

## Seeing Through the “I” of the Past Self: Tracing Empathy in Autobiographical Narratives of Childhood

Though these concepts refer to the same historical person, the narrated “I” of past experience is always already removed from the narrating “I,” even if by a matter of minutes, through the very act of narration. When writers attempt to impose order on their own childhood memories through narrative—whether prose, verse, or visual—that distance is often much greater than minutes, and it’s not only temporal but often positional as well. As they remember and indeed reconstruct past events, the adult/narrating “I”—a textual construct who shares a name with but does not precisely correspond to the author—is engaged in a fundamentally empathic relationship with the narrated child. In this presentation, I look to graphic memoirs for middle graders—including Cece Bell’s *El Deafo*, Vera Brosgol’s *Be Prepared*, Raina Telgemeier’s *Smile*, and Jarrett Krosoczka’s *Hey, Kiddo*—in an effort to articulate the nature of the empathic relationship between their narrating and narrated “I”s. In particular, I attend to the ways in which such texts represent a unique engagement between narrator and narrated but between narrator and implied child reader. Thus, I conclude by speculating as to how this narrative empathy might extend into the so-called “real” world—both back toward the real author constructing the narrative and also out toward the texts’ real child (and adult) readers.