

Editorial

Wordless Graphic Novels: The Power of Silence Beyond Words Across Themes

Rong Zhang

In the realm of children's literature, there exists a unique genre that speaks volumes without uttering words - wordless books. Wordless books offer different reading and comprehending experiences for potential audiences that transcends language. As there are no or almost no words in wordless books, such books empower readers to become active participants or even authors to interpret and give voice or narrative to the story. This creates large space for readers to freely use their imagination and create what the story can become. As wordless books use solely on images to convey meaning, the visual designs, such as the use of color, space, light, and lines, are purposefully applied to add different layers of meaning including emotion, interactions, and context details. Wordless books as a visual medium encourages creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence as children explore the richly detailed illustrations, decipher visual cues, and construct narratives based on their own experiences and perspectives. Teachers and researchers have been exploring the potential of using wordless books in developing children's literacy skills, including visual literacy, cultural appreciation, language development.

Despite the rich value that wordless books provide for children's development, wordless books often are considered as "easy books" and are designed for young children who haven't acquired adequate skills to digest books. However, wordless graphic novels present another format of wordless books that sticks to the visual method of delivering narratives but at the same time reaches to the level of complexity that challenges readers' ways of understanding. They present multiple aspects of the society concerning topics, such as, underrepresented groups, immigrants and refugees, and cultural diversity.

With the affordances of wordless graphic novels in mind, five books were purposefully selected to become the focus of this issue. Through the lens of wordless graphic novels, the

authors examine the intricate tapestry of human experiences, amplifying the voices of diverse populations and fostering empathy and understanding across themes, including immigrants, refugees, social-emotional learning. *The Only Child* written by Guojing transcends languages to depict a child's experience of loneliness under one-child policy and embarks on an imaginative journey with friends. *Small Things* by Mel Tregonning offers a compelling portrayal of a young boy grappling with anxiety and depression with haunting illustrations of inner struggles. *Letters to Prison* by Jacques Goldstyn sheds light on the plight of unjust imprisonment, highlighting the importance of empathy and solidarity of family bonds in the face of adversity. *Isla to Island* by Arthur Yao focuses on the experience of a refugee girl who was in the Operation Peter Pan. *The Arrival* written by Shaun Tan presents as a masterful portrayal of immigration and cultural assimilation, offering a visually stunning odyssey of displacement and adaptation in an imaginative world. The book collection embraces a variety of identities, cultures, and experiences and at the same time shedding light on the vast potential of other wordless graphic novels that can contribute to a broad scope.

In a world filled with noise, wordless graphic novels stand as beacons of silent storytelling, amplifying the voices of a variety of populations and provide insights on universal themes of cultures, social justice, immigration, refugees, mental health, and hardships. As we reflect on the profound impact of these captivating works, let us embrace the artistry of silence and continue to explore the untold stories that dwell within their beautifully illustrated pages.

About the Author

Rong Zhang is an assistant professor in Literacy Education at Appalachian State University. Her research focuses on children's wordless picturebook reading, diverse themed children's literature, and their affordances for children's cultural, social-emotional, and literacy development. She is interested in multimodal and multicultural literacies, family literacies of emergent multilingual children and their families.