known as “the greatest threat to Indian survival
since the military campaigns of the 1800s”. Finally, in the late 1960s, United States politicians overturned this ineffective and anti-Native American policy. (Nies, 1996: 306)

Termination policies and the corrupt political situation on reservations prompted the foundation of resistance movements, such as the American Indian Movement (AIM). AIM activists organised three major events between 1969 and 1973. The first one was the occupation of Alcatraz Island, where mainly Native college students wanted to call attention to their situation. (Smith, 2009: 92) Secondly, following Nies, AIM activists were heavily involved in the so called Trail of Broken Treaties, where thousands of Native American people travelled “from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., to highlight the U.S. history of broken treaties”. When they eventually reached Washington, the activists tried to present “a 20-point position paper on Indian rights” to the government – without success. To demonstrate their frustration, they took over Washington’s Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), an act that finally “brought Indian rights to the national agenda”. However, the culmination of Indian activism took place in 1973 when AIM activists occupied the historical site of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge reservation. Several hundred people, among them such prominent names as Russell Means or Dennis Banks, occupied the area for seventy-one days. (1996: 373-375) The U.S. government literally over-reacted with sending more than 300 federal marshals and FBI agents equipped with guns, armoured personnel carriers, and other military weapons. The head of the U.S. Army’s 82nd Airborne Division was called in for military attack preparations. [Eventually] [t]wo Indians were killed in the 10-week standoff, which finally ended in a negotiated release with 185 people indicted on charges of arson, theft, assault, and interfering with federal officers. (ibid: 375)

Smith concludes that “there was no fundamental change in Indian-U.S. relations” and that “[i]t seemed like every AIM leader was in jail or on the run, and the movement was broke”, although the media was heavily involved in writing about and commenting on this political upheaval. (2009: 134, 152)

6.3.1.7 **Self-determination**

The situation improved again with the introduction of The Indian Self-Determination Act in 1975. The Act’s most crucial reformations were that “it gave Indians the power to contract with the government on their own, and it also allowed Indians to control how
federal moneys were spent on Indian matters”. The new slogan was that “Native Americans at the community level know best how to spend money in their own communities”. (Lippert & Spignesi, 2008: 212)

Self-determination is still in effect today and has brought about several important Acts of Congress with respect to Native American cultures:

- The Indian Health Care Improvement Act (1978)
- The American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978)
- The Indian Child Welfare Act (1978)
- The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (1990)

Following Lippert & Spignesi, the Indian Health Care Improvement Act guarantees improved healthcare facilities on Native American reservations, whereas The American Indian Religious Freedom Act legalises several, formerly outlawed, religious practices, such as the Sun Dance or the use of eagle feathers in ceremonies. Additionally, The Indian Child Welfare Act grants Native American people and tribal courts the right to legally decide over “Native American children living on reservations”. The most recent concession on the part of the U.S. is The Native American Graves and Repatriation Act. It commands that governments must return “human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony that have been found on public lands” to “culturally affiliated federally recognized tribes”. (2008: 213-214)

Bordewich concludes that “[s]elf-determination gives Indian tribes the ability to manage the speed and style of integration, but not the power to stop it, at least for long”. (1996: 332) Furthermore, a lot of hope is linked to self-determination as

it represents the struggle of peoples who have been flattened out into cliché and myth to regain dimension and to shape an identity that is simultaneously more traditional and more modern, more conscious of history and less dominated by it, and, ultimately, both more Indian and more American. (ibid: 336)

6.4 Native American cultures in the 21st century

In this chapter I want to find an answer to the question of Who exactly is a Native American in the 21st century?, as legal acknowledgment of one’s indigeneity is not as self-evident as it seems. Secondly, I want to provide a brief overview on recent Native
American economic developments, including gambling, waste disposal, and natural resources.

6.4.1 Who is officially designated a Native American in the United States?

One of the most crucial issues concerning native identity is the question of who exactly is a Native American person. Is it the light-skinned man who claims that his great-great-grandmother was an enrolled member of the Lakota Nation? Or is it the full-blooded Cherokee girl who is not a federally enrolled tribal member? There is no simple answer to this problem as “issues of identity are becoming more flexible and less and less dependent on the bipolar opposition between black and white, or between white and red” (Vickers, 1998: 159). However, the United States government defines specific requirements that must be met in order to be officially recognised as either Native American tribe or Native American person.

6.4.1.1 Requirements to be officially recognised as Native American tribe

Following Lippert & Spignesi, it is pivotal to be officially acknowledged, as only then are tribes eligible for benefits from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Accordingly, tribes have to fulfil seven basic requirements to eventually reach official recognition, namely:

1. The petitioner has been identified as an American Indian entity on a substantially continuous basis since 1900.
2. A predominant portion of the petitioning group comprises a distinct community and has existed as a community from historical times to the present.
3. The petitioner has maintained political influence or authority over its members as an autonomous entity from historical times to the present.
4. A copy of the group’s present governing documents including its membership criteria [is needed].
5. The petitioner’s membership consists of individuals who descend from a historical Indian tribe or from historical Indian tribes which combined and functioned as a single autonomous political entity.
6. The membership of the petitioning group is composed primarily of persons who are not members of an acknowledged North American Indian tribe.
7. Neither the petitioner nor its members are the subject of congressional legislation that has expressly terminated or forbidden the federal relationship. (2008: 313)

Obviously, it is not easy to comply with the above mentioned requirements. Bordewich argues that this is partly due to the fact that many Native American Nations are not able to provide uninterrupted documentation from 1900 onwards. “Tribes most often became
legally recognised when they made treaties with the United States government”, but what about tribes that “never made war on the United States [and did not need] to make treaties”? Such tribes often lack continuous documentation of their existence and therefore face major problems with receiving governmental funds and recognition. The most prominent tribe that is currently fighting for its federal recognition is the Lumbee Nation. (1996: 68)

According to Bordewich, the Lumbee’s major problem is that they are not ‘Indian’ enough:

They run the physical gamut from blond hair and blue eyes to the nearly Negroid. They have no chiefs or medicine men and no reservation. They have no memory of the tribe from which their ancestors may have come, nor of the language they spoke, nor of any religion older than the pious and passionate Baptist faith […]. Even their present name is a neologism, coined in the 1950s […]. There is, in fact, nothing at all about the Lumbees that fits conventional notions of what it means to be Native American. (ibid: 63)

The Lumbee Nation has not achieved federal recognition yet, but they are granted the right to “call themselves Indian”. However, the Lumbee tribe’s current problem may become the future of most Native American Nations as cross-cultural mixing is a daily occurrence. Full-blooded American Indians will be a rarity within some decades. “A 1986 congressional study estimated that the percentage of Indians with one-half or more Indian blood would decline from about 87 percent in 1980 to just 8 percent by 2080.” So, Native American identity should not be searched for in historical and biological facts, but instead “true tribal identity may reside […] in the very process of cultural change and reinvention that has been the defining experience of […] community”. (ibid: 65, 78-79)

6.4.1.2 Requirements to be officially recognised as person of Native American descent

Not only tribes, but also individuals must comply with several official requirements in order to be acknowledged as persons of Native American descent. Again, it is the Bureau of Indian Affairs that decides over a person’s status and prescribes four distinct criteria, namely:

- Their blood quantum must be at least ¼ American Indian.
- They must be listed as a member of a tribe that is federally recognized.
- They must be able to definitively trace their Indian ancestry back at least three generations.
• They must be formally approved by BIA officials. (Lippert & Spignesi, 2008: 313)

All of these criteria can be seen as highly problematic as a number of Native American people have become assimilated into ‘white’ American society. A consequence of assimilation is that many people have lost any record of their ancestry and are therefore not enrolled in an officially recognised tribe. (ibid: 313-314) Bordewich emphasises that tribal enrolment is another major problem due to its ambiguity. For example, a Native American child, whose mother or father are enrolled tribal members, is born off reservation and thus counts as ‘not enrolled’. The result is that such “NEs [not enrolled people] [are], in principle, disqualified from voting or running for tribal office, even though they [meet] the tribe’s blood quantum and residency requirements for membership”. Also, the obligation to prove a certain amount of Native American blood (blood quantum) is highly debated as “criteria vary greatly” from tribe to tribe. This “confusing state of affairs [...] produces more than a few individuals who may, for example, qualify as an Indian for educational benefits but not for medical ones.” (1996: 67, 73, 88)

Evidently, the answer to the question of Who exactly is a Native American person in the 21st century? remains fairly vague. This leads me to the conclusion that Native American identity and ancestry cannot be successfully defined by some official requirements. Instead, people should realise that their “futile attempts to remake one another by force” (ibid: 343-344) are superfluous, and even prejudicial.

6.4.2 Native American economic developments

Contemporary Native American people are by no means trapped in the past, but they play an active role in the American economy. Although most Native American reservations are still very poor, they experience economic growth due to gambling, waste disposal, and natural resources. Following Lippert & Spignesi, these new sources of income help Native American communities on their way towards independence, enabling them to improve their healthcare and education facilities, for example. Furthermore, communities are able to spend more money on programs that fight alcoholism, an issue that is still of major concern on many reservations. (2008: 25)
6.4.2.1 Gambling

Following the introduction of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in 1988, casinos and bingo halls have become lucrative economic factors on reservations. To date, about 200 American Indian owned casinos have been established on various reservations and provide most of the income. Moreover, gambling provides “a much needed source of reservation jobs” and it helps “to support reservation projects encompassing improved housing, educational scholarship, medical clinics, repurchase of reservation land held by non-Indians and the establishment of industrial parks for new business opportunities”. (Vinje, 1996: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0254/is_n4_v55/ai_18910969/)

The gambling business has drawbacks too. Numerous people do not see their future in gambling and worry about its long term consequences. Additionally, traditional and elderly people perceive gambling as being incompatible with Native American beliefs and culture. (ibid.: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0254/is_n4_v55/ai_18910969/)

6.4.2.2 Waste disposal

Waste disposal on reservation land is a very problematic and complex issue. In his article Brook emphasises that more and more communities open up their land for “much of the poisonous industrial by-products of the dominant society”, including nuclear waste. Considering the fact that most Native American communities are far from being prosperous, “it is not surprising that some tribes have considered proposals to host toxic waste repositories on their reservations”. (1998: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0254/is_n1_v57/ai_20538772/?tag=content;col1)

Following Brook, providing land is often the only available resource due to four factors:

1. There is a lack of natural resources on reservation land.
2. The reservation is too remote to host other profitable businesses.
3. The reservation is not densely populated and thus has enough space for waste disposal.
4. Communities want to “resolve their reservations’ own waste disposal problems while simultaneously raising much-needed revenue”. (ibid: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0254/is_n1_v57/ai_20538772/?tag=content;col1)
However, the risks that waste disposal entails should not be ignored. Even if landfills do not seem menacing at the moment, they “will pose an increasingly greater health and safety risk for all future generations”. (ibid: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0254/is_n1_v57/ai_20538772/?tag=content;coll1)

6.4.2.3 Natural resources

Natural resources such as oil, gas, uranium, coal, or water are the third important source of income on reservations. Following Bordewich, “[a]t least 50 percent of all the uranium, between 5 percent and 10 percent of all the oil and gas reserves, and one third of all the strippable low-sulfur coal in the United States lie on Indian lands”. Native American cultures regained their right to manage and profit from their own resources due to the introduction of the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975. (1996: 134-135) Following Lippert & Spignesi, Native American communities all over the United States are currently involved in:

- Oil, gas, and coal mining operations [...]
- [...] wind farms and tidal plants for generating electricity [...]
- [...] hydroelectric plants utilizing rivers as an energy source [...]. (2008: 326)

Bordewich emphasises that communities that “control valuable resources” should not be underestimated in the future. They “will be able to shape not only their own destinies but to an increasing extent that of non-Indian communities, as well”. (1996: 137)

It can be concluded that Native American people have only recently got the opportunity to shape “their own destinies largely beyond the control of whites”. They focus on improving education, health care facilities, and on profiting from their own resources. Further, they come to “grips with the alcoholism and social pathologies that blight reservation communities”. (ibid: 11) Native American communities have eventually succeeded in reinventing themselves and in becoming more and more independent from ‘white’ paternalism.

Next to all other inspired and encouraged Native American activists, it is Native American writers such as Sherman Alexie who play a pivotal part in contributing to Native American sovereignty and individualisation. Sherman Alexie tackles many of the above mentioned issues in his literary work, as for instance in his poem 13/16 and his short story A Drug called Tradition. Problematic issues, such as blood quantum,
identity, or reservation life are not ignored but explicitly addressed and challenged by the author. Bordewich emphasises that Native American people’s real lives are “far more complex, and interesting, than our persistent fantasies” (ibid: 20).
7 Teaching Sherman Alexie’s poem 13/16 and short story *A Drug Called Tradition*

In the last chapter of my thesis attention will be given to the Spokane / Coeur d’Alene author Sherman Alexie and two of his texts, namely the poem *13/16* and the short story *A Drug called Tradition*. Starting out with a brief introduction to Sherman Alexie, the chapter will continue with text selection criteria and a discussion of the texts’ three core issues: identity, reservation life, and stereotypes. The chapter’s final part will offer an exemplary teaching unit.

7.1 The author Sherman Alexie

Sherman Alexie is one of the most prominent Native American writers of our time. Following Moore, the dominant motives that reoccur throughout his work include:

- psychological and social border crossings; internalized oppression; violence; addiction;
- the absent father; and racial tensions [...] pain and humor; hunger and survival; love and anger; broken treaties; manifest destiny; basketball; car wrecks; commodity food; US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) houses; small-pox blankets; promises; and dreams. (Moore in Porter and Roemer, 2005: 297)

Moore argues that Alexie sets himself apart from other American Indian authors to the extent that he does not recoil from facing the often painful reality. His humour and irony help him to tackle complex and serious issues without the “earnest lyricism” that is common among other native writers. Alexie offers the reader an insider view into contemporary Native American cultures that “serves to alert readers to private and public crises in Indian country”. Also, he does not intend to portray his protagonists as perfect native heroes, but instead they show “[a]uthentic emotions of anger, desire, fear, [and] grief”. (ibid: 297-299) Hence, Alexie’s imaginary world is inhabited by ordinary people whose individuality is not flattened out according to prevailing stereotypical ideas.

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6 see appendix 10.1
7 see appendix 10.2
Furthermore, Alexie tends to blend fictional and autobiographical elements in his stories. The majority of Alexie’s fictional characters belong to the Spokane Indian tribe and his stories are set either on the Spokane Indian reservation “where he finds a virtually inexhaustible literary wellspring for his writing”, or in surrounding cities. (Grassian, 2005: 6) Also, the reoccurring themes of alcoholism, education, and poverty are partly autobiographical. Alexie himself attended a ‘white’ “high school off the reservation [...] where he knew he would get a better education”, “had a problem with alcohol that began short after he started college”, and suffered from a chronic lack of money in his youth. (Alexie, 2010: www.fallsapart.com/biography.html)

Accordingly, Sherman Alexie is ideal for my purpose of deconstructing Native American stereotypes and of promoting perspective-taking in the EFL classroom. Obviously, he does not idealise modern Native American people, but he “[tries] to write with imagination about a real world. A world in which [he] grew up, the world that [he] live[s] in now.” (Torrez, 1999: http://poetry.about.com/library/weekly/aa083199.htm?once=true&terms=alexie). Alexie’s focus on real-life issues, together with his humour, are convincing qualifications for introducing his texts to the EFL classroom. Furthermore, Sherman Alexie invites students to think critically and to challenge their existing ideas and perceptions of Native American people. He emphasises a person’s individuality and tackles issues of cross-cultural relevance, which offer Austrian, and European students in general, the chance to identify points of identification and personal interest, which may motivate them to immerse themselves in Alexie’s literary world(s).

7.2 13/16 and A Drug called Tradition

7.2.1 Text selection criteria

Apart from general text selection criteria (see chapter 4.1.2), the poem 13/16 and the short story A Drug called Tradition offer further valuable features. Firstly, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, they contribute to the deconstruction of prevailing stereotypes of Native American cultures. However, they also encourage intercultural discussions and personal reader responses, foster critical cultural awareness, and they help students to identify and overcome their own ethnocentric perspectives. In other words, they invite students to adopt an open focus and to become personally involved
with the texts. Also, European students may discover similarities between themselves and the short story’s protagonists despite cultural differences as they, too, are teenagers who face similar problems – for example alcohol, substance abuse, and the pubertal search for identity.

Two other criteria why I selected a short story and a poem are their distinct literary features and their brevity. Students are not confronted with a lengthy and complex text, but are presented two readily comprehensible genres. Thaler refers to Werlich when arguing that a short story is ideal for classroom use due to specific characteristics:

- It centres around one incident, which is often revealed as an unusual one.
- It organizes character and action into a simple plot [...].
- It concentrates on a limited number of characters, often revealing their state of mind at some single moment of crisis [...].
- It is often confined to one setting, covering in detail only a short period of time.
- It is told in language highly charged with meaning and suggestion [...].
- It builds up suspense towards the end [...]. (2008: 91)

Further, Thaler refers to Müller-Zettelmänn when claiming that poems also offer a variety of suitable characteristics, namely:

- Brevity
- Density of subject matter (reduction, compression)
- Increased subjectivity (individual experience)
- Musicality (proximity to songs)
- Aesthetic self-referentiality (self-reflexivity, artificiality)
- Structural complexity (lines, metre, stanza)
- Phonological complexity (sounds, rhyme)
- Morphological complexity (words, word formation)
- Syntactic complexity (arrangement of sentences)
- Semantic complexity (figurative language) (ibid: 115)

Thus, short stories and poetry offer manifold benefits to teachers as well as students. Teachers benefit from both texts as they can be dealt with in a short amount of time. Furthermore, their brevity and contents promote a student-centred teaching approach as learners are invited to interpret and negotiate meanings and to actively participate in classroom discussions.

Additionally, the selected texts complement each other very well since both comment on Native American people and their problems. A Drug called Tradition offers students a brief glimpse into reservation life and its hardships. 13/16, on the contrary, explores issues such as stereotypes, loss, and the exploitation of Native American cultures by
‘white’ people. However, the two major issues that occur in and link both texts are (the loss of) identity and reservation life.\(^8\)

Furthermore, both texts are not too demanding concerning grammar, vocabulary, and style. This quality is crucial as students should be able to focus on the texts’ content, instead of becoming frustrated and discouraged by linguistic barriers.

### 7.2.2 Major issues

As already mentioned, *A Drug called Tradition* and *13/16* explore three core issues (identity, reservation life, and stereotypes), which will be further investigated in the following subchapters.

#### 7.2.2.1 Identity issues: modern warriors between reality and stories

Following Grassian, the short story’s title (*A Drug called Tradition*) hints at two of its main themes, namely identity and the loss of traditions. “[...] Alexie shows how, on the Spokane Indian reservation (and presumably on other reservations as well), drugs, most prevalent among them alcohol, have replaced cultural traditions”. (2005: 59)

Throughout the story, the three protagonists, Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Victor Joseph, and Junior Polatkin, are torn between their own traditions and American mainstream society. The three teenagers are not the great warriors of the past anymore, but they are confused and disoriented as, apparently, any cultural background is missing. An obvious example of them searching for their cultural identities is the attempt to recreate the look of “horsepowered warriors” (Alexie, 2005: 13).

The story suggests that most traditional rituals and ceremonies that once helped young boys to grow into men and to shape their identities are lost. Thus, still in quest of their identities, the three protagonists desperately try to engage in some kind of modern ritual and decide to “do a new drug, motivated by a desire to reclaim their cultural traditions, which they believe to involve visions”. (Grassian, 2005: 59) Grassian argues that Thomas, Junior, and Victor perceive the drug as a way to reconnect with their culture. However, the “desire to reclaim their culture is misguided, derived from Western stereotypes of Indians, which dictate that “authentic” Indians have spiritual visions”. In

\(^8\) see chapter 7.2.2
other words, ‘real’ Indians must have guiding visions otherwise they do not count as ‘authentic’ at all. In Alexie’s story it is the drug with its hallucinogenic effects that evokes ‘visions’ and that allows the boys to “see their unrealized potential or subverted culture”. (ibid: 60)

Alexie draws on the Native American traditions of having visions and of storytelling in order to emphasise and illustrate the boys’ identity crisis. Stories, visions, and imagination help the protagonists to “break the monotony of reservation life” (ibid: 61) and to reinvent themselves. They imagine being horse thieves, famous guitar players, and mighty warriors who perform the Ghost Dance and who chase away all ‘white’ invaders. In reality, on the contrary, they are deprived of both a promising future and a positive cultural identity.

Identity plays a decisive role in Alexie’s poem 13/16 too. According to Grassian, the title 13/16 “addresses [Alexie’s] own conflicted multiracial status, being three-sixteenths white.” The poem suggests that many Native American people experience a “massive identity crisis [...] due to being biracial”. It accuses the U.S. government of dehumanising Native Americans through enumerating “them while determining and cataloguing their identity”. Next to the government, mainstream American citizens are accused of leaving “Indians without a clear identity”. (2005: 24) In the poem, the “cans without labels” (Alexie, 1992: 17) metaphorically stand for the homogenous mass that mainstream people perceive when meeting a Native American person. Alexie’s offered solution is to appreciate Native American people’s individuality and, as it says in the poem, to open “them [the cans] one by one” (ibid: 17). (Grassian, 2005: 24-25)

7.2.2.2 Reservation life

In A Drug called Tradition the Spokane Indian reservation is a place where people live under destitute conditions. Alexie demonstrates the people’s poverty in the opening scene, in which Junior asks Thomas why his fridge “is always fucking empty?” (Alexie, 2005: 12). The second obvious sign of poverty is Junior’s car. “The engine was completely shot but the exterior was good. [...] It belched and farted its way down the road like an old man.” (ibid: 13). For the story’s protagonists, however, the only answer and solution to their problems seems to be substance abuse.
Furthermore, *A Drug called Tradition* emphasises the economic importance of water on the Spokane Indian reservation. It seems as if the only source of income was to lease land to “Washington Water Power” and to “have ten power poles running across some [reservation] land” (ibid: 13).

In *13/16* Alexie addresses the importance of water for Spokane Indians by mentioning the disappearance of salmon due to the establishment of Little Falls Dam. In the poem, loss in general is defined as part of reservation life: “What we have lost: uranium mine, Little Falls Dam salmon.” (1992: 16) Next to water, also uranium mining was a source of income for the Spokane Indians and Alexie considers the mine’s closure as a loss for the people. Yet, the mine has entailed severe repercussions that are still perceptible today:

The open-pit uranium mine is the source of radiation and heavy metal contamination of Blue Creek, which flows into the Spokane River arm of Lake Roosevelt. After some 25 years of inaction, the Midnite Uranium Mine is now designated as a federal Superfund site requiring a $280 million cleanup.

(Mining Law Reform: [www.mining-law-reform.info/WhyNow.htm](http://www.mining-law-reform.info/WhyNow.htm))

Finally, the poem *13/16* regards commodity food\(^9\) and a high crime rate as sad but inextricable parts of reservation life.

### 7.2.2.3 Stereotypes

The third major issue that comes up in both texts are stereotypes in combination with a lack of respect for Native American cultures. *A Drug called Tradition* criticises that Native American people are influenced by ‘white’ stereotypes and aims at illustrating the impacts that pre-held misconceptions may have on Native American people. As already mentioned in chapter 7.2.2.1, the story’s protagonists believe that visions are vital parts of ‘authentic Indianness’. They relate themselves to buffalos, horses, and the famous chief Crazy Horse, although the Spokane Indian tribe has always been a fishing and deer-hunting Nation, and although Crazy Horse was an Oglala Lakota of the Great Plains. Furthermore, Victor adopts a westernised stereotype, which is related to the

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\(^9\) “The FDPIR [Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations] provides monthly food packages of commodity foods to low-income American Indian households living on or near Indian reservations. Currently there are some 243 tribes receiving benefits under the FDPIR. Household eligibility for the program is based on income and resource standards set by the federal government. [...] Each month, participant households receive a food package to help them maintain a nutritionally balanced diet. Participants can select from over seventy products, including items such as frozen ground beef and chicken; canned meats, poultry, and fish; canned fruits and vegetables; canned soups and spaghetti sauce [...].” (Kepos, 2011: [www.faqs.org/nutrition/Ca-De/Commodity-Foods.html](http://www.faqs.org/nutrition/Ca-De/Commodity-Foods.html))
The “Indian princess” stereotype turns up a lot in misleading history, and even more in third-rate television and movie westerns. The stock Indian princess saves the white hero from her less enlightened brethren, and is often depicted as being tall, beautiful, and freakishly light-skinned. 


Following Grassian, also the poem 13/16 places great emphasis on incidents, in which ‘white’ people stereotype and “appropriate” Native American cultures. (2005: 24) A sample situation is presented in the poem’s tenth and eleventh paragraph: “A ten-year-old white boy asked if I was a real Indian. He did not wait for an answer, instead carving his initials into the totem with a pocket knife: J.N.” (Alexie, 1992: 16-17). Grassian argues that “[t]he boy literally overwrites Indian culture, but metaphorically his act represents how mainstream Americans have rewritten “history” according to their own skewed perspective of Manifest Destiny [...]”. (2005: 24)

7.3 Exemplary teaching unit

In the following section my focus is on how to teach A Drug called Tradition and 13/16 in the EFL classroom. Starting out with main learning objectives and possible stumbling blocks, the chapter will continue with a brief description of the teaching unit. The last part will be dedicated to the teaching unit’s practical examples.

7.3.1 Learning objectives and stumbling blocks

The following teaching unit has been designed to provide English language teachers with some practical ideas on how to teach Sherman Alexie, in combination with intercultural competence, in the EFL classroom. Also, it offers constructive ideas on how authentic texts can contribute to the deconstruction of stereotypical ideas and ethnocentrism in general.

The following activities should foster intercultural awareness, empathy, and dialogic cultural competence with its distinct goals such as curiosity and giving others the right

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10 see chapter 6.1.1
to be different (see chapter 3.4). Throughout the teaching unit students are invited and encouraged to learn more about themselves and others. Furthermore, the designed activities should make students aware of their own limited perspectives and foster perspective-taking through active personal involvement with and interpretation of meaningful literature. A long term hope is that students will be able to identify stereotypical ideas in everyday life, and that they will succeed in reconsidering and deconstructing them.

However, teachers and students must pay attention to the fact that the presented texts are fictional and only represent some individual aspects of Native American cultures, as already discussed in chapter 4.2. Learners therefore must not overgeneralise the aspects presented in the texts, but examine them critically. For example, it would be wrong to conclude that all Native American teenagers are drug addicts or face identity problems.

Also, teachers must bear in mind that intercultural and dialogic cultural competence may not be achieved within a couple of days. Therefore, the chosen texts and activities should only serve as a basis for further intercultural discussions and learning.

7.3.2 Description of the teaching unit

I have designed twelve successive activities for teaching Sherman Alexie’s *A Drug called Tradition* and *13/16* in the EFL classroom. The teaching unit is divided into three stages: the pre-reading, the while-reading, and the post-reading stage. Further, I have linked these three stages to Delanoy’s evocation phases, I already explained in chapter 4.3.1. Accordingly, my pre-reading activities are designed to correspond to the evocation phase of feeling like reading, my while-reading activities should correspond to both getting into the text and lost in the text, whereas my post-reading activities should promote perspective-taking and provide a sense of an ending.

With respect to Delanoy’s dialogic approach, which I explained in more detail in chapter 3.4, both group and plenary discussions are encouraged throughout the whole teaching unit. I have also included individual writing tasks with the aim to promote writing skills and to give students the opportunity to reflect upon the texts and their emotions on a more personal level. Such diversified activities are of central concern to
me, as they should counteract monotony and help students to maintain a high level of motivation and interest throughout the whole project.

Finally, I suggest that the designed teaching unit is most appropriate for students between the ages of 16 to 18 as both texts, as well as some activities, demand a certain degree of intellectual maturity and the ability to work autonomously. Furthermore, students should have already developed advanced reading, writing, and oral skills, so that they can actively participate in the activities without having serious problems understanding the texts and/or expressing themselves.

7.3.3 Practical examples

In this chapter, the teaching unit’s practical examples will be introduced and explained. Readers of this thesis are invited to keep the teaching unit’s main learning objectives in mind while exploring the following exercises. Furthermore, they should consider that the following set of activities serves as a suggestion, offering just one way of teaching Sherman Alexie’s texts in the EFL classroom.

7.3.3.1 Pre-reading stage

Before the actual teaching unit starts, learners are asked to keep a reading portfolio, in which they collect and note everything linked to the project (ideas, activities, questions, remarks). Ideally, the portfolio should support students while reading and working on the texts, so that important knowledge and new insights do not get lost.

7.3.3.1.1 Exercise 1: Brainstorming

As a first step, it is crucial to check on the students’ prior knowledge about Native American cultures and prevailing distorted images. Through collecting ideas in class, students become involved with the topic and activate their background knowledge. However, brainstorming is not only useful for students, but also for teachers as they get a first impression of what students know, and which areas need to be further clarified and discussed. Following Baer and Garret, brainstorming allows students to learn “new things [...] from the ideas offered by other students”. Yet, teachers should bear in mind

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11 see chapter 7.3.1
that brainstorming must not involve any kind of judgement, even if students seem to hold stereotypes. Judging and correcting wrongly held assumptions must only happen later, so students do not become too inhibited to share their ideas. (Baer & Garret in Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010: 10-12)

During the brainstorming, learners are invited to come up with their own ideas spontaneously, the teacher’s task being to jot them down on the board. If students need support in coming up with ideas, teachers can provide some guiding questions, for example:

- **a.** When you think of Native American people, what comes to your mind?  
  (outward appearance, character traits and behaviour, proverbs ...)

- **b.** Where do you get your information on Native American cultures from?  
  (movies, books, comics, first-hand experience ...)

There should not be any discussion until all ideas are collected and written on the board. Only if the brainstorming process is completed should a discussion be encouraged. To get started, I suggest four open questions:

- **a.** You came up with a lot of ideas about Native American people. Do you think that all mentioned points are true for every single Native American person? If yes, why do you think so? If not, why do people believe in such stereotypes after all?

- **b.** Do you think Native American people are portrayed in an authentic and accurate way in mainstream cinematic and/or literary sources? If yes, why? If not, why?

- **c.** Why can such wrong assumptions be a problem for both sides?

- **d.** What do you know about contemporary Native American cultures?  
  (living conditions, identity ...)

According to the discussion’s results, new ideas and findings can be added to the board and/or initial ideas can be reorganised. At the end of this activity, all ideas should be jotted down on the flipchart and into the students’ reading portfolios. Eventually,
learners, as well as the teacher, should have gained a first impression of their current perceptions and knowledge of Native American cultures.

7.3.3.1.2 Exercise 2: Providing further background knowledge

Following the initial brainstorming, further background knowledge should be provided, so that students can make sense of unfamiliar cultural concepts in Sherman Alexie’s texts. Allowing for a learner-centred approach I compiled a list\footnote{see appendix 10.3}, which includes statements about both Native American cultures and Austrian people. Not all statements are accurate descriptions of the respective cultures though, and it is up to the students to decide which ones are accurate and which are not. Each student is asked to read through the list for him/herself. Then, discussions in small groups should be encouraged, in which learners can discuss, and alter, their results. The whole class should eventually be involved in a plenary discussion and present their findings and thoughts. The teacher’s responsibility is to moderate the discussion, to answer open questions, and to explain underlying reasons behind some statements in more detail.

**Suggested guiding question for the following plenary discussion:**

- How do you feel when others think that Austrians live on mountains and wear Lederhosen, for example? Can you imagine how Native American people feel when they are portrayed according to stereotypical ideas?

The activity’s ultimate goal is to equip learners with essential knowledge of Native American people, to promote perspective-taking through comparing Native American cultures to one’s own culture, and to make students aware of the negative effects that categorical thinking may have on both parties involved.

7.3.3.1.3 Exercise 3: Predicting

The third and last pre-reading exercise is based on the text’s titles (13/16 and *A Drug called Tradition*) and focuses on the learners’ expectations. Students are informed that they are going to read a short story and a poem of the Native American author Sherman Alexie. At this stage, the teacher should offer basic information on Sherman Alexie and
be prepared to answer arising questions with respect to the author. Then, both titles are written on the board and students are asked to come up with their own predictions concerning both texts (settings, plot, protagonists ...). They are invited to work in groups and to jot down all of their ideas into their reading portfolios. They should then discuss their expectations, emotions, and whatever comes to their minds when thinking of the titles. Eventually, each group is asked to design a poster on which they note and/or draw their predictions, ideas and so on. Once the groups are finished, they are invited to present their posters and ideas to their peers and the teacher.

Linking back to Delanoy’s evocation phases, this task in particular aims for raising curiosity among students and for preparing them to enter the texts’ secondary worlds (getting into the text). It should also raise the students’ reading motivation as they are allowed to bring in their own interpretative suggestions and creativity.

7.3.3.2 While-reading stage

7.3.3.2.1 Exercise 4: Introducing 13/16

With the introduction of the poem 13/16, the actual reading process begins. I suggest that before the poem is handed out to the students, the teacher offers to read it out loud, so learners can concentrate on the poem’s rhythm and get a first impression. Following this brief listening exercise, students are asked to do a second reading for themselves and to jot down all feelings and thoughts that the poem evokes in them. Also, they should underline unclear concepts and/or words and note any questions that arise while reading 13/16.

After having finished the individual reading phase, students are invited to exchange their ideas and questions in pairs or small groups. Students’ individual interpretations are very welcome and should be encouraged. It is of central concern that the teacher does not offer his own ‘superior’ interpretation, as this inhibits personal involvement and creativity, and may eventually result in frustration and a lack of motivation.

Once the students have finished discussing the poem within their groups, a plenary discussion should be encouraged. Students’ emotions and ideas, interpretative suggestions, and unclear concepts should then be jotted down on the flipchart and into
the reading portfolios. Concerning unclear concepts, teachers should not provide any detailed explanations at this point of the project.

At this stage, the main goal is to get students involved with the poem and to encourage manifold interpretations. Students should be able to immerse themselves in the poem and to establish a first positive relationship with it (getting into the text). However, interpreting 13/16 is no easy task, and therefore it is crucial that every single interpretative suggestion is acknowledged as a worthwhile contribution.

7.3.3.2.2  Exercise 5: Internet research

Exercise five is still linked to the first while-reading task, in which foreign cultural concepts were identified and jotted down without further explanation. In order to promote student-centred teaching, exercise five invites learners to research the internet for the missing explanations themselves. Students should work in small groups, each of them tackling a different concept or problem. The teacher may offer some useful web pages beforehand, so students will not get lost or misled by unreliable online articles. In the next step, learners are asked to compile a brief oral presentation of their chosen topic and to present it to their peers. Visual aids such as power point presentations, posters, pictures, drawings, atlases, or anything else they regard as appropriate, are welcome. Students are also invited to prepare a handout of their presentations, so that each and every pupil can draw on the others’ findings as well.

Most likely students will identify and do research on the following topics:

- blood quantum
- commodity food
- enrolment number / tribal enrolment
- Little Falls Dam and its impact on the Spokane Indian Tribe
- uranium mining on the Spokane Indian Reservation
With reference to the assumed areas of difficulty, I recommend the following online sources:

- Blood quantum
  - [www.native-languages.org/blood.htm](http://www.native-languages.org/blood.htm)
  - [www.americanindiansource.com/bloodquantum.html](http://www.americanindiansource.com/bloodquantum.html)

- Commodity food

- Enrolment number
  - [www.native-american-online.org/tribal-enrollment.htm](http://www.native-american-online.org/tribal-enrollment.htm)

- Little Falls Dam
  - [http://findlakes.com/little_falls_dam_washington-wa00069.htm](http://findlakes.com/little_falls_dam_washington-wa00069.htm)
  - [www.nwcouncil.org/history/SpokaneRiver.asp](http://www.nwcouncil.org/history/SpokaneRiver.asp)

- Uranium mining

This task occupies an important place within the teaching unit, as it helps to clarify possible stumbling blocks while giving learners the chance to work autonomously. They are encouraged to find and present their own explanations, instead of being dependent on the teacher’s clarifications. Such an approach may help students to sustain their motivation and interest in the project. Also, learners develop a positive feeling of achievement by doing research on their own, which further contributes to getting engrossed in the poem’s secondary world.

### 7.3.3.2.3 Exercise 6: Introducing *A Drug called Tradition*

After having clarified all foreign concepts and questions with respect to the poem, *A Drug called Tradition* is presented to the students. I have decided to introduce the short story after the poem, as the short story is easier to read and to understand. Students are
asked to read *A Drug called Tradition* at home and are invited to jot down whatever comes to their minds during the reading process, such as emotions, discussion questions, incomprehensible parts, ideas, and thoughts, into their reading portfolios. In class, students get the opportunity to discuss the story in small groups, before a plenary discussion is encouraged. Again, the discussion phase should make unclear concepts and/or passages more understandable, encourage learners to express their personal viewpoints, and give them the positive feeling of being taken seriously. I consider such intercultural discussions pivotal in this context, as students must not be left alone with their feelings and problems. Also, class discussions contribute to the development of dialogic cultural competence by promoting active learner participation.

7.3.3.2.4 Exercise 7: A journey through the texts

Having read both texts, students should get engrossed in the texts more profoundly. At this stage, I want to promote critical thinking as well as personal reader responses. *A journey through the texts* consists of two parts, each one composed of a series of questions that concentrate on 13/16 and *A Drug called Tradition*. Part one invites students to regard both texts in isolation. Only in part two should both texts be interrelated and compared to the students’ own reality. An important aspect to consider is that there are no wrong answers to the questions, as individual thinking should be encouraged.

Starting out with part one, students are asked to answer all questions individually and jot down their responses into their reading portfolios. They are allowed to reread the texts in class and search for relevant passages. After having completed part one, they can lead a brief discussion in pairs or small groups and compare their findings. Then, students are invited to discuss their responses in class, so that the whole group can profit from individual ideas. Learners are again encouraged to take notes of the discussion so they can more easily remember worthwhile ideas.

Subsequently, they are asked to carry on with part two, which, again, is followed by another plenary discussion in which students are asked to present and justify their answers.

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13 see appendix 10.4
The ultimate goals of this activity are to offer students the chance to become completely immersed in the texts’ secondary worlds and to develop a more holistic view. This last while-reading activity should also promote critical cultural awareness, as students are asked to relate the texts to one another as well as to their own lives and experiences. Furthermore, students practise their reading skills by being able to identify passages relevant for a specific purpose and by interrelating literary pieces.

7.3.3.3 Post-reading stage

7.3.3.3.1 Exercise 9: Reconsidering the texts

As already stated in chapter 7.3.2, post-reading activities should help students leave a text’s secondary world in a positive way and, again, foster perspective-taking and individual interpretations. With exercise nine, the first of four post-reading activities, I intend to promote response writing and I want students to reconsider both texts. However, they can choose between two tasks\(^{14}\) (letter to a friend\(^{15}\) and magazine review), so they are not forced into an activity.

I consider this post-reading activity as worthwhile, as it gives students the opportunity to communicate their feelings and thoughts about the texts on an individual level. Also, learners have to reconsider multiple aspects in relation to the texts and reflect upon their own impressions in order to complete the tasks. In other words, both activities incorporate a reflective element that should help students to leave the texts’ secondary worlds more easily. However, as the teaching unit is designed for advanced students, I expect them to be already familiar with some basic rules on how to write a letter or a magazine review.

7.3.3.3.2 Exercise 10: Perspective-taking

This activity is designed to promote empathy and perspective-taking among students. Again, they can choose between two tasks\(^{16}\), which both demand an open focus and imagination. In contrast to the preceding post-reading activity, learners are invited to write from a fictitious point of view, and thus are encouraged to go beyond their own

\(^{14}\) see appendix 10.5

\(^{15}\) idea for this activity in Wiesolek Kuta, 1997

\(^{16}\) see appendix 10.6
limited perspective. Also, this activity promotes personal reader responses and creativity among students.

The difference between the two tasks is that the first one requires students to work individually (a diary entry\textsuperscript{17}), while students are allowed to work in pairs when choosing the second one (an interview). I opted for this distinction as each student should be granted the opportunity to work accordingly to his/her individual preferences and personality. For example, not every student is as outgoing and self-confident as to perform an interview in front of the class. By giving them the option to choose, I hope to maintain a high level of motivation and enthusiasm among learners even at the end of the project.

7.3.3.3.3 Exercise 11: Asking Sherman Alexie questions

My third post-reading activity invites students to compile a list of questions that they would like to ask Sherman Alexie. By doing this, learners get the chance to communicate open questions and to leave their secondary worlds with some motivation to engage in further exploration. Students should jot down whatever questions they have in mind, for example:

- Mr. Alexie, what do you mean with “On this reservation we play football on real grass” (Alexie, 1992: 16) in your poem 13/16?
- Does the short story \textit{A Drug called Tradition} include autobiographical elements?
- Is the Native American tradition of telling stories still maintained today?
- Who is the intended readership of your texts?
- Would you change anything on reservations if you had the power to do so? If yes, what?

After having jotted down the questions into their reading portfolios, students are encouraged to read them out loud. One student is asked to note all questions on the flipchart in order to visualise them. Finally, an open class discussion should evolve. A further option would be to try and send the collected questions, in combination with a

\textsuperscript{17} Idea for this activity in Wiesolek Kuta, 1997
brief description of the project and its goals, to Sherman Alexie who may be willing to provide some answers and insights.

7.3.3.3.4 Exercise 12: End of the project and evaluation

The last phase of my teaching unit is dedicated to the recapitulation and evaluation of the project. Students are invited to look through their reading portfolios and recall the ideas that they initially had about Native American people. They are encouraged to reflect on whether or not the teaching unit has succeeded in altering their perceptions of Native American people and stereotypes in general. Each student should ponder the project as a whole and – as a last entry – jot down their findings into their reading portfolios. Subsequently, the hoped-for conclusion would be a final class discussion, in which students discuss their newly gained insights and offer constructive feedback concerning the project. Learners are equally invited to name positive and negative aspects and they are encouraged to offer suggestions for improvement. If teachers feel that students are not going to be honest, or too inhibited to give feedback in a plenary discussion, learners should be allowed to write their answers, suggestions, and feedback on a sheet of paper and submit it anonymously.
8 CONCLUSION

My diploma thesis aims at showing how authentic literary texts can help to promote intercultural competences, such as perspective-taking and stereotype-free thinking, in the EFL classroom. All of these concepts are not only valid in educational contexts, but they are of growing importance in other areas of life as well, as reading and interpreting meaningful literature educates the whole person. The EFL classroom offers teachers an early opportunity to make students aware of and assist them in going beyond their own ethnocentric perspectives. This can be achieved by fostering inter-cultural acceptance and understanding, so that learners may appreciate cross-cultural mixing and diversity instead of fighting it.

Furthermore, I regard authentic literature as particularly suitable for imparting dialogic cultural competence and open-mindedness. Accordingly, my thesis has been concerned with promoting student-centred teaching, in which students are granted the right to come up with their own interpretations, and are invited to communicate their ideas and emotions. In line with this, I have attached great importance to the concept of aesthetic reading, which implies that it is neither the text nor the reader that creates meaning, but it is the transaction between the two that allows meaning to evolve. The thesis has also drawn attention to the fact that the modern teacher is not in the position to provide the one and only interpretation of a text anymore, but students should have the opportunity to make sense of the text themselves.

However, getting involved with a text and facing intense emotions bears certain risks, so learners have to be prepared for and guided through the reading process carefully. Therefore, my paper has aimed at presenting concepts that turn the reading process into a worthwhile and positive experience, for both learners and teachers. The thesis has also shown that teachers must be careful when selecting a literary text, as not all texts are suitable for classroom use. For example, factors such as age, cultural background, intellectual maturity, or language proficiency have to be considered.

Furthering the goal of stereotype-free thinking, I have decided to introduce Sherman Alexie and his short story A Drug called Tradition and poem 13/16 to the EFL classroom. I regard these two texts as particularly suitable for broadening the students’
horizons, and thus they serve as a literary basis for my exemplary teaching unit. Also, Sherman Alexie’s texts tackle topics of cross-cultural relevance, so even European students are very likely to get involved with them. Another pivotal aspect why I opted for Sherman Alexie was that he knows how to address serious issues, such as identity crisis, drug abuse, and poverty, without sounding overly didactic. He encourages his readers to come to their own conclusions and to adopt an open focus – two notions that are completely in line with the major concerns of my thesis.

Finally, the exemplary teaching unit has been designed to put theory into practice. Following a holistic approach, it should offer teachers an example of how theoretical models can be applied to actual teaching situations. Hence, the proposed exercises should breathe life into the paper’s theoretically discussed concepts, so the thesis becomes more vivid and rich in content.
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10 APPENDIX

10.1 13/16

13/16

1. I cut myself into sixteen equal pieces
   keep thirteen and feed the other three
   to the dogs, who have also grown

tired of U.S. Commodities, white cans
black letters translated into Spanish.
"Does this mean I have to learn

the language to eat?" Lester FallsApart asks
but directions for preparation are simple:
a. WASH CAN; b. OPEN CAN; c. EXAMINE CONTENTS
   OF CAN FOR SPOILAGE; d. EMPTY CONTENTS
   OF CAN INTO SAUCE PAN; e. COOK CONTENTS
   OVER HIGH HEAT; f. SERVE AND EAT.

2. It is done by blood, reservation mathematics, fractions:
   father (full-blood) + mother (5/8) = son (13/16).

It is done by enrollment number, last name first, first name last:
Spokane Tribal Enrollment Number 1569; Victor, Chief.

It is done by identification card, photograph, lamination:
IF FOUND, PLEASE RETURN TO SPOKANE TRIBE OF INDIANS,
   WELLPINIT, WA.

3. The compromise is always made
   in increments. On this reservation
   we play football on real grass
   dream of deserts, three inches of rain

in a year. What we have lost:
uranium mine, Little Falls Dam
salmon. Our excuses are trapped
within museums, roadside attractions

totem poles in Riverfront Park,
I was there, watching the Spokane River
changing. A ten-year-old white boy asked
if I was a real Indian. He did not wait

for an answer, instead carving his initials

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18 Alexie, 1992: 16-17
into the totem with a pocketknife: J.N.
We are what we take, carving my name
my enrollment number, thirteen hash marks

into the wood. A story is remembered
as evidence, the Indian man they found dead
shot in the alley behind the Mayfair.
Authorities reported a rumor he had relatives

in Minnesota. A member of some tribe or another
his photograph on the 11 o'clock news. Eyes, hair
all dark, his shovel-shaped incisor, each the same
ordinary identification of the anonymous.

4.
When my father disappeared, we found him
years later, in a strange kitchen searching
for footprints in the dust: still

untouched on the shelves all the commodity
cans without labels—my father opened them
one by one, finding a story in each.
10.2 *A Drug called Tradition*\(^\text{19}\) by Sherman Alexie

A DRUG CALLED TRADITION

“...Oddamn it, Thomas,” Junior yelled. “How come your fridge is always fucking empty?!”

Thomas walked over to the refrigerator, saw it was empty, and then sat down inside.

“There,” Thomas said. “It ain’t empty no more.”

Everybody in the kitchen laughed their asses off. It was the second-largest party in reservation history and Thomas Builds-the-Fire was the host. He was the host because he was the one buying all the beer. And he was buying all the beer because he had just got a ton of money from Washington Water Power.

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\(^{19}\)Alexie, 2005: 12-23
And he just got a ton of money from Washington Water Power because they had to pay for the lease to have ten power poles running across some land that Thomas had inherited.

When Indians make lots of money from corporations that way, we can all hear our ancestors laughing in the trees. But we never can tell whether they're laughing at the Indians or the whites. I think they're laughing at pretty much everybody.

"Hey, Victor," Junior said. "I hear you got some magic mushrooms."

"No way," I said. "Just Green Giant mushrooms. I'm making salad later."

But I did have this brand new drug and had planned on inviting Junior along. Maybe a couple Indian princesses, too. But only if they were full-blood. Well, maybe if they were at least half-Spokane.

"Listen," I whispered to Junior to keep it secret. "I've got some good stuff, a new drug, but just enough for me and you and maybe a couple others. Keep it under your warbonnet."


We ditched the party, decided to save the new drug for ourselves, and jumped into Junior's Camaro. The engine was completely shot but the exterior was good. You see, the car looked mean. Mostly we just parked it in front of the Trading Post and tried to look like horsepowered warriors. Driving it was a whole other matter, though. It belched and farted its way down the road like an old man. That definitely wasn't cool.

"Where do you want to go?" Junior asked.

"Benjamin Lake," I said, and we took off in a cloud of oil and exhaust. We drove down the road a little toward Benjamin
Lake when we saw Thomas Builds-the-Fire standing by the side of the road. Junior stopped the car and I leaned out the window.

"Hey, Thomas," I asked. "Shouldn't you be at your own party?"

"You guys know it ain't my party anyway," Thomas said. "I just paid for it."

We laughed. I looked at Junior and he nodded his head.

"Hey," I said. "Jump in with us. We're going out to Benjamin Lake to do this new drug I got. It'll be very fucking Indian. Spiritual shit, you know?"

Thomas climbed in back and was just about ready to tell another one of his goddamn stories when I stopped him.

"Now, listen," I said. "You can only come with us if you don't tell any of your stories until after you've taken the drug."

Thomas thought that over awhile. He nodded his head in the affirmative and we drove on. He looked so happy to be spending the time with us that I gave him the new drug.

"Eat up, Thomas," I said. "The party's on me now."

Thomas downed it and smiled.

"Tell us what you see, Mr. Builds-the-Fire," Junior said.

Thomas looked around the car. Hell, he looked around our world and then poked his head through some hole in the wall into another world. A better world.

"Victor," Thomas said. "I can see you. God, you're beautiful. You've got braids and you're stealing a horse. Wait, no. It's not a horse. It's a cow."

Junior almost wrecked because he laughed so hard.

"Why the fuck would I be stealing a cow?" I asked.

"I'm just giving you shit," Thomas said. "No, really, you're stealing a horse and you're riding by moonlight. Van
Gogh should've painted this one, Victor. Van Gogh should've painted you."

*It was a cold, cold night.* I had crawled through the brush for hours, moved by inches so the Others would not hear me. I wanted one of their ponies. I needed one of their ponies. I needed to be a hero and earn my name.

I crawl close enough to their camp to hear voices, to hear an old man sucking the last bit of meat off a bone. I can see the pony I want. He is black, twenty hands high. I can feel him shiver because he knows I have come for him in the middle of this cold night.

Crawling more quickly now, I make my way to the corral, right between the legs of a young boy asleep on his feet. He was supposed to keep watch for men like me. I barely touch his bare leg and he swipes at it, thinking it is a mosquito. If I stood and kissed the young boy full on the mouth, he would only think he was dreaming of the girl who smiled at him earlier in the day.

When I finally come close to the beautiful black pony, I stand up straight and touch his nose, his mane.

*I have come for you,* I tell the horse, and he moves against me, knows it is true. I mount him and ride silently through the camp, right in front of a blind man who smells us pass by and thinks we are just a pleasant memory. When he finds out the next day who we really were, he will remain haunted and crowded the rest of his life.

I am riding that pony across the open plain, in moonlight that makes everything a shadow.

*What's your name?* I ask the horse, and he rears back on
his hind legs. He pulls air deep into his lungs and rises above the
ground.

*Flight*, he tells me, *my name is Flight.*

“That’s what I see,” Thomas said. “I see you on that
horse.”

Junior looked at Thomas in the rearview mirror, looked
at me, looked at the road in front of him.

“Victor,” Junior said. “Give me some of that stuff.”

“But you’re driving,” I said.

“That’ll make it even better,” he said, and I had to agree
with him.

“Tell us what you see,” Thomas said and leaned
forward.

“Nothing yet,” Junior said.

“Am I still on that horse?” I asked Thomas.

“Oh, yeah.”

We came up on the turnoff to Benjamin Lake, and Junior
made it into a screaming corner. Just another Indian boy engaged
in some rough play.

“Oh, shit,” Junior said. “I can see Thomas dancing.”

“I don’t dance,” Thomas said.

“You’re dancing and you ain’t wearing nothing. You’re
dancing naked around a fire.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Shit, you’re not. I can see you, you’re tall and dark and
fucking huge, cousin.”

* * *

16
They're all gone, my tribe is gone. Those blankets they gave us, infected with smallpox, have killed us. I'm the last, the very last, and I'm sick, too. So very sick. Hot. My fever burning so hot.

I have to take off my clothes, feel the cold air, splash the water across my bare skin. And dance. I'll dance a Ghost Dance. I'll bring them back. Can you hear the drums? I can hear them, and it's my grandfather and my grandmother singing. Can you hear them?

I dance one step and my sister rises from the ash. I dance another and a buffalo crashes down from the sky onto a log cabin in Nebraska. With every step, an Indian rises. With every other step, a buffalo falls.

I'm growing, too. My blisters heal, my muscles stretch, expand. My tribe dances behind me. At first they are no bigger than children. Then they begin to grow, larger than me, larger than the trees around us. The buffalo come to join us and their hooves shake the earth, knock all the white people from their beds, send their plates crashing to the floor.

We dance in circles growing larger and larger until we are standing on the shore, watching all the ships returning to Europe. All the white hands are waving good-bye and we continue to dance, dance until the ships fall off the horizon, dance until we are so tall and strong that the sun is nearly jealous. We dance that way.

"Junior," I yelled. "Slow down, slow down."

Junior had the car spinning in circles, doing donuts across empty fields, coming too close to fences and lonely trees.
“Thomas,” Junior yelled. “You’re dancing, dancing hard.”

I leaned over and slammed on the brakes. Junior jumped out of the car and ran across the field. I turned the car off and followed him. We’d gotten about a mile down the road toward Benjamin Lake when Thomas came driving by.

“Stop the car,” I yelled. and Thomas did just that.

“Where were you going?” I asked him.

“I was chasing you and your horse, cousin.”

“Jesus, this shit is powerful,” I said and swallowed some. Instantly I saw and heard Junior singing. He stood on a stage in a ribbon shirt and blue jeans. Singing. With a guitar.

*Indians make the best cowboys.* I can tell you that. I’ve been singing at the Plantation since I was ten years old and have always drawn big crowds. All the white folks come to hear my songs, my little pieces of Indian wisdom, although they have to sit in the back of the theater because all the Indians get the best tickets for my shows. It’s not racism. The Indians just camp out all night to buy tickets. Even the President of the United States, Mr. Edgar Crazy Horse himself, came to hear me once. I played a song I wrote for his great-grandfather, the famous Lakota warrior who helped us win the war against the whites:

*Crazy Horse, what have you done?*
*Crazy Horse, what have you done?*

*It took four hundred years*

*and four hundred thousand guns*
but the Indians finally won.
Ya-hey, the Indians finally won.

Crazy Horse, are you still singing?
Crazy Horse, are you still singing?
I honor your old songs
and all they keep on bringing
because the Indians keep winning.
Ya-hey, the Indians keep winning.

Believe me, I'm the best guitar player who ever lived. I can make my guitar sound like a drum. More than that, I can make any drum sound like a guitar. I can take a single hair from the braids of an Indian woman and make it sound like a promise come true. Like a thousand promises come true.

"Junior," I asked. "Where'd you learn to sing?"
"I don't know how to sing," he said.

We made our way down the road to Benjamin Lake and stood by the water. Thomas sat on the dock with his feet in the water and laughed softly. Junior sat on the hood of his car, and I danced around them both.

After a little bit, I tired out and sat on the hood of the car with Junior. The drug was beginning to wear off. All I could see in my vision of Junior was his guitar. Junior pulled out a can of warm Diet Pepsi and we passed it back and forth and watched Thomas talking to himself.

"He's telling himself stories," Junior said.
“Well,” I said. “Ain’t nobody else going to listen.”

“Why’s he like that?” Junior asked. “Why’s he always talking about strange shit? Hell, he don’t even need drugs.”

“Some people say he got dropped on his head when he was little. Some of the old people think he’s magic.”

“What do you think?”

“I think he got dropped on his head and I think he’s magic.”

We laughed, and Thomas looked up from the water, from his stories, and smiled at us.

“Hey,” he said. “You two want to hear a story?”

Junior and I looked at each other, looked back at Thomas, and decided that it would be all right. Thomas closed his eyes and told his story.

It is now. Three Indian boys are drinking Diet Pepsi and talking out by Benjamin Lake. They are wearing only loincloths and braids. Although it is the twentieth century and planes are passing overhead, the Indian boys have decided to be real Indians tonight.

They all want to have their vision, to receive their true names, their adult names. That is the problem with Indians these days. They have the same names all their lives. Indians wear their names like a pair of bad shoes.

So they decided to build a fire and breathe in that sweet smoke. They have not eaten for days so they know their visions should arrive soon. Maybe they’ll see it in the flames or in the wood. Maybe the smoke will talk in Spokane or English. Maybe the cinders and ash will rise up.
The boys sit by the fire and breathe, their visions arrive. They are all carried away to the past, to the moment before any of them took their first drink of alcohol.

The boy Thomas throws the beer he is offered into the garbage. The boy Junior throws his whiskey through a window. The boy Victor spills his vodka down the drain.

Then the boys sing. They sing and dance and drum. They steal horses. I can see them. They steal horses.

"You don't really believe that shit?" I asked Thomas.
"Don't need to believe anything. It just is."

Thomas stood up and walked away. He wouldn't even try to tell us any stories again for a few years. We had never been very good to him, even as boys, but he had always been kind to us. When he stopped even looking at me, I was hurt. How do you explain that?

Before he left for good, though, he turned back to Junior and me and yelled at us. I couldn't really understand what he was saying, but Junior swore he told us not to slow dance with our skeletons.

"What the hell does that mean?" I asked.
"I don't know," Junior said.

There are things you should learn. Your past is a skeleton walking one step behind you, and your future is a skeleton walking one step in front of you. Maybe you don't wear a watch, but your skeletons do, and they always know what time it is. Now, these skeletons are made of memories, dreams, and voices.
And they can trap you in the in-between, between touching and becoming. But they’re not necessarily evil, unless you let them be.

What you have to do is keep moving, keep walking, in step with your skeletons. They ain’t ever going to leave you, so you don’t have to worry about that. Your past ain’t going to fall behind, and your future won’t get too far ahead. Sometimes, though, your skeletons will talk to you, tell you to sit down and take a rest, breathe a little. Maybe they’ll make you promises, tell you all the things you want to hear.

Sometimes your skeletons will dress up as beautiful Indian women and ask you to slow dance. Sometimes your skeletons will dress up as your best friend and offer you a drink, one more for the road. Sometimes your skeletons will look exactly like your parents and offer you gifts.

But, no matter what they do, keep walking, keep moving. And don’t wear a watch. Hell, Indians never need to wear a watch because your skeletons will always remind you about the time. See, it is always now. That’s what Indian time is. The past, the future, all of it is wrapped up in the now. That’s how it is. We are trapped in the now.

Junior and I sat out by Benjamin Lake until dawn. We heard voices now and again, saw lights in the trees. After I saw my grandmother walking across the water toward me, I threw away the rest of my new drug and hid in the backseat of Junior’s car.

Later that day we were parked in front of the Trading Post, gossiping and laughing, talking stories when Big Mom
walked up to the car. Big Mom was the spiritual leader of the Spokane Tribe. She had so much good medicine I think she may have been the one who created the earth.

"I know what you saw," Big Mom said.

"We didn't see nothing," I said, but we all knew that I was lying.

Big Mom smiled at me, shook her head a little, and handed me a little drum. It looked like it was about a hundred years old, maybe older. It was so small it could fit in the palm of my hand.

"You keep that," she said. "Just in case."

"Just in case of what?" I asked.

"That's my pager. Just give it a tap and I'll be right over," she said and laughed as she walked away.

Now, I'll tell you that I haven't used the thing. In fact, Big Mom died a couple years back and I'm not sure she'd come even if the thing did work. But I keep it really close to me, like Big Mom said, just in case. I guess you could call it the only religion I have, one drum that can fit in my hand, but I think if I played it a little, it might fill up the whole world.
10.3 Instruction sheet exercise 2

Decide for yourselves whether or not the following statements about Native American people and Austrians provide accurate information.

You should be able to defend your choices in the following group and class discussions.

1. Native American people have one common language.
2. Many Native American traditions have been lost over the decades.
3. Native American people wear feather bonnets and are dressed in animal skin.
4. Reservations still exist today.
5. Alcohol abuse is a problem within some Native American communities.
6. Native American cultures belong to the richest ones in the world.
7. Most Native American people live in tepees.
9. Native American people are inferior to the American mainstream culture.
10. The term ‘blood quantum’ refers to a Native American person’s percentage of native blood.

11. German is the official language in Austria.
12. Austrians are unfriendly and inhospitable people.
13. Austria has no state religion, but Catholicism is the dominant one.
14. Austria is divided into nine federal states.
15. Most Austrians live on mountains and wear Lederhosen.
16. W. A. Mozart is representative of all Austrians.
17. Austria possesses many mountains and lakes.
18. Austrians are anti-Semitic people.
19. All Austrian teenagers know how to yodel.
20. To be officially recognised as citizens, Austrians must possess more than 50% ‘pure’ Austrian blood.
PART ONE:
Try to answer the following questions on the poem 13/16 and the short story *A Drug called Tradition* individually. There are no wrong answers, so do not hesitate to come up with your individual interpretative suggestions. Jot down your answers into your reading portfolios. Should you consider the questions to be too limited in scope, feel free to go beyond them!

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**13/16**

- What do you think is/are the poem’s main message(s)?
- What does the poem tell you about Native American identity?
- Look at the attached tribal enrolment application of the Ojibwe tribe. Imagine you are a person of Native American descent and try to fill it out. How do you feel? Is it an easy task? Why? Why not?
- How would you interpret the poem’s ending (verses 14-15)?

**A Drug called Tradition**

- There are two dimensions in the story. In your opinion, what is the oral stories’ purpose? Why did the author include this second dimension?
- Try to describe the protagonists’ feelings and thoughts. Can you imagine why they take the drug?
- What does the story tell you about reservation life?
- In your opinion, why is it so hard for Native American teenagers to develop a positive identity?
PART TWO:
Now try to interrelate 13/16 with *A Drug called Tradition*, so that a more holistic view may develop. You may work in pairs or small groups if you want to.

THE BIG PICTURE

- Compare both texts with regard to identity and reservation life. Jot down words, phrases, and/or passages from the texts that are related to these topics.

- Try to relate the addressed identity crises and living conditions to Austrian teenagers. Can you identify any similarities or differences to a teenager’s life in Austria? Are there any other aspects in the story / the poem that you regard as being similar / different to a teenager’s life in Austria?
Tribal Enrollment Application of the Ojibwe Tribe

Office of Tribal Enrollment
Application For Enrollment

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Complete the entire application page.
2. Attach the Applicant’s CERTIFIED BIRTH CERTIFICATE with the full name of the father and the full (maiden name) of the mother.
3. Attach a copy of Proof of Citizenship (if necessary).
4. If the Applicant is a member of another tribe, a relinquishment must be attached.
5. Mail the completed Application and all the necessary attachments to:

Office of Tribal Enrollments
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
115 Sixth Street NW, Suite E
Cass Lake, MN 56633

PRIVACY NOTICE

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe will use the information you provide to determine eligibility for enrollment with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. Providing Social Security Numbers is optional, if you do not provide other information, it may delay processing. In the event the application is approved, information about members is used to update Leech Lake Band and MCT records.

WARNING!

A false statement on any part of the application may result in a denial or loss of membership.

NOTICE

If the Applicant’s parents are both MCT members but affiliated with different Bands, the applicant will be enrolled under the Mother’s Band unless otherwise specified.

QUESTIONS?

Contact Office of Tribal Enrollments, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
Phone: 218-335-3601 or 1-800-442-3909 ext. 3601

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Applicant:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Last</th>
<th>Maiden</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Birth:</td>
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<td>State</td>
<td>Zip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security Number:</td>
<td><em><strong>-</strong></em>-______</td>
<td>Is the Applicant an Enrolled Member of another Tribe?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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* If the Applicant was not born in the United States, you must provide proof of citizenship.

Mother of Applicant:

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<th>First Name</th>
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<th>Last</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Physical Address:</td>
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<td>State</td>
<td>Zip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mailing Address:</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Zip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of Birth:</td>
<td>Social Security Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is Mother an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

If No, Does Mother possess any MCT Indian Blood? | Yes | No
If Yes, state degree

Name of person MCT Indian Blood is derived from

Does Mother have any other Indian Blood (outside of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe)? | Yes | No
If Yes, What Tribe and State?

What degree of Non MCT Indian Blood does she possess?

Father of Applicant:

<table>
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<th>Middle</th>
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<tr>
<td>Date of Birth:</td>
<td>Social Security Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is Father an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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</table>

If Yes, Father's Enrollment Number: |

If No, Does Father possess any MCT Indian Blood? | Yes | No
If Yes, state degree

Name of person MCT Indian Blood is derived from

Does Father have any other Indian Blood (outside of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe)? | Yes | No
If Yes, What Tribe and State?

What degree of Non MCT Indian Blood does he possess?

Specify Reservation of Enrollment for Application ____________________________________________________________

(Please note: All applicants will be enrolled under their Mother's Band, unless otherwise specified)

Signature of Person Filing Application ____________________________ Date ______________

Relationship to Applicant ____________________________ Telephone Number ____________________________

(If guardian attach proof)

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<th>AR#</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enr. Date</td>
<td>BQ</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Enr. Date</td>
</tr>
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Applicant MCT BQ ________ Percentage (%) ________ Band/Reservation ____________________________
10.5 Instruction sheet exercise 9

Choose one of the following writing tasks.

Pay attention to the different formats (letter and review) and their distinct characteristics. Write about 400-450 words and do not forget to add your letter/review to your portfolios. Should you consider the following suggestions too limited, feel free to go beyond them and add your own ideas!

1. **Write a letter to a friend about the texts you have read (13/16 and A Drug called Tradition). You may include ...**

   - information on plot, protagonists, settings, problems ...
   - information on the author
   - thoughts and emotions the texts have evoked in you
   - what you have learned from the texts
   - ideas or passages that still remain unclear
   - whether you like the texts or not
   - any other ideas you have

2. **Write a review of the story or the poem for a literary magazine. You may include ...**

   - information on the author and the story’s / poem’s settings and plot
   - your personal thoughts and impressions
   - the topics addressed in the text
   - why you would recommend it or not
   - the main message(s) of the text (in your opinion)
   - the intended readership (adults, teenagers, children, Native American people ...)
   - any other ideas you have
10.6 Instruction sheet exercise 10

Choose one of the following tasks. Pay attention to the different formats (diary entries and interview) and their distinct characteristics. Write about 400-450 words and add your diary entries/interview to your portfolios. Should you consider the following suggestions too limited, feel free to go beyond them and add your own ideas!

1. **Individual work:** Imagine you are one of the texts’ protagonists. Write diary entries of a typical day / week / month in your life. It is up to you how many diary entries you include. You may write about …

   - your feelings, thoughts, emotions …
   - your relationship with other characters of the story
   - problems you have to face in your life
   - your living conditions
   - explanations why you react(ed) in a certain way
   - any other ideas you have

2. **Pair work:** Conduct an interview and put it down on paper. Make sure that you pay attention to discourse markers in speech *(well, you know …)*

   *Student A:* You work for the local school magazine and you have been instructed to conduct an interview with one of the texts’ protagonists. You should concentrate your questions on stereotypes and their impact on the interviewed person, identity and reservation life.

   *Student B:* You are one of the texts’ Native American protagonists who is eager to inform mainstream students about stereotypes and their effects on Native American people, identity issues, and reservation life.

You are invited to act out the interview in class next lesson!