


Chapter 10

Between the Pages: Young Men of Color and Connecting With Graphic Novels

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how educators can use diverse graphic novels to engage Young Men of Color in transformative ways. By sharing our own experiences as men of color, we demonstrate how these texts open doors for meaningful discussions, creative expression, and cultural exploration. We provide strategies for fostering student connection, helping them find solace, and using storytelling as a path to healing and liberation. This chapter highlights the power of representation in all educational settings.

INTRODUCTION

Love is the universal truth that we are all searching for and deserve, especially our young men of color. Literacy is at the heart and the foundation of any curriculum. In order for our students to be strong in any aspect of the curriculum, they have to be able to relate to what it is that they are learning. In *Cultivating Genius*, Dr. Gholdy Muhammad argues “We cannot continue to design new frameworks that have traditionally only served the mainstream, or are designed to advance skills alone, and hope that they also help children of color. Hope alone is not enough. We

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need to be designers in curriculum, instruction, and leadership to get it right with those who need it the most” (p.88). It is our job, as educators, practitioners, and authors, to constantly be evolving alongside the curriculum so we can do all that we can to cater to our students.

Many teachers, especially since the pandemic, struggle with fostering a love of reading and connection to texts. Graphic novels are multi-modal, easy to read texts, centered around complex themes that give a voice to those who have been marginalized and silenced for many centuries. With the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, there has been a radical moment towards making sure diverse voices are amplified, heard, and appreciated. bell hooks states that “To indoctrinate boys into the rules of patriarchy, we force them to feel pain and to deny their feelings.” Oftentimes, young men, particularly those of color, are hesitant to show any kind of emotion or vulnerability, or identify with issues such as race, prejudice, bullying, and loneliness.

Advocating and echoing the sentiment of the “Books Save Lives” campaign from We Need Diverse Books and Reading Without Walls, books like *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang, *New Kid* and *Class Act* by Jerry Craft, male authors of color specifically, have had the chance to pioneer that change and rewrite that narrative with telling stories of fellow young men of color, who look like them and break the stereotypes placed on them as minorities.

These graphic novels along with Lê’s *Green Lantern Series* are rooted in the themes of identity, inclusions, racial biases/discrimination, social emotional learning and learning to love one’s culture/ authentic selves. With so many young adults in their developing years, they seek a sense of identity and individuality and these graphic novels invoke thought in the reader, making them reflect on their own individuality.

In *Between the Pages: Young Men of Color & Connecting with Graphic Novels*, we aim to educate, embolden, and empower educators on how to use graphic novels of diverse perspectives in any educational setting, to help young men of color connect with texts, reflecting their experiences, feelings, thoughts, ideas, and fall in love with the power of authentic storytelling.

Part I: What Lies Between the Pages

What Lies Between the Pages

Finers gaze across the pages

eyes steadily taking in

truths unspoken

Histories hidden.

Voices silenced.

Worlds attempted to be erased.

What lies between the pages—

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