

## Cognitive Engagement and Emotional Resonance of Young Readers in Graphic Narratives: A Psychological Exploration of *American Born Chinese* and *The Arrival*

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### Abstract

A thorough study reveals that there is a strong connection between psychology and graphic literature. In fact, graphic narratives are more powerful and meaningful especially for young readers. This paper is a humble attempt to look into the profound psychological impact experienced by young readers while engaging themselves with two heavily acclaimed graphic novels titled *American Born Chinese* and *The Arrival*. Both these narratives negotiate the challenging issues involving cultural identity, immigration, as well as adaptation and offer a compelling backdrop for exploring cognitive and emotional responses, especially in young readers. After employing a comprehensive research approach blending textual analysis, and cognitive psychology frameworks, this exploration unveils the intricate ways these graphic novels influence young minds' cognitive development and emotional resonance. By examining the convergence of visual storytelling, thematic exploration, and character development, this research paper seeks to uncover the unique elements within each narrative that provoke cognitive engagement and emotional connection.

This research paper will clearly throw light on the pedagogical effectiveness of graphic novels highlighting how the medium foster in young readers a sense of self-awareness, cultural understanding, and critical thinking. This paper will also discuss the psychological and emotional repercussions underlining the significant impact that visual narratives have on young people's mental, psychological and emotional growth in the remarkably evolving and globally interconnected contemporary world.

**Keywords** Graphic novel, visual literacy, visual language, psychological impact, & reader engagement.

*To me, all creativity is magic. Ideas start out in the empty void of your head and they end up as a material thing, like a book you can hold in your hand. This is the magical process. It's an alchemical thing.*

– Allan Moore

*Because literature is a record of human consciousness, the richest and most comprehensive we have ... The novel is arguably man's most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time.*

– David Lodge

### INTRODUCTION

Through graphic literature, readers can understand human experiences and receive messages. Its foundations are primarily psychological laws, principles, and aesthetics and the majority of study on the influence of integrating visualisation on academic performance emphasises on how representation and graphics enhance retention and knowledge. Perception study tests reveal that humans receive visual cues far faster compared to spoken language. Lynell Burmark (2008) writes in "Visual Literacy: What You Get Is What You See" that "humans process visuals an astounding 60,000 times faster than text" (7). Scott McCloud emphasizes the importance of visual narratives especially graphic novels which have a unique way of storytelling that uses a combination of both words and pictures in a narrative to generate a distinctive language that engages the readers on both intellectual and emotional levels. In *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, McCloud emphasized the fact that visual communication in comics can be powerful in its immediacy, while writing involves abstract symbols of language, and decoding them requires time and specialized knowledge. He states that "pictures are received information. We need no formal education to get the message. The message is instantaneous. Writing is perceived information. It takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language" (p. 49). The Illustration nature of graphic writing helps in breaking down complex ideas, making the narrative more

digestible and comprehensible. This element requires the reader to have the ability to comprehend visuals, which is visual literacy, a term coined by John Debes in 1969. Pertinently, visual literacy is the capacity to critically analyse, understand, and convincingly communicate content such as a narrative, an argument etc. through visual cues or visuals. It is the capacity to decipher the meaning that a picture conveys, as well as providing the reasons behind the artist's different artistic decisions. Visual literacy is the capacity to integrate both the physical and graphic aspects of the work and pictorial arrangement which improves readers' comprehension and engagement in understanding their social environment and community. In *Building Literacy Connection with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel* (2007) James Bucky Carter opines that "with the growing understanding of the importance of critical literacy, visual literacy, and other types of literacy that were once considered alternate, more attention has been paid to graphic novels" (1). Carter additionally places the importance of comics and graphic novels in the light of Dewey's arguments for democracy and the performing arts, since the latter believed that critical thinking and artistic expression were essential elements of academic achievement. Schwarz notes in "Graphic Novels for Multiple Literacies" that "in an increasingly visual culture...literacy educators can profit from the use of graphic novels in the classroom, especially for young adults" (262). Schwarz adds that the recognition that graphic novels are becoming into a respectable medium is a representation of popular culture in the medium which ties in with the expanding concept that contemporary media culture possesses to have been granted more consideration in academic settings.

Comic/ graphic novels have begun to work comfortably in the setting of the New London Group, which questioned the very concept of literature and these include Courtney Cazden, Bill Cope, James Cook, Norman Fairclough, Jim Gee, Mary Kalantzis, Gunther Kress, Allan Luke, Carmen Luke, Sara Michaels, and Martin Nakata. As stated in the group's statement, "the graphic novel now offers English language arts teachers opportunities to engage all students in a medium that expands beyond the traditional borders of literacy" (Schwartz, 2006, P 58). The New London Group advocates for a multiliteracies methodology for teaching literacy. According to them, meanings other than linguistic ones are gaining more and more significance. These consist of multimodal communication, gesture meanings (nonverbal communication), aural significance (music, sound effects), visual conceptions (images, page layouts, screen formats), spatial implications (environmental space). This Multimodal function is the most significant mode of learning, considering that it connects together of the additional forms in rather truly changing interactions. McCloud opines:

Pictures can induce strong feelings in the reader, but they can also lack the specificity of words. Words, on the other hand, offer that specificity, but can lack the immediate emotional charge of pictures, relying instead on a gradual cumulative effect. Together, of course, words and pictures can make miracles (p. 135).

During the 2000s Gene Yang claims, current educators are using comics to nurture talents that some instructors in the 1940s were afraid would be hampered, notably reading and creativity. Obstacles to bringing comics into school or allowing youngsters to appreciate them have not been related to the medium's effectiveness. On the contrary, Yang highlights the intrinsic properties of graphics that he feels allow them to be appropriate for educational environments. He begins by emphasising its stimulating feature, which is substantiated by studies extending generations that shows a deep link between youngsters and comic books. Yang further emphasises the visual element of comics as a significant instructional attribute connected with multiple intelligences and literacies because graphic novels/comics are spatial oriented he says:

Time within a comic book progresses only as quickly as the reader moves her eyes across the page. The pace at which information is transmitted is completely determined by the reader. In educational settings, this visual permanence firmly places control over the pace of education in the hands of the student (Yang 2003)

Additionally, Yang's view represents the idea that comic books effectively connect pupils to issues and specialities which transcend beyond knowledge. He emphasises the value of illustrated work as a significant component of contemporary society, providing an outlet for a careful investigation of popular culture. P.L. Thomas in "Adventures in Genre!: Rethinking Genre through Comics/Graphic Novels" listed important themes related to graphic novels/Comics noting as beneficial impact upon adolescents and their interpretation on societal requirements, powerful activity for readers, develop literacy skills, be emotionally and educationally suitable for youngsters, and be an appropriate choice to impart critical media literacy, which is a genuine emerging medium. He Advocates for recognising comics and graphic novels as an influential and powerful medium ... with others (189-192).

In *The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images* Neil Cohn expresses that a comic may incorporate any arrangement of verbal expression and visuals, whether individual pictures, successive illustrations, some text, nothing of them etc., by understanding "visual language" as an arrangement apart within its prevailing sociocultural environment. In actuality, any possible arrangement that includes these components may be encountered in what are referred to as comics. In the end, comics are characterised by an interconnected set of characteristics that incorporate their subjects, layout, popularity, historical events, commerce, particular visual languages

they utilise and other aspects of culture.(2). Comics are able to convey ideas using written expression (text) as well as graphic language (pictures). This combination illustrates how people may communicate ideas using a variety of modalities. Visual language refers to the physiological and psychological capacity to communicate ideas visually, while comics refers to the sociocultural setting in which this form of communication is used, frequently alongside with written text. It becomes essential to stress the fact that comics are generated in an aesthetic that is typified by sequential pictures, not a language unto itself (2).The differentiation of the structural/cognitive system (also known as graphic speech) and the social-cultural setting (also known as comics) is crucial to the way every aspect is being examined. The verbal and psychological fields ought to explore visual language, but comics can be explored predominantly in a societal setting (literary studies, political science, economics, history, etc.). The graphical manner in which they are composed, shows how the cognitive system employs various mediums to construct its implications, and the relationships between graphic voice and other mental processes.

In actuality, psychological or tangible phenomenon from out of the universe does not constitute the final subject of study in the fields of cognition and languages. However, it focuses on the concepts and interpretations that underpin understanding within the individual's consciousness. It concerns everything from understanding the structure and significance to applying communication in contexts of society. These ideas are standardised, contrasting to occurrences associated with particular cultural settings, like comic books or novels. That is why the psychological investigation of graphic language seeks to reveal the relationships across fields, offering a deeper understanding of the nature of human speech, even if it is sometimes arbitrarily classified within the heading of comics' analysis(2). Cohn suggests that generating voices, transitioning the physical bodies, and delivering visual illustrations are the three paradigms that individuals leverage when conveying ideas. However, each of these methodologies produces a certain kind of language when they adopt an organised succession which is regulated by rules which restrict the output, or grammar. So organised sequentially postures constitute sign languages, organised linear audio becomes global spoken languages, and controlled consecutive illustrations produce global visual languages (3)

### **Cognitive Engagement in *American Born Chinese***

*American Born Chinese* is a 2006 graphic novel by Gene Luen Yang, it was the first to receive the Michael L. Printz Award, which honours literature aimed at younger readers. It was also featured on other 2006 best-of lists and received the highest accolade in the animation business, the Eisner Award. Three seemingly unconnected stories are told throughout the novel, yet they ultimately turn out to be connected. One plot thread is on Jin Wang, an Asian American teenager who has difficulties after moving to a school with just one other student of that race. The story of the Monkey King, a legendary deity from the *Journey to the West*, a Chinese classic from the 16th century, is another. The third tells the story of popular kid Jin Wang, who has light hair and eyes, and is ashamed of his visiting cousin, who embodies every prejudiced stereotype of a Chinese person that is spread by the media. Yang states that the plot follows "a young man who is struggling with his own cultural heritage, with the way he looks, with the language his parents speak, [who] becomes friends with this immigrant kid," said Yang. "And it turns out that this immigrant kid isn't just from Asia, he's actually from Asian mythology. The main character eventually learns to accept himself through this friendship" (Los Angeles Times). In "The Truth about Graphics Novels: A format Not a Genre", Kristin Fletchr-Spear, Merideth Jenson-Benjamin, and Teresa Copelan posits that "graphic novel is an imprecise term used to describe a format that uses a combination of words and sequential art to convey a narrative. Graphic novels can be of any genre on any topic" (38). So, three genres are deftly combined in Yang's graphic novel: satire, a genuine concern novel, and a classic Chinese tales. Yang skilfully blends these disparate disciplines to provide knowledge that goes beyond what can be found in a conventional written text. Neil Cohn expresses the phrase "Kirbyan" which refers to the mainstream American graphic language which is commonly used in comics about superheroes along with other closely similar genres published by the mainstream comic book industry. Men are more likely to be physically oversized in Kirbyan artistic style, whereas women tend to have a tendency towards voluptuous. Characters in Kirbyan visual language frequently adopt "dramatic" and "dynamic" stances that err on the side of caution when performing activities. Figures and postures are frequently excessively absurd. The artwork in popular American comics are rarely accurate representations of real people, they are like drawings leading to highly unrealistic phenomena and do not represent the way the things actually exist "in the world". Another type of language observed in American Pictorial Conversation is called "Barksian". This specific medium can be seen in cartoons, comic books, and comic strips. It features an overwhelmingly "cartoony" visual appearance (Pp. 139-142). Barksian incorporates exactly what McCloud describes as "amplification of simplification" (30), magnifying particular elements and overlooking parts. Cartoonish visualisations, in other words, emphasise some aspects despite simplifying pictures to their most basic components. In the novel, characters' elbows and knees, for example, may not be well defined, and joints can only be observed when extended. Several physiological elements are frequently muted, altered, or left out. Only when they are emphasised or contracted can muscles get visual representation. The "indy" language is a separate albeit conceptually different set of the popular dialect that explores subjects that are realistic, emotional, mature, or serious, but not exclusively so. It was the goal of individuals like Art Spiegelman and

Robert Crumb to develop a genuine as well as unique style that departed from the traditional superheroes graphic themes. Many of the authors in this category have grown to be associated with a more serious comics subgenre that operates outside of conventional conventions. Although this dialect also has a “cartoony” flair, it stands out for concentrating on topics and ideas appropriate for the independent genre (143).

The ability to enable and confront the past and contemporary concerns of prejudice and racial discrimination is made possible by literature along with other textual disciplines. In the words of Rebecca Rogers and Melissa Mosley, “to prepare children to participate in U.S. democracy, education in schools must address race, racism, and antiracism in an educative manner” (465). Examining the narrative’s racial awareness enables the reader see racism as being greater “about the distribution of power” and assets compared to interpersonal inequalities (99). Lani Guinier created the phrase racial literacy and describes in “From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy: *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest Divergence Dilemma” as:

[Racial literacy] is about learning rather than knowing . . . and reads race in its psychological, interpersonal and structural dimensions. It acknowledges the importance of individual agency but refuses to lose sight of institutional and environmental forces . . . [and] constantly interrogates the dynamic relationship among race, class, geography, gender and other explanatory variables (115)

Gene Luen Yang’s present work is a multimedia genre that offers important insights on young readers’ cognitive engagement while offering a great deal of opinions concerning ethnicity and political issues. Yang tackles racial prejudice, individuality, and cultural challenges that Asian Americans and Asians face in US society through the three narratives: the ridiculous and clichéd Cousin Chin-Kee; the Chinese myth of the Monkey King; and Jin, a student. In *American Born Chinese*, identity is a crucial subject matter and its issues recur often in the book, connecting the tales of Jin and The Monkey King. Despite the numerous obstacles they encounter from bigotry and discrimination, both characters go through a psychological turmoil during which they ultimately grow as individuals and arrive at terms with their distinct personalities. Discrimination of one kind or another affects both of their personalities, and as a result, they disavow their true identities. The isolation the Monkey King experiences during the celebration in the heaven is the cause of his identity struggle along with humiliation, he was not allowed to enter the festivity “look you may be a king- you may even be a deity- but you are still a monkey”, the monkey king felt [so] embarrassed [that] he almost left without saying a word” (Gene Luen Yang 21). The abandonment of his monkey persona and subsequent descent of self-hatred are triggered by the denial, which serves as an epiphany in his character’s development. Notably, “after the dinner party the monkey king issued a decree throughout all of flower-fruit mountain: all monkeys must wear shoes”, (58) and becomes stronger by achieving all “the four major disciplines of invulnerability” (59). When he additionally opposes Tze-Yo-Tzuh, claiming that his status is superior to becoming a monkey, it becomes quite evident the extent to which he despises himself and denies his true nature as a monkey by saying “I am not a monkey” (71). He feels inferior to the other deities because of his rejection by the more powerful celestial realm which is advanced when he is humiliated and “convicted of trespassing upon Heaven” and sentenced to death (62). He thus transforms into a more powerful version of oneself in order to conquer the challenges. This is perhaps demonstrated when he declares himself to be “The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven” (66) totally disregarding his former designation of “The Monkey King”. His determination to disapprove and distance himself regarding his true identity is further demonstrated by his metamorphosis into a significantly powerful being via all four major disciplines of “bodily form” (61).

The Monkey King and Jin face marginalisation based on their unique identities. Although the events of the gathering in the heavenly realms constitute the main cause of The Monkey King’s identity dilemma, Jin faces a different kind of marginalisation that is more delicate and comes from several characters throughout the narrative. He encounters racism and prejudice for the first time on the very first day of school, his teacher mispronounces his name as “Jing Jang” (35) and tells the students that, despite being born in San Francisco, he is from China and that, when asked about the custom of eating cats and dogs, his family “probably stopped that sort of thing as soon as they came to the United States!” (36). They encounter racism and discrimination that is specifically connected to their respective identities in both scenarios. Both of them are evaluated only on their intrinsic traits, physical attributes, and immutable characteristics. In the same manner that Jin is assessed simply because he’s Chinese, the Monkey King is evaluated with regard to be “still a monkey” (21). The situation becomes extremely obvious in the panel with Jin, Greg, and Amelia. For example, Greg says, “He’s a nice guy, but he’s kind of a geek. I mean, what’s with the hair?” (183). Greg cannot perceive Jin via their shared features despite the things they share in common, even if Jin has an identical hairstyle as him. Rather, his concentration is entirely focused on his position in society as an outsider and lack of recognition. Both of these are clearly related to his Chinese heritage. The Monkey King, for instance, is described as just “a monkey” (21) in spite of the most powerful creature in the universe face identity problems due to rejection and marginalizing factors like prejudice and racial discrimination. The novel explores the themes of metamorphosis and identity formation in characters like Jin and The Monkey King. Jin’s transformation into Danny, a young Anglo-American man, is a significant transformation due to bigotry,

discrimination, and humiliation. However, Chin-Kee, Jin's Chinese identity, ruins his transformation. The Monkey King, on the other hand, transforms into a more powerful creature, expecting it to resolve his identity crisis. Tze-Yo-Tzuh, the ruler of the apes, imprisons him for 500 years. Both characters face epiphanies about growth, with the Monkey King's journey towards the West and Jin's acceptance of Chin-Kee. The maturing part of their transition can be examined in the context of multidisciplinary health and daily expertise concerns. The novel offers a unique perspective on identity formation and Jin's journey towards acceptance and a healthier self-perception.

By the time the story ends, both Jin and The Monkey King have gained a more positive self-awareness, their tales can provide young readers with another perspective on how to go beyond something about overcoming racial bias, presumptions, and discrimination against the identities of others—what Schachter & Gallihier describe as “forces of marginalisation”. A critical reader looks for underlying ideologies, power dynamics, and meanings beneath the material that is offered. The reader then places these messages into larger historical, social, and political contexts. According to Lisa Patel Stevens and Thomas W. Bean, “when readers take this stance, they develop a critical consciousness, fostering a search for justice and equity by reading the meanings behind the text” (6). When teaching students to recognise, suspect about, and harness various forms of communication, reading, and writing as engaged and involved citizens within an open society, an essential equilibrium towards literacy becomes important.

The third narrative in *American Born Chinese* is Chin-Kee, an important figure in terms of prejudices, racial bias and discrimination. He is a live and contemporary racist cliché of Chinese individuality, he sees Danny annually, rendering the experience extremely uncomfortable. In a speech Yang notes that Yang understood that his intentionally created personality, Cousin Chin-Kee whom he established to pique readers' attention to traditional and contemporary times preconceptions of Asians and Asian Americans, ended up being dismissed by youngsters as simply nothing more than an enjoyable joke. Yang says, it's fine if the readers find Chin Kee funny “but I want you to laugh at him with a knot in your stomach”. A reader may not form that knot unless having even an elementary hold of Chin- Kee's “historical roots” (12). Cousin Chin-Kee is the result of generations of prejudices thrown upon Asians, especially Asian Americans. Yang explains how persona encompasses visuals representing various historical and contemporary prejudices. He observes that Chin- Kee's locks and attire resemble “more overtly racist imagery prevalent in the late 1800s and early 1900s” (12), which accompanied the United States' manipulation of Chinese immigrant labourers amid the gold rush and the building of the Transcontinental Railway road. Yang encourages readers to recognise and identifying the truth that, despite recognition of racism associated with traditional representations of Asians and Asian Americans throughout the era of Civil Rights in the 1960s, contemporary stereotypes are frequently dismissed as impolite jokes. Yang stresses the need to acknowledge the power and historical context of pictures because “images...have power. And images have history... we must remember who their grandfathers are. And we must ensure that the next generation does the same” (13). In the novel Chin-Kee cannot accurately enunciate words in English and interacts in a highly exaggerated as well as absurd fashion employing typical Chinese expressions “rong time no see! Chin-Kee happy as ginger root pranted in nutritious manure of well-bred ox” (53). Chin-Kee, in furtherance of speaking the language, dresses in traditional Chinese attire, maintains an archaic Chinese haircut referred to as queue, has a pale complexion, narrowing eyes, and huge frontal teeth. Chine-Kee skin colour portray a racial colour analogy that refers to the existential risk which the peoples of East and Southeast Asia pose to the West and is termed as “yellow peril” coined by Russian sociologist Jacques Novikow (John Rohl p.203). Frayling notes how the “western” concept of Chinese identity was frequently connected to “demons” and “badly behaved children”, which led to “antagonism” among Asiatics and Eastern cultures. This description fits Chin-Kee well, since he behaves in a way that the racist propaganda concerning Yellow Peril may have led readers to believe.

The findings of Richard E. Mayer together with other cognitive experts established the cognitive concept of multimedia learning, this asserts that human beings understand more effectively from spoken words and visuals compared to phrases alone, what has been referred to as the multichannel concept (Mayer 2005a). They describe it as the incorporation of written and visual content, and they propose that learning using multimedia takes place when we construct cognitive models combining these verbal and visual mediums (Mayer 2005b). The narrative of Chin-Kee and his holdings emotionally attaches the readers, demonstrating how harmful and irrational discrimination, in general, maybe. Particularly, Chin-Kee comes following Jin's transition into Danny, implying that he represents Jin's concerns about his Chinese belonging, since he is a representation that provides continual feeding of biases and presumptions that are excessively amplified and dramatized. The Chin-Kee stereotypes constitute a manifestation of the Jin's anxieties, identity issues, and troubles fitting in. As Jin is ridiculed by others due to his Chinese ethnicity, Chin-Kee along with everything he is and stands for becomes exactly the way Jin perceives himself: as the categorised and racial hatred he has to confront all the time by his peers as well as an embodiment of his Chinese ethnicity, along with the “yellow peril” concept. As a result, Jin encourages and accepts biases and preconceived notions, resulting him to develop an identification problem and insecurity which he is innocent of blame. His perception of his cultural heritage and self-shifted to the stereotyped and prejudiced features imposed on him by others around him.

### **Emotional Resonance in *The Arrival***

In the description of the graphic novel Shaun Tan (2007) says:

The style of the artwork borrows heavily from old sepia / monochrome photographs of the kind that typically document social life during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to some extent the book behaves like a silent film. My drawings are all graphite pencil and quite photorealistic, attempting to create a convincing world of imaginary people, animals, architecture, domestic objects, vehicles and natural landscapes (one reason the book has taken so long to illustrate!). One of my initial ideas which I have tried to preserve is that the entire book might look like a strange photo-album, since it occurs to me that photo albums are essentially silent, illustrated picture books(2).

One of the renowned photographer Ellen Fisch expresses the fact that “sepia photography is similar to black-and-white photography in that it’s monochromatic, meaning one tone or one colour. But it’s more brown or tan”. The Brown colour of the Shaun Tan narrative alludes to a sand narrative which Neil Cohn termed as a Central Australian Visual Language (CAVL). The sand narrative as a communicating method is inextricably linked to the cultural role of the ground itself in these civilizations. Various regular interpersonal relationships can take place whilst individuals are sitting or lounging upon the earth. As a result, the earth offers a conveniently available and viewable ground for artistic and rooted implications, which can be created through sand narrative or naturalistic tracks. Many researchers have claimed that the earth’s surface operates as a massive and organic painting board which may be read by the readers. Sand stories are told using CAVL, speech, and manual signs (174). Being a multimodal, sand narrative employs two space expression one is called “ground space” for drawing on the surface and the other is termed as “air space” which is used to articulate manual signs (175). Shaun Tan narrative also employs such expression to emotionally attach the readers.

Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival* is a nonverbal visual novel about an immigrant’s journey through an entirely new and foreign nation. The novel’s emotional connection is essential, and it generates a wide variety of feelings in readers through its compelling and tragic narrative. *The Arrival* is an exclusive and emotionally charged piece that crosses regional and linguistic boundaries, asking readers to consider the common features of the immigrant experience. Shaun Tan’s narrative creates a strong emotional reaction and engagement within its readers by virtue of its amazing graphic narrative and universal themes. In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud investigates how readers might connect to a graphic narrative on a psychological, intellectual, and emotional level. According to McCloud, the reader’s ability to place oneself in the world that is depicted on the text is crucial to this connection. Cartoons in particular, where individuals are frequently shown with masks or abstract characteristics to evade simple classification, he contends that visual tales generate inviting areas. These fictional characters serve as “an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm” (36).

McCloud explains a camouflage technique wherein figures are rendered simply and positioned behind backdrops that are usually realistic. According to him, “this combination allows readers to mask themselves in a character and safely enter a sensually stimulating world” (43). Tan uses the characters’ gaze, mannerisms, and body language to guide the reader throughout the progression of the narrative. By doing so the characters in question invite readers to go with them across locales which are simultaneously accessible and fanciful enough to appear alien and serve as the subjects of the narrative’s most intricate readings. John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* suggests that “when we see a landscape, we situate ourselves in it” (515). This process of placing oneself in relation to the story’s visual environment is particularly significant. Berger claims that our perception of art, “we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relations between things and ourselves. Our vision is continuously active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are” (513). This dynamic interplay between details in the visual narrative and the readers’ perception of them is central to our study. Moreover, in his foreword to Evelyn Arizpe, Teresa Colomer, and Carmen Martinez-Roldan’s *Visual tour through wordless narratives*, Shaun Tan mentions of a process he describes as “open readings”. He explains that “any good act of creativity is fundamentally an act of sharing and co-creation” and, in terms of scene, writes “As a creator, you provide a little architecture, build some imaginary walls, add a few furnishings, then wait for an anonymous visitor to arrive”. Thus the novel offers an invitation to the readers to arrive at what Tan calls “free-roaming interpretations” (qtd in *Looking beyond the Scenes*).

Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival* (2006) is a voiceless visual novel. The narrative is broken down into six sections which sometimes include full-page drawings. It depicts the life of an immigrant in a fictional universe that occasionally mirrors the one we inhabit. Shaun Tan illustrates the emotions of a parent travelling to an unknown area without utilising voice or words. Tan distinguishes *The Arrival* from children’s artwork by noting the fact that writings with many images and panels focus more on regularity, and that a graphic novel story like his artwork more closely resembles the process of creating a movie. Shaun Tan stated in an interview with Margolis that he hoped his work would instil empathy within readers, he says “In Australia, people don’t stop to imagine what it’s like for some of these refugees”. They simply

perceive them as a problem after they arrive, without considering a broader context. "I don't expect the book to change anybody's opinion about things, but if it at least makes them pause to think, I'll feel as if I've succeeded in something".

Tan brilliantly highlights aspects characteristic of the immigrant tale, such as departing, journey, and return. Numerous figurative items are presented throughout the text, including archetypal imagery of travel, such as a luggage, a map, a family photograph, and sailboats. The work itself possesses the appearance of a picture album and might be viewed as an image commemorating the immigrant's trip. The central character is hardly explicitly defined as a member of a certain race or nationality, implying that he is the archetypal immigrant. Tan emphasises the idea of social and cultural difference before the narrative begins, with a sequence of images grouped in six consecutive rows comprising ten pictures each appearing on the inside front and rear panels. Every picture in the collection depicts a separate person, spanning a wide range of races, skin tones, genders, and ages. Some photographs have been sepia-toned to indicate indications of deterioration. The similar images on the inside back cover, reminiscent of passport photos, instantly invoke concepts of migration and border crossings, presenting themes of difference and diversity from the very beginning of the narrative. On the cover book, the reader is introduced to a protagonist that image depicts a solitary male figure standing behind. He wears a hat and has his head inclined in opposition to the reader's gaze. But we as a reader cannot feel convinced regarding his true nature, this implies that the protagonist is the Everyman, an unauthorised immigrant.

Tan's depiction of the utopian setting in *The Arrival* is noteworthy due to its originality. Even though everyone in the nation is a human, the novel's panels are full with strange creatures and bizarre mechanical devices that the people use on every occasion. Massive figures of strange yet amiable animals clutching egg-formed things and enormous owl-like species floating atop buildings characterise the town's horizon. Furthermore, the narrative depicts a broad variety of companion species of animals. One of the creatures in the new land is crucial to the protagonist's adaptation and his dedication towards establishing a house. Almost all individuals in this strange land are acquainted with their animal friends, some of whom resemble familiar creatures such as cats or tortoises. However, the protagonist's constant companionship is an odd-looking creature that appears to be a hybrid of a mouse and a dolphin and demonstrates dog-like conduct. Despite the protagonist's initial apprehension, the creature turns out to be very helpful in retrieving goods such as newspapers and caps and developing an enduring partner. The Human-animal interaction evokes emotional sentiments among the readers, one such instance is seen when the protagonist is depicted as suited in his professional attire and hat, carrying a bag while staring down carefully at the animal. The animal figure reciprocates the man's view by looking upwards at him. The suited man appears to be perplexed but it is not a cynical communication rather it is one of emotional magnitude, indicating that he expects the creature may assist him in this unfamiliar setting. Tan's decision to display a universe of man and the animal's relationship on the novel's front page highlighted in the writing suggest a strong human-animal alliance with highly esteeming one another. Other readers of Tan's novel *The Arrival* might consider the human-animal relationship as ancillary to the narrative's core issues. Nevertheless, there are multiple indications which suggests that the native of the new town's connections towards their animal are an essential component of their culture. Though Tan does not intend to establish his novels in a specific era and setting, but he has acknowledged that the city of New York in the 1900s was the primary source of inspiration for this novel. He notes on his website:

One of my main sources for visual reference was New York in the early 1900s, a great hub of mass-migration for Europeans. A lot of my inspirational images blu-tacked to the walls of my studio were old photographs of immigrant processing at Ellis Island, visual notes that provided underlying concepts, mood and atmosphere behind many scenes that appear in the book (qtd. in the website).

Tan included a double-page panel story in his narrative that is equivalent of the image of an immigrants come across the Statue of Liberty as people arrive in New York Harbour. Instead of the Statue of Liberty, the harbour is marked by two huge sculptures, one male and one female. Both are standing atop boats laden with travel-related items, bending in for a friendly greeting. Interestingly, every individual is escorted by an animal; the woman is holding an animal with a long tail, while the man is carrying something that resembles a bird on his shoulder. This picture implies that the protagonist has entered an immigrant country, and the statues represent the initial settlers. The animals play an important role in the representation of these two individuals, similarly to how the flame carried by the human form in the picture of the Statue of Liberty symbolises liberation from injustice and dictatorship. These images represent an empathy-based morality founded on interspecies connections.

## CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the examination of cognitive engagement and emotional resonance in graphic narratives, as demonstrated by *American Born Chinese* and *The Arrival*, illuminates the significant influence these works of literature possess on young readers. When perceived through a psychological viewpoint, these visual stories clearly function as potent means

of allowing readers fully submerge themselves in distinct universes and stimulate both cognitive engagement and affective bonding. This comprehensive and profound experience, which goes beyond typical literary styles, provides especially for young readers through the story and visually engaging aspects. *American Born Chinese* and *The Arrival* stand out for their creative use of visual narrative methods and thus generously engage audiences. Readers are able to immerse themselves fully into the narrative's universe owing to the characters' multifaceted, frequently abstract or disguised depictions, which greatly enhances their sense of empathy and association. In short, this paper examines the psychological impact of graphic stories especially on young readers' cognitive and affective growth, revealing that they enhance cultural awareness, empathy, and creativity by providing a comprehensive reading experience and as such establishing a theoretical foundation for future research.

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