

Graphic Journeys: Graphic Novels’ Representations of Immigrant Experiences

Graphic novels can be a provocative resource for engaging the complex issues surrounding immigration and immigrant experiences.

Michael D. Boatright

Seldom does a day pass in the United States when the issue of immigration is not a component of a national media conglomerate’s headlines. An advanced search of *The New York Times*’s online archives is revealing. In the past months (as of July 29, 2009), 1,233 articles, editorials, and blogs have been published on topics such as the raids and subsequent deportation of undocumented migrant workers, discontinuing or severely limiting the public services available to undocumented immigrants, and of course, the notorious and highly controversial construction of a wall along the U.S.–Mexico border to prevent undocumented immigrants from entering the country.

In the political arena, drastic legal measures over the last 10 years have affected opportunities for and perceptions of immigrants in the United States. Statutes such as the PATRIOT Act of 2001 and the Homeland Security Act of 2002, each severely limiting immigrant rights and privacy, subjected U.S. immigrants to high levels of governmental surveillance and scrutiny by creating detention centers for undocumented immigrants and denying them medical assistance (Bernstein, 2008). These legislative rulings continue to play a significant role in redefining Americans’ already ambivalent attitudes toward immigrants and immigration (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Given the media’s frequent coverage of immigration and immigrant issues in the United States as well as political legislation over the past decade, English language arts teachers in the United States have a unique opportunity to seize upon this highly political and fiercely challenged issue by opening up their curricula to the theme of immigration in their classrooms. The world of literature provides one such avenue for exploring immigration issues and their intricately complex social, economic, political, cultural, and historical realities. Moreover, literary critics and literacy scholars from Dillard (1982) to Rosenblatt (1995) have attested to literature’s potential for drawing connections to the lived experiences of readers and their worlds. The graphic novel allows a point of entry to engage this dialogue.

My own interest in the topic of representations of immigrant experiences evolved from my career as a high school English for speakers of other

languages (ESOL) teacher in the Southeastern United States. Within this teaching context, I worked with international students whose vastly diverse experiences served to disintegrate the notion of a unifying and definitive immigrant experience, and I share Montecinos's (1995) skepticism when she critiqued monolithic presuppositions about cultural narratives, assumptions grounded in the belief that only one immigrant experience exists among a sea of possible realities and experiences. With one out of five children in the United States being the child of an immigrant (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008), we owe it to ourselves and to our students to study and critique immigrant experiences as they are portrayed in works of literature, especially because literature has the potential to ignite dialogue, force questions, and foster community building in an atmosphere of inquiry and reflection.

This article provides a critical literacy analysis of three graphic novels available to English language arts teachers interested in using or who currently use texts about immigrant experiences in their classrooms: Tan's (2007) *The Arrival*, Kiyama's (1931/1999) *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924*, and Yang's (2006) *American Born Chinese*. Because graphic novels convey meaning by employing both illustrations and words, I argue that the combination of images and words in graphic novels privileges certain perspectives and merits critique in their representations of immigrant experiences.

To achieve my intended goal, I purposefully selected three graphic novels based on the following criteria: (a) each graphic novel deals explicitly with narratives that construct immigrant experiences, and (b) each graphic novel was published in the last 10 years. Because immigration and immigration policy continue to pervade media headlines and energize political debates in the United States, immigrant experience narratives may be of value to English language arts teachers interested in addressing this topic in their classrooms. Furthermore, the critical literacy analysis employed in this article may open up possibilities for studying these three graphic novels in the classroom by attending to traditional author–reader power relations and focusing on the fissures and silences stu-

dents uncover when reading about these, and other, immigrant experiences.

Graphic Novels in the Classroom

Given the increasing popularity of graphic novels, a growing number of literacy educators have identified graphic novels as an engaging literacy resource in the classroom for helping reluctant readers (Crawford, 2004). In defense of graphic novels in literacy classrooms, Schwarz (2002) acknowledged that, “In an increasingly visual culture, literacy educators can profit from the use of graphic novels in the classroom, especially for young adults” (p. 262). Moreover, Lavin (1998) advocated that the reading of graphic novels, rather than being simplistic ventures into subpar texts, actually requires high levels of engagement to render meaning from the combination of images and words. Of other teachers who have included graphic novels in their classrooms, Frey and Fisher (2004) implemented graphic novels and other elements of popular culture in their pedagogies, reporting that their “students became not only better writers but also more knowledgeable consumers of ideas and information” (p. 25). Similarly, Bitz (2004) conducted a study in which students created their own comic strips in an after-school setting as inroads to literacy and as a means of connecting to students' lived experiences.

In a different yet related discipline, Christensen (2006) reviewed nine graphic novels for use in social studies classrooms that address complex political and social issues and argued that these graphic novels have the potential for reaching readers at multiple reading levels while still attending to salient social, cultural, and historical issues. Of the nine texts reviewed, Christensen (2006) specifically cited graphic novels on the topic of immigration, such as *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (Satrapi, 2000/2003) and *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return* (Satrapi, 2001/2004). This particular article represented the sole exemplar that specifically addressed immigration in the context of graphic novels.

A Critical Literacy Framework

Pinpointing a concise definition of critical literacy is less productive than—perhaps even counterproductive

to—exploring a few of its tenets, according to critical literacy advocates at the end of the 20th century and the nascent years of the 21st century. This resistance to a singular definition coincides with Luke's (2000) claim that critical literacy, by its very nature, cannot be reduced into a formulaic method, because it values the plurality and openness of meanings (Janks, 2001). Furthermore, for Comber (2001a, 2001b), critical literacy is a site of contestation and finds its most productive uses as "locally negotiated practices" (2001b, p. 272). Based on these ideas, critical literacy refuses a simplistic definition, because it constitutes a practice for understanding texts that remains open to multiple interpretations and is always situated in localized contexts. Thus, the more productive question to ask is how critical literacy works in use than to ask what critical literacy is.

One approach to adopting a critical literacy framework, as McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) offered, is by understanding that "critical literacy views readers as active participants in the reading process and invites them to move beyond passively accepting the text's message to question, examine, or dispute the power relations that exist between readers and authors" (p. 14). In other words, critical literacy studies encourages readers to delve past a comprehension-level understanding of a piece of text to identify the underlying ideologies, or belief systems, inherent in any given word and image. By empowering readers (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000) to identify the ideological currents running throughout a particular text, readers become agents of their own reading experiences. They are invited to take up, refuse, or contest an author's message, which disrupts the power relations in the author-reader binary. Moreover, a critical literacy approach examines the assumptions authors make about their readers, who gets to speak for whom, and whose voice or point of view is ignored (Luke, 2000).

To further concentrate this article on immigrant experiences within a critical literacy framework, I adapted Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco's (2001) and Suárez-Orozco et al.'s (2008) work to explore social mobility myths, issues of assimilation, and immigrant identities. Because Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco's (2001) primary emphasis lay in

understanding "how children of immigrants [were] faring in American society" (p. 3), their explorations into how immigrant children have adjusted to U.S. life over the past 10 years complement this article's critical literacy framework and how these three graphic novels could be studied in the classroom.

When Pictures Narrate: A Wordless Graphic Novel's Immigrant Experience

The realm of wordless books opens countless opportunities for expression and meaning potential. One such wordless graphic novel, *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007), presents a surrealistic vision of one immigrant family's experience, narrated without worded signposts to shepherd the reader through the story line. Although Hicks (2007) lauded this wordless graphic novel for its diversity and adventurous spirit, and acknowledged the accolades it has received from the literary community, Tan's book is far from a facile narrative about immigrant experiences.

At the risk of overly simplifying Tan's visual narrative, a brief summary of his novel, using words of course, is in order. *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007), a black-and-white illustrated graphic novel infused with hints of sepia, begins with a young man leaving his wife and daughter in search of a better life in another country. This young man travels by ship, along with countless other emigrants leaving their native soil. Once the steam liner arrives at its destination, the illustrations reveal a constrained and crowded ship's deck full of men vying for a glimpse at this new country. Soon after the young man arrives in the new country, he relies on the kindness of strangers to find lodging, learn the language, and obtain a job. Despite the young man's obstacles and setbacks in a new culture and new land, he eventually earns enough money to pay for his family's voyage to their new home in this new country. Tan—himself an Australian author and illustrator of immigrant parents—explicitly stated in the Artist's Note that these images were modeled after museum and archival photographs of Ellis Island at the turn of the 20th century.

Tan distinctly draws the immigrant family at the center of this narrative with white skin, denoting their association with Western European immigrants. If we recall that Tan modeled particular scenes from

turn-of-the-20th-century Ellis Island archives, then this family's immigrant experiences might conjure images of British, German, Irish, and Scandinavian immigrant experiences of 100 years ago (Lowery, 2000). These immigrants, being of Nordic ancestry, were able to dispose of their ethnic heritage and blend in with white American culture with the passage of time. Moreover, Western European immigrant narratives have historically been depicted with characters who successfully pursue an "upwardly mobile journey" (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 4) and prosper in the United States.

In conjunction with privileging a Western readership and concentrating the narrative of his graphic novel around the trials and challenges of a European main character and his family, Tan's choice of a male protagonist also invites criticism. Tan depicts a young white male who endures countless physical, linguistic, and financial obstacles to find a better life for himself and his family. The image of the successful European male immigrant of 100 years ago (Lowery, 2000) provides a pivotal point of departure for addressing immigrant patterns of the last 10 years. According to Jensen (2001), immigrants now constitute an increasingly heterogeneous population and arrive in the United States in various family and individual formulations with women and children also emigrating from their native countries to live in the United States (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). By using a white male protagonist, Tan creates a representation of immigrants that exists in stark contrast to multiracial, multiethnic immigrants of recent immigration trends. As readers of this pictorial narrative, we are left wondering whose immigrant narratives are not told at the expense of Tan's successful immigrant tale.

Furthermore, although his journey is perilous, the main character refrains from engaging in any illegal activities to establish himself in his new country, representing an ideal immigrant (McLaren & Dyck, 2004) or the good immigrant (GOOD Worldwide & Huang, 2008), or one who abides by all the laws of the new country and achieves a successful lifestyle. To put it differently, Tan's archetypal immigrant is consonant with the American Dream myth (Adams, 1933) in that the young man survived against terrific

odds, followed the codes of conduct and legality in his new country, and acquired purchase in his newly adopted country. Thus, as readers of Tan's pictorial narrative, we experience an ideal immigrant narrative, one in which the main character determinedly overcomes all obstacles to become a self-made man by the graphic novel's end. In today's global society, English language arts teachers have an excellent opportunity for questioning immigrant experiences that are portrayed as ideal or good and for exploring how such immigrant labels as good and bad have come into existence.

In today's global society, English language arts teachers have an excellent opportunity for questioning immigrant experiences that are portrayed as ideal or good and for exploring how such immigrant labels as good and bad have come into existence.

A Firsthand Account: Autobiography as Immigrant Experience

Kiyama's (1931/1999) autobiographical graphic novel, *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924*, narrates through words and illustrations the author's experiences as a Japanese immigrant in turn-of-the-20th-century San Francisco. From this immigrant lens, Kiyama depicts the blatant racism and classism working-class Japanese immigrants endured in the United States in the early 1900s. These attitudes toward immigrants and immigration mirror current perceptions of immigrants in the United States in which issues of race and class commonly influence negative attitudes toward immigrants (Esses, Dovidio, & Hodson, 2002; Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001; Haubert & Fussell, 2006). Considering that 21st-century immigrants are subject to similar ridicule and exclusion, Kiyama's work represents a palpable contribution toward understanding an immigrant experience relevant to today's readers through the medium of the graphic novel.

Kiyama's (1931/1999) *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924* details the experiences of four young Japanese men who immigrate to the United States. Originally envisioned as a newspaper weekly serial to span a calendar year,

Executed with poignancy and sincerity, Kiyama's autobiographical account of a Japanese immigrant experience provides a unique occasion for English language arts teachers to unpack the ideas and social realities detailed in this graphic novel.

Kiyama's book consists of 52 individual, black-and-white comics, each with eight panels, with the four main characters' exploits at the center of activity as they experience San Franciscan society in the early years of the 20th century. Kiyama's book also serves as a historical document, alluding to such landmark events as the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, World War I, and Prohibition. The four young characters, opting for American names to ease integration into San Franciscan society, become victims of bank fraud, lose jobs because of their limited English capabilities, and fall prey to exploitative employers who take advantage of their inexperience in the American

labor force. Executed with poignancy and sincerity, Kiyama's autobiographical account of a Japanese immigrant experience provides a unique occasion for English language arts teachers to unpack the ideas and social realities detailed in this graphic novel.

Rather than drawing his characters with explicit attention to detail and rendering realistic portrayures of real people, Kiyama instead emphasized their cartoon-like features by using simplistic lines and circles. McCloud (1993) offered the following rationale for this artistic decision: "When you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face, you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon, you see yourself" (p. 36). In other words, the iconography of cartoonish features may invite readers to identify more readily with characters drawn in this style than characters that resemble a reality of their own. In the case of Kiyama's graphic novel, the sparse use of lines and circles invites readers to enter the world of the graphic novel and join in the meaning making of the characters' experiences.

Kiyama also intentionally illustrated the Japanese characters in his graphic novel with Westernized features (Schodt, 1931/1999). To further distance his experience from those of other Asian Americans, especially Chinese Americans living in San Francisco

in the early 20th century, Kiyama assigned the few Chinese characters that populate his narrative with stereotypically slanted eyes and pronounced front teeth, two distinct features that he did not assign to his Japanese characters. By so illustrating his characters, Kiyama was actively carving out an experiential reality that portrayed Japanese as modernized and cultured in a Western sense and that situates them in stark contrast to their Chinese American counterparts. Kiyama's illustrative decision may also have been partially motivated by troubled political relations between Japan and China spawning from the recent First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), a war that demonstrated Japan's military prowess over China and announced its entry into the "modernized" world of the 20th century.

The work of Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) assisted in critiquing Kiyama's decision to create Westernized Japanese characters. This illustrative move harmonizes with Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco's concept of an ethnic flight identity in which immigrants abandon what they perceive as negative attributes of their native culture to assimilate into the dominant culture of the receiving country. Although Kiyama's four Japanese immigrant protagonists possess Westernized facial features, their endeavors to assimilate into American culture and abandon their ethnic identities result in failure. Instead, the Japanese characters that populate Kiyama's graphic novel continually encounter walls of racism and xenophobia that summarily prevent them from full assimilation into the American fabric of white San Franciscan society.

Through a satirical veneer of humor and comedy, Kiyama relates a provocative social commentary on the Japanese immigrant experience as he perpetually depicts Japanese Americans as subject to the ridicule of the dominant white mainstream society. Other researchers, most notably Ngai (1999), have extended Kiyama's narrative by employing his work as a primary account of the discrimination Asian Americans have historically endured in the United States. In her article, Ngai reprinted one of the episodes from *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924* to address the discrimination faced by Asian Americans at the turn of the 20th century. Ngai reproduced Episode 45, "The Great

War in Europe” (Kiyama, 1931/1999, pp. 118–119) to highlight how Japanese living in America were persistently precluded from taking full purchase in American society. In this series of eight frames, Frank and Charlie, two of the four Japanese friends who immigrated to San Francisco together in 1904, learn that America has gone to war in Europe (World War I). Charlie decides to enlist, with the hopes of expediting the citizenship process and buying a home in the United States. However, when Charlie returns from Europe after serving his tour of duty and appears before a judge requesting citizenship, the judge denies his request, stating that citizenship is impossible for “Orientals” at this time in history (p. 119).

To provide context for Kiyama’s novel, Ngai (1999) chronicled immigration legislation in the United States leading up to the Immigration Act of 1924, which summarily precluded most immigration from Asia into the United States. At the same time, this law enacted quotas for immigrants admitted from Western European countries, demonstrating an early instance of the United States’s ambivalence and sometimes outright disparagement of people of color. During this time in American history, the social construction of nation, nationality, and race in America favored Nordic peoples and their whiteness while discounting others for their nonwhiteness.

As Ngai (1999) argued, race relations have played a pivotal role in shaping the types of immigrant experiences possible for people of various ethnic backgrounds. Although Kiyama’s autobiographical graphic novel account represents one reality of the Japanese immigrant experience, the conflict and injustice his characters face are by no means localized to this point of view. In light of the Japanese internment camps established in the United States after the attack on Pearl Harbor (Sweeting, 2001), Kiyama’s text percolates with potential for further explorations of race and immigration issues in English language arts classrooms.

Born an Immigrant: An Adolescent’s Immigrant Experience

Yang’s (2006) contemporary *American Born Chinese* offers yet another immigrant experience as represented in a graphic novel. Yang’s novel, illustrated using the full color palette, recounts the fictional story

of Jin Wang, a second-generation, American-born Chinese boy dealing with issues of identity and acceptance while growing up in San Francisco. Concurrent with Jin Wang’s coming-of-age story line are two other connected narratives interwoven throughout the graphic novel: One is the mythological tale of the Monkey King, and the other revolves around the antics of Chin-Kee, a hyperbolic representation of negative Chinese stereotypes. Yang complements and complicates Jin Wang’s narrative by interpolating these two story lines.

In the course of the narrative, Yang’s young adolescent protagonist, Jin Wang, finds himself attracted to a European American girl named Amelia Harris. Jin’s skin color is depicted with a paler hue than Amelia’s, whose blonde hair and peach-toned skin grab Jin’s attention one day while in class. From that moment onward, Jin convinces himself that the only way for a girl like Amelia to notice him is to reimage himself after a fellow classmate who happens to be white. The author’s accentuation of skin color plays a prominent role in his protagonist’s development of an immigrant identity (Tummala-Narra, 2001). Jin Wang perceives that his only route to securing a date with Amelia rests in somehow altering his physical appearance. Because he cannot control his skin color, a self-perceived roadblock to achieving his ambitions, he instead curls his straight hair to mirror the hairstyles of his white high school peers. From a critical literacy perspective, English language arts teachers could draw connections with and interrogate Jin Wang’s desire to transform his physical appearance to the hegemony of whiteness as a socially constructed preferred skin color in the United States (Segura-Mora, 2009).

Another instance of identity conflict issuing from Yang’s graphic novel is brought into sharp relief in the parallel story line involving Chin-Kee, who represents an overblown Chinese teenager saturated in negative stereotypes with slanted eyes, two protruding front teeth, traditional Chinese attire, the phonetic intermingling of the *r* and the *l* sounds, and pale-yellow skin that easily distinguishes him from the rest of the European American community. Although Chin-Kee means well, he represents an embarrassment to Danny, his unassuming and insecure European American

teenage cousin, who attempts to disassociate himself from his Chinese heritage. By using a caricature like Chin-Kee, whose European American cousin desperately attempts to avoid, and through Jin Wang's desire to look more acceptable by refashioning his hairstyle after his European American male peers, Yang arrives at the heart of the immigrant identity issues at work in his graphic novel. In both instances, characters confront what it means to be Asian American. English language arts teachers may critique such immigrant identity issues with their students by engaging in dialogues that trouble the unstable identity construct of a second-generation immigrant that, in turn, question privileged as well as marginalized second-generation immigrant identity constructs.

In an interview about the impact of *American Born Chinese*, Yang was asked about the assimilation issues central to his graphic novel:

I'm still trying to figure out what it means to be Asian American. I think I've progressively gotten away from shame in my own culture, although it's still there.... There's definitely a temptation to become fully assimilated, fully a part of America, but as Asian Americans, we have to constantly struggle against that. (Woan, 2007, p. 78)

The tension Yang cites in resisting absolute assimilation into American culture while at the same time maintaining his Asian identity articulates a desire to reside in both Asian and American cultures. This hybrid identity (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) that Yang spoke of represents a complex balancing act between acculturation and assimilation that second-generation immigrants may experience. Even though Jin Wang, the graphic novel's teenage protagonist, eventually comes to terms with his Asian American identity, his journey toward this hybrid identity gestures toward a problematic and complex reality for second-generation immigrants in the United States living in two often contradictory cultural worlds. Because identity formation constitutes a central concept for many adolescents, Yang's work offers a provocative conduit for investigating this theme with students.

Studying Experiences: Implications for the Classroom

Similar to the media's reporting on immigrants and immigration that introduced this article, the authors of the three graphic novels analyzed in this study also chose to represent immigrant experiences in various capacities in their texts. The major themes highlighted in these graphic novels—immigrant success stories, immigrant discrimination, and immigrant identity—present only three possible topics for studying immigration in the classroom. To examine these contested topics from a critical literacy standpoint, teachers and their students are encouraged to “raise questions and seek alternative explanations as a way of more fully acknowledging the complexity” (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p. 15) of these issues.

From a critical literacy perspective, Tan's (2007) *The Arrival* could augment classroom discussions that address silences and absences (Luke, 2000) in conjunction with how Tan composed this graphic novel without words. After reading Tan's work, teachers might find it useful to encourage students to illustrate their own understandings of what immigration looks like, or perhaps even focus on other senses by asking students what sounds are conjured or what aromas are stirred when they think about immigrants and immigration. From such springboards of ideas, teachers can base classroom dialogues on uncovering students' assumptions about immigration and ask how their reactions cohere together or complicate their understandings of immigration. Because Tan's work pivots on silences, teachers might delve into other ways this graphic novel could perform as a site for newer understandings when words are not available.

Kiyama's (1931/1999) *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924* offers teachers an opportunity to encourage students to adopt research habits, such as examining the historical events surrounding this narrative for authorial bias. For example, Kiyama referenced the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and World War I, and students could investigate these events to see if they agree or disagree with Kiyama's accounts. Also, in searching for open meanings (Janks, 2001), students might explore the 20-year period Kiyama covered by studying other perspectives through the act of role-playing characters,

Table 1 A Brief Set of Suggested Questions for Studying Immigrant Representations in Graphic Novels

Graphic novel	Suggested questions
<i>The Arrival</i> (Tan, 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Although the main character succeeds, what messages are transmitted about the countless European immigrants at the turn of the 20th century who met a different fate in their attempts to prosper in the United States? ■ How might this immigrant narrative have yielded a different outcome had the protagonist been female? Why? ■ How do the author's illustrations influence what the reader sees and does not see when navigating this graphic novel?
<i>The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924</i> (Kiyama, 1931/1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What were the ethnicities of people who were received favorably by people of Western European ethnicities in the United States? Why? ■ What were the ethnicities of those people who encountered hostility and animosity when they immigrated to the United States? Why?
<i>American Born Chinese</i> (Yang, 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Why might an adolescent feel compelled to abandon his native or home identity for the identity of his peers? ■ How does the media play a role in defining beauty and what is desirable in society? ■ Is it truly possible to shed one's identity and adopt another? How so? ■ Describe other identity issues that go beyond race, such as sexual preference and class.

such as an early 20th-century San Franciscan historian, a civil servant working at Angel Island, or a Chinese immigrant of high socioeconomic status. By critiquing the authorial narratives of immigrants and immigration in graphic novels and searching for other perspectives on historical events, teachers invite their students to search for counternarratives of and by immigrants, engage in historical explorations regarding immigrant documentation, discover legal proceedings involving immigrants, and arrive at their own understandings of immigration as informed by multiple sources.

With Yang's (2006) *American Born Chinese* set in the first decade of the 21st century, teachers and their students could examine how popular culture functions as a socially constructed artifact (Comber, 2001a) in shaping immigrant identities. Because Yang addressed adolescence in current times, teachers might encourage students to examine how television, the Internet, and film produce particular images of immigrants and how these portrayals differ from their representations of nonimmigrants. Students working with Yang's graphic novel could research webpages, fashion magazines, and newspapers to identify stereotypes and negative depictions of immigration. From these explorations, teachers could engage their classes in discussions to address why

such representations exist and who benefits from them, and look for possible options for resisting negative portrayals of immigrants and immigration.

With the rise of the graphic novel as a viable genre in the classroom (Yang, 2008), English language arts teachers have yet another provocative resource for engaging the complex issues surrounding immigration and immigrant experiences with their students (see Table 1). By employing graphic novels as resources for engendering critical literacy skills, English language arts teachers can assist their students in developing an analytical awareness of graphic novels' power to represent immigrant experiences and how these representations privilege certain immigrant experiences while leaving countless other immigrant experiences untold.

References

- Adams, J.T. (1933). *The epic of America*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Alvermann, D.E., & Hagood, M.C. (2000). Critical media literacy: Research, theory, and practice in the "new times." *Journal of Educational Research*, 93(3), 193–205.
- Bernstein, N. (2008, August 12). Ill and in pain, detainee dies in U.S. hands. *The New York Times*. Retrieved December 1, 2008, from www.nytimes.com/2008/08/13/nyregion/13detain.html
- Bitz, M. (2004). The comic book project: Forging alternative pathways to literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 47(7), 574–586.

- Christensen, L.L. (2006). Graphic global conflict: Graphic novels in the high school social studies classroom. *Social Studies*, 97(6), 227–230. doi:10.3200/TSS.97.6.227-230
- Comber, B. (2001a). Classroom explorations in critical literacy. In H. Fehring & P. Green (Eds.), *Critical literacy: A collection of articles from the Australian Literacy Educators' Association* (pp. 90–102). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Comber, B. (2001b). Critical literacies and local action: Teacher knowledge and a new research agenda. In B. Comber & A. Simpson (Eds.), *Negotiating critical literacies in the classroom* (pp. 271–282). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Crawford, P. (2004). A novel approach: Using graphic novels to attract reluctant readers and promote literacy. *Library Media Connection*, 22(5), 26–28.
- Dillard, A. (1982). *Living by fiction*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Esses, V.M., Dovidio, J.F., & Hodson, G. (2002). Public attitudes toward immigration in the United States and Canada in response to the September 11, 2001 “Attack on America.” *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 2(1), 69–85. doi:10.1111/j.1530-2415.2002.00028.x
- Esses, V.M., Dovidio, J.F., Jackson, L.M., & Armstrong, T.L. (2001). The immigration dilemma: The role of perceived group competition, ethnic prejudice, and national identity. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(3), 389–412. doi:10.1111/0022-4537.00220
- Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (2004). Using graphic novels, anime, and the Internet in an urban high school. *English Journal*, 93(3), 19–25. doi:10.2307/4128804
- GOOD Worldwide, & Huang, H.H. (2008). *The GOOD Sheet: Coming to America*. Retrieved March 1, 2009, from awesome.goodmagazine.com/goodsheet/goodsheet003immigration.html
- Haubert, J., & Fussell, E. (2006). Explaining pro-immigrant sentiment in the U.S.: Social class, cosmopolitanism, and perceptions of immigrants. *International Migration Review*, 40(3), 489–507. doi:10.1111/j.1747-7379.2006.00033.x
- Hicks, J. (2007, September). *Catching the reading bug: Looking at how to immerse children in the literary experience using visual and textual literacy*. Paper presented at the Future Directions in Literacy: International Conversations Conference, Sydney, Australia.
- Janks, H. (2001). Identity and conflict in the critical literacy classroom. In B. Comber & A. Simpson (Eds.), *Negotiating critical literacies in the classroom* (pp. 137–150). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Jensen, L. (2001). The demographic diversity of immigrants and their children. In R.G. Rumbaut & A. Portes (Eds.), *Ethnicities: Children of immigrants in America* (pp. 21–56). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lavin, M.R. (1998). Comic books and graphic novels for libraries: What to buy. *Serials Review*, 24(2), 31–46. doi:10.1016/S0098-7913(99)80117-8
- Lowery, R.M. (2000). *Immigrants in children's literature*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Luke, A. (2000). Critical literacy in Australia: A matter of context and standpoint. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 43(5), 448–461.
- McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. New York: HarperCollins.
- McLaren, A.T., & Dyck, I. (2004). Mothering, human capital, and the “ideal immigrant.” *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27(1), 41–53.
- McLaughlin, M., & DeVoogd, G.L. (2004). *Critical literacy: Enhancing students' comprehension of text*. New York: Scholastic.
- Montecinos, C. (1995). Culture as an ongoing dialog: Implications for multicultural teacher education. In C.E. Sleeter & P.L. McLaren (Eds.), *Multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and the politics of difference* (pp. 291–308). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Ngai, M.M. (1999). The architecture of race in American immigration law: A reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924. *Journal of American History*, 86(1), 67–92. doi:10.2307/2567407
- Rosenblatt, L.M. (1995). *Literature as exploration* (5th ed.). New York: Modern Language Association of America.
- Schodt, F.L. (1999). Introduction and notes. In H.Y. Kiyama, *The four immigrants manga: A Japanese experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924* (pp. 7–18, 134–152). (F.L. Schodt, Trans.). Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge. (Original work published 1931)
- Schwarz, G.E. (2002). Graphic novels for multiple literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 46(3), 262–265.
- Segura-Mora, A. (2009). What color is beautiful? In W. Au (Ed.), *Rethinking multicultural education: Teaching for racial and cultural justice* (pp. 263–268). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- Suárez-Orozco, C., & Suárez-Orozco, M.M. (2001). *Children of immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Suárez-Orozco, C., Suárez-Orozco, M.M., & Todorova, I. (2008). *Learning a new land: Immigrant students in American society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sweeting, M. (2001). A lesson on the Japanese–American internment. In B. Bigelow, B. Harvey, S. Karp, & L. Miller (Eds.), *Rethinking our classrooms: Teaching for equity and justice* (Vol. 2, pp. 73–74). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- Tummala-Narra, P. (2001). Asian trauma survivors: Immigration, identity, loss, and recovery. *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 3(3), 243–258. doi:10.1023/A:1011579617139
- Woan, S. (2007). Interview with Gene Luen Yang. *Kartika Review*, 1, 77–88. Retrieved November 2, 2008, from www.kartikareview.com/archives.html
- Yang, G.L. (2008). Graphic novels in the classroom. *Language Arts*, 85(3), 185–192.

Literature Cited

- Kiyama, H.Y. (1999). *The four immigrants manga: A Japanese experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924* (F.L. Schodt, Trans.). Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge. (Original work published 1931)
- Satrapi, M. (2003). *Persepolis: The story of a childhood* (Mo Ripa & Bo Ferris, France, Trans.). New York: Pantheon. (Original work published 2000)
- Satrapi, M. (2004). *Persepolis 2: The story of a return* (A. Singh, Trans.). New York: Pantheon. (Original work published 2001)
- Tan, S. (2007). *The arrival*. New York: Arthur A. Levine.
- Yang, G.L. (2006). *American born Chinese*. New York: First Second.

Boatright is a graduate assistant at The University of Georgia, Athens, USA; e-mail michaelboatright@gmail.com.