

1-1-2013

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Recommended Citation

Kurkjian, Catherine and Kara-Soteriou, Julia (2013) "Insights Into Negotiating Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* Using a Literature Cyberlesson," *SANE journal: Sequential Art Narrative in Education*: Vol. 1: Iss. 3, Article 2.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sane/vol1/iss3/2>

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Insights Into Negotiating Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* Using a Literature Cyberlesson

By Catherine Kurkjian and Julia Kara-Soteriou, Central Connecticut State University

I suspect that I might not have read *The Arrival* with the appreciation and depth of understanding that is required. I may have underestimated the richness and complexities of graphic wordless novels for children. I've since witnessed other adults read my copy of the book, marveling at the illustrations, yet moving quickly through it. There are so many details and symbolic meanings, that this "children's" book is deceiving. It must be read slowly, contemplated, scrutinized. Simply put, I might have missed a lot...

This comment was made by a teacher who participated in a reflective inquiry project focusing on Shaun Tan's award winning graphic novel, *The Arrival* (2010). Her response reflects the visual complexity and multifaceted nature of this text and is characteristic of the responses one could expect for wordless graphic novels. In fact, it is argued that these texts require a substantial degree of reader participation for narrative interpretation (Chute, 2008; Wolk, 2007). Further, as Will Eisner (1985) comments, "...while they [wordless books] seem to represent a more primitive form of graphic narrative, [they] really require some sophistication on the part of the reader (viewer). Common experience and a history of observation are necessary to interpret the inner feelings of the actor" (p. 24).

Whether visual narratives are referred to as graphic novels, picture books, sequential visual art with supporting text, or wordless books, these engaging texts have quickly taken hold, and increasingly there has been a blurring of lines among and between these formats (Evans 2011; Foster, 2011). Discussion surrounding the need for professional development for teachers in the mediation of these texts abound (Eckert, 2010; Hughes, King, Perkins, & Fuke, 2011; Kelley, 2011) as well as calls for research surrounding effective ways to use these books (Bitz, 2010; Callahan, 2009; Carter, 2007b; Cooper, Nesmith, & Schwarz, 2011; Gavigan, 2011, Monnin, 2009).

Our descriptive study is a response to these calls. It examines both the textual challenges and supports that Tan's *The Arrival* poses and the ways in which an Internet-based instructional framework supported or detracted from the viewer's understanding of the text. The research questions that guided the study were the following:

1. How did the images support and challenge the viewer's understanding of the visual narrative?
2. In what ways did the implementation of the instructional sequence support and challenge the viewer?

Background and Theoretical Framework

This investigation is grounded in a social constructivist theory in which social

interactions, the cultural context, and cultural tools play a key role in scaffolding learning. Key assumptions are that (a) written and oral language are integrated, (b) learning is a social activity, and (c) learners are actively engaged in constructing meaning (Wilkinson & Silliman, 2001). Within this framework the Internet and other computer mediated networks can be seen as “cultural tools” (Vygotsky, 1962) that individuals might use to mediate meaning. In fact, an emerging new literacies theory is directly aligned with the view that the Internet and other Informational Communication Technologies are tools that scaffold inquiry. These technological tools support the identification of important questions, the location of information, the critical evaluation of the usefulness of that information, the synthesis of information to answer those questions, and then the communication of the answers to others (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004).

This study is also informed by 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. Iser’s (1978) notion of Implied Reader versus an Actual Reader gives credence to the reader as an active constructor of meaning who fills perceived blanks in texts by bringing lived experiences to bear in the reading of the text. For these theorists, certain interpretations of text are more credible than others given that the structure of the text created by the author/illustrator plays a key role in shaping comprehension as the reader interacts with the text (Rosenblatt, 1995; Ward, 2006). Thus, this may involve close readings of the text to find evidence to support an interpretation.

Visual narratives pose unique comprehension challenges to readers. It is argued that visual formats have prominent gaps and that more information is omitted than is included (Wolk, 2007). The reader literally reads between the juxtaposed panels and gutters (the spaces between panels) and traverses back and forth recursively to make sense of the images and text. This process calls upon the reader to bring to bear topical knowledge and structural conventions, such as panels, panel borders, use of the gutter, time, and motion, as well as the visual elements that illustrators use.

Methodology

This descriptive teacher inquiry made use of principles of action research (Creswell, 2008) where a problem is identified and possible solutions are implemented and then studied through systematic collection and analysis of data. The researcher, a university professor, intended to provide an instructional intervention that would make the study of a complex visual narrative more accessible to its viewers. Participants were classroom teachers pursuing a graduate degree in reading and language arts. Twenty-one of them were enrolled in a language arts course and 19 were enrolled in a multicultural literature course. Most of the participants met with the instructor in a computer lab setting equipped with individual computers and an LCD projector for whole class viewing. The remaining teachers met in a classroom equipped with Internet access, overhead projector, document camera, and instructor’s computer connected to LCD projector. All participants had Internet access at home and/or in their respective schools.

The instructional intervention for the participants in each course spanned three weeks and the data was gathered across three semesters. Data sources included the instructor’s classroom field

notes, open-ended focus group interviews, blog postings, and work samples. All were analyzed with the objective to describe identifiable patterns and subcategories organized into representational categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The analysis was a recursive process in which artifacts were examined by research questions and by stages of the instructional sequence. For each round of analysis, categories were compared and contrasted, revised and/or refined to capture challenges and supports posed by the text within the different phases of the instructional sequence. Additionally, keeping the same research questions in mind two participating teachers modified and implemented an almost identical instructional intervention and conducted parallel inquiries within their own classroom settings (grade 2 and grade 7 remedial reading). Findings from these separate inquiries are integrated within the discussion section of this paper.

The Text and the Instructional Framework

With a focus on immigration, Shaun Tan's wordless graphic novel, *The Arrival*, served as the centerpiece of this research project. *The Arrival* has been described as an "intellectual masterpiece" that gives the reader the gift of seeing things through the eyes of an immigrant (Carter, 2007a). The series of wordless drawings in sepia document the story of the main character, who leaves his home and family to embark on an immigration journey that leads him to become a stranger in a very strange land. Images are at once historic, yet futuristic, realistic yet surrealistic. In combination, Tan communicates both a sense of time and of timelessness, of place and of placelessness, that serve to heighten the "strangeness" of the situation and its applicability to an "everyperson."

Tan's *The Arrival* was taught with the use of a Literature Cyberlesson, an Internet-based instructional framework originally designed by Tancock (2001). The Literature Cyberlesson was subsequently refined and modified in light of teacher research projects that explored its efficacy as an Internet instructional framework in supporting teaching fiction and content area reading (Kurkjian, 2006; Kurkjian & Kara-Soteriou, 2008) and as a vehicle to heighten critical literacy in a remedial reading high school classroom (Howard-Bender & Mulcahy, 2007). This method framework has similarities to the Directed Reading Activity (Betts, 1946) framework along with many of its incarnations, such as Guided Reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), and with some instructional routines, such as the KWL (Ogle, 1986) and the Anticipation Reaction Guide (Head & Readence, 1992).

While these frameworks are used in various ways and for various purposes, what they have in common is the effort to systematically guide readers through a text by (a) activating and/or building background knowledge, (b) helping the reader to generate a purpose for reading and to monitor comprehension in light of this purpose, and (c) encouraging the reader to rethink and revisit the text for various purposes to enhance comprehension. The reading activities selected to scaffold comprehension through various phases of the text depend on a variety of factors which include the reader, the purpose for reading, the demands of the text, and the context of the situation.

Unlike the print-based versions of these earlier frameworks, the Literature Cyberlesson systematically capitalizes on the resources of the Internet and other information and communication technologies to support comprehension before, during, and after the reading of a text. These may include video, audio, multiple texts and graphics, interactive websites, blogs,

wikis, and email. When developing a Literature Cyberlesson, one could present it as a webpage with links to the different online resources and new technologies or as a highly engaging PowerPoint presentation with several hyperlinks and extensive use of multimedia. A major characteristic of the Literature Cyberlesson is the presentation of the instructional content in four major phases: The Before Reading Phase, the During Reading Phase, the After Reading Phase, and the Beyond Reading Phase. All phases engage the reader in activities that require the use of Internet and other new technologies with the objective to provide a deeper understanding of the text. This is the format that was also followed for the development and implementation of The Arrival Literature Cyberlesson.

Instructional Objectives

The Arrival Literature Cyberlesson aligns with broad standards, as well as specific elements of the standards, across varying professional roles as derived from the revised standards of the International Reading Association (IRA) (International Reading Association, 2010). The Arrival Literature Cyberlesson was designed to help the participants consider the challenges of negotiating and comprehending visual narratives themselves and to inform them about ways they might scaffold comprehension of these engaging formats in their own classrooms. It was also designed to help teachers consider the multicultural nature of our American experience and to empathize with those who came before us and with those who are newcomers. Another intent was to provide the participants with an opportunity to experience and consider the use of the Literature Cyberlesson in their own classrooms as a framework that embeds technology into curriculum. More specifically, instructional goals of The Arrival Literature Cyberlesson included:

- To heighten readers' sensitivity to diverse groups of people in our global society and to experience the common bonds of humanity we have with immigrant populations through the vehicle of Tan's graphic *The Arrival* (addressing the 2010 IRA Standard 4: Diversity).
- To increase readers' awareness of literacy strategies involved in making sense of a graphic novel (addressing the 2010 IRA Standard 1: Foundational Knowledge).
- To enhance understanding of the impact of a Literature Cyberlesson on reading comprehension of a graphic novel (addressing 2010 IRA Standard 1: Foundational Knowledge; Standard 2: Curriculum and Instruction; Standard 3: Assessment and Evaluation).

Before Reading Phase of Implementation

The Before Reading activities were implemented during class time in a collaborative manner. The first slide to The Arrival Literature Cyberlesson created an anticipatory set about what was to come (Introduction slide); whereas the second informed the participants about which materials were required to complete the lesson (Materials slide). Participants then worked in teams to view and to discuss selected images from *The Arrival* presented on an online site. Students worked together to make inferences about what was happening and then made predictions about what they thought would happen based on the selected online images (Before Reading Slides). This was followed by a whole class discussion in which participants revisited online images and subsequently rethought their interpretations in light of visual structural conventions. Finally, in

this phase participants accessed an Ellis Island website and made entries in a reader response journal about what they learned as well as any connections they made to *The Arrival*.

The Before Reading phase served as an effective way to launch students in deciphering the abstract nature of this wordless text. In each of the class sessions social interaction was a key category. These interactions facilitated the process of 1) bringing background knowledge and topical knowledge to bear, and 2) highlighting textual conventions. The second salient category emerged in relationship to the availability of the resources of the Internet. When students posed questions the resources of the Internet facilitated inquiry and enriched the conversations.

An example of social interactions and conversations regarding the fantastical nature of Tan's images viewed on the Vulture website (New York Media, 2007) transpired in one class prior to previewing the Ellis Island website. The questions they posed and the availability of the Internet as a tool facilitated their inquiry and classroom discussion.

Class Discussion Anecdote: Student 1 (S1): I don't like that he (Tan) included fantasy images. I don't like them. They are so strange and distracting. **S2:** I agree. They are so strange. I see images that clearly look like Ellis Island, like Grand Central Station but some of the images are confusing. **S3:** Hmm- maybe these strange images show how strange it must seem to come to a new land. I think that is why they are included. **Professor:** Did you ever travel somewhere and see animals that seemed fantastical to you? When I was in Korea in 2008 I went to a fish market and I saw fish that were totally fantastical to me. **S1:** I wonder if the animals in the text resemble any animals in Australia since the author is from there. (fieldnotes)

In the quest to understand why Tan chose to include fantastical elements in *The Arrival*, participants went through a process referred to as "unpacking" (Burmark, 2008) in which the reader responds to and asks certain questions about an image. In this case the participants were questioning why Tan chose to incorporate fantastical elements in his images and reflected on the degree to which Tan's Australian background impacted his choice of these images. Participants understood at some level that authors often draw on their own lived experiences and so, before actually reading the text, they used the resources of the Internet to find pictures of Australian animals and located images of bandicoots, wombats, and numbats to see if these Australian creatures shared similar features of the fantastical creature pictured on the cover of the text. This inquiry launched them on a journey of sorting out what images were rooted in reality and speculation as to why Tan chose to present images in the way he did.

Conversations in response to the shared viewing of the Vulture website also focused on visual conventions that Tan used. Participants speculated on the symbolic nature of images, Tan's use of size, shape, light and dark and the juxtaposition of various images and the way they expressed meaning. In most cases these conversations originated with the participants. The professor researcher would then pose questions that were intended to facilitate their thinking about the use of visual cues that Tan used to carry meaning.

During Reading Phase of Implementation

The During Reading phase was done independently at home where the participants still had online access to The Arrival Literature Cyberlesson. First, participants were asked to call to mind what they knew about the text and make predictions based on their background knowledge. As they viewed the images in the text they kept a dual entry journal in which they tracked and responded to realistic and surreal images. On one side of the journal they listed and responded to realistic images and on the other side they listed and responded to the fantastical ones. This assignment was intended to help participants monitor their thinking about what was happening in the story and to invite interpretation based on structural cues.

Analysis of the data from the dual entry journals indicated that they varied in detail as well as in the number of entries made. The majority of entries were interpretive while others were descriptive and/or literal lists of the images. Some interpretive comments involved noticing repeated images, and/or intertextuality among images, attributing meaning based on Tan's juxtaposition of one image in relationship to another. Other interpretations addressed Tan's use of size and symbolism, and included comments on Tan's use of dark and light, use of size, and use of repeated images to highlight and foreshadow ideas. Depending on the images selected, interpretations reflected the ability to understand Tan's visual cues to show flashbacks, as well as the passage of time (On the next page, Figure 1 provides a sample of interpretive responses to selected images).

Figure 1. During Reading Responses on Foreshadowing and Juxtaposition

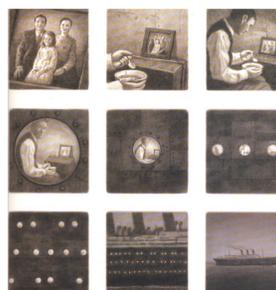
Repeated images, symbolism and foreshadowing

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?



Juxtaposed images

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.



Images reproduced with permission from *THE ARRIVAL* by Shaun Tan, Lothian Children's Books, an imprint of Hachette Australia, 2006.

After Reading Phase of Implementation

Designed to be completed independently, the After Reading phase aimed to help students revisit their observations in the During Reading phase in order to think more deeply about the text. This entailed revisiting of the dual entry journal to put together what went on in the story and to use evidence collected to write about the theme of the text and to post a review of the book on a class blog. Participants accessed online book reviews of *The Arrival*, viewed Tan's website and listened to a podcast interview with Shaun Tan on another site. Students were then given only an abbreviated opportunity to share in class prior to moving on to the last phase of the Literature Cyberlesson implementation, the Beyond Reading phase.

When the participants' written materials were collected and analyzed it was found that the reviews of Tan's book varied in sophistication. However, the majority addressed the main theme and provided evidence from images to support their interpretations. The range of themes encompassed the following ideas:

- *The experiences that immigrants go through as they transition from the familiar to the unknown and the resulting feelings of fear, confusion, isolation and loneliness that are the outgrowth of these experiences...*

- *Finding where you belong and fitting in...*
- *Overcoming hardships and unfamiliarity in new situations to become stronger and thrive as a family...*
- *Paying tribute to immigrants who journey on the wings of hope (paper birds)...*
- *Pondering what it took for us to get where we are today, just as the man on the front of the book appears to be pondering the image of the peculiar animal that, unbeknownst to him, would soon become his faithful companion.*
- *Helping others. To survive in this new place he needs the help of others...*
- *There is a face behind every statistic. Shaun Tan seems to show us both how this man can be lost in the masses and how each person has a story of their own....*
- *Relating to all sorts of human beings no matter what background or race because our emotions are so similar...*
- *Understanding the reasons why many people emigrated from their homelands...*

In one class there was evidence that one participant missed an important aspect of the visual text. In this case the participant did not seem to notice the time shifts in which characters in the stories had flashbacks to their own experience. Instead she interpreted these events as occurring in the present. From this we learned that it was important to provide a time for class discussion focusing more systematically on visual conventions. Additionally, discussion time immediately following the During Reading Phase would allow for informal assessment and teacher modeling of thinking about structural aspects of the text (Fisher & Frey, 2009) to better support comprehension.

Likewise, providing a social forum to discuss the text following the After Reading phase gave the students an opportunity to delve deeper into their interpretations, and to use Internet resources to investigate the validity of their ideas. Below is an anecdote of one salient conversation when time was provided for discussion.

Anecdote: S1: I studied in Australia and when I viewed the image of the one legged soldier facing the town that has been devastated by war, I thought of the song *Waltzing Matilda*. I went online at home because somewhere I remembered that it had some association to war. Here is the link I found. (The link was accessed to view the lyrics of a variation of *Waltzing Matilda* entitled *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda* with antiwar lyrics.) (fieldnotes)

In response to this participant's insight, the class researched further 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 in which so many Australian soldiers lost their lives. We accessed a video of Liam Clancy singing *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda* (Mitchmallow, 2008). The soldier in the song tells us of how he lost his legs and "that there are worse things than dying." He goes on to sing "A man needs both legs, no more waltzing Matilda for me." As we reviewed the images of war we wondered if Tan had been influenced by this important piece of Australian history. Participants began to question Tan's purpose for including these images and wondered if he was presenting an antiwar stance by creating these evocative images of the devastation of war. Thus, they were able to

hypothesize about underlying beliefs embedded in the text which provided participants with more agency of their own reading experience (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Boatright, 2010).

This anecdote demonstrates the power of social interaction in the co-construction of meaning and how the “whole can be more than the sum of its parts.” Through group interaction, new knowledge and insights were collaboratively constructed that went beyond any single individual's initial understanding. We see here that students are “stepping outside of the text” and beginning to take a critical stance in understanding that all texts are constructed from a particular viewpoint (Hobbs, as cited in Frey & Fisher, 2008). This anecdote also demonstrates how the availability of the Internet and its multimedia resources supported and facilitated inquiry at the point of need.

Beyond Reading Phase of Implementation

The Beyond Reading phase entailed having the participants read two of three selected books that deal with immigration (*Maggie's Amerikay* by Barbara Timberlake Russell, *Letters from Rifka* by Karen Hesse, and *The Memory Coat* by Elvira Woodruff) in order to encourage across text connections to *The Arrival*. Next, participants interviewed a friend or a family member who had immigrated to the United States and then using the knowledge and insights gained from the interview they created a paper or electronic scrapbook that an immigrant might have made about his/her journey to a new country. Participants created a backstory of the person whose scrapbook they made and shared their scrapbooks with the rest of the class.

In reading the two selected books the participants were encouraged to make intertextual connections and then to revisit *The Arrival* with new insights. Some participants found that the reading of the texts broadened their understanding of *The Arrival*, in essence putting more “meat on the bones” of the visual images. For example, in response to *Letters from Rifka* and *The Memory Coat* one participant commented that reading these books helped to provide her with a sense of the individual when she revisited Tan's image of Examination Hall at Ellis Island in *The Arrival*, an image depicting masses of people being processed in the holding area. Another participant commented that *Letters from Rifka* helped to dispel the idea that all immigrants were illiterate. She pointed out that the letters which characters wrote to each other included quotes from Pushkin, a Russian poet and novelist. Other participants became more aware of the trauma immigrants experienced passing through Ellis Island. One participant commented, “The fear that immigrants felt must have been numbing. So much is at stake and there are so many steps that one little misstep can wreck it all.” Other themes across texts included varying reasons why people immigrate, the feelings of isolation immigrants felt, the importance of family, the determination and resiliency of characters, and awareness that some immigrants experienced having a foot in each land noting that they were “living in a limbo-like existence” until they were able to adjust.

By juxtaposing other texts with *The Arrival*, a critical stance was encouraged as participants uncovered their assumptions about immigrants and became more aware of the complexity of immigration (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). While the selected texts did present a more complex view of immigrants and immigration, they primarily presented a turn of the century Western European worldview. In a critical analysis of three graphic novels, one of which is *The Arrival*, Boatright (2010) questions ideologies underlying views of the immigration that are presented. He argues that *The Arrival* depicts a view of what is referred to as the “good

immigrant” narrative, which is typically associated with Western European upwardly mobile immigrants who pursue and ultimately achieve the “American Dream.” Boatright suggests that teachers can use this narrative to help students examine the power relations that exist between readers and authors. He recommends that teachers work with students to investigate the hows and whys of immigrant narratives. In retrospect, the conscious inclusion of texts with a balance of female and male protagonists from recent multiracial and multiethnic backgrounds might have served to facilitate such a discussion and to help readers to develop a more complex and critical understanding of immigration.

During the Beyond Reading Phase participants interviewed a wide range of people and at times told their own story of immigration. Some interviewed their parents and relatives. Others met with parents of their students, colleagues, friends, and neighbors. Some told stories of middle class people who spoke English; others about emigrating from rural to urban areas. There were interviews of people who immigrated to the United States over a generation ago, and there were interviews with recently immigrated people. There were stories of people who came from poverty seeking a better life, and stories of middle class professional people who wanted to take advantage of economic opportunities. There were other stories of escape from persecution and political strife. The interview of immigrants and the presentation of a scrapbook, in particular, appeared to be evocative and memorable. A representative comment about the power of this aspect of the Literature Cyberlesson follows:

The most evocative part of the cyberlesson was the creation of the Electronic Scrapbook. I chose to create my scrapbook based on my father’s immigration to the United States from Sicily in the 1950s. The scrapbook gave me the opportunity to interview my father and take his personal experiences of being new to a new and “strange” land and translate them into connections to *The Arrival*. I valued the chance to take photographs and his personal memories and create a special artifact for myself and my father. (online blog)

The scrapbook component of the Beyond Reading Phase was designed to make immigration more personal to the participants and to transfer what they had learned about immigration to something more personal. Below is an anecdote from one of the many moving stories that participants chose to share.

Anecdote: As she sat there sharing her scrapbook with the class we saw real photos from a family album. Tears were in her eyes as she revealed that indeed this was the story of her own family and the character she portrayed was a holocaust survivor who fled her homeland to come to the US to escape persecution. She talked about the challenges and joys that this character faced in her new life in her new land. At the end of her presentation, many of us in the class had been moved to tears. (fieldnotes)

When the participants reviewed what they learned from the range of presentations it appeared as though their conceptions of what it means to be a stranger in a strange land had been broadened. One student noted that the stories of the people in *The Arrival* became the stories of real people.

Conclusions

Research question number one considers how the images in *The Arrival* support and challenge the viewer's understanding of the visual narrative. In summary, Tan provided a variety of visual cues that both supported and challenged comprehension at times. The cues conveyed information about literary elements such as setting and timeframe, foreshadowing, flashbacks, and symbolism. We found that he did this through his use of color, of dark and light, intertextuality of images on a single page and across chapters, and through the repetition of images, size, shape and perspective. For example, participants understood how the sequence of images portrayed the changes of seasons, how use of color signaled flashbacks, and how the use of light and dark was used to convey danger, foreboding and/or hope. They also understood that repetitive images appearing through the text had a symbolic meaning. While visual cues provided support to intended meaning, we also learned these cues could pose challenges for those who did not notice them or were unable to interpret them.

Research question number two considers the ways the implementation of the Literature Cyberlesson supported and challenged the viewer. In our analysis of the instructional sequence we concluded there was a lack of systematic instruction and assessment that focused on visual conventions. We only discovered this during the After Reading phase when participants' work was analyzed. We learned that more direct instruction with teacher modeling of thinking about structural aspects of the text (Fisher & Frey, 2009) along with discussion time following the During Reading phase would have better supported comprehension.

Three salient aspects of the implementation appeared to enhance comprehension. First, the chance for peer collaboration, social interaction and discussion, when provided, helped expand the reading of the text. It offered participants the opportunity to linger over the text, revisit sections, and pool interpretations and background knowledge. Moreover, the sharing of projects gave participants the opportunity to learn about a wide range of immigration stories personal to their classmates. Second, the availability of the Internet allowed discussions to turn into inquiry. Participants were actively pursuing their questions and would then bring information back to the class for more discussion and interpretation. Third, the opportunity to make learning personal appeared to engage participants and make learning about immigrants relevant to their own lives. In particular the Beyond Reading phase lent itself to the transfer of understanding to other related contexts.

Martínez-Roldán and Newcomer (2011) report similar findings in their study that describes the interpretive processes immigrant children ages 10-11 engaged in as they made sense of *The Arrival*. The researchers point to the social nature of the students' interpretive work. The children drew on personal experiences of immigration and their background knowledge, and engaged in inquiry in the form of hypotheses generation as they worked together to co-construct meaning by sharing resources, questions and strategies. The power of "social interactions" via discussion and the idea of making learning personal echos in the work of Gomes and Carter (2010), as well. In their study ninth grade students in a special education English class, who typically have difficulty engaging in face-to face, found a "safe house" via the communication tools of the Internet when responding to Yang's (2006) graphic novel *American Born Chinese*. Within the context of the "safe house" of a blog in which they conversed with each other and with Yang, learning became both personal and relevant as the students shared their sometimes very personal experiences of not fitting in. Similar to our study, the role of the Internet was

prominent in supporting inquiry and close reading of the text.

In pooling and analyzing data with the two participating teachers who implemented and analyzed *The Arrival* Literature Cyberlesson in grades 2 and 7 (Kurkjian, Lynch, & Billings, 2009; Kurkjian & Billings, 2010) we found a convergence in terms of what we learned in the development and implementation of our respective *Arrival* Literature Cyberlessons. We learned that one size does not fit all. The ways in which we implemented our Literature Cyberlessons varied considerably according to our contexts, grade levels, student needs, purposes and curriculum. However, we found that each of our Literature Cyberlessons benefited our students and assisted our instructional purposes by slowing things down and providing an opportunity for close readings. We found that availability of technological tools played a key role in our design. Each of us found the role of social interaction as a key benefit of the Literature Cyberlesson in that the Cyberlesson provided a forum to share interpretations.

We noted that the extent of teacher support varied across all levels but still needed to be there, even with graduate students, during the Before Reading phase. We also agreed on the need to incorporate ongoing informal assessments by monitoring participant artifacts accompanied by timely interventions, such as teacher modeling and think alouds, and discussions. This would allow a more systematic intervention at the point of need. Each of us provided companion textual information (books, websites, multimedia information) and this was thought to play an important role in teaching concepts and in broadening understanding. Each of us found that making it personal to our students, whether through scrapbooks, visitors, or blogging with immigrants brought *The Arrival* and the topic of immigration to life.

In conclusion, while we found room for improvement, the Literature Cyberlesson appears to be a viable and promising way to guide comprehension before, during, after, and beyond the reading of graphic novels like *The Arrival*. Features that appear to support comprehension within the structure of Literature Cyberlesson when in evidence included (a) the provision of systematic instruction and ongoing assessment of textual features, (b) the allowance for social interaction and discussion in which learners can inquire and co construct hypotheses, (c) the affordance of the tools of the Internet to inquire at the point of need, and (d) the opportunity to revisit and transfer learning in a way that is relevant to the experiences of learners.

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