Literacies Beyond the Page: Acquiring Literacy in a Digital Age

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Introduction

Literacy and what it means to be literate is continuing to grow and change as new mediums are being created within the digital age. Yet, much of how we are teaching literacy is not changing alongside these new developments. Thus, my research asks, how can educators bridge this gap?

Multiliteracy

Multiliteracy demands that we take in information from various modes and combine them to create a complete understanding and analysis of a text. First defined by The New London Group in 1996, multiliteracy has become more important as literacy has expanded with the growth of the internet and modern students must navigate digital spaces.

Digital Citizenship

Being able to use the internet responsibly is the biggest skill that students in the modern classroom need to be successful post-graduation. Students must be able to write for their expanded audience, be aware of their digital footprint, and be able to both analyze and create material in multimodal environments. Multiliteracy is a steppingstone moving students towards digital citizenship.

Graphic Novels

Graphic novels create a bridge between tradition and digital literacy in a process called scaffolding, or slowly building from one skill to the next. Graphic novels, due to their history of growing in popularity outside of the mainstream, have become a space for discussions of social justice giving students the maturity and language to have educated discussions in online spaces. In the given example, students must use the visual information to fully comprehend the scene. It is in the visual information that students learn the main character is singing, his peers are judgmental of the main character, and the main character is embodying negative stereotypes of Chinese Americans. The text itself does not provide any of this information.
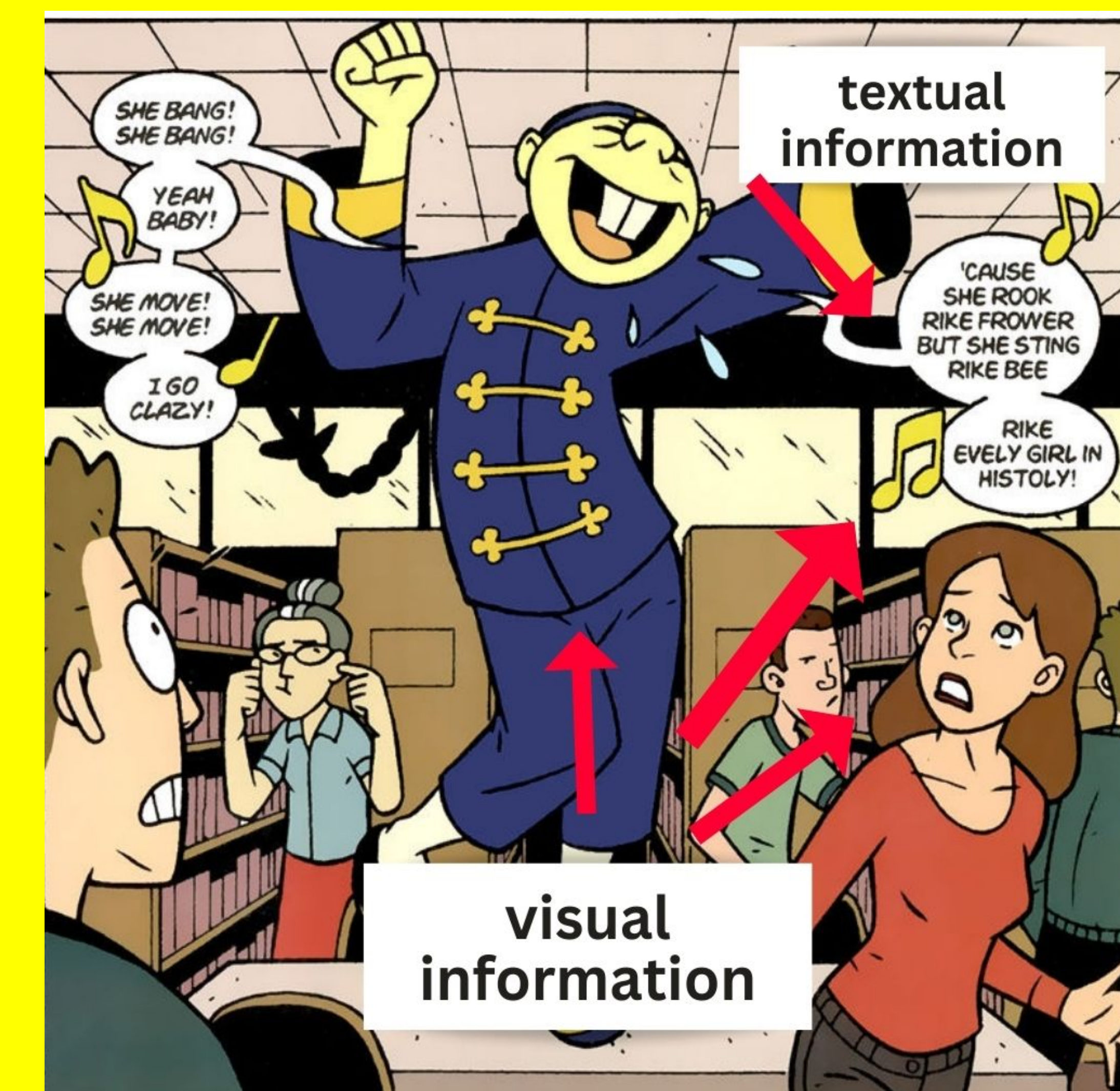
Yang, Gene Luen. *American Born Chinese*. Guanda, 2008, p. 203.

Results

A division in the classroom between teacher and student is growing within the secondary classroom. Teachers are ignoring and bypassing the natural literacies of students. Our students are not less literate, as many fear, but rather literate in different ways. Whereas generations before thrived with traditional literacy, young people today need to grow into digital citizens to be functional in the world. Graphic novels enable educators to scaffold students toward digital literacies.

Methods

In my research, I used a wide range of academic sources. I found connections between the works creating a Literature Review of persistent ideas then built my own conclusions about the found information.