

First Opinion: The Arrival

Tan, Shaun. *The Arrival*. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007

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Indeed, the life of a single individual often offers a limited perspective on the broader reality of the world. Adversities, struggles, hopes, and expectations are not unique to any one person but might instead be shared by countless individuals across different circumstances and backgrounds. Thus, embracing the diversity of human stories, we gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of life. *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan provides readers with a panoramic view of events by delving into the lives of several people who share similar life stories - the lives of immigrants.

The Arrival immediately captivates the reader as it starts narrating right from the front endpaper of the book depicting a collection of diverse people's portraits. These faces, representing various ethnicities, religions, and ages might intrigue readers and cause their curiosity about the potential connections between these individuals and the narrative that lies ahead. As the story unfolds, the significance of these portraits becomes clear - they illustrate the interconnectedness of the main character's journey and the universal themes of migration and belonging explored throughout the book.

The main character - a beloved husband and caring father, embarks on a journey to another country in search of a better life for his family. Like countless others seeking asylum and opportunity in foreign lands, he faces myriad challenges upon arrival: from the struggle to secure basic necessities such as food and shelter to finding employment. Obviously, the man's life in a new place is full of uncertainty, discomfort, and deprivation. However, he bravely navigates the challenges of his new reality. He meets several immigrants who, like him, are grappling with the complexities of starting anew in a foreign land. In the shared journey of adaptation and survival, the man's void of loneliness is gradually filled with the warmth of friendship and understanding.

What impressed me most was the symbolic approach to present the setting, events, and even the characters. Rather than depicting a specific real-life host country for immigrants, Shaun Tan employs allegory to create a universal representation of the challenges faced by migrants worldwide. For instance, the depiction of a bleak figure of a monster that follows the main character at the beginning of his journey symbolizes the adversity and uncertainty that often accompany the immigration process - the fears, anxieties, and challenges that migrants face as they leave behind their familiar surroundings and embark on a journey into the unknown. Furthermore, the author inhabits the place with phantasmagorical creatures, language systems, and living conventions to underscore the cultural and social differences and the sense of disorientation and unfamiliarity experienced by immigrants as they navigate foreign environments. One special symbol is the origami bird which symbolizes a crucial link between immigrants and their families back home - a messenger of connection and communication across vast distances. Its presence in the narrative underscores the enduring ties that connect individuals with their homeland, despite the physical separation.

I wholeheartedly recommend *The Arrival* for class discussion so that children can gain some insight into the lives of individuals who embark on the journey of immigration, leaving behind their native countries to build new lives in unfamiliar lands. It is also significant that the story permeates themes of sympathy, support, and solidarity, underscoring the importance of human connection across the borders defined by nations, races, and cultures, and empathy in overcoming adversities. A motivating story of the human spirit, the transformative power of hope, and perseverance when facing difficulties will be a beneficial contribution to learning and the expanding life experience for potential readers.

About the Author

Natalya Stepanova is an ESL teacher working with students through elementary to high school. She is also a doctoral student in Language and Literacy at the University of South Carolina. Along with developing her students' literacy, Natalya is passionate about nurturing moral values in her students. Using texts and other visual materials, she facilitates her students' critical views and fosters oral and written discussions to promote social prosperity.