

Persepolis as a Tool to Teach Empathy and Reduce Racial Bias

In 2013, the Chicago Public School system made headlines for pulling Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000) off of their library shelves. While the Chicago Public School system deemed this text unsuitable for school age children for many reasons, *Persepolis* is a graphic novel that explores the intersectionality of youth identity and marginalized cultures. Though *Persepolis* is a commonly studied text in academe, many in secondary education have not realized the potential of the novel to shape the minds of young readers. *Persepolis* portrays a character that American students can both relate to and learn from, promoting empathy and potentially reducing implicit bias by forcing readers to practice theory of mind and complete narrative closure over panels, and by providing a counterstereotypic exemplar in the character of Marjane.

Reading the text through the cognitive approaches of embodiment, theory of mind, and the neurobiological foundations of empathy highlights the emotional connection that readers create with Marjane emphasized by the graphic novel form. Relying on the work of Scott McCloud, Lisa Zunshine, and Maria Nikolajeva, as well as current research in cognitive science and education, I argue for the critical benefits of the exposure to and active cognitive and visual reading of this text, including the deconstruction of many stereotypes that plague American views of the Middle East. The safe space that *Persepolis* offers students to explore an often marginalized culture, connect with a relatable character, and practice the social cognition vital to life is integral to promoting activism and creating open minded students.