ANALYZING CULTURAL HERITAGES AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES IN TEENS' GRAPHIC NOVELS

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INTRODUCTION

Good representation in media, including graphic novels, always important since it creates discourse about groups of people in the society. Besides the idea of representation, Herndon (2021) states that graphic novels are a great way to learn about social justice issues. Specifically, nonfiction graphic novels provide a unique way to teach students from the author's experience. However, Moeller and Becnel (2019) argue that if we compare statistical data from the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), which reflects the number of books about or written by people of color, and the U.S. population by the United States Census Bureau (USCB), the representations in graphic novels do not reflective of the actual diversity.

Since graphic novels are an excellent resource for learning about social justice but still have a problem with diversity regarding the number of people of color related to the books, it is essential to see how diversity is portrayed. The study will specifically know how the authors' cultural heritage and cultural identities are represented on the cover of graphic novels for teens since the cover often tells stories and attracts attention (Mansfield, 2019). Graphic novels convey meaning using three semiotic systems, which are linguistic, visual, and spatial (Jimenez & Meyer, 2016). However, this study only focuses on the visual system since the covers of graphic novels mostly contain images.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Graphic novels are narratives published in comic book style and include different genres (Gavigan, 2011). Miller (2005)—argues that graphic novels provide chances for students to develop critical thinking skills because they present historical and social issues.

Additionally, graphic novels significantly impact children's perceptions of what is "normal, acceptable, and powerful" in society due to their combination of text, image, and narrative (Moeller & Becnel, 2019, p. 2). From the writer's point of view, Danzak (2011) mentions that graphic novels provide a place for the author's identities to be expressed since they actively construct stories that define them.

This study specifically focuses on the author's cultural heritage and cultural identities. The UNESCO Insitute for Statistics (2009) defines cultural heritage as artifacts, monuments, buildings and sites, and museums with cultural values. In addition, cultural identities mean subjective identification with particular social groups shaped by social, cultural, and historical experiences (Usborne & de la Sablonniere, 2014). Cultural identities include race, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, and social class. In this study, I propose two research questions. In addition, I want to see how authors from marginalized groups present their heritage and identities differently from authors from dominant groups.

RQ1: How do authors of nonfiction graphic novels represent their own cultural heritage on the cover of their books?

RQ2: How do authors of nonfiction graphic novels represent their own cultural identities on the cover of their books?

METHOD

The study will use **semiotic analysis**. Berger (2014) argues that semiotics studies signs and their meaning. Signs are divided into two parts: signifiers and signified.

The meaning of signs is a relation between signifiers and signified based on societal agreement, which means our society creates meaning in signs, and these meanings can change (Berger, 2014). Van Leeuwen (2011) believes that semiotic analysis helps analyze the representational aspect and the symbolic meanings of "people, place, and things" in various images (p. 29). **This study specifically focuses on the cover of graphic novels** since Mansfield (2019) mentions that the cover often tells stories and attracts readers' attention.

DATA

The study sample consists of a subset of the **nonfiction titles featured on the "Great Graphic Novels for Teens" (GGNFT) booklist** published and promoted by the Young Adult Library Services Association **between 2019 and 2023**. The time range is based on Moeller & Becnel (2018) argue school and public librarians rely on the GGNFT booklist to select their library collection. In addition, the nonfiction category is chosen based on Aziz's argument (2019) that graphic memoirs can help develop multimodal practices for all students and build their knowledge about their worlds and worlds outside of their own. From this categorization, the study will analyze **covers from 84 graphic novels**.

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