**Reading between the panels: Navigating and comprehending visual narratives**

Comics, graphic novels, picturebooks are terms whose definitions have blurred and blended in an age where the visual image plays a central role in the readers’ construction of meaning. With the shift from the centrality of writing to the centrality of both the image and writing, the definition of what it means to be a literate in the 21st century has morphed, as well. Multiliteracy theorist Gunther Kress (2008) refers to graphic novels as “multimodal ensembles” in which the reader combines the visual and verbal to create meaning. Lapp, Flood and Fisher (1999) use the term intermediality when readers combine modalities to construct a new meaning. Kress (2003, p.1) emphasizes the need to understand that the written word and the image have separate and distinct logics. He describes writing as governed by the logic of time and sequence while the image is governed by space and simultaneity. Text and images are seen to be woven together by the reader to provide a more complete understanding of the message (Frey & Fisher, 2008). One might argue that graphic novels and other visual narratives are aligned with the kinds of multimodal reading we do in the 21st century (Serafini, 2011).

This paper provides key foundational concepts regarding the definition and nature of graphic novels. It discusses varying viewpoints on what constitutes a graphic novel: its categorization, and relationship to other visual narratives. It then focuses on the ways in which readers negotiate and comprehend these complex texts with particular emphasis on visual literacy strategies. Examples are drawn in response to Shaun Tan’s masterpiece, *The Arrival*, an award winning wordless graphic novel. It is argued that visual literacy strategies to negotiate meaning in complex graphic novels such as *The Arrival* can lay the groundwork for understanding the complexity of visual narratives and Internet-based multimodal formats.

**Hybrids and the blurring of boundaries between picturebooks and graphic novels.**

In recent years there has been a blurring of boundaries between graphic novels and picturebooks (Evans, 2011; Foster, 2011). Based on Evan’s analysis of what these hybrids entail, she concluded that they all fall under the umbrella of visual narratives. The definition of graphic novels as visual narratives incorporates wordless books (Evans, 2011) such as Tan’s *The Arrival* and Weisner’s *The Three Pigs*. These books may be considered to be graphic novels and/or picturebooks. In determining what counts as picturebooks, Foster (2011) cites four books spanning from 2006-2009, that won Picture Book of the Year by the Australian Children Book Council (ACBC). Foster points out that these winning books are also considered to be graphic novels or at the very least “graphic picturebooks”. The list of the ACBC Picture Book of the Year in 2006. included Shaun Tan’s wordless graphic novel *The Arrival*.

When Foster compared and contrasted the winning books, like Evans (2011) he indicates that they all rely on images to further the story, but that these books also contain a number of pictures on a single page that are evident in comic book and graphic novels. Foster (2011) argues that the use of multiple images on a single page provides new possibilities for illustrators of picturebooks. He suggests that we use the term graphic picturebook for those picturebooks whose format make use of multiple images on a page.
Some disagreement revolves around the morphing of picturebooks and graphic novels. Hatfield (2005) contends that while there are similarities between the two formats “Picture book theory does not address comics page layout with fragmented text...” (as cited in Hammond, 2009, p.36). When Shaun Tan (2011) discusses his choice of format for *The Arrival*, he explains that it started out as a picturebook, but when *The Arrival* expanded to 128 pages, lost its text and changed its format, it morphed into a graphic novel. Tan indicates that he chooses to write in a graphic novel format “when it is the best way to tell a particular story” (p2).

**Graphic novels as a genre to itself or as a format?**

Some consider comics as a genre and classify graphic novels as an aggrandized comic book and that only differs from the comic book in length. When graphic novels are considered as part of a comic genre, they carry all the assumptions and negative stereotypes and the historical bad press associated with them. Thus, comics and graphic novels as its own genre are seen to be intended primarily for young readers, devoid of intellectual content, literary and artistic merit and do not deserve serious attention. They represent lowbrow entertainment.

On the other hand, major comic theorists and scholars like Will Eisner (1985), and Scott McCloud (1993), take issue with this idea. They do not consider comics as a genre, nor do they see comics as separate from graphic novels. Instead these scholars describe comics and graphic novels as a medium or format for expressing ideas. From this vantage point, form and content are separate. McCloud (1993) likens the medium or format for both comics and graphic novels as “a vessel that can hold any number of ideas and images” (p.6).

Will Eisner, coined the term graphic novel, and set the stage in 1978 for other groundbreaking works with his publication of *A Contract with God*, considered the first modern graphic novel. Eisner (2008) uses the term sequential art and indicates that it is “a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea” (Forward, unpaged). The word “sequential” implies a series of connected images, as opposed to a single image. Additionally, Eisner also uses the term graphic literature, a more open-ended term which could refer to the varying purposes of these texts including providing an aesthetic experience, entertainment, information and serving as a vehicle to persuade.

Influenced by Eisner, McCloud’s (1993) definition is in sync with Eisner’s view of the varying purposes of sequential art. He defines comics as ‘juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer’ (p. 20). This definition extends itself to graphic novels in particular as: “book-length sequential art narrative featuring an anthology-style collection of comic art, a collection of reprinted comic book issues comprising a single story line (or arc), or an original, stand-alone graphic narrative” (Carter, 2004, p.1).

McCloud (1993) indicates that the definition of sequential art is more about what it doesn’t say than what it does. For example, he notes that the definition does not mention anything about superheroes, about particular genres being ruled out, it does not mention anything about pen and ink or about a particular printing process, and no schools of art are banished (p.21-22). Thus, freed from the more limited concept of comics as its
own genre, along with this more open-ended definition, graphic novels can accommodate a wide diversity of works of art such as Pulitzer Prize winning *Maus I* (1986) *Maus II* (1991), *Watchmen* (2005), the 9-11 Report: A graphic adaptation, which was endorsed by the 9-11 commission. Other renowned, contemporary award winning books suitable for young adults and award winning books for younger readers include *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, *Wonderstruck* by Brian Selznick, *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang, and *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan. These are examples of the many outstanding graphic novels that are considered to have literary and artistic merit, each formatted in their unique visual and/or verbal way, and address issues of moment such as the national identity, societal concerns, the holocaust, faith, cultural identity and immigration.

**Graphic Novels as a Multimodal Ensemble**

Graphic novels as multimodal ensembles (Serafini, 2011) require different cognitive strategies in reading as readers combine modalities to construct a new meaning. Cavanaugh (2015) considers print-based graphic novels as akin to 21st century reading on a screen because “they [comics] are a unique hybrid of page-centric and screen-centric forms, largely in the way that they foreground image as screens do, while relying also on a reader’s familiarity with the logic of the page (i.e., left to right movement). And that use of image certainly matters. p.29”

Although Kress and others also argue that all texts are multimodal in that readers take in a variety of “texts” as we interpret the world around us (as cited in Cavanaugh, 2015, p.10), some scholars argue that the visual images take precedence. Groensteen defends this controversial view by noting that so much of the meaning is derived from the images. He states: “The sequential image is seen to be plainly narrative, without necessarily needing any verbal help” (p. 9) (as cited in Hammond, 2009, p.38).

**Negotiating multimodal ensembles**

Three perspectives support readers in navigating and comprehending visual images in multimodal ensembles. Each of these perspectives involve noticing something concrete in an image, moving beyond the literal level to the interpretative, and hypothesizing about the implications of the why it was included. The first perspective is an awareness of art theory and criticism as it relates to cultural components. In particular, symbolism for word and image may relate to particular cultures and historical eras and to popular media. The second perspective includes grammar of visual design that entails an analysis of elements of composition, perspective and visual symbolism. The third perspective focuses on media literacy and involves interrogating images in advertisements (Serafini, 2011 p.343).

All of these perspectives invite the reader to scrutinize visual information before interpreting and critically analyzing the texts. Serafini (2011) states “This focus on the denotative or literal levels of images and texts provides readers with a foundation for comprehension” (p.348). By moving from moving from the literal level and finally stepping outside of the text to consider implications of the image the reader is encouraged to critically examine the illustrator’s perspective by interrogating the images and text and by asking, “What did he/she want me to think?”

The examples that follow put the spotlight on artistic visual elements that aid in interpretation, the role of cultural codes and experience that support taking a critical
stance, as well as the ways in which readers must take an active stance in construction meaning give the structure of visual narratives.

**Comic book conventions and visual elements**

In graphic novels readers may make use of conventional visual comic book conventions such as panels, frames, borderless panels, bleeds, splash panels, foreground, mid-ground, and background, gutters, layout, speech bubbles, thought bubbles, captions as well as the use of line to convey various concepts, sound effects, emanata, and use of special effects lettering. Readers must also consider the use of artistic visual elements such as dark and light, color, size, shape, line, perspective, design of images on a page, juxtaposition of images, intertextuality of images across the text, as well as the illustrator’s idiosyncratic way these elements are used to convey meaning.

Within an analytic tool kit for interpreting visual design of images, Connors (2011, p.10-16) highlights the elements of shape, perspective and left to right placement of images within a composition that can suggest a variety of meanings. He emphasizes that these elements do not function in isolation but are woven together by the reader to construct integrated interpretations beyond any one element. Shape, for example, can suggest responses related to stability, dynamics, and strength. Perspective can provide social distance and power relationships between viewer and text. Placement of images from left to right, while culturally determined, may suggest importance of what is depicted with movement from what we already know on the left to something distinct on the right. Other elements might include the artist’s use of color, shape, line and size (Lewis, 2001), typography (Serafini, Clausen & Fulton, 2012).

Other elements include the design of the text as impacted by publisher including epitextual/peritextural features such as video promos, and other publicity promotions, book reviews, editorials and asides to readers and paratextual features text such as endpapers, cover art, title author dedication, author notes, references and the like to influence the reader’s interpretation of the text (Genette, 1997 as cited in Croker, 2011).

Figure 1 is a single image in a series of images entitled *Shadow on the Wall* appearing early on in *The Arrival*. By examining its visual elements the reader can put together the information based on visual elements to construct meaning. The following is a sample of how a reader might use knowledge of artistic elements within the image to interpret and question the visual narrative.

**Sample one of Artistic Visual Elements Aiding Interpretation**

In this single page image, *Shadow on the Wall*, the artist uses of dark and light in a way which imparts a sense of foreboding. The configuration is of the family, as inferred from previous images, depict three figures walking in the shadow on a dark street. The parents on either side of the child are looking forward and their bodies appear stiff and
tense. They appear to be guiding the child forward. This may connote their protective stance for the child and underlines the nature of the family unit. It appears that the mother and father are intent on getting to their destination. The man is carrying a suitcase and from previous images the reader can predict that it is the father who is departing. The figures are located at the bottom corner of the vertical rectangular image in the foreground and it appears that they are about to exit the setting pictured. The diagonal line shows the movement towards their destination and the direction from which they came. The shading from the mid-ground to the background of the image gets increasingly lighter, however, the contrasting shadow on the wall of a giant serpent-like tail mars the morning light. The spiky-tailed creature is facing the place from where the characters came. The tail stands out prominently on the white background at eye level of the reader and its size in comparison to the size of the figures hints that that this is a threatening situation for the family. The family is seemingly laying low in the shadows trying to go unnoticed. The reader is looking down at the figures taking in the whole scene and the straight lines on the wall draw ones eye’s down to the family and up to the lower curve below the shadow of the serpent-like tail. The family walking under the enormous shadow of the tail may convey the family’s vulnerability and invite the reader to consider why they might want to walk in the shadows and why the father might want to leave his home and loving family.

One of the students participating in this author’s previous study (Kurkjian & Kara Soteriou, 2010) keyed in on the illustrator’s use of size, and symbolism to interpret the image in this way:

*The shadow of the tail that is shown on the building. I believe it is meant to be a symbol for something very dangerous, and because of its size, overpowering. It seems like they have to sneak away.* (Student artifact)

**Insert FIGURE 2 Here (Destroyed Town)**

**Sample 2 of Artistic Visual Elements Aiding Interpretation**

Figure 2, *Destroyed Town*, is a single panel image having been preceded by as series of pages with single images that cause the reader to slow down and take stock and pages with multiple panels that speed up the action to move the narrative forward. This is the last image in this sequence and can be interpreted as a flashback since it is created in sepia tones conveying past times. Additionally, it is depicted as an old photograph pasted in an album. The image is of a one legged soldier is taking in the view of a town that has been totally devastated by war. He is in the foreground in a lighted area. The reader is above and behind this wounded soldier observing the whole scene and is able to see what the wounded soldier sees. The soldier is the sole person in the scene and his size in comparison to the vast desolation creates an overwhelming sense of destruction and desolation. The reader might ask, “What happened to the townspeople?” and might wonder if there are any survivors. The curving lines and areas of light invite the viewer to look up into the devastation in background and come down once again to the soldier. Knowing the one legged soldier’s history from previous panels, the scene is evocative
and may prompt questions such as, Is this based on reality? What inspired Tan to include this image? and What are the underlying assumptions embedded in this image?

**Commonality of experience**

Eisner (2008) refers to the relationship between images and text in comics as the “interplay in which the reader is asked to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills (as cited in Cavanaugh, 2015 p.52) “ and to engage in a “visual dialogue” with the text (as cited in Cavanaugh, 2016 p.56). In the end however, according to Eisner (2008) and McCloud (1993), the reader ultimately places closure to the meaning by bringing to bear his or her “commonality of experience” with the images and narrative to make sense of text (as cited in Cavanaugh, p.56). In particular background experience plays a key role in coming to closure when viewing an image. Eisner (1985) comments on wordless books, “…while they seem to represent a more primitive form of graphic narrative, really require some sophistication on the part of the reader. Common experience and a history of observation are necessary to interpret the inner feelings of the actor” (p. 24).

The anecdote that follows comes from a student in the aforementioned study (Kurkjian & Soteriou, 2010) in response to this image and demonstrates how she brought to bear her commonality of experience and use of cultural background to generate questions and hypotheses about the text.

**Sample of Commonality of Experience and Cultural Reference impacting interpretation**

While discussing the images in class one student shared that she had lived in Australia and when she viewed the image of the one legged soldier facing the town that has been devastated by war, she thought of the popular Australian song *Waltzing Matilda*. She explained that she had remembered that this song had some association to war. She found online information and shared a link with the class. The site included a video of a song and lyrics of *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda* (Mitchmallow, 2008), a version of this culturally iconic song, with antiwar lyrics. The class further researched the song and learned that this song is sometimes associated with the Battle of Gallipoli during World War I. The participants wondered if perhaps the images of the one legged soldier depicted in *The Arrival* had been influenced by the devastation of the Battle of Gallipoli during WWI, a battle in which so many Australian soldiers lost their lives. They wondered about this in light of the fact that the artist, Shaun Tan is Australian. In the lyrics of the song *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda*, a soldier sings of how he lost his leg and “that there are worse things than dying.” He goes on to sing “A man needs both legs, no more waltzing Matilda for me.”

This anecdote lends credence to the importance placed on commonality of experience between the reader and the text as espoused by Eisner. It shows how a reader focused on the one-legged man in the image and considered it in terms of her personal experience and an Australian cultural reference. It also reveals how readers may use their
intertextual background experiences to fill in information that is not directly stated. In this scenario the class collaboratively generated questions and perhaps a defensible hypothesis.

**Conventions: Reading Between the Panels**

It is argued that visual formats have prominent gaps and that more information is omitted than is included (Wolk, 2007). Readers play an active role in making sense of graphic novels by bringing closure or by filling in these gaps by spending time in the gutter, the space between the panels. According to McCloud, “the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the heart of comics.” (p.61). Eisner’s view of the reader bringing to bear his or her commonality of experience with images and narrative is in keeping with Reader Response Theory espoused by Louise Rosenblatt (1994/1978) in which reading is seen as a transaction between text and reader. From this perspective, meaning does not solely reside in the text; instead the “poem” is an act of construction of meaning as the reader brings to bear background and aesthetic response in interaction and under the guidance of the text. McCloud (1993) speaks to the critical role of the reader when in bringing closure by reading between the panels: “Here in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea. And it is “…closure that allows us to connect these moments and to mentally construct a continuous unified reality” (p.67). While the illustrator can lead the reader to understand the text in certain ways, ultimately the individual reader fills in the information to provide closure based on background and including cultural considerations and commonality of experience. Similarly, while some panels may invite readers to proceed linearly, this author argues that readers may choose to read recursively by reading ahead or by returning to previous panels and/or pages to support their efforts in filling in the gaps in making sense of the sequence of images. Unlike a film that is fed to the viewer frame by frame, readers of print and or visual texts have the option of easily moving back and forth and ahead in the text as needed to revisit cues to understand what is currently being read.

**Transitions**

In the world of comics, time and space and motion are linked (McCloud, 1993 p.107). Eisner (1985) emphasizes the use of panels are a critical element in conveying these concepts.

McCloud (2006 p.15-18) discusses six kinds of actions that occur between images as 1) moment to moment, 2) action to action, 3) subject to subject within a given scene, 4) scene to scene across time and space, 5) aspect to aspect which stops time within a scene, and then the 6) non-sequitur, the least used transition. These shifts are intended to convey changes in time and/or space. They can slow reading down, stop time and move the action forward quickly. They can shift over distant locations and large spans of time. Transitions that slow down or stop time can portray the quality of an idea, mood or action. All of these transitions can help the illustrator tell the reader what to hone in on and what to notice, and where to spend time. While McCloud indicates that his scheme of panel transitions are not an exact science, they serves as an interesting lens to examine and hypothesize about the illustrations.
In moment-to-moment transitions the action between panels are usually momentary and slows the action down. The gaps between panels are usually small and require little closure. McCloud compares moment to moment transitions to movies in which images are closely sequenced and appear as an overall unified transition. This transition is used to expand a single moment to create depict the quality of the action and to create a mood.

Aspect to aspect transitions are akin to moment to moment transition in that they are designed to be more qualitative. These transitions clarify the nature of an action, mood or idea. Unlike moment to moment, aspect to aspect shifts serve to suspend time and let “the eye wander” (p.17). This transition is designed to create a strong sense of place and mood, invites close reading of an idea, place or mood. Both moment to moment and aspect to aspect shifts are emotionally evocative and go beyond the bare facts.

Action-to-action, subject to subject and scene to scene transitions serve to move the plot forward briskly and efficiently. These transitions are used to convey the basic facts of the story. Action to action shifts include a single subject in a series of actions. In action to action the reader can spend time between panels inferring cause and effects of actions. Unlike action to action transitions, subject to subject transitions change subjects and angles to direct the readers’ attention to express certain meanings.

In scene to scene the story jumps from one location and timespan to another. Once again it is a tool to move the story along and is used shorten the story while broadening locations and elapsed time. The narration box for these transitions might include phrases like Elsewhere, Meanwhile and Later (McCloud, 2006,p.17)

The least used and most experimental transition is the non sequitur. This transition portrays seemingly unrelated images and or words that appear nonsensical. Non sequitur shifts can be used for a comic effect, to portray irony and/or or can shock or surprise the reader within a predictable context.

Using images from The Arrival, Tan’s Balloon Landing demonstrates moment to moment and action to action transitions (See Figure 3). In Figure 4 Tan’s Ship Porthole demonstrates aspect to aspect transitions as interpreted by this author.

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE (Balloon Landing)

**Action to Action and Moment to Moment Transitions**

In Tan’s Balloon Landing there are a series of 12 panels with three panels sequences in each of four rows. All 12 panels are read from top to bottom and left to right with a return sweep to the beginning of the next row, as if we are reading print. In this scene there is action to action shifts portraying the progress of the Balloon transport as it comes in for a landing. In the first 3 panels there are action to action shifts among the birds that prepare the reader for the landing. The birds are looking down Panel 1), then
looking up (Panel 2) and then appear to be scattering (Panel 3). In this sequence the reader may spend time between the panels inferring and or wondering about the reason for their movement. In panel 4 the reader’s eyes makes a return sweep from the end of one row to the beginning of the second row. In panel 4, information is provided as part of the transport comes into partial view. The action moves forward fairly briskly with the landing of the transport lands and the protagonist opens the door and exits. (panels 4-8). However, the transition from Panel 8 and Panel 9 moves from action to action transitions to a moment to moment transition. Panel 8 appears at the end of the third row with the protagonist is standing still looking to his right. With the return sweep of the eye at the beginning of the fourth row, his body is in the same position, except that he is looking to his left, and in Panel 9 he moves on. The shift between Panel 8 and 9 slows the action down. The reader may wonder why the protagonist is not literally moving forward on his way, rather than pausing look left and right. It creates a qualitative moment, which perhaps conveys hesitancy or uncertainty or something about the situation or character that delays the protagonist from moving on to his new situation. The juxtaposition from action to action to action, to moment to moment and then back to action, may cue the reader to think more carefully about the nature of moment to moment panels and to read between those panels.

**Recursive and intertextual reading of the Balloon Landing**

While these panels invite a linear reading this does not preclude the possibility that readers might revisit a previous page or a previous panels on the same page to make intertextual connections. The reader has the option of easily moving back and forth and ahead in constructing meaning of these complex texts. For example, the view of the birds, which have been depicted in earlier scenes, might cause the reader to a return to previous pages to understand the contexts in which they are portrayed. In the previously cited study (Kurkjian & Soteriou, 2010) one student responded to the birds in Balloon Landing in the following way.

> These creatures hovering before his booth lands remind me of the paper doves that the man makes with his daughter. Is this foreshadowing that he will be reconnected with his family, or that they are watching over him?

Similarly the readers may choose to scan the next page which is a single panel page in which the landing occurs and the protagonist has walked away from the transport and is beginning to enter his new world. If the reader should do this, then her or she could bring to bear what was learned when closely reading the paneled page.

**Aspect-to Aspect Panels**

Aspect to aspect transitions are intended to create a strong qualitative sense of place, a mood or idea and these shifts can be quite evocative. The action is stopped and the readers are invited to let their eyes wander and to understand the nature of what is being presented. In consideration of Figure 4 through the lens of aspect to aspect shifts it can be argued that the nine panels with three per row is an demonstrates both the personal toll of emigration and a broader more object aspect of emigration.
The first three panels evoke the subjective experience of the protagonist. The idea of the importance of family and the difficulty of leaving home and loved one is portrayed as an aspect of emigration. The first panel sets the stage in the depiction of this aspect with the close up of the family photograph. It fills most of the first panel and it seems as though the viewer and the protagonist share the same vantage point. The photograph appears in panel 2 and 3 as the viewer is moved further away from the scene. By panel 3 the viewer is given enough information to understand that the protagonist is in a small room, perhaps on the ship, eating dinner alone in close proximity to the family picture. In the first three panels it is not clear where the action is. The reader may predict that it inside of the ship, but this is confirmed in the second row.

The second row of three panels moves the viewer from a subjective stance to a more objective one. As the reader transitions across panels he or she may come to understand that the emigration story expands beyond an individual experience. In the first panel the reader observes the protagonist from the outside of a window that is perhaps a porthole. In fact, the reader may have to piece the next two panels together to confirm that the protagonist is on ship with others in a similar situation. The close up in the first panel shows the protagonist looking out of the window from his room on the ship, perhaps towards home while simultaneously looking at the viewer. The family photograph is featured and included in each of the panels and gets increasing illegible by the third panel as the viewer becomes further and further distanced from the protagonist. As the reader is distanced from the family photograph, the protagonist moves further away from his home and his family.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen, when protagonists look directly at the viewer, it can be understood that he or she is expressing a demand and a call for some kind of response (as cited in Lewis, 2001). The objective viewer is invited to consider what the protagonist is asking not only within the story but also outside of it. According to Lewis, the demand separates the boundary between the reader and the imaginary story (p.157). This panel seems to bring the reality of emigration home to the reader. A somber and sad mood is evoked as the protagonist gets further away. By the third panel with the inclusion of other portholes the reader may consider that there are many emigration stories beyond the protagonist’s story. Thus, there is another aspect of emigration portrayed.

Finally in the third row, the aspect presented has to do with the magnitude of emigration. In the first panel the reader can only see portholes depicted as circles of light. The people are no longer visible. From this image the reader begins to grasp the size of the ship with at least three levels. In the second panel the viewer is further away and gets a partial picture of the front of the ship and the enormity of the numbers of emigrants departing. In the last row the whole ship is viewed sea at a distance on its way.

Aspect to aspect transitions can be used effectively in emotionally driven stories (McCloud, 2006). Figure 4 can be quite evocative in provoking an aesthetic response. For example, one student responded to the series of panels by stating:

*The photos of the man in the window of his ship make me think of how he is about*
to become one of the masses of people immigrating. No one will care about his particular story, and he will blend in with all of those trying to escape (Kurkjian & Kara Soteriou, 2010 unpagd fieldnotes)

Summary

Graphic novels as a format allows for the inclusion of a wide range of art forms, and can address topics of moment in engaging and creative ways. Thus, graphic novels such as The Arrival are works of art that are significant in their own right. Using examples from The Arrival, this paper demonstrates that graphic novels call for 21st century reading strategies. These include a repertoire of artistic visual elements that invite the reader to take a critical stance in analyzing and interpreting texts. In our informational age where images play a central role in the construction of meaning, it is important for readers to be able to read both between the lines and between the panels. The sample analyses of images from The Arrival models a close reading process which encourages attention to visual elements at the concrete and then at the more abstract interpretive level (Papola, 2013).

It is argued that graphic novels are closely aligned with the kinds of multimodal, active and critical reading that we must we do online. With the emergence of the Internet as “the defining technology of our century” (Leu, Forzani, Maykel, Kennedyn & Timbrell 2013), graphic novels can serve to cultivate critical reading, develop visual literacy strategies and nurture the capacity to analyze a wide range of multimodal texts.

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**Children’s Literature Cited**


