

2020

Gazing at scattered stars: Immigration through the lens of elementary graphic literature

Jennifer K. Stanerson
University of Northern Iowa

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Gazing at scattered stars: Immigration through the lens of elementary graphic literature

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze graphic literature for respectful and authentic portrayals of immigrants to help librarians and classroom teachers build culturally inclusive library collections. The study sought to answer the question of how immigrants are portrayed in elementary level graphic texts. Nine books were chosen utilizing reviews from authoritative sources along with the Wilson's Children's Collection and Wilson's Middle and Junior High Core Collection databases to ensure the study was comprised of high-quality literature. The selected texts were analyzed to determine the themes present in both the text and illustrations. Results of the study found the most commonly occurring themes, or those that are present across most of the books, to be: Family Stressors, Creation of a New Social or Cultural Identity, Anti-Immigration Climate, and Acculturative Conflict. However, this analysis revealed more prominent themes across the selected literature; themes are prominent when they are fundamental to the advancement of the storyline in multiple books. These prominent themes include Family Stressors, Adversity Faced in the Homeland, and Difficulties During the Immigration Process. Themes that are present across some of the books, but play a major role in very few texts include Pride in Heritage and Support from Community. Finally, the theme of Social Mobility is not found to be present in any of the selected literature. This research aids librarians and classroom teachers in identifying literature to build an inclusive library collection which promotes empathy for others and provides immigrants an opportunity for self-reflection.

**GAZING AT SCATTERED STARS: IMMIGRATION THROUGH THE LENS OF
ELEMENTARY GRAPHIC LITERATURE**

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of School Library Studies
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Jennifer K. Stanerson
May 2020

This Research Paper by: Jennifer K. Stanerson

Titled: Gazing at Scattered Stars: Immigration Through the Lens of Elementary Graphic

Literature

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts.

Date Approved

Joan Bessman Taylor, PhD. - Graduate Faculty First Reader

Date Approved

Karla Krueger, EdD. - Graduate Faculty Second Reader

Date Approved

Robin Dada, PhD. - Head, Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze graphic literature for respectful and authentic portrayals of immigrants to help librarians and classroom teachers build culturally inclusive library collections. The study sought to answer the question of how immigrants are portrayed in elementary level graphic texts. Nine books were chosen utilizing reviews from authoritative sources along with the *Wilson's Children's Collection* and *Wilson's Middle and Junior High Core Collection* databases to ensure the study was comprised of high-quality literature. The selected texts were analyzed to determine the themes present in both the text and illustrations. Results of the study found the most commonly occurring themes, or those that are present across most of the books, to be: Family Stressors, Creation of a New Social or Cultural Identity, Anti-Immigration Climate, and Acculturative Conflict. However, this analysis revealed more prominent themes across the selected literature; themes are prominent when they are fundamental to the advancement of the storyline in multiple books. These prominent themes include Family Stressors, Adversity Faced in the Homeland, and Difficulties During the Immigration Process. Themes that are present across some of the books, but play a major role in very few texts include Pride in Heritage and Support from Community. Finally, the theme of Social Mobility is not found to be present in any of the selected literature. This research aids librarians and classroom teachers in identifying literature to build an inclusive library collection which promotes empathy for others and provides immigrants an opportunity for self-reflection.

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CHAPTER 1

The power of literacy is not just that it allows words and ideas to travel across time and space and to move across borders that sometimes keep people out. It is that words can travel between minds and hearts. They can *open* our hearts and minds, taking us into the experiences of people whose lives are very different from our own. They can help us to see new possibilities and to imagine the world as we want it to be, not just as it is now.

–Marjorie Faulstich Orellana, *Literacy Lives in Transcultural Times*

INTRODUCTION

With millions of immigrants living in the United States, immigration is a frequent focus in the national news and the topic of many heated debates. Caught in the middle of this immigration issue are many children who have the legal right to receive education under the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on *Plyer v. Doe* (1982). The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2018) estimates that as of January 2015, 12 million undocumented immigrants were living in the United States. Of those, over 1 million were under the age of eighteen. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2019) reports that in 2017 alone, over 250,000 students or children were granted lawful permanent resident status. These statistics indicate a significant number of immigrant school age children living in the United States. Providing academic resources to best meet the needs of this diverse population of students is crucial to creating a welcoming learning community in which they can thrive.

Problem Statement

As the U.S. student population becomes more culturally diverse, it is critical to develop an equally diverse collection of library materials in which all learners see themselves reflected. Additionally, it is important for the entire student population to

gain empathy and understanding of those different from themselves in order to create a culturally inclusive learning community. The inclusion of graphic literature in the learning environment provides reading support and enjoyment across a wide range of student needs and interests. Additionally, the portrayal of immigrants has not yet been studied in graphic literature at the elementary level. Thus, this study explores the portrayal of immigrants in diverse, high-interest graphic literature for youth in grades kindergarten through fifth.

Issues

The topic of immigrant portrayal in graphic literature is informed by statistics and scholarly research in the following three areas: U.S. immigration rates and presence of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the state of Iowa, the use of graphic novels to improve student reading comprehension skills and social understanding, and the need for diverse literature.

United States Immigration Rates and Presence of LEP Students in Iowa

Although states such as California and Texas receive a large majority of the U.S. immigrant population, many are choosing to make Iowa their home. While some of these students are able to speak and read English fluently, others experience greater difficulty with English language acquisition. In a 2018 report, the Iowa Department of Education states that nearly thirty thousand students, or 6% of public school enrollment, are LEP students, defined as having a first language other than English. This gap in English language skills has several implications on the education system, one being the provision of appropriate and effective learning materials. As suggested by Murphy (2018), many

libraries lack funds to enable the extensive purchase of reading materials to support each of the native languages spoken by immigrant students. Additionally, materials in these various languages can be difficult to locate. This leaves teachers searching for alternative learning and instructional resources to help support these students.

Use of Graphic Novels to Improve Reading Comprehension Skills and Social Understanding

Graphic novels have been identified as a viable resource for improving struggling readers' comprehension skills (Smetana & Grisham, 2012). Similarly, Barack (2015) and Chun (2009) suggest that graphic novels can be an effective resource in raising the reading comprehension of English Language Learner (ELL) students. Furthermore, ELL students have expressed a preference for the graphic novel medium (Howard, 2017). In addition to aiding reading ability, Murphy (2018) proposes that another benefit to utilizing graphic novels with immigrant students is that they "often address social, cultural, and historical content" (p. 62). This combination of ELL student preference, benefit to reading comprehension, and aid to cultural and social understanding, makes graphic literature a unique and effective resource to utilize with all immigrant students across a broad range of reading levels and English proficiency.

Need for Diverse Literature

The need for diversity in library collections is at the forefront of many interest groups. In an article written for the Association for Library Service to Children, Naidoo (2014) states "stories help children understand how society perceives their culture as well as the cultures of their classmates, teachers, caregivers, and others, thereby influencing

their social and identity development” (p. 2). Naidoo further suggests that it is crucial for children’s literature to respectfully portray diverse cultures, as repeated exposure to stereotypes can lead to poor self esteem of a child whose cultural characteristics are depicted, along with the perpetuation of hurtful misinformation about diverse cultures. The importance of diversity is also reinforced as a learning standard by the American Association of School Librarians (2018) by the identification of the need for students to “demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community” (p. 4).

Rationale

The number of students categorized as Limited English Proficient in the United States nearly reached an estimated 5 million for the 2013-2014 school year (United States Department of Education, 2014). Locally, 77% of Iowa school districts report the presence of LEP students (Iowa Department of Education, 2019), while nationally their presence is reported in every state (United States Department of Education, 2014). Schools nationwide are challenged to provide learning resources to meet the diverse academic and social-emotional needs of these immigrant students. Graphic novels have shown to be effective in closing reading comprehension gaps (Murphy, 2018), to help immigrant students understand social norms, and to provide multicultural “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” (Bishop, 1990) for all students. Thus, these materials should be included in the library and classroom collections of all schools. This study aims to benefit librarians and educators in creating diverse reading collections that include graphic literature which respectfully and authentically portray immigrants.

Deficiencies in Past Research

Studies of multicultural content in various segments of children's literature have been completed in past years, including an analysis of multicultural content in picture books by Goodale (2012), the portrayal of immigrants in graphic novels by Boatright (2010), and the portrayal of race in young adult graphic novels by Moeller and Becnel (2018). In an effort to further understand how immigration is portrayed in children's literature, this study focuses on the portrayal of immigrants in graphic novels for youth in grades kindergarten through fifth.

Summary of Problem

As graphic literature can be utilized to help immigrant students improve reading skills, to assist with social inclusion and understanding, to provide opportunities for self-reflection, and to foster empathy towards them, educators need to identify resources which respectfully and authentically portray immigrants.

Purpose

The intent of this study is to analyze graphic literature for respectful and authentic portrayals of immigrants to help librarians and classroom teachers build culturally inclusive library collections.

Research Question

1. How are immigrants portrayed in elementary level graphic literature?

Assumptions and Limitations

This study is limited by the number of graphic texts containing immigrant narratives published for youth in grades kindergarten through fifth. Selection was further

limited by the requirement of two positive professional reviews for a work to be included in the research sample.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to identify graphic literature offering respectful and authentic portrayals of immigrants to help librarians and teachers build culturally inclusive library collections. Previous research related to this topic includes the following categories: sociological and psychological perspectives on immigration, and portrayal of immigrants in children's literature.

Sociological and Psychological Perspectives on Immigration

While immigrant children face educational challenges related to language acquisition, it is also important to recognize the difficulty in adjusting to their new cultural and social environment. Identifying these sociological and psychological perspectives leads to a better understanding of the holistic immigrant experience. Hilburn (2014) sought to identify the barriers immigrant students face beyond language acquisition by enlisting teachers in pinpointing perceived “non-linguistic challenges” (Introduction, para. 4). Hilburn's research group consisted of six middle and high school Civics teachers in urban, suburban, and rural schools in North Carolina. Data were collected through individual interviews as well as as a focus group meeting and were analyzed and organized to identify themes. The findings of this study identified four main barriers in the immigrant education experience: use of a curriculum deficient in “representation of immigrant history and heritages” creating a lack of relevancy to immigrant students (Findings, para. 3), questionable legal status of undocumented students and families leading to lack of personal motivation in their education, the “new

gateway state factor” describing North Carolina as lacking in necessary infrastructure to properly serve the immigrant student population, and the anti-immigration climate of the learning environment. While these findings illustrate the experience of immigrants at school, it is equally important to understand the dynamics of their home life.

A study by Patel et al. (2016) researched the effects of immigrant students’ family lives in order to identify correlations to their school performance. The demographic group was comprised of 189 high school students originating from around the world and presently enrolled in a U.S. urban international high school. The data for the study were gathered via online surveys of 189 participants and verbal interviews of sixty-six of those participants. Additionally, nine teachers from the two schools participated in the study, providing data on externalized symptoms of immigrant students. The compiled data were analyzed quantitatively to determine correlation to academic achievement and qualitatively for deeper exploration of themes and subthemes related to family stressors. Three major family stressors were identified: separation from a family member, life events such as illness or substance abuse of a family member, and acculturative conflict between parents and children. Quantitative analysis showed that being separated from a family member and experiencing family conflict had little negative effect on GPA, while life events had the most significant impact on GPA, especially when that family member was still living in close proximity to the student. The qualitative analysis of subthemes in each variable provided greater insight on the difficulties immigrant students face including loss of extended family network and traditional family routines, parental

misunderstandings of students' social desires, and parental pressure relating to academic performance.

In a similar study of the stressors immigrants face, Tummala-Narra and Sathasivam-Rueckert (2016) focused on three key details: "how adolescents experience themselves as either immigrants or as children of immigrants, and as racial minorities" across the contexts of school, home, and community (p. 304), the acculturative stress immigrant adolescents experience, and how they cope with that stress. The study was carried out through group interviews with sixty-four male and female adolescent immigrants or children of immigrants from Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Latinx, and South Asian originations. Data were obtained qualitatively from participants' experiential accounts and analysis of this data revealed four domains. The first domain included themes of pride in heritage, language, and ethnic community's contributions to society. Adjusting to culture comprised the second domain and included difficulties associated with English language acquisition, friendships with peers, and conflicts in the family due to differences in cultural experiences and expectations of parents versus children. The third domain centered around positive and negative stereotypes immigrants face and reports of discrimination in some form by all students in school, community, neighborhood settings, and among like ethnic groups based on perceived differences between first and second generation immigrant youth. The final domain focused on how participants coped with these stressors, with students stating that they were not likely to seek help from adults at school or home, but rather preferred talking with peers from a similar ethnic or linguistic background. These cumulative findings illustrate the impact

of family, school, and community dynamics on young immigrants and provide a better understanding of the social and psychological stress they endure (Hilburn, 2014; Patel et al., 2016; Tummala-Narra, Pratyusha, & Sathasivam-Rueckert, 2016). The stressors identified can be utilized as categories for analyzing the portrayal of immigrants in literature.

Portrayal of Immigrants in Children's Literature

A study conducted by Rodriguez and Braden (2018) suggested that recent immigration policies have created or strengthened misconceptions and hostility toward immigrants and fear among immigrant families. The authors asserted that children's picturebooks can serve as mirrors and windows, reflecting the accurate experiences Latinx immigrants face in an attempt to grow empathy among native born citizens and provide an opportunity for immigrants to see themselves authentically portrayed. Thus, the study sought to identify how immigrant Latinx children, children of Latinx immigrants, and their experiences are represented in children's picturebooks. The researchers conducted a literature review of thirteen picture books containing current Latinx immigration themes published between 2010 and 2016. The content of the books was analyzed using a critical race theory lens specific to Latinx experiences, coding representations in both the text and pictures. Two main themes were identified in the literature, "children's level of awareness of the immigration journey" and "children's difficulties with adjustment to life in the United States" (p. 8).

Similarly, Lamme, Fu, and Lowery (2004) sought to identify literature portraying the immigrant experience to help support the growing number of immigrants and children

of immigrants in schools. The study analyzed over 60 children's picturebooks, identifying 27 books containing the most authentic immigrant experiences. Qualitative analysis of the books revealed three main themes: transitioning to life in a new country, creating and maintaining connections to the homeland and cultural traditions, and creating a new cultural and social identity through acculturation. The researchers provided a summary of each book and created a chart indicating the main theme present in each book. Additionally, the researchers identified common themes missing in the surveyed materials, including immigrants' feelings of being outsiders in both their new country and their homeland, enduring discrimination from Americans and members of their own origin group, the conditions in which immigrants live, and the importance of community support in the lives of immigrants.

A third study of immigrant portrayal in literature was conducted by Boatright (2010) who suggested that graphic novels were a useful resource for exploring immigration issues. The goal of the study was to analyze the immigration experiences represented in the text and illustrations, exploring "social mobility myths, issues of assimilation, and immigrant identities" (p. 470). Boatright selected three graphic novels to examine based on currency and the presence of an immigrant based narrative. A detailed summary was completed for each book with analysis based on a critical literacy framework. In addition to analyzing the written content, Boatright carefully examined the graphic elements, identifying the visual details that help shape the immigrant and non-immigrant portrayals in the novels. Finally, Boatright provided numerous ideas for extension activities connected to the themes of immigration and a list of suggested

questions to utilize in class discussions of the novels. The results of these studies provide insight on the experiences, perspectives, and visual elements to consider when analyzing immigrant portrayal in graphic literature (Boatright, 2010; Lamme, Fu, & Lowery, 2004; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018).

Summary

Previous studies have been conducted to identify common stressors and difficulties immigrant students experience in their new environments. One study pinpointed the stressors that most affect immigrants' academic achievement, including lack of personal connection to the curriculum, illegal residency status, alienation and hostility towards immigrants in the learning environment, and inadequate academic support to aid immigrant students (Hilburn, 2014). Two studies identified stressors among family, peers, and community, including English language acquisition, difficulty establishing friendships, and familial conflicts over acculturation, academic performance, separation from family, and substance abuse (Patel et al., 2016; Tummala-Narra, Pratyusha, & Sathasivam-Rueckert, 2016).

Researchers have also analyzed children's literature to determine how the immigrant experience is portrayed. All three studies identified common immigration themes present in youth literature including character awareness of the difficulties endured during the immigration process, numerous struggles adjusting to life in a new country, immigrant success stories, and maintaining homeland and family traditions while creating a new cultural and social identity (Boatright, 2010; Lamme, Fu, & Lowery, 2004; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018). Lamme, Fu, and Lowery (2004) also identified

themes missing in literature, including immigrants' feelings of being outsiders in both their new country and their homeland, enduring discrimination, immigrant living conditions, and the importance of community support in the lives of immigrants.

Additionally, Boatright's (2010) study analyzed the visual details comprising the selected novels' illustrations, noting the impact the illustrators' artistic choices had on the portrayal of the immigrants and remaining characters.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to analyze graphic literature for respectful and authentic portrayals of immigrants to help librarians and classroom teachers build culturally inclusive library collections.

Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative content analysis approach to evaluate elementary level graphic texts for the portrayal of immigrants. Wildemuth (2017) describes qualitative analysis as “a process designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation” (p. 319), allowing the researcher “to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner” (p. 318). More specifically, the current study employs directed analysis of content, “in which initial coding starts with...relevant research findings” gleaned from the study’s literature review (Wildemuth, 2017, p. 319). This research design fits the current study as the researcher is examining graphic texts to identify themes and patterns in how immigrants are portrayed.

Sample of Books

To identify books for analysis in the study, the researcher utilized a query of literature categorized as supplementary, core collection, or most highly recommended in *Wilson’s Children’s Collection* and *Wilson’s Middle and Junior High Core Collection* databases for youth in grades kindergarten through fifth. The search of the databases utilized the keywords: *immigra** or *emigra** or *refugee** and “comics” or “graphic novels” or “comic books” not “picture books.” The search yielded three texts: *Illegal*

(Colfer), *The Rooftop Adventure of Minnie and Tessa*, *Factory Fire Survivors* (Carbajal), and *Dalen and Gole: Scandal in Port Angus* (Deas). *Dalen and Gole: Scandal in Port Angus* is excluded from the study due to its nonhuman focus. The remaining two texts are included in the study. The text sample generated from *Wilson's Collections* is based on titles included as of September 2019. To expand the search, the researcher queried the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (CLCD), Follett Titlewave, and Mackin to identify seven additional texts. In an effort to ensure quality literature was included for analysis, the researcher limited the selection to texts with two or more positive reviews from authoritative sources including *School Library Journal*, *Kirkus*, *Booklist*, *Horn Book*, and *VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)*. The comprehensive selection of graphic texts is listed in Appendix A.

Procedures

Data Sources

Similar to the analysis process employed by Moeller and Becnel (2018), each book was read three times. The first reading focused on text alone, the second reading focused on graphic portrayal, while the third reading analyzed text and graphics together. These additional readings also aided the researcher in utilizing the constant comparison method to ensure themes were coded accurately and consistently throughout the study. Data was recorded on the Coding Sheet (Appendix B) in accordance with the Coding Manual (Appendix C), with text and graphic evidence recorded for each theme identified. The preliminary coding sheet allowed for additional themes to be added, as Wildemuth (2017) states, "using the constant comparative method, your coding manual will evolve

throughout the process of data analysis” (p. 321). The Initial Themes included in the coding sheet are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Initial Themes for Coding

Acculturative Conflict
Anti-Immigration Climate
Creation of New Social/Cultural Identity
Difficulties During Immigration Process
Family Stressors
Pride in Heritage
Social Mobility

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data utilized constant comparison and coding. Wildemuth (2017) states that “coding is the process of reducing the entire content of the messages in your sample into quantitatively analyzable data describing only the variables in which you are interested” (p. 310). The study followed Wildemuth’s coding and content analysis process where researchers “immerse...in the data and allow themes to emerge” (p. 319), using inference and reasoning to reconstruct meanings from the data, “exploring the properties and dimensions of categories, identifying relationships between categories, uncovering patterns, and testing categories” (p. 322).

Limitations

Wildemuth (2107) states that “any time humans...interpret meaning, there is bias” (p. 311). Additionally, the research employed a single coder who is a member of the dominant culture group in the United States, further increasing the risk of bias. The selection of literature included in the study was limited by the number of graphic texts containing immigrant narratives published for youth in grades kindergarten through fifth. Selection was further limited by the requirement of two positive professional reviews.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The researcher read nine graphic texts containing immigrant narratives for youth in grades kindergarten through fifth to identify themes in how immigrants are portrayed. The texts were analyzed for the seven Initial Themes on the preliminary coding sheet, considering both text and graphic evidence independently and in tandem. During analysis of the literature, two Additional Themes, *Adversity Faced in Homeland* and *Support from Community*, were identified and added to the Coding Sheet. These two additional themes emerged from analysis of the books studied through a process of comparison with other themes; through this process these themes stood out as new with uniqueness not captured in the initial themes. The complete list and occurrence of these themes across the study's sample of texts are presented in Table 2. Those texts that are bolded in Table 2 are considered to contain the theme as a major component of the story, meaning it is fundamental to the development of the plot. The remaining texts included in Table 2 also contain the theme, but the occurrence is a minor component of the story.

Table 2

*Presence of Themes in Selected Texts**

Theme	Texts Containing the Theme (bold font indicates major component of the story)
Acculturative Conflict	<i>Azzi in Between, Be Prepared, Lily Renee, Stargazing, When Stars Are Scattered</i>
Anti-Immigration Climate	<i>Be Prepared, Illegal, Lily Renee, Pashmina, The Rooftop Adventure of Minnie and Tessa, Undocumented</i>
Creation of New Social or	<i>Azzi in Between, Be Prepared, Lily Renee, Pashmina,</i>

Cultural Identity	<i>The Rooftop Adventure of Minnie and Tessa, Stargazing, When Stars Are Scattered</i>
Difficulties During Immigration Process	<i>Azzi in Between, Illegal, Lily Renee, Undocumented, When Stars Are Scattered</i>
Family Stressors	<i>Azzi in Between, Be Prepared, Illegal, Lily Renee, Pashmina, The Rooftop Adventure of Minnie and Tessa, Stargazing, Undocumented, When Stars Are Scattered</i>
Pride in Heritage	<i>Azzi in Between, Be Prepared, Pashmina, Stargazing, When Stars Are Scattered</i>
Social Mobility	not present
Adversity Faced in Homeland	<i>Azzi in Between, Lily Renee, Pashmina, When Stars Are Scattered</i>
Support from Community	<i>Illegal, Lily Renee, Pashmina, Stargazing, Undocumented, When Stars Are Scattered</i>

**Themes are defined in the Coding Manual, Appendix C*

Acculturative Conflict

In acclimating to a new country, immigrants often experience conflict in adapting to a new culture. This conflict can result in difficulties developing relationships with peers, stress over acquiring new language skills, and challenges in navigating new roles such as serving as a translator for parents. Additionally, acculturative conflict creates strain within families which will be included within the theme of Family Stressors. While most of the books examined touch briefly on the theme of acculturative conflict, it is fundamental to the development of the plot in *Azzi in Between*, *Be Prepared*, and *When Stars Are Scattered*, through subthemes of language acquisition and difficulties establishing friendships. In *Azzi in Between*, the main character Azzi is a young girl who immigrates with her mother and father. Azzi experiences moments of anxiety upon

arrival in the new country and also during her first experiences at school. During their immigration, Azzi observes what is happening around her and notes, “Everything was different in the new country....Men and women talked to Father and Mother in words they couldn’t understand” (Garland, 2012, p. 10). Azzi’s most anxious moments are in anticipation of going to school; she thinks, “How could she make friends when she couldn’t speak the new language? How could she understand her new teacher?” (Garland, 2012, p. 13). Once Azzi reaches school, she again expresses her discomfort and social exclusion, noting, “Their clothes were different, their language was different, and nobody stopped to say hello” (Garland, 2012, p. 14).

The challenge of acquiring a new language is also present in *When Stars Are Scattered*. Omar, a young boy at a refugee camp, discovers that all classes at school are taught in English and his success hinges on his ability to understand English. Omar expresses “everything in school is in English, so I barely understand anything...maybe I should just give up” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 57).

In *Be Prepared*, the main character, Vera, is a second generation Russian immigrant. Vera’s acculturative conflict is depicted in the social dynamics within her group of friends. In the beginning of the book, Vera attends a slumber party where she encounters difficulty fitting in. While the other girls play together with their American Girl type dolls, Vera is excluded and she eventually makes up a lie about having a doll but simply forgetting it at home. When the other girls begin talking about their summer camp plans, Vera feels excluded again and is shown sadly walking to the kitchen by herself. This conflict is further magnified when Vera hosts her own sleepover where her

friends clearly feel uneasy and end up going home in the middle of the night. After her party is over, Vera concludes, “I knew the party wasn’t right. It was too poor. It was too Russian. It was too different. I was never going to fit in with the American kids” (Brosgol, 2018, p. 28). As the story progresses, Vera hears about a Russian summer camp and convinces her mother to let her go, along with her brother. Vera says to her brother, “We’re going to make so many friends. These ones will be Russian. They’ll be just like us. Won’t it be nice to not feel all weird and different?” (Brosgol, 2018, p. 41). However, Vera continues to experience difficulty fitting in at camp, even among a group of all Russian children. By the end of camp, Vera realizes that it is more important to be herself and in order to find friends, whether she is among Russian kids or American, she needs to find people with common interests as her.

Anti-Immigration Climate

Immigrants face varying degrees of hostility, at a national level through immigration policies, and through more personal affronts, including stereotyping and discrimination in the forms of misidentified ethnicity, assumed language difficulties, bullying, and false blame placed upon them. The theme of anti-immigration is fundamental to the plot, and presented similarly in the texts *The Rooftop Adventure of Minnie and Tessa* and *Undocumented*. These stories both focus on discrimination of immigrants in the workplace, shining a light on the need for equality in workforce rights and safety measures. *The Rooftop Adventure of Minnie and Tessa* is based on true accounts of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire and provides a historical glimpse into immigration labor and the unsafe working conditions of the early 1900s. It

illustrates how immigrants had very few options for work and thus many resorted to working in factories. The immigrants, Minnie and Tessa, work for very little and the working conditions in their factory are poor, with workers packed in tightly, row after row. The factory foreman distrusts the immigrant workers and locks them in to prevent them from leaving work early. When the factory catches on fire, many of the workers perish because they are unable to exit the building. Although the factory was found innocent of any wrongdoing, this event demonstrated the need for more adequate safety measures and improved working conditions for factory workers. This book does not provide details about the process of labor reform in the United States, but could serve as an introduction to this historical movement.

Undocumented focuses on the more recent lack of equal rights for undocumented immigrant workers. In this text the main character, Juan, has worked at the same restaurant for years, working “twelve hours a day, seven days a week - for very little pay” (Tonatiuh, 2018, p. 9). When Juan was initially hired, the boss told him that he was doing Juan “a favor because I had no papers” (Tonatiuh, 2018, p. 8). The boss pays him \$2 less than minimum wage, steals his tips, forces him to work even when sick, and refuses to pay overtime wages. A new coworker arrives and convinces Juan to join her in fighting for minimum wage and equality for the undocumented workers at their restaurant. Juan realizes that “he was using the fact that I didn’t have papers to take advantage of me” (Tonatiuh, 2018, p. 14). They receive legal consultation, file a complaint, and eventually the boss agrees to repay years of wages and provide them better working conditions.

Pashmina demonstrates that some immigrants endure bullying as part of the anti-immigration climate. Pri, a shortened nickname for Priyanka, is bullied at school by another female classmate. The girl calls her “thrift store” and “teacher’s pet” (Chanani, 2017, pp. 5-6). While these two occurrences could easily be directed towards a non-immigrant, the same girl also makes fun of her name, calling her “Priyucka” leading the researcher to believe that Pri is being targeted because of her ethnicity.

In *Lily Renee*, Lily is the subject of discrimination during her stay in England. Officers from the Scotland Yard arrive at Lily’s quarters to question her, search her belongings, classify her as an enemy alien based solely on her heritage, and require her to “report once a week to the police station” (Robbins & Timmons, 2011, p. 49).

Creation of New Social or Cultural Identity

Membership in a new environment often influences the social and cultural choices of immigrants. This process of melding new and native social and cultural characteristics can result in immigrants bridging holidays, choosing a variant or alternate name, changing clothing preferences, and adopting a dual ethnicity, such as Japanese American. Creation of a new social or cultural identity is a major theme in the texts *Azzi in Between* and *Stargazing* where both of the main characters make adaptations based on their new social and cultural environments. In *Azzi in Between*, Azzi merges her experience of gardening in her homeland with her school’s community garden where she successfully constructs a support system to grow the beans her family brought with them. Additionally, Azzi’s family celebrates the arrival of her father’s paperwork allowing him to stay and work in the new country. Her family enjoys a meal of their native beans that

she grew in the school garden and her Grandma proclaims, “New beans, new life” (Garland, 2012, p. 36).

In *Stargazing*, the main character Christine is the oldest daughter in a conservative Chinese family. Christine’s life is forever changed when her parents offer their small apartment up for rent to a single mother and her daughter, Moon Lin. Christine’s first impression of Moon is that she’s “confident...funny...not Asian” even though Moon and her mother are Chinese (Wang, 2019, p. 47). This sets the stage for a friendship that opens Christine to new experiences, both social and cultural. For example, Moon plays K-pop music for Christine and teaches her dance moves. Dancing to the K-pop music is all new to Christine, illustrated through the unease in her expressions and the initial awkwardness of her dance moves. Moon also convinces Christine to paint her toenails, to which Christine responds, “I’ve never worn nail polish before....my parents say it’s not for kids” (Wang, 2019, p. 74). Christine’s overall social and cultural transformation is illustrated in the contrast between the story’s beginning where she is playing violin in a formal and reserved concert setting, and the story’s close where she is dancing carefree in the school’s talent show.

Finally, an instance of merging native and new cultures occurs in *Be Prepared*. Vera longs for a summer camp experience like the ones her American friends have planned. She finds out about a special camp just for Russians and begs her mother to let her go. Vera says, “Camp. Like all my classmates went to. Except at this camp, everyone would be Russian like me. I had to go” (Brosgol, 2018, p. 33). In this declaration, Vera demonstrates how she plans to achieve her desire to share a common

experience with her American friends within the familiar comfort zone of her Russian heritage.

Difficulties During Immigration Process

Many immigrants face adversity in the immigration process, including emotional turmoil, physical endangerment, and legal issues. Enduring difficult experiences during immigration is a major theme in four of the selected texts: *Azzi in Between*, *Illegal*, *Lily Renee*, and *When Stars Are Scattered*. The difficulties experienced by the characters in the selected texts include feeling intense fear and sadness, enduring a long and difficult journey, lack of adequate supplies, deception by people offering services, exposure to physical danger, difficulty in finding work, and the feeling of not having a real home.

Azzi in Between offers a more simplistic view of an arduous and fear filled immigrant journey, and would be well suited for a younger audience. Three different immigrations are depicted, each one with its own perils. Azzi and her parents are shown leaving at night and travelling at first by car, where Azzi had to hide from the soldiers. “Azzi didn’t make a sound. She knew there were no papers for her and she was scared” (Garland, 2012, p. 6). Azzi and her parents also have to rush through a crowd of people shoving and pushing to board a boat before the boatman shouts, “That’s it! No more!” (Garland, 2012, p. 8). The immigration journey Azzi’s grandma makes is depicted through illustrations alone, showing her sneaking out at night, having to sell her jewelry, riding in an overcrowded truck, and hiding in a cave. Sabeen, Azzi’s school aide, shares her journey with Azzi recalling, “I walked with my family through the forest, and across

rivers, and over mountains, until we came to a camp. Then I was allowed to leave....But my family had to stay behind” (Garland, 2012, p. 19).

The adversity and harsh dangers encountered in the immigration journey are vividly depicted in *Illegal* in a sequence that jumps back and forth in time and settings. Given this text complexity it is recommended for more advanced readers. This story follows two brothers, Ebo and Kwame, as they flee their home country of Ghana. The brothers’ journey is filled with desperate attempts to find work where there is little opportunity. Ebo declares, “I need food, I need money, I need work” but the man offering work replies, “There’s nothing for you here” (Colfer et al., 2018, p. 35). It takes Ebo and Kwame 21 weeks to save enough money to pay for transportation across the desert, while Kwame states, “Most people have to stay much longer” (Colfer et al., 2018, p. 51). The brothers are also at the mercy of those looking to take advantage of the fleeing immigrants’ situation. This is noted on the journey across the desert when the men in charge take away all their water bottles and begin rationing water, but later charge increasing amounts of money for drinks. The brothers are also deceived by the people who sell them boat passage across the sea. Ebo recalls, “Before, the men showed us a photograph of a better boat....Not this rotten, patched-up thing” (Colfer et al., 2018, p. 5). When the brothers begin to argue about the boat, the men shout, “Move or there’s a bullet in your back” (Colfer et al., 2018, p. 5). Most alarming is the physical danger that the boys face on their journey. In the middle of the desert, one member of their team is shot and killed and they are forced to walk the rest of the way across the desert in the hot sun without adequate food and water. Another member of their party passes away overnight,

perhaps due to the extreme cold of the night time desert. Finally, the boat ride across the sea ends up claiming an enormous number of immigrant lives. Ebo watches as his brother, Kwame, succumbs to the water and the boat goes under with people trapped on board. Ebo admits, "... I lose my big brother. I never see him again" (Colfer et al., 2018, p. 105).

Lily Renee, Escape Artist, offers a more historical perspective on immigration as it follows a young Jew escaping from the Nazis during World War II. Lily's narrative shares the range of emotions experienced during her immigration, from grief in having to leave Austria without her parents, to sympathy in her consolation of younger children on the Kindertransport. Lily also endures the fear of Nazi soldiers patrolling the train and searching belongings, and sadness when a soldier purposefully destroys her piece of keepsake pottery.

When Stars Are Scattered, a more current immigrant depiction for middle grade readers, is the story of two brothers fleeing from war-torn Somalia to a refugee camp in Kenya. Omar describes the difficulties in leaving Somalia, recalling, "We walked and walked and walked...but there was no place to go. There was too much fighting" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 186). He continues, saying, "We hid in bushes...sometimes we couldn't hide and the bandits found us. They'd take our food, our clothes...our...everything" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 186-187). Omar further expresses, "I was young, but...I knew people were dying. Our group got smaller and smaller" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 187). Omar describes how weak he and Hassan were by the time they reached the refugee camp, spending years recovering at the

hospital due to malnourishment, dehydration, and malaria. The brothers continue to experience difficulties after reaching the refugee camp. The lack of food and clothing at the refugee camp is a constant recurring theme throughout the story, illustrated by the small amounts of food they receive, the need to hide their ration card and entrust their foster mother, Fatuma, with their food rations so they will not get stolen. Omar describes a family where a younger child does not understand why there is no food to eat; “I see them hitting their mom because they’re so angry about being hungry” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 62). Omar declares, “The little kids don’t understand what the older kids do - there is no food. Once they are older, they’ll get used to being hungry” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 63). Limited access to education is another major theme in this text, as passing the tests to advance to the next level of school becomes of great importance to Omar. Omar states, “In Dadaab, any kid can go to primary school....But not every kid can go to secondary school” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 95). A final theme of the immigration process depicted in *When Stars Are Scattered* is the feeling that the refugees are stuck, unable to go back home and unable to move on to a new home. Omar poignantly shares what being a refugee means to him:

Being a refugee means I am always worried about my brother. He needs medical treatment, but the doctors here can’t stop his seizures. Being a refugee means I am worried about Fatuma. Being a refugee means I am worried about my future. If I can’t work, how can I support my family? Fatuma is getting weaker. How can I care for her, and my brother, and still earn money? Being a refugee means you don’t really have a future. (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, pp. 228-229)

Omar’s solemn testimony to the harsh realities of refugee life illustrates his frustration over not being in control of his circumstances and the accompanying worries of self-survival and providing for others.

Family Stressors

The significant amount of family related stress in immigrant lives demonstrates the importance of family and the consequences immigration has on family dynamics. Immigrant families experience strain from being separated from one another, acculturative conflict between family members, and major life events such as divorce, substance abuse, legal difficulties, illness, and death. The theme of family related stress is present in every text in this study, with subthemes related to death of family members, inability to find work, substance abuse, separation from parents, divorce, pressure to provide and care for family, and acculturative conflict between parents and children over social and cultural expectations.

Stargazing illustrates the social and cultural expectations of parents from the very onset of the story. Christine has just finished performing in an orchestra concert where everyone is dressed in uniform. Afterwards, Christine's mother and father are fussing over her unbuttoned shirt collar and complaining, "Everyone's gonna ask, why does Christine look different?" (Wang, 2019, p. 5). This focus on appearance returns when Christine's father discovers she has painted her toenails. He voices his disapproval, stating "things like clothes, makeup, and nail polish are just things to keep smart girls like you from succeeding" (Wang, 2019, p. 114). Christine finally reaches her emotional peak and shares her feelings with her father, asserting, "You want everyone to be perfect! Especially me! I try so hard to be perfect, but I just wish I could be more like Moon" (Wang, 2019, p. 186). This assertion demonstrates Christine's desire to be more bold,

confident, and carefree like Moon, rather than conform to her parents' expectations to be conservative, reserved, and studious.

Pashmina is the story of Pri, a teenage girl born in the United States following her mother's immigration from India. *Pashmina* provides perspective on the family stress of a single parent household with little extended family support. Pri's mother attempts to maintain religious rituals, but Pri often objects and at one point says to her, "Prayers are useless" (Chanani, 2017, p. 32). Pri's mother fires back, declaring, "In India I would never talk this rude way to my mom" and Pri responds with, "We're not in India" (Chanani, 2017, p. 32). Family stress can also result from a parental wish to maintain pride in heritage and connections to the homeland, while children may develop a stronger connection to life in the new country. In an interesting variation of this theme, Pri wants to know more about India and would like to travel there, while her mother states she never wants to return. This topic returns repeatedly and is a major source of disagreement between Pri and her mother. Pri's mother is decidedly against her visiting India, stating, "It's not safe or happy like you imagine it is" (Chanani, 2017, p. 82). Pri is also curious about why her mother left India without her father and inquires about him on multiple occasions. Her mother finally responds "that subject is permanently closed" (Chanani, 2017, p. 33).

The theme of family stress is quite evident in *When Stars Are Scattered* with many subthemes woven throughout. Omar and Hassan are Somali refugees at a camp in Kenya. They are without their parents, as Omar states, "Our father died in Somalia. But our mother is alive. We just don't know where" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 27).

Frustration over their mother's whereabouts returns multiple times, revealing Omar's mixed emotions. He expresses, "I love my mom. But sometimes I hate her for leaving us. It's like these two feelings are tearing me apart....We're here all alone!...Don't you care?!? Don't you love us?!" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 93). Omar is the oldest and has to care for his brother, Hassan, who has special needs. This responsibility prevents Omar from going to school and also places a great deal of stress on him to complete their family chores on his own. Eventually, Omar begins attending school and his stress level increases as he feels guilty leaving his brother and because he has even less time for chores. Omar returns home from school one day to find that Hassan has made a mess. Omar is exhausted and yells at Hassan, then defeatedly says, "I'm just so tired. I can't do all this. It's too hard" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 57).

Also prevalent across works is the inability for refugees to find work and earn enough money to support their family, often leading to substance abuse. Jeri, a friend of Omar, experiences this family stress as his father succumbs to depression and spends most of his time sitting around the market with nothing to do. Jeri and Omar find him there one day. Omar describes, "His eyes were all red, and his face looked sunken in. He and the men around him were all chewing khat leaves....They say it kind of helps you...forget things" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 126). Jeri's father ends their conversation by demanding that Jeri, "Get out of my face" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 128).

Dissonance between parents and children is further illustrated through the perspective of Maryam, an older girl who goes to school with Omar. Maryam is the top

female student at their school and has high aspirations to continue her education, while her father wants to marry her off to gain money. She asserts “if I stay number one in my class...my dad will have to let me stay in school. He’ll see that a scholarship to Canada is worth a lot more money than me getting married” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 85). In the end, Maryam’s father arranges for her to be married and she is not allowed to complete her exams as “there’s no point since she won’t be continuing on in school” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 104). Maryam is heartbroken, as she believed her success in school was her family’s ticket out of the refugee camp.

Pride in Heritage

Immigrants demonstrate pride in their heritage through maintaining food and clothing traditions, continuing to speak their native language, practicing traditional religion, observing native celebrations, and through societal contributions as members of their ethnic communities.

The most common subtheme across the selected texts is the continued practice of the immigrants’ traditional religions. It is present in *Be Prepared*, where Vera’s camp experience is steeped in Russian Orthodox religion. Vera’s family also attends worship service, where Vera realizes that role it plays in their lives. She observes, “But coming here was important to my mother. It was a little pocket of Russia, a familiar place in a strange land” (Brosgol, 2018, p. 31). The importance of practicing traditional religion is also conveyed in *Pashmina*, as Pri and her mother celebrate Diwali and pray often to the goddess Shakti. Shakti also plays a prominent role in the story, as her spirit weaves mysteriously throughout the narrative. Shakti eventually reveals herself and explains that

she summoned the creation of the magical pashmina and that she is responsible for Pri's call to India. Shakti then enlists Pri in helping spread her message of choice to more Indian women through the pashmina. Finally, religious practice is woven throughout *When Stars Are Scattered*, where daily prayer is announced over loud speakers. Omar also studies the Quran and observes Ramadan, participating in the refugee camp's "big Eid prayer" with "thousands of people" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 149).

The remaining subthemes play minor roles in the texts. The continued speaking of native language is present in *Stargazing*, where Christine's mother teaches a class on how to speak Chinese. It is also present in *Be Prepared*, as Vera learns how to speak Russian in one of her classes at camp. However, in neither case are the characters seen utilizing the native language in their daily lives. Eating traditional food is featured in *Be Prepared*, with the family eating Russian food, including borscht, Medovik tort, and a beverage called kvass. Finally, the only character out of all the texts to continue wearing traditional clothing is Pri's mother in *Pashmina*. Pri momentarily revels in trying on a traditional Indian outfit, smiling at herself in the mirror and saying, "I feel so...INDIAN" (Chanani, 2017, p. 57). However, she is never again pictured wearing the outfit and when she returns home to the United States she continues to wear her usual t-shirt and pants.

Adversity Faced in Homeland

An additional theme emerging from these texts is the adversity immigrants face in their homeland. The presence of this theme provides great insight into the driving forces behind why some immigrants leave their home country. In the selected texts, the

adversity most often stems from violence and fear for personal and family safety.

Additionally, gender inequality is the impetus for leaving the homeland in one of the stories.

Azzi in Between, *When Stars Are Scattered*, and *Lily Renee, Escape Artist* all contain depictions of violence and fear for one's safety in the homeland. *Lily Renee* offers a historical perspective on the Nazis' persecution of the Jews. Lily and her family watch as the Nazis invade their town in Austria, with Lily fearfully peering out the window and admitting "... I'm scared" (Robbins & Timmons, 2011, p. 7). Lily describes a lack of food, stating, "I've been hungry for a year. Once the Nazis took over, we never had enough food" (Robbins & Timmons, 2011, p. 26). The story details how the Nazis whittled away Jewish rights and freedoms, recalls the events of Kristallnacht, and mentions the most horrible result of the Nazi persecution, stating, "Of the less-fortunate children who remained behind, 1.5 million were murdered by the Nazis" (Robbins & Timmons, 2011, p. 23). Similarly, *Azzi in Between* depicts an army of soldiers moving into their city and helicopters flying overhead. One night Azzi's family receives a phone call and her father cries out, "Quick! Get in the car! No time to lose, no time to pack. We must leave the country. We are in terrible danger!" (Garland, 2012, p. 4). The final text of the sample that contains this theme of violence and fear is *When Stars Are Scattered*. Omar recalls his story of leaving Somalia, beginning with a group of men with guns attacking his father while he worked in the field. Omar and Hassan ran back to their village, where Omar describes "... I heard gunshots, and screaming, and soon the whole village was running. There were angry men everywhere" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020,

p. 182). Omar also states, “What happened in our village was happening everywhere in Somalia. We had to find someplace safe” (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 186).

In *Pashmina*, the oppression of women in India is gently exposed through a fantasy story surrounding a magical pashmina, or shawl. Pri, the teenage daughter of an Indian immigrant, discovers the pashmina in her mother’s old suitcase. When she places it around her shoulders, Pri is transported to a fantasy version of India. This spurs her curiosity and is the seed to Pri’s idea to visit India. Prior to Pri’s trip to India, her mother sets the stage for illumination of the theme, saying, “In India they don’t allow girls to drive” (Chanani, 2017, p. 2), and India is “not safe or happy like you imagine it is” (Chanani, 2017, p. 82).

When Pri visits her aunt in India, she learns the story of why her mother left for the United States. Pri’s mother was promised to be wed to a man but when she became pregnant by him prior to the wedding, the man’s family called off the marriage. If Pri’s mother remained in India “it would bring his family dishonor. They had money and power. They offered to arrange for your mom to leave” (Chanani, 2017, p. 123). Pri’s aunt also discovers the magic of the pashmina, as it allows her a look into a future where her daughter is forced to teach in the Indian slums. Pri and her aunt are driven to uncover the origin of the mysterious pashmina. They discover the pashmina was first woven by Rohini, a poor girl in India who felt like she didn’t have any choice but to work in a weaving factory. In a fiery vision, the goddess Shakti led Rohini to magical golden silk, directing her to “make one last pashmina. That pashmina will allow women to see their choices. You shall no longer be bound by fear” (Chanani, 2017, p. 142). Upon finishing

the pashmina and placing it around her, Rohini states, “I saw a possible future free of factory work” and a life “full of joy and in my control” (Chanani, 2017, p. 145).

When Pri arrives back home, she learns that her mother received the pashmina as a gift from her nanny the night her marriage was called off. When her mother placed it around her shoulders she envisioned life in the United States, thankfully saying, “Life with you would’ve been impossible in India. Here I can be independent” (Chanani, 2017, p. 155). In the final page of the book, yet another Indian woman in a servient role is discovering the magic of the pashmina.

Support from Community

The second additional theme emerging from multiple texts is the support immigrants receive from community, including assistance and encouragement from other immigrants and nonimmigrants.

Lily Renee depicts how Jewish children were assisted by non-Jewish citizens during the Nazi Holocaust. Lily receives help from several people during her immigration journey, including her pen pal’s family in England who allow her to stay with them, the Dutch people who provide nourishment to the children on the Kindertransport, and friends of Lily’s cousin who provide Lily safe quarters and help her obtain passage aboard a ship sailing to the United States. *When Stars Are Scattered* also demonstrates community aid through the supplies and social work support the refugees receive through the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency. In particular, Omar receives assistance multiple times from Susan Martinez, a UN social worker, including help filling out the resettlement paperwork.

Illegal, Lily Renee, Stargazing, Pashmina, Undocumented, and When Stars Are Scattered all illustrate immigrants helping one another. This theme is highly notable in *When Stars Are Scattered*, as the refugee camp as a whole provides immense support to Omar and Hassan. The boys receive the most care from Fatuma, a kind older lady who agrees to be their foster parent. Fatuma's love for the boys is demonstrated throughout the book, as she cooks for them, helps provide them with clothing, and cares for Hassan while Omar is at school. The boys also receive support from other camp members who frequently escort Hassan back home, as he has a tendency to run off. Hassan even runs miles away to a neighboring camp where Omar finds that he has been taken in by a kind family. The father remarks, "He is safe at my home....My wife is caring for him" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 239). One of the older refugees also befriends Omar, encourages him to attend school, and offers him English lessons to help him be more successful at school. Additionally, Omar describes the care they received during their journey from Somalia, recalling, "we walked with our neighbors...they had our lives in their hands" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 186). The care and support that Omar and Hassan receive is crucial to their survival and Omar illustrates his appreciation at the close of the book, expressing, "Many years ago, we lost our mother. But maybe she's not gone. She is in the love that surrounds us and the people that care for us" (Jamieson & Mohamed, 2020, p. 254).

Summary

This analysis of nine graphic texts containing immigrant narratives for youth in grades kindergarten through fifth identified multiple themes present in the texts. The most common theme, Family Stressors, is present in every book with varied depictions of family separation, divorce, acculturative conflict between family members, substance abuse, inability to find work, illness, and death. Three additional commonly occurring themes that are present across most of the books include Creation of a New Social or Cultural Identity, Anti-Immigration Climate, and Acculturative Conflict. The Creation of a New Social or Cultural identity is depicted in the how the immigrants' new environments influence their social and cultural choices with friends and classmates. The theme of Anti-Immigration Climate is presented through discrimination against immigrants in the workplace and community, and bullying at school. Finally, Acculturative Conflict is depicted in the books through the immigrant characters' experiences in adapting to new culture in their navigation of relationships with peers and challenges in learning a new language.

This analysis also revealed more prominent themes across the selected literature; themes are prominent when they are fundamental to the advancement of the storyline in multiple books. These prominent themes include Family Stressors, Adversity Faced in the Homeland, and Difficulties During the Immigration Process. The theme of Family Stressors is also one of the more commonly occurring themes and is described above. The Adversity Faced in the Homeland is depicted through gender inequities experienced by immigrant characters and the violence occurring in immigrants' homelands. The theme of Difficulties During the Immigration Process is illustrated through the intense

fear and sadness experienced by the immigrants, the long and difficult journeys endured, the lack of adequate supplies, deception by people offering services, exposure to physical danger, difficulty in finding work, and the feeling of not having a real home.

Themes that are present across some of the books, but play a major role in very few texts include Pride in Heritage and Support from Community. The theme of Pride in Heritage is depicted across the texts through the continued practice of traditional religions, continued speaking of native languages, eating traditional food, and wearing traditional clothing. Support from the Community is illustrated through the assistance and encouragement immigrants receive from others, both fellow immigrants and nonimmigrants. Finally, the theme of Social Mobility, or advancement in social hierarchy, is not found to be present in any of the selected literature.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to analyze graphic literature for respectful and authentic portrayals of immigrants to help librarians and classroom teachers build culturally inclusive library collections. The study sought to answer the question of how immigrants are portrayed in elementary level graphic texts. Nine books were chosen utilizing reviews from authoritative sources along with the *Wilson's Children's Collection* and *Wilson's Middle and Junior High Core Collection* databases to ensure the study was comprised of high-quality literature. The selected texts were analyzed to determine the themes present in both the text and illustrations. Results of the study found the most commonly occurring themes, or those that are present across most of the books, to be: Family Stressors, Creation of a New Social or Cultural Identity, Anti-Immigration Climate, and Acculturative Conflict. However, this analysis revealed more prominent themes across the selected literature; themes are prominent when they are fundamental to the advancement of the storyline in multiple books. These prominent themes include Family Stressors, Adversity Faced in the Homeland, and Difficulties During the Immigration Process. Themes that are present across some of the books, but play a major role in very few texts include Pride in Heritage and Support from Community. Finally, the theme of Social Mobility is not found to be present in any of the selected literature. This research aids librarians and classroom teachers in identifying literature to build an inclusive library collection which promotes empathy for others and provides immigrants an opportunity for self-reflection.

Conclusions

This analysis of nine elementary level graphic novels found the portrayal of immigrants to resemble that described in previous research in several ways. The works explored here, and those reported on in previously published literature, found several recurring themes: Acculturative Conflict, Anti-Immigration Climate, Creation of New Identity, Difficulties During Immigration, Family Stressors, Pride in Heritage. However, the theme of Social Mobility, identified in past studies, was not found to be present in the current study's texts. To the list of themes related to the portrayal of immigrants in youth literature, the current study adds two additional themes: Adversity Faced in the Homeland and Support from the Surrounding Community.

Previous studies identified common stressors and difficulties immigrant students experience in their new environments and analyzed how immigrant experiences are portrayed in children's literature. In comparing the findings of the current analysis with those of previous research, we can assess the current status of immigrant portrayal in graphic literature for youth.

As found in a study by Tummala-Narra and Sathasivam-Rueckert (2016), the acculturative conflict experienced by immigrant students includes difficulty establishing relationships with peers, the challenge of learning a new language, and having to serve as a translator for family members. While serving as a translator was not an experience encountered in the narratives explored here, language acquisition and difficulty with peer relationships were both present. Due to the difficulty establishing relationships, immigrant characters felt isolated and lonely. The challenge of learning a new language

is present in two of the texts and in both, the immigrant students' success in school is affected by their ability to learn English. These depictions of acculturative conflict reveal the potential impact it has on student learning and the ability to make friends.

Tummala-Narra and Sathasivam-Rueckert (2016) also identified anti-immigration experiences that immigrant students face, including positive and negative stereotypes and discrimination through ethnicity misidentification, assumed language difficulties based on ethnicity, and bullying or being falsely blamed. However, not all characters in the current study's selected texts were students, and thus some of the anti-immigration experiences fall outside this prior study's student-centered scope. As such, the most notable theme in two of this study's books is discrimination in the workplace where workers do not receive fair pay and benefits due to their immigration status. More in tune with student perspectives, two characters face discrimination among their school peers. Discrimination against immigrants was a theme identified as missing in the previous picturebook analysis conducted by Lamme, Fu, and Lowery (2004). The varied depictions of discrimination present in the current study's texts illuminate that discrimination takes many different forms and that individuals of any age can be potential targets.

Lamme, Fu, and Lowery (2004) identified that merging native and new culture and becoming a naturalized citizen demonstrate the creation of a new social or cultural identity. Although this theme is present in a majority of the texts, in most cases it appears in brief moments. However, this theme is notable in *Stargazing*, where Christine breaks away from the cultural and social boundaries established by her parents. Whereas some

depictions of immigrants creating a new identity show the characters ditching their heritage altogether in favor of the new culture, none of the characters across these texts do so. A depiction of immigrants choosing to retain aspects of their heritage is important as it celebrates and preserves diverse cultures and values. This aspect is important to consider when selecting literature for a culturally inclusive learning environment.

A study by Rodriguez and Braden (2018) examined how Latinx immigrants were portrayed in picture books and identified that during the immigration process, characters often feel a range of emotions, show strength in adverse times, and face dangers during their journey. While not every book in the current study depicts the character's immigration process, every story that does include the immigration journey depicts the difficulties endured by the immigrants. The immigrants do experience a range of feelings, but what is most enlightening are the hardships and dangers immigrants endure in making their journey. One text offered the simplest and most innocent depiction of the perilous journey, showing a girl hiding under a blanket in the car as her family tries to pass through the border patrol. In contrast, another text offers a stark depiction of the potential danger and consequences, including a lack of adequate supplies, deception by people offering services, and grave exposure to physical danger, revealing that not all who attempt the journey survive. Depictions of these circumstances are important for providing immigrants an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and crucial in developing awareness among nonimmigrants of the difficult journeys immigrants endure.

Similar to the themes identified in children's picturebooks by Lamme, Fu, and Lowery (2004) and the immigrant experiences identified by Patel et al. (2016), the texts

in the study illustrate family related stress resulting from the death of family members, inability to find work, substance abuse, familial separation, divorce, pressure to provide and care for family, and generational acculturative conflict. The most common family-related themes identified in this study's texts are acculturative conflict among family and family separation and/or death. The theme of family stress is present in every text, suggesting that family is vitally important to immigrants and the process of immigration brings significant adversity to families.

As suggested by Tummala-Narra and Sathasivam-Rueckert (2016), immigrants take great pride in sustaining religious and cultural customs that celebrate their heritage. Additionally, immigrants and immigrant families place value on continuing the use of native language. The current study identified continued religious practice as the most common depiction of this theme and found it present in several of the texts. Continuance of native language, eating traditional food, and wearing traditional clothing make cameo appearances as well in the texts, providing further examples of immigrants choosing to retain cultural and ethnic customs. Depictions of immigrants celebrating pride in their heritage is important as it acknowledges and preserves diverse cultures and values. This dimension is important to consider when selecting literature for a culturally inclusive learning environment.

The adversity immigrants face in their homeland is a significant new theme to emerge from this study and provides insight into the impetus for immigration. This theme is evident in four of the texts, with three illustrating violence and fear for personal and family safety. The fourth text depicts a less than ideal quality of life due to gender

oppression, providing a very different perspective on why immigrants leave home. Oftentimes it is thought that immigrants make a willing choice to leave their home country, but in actuality there is a more complicated catalyst: they are choosing between life and death. The emergence of this theme suggests that its inclusion in an immigrant narrative is vital in creating a more complete depiction and greater understanding of the holistic immigrant experience.

Finally, the support immigrants receive from the community around them, from other immigrants or non-immigrants, is also illustrated in many of the books. This theme was identified as missing in the previous picturebook analysis conducted by Lamme, Fu, and Lowery (2004). In the current study, community support is illustrated through the brave and courageous immigrants and nonimmigrants that reach out to help immigrants escape imposing dangers and helped provide basic life necessities. The show of community support in immigrant narratives demonstrates a positive role model for all members of the greater community and suggests that communities can and should provide assistance to aid immigrants and immigrant families.

This comparison of the findings of the current analysis with that of previous research suggests the current study's texts do provide authentic immigrant portrayals, as themes were presented similarly or in a closely related manner. Therefore, these texts could benefit immigrants as they provide opportunities for genuine self-reflection. Additionally, the literature included in this analysis could benefit all students, immigrant and nonimmigrant, as Naidoo (2014) states, "stories help children understand how society perceives their culture as well as the cultures of their classmates, teachers,

caregivers, and others, thereby influencing their social and identity development” (p. 2). Experiencing diverse cultural characteristics in literature enables readers to consider other perspectives and make personal connections with individuals who may initially appear to be different. Fostering these connections among community members helps build stronger, more empathetic communities that embrace diversity and inclusion.

Recommendations for Educational Use

The list of high quality literature provided in this study offers guidance to librarians and educators in selecting graphic literature to benefit all students. Additionally, the themes identified can provide insight on qualities to look for when considering other immigrant narratives outside the scope of this study.

According to a study by Hilburn (2014), immigrant students face four main educational barriers beyond language acquisition: use of a curriculum deficient in immigrant representation, inadequate academic support to aid immigrant students, the anti-immigration climate of the learning environment, and the legal status of undocumented students. Three of these barriers can be addressed through the adoption of literature included in this study. Utilizing literature that contains respectful and authentic immigrant narratives provides an opportunity for students to see themselves or their experiences reflected in curricular materials, thereby increasing personal connection. Graphic texts also provide academic support by aiding reading comprehension (Barack, 2015; Chun, 2009; Smetana & Grisham, 2012) and providing opportunities for social and cultural growth (Murphy, 2018). Social emotional learning opportunities also exist as the

immigrant experiences reflected in these stories can be openings for immigrants to share their own personal experiences.

The combination of local students feeling comfortable in sharing their personal stories, along with the narratives provided through literature provision can help address the third barrier, the anti-immigration climate. A study conducted by Rodriguez and Braden (2018) suggests that recent immigration policies have created or strengthened misconceptions and hostility toward immigrants and fear among immigrant families. Providing respectful and authentic immigrant representation in literature allows readers an opportunity to gain awareness of the difficulties immigrants encounter and grow empathy in our community to combat those misconceptions and hostility.

Finally, it is interesting to compare the prevalence versus the prominence of the themes present across the literature. The most commonly occurring themes, or those that are present across most of the books, include: Family Stressors, Creation of a New Social or Cultural Identity, Anti-Immigration Climate, and Acculturative Conflict. However, the most prominent themes present in the books, meaning the theme is fundamental to the advancement of the storyline in multiple books, are: Family Stressors, Adversity Faced in the Homeland, and Difficulties During the Immigration Process. While all of these themes help provide authentic portrayals of immigrants and the difficulties they face, great importance is placed on sharing the adversity immigrants are subject to, both in the homeland and during the immigration journey, and the significant impact such has on their family lives. Perhaps illuminating the reasons immigrants leave their home countries as well as the somber realities of the dangerous journey and its impact on

families will help foster a new level of empathy in readers. The more empathy and compassion we can foster in our communities, the more we can decrease the stereotypes and discrimination immigrants experience and celebrate the rich cultural offering on which our country was founded.

Recommendations for Future Research

New graphic literature continues to be published and immigration remains an important topic in the United States and beyond. The books included in this study unite these trends and are appropriate for a kindergarten through fifth grade audience. Future research could focus on books for an older audience, sixth through twelfth grade, providing support to librarians and classroom teachers working with older students. The study could also be repeated at a future date as graphic texts portraying immigration will continue to be published for the kindergarten through fifth grade audience. Additionally, the study could be adapted for research using other literature formats, such as chapter books or picture books.

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APPENDIX A
TITLES USED IN STUDY

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APPENDIX B
PRELIMINARY CODING SHEET

Title:

Author:

Total pages:

Lexile:

	Text evidence (with page numbers)	Illustrative evidence (with page numbers)
Acculturative Conflict		
Anti- Immigration Climate		
Creation of New Social or Cultural Identity		
Difficulties During Immigration Process		
Family Stressors		
Pride in Heritage		
Social Mobility		

APPENDIX C

CODING MANUAL

Acculturative Conflict

A study by Tummala-Narra and Sathasivam-Rueckert (2016) cites the following phenomena as contributing to the acculturative conflict experienced by immigrant students:

- Difficulty establishing relationships with peers
- Language acquisition
- Serving as translator for parents
- (Acculturative Conflict also creates Family Stressors; those are noted below)

Anti-Immigration climate

A study by Tummala-Narra and Sathasivam-Rueckert (2016) cites the following phenomena as contributing to the anti-immigration climate experienced by immigrant students:

- Stereotypes, both positive and negative
- Discrimination, including misidentifying ethnicity, assuming language difficulties based on ethnicity, being bullied and falsely blamed, and among like ethnic groups based on perceived differences between first and second generation immigrant youth

Creation of New Social and Cultural Identity

A study by Lamme, Fu, and Lowery (2004) cites the following phenomena as demonstrative of the creation of new social/cultural identity:

- Merging native and new culture, such as bridging holidays and traditions

- Developing a new identity, including name changes, change in clothing preferences, and declaring dual ethnicity; for example, Japanese American
- Establishing citizenship

Portrayal of Difficulties During Immigration Process

A study by Rodriguez and Braden (2018) identified the following literary portrayals of difficulties during the immigration process:

- Character demonstrates emotions in regards to the immigration experience, including fear, worry, sadness, heartbreak, distress, optimism, and happiness
- Character shows strength in the face of adversity
- “Strong emotional language and rich description of the perils of the journey in immigrating to the United States...demonstrates children can be aware of the dangers of that journey” (Rodriguez & Braden, 2018, p. 54).

Family Stressors

A study by Patel et al. (2016) identified the following themes that comprise family stressors experienced by immigrants:

- Separation from family, including loss of extended family networks, separation from parent(s), difficulty adjusting to migration patterns, difficulty with family reunification, change in traditional family routines such as dinner together
- Acculturative family conflict, such as differences between parents and children in cultural openness, gender expectations, academic expectations, educational aspirations, and social life

- Family life events, including divorce, new family system, legal troubles, substance abuse, conflict between parents, illness and death

Pride in Heritage

A study by Tummala-Narra and Sathasivam-Rueckert (2016) identified the following themes that comprise pride in heritage:

- Continuing religion and celebrations from homeland
- Continuing to speak in native language
- Ethnic community rallying together to make contributions to society

Social Mobility

Britannica (2018) defines social mobility as the “movement of individuals, families, or groups through a system of social hierarchy” (para 1). In a study of immigrant representation in graphic novels, Boatright (2010) explored the social mobility myths present in the texts. Boatright stated that the immigrant portrayal in one of the novels presented “an ideal immigrant narrative, one in which the main character determinedly overcomes all obstacles to become a self-made man by the graphic novel's end” (para. 16).