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Illustrating adolescent awareness: Teaching historical injustices and promoting agency through picture books in secondary classrooms

Melissa Hoak

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Illustrating Adolescent Awareness:
Teaching Historical Injustices and Promoting Agency through Picture Books in Secondary
Classrooms

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

Picture books, often marketed to and written for young children, are typically thought of only as tools to inspire early literacy. They rarely make their way into secondary lesson plans, and with their seemingly simple illustrations and text, they are mostly deemed (socially, if not academically) inappropriate for accomplished readers. This thesis explores the advantages of including picture books when teaching four young adult texts: Pam Muñoz Ryan's *Esperanza Rising* (2000), Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005), Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014), and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003). Picture books can serve as valuable companions to anchor texts such as these because they help develop critical thinking skills and invite students to analyze the illustrations. Additionally, when teachers include anchor texts to help connect themes of acceptance and social awareness, picture books encourage adolescents to be more hopeful and empathetic and to recognize and seize their agency against contemporary injustices.

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Introduction

“So Matilda’s strong young mind continued to grow, nurtured by the voices of all those authors who had sent their books out into the world like ships on the sea. These books gave Matilda a hopeful and comforting message: You are not alone.”

—ROALD DAHL, *MATILDA* (1988)

Books have often been thought of as portals to other worlds. Whether it is a different culture, place, or perspective, stories provide their readers with a new understanding of topics formerly unclear or unknown. Literature lets us know, as Roald Dahl states in *Matilda*, that we are not alone. This simple sentiment meant to comfort a young, lonely reader conveys a complex consideration. Not only are readers kept company by all the characters, fiction and non-fiction, that fill the pages of books, but we are also joined, in a more literal sense, by billions of other humans on this planet, each belonging to different cultures with varying beliefs and dense histories.

Though I don’t believe Dahl had this larger idea of global diversity in mind with his piece of narration in *Matilda*, it nevertheless serves as an accurate umbrella for this project: the use of picture books in secondary classrooms. Typically, adolescence is thought of as a time of self-centeredness, or, in Piaget’s terms of developmental stages, egocentrism. As described in David Elkind’s article, “Egocentrism in Adolescence,” this stage is when an adolescent is “primarily concerned with himself” (Elkind 1029). He explains that, since adolescents often fail to differentiate between what others are thinking about and their own mental preoccupations, they assume that other people are as obsessed with their own behavior and appearance as they are themselves (Elkin 1029). Rather than perpetuate these egocentric attitudes in the classroom, teachers can use literature to help students understand the value of thinking beyond themselves and considering and accepting diversity in terms of experiences, ideas, and beliefs that may differ from the students’ own. Literature offers a way to not only illustrate the world’s intricate

diversity, as literature, in recent decades, has become rich with multiculturalism, but it can also inspire young readers to become more aware, active, and empathetic members of society.

Children's literature, specifically picture books, is especially valuable in promoting awareness to young readers and students. Multicultural historical fiction that is written for a young audience features countless texts focusing on social injustices that affect minority cultures. In their book, *Human Rights in Children's Literature: Imagination and the Narrative of Law*, Jonathan Todres and Sarah Higinbotham write about discrimination, equality, and the importance of young readers having access to historically accurate accounts of events. They write,

Historically children's literature has often perpetuated racial stereotypes of minority groups. Many classic books, in fact, are responsible for the ways in which white children in literate white families came to understand African Americans and American Indians, through racialized caricatures. (Todres and Higinbotham 66)

Children's literature reinforced what many children learned in schools and in their homes, further entrenching a racist othering of people of color (Todres and Higinbotham 66). This reinforcement suggests the power of literature and the danger of young people reading misrepresentations. According to Todres and Higinbotham, "Authentic, accurate stories and images serve as mirrors for children to see themselves and their families, and as windows to learn about the rest of the world" (84). They continue to explain that literature allows children to experience what another person is thinking and feeling, often people very different from themselves, acting as a vehicle to travel to different worlds and learn about the experiences of others (Todres and Higinbotham 84-85). Reading fosters children's language skills, improves

memory, increases attention spans, and even reduces violence, as it promotes empathy (Todres and Higinbotham 9). Historically accurate and age-appropriate texts offer students the opportunity to learn about human rights and the consequences brought on by their denial, increasing awareness and empathy, but also providing the safety to explore complex issues with a lessened risk of traumatization than lived experiences.

Picture books, often marketed to and written for young children, are typically valued only as tools to inspire early literacy. Picture books often become the first texts children attempt to read on their own, emphasizing their importance in terms of literacy, but also placing them firmly on early elementary bookshelves, rarely making their way into the classrooms of secondary students. Outside of early childhood, picture books get frequently forgotten or dismissed, despite the expansive variety of topics they increasingly cover and their ability to connect thematically to adolescent literature. They rarely make their way into secondary lesson plans, and with their seemingly simple illustrations and text, they are mostly deemed socially and/or academically inappropriate for adolescent readers. Despite these perceptions, however, picture books can serve as strong companions to anchor texts,¹ specifically those taught in high school English language arts classes. This thesis explores the benefits of including picture books in the curriculum when teaching four young adult texts: Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005), Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014), Pam Muñoz Ryan's *Esperanza Rising* (2000), and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003).

Largely dismissed in secondary education, picture books are often considered unsuitable in literary instruction for middle or high school students because they are believed to be too immature for adolescents, too easy for accomplished readers. However, though sometimes

¹ An anchor text is the work of literature in an English Language Arts unit that presents a central idea for additional readings and activities to circle around; a text that holds the unit together and anchors it to the curriculum.

disguised with a child audience in mind, picture books can feature complex, controversial issues and discussion points within their brightly colored pages, adding depth and understanding to lesson plans for adolescent students. A common occurrence within children's literature, picture books frequently convey two messages: one intended for the child, and one intended for the adult reader. Though these are often the same general messages, the books target older readers through various design elements and subtexts. Situated between childhood and adulthood, adolescents have the capacity and, most likely, the prior knowledge to notice these subtexts, making picture books the perfect tools to accompany controversial anchor texts in secondary English language arts classrooms.

Because they typically explore one specific topic in greater depth, teaching with a group of picture books can pose a richer learning experience than textbooks, which normally cover a broad range of topics through snippets of information. Armed with their prior knowledge, secondary students who examine picture books about historical events or eras will enhance their repertoire of historical knowledge and perspectives, along with interpretive skills, through the experience of the characters, as well as the book's design and illustrations. In this way, picture books help develop critical thinking skills by offering opportunities for discussion questions that differ from those presented by textbooks. Picture books invite adolescent students to analyze the intentions of the illustrators and their artistic designs as they work with the narration, raising inquiries about conventions such as symbolism, colors, choice of medium, and use of space. In addition to these advantages, picture books provide faces to the people, times, and situations discussed within the stories. They present a clearer representation of historical events through illustrations and varying perspectives, allowing students to move beyond memorization of dates and places.

Picture books function differently than textbooks and novels because their illustrations and design appeal to visual learners. In her Prezi titled “Picturebooks in the Secondary Classroom,” Jenna Gardner explains that picture books create perfect tools to engage students in making meaning because they employ art and text together in order to evince metaphors and other examples of figurative language. She writes that this combination of image with text also allows students to more easily discern tone and mood from a work. Students’ constant use of visual media, such as computer games, social media applications, and television, has helped to develop sophisticated visual skills in adolescents, making them better suited to interpret visual narratives (Gardner). This image-text interaction succeeds in engaging students where novels and textbooks sometimes fail, especially through accessibility. With a picture book, struggling readers can succeed along with the advanced readers because they read more than words—they interpret design choices and central ideas, leading to a boost in confidence, which can later make a difficult text easier to manage. The picture book serves as a less threatening way to encourage reading and ownership in studying a demanding text (Gardner). The simpler text and use of pictures also help students who have difficulty reading or whose first language is not English. By using an area where students feel confident, their visual literacy, Gardner says that teachers can inspire students to take risks by “reading text beyond the literal to the implied meaning and connection that are shared by all great literature from Jon Scieszka’s *The Stinky Cheese Man* to John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*” (Gardner).

Gardner also highlights the possibility of using picture books to teach literary devices and their functions, explaining “The picturebook is an opportunity to review the elements of a story: character, setting, conflict, plot, theme, rising tension or action, resolution, and conclusion” (Gardner). She explains that, as students talk about these elements in relation to the story, they

also focus on familiar elements such as point of view, leads, and pacing of the action as developed by the varying sentence structure of the story (Gardner). This also offers an opportunity to discuss unreliable narrators—an important yet sometimes elusive concept in literature. If paired with a picture book where the images tell one story while the text tells another, however, students have a concrete, visual example of an ambiguous concept. Gardner says that the various types of image-text interaction in picture books can be introduced to students so that they move from images that build the story's meaning alongside with the text to a counterpointing or even contradictory interaction whose ambiguity challenges the reader to distinguish between words and pictures in order to establish a true understanding of what is being depicted (Gardner). The picture book, rather than continuing only as a fixture in kindergarten story-time, becomes a major possibility for secondary educators to move beyond a novel and connect to students' visual capabilities.

In her article, "What is a Picturebook, Anyway?: Across the Borders of History," Barbara Kiefer states, "Throughout the years the creators of picturebooks have been people who had some inner need to tell about their world through pictures, to respond to societal needs but also push the boundaries of visual depiction" (Keifer 20). This message about authors' and illustrators' intentions becomes particularly true when looking at picture books about controversial issues or events, such as immigration and child labor, the Holocaust, and the Civil Rights Movement. Though many photographic accounts exist of these issues and events, they may present moments too graphically, submerging students in distressing realism. In the classroom, teachers must exercise care to protect students from overly negative emotional responses. Picture books can inspire without traumatizing readers, unlike some of the most powerful photographs.

In her 2011 qualitative case study, “The Use of Picture Books in the High School Classroom,” Melissa Reiker explains that authors and illustrators now frequently choose the picture book vehicle for tackling complex topics, some that would be entirely inappropriate for very young readers (Reiker 4). She writes,

Visualizing the term “picture book” must no longer be limited to an image of an elementary school teacher reading a *Dr. Seuss* book aloud to a roomful of young children; it must widen to include a high school teacher reading a picture book to his students that addresses nuclear war, AIDS, or homelessness. (Reiker 4-5)

She continues, in support of Gardner’s previously stated claims, to say that picture books, even those that tackle complex topics, connect to high school students through their visual nature (Reiker 6). “Clearly,” she says, “our students live in a world that has reached unprecedented levels of visual stimulation. The interplay between text and illustration may appeal to students who enjoy the same kind of experience when texting [or] playing a video game” (Reiker 6).

Another advantage of picture books is that they play a role in creating a safe learning environment for students. Despite their potentially dark subjects, “the picture book is one tool for building a sense of community in the classroom, a key component of a successful learning environment” (Reiker 8). Teachers can use picture books to create this sense of community through subject matter and the shared reading and discussion experience, gaining the trust of even the most reluctant readers and students (Reiker 8). This establishment of a classroom community is crucial in discussing difficult topics like human rights violations.

If educators open a safe space to explore these issues and injustices, students have the opportunity to become emotionally engaged with a topic or text. In her book *Genocide in Contemporary Children’s and Young Adult Literature: Cambodia to Darfur*, Jane Gangi explains

how authors who write about genocide for children have different considerations than those who write about this topic for adults. Though only one chapter of my project focuses directly on genocide, I use Gangi's work to demonstrate the care teachers must take to discuss these complex topics with students in the classroom, and how careful conversation and encounters can develop more aware and empathetic individuals. She emphasizes the importance of educators allowing their students to "encounter literature and the arts on genocide" with instructional framing, writing that, if they are not given this space to process on their own and with each other, "the pursuit may become meaningless" (Gangi 171). Instead of guiding students through genocide and other difficult topics with constant movement, transition after transition to fit into a demanding time schedule, teachers must allow learners time for their own encounters with the material. Teachers must "help students find their voices to respond to genocide, both personally and socially" (Gangi 172).

This pedagogical approach fits with the inclusion of picture books because picture book analysis requires that readers slow down, not only interpreting the meaning of the text but also every detail of illustration and design. Instead of racing through the text to reach the main message or action, as one can do with textbooks and sometimes with novels, quality picture books invite readers to take their time and notice decisions made by the artists. How do the colors affect the mood? Are they symbolic? Where are the characters situated in the illustration? Why is their location important? How is white space implemented and how does that work with the overall message? A slower interpretation, guided by questions like these, allows students to experience the encounter Gangi describes, providing a safe space while they process larger, darker concepts. She says that fiction is fact implanted within a story and that it has a way of "becoming knit into the mental processes much more easily, much more

permanently, than facts on their own, unrelated, ever can” (Gangi 168). Connecting to the advantages of fiction, specifically picture books, over textbooks, she explains that emotional engagement “can propel people of all ages to look for more information about a subject” (Gangi 169). This means that if students become emotionally invested in a topic, they will be more likely to continue their research, therefore becoming more aware of unjust events. Using picture books in the classroom builds a gateway to further learning, rather than potentially caging students within nonfiction that could harm more than help. “Using a very limited vocabulary,” Gangi says, “writers for young people must navigate this tension between over-simplification and nightmare-inducing intensity” (Gangi 6). This is where picture books become important, potentially bridging these two extremes with their illustrations and artistry.

Similar to Gangi’s discussion, Naomi Sokoloff, author of *The Holocaust and Literature for Children*, explains that children’s authors should express explicit lessons and look for ways to present the Holocaust, as well as other injustices, in accessible, easily digestible narratives. She says that “writing for children must be life-affirming and offer hope; at the very least, it mustn’t traumatize child readers” (Sokoloff 176). Though this article addresses Holocaust literature, the same could be said of all controversial texts intended for children, especially when used in a classroom. Teachers should use materials, such as picture books, that educate students and inspire deeper thinking rather than traumatize them and potentially cause resistance to the topic. Learning about human rights violations, especially in connection with contemporary discriminations, may be difficult for students to digest, but their awareness has the potential to shape a more accepting and peaceful future.

In terms of difficult-to-digest topics, arguments exist in support of traumatizing young readers in order for them to mature, such as those of Eric Tribunella in his 2010 monograph,

Melancholia and Maturation: The Use of Trauma in American Children's Literature. He describes the trend of loss and trauma in American children's literature and argues that traumatization is the "fuel used to achieve the speed necessary for escaping the gravitational force of childhood" (Tribunella xi). This suggests that not only is trauma important for a child to endure, it is such a part of children's lives that it even seeps into the books they read. Though some young readers may experience trauma in their books and, as a result, learn to better handle trauma in real life, in a classroom setting, a teacher must exercise caution with potentially harmful topics, ensuring that all students are prepared to encounter them. If students become overwhelmed by material or discussion, they will likely shut down and no longer be receptive to these important lessons. While traumatic topics exist in picture books, these books are often first intended for children, almost guaranteeing an easily digestible message along with subtexts and illustrations from which adolescent students can interpret and synthesize meanings at their own pace.

One could argue that including picture books in secondary education would coddle older students, preventing them from fully facing these controversial topics and therefore acting as a hindrance to their learning experience. If used responsibly, however, picture books can offer a deeper understanding as students analyze subtle design choices, such as color and illustrations, spacing, word choice, and placement of text. They invite students to analyze, interpret, and critically think about thematic connections, requiring a deeper level of thinking than simply receiving visuals. Despite their reputation as only valuable to young children, when paired with anchor texts, picture books can serve as these visual tools, leading students to learn and connect instead of simply seeing.

The purpose of this thesis is to unpack the potential of children's picture books when paired with controversial anchor texts in secondary classrooms. By analyzing several picture books with themes that connect to those within the four aforementioned novels (*The Book Thief*, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, *Esperanza Rising*, and *Persepolis*), I will examine how picture books can lead to a deeper understanding and a higher level of thinking in conjunction with the anchor text than if students are assigned an anchor text only. Through identifying thematic connections and analyzing design choices, I construct a strategy for educators to teach controversial topics while promoting student awareness and activism. In addition to stimulating conversations and critical thinking, these pairings invite students to not only actively participate with the texts but also with these controversial issues outside of the classroom. Picture books often encourage child agency, reminding young readers of the power they hold. Combining this message of power with anchor texts that deal with historical injustices will ideally inspire adolescent students to realize their potential to impact social change as well.

The four anchor texts selected for this project were chosen because they are frequently found within high school English language arts curricula in the United States, each one containing a publication date after 2001. My goal is to explore the expansive potential of picture books in the secondary classrooms and to highlight their ability to serve as invitations to students to act, as well as to read. A significant similarity throughout the anchor texts selected is that each of them is a reflection of the author's familial history and told in present-time as the author/narrator looks back on past events. The emphasis on memory that weaves through these selected texts encourages students to not only recognize their own heritage and culture but to also draw awareness to these historical events, inspiring vigilance toward prejudices. This

emphasis on memory is a call to action for young readers, reminding them of their own power and activism for the future.

Another important similarity connecting the four texts is that they all feature a strong, female protagonist. Though it began as a coincidence, as this project grew, this trait became crucial to fit with the goal of social change by offsetting the traditional gender schema through the highlighting of these strong female characters. Throughout their stories, Liesel, Jackie, Esperanza, and Marji each become more aware about the pitfalls of society and the basic human rights denied to some people. With this knowledge, they attempt to make a positive impact by taking ownership of their power, if only locally or within their families. These characters suggest to their young readers that children and adolescents have much more power than they are typically credited with. This becomes especially important for high school students, who may be accepting new adult responsibilities but are still required to submit to authorities within the school walls—asking for permission to use the restroom, sitting in an assigned desk, etc. Todres and Higinbotham write, “As children mature, they make a...transition from subject to participant. And their rights, which are innate, must be recognized by others” (15). They explain that teaching children about their rights helps children transition from mere subjects of adults to “partners and participants in their families, communities, and nations” (Todres and Higinbotham 15). These lessons imbue them with rights that are meaningful and, as many examples of children’s literature underscore, “also convey responsibilities that children will grow into as they mature” (Todres and Higinbotham 15). Reading about powerful characters may remind readers of their capabilities and their value within society, helping them with the transition to participants in the adult world.

Female characters are also important because male characters fill so much of what children read. In a 2011 study that examined over five thousand picture books, Janice McCabe and her team found that 57% of children's books published each year feature a male central character, 31% have a female central character, 23% have a male animal main character, and only 7.5% have a female animal main character (McCabe et al. 2008). McCabe explains that the effects of gender schemas can be seen in children's preferences for male characters. "Boys," she writes, "and, to a lesser extent, girls prefer stories about boys and men" (McCabe et al. 200). This research suggests that children see girls and women as less important and interesting, highlighting a severe problem in the way that females are represented in literature. This underrepresentation only serves to reinforce the gender imbalance; showing females less frequently than their proportion in the population conveys to children that they are not socially valued (McCabe et al. 200). The disparities found in this study point to what McCabe calls "symbolic annihilation," the denial of existence to women and girls by ignoring them or underrepresenting them in cultural products (McCabe et al. 198). Because of this, McCabe says that children's books reinforce, legitimate, and reproduce a patriarchal gender system (McCabe et al. 198).

Because this imbalanced gender structure is so deeply embedded in our society, including in children's literature, it became important to me to include four strong leading ladies in this project. Many classic novels taught in schools, such as *Of Mice and Men* and *The Outsiders*, feature adult or adolescent male protagonists. Even *To Kill a Mockingbird*, though narrated by Scout Finch, tells the story of three men: Atticus, Jem, and Boo Radley. Despite boys' preference to read about male characters, possibly developed by the overwhelming majority of male protagonists in literature, girls and women make up half of the world's human population.

Including more female protagonists in the curriculum may inspire students to correct this sense of unimportance among girls and privilege among boys, working to shrink this gender gap.

The four female protagonists and their stories helped guide me to specific picture books and a central question for this project. The main question I seek to answer is *why should teachers continue teaching with picture books beyond elementary school?* An exploration in pairing picture books with anchor texts that address controversial issues is necessary to understand and justify picture books' complex abilities and benefits within the secondary classroom. The way in which students learn about controversial topics, such as the ethnic tensions and traumatic events these novels convey, can impact the way they view history as well as present society. I investigate this question through four topics, each discussed in a separate chapter and with a different anchor text.

The first chapter explores the Holocaust through Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, specifically its historical context and Liesel's important role as a protector of not only words but also her family. Also discussed in this chapter are three illustrated texts. *Erika's Story* by Ruth Vander Zee outlines questions and the devastating possibilities of the Holocaust but ends with the hope of a survivor who grounds herself in her family. *The Harmonica* by Tony Johnston follows a young boy through separation from his parents and his new life in a concentration camp, where he must find hope through music and memories of his family. He serves as an activist, keeping hope alive for an entire group of prisoners. *Hidden* by Loic Dauvillier, a short graphic novel, also places an emphasis on remembering.

Chapter Two examines civil rights, both historical and contemporary, through Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming*. This chapter follows Jackie through her beautifully written, free verse childhood memories and considers how she promotes empathy and child agency.

Freedom Summer by Deborah Wiles joins *Brown Girl Dreaming* through a discussion of colors and formatting by illustrator, Jerome Lagarrigue. A second text by Jacqueline Woodson, *The Other Side*, and *A Sweet Smell of Roses* by Angela Johnson offer further evidence to support my analysis of children as powerful and influential while simultaneously presenting brilliant design choices for students to consider.

The third chapter assesses *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan and its complex discussion of immigration and the American Dream, child labor, and the importance of heritage. Picture books analyzed in this chapter include Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*, Duncan Tonatiuh's *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale*, and Don Brown's *Kid Blink Beats the World*. I consider the connections between these three picture books and *Esperanza Rising*, focusing first on Esperanza's journey and her transition from being an upper-class child in Mexico to a lower-class adolescent in America. I compare her story with the often lonely and unpleasant immigrant experience in *The Arrival*. Serving as a universal perspective, Shaun Tan's wordless, and timeless illustrated text invites students to look at immigration and the challenges it presents. The various storylines ask that readers recognize the value and texture of cultural background. Duncan Tonatiuh's *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale* offers a space for a discussion of current events in terms of illegal immigration from Mexico to the United States while also opening conversation on child labor. The third book I analyze is *Kid Blink Beats the World* by Don Brown and its presentation of the newsies strike of 1899. I use this story to contrast child labor in industrial areas like New York where *Kid Blink* takes place and child labor in agricultural regions, like Esperanza's San Joaquin Valley in California.

The fourth chapter works as a conclusion to the project and looks at *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel, and its emphasis on remembering. Because this is an illustrated text, I

will use it to tie the previous three chapters together in discussing trauma, memory, and activism, as well as to discuss the literary and educational value of illustrated texts. Ultimately, all the sections work together to demonstrate how picture books are valuable pedagogical tools when teaching difficult topics, especially for adolescent learners.

As a graduate student, I worked as a teaching assistant for an introduction to children's literature course. One morning, when I began writing this project, I asked the students how many of their high school or middle school teachers included picture books in their lessons. Over 100 students sat in front of me that day, but only one raised her hand. This suggests that the use of picture books in secondary classrooms is vastly underused and underrated, especially considering their infinite pedagogical value. As she discusses genocide in texts for young readers, Gangi writes, "Even when they are not intended to do so, picture books provide children with some of their earliest takes on morality, taste, and basic cultural knowledge, including messages about gender, race, and class" (Gangi 194). The value of picture books and their ability to visually convey important messages do not disappear as children age; they arguably become more intricate with possibilities, interpretations, and lessons to discover. Though severely underused outside of elementary classrooms, picture books have the power to enhance literature-based units, working as effective companions to anchor texts that encourage students to be empathetic, active members of society.

Chapter One—First the Colors, Then the Humans:

Drawing on Hope and Memory in Secondary Holocaust Education

“If, indeed, the Holocaust represents a new algorithm in horror, in evil, in the foulness of human nature, then the next question becomes: how do we talk with children about this evil?”

-- ELIZABETH BAER, 2000

Bringing the Holocaust into classroom discussions poses a challenge. Finding words to accurately yet carefully capture the preconceived, systematic murder of over six million people requires meticulous thought. This classroom narrative becomes a delicate balancing act, especially when it involves children and adolescents. In order to responsibly educate, teachers must ensure that the reality of the Holocaust is not reduced to words in a conversation. At the same time, they need to speak carefully, without amplifying the trauma this topic presents and risking emotional backlash from students. In the introduction of her book, *Representing the Holocaust in Children's Literature*, Lydia Kokkola discusses Holocaust literature for children, saying, “Writing about the Holocaust for children breaks a strict taboo: that children are not to be frightened” (Kokkola 11). She explains that Holocaust literature brings young readers into a world where parents are not in control, where survival does not depend upon one's wits but upon pure luck, where evil is truly present, and where “worst of all, a horror story [...] is true” (Kokkola 11). If writing about the Holocaust for a young audience presents such challenges, how can educators responsibly teach it to their students? And why is it important for students to learn, despite these challenges?

As the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website explains, studying the Holocaust leads to an understanding of the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping while also offering an opportunity to explore the dangers of remaining silent, apathetic, and indifferent to the oppression of others (USHMM). Students' exploration of this

topic will help them realize that “the Holocaust was not an accident in history; it occurred because ... [of] choices that not only legalized discrimination but also allowed prejudice, hatred, and ultimately mass murder to occur” (USHMM). In learning about the racism, prejudice, oppression, and dangers of remaining silent, students become witnesses to these atrocities and therefore, become responsible in preventing them from ever reoccurring.

In this chapter, I explore the lessons of agency and awareness that emerge from teaching Holocaust literature in secondary classrooms, specifically through Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief* and three related children’s picture books: *Erika’s Story* by Ruth Vander Zee, *The Harmonica* by Tony Johnston, and *Hidden* by Loïc Dauvillier. Focusing on *The Book Thief* as the anchor text for this unit of study, I aim to outline strategies for classroom discussions and interpretations that honor the historical accuracy and depth of the Holocaust while reaching a middle ground between protecting students from history and traumatizing them.

I first experienced Holocaust literature within the classroom as a ninth grade student in Michigan. In her article featured on the University of Southern California’s Shoah Foundation webpage, Rhonda Fink-Whitman says there currently exist only five states in the United States that mandate Holocaust education, whether it be in a separate class or included with literature or history (Whitman 1). This miniscule group includes New York, New Jersey, California, Illinois, and Florida. Until recently, Michigan did not require Holocaust education, but in ninth grade, I read Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (1956). I remember reading it, equally fascinated and horrified, and wanting to learn more, but I can recall no classroom discussions or activities that spoke to the history surrounding the story. My classmates and I simply read Wiesel’s words, most likely without realizing his message of memory or warning for the future. And then we switched gears, quickly moving on to *The House on Mango Street* in order to remain on schedule.

I realized a similar trend, years later, as a student teacher. I student taught in a ninth grade Honors English classroom of a Michigan public high school, where the entire course curriculum dealt, unintentionally, with death. In this classroom, students were assigned *Of Mice and Men*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and, to finish the year, *Night*. Each of these texts carries heavy messages and themes, not just of death, but also of humanity and morality. While I observed and often taught literary elements, mechanics of language, and character development, I noticed something: the larger messages in these books got passed over, mostly, I assumed, because of time constraints, but perhaps also due to their difficulty to discuss. Throughout this course, students read about several homicides, a double suicide, and bombings. Then they were asked to read literature on the Holocaust with little space to unpack or discuss the significance of what they read.

While *Night* features no traditionally happy ending, it closes on a hopeful note that emphasizes the importance of memory and awareness when it comes to the Holocaust. When teaching Holocaust literature, students need to learn the history in a way that does not traumatize them but that also invites them to discuss and process the material. Rather than simply reading a story and moving on, or, conversely, concentrating completely on the destruction and horror of genocide, lesson plans should focus on the hope, however little, that can emerge from these unimaginable historical events.

In the classroom mentioned above, one of the texts paired with *Night* was the film, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, shown in its entirety. Whereas Elie Wiesel speaks about hope to conclude his memoir, this adaptation of John Boyne's novel emphasizes the anguish of this era, as demonstrated by its final scene. The screen turns black, and viewers must listen to the desperate pounding of soon-to-be victims against the doors of the gas chamber. Instead of

leaving students with a lesson for the future, this film leaves students focusing on the hopelessness of the past. Many texts exist, though, that convey the truth of the Holocaust through much less traumatic narratives, such as other fictional novels, witness accounts, and picture books. Adding picture books to secondary Holocaust education can transform units from grim, potentially traumatic experiences into lessons of hope, triumph of spirit, and the importance of memory.

Though there are plenty of works that discuss these themes, picture books teach them through their moving narratives and illustrations in addition to their carefully considered elements of design. These characteristics of picture books offer opportunities for interpretation and critical thinking. They also provide a certain amount of differentiation, inviting students to analyze at a level with which they feel comfortable. Because every student processes trauma and difficult subjects differently, picture books serve as a safe space for students to explore the information presented. As discussed in my introduction, illustrations and other design choices ask that students slow down to consider their purposes in the text and how they help construct the text's message.

Though *Night* serves as a wonderful tool in Holocaust education and is still widely taught, I chose *The Book Thief* for this analysis because of its similarities to the books analyzed in the other chapters of this project. All four anchor texts in the units discussed feature young, female protagonists and fit into the genre of historical realistic fiction, have publication dates after 2001, and highlight some biographical element(s) of the author's life. These texts are also widely taught in secondary schools across the United States.

Australian author, Markus Zusak, published *The Book Thief* in 2005, and it was released in the United States primarily as a young adult text. Narrated by Death, the book covers the

wartime experience of a young German girl, Liesel Meminger, near Munich in the years just before World War II. She lives with her foster parents, the Hubermanns, who begin to hide a Jewish man in their basement in 1940. Despite her participation in the Hitler Youth, Liesel's experience of helping to hide this man, along with her witnessing the forced marches of Jewish prisoners from a nearby concentration camp, inspire her resistance to the Nazi regime. As she learns to read and write, Liesel falls in love with words, a passion that helps her to become active in subverting the childhood her government expects of her and that ultimately saves her life.

In the beginning of the story, words become a way for Liesel to remember her younger brother, who dies during their trip to the Hubermanns' home. During his funeral, a gravedigger drops a book, and Liesel quickly grabs it and takes it with her. The book, *A Gravedigger's Handbook*, becomes Liesel's platform for learning. Each night, Hans Hubermann teaches her to read using the book. This not only helps her to become more comfortable in the house on Himmel Street, but it also invokes her love for words.

Later, Liesel attends a Nazi book burning as part of her Hitler Youth assignments, and though she looks forward to seeing the fire, she cannot understand why anyone would want to destroy books. At this point, Liesel's understanding of the Nazis and Hitler grows. During the speech that precedes the fire, Liesel listens as the speaker warns the crowd to "be watchful, to be vigilant, to seek out and destroy the evil machinations plotting to infect the motherland with its deplorable ways" (Zusak 110). When she hears mention of communism, she connects it to her parents and their standing as communists and realizes that Hitler is to blame for their disappearance. When the ceremony and the fire end, as retaliation against Hitler, Liesel commits her first act of subversion: she steals a surviving book from the pile of ashes.

This moment of theft emphasizes Liesel's courage and her fascination with reading and language, but it also provides Hans with an idea that steers the rest of the story. As he walks home with Liesel and her stolen book, he thinks of a travel plan for Max Vandenburg, the Jewish man who comes to hide in the Hubermann home. Because travelling the streets poses serious danger for Jews, Hans sends Max a copy of *Mein Kampf* to carry during his journey, tricking any onlookers into believing he is German.

Max serves as an important figure for Liesel, illustrating the cruelty of the Nazis as he is forced to hide beneath the stairs of her basement. Their friendship grows through their shared nightmares and dedication to telling stories, while Liesel continues to read and write under the tutelage of Hans, and now, Max. Liesel acts as Max's connection to the outside world, often bringing him newspapers and describing the weather to him. She keeps Max informed, helping him to hold onto civilization as the current society works against him. In one of the book's most subversive moments, Max tears out several pages of *Mein Kampf* and ironically paints over Hitler's words with a new story. He fills the pages with his own struggles, assembling the desecrated pages and giving the new book to Liesel as a birthday gift, teaching her the importance of storytelling.

As time progresses, Liesel gains confidence in her reading and writing. When Max becomes sick for several weeks, she reads to him, hoping that the sound of her words will wake him from his illness. One night, after Max regains his health and strength, and everyone on Himmel Street frantically takes cover from an air raid, Liesel settles the chaos in the shelter by reading to the group. Instead of allowing fear to seize her, like the rest of her neighbors, she realizes the power she has to improve the situation, offering peace through her voice and the

story. Rather than listening to the falling bombs, everyone in the shelter listens to Liesel's calm voice of reassurance.

Though Max leaves the Hubermann house and eventually gets captured and sent to a concentration camp, Liesel continues to cultivate the lessons he taught her. Near the end of *The Book Thief*, while all the residents on Himmel Street are asleep, Liesel begins a project in her basement. Following strategies outlined by Max, she starts to write her story in the same space where Max wrote his. Readers learn that, because she is writing in her basement, Liesel survives a surprise bombing; everyone else—her parents, her friends, and the rest of her neighbors—are killed. Writing her story literally saves Liesel's life, while also giving her new possibilities for this life.

Because this text examines the Holocaust while also addressing several other aspects of WWII, teachers can discuss themes of war, mortality, identity, and courage in a historical context while also relating them to other texts or real-life scenarios. Using picture books to analyze these themes is advantageous when teachers can weave in selections that are written for a more mature audience. Especially when dealing with a text as dense as *The Book Thief* and topics as heavy as war and genocide in the classroom, students can benefit from the openness of picture books. Acting similarly to works of art in a museum, picture books offer space for varying interpretations while also giving readers the freedom to realize certain meanings at their own pace. Some students may come away with a darker analysis than others, exemplifying different learning levels or styles, while still learning the same topics and themes as the rest of the class.

In *What I have Learned to Feel: The Pedagogical Emotions of Holocaust Education*, Rachel N. Baum states that teaching about the Holocaust means beginning with the most fundamental of questions: “What is it we want our students to learn? Why teach Holocaust

literature at all?" (Baum 44). She goes on to explain that Holocaust literature teaches us, in part, how to feel about historical facts with the hope of changing feelings of confusion and apathy into feelings of concern and commitment (Baum 45-46). If teachers fly through Holocaust literature, solely studying symbolism and plot elements without explaining the depth of historical events, students may remain confused and apathetic. They may continue to think of the Holocaust as just a story, a chapter in a history textbook or a literary novel, rather than as a lesson in corrupt humanity and a crucial comparison for contemporary genocides.

Keeping in mind the ways picture books effectively reach even older readers, as demonstrated in the introduction, these texts can be particularly appropriate in teaching about the Holocaust. In contrast to writers of adult literature, Naomi B. Sokoloff, author of "The Holocaust and Literature for Children," explains that children's authors should express explicit lessons and look for ways to present the Holocaust in accessible, easily digestible narratives. She says that "writing for children must be life-affirming and offer hope; at the very least, it mustn't traumatize child readers" (Sokoloff 176).

Though this philosophy may come off as coddling high schools students by minimizing their ability to process traumatic information, picture books on the Holocaust marketed for younger readers also include compelling subtexts that can challenge high school students and increase their engagement with the unit. According to Sokoloff, "Traces of horror, unresolved grief, and ongoing trauma find their way into and cast ironic light on the inspirational stories that are offered up to children" (Sokoloff 179). High schoolers have the capacity and, most likely, the prior knowledge to notice the irony of these subtexts, making picture books the perfect tools to accompany *The Book Thief*. The books discussed in this analysis, two picture books and one graphic novel, intended for readers at elementary levels, each give a hopeful twist to learning

about the Holocaust and could serve as a welcome change of pace in many classrooms. Because the number of picture books available about the Holocaust has sharply increased within the past twenty years, the collection presented here is by no means comprehensive; rather, these books connect thematically with *The Book Thief* and could serve as relevant and valuable supplemental texts.

In Ruth Vander Zee's *Erika's Story*, the narrator tells of how, as an infant, she was thrown from a train headed for a Nazi death camp in 1944. Rescued and raised by a woman who risked her own life to save the baby, our narrator finally finds peace through her own family. Rather than placing the focus on the adults in the cattle car on their way to death, Vander Zee highlights hope through gentle narration and powerful symbols. With this story, students have the opportunity to see a rare, relatively happy ending with roots in the Holocaust, similar to Liesel's eventual reunion with Max in *The Book Thief*.

The narration in *Erika's Story* does not hide any of the horrific truths about the Holocaust. Erika begins her story with the eternally startling fact, "From 1933 to 1945, six million of my people were killed" (Vander Zee 1). She even explains how these people died: "Many were shot. Many were starved. Many were burned in ovens or gassed in chambers" (Vander Zee 1). After these dark truths, however, she includes a note of hope: "I was not" (Vander Zee 1). Though the focus here is on Erika, this introduction asks readers to think about those who were not as lucky to have been given a survival story. Already, older readers are exposed to another level of meaning; this story about survival points a subtle finger toward the devastation of the Holocaust, a layer that secondary students' prior knowledge will help them decipher.

These four sentences alone introduce students to the approaching story. This beginning lets them know that, while it does share events from a heartbreaking point in history, some people still survived, given the opportunity for happily-ever-after (or as happy-as-possible) because of the brave decisions of others. That one simple statement, “I was not” (Vander Zee 1), tells the reader that this story will be different. This story will show that hope can, and does, still prosper even during the darkest times.

Erika tells her story through questions and abstracts. The first page of her narration holds several pieces of personal information she does not know, such as her birthdate, her real name, and her birthplace. She says that what she does know, however, is that she “was saved from the Holocaust” (Vander Zee 1). This sentence is the last on the page, followed only by an empty Star of David image, drawing attention to her rescue rather than the events she had to be rescued from.

The following pages fill with descriptions of specific events of the Holocaust, unfolding with more questions and uncertainty. Vander Zee provides a historically accurate picture of ghettos and evacuations, continuing to offer students correct information, but the descriptions feel distanced. Readers understand that our narrator cannot personally remember these moments; these recollections form from what she assumes may have happened.

This flashback style of narrative, with what-ifs and maybes, keeps students firmly planted in the present rather than swallowing them whole into hard-hitting historical truths. This story’s sprinkling of questions lightly encourages readers to realize the horror of these facts on their own, rather than making them obvious. Because much of this story is abstract, students can discuss the connections between narration styles, between that of Erika, and that of Death in *The Book Thief*. Erika knows very little about her life, yet feels at peace because she now has a

family and children, and she serves as a symbol for hope and survival—evidence that the Holocaust failed to completely eliminate the Jews. Zusak's Death seems to be an all-knowing figure, but readers can easily detect his depression. Early on, Death even explains the need for distractions. He says,

As I've been alluding to, my one saving grace is distraction. It keeps me sane. It helps me cope, considering the length of time I've been performing this job. The trouble is, who could ever replace me? Who could step in while I take a break in your stock-standard resort-style vacation destination, whether it be tropical or of the ski trip variety? The answer, of course, is nobody, which has prompted me to make a conscious, deliberate decision—to make distraction my vacation.

Needless to say, I vacation in increments. In colors. (4-5)

The contrast between the two characters offers students space to not only distinguish narrator differences, but also to examine the educational purposes behind each choice. A possible topic of discussion could include evaluating which narrator serves as a better teacher. From whom do the students learn more about the Holocaust, and why? Discussing these connections provides the space for students to unpack what they have read, allowing time for sufficient processing.

The symbols in *Erika's Story* also work to emphasize the hopeful aspects of this story. From first glance, a reader will notice the bright yellow star cutout on the cover. The cutout functions as a window from the dreary illustration of a train platform, passengers contained by barbed wire and brick walls, to the endpapers, a bright, sunny yellow, that perhaps foreshadow the positive ending.

Throughout the story, tiny Stars of David serve as separations between paragraphs and major moments. This star symbol, one of the most well known icons of the Holocaust, not only

inspires the telling of this story but also weaves through it as a subtle reminder of the Jews' religion and culture, emphasizing their hope despite its use as a degrading label. As part of the author's note, Vander Zee explains how she met Erika and that seeing the Star of David on Erika's necklace sparked the conversation that led to her moving story. The tiny stars frame the author's note, the list of personal facts Erika will never know, the description of the ghetto, the evacuation to the train platform, the time in the cattle cars, the moments before and after her parents made the decision to throw her from the train, and finally, the description of her life in the present.

The tiny symbols appear on each page, at least once, with the exception of one page: the two-page spread of the train platform. There, the stars creep onto the page many times, but as part of each passenger's clothing. This spread could lead to many discussion questions and plenty of interpretations from students. Why does Vander Zee include no text? In what ways does the full spread of illustration make this moment more powerful? What significance does the color yellow have? Bright yellow stars rest against an entire illustration composed in shades of dark gray. Passengers board the trains toward their deaths. Though this interpretation of color seemingly contradicts the idea of yellow as hope, students must recognize that the symbol of the yellow star represents her parents and how they worked together, maybe with everyone else in the cattle car, to create hope for Erika. Students can connect this to the Hubermann family working together to protect Max in *The Book Thief*, and they can also link it to a larger theme of the Holocaust. This story potentially symbolizes the Jewish people, saving those they could in an attempt to preserve their culture and presence, even as Hitler planned the opposite.

Two more yellow stars appear in the book but not as insignia on clothing. The first rests below the author's dedication. "To my children," she writes. "Your stars still brighten my life."

This tiny, yellow star could foreshadow the final sentence of the story. On the final pages, after telling readers that six million stars fell between 1933 and 1945, the narrator ends her story by saying, “My star still shines” (Vander Zee 17). These four words sit alone on an entire page of white space, accompanied only by the second tiny, yellow star. Instead of ending the story with death or sadness, Vander Zee and her narrator leave readers with a bright and hopeful conclusion, in which Erika finally finds peace through her family and her survival.

At the end of *The Book Thief*, readers learn that Liesel has moved to Sydney, Australia, having lived to an old age. Zusak’s final pages suggest that, despite the trauma she withstood during childhood, she somehow reached peace, just as Erika has.

Along with hope and courage, another theme Liesel demonstrates within *The Book Thief* is the power of words and reading. Literacy saves her life, literally and figuratively. In his afterword, Zusak says that, while writing, he “thought of Hitler destroying people with words, and now I had a girl who was stealing them back, as she read books with the young Jewish man in her basement and calmed people down in the bomb shelters” (9). He says that Liesel writes her own story through the ugliness of the world around her (Zusak 9). This ability to read and write inspires her awareness of the injustices surrounding her and eventually leads to her survival; words and writing physically protect her from the bombing the way they figuratively connect her to Max, leaving her with a friend after all of her other friends have perished. *The Book Thief* serves as a poignant reminder of the power of literature, connecting to the next picture book, Tony Johnston’s *The Harmonica*, which uses the power of music for survival.

In this text, themes of love and music piece together one boy’s tale of the Holocaust. When the young narrator becomes separated from his parents and placed in a concentration camp, he must rely on loving memories of his family and his ability to play the harmonica for

survival. The first sentence of the story conveys much about what students will learn as they continue: “I cannot remember my father’s face, or my mother’s, but I can remember their love, warm and enfolding as a song” (Johnston 2). The story begins with an emphasis on love. The two-page spread contains a beautiful illustration of a little boy encircled by his parents as they read a book. From the first words, readers experience the love and the importance of music in this family.

The introduction of the harmonica becomes a pivotal point in the story, as readers expect from the title. It becomes the boy’s way to survive, first at home with his parents and later at the concentration camp. The narrator learns how to play Schubert on the harmonica his dad gives him. He plays while his parents dance. They ignore the war “raging outside like a bad dream” (Johnston 11).

Here, the harmonica helps the family to focus on happiness rather than the war. He says, “In our dream, we believed the world to be good” (Johnston 14). This is when readers first learn the story takes place in the heart of Poland, and Nazi soldiers march in the streets outside. The following page informs readers that the narrator and his parents are Jewish, which is enough for the Nazis to split the family like a “length of kindling” (Johnston 15).

The boy gets sent to a concentration camp, where he thinks of his parents often and clings to his harmonica and the memories it helped make. One night, realizing his parents had been killed, he begins to play Schubert again.

Somehow, the commandant, a fan of Schubert, finds out the boy can play and requests he play for him. The boy plays for the commandant every night, and each night, the boy receives an extra piece of bread.

These moments of the boy with the commandant offer a unique perspective of the concentration camps. His playing for the commandant and receiving the extra bread become crucial to his survival, but playing also forces him to contemplate how someone so evil can appreciate the beauty of Schubert. He begins to despise himself for getting extra food while other prisoners starve. The commandant favors him and keeps him alive because of the boy's musical gift while others around him are dying. With this moment, students could analyze how humanizing the Nazis in such a way may make them seem even more villainous. The Nazis acted like monsters, carrying out the maniacal plan of the greatest villain in history, burning, destroying, and murdering for years. This illustration, however, shows readers that though they behaved like monsters, they were humans who understood beauty and perhaps even compassion. Students can discuss how humanizing the Nazis instead of seeing them only as historical villains makes their crimes even more unimaginable. How can humans be so destructive toward other humans, especially children?

Memories of the boy's father and mother as they sang and danced help keep him focused on his survival, and one night, he learns that his playing of Schubert reaches the other prisoners. He learns that the prisoners listen to him play the harmonica every night and that the beautiful music gives them hope. This gives the boy the encouragement he needs to keep playing and ultimately stay alive. The boy's triumph of spirit, even in the darkest of situations, makes this story a positive learning experience for students. Secondary students will already be familiar with the background of this story, leaving them to focus completely on the talent of this one child provides hope to an entire group of prisoners.

At this point, students can relate the inspiring music of this young boy in a concentration camp to the moment of Liesel reading in the bomb shelter. Though these two characters

represent two different groups trapped in the Holocaust and WWII, they each symbolize the role that children can play as advocates. The boy in *The Harmonica* has been targeted and captured by Nazis but continues to bring hope to others through his strength and music. Liesel does the same in the bomb shelter; through her storytelling, she is able to calm her frightened audience, offering them some sense of safety and reassurance.

The comparison of these two texts also creates a segue into potential discussions of concentration camps, ghettos, bombings, and other aspects of the war, especially after considering the different perspectives and locations in each book. Students can discuss how the war was different for Liesel, as a young German girl, than the war experienced by the young Jewish boy in *The Harmonica*. By sparking these conversations with students, teachers can emphasize the importance of remembrance and awareness. Elizabeth Baer, writer of “A New Algorithm in Evil: Children’s Literature in a Post-Holocaust World,” explains that asking young readers to “remember” when it comes to the Holocaust gets tricky because no memory is being invoked; for them, it is being created (Baer 380). She says that this idea of memory has at least two purposes: “to memorialize those who died so ignominiously and ... to forestall such mass slaughter, such racial hatred from recurring” (Baer 380). Baer mentions the resurgence of white supremacy in the United States and of the skinhead neo-Nazi culture throughout Europe, indicating the continuing importance of Holocaust education (Baer 380).

The third illustrated text emphasizes this importance of memory, both invoked and created. Loïc Dauvillier’s graphic novel, *Hidden*, tells the story of a grandmother who shares with her granddaughter her experiences during the Holocaust. Dounia recounts memories of growing up as a Jewish child in France during the Nazi invasion: from wearing the yellow star and her removal from school, to her parents’ abduction and her life in hiding. The design

elements of this graphic novel help keep the story moving without being traumatizing, while the beautiful illustrations by Marc Lizano and Greg Salsedo help tell her story, emphasizing the importance of remembering the past and sharing these memories with younger generations.

From the flip of the first page, readers will notice the use of color. The pages weave together difficult memories of humiliation, losing parents, and essentially growing up while hiding from the Nazis. Color helps tell this story in a way that makes it feel almost like a picture book rather than a heavy, heartbreaking graphic memory of the Holocaust. In addition to adding a level of comfort, the use of color also helps readers to distinguish between past and present time, as well as working with words and images to draw out specific emotions.

Upon opening the book, Dounia's granddaughter Elsa, originally tucked in and ready for sleep, hears a sound coming from her living room and when she investigates, she finds her grandmother crying because she had a "nightmare" (3). When readers first see Dounia, the panel colors turn from cool, mysterious blues to warm red and orange tones, immediately shifting emotion. Unlike the previous page, which evoked feelings of intrigue and suspense, the warmer coloring invites readers to acknowledge the love between Dounia and Elsa. Elsa climbs into her grandmother's lap and asks her to tell her about the nightmare.

Readers see another shift in color when Dounia begins to tell her story. Whereas before, a warm, red tone filled panels, the panels of the past have neutral, somewhat faded coloring. These panels look historical, but they also appear less cozy and inviting. This could perhaps symbolize the harsh reality of that time period; rather than cuddling with her granddaughter in the comfort of her safe home, young Dounia had to survive an era of very little security. This shift in color between past and present also helps readers to keep track of which time period the panels occur in, as they frequently switch mid-page.

In this story, color also works to convey emotions. When the Nazis come for Dounia's parents and her mother helps her to hide in a suitcase inside of a closet, four out of the seven panels in the spread have a black background. In addition to reading the words and seeing the facial expressions, readers will understand that the black represents fear and the unknown. Dounia has no idea what will happen beyond those moments. For the next two pages, once the Nazis leave with her parents, she remains in hiding. Dark grays and blues fill these pages, drawing on emotions of fear, loneliness, and sadness.

Near the end, the colors shift again. They brighten entirely when Dounia escapes to the country with her neighbor, Mrs. Pericard. Bright green trees and a crisp blue lake offer the sense that safety has arrived. Perhaps the most powerful use of color, however, occurs when Dounia's mother returns, rescued from a concentration camp.

The splash contains only Dounia's mother, emaciated, still wearing a striped prisoner's uniform, a completely jarring image against the only white background in the book. The white seems to symbolize the uncovering of all the truth that had been hidden from Dounia. No longer can the secrets of the Holocaust remain covered; the cruelty of what the Nazis did sits in front of her in the form of her mother. The blues and greens of the country in previous pages make the gray figure of her mother and the stark white background all the more compelling. Though color works in a comforting way throughout most of this book, this page's lack of color makes it the most powerful page.

As students interpret how *Hidden's* illustrators employ colors, they can also connect to Zusak's descriptions of color. Death's fascination with color weaves throughout *The Book Thief*. Zusak literally opens with color, as Death narrates: "First the colors. Then the humans" (Zusak 3). Death explains that he focuses on colors as a distraction from his exhausting and eternal job.

He says that he vacations in colors and makes a point to notice them because they are his one “saving grace” (Zusak 4). Students can examine the most “colorful” moments in *The Book Thief* in comparison to those in *Hidden*, discussing which scenes feature which colors and why they think the writers and illustrators selected those colors, and how colors can work as both a comforting aspect and a disruptor. Students may also discuss how they perceive colors when they’re described in words and how that shifts when they see colors for themselves.

Though the use of color stands out in both texts, *Hidden* includes another important design element. In my experience, graphic novels rely on images to convey most of the story and its emotions rather than using words. With such a heavy topic as the Holocaust, however, and having the story told as a flashback, the captions along with speech bubbles play an important role. In the flashback scenes, captions signify the present-day grandmother, Dounia, telling her story to her granddaughter.

In the beginning of the grandmother’s story, the captions simply serve as narration. They set up the back-story of Dounia’s childhood and help readers understand her simple, happy life before the Nazi invasion. Once readers have sufficient background, the speech bubbles take over with dialogue while the captions thin out. Their new role becomes to express the more powerful messages that, as an adult, Dounia says as she looks back.

Beyond the first two pages of the grandmother’s story, the captions become short, powerful statements to accompany iconic moments. Students can see that, while the captions provide adult Dounia’s narration, they also work to frame moments with her descriptions, reminding readers of the flashback style. In the first and most obvious instance, a splash, Lizano and Salsedo illustrate a shop window covered in a giant, black Star of David after an act of Nazi vandalism. It is the first full-page illustration in the book, accentuating the magnitude of the

symbol, but also calling readers' attention to the two small captions. One hangs from the top left corner of the page: "All the students in the class had laughed" (19). The second rests in the bottom right corner: "He [the shop owner] had cried" (19). On the following two pages, one panel shows Dounia kicked out of school with the caption, "It was humiliating" (20). The next panel shows her outside a bookstore, facing more windows that had been vandalized with the Star of David. In the bottom right corner, the caption reads, "Really humiliating" (21). Though the images hold clear significance on their own, the punchy captions highlight these moments. They help suggest that the events in these panels serve as crucial turning points in the story, as well as in history, and could provide an opportunity to discuss Kristallnacht and other instances of Nazi vandalism.

Pages later, after the Nazis have taken Dounia's parents away and her neighbors, the Pericards, have taken her in, 12 equal-sized panels spread across two pages. They show Mrs. Pericard removing the yellow star from Dounia's jacket, cutting it into pieces, and burning it. The only speech bubble is in the last panel. Mr. Pericard hugs his wife and tells her that they will "take care of her" (35). In the background of this panel, Dounia stands in the doorway, expressionless. The final and most haunting element on this page is the caption, which creeps halfway out of the last panel and reads, "And Mom and Dad? Where were they?" (35).

This caption and its accompanying panel sit right below an entire panel of flames that wrap around Dounia's symbolic yellow star and destroy it completely. Dounia's mentioning of her parents here along with the image of the burning star could serve as a foreshadowing of her father's death in the concentration camps along with the deaths of so many others.

At this point, students should explore the connections between Leisel and young Dounia. Both sets of parents disappear though they belong to different groups. Teachers can discuss how

Hitler sought to exterminate several other groups besides Jewish people because of their perceived racial or ideological inferiority. In addition to Jews and Communists, like Leisel's parents, Nazis also targeted Gypsies, the disabled, Slavic groups such as Poles and Russians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals. Often, when teaching the Holocaust, much of the focus in the classroom is on Jewish persecution with little conversation about the other groups. Comparing Leisel to Dounia, and to Erika and the little boy in *The Harmonica*, gives educators an opportunity to talk about all the others Hitler pursued with his Final Solution.

While necessary in a responsible Holocaust lesson, this discussion of so many targeted people can be difficult for even secondary students to digest. The captions in *Hidden*, however, help in delivering important messages and serve a much deeper purpose than simple narration. This book is intended for ages six to ten years old, and an important part of creating Holocaust literature for children is ensuring a safe distance exists between potentially traumatizing subjects and the young reader. In the panels depicting 1940s France, the captions serve as reminders that these events happened in the past and could help readers to keep one foot, so to speak, in the safety of the present. In her article, "Educating Without Overwhelming: Authorial Strategies in Children's Holocaust Literature," Sarah Jordan explains that using a child protagonist who self-narrates stories of their Holocaust-era childhood is "perhaps the easiest way for today's children to identify with children of the past" (Jordan 201). Similar to this flashback style of narrative in *Hidden*, Jordan says that using a child narrator to tell his or her story is also a very useful tool in protecting today's children from over-identifying with graphic details of the Holocaust (Jordan 201). Though *Hidden* is not told from the perspective of a little girl currently experiencing the Holocaust, readers experience Dounia's story about her childhood as it is told to a child. This potentially results in an even safer account, as this fictional grandmother seeks to protect her

granddaughter. The captions and other design elements work to emphasize the Holocaust's past occurrence.

While these design elements help make this story a moving and unique perspective on the Holocaust, the emphasis put on memory in the last five pages become an important opportunity for teachers. In these final pages, Dounia's son expresses his interest in hearing the story Dounia has never shared with him. "You know, when I was growing up, I would've liked to hear the story too" the son says (Dauvillier 73). He then explains that he knows she was only trying to protect him and that he understands why she never told him (Dauvillier 74). This exchange, however, shows how important it is for Holocaust survivors to tell their stories, not only for the sakes of themselves and their families, but also for the rest of the world. Baer says that to speak about the Holocaust is to recognize a sort of paradox, as it is "at once 'unspeakable' and yet something that *must* be spoken about, not necessarily to make it meaningful but to make its reality imaginatively possible so that the next generation is vigilant about the hatred inside all of us" (Baer 391). Though students will not be calling upon their own memories, the purpose of memory here is to call upon students' prior knowledge and the importance of remembering what they have learned about the Holocaust. The purpose of memory in education is to impart knowledge to students so that they may be aware of past social injustices and work to prevent such atrocities from occurring in the future.

These stories and their messages of hope and courage, finding peace through a loving family, comfort in music and literature, and the importance of remembering the past are lessons students can understand and find relatable. Pieces of these stories undoubtedly exist in some of their lives, whether they have dealt with a near death experience, have suffered through poverty or homelessness, or even eventual adoption after living in foster care. These relatable moments

can help students to understand the Holocaust in ways they may dismiss if lessons become too emotionally daunting or do not allow for open discussion. If paired with a heavier anchor text like *The Book Thief*, picture books can help students find links between not only the texts but their own lives as well. This would emphasize the reality and complexity of the Holocaust, the importance of memory, and how we must never allow something so horrible to happen again.

Sokoloff says:

Children's literature has low status and is rarely deemed worthy of serious study. Yet it should, for it has a lot to teach us—not just about what we have accomplished and what we have failed to accomplish with Holocaust education, but significantly, about how adults in various cultural contexts have interpreted history and what they are willing to impart on the next generation. (176)

These books, along with many others, have plenty to teach readers, especially students and, when used correctly in a classroom, have the potential to teach their lessons of the Holocaust in gentle yet captivating ways. Similarly, other anchor texts and picture books can be paired to teach about other historical injustices, including the American civil rights movement, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Two—A Country Caught Between Black and White:

Turning the Page Toward Empathy through Color and Design

“And the great power of books is they have the capacity to take you out of yourself and put you somewhere else. And to suddenly say, ‘Oh, this is what it’s like’—maybe not perfectly—but it gives you some glimpse of ‘This is what it is like to be a woman,’ or ‘This is what it is like to be an African-American.’ Or ‘This is what it is like to be impoverished in India.’ Or ‘This is what it’s like to be in the midst of war.’”

—PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, 2007

In recent years, countless news stories, secondarily reporting the relationships between Black and White people, as well as people of other races, have disturbingly reflected reprehensible chapters of American history. As we move further away from the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, tensions among races seem to be growing again. Protests surface. Riots erupt. Movements spread through the country like threatening flames. Innocent lives, of all colors and cultures, are lost as a result of anger, misconception, and fear. These tragic events do little to stitch opposing sides together. Rather than perpetuating stereotypes that deepen this divide between cultures, adults, especially educators, have a responsibility to become informed and transfer new ideals of acceptance and diversity to the next generation with the hope for a more aware and empathetic future generation.

This chapter outlines strategies for responsibly teaching secondary students the importance of racial equality and the power of empathy through various accounts of the American Civil Rights era. These accounts are presented through Jacqueline Woodson’s memoir, *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014), and three thematically related picture books: *A Sweet Smell of Roses* by Angela Johnson (2005), *Freedom Summer* by Deborah Wiles (2002), and *The Other Side* (2001), also by Jacqueline Woodson. As in other chapters, I argue that by examining elements of illustrations in relation to larger themes, high school readers will gain a deeper

understanding of these topics, inspiring them to recognize injustices in their own lives and perhaps to serve as advocates for acceptance and equality. As in my discussions about Jewish persecution in Chapter One and Latino immigration in Chapter Three, I write about these racial tensions as a cultural outsider, but also as an ally. As a White member of the middle-class, I recognize that I have not experienced personally much of what I write about here. My position as an outsider, however, still allows me to perceive social injustices and advocate for change.

In 2012, when 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was followed, attacked, and then murdered by George Zimmerman in Sanford, Florida, a new light was cast on American racial tensions. Martin's death, and the ill-defined sequence of events that occurred just prior, illuminated and amplified bigoted rhetoric and attitudes, as members of the White community speculated wrongdoing on Martin's behalf, supporting Zimmerman's attack. The country divided, taking sides and imagining scenarios to fill in the cracks that truth left behind. When justice failed with the acquittal of George Zimmerman, Bettina Love, an education professor at the University of Georgia, explored the ways Trayvon Martin serves as a metaphor for Black male students in the American education system. Love says, "The turmoil of Martin's murder and Zimmerman's trial have [sic] served as means of publicly reviving the long-standing racial divide in the U.S." (Love293). As this divide widens, the contrast between Black students and White students becomes more visible. Love says that often, especially with the Common Core State Standards, Black students are not seen as human beings capable of social change, but as objects, only capable of memorizing testable facts (Love 296-297). As their prior knowledge, creativity, and culture continue to be ignored, students fall victim to these preconceived notions that result from false racial stereotypes (Love 297). While many students, especially those from other cultures

and countries, may experience the same neglect, Love's work focuses primarily on the treatment of Black male students in the American education system.

This exploration into a particular pitfall of education and the mistreatment of Black male students is important because the this oppression and neglect is an example of perpetuating fear and misunderstanding, and it relates to the student age group for this project. Love's argument suggests the clear necessity for classroom discussions about Civil Rights and contemporary tensions, not only for students but teachers as well. Love writes, "Jim Crow laws furthered the myth that Black males were violent rapists and thieves... [They] restricted the physical movement of Black people, ensuring that Blacks could not enter particular public spaces, schools, universities, and neighborhoods" (Love 300). Because these racial constructions are still prevalent today, Black males are often still considered criminals in and out of school (Love 300). This history charged with falsity still casts shadows of fear within schools, and, often, White educators and administrators respond to this, Love says, "by attempting to increase their control" (Love 301). She elaborates that, in this way, schools begin to mimic prison with dress codes, limiting or prohibiting social interaction between students in the hallways and cafeterias, removing "disruptive" students from classrooms in handcuffs, and the list goes on (Love 301). Because of this fear, "Black students tend to receive less attention, less encouragement, less praise, less time to respond, less eye-contact, and more verbal and nonverbal criticism" (Love 301).

These unfounded racist attitudes in education do little besides set up students, both Black and White, for failure within classroom communities—Black students in academics, and White students in the social acceptance of others. In her conclusion, Love suggests that teachers should include discussions on multicultural and social justice education, as well as anti-oppression and

culturally relevant pedagogy, in order to “gain some momentum in how we should educate all students differently as we recognize and celebrate their cultural, social, sexual, religious, and class identities—or just simply their otherness” (Love 303).

The question is how difficult would it be to inspire change in attitudes so deeply rooted in prejudice? In 2009, about a year after President Barack Obama took office and five years before Trayvon Martin died, Kim Mills, writer for the American Psychological Association, interviewed Yale University psychology professor Dr. John Dovidio about race relations “in a new age” (Mills 28). Dovidio discusses what it means for America to have a Black president, what will change, and what, most likely, will not. When asked about racial attitudes and if people with “deep-seated racial prejudice” ever change, Dovidio explains that most White Americans know that we should be non-prejudiced and egalitarian (qtd. in Mills 28). “But the emotional impact,” he says, “the ‘gut’ impact, that race has on people still lags behind” (qtd. in Mills 28). To truly change attitudes at the core requires “direct interracial experiences that are positive and personal, that replace feelings of fear and anxiety, with those of empathy, connection, and respect for members of another group” (qtd. in Mills 28). Though Dovidio references adults here, these attitudes, if practiced by a parent or relative, could easily transfer to a child and then be brought into a classroom. Older students who have either formulated these prejudicial attitudes on their own, or who have absorbed them from adults or peers, may hesitate to participate in a direct interracial experience. Not to mention, if these students do not reside in racially diverse areas, they may not have this form of organic experience. In this absence, literature can lend a hand.

I imagine that literature has been compared to every cliché portal in existence – a door, a window, a mirror—but for good reason, because reading books, especially contemporary fiction and historical fiction, provides the opportunity to visit new places, meet new people, and see

both people and places through a new lens. Words and illustrations act as architects as well as vehicles, building and transporting us, granting access to new information, experiences, and emotions. Arguably the strongest and most important emotion that literature has the power to elicit is empathy.

As defined in Janet Alsup's book, *A Case for Teaching Literature in the Secondary School: Why Reading Fiction Matters in an Age of Scientific Objectivity and Standardization*, empathy is "the vicarious, often visceral and spontaneous expression of emotion in response to witnessing another's emotional state" (Alsup 38). Alsup writes about the value of fiction, how it inspires students to become empathetic, and how their empathy can transfer from an experience within the book to experiences in their world. She states, "[F]iction provides a space for readers to work out their responses to others and practice 'mind reading' in a safe, unreal world," suggesting that, should students feel uneasy about a situation, they can initially explore it through words on a page rather than in real life, creating a low-stakes encounter (Alsup 36). In this way, books can give students an opportunity to become familiar and aware of experiences before they encounter them in their lives, teaching them how to react responsibly. Additionally, books can also act as bibliotherapy by providing an outlet for reflecting on their encounters and a safe space for thoughtful comparison between story and real-life. Exposing students to texts with these purposes in mind could inspire them to become more empathetic toward injustices around them.

"Empathy," Alsup writes, "...seems essential to developing a true sense of social justice, equity, and fairness" (48). She explains that in order to believe that social justice is an important issue in society, one must see inequity and unfairness as unacceptable, even if those inequities occur to another person or group of people and are only noticed or understood vicariously, such as through reading and responding to fiction (Alsup 48). Reading not only gives students a space

to process a new experience, but it also cultivates emotions that can help students become more accepting of individuals who are different from themselves.

Alsup's discussion is particularly important to this project because she outlines how social justice-inspired classrooms should function:

Teaching for social justice would incorporate pedagogical techniques and strategies that encourage students to think about social justice in their worlds (or its lack, as the case may be) through critical reflections, discussion, engaged response, or other student-centered practices. (Alsup 47)

As she explains why teaching social justice through characters, events, and settings becomes so crucial, Alsup suggests that if a young reader does not see any injustice in the world, or only sees his or her own perceived injustices, "there will be no sense of a wider need for activism to promote social justice" (Alsup 48). "Without the activist orientation," she says, "there is...no true social justice teaching" (48). Literature, particularly fiction, provides students the lens to recognize social wrongdoings both on the page and in their own communities. While empathetic experiences, such as those created when students read fiction, could possibly help inspire awareness to social justice in the classroom and school community, the hope is that this awareness travels with students beyond the classroom.

In their book *Human Rights in Children's Literature: Imagination and the Narrative of Law*, Jonathan Todres and Sarah Higinbotham also explore empathy, specifically as it appears in children's literature. They write, "Authentic, accurate stories and images serve as mirrors for children to see themselves and their families, and as windows to learn about the rest of the world" (Todres and Higinbotham 84). Continuing this window metaphor, literature also allows

children to see into another person's thinking and emotions; these experiences are most valuable when the characters read about are very different from the reader (Todres and Higinbotham 84).

These claims about the value and promotion of empathy become especially true when reading Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Though this chapter has primarily focused on empathy development via fiction, and *Brown Girl Dreaming* fits easily under the categories of "biography" or "memoir," I include it in this chapter because its style and honesty may lead to a more emotional response from students. Furthermore, as it gains popularity, in large part because of its enthusiastic critical reception,² this text will become more widely taught in high schools, and therefore it will be more accessible to a large number of students.

Written in beautiful and moving free verse, Woodson recounts her family history through a style that loosely resembles the epics of Ulysses or Dante Alighieri. Woodson's memoir travels through a collection of written snapshots, separated by major defining moments, that work to recreate her childhood while also reflecting a specific point in American history—the 1960s and 1970s. Though students at the secondary level may have already encountered several pieces of literature about the Civil Rights Era (such as Christopher Paul Curtis' *The Watsons go to Birmingham* [1995] or Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* [1976]), *Brown Girl Dreaming* offers a new perspective: Jackie, the protagonist, experiences childhood in both the North and the South. This unique aspect contrasts the two environments and helps students to understand the divide between a more accepting New York and Ohio, and the still-segregated South Carolina.

² As listed on Jacqueline Woodson's website, since its publication in 2014, *Brown Girl Dreaming* has won several awards and commendations, including the National Book Award, NAACP Image Award in the category of Outstanding Literary Work for Youth/Teens, Coretta Scott King Author Award, Newbery Honor, Sibert Honor, and many others.

Through stories of her family's history, Woodson captures the essence of the opposing regions and delivers her sense of this disconnect to her readers as we follow her journey to self-discovery. As Jackie pieces together memories from even before her birth, readers witness a rich cultural background and begin to recognize the severity of racial inequality. From the first pages, Woodson references Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., James Baldwin, Ruby Bridges, and Rosa Parks, powerful historical figures that serve as her role models from her first moments of life (Woodson 5). Students may inquire about these figures and how they relate to Jackie and this time period. This could offer an opportunity for an introductory activity. If students are asked to research the influential people at the beginning of *Brown Girl Dreaming*, they may gain a more solid footing in the unit and future discussions. Learning more about Jackie's role models may spark students' interest and curiosity, opening wider the windows into history and clearing paths that may lead to empathy. More than anything, this section introduces readers to the character they will follow throughout the book, already suggesting her strength and future activism through her choice of role models and drawing students into her realm, forging connections to this historical topic.

In her book, *Child Sized History: Fictions of the Past in U.S. Classrooms*, Sara Schwebel explains that today's classrooms have inherited a classroom canon constructed during the 1980s, and therefore, curricula features a range of historical and historiographical interpretations that typically preach messages of equality, tolerance, and respect as America's most important values (Schwebel 100-101). She notes that, especially during Black History Month, classrooms celebrate change: "Once there was slavery, now there is freedom; once there was racial violence, now there is racial harmony. Once black and white children attended separate schools, now people of diverse backgrounds study and learn together" (Schwebel 128). In all of this

discussion about change and improvement, rarely do students learn how it happened, why it took so long, and that “the narrative of progress we tell disguises continued inequalities and ongoing resentment and distrust” (Schwebel 128-129). Schwebel states, “Children’s historical fiction captures the stages of an ongoing project” toward racial equality and social justice (Schwebel 129). Woodson’s memoir achieves the same as it advances through history, illuminating how attitudes toward race, especially her own, transform over time.

In one of our initial interactions with Jackie, she shares the verbiage of her birth certificate, highlighting the racial divide in America. From the moment she is born, she is labeled as “other”: “Female Negro” instead of simply “Female” (Woodson 3). Following this, she succinctly outlines the movements made by others with the same racial label: “Martin Luther King Jr. is planning a march on Washington...Malcolm X is standing on a soapbox talking about a revolution...In Montgomery, only seven years have passed since Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus” (Woodson 3). Students are immediately invited into this moment of history and asked to compare and contrast between now and then, as if Woodson asks readers to open their eyes and think about whether society has actually transformed.

Further exemplifying this segregated chapter in history is Woodson’s description of her grandfather at work. After Jackie’s parents separate and her mother brings Jackie and her siblings to live in a Black neighborhood of Greenville, South Carolina, the protagonist learns about the inequality her grandfather endures on a daily basis. In a section titled “at the end of the day,” Woodson writes:

There are white men working at the printing press
beside Daddy, their fingers blackened
with ink so that at the end of the day, palms up,

it's hard to tell who is white and who is not, still
they call my grandfather Gunnar,
even though he's a foreman
and is supposed to be called
Mr. Irby.
But he looks the white men in the eye
sees the way so many of them can't understand
a colored man
telling them what they need to do.
This is new. Too fast for them.
The South is changing. (Woodson 53)

Though the South is shifting, many aspects of the Jim Crow era live on, in this text and in contemporary America, further emphasizing the idea of deep-seated prejudice mentioned previously by Dolvidio. In this text, regardless of new laws for equal rights, the past still affects the way the White workers treat the Black foreman, a symbol for the continuing tension in the South. Just because the laws change does not always guarantee the transformation of the attitudes so deeply engrained within people. Because readers have come to care about Jackie and her family, we begin to care for her grandparents, who consistently endure disrespect and segregation because of where they live and the color of their skin. Since Jackie and her siblings spent the beginnings of their childhood in Ohio, they learn about this injustice as the narration teaches the reader. Students who may have only encountered textbook versions of history will most likely learn about this slow progression toward equal rights as the protagonist experiences it. This connects back to Schwebel's mention of social justice as an ongoing project. "The

journey to social justice is ongoing,” she writes, “and historical interpretations of past inequalities can stimulate action toward addressing civil rights issues today instead of reinforcing the status quo as a promise already fulfilled” (Schwebel 130).

Because *Brown Girl Dreaming* shares both a Northern and Southern perspective, students are offered pieces of historical accuracy along with the honesty and innocent thought process of a child protagonist who only partly understands The Black Panthers and why, even during the 1970s, her grandmother continues to sit at the back of the bus. Students are thus required to fill in the blanks left behind by Jackie’s narration, possibly inspiring them to even do further research. For example, in the section titled “everybody knows now,” Woodson describes a summer visit to Greenville and the still-divided South she witnesses.

Even though the laws have changed
 my grandmother still takes us
 to the back of the bus when we go downtown
 in the rain. *It’s easier*, my grandmother says,
than having white folks look at me like I’m dirt.

But we aren’t dirt. We are people
 pay the same fare as other people.
 When I say this to my grandmother,
 she nods, says, *Easier to stay where you belong.*

I look around and see the ones
 who walk straight to the back. See

the ones who take a seat up front, daring
anyone to make them move. And know
this is who I want to be. Not scared
like that. Brave
like that. (Woodson 237)

As our protagonist discovers this about herself, readers realize how slow the attitudes of oppressors are to change. Jackie realizes here that instead of fearing the judgment of those oppressors, and allowing them to continue the segregation and injustice, she wants to be like the brave riders at the front of the bus—someone willing to push inequality deeper into the past rather than allowing it to grow into the future.

Here, readers see Jackie's grandmother beaten down, too weak from the past to take on a challenge, but Jackie is the opposite: young, strong, and still looking to stand up for her beliefs and her people. She is the strong character that evokes perhaps the most empathy from her readers, as well as being the character with whom readers are most expected to identify. We laugh when she sings about funk against her mother's rules, worry when her younger brother gets sick, and feel empowered and capable of change when we leave her at the end of the novel.

To continue to promote emotional connections and empathy, as well as connecting shared themes and different perspectives, teachers can include picture books written about the same historical era in their lessons on an anchor text or a longer work of fiction. Though picture books are typically deemed too young or too easy for secondary students, often, picture book authors compose with two audiences in mind: the child and the adult reading the book to the child. In this way, secondary students fall right in the middle of these target audiences and will ideally be

able to mindfully access the messages included for both.³ As previously mentioned, the three picture books explored in this chapter are *A Sweet Smell of Roses* by Angela Johnson, *Freedom Summer* by Deborah Wiles, and *The Other Side*, another text by Jacqueline Woodson. The topics in these books, along with the illustrations and designs, open a space for interpretation and discussion, and create perfect pedagogical tools to enhance an anchor text like *Brown Girl Dreaming*.

Written by Angela Johnson and illustrated by Eric Velasquez in 2005, *A Sweet Smell of Roses* tells the story of two young sisters who sneak out of their home to be part of a civil rights march in their town. In the two pages before the story begins, an illustration spreads across the bottom of both pages and underscores two notes, one from the author and one from the illustrator, inviting readers to learn vital background information before entering the story. Sitting directly above a long, narrow sketch of black, white, and red, a note from the artist describes his style in this book. He explains that two artists inspire his illustrations, artists whose work each captured the Civil Rights movement. Harvey Dinnerstein and Burton Silverman, both well established in the art community, documented the events during the 1965 Montgomery Bus Boycott in a series of drawings. Velasquez calls their work simple yet powerful and uses his own sketches in *A Sweet Smell of Roses* as an homage to “two artists who help spread the news of an oppressed community’s fight for justice and equality” (Johnson ii).

With this background, teachers are immediately offered an opportunity for connecting literature to history. Students could compare and contrast the artwork of the famous Dinnerstein and Silverman, and of actual events often captured in photographs, to the art of Velasquez in this picture book, compiled largely from imagination and his own research rather than his own

³ For more discussion about the reasons to read picture books with secondary students, see the introduction.

personal observations. Furthermore, this illustrator's note clearly connects to the passages in *Brown Girl Dreaming* when Woodson mentions Martin, Malcolm, Rosa, and Ruby, who each, in one way or another, played a role in progressing Civil Rights, just as these artists did.

Angela Johnson also mentions these figures in her note, titled "about the book." She explains that while these names are important, there are tens of thousands of people who sacrificed just as much, some of them being children. She writes that *A Sweet Smell of Roses* is a tribute to the children overlooked in so many accounts (Johnson ii). Even before reading this story, students will be able to link this discussion to *Brown Girl Dreaming*, specifically in the section titled "the american dream," when Jackie's grandmother tells the children that the marches have been going on for a long time—an entire generation (Woodson 88). Jackie's grandmother states that everyone has the same dream to live equal in a country that's supposed to be the land of the free (Woodson 89). These pieces of paratext in *A Sweet Smell of Roses* work along with students' prior knowledge and set up a frame for the impending story and future discussions.

The first illustration within the story depicts two young girls, looking down a hallway as they prepare to sneak out of the house. The text occupies a small space on one page while the illustration rests on the opposite side, taking up almost the entire space, but contained within a thin, black border. This border could serve as a symbol for safety as they exist inside the protection of their home and childhood. Students may also notice the direction of the sisters' bodies, facing toward the right, toward progression and the next page, but their faces are intent on the hallway beyond the fourth wall. The text implies that they are listening for their mother before they sneak out, but perhaps their gaze also suggests a possible hesitation to leave the house and enter a realm of potential danger.

One of the most moving elements in this picture book is Velasquez's ability to draw the reader's eye to the page turn. This action often gets taken for granted and, in his discussion on page turns, "A Page is a Door," Remy Charlip says, "Usually the turning from page to page is incidental, and in a long book a bother" (Charlip). But turning the page means the continuation of a story. It signifies the victory over one section of a text and the ability to continue, and, if readers slow down, it is the turn of the page that calls attention to a book's physicality. According to Charlip, pages are doors, and the most exciting doors are those that have "something completely different behind it [them]" (Charlip). He writes that the element of delight and surprise is helped by "the physical power we feel in our hands when we move that page or door to reveal a change in everything that has gone before, in time, place, or character" (Charlip). Opening this door and turning the page is what Charlip calls a "momentous moment" (Charlip), and in *A Sweet Smell of Roses*, Velasquez's illustrations support this claim.

On this first page, students should notice the curtain that occupies the center of the illustration. Though the sisters are positioned to look out of the book, almost at the reader, the curtain commands attention and draws the eye toward the bottom right-hand corner. Since, in English, books are read from left to right, the right side signifies the progression of the book. Rather than simply drawing this curtain flat against the wall, Velasquez made a conscious decision to sketch a curtain that literally points to where the reader will lift the page and continue the story. Students can analyze why this may have been done. What does Velasquez suggest by calling attention to this particular corner? Why is it the curtain pulling readers deeper into the story and not the sisters?

Moving to the next page, readers see a spread of illustrations, broken into three sections; two contained within neat, bordered panels, and one that reaches across the right page,

expanding into the top and bottom corners, as if it has burst free from the panels. Here, the black borders seem to represent a cage of oppression—neat, closed lines that contain sections of their neighborhood—and as the girls escape the panels, they move toward equality. The panels imply movement, as the girls travel through their neighborhood and toward an unknown destination. They have left the first panel behind them, filled with a milkman headed in the opposite direction, and are escaping the second panel as readers see them, the younger girl's foot just barely still inside the second panel with her teddy bear flying behind her. Their direction and the placement of their feet tell the reader that they are quickly progressing; however, the older girl's head is turned, looking backward, cautious as if she understands more than her younger sister about the risks ahead.

The milkman in this first panel offers an interesting perspective. When looking closer, students may draw connections between this illustration and Woodson's grandmother in *Brown Girl Dreaming*. This milkman heads toward the left, in the opposite direction of both page progression and the progression of history. He faces down, looking weathered and beaten, similar to Woodson's grandmother on the bus after the laws had changed. Instead of feeling invigorated with social change, she felt weak after years of oppression and instead of fighting, found it easier to accept the place her oppressors had given her. Rather than head toward the march with these young girls, the milkman continues to work, choosing instead to accept his place, heading backward into a time period of familiar injustice.

When the sisters reach the march, a single illustration stretches across both pages and readers see, on one page, a road waiting patiently to be filled with activists and on the other page, a group of adults and two children. The perspective in this illustration seems to be that of a child, as readers look up to see the backs of the two girls, while the adult marchers must turn

their heads backward and down to face them. Students can see here that this event is not meant for children, possibly connecting it to what they learned in *Brown Girl Dreaming*—that adults often assumed this movement was far larger than children could ever understand, but pieces of it broke away and affected younger citizens just the same, inspiring them to get involved as well, both with and without adults' consent. These two young girls face ahead with the marchers, holding hands, united, brave, and ready. When Dr. King appears in the following pages, the white space disappears as if to suggest the magnitude of his presence; the moment explodes beyond the page. All marchers face him, and they begin to move forward, led by Dr. King, toward the fourth wall.

When an angry mob of White people appears in the next spread, the layout of illustration shifts. Where there was no white space on previous pages, it now creeps from the left side of the book and takes up almost half of the left page. The angry mob of protestors occupies the middle of the spread, as if they are drawing the white space across the page, like a shade that will white out the movement in front of them, or erase it like a careless mistake. The mob is situated partly on the left page and partly on the right, potentially suggesting the disposition of White bigotry, crashing against any effort toward equality and acceptance, highlighting a desire to perpetuate cultural gaps and White privilege. These angry protestors crowd the marchers, folding over them like a tidal wave, with their rounded backs trying to envelope the peaceful marchers in hate, attempting to persuade them toward violence and surrender. The marchers continue, however, as they advance to the page-turn and closer to equality.

To accurately depict the magnitude of Dr. King speaking to his followers at the end of the march, Velasquez draws an entire spread that features only King, behind a podium, facing out, hand raised, and eyes determined. Here, students can examine why this design choice was made.

Why is Dr. King featured so prominently? Why are none of the marchers included in this illustration? How does it make the image more powerful to have such a close view of Dr. King? If the drawing of Dr. King only takes up one page, why did Velasquez choose to leave the other page almost entirely empty, but shaded, not white? Who is left out in this focus on just one figure, and why is this conscious absence important?

The following illustration, stretching across two complete pages similar to the previous pages, features three important opportunities for student discussion. The first is the policeman, threateningly positioned across the entire left side of the page, as if to loom over the marchers as they head home. Readers still occupy the perspective of a small child, as we sort of look up when we face the book, making the large illustration of this police officer's legs, feet, and hand wrapped preemptively around his baton all the more unsettling. Students can consider what it means to have a police officer displayed so conspicuously on this page, especially since the march had reached its end. This could open a discussion about peaceful demonstrations and how the White people worked against those demonstrating, constantly baiting them, similar to what Woodson's aunt described in *Brown Girl Dreaming* about the peaceful "trainings" (Woodson 76). Woodson writes, "They learn how to change the South without violence, how to not be moved by the evil actions of others, how to walk slowly but with deliberate steps...how to sit tall, not cry, swallow back fear" (Woodson 76). Students could consider why, if these marchers practice peace, the police officer is drawn larger than any other figure and how this threatening presence affects the marchers.

Sharing the page with the police officer is a man with one leg, mobile by use of crutches. Students can discuss what it means to have this man placed here. Why did Velasquez choose to include this person, especially directly above the text, so readers' eyes are drawn to him, rather

than to the young girls? How does this make the illustration and the movement in which he participates even stronger? What does it suggest that the police officer seems to be looking directly at him? This page presents the opportunity for students to call on their repertoire of current events, relating to the present trend of police brutality, bridging not only the pieces of literature, but also their lives outside the classroom.

The marchers begin to head home, but not toward the left; their backs face the reader as if they are simply moving in a different direction rather than backwards. As readers study this spread, we see that the police officer and the young girls heading home occupy two very different spaces. The police officer, White, dangerous, and deeply shaded, commands the space on the left side of the book—the side that is considered backwards, in terms of turning the page. He faces the girls and the rest of the marchers, the activists, with his weapon poised and ready to use against them. As the readers' eyes move to the next page-turn, toward the right, we see the girls heading forward with the peaceful marchers. With these observations, students can analyze what it means to have an officer of authority stuck on the wrong side of justice and perpetuating violence instead of peace.

The girls begin their run back home, just as urgent as their journey to the march, but fueled with motivation inspired by Dr. King and the solidarity they felt as marchers. They run back toward the black-bordered panels that still have yet to break open and free from oppression. This time, however, the person they pass, the postal worker, heads toward them, looking up and facing the page-turn, suggesting that perhaps the march that morning may have helped change something; it may have helped move society toward justice and equality.

When they arrive home and are greeted by their mother, the illustrations revert to being on one page while the text sits on the other. The text and image share the final page, though,

depicting a flower box of red roses and the text “and there is a sweet smell of roses all through our house” (Johnson 32).

As students complete this book, the repetition of the “sweet smell of roses” could easily serve as a topic of discussion, as they consider what this scent could symbolize. They can also interpret what it means to have the color red travel from page to page. What role does the color red play? Why is it significant that it’s only in one space on each spread and that it jumps between the ribbon on the younger sister’s bear and the stripes in the flag? The characters in this book, along with the moving illustrations, capture the experience of the march for students to interpret and connect to contemporary issues. Learning about these children becoming activists could potentially spark awareness and activism in student readers as well.

Another text that complements the two discussed above is *Freedom Summer* by Deborah Wiles. Illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue and published in 2001, *Freedom Summer* won the Ezra Jack Keats Book Award, honoring new authors and illustrators of any race who promote themes of diversity and universality, and the Coretta Scott King Award, honoring outstanding African American authors and illustrators. Learning of these awards that the book has received, students may want to consider the race of the author and of the illustrator. Lagarrigue is Black and Wiles is White, potentially capturing two perspectives in one story—one through the illustrations and another through the words. Teachers should also point out the difference in point of view in this book. The previous two texts explored the Civil Rights era through the perspective of Black characters; *Freedom Summer*, however, privileges the perspective of a young White boy while discussing this era. Though this could be met with resistance, students can think about how this choice in narrator affects the information readers receive, and how the illustrations, especially considering Lagarrigue as the artist, work to either enhance or contradict Wiles’ writing.

Freedom Summer outlines the story of Joe and John Henry, whose friendship triumphs despite their different skin colors. Set in Mississippi during the summer of 1964, the two friends lead similar lives though they experience very different opportunities. In this story, however, a law is passed that forbids segregation and opens the town pool to everyone. Joe and John Henry are so excited until they discover that, similar to Woodson's characters in *Brown Girl Dreaming*, it takes more than a change in legislation to open the door to acceptance and equality.

In the author's note prior to the story, Wiles offers historical context about the era of her childhood called Freedom Summer. It followed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, allowing Black Americans to register to vote, leading to great racial violence and change. Wiles explains that, though this story is fiction, it is based on real events and grew out of her feelings surrounding this time period (Wiles). To discuss this book and its use in the classroom, I analyze the illustrator's use of color and space and how these design elements can lead to an effective conversation about human rights.

The opening of *Freedom Summer* immediately immerses the reader in segregation. On the left page, readers see a full illustration with two Black figures, one woman, who looks as if she's reporting for work, and one young boy, who looks like her son. These figures occupy space within a full-page splash, walking toward the gutter of the page as a bus disappears along the side of the left. The little boy is positioned closer to the gutter and the other side, suggesting along with his smile, that he looks forward to his destination. His mother, conversely, remains stoic. On the opposite page, a large amount of white space serves as the backdrop for text, and a frame for a small, rectangular illustration. Inside this illustration sits a small White boy. The text tells us that the woman is Annie Mae, and she works for the White boy's mother. The little boy with her is John Henry.

The gutter separates these two characters the way society already does during this era. The space of these initial two illustrations also offers an interesting insight, as if Joe, the young White boy, is safely contained in a world of white, closed off and protected from the danger of oppression, unlike Annie Mae and John Henry. These two characters, however, have no protective frame of white space and are depicted in a borderless illustration, symbolizing their susceptibility to danger and those who control their lives.

Rather than using only one shade of brown to color these figures, Lagarrigue fills the skin of Annie Mae and John Henry with blues, purples, and greens. This potentially represents the depth of these characters, and that, like all of those oppressed because of skin color, they are so much more than a simple shade of brown or black. This becomes an even deeper discussion when students examine the illustration of Joe, and though he is much lighter, pieces of his skin are the same shade of blue used in John Henry's.

If students consider direction of gaze again, similar to in *A Sweet Smell of Roses*, they can analyze and discuss what it means that Joe is looking backwards and Annie Mae and John Henry are both moving toward the right, advancing closer to the future and the turning page.

Pages in, when the boys decide to go swimming, above the text sits a tiny square illustration of a sign that reads "Private Pool" and "Members Only." On the opposite page, a full-page splash depicts the two boys swimming in a creek. The boys jump in "wearing only our skin" (Wiles). Readers see the two young boys, wrapped in water, bobbing in the fetal position, almost interchangeable except for the contrast of their skin. The blues and purples that filled John Henry's skin pages before now wash over them both, bringing them to equality underneath the safety of the water.

When they travel to the general store after their swim, Joe must go inside without John Henry, a stipulation of the time period simply accepted by the young boys. The illustration accompanying this moment portrays the outside of the general store, Joe tiny and inside at the counter, and John Henry prominently featured. He faces left, as if this demeaning act chips away at his hope and his will to look forward, but he must comply by pretending to be unaware.

When the boys learn about the pool that will open to all people in town, Black and White, they plan to be the first in the water. John Henry even brings his “good-luck nickel.” When they arrive, however, workers are filling up the pool with asphalt. That night, a page after they watch the pool fill with thick, hopeless tar, an illustration that fills the entire right page and stretches across half the left positions the boys on the diving board above the pool. Though he sits on the right of Joe, John Henry hangs his head, defeated. This page, along with its text, conveys to the reader that the children know exactly why the pool was filled. This extended illustration seems to suggest that, though the laws had been changed, most of the White southerners would still operate as though the oppressive laws were still in place, as though time was instead moving backward.

The full splash of John Henry’s face on the following page reaches out to the reader; his eyes, full of the pain and exhaustion of understanding, gaze out beyond the fourth wall and he seems to ask readers to understand as well. In terms of empathy, this illustration is the most powerful in this text, and, like the rainbow of colors that fill John Henry’s face, the audience is completely filled with the injustice felt by this young character.

Here, the pool serves as a painful, concrete example of racism as it affects John Henry’s childhood, segregating him not only from the White community but further separating him from his best friend. This helps John Henry to realize that he must take an active role in fighting

against violations of equality. He begins to realize the power he has to stand up for himself, a ripple with the potential to turn into a wave of activism, which inspires his decision to enter the general store a few pages later. Joe also experiences a shift toward equality, and on the final page, both boys occupy the small, square illustration, depicting their entrance into the general store together, and John Henry ready to purchase his own ice-pop. Though the first small, square illustration seemed to mean Joe was closed off and protected, this final small frame seems to symbolize that these boys are protected from closed-mindedness, having both accepted equality and justice instead, and therefore are safe inside their awareness of the time period.

Using a similar format in terms of white space and its power, *The Other Side* written by Jacqueline Woodson and illustrated by E.B. Lewis was published in 2001 and follows the story of Clover, a young Black girl, and Annie, Clover's young White neighbor, who are separated, along with their town, by a fence, keeping Black residents on one side and White residents on the other. Clover's mother forbids her to climb to the other side of the fence, but Annie sits on top of it and invites Clover to join her. These two young girls serve as the first step to taking down the fence and becoming active toward ending segregation.

What students may want to consider before reading this book is that it shares the author of *Brown Girl Dreaming* and was published 12 years prior. Perhaps paired with a discussion of the author's note preceding the first page of *The Other Side*, teachers could ask students what Woodson means when she mentions that there are still fences in society today. What do these metaphorical fences separate? Having read *Brown Girl Dreaming* before reading *The Other Side* could also act as a beneficial background of Woodson's childhood. At this point, students can think about why it was important for her to create a picture book for children about segregation. What in her personal childhood, as outlined in *Brown Girl Dreaming*, suggests that very early

readers should know about equality and acceptance? Students should keep these thoughts in mind while reading *The Other Side*.

The book's first illustration spans across two pages and is a beautiful full depiction of houses, a field, and the fence that cut everything in half. When Annie, the young White girl, appears on the next page, the illustration shifts to the left side of the book, leaving space on the right side for text. Clover sits close to the reader and faces Annie, who is small, far, and has climbed on the fence, watching Clover. When the page flips, so does the white space, moving instead to the left side of the book but allowing the picture to still stretch across almost the entire two-page spread. This shift in white space also highlights the different perspectives of the characters along with the distance between the White side and the Black side of the town.

On the page that features Annie hanging over the fence, talking to the group of Clover's friends, the book physically serves as a barrier between White and Black, with the spine of the book working as the fence. The gutter continues to work in this way when, pages later, we see that the children, still separated, become those most interested in abolishing segregation. Clover even asks her mother why the fence is there. Her mother responds by telling her that it's the way things have always been (Woodson).

Clover's mother's response becomes a pivotal moment in this text, especially in terms of classroom use. With this active child figure versus the passive adult, students can analyze the power children actually have but that typically gets overlooked or underappreciated. During this quick exchange, the illustration shows the adults facing their respective sides and the children facing each other, hoping to unite. Here, readers can see that both Clover and Annie are stronger activists than their mothers. This moment allows us to recognize not only a child's ability to be aware and understand a difficult situation but also his or her ability to inspire social change.

Finally, by the end of the summer, Clover becomes brave enough to speak to Annie. Annie tells her that a fence like this one was made for sitting on—a moment appropriate for classroom discussion. Students' prior knowledge will allow them to understand that the purpose of this fence is not so people could gather on top of it; its purpose is to keep people separated, not bring them together. Additionally, students could consider what it means when people use the expression “on the fence.” Typically, it means that they are in between a decision, unable or unwilling to commit to one side or another. Rather than staying away from the fence and committing wholly to segregation, like their mothers, Annie and Clover have come closer to equality. Instead of not considering the other side at all, these girls and their friends are not only physically on the fence, but also symbolically considering the advantages and disadvantages of both sides, making the first move toward social change.

By inviting Clover to sit with her, Annie opened up an entirely new possibility—transforming the very purpose of the fence. This suggests that young people have enough power to completely transform a negative social hindrance into something positive and optimistic. The children on top of the fence say that someone will come along and knock it down someday. Clover repeats, “Someday,” foreshadowing how the fence has been not completely knocked down but significantly lowered in the years beyond the historical setting of this text.

After completing this book, students should examine how it thematically connects to the previous three texts, discussing the fences present in each story. In thinking about fences and their power in separating groups, they can perhaps identify even fences that they encounter on a personal level. Whereas Woodson presents a symbol that captures decades of historical perspectives, her characters may only see this fence as a roadblock in between a potential friendship. If students think about cliques, for example, or tables in the lunchroom, or any other

group that has a metaphorical fence that prevents inclusion, they may develop a stronger sense of empathy toward the characters in the story, and perhaps their peers.

Each of these four texts features young characters who are not only aware of the social constructs around them but are also active in trying to change them. Their characters suggest that young people hold much more power than they are often credited with. Through Jackie yelling the chants of the Black Panthers, the two sisters marching, Joe and John Henry buying an ice pop together, and, finally, Clover and Annie working to symbolically lower the fence, students are informed that they have an opportunity to change what they feel is wrong. They are empowered through these texts and lessons to get informed, be aware of inequality or mistreatment surrounding them, and make a difference. Through discussion and activities within the classroom, these texts have the capability to teach students about historical and contemporary injustices, elicit empathy, and, ideally, inspire them to be as active as the characters within the books.

Chapter Three—On the Same Side of the River:

Promoting Agency and Acceptance through History and Interpretation in Children’s

Literature

“Children often approach a book with an open heart. Adult readers often come to a book with an agenda. Educators have a social responsibility to be mindful of the stories they tell or read to their students...educators should expose *all sides* of a story, not just one.”
—PAM MUÑOZ RYAN, 2008

Modern textbooks and other works of nonfiction that claim to convey 20th century American History, finding their way onto secondary curriculum booklists and settling into classroom shelves and cubbies of lockers, frequently portray the United States as a land of success and, often, of acceptance. By the time they reach high school, students have heard about the beckoning shores and the huddled masses through lessons that teach about immigration as a historical event rather than a current, ongoing, and contested process. Rarely does the curriculum allow for discussion of contemporary attitudes toward immigration, narrowly inviting educators to open conversations and pose questions about the past and thereby, potentially trapping students in ignorance and perpetuating the lack of equality still often granted to immigrants.

This neglect in education leaves students to either learn independently about today’s views and statistics on immigration, turning to unreliable and often sensationalist media outlets, or simply to remain in the dark. In an attempt to provide adolescents with more than the perspective offered in textbooks, teachers, especially in the English classroom, can include historical fiction to provide a more well-rounded presentation of the immigrant experience. Reading historical fiction that discusses immigration can help students to understand the contemporary situation many immigrants face, introducing themes like lack of acceptance as well as inequality. Especially in the classroom, these themes encourage students to bridge the

past and present, asking that they make connections between characters in the story and people they may encounter daily.

In exploring and challenging the prevailing narrative of immigrants in the US, students may become more tolerant, accepting individuals, potentially working toward abolishing this stereotypical and negative narrative, and promoting equality among all Americans—natively born or not. Discussing contemporary immigration in combination with its history may also inspire a decrease in discrimination and prejudice among students with a diverse collection of peers or classmates.

This chapter seeks to set a foundation for this practice and conversation, focusing on Pam Muñoz Ryan's *Esperanza Rising* as the anchor, or central, text within the unit. In conjunction with this anchor text, I investigate three picture books—Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*, Duncan Tonatiuh's *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*, and Don Brown's *Kid Blink Beats the World*—and their ability to connect thematically, promote awareness and student discussion, and offer a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience. It is important to note here that while there are countless different cases and types of immigrant experiences, this chapter connects mostly to those travelling to America, often moving from one impoverished area to another, in order to reach employment, opportunity for advancement, and a better life for their children. Through examining these four texts, this chapter closely identifies the struggles that outsiders so often neglect to consider: the dangerous journey across the border (specifically in terms of Mexican immigration), awful living conditions, perhaps worse poverty than their place of origin, and potentially rampant discrimination.

In this chapter, as in the previous chapters, I write as an outsider—someone who has never been on the other side of the border, the river, or the fence, figuratively speaking—but I

write as an ally, hopeful for social change. As a White member of the middle-class, I recognize that my experience with immigration has simply been as a spectator. This position, however, allows me to perceive injustices and imagine solutions. I believe one space capable of cultivating change is the secondary classroom.

To begin this discussion on immigration, I turn to Jennifer Graff's 2010 article, "Countering Narrative: Teacher's Discourses About Immigration and Their Experiences Within the Realm of Children's and Young Adult Literature," where she examines how the inclusion and discussion of literature involving immigrants can support educators' awareness of hegemonic policies and practices toward immigrants in the US. She explains that immigration is an inherent characteristic of humankind, highly contentious, and "an integral component of global social policies under the auspices of national security and goodwill" (Graff 106). She continues to say that because international media outlets consistently showcase anti-immigrant sentiments and laws throughout the world, the hegemonic and racist depictions of immigrants, especially those undocumented, continue to rage throughout the United States (Graff 106). As an example of these racial sentiments, Graff references Arizona and its 2010 enactment of a law that required immigrants to carry documentation of their legal status at all times and provided law enforcement with the power to detain anyone who they believed *might* be living illegally in the US (Graff 106). To blame for these negative views toward immigrants, particularly those identified as "illegal" or "undocumented", she mentions weakening national and global economies, suggesting that these financial characteristics "have provided fertile ground" for the amplification of prejudicial attitudes (Graff 107).

Though this was written several years ago, much of what Graff outlines about immigrant discrimination continues today. She writes, "Ongoing demands for increased border patrol

between US and Mexico, accusations of immigrants usurping US jobs, as well as unfounded correlations between immigrants and increased crime, are frequently entertained in the news and within various social circles” (Graff 107). Considering current politicians and proposals for the construction of a wall separating Mexico and the United States, views on immigration do not seem to be improving. Graff explains that 1.6 million immigrants arrive in the US annually while approximately 20 percent of US public school students are children of recent immigrants; if individuals are unaware of the complexities surrounding immigration, they may unjustly harbor resentment and exhibit prejudicial attitudes and behavior toward immigrants (Graff 107). These behaviors further marginalize immigrants in already contentious environments.

To frame classroom discussions of these topics and challenge the above stereotypes, teachers can teach through historical fiction. *Esperanza Rising* draws upon the experiences of the author’s maternal grandmother. Through *Esperanza*, Pam Muñoz Ryan presents themes of immigration, child labor, and child agency. Though clearly meant for an audience toward the beginning of secondary education (as exemplified by its sanitized perspectives, especially when compared to other thematically-similar texts often taught in secondary classrooms like Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*), it provides the building blocks that could form a deeper conversation, especially when paired with the picture books listed above.

By presenting discriminatory behaviors through literature, teachers have the opportunity to challenge them. In their book, *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children’s Literature: Mirrors, Windows, and Doors*, Maria Botelho and Masha Rudman explain that “the study of children’s literature is a social practice that can produce, reproduce, and circulate dominant cultural meanings as well as resist and subvert these prevailing ideologies” (154). The texts students read or that are offered by the curriculum become artifacts of ideology, working as

representations of the current and/or historical attitudes toward specific issues. Historical fiction frames a window to the time period in which it is written as well as to the time period in which it is set, providing readers with ample opportunity for analysis. Critical multicultural analysis, according to Botelho and Rudman, creates a space for adults and children alike to recognize their discursive constitution, “as well as providing a site for resistance, subversion, and transformation of dominant class, race, and gender ideologies” (154). In their collection of examined texts discussing immigration and class issues, Botelho and Rudman notice that impoverished immigrants are represented by characters who are “resourceful, resilient, and family-minded, and whose responses are products of their lived experiences” (156). They note that this representation contradicts stereotypes often associated with the working poor, such as “lazy, uneducated, unlucky, abusive, dirty, immoral...and undisciplined” (Botelho and Rudman 155). Included in their study is *Esperanza Rising*, an example of a text that works toward unraveling stereotypes, presenting different perspectives to young readers, and responsibly (if mildly) exploring the immigration experience.

In constructing a foundation to a discussion about contemporary immigration, a clear starting point for educators may be to talk to students about why people choose to immigrate to the US. In their book *The Distant Mirror: Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction*, Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair address the representation of immigration in several works of historical fiction, paying careful attention to the idea of the American Dream. Students can unpack this promise that America ostensibly offers and how it represents job opportunities; land; freedom from religious, ethnic, and political persecution; and reunification with family members who preceded them (Brown and St. Clair 143). Brown and St. Clair write that there are two essential components of the American dream: “first, that movement from one class to another

can be accomplished with relative ease, and second, that the movement is primarily the result of individual effort rather than communal cooperation” (109). Students should discuss how successful people are, historically, at reaching this promise, and perhaps what this success or lack thereof says about the promise. Another related pair of themes, especially presented in *Esperanza Rising*, is that hard work doesn’t ensure success and that social mobility and self-determination, “two cherished components of the American dream,” can be undermined by forces beyond human control (Brown and St. Clair 117). According to Brown and St. Clair, “being at the bottom of the socio-economic heap means more than struggling simply for enough food to eat...it also means giving up autonomy” (109). Including a text like *Esperanza Rising* can offer students a space to explore these pitfalls on the road to achieving the American dream.

Also included in *Esperanza Rising* is the theme of child labor. Throughout my research, I noticed a sequence of events leading to child labor related to immigration. Because immigrants, especially historically, live in poverty, children would often need to act as extra wage earners to supplement family salaries. As families immigrate and assume positions at low-paying jobs, children would also go to work in an attempt to offset financial hardship. As discussed in their book, *Human Rights in Children’s Literature: Imagination and the Narrative of Law*, Jonathan Todres and Sarah Higinbotham write that about “168 million of the world’s children are laborers, 85 million of whom toil in hazardous labor” (Todres and Higinbotham 153). They explain that, though most of these children live in developing countries, there are children at work in every country (Todres and Higinbotham 153). Not to be confused with chores and age appropriate work, Todres and Higinbotham define child labor as everything from work under unfair labor conditions to hazardous forms of labor to exploitation (Todres and Higinbotham 153). I include this theme because child labor seems to be a frequent consequence

of poverty, immigration, or both. Additionally, Pam Muñoz Ryan's text presents this issue through her descriptions of poor labor conditions, children on the job, and labor strikes. This inclusion provides not only an opportunity to discuss child labor and human rights but also to consider the agency and ability of children to inspire social change.

When readers first meet Esperanza, she is a spoiled almost-thirteen-year-old living in 1930s Mexico. The daughter of affluent landowners, she has, for years, enjoyed a childhood friendship with Miguel, the son of the family's housekeeper, Hortensia, and her husband, Alfonso, the gardener. But as she nears adolescence, Esperanza tells Miguel that they stand on different sides of a deep river that neither can cross, for she assumes that the class differences that separate them are inflexible and constant (Ryan 18). Following the sudden death of her father, Esperanza and her mother, Ramona, decide that they will secretly leave for the United States, joining Hortensia, Alfonso, and Miguel on their journey. Alfonso has arranged living quarters and fieldwork through his brother, an employee on a large farm in California. Alfonso and his family hope to leave behind Mexico's poverty and class separations while Ramona and Esperanza seek to escape the extortion of a corrupt uncle. They begin their migration to America, though without Esperanza's injured grandmother, Abuelita, who must remain behind. Once Esperanza is forced outside of her protective, privileged realm, she begins to understand how quickly class differences can shift, especially for the worst.

Exemplifying the danger and discomfort of crossing the border, Esperanza must ride hidden in a wagon beneath a load of guavas during the first part of the journey. Though she travels by train next, Esperanza feels distraught by her surroundings, linking the grimy conditions endured by the peasant passengers with thievery and untrustworthiness. When her mother begins to make friends with a woman travelling with a crate of hens, Esperanza is

appalled. The women exchange stories about the struggles that have brought them each to this train. When the woman gets off the train, she leaves two hens with Ramona and gives a coin to a woman begging outside the station. Miguel notices this action and says, “The rich take care of the rich and the poor take care of those who have less than they have” (Ryan 79). He also mentions here that people with Spanish blood, those with the fairest complexions, are the wealthiest. Esperanza dismisses this observation as an old wives’ tale, not wanting to admit that it might be true. Besides, she tells herself, soon they would be in America, where there is no link between skin color and social status.

At this point, secondary students can detect the severity of Esperanza’s naivety. Previously shielded by her family’s privilege and wealth, Esperanza has yet to experience any consequences brought on by a lack of money or a lower social standing. Should teachers scaffold this text with lessons about child labor, students will see the disparities between Esperanza’s comfortable Mexican childhood and the experiences of children who must act as wage earners—essentially, the unglamorous lifestyle for which Esperanza is headed. Though Esperanza has a difficult time comprehending what is ahead, students’ prior knowledge will help them connect Esperanza’s future job responsibilities with those presented in textbooks or other works they may have encountered that include aspects of 1930s America.

When the group finally arrives at the camp in the San Joaquin Valley of California, readers encounter the hideous living conditions offered to the workers. Reflecting the gender relations of the time period, the camp has no housing for unmarried women; Ramona and Esperanza must share a tiny, drafty shack with Hortensia’s family. Esperanza compares the shack to the horse stalls back at her ranch in Mexico, quickly judging the small home as far inferior. Her disappointment only deepens when she learns of the toilets that offer no privacy.

Esperanza soon learns that her job at the camp is to help Alfonso's daughter Isabel in taking care of her infant twin siblings, as well as to sweep an outdoor stage often used for dances. She learns that, in addition to these tasks, once Isabel returns to school, Esperanza will be responsible for all of the laundry. When she tries to sweep for the first time, she becomes deeply humiliated—as someone who always had a housekeeper and other caretakers, she has no experience and lacks proficiency. When Miguel laughs at her and teaches her how to hold a broom, she humbly admits, “It’s not easy for me” (Ryan 120). Though Esperanza’s hesitancy toward sweeping aligns with Ryan’s sanitized representation of major issues, describing migrant child labor through a relatively effortless and risk-free task like using a broom, this description of child labor emphasizes Esperanza’s position in life. Sweeping and laundry would, contemporarily, fall under the category of “child work” as chores rather than brutal child labor, but because Esperanza must learn these tasks for the first time, surrounded by the contemptible living conditions at the camp, students may understand this as a pivotal moment in her moving closer to the other side of the river. Plus it precedes her work in the sheds after her mother becomes ill, a job that would certainly still be considered child labor. Esperanza’s submission to her new responsibilities depicts her fall to, as Brown and St. Clair would say, the bottom of the socio-economic heap (109).

As time progresses and pages turn, Esperanza adjusts to her new life and gains proficiency with her chores. As migrants from Oklahoma flood the San Joaquin Valley in an attempt to escape the Dust Bowl, however, Esperanza’s new family fears the possibility of losing their jobs and homes. Striking workers also threaten to disrupt the rhythm of the camp. Though the workers in their camp have agreed not to strike, a friend says that many Mexicans still have the revolution in their blood and, therefore, are prepared to fight in order to feed themselves and

their children. This exchange suggests unequal treatment of the laborers, especially those who have recently immigrated. The workers begin to notice inconsistencies in privilege based on their skin color, such as the use of the company's pool and the distribution of honors among their children in the local public school. As the strikes pend, Ramona falls victim to Valley Fever—another example of poor working and living conditions. A doctor advises that she stay at the hospital in order to breathe clearly and recover.

In light of Ramona's illness and inability to work, Esperanza realizes her shift in responsibilities. No longer a wealthy child, she must assume a leadership role and earn money to bring her grandmother to California, taking over her mother's work in the sheds. Though she has taken charge and is working to care for her family, she begins to feel lonely in Ramona's absence and seeks comfort in the company of other young peasants in her camp. This interaction emphasizes the trajectory Esperanza has travelled in negotiating between socioeconomic statuses and her stereotypical views. Once a girl who feared and felt suspicious in the company of peasants, Esperanza has moved closer to accepting her new place and those surrounding her. Because she has experienced the same plight of these peasants, she not only feels unthreatened, but also finds solace in their friendship. By working alongside those who had childhoods much less fortunate than her own, she is able to accept them and move closer to accepting herself as one of them.

As this transformation occurs in Esperanza's personal life, the strikers from other camps grow stronger and better organized and are sabotaging worker efforts throughout the San Joaquin Valley in an attempt to gain support. These disruptions result in immigration "sweeps," a strategy utilized by the government to expel strikers from camps. In an attempt to purge illegal immigrants from the area, and ultimately the country, even Mexicans with proper papers and

American citizens who had never been to Mexico were targeted and deported. Learning about and witnessing this process disturbs Esperanza, who narrates, “Something seemed very wrong about sending people away from their own ‘free country’ because they had spoken their minds” (Ryan 208).

Besides these sweeps, another example of the prejudice toward Mexicans appears when Esperanza notices that Miguel travels further to shop at a Japanese market rather than the American shops near the camp. When she inquires about this, Miguel replies that the Japanese owner treats Mexicans with dignity, “like people” (Ryan 186). He describes how Americans stereotype Mexicans—they are perceived as “uneducated, dirty, poor, and unskilled...as one big, brown group who are good for only manual labor” (Ryan 187). Esperanza considers the special sections the towns have for “Negroes and Mexicans,” thinking also about how they keep schools segregated because parents don’t want their children going to school with children of these other cultures. At this point, she realizes an advantage of living in the camp: all the children, skin color aside, go to school together. This realization further explains Miguel’s observation that those experiencing the same immigration journey, or those who have experienced it somewhere in the recent past, are more tolerant of diversity as it operates beneath White privilege. As she thinks about the blended school on the camp, Esperanza notes, “It didn’t seem to matter to anyone because they were all poor” (Ryan 188). This links back to Miguel noticing the poor woman on the train giving a coin to the beggar—the poor take care of those with less. These thoughts and her exchange with Miguel emphasize that prejudice applies to class just as much as race.

As Esperanza continues to work and save money, inching closer to being able to bring her grandmother to California, she learns of a new camp being constructed specifically for White

workers from Oklahoma. It features far better living conditions than where Esperanza lives, boasting inside toilets, hot water, and even a swimming pool. Esperanza learns that Mexicans will be permitted to use the pool, but only on Friday afternoon before its Saturday morning cleaning. Extending the racial segregation most famously exemplified in the Jim Crow Era in the southern US, which I discussed in Chapter Two, this development serves as another example of the White privilege that persistently acts as a wedge between cultures, always distancing the possibility of equality. The acceptance that she's worked so hard to reach begins to unravel, and Esperanza feels defeated and angry that others are being rewarded simply because of their skin color and place of birth.

In addition to the creation of this new camp for White citizens from Oklahoma, Miguel loses his job at the railroad after being replaced by White men from Oklahoma with no experience. Faced with unemployment, Miguel contentedly decides to lay tracks for the railroad company rather than continue to work with motors. This upsets Esperanza, who explodes at him: "Nothing is right here ... You cannot work on engines because you are Mexican ... They send people back to Mexico even if they don't belong there, just for speaking up. We live in a horse stall. And none of this bothers you?" (Ryan 221). In his response, Miguel highlights the reasons so many immigrants choose to come to America. At the same time, he also emphasizes the major difference between Esperanza and himself. He says,

In Mexico, I was a second-class citizen. I stood on the other side of the river, remember? And I would have stayed that way my entire life. At least here, I have a chance, however small, to become more than what I was. You, obviously, can never understand this because you have never lived without hope. (Ryan 222)

An exhausted and just about hopeless Esperanza spits back a reply, shooting down his optimism and telling him he is still just a peasant who has not moved to the other side of the river. Miguel is gone the next morning, seemingly having plans to search for railroad work in Northern California and leaving behind a guilt-stricken Esperanza.

Her mood improves drastically, however, when Ramona is released from the hospital and returns home after five months. When Esperanza tries to show her the money she has saved for Abuelita's journey, her savings have disappeared. She concludes that Miguel has stolen the money, and she soon learns why. In a somewhat easy wrap-up of this story, focusing on a small, quick solution for the Ortega family rather than attempting to fix larger societal issues, readers learn that Miguel travelled back to Mexico using Esperanza's savings and has returned to the work camp with Abuelita.

At the end of the book, Esperanza is about to turn fourteen, but has advanced more than typically expected in one year's time. Remembering her grandmother and a story of a phoenix, she considers her journey from childhood to adolescence over the past year:

She soared with the anticipation of dreams she never knew she could have, of learning English, of supporting her family, of someday buying a tiny house.

Miguel had been right about never giving up, and she had been right, too, about rising above those who held them down. (Ryan 250-251)

She has risen above the struggles that come with immigrating to a new place, starting over, and learning to adapt to a new social standing. Students who read about Esperanza will be able to see connections between her tale and other immigrants throughout history, as well as contemporary attitudes regarding the value of diversity. In experiencing Esperanza's transition and acceptance of her new life and of others, students, with hope, will also experience a shift in

their perceptions, perhaps beginning to understand the journey of others and accepting diversity, just as Esperanza did.

These circumstances connect to the topics presented in the picture books discussed in this chapter. In Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*, a wordless text that sits somewhere in between a picture book and a graphic novel, audiences follow a nameless, race-less man through his immigration and assimilation into a new and unknown culture. Tan invites readers to think critically about the struggles the character endures and the reasons he decides to endure them. Students can easily connect his experience to that of Esperanza. Both of these characters have left behind family members, traversed a risky journey, and arrived in a new and foreign place seeking opportunity. While *The Arrival* depicts immigration from more of a global, even universal, standpoint, illegal Chicano immigration to America is represented in Duncan Tonatiuh's text, *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*. His mixed-media illustrations convey the complex dangers of Mexicans travelling near the American border and the risks of entering the country, relating to the journey Esperanza and her family made legally to California. Finally, although depicting a moment in time before *Esperanza Rising* takes place, Don Brown's *Kid Blink Beats the World* offers students a different perspective on child labor through the newsies, children, often of European immigrants, working as newspaper peddlers in industrial cities. Each of these texts provide different pieces of the overall theme of agency and acceptance, encouraging student readers to recognize their ability to influence social change.

Shaun Tan's wordless book, *The Arrival*, illustrates the story of a man who leaves his family in order to establish a better life for them in a distant, unknown land. Facial expressions and gestures in multiple sized panels and tones of shading carry readers through frames as the foreigner arrives in his new country and struggles to adapt. Through this mysterious protagonist,

audiences meet other characters and learn of their personal immigration journeys. Tan's use of color, specifically for the shadows and darkness, represents danger and threats, but leaves space for interpretation. The timelessness and lack of placement also help achieve open-interpretation. Though plenty exists in this book to discuss, because of space constraints, I will focus on Tan's use of color and symbolism in connection to *Esperanza Rising*.

Nine square panels of warm sepia introduce readers to familiarity and contentedness. Though immediately obvious that these characters occupy a different socioeconomic class than Esperanza did at the beginning of her story, the cozy cookware and child's drawing of a family portrait offer readers an insight into their serenity. This presentation of security and stability, however, quickly shifts when readers see the boarding pass in the seventh panel and a filled suitcase in the eighth. The illustration of the family portrait in the ninth panel ties this first page together as it places an emphasis on family.

Readers first meet potential danger when the family leaves their home. The shadow of a giant dark gray tentacle enters from the top left corner and extends across the entire page. This full-page panel depicts only a small section of one tentacle, suggesting the sheer size of the monster to which it belongs. When the page turns, a spread of the entire city emerges—the surroundings of the previous page—that shows the obviously evil tentacles that entangle the city and the family, tiny and powerless, in comparison. These pages could spark student conversation as they discuss the tentacles as possible metaphors for oppression, illness, or even weather or natural disasters—forces that drive immigrants to leave their homes and start over.

In her article featured on NPR, titled “In Wordless Imagery, An Immigrant's Timeless Tale,” journalist Ruta Sepetys describes Tan's text, paying special attention to the endpapers. She says, “In a grid of 60 beautiful faces, each reader will find a familiar story or archetype

represented: My own father came to the United States as a refugee from Lithuania, running from the dark shadow that was Josef Stalin” (Sepetys). She continues, saying that her friend’s mother left Cuba just prior to the revolution, and “our neighbor fled New Orleans as Hurricane Katrina swallowed the city” (Sepetys). The endpapers and their faces, along with the book’s wordlessness and timelessness, help to extend this story universally and reach every immigrant experience—even the story of a thirteen-year-old Mexican girl.

In *The Distant Mirror: Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction*, Brown and St. Clair write about immigrants, saying that the journey from their native lands was often perilous at best. Most brought little but their wishes for a better future, hoping that in this Land of Freedom and Opportunity they could begin new lives (143). Though this specifically references immigration to America, this description can easily connect to *The Arrival*. The dark tentacles that slither through Tan’s city in the beginning of the book potentially represent religious, ethnic, or political persecution, perhaps something akin to the Nazi persecution discussed in Chapter One, influencing the protagonist to leave his family in search of something better.

“Many did indeed find jobs in the United States to answer their most optimistic dreams,” explain Brown and St. Clair, “but others among the huddled masses were met with less than the promised welcome” (143). They write that each wave of immigration aroused alarm among earlier immigrants and their descendants, who viewed the newcomers with suspicion, some fearing that these “foreigners” would take away jobs and move into neighborhoods where their presence would send property values plummeting—issues that presently plague the United States (Brown 143). Tan’s readers experience this despair when, through a series of small, thumbnail-type frames, the protagonist seeks a job at several locations but struggles to convince someone to hire him.

Though Esperanza and her family were given work upon their arrival, they still experience much of what Tan's protagonist does. From the flip of the first page, readers feel that the impending trip is not one of leisure. The tickets and packed suitcase indicate that a trip awaits, but the protagonist packing away the photograph, and the wife's hand on his suggest an involuntary separation. This is similar to Esperanza's initial unwillingness to leave Mexico. Each of these characters' departures is by force—conditions beyond their control. Students can connect the protagonist leaving his wife and child behind to the way Esperanza had to leave her grandmother in Mexico.

After the protagonist departs, Tan illustrates a full page of looming buildings that tower over his wife and child as they make their way back, walking toward the danger that waits beneath the tentacles. This final page of the first chapter serves as a reminder to readers of why immigrants leave their countries of origin.

A point of discussion and analysis in the classroom could be Tan's use of shading and shadows. While the pages lack full color illustrations, different tones of sepias and grays help convey emotion. The spread across pages 13 and 14 depicts a powerful storm cloud over the ocean with the tiny ship in the bottom left corner of page 13. The ship's lack of size suggests how small the immigrants are in relation to the place to which they are travelling, allowing readers to interpret the fear and uncertainty they must feel—especially in an environment so dark. The only light on the page appears in the far left corner, inviting readers to see the ship as it heads to the far-right corner, into blackness and mystery. This corner is shaded so darkly that readers can hardly distinguish between ocean and sky. The enormous storm cloud that billows above the ocean turns darker as readers' eyes move across it, inspiring movement toward the page turn, but also threatening difficult times ahead for the travelers. This foreshadows the

struggles for which the immigrants are headed. Students can discuss how, just because immigrants left the hardships of their homeland behind, the lives awaiting them offer challenges as well. Students will be able to connect the ideas presented in this spread to Esperanza's arrival in America and the degree of unexpected difficulty that met her.

Beyond relaying emotion, the shading and tone serve as a way to distinguish storylines when the protagonist encounters other immigrants. As the narration continues, readers meet more characters that weave in their backstories, joining the overall immigrant narrative. Because of its wordlessness, Tan uses color and design to help readers separate these stories from the protagonist's main storyline. The first use of this color distinction appears when the protagonist meets a young girl who has documentation similar to his own. When her story begins, Tan shifts the color of the page borders to a somber gray. Twelve small square panels depict moments of the girl's past as a slave laborer with borders of tattered white to mimic photographs. Readers see her locked up and forced to work until Tan illustrates her escape.

Another backstory presented is that of the protagonist's fellow factory worker, an older gentleman who shares his haunting past. Again, Tan separates storylines by border color. This story sits on what looks like old sheets of paper, crumpled and worn with age, holding warm sepia snapshots of this man's memories. Tan introduces a splash of an army, suggesting war, and twelve snapshots on the following page that show what we can assume is the man's foot. This conveys the distance this character covered as readers see the different terrains beneath his foot: the cobblestone of the city, leaves through a forest, rocks, water, and most disturbing, humans. The following page features a splash of shadowy troops running toward an unending pile of skeletons on the next side (Tan 94-96).

An important aspect of presenting traumatic topics, such as forced child labor and war, to children through historical fiction is that young readers remain aware that the events happened in the past. Though these issues still exist as grave realities in our present, this book neatly contains the moments described within the past. The alternate tone of page borders reminds young readers that this particular piece of the story differs from that of the protagonist. As was discussed in Chapter One, it is important for teachers to tread lightly and mindfully when potentially traumatic issues surface in conversation. Containing trauma in the past, within pages of a book, reassures students—even those in high school—that they are securely in the present, unable to be harmed by what may be harming the characters in the book. Rather than shutting down to escape an uncomfortable discussion, effectively ending any further learning, students will remain receptive to lessons when their comfort levels are respected. Students will be able to find connections between the texts, helping them to discuss how these stories and characters relate to present conversations about immigration as well.

A milder, historical presentation of traumatic events also allows teachers to control how far discussions go. Based on the receptiveness of his or her classroom, a teacher can choose to further conversation or activities with hard-hitting works of nonfiction that graphically present every detail of modern war or child exploitation. Or, conversely, a teacher can choose to explore these topics through alternate mediums, like picture books or other works of art, that allow students to interpret what is manageable in terms of their own personal understanding.

To connect these moments in *The Arrival* to *Esperanza Rising*, students can discuss how Esperanza relates to the young, female slave laborer. While Esperanza is not physically locked away, her recent shift in social standing and economic class constrains her and forces her to work, imprisoned within a dusty, dirty work camp that threatens to poison her with disease. Her

position, as a child as well as a lower-class citizen, chains her to responsibilities similar to those depicted in this girl's experience in *The Arrival*.

Paired with a lesson on the Mexican Revolution, students can also compare *The Arrival*'s pages about the man in the war to Esperanza and the war that affects her story. Visible similarities also lie between Esperanza and her family who escape her corrupt uncle, and the immigrants illustrated by Tan that escape the dangers of their countries.

More than a hundred pages of illustrations offer far more than can be discussed within this chapter, but Tan's beautifully woven tapestry of immigrant perspectives serves as an important reminder to students of the journey that so many people make in search of a better life. Students follow Tan's protagonist and, with hope, become more aware of the people embarking on similar journeys in the present. This lesson of agency, empathy, and awareness seeps through the pages of *The Arrival* as well as *Esperanza Rising*, encouraging students to remember that these events happened and calling attention to their occurrences today.

Further offering students a representation of immigration and labor, especially as it fits with more modern occurrences, is Duncan Tonatiuh's *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*, a story of a young rabbit that awaits his father's return from "the north," where he went to find work. When his father does not return home when expected, Pancho sets out to find him. On his journey, he meets a coyote who offers to help Pancho in exchange for the food Pancho has brought. They travel until the food is gone, and the coyote threatens to eat Pancho. In the last moment, Pancho's father arrives and rescues him from the coyote. When provided appropriate historical context with this book, students can recognize that this story is not simply a children's tale, but also a complex commentary on recent immigration topics between the US and Mexico.

Tonatiuh presents to readers the hardship and struggles facing families who seek to build better lives by illegally crossing the border.

In his note that follows the story, Tonatiuh explains that in Spanish, the word “coyote” has two meanings: it is the name of an animal as well as slang for a person who smuggles people between the US and Mexican border. He refers to Amnesty International as he explains that immigrants leave their home countries mostly because of poverty and lack of opportunity at home. Immigrants coming to the US pay coyotes exorbitant fees and risk their lives to reach their destinations. Tonatiuh continues to write,

Illegal immigration is a complicated issue that involves the US, Mexican, and Central American governments and societies. On the one hand the immigrants’ home countries have to improve living conditions and create better opportunities for their citizens so that they are not forced to look to the outside for answers. On the other hand the US needs to admit its dependency on undocumented workers to do much of its manual and domestic labor and to provide legal and safe working opportunities for those seeking employment. Undocumented immigrants are a huge and important part of the US workforce...working in low skilled and often grueling jobs, like farming and construction. Only 31% of US-born workers hold those occupations (Tonatiuh 32).

These issues of illegal immigration are also brought up in *Esperanza Rising*. The journey that Esperanza and her family make may not be nearly as dangerous as that of illegal immigrants sneaking their way to the border, but they still must consider possible perils. Esperanza, for instance, must ride beneath a wagon on their way to the train station to hide from bandits and her uncle’s spies (Ryan 59). Students can also compare the challenges that undocumented

immigrants must face, as discussed in *Pancho Rabbit*, to how easily Esperanza and her family got through the border. With a stern look from Ramona, the immigration official allows Esperanza and her mother to enter the country with their documentation papers (Ryan 82-83).

I include an analysis of *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* in this chapter to promote awareness of current immigration issues and their presence in American history long before and after the 1930s. Students should recognize that adults are not solely affected by our lack of acceptance of immigrants; children, like Esperanza and Pancho, bear the weight of these choices as well.

The first scene in Tonatiuh's text illustrates the men leaving their families as they head "north" to find work in the great carrot and lettuce fields because "[t]here they could earn money for their families" (Tonatiuh 2). Prior knowledge can help students recognize that Tonatiuh's mention of "north" here, as well as the description of the fields as "great" implies America. This links to Esperanza's first impressions of America, when Ryan writes, "Flat and spacious, [the valley] spread out like a blanket of patchwork fields. Esperanza could see no end to the plots of yellow, brown, and shades of green" (Ryan 94). These descriptions oversell America, emphasizing its greatness but falling into the idea of the American Dream and its unequal distribution among its residents. Characters believe that America provides endless opportunity and possibility, when actually, as shown in *Esperanza Rising* and in Tonatiuh's Author's Note, working conditions in the United States are dangerous and workers are not sufficiently cared for or respected.

Through his mixed-media illustrations, Tonatiuh explores the perils that await those travelling to the border. First, the mere term for the person supposed to help suggests danger. Tonatiuh's representation of a coyote fits that expectation, with his red eyes and sharp teeth and

nails (Tonatiuh 12). Perhaps the most symbolic of scenes, however, is the two-page spread depicting the border patrol officers, the fence, and the coyote and Pancho who must crawl through a tunnel beneath it (Tonatiuh 17-18). A green wall expands across the entire background of this scene, symbolizing the fence that the US built in order to keep illegal immigrants in Mexico. The border patrol officers are rattlesnakes, conveying to readers that they are just as dangerous as the coyote. Tonatiuh has illustrated them to look like soldiers in camouflage, though it remains unclear if they represent American or Mexican soldiers, raising questions about whether it matters which country's soldiers they are. To get by, Pancho bribes the snakes, signaling to readers the corruption behind this system (Tonatiuh 17-18).

By the end of the story, Pancho and his father return safely to their home in Mexico, surviving the many dangers that they each encountered. Though Pancho needed help from his father to survive, this story promotes child activism through Pancho's decision to leave home and conduct a search for his missing father. His choice to look for his father expresses the power and desire that children have to execute plans on their own. An important lesson in this book, Pancho's agency encourages young readers to not only learn about cultural injustices but also encourages them to act as accepting members of society, relating to Pancho's desire to search for his father on his own. This lesson encourages children and adolescents to become protectors of liberty for all humans, not just those born in America.

The final book discussed in this chapter, Don Brown's *Kid Blink Beats the World*, explores the New York City newspaper strike in the summer of 1899. This book tells of the hundreds of newsboys and girls who sold Randolph Hearst's *The Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *The World* and went on strike when the newspaper owners proposed to charge them a penny more to buy their papers. These children refused to sell papers, staged rallies, and finally

brought the newspaper owners to a point of negotiation. To appropriately connect this story to *Esperanza Rising* in the classroom, however, teachers must address the history of child labor.

In Susan Campbell Bartoletti's *Kids on Strike!*, she explains, "Children also worked because their parents needed their wages. Parents used the money to buy food or pay rent and medical bills. Many children were eager to work, especially if they thought it would help their families" (Bartoletti 24). This continues to fall into the theme of childhood not necessarily serving as protection. Instead of attending school or playing with friends, children of immigrants and lower class families were seen as additional wage earners. Because they knew their pay would help their families, children often wanted to work. Esperanza experiences a moment like this when her mother falls ill and she desperately wants to take Ramona's place in the shed, knowing that she must continue to earn money.

With *Kid Blink*, students can compare the types of child labor in both the East and the West. *Esperanza Rising* only offers a view of migrant field and farm work and hardly provides a fully accurate depiction of the terrible Dust Bowl, living conditions, and responsibilities at the camps. When paired with *Kid Blink*, an opportunity for discussion arises, allowing teachers to fill in the blanks with historical context. Bartoletti writes, "The history of child labor is the story of millions of kids who worked long, grueling hours for meager wages. It's the story of kids who helped to support their families and who improved their families' lives. It's the story of kids who only wanted what adults wanted: a fair day's work, a fair day's wage, a safe working environment, and better living conditions" (Bartoletti 193). Because employers often failed to meet these goals, children, like adults, had no choice but to strike.

The most obvious similarity that students will find between these two texts, besides their depictions of child labor, is their inclusion of labor strikes. As Bartoletti mentions, children

along with adults accepted the work of their employers but expected fair treatment and pay. In *Esperanza Rising*, though readers do not see young children striking, Ryan uses adolescents, like Marta, and adults to illustrate the controversy around union strikes. Marta, a young woman barely older than Esperanza, attempts to organize workers from multiple camps into strikes, using a kitten as a symbol:

‘This is what we are!’ she yelled. ‘Small, meek animals. And that is how they treat us because we don’t speak up. If we don’t ask for what is rightfully ours, we will never get it! Is this how we want to live?’ She held the kitten by the back of the neck, waving it high in the air. It hung limp in front of the crowd (Ryan 132).

Both *Esperanza Rising* and *Kid Blink Beats the World* promote powerful young characters. Though *Kid Blink* takes place in an urban setting, the goal of the strike remains the same as Marta’s above: fair treatment. The children working as newsies realize that if the newspaper companies raise the cost by even a penny, one less penny makes it home to their families. This is monumental “when a family survived on ten dollars a week and fifteen cents fetched a dinner of soup, stew, and pie” (Brown 4). These children play a valuable role in the workforce, holding much more power than adults typically think. The impending strike against these businesses underscores the impact that children, when organized and focused, can have on society.

As Brown describes, “Three hundred newsies rallied on July 20th near the newspapers’ offices in lower Manhattan, and tried to halt delivery of the papers. But the police scattered the youngsters, took a few to jail, and the papers got out. Still, kindhearted onlookers showed their support and rained coins on the youngsters from overlooking windows” (7). This page with its illustrations of the newsboys dancing underneath raindrops of coins marks the beginning of the

strike. Through the course of this text, the strike spreads and grows through multiple states as more children join the effort: “They stopped newspaper deliveries, pummeled deliverymen with rotten fruit, and swiped papers from the few kids and newsstands that still sold the papers” (Brown 12-13).

By the end of the story, readers learn how far the strike has branched—through New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Kentucky—with messenger boys and shoe shine boys joining the effort out of sympathy (Brown 26). Here, readers also learn of the impact the newsies made: “Where once the papers were printing 350,000 copies a day, they now printed only 125,000. The newsies had won!” (Brown 26).

Though the eventual outcome was not what the children had hoped, the strike led to a negotiation with the newspaper companies who “offered to buy back all copies of the newspaper the newsies were unable to sell” (Brown 28). This moment of victory becomes an important historical event in supporting child agency. In her article, “The Power of Work and Wages: Working Toward Historicity in Children’s Fiction,” Bartoletti says that the exploited and submerged child is a familiar trope, but, just as adults did, “children negotiated, protested, and rebelled against unfair working conditions and challenged dominant authority and institutions” (Bartoletti 112). In times of hardship and trauma, not only are children unprotected, but they also must rise to take on adult roles. This acceptance of responsibility “was often not one of passive toleration of servitude in hellish conditions, but rather one of newfound agency” (Bartoletti 113). Kids during this period of time recognized their power and their ability to change injustices, and they welcomed this role, like the newsies in *Kid Blink* and the young farm workers in *Esperanza Rising*. Because they recognized their individual power, they also realized that as group numbers grew, so did their strength.

Bartoletti says,

Like the adults who fought for union recognition and labor reform, working children discovered that they shared common needs and experiences. One child worker was helpless against an employer, but when children banded together, they numbered enough to present their grievances and demands. And when negotiations failed, children—like adults—participated in and initiated strikes for better wages and labor reform (114).

Often, children are viewed as “other,” as outsiders to the adult world that holds the power and the influence. Children lack many of the basic human rights (or at least awareness of these rights) into which contemporary adults have grown, but in *Kid Blink* and *Esperanza Rising*, children hold power. Esperanza works. Marta organizes. Kid Blink and the newsies strike, crippling two major businesses. These characters suggest to children and adolescents that their voices matter and they can influence change.

At the end of *Esperanza Rising*, Esperanza has accepted her new standing in society. No longer the spoiled princess who expects to grow into a “head of household” role, she understands that life is much messier. She finally feels as if she and Miguel are on the same side of the river (Ryan 250-251).

In her article, Graff claims that with the juxtaposition of an increasing number of “linguistically and culturally diverse student populations in the public school sector and escalating anti-immigrant sentiments within the US, educators are poised to become more active stewards of critical thinking and agents of change” (Graff 107). Incorporating these three illustrated texts along with *Esperanza Rising* into the secondary classroom can provide a deeper and more responsible investigation into the immigrant experience and child labor, offsetting the

current narrative of immigration. These texts present characters that remind students that unpleasant moments and difficult situations exist for many people, especially immigrants, and invite them to become aware—to notice when injustice surrounds them so they might speak up. Bartoletti says, “Children...are emerging social and political beings, capable of promoting change” (Bartoletti 116). These characters and their stories emphasize this potential, ideally reaching and transforming the attitudes of students.

Conclusion

“No matter how one defines violence, children and young adults are exposed as much as, and sometimes more than, adults. Being able to discuss what they see and hear in this regard is a step closer in helping them make sense of it all by being more critical about it as a way to distinguish between entertainment, history, and real-life current events, as well as why and how to avoid violence toward or against oneself.”

—KIMBERLY PERSIANI-BECKER, 2010

In the previous three chapters, anchor texts were explored by examining one major topic or theme (the Holocaust in *The Book Thief*, civil rights in *Brown Girl Dreaming*, and immigration in *Esperanza Rising*), alongside several picture books that illustrated additional connections within each unit. Though these works of literature have been discussed as single units that stand alone, educators can use them together in order to scaffold and build up to a culminating novel. In this chapter, I explain the connecting theme that threads throughout these three anchor texts and how they can connect with one other work of literature: Marjane Satrapi’s graphic memoir *Persepolis*.

A common theme strung among these four novels is their focus on memory in terms of family history. Each story is told as either the protagonist or the author looks back on past events related to their family. Pam Muñoz Ryan based *Esperanza Rising* on the story of her grandmother’s childhood, recalling events that she experienced as an immigrant from Mexico. Markus Zusak’s parents lived in Munich during World War II, and their experiences inspired *The Book Thief*. *Brown Girl Dreaming* is a memoir Jacqueline Woodson wrote about her childhood and her journey as a writer, supported through stories told by her family members. And finally, *Persepolis* is Satrapi’s memoir recounting her experiences growing up in Iran after the revolution. These accounts of personal and familial history provide students with several perspectives on the past, helping them to see connections in their own lives and increasing their awareness of modern mistreatment. By providing various points of view on historical events,

these texts can inspire students to be empathetic toward characters and their struggles, perhaps encouraging them to practice empathy and tolerance in their daily experiences.

Because these texts feature the perspective of a child (with the possible exception of *The Book Thief*, where the narrator is Death, observing the events in a child's life), the traumatic experiences they encounter are described, more or less, as a child would describe them. Readers only get an account of child labor and poverty through Esperanza's thirteen-year-old eyes, and the accounts we receive from Liesel and Jackie are similarly naïve. The trauma presented in *Persepolis* reaches readers through the same process—written by an adult but telling the story of a child. Setting this graphic novel apart from the other anchor texts discussed, however, is its deeply moving artistic representations of trauma.

Throughout this project, illustrations of picture books and other illustrated texts have been examined as tools to promote critical thinking, thematic connections, and a secure space from which to explore potentially traumatic topics. In this chapter, I use *Persepolis* and its illustrations to further investigate these advantages of illustrated texts, specifically focusing on how Satrapi normalizes trauma through her style choices. These representations of such terrible violence can open an opportunity for students to discuss trauma, awareness, and why it's important to learn about and remember traumatic events. With this final text, students can apply the visual interpretation skills they acquired through examining the previously discussed picture books.

In frames of flat black and white, Satrapi illustrates her childhood as Marji, a ten-year-old girl (at the story's beginning) growing up in Tehran between 1978 and 1984. Her country's turmoil shaped her childhood, with the overthrow of the Shah's regime, the Islamic Revolution, and the start of Iran's war with Iraq, submerging herself, her family, and the rest of her country

in political unrest. In an interview with Powell's Books, Satrapi says, "I lived the revolution and the war. My whole life and the life of a whole nation was upside down because of what was happening" (Powell's Books). As an artifact of such a dark era, one might expect grand illustrations with shading, if not color, to connect readers directly with the horror Satrapi experienced. Her use of only black and white, however, is a specific, conscious choice that she believes subverts the normalcy of violence. Hillary Chute, author of *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*, writes about the style of *Persepolis* and quotes Satrapi:

I write a lot about the Middle East, so I write about violence. Violence today has become something so normal, so banal—that is to say everybody thinks it's normal. But it's not normal. To draw it and put it in color—the color of flesh and the red of blood, and so forth—reduces it by making it realistic (qtd. in Chute 146).

Chute writes that Satrapi's "pared-down techniques of line and perspective...is [are] hardly a shortcoming of ability" (146). She explains that this style fits with genres like modernist paintings, German Expressionism, and abstract expressionism, which "justifies a flatness of composition to intensify affective content" (Chute 146). She describes the work in *Persepolis* as a sophisticated, and historically cognizant, means of doing the work of seeing. In this style, Chute writes, Satrapi's illustrations permit the "new seeing" of reality—"instead of the mere 'recognizing' or 'acknowledging'" (Chute 146).

With this design choice, students can discuss how it makes Satrapi's message about violence and trauma even stronger. This discussion could even lead to a conversation that compares the work in *Persepolis* to the violence so often portrayed in films and video games. Students may be surprised to find Satrapi's more innocent depiction of violence far more

effective, as it requires readers to fill in the blanks with their prior knowledge. Graphic media often makes trauma too obvious, leaving it easily accessible and therefore, normal. This idea of graphic violence as a regular part of media lends itself to getting passed over, or leaving no room for interpretation—two equally dangerous consequences. As discussed with the previous illustrated texts, this space for interpretation is important when teaching about violence and trauma because, especially in the classroom, students can analyze and process what is personally manageable. With *Persepolis*, if students are only capable of seeing trauma the way child Marji shares it (or recognizing, as Chute says), they can still pick up on the larger messages. This somewhat sanitized reading of *Persepolis* is possible while still allowing students who may be more capable of handling violence to analyze the deeper levels that adult Satrapi intends for her readers; this is Chute's idea of "new seeing."

In looking at these different possibilities for interpretation and considering the style of graphic narratives, Chute says that Satrapi "further stresses the gap between our knowledge (or our own imagination) of what brute suffering looks like and that possessed by a child" (147). She explains that the tension established by Satrapi illustrating trauma results from the "discursive scaffolding" of a child (Chute 147). This means that these gaps are supplied by a disagreement between what child protagonist Marji doesn't know and therefore cannot convey to her readers, and what adult author Satrapi has learned and wants to teach to her audience. Adolescents reading this text may experience a similar gap, potentially untouched by the more severe implications of Satrapi's narrative. This is another advantage of the interpretive freedom of illustrations, as they allow students with wider gaps to still explore pieces of the main point, while also allowing other students to grasp the numerous subtleties within the illustrations.

In one of the most chilling sections of the narrative, readers experience an example of this stylized gap. Siamak and Mohsen, friends of Marji's parents, visit and describe their experiences in prison. Readers learn of finger nails being ripped out and whippings while the men almost brag that their torturers "received special training from the C.I.A." that allowed them impressive knowledge of anatomy— "They knew where to hit!" (Satrapi 50). The manner in which these men spoke about their torture leaves Marji and her parents in shock. Satrapi presents these moments to her readers through the innocent interpretations of her child protagonist, who witnesses a traumatic conversation but cannot fully comprehend the full implications of what these men explain. When they describe the treatment of a fellow prisoner, a suspected guerilla who "suffered hell" and was burned by an iron, readers see Marji look at her mother's iron and narrate, "I never imagined that you could use that appliance for torture" (Satrapi 51).

At the top of the following page, readers learn the end of the conversation: "In the end he was cut to pieces" (Satrapi 52). The accompanying panel that stretches the width of the page shows Marji's limited development in terms of processing trauma. Because she cannot yet realistically imagine a human being cut to pieces, Satrapi illustrates a man separated into seven neat pieces. Instead of depicting the graphic reality of such a death, the frame portrays what a child might imagine: a figure that resembles a dismembered doll with cleanly separated limbs and visible absence of any internal organs. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Satrapi tells Tara Bahrapour, "I cannot take the idea of a man cut into pieces and just write it. It would be anything but cynical. That's why I drew it" (Bahrapour). According to Chute, though this image is realistically erroneous, it is emotionally, expressionistically informed (Chute 150-152). With this image, Satrapi shows readers that certain modes of representation depict historical trauma more effectively, and more horrifically, than does realism. *Persepolis's* style, Chute

says, “shows that the retracing work of historical graphic narrative—even when retracing trauma—does not have to be visually traumatic” (Chute 152). This style helps Satrapi convey one of her main messages: the disturbing normalcy of violence in Iran.

Another important message in *Persepolis* that links with the other three anchor texts discussed in this project is that mantra which is preached by so many survivors of injustice: “never forget.” Personified through the most significant relationship in *Persepolis*, Marji is instructed not to forget by her uncle Anoosh, a Marxist suspected of being a Russian spy, who is imprisoned and executed. Before his death, while visiting Marji and her parents, he tells Marji of his time in prison and his relationships. He tells her: “Our family memory must not be lost. Even if it’s not easy for you, even if you don’t understand it at all.” Marji promises, “Don’t worry. I’ll never forget” (Satrapi 60).

A similar promise appears in each of my previous chapters, but especially in Chapter One, which explores *The Book Thief* and Holocaust-themed picture books. In linking to another illustrated text, students should connect this discussion of family history and the importance of remembering to *Erika’s Story* by Ruth Vander Zee. As an infant, Erika was thrown by her parents from a cattle car on its way to a Nazi death camp and saved by a woman who raised her. Instead of dying in the Holocaust like the rest of her family, she was able to grow up and raise a family. Here, students can compare Anoosh, and his outlining a detailed personal history for Marji, to Erika, who only knows one real fact about her family history. They can talk about if and how the amount of history known affects its need for remembering. Both of these characters have experiences that greatly affect the way they live. In thinking about the illustrations, students may compare the style of Satrapi to that of Vander Zee. How do the pictures change when color and depth are added? How is trauma represented differently with these opposing

choices? Another connection students may see is Anoosh's imprisonment and execution for his political beliefs just as Erika's family was persecuted for their religious beliefs. Teachers should guide students to these connections so that they may understand how injustice seeps across decades and centuries, as well as countries.

In the same way, connections appear between *Persepolis* and Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*, the wordless illustrated text examined in the chapter about the drawbacks of immigrating to America. Students can relate Marji's exile at the end of *Persepolis* to Tan's protagonist, who leaves his country of origin in search of a better life. At this point, discussions can include possible dangers that each character faces if they stay in their tumultuous countries, in addition to the consequences of leaving and starting somewhere new. Students may consider what it means for Marji's parents to stay in Iran, just as Tan's protagonist's family also stayed behind. Why is it important that only Marji left? What does it suggest about the original environment, and possibly the family, that only one person is able to leave at first? Here, students may even think about Max in *The Book Thief* and consider his difficult journey to safety, and the dangers he attempts to escape. As students compare *Persepolis* and *The Arrival*, they can think again about colors used by the illustrators—how Tan uses color to separate storylines, moments in time, and emotions and how Satrapi's style differs in order to depict these same shifts. Students can investigate the power of spacing and formatting, facial expressions, and captions versus speech bubbles.

Additionally, students can look at *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson, a picture book that describes the racial tensions a young Black girl discovers as she wonders why a fence separates the Black side of town from the White side, and compare Woodson's Clover to Marji. Both protagonists spend their stories learning about the unfounded injustice that surrounds them

with the goal to subvert social expectations. Clover spends the summer intrigued by Annie, the young White girl who sits on the fence everyday. Clover wants to join Annie, but her mother has instructed her not to go over the fence. Finally, in a moment that disrupts the norm, Clover and Annie sit on top of the fence together, justifying their actions by saying that their mothers never said they couldn't sit on top of the fence. Similarly, Marji participates in her own forms of subversion. She wears her veil incorrectly, paints her nails, listens to Michael Jackson, and gets expelled from school for hitting her principal.

With these parallels, students can see the capability of young people to not only understand problematic social expectations, but they can also see how they work to correct them, at least within their own lives. Clover and Marji both work to break down oppressive barriers rather than reinforcing them. These characters and their experiences emphasize the distance between right and wrong, and both Clover and Marji exemplify the risks, as well as the rewards, in trying to move closer to what's right. Students may also find connections between these texts and contemporary intolerance of diversity in their community and society.

By creating *Persepolis*, Satrapi works as a witness and completes a process of remembering, compiling her childhood memories into literature. Through her illustrations and commentary on violence and political turmoil, Satrapi positions readers of a younger generation to think critically about human rights. In discussing her childhood in an interview with Powell Books, Satrapi says,

In the years that I was in Iran, Iran was not political. The young were not political. We were the generation that knew about political prisoners; we knew about the revolution; we knew about the war. We knew that if we'd opened our mouths we could have paid with our lives. We didn't talk about politics because

we were so scared. This new generation is different. They haven't lived what we have gone through. They don't have the same fears. (Powell's Books)

This explanation captures the main reason for including *Persepolis* in this collection of texts and discussions. It is important for students, for this new generation, to learn about history from literature so that they do not have to personally experience the pain and trauma of the past. History must be remembered, so that younger generations can be aware of not only their own power in preventing injustice but also of all the lives that were lost during such difficult times. Learning about war and violence, while difficult to discuss, provides a little bit of justice to the people who fought through them. Satrapi says, "That's why I think this book is important. I would have died of sadness if all these people had been forgotten" (Bahrapour).

The authors of the three other central texts analyzed throughout this project commit to a process of remembering in the same way as Satrapi, hoping to eternally preserve moments of their family histories, using a platform to reach and inspire a younger generation. As readers of their memories, we learn how the past affected characters' lives and, consequently, gain the ability to understand history more thoroughly. Discussing topics such as the Holocaust, the Civil Rights Movement, immigration and child labor, or war in the Middle East, becomes an act of commemoration, important for not only young students but also for teachers to become more accepting and aware members of society.

In addition to using anchor texts to create these acts of commemoration, teaching thematically related picture books can make units especially effective for student understanding. Picture books invite students to analyze illustrations and consider implications of design choices while exploring the interaction between image and text. They provide students the space to think critically and to process challenging and sometimes emotionally troublesome information

through their artistry, simpler text, and messages that reach both adults and children. Providing students a safe and effective strategy for learning difficult lessons not only deepens their understanding in the classroom, but also increases the possibility that they may become concerned, thoughtful citizens. Connecting themes of acceptance and awareness between these anchor texts and picture books encourages adolescents to be more hopeful and empathetic, and to recognize and seize their agency against contemporary social injustice.

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