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Patrick Ness' Young Adult Fiction and Its Use In ELT

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci zpracoval samostatně pouze s využitím pramenů uvedených v seznamu literatury.

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.....

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses two selected young adult novels by a contemporary author Patrick Ness, namely the novels *A Monster Calls* and *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. The first chapter provides general information about the author and is followed by the analysis and interpretation of the two novels, each novel's analysis being one chapter of the thesis. The last chapter deals with the implementation of the chosen novels' extracts into English lessons, giving examples of the usage of the worksheets that are ready-made materials for the teachers to use in their lessons. The worksheets are listed in the Appendices.

INTRODUCTION

When I first read *A Monster Calls*, it fascinated me how much can be told by something as simple as a story. *“Stories are wild creatures, the monster said. When you let them loose, who knows what havoc they might wreak?”*¹

But apart from causing damage, the stories have always been the great source of our wisdom, be it the old mythical tales of the world’s creation, the ancient philosophical works, epics of the middle ages or fairy tales that are still being told to children, passing on them the basic elements, rules and values of our society and teaching them morals so necessary to become good people and to be successful in their future lives. And when I read the novels, letting the stories mentioned by the monster shape my world, it came into my mind that the “wild creatures” could be tamed and used to teach what we assume is needed. That the beast a story is could be released to trigger and support the learning process.

I also have witnessed many times at school, in the roles of a pupil, a student and eventually in the role of a teacher as well that many learners of a foreign language are shy to speak it. It might be caused by their introverted personality, it may be the fear of making mistakes, but one of the problems appeared to be that many topics seemed to be too personal to be talked about aloud, and this is the place for artificial literature. As uncovering the motifs behind the behaviour of the characters or talking about their problems is the way to make the learners leave their shells made of silence and start using the language more, which is the great way of learning it.

It also appears to me than learning the language from “something real”, the phrase commonly used by the students bored by the drilling, should be reacted to.

This thesis therefore concentrates on analysis of the two novels mentioned in the abstract, and the last chapter provides a manual of how the stories should be tamed in the lessons, and provide examples of the learning process as well where the experience of the author of this thesis makes it possible. The worksheets themselves are listed in the Appendices so they are easy to find, print, and take to the lessons.

¹ NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 69

1. PATRICK NESS

In this chapter I am going to provide information about the author of the novels this thesis will deal with in detail. The chapter will also supply the reader with a list of books written by the author to make more detailed overview on the author's work and its critical acclaim.

1.1 Patrick Ness' Life

Patrick Ness was born in 1971 in the USA.² As he states at his official website³, he was born in Virginia, but moved in an early childhood to Hawaii. He spent his years at high school junior and high school in Washington. Then he moved to Los Angeles where he studied at the University of South Carolina. In 1999 he moved to the United Kingdom where he lives up to these days.

He is a writer and a literary journalist, well known and critically acclaimed especially for his young adult novels, the most famous of them, named *A Monster Calls*, was also made into a movie, the screenplay being written by the author of the book himself.

Apart from writing, he has taught Creative Writing at Oxford University. He has written literary critics for the *Sunday Telegraph*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*. Currently, he also reviews books for *The Guardian*.⁴

1.3 Patrick Ness' Work and Its Critical Acclaim

The first novel by Patrick Ness was *The Crash of Hennington*, published in 2003. In 2004 he published a collection of short stories called *Topics About Which I Know Nothing*.

“In 2008, he published the first in his 'Chaos Walking' trilogy for young adults, *The Knife of Never Letting Go*. It is set in a dystopian world where everyone can hear everyone else's

² Patrick Ness – Literature. *Literature.britishcouncil.com* [online] [4. 3. 2020] Available from: <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/patrick-ness>

³ *Patrickness.com* [online] [4. 3. 2020] Available from: <https://patrickness.com/about-me/>

⁴ Patrick Ness – Literature. *Literature.britishcouncil.com* [online] [4. 3. 2020] Available from: <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/patrick-ness>

thoughts. This book won the 2008 *Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize and the Booktrust Teenage Prize, and was shortlisted for the 2009 Carnegie Medal. In 2009, the second book in the trilogy, *The Ask and the Answer*, won the Costa Children's Book Award. The third book, *Monsters of Men*, was published in 2010.⁵ The final novel of the trilogy was awarded Carnegie Medal.⁶

In 2011 Patrick Ness published his most famous young adult novel, *A Monster Calls*, which was awarded a Carnegie Medal a year later.⁷ The book will be a subject of deep analysis in this thesis, as well as its film adaptation from 2016 for which Patrick Ness himself wrote a screenplay. The basic story was created by a respected writer of children's prose Siobhan Dowd who died before she could write the book. Before she died she offered the idea to Patrick Ness who gladly accepted it and worked it into his most well-known novel.

Next Ness' other works include young adult novels called *More Than This* (2013), *The Rest of Us Just Live Here* (2015), and *Release* (2018), which were all shortlisted for Carnegie Medal.⁸

In 2014 he published *The Crane Wife*, a novel meant for adult readers.

2 A MONSTER CALLS

In this chapter I am going to analyse the novel *A Monster Calls*. The chapter will deal with genre analysis, plot summary and the role of the narrator as it plays an important role in the novel. The chapter will also include characteristics of the novel's protagonists and deeper interpretation of literary motifs of the novel which should help the teacher while using the worksheets in Appendices.

⁵ Patrick Ness – Literature. *Literature.britishcouncil.com* [online] [4. 3. 2020] Available from: <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/patrick-ness>

⁶ Carnegie Medals Winners – The CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Children's Book Awards. *Carnegiegreenaway.org.uk* [online] [4. 3. 2020] Available from: <https://carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/archive/carnegie-medal-winners/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Patrickness.com* [online] [4. 3. 2020] Available from: <https://patrickness.com/about-me/>

2.1 Genre and Plot Summary

A Monster Calls is a typical mixture of genres that Patrick Ness likes to combine in his books, namely realistic story and fantasy. While realism represents the ability of “*revealing the truth of contemporary life in society*”⁹, fantasy is a literary term often used “*to describe a metagenre of disparate works characterised by a degree of explicit anti-realism and embracing horror, high fantasy, dark fantasy, science fiction, cyberpunk, futurism, Gothic fiction, ghost stories, magical realism, counterfactual stories, myths, folklore and fairy tales. (...) This diversity makes fantasy an unusually difficult genre to specify. It has no conventions apart from anti-realism and its subject matter may be wizardry, or a fictional application of quantum theory, or the Celtic twilight, or a Californian town besieged by vampires.*”¹⁰ Having identified and described the genre, let us elaborate on the way they are implemented into the novel.

As for the elements of realistic writing, A Monster Calls is a story of a thirteen years old boy called Conor whose mother suffers from cancer and is slowly dying. Unfortunately, Conor does not have firm relationships that would help him ease his pain and deal with the heart-breaking situation, and that makes place for a fantasy genre element to emerge from his fear and to help him face the unbearable reality of his mother’s inevitable death. This fantastic element is a yew tree referred to as *monster* which is brought to life, as it explains to the boy, by Conor himself.

*“What do you want from me?” Conor said. The monster pressed its face close to the window. It is not what I want from you, Conor O’Malley, it said. It is what you want from me. “I don’t want anything from you,” Conor said. Not yet, said the monster. But you will.”*¹¹

What the monster means is that Conor is in desperate need of someone to whom he could talk about his miserable situation. The monster therefore comes to help him deal with his suffering by telling him three stories that shall make it possible for the boy to understand and finally accept what is inevitably going to happen.

⁹ FOWLER, Roger, ed. *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*. London: Routledge, 1993, ix, 262 p. ISBN 0415058848. p. 200

¹⁰ *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. HERMAN, David, Manfred JAHN and Marie-Laure RYAN. London: Routledge, 2008, xxix, 718 p. ISBN 978-0-415-77512-0. p. 160

¹¹ NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 47-48

The upcoming death of the boy's mother is not his only problem. Six years earlier, Conor's father had moved away from the family to start a new one, which makes Conor's current situation even harder as he is scared of his future life without his mother or anyone loving to care after him. There is Conor's grandmother from his mother's branch of family tree, but she is a very strict woman with lack of empathy to raise a struggling child. She demands strong discipline and enforces rules to be followed, which is the reason why Conor does not like her at all. On top of that, at the time his mother's illness appears for the first time, Conor starts to be bullied at school, and in consequence there is no place where he would feel safe and contended. All aspects of his life seem to be equally miserable. Nevertheless, with the help of the three stories told by the monster, Conor finally finds a way to overcome his mother's death and makes peace with his grandmother who moves in to take care of him.

2.2 The Role of the Narrator and the Structure of the Narrative

Before we proceed to the characters and motifs of the novel, it is necessary to mention the specifics of how the novel itself it is written. As already mentioned, the novel merges aspects of realism with those of fantasy, which is what the author does on regular basis, but we have not mentioned yet the structure of the novel or the role of the narrator. *A Monster calls* is written from the third-person point of view. Based on the literary terminology set by Vodičková we can say that the story of Conor is told by a specific type of the omniscient narrator. "*None of the characters seems to be the central teller of the story, and we have access to all, or at least to many, of the characters' thoughts and feelings*".¹² It is obvious that the narrator of the story has the knowledge of what is going on and is able to give the information to the reader that is necessary to understand the plot and motivation of most characters.

On the other hand, there seems to be slight imbalance between the place that is given to the thoughts of the main protagonist and place for all the others. In other words, there appears to be the central character of Conor, and therefore we must specify the type of the narrator further. Foster questions the role of the narrator even more as he introduces a sub-type of third person which he calls third person limited. "*Like the omniscient narrator, this one is an outsider to the action, usually unidentified as anything other than a voice. This one, however, only identifies*

¹² VODIČKOVÁ, Milena. *How to Read and Study Literature*. Olomouc: Palacký University, 2006, 92 p. ISBN 8024415100. p. 35

with one character, going where she goes and seeing what she sees, as well as recording her thoughts. It provides a fairly one-sided view of the action, although this is not the impediment it might seem."¹³ This description depicts the narrator as precisely as possible. There is the character of Conor whose thoughts, opinions and emotions are described to the reader more frequently than those of the other characters. We can undoubtedly trust the narrator in what he says about Conor or anyone else. There is no situation where the narrator would lie or give confusing or inaccurate information. The only thing the narrator does is that he gives the pieces of information in the way that the reader does not know everything immediately, making the reader think for themselves until the matter is openly revealed. For example, when Conor starts to be bullied for the first time, the narrator only tells us what Conor thinks the reason might be and lets us ponder about the true reason, which is to be revealed by the bully in their direct speech later in the novel. The postponing of such revelation is not deceiving the reader. It is a means of building tension and interest which is a key device used by the authors to grip the reader to the story.

The writer is using the device that Wolfgang Iser described as the theory of empty places in literature.¹⁴ The key principle is that the information missing is being constructed by the reader which makes them an active participant of the story. It is not only important what is written or said, says Iser, but also what is not. Be everything said immediately, the reader would soon become bored by the book and their motivation to continue reading would fall. It is rather this principle that makes the narrator not reveal some facts or motivations immediately than the lack of the information on the side of the narrator. After all, the narrator is not a character of the story and cannot be therefore suspected of altering the facts or hide anything based on their own interests. He only wants to tell us the story, and he wants to do it as best as he can.

The unusual aspect of the novel is that the narrator changes several times within the novel. The one identified and described above is the main storyteller, but there are times when the narrative role is overtaken by a character of the novel, namely the monster. When the monster

¹³ FOSTER, Thomas C. *How to Read Novels Like a Professor*. New York: Harper, 2017, 312 p. ISBN 978-0-06-134040-06. p. 46

¹⁴ VALA, Jaroslav. *Vybrané kapitoly z didaktiky literární výchovy*. Olomouc: Palacký University, 2014. [online] [4. 5. 2020]. Available from: [http://kcjl2.upol.cz/studijni_materialy_akreditace/NAVAZUJICI_MAGISTERSKE_STUDIUM/2\)_Didaktika_literatury_1_\(VALA_J.\)/Vala-Vybrane_kapitoly_z_didaktiky_literatury.pdf](http://kcjl2.upol.cz/studijni_materialy_akreditace/NAVAZUJICI_MAGISTERSKE_STUDIUM/2)_Didaktika_literatury_1_(VALA_J.)/Vala-Vybrane_kapitoly_z_didaktiky_literatury.pdf)

comes to tell Conor stories, it takes over the narrative role and we become aware of the fact that the narrative perspective has changed.

The monster comes to tell stories that do not at first seem to be connected to the main story of the novel. This principle is known as a story within the story, and it plays a major part in the narrative. The monster tells tales of long ago forgotten times that at first do not seem to be connected to Conor's life, but later on the monster explains to Conor, as well as to the reader, the hidden meaning of the stories. The stories themselves shall be interpreted later in this thesis. When a story given by the monster ends, the former narrator takes their role back and the narrative continues in the same way as before.

As the monster is a character of the book, the reader becomes more suspicious of what it says as there might be hidden motivation behind its words that is to be revealed further in the story. As Foster says, "*Stop believing the narrator when you see the word I*".¹⁵ At first, Conor does not understand the message the monster brings to him. This may be caused by the nature of the first story that appears to be a bed-time story, and Conor is not at first interested in listening to it. The connection between the monster's tales and reality of Conor's life develops slowly during the whole novel.

Considering the structure of the novel, it is divided into short chapters which are supposed to make it possible to read the book continually for a longer time, leaving places where the reader can interrupt their reading and get back to the book in a point when one logically finished part ends and another one begins. The names of the chapters also make it possible to easily find passages that the reader might be searching for in order to reread them, which would help recollect already known facts when reading. The story is complex and to understand the current situation it might be useful to get back to certain passages.

The story of Conor is told chronologically with several flashbacks, for example the moment when Conor recollects his memories of his father leaving or his mother's illness' first appearance, and the times when the monster takes over to tell its stories.

¹⁵ FOSTER, Thomas C. *How to Read Novels Like a Professor*. New York: Harper, 2017, 312 p. ISBN 978-0-06-134040-06. p. 57

2.3 The Characters

*“If we except lyric poetry, nearly all literature is character-based. That is, it’s about people. (...) And for people, characters, to hold our interest as readers or viewers, it is important for them to do things from time to time. Big things: go on quests, marry, divorce, give birth, die, kill, tame the land, make a mark. (...) No matter how large or small the actions, though, the most important thing that characters can do is change-grow, develop, learn, mature, call it what you will. As we know from our own lives, change can be difficult, painful, arduous, possibly dangerous. Sometimes even fatal.”*¹⁶ To complete Foster’s idea, we would like to add that it is not only important what the characters do, but also what is done to them, or what happens to them by means of outer power as it may force them to develop, no matter whether they truly want to or not. *A Monster Calls* is not about astounding adventures or heroic journeys done by the protagonists, but rather about the changes in Conor’s mind and the way he deals with his fate that he does not possess the option to alter. The key word from Foster’s definition is therefore maturing.

2.3.1 Conor

As already mentioned, Conor is a thirteen years old boy whose mother is slowly dying to cancer, and the third person narrator looks on the world mostly from his perspective, describing to the reader what Conor feels, thinks or plans to do. When he was seven years old, his father left his mother to start a new family in America, and it took Conor several years to accept the fact that he will not see his father often, staying with his mother in Great Britain. It is the memory of having lost the father that makes his situation tremendously difficult when he finds out his mother is going to leave him forever and he will have to live with his grandmother whom he does not like. At first Conor wishes he could follow his father and become a part of his new family, but the adults insist that Conor’s life is where he lives.

For a boy his age, Conor is very mature even at the beginning of the story because his mother is not always capable of cooking or caring for him due to her illness. Having to prepare food for himself and clean the kitchen afterwards becomes daily routine soon in his life and he gets

¹⁶ FOSTER, Thomas C. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. New York: Harper, 2014, 336 p. ISBN 978-0-06-230167-3. p.77

quite self-sufficient in many aspects of life that children his age usually need to be helped with by their parents. He cooks and eats alone, helps his mother when necessary and does the schoolwork on his own as he knows about the situation in the family and feels uncomfortable about bothering his weak mother with matters that are not of key importance. He is used to do most things by himself and often refuses help even when he needs it, being also quite ambitious to manage everything without the need to be helped, guided or organized eternally. His mother is aware of the situation and often feels sorry for her son. *"You're a good boy," she said again. "I wish you didn't have to be quite so good."*¹⁷ This opinion is shared by Conor's grandmother, too, when she comes for a visit to take care of her daughter and to settle her grandson's future. *"I'm here because thirteen-year-old boys shouldn't be wiping down counters without being asked to first."*¹⁸ The appearance of his grandmother always scares Conor as she only comes for a visit when her daughter's illness gets worse. Conor also knows that when his mom dies, he will quite probably have to move to his grandmother's house and change school, which does not appeal to him as he would lose the last remnant of the world he used to know and like a long time ago.

2.3.2 The Monster

While Foster says most narratives are about people, the characters may be represented by things, thoughts, or even personality traits. The second most important character in *A Monster Calls* is a yew tree that grows on the graveyard behind Conor's house, and it is referred to as *monster*. The presence of the graveyard as well as the fact that the monster lives at this sort of place gives the monster from the very beginning the association with death. The symbolism is strengthened even by the type of a tree it is. Ferber says that *"It is presumably because yew berries and leaves are poisonous that the tree acquired its deadly associations, and perhaps also because its dark foliage."*¹⁹ On top of that, the last medicament that Conor's mother takes before she loses her fight with the illness is said to come from the yew berries, which connects the symbol of death with life. These hints shall suggest that while the monster comes to the boy to help him deal with his mother's death, it is also willing to help him endure the situation so his own life

¹⁷ NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 31

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 59

¹⁹ FERBER, Michael. *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, x, 263 p. ISBN 0521591287. p. 245

would continue afterwards. Life and death merge in the character of the monster to prove that every suffering can be overcome and that there always is hope.

At the beginning of the novel, the existence of the monster is sometimes doubted as it can only be seen and heard by Conor. At first, the boy speaks of it as of a nightmare that visits him time to time, always precisely seven minutes after midnight. There is the same symbolism of merging good and bad signs in the time the monster occurs which is always the same, with one exception when it appears seven minutes after noon. Not the midnight, but the time on the clock is the same.

The existence of the monster is proven by the fact that it leaves marks that can be visible even when Conor is awake. *“It had been a dream. What else could it have been.? (...) He’d laughed a little at the thought, at how stupid it all was, and he’d stepped out of bed. To the sound of a crunch beneath his feet. Every inch of his bedroom floor was covered in short, spiky yew tree leaves.”*²⁰

While the monster itself can only be seen by Conor, the leaves that appear on his bedroom floor in the morning alert the boy who keeps throwing them into the trash secretly for his mother not to see them. This ambiguity of the monster’s perception by the other characters lies in the fact that the monster may represent feelings and opinions that only Conor knows about, desperately keeping them a secret, so if he tries hard enough, the monster will not be revealed to anyone else but him. The little possibility of a leak of Conor’s emotions is represented by the branches that remain lying on the floor of his room after the monster leaves. The existence of the monster, just as the thoughts the boy is scared to say aloud, is therefore partly possible to be registered by the others as well, and therefore he needs to do his best to keep everything a secret.

2.3.3. Harry, Sully and Anton

Harry is the leader of a group of boys who start bullying Conor after the nature of his mother’s illness is revealed to everyone at school by Conor’s friend Lily. While Harry is a deep and slightly mysterious character, Sully and Anton only serve the role of his followers, having no brains of their own and being satisfied by always doing precisely what Harry tells them to do.

²⁰ NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 26

Harry is by no means a primitive brute. He is clever and wants to see behind what is shown, said or done. It is him who finally discovers Conor's greatest fear and tries to use it against him, having find out that ignoring Conor will hurt him significantly more than physical violence as the only thing Conor is desperate for is attention, which is the reason why he does not try to oppose his bullies.

In the story, Harry represents the evil that rises from nowhere with no previous warning when there is an opportunity to hurt and destroy someone already bound to bear the unbearable.

2.3.4. Lily

Lily is Conor's only friend, but he is angry with her as it was her who gave away the secret of his mother's health issues at school. He blames her for all the changes in attitude and behaviour that he can see in his schoolmates and teachers who do not know how to behave to a child who is in such a miserable family situation. Despite the fact that Lily has always tried to defend him and truly feels sorry for him, he is deeply convinced that if she had not told everyone about his mother, he would lead a relatively normal life, being accepted and treated just as a regular child his age. As a result of the secret revealed, the teachers become alerted by his presence, try to be nice to him and do not impose the same requirements on him as they do on other pupils. From Conor's point of view, this kind of behaviour is terrible as he wishes at least some aspects of his life to be the same as they used to be.

2.4 Motifs of the Novel

Foster defines literary motifs as "*Staff that happens again and again. (...) Motif can be image, action, language pattern, anything that happens again and again. (...) Like the flowers in Mrs. Dalloway.*"²¹ It is therefore a phenomenon that keeps reappearing in the novel, which draws our attention. The importance of the action or event is not always given purely by its repetition, but the constant or recurrent presence of it shall imply that it is important.

²¹ FOSTER, Thomas C. *How to Read Novels Like a Professor*. New York: Harper, 2017, 312 p. ISBN 978-0-06-134040-06. p. 29-30

2.4.1 The Monster

One of the key motifs of the novel is the monster. As we have already mentioned, it is a yew tree which came to life, but its meaning in the book is revealed slowly, mostly through its words and actions. It is also worth a thought where it comes from and what makes it rise from its state. The very first moment the monster appears it explains that it comes for a certain purpose that is hidden, but that will be revealed in a short time. The purpose of the monster's interference into Conor's life can be found out by hints that the monster gives to Conor when being asked about itself. *"I have had as many names as there are years to time itself!" roared the monster. (...) I am the spine that the mountains hang upon! I am the tears that the rivers cry! I am the lungs that breathe the wind! I am the wolf that kills the stag, the hawk that kills the mouse, the spider that kills the fly! I am the stag, the mouse and the fly that are eaten! I am the snake of the world devouring its tail! I am everything untamed and untameable! (...) I am this wild earth, come to you, Conor O'Malley. (...) I do not often come walking, boy, the monster said, only for matters of life and death. I expect to be listened to."*²²

By now it is clear that the monster comes to solve a matter of life and death. It is however still not certain who the monster is. The speech that should reveal its true nature contains too many contradictory information, and it is therefore suggesting that the monster is neither the killer nor the prey, neither good nor evil. Its role lies in between the contradictory principles of the world, representing them both and possibly maintaining the balance between them. The monster also insists that the reason it comes to this world lies in Conor, and that it was him who called the monster and not vice versa. *"You thought I might be here to help you, the monster said. (...) You felt the truth of it when I said that you called for me, that you were the reason I had come walking. Did you not?"*²³ The help lies in the stories that the monster is going to tell, and before the first one is introduced, the monster insists that once the last story is over, Conor has to tell one story in exchange. *"You will tell me the fourth, the monster repeated, and it will be the truth. (...) Not just any truth. Your truth. (...) You know that your truth, the one that you hide, Conor O'Malley, is the thing you are most afraid of."*²⁴

²² NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 49-50

²³ Ibid, p. 68

²⁴ Ibid, p. 52

2.4.2 The First Story

It is said by the monster at the first time it appears right at the beginning of the novel that the key motif in the narrative will lie be the stories that are going to be told. The first story takes place after Conor's grandmother appears and tells him that after his mother's death, he will have to live with her. The monster comes to tell Conor a story about a kingdom whose king lost all his sons in battles and had only a grandson remaining from his family. The king married again happily, but after some time he got ill. It was rumoured that his new wife was a witch and that she started to add poison to her husband's drinks so she would get full power over the kingdom after his death.

Once the king died, she became the queen and it was agreed on that she will pass the reign on the king's only grandson when he is old enough to rule. However, she enjoyed her power, and therefore decided to marry the young prince, her step-grandson, and rule by his side, which he does not approve of so he runs away with his love who was only a daughter of a poor farmer. The young couple decides to run away together, and at night they settle under a great yew tree – the monster. *"But his love did not wake. He shook her, and it was only as she slumped back in the moonlight that he noticed the blood staining the ground. (...) The prince also had blood covering his own hands, and he saw a bloodied knife on grass beside them, resting against the roots of the tree. Someone had murdered his beloved and done so in a way that made it look like the prince had committed a crime."*²⁵

The prince put together a group of villagers and declared that his bride was killed by the queen. Then they attack the kingdom, seize the queen and decide to burn her alive, which is the moment when the monster interferes. It takes the queen and takes her far away from the kingdom, letting her finish her life in peace at the place where she could do no harm. At first, Conor is surprised by the end, but the monster explains that it was the prince who killed the young woman. He needed the anger of his people to help him overthrow the queen, and the claim that she had murdered his bride served that purpose. He then became a popular king and his reign was good, while the witch saved by the monster finished her life elsewhere. Conor is confused and does not understand the point of the story as he is strongly convinced there should be heroes and villains and he is not able to tell one from another. The monster explains: *"There is not always*

²⁵ NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 75-76

*a good guy. Nor is there always a bad one. Most people are somewhere inbetween. (...) Kingdoms get the princes they deserve, farmers' daughters die for no reason, and sometimes witches merit saving. Quite often, actually. You'd be surprised."*²⁶

At first, Conor is not able to find the moral of the story, nor can he tell how it is connected to his life and why the monster tells him this kind of a tale. In his childlike and narrow interpretation, he suggests that his grandmother is a witch and he should be saved from her with the help of the monster, but as the story ends, he is not able to understand anything. The creation of parallels between the monster's tales and the reality of Conor's life is partially the duty passed on the reader as Conor is not always capable of understanding.

2.4.3 The Second Story

The second story of the monster after Conor moves to live with his grandmother when his mother is in hospital as her health gets worse. This time, it is Conor who calls the monster intentionally, breaking an old clock and leaving the hands of it at the time when the monster always arrives. It is the first time the monster appears indoors, namely in Conor's grandmother's house. The monster introduces the tale as the story about a man who only thought of himself, which makes Conor think about what he had told his father who had recently arrived to spend some time with him.

The story takes place a long time ago when factories started to be built. At these times, there was an apothecary who used herbs and natural resources to heal people. With his knowledge of body and its functioning he could use the gifts of nature to cure nearly any disease, and he was respected by the villagers who often came to him for help. On the other hand, he was greedy and demanded to be paid a lot of money for his services. There also was a church led by an ambitious parson who declared the old ways of the apothecary not appropriate for the modern age, and with his sermons he slowly lured the villagers into the hands of religious belief, and far from the old ways of healing. The apothecary lost nearly all his patients and his business was nearly destroyed.

²⁶ NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 84

To be able to go on with his procedures, the apothecary needed a yew tree that grew close to the church and it was under the parson's authority. Many times the apothecary came and asked for the tree to be given to him, but he was always sent away. One day, both parson's daughters get ill and no prayers seem to be able to help them. The parson goes to the apothecary and offers him the yew tree if he will cure his daughters. He offers to serve sermons in favour of the apothecary and to help him become trusted again.

*"The Apothecary was surprised. "You would give up everything you believed in?" "If it would save my daughters," the parson said, "I'd give up everything." "Then," the Apothecary said, shutting his door on the parson, "there is nothing I can do to help you.""*²⁷

That night, the parson's daughters both died, and at that moment the monster came walking again. But to the great surprise of Conor, the monster decided to punish the parson and destroy his home. Conor thinks it was the apothecary who refused to save the innocent children who deserved to be punished, but the monster thinks otherwise.

*"He was greedy and rude and bitter, but he was still a healer. The parson, though, who was he? He was nothing. Belief is half of healing. Belief in the cure, belief in the future that awaits. And here was a man who lived on belief, but who sacrificed it at the first challenge, right when he needed it most. He believed selfishly and fearfully. And it took the lives of his daughters.""*²⁸

As a punishment, the monster destroys the parson's home, and it offers Conor an opportunity to help, which he gladly accepts. Within the image of the story, Conor and the monster destroy everything they can. Once they are done, the scene changes and Conor finds himself in the ruins of the sitting room in his grandmother's house. *"Conor stood there in shock. He looked down at his hands, which were covered in scratches and blood, his fingernails torn and ragged, aching from the labour.""*²⁹

²⁷ NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 131

²⁸ Ibid, p. 135

²⁹ Ibid, p. 139-140

2.4.4 Invisibility

The term is not used in its usual meaning we would expect it to have in fiction. It relates to the state that Conor enters when his schoolmates and teachers find out about his mother's illness, and not having a clue of how to behave, they simply decide not to recognise his existence at all. It is not by bad intention, but everyone starts to be so careful not to say anything that could do harm that they end up not talking to Conor at all, forgiving his mistakes, ignoring the tasks for school that he did not submit and feeling about everything wrong that Conor does that it shall not be taken into account because of the problems he is facing in his life. While the people generally do this with the intention to avoid additional harm, it has exactly the opposite effect. On top of what is happening to his mother, Conor starts to feel socially isolated, which only adds to his already great frustration.

Even though his personal life is not satisfying, the boy wishes to be accepted and treated just like everyone else at least at school, and being ignored, he feels deceived. It is not only the withdrawal of his former friends who he used to talk to (not that there were many, as he says), but this type of behaviour comes from his family, too, when he destroys the sitting room in his grandmother's house. The next morning, his father talks to him at breakfast and he suggests acting like the destruction never happened. Conor is not to be punished at all. *"What could possibly be the point?"*³⁰ The father, no matter how good his intentions are, does not realise that by leaving such deed without notice, he does not make his son's life more bearable, but he is actually doing him more harm. Conor desperately wishes to be seen and to be treated as normally as possible, which is a privilege taken away from him. *"Mrs Marl didn't even make him hand in his Life Writing homework, even though it was due that day. Conor hadn't written a single sentence. Not that it seemed to matter."*³¹

While being ignored by teachers is something that most pupils could cope with quite easily, Conor slowly realises that he is utterly alone when even Lily seems to stop caring about him. *"He found himself trying to catch her eye but she never looked over at him. Almost as if she could no longer see him."*³²

³⁰ NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 149

³¹ Ibid, p. 150

³² Ibid, p. 146

The ignorance of Conor's person is taken to another level when his bully Harry realises why Conor never defends himself when being beaten. In their brief history of bullying, there never was a moment when Conor would fight back, even though his bully did not have advantage in power that would make acts of self-defending useless. Conor just accepts hits and evil remarks of his mother's state as they are the only signs of attention and recognition of his existence that he gets from the whole world around him. Being laughed at, scorned or beaten does not appear to be that bad being compared to the state of total social death. And that is what Harry realises when Conor openly asks to be hit by him.

*"Here is the hardest hit of all, O'Malley," Harry said. "Here is the worst thing I can do to you." He held out his hand, as if asking for a handshake. He was asking for a handshake. Conor responded almost automatically, putting out his own hand and shaking Harry's before he even thought about what he was doing. They shook hands like two businessmen at the end of a meeting. "Goodbye, O'Malley," Harry said, looking into Conor's eyes. "I no longer see you."*³³

Thinking about the long-term bullying, we might assume that its end would be welcome as a relief, but it is the contrary in this situation. Harry guessed the situation right. By beating Conor, he used to be the last bound between him and the world of the living, as there was no other interaction between Conor and those who were alive. The act of reconciliation was not nice, in fact this was the first time when Harry actually did harm to Conor, for one of his greatest fears and miseries was based on the deep inner feeling of being useless, empty and worthless. The tremendous and unbearable feeling that he had no true value to any other human being, which rose and strengthened as he was slowly falling into the abyss of ignorance. As put down by the monster, *"if no one sees you, (...) are you really there at all?"*³⁴

There are several ways of proving one's existence. The biological one says that you are alive when you breathe and have a heartbeat, but the social one says that a person is only alive when they affect other lives. In other words, a person is alive when their actions, deeds and existence have impact on other beings within the realm of the living, and from this point of view, what Harry did to Conor by shaking his hand was an attempted murder. The deed that required the intervention of the monster and its last story.

³³ NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 173

³⁴ Ibid, p.175

2.4.5 The Third Story

The third story of the monster starts at the moment when Harry tells Conor he no longer sees him. It is then when the clock reaches 12.07, the time of the monster, when Conor is told a third story. The story of a man who was invisible. *“It was not that he was **actually** invisible, (...) It was that people had become used to not seeing him.”*³⁵ The invisible man called for a monster to help him be seen, and with the help of the monster, Conor gave Harry a hard beating, which was later summarised by the Headmistress of the school. *“You broke his arms, his nose, and I’ll bet his teeth are never going to look that pretty again.”*³⁶ The rules at school demanded immediate exclusion, which made Conor happy as he was after a long time of ignorance going to reach a sign of the others becoming aware of his existence. He had done something big and important, and he was looking forward to hold responsibility for his doings. However, he was not expelled and the talk about his punishment was postponed to the time where he did not have “bigger things to think about”, as the Headmistress said. It is that day after he is led back to class that he realises the truth behind the lesson given by the monster’s last story. *“There are worse things than being invisible, the monster said, and it was right.”*³⁷ The effort put to being seen was successful, but excessively. Conor turns from being ignored to being feared, which he soon realises is much worse.

2.4.6 The Nightmare and The Fourth Story

There is a nightmare that Conor goes through, mostly at nights and that makes him wake up screaming. The nightmare is mentioned throughout the novel, but its true nature is revealed only after a talk he has with his mother in the hospital. She makes him know she is not going to survive this episode of her illness and that he will have to deal with it. Right after, Conor asks his grandmother to take him to the house where he lived before he had moved to her, she leaves him there and he goes to the yew tree at the graveyard behind his house. The tree wakes up, no matter it is not its time, and asks Conor to tell the fourth story. The monster takes Conor into his nightmare where his mother is falling to emptiness while he is holding her hand. *“He was on the cliff edge, bracing himself, holding onto his mother’s hands with all his strength,*

³⁵ NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 175

³⁶ Ibid, p. 180

³⁷ Ibid, p. 187

*trying to keep her from being pulled down into the blackness, pulled down by the creature below the cliff.”*³⁸

The nightmare used to end by Conor letting go of his mother’s hands, letting her fall, but this time it goes on and the monster keeps asking for the truth that he finally gets. *“I can’t stand it any more. (...) I can’t stand knowing that she’ll go! I just want it to be over! I want it to be finished!”*³⁹ This is the truth that had to be spoken. The fourth story. There were times when Conor felt so miserable that he wished for everything to be over, and he felt like he was a miserable person for having such a wish, but it is explained to him by the monster that it is actually all right as he mostly wished for the end of pain. Even believing two contradictory thoughts at the same time is according to the monster acceptable. *“Because humans are complicated beasts, (...) The answer is that it does not matter what you think, the monster said, because your mind will contradict itself a hundred times each day. You wanted her to go at the same time you were desperate for me to save her. Your mind will believe comforting lies while also knowing the painful truths that make those lies necessary. And your mind will punish you for believing both.”*⁴⁰

What matters then is what a person does facing their worst nightmares, not what they assume, think or wish for. It is this revelation that leads Conor to do the right thing when he is taken to the hospital to say the last goodbye to his mother. *“I don’t want you to go,” he said again. And that was all he needed to say.”*

2.5 Comparison Between the Novel and the Movie

In 2016 the novel was made into a movie, Directed by J. A. Barona, the script being written by the author of the book himself. There are many passages from the novel quoted word-to-word in the movie, which is because the author believes in power of his words and would like to make the same impact using them in the movie just as he did in the book. Compared to the book, there are fewer encounters of Conor with the monster in the movie and the plot is revealed slightly faster. What the monster has to tell it tells more quickly and goes sooner to the point. The same applies to the state of Conor’s mother who has a weak moment at the beginning of the movie

³⁸ NESS, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 244 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6585-6. p. 211

³⁹ Ibid, p. 220

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 223-224

to show how bad her health is. The nature of Conor's nightmare is also revealed to the viewer sooner as the visual adaptation needs to show more than is explained in the book neutrally as darkness or emptiness. In the movie, Conor's nightmare always happens at the graveyard which connects it immediately with death. Also, in the movie, Conor is one year younger than he is said to be in the book.

The proportions of magical features are also different. For example, when Conor enters the graveyard, in the book he has to climb the gate while in the movie it opens itself when he approaches.

To strengthen the difference between the tales told by the monster and reality, the tales are animated while the rest of the movie is acted, except the monster, of course.

The movie relieved a few more information about other characters than just Conor. Conor's mother wanted to go to art school, but she got pregnant with Conor and everything changed. While the book mostly concentrates on Conor, the movie gives us a look into the other characters as well. This is partly because an acted movie logically features more dialogues and there is more to be told aloud, so it feels natural that the characters speak slightly more than they do in the book. The father tells Conor about the times when he was younger and married his mother, which is not spoken about in the book. The past is given much more place in the movie. There is short movies that the grandmother watches from Conor's early childhood when his mother is teaching him to draw. She draws the monster which connects the past with the present. In the book, the mother says the monster is her and Conor's friend, but does not seem to have such a firm bond with it. In the crucial scene where Conor's mother dies it appears that she can see the monster, too, and when Conor is given his own room in his grandmother's house, he finds a sketchbook owned by his mother which contains pictures from the stories told by the monster and of the monster as well with Conor's mother as a little girl on the monster's shoulder. This scene is extra as the book ends in the hospital.

In the book, the talk in the Headmistress' office happens between three people. There is also Miss Kwan, the teacher who tries to speak for Conor and justify his beating Harry. In the movie, she is not there so the talk is shorter and the only thing that is said is that there will be no consequences for Conor at the moment.

To sum up, the movie is very similar to the book and contains only a few minor changes.

3 THE REST OF US JUST LIVE HERE

In this chapter I am going to analyse the novel *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. The chapter will include the plot summary, information about the genre, the characters and key motifs of the novel.

3.1 Genre and Plot Summary

The book mixes genres typical for the author, so it is again a combination of a realistic story with several fantasy features that define the world in which the story happens. The realistic feature is a tale of two siblings who have both gone through serious health trouble and are trying their best to survive until their life conditions get better. They are both in the graduation year of high school which means that next year they will leave their home for another country to study at the universities, each of them a different university in a different state. Mikey is a year younger, but as Mel had to repeat a year at school once due to her health, they are in the same grade. Their father is an alcoholic and their mother is a politician who wants to make a big career to which she sacrifices everything, so the children do not have much support in their family. Mikey and Mel have a younger sister, 10 years old Meredith, but she is a minor character and does not appear to have any problems that bother her older siblings.

The fantastic feature is a fight going on in the background that no one can truly understand. It appears that there is a war between two worlds, the one of which Mikey and Mel are a part, and one more that no one is capable to tell about. Some children at school are called “indie kids” and it is known that they see into the problem and are probably involved in the war of the realms, but as they do not speak to anyone about their mission, no one is able to tell exactly what is happening and what consequences it might possibly have. In this crazy world of blue-eyed indie kids, Mikey and Mel are trying to survive until they graduate and finally have the opportunity to escape their former lives to start new ones, each of them at a different place.

As for the fantastic part of the plot, it is not utterly clear. The only thing we can say for sure is that there is a realm of the Immortals who want to invade our world, and among the children of

our world, there are some “indie kids” as they are called in the novel whose goal appears to be to prevent the invasion. The story is full of betrayals and as the indie kids tend to have repetitive names it is hard to identify them from one another. In the end, the indie kids manage to close the last fissure through which the Immortals planned to enter our world, which means there shall be no more deaths of innocent people who have no idea about the war of the realms happening. The war is over.

3.2 The Role of the Narrator

There are two narrators who take turns. One of them is Mikey who explains everything from his point of view. This type of a narrator is identified by Frost as First person central. *“The main character makes his own excuses. (...) Probably more popular in novels of growing up than any other subgenre, with the possible exception of hard-boiled detective novels.”*⁴¹

The problem with this type of narrator is that he does not possess all the information about what is happening, and so the reader might be mistaken by them. Mikey is a thinking storyteller who tries to be as objective as possible. He declares his thoughts and feelings openly to the reader, even though he is not always able to communicate them to the other characters as well because he is rather a shy and insecure person. Nevertheless, he is open and communicative towards the reader and always gives the information that seems to be necessary to understand his situation.

There is also a special order of the information given about the characters. When talking about people, Mikey tells us what he personally thinks is important at the moment he is speaking, so the information about them is given slowly and many times the reader is confused or forced to change their perspective towards a character. For example, it is said that Mikey’s friend Jared is a quarter-god, but the information does not come at first appearance of Jared in the book.

It is a specific way of narrating the story that applies to many characters, both major and minor, that we do not get a set of attributes when first meeting them as most readers are used to. The introduction of characters happens through their actions or through the pieces we get from Mikey slowly and without a plan of what Mikey wants us to think about the characters.

⁴¹ FOSTER, Thomas C. *How to Read Novels Like a Professor*. New York: Harper, 2017, 312 p. ISBN 978-0-06-134040-06. p. 47

However, he does not appear to be selfish, try to impress the reader or to make the reader dislike someone whom he personally does not like. He is honest and tells us that he does not like Tony because he used to date his crush Henna, but their personal rivalry does not make Mikey speak badly about him. *“Tony is stupidly handsome but not in an arrogant way. He was always a nice guy. Always good with Henna and to her.”*⁴²

As for the information about the war between the worlds, Mikey does not play an important role in that fight and so his insight into this matter is limited. He does not pretend to know more than he knows and is willing to share the little he could reveal for himself, as well as his thoughts and guesses. However, he also makes it clear what appears to him to be sure and what is only an estimation he thinks may be wrong.

The second narrator is a third-person type who introduces each chapter by a brief summary of what is happening in the big matter of the worlds fighting. This narrator does not fit any subtype of a third-person narrator described by the literary theories mentioned as it is too specific to be defined as one of them. This narrator appears to only know about the realm outside of this world and does not care about what happens in Mikey’s life or in lives of other main characters of the novel. The information it brings sometimes collides with what happens in the novel, but most of it cannot be interpreted by what we get to know from Mikey.

The parallelism in the narrative is supposed to express one of the main messages of the novel that not everyone is a hero saving or destroying the world, and that most people’s lives are simply not a part of anything bigger or transcending their reality. The lack of connection between the two narrations tells us that not everyone can be the chosen one to deal with big matters. There are people who just try to get the best of the life they have, and it is not diminishing to do so. To make greater insight into the third-person narrator, we present an introduction of one of the chapters as an example, along with a brief summary of the chapter itself.

⁴² NESS, Patrick. *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 344 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6556-6. p. 273

*“CHAPTER THE FIFTH, in which indie kid Kerouac opens the Gate of the Immortals, allowing the Royal Family and its Court to temporarily enter this world; then Kerouac discovers that the Messenger lied to him; he dies, alone.”*⁴³

Then the chapter is narrated by Mikey. The fifth chapter is where Mikey gets involved in a car accident with his friend Henna whom he loves, and they end up in a hospital. The car ran into a deer when it was running, along with many other deer, supposedly from something frightening. There is no sign of connection between the introduction to the chapter and the chapter itself, which makes it probable that the connection between our world and the world of the Immortals is not always manifested in Mikey's story. The two plots seem to be nearly completely separated throughout the whole novel. The most common connection is that the characters of our world get the information about the death of one of the indie kids who attended the same school, or that an event between the groups fighting results in explosions that are quite frequent. For example, it was said that the school the characters visit was blown up in the past.

3.3 The Characters

3.3.1 Mikey

Mikey is the main protagonist of the story and also the main narrator. He is in a final year of high school and he has two wishes. Firstly, he wants to survive until he can move to another country and leave his former life behind. Secondly, he is in love with Henna and wants to be as close to her as possible.

The nature of Mikey's health trouble needs to be examined to interpret his personality traits correctly. Mikey suffers from OCD and time to time he gets stuck in loops, for example he washes his hands, but has the feeling he did not do it “correctly” so he washes them again and this can last forever. It is mostly the help from his friends that keeps him from going totally crazy. On top of that, he has a strong self-doubt that makes it impossible for him to express his emotions to the others. This feeling that defines him is best described by Mikey's friend Jared when they have an open talk and Jared tries to lift his friend's self-confidence.

⁴³ NESS, Patrick. *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 344 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6556-6. p. 66

“Here’s what’s important, Mike. (...) What’s important is that I know how much you worry about shit. And what’s also important is that I know a big part of that worry is that, no matter what group of friends you’re in, no matter how long you’ve known them, you always assume you’re the least wanted person there. The one everyone else could do without.”⁴⁴

Mikey’s struggle originates in a strong conviction that he is nothing when being on his own. He does not think he has ever achieved anything worth speaking about only by himself and he needs constant support of his friends so he would feel complete and alive. This is the main reason Mikey’s mental health keeps getting worse in time as he realises that after graduation from the high school, he will lose all his friends and his sister Mel, too because she plans to move to a different state. The reasons of his self-doubt he explains to a psychotherapist he goes to see after the explosion at the concert he visits and at the times his mother is running an intensive campaign to become a Congresswoman.

“... They don’t need me.”

“Not like you need them.”

(...)

“Look, it’s... They’ve got all other lives. Jared’s got all his family stuff, Mel’s dating a doctor, Henna’s going to Africa. And what do I have? I have them. I don’t have anything else.”⁴⁵

3.3.2 Mel

Mel is Mikey’s sister who is older but in the same grade. She suffers from mental anorexia which started in direct connection with her mother’s pre-election campaign in her early teenage years. One of the campaign team members said that Mel looks fat in the promotional family photo and that her looks might discourage potential voters. This remark on the sensitive teenage girl’s appearance led to development of a serious illness that ended with Mel in a coma as she did not eat for several months. Since the incident, Mel struggles to eat her meals sometimes and needs help from her brother Mikey who sometimes feeds her when she is not able to push herself to eat. However, the two siblings make a good team, helping each other when in need.

⁴⁴ NESS, Patrick. *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 344 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6556-6. p. 137

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 251-252

3.3.3 Jared

Jared is Mikey's closest friend to whom he always talks about his anxiety and loops he gets caught in. They also had sex several times as Jared is a homosexual, but the relationship is just a friendship. Jared is a quarter-god, and as such he has some information about the war between the worlds, but he knows little and is not allowed to reveal what he knows as there are secrets kept within the realms of Gods. His grandmother was a Goddess of cats and he inherited part of her powers. Jared is sought by all animals belonging to this kind of species, most frequently it is cats or mountain lions which worship him and pray to him, but also come for healing as Jared has a sacred healing power. This ability transcends the realm of felines and he is able to cure people as well, but his powers here are limited. Many times, he uses the perks of his supernatural origin to help his friends cure their injuries and diseases.

Jared leads two lives, a human one in this world and a godly life in his realms. At the end of the novel he accepts a deal with his superior authorities of his realm and becomes a full-time God in exchange for extension of his healing powers which allow him to save an injured child who could not be saved otherwise. It is negotiated that he will leave our world and enter his realms forever after the graduation from the university.

"That was my condition. I want to go to college. I want to see what it's like. But after that..."

"After that, you're a full-time God."

"Looks that way," Jared says. "I'll ascend after I get my degree."

"A God with a degree in Mathematics?"

"A God of cats with a degree in Mathematics." Jared shakes his head. "My usefulness will know no bounds."⁴⁶

The plan is that Jared will go to the university with Mikey to care after him, and after he gets his grade, he will leave him forever.

⁴⁶ NESS, Patrick. *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 344 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6556-6. p. 326

3.3.4 Henna

Henna is Mikey's crush from the beginning of the novel. They are close friends and spend a lot of time together along with their peers from school, but Mikey wishes to take the relationship to another level. They have sex once near the end of the novel, but realise they only want to be close friends and this feeling is mutual.

"It's love. But it's a different kind."

*"Doesn't make that any less love, though."*⁴⁷

Mikey wishes her the best and it is probable that she will get back to her ex-boyfriend Tony.

Henna has religious parents and they wish for her to go with them to spread religion in Africa, which she does not want to do, but she is not able to oppose her parents. Throughout the novel she becomes more self-confident and gets the feeling that she should make important decisions of her life herself. In the end she decides not to follow her parents' wishes and do what she feels is good for her.

3.3.5 Nathan

The character of Nathan is specific as he is somehow connected with all the characters, yet he is not that important himself. He rather projects the traits of the other characters and makes them be more visible. He is a homosexual and dates Jared, but Henna likes him too, which makes Mikey jealous. He is also said to may have been an indie kid in the past, but he does not play in important role in the matter either.

3.4 Motifs of the Novel

3.4.1 Mental Health

⁴⁷ NESS, Patrick. *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 344 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6556-6. p. 314

As already mentioned, there are many characters in the novel who come through a difficult situation and need help with their mental health. The novel introduces a character of Dr Luther who explains to Mikey that his OCD is nothing he should be ashamed of as he is not responsible for causing it. She also makes it clear that it is not an individual failure to ask for help when a person needs to be helped with a mental disease. *“Medication will address the anxiety, not get rid of it, but reduce it to a manageable level, maybe even the same level as other people so that – and here’s the key thing – we can talk about it. Make it something you can live with. You still have work to do, but the medication lets you stay alive long enough to do that work.”*⁴⁸

This honest talk means a lot to Mikey who had revealed to the doctor that he had suicidal thoughts and seriously considered killing himself to escape his pain. The “living for long enough” matter is also mentioned by Mel in a powerful scene when she is not able to eat her lunch and asks Mikey to literally feed her.

*“I get some salmon and rice on the fork. I lift it up. And I feed her. Mrs Choi and our grandmother sleep, the room is quiet, that middle bed between them empty, empty, empty, and I feed my sister her lunch. We share our craziness, our neuroses, our little bit of screwed-up-ness that comes from our family. We share it. And it feels like love.”*⁴⁹

The mental issues talks in the book are often connected with someone who is understanding and caring, as if it was there merely to illustrate the possibility to solve all sorts of such problems. Right before the passage quoted above, Mel tells Mikey what he is yet to discover for himself. *“I don’t want to die. I want to live. I want to live long enough so I can really live.”*⁵⁰

The quote undoubtedly feels relatable to many target readers as everyone has to face some problems in their life, and teenage years are crucial. By highlighting the “living long enough” part in the novel twice, the author implies that all human lives contain considerable amount of suffering and pain, but it is within our possibilities to deal with whatever comes and become stronger as a result. The good is yet to come, but it will be paid off with much suffering forced to be endured.

⁴⁸ NESS, Patrick. *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 344 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6556-6, p. 260

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 205

⁵⁰ Ibid.

When Jared decides to accept the deal and become a full-time God, he is given a healing power so strong that he is able to cure all the diseases, which means he could make Mikey's loops become past forever. When he offers this to Mikey, he considers the matter and decides not to use this opportunity because he wants to see if he can deal with his OCD on his own with the help of medication and conventionally used ways. He also refuses Jared's idea that he could make disappear the scar that Mikey got in the car crash as he realises that the wounds from previous battles remind us of who we are and what we have already survived. It is not debated but Mikey thinks that Mel would make the same decision if Jared offered to use his powers to cure her anorexia. The bad things that happen to us are those by which we are defined, no matter how demanding and painful it might be, and each suffering makes possible the occurrence of help and compassion, the treasured acts of kindness we surely would miss if there was no suffering in our lives at all. The fight has to be fought by fair means.

3.4.2 Generation Gap

By generation gap we usually mean the misunderstandings between people the age difference between which exceeds one generation. In the novel it is mostly the conflicts between parents and children based on different stage of maturing and conflict of values. While the mother of Mikey and Mel sacrifices everything to her political career and does not even seem to be worried about her son's broken ribs when she visits him in a hospital after the car crash, the children face regular teenage problems such as love affairs and struggle to have good marks at school. While the children think of their mother as of a selfish person not caring about them at all, the mother thinks vice versa as she claims to only run for the position in Congress to be able to make world a better and safer place for her beloved children. She also says to Mikey when she is taking him from the hospital that she had seen bad things when she was younger, but he does not believe her. It is hard to imagine one's parent to have been a child or a teenager struggling to deal with problems.

Henna has a problem with her parents too as they expect her to follow their religion and risk her life to spread faith in a country that is currently troubled by a civil war. The parents are often not able to see that their children do not always have to be their exact copies in matters of wishes, dreams and the way they want to spend their lives, and every single bildungsroman makes this clear to the readers.

3.4.3 The Role of a Person in Universe

While it might appear silly, it is an important motif in the book. The world is in chaos and it is everyone's duty to discover what role they should play in the matter. There are the indie kids, there are Gods, and there are friends and lovers. The role of an individual might be judged by the impact they have on the others, but it does not necessarily mean that everyone may be the hero to save the world. There are kings, queens, but there are also peasants who have no idea of why they are being moved. The big decisions are made in realms beyond our reach, and sometimes we have to accept what happens. As Jared tells Mikey, *"Not everyone has to be the Chosen One. Not everyone has to be the guy that saves the world. Most people just have to live their lives the best they can, doing the things that are great for them, having great friends, trying to make their lives better, loving people properly. And while knowing that the world makes no sense but trying to find a way to be happy anyway."*⁵¹

Mikey has been repeating the mistake of being too involved in everything. He is of course protective towards his sister who needs his help, but he keeps feeling that he is personally responsible for what is happening and wants to solve everything on his own, not realising that there might be matters of which he will know nothing for all his life and that it is not his duty neither it is possible that he could deal with everything himself. That he shall be only one of "the rest of us who just live here", as told by the title of the novel.

The desire to understand and resolve everything is naturally passed on the reader as we see the world through Mikey's eyes and are therefore lured to share his desire to see into everything while there are things we cannot comprehend, even if we put all the information together. We tend to seek for something bigger, not realising that everything great the world has to offer, namely friendship, love, affection and loyalty, are happening to Mikey right in front of us.

4 USAGE IN THE LESSONS

In this chapter I will explain the reasons to use literature in teaching English and describe how to work with the worksheets listed in the Appendices. The worksheets are supposed to be used

⁵¹ NESS, Patrick. *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 344 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6556-6. p. 238

in lessons of English language following the instructions given in this chapter. As the needs of individual teachers might differ, I will introduce different possibilities of working with the literary texts. The chapter also introduces the outputs from the lessons to illustrate the advantages and possibilities that the usage of literature might offer in teaching.

4.1 Using Literature to Teach English

The usage of literary texts is supported as it is expected that working with them is motivational for the students and learners. Reading the actual extracts of contemporary novels should draw the learners' interest and support their will to learn and use English language, which is one of the means to support the learning process.

“Reading is important. Books are important. Librarians are important. (Also, libraries are not child-care facilities, but sometimes feral children raise themselves among the stacks.) It is a glorious and unlikely thing to be cool to your children. Children's fiction is the most important fiction of all. There. We who make stories know that we tell lies for a living. But they are good lies that say true things, and we owe it to our readers to build them as best we can. Because somewhere out there is someone who needs that story. Someone who will grow up with a different landscape, who without that story will be a different person. And who with that story may have hope, or wisdom, or kindness, or comfort. And that is why we write.”⁵²

A respected contemporary fantasy author Neil Gaiman describes the reason why it is important for children to read. Reading is a pleasure that can develop character, awaken interest into a topic or, as we are trying to emphasise in our thesis, teach. While it is true that artificial literature literally “tells lies”, the lies can teach us real things about us or about the real world around. It is therefore a good means to teach morals, as well as reasoning and understanding the motivation behind real people's behaviour, which makes the imaginary world transcend into the real one. The same opinion is shared by Řeřichová:

“Reading ceases to be the mere acceptance of the literary work and becomes a place where literature and readers engage, where readers have the opportunity to become aware of their

⁵² GAIMAN, Neil. In: GAIMAN, Neil. *The Graveyard Book*. Illustrated by Dave McKEAN. New York: HarperCollins Children's Books, 2018, 307 p. ISBN 978-0-06-053094-5

own place in the world, in life and society and of their relation to the reality that surrounds them.”⁵³

As reading makes an important part of each person’s life, it is only advisable to use its advantages at schools. The focus of the worksheets listed in Appendices is going to be different and it will range from creative writing to practising certain structures or model sentences or sentence patterns.

4.2 A Monster Calls (See Appendix 1)

The worksheet contains an extract from the novel *A Monster Calls*. It is a semi-authentic text as the extract from the novel was shortened in order not to reveal more information than necessary to the learners. The intervention was done with respect to the nature of the tasks below the text that are to be done. The places where the text was shortened are not indicated, the aim of which is not to confuse the learners with triple dots in brackets covering a considerable part of the extract. The level of English was not adjusted in any way, the only modification was the omission of the parts giving too much information that would serve against the task.

The task is based on the reader-response theory by Wolfgang Iser which says that the text interacts with the reader and that the text should in fact be completed by the reader.⁵⁴ It is therefore important not only what the text says, but also what it does not say, as the unsaid is to be completed or made up by the reader. A great example of this principle applied in literature is the first sentence of the first book of the Harry Potter series: “*Mr and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much.*”⁵⁵

⁵³ ŘEŘICHOVÁ, Vlasta. *Values in Literature and the Value of Reading*. In: SLADOVÁ, Jana, et al. *Literature for Children and Youth in the Process of Personal and Social Education in the Basic School*. Translated by David LIVINGSTONE and Václav ŘEŘICHA. Olomouc: Palacký University, 2015, 139 p. ISBN 978-80-244-4443-7. p. 27

⁵⁴ VALA, Jaroslav. *Vybrané kapitoly z didaktiky literární výchovy*. Olomouc: Palacký University, 2014. [online] [4. 5. 2020]. Available from: [http://kcjl2.upol.cz/studijni_materialy_akreditace/NAVAZUJICI_MAGISTERSKE_STUDIUM/2\)_Didaktika_literatury_1_\(VALA_J.\)/Vala-Vybrane_kapitoly_z_didaktiky_literatury.pdf](http://kcjl2.upol.cz/studijni_materialy_akreditace/NAVAZUJICI_MAGISTERSKE_STUDIUM/2)_Didaktika_literatury_1_(VALA_J.)/Vala-Vybrane_kapitoly_z_didaktiky_literatury.pdf)

⁵⁵ ROWLING, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014, 331 p. ISBN 978-1-4088-5565-2. p. 1

The idea of rather not saying something than saying something strengthens the role of the reader who is to decide what is happening or what is true. At the very first moment we start reading Harry Potter, we get to know that there is something weird, wrong or at least unusual about the Dursleys, but we are left in tension of not having a clue to what it might possibly be. The same principle is applied to the worksheet based on the modified extract from Ness' novel *A Monster Calls*.

The extract was modified in order to leave as many empty places to the reader's imagination as possible. The only thing revealed are the two characters, Conor and the monster, but the extract does not tell the reader anything about the nature of the monster. There is also no information about Conor, except for his name. The hint to interpret the extract might be the time the monster appears that combines midnight, the time of ghosts, nightmares and magic, and seven minutes, seven being a lucky number. It could be therefore assumed that the monster brings something scary or dangerous but lucky and appreciated or needed at the same time. It also is announced by the monster that it will come again and that it will tell Conor three stories, but there is no hint of what these stories might be about. The mystery lies also in the relationship between the monster and Conor as they cannot agree on who called whom and who is the one to need something from the other. The tasks below the text are formed with the aim to draw attention to the empty places that need to be filled for the story to be complete, while still leaving enough options to the learners to use their imagination freely.

4.2.1 Target Learners and the Aims

The worksheet is meant for higher grades of lower secondary or any of the grades in upper secondary education. It can also be used to teach creative writing to adult learners with comparable level of English language.

The primary aim for the learner is to write a story that fulfils the two tasks below the text.

The secondary aim lies in learning new vocabulary as the learners should have access to dictionaries while working on their writings.

The language skills that are developed are reading and writing.

4.2.2 The Experience with Usage

The learners: 18-19 years old

4th grade at high school

The aims: The learners will write a story based on the extract and fulfil the two tasks below.
The learners will find out a word they do not know in a dictionary if they need to.

Time limit: 45 minutes

The process:

The learners were given the worksheets and asked to read through them carefully. After a few minutes the teacher asked whether the learners understand the task and let one learner to describe the task aloud to make sure the others were sure about what to do as well. The learners were told that they might ask the teacher when they have any questions or problems dealing with the text or the task. There were also dictionaries available as the learners did not know the teacher personally and it appeared probable that they would prefer the usage of the dictionary over asking the teacher for help. This expectation turned out to be right as there were no questions, but the dictionaries circulated around the class and were frequently used.

With respect to the type of the task, we chose qualitative method of research the output of which are twelve hand-written assignments that are to be analysed now.

The results summary:

The twelve pieces of writing differ from each other so much that it is impossible to create a statistic summary. Each story is unique and only few aspects repeated more than once. It was for example the nature of the monster which was more than once told to be a ghost. The differences were also in connecting the writing with the text in the worksheet. While some learners thought of the initial text as of an end of a chapter and started writing a new one about the next day or the time the monster came next, some learners continued straight away and elaborated on the dialogue between the monster and Conor. The focus of the writings, in terms of the Iser's theory the choice of the empty spaces to be filled differed, too. Some writings concentrated on the character of Conor, some preferred to tell us more about the monster while another part of the works concentrated on the stories that were to be told, making the Conor and

the monster slightly less important than they were in the initial text. As the research uses qualitative method, we will now proceed to the analysis of the individual pieces of writings handed in by the learners.

4.2.2.1 Writing 1

The learner focused on the specific time the monster arrives. It is 12:07 because the monster took Conor to another world. Time goes on there, but it stopped on the Earth at the time between the midnight and the morning. The monster is called a “ghost”, a “spirit” or a “specter” and it is said to have metallic voice. The first tale of the monster is about a farmer called Henry who lived over a thousand years ago. Once he found a glass vile and accidentally released a demon from it which gave him an offer, but that is where the writing ends with words “no time to finish sorry”. Regarding the tasks, the reason why the monster came was not given. It can be supposed that it was to be revealed through the story, but the author did not manage to finish it on time.

4.2.2.2 Writing 2

The writing focuses partly on Conor and partly on the first story. The style is straight-forward and most information is told through the direct speech of the monster. “You are the only one who can see me. I’m here to help you. I’m here to teach you three lessons that will make you a better person.” The monster then says that it is not happy with who Conor is as a person. It is however interesting that it is not mentioned how old Conor is, so we do not know how long time is meant when the monster says it had been watching Conor for his whole life. Nevertheless, it is probable that Conor is a child as the monster starts the first story by “When I was the same age as you are”. The monster said it was selfish and not nice to its parents who died in a car accident later and the monster deeply regrets being unkind to them. “Conor O’Malley do not be like me do not make the same mistake as I did.” It is apparent that the author thought of a monster as of a teacher of morals and universally acceptable truths that should make a life of a human being nicer and warmer. The first lesson was therefore about being kind and helpful to his parents and to other people as well which would make Conor’s future life better as he would have relationships of a high quality. At the end of the writing, the monster says it will come the very next day to tell its second story.

4.2.2.3 Writing 3

This story is unique as it gives a historical setting to the story of the monster, which was not done by any other learner. The history has a strong purpose and plays a key role as it is connected to the present. The historical settings of the monster's first story is the end of the 19th century when Conor's ancestors decided to move from Ireland to America. The monster describes the sail and the problems the people on board had to face in a storm and there is a moment when Conor's great grandmother had to sacrifice his life to save her son, Conor's grandfather. The monster says that the history of a family is important and there always should be someone who knows his personal history. At the end of the story the monster says that it chose Conor because he is the only person in his family sensitive enough to be able to see ghosts. The monster also emphasises the moral of being grateful for sacrifices that our ancestors had made in order to make our lives better than theirs had been.

4.2.2.4 Writing 4

The writing focuses on the character of Conor and achieves to tell all three stories. Conor is an 80 years old man awaiting his death and the monster comes to him to show him three flashbacks of his former life. The stories show Conor when he is a little boy, then when he is 20 years old and finally in the present when he is 80. Conor used to dream about a career of a professional football player, but he was aggressive and sought out violent fights. His dream eventually came true, but as he was too violent even on the pitch, he was often expelled at the beginning of the matches, leaving his team short-handed. This led to an early end of his career, but the violent nature of his stayed with him for his whole life. Apart from him dark side, Conor was a clever and successful man, even though he had no friends and his only love left him because of domestic violence, he felt happy and proud of himself as he could beat anyone and get over any obstacle between him and whatever he wanted.

The monster comes to tell him that he has been a bad person for his whole life and that he needs to change before he dies. And that is where the monster shows itself. "... your life here is over Conor. And I'm the worst part of your soul coming here for you. I'm the happiness connected to bloody fights, broken boned, loud shouting and evil laughing. I'm you Conor. And I came to you to make you see what have you created and to make you regret it." After this speech, the monster reveals itself in the light and Conor can recognise himself in it. At the end of the

writing, the monster says: “Fix what you’ve done. Apologize to people you had hurt and do everything to make me disappear. Or I’ll grow, come back to you and that time I’ll take you with me.” At the end of the third story, Conor says he deeply regrets his former mistakes and that he will do his best to reform.

4.2.2.5 Writing 5

This writing focuses on the monster and on the story which it tells the night after the one in initial text. The monster looks like a bear and has yellow shining eyes. The first story is about a girl who used to play in the woods, but once she disappeared. “Deep woods are nightmares to many kids, because ghosts and witches are there.” The girl was killed and her soul was destroyed by three monsters. There were more children who were forever lost in the woods, and Conor realises that one of them was his sister Jane who disappeared in the woods a long time ago. The monster comes to tell Conor that he should reveal the truth about the dangers hidden in the forests and warn as many children as possible to prevent further deaths.

4.2.2.6 Writing 6

The writing sets the story into Scotland. The monster is a legendary beast which is evil and famous for doing people harm. It comes to Conor and bites his arm. The only motivation of the monster is to cause damage because the monster itself is evil. At the end of the writing it is stated that the monster is still existent and keeps harming Scottish children.

4.2.2.7 Writing 7

In this writing the author concentrates on the personal story of monster’s past and it is the only story in the research that does this. In the distant past, the monster had trouble finding a job, and finally it accepted a position of a monster which shall scare children at nights, so it started visiting children in order to cause fear for a living. “Then I used to tell them some scary fairytales, but in half of my speaking they started to laugh.” And so the monster decided to leave the idea of causing fear and started helping children instead. In the end of the story the monster offers to help Conor to help him get rid of the boys who bully him, and the way the matter is going to be solved is finding out the reason of the bullying. The monster wants Conor

to help it understand the hidden motivation behind the actions of the bullies. It wants to discover what makes them behave the way they do and help them from their problems so they would stop bothering Conor.

4.2.2.8 Writing 8

The writing focuses on the family story of Conor that is told by the monster. The monster comes from a different world and comes to Conor to explain why his mother had left the family. She was needed by the monsters as an example of human species so the monsters could study people. The monster says that Conor's mother escaped death and that she was cloned for scientific purposes. The mother never got back to her family and was kept within the world of the monsters.

The monster speaks in a neutral tone and does not seem to be good or evil. It appears to be speaking the truth and its motivation truly appears to be to explain to Conor the reason of his mother's disappearance. On the other hand, there are no clues of why the monster needed to reveal it. The piece of writing itself leaves many empty places for the reader to complete.

4.2.2.9 Writing 9

This writing is unique as the monster is actually not a monster at all. It is a burglar who wants to distract Conor from guarding his personal belonging. The stories and the talk are not important at all as they are only meant to draw attention from the burglar's accomplice who manages to go through the house and steal everything valuable there is to be stolen. "It didn't take much to naïve Conor to realise that he was taught that ghosts do not exist, he found out that this whole pleasant talk was just a burglar that stole from him, as he found mess and open doors afterwards." After realising that he had been robbed, Conor decides to find the burglars and "beat the devil out of them". "So, there began his journey."

The ghost that keeps Conor entertained by talking to him introduces himself using a name written in ruins that we are not able to decipher. It appears to be the part of the plan to keep Conor busy trying to solve the weird things that were being told to him while the other ghost was stealing in the other rooms. Both burglars are called ghosts until Conor realizes he was

robbed. The story is written in the third-person point of view that uses the knowledge that Conor possesses and considers it to be true until Conor finds out it is all a fraud.

Beyond the writing that is an excuse saying that the author kept writing and forgot about the task to tell the monster's story. Nevertheless, the story of the monster seems to be served by the nonsense talking of the first ghost that is the monster from the initial text.

4.2.2.10 Writing 10

The author of this writing had read the original book before getting the task, but decided not to reveal it when the task was introduced and managed to come up with a story of their own. The story told by the monster is about a bear which thought of itself as of the strongest and most intelligent animal in the woods. Thinking that high of itself, the bear started stealing food from other animals and behaved in a very arrogant, superior way. Once, a fox comes to the wood and is attacked by a wolf, but the fox manages to escape. It goes deeper into the wood where it meets an angry bear that threatens to kill the fox. The fox agrees to be killed, but only if the bear beats it in a competition. It is a competition in mouse catching. The writing ends at this moment with a playful sentence in brackets. "(U can guess how it ends)", it says.

It appears that knowing the story, the author decided to leave Conor as he is and tell a completely new tale about the animals in the woods. The story given by the monster is not at all connected to Conor or the monster. The main character of the writing is the evil and self-important bear bullying the animals in the woods. The appearance of the fox and a wolf turn the genre into a typical fable, and so it is probable that the fox will manage to punish the arrogant bear, but again, we do not know for sure, and we do not know exactly how it will happen. It is one of the writings that leave empty places, too, this time undoubtedly intentionally.

4.2.2.11 Writing 11

This writing merges the characters of Conor and the monster. The monster had always been present in Conor's life, but it started to grow bigger as time went by. "Conor O'Malley, I' your own shadow, your minds and your other side of the character. I reflect your own dirty minds

and behaviour. I'm a part of your life and you won't stop me. Everywhere you will be, I will be too. In the end, you will be I and I will be you – only one creature!"

The idea of the monster being Conor's shadow already appeared in Writing 4 where the monster comes to show Conor three flashbacks of his life. However, this time it is different at this narrative does not show the option to reform and change what is going to happen. The author of Writing 4 also does not merge the characters, the monster only appears to reveal the true nature of an 80 years old man and tells him who he is. In Writing 11 there is no chance to make a change. The monster says that it is the worst part of Conor and that it is going to destroy him, no matter what Conor will do. The absence of the possibility of change makes this story darker and more dismal than the former one.

4.2.2.12 Writing 12

This writing works with the relationship between the monster and Conor's father. The monster used to be troubled by people who hated it for it was different. "They've never really liked me. They were always calling me a creature, unreal thing and even worse." Conor's father is the only one who was willing to become friend with the monster and he did. He kept visiting the monster and talked to it, but one day he was kidnapped by a group of angry people and he was never seen again. It happened 8 years ago and the monster had promised that if anything wrong happened to the father it would take care of Conor, and so it came to him.

The story puts the monster into a role of a victim, which makes it unique within the others. However, it is not explained why the monster comes to Conor 8 years after his father disappeared. It would have been more logical if the monster came right at that time, saying what happened and taking care of the boy as promised. The 8 years delay is not explained.

4.2.2.13 Summary and suggestions to further work:

Based on the pieces of work, it is clear that the task served its purpose. Most of the submitted works managed to fulfil the two tasks and even the few which did not introduce an interesting story worth reading. Considering originality and imagination, the learners were on a high level. Considering the linguistic part of the writings, the most common mistakes were in punctuation. It

is apparent that the learners tend to use punctuation in the same way it works in Czech language, and there are therefore several extra commas in the texts.

Some learners also used subjective word order in a few sentences, but it usually served an artificial purpose in the story and should therefore not be considered a mistake.

The area suitable for improvement in this group of learners is identified to be the usage of punctuation in English.

4.3 A Monster Calls (See Appendix 2)

It is the same extract used in a previous task⁵⁶, but the task is now different. It is again based on the reader-response theory, but it serves a different role. While in the previous task the learners were supposed to fill in the missing information via a form of writing, this time it is a form of a short drama scene. While there are two characters in the story, the learners are supposed to work in groups of four and it is demanded that everyone plays a role in the scene, which makes the learners create two more characters that are not included in the initial text. The focus of the task is on speaking as the learners have to make up a brief plan of what will happen, create two more characters, distribute roles within the group and play the whole scene in front of the class at the end of the lesson.

4.3.3 Target Learners and the Aims

The task is meant for learners aged lower secondary and above. The success of the lesson is based on the will of the learners to participate in a theatre-like lesson and it is a responsibility of each teacher to decide whether this activity is suitable for their class.

The primary aim of the learners is to write and perform a short drama scene based on the initial text and the tasks below it.

The task develops all the language skills – reading the extract, speaking and listening while making up the scene and writing it. It is however not necessary to write the script down.

⁵⁶ For more information about the extract, See Chapter 4.2

4.3.4 Experience with Usage

Learners: A heterogenous group of 9 learners

15-35 years old

Level of English ranging from B1 to C1

The aims: The learners will work in groups of four and invent a story based on the worksheet.

The learners will perform their scene in front of the others.

The learners will give feedback to other learners.

Time limit: 45 minutes

The process:

The learners were given the worksheets and task to read them carefully. Then they were introduced to the task and a random learner was asked to summarise the task so it would be clear to the others. As the total number of learners was nine, there was one group of four and one group of five learners. The learners were told they can ask the teacher whenever they have any questions. Then they were given 20 minutes to prepare their scenes. After 15 minutes the learners were told there were only 5 minutes left. After 5 more minutes the learners performed their scenes and got feedback from the teacher and from the other learners as well.

4.3.4.1 Scene 1

The group had 4 members. The characters were Conor, the monster from the initial text, one more monster and the narrator. The narrator introduced the scene, speaks about the surroundings of the place where Conor lives and describes in which room Conor is in the house.

It is seven minutes past midnight that the monster appears behind the door and asks Conor to be let in. Conor opens the door and lets it enter. The monster tells a story of a boy who was killed in the house where Conor lives and demands that Conor leaves with the monster to save himself.

At that moment, there appears another monster behind a chair and says that the first monster is a liar and that it should not be trusted. There is a short dialogue between the monsters and Conor who is questioning them both to find out whom he should trust. In the end, the new monster

shows Conor an amulet, an old artefact of his family, which gains Conor's trust. The first monster tries to attack Conor, but it becomes scared of the amulet and leaves, disappointed, while the boy goes to sleep. The guardian monster sings a lullaby and the narrator tells the audience that Conor was safe.

4.3.4.2 Scene 2

The group had 5 members. The characters who appeared in the play were Conor, the monster from the extract, the dragon, the prince and the old man.

Conor is lying asleep when the sound of a clock strikes midnight and the monster arrives in a few seconds. It was a nice idea to play an old clock's sound on a mobile phone. The monster appears to tell its first story. A tale about a prince who wanted to save a princess imprisoned and guarded by a strong dragon, but on his way to the dragon's lair he meets an old man who needs help carrying wood.

While the monster is narrating, the learners from the group who were sitting apart up to this moment stand up and start playing the roles the monster mentions. The prince helps the old man and is given a potion of invisibility that is supposed to help him to beat the dragon. The prince arrives at the dragon's lair, drinks the potion and calls for a dragon. He offers that he will not kill the dragon if it flies away and lets the princess go. The dragon looks around and as it is not able to see any enemies, it gets slightly frightened. It questions the prince's abilities. The prince claims to be a powerful wizard and threatens to use his most powerful magic if the dragon insists on fighting for the princess. The dragon finally trusts him and decides to fly away. The prince calls out for the princess and shouts that the dragon is away, which is where the monster makes several steps in front of the scene and the prince hides behind the monster.

Conor keeps asking for the end of the story as it was not said whether the prince married the princess or not. The monster says that the prince was invisible forever, and with his supernatural power he made a lot of good deeds about which the monster will speak next time. Then the monster departs, leaving Conor confused as he thinks the prince should get rewarded for his bravery, and if it's not the prince to marry, it should be a lot of money at least. At the very end of the story Conor assumes that maybe the monster will give him a detailed explanation the next time it comes.

The ending of the story triggered a discussion in the group about the ways we are used to end the fairy tales. Some learners suggested that it was not fair that the prince could not become visible and get credit for what he had done while others thought the story was original and as the old man did not say that the supernatural power obtained after drinking the potion will decline in time, no one was done any harm so the ending is good.

After the discussion of the plot and several more options of the type what if something didn't happen, happened differently, was or wasn't said etc., it was agreed on that great deeds require not only bravery, but also sacrifices, and that the most important people who have done great things for society or for other people in general sometimes have to pay the price to be able to do what they do.

4.4 The Rest of Us Just Live Here (See Appendix 3)

The worksheet contains a brief quotation from the novel *A Monster Calls*. It is a semi-authentic text again, the intervention lies in removing the unnecessary information about the place where the characters are which is not important for the situation. There also are minor characters mentioned in the original text which were omitted in order not to cause confusion as they are not important for the matter.

4.4.1 Target Learners and the Aims

The worksheet is meant for higher grades of lower secondary or for any grades in upper secondary education. The topic is mental anorexia and acts of kindness, and it is possible for the teacher to choose which they will emphasize. It is also possible to talk about the role of the family and its impact on the lifestyle and health of the children. The part about good deeds should uplift the atmosphere and emphasise that whatever trouble we are facing, it is good both to help someone and to ask for help when we are in need of it.

The primary aim for the learners is to find information about mental anorexia and form an opinion on a healthy lifestyle. They should also get the information about where they could get

help when having mental health problems. As the topic is sensitive, it is the teacher's responsibility to know the learners and pick the correct way to deal with the topic.

The plan for the lesson:

The learners are given the worksheets and asked to read them in groups of four. Then they have 10 minutes to find the information about the illness the narrator's sister is suffering from. After that, the teacher starts a discussion within the class against the topic, pointing out the danger of unhealthy beauty standards and the impact of it on our health. The teacher or the learners may come up with the information about the types of human bodies, the body mass index and other information relevant to the topic. The discussion should last for about ten minutes, but can be longer if necessary. Then the teacher emphasizes the need to face problems and the importance of help to deal with not only the illnesses, but trouble in life in generally, and asks the learners to share their stories about doing good deeds. At the end of the lesson, the teacher sums up the information that arose from the discussion and again emphasizes the need of helping other people.

As this lesson was not tried out, we are not able to share any experience of using the worksheet.

4.5 The Rest of Us Just Live Here (See Appendix 4)

The extract is taken from *The Rest of Us Just Live Here* and is neither shortened nor modified. No interventions into the text were made as the extract is meant to be used as an example of a more complicated text with advanced vocabulary so the learners would have to find out a few words to understand the text. The parts should be read by the teacher, or, which seems to serve its purpose better, they should be projected on the interactive whiteboard or on the wall in class. Each time the learners finish reading the part, there is a set of trigger questions asked by the teacher to trigger discussion in the class.⁵⁷ The teacher plays the role of a moderator and leads the discussion between the learners.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 4.5.2

4.5.1 Target Learners and the Aims

The task is meant for upper secondary grades as the text features advanced vocabulary. It deals with the topics of politics and generation gap which are the topics interesting for the target age group.

The primary aim for the learners is to express their opinion about the generation gap issue and to describe in their own words the relationship between the son (Mikey) and his mother.

The language skills developed are reading, speaking and listening, the key one being speaking.

4.5.2 Experience with Usage

Learner: One 24 years old University student

Level of English approximately B2

The aims: The learner will actively participate in a dialogue with the teacher and express their opinion on the topics of the literary texts.

The learner will find out or ask about the vocabulary they do not understand.

They will learn the correct pronunciation of the words.

Time limit: 45 minutes

The process:

As the current coronavirus crisis has changed the way of teaching and online courses became very popular as a result, we tried using a longer literary text divided into four parts as a trigger of a dialogue between the teacher and one learner. The parts of the text were shared written in a presentation through online webpage that allows sharing the windows. The learner always saw only the part about which they were currently talking with the teacher.

The learner was always asked to read the part out loud and the mistakes in the pronunciation were corrected when necessary. The learner had to repeat the mispronounced word until they said them correctly. After reading each part, the learner was asked to summarise what the extract is about so the teacher would have the control over the overall understanding of the text. The learner was encouraged to ask questions when they did not understand individual words or phrases which they did frequently.

Let us describe what was discussed with the student.

4.5.2.1 PART ONE

The student said the extract is about a child speaking to their mother. They assume the child is a girl and it was not revealed until PART THREE that it is the boy. The learner says that the relationship between the child and the mother seems to be too cold as they are speaking about politics. They also think that the mother is puzzled and struggling to find balance between her political career and her role as a mother. It is hard to form a relationship and keep it neat, and it can be easily changed to worse, which the learner thinks had happened here. The last sentence triggers the thought of family members feeling a sort of intergenerational rivalry or misunderstanding, so the topic of the generation gap is mentioned for the first time. The student mentions the need to keep the relationship going the right way because it may change if the children and parents do not share their worlds with each other.

4.5.2.2 PART TWO

After the reading the learner was asked if their opinion on the mother or the relationship to her child has changed. The answer is that the relationship feels to be even colder now that the narrator said that the mother “never talks like this” it appears that the characters have not spoken to each other in a long time and they are nearly strangers. The part when the mother says “We’ve forgotten how to talk to each other” supports this point of view. The learner says the tone of the conversation is very formal, even though it is a parent-child talk. The straight-forward way of expressing one’s opinion makes the dialogue close to a political interview or a debate between adults on politics. The way the values are expressed and the questions are asked does not include any emotions that the learner would expect to be between the teenage child and the mother. They also say that they think they know the mother a bit more after reading this extract.

There is a question asked by the teacher about what the child thinks of their mother and how they will answer the question put by the mother: “I wonder what you think of me. Really. What kind of a person I am when seen by you?”⁵⁸

The learner says the child does not know their mother well and will be confused by the question. The guess was that it will joke about the mother’s political ambitions in a careful or possibly cynical way to hide their true feeling. But deep inside the child wished to see emotions when talking to their mother.

4.5.2.3 PART THREE

The learner is surprised that the child is a son and not a daughter. They admit that this part is difficult because of vocabulary they are not familiar with. Several minutes were spent speaking about the political system in the USA and the seat the mother is running for as the learner was interested in the level of politics where the mother wants to get. It would make a big change in the personal life not only for the mother, but also for the whole family.

This part made the learner understand the tone of conversation as they now understand the importance of the matter being discussed. In the learner’s opinion, the reason the mother speaks to her son in this cold way is that she thinks the child inherited her personality, which seems not to be true as we can see how the son reacts.

The next topic of the discussion is dreams as the mother has a big dream and is very close to reaching it. The teacher asks about the dreams of the characters. The learner says that the mother’s dream is to become an important politician and she is willing to sacrifice anything to achieve it. Her son believes she will win the election but secretly does not want her to as he is afraid of the impact it might have on his life. When the learner is asked about their dreams, they react with a quotation from the book by American philosopher and psychologist Dr Peterson who says that we should come to our dreams conscious, being aware of what is happening and dealing with them carefully.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ NESS, Patrick. *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*. London: Walker Books, 2016, 344 p. ISBN 978-1-4063-6556-6, p. 172

⁵⁹ PETERSON, Jordan B. *12 Rules for Life. An Antidote to Chaos*. Random House Canada, 2018, 409 p. ISBN 978-0-7352-7679-6

Being asked about their own dreams, the learner says he wishes to listen to life and be able to understand it. One day, he wants to have a family and he is working on a relationship with his girlfriend. He is sure that having a loving family is the greatest thing the person can achieve in their life. Secondly, he is learning for his final state exams at the university and wants to start a career as a University teacher of physics.

“That are two fields where I am trying to do some improvement, but it’s a kind of spiritual field which has major impact on this relationship. Sometimes it needs adjustment. From definition and all the time you must some kind of make it better all the time, work on in. (...) In terms of this life it’s foolish to hunt the goal. I think that’s not the point.”

Being asked about the change brought by starting a family, he says that the family life goal is not a square in a to-do list and you have to continue working on it for your whole life. At the same time, it will keep producing other problems to solve, for example the children’s struggle at school, their leaving home et cetera.

“The goal is meaningful but hard. Even if I get there, there still will be things to do. The children will have problems at school or something. But maybe I am pleased by little improvement. I thought this could be a big problem but it wasn’t.” So the discussion of the third part of the text ended up by realising part of the dream is coming true and it was not as difficult as it had appeared to be before.

4.5.2.4 PART FOUR

“I think it’s the funniest part of the text. I like the repetition of “do you?” The arguments of his mother are unbelievable. You won’t believe her this. Maybe it’s obvious. The son thinks that the mother will do better if she will help just like her family. He thinks she should take the energy that she wants to take into the politics to her family, that would make the life of the siblings better. That’s the opinion of her son.” Then the teacher asked about the problems the son might be facing that he does not speak about. “There could be some bullying, first loves, school problems, maybe he thinks that she isn’t listening to him enough. The mother is rather selfish. She says “language”, but she does not mean it. If you correct a child and not give a bit of emotion to it, it means nothing.”

CONCLUSION

This thesis concentrated on two young adult novels and their implementation into English lessons at schools. The novels were analysed with respect to literary theory and their deep analysis also may be helpful for the teachers who will decide to use the worksheets listed in the Appendices. The good knowledge of the whole book should be useful to anyone who would like to use the worksheets.

The tasks and questions to the texts were chosen in order to develop various language skills. Reading, listening, speaking and writing. The worksheets together cover and combine all the language skills that are a main focus in current ways of teaching foreign languages.

Due to the current situation in society, the plan for trying out the worksheet listed as APPENDIX 3 could not be realised and the worksheet listed as APPENDIX 4 had to be changed slightly and used in a different way that was expected at the beginning.

However, the thesis gives examples of good practise of working with the chosen extracts both in formal and informal education, and therefore the extracts given, along with their analysis and examples of successful practise would serve well to any teacher who would like to freshen their lesson with a piece of contemporary young adult literature.

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APPENDIX 1: A MONSTER CALLS WORKSHEET 1

That was two hours ago. He'd lain awake since then, waiting.

But for what?

His bedside clock read 12.05. Then it read 12.06. He looked over to his bedroom window, shut tight even though the night was still warm. His clock ticked over to 12.07.

He got up, went over to the window and looked out.

The monster stood in his garden, looking right back at him.

Open up, the monster said, its voice as clear as if the window wasn't between them. *I want to talk to you.*

"Yeah, sure," Conor said, keeping his voice low. "Because that's what monsters always want. To *talk*."

The monster smiled. It was a ghastly sight. *If I must force my way in*, it said, *I will do so happily.*

"What do you want from me?" Conor said.

The monster pressed its face close to the window.

It is not what I want from you, Conor O'Malley, it said. *It is what you want from me.*

Here is what will happen, Conor O'Malley, the monster continued, *I will come to you again on further nights.*

Conor felt his stomach clench, like he was preparing for a blow.

And I will tell you three stories.

1. Finish the story. In your writing, you should:
 - a. Include at least one of the monster's stories.
 - b. Explain why the monster came to talk to Conor.

APPENDIX 2: A MONSTER CALLS WORKSHEET 2

That was two hours ago. He'd lain awake since then, waiting.

But for what?

His bedside clock read 12.05. Then it read 12.06. He looked over to his bedroom window, shut tight even though the night was still warm. His clock ticked over to 12.07.

He got up, went over to the window and looked out.

The monster stood in his garden, looking right back at him.

Open up, the monster said, its voice as clear as if the window wasn't between them. *I want to talk to you.*

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"What do you want from me?" Conor said.

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It is not what I want from you, Conor O'Malley, it said. *It is what you want from me.*

Here is what will happen, Conor O'Malley, the monster continued, *I will come to you again on further nights.*

Conor felt his stomach clench, like he was preparing for a blow.

And I will tell you three stories.

- 1) Work in groups of four.
- 2) Prepare a short scene of the next meeting of Conor and the monster.
- 3) All of you must play in the scene.
- 4) You will play the scene at the end of the lesson.

APPENDIX 3: THE REST OF US JUST LIVE HERE WORKSHEET 1

“I get some salmon and rice on the fork. I lift it up. And I feed her. The room is quiet, and I feed my sister her lunch. We share our craziness, our neuroses, our little bit of screwed-up-ness that comes from our family. We share it. And it feels like love.”

Work in groups of four and answer these questions.

- 1) What do we know about the characters? What do you like or dislike about them?
- 2) Why do you think the narrator is feeding his sister? Is she a little child or is there other reason? Use the internet to find information about the issue.
- 3) Think about a situation when you helped someone or when someone helped you. It might be anything. Tell about it to your classmates. Choose the best of your stories.

APPENDIX 4: THE REST OF US JUST LIVE HERE WORKSHEET 2

PART ONE

Mel drives Dad and Meredith back home. I ride with my mom.

“The best thing is that it’s only six months to the election so it’s a short campaign,” my mom says, pushing on through the dark. “Normally for a seat this big, I’d have had to be running for at least the last year.” She glances over at me. “Which would have been worse.”

“You’d still have run, though.”

“Yeah, I probably would have. And you and your sister judge me for that, I know.”

“We don’t judge you.”

To my surprise, she snorts. “Yes, you do. I judged *my* parents. That’s what young people do, isn’t it?”

PART TWO

Her parents live in South Dakota. I’ve met them about four times in seventeen years of life. I wonder if she still kept on judging them.

“I do all this for you, guys, you know,” she says. “I know you think it’s just ambition and power-seeking, and well, for goodness’ sake, I’m a politician and I wouldn’t be a politician if those things weren’t there, too, but it’s not just that.”

I don’t know what to say. She *never* talks like this. Never hints there’s anything behind their motivations other than pure, patriotic public service. “Are you feeling okay?” I ask.

“The thing is, I’m not even surprised you’d ask that. We’ve forgotten how to talk to each other, haven’t we? Funny how things evolve and evolve and then one day, you look up and they’re different.”

“You don’t believe in evolution.”

She laughs. Actually *laughs*. “Well, not politically, I don’t.” She looks over at me again. “I wonder what you think of me. *Really*. What kind of a person I am when seen by you?”

PART THREE

I keep quiet, hoping like hell this is a rhetorical question. It is.

“I am feeling okay,” she says. “But I’m also stepping into the big game, son. This isn’t local government with all its little tyrants and little feuds. This is national office.”

“Which has big tyrants and dangerous feuds.”

“Absolutely,” she sighs. “I thought it was all over with the Lieutenant Governor’s race, that I’d be in local office forever. Maybe end up on a state commission for something or other. But all of a sudden, in the space of a few weeks, here it all is. The big show.”

“If you win.”

“I will.”

Yeah, she probably will.

“What do you *do* when your dreams are about to come true?” she asks. “No one ever tells you. They tell you to chase them, but what happens when you actually catch one?”

PART FOUR

“You enjoy it. Do your best, try not to be a dick.”

“Language.” But she’s not upset. “I really do this for you guys, though, whatever you may believe. They’re *my* dreams, yes, but they’re dreams of a world I can make better for you.”

“Us specifically? Me and Mel and Meredith?”

“Your generation. I know you guys face some tough things.”

“Do you?”

“I want to help with that.”

“Do you?”

“Quit saying that. I was a teenager once, too. I know what goes on.”

“You do?” I risk.

RÉSUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá analýzou a interpretací románů *Volání netvora* a *My ostatní tu prostě žijem* od Patricka Nesse. Práce předkládá pracovní listy s ukázkami z románů, které mohou být využity ve výuce anglického jazyka. Součástí práce jsou i příklady využití pracovních listů, a to jak ve formálním, tak neformálním vzdělávání.

ANNOTATION

Jméno a příjmení:	Tomáš Velech
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Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Petr Anténe, Ph.D.
Rok obhajoby:	2020

Název práce:	Patrick Ness, jeho próza pro mládež a její využití ve výuce anglického jazyka
Název v angličtině:	Patrick Ness's Young Adult Fiction and Its Use in ELT
Anotace práce:	Diplomová práce se zabývá analýzou a interpretací dvou vybraných románů Patricka Nesse a jejich využitím ve výuce anglického jazyka. Práce předkládá pracovní listy s ukázkami románů a uvádí příklady jejich využití ve výuce.
Klíčová slova:	Patrick Ness, Volání netvora, My ostatní tu prostě žijem, výuka anglického jazyka, jazykové dovednosti
Anotace v angličtině:	The thesis deals with analysis and interpretation of two selected novels by Patrick Ness and the possibility of their usage in ELT. The thesis presents worksheets featuring extracts from the novels and gives examples of their usage in teaching English.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Patrick Ness, A Monster Calls, The Rest of Us Just Live Here, English language teaching, language skills
Přílohy vázané v práci:	Appendix 1: A Monster Calls Worksheet 1 Appendix 2: A Monster Calls Worksheet 2 Appendix 3: The Rest of Us Just Live Here Worksheet 1 Appendix 4: The Rest of Us Just Live Here Worksheet 2
Rozsah práce:	66 stran
Jazyk práce:	Anglický