

Analysis via Close Reading

EQ: How does G.L.Y. connect The Arrival to the American Dream?

The New York Times
November 11, 2007
CHILDREN'S BOOKS
Stranger in a Strange Land
By GENE LUEN YANG → Asian graphic novelist

Some of the most accomplished graphic novels in existence are never identified as such.

Maurice Sendak's "In the Night Kitchen" comes to mind, as does Peggy Rathmann's "Good Night, Gorilla" and David Wiesner's recent Caldecott winner "Flotsam." Sendak, Rathmann and Wiesner are best known as children's book illustrators, but these particular works are pure comics in the way they construct their narratives.

Shaun Tan's latest book could also end up tucked away with the picture books in bookstores. But it plainly acknowledges its medium by presenting quotations on its back cover from graphic-novel luminaries like Jeff Smith, Marjane Satrapi, Craig Thompson and Art Spiegelman.

Tan has been walking the fine line between picture books and graphic novels for years now. "The Rabbits" (2003), written by John Marsden, has a tight montage that reads like a comic, using panels and captions to advance the action. And "The Lost Thing" (2004), both written and illustrated by Tan, could also be classified as a graphic novel. Although the story's prose bears almost all the narrative responsibility, the interplay between text and image, and the paneled layouts, foreshadow Tan's eventual heading leap into the medium of comics. With "The Arrival," Tan the graphic novelist has finally arrived.

"The Arrival" tells not an immigrant's story, but the immigrant's story. Its protagonist, a young father with vaguely Eurasian features, leaves his home to create a better life for his family in a distant land of opportunity. He struggles to find a job, a place to stay and a sense of meaning in his new existence. Along the way he befriends other, more established immigrants. He listens to their stories and benefits from their kindnesses. The young father reunites with his family as "The Arrival" draws to a close, and the distant land finally becomes home.

By placing photorealistic human figures in abstract, surreal environments, Tan evokes the intimacy of an individual immigrant experience without ever settling on a specific person, time or place. His drawings depict architecture and clothing that are at once historic and futuristic. Shadowy dragons' tails haunt the old country, while the new land consists of structures and creatures that look like a 6-year-old's drawings brought to three-dimensional life.

Tan even avoids pinning his story to a particular language. "The Arrival" is completely wordless. A system




Handwritten notes:
- all immigrants' story, like in America
- finding a home = pursuit of happiness
- getting a job & supporting family economically
- As Americans, we are immigrants.
- no mention of politics
- what is G.L.Y.'s family story?
- complex & wordless
- I think even in the kids section
- I think he's saying graph novelists don't get much credit
- mix of European & Asian descent
- zzz! immigrants
- American Dream still baby
- Flashbacks? → dream comes true!
- better social & economic life
- like Ellis Island
- bc it's wordless w/ crazy symbols

CLOSE READING

..... anchor chart

CLOSE READERS

DO THESE THINGS

- ✓ Read the text slowly at least twice ► x 2
- ✓ Get the gist of what the text is about ★
- ✓ Circle words you aren't sure of and try to figure them out ○
- ✓ Reread, annotate, and underline key vocabulary 
- ✓ Use the text to answer questions ???
- ✓ Gather evidence from the text 
- ✓ Talk with each other about what you think it means 
- ✓ Read again to summarize or answer specific questions ↩

FORMALISM

Focus – Style, Setting & Theme



- How does the **form** (how it is written) of the text work to reinforce the **theme** (why it was written)?
 - Look at literary devices such as similes, imagery, metaphors and personification.
 - Look at the setting and atmosphere
 - Look at the repetition; what is being emphasized?
- Easiest to use for shorter texts like poems and song lyrics. Also good evidence to support a gender, Marxist, or psychoanalytical analysis.

Formalist Analysis Example

The Red Wheelbarrow

William Carlos Williams, 1883 -
1963

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

CLOSE READING NOTES

- Simple **imagery**, with specific color –red and white
 - Red is a strong color, used to emphasize importance. Connected to blood? Blood necessary for life?
 - White **symbolizes** purity, innocence, cleanliness
- **Stanza spacing** provides distinct separation between all 3 images (wheelbarrow, *collects* rain water, *feeds* the white chickens = life cycle), which forces us to look at how each one relies on the wheelbarrow
- The first line “so much depends upon” sets up the theme – the importance of the wheelbarrow – to sustain life of animals and humans.
- **Setting** – probably a farm in early 1900
- Narrator - farmer?

Formalist Analysis of the poem “The Red Wheel barrow”

The poem “The Red Wheelbarrow” by William Carlos Williams works to glorify a seemingly simple farm tool – a wheelbarrow because of its ability to sustain life. This is emphasized through the poet’s imagery, setting and stanza structure.

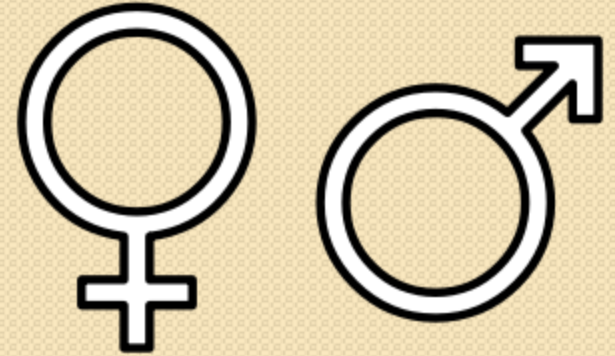
The wheelbarrow is the most vivid image because it is red in color, and so it stands out from all of the other images, thus emphasizing its importance. The stark contrast between the powerful red, and the innocent white of the chickens also really accentuates the wheelbarrow. The color red could be symbolic of life, as blood, our primary life source is red. In addition, the image of the wheelbarrow “glazed with rainwater” also hints at life sustainability as water is an essential life source.

Of course, the setting here is outdoors on a farm; a place where a wheelbarrow and chickens would be seen daily, as a wheelbarrow is farming tool, while chickens are also a typical farm animal. It is outdoors because the wheelbarrow is “glazed with rain water”. Considering that the poem was written in the early 1900’s, it becomes clear that mechanized farming tools were not invented yet, and so the very simple yet effective wheelbarrow would be an innovative tool for transporting earth, water, seeds, food for the animals, and basically anything that needs to be moved from one place to another. Without this tool, the farmer would have to perform back breaking work, or rely on a bull or an ox to carry goods, which would be slower and more costly. Therefore, the wheelbarrow would not only be instrumental in feeding the farm animals, but it would ensure farmer’s livelihood.

Finally, there are only four stanzas, each separated by a significant space. The first and second stanza “so much depends upon” and “the red wheelbarrow” really sets up the main theme of the poem – the importance of the wheelbarrow. Not only does the color of the wheelbarrow allow it to stand out, but also the fact that it stands alone structurally – it has its own stanza. The separation between each stanza urges the reader to look at each image separately, and really allows us to understand how the life cycle on the farm all begins with the wheelbarrow.

GENDER

Focus – Characterization & Conflict



- Do the portrayals of gender in the text **reinforce** or **challenge** traditional gender stereotypes?
 - Look at how the characters behave. What do they think, say or do? What do they look like?
 - Look at how the characters speak to and about one another.

Gender Analysis Example

P!nk – Stupid Girls Lyrics

(Uh-huh, uh-huh)
Stupid girl
(Woo)
Stupid girls
Stupid girls

[Chorus]
Maybe if I act like that
That guy will call me back
Porno paparazzi girls (yeah)
I don't wanna be a stupid girl (uh-huh)

Go to Fred Segal, you'll find them there
Laughing loud so all the little people stare
Looking for a daddy to pay for the champagne
(Droppin' names)

What happened to the dream of a girl president?
She's dancing in the video next to 50 Cent
They travel in packs of two or three
With their itsy-bitsy doggies and their teeny-weeny
tees

Where, oh where, have the smart people gone?
Oh where, oh where could they be?
(Yeah, yeah, yeah)

CLOSE READING NOTES

The title “Stupid Girls” and the first 3 lines of this song are very blunt and reinforce negative female stereotypes that women lack intelligence.

It goes on to explain the behavior “stupid girls”

Male Dependent

- believe that if they act dumb, guys will be more interested in them “that guy will call me back”. This also suggests that girls will change who they are for a boy = negative stereotype. It also suggests that girls need male approval.
- “Looking for a daddy to pay for the champagne” suggests that women like to experience an upper class life by drinking champagne, but don’t want to achieve it on their own, and instead find “a daddy” or a man to pay for their desired lifestyle.

Exploit their Sexuality

- The alliteration “porno paparazzi girls” uses sexualized language and suggests that in front of the camera “stupid girls” will try to look more sexy, by perhaps posing in a sexy way.

Childish & Petty

- Fred Segal is a hip clothing retailer based in Los Angeles, California. This suggests that women love shopping and laughing out loud to get attention.

- “Travel in packs” suggests that they cannot do things independently

- ”Dropping names” is something desperate people do to show off how well-connected they are to gain approval or praise from others

PSYCHOANALYSIS

Focus – Characterization & Conflict



- How does the character use **defense mechanisms** to cope with challenges ?
- Is the character's actions primarily motivated by the **id, ego** or **superego**?
 - Look at the inner thoughts of the character.
 - Look at the interactions between characters; are their underlying insecurities that may be causing problems?

Psychoanalysis Analysis Example

Vertigo by Anne Stevenson

Mind led body
to the edge of the precipice.
They stared in desire
at the naked abyss.
If you love me, said mind,
take that step into silence.
If you love me, said body,
turn and exist.

Close Reading Notes

Vertigo definition: a sensation of whirling and **loss of balance**, associated particularly with looking down from a great height or “the edge of a precipice”
Personification of mind and body as they are speaking to each other; mind wants to commit suicide “step into silence” and body wants to “turn and exist” = conflict

My Inferences

Mind wants silence which suggests that it is currently very noisy, perhaps the ego is having difficulty **balancing** the immediate desires of the id and the moral expectations of the superego. Perhaps the ego has been giving in to the Id too much; immediate pleasures that the body would enjoy such eating, sleeping, massage, sex, gambling and another adrenaline inducing activities, thus explaining the body's desire to exist. Without effective defense mechanisms, a person may resort to suicide as a means to escape.

Working thesis: The poem “Vertigo” by Anne Stevenson personifies the mind and the body as a way to illustrate the conflict that exists between the id and the superego and the negative consequences of a lack of defense mechanisms.

MARXISM

Focus – Themes, Conflict & Characterization



- How does the text **criticize** or **validate** issues about **race**, **class** and **power**?
- Does the text **reinforce** or **challenge** hierarchical class structures?
 - Look at characters/groups who have power; do they use it responsibly or for selfish gains?
 - Look at characters/groups who do not have power? Are they helpless or not?

Marxist Analysis Example

Green Memory (1951)

Langston Hughes

A wonderful time—the War:
when money rolled in
and blood rolled out.

But blood
was far away
from here—

Money was near.

Close Reading Notes

Poem was written in 1951, so “the War” must be WWII (Historical Lens)
Langston Hughes is an African American writer and may be commenting on the plight of the black soldier in WWII (Biographical Lens)

To describe WWII as a “wonderful time” seems like a paradox (sounds false, but may have hidden truth), perhaps sarcasm

“money rolled in” suggests that some people may have profited financially from the war, while others died - “blood rolled out. Who is **making money, who is dying?** This could easily be connected to social hierarchies. **Rich business owners or investors in war goods would make \$, they would be part of the upper class.** The people dying, are soldiers, probably from lower to middle class, who may not have had as many educational opportunities, and so enlisted in the war for \$.

“blood was far away from here” suggests that the poem is written from the a country who is far from the war in Europe/Japan, so likely an American perspective. It also suggests that Americans did not suffer as much death and destruction and may have been sheltered from the horrors of war.

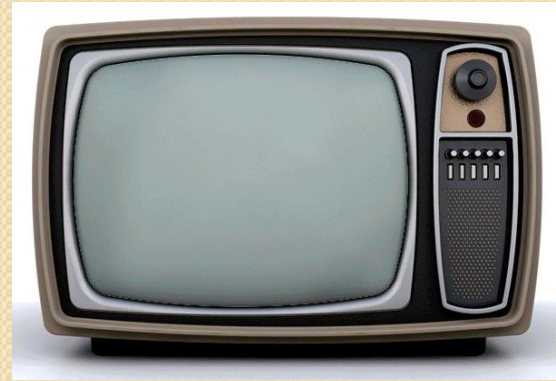
Instead, “Money was near” which suggests that many Americans, and hence America was financially strengthened by the war, and the improved economy would likely benefit many Americans. As such, the “wonderful time” now makes sense, but is it fair?

The sarcastic tone then could be commenting on the injustice, or inequality of the system.

Working Thesis: The poem “Green Memory” by Langston Hughes, criticizes American social hierarchies by sarcastically highlighting the unequal effects WWII had on the American population; **some became rich, the American economy flourished while countless suffered and died.**

MEDIA

Focus – Camera Angles and Special Effects, Characterization & Setting



- How do **camera angles**, **special effects**, **sound** & **lighting**, **characters**, and **setting** portray **gender**, the mind, and/or power relationships?
 - For example: The **extreme close-up** on the woman's face showing her fear, along with the **eerie music in the background** **reinforces negative gender stereotypes** as it **emphasizes the woman's weakness and vulnerability**.