

Graphic Novel 1

Title: *They Called Us Enemy*

Author: George Takei

Question	Response
Is reading a graphic novel easier, or does it require a different kind of thinking? Explain. Provide evidence from your novel.	From 2019 to 2024, sales of graphic novels rose fivefold. Is it because graphic novels offer an easier read, or is it something else? Reading a graphic novel is no easier than reading a regular novel in prose because it requires analysis not just of the words, but also of the pictures. While reading prose, everything you need to know is handed to you in the form of words, and while those may be esoteric, they are still the only thing necessary of analysis. On the other hand, in graphic novels the reader must derive meaning from both the words and the illustrations. For example, on page 67 of <i>They Called Us Enemy</i> , a book about the Japanese incarceration camps, the author utilizes pictures such as the one where Mama is gazing adoringly at her sewing machine. Without any words, the Takei and the illustrator convey how much Mama loves her sewing machine, and how important it is for her. While he could have described this, it makes a larger impact on the reader if they can read the feelings in her face themselves. While graphic novels are certainly faster reads, they are no less easy to read than prose, as you must analyze both the images and the text. So does the addition of pictures really make reading graphic novels easier... or does it add an extra layer of complexity?
Which panel in your book communicates the most meaning—and how? Which matters more in this moment—the words or the visuals? Defend your thinking.	Can a single color convey meaning just as well as words? The panel on the bottom of page 27 of <i>They Called Us Enemy</i> proves that it certainly can. This panel, a square of black, quickly conveys to the reader all the feelings the Japanese were feeling. The black symbolizes the overwhelming confusion and uncertainty that these people were faced with. The author makes a statement by adding this panel, and the reader gains a deeper understanding of what the Japanese were feeling. No words could convey with as much impact the situation and deluge of feelings as well as this panel does. By using symbolism, the reader is forced to think critically and infer. In conclusion, even though this panel has only

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	one color and no words, it conveys meaning more effectively than words through symbolism.
Where does the story take place? How does the setting impact the characters or the problems in the story?	BANG BANG. That's the sound of the military hammering at your door, coming with the news that you and your family are being forcibly removed from your home. George and his family have to deal with this in <i>They Called Us Enemy</i>, and as such, the setting varies often over the span of the book. Most notably, the story takes place at the internment camps, Camp Rohwer and Camp Tule Lake. These unwelcoming settings shape the problems that the characters face, and force them to grow and adapt. On page 77 we see how the camps were unready for simple natural events like rainstorms. The characters come together as a community and use their ingenuity to fix the issues that came with the rain, showing how the camp's flaws led to a deeper sense of community. Furthermore, pages 78-79 illustrate how the problems in the camps led to George's father becoming the "block manager". His work listening and representing the community makes him a role model for his son, and later his experience lets him be a valuable source of wisdom. In conclusion, the harsh camps that the characters spend most of their time in force them to think creatively about how to address problems. In this case, the axiom "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger" certainly rings true.
How does the character define themselves at the beginning of the story? Middle? End? Provide text evidence (from pictures and/or words).	My sister used to want to be a cow when she grew up, but she now has very different ideas about her future. Just like her, George's definition of his future and current situation changes drastically as he grows up. At the start of the story, George is a young and innocent boy, ignorant of the unjustness of the world. He places incredible faith in his parents, especially his father. When his brother asks a question he is unsure about, he replies, "Daddy will know why... Daddy knows <i>everything</i>" (pg. 137-8). This faith in his father leads him to believe that the incarceration camps are just normal, because he sees his father acting calmly in the situation. His view of himself reflects this: he is simply a normal boy in a normal family. As a teenager, George gains a deeper interest of

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	history, and his view of his time in the camps morphs. "As I studied civics and government in school, I came to see the internment as an assault, not only upon an entire group of Americans... but on the constitution itself. How its guarantees of <i>due process</i> and <i>equal protection</i> had been decimated by forces of <i>fear</i> and <i>prejudice</i>... unleashed by unscrupulous politicians" (pg. 173). George views himself as an American, and he abhors how the government incarcerated its citizens. While it is hard to understand, George still believes that he has the full picture: of the camps, of his father's choice, and of the injustice done. On page 142 the author shows just how confident George is with his worldview in this conversation with his father, "'You'll understand some day.' 'When I grow up, is that it? Well I am grown up and I do understand.'" The pictures of this period in his life depict him with pride in his heritage and defiance over the camps. As George grows up, he realizes how hard the camps were for his parents, and he understands that it is his duty as a part of American democracy to make sure he advocates for his beliefs. George takes part in groups to build awareness about causes, "To build pressure on Washington, I was proud to join hundreds of other witnesses to testify before the <i>Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians</i>" (pg. 192).
Graphic novels tell stories both through words and images. As you read, find panels that show themes such as assimilation, culture, cultural preservation, immigration, refugee experiences, identity, and conformity. Explain how the words and images together communicate these ideas.	With a topic as multi-faceted as immigration, it makes sense to portray it through a graphic novel. By using both words and pictures, immigration is more precisely represented. On page 36, George's father is handed a tag, akin to something you would put on your luggage, so that the guards could track the Japanese. The words explain the situation, "We were loaded onto trains headed east, but not before being 'tagged' to keep track of us like cattle." The pictures display groups of people crowded together, their faces filled with shame. This scene shows how degrading the experience was; these people's identity as <i>Japanese</i> was more important than their identity as <i>human</i>. Additionally, on pages 105 and 106, the story shows the people at the internment camps celebrating Christmas night, an American holiday. This shows

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	assimilation to American culture, and emphasizes the unfairness of the camps. Many of the people were born in America, and grew up celebrating holidays like this, even if they are of Japanese heritage. Ultimately, the use of both images and words shows with accuracy themes of identity and assimilation, and in the doing so conveys how unjust the internment camps were for many who felt American.
What challenges does your character face? How does s/he overcome them?	"Life is hard." My grandfather's favorite quote is not always reassuring, but it certainly is true. George faces many challenges, namely dealing with legalized racism as well as trying to cope and understand his time in the internment camps. By finding support in his family, he is able to overcome these challenges, and in doing so, gain pride and strength. In the internment camps, George faces violence and anger. He turns to his father to help him understand why he is exposed to such things. On page 138 the panels depict George's father patiently explaining to him what was going on. After leaving the camps, George is struck with the injustice of the camps, and spends a lot of time trying to understand how democracy could go so wrong. He has many post-dinner conversations with his father, where again he questions to try and find the truth. Through the support he gets from his father, George finds a way to cope with the trauma of the camps while also understanding how to make sure nothing similar occurs again. The story leaves the reader with a sense of gratitude for our family and the wisdom they impart to us everyday.
What questions do you want to ask your book character to help you understand their identity, their experience, and/or challenges? How would these answers help you understand the character's experience better?	It takes an act of courage to write about traumatic experiences, and to revisit memories that you'd rather leave buried. George Takei is brave, and if I could further ask him about his time in the relocation centers, I would query about how his experience would have been different if he had been older and why learning about events like this is important for ensuring growth in the future. In the book, such as on page 142, Takei expresses his regret for how he spoke to his father about the camps, "It still pains me to this

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day... that arrogant boy's outspoken bluntness inflicted on his father... a man who knew the anguish of those dark internment years more intensely than that boy could ever understand." I would like to know how Takei believes his feelings about the internment would have changed had he been older when it had happened. Did he think he would still have spoken to his father with such brashness, or with more understanding? Knowing this answer would allow me to appreciate further how he imagines his innocence affected his perceptions of Camp Rohwer and Tule Lake. Moreover, another question I would ask Takei is why he believes learning about events such as the passing of Executive Order 9066 is necessary to ensure that there is growth in the future. The answer to this would allow me to see Takei's point of view about democracy and society better. In short, given the chance to ask Takei about his experience, I would ask about how his age affected his impressions of his years in the internment camps and why education about certain events is important to ensure a brighter future.