

CRITICAL VISUAL ANALYSIS OF THREE MULTIMODAL TEXTS ABOUT DISPLACEMENT FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICE



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HUMAN DISPLACEMENT, occurring globally, involves the forced or involuntary relocation of people (Carling, 2023; Storey, 2023). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] (2023) reported that 108.4 million people worldwide experienced forced displacement due to war, persecution, violence, conflict, natural disasters, climate-induced famine, or human rights violations. Among them, 35.3 million were refugees. In 2022, Ukraine, Mozambique, and Burkina Faso were among the countries facing the fastest-growing displacement crises (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2022, p. 23). Refugees experience challenges to their safety, health, and socioeconomic conditions at a disproportionate rate, with children making up half of the affected population in need of humanitarian aid.

To raise awareness of these devastating realities, UNOCHA and the University of Virginia launched The Read for Action Humanitarian Book Club, which combines the use of fiction books with real-world humanitarian response to build a supportive community of relief experts, readers, and policy advocates for global action. Utilizing children's and young adult literature that platforms immigrant and refugee perspectives is one viable method to fulfill UNOCHA's global action call for supporting people affected by displacement, and educators play a vital role in raising awareness and cultivating a strong commitment to human rights in their students.

The purpose of this article is to model critical visual analysis as a method to apply Kress and van Leeuwen's framework for reading the visual in classroom teaching and learning (Farrell et al., 2010; Martínez-Roldán & Newcomer, 2011). With the aim of promoting an ethic of care (Vaughn, 2023) amidst global instability, I applied a critical visual analysis to the following books: *The Island* (Greder, 2007), *The Rabbits* (Marsden & Tan, 1998), and *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007), as a sense-making method in reading children's literature for equity. I used Kress and van Leeuwen's framework to analyze the selected texts and explore critical themes. While scholars have examined these texts through Kress and van Leeuwen's framework (Banerjee, 2013; Fahmi, 2015; McGlasson, 2013; Smyczyńska, 2018) and have acknowledged their significance in teaching for social justice (Dallacqua et al., 2022; Pantaleo, 2021; Rhoades et al., 2015), teachers necessitate practical and guided approaches to apply this framework and effectively use these texts as critical tools in the classroom (Serafini & Reid, 2022).

Positionality and Research Perspective

When I selected the books mentioned above and began my initial analysis for this study, I was an international graduate student at a United States land grant institution. Discovering critical literacy during my graduate studies empowered me to embrace my identity as an international scholar and a literacy teacher by implementing a democratic approach to reading children's and young adult literature.

Plenty of well-documented research exists on the effect that reading can have on students' ability to make meaning of their world. For example, children's and young adult literature can help students actualize their funds of knowledge and experiences through books as springboards for meaning making (Farrell et al., 2010; Pantaleo & Bomphray, 2011), increase student agency (Vaughn et al., 2020), support affective goals (such as developing empathy) (Rhoades et al., 2015), and inform how they can act upon the world to transform it (Luke, 2012). Despite these affordances, critical visual analysis for supporting student interpretations of multimodal texts is underutilized in both teacher preparation programs and K-12 classrooms (Arizpe, 2021; Janks et al., 2013; Luke, 2012; Pantaleo, 2013). For this reason, I set out to examine the ways in which multimodal texts can act as a catalyst in preparing students to challenge and question power imbalances in texts.

Multimodal Texts as Platforms for Critical Visual Analysis

Young and adolescent readers are reading texts with intricate visuals, new and unusual story structures, and elaborate designs (Serafini, 2011, 2020). Picturebooks and graphic novels are multimodal artifacts that use both images and text to convey meaning, including sensory details like color, composition, and typography (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2013). A working distinction between a graphic novel and a picturebook can broadly be made based on storytelling and form; the graphic novel is a longer-form narrative where the storytelling relies on panels to denote time progression and spatial order, while the picturebook, usually a shorter form, includes illustrations that complement, clarify, and anchor the text (Sanders, 2013). The combination of images and words, as different modes, prompts readers to go through the narrative multiple times (Serafini, 2011, 2020, 2022, 2023), which is especially important in facilitating critical understandings of ideologically complex themes (Hollindale, 1995).

Multimodal texts can act as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors to help readers understand the world beyond their experiences (Bishop, 1990). Mirrors allow readers to see themselves in texts, windows offer glimpses of other people's experiences, and sliding glass doors provide access to new perspectives. The transformation of books into windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors depends on readers' interpretations of narrative elements like the plot, characters, and

theme, which enables them to form meaning potentials by evoking their schema, funds of knowledge, and experiences through text and images (Dallacqua, 2022; González et al., 2006; Serafini, 2023). In this way, readers' responses shape the potential meanings of narratives (Rosenblatt, 1978). Hence, the visual aesthetics of multimodal texts open spaces for students to explore social justice issues of racism, bigotry, oppression, displacement, and diverse mental states (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Specifically, multimodal texts afford possibilities for readers to engage with concepts in images, such as "power, interaction, detachment and involvement" and produce "meaning potentials" of said images (Liu, 2013, p. 1260). Throughout this article, I use the concept of meaning potentials to explain how readers can interpret texts differently based on their own experiences and cultural backgrounds (Janks, 2002, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1978).

Literacy scholars stress the importance of critically reading children's literature with underrepresented identities to challenge stigmas surrounding human displacement (Arizpe, 2021; Nel, 2018; Tomsic & Zbaracki, 2022). Educators can employ a critical visual method to foster a multimodal learning experience, allowing students to explore the deeper meanings of text and images from a perspective of human diversity and empathy (Lacina, 2023). Inclusive classroom libraries should incorporate realistic depictions of human diversity, considering intersectional factors (such as ethnicity, gender identity, and socioeconomic status) (Sotirovska & Elhess, 2021; Sotirovska & Vaughn, 2021, 2022ab, 2023; Vaughn et al., 2020). According to Lacina et al. (2022), a study of award-winning picturebooks ($n=61$) revealed diverse and multilayered portrayals of refugee and immigrant protagonists, showcasing positive and balanced representations. Educators can leverage these picturebooks to engage immigrant and refugee children's identities and experiences, offering a platform to share their stories with compassion, realistic representation, and cultural authenticity (Lacina et al., 2022).

Scholars emphasize the significance of authentic representations of immigrants and refugees in literature, promoting a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by vulnerable and underrepresented populations affected by displacement (Roberts & Crawford, 2019; Tomsic & Zbaracki, 2022; Ward & Warren, 2020). For example, Darragh and Kelley (2022) examined children's literature to raise awareness of human suffering, trauma resolution, and diversity, which can aid socioemotional learning. The authors echo that teachers

and students must work together to prioritize conversations about displaced and underrepresented individuals with the aim of “[r]aising refugee voices” (p. 35) by showcasing narratives through balanced depictions of hardship and hope. In another study, McAdam et al. (2020) employed five texts to examine displaced identities in children’s literature used by mediators and educators in Egypt and Mexico. The authors focused on the role of hope as a transformative pedagogy in dynamic contexts, particularly during periods of forced displacement and the subsequent wait for resettlement programs to take effect. These examples echo the potential for children’s and young adult books to serve as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors in conversations about the realities of displacement, hope and peace, support systems, and equity. My goal in this study was to emphasize underrepresented perspectives and experiences by using multimodal texts that require visual analysis for interpretation. To accomplish this, I explored how three open-ended texts without overtly discernable demographic and geographical characteristics can serve as mentor texts to challenge stereotypes about migration and show how displacement affects people. I selected these texts for their visual qualities and critical themes, which offer perspectives on power structures (Foucault, 2019) and issues of displacement (UNHCR, 2022). In this article, I propose strategies for incorporating these texts into the classroom to analyze visual meanings (see Table 1), foster critical literacy (see Table 2), and examine power dynamics (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Below, I outline how critical literacy theory can serve as a lens to analyze power relations in the selected texts.

Theoretical Framework

I situated this multimodal analysis in critical literacy theory (Lewison et al., 2002). In the scope of teaching, scholars define critical literacy as taking action to dismantle hegemonic power dynamics by accounting for systemic factors (such as racial discrimination, class inequity, gender identity bias, and other factors) that shape schooling (Freire, 1970; Lewison et al., 2002). One of the key aspects of critical literacy analysis involves examining human representation, or how popular media and discourse depict individuals, groups, and peoples (Janks, 2013).

Even more central to this critical analysis is exploring multiple perspectives and addressing sociopolitical issues (Lewison et al., 2002). To explore multiple perspectives, teachers and students must ask the question: Whose perspec-

tives are present in the text, and whose are absent (Botelho & Rudman, 2009)? To answer this question, they must analyze the sociopolitical context, meaning the systemic factors reflected in texts.

A critical visual literacy lens enables readers to analyze images for stereotypes, symbols, and patterns (Janks & Vasquez, 2011). Hence, central to the analysis of the selected narratives about migration and displacement is the concept of othering. Othering is the process of denying membership to the dominant group and is the consequence of power structures in society (Jensen, 2011). In the case of immigrants and refugees, othering becomes a consequence in human geography, where people become social Others by being denied ethical consideration or membership (Dervin, 2012). For example, in *The Island* (Greder, 2007), the fictional island is the point of contact between the island’s inhabitants and the Other. It is also the place where the Other becomes alienated in the narrative. The inhabitants’ perception of the Other turns said character into an alienated being that readers can witness.

Negative tropes surrounding migration may create a narrow and oversimplified view of refugee and immigrant narratives (Hart, 2021). This leads to a dichotomous classification of people into members and non-members and perpetuates othering. If we do not challenge these tropes in the classroom, students may not develop a critical stance to contextualize migration narratives in a humane landscape with its historical, cultural, linguistic, and intertextual complexities. The combined influence of othering, displacement, and alienation as elements of a broader migration discourse makes these books complex multimodal artifacts that can serve as mentor texts for critical visual analysis.

Critical visual analysis is thus crucial to comprehending social phenomena, especially for young readers who see themselves and the world in books (Bishop, 1990). To illustrate, Janks (2002, 2013) uses critical analysis grounded in the works of Halliday and Kress and van Leeuwen on visual semiotics in addition to Freirean problem-posing education to analyze messaging about power in visual formats such as advertisements (Janks, 2002). In this way, a critical visual literacy framework examines the relationship between texts, contexts, and pedagogy through the lens of multiple perspectives, politics, and power dynamics. To connect Kress and van Leeuwen’s framework with critical literacy theory, I examined the narratives using the questions in Table 2 as a guide. Then, I identified concepts (characters, context, and

power) and used the three meaning potentials of the visuals (representational, interpersonal, and compositional) to analyze the selected texts.

Campano and Ghiso's (2011) discussion of immigrant students as cosmopolitan intellectuals focused on how said

students engaged with images from *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007) as meaning making modes (Hollindale, 1995) to unpack messages about power, and also connect as critical viewers with the text and context of the multimodal narrative. Hence, critically reading multimodal texts like Tan's *The Ar-*

Table 1
CRITICAL VISUAL ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

REPRESENTATIONAL MEANING	INTERPERSONAL MEANING	COMPOSITIONAL MEANING
The participants, setting, and objects in the visual field.	The interaction between the participants in the visual field and the viewer.	The arrangement of the participants in the visual field.
DEFINITIONS OF CONSTRUCTS, CONCEPTS, AND PROPOSITIONS		
Narrative processes are actions indicated by a vector.	Offers are images presented for viewer reflection (e.g., a landscape denoting the setting). Demands are images that require viewer participation (e.g., a participant's action).	New and given information patterns indicate the directionality of information in the narrative.
Vectors connect the eyeline of a focal participant to another participant, object, or locative circumstance in the visual field. The vector directs the viewer's attention to the action.	Social distance refers to the placement of the participant or object in relation to the viewer. Increasing the proximity of participants and objects in the visual field enhances viewer interest.	Given information refers to information mentioned earlier in the text. New information refers to information introduced for the first time.
Narrative circumstances are fixed elements in the visual field, like the setting, objects, and participants, without directional indicators.	Objective attitude refers to the absence of perspective in the visual field. Subjective attitude refers to the observed perspective in the visual field.	Position in the visual field denotes the placement of participants and objects (e.g., the participant occupies a central position in the image).
Action images depict the start of a process characterized by a vector.	Subjective images shape perspectives, affecting power dynamics between the viewer and the participants in the visual field. Objective images inform and engage viewers, typically without influencing their perspective.	Top, center, bottom, and margin indicators of presence or absence denote the power of the participants in the visual field.
Reaction images represent responses to preceding actions or circumstances.	The vertical angle in the visual field signifies power dynamics between the participants and the viewer.	Salience is the visual quality of participants and objects, characterized by distinct features such as framing, color saturation, authenticity, or contouring, which can affect prominence.

Note. Adapted from Kress & van Leeuwen (1996).

rival can facilitate the examination of othering, migration, power, and displacement and situate these phenomena in a political context of the word/world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). To accomplish this, students and teachers must first examine how authors and illustrators utilize images in multimodal texts (Serafini, 2022) in order to apply critical visual analysis (see Tables 1 and 2) as a viable classroom approach to practicing critical literacy (Janks et al., 2013). I used the conceptual definitions in Table 1 (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) as codes in this critical visual analysis.

Book Selection and Analysis

As mentioned previously, this critical visual analysis was conducted in the following works: *The Island* (Greder, 2007), *The*

Rabbits (Marsden & Tan, 1998), and *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007). The books I selected for this study depict migration narratives through allegory, where the protagonists experience othering. While the book selection was not exhaustive, I chose these three mentor texts to lay the groundwork for critical visual analysis of classroom literature for educators. I applied Kress and van Leeuwen's principles to analyze book images and to understand how the authors' choices affect their meaning potential. I provide example-based tools for critical visual analysis of images extracted from multimodal texts about migration and displacement. The research question that guided this study was: What are the experiential, interpersonal, and compositional meaning potentials in three multimodal texts about displacement?

Table 2
QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL LITERACY ANALYSIS

CHARACTERS	CONTEXT	POWER
Who are the main characters in the narrative?	Where is the story taking place?	Who can make decisions and perform actions in the narrative?
How are the characters portrayed in the visuals? How are the characters described in the text?	When is the story taking place?	How do the characters show agency through their actions? Examine the barriers, negotiations, and outcomes the characters navigate. How do these characters differ from each other in terms of agency?
Are the characters evenly represented? Do the characters differ in their visual and textual representations?	What is the sociohistorical background of the narrative?	Whose actions influence how the narrative ends?
Who is the main character(s)? Who is the secondary character(s)?	Do any symbols, objects, or references in the visual field reveal the geographical location of the narrative?	Who is the most prominent character(s) in the narrative?
Whose actions call for viewer engagement?	In what ways does the narrative's setting impact the story arc, characters, and conclusion?	Do any symbols or references in the visual field signal this prominence?
Who is the hero? If such a character exists, what influenced this author's decision?	Does the setting change? If yes, how does this impact the story arc, characters, and conclusion?	Who or what occupies the center/edge of the visual field?

Note. Teachers are encouraged to follow up each question listed above by asking students: *How do you know?* (to support their responses with text examples). Adapted from Sotirovska and Vaughn (2023) and guided by Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) grammar of visual design.

I selected the three mentor books based on the following criteria: (a) the book is a well-established and awarded multimodal text (e.g., *The Arrival* has won the 2008 Best Books for Young Adults award); (b) the text is suitable for a range of grade levels; (c) themes of migration and displacement are highlighted; and, (d) the story is open-ended, without discernible markers that would situate the narrative in a specific place, context, and time period. For instance, Tan challenges traditional demographic and geographical markers in *The Arrival* by incorporating anthropomorphic characters, invented language, and fantastical elements, offering an immigration narrative open to viewer interpretation.

I read each picturebook several times and invited a university resource librarian to review these texts, and together, we discussed the characters, settings, and themes to ensure a more objective initial interpretation. The first reading was to understand the story elements and plot. In the second reading, I identified representational, compositional, and interpersonal meaning potentials for each book using Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) grammar of visual design. Guijarro and Sanz (2008) operationalized these principles in their analysis of the picturebook *Guess How Much I Love You* (McBratney, 1994), and their article guided this analysis, but with an approach of using questions to assist teachers and students in reading complex multimodal texts from a critical perspective (see Table 2).

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) define representational meaning as the characters, actions, and settings; interpersonal meaning as the way characters interact with each other and the viewer; and, compositional meaning as the placement of characters and objects in the frame and the salience of their attributes in their portrayal. Salience is a visual characteristic that draws viewers' attention by making an element easily distinguishable in the visual field. I illustrate this analysis below and engage Kress and van Leeuwen's framework with critical literacy aims.

To connect the representational meaning potential to critical literacy analysis, I asked the following questions: Who or what stands out in the visual field? What is the sociohistorical background of the story? How do the characters show agency through their actions?

To connect the interpersonal meaning potential to critical literacy analysis, I asked the following questions: Who can make decisions and perform actions in the narrative? Whose actions influence how the narrative ends? Whose actions call for viewer engagement?

To connect the compositional meaning potential to critical literacy analysis, I asked the following questions: Who is

the most prominent character in the narrative? Do any symbols or references in the visual field signal this prominence? Who occupies the center/edge of the visual field? Table 2 contains further information about this analysis, addressing questions about characters, context, and power.

Once I identified the elements of the representational, interpersonal, and compositional meanings in the texts, I analyzed them through a critical lens. For example, in *The Rabbits* (Marsden, 1998), I examined the rabbits' flag as a significant representational and compositional element because it characterizes the rabbits and occupies a central position in the visual field. In this regard, I asked the following questions: How does the flag get introduced into the visual field? Who is carrying the flag? What does the flag signify based on its design? Where is the flag placed in the visual field?

The analysis revealed power dynamics between the main characters in the text, the rabbits and the numbats. I analyzed the images while I used the text to support the inferences drawn from the visuals. Specifically, I examined the visuals in each book using the codes presented in Table 1. Working from the framework described in Table 1, I connected various text features (e.g., symbols of power) and linked them to themes and patterns in the narratives that explore displacement (see Table 2). Below, I provide examples and explain the possible meanings of the selected texts.

Meaning Potentials Using Three Mentor Texts for Critical Visual Analysis

In this section, I feature meaning potentials or the interpretations of the illustrations in each of the selected texts and the implications the illustrations may convey for teachers and students. I highlight examples from each text to illustrate Kress and van Leeuwen's principles in this critical visual analysis.

The Island by Armin Greder (2007)

The Island is an allegory about human displacement. The island's inhabitants encounter a stranger on the shore who appears different from themselves and the people they know. Driven by fear and panic, the island's inhabitants lock the newcomer in a goat pen, feed him slops, and exclude him from the community.

Representational Meaning The main characters in *The Island* are the island's inhabitants and the newcomer. Greder positioned the characters in the middle of the illustrations

and demarcated their silhouettes with a saturated crayon, creating negative space. Greder emphasizes essential elements in the visual field by utilizing negative space, omitting intricate backgrounds, and focusing on participant and object boundaries, resulting in increased viewer involvement. Using spatial metonymy, Greder portrays the island through scenes featuring rooms, furniture, and fortress images juxtaposed with ocean imagery.

Throughout the narrative, the island's inhabitants and the newcomer retain their placement in the illustrations, and three specific images depict the island's inhabitants following the newcomer with farm tools in almost the same way. Using Kress and van Leeuwen's terminology, most images in *The Island* are narrative processes because the participants' actions follow a chronological sequence. In *The Island*, vectors going from the eyelines of the island's inhabitants towards the newcomer form narrative patterns (Guijarro & Sanz, 2008), resulting in five action images and ten reaction images.

Specifically, the vectors align with the directionality of the narrative, evidenced by the island's inhabitants pointing at the newcomer with their farm tools. Greder uses morphism to show power dynamics by distorting the newcomer's silhouette and features, and portraying the island's inhabitants as silhouettes mixing and morphing into an angry mob. The inhabitants' strong visual presence and the newcomer's minimalistic rendition create a contested space.

The illustrations depict how the island's inhabitants react to the newcomer through action images. This is the case on pages 4 and 5, where the armed inhabitants clutch their farm tools with angry and perplexed facial expressions. Parallel to the visuals, the textual components in this scene reinforce the inhabitants' attempts to alienate and banish the stranger from the island because he is a newcomer to the community. Despite being unseen, Greder portrays the island as a secondary participant or a locative circumstance (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996) through text rather than visuals. In *The Island*, the fortress is a locative circumstance appearing on the cover and the penultimate double-page spread. The fortress image follows a vertical axis on the page and signifies the inhabitants' attempts to separate themselves from the Other. This image puts the viewer in the newcomer's position, observing the fortress from a bottom-up perspective.

Interpersonal Meaning The interactive function examines the way in which visuals direct the viewer's attention to the

represented participants. Guijarro and Sanz (2008) suggest focusing on the most engaging parts of an image when analyzing its interpersonal meaning. From this, the placement of the island's inhabitants and the newcomer makes them the most salient elements in the visual field. Images where the represented participants express fear through their gaze form a strong affinity with the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The image demands mainly involve the island's inhabitants staring at the newcomer with disdain, mimicking *The Scream* (Munch, 1893), a surreal painting of a screaming human-like silhouette. Four images that showcase the inhabitants' facial expressions are demands and elicit viewer reactions. The remaining images of the inhabitants fixating on the newcomer or each other are offers, which create contested spaces without prompting viewer engagement. In the absence of participant-viewer interaction, the image turns into an object for reflection (Guijarro & Sanz, 2008), serving as an offer and resembling a backdrop, much like the setting in a book.

In *The Island*, Greder portrayed the social distance between the island's inhabitants and the newcomer through long shots of varying sizes. Regarding attitude, Greder presented eight images from a horizontal angle and six from a vertical angle. Greder positions the viewer to look at the illustrations from a frontal angle (14 images) and a few from a top-down angle. While some images create a certain distance from the viewer, some invite the viewer to participate. This composition suggests both subjectivity and objectivity and strengthens the image demands discussed earlier, showing that the island's inhabitants require viewer participation on their fear-mongering mission.

Through dominant positioning and vertical alignment, six images depict the island's inhabitants in positions of power. Greder visually emphasized this power difference in one double spread by rendering the newcomer smaller than the island's inhabitants. The fortress appears on the cover and the final page of the picturebook as a recurring close-up image that encloses the island and prevents contact (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The remaining images are long shots of the island's inhabitants and the newcomer.

Compositional Meaning The spatial organization of information on the page expresses compositional meaning through character and object placement in the visual field (e.g., top/center or left to right) and the patterns of introducing (new) and referencing (given) information in the narrative (e.g.,

new/given or given/given) (Guijarro & Sanz, 2008). The primary information sources in *The Island* are the illustrations, which prominently depict the island's inhabitants and the newcomer, while the text serves as a secondary source.

The principal point of analysis in *The Island* is an image of a stranded and naked newcomer arriving on the shore. The second illustration depicts the island's inhabitants, whose perspective is the point of departure in the narrative. Out of the visuals portraying the represented participants, double spreads 1, 5, and 6 follow a new/given pattern, double spreads 4 and 12 follow a given/new pattern, and double spreads 11 and 13 follow a given/given pattern, displaying only the island's inhabitants. In a chronologically organized narrative, authors typically introduce information and later refer to it (Guijarro & Sanz, 2008). For instance, Greder presents the island's inhabitants and later refers to them as a recurring image, using the unmarked order given/new. The fixed positions of the island's inhabitants and the newcomer in the double-page spreads reinforce the given/new pattern. In double spread 4, the island's inhabitants point their farm tools at the newcomer, and this scene recurs in double spread 13, except the newcomer is walking while fettered and restrained.

The absence of frames in *The Island* reduces social distance and increases viewer involvement with the represented participants. Guijarro and Sanz (2008) explain, "the lack of frames creates an intersemiotic compositional cooperation between the visual and verbal modes, which mesh with each other and give the tales a sense of visual and written unity" (p. 1615). For instance, light brown frames with gray corners enclose the rectilinear images on double-page spreads 5, 8, 9, and 10. When a sequence of rectangular elements surrounds a character, this arrangement suggests danger (Moebius, 1986). One such example is an image that conveys a schoolteacher's reaction to the newcomer, portrayed with a menacing facial expression (open mouth with bared teeth) and gestures signaling danger (raised and open palms). Greder shows the island's inhabitants projecting their fears onto the newcomer in this rectilinear image, which is one in a series of four on a double-page spread.

The dimensions and extent of the represented participants' portrayal, such as size and scale, determine their salience (Guijarro & Sanz, 2008). Based on the salience analysis, Greder showcased the island's inhabitants more distinctly than the newcomer in select double spreads, with well-defined features and outlined silhouettes. While the island's

inhabitants are proportionately larger and clothed, the newcomer appears smaller and naked. Compared to the island's inhabitants, the newcomer's facial expressions lack definition: the eyes, two dots, and the mouth, a line, curved down. Another indicator of salience is the character's placement in the visual field. For example, the island's inhabitants appear on the left-hand side and occupy the entire double-page spread. Greder uses charcoal edges against the white background to create tonal contrasts and distinguish the characters. The achromatic color scheme comprising a grayscale palette with ochre and crimson accents is also an indicator of salience. The last double-spread image of *The Island* portrays a fortress and a shot seagull, serving as a visual metaphor for the bleak ending that reflects themes of surveillance and xenophobia commonly found in dystopian literature.

***The Rabbits* by John Marsden (author) and Shaun Tan (illustrator) (1998)**

The Rabbits is an allegorical picturebook that delves into themes of displacement and land devastation through the narrative of numbats and rabbits. The author and illustrator portray the deleterious effects and aftermath of the numbats' displacement through the story of anthropomorphic animals.

Representational Meaning Following Kress and van Leeuwen's definitions of narrative events, most images in *The Rabbits* are narrative processes, showcasing characters and actions in a spatial sequence. In *The Rabbits*, Marsden and Tan utilize the spatial organization of the participants to denote actions in double spreads 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, and 13, which showcase the rabbits intervening in the setting. For instance, in one of these double spreads, the rabbits employ machinery to populate the landscape, underscoring their influence on vegetation. The narrator, representing the collective voice of the numbats, foreshadows the effects of the rabbits' intervention on numbat land by emphasizing their activities, including surveying, altering, occupying, and exploiting the numbats' natural resources (Marsden, 1998). For instance, in double spread 1, Marsden (author) and Tan (illustrator) invite the viewer to gaze at a distant smokestack, which breaks up the earthy hues and peaceful landscape to hint at the rabbits' arrival.

The eyelines of the rabbits and the numbats form vectors that establish narrative patterns, resulting in five reaction images. Eight double-spread images signify action, whereas only three represent reaction. While the rabbits and the num-

bats are the main participants, the numbat landscape is a secondary participant functioning as a backdrop for the rabbits' actions. Double spreads 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 exhibit the rabbits' machines, technology, flags, and planar figures as locative circumstances. Nine images showcase the rabbits' flag, depicting the rabbits' power over the Native numbats and the resulting damage to the numbat land. The size and location of the rabbits and the numbats on the page indicate their power dynamic.

Marsden and Tan denote processes mainly through double-page spreads in the narrative. They illustrate the stages of numbat displacement in double spreads 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12 through narrative representations that either show their absence from the images or their presence in the page margins. The first double-page spread introduces the viewer to the rabbits on numbat land in a new/given pattern. The point of view is that of the displaced Indigenous numbats who are witnessing the rabbits depleting their land. The prevalent theme in *The Rabbits* is capturing the detrimental effects of displacement on the Indigenous community. For example, the narrator details how the rabbits depleted the land of resources and took numbat children (Marsden, 1998). In the illustrations, the landscape gradually becomes populated with rabbits that outnumber the numbats. The textual elements reinforce this outnumbering with the repetition of the word *rabbits*. Even when the illustrations do not show the rabbits, Marsden and Tan use metonymic objects like machinery, flags, and smokestacks to signify the rabbits' presence throughout the visual field. A metonym is a conceptual proxy that refers to a related concept, like using the word "crown" to represent power (Quick, 2011). Marsden and Tan use visual juxtaposition to evoke the predisplacement times, featuring a double-page spread that showcases the numbats' formerly vibrant world now drained of color, leaving the numbats pondering in resignation about their agency, safety, and future.

Interpersonal Meaning Concerning gaze, the rabbits in the images direct their attention toward each other or objects in the background (e.g., the map, the land, and machinery). Hence, the rabbits as the main participants do not foster an affinity with the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), resulting in offer images for viewer reflection (Guijarro & Sanz, 2008). In relation to social distance, the rabbits primarily appear in wide and full-length shots in double spreads 3, 4, 5, 7, and 11. From a frontal viewpoint, the viewer can observe

long-shot images of the rabbits in positions of power. Double spread 5 exemplifies this by featuring the rabbits holding a painting in the center and the numbats in the page margins.

Compositional Meaning The compositional meaning of *The Rabbits*' book cover alludes to a twentieth-century painting by E. Phillips Fox (1902) depicting the arrival of the British, entitled *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770* (Banerjee, 2013). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggest that the principle of spatial dimension indicates that participants and objects placed in the center of an image connote power. The central positioning of the rabbits, in contrast to the marginal placement of the numbats, showcases this principle. Through this, Marsden and Tan visually communicate the start of a narrative process where the rabbits dominate the illustrations in sequential order in both color salience and the compositional arrangements of the visuals. The vibrant colors representing the rabbits symbolize prosperity, dominance, and power in contrast to the bleak browns and grays used for the numbats' silhouettes (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001). The rabbits' red flag with intersecting arrows symbolizes power and increases their salience. The numbats slowly disappear from the illustrations as the rabbits take over the landscape along a vertical axis. Their dominance continues to be reinforced by their machinery occupying a central position on the page.

The Arrival by Shaun Tan (2007)

The Arrival is a wordless graphic novel about migration. Tan portrays the protagonist's experience navigating an unfamiliar world away from family and home. Tan details the protagonist's journey of finding work, meeting human and anthropomorphic characters, and facing various challenges.

Representational Meaning In *The Arrival*, the reader is presented with a wordless multimodal narrative following the immigration journey of an unidentified man. The positioning of this character in the visual field and the pronounced shading of his silhouette suggest that he is the protagonist. The locative circumstances change from realistic to fantastical as the protagonist emigrates from the old world to the new world. Tan's images show a city consumed by tentacle-shaped shadows in a sepia-toned world. The point of departure in this graphic novel is an image of the main character and his partner holding hands. Tan features real and phantasmagorical characters, including anthropomorphic creatures. One of

these creatures, an anthropomorphic lizard, is the migrant's co-tenant in the new country. The ordinary setting gives way to a fantastical one, where a blended community of anthropomorphic creatures and humans faces the challenges of a bewildering world (Nabizadeh, 2014).

Tan creates spatial metonymy with micro-images connecting objects to characters. For example, a sequence of panels demonstrates the protagonist's routine as he prepares to leave for work. The viewer sees the sequence of images where the protagonist is taking a shower, shaving, buttoning up his shirt, tying his shoes, and counting money. Tan incorporates science-fiction elements, such as anthropomorphic creatures, futuristic transportation, and imaginary language. However, some ambiguous scenes, like the factory assembly line, may remind the viewer of the industrial age, making it challenging to pinpoint the exact timeline of this story.

In *The Arrival*, most images are narrative processes arranged in a spatial and chronological sequence. Tan utilizes spatial positioning and perspective shifting to evoke emotions without relying on text. In some images, Tan provides a close-up of the protagonist's facial expression, while in others, the protagonist faces away with his back turned at the viewer. In many reaction images, the protagonist interacts with objects and anthropomorphic creatures; Tan presents these dynamic scenes from various angles, adding spatial dimension and depth to the visual field. In individual sequences, such as when the protagonist is running away from a serpent-like creature, the images display reactions (fear) and actions (escape), and the locative circumstances reinforce these messages through symbolism. For example, the rigid buildings in the new world loom over the characters and become locative symbols of the protagonist's unease in the unfamiliar country.

Interpersonal Meaning The most engaging images in *The Arrival* are the individual close-ups of the protagonist. Concerning gaze, many images are offers and do not require viewer involvement. The scene where the protagonist holds his partner's hand without looking at them is an example of an offer image. Tan begins and ends the graphic novel with close-ups of human portraits, which become image demands. However, some images only reference the protagonist, showing his face or limbs (e.g., a sequence of images of the protagonist's hands moving objects along an assembly line) instead of the entire scene at once. This sequential arrangement denotes the social distance between the viewer and the protagonist. Viewer atten-

tion is shifted in the book as the perspective alternates between the protagonist and panoramic views of the new and old world.

Compositional Meaning The human portraits in *The Arrival*, displayed as a sequence of offer images, serve as the point of departure, whereas the first illustration depicting two people holding hands is the point of analysis. Through portrait images, picture stories, double-page spreads, and individual pages, Tan portrays the protagonist's immigration experiences and elicits emotions of fear, isolation, and hope (Nabizadeh, 2014). Within the narrative, Tan uses sepia-toned panels to present illustrated portraits of immigrants and immigration documents as historical artifacts. By using rectilinear shapes (Moebius, 1986), Tan enclosed the portraits with a tint of dark brown to increase their prominence. Tan features varying degrees of exaggerated and realistic scenes, which include floating ships and levitating orbs of light, a gargantuan amphibian creature and insects, and out-of-proportion renditions of characters and architectural elements, making the transformation of the traditional cityscape just as surreal as some of the anthropomorphic characters.

Themes across the Three Multimodal Texts

My analysis of the representational meaning potentials in all three texts reveals that the narrative patterns consist mainly of processes, encompassing both action and reaction images. These narrative patterns capture readers' attention, while narrative circumstances, such as time and place, establish the context. In terms of interpersonal meaning, the multimodal texts present viewers with more offers than demands. Often, the viewer assumes a frontal viewpoint and observes the participants from long and medium shot angles; such is the case with *The Island* and *The Arrival*, where some images are demands.

The visual metaphors in *The Island*, *The Rabbits*, and *The Arrival*—represented by the newcomer, numbats, and migrant, respectively—highlight the experiences of displaced and deracinated individuals. The island's inhabitants ostracize the newcomer by placing him in a goat pen, feeding him slops, excluding him from the community, and exiling him into the murky ocean waters. The numbats bear witness to the devastation of their homeland and the young population. In *The Arrival*, the cityscape physically swallows the protagonist, and the viewer sees glimpses of this character scattered in a sequence of images.

From a compositional aspect, the patterns new/given (*The Rabbits* and *The Arrival*) and given/new and given/given (*The Is-*

land) are prominent in the three multimodal texts, and I considered the character renditions in determining salience. All three narratives reveal power imbalances in host societies through the experiences of displaced protagonists. As a result, the depictions of the Other (newcomer, numbats, and migrant) signify diminished social power by considering the size, color, and contour parameters of salience. The sampled multimodal books are valuable resources in the classroom for analyzing power dynamics and questioning power structures through images.

Implications for Classroom Practice

Educators can utilize these three narratives as examples in the classroom to examine texts and traditional literature that may contain stereotypes. For example, teachers and students can analyze textbooks by considering how images support or contradict messages about power (Simpson et al., 2021). According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center (2019), White and anthropomorphic protagonists are more prevalent in children's literature than protagonists portraying Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). By critically reading *The Rabbits*, teachers and students may start questioning why popular children's books feature more animal proxies than underrepresented human characters (Sotirovska & Kelley, 2020).

Multimodal designs engage viewers through visuals representing narrative processes, image demands, and actions while presenting circumstances and offer images for observation. To engage with the compositional qualities of images, teachers and students can use these guiding questions for critical visual analysis: a) Representational—Who are the participants in the visual field? Who stands out visually? Who is overlooked or missing? Which narrative processes can you identify using image vectors and circumstances? Which images denote actions and which reactions?; b) Interpersonal—Which images warrant viewer attention? Which images are offers, and which are demands? How do visual elements influence your perspective on the narrative?; and, c) Compositional—How is the visual field organized based on participant and object placement? Who and what appears in the top, center, bottom, and page margins? How are the participants and objects portrayed in the images based on their salient features (such as the authenticity of character representations, cultural and historical accuracy, size, or framing)? Teachers can engage students in critical visual readings of classroom texts by utilizing Kress and van Leeuwen's definitions in Table 1, the critical literacy questions in Table 2, the mentor text examples, the

guiding questions for image analysis, and by asking students to support their understanding with text examples.

In a world where there are many competing narratives about displaced people (Darragh & Kelley, 2022; McAdam et al., 2020; Storey, 2023), practicing these skills both through text and visuals is crucial in cultivating a robust understanding of the world through literary texts (Freire, 1970). By asking: How are the characters portrayed in the visuals, and how are the characters described in the text? (see Table 1), teachers invite students to juxtapose two information modes and read the narrative twice, using the text and images as complementary resources to consider their representational, interpersonal, and compositional meaning potentials (see Table 2). In this way, students can discern patterns of meanings to support their critical analysis, and this practice promotes reader response (Lacina et al., 2022; Rosenblatt, 1978). Hence, conducting a critical visual analysis is especially pertinent to understanding complex phenomena, such as migration and displacement, by simultaneously showcasing the universality and idiosyncrasies of the displacement experience.

Students can use critical visual analysis to examine how visual metaphors shape their understanding of social issues. For example, teachers can use scenes from *The Arrival* as project prompts by having students identify visual metaphors like the ship, architectural elements, maps, documents, and invented language. Considering that *The Arrival* is a wordless graphic novel, one possibility is for students to add text to the images or create alternative narratives using the visual metaphors in the book. Also, students can employ the guiding questions (see Table 2) as prompts while developing their new projects, which can take the form of multimodal texts, storyboards, and videos.

Using these three mentor texts as guides, students can create their own texts to explore social issues by incorporating visual metaphors, designing images, and writing texts that convey critical themes. Students can examine how visual metaphors (like the ship in *The Rabbits* and *The Arrival* or the fortress in *The Island*) symbolize ideas in various children's and young adult literature, textbooks, and media. They can also consider recurring tropes in other works and find the reasons behind their repetition. Students can then evaluate how these representations shape or question prevailing narratives about migration and displacement. After completing the research, students can expand their understanding of how authors employ metaphors to communicate representational, compositional, and interpersonal meaning potentials. Teachers can use this activity to engage

students in exploring how visual choices can effectively convey messages about diverse human experiences and their connection to social issues. Such activities allow students to share their interpretations by engaging with multiple perspectives (Lewison et al., 2002). Teachers can integrate these concepts into various subjects, fostering cross-curricular and interdisciplinary connections, and adapt these activities to fit their students' grade level, learning goals, and knowledge funds.

Conclusion

Bishop (2014) advocates for teachers and students to participate in civic engagements and youth activism for equity. Given the current state of political flux, displacement, and global turmoil, we need this practice now more than ever. Encouraging inclusive teaching approaches to children's and young adult literature invites an intersectional perspective, examining how race, ethnicity, gender identity, and disability intersect with displacement experiences and shape storytelling. This practice enables students to connect with narratives that humanize immigrant and refugee experiences. The concepts and questions provided in Tables 1 and 2 prompt students to reflect on the diversity of human plights and engage with narratives that otherwise might go unnoticed.

However, to enact these democratic ways of practicing critical literacy (Vasquez et al., 2019), teachers must provide guidance by modeling these skills. The effectiveness of inviting students to engage in critical dialogue hinges on the use of strategies like probing questions and teaching critical visual analysis principles through relevant multimodal texts. My goal was to use critical visual analysis to emphasize the characters' complex mental states and the physical uprootedness they experience in the selected narratives. Arizpe (2021) argues that "few studies have analysed in depth how aesthetic and literary strategies work to engage readers with the refugee experience" (p. 1343). For this reason, critical reading approaches, such as the critical visual analysis framework (Tables 1 and 2), are necessary to engage students with the complex landscape of today's world through classroom literature. In this way, teachers and students can delve deeper into the intentional design of texts and illustrations that convey critical themes and cultivate critical literacy skills necessary for democratic participation and shaping a more equitable future. •

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