

# An Investigation of Student Preferences of Text Formats

**T**oday, young adults increasingly embrace our multimedia world. They communicate with their friends through texting and social networking sites. They seek information via the Internet and find entertainment through participating in global electronic games with people all around the world. Some even spend time creating their own electronic video games. This digital generation of learners is redefining the meaning of literacy. In large part, students engage in these sophisticated multiliteracy practices out of school, leading to a mismatch with the academic literacies in school.

While there is a growing body of research that focuses on student use and increasing engagement with 21st century multiliteracies both in and out of school (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, & Phelps, 2006; Hagood, 2003; Rhodes & Robnolt, 2009), there remains concern about students' achievement levels with conventional texts (NAEP, 2009). These achievement results, along with the pervasive use of technology by students, suggest that we may be at a critical juncture in regard to the types of literacy experiences that we offer adolescents in school settings.

In addition to the increasing influence of digital media on students' literacy lives, there is yet another phenomenon that we believe needs to be considered related to the issues of adolescent literacy—the growing availability of diverse text formats found in young adult literature. In particular, many of these text formats include strong visual elements that may well appeal to this digital generation of adolescents. In light of these changes, we wondered how changes in text

formats may be influencing the reading preferences of middle school students. As a result, we conducted a study that was guided by the following questions:

- What is the relationship between text format and reader preference?
- What text factors do students identify as influencing their preference for texts?
- What text factors influence students' choices when selecting books to read?

In this article, we first provide background information that informed our study, focusing both adolescent literacy and the changing nature of books for young adults. We then share our findings and offer instructional implications.

## Background

### Adolescent Literacy

To be a “literate” adolescent today means moving beyond handling the traditional literacy demands of school to engaging in the multiple literacy practices needed in this digital age (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 2006). Adolescents now “read” and interpret film, websites, multimedia, and other electronic texts that contain numerous visual images. They also communicate in writing in graphically different ways through blogs, texting, and social networking sites. All of these new literacy activities require an understanding of how the elements of sound and visual images work to convey meaning (Rhodes & Robnolt, 2009).

Yet, simultaneously, there still remains a great

need to support acquisition of traditional literacy competencies. As early as 1989, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development noted that middle schools may be the “last best chance” for many students to acquire proficiency in literacy necessary for future success. Studies have raised deep concerns about the wide disparity in the reading proficiency of young adolescents and their fading interest in reading (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Ley, Schaer, & Dismukes, 1994).

More recently, large-scale assessments continue to indicate that middle-grade students are not moving beyond basic levels in significant numbers. Nationwide, approximately 26% of students in grade 8 read below the basic level (NAEP, 2009). Further, in this latest report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the overall reading scores for students in grade 4 in 2009 remain unchanged from the scores in 2007, whereas the average scores for eighth-grade students showed only a slight increase since 2007. These numbers indicate that a substantial number of eighth-grade students are still unable to read critically and perform other higher-level thinking tasks.

Another concern at the middle school level is the increasing number of students who are aliterate (Beers, 1998). Many middle school students have developed negative attitudes toward reading (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995; Worthy & McKool, 1996) and consequently read less than in previous years (Ley et al., 1994). Such negative attitudes toward reading and a lack of interest in reading lead to lower academic performances, not only in the language arts but also across different subject matter disciplines (Anderson et al., 1988; Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990). Ivey’s work (1999) suggests a possible means of countering students’ negative attitudes toward reading. She found that opportunities for choice in reading motivate middle school students to read. Hence, teachers need to offer diverse reading materials that appeal to disengaged readers (Alvermann, 2002; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999).

### Young Adult Literature

In recent years, there have been many changes in the world of young adult literature—changes that hold promise for motivating adolescent readers. First, there has been a dramatic increase in the volume of young adult novels being published (Donelson & Nilsen,

2008; Wolf, 2008). There have also been changes in the nature of books for adolescents (Koss & Teale, 2009). In particular, we are seeing an increasing use of visual features in books written for adolescents (Dresang, 1999; Wolf, 2008). In fact, Wolf (2008) argues that the inclusion of these visual elements in contemporary young adult fiction results in the creation of an engaging literary genre for the adolescent audience. She analyzed 60 young adult novels published since 2000 and found that approximately 20% included illustrations of some sort. The illustrations in these books had the potential to support the efforts of readers in constructing meaning by: (1) providing a preview of an upcoming element in the book; (2) highlighting key elements; (3) supplying background information; (4) helping readers organize and track information; (5) helping readers visualize settings; and (6) injecting important information not included in the text. In addition to identifying the functions of illustrations in young adult novels, Wolf also noted other graphic design elements that are often used to convey meaning, such as the use of visual symbols and varied font types and point sizes.

Furthermore, new formats have emerged in the world of young adult literature. Scholars have noted increases in books in journal format, novels in verse (Campbell, 2004), and, more recently, graphic novels (Temple, Martinez, & Yokota, 2011). Some authors experiment with highly innovative formats in which visuals are used in creative ways to convey critical elements of the stories. Examples of these “hybrid novels” include Deborah Wile’s *Countdown* (2010) and Brian Selznick’s *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007).

Historically, educators have considered picturebooks (a format that is inherently visual) to be for young readers. Yet this format has also undergone changes in recent years that broaden its appeal to include older readers. There are many picturebooks now that address previously forbidden subjects, a radical change that Dresang (1999) calls “changing bound-

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aries” (p. 17) and Elleman (2004) calls “blunt realism” (p. 13). This “blunt realism” is evident in Huck, Hepler, Hickman, and Kiefer’s (1997) listing of topics explored in recent picturebooks. These topics include environmental concerns as well as personal and social issues relevant to adolescents, including gang violence, bullying, and peer relationships. Picturebook authors also write about historical issues relevant to

young adults, including the Holocaust, Civil Rights, the Depression, and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. In effect, this new breed of picturebook often explores challenging subjects and addresses mature themes, thus blurring the lines between children’s and young adult books

(Osborn, 2001; Zvirin, 1998). Hence, this highly visual format has found a place in the field of young adult literature.

### Text Preferences of Young Adult Readers

Offering the appropriate choice in reading materials is dependent upon an understanding of the text preferences of students. While research on text preferences goes back many decades, there are few contemporary studies. Those more recent studies identify a number of factors linked to text preferences, including topic or subject matter, genre, literary devices (e.g., humor and happy endings), and external factors such as author, length of text, and appeal of title or book cover (Sebesta & Monson, 2003). These factors, however, are by no means inclusive of all potentially significant text factors. In particular, publishers are marketing fictional texts written in a variety of diverse formats for older readers. These diverse formats do not always follow the traditional chapter book format that has dominated the field of young adult literature. Today’s adolescent reader will find novels in verse, graphic novels, novels in journal format, and picturebooks. Of particular note is the significant role of visual elements in a number of these formats. While the visual elements in picturebooks and graphics are obvious, visual elements also include the use of varied fonts and distinctive print layouts found in books such as

*Monster* (1999) by Walter Dean Myers and *Witness* (2001) by Karen Hesse. However, there is little or no research that addresses reader preferences for these types of formats and visual features, let alone the impact these elements may have on reading choices.

In light of these changes in young adult literature and the continuing need to engage adolescents in traditional literacies, we posed the following three questions for this study:

1. What is the relationship between text format and reader preference?
2. What text factors do students identify as influencing their preference for texts?
3. What text factors influence students’ choices when selecting books to read?

## Methodology and Data Sources

### The Research

Participants were 20 proficient eighth-grade readers in one section of a reading class at a Title I middle school in an urban school district in the Southwest. All students were Hispanic and spoke English fluently. At three different points in the study, we shared with the students six historical fiction books, each representing a different format. We selected books from this single genre to ensure that genre did not influence student choice in book selections. Historical fiction was chosen because of the availability of books written in a variety of formats appropriate for middle school students. The text formats included a novel in verse (*Out of the Dust*, Hesse, 1997), picturebook (*Pink and Say*, Polacco, 1994), traditional novel (*The Well*, Taylor, 1995), graphic novel (*The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane, 2006), novel in journal format (*Pedro’s Journal*, Conrad, 1991), and hybrid novel (*The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, Selznick, 2007). (This hybrid novel tells a story by alternating sequences of pictures with multiple text-only pages throughout). We shared the books with the students in each of three different phases of our study.

### PHASE 1

We met with the students individually and asked each to preview the books and rank order them in terms of reading preference. We then interviewed the students individually, asking them to explain the basis of their ranking. If students did not talk about text format as a

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factor in their decisions, we then provided a label and description for each book format and asked, “How did this influence your selection?”

### PHASE 2

In preparation for the second interview, we had asked the students to read approximately 10% of each book in order to select two books to read in their entirety. While reading the 10%, students completed a note-taking chart to document reasons for wanting or not wanting to read a book. We then interviewed the students individually, asking them to explain the reasons for their selections of the two books. Again, if students did not talk about text format as a factor in their decisions, we explicitly addressed text format by asking, “How did the format influence your decision to read these two books? How did format influence your decision not to read the other books?”

### PHASE 3

For the final phase, students read the two books chosen in Phase 2 and completed an opinion chart in which they wrote about their reactions to each book. We again conducted individual interviews in which students talked about the two books they preferred. In an attempt to capture students’ views about text format, we asked, “If you had to describe these books to a friend, what would you say?” If text format was not addressed with this prompt, we followed with an explicit probe about text format.

## Findings

### PHASE 1

As the students previewed the books, we noticed that half of them conducted superficial inspections of the books looking only at the front and back covers. The other half looked more closely at the books, sometimes reading the dust jacket and flipping through pages. When we asked the students to tell us how they made their top two selections for reading, almost half of them (47%) offered only general valuing comments (“It looks interesting,” “It looks mysterious and fun,” or just “It looked good”). Students offering more concrete rationales for their selections talked about the pictures in the books (18%) and the genre of the books (18%). For example, one student commented that she was interested in *Pink and Say* because she “likes books with pictures.” Another student placed

*The Invention of Hugo Cabret* as one of her top choices because “I can tell what the story is about when I see pictures.” In regard to genre, one student selected *The Well* because “it’s a fiction story.”

### PHASE 2

In this phase, students sampled 10% of each of the six books to select two books to read in their entirety. Approximately 83% of the students’ top two choices were books in which pictures played an integral role. This included the hybrid novel *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, the picturebook *Pink and Say*, and the graphic novel *The Red Badge of Courage*. The other three books altogether were selected by students as a first or second reading choice only seven times. Length of book did not appear to be a determining factor, since *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* with 526 pages was selected by 18 students as a first or second choice, whereas the 40-page *Pink and Say* was chosen as a first or second choice by only 6 students. The graphic novel *The Red Badge of Courage* was selected as a first or second choice by 11 students. In effect, students gravitated toward the two books that used pictures in more creative ways (*The Invention of Hugo Cabret* and *The Red Badge of Courage*) rather than the traditionally illustrated picturebook (*Pink and Say*).

In explaining their top two book choices, students offered a variety of reasons, including characterization, pictures, genre, plot, subject matter, point of view, and setting. The rationale most frequently given was the inclusion of pictures in the books (44%). For example, one student selected *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* because “it showed me the pictures and what was happening.” Another student selected the same book because “it had many pictures and words and it made me understand the story.” A student who selected *The Red Badge of Courage* stated that he “likes graphic novels and comic books.”

### PHASE 3

In this final phase, students read their top two choices in their entirety. They again overwhelmingly chose books in which illustrations played a predominant role in telling the story. As their first choice, 86.0% of the students selected books with pictures as their favorite—*The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, and *Pink and Say*. Of these three, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* and *The Red Badge of Courage*

were the most popular. As their second choice, 89.4% of the students selected books with pictures. Perhaps of particular note, none of the students selected as their first or second choice to read *The Well*, the novel representing the traditional format. One student explained, “There are no pictures and it looks kind of boring.”

Those students who considered pictures to be an important factor in their book selections talked about how these pictures influenced their choices. Some students felt that pictures engage them in the book. For example, one student said, “Pictures just made me want to read them.” Other students talked in a general way about how pictures helped them understand what they were reading. For example, one student stated, “I understand it more. I got a better view of what was going on.” Other students gleaned character and setting information from the pictures. One of these students commented, “I like seeing how the characters actually look and how something absolutely looks that they are describing.” Still others mentioned that pictures clarified the plot of the stories. For example, in *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, the main character becomes obsessed with getting an “automaton” to work. The concept of an automaton is obscure, one that most students would grapple with while reading the book. However, with the pictures of the automaton providing a visual explanation of the concept, readers are able to grasp the meaning of the word. In talking about the value of pictures, one student explained how pictures aided in understanding an “automaton” with this comment—“the sketches, the designs of the dad helped me know what they were talking about.”

## Implications for Teaching

Our findings suggest that today’s young adults gravitate toward books with visual elements. Our task as educators, then, is to find and use high-quality books with visual elements that appeal to today’s students. In this section, we present an in-depth look at books representing five distinctive formats. These formats represent different ways in which contemporary authors of young adult books are incorporating pictures and other visual elements into their writing. We selected a documentary novel, a novel with pictures that support complex descriptions, a picturebook, a wordless book, and a graphic novel. We conclude by

offering a list of high-quality books containing distinctive visual elements that hold potential for capturing students’ interest and attention. The list contains book summaries as well as instructional suggestions for exploring visual, literary, content, and literacy foci. (See Table 1.)

### A Documentary Novel—*Countdown*

Deborah Wiles’s new work of historical fiction, *Countdown* (2010), is set in 1962 during the era of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Eleven-year-old Franny experiences normal growing pains as she works through her tenuous relationship with her best friend and deals with complex family issues. Overshadowing these tensions are the larger tensions of the era, including the fear of Communism and the imminent threat of nuclear war spawned by the Russian missile crisis in Cuba. In addition, societal structures are in transition as the civil rights movement gains momentum. These larger tensions have a direct impact on Franny’s everyday life as she is required to participate in fearful civil defense drills, view films about nuclear attacks, and watch her college-age sister become caught up in the civil rights movement.

### VISUAL ELEMENTS

What makes this book unique is its reliance on a variety of visuals interspersed throughout the pages to recreate the societal tensions of the time—tensions that directly affect Franny, her family, and her friends. What sets this book apart from other historical fiction books is Wiles’s masterful use of visuals to capture key elements of the social, political, and cultural dynamics of the era. For example, she includes pictures of nuclear explosions, political cartoons, signs announcing fallout shelters, newspaper headlines of political events, photographs of major political figures (such as Kennedy and Khrushchev), and photographs depicting civil rights events (such as the bombing of a Greyhound bus with Freedom Riders as passengers). In addition, Wiles intersperses these political visuals with cultural artifacts, such as song lyrics, photos of famous people (Miss America, James Bond, Cassius Clay, Lucille Ball, and Desi Arnaz, to name a few).

### A Novel with Supporting Pictures—*Leviathan*

*Leviathan* (Westerfeld, 2009), a mixed-genre novel blending science fiction, fantasy, and historical

**Table 1.** Samples of books utilizing visual elements

<b>NOVELS</b>		
Title and Author	Summary	Instructional Potential
<i>Monster</i> by Walter Dean Myers	Sixteen-year-old Steve Harmon is on trial for the murder of a convenience store owner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—ways in which authors use variations in typeface and font size to signal different genres (e.g., journal, movie script); pictures</li> <li>• Literacy focus—characterization</li> </ul>
<i>Nothing but the Truth</i> by Avi	Freshman Phillip Malloy is misunderstood by his English teacher when he hums the National Anthem during homeroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—ways in which textual layouts relate to genre (e.g., letters, memos, plays scripts, diary)</li> <li>• Literacy focus—plot</li> </ul>
<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> by Sherman Alexie	Junior, a Native American Indian with a talent for drawing cartoons, leaves the high school on the Spokane reservation to attend the all-white school in a neighboring town.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—contribution of drawings, doodling, sketches, and cartoons contribute to storytelling</li> <li>• Literacy focus—characterization</li> <li>• Content focus—contemporary Native American life</li> </ul>
<i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid</i> by Jeff Kinney	The ups and downs of being in middle school are highlighted in this humorous series of books.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—use of cartoon-style illustrations with dialogue bubbles to complement storyline</li> <li>• Literacy focus—Promoting recreational reading</li> </ul>
<i>Trial by Jury Journal</i> by Kate Klise	Sixth-grader Lily Watson becomes a sequestered juror in order to complete a research project and avoid summer school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—use of representations of environmental print (e.g., carnival ride tickets, excerpts from newspapers, commercial ads, pictures) to tell the story</li> <li>• Literacy focus—Promoting recreational reading</li> </ul>
<b>GRAPHIC NOVELS</b>		
Title and Author	Summary	Visual Elements
<i>One Bad Rat</i> by Bryan Talbot	Struggling to overcome the devastating impact of childhood sexual abuse by her father, Helen Potter runs away from home and begins a journey of recovery that is linked to the life of her namesake—Beatrix Potter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—use of characters' intense facial expression and variations in color to depict character emotions</li> <li>• Literacy focus—characterization and the life and works of well-known author Beatrix Potter</li> </ul>
<i>Ethel and Ernest</i> by Raymond Briggs	The story of a British couple's life plays out against the tumultuous changes of the twentieth century beginning with the Great Depression and continuing through the cultural upheaval of the 1970s.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—variation in which dialogue is presented to the reader (e.g., speech bubbles and free-standing dialogue); pictorial depictions of setting</li> <li>• Content focus—life in the 1930s–1970s</li> </ul>
<i>Maus I: A Survivor's Tale</i> by Art Spiegelman	In a somewhat allegorical fashion, Spiegelman recounts his father's experiences during the Holocaust by using animal figures to represent Germans as well as the Jews and other victims. He also recounts the impact of the Holocaust on the characters' later years and the lives of subsequent generations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—symbolic use of black and white to tell this story</li> <li>• Content focus—Holocaust and its impact</li> </ul>
<i>To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel</i> by Siena Cherson Siegel and Mark Siegel	This memoir traces Siena Cherson Siegel's involvement in the world of ballet from her early years in Puerto Rico to her adolescent studies at the American School of Ballet in New York to the beginning of her professional career as a ballerina.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—contrasts of color; variations in panel sizes; frequent use of illustrations alone to tell the story line; conventions used to convey dialogue and narration</li> <li>• Literacy focus—memoir genre</li> </ul>

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Table 1. Continued

PICTUREBOOKS		
Title and Author	Summary	Instructional Potential
<i>The Wretched Stone</i> by Chris Van Allsburg	A mysterious glowing rock brought aboard a ship turns the shipmates into apes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—use of pictures to convey plot</li> <li>• Literacy focus—theme</li> </ul>
<i>Rose Blanche</i> by Roberto Innocenti	This picturebook is a World War II story of a German schoolgirl who discovers the horrors of concentration camps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—use of illustrations establish the mood of this somber story</li> <li>• Literacy focus—mood</li> <li>• Content focus—World War II</li> </ul>
<i>The Wall: Growing Up behind the Iron Curtain</i> by Peter Sis	Peter Sis chronicles his early years growing up behind the Iron Curtain in Czechoslovakia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—use of color to convey symbolic meanings and the use of diverse visual artifacts to establish time and place</li> <li>• Literacy focus—symbolism and setting</li> <li>• Content focus—Life behind the Iron Curtain</li> </ul>
<i>Dear Mrs. LaRue: Letters from Obedience School</i> by Mark Teague	When Ike the dog is sent to obedience school, he writes letters to his mistress documenting his “mistreatment.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual study—ways in which illustrations and texts can convey contradictory information</li> <li>• Literacy focus—humor</li> </ul>

fiction, is about the young heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the advent of World War I. Aleksandar Ferdinand, running for his life, becomes caught up in the conflict between two great empires of the time. For defense, the Austro-Hungarian and German empires rely on Clankers, steam-powered iron machines. The opposing British Darwinists and their allies use fabricated beasts as weapons.

#### VISUAL ELEMENTS

Scott Westerfeld uses few visuals, but those he does include are critical in supporting readers’ understanding of the story. He uses pictures to help readers better understand and visualize both the fabricated beasts and the fantastic Clankers weaponry. The author also uses endpapers (the first pages one sees when opening a book and the last pages one sees before closing the book) as another visual device to convey important information—in this case, information about the setting of the story. Westerfeld reinforces the concept of fabricated beasts and Clankers through his representation of a map of Europe where machinery motifs represent Austria-Hungary and beast motifs represent the Allied countries. The use of endpapers to convey story information is a technique more commonly used by the creators of picturebooks than by authors of novels.

#### A Picturebook—*Voices from the Park*

In this innovative picturebook about a day in the park, Anthony Browne (1998) uses four different perspectives to tell the story. A well-to-do woman, who is

also a dominating mother, and her meek son walk their dog in the park. That same day, an out-of-work father and his lively daughter also walk their dog in the park.

#### VISUAL ELEMENTS

While the plot of the book is simple, character is the critical literary element in *Voices from the Park*. It is through the illustrations that the author/illustrator reveals the dynamics of character relationships and feelings. For example, Browne visually conveys the disparity between the two adults through their clothing, bodily stances, and even facial expressions. In one key scene, we see the two adults near the same park bench, yet clearly separated by a large pole that is between them. Readers must carefully examine the pictures in order to understand the subtle meanings that the author expresses in this book.

#### A Wordless Book—*The Arrival*

In *The Arrival* (2006), Shaun Tan tells a complex story of immigration. Initially, the story appears to be a traditional or straightforward tale of the immigrant experience. We follow him as he leaves his family and appears to travel to the New World. Soon, though, it becomes apparent that this new world from the perspective of the immigrant is not the world as we know it.

#### VISUAL ELEMENTS

This story is told solely through the visual. The early pages alternate between a series of panels and full-

page spreads to depict the immigrant's preparations for departure. As the story progresses to his arrival in the new world, Shaun Tan captures what must often-times be the confusing, shocking, and overwhelming experiences faced by an immigrant. The visuals create a surreal context that begins to move us away from a realistic representation of the immigrant experience to a fantasy representation. Some of the fantasy elements encountered by the immigrant include ships and elevators that float through the air, cone-shaped structures, bizarre creatures, and even an invented alphabet. Taken together, these elements capture the overwhelming confusion that many immigrants experience when arriving in a new world. The endpapers also play a role in telling the story by featuring rows and rows of pictures of immigrants from around the world. In addition, the sepia-toned title page features visual elements that include an old photograph as well as official stamps that are found on passports and other travel documents.

### **A Graphic Novel—*American Born Chinese***

Gene Luen Yang in *American Born Chinese* (2006) uses the graphic novel format to tell what initially appears to be three separate stories. The first story tells of an unhappy monkey king who sacrifices his own sense of self in his quest to be accepted and revered as a god. In the second story, Jin Wang, a Chinese American boy, encounters resistance and bigotry when he attempts to win the favor of Amelia, an American girl of European descent. In the final story, another character, Danny, is embarrassed by his visiting Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee, who is portrayed in a highly stereotypical fashion. The three stories come together in unexpected ways at the end to address issues related to ethnic identity and self-acceptance.

### **VISUAL ELEMENTS**

Gene Luen Yang uses visual representations in the graphic novel format to convey both character and plot throughout the story. While most of the pages contain the typical panels found in graphic novels, he also occasionally inserts pages containing no panels, instead using a single illustration to tell the story. The visuals are particularly critical for revealing characters' feelings and actions as well as for representing stereotypes of one Chinese character and an American bully. On the final page of the book, Yang includes

an intriguing coda—a single YouTube frame related to the story ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xt\\_m7qooZfo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xt_m7qooZfo)).

## **Final Thoughts**

Our investigation of student preferences for text formats was exploratory in nature and, as such, was limited in several ways. First, we realize that our relatively few participants represented one particular demographic, and we acknowledge the need for research with a broader population. In addition, while we controlled the impact of genre on student choices by limiting the books to historical fiction, the subject matter of the books was varied and could have influenced students' selection of books.

However, these findings still have important implications for the ways in which teachers select books for their classrooms. While more traditional fictional formats certainly have a place in classrooms, teachers need to keep in mind student preferences for books containing visual elements. Today, publishers offer increasing numbers of high-quality books that use visual elements in very sophisticated ways. Reading such books can be demanding for some students, which underscores the importance for visual literacy instruction (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2008).

*Miriam Martinez is a professor of Literacy Education at the University of Texas at San Antonio where she teaches courses in reading and children's literature. She is currently coeditor of the Journal of Children's Literature.*

*Janis Harmon is a professor of Literacy Education at the University of Texas at San Antonio where she teaches courses in literacy and young adult literacy.*

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