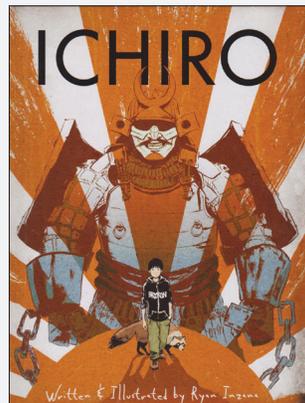


## Second Reaction: Academically Adrift in the World—Pedagogical Applications of *Ichiro*

Inzana, Ryan. *Ichiro*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

Justin Wigard



Upon seeing the gorgeous, staggering, and slightly imposing cover of *Ichiro*, written and illustrated by Ryan Inzana, I was at once intrigued by the hefty graphic novel I held in my hands and surprised to find that my thoughts kept returning to the idea of sharing this with students. Some parts of the narrative I felt could be paralleled to the experiences of some of my peers as they struggled to find their place in the world, while other parts seemed to fit consistently with a secondary or middle-level educational environment. Though *Ichiro*'s tale is a great read, I feel that it would be better used as a pedagogical tool than an independent read.

I suggest a couple of ways to use this novel in the classroom based on the educational context. I believe that this graphic novel could indeed serve as a primary text within an English course, perhaps best utilized as part of an entire unit exploring cultural pluralism incorporating other graphic novels such as *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang, or *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan, or even Joe Sacco's *Palestine*. These stories feature protagonists with different cultural and environmental challenges. The plot of *Ichiro* trying to navigate and ultimately come to terms with his cultural identity provides an opportunity for young readers to empathize with those from different cultures and communities while demonstrating how diverse cultures learn to appreciate each other. *Ichiro*'s own **bildungsroman** is relatable: A young man trying to figure out where he fits in the world, whether in the past or present, in his old country or new home, is something most students experience. In look-

ing at *Ichiro* as a coming-of-age tale, the cross-cultural aspects of Ichiro maturing provide a rich and somewhat unique text to give to students. Adding in fantastic elements steeped in history, however, allows this graphic novel to be something more than a coming-of-age tale for a new generation.

The second way the graphic novel might be used in a classroom is as a secondary text to supplement a lesson, rather than being the sole focus of a class. History classes could benefit greatly from the inclusion of this text by providing a visual of lessons at hand—lessons surrounding the Empire of Japan, for example. Educators can use the mythological Gods and Demons found in the spirit world as visual entry points, examining the spirit world as an analogy for different aspects of World War II (concentration camps, racism, McCarthyism). These same characters can also be used in conjunction with other mythologies (Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Norse, etc.) in order to explore different facets of American, Japanese, or world history. This text, however, could not by any means replace a textbook devoted to history, particularly more specialized textbooks pertaining to the class at large, but could support the movement of the course, much like *The Grapes of Wrath* or *Johnny Tremain*.

In an art class, the Japanese-inspired calligraphic art style and unique color palettes, ranging from grey-and-white reality, to sepia-toned flashbacks, to full color retellings of Japanese mythology, could show how color schemes relate to the different parts of illustrated storytelling within sequential art. Rather than using black and white images that can be disorienting sometimes, Inzana's colorful narrative gives the reader something to grasp onto, framing reality (the familiar) in mostly black, grey, and white, and reserving his use of color for the Spirit Worlds and the retellings of Japanese mythology. In these realms of the narrative, both red and green represent opposing sides in a war with a young boy caught in the middle, giving weight to lessons involving meaning of color in art.

My only caution within *Ichiro* revolves around the potential difficulty that may arise from the sometimes frenetic and frenzied images within this graphic novel. Though *Ichiro's* narrative may be slightly confusing as the lines between the real and the fantastic begin to blur, I believe that the real confusion may derive from the images that tell this tale. At times, the action is chaotic: demons and spirits fight, and it seems as though it's simulating war, which is itself chaotic and unpredictable. Yet, the images are a text unto themselves requiring their own literacy, and, as such, jarring images that break up the fluidity of storytelling are really working against the narrative, forcing the reader to decipher what is being shown, what should be seen, and what the images mean.

This is, by all means, not meant to be an exhaustive review of all of the methods to include *Ichiro* into the classroom nor is it an exhaustive review of *Ichiro* itself; yet, it is a start to thinking about including graphic novels in a myriad of educational settings. *Ichiro* acknowledges its influences while progressing forward, representing a perfect blending of older and newer storytelling that can be taught in classrooms. Even if this graphic novel cannot fit into the

classroom, please consider placing this on a bookshelf; after all, both *Ichiro* the graphic novel and Ichiro the character are simply looking for what we all want: a place to call home.

### **About the Author**

**Justin Wigard** is a recent graduate from Central Michigan University, where he majored in English with a concentration in children's and young adult literature. This has allowed him to present essays on multiculturalism within graphic novels, transmedia operating within *Game of Thrones*, and on the literary implications of the similarities between Superman and Edward Cullen. Realistically, he would like to continue talking about things he loves (books, comics, video games, dinosaurs) with people who will indulge a short ginger kid who rambles, and he hopes becoming an English professor will allow him to do so. He can be reached at wigar1jm@cmich.edu.