



But I Live Educational Resources

The Author's Use of Graphic and Literary Techniques

In an interview, Miriam Libicki, the artist and author of the graphic narrative about David Schaffer's Holocaust experience, discussed the kinds of graphic and literary techniques that featured most prominently in the narrative. Teachers may find it useful to acquaint themselves with the use of these techniques in the text before teaching the first lesson in this mini-unit, "Graphic and Literary Techniques."

Prominent Graphic Techniques

A Fairy-Tale Aesthetic

Libicki noted that she specifically used aesthetic elements suggestive of fairy-tale settings, as seen through her use of colour, panel bleeds, evocation of timelessness, and her representation of setting. The narrative creates a sense of timelessness by evoking *not* a specific moment in time, but rather the general experience of the survivor. The setting is suggestive of many fairy-tale settings: the narrative takes place in a forest where victims hide from perpetrators who circulate among the trees.

Colour Scheme

The author emphasized different colours for different characters, objects, and settings. For example, orange is used only for David's hair; the bright colour has a strong visual effect on the reader. David and his family are outlined in red. Secondary characters are outlined in other colours. Nazis are outlined in the same colours as inanimate objects. This approach emphasizes the presence and animacy of the main characters, drawing a reader's attention to them. Libicki's distinctive and intentional use of colour mediates a reader's gaze; the colours can either distance or connect a reader to the narrative by creating strong and unnatural visual contrasts.

Panel Bleeds

For example, in the scene in the forest (when Libicki imagines David being captured by a Nazi soldier), the author allows the graphics to bleed beyond the panel margins, thereby suggesting a state of timelessness, of things that could have occurred but did not.

Diagrams

During his testimony to Libicki, David explained a number of objects and processes in great detail, such as how his family picked tobacco, how wheat grows, how to gather sugar beets, and how the summer kitchen (where they hid) was designed. In the narrative, the author uses diagrams, which are non-diegetic elements (elements of the story that do not exist within the world of the story, or the story's plot, but are introduced by an author to heighten a reader's relationship to the story—for instance, a film soundtrack, which characters cannot hear, versus a character in a film playing the piano), to illustrate the significance of these details in David's memory.

Scenes Outside of Characters' Points of View

For example, when the Jewish partisan shoots the Nazi soldier, the events are not shown from a character's point of view. Or, when David's grandmother is left behind, she breaks the fourth wall by looking directly at the reader.

Splash Pages

The author uses splash pages only for especially important moments in the story.



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Prominent Literary Techniques

Narrative Peaks And Valleys

Libicki emphasizes positive events in the narrative right before negative ones. For example, she highlights family happiness right before the typhus outbreak. Another instance: just as liberation appears imminent, David breaks his arm.

Emphasizing the Inciting Incident

This is the moment that begins the plot, the point at which “there is no turning back.” This occurs when David’s family is forced to leave their home, their home. For the reader, the story gains momentum and the ensuing experiences feel unavoidable. The author uses a splash page to emphasize the event’s significance.

Creating Climax

The climax occurs when David and his father stand outside the door of the summer kitchen with an axe and shovel, seeking to control their fate and resist attack by the Nazis.

Nature as a Looming Force

The author represented nature as an eerie force surrounding David’s family, thereby emphasizing the looming, non-specific presence of threat in the characters’ lives.

Limited Speech Or Dialogue

Dialogue deliberately occurs only in the present day, thus emphasizing the dream-like, or temporally uncertain, quality of the story.

Symbolism and Metaphor

The author augments characters’ experiences in the wilderness through symbol and metaphor to suggest the ways in which nature can be both harmful and helpful. The characters in the story demonstrate their agency by striving to survive, but they do so largely invisibly.

Ambiguous Denouement

The story ends deliberately without any closure, thus emphasizing its timeless fairy-tale quality, allowing for a sense of narrative possibility and openness. Libicki was influenced by a conversation with a historian who explained that Anne Frank’s story is so powerful, in part, because Frank remains a child throughout. The reader knows that Frank never outgrows the stories she is telling, thus creating a fragile vulnerability; a timelessness that juxtaposes the reader’s knowledge that Frank has been trapped by time. David told the story of his later life to the author, but Libicki chose not to include these stories.