

Here I Am: Graphic Novels as Social Equalizers for English Language Learners

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Content Objectives

When faced with the ever-growing pressure of meeting Common Core Standards in literacy and math, how can teachers find ways to empower their students to voice their concerns and use their creativity to make the world a better place? More importantly, how can educators create space in their everyday classrooms (in person or virtually) for authentic conversations surrounding identity, race, and cultural norms? This curriculum seeks to use graphic novels to fuel complex and meaningful instruction for English Language Learners through the exploration of identity and social justice themes.

Educators have a responsibility to not only prepare students for academic success, but also engage in discourse surrounding the social inequalities and discrimination faced by their students. Specifically, there is a need to be conscious about confronting intersectionality in the education of English Language Learners. This also demands constant examination of policies, curricula, and teaching practices, and how they impact students' identities and performance in the current structures of our educational system. Students need safe spaces to examine who they are, where they have come from, and who they envision to become, while also challenging systemic racism and xenophobia.

During our studies in the seminar, "The Dark Fantastic: Reading Science Fiction, Fantasy and Comics to Change the World" with Dr. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas of the University of Pennsylvania, we spoke about speculative fiction as a form of social justice, wherein the author can imagine a collective future. Through the use of videos, music, articles, and literature, we explored the genre of Afrofuturism, as well as the overall importance of representation in science fiction, fantasy, and other genres of fiction. Professor Tiffany E. Barber (2018) describes Afrofuturism as a genre of speculative fiction that "combines science fiction elements to imagine alternate worlds with regard to racial politics and belonging. In so doing, it is seen as a way to make sense of the past and its relevance to our black political present" (137). Dr. Thomas (2020) further explained in our class that representation in literature and speculative fiction could even further be known as a form of agency, whereby "young people can read and write themselves into existence." As such, educators must be conscious about designing space for students to share their voices and experiences without fear of judgement, while also seeking out texts across genres to use that are representative of their students.

Over the course of our term together, we further discussed the importance of representation in children's literature and how vital it is to exploring one's own identity. As educators, we must do this work ourselves in order to support our students in envisioning the same. Dr. Robin Danzak (2011) explains that "rather than identity being expressed *through* story, identity *is* story, and is thus comprised of narratives that people create for themselves and others. Because individuals actively construct and co-construct the stories that define them, this conceptualization of identity highlights human agency and the dynamic nature of identity" (p.188). We can help students to analyze their own narratives while also constructing a space where multiliteracies are supported. This unit aims to give students the opportunity to share their own experiences, study diverse mentor texts, and envision their own futures.

As the daughter of an immigrant and also as the teacher of many first- and second-generation Americans, immigration narratives and experiences have always had compelling interest to me as a source of analyzing one's identities. Boatright (2010) offered a critical analysis, concluding that, "English language arts teachers can assist their students in developing an analytical awareness of graphic novels' power to represent immigrant experiences and how these representations privilege certain immigrant experiences while leaving countless other immigrant experiences untold" (p. 475). This concept of *voicelessness* is pervasive in a society where everything seems as though it is at our fingertips with technology. Danzak (2011) further explains that "Indeed, immigration narratives shape the identities of ELs and constitute a compelling discourse that can provide a valuable linguistic resource in the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classroom" (p.187). Not only does it have educational value, but we have a responsibility to develop curricula that engages students with authentic conversations about the impact of immigration on our identities, as well as the social contexts of our futures.

One important ideal that Dr. Thomas stressed in our seminar and in her work at Penn is the use of diverse texts in the classroom as "seed work." Thomas (in Hertzler 2020) explains that,

"Anti-racist reading, open dialogue, and a commitment to systemic change—beyond temporary task forces and speaker series—can all be effective... If (we are) able to get the right kinds of books in the hands of kids from families who, say, don't like people who look like them, or are in abusive households or in neighborhoods that are distressed, for instance, it will stimulate their imagination. They will be able to imagine otherwise" (pp.2-3).

At Penn Alexander School, there are close to 50 students who qualify for English Language Development services, while an additional 100 students on the PHLOTE list (Primary Home Language Other Than English). Chinese, Arabic, Bengali, Spanish, and

Russian are the most common languages spoken at the school other than English. However, all too often these languages and cultures are not represented in the classroom libraries or mentor texts that are used by teachers. Compared to their classmates who are native English speakers, our English Language Learners are often vulnerable to economic disparities, discrimination by peers and the community, and even religious intolerance. Finding books with characters that are representative of different races, religious groups, gender and cultural identities is vital for students to feel accepted and safe in the classroom.

As part of this curriculum, I urge educators to perform a needs analysis of their own classroom libraries and the texts they use for instruction. In the appendix, there is a suggested reading list of books featuring culturally diverse characters and authors across genres, focusing particularly on graphic novels. These texts are central to initiating conversations about complex social issues. Graphic novels in particular offer visual scaffolds for ELs to engage in these dialogues that overcome language barriers. One graphic novel author, in particular, that features these topics is Gene Luen Yang, author of *American Born Chinese*. Michael Boatright (2010) explains that “The tension Yang cites in resisting absolute assimilation into American culture while at the same time maintaining his Asian identity articulates a desire to reside in both Asian & American cultures...a complex balancing act between acculturation and assimilation that second-generation immigrants may experience” (p.474). *American Born Chinese* is just one of many graphic novels that can be used as a mentor text to teach literacy skills but also engage students in classroom discussions about social issues and the complex emotional challenges that they may face. For students born in the United States that speak English, these texts can teach tolerance and empathy, and yet for those who have immigrated or are descendant of immigrants, they offer shared experiences and the language to engage in complex realities.

While many educators may be dismissive of comics or graphic novels as instructional tools, Robin Danzak (2011) explains that a lot of research has been done to emphasize their importance in working with English Language Learners.

“Wright (1979) argued that comics provide visual support for ELs’ construction of meaning during reading, and suggested incorporating comics into writing activities with these students. More recently, Cary (2004) published a practitioners’ manual for using comics in multilingual classrooms. This author suggested that, thanks to visually supported text, graphic novels provide comprehensible input and lower the affective filter for second language readers” (p.189).

The use of visuals to teach literacy skills to English Language Learners has long been considered a best practice. In addition to graphic novels, educators can use a variety of

different teaching strategies in this curriculum that will support English Language Development.

This unit aligns with English Language Development Standards for listening, speaking, reading and writing, while also teach literacy skills related to reading comprehension, narrative elements, and character development. More so, the curriculum aims to develop a safe space where students have the opportunity to express their concerns about the world around them, discuss their own cultural identities, fantasize ways to empower their characters to make change, and write graphic novels to share their voices.

The objectives of the unit will include the following:

- explore identity and how our own immigration stories impact our view of the world,
- explain how mentor authors of fantasy books and graphic novels create new worlds and characters that both are impacted by the setting and impact the setting through their actions,
- identify how writers weave narration through a creative writing piece, make connections across parts, and have a moral or theme infused within,
- understand the power of special language and dialogue to give their characters' voice,
- express empathy when people are mistreated or excluded because of their identities,
- recognize diversity and understand the history of social justice around the world,
- establish a plan to take action against bias and injustice in the world through the development of a graphic novel.

Teaching Strategies

There is a heavy emphasis in grades K-3 to develop a student's reading and writing ability before they end 3rd grade. Students get at least 120 minutes of independent reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling instruction daily, on average. In addition, students are also constantly being asked to develop their ability to read, write, and respond to content-area tasks in social studies, math and science, that it does not always leave teachers the opportunity to have creative writing as a means to make change. Meanwhile, in grades 4-8, there has been a shift to skills-based instruction that can often be devoid of rich content or space for rich discussions or creative thinking. As a result, there is a need for teachers to be intentional in making time to explore and infuse creative writing and social justice topics in every unit they work on. As an ESL Program Specialist, or English Language Teacher, it is my responsibility to support classroom teachers with content, as well as instruct English Learners based on WIDA Standards in

Reading, Writing, Listening & Speaking goals. This encompasses direct instruction with academic and social vocabulary, grammar, and phonics.

This unit could be tailored to support English Language Learners in grades K-8, although the student resources and content would be best geared for grades 3-8. Many students in this grade band spend most of the day in either a self-contained classroom or rotating through core subjects (Literacy, Math, Social Studies, and Science). Students have a 30-minute lunch break, and a 15-minute recess, in addition to daily specialist classes in Art, Music, Gym, and Technology. While many ELL teachers use push-in and pull-out instruction during their school day, the unit would work best in a pull-out model that allows for more autonomy, but may be adapted for usage with push-in models. Collaboration with the classroom teacher is essential to develop diverse text sets to counteract the single narrative that implicitly exists when teaching traditional units of study. This unit will also include various, age-appropriate teaching strategies to engage students both in the classroom and digitally. The lessons are divided into four distinct units that can be taught in sequence or across the school year.

Unit 1 – Here I Am: Immigration Narratives

The first unit is centered around the mentor text “Here I Am” by Patti Kim. This is a wordless picture book about a boy’s journey and experiences moving to America. Kim’s text will give students the opportunity to express what the boy is feeling & thinking using sentence frames, and English vocabulary. It will also lend itself to discussions about the challenges faced by immigrants, the pressures to assimilate into larger American culture, and the desire to maintain a unique cultural heritage. The key teaching strategies for this unit will include:

- *Think, pair, share* – Students will have the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas with partners. Then, partners will group with another partnership to share their ideas and collaborate.
- *Questioning* – An ample opportunity for group discussion will help facilitate student understanding. Using Bloom’s Taxonomy, teachers can craft key questions to help expand students’ thinking.
- *Scaffolding* – ELD teachers can use a variety of sentence frames, vocabulary, and modeling to access the material.
- *Utilizing Visuals* – A wordless graphic novel has the ability to convey complex themes without the challenge of reading the text.

Unit 2 – Exploring Identity: Studying Mentor Texts

The second unit is centered around exploration. Specifically, the study of character identities and voices across different genres of graphic novels. Such culturally relevant

literature provides a mirror for ELL students to see themselves and also become engaged through language and literacy strategies. It is also important to offer students windows into other worlds and allow students to explore characters across genres of historical fiction, science fiction, and fantasy. The key teaching strategies for this unit will include:

- *Think, pair, share* – Students will have the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas with partners. Then, partners will group with another partnership to share their ideas and collaborate.
- *Use of native language* – By allowing students to access a variety of diverse texts, including those in other languages, allows students to lower their affective filter, while also engaging the content.
- *Build Background Knowledge & Vocabulary* – One crucial step that many teachers overlook when demanding ELs to begin writing in the classroom is to deepen their background knowledge of the content and vocabulary. Graphic novels are a great tool for exploration of a new genre or area of study.
- *Literature Circles* – Students will have the opportunity to work in collaborative groups to read variety of graphic novels. Each group will analyze passages, use context clues to define robust vocabulary, develop questions about the text and cultures, make connections to the text, and also envision the characters and settings.

Unit 3 – Graphic Novel Deep Dive: Skills & Strategies

The third unit is the phase of explicit teaching. Educators can work collaboratively with classroom teachers about which key skills need support, while also equipping students with the skills necessary to develop their own graphic novel. This unit would encourage students to delve deeper into the mentor texts from Unit 2 to draw upon key literary skills, such as inferencing, character, setting, and mood. The key teaching strategies for this unit will include:

- *Whole Group Direct Instruction* – The teacher will be at the front of the classroom explaining complex information to students via a SMART board, anchor chart, or whiteboard. This format works great to introduce new material and explore digital text sets.
- *Small Group Instruction* – For students struggling with key concepts, the teacher will meet with them in small groups to review concepts and to differentiate learning. This is also a format that is beneficial for guided reading, as well as teams of students rotating through centers in the classrooms.
- *Jigsaw* – Students will work collaboratively to analyze different parts of the same text and analyze them for different purposes.

- *Visual Observations* – Students will have the opportunity to observe pictures or selected graphic novel pictures. They will record responses to questions like: Can you explain what is happening? What is the relationship between _____ & _____? How did _____ happen? What issues is the character facing? How could this be solved?

Unit 4 – My Voice: Writing as Social Change

The last unit would be a literacy activity that asks students to write their own narrative “graphic novel.” Students can use comic creation programs online to design a comic. For ELL students, creating a comic may be less intimidating than writing a formal essay. The goal of this unit is to have students develop a new world collectively and create characters or avatars who exist there. This allows students to envision a new world where social issues are addressed or solved.

- *Graphic Organizers* – Teacher-made worksheets using visual representations will help students organize their thinking, plan for their graphic novel, and assess their work.
- *Digital Learning*– Students will be engaged in developing a digital graphic novel using the site Pixton or an alternative comic builder website.
- *Journaling* – Students will have the opportunity to reflect on lessons, and respond to pre-determined prompts. You may opt to have one journal designated for this work, or they may write in subject-area journals to prepare for thinking about their own Graphic Novels.
- *Shared & Independent Work* – Students will have the opportunity to complete tasks working with partners, small groups, and independently. This helps students have more accountability, but also offer support to peers. This will be an essential component during the development of their graphic novel.

Classroom Activities

This unit is designed to take across four units of study. The units can occur in sequence or may be taught spread out across the course of the school year.

Unit 1 – Here I Am: Immigration Narratives

Timeline for Completion

This unit should take between five to seven days.

Objectives & Standards

WIDA: English Language Development Standard 1: English language learners communicate for Social and Instructional purposes within the school setting Social and Instructional language.

Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards: 1. Students will develop language and historical and cultural knowledge that affirm and accurately describe their membership in multiple identity groups.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Materials

- Text: *Here I Am* or *The Arrival* – A copy for each student (*You may also copy select pages from the text for students to be able to write directly on*)
- Post-it notes
- Sentence Frames & Vocabulary Cards
- Anchor Chart Paper
- Analog or digital writing materials
- Students should bring in photographs or download pictures from countries their family immigrated from using online resources or even Google Earth. Photographs are a great starting point for conversation and narrative writing.
- **Example:** This photograph is a picture of my father and his family before boarding a ship to immigrate through NYC Port from Germany in the early 1950's. It is important for teachers to model not only being vulnerable to share their own narratives, but to model best narrative practices. I would encourage educators to share an immigration story using sentence frames. Students can also use the frames and vocabulary prompts to analyze the pictures.



Step-by-Step Completion Guide

Pre-Teach

Before beginning the text, it will be helpful to create an anchor chart and review “The Power of Accountable Talk,” that promotes students to engage and listen to one another. Use some of the sentence starters and questions below to help scaffold students into better conversations about the text.

For example:

- Can you tell me more?
- This reminds me of _____, because _____.
- Why do you think that?
- Can you give me an example from the picture?
- In addition to what you said about _____, I noticed....
- I agree with _____, because....
- I disagree with _____, because...

Picture Walk

The teacher will “read aloud” the book by taking a picture walk through the wordless graphic novel. Be sure to mark points to stop and discuss what is going on in the text, how the character is feeling, and make predictions about what will happen next. If you

only have one copy of the text, I would encourage you to use a doc camera, use ScreenCastify, or scan the pages into a slide show.

After going through the text together, each student will be assigned a section of the text, given post-it notes, and will be asked to add character dialogue, thoughts, and describe the events taking place. Urge students to consider what issues or problems that character is facing, and make parallels to any personal experiences.

Family Interview

Students will be asked to interview their family about the story of their own immigration to the United States. They can also bring in pictures of their family to share that may facilitate the conversation.

Retelling Review

Using a graphic organizer (5-finger Retell or The Summary SWBAT), the teacher will model retelling an immigration story. Students will practice with partners using the story of “Here I Am” and/or another text.

Oral Presentation

Using pictures, students will share their family immigration story and use the rubric to self-assess.

Supports & Modifications

For students with ELP Levels 1-3, offer a story frame with transitional phrases to help guide their story. Students may also use phrases in their native language.

To help support students in their native language, you can utilize Google Translate. Here is an example of developing a Google Spreadsheet coded to translate vocabulary words for English Language Learners: [Google Translate Sample](#)

Due to the status of their family’s citizenship, some students may be resistant to sharing their family’s immigration story. Also, some English Learners are born in the United States but speak another language at home. Instead, have them focus on comparing and contrasting life in two countries, sharing traditions from home vs. school, or sharing immigration stories of their parents/relatives.

Evaluation Tools

This unit is intended to be a formative step, and therefore, students will use the rubric (see Appendix) to self-evaluate with support from the teacher.

Students may be interested in using recording devices like Screencastify, Flipgrid, or Padlet to record family interviews or even pre-record their own immigration story. They may take this lesson further to create a photo collage of pictures and short stories that can be posted in the school.

Unit 2 – Exploring Identity: Studying Mentor Texts

Timeline for Completion

Students should be given a minimum of two weeks to allow for exploration of a large number of texts.

Objectives & Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Materials

- Anchor Charts
- Literature Circle Assignment Sheets
- Play the Post-It Game Boards
- Post-its
- Books Bins with a large volume of graphic novels

Step-by-Step Completion Guide

Independent Reading

Students will have the opportunity to select from bins of graphic novels. While reading, students will jot down their thinking on post-it notes and save for a later date. The teacher should encourage students to think outside of simply the narrative elements, but to make connections to the world around them, other texts, and their own stories. Here is a short example of a student recording their [thinking](#) about a book they are reading in regards to character traits.

Play the Post-It

While students are reading independently, they should collect a number of post-it notes with their thoughts. Working with a small group of four students, each child should place a post-it they are proud of on the gameboard. Each student has a chance to “play their post-it” and explain their thinking surrounding the book that they read. At the end of each round, the group will select a favorite post-it. They may play at least 2-3 rounds. At the end, the teacher can host a full-class game whereby each group plays their favorite post-it. This is simply a game to encourage accountability from students in regards to responding while reading, while also an opportunity for discourse around books.

Literature Circles

The teacher will form small groups to analyze a specific graphic novel or multiple graphic novels from the same author or theme. Each student in a group of five will be assigned DIFFERENT roles. They will be asked to read the graphic novel individually or with support, prepare their insights, and share with their classmates in the small group.

Passage Picker: Each student will pick four short passages, quotes, or sections to read aloud that they feel are important to the story. The passage may be a good part, an interesting part, a funny part, a “good” piece of writing, a scary part, and a good description. They will mark the parts with post-it’s in their book. When groups meet, they will take turns reading aloud their selections and discussing why they chose them.

Word Wizard: Each student will look for five words that may be new, interesting, different, strange, funny, hard, or important. They will write the word, page, and definition, along with why it stood out to them and/or why they chose it. Students are encouraged to use context clues to explain its meaning before looking it up in the dictionary.

Artful Artist: Students will draw a picture or select an image from the text that was impactful while reading. This envisioning technique will help to point out parts of the

text that were descriptive and allowed them to picture clearly what was happening. The picture can be about anything the student liked or simply could visualize in the story. For example, a character, the setting, a problem, an ironic twist, a surprise, an exciting part. Each student will show their picture to the group, give their peers an opportunity to guess why the artist chose it, and also time to discuss what the author did to help the reader make meaning.

Connector: The role of the connector is to share any connections that they felt with this part of the story. Remember the three kinds of connections: Write down anything that reminds the students of: – TEXT TO SELF: Any connections to their own life, other people or problems in real life – TEXT TO TEXT: Other books or stories that students have read, -writings/stories by the same author –TEXT TO WORLD: Happenings at school or in the neighborhood, similar events that happened at other times/places. This is an important role to elicit social issues that the characters may be facing and create space to discuss them.

Discussion Director: The role of the discussion director is to challenge the group to “dig deep.” Each student should be prepared to write 5 questions to ask the literature circle. There should be 1 question that begins with "if," one with "why," and one with "how." The questions can focus on the plot, characters, setting, or author’s craft. In the beginning, the teacher can also serve as discussion director to probe for more complex discussion topics.

Supports & Modifications

To scaffold students’ thinking, they can use a stop & jot bookmark with suggested topics to write about.

Also, if students have never participated in a literature circle, encourage all students to complete the same job each week until they are more comfortable with the assignment.

Evaluation Tools

Using a rubric, students will track their progress in a book club rubric. They can also peer-assess their classmates’ participation each week.

Students may also choose to log their reading to make sure they are selecting a variety of diverse texts. Reading logs are excellent tools for self-reflection.

Unit 3 – Graphic Novel Deep Dive: Skills & Strategies

<p><i>Timeline for Completion</i></p> <p>This unit could take between 5-15 days.</p>
<p><i>Objectives & Standards</i></p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.</p>
<p><i>Materials</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anchor Charts (Narrative Elements – Grade Appropriate)• Mentor graphic novel pages (Try selecting ones that feature diverse characters and are being read by your students). Suggestions include: <i>Moon Girl & Devil Dinosaur</i>, <i>Running Overload</i>, <i>Wierdo</i>, or others listed in the Bibliography.
<p><i>Step-by-Step Completion Guide</i></p> <p>Each day, the teacher should introduce a different narrative element and students will “dive in” to the graphic novel to find evidence of how the artist and author included it. Teachers may begin with a short 10-minute mini-lesson about the grade-specific content, followed by a 10- to 15-minute scavenger hunt whereby students try to discover those components in the mentor texts. Possible focus lessons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Character: Traits, Personality, Dialogue, Thoughts, Emotions• Setting: Time of Day, Season, Weather, Place• Plot: Sequence of Events• Conflict: The Problem & Solution central to the story• Theme: Subject or lesson of a story• Additional Topics: Mood, Literary Devices, Point of View, Social Issues

While doing this work, it is important to have students study different genres within graphic novels to see how writers of science-fiction and fantasy stories accomplish the same tasks as writers of historical or realistic fiction books.

The teacher should also use this opportunity to question students about representation in texts and observe social issues.

Supports & Modification

Many ELLs may need a sentence frame bookmark, academic language or guiding questions to help them to find the language to discuss the books in-depth.

Evaluation Tools

The teacher can collect an enormous amount of formative data based on student observations. If more tangible data is required, students can complete a graphic organizer about narrative elements, a portfolio of post-it notes about their thinking, or journal a response. It is important to give students options when requiring summative assessments.

Unit 4 – My Voice: Writing as Social Change

Timeline for Completion

Students should be given ample time to go through the writing process, which could take anywhere between 10-21 days.

Objectives & Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

Materials

- Anchor Chart Paper
- Writing Process Anchor Chart
- Planning Sheets & Graphic Organizers
- Laptops
- Optional: Subscription to Pixton EDU or another Graphic Novel Website

Step-by-Step Completion Guide

World Building

One of the most crucial steps in the writing process is the act of world building and setting the stage for what students will write their graphic novels about. This should be done as a class, but students can respond independently in a notebook. Possible Prompts: When will your story happen? Where will the story happen? What are issues in your community and what are possible fantastic solutions for them? What are the rules in this world? What aspects of your own immigration story could you include in the new world?

Generating

Students will begin developing a protagonist and point of view for their story. They will begin thinking about different plots or storylines and what they would like to see happen in one chapter of a larger graphic novel. For older students, you may ask them to plan more of the text. This is also the time to develop a student-made rubric that the class will use to assess their final projects. It can be adapted as the project develops. Students should have the opportunity to work in partnerships or in small groups during this process.

Rehearsing

It is crucial for ELs to have time to verbally rehearse their stories with peers, collect vocabulary to write, use sentence frames, and get scaffolding handouts with other vocabulary resources.

Planning

Students are encouraged to draft their story using a graphic organizer (see Appendix), or sketch out their plan freehand including details about the dialogue, setting, and graphics of each storyboard.

Drafting

Students should each have access to a *Pixton* account. For younger students, the teacher may want to take a day to introduce them to the program and explain some of the features and options. I would highly encourage doing this earlier in the unit and allow students time to create other comics with prompts before developing a longer graphic novel.

Revising

This is the perfect time for students to share their work, peer and self-assess, and decide on ways to grow their stories. Encourage students to develop their character, make more personal connections, and make sure their novel has a strong theme rooted in social justice.

Editing

When students believe their storyline is ready, encourage them to “fix and fancy” the text.

Publish & Share

Find a platform for students to share their work. You can print out texts and add them to your classroom library, create QR codes for families to access the texts virtually, post them on a common site (like Padlet), or even share them on a classroom bulletin board. You can also collect the students’ graphic novels and publish them in a class book. It is important that students have the opportunity to have their voices and stories heard not only by their ELL community but the larger school community.

Supports & Modifications

Small group and one-on-one instruction are imperative at this point of the process, as students will have different needs based on where they are in the writing process. Sentence Frames, Vocabulary Lists, Visual Directions, and other forms of scaffolding are important for the success of ELLs at this stage.

Evaluation Tools

With a project so deeply personal, I would work collaboratively to develop a student-made rubric and checklist that could be used by students to self-assess their work with

support. A great way to track growth is to use “Glows” & “Grows” versus a numerical checklist or rubric. This is an example of a student self-reflecting on a [personal narrative](#).

I would encourage students to collect their work in a portfolio (analog or digital) to share their stories with family and peers. Students have the opportunity to engage in this work each year with more complex texts and literary skills.

Resources

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Smith, Jennifer M., & Kathryn Pole. "What's Going on in a Graphic Novel?" *The Reading Teacher*. Vol. 72. Issue 2. September/October 2018, pp. 169-177.

Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. "The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games." NYU Press: New York. 21 May 2019.

Thomas, Dr. Ebony. *Seminar Lectures*. Teachers Institute of Philadelphia: The Dark Fantastic: Reading Science Fiction, Fantasy and Comics to Change the World. January-March 2020.

Toliver, Dr. Stephanie. *Guest Lecture*. Teachers Institute of Philadelphia: The Dark Fantastic. 6 May 2020.

Student Reading List

The following texts are suggested resources that can be read by students over the course of the unit and added to the classroom library. While many are graphic novels that feature diverse protagonists, there are additional fiction texts that are excellent mentor texts to teach literacy skills and engage students in discussions about social issues. These texts are geared for students in Grades 3-8, but some may be appropriate for younger students.

Alexander, Kwame. "The Crossover." 2019

Applegate, Katherine. "Wishtree." 2017.

Bacon, Lee. "The Last Human." 2019.

Bell, Cece. "El Deafo." 2014.

Chokshi, Roshani. "Aru Shah and the End of Time." 2019.

Cornwall, Gaia. "Jabari Jumps." 2020.

Craft, Jerry. "New Kid." 2019.

Davila, Claudia. "Luz Makes a Splash." 2012.

Do, Anh. "Weirdo." 2019.

Draper, Sharon M. "Clubhouse Mysteries: The Buried Bones Mystery." 2011.

Dumas, Marti & Marie Muravski. "Jaden Toussaint, the Greatest Episode 1: The Quest for Screen Time." 2015.

Elliot, Zetta. "Dragons in a Bag." 2018.

Faruqi, Saadia. "Meet Yasmin!" 2018.

Garland, Sarah. "Azzi in Between." 2013.

Grimes, Nikki. "Make Way for Dyamonde Daniel." 2010.

Hatke, Ben. "Zita the Spacegirl." 2011.

Hernandez, Carlos. "Sal and Gabi Break the Universe." 2019.

Jamieson, Victoria & Omar Mohamed. "When Stars are Scattered." 2020.

Johnson, Varian & Shannon Wright. "Twins." Release Date October 6, 2020.

Khan, Rukhsana. "Big Red Lollipop." 2010.

Kibuishi, Kazu. Amulet Series. 2008-2018.

Kinew, Wab. "Go Show the World: A Celebration of Indigenous Heroes." 2018.

Lai, Remy. "Pie in the Sky." 2019.

Lewis, John, & Andrew Aydin. "March: Book One." 2013.

Look, Lenore. "Alvin Ho: Allergic to Girls, School, and Other Scary Things." 2009.

Love, Jessica. "Julian is a Mermaid." 2018.

Maddox, Jake. "Running Overload." 2020.

Marin, Ann M. & Raina Telgemeier. "The Baby-Sitters Club." 2015.

Mbalia, Kwame. "Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky." 2019.

McCann, Jim. "MARVEL's Black Panther: The Junior Novel." 2018.

Michiko Florence, Debbi. "Jasmine Toguchi, Mochi Queen." 2017.

Morris, Brittney. "Slay." 2019.

Nyong’o Lupita & Vashti Harrison. “Sulwe.” 2019.

PIXTON EDU. Available at <https://app.pixton.com/>

Reeder, Amy. “Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur 1: Bff.” 2016.

Starling Lyons, Kelly. “Jada Jones: Rock Star #1.” 2017.

Stevenson, Noelle. “Nimona.” 2015.

Sutherland, Tui. “Wings of Fire: Book 1.” 2012.

Takei, George. “They Called Us Enemy.” 2019.

Tan, Shaun. “The Arrival.” 2007.

Telgemeier, Raina. “Smile.” 2010.

Wang, Jen. “Stargazing.” 2019.

West, Kara. “Mia Mayhem is a Superhero!” 2018.

Whitley, Jeremy. “Princess, Volume 1.” 2011.

Wilson, G. Willow. “Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal.” 2014.

Yang, Gene Luen. “American Born Chinese.” 2006.

Appendix

This unit was designed to implement local and national academic standards. The Core Curriculum of the School District of Philadelphia is aligned to the Pennsylvania Academic Standards English Language Arts Standards, as well as the Anchor Standards and Domains for Social Justice, as created by Teaching Tolerance.

PA Common Core Standards

PRE-K to 5 Standard 1.3 Reading Literature: Students read and respond to works of literature—with emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.

Pre-K to 5 Standard 1.4 Writing: Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.

Pre-K to 5 Standard 1.5 Speaking and Listening: Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically, and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions.

Common Core Standards – College & Career Readiness Anchor Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCRA.R.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

WIDA Standards

English Language Development Standard 1: English language learners communicate for Social and Instructional purposes within the school setting Social and Instructional language.

English Language Development Standard 2: English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Language Arts

English Language Development Standard 5: English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Social Studies

Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards. *Available at:*

https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-06/TT_Social_Justice_Standards_0.pdf

Teacher Resources

The following resources are intended solely to be guides for classroom instruction and should be adjusted to support different grade level or Language Proficiency Levels.

Immigration Story Rubric

Here I Am: My Immigration Story

Glow		Grow
	<p>Focus & Organization Point of view, character, sequence of events, conclusion</p>	
	<p>Elaboration & Creativity Narrative elements, dialogue, experiences, events, etc.</p>	
	<p>Language Grade-level vocabulary & use of sentence frames</p>	
	<p>Conventions Grade-level grammar and English Language Development Goals</p>	

Play the Post-It

PLAY THE POST-IT

<p>PLAYER ONE</p>		<p>PLAYER TWO</p>
	<p>PLAY</p>	
<p>PLAYER THREE</p>		<p>PLAYER FOUR</p>

Book Club Rubric

Name: _____

Book Club Rubric

Did You...	1	2	3
Complete your reading and reflection assignment?	I did not finish my reading assignment before my meeting.	I finished some of my reading assignment before my meeting.	I finished my entire reading assignment before my meeting.
Listen to others while they were talking?	I did not listen while others were talking and/or interrupted them.	I interrupted others or did not listen some of the time.	I listened to others the whole time and did not interrupt them.
Contribute to the book club by sharing your ideas?	I did not contribute to my book club with thoughts and ideas.	I sometimes contributed to my book club with a few thoughts and ideas.	I contributed to my book club with at least three thoughts and ideas.

Score: _____/9

Graphic Novel Planning Sheet

Graphic Novel Planning Sheet

Story	Dialogue	Graphics

Student Comic Samples

Below are a few examples of graphic novel drafts that were developed by third graders as *free write* activities. Some students chose to use a prompt that had their main character transported to another world or into the past/future. Using student work as mentor texts in the classroom is an excellent way to encourage students to be reflective, inspired, and make tasks accessible. Using the framework “glows” and “grows” allows students to find areas they excelled at while also finding ways to grow as writers.







