

## **Questions All Around: A Collection of Questions for Graphic Novel Stories from *Great Immigrants*, *Great Americans***

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The following resource contains two sections: The first section is a list of ten questions and discussion prompts that can be used in conjunction with the reading and analysis of any comic/graphic novel; the second resource is a list of three discussion questions for each of the stories in [\*Great Immigrants\*, \*Great Americans\*](#).

### **Overview**

The resource is designed to support thoughtful engagement with *Great Immigrants*, *Great Americans* and other graphic novels. The general questions can be applied to any comic or graphic novel, while the story-specific prompts aim to deepen student understanding of each immigrant's journey and accomplishments. These questions are meant to be flexible: Use them for class discussions, quickwrites, paired or group conversations/activities, or as jumping-off points for longer written responses.

Rather than treating these prompts as isolated questions with “right” answers, consider how they might inspire broader exploration. A single question might launch a research project, connect to students' own family stories, or spark a creative visual or performance-based response. A question about layout or visual choices might open a conversation about storytelling across mediums. Let these prompts serve as a starting place. Your students' curiosity and insights will help shape where they go next.

### ***Ten questions to assist in the reading of any comic or graphic novel:***

1. What do comics accomplish that a story in prose format could not? How would this story change if it were a traditional prose story?
2. What is not being said? Why does the writer/artist leave those items on the cutting room floor? What are some of the major inferences that the author/artist force us to make? What part of the comic forces you to add the most detail to the story between panels?

3. If you were the editor of this comic and you had an extra page to add, based on what you know, what would you add and where would you add it? What would the page look like?
4. How does the color or lack of color and shading affect the tone and mood of the piece?
5. For those of you not as familiar with comics and graphic novels, what surprised you about what we just read? What did you enjoy? What did you not enjoy?
6. How do the visuals and text work together to tell this story? What parts stuck out to you as the best use of this blending of text and image?
7. One thing that comics do well is the use of graphic weight: The part of a page and/or panel that immediately draws your eye, even if it's not at the top of the page. What parts/pages of this comic utilize a strong sense of graphic weight? Why do you think the writer and artist want you to look there first?
8. Like in films and television, costuming and set design play a large role in characterization and creating setting. As you read through the comic, select a costume or set design element that you feel works well. What is it trying to do? And why is it successful?
9. Were all pages easy to read? Does the panel structure make sense? If there is a page that is a bit more difficult to read, what is making it difficult, and what would you do to fix it? What do different panel designs possibly say or what feelings do they create?
10. Images can create themes as powerfully as words. As you explore the comic, what themes arise from the visual narrative?

### ***Discussion Questions for Great Immigrants, Great Americans Comic***

*Jim Lee*

1. How can being an “outcast” give you an advantage in the creation process?
2. We see an angry teacher take away Jim’s drawing, but at the end of the story, that drawing is displayed on the board. We are told that Jim’s parents wanted him to become a doctor, and he ends up as an artist. What role do adults play in shaping the interests and career directions of children? What role *should* they play?

3. In the second panel of the comic, Jim mentions food and language as being a couple of the barriers to moving from home life to school life and back. What barriers do you face switching from home life to school life? How do those barriers affect your day-to-day decisions?

*Mona Hanna*

1. After you finish reading the story, go back and look at the opening two panels. Why do the author and artist decide to open the story this way?
2. Mona states “Everything that makes me different—being a woman, being brown, being an immigrant—makes me see the world differently.” How do your differences help make you stand out? How do they work to help you develop your story?
3. Why would the state try to discredit Mona? And why is the overall story of this comic an important one?

*David Byrne*

1. Some people could argue that the second page of this comic is a bit busy (there is a lot going on). How does the page layout support the story, or does it distract you? Why?
2. Why do you think this comic has more narration and information text than dialogue? How does that affect the story?
3. On the second page David says, “I thought, somehow, somewhere out there, there’s this secret network of people, perceiving the world in a very different way.” What does he mean by that? Do you ever feel this way? If so, what makes you feel this way?

*Katalin Kariko*

1. The first page of this comic is dominated by the color blue. Why do you think this is, and why doesn’t that continue on the second page?
2. When Katalin and her family come to the US, she mentions that she stitches a lot of their money into a Teddy bear. Why does she do this? And what can that tell us about society?
3. What is the purpose of including the family photos into the comic?

### *Mo Amer*

1. This comic contains a lot of warm colors (reds, yellows, oranges, etc.). How does the color of the comic affect the overall feel of it? Why do you think the writer/artist selected those colors?
2. The bottom panel of the first page has exaggerated angles behind Mo as he tells his story. What do these angles do to help the story?
3. Why did comedy become important to Mo, and how does the comic show this?

### *Betty Kwan Chinn*

1. Betty Kwan Chinn has served over 9 million meals to people in need! If you could work to fix a societal problem, which would you choose and why?
2. This comic follows a more straightforward page layout than most of the others in this collection; what are the benefits and setbacks to writing and drawing a comic that is more straightforward in layout?
3. Discuss the significance of the first and last panels of the comic. How do they work to bookend the story?

### *Jean-Claude Brizard*

1. How did Jean-Claude Brizard's experience in the prison shape the next step in his career?
2. How do the close-up and far-away perspectives help tell the story in this comic? Why is each important?
3. Discuss the significance of the sandwich. Why is this something that is included in this short comic, and why is it important?

### *Terence Tao*

1. What does Terence say is the benefit of teamwork? How do the visuals of this comic work to showcase not only why teamwork is great but also how working alone can cause stress?
2. We have yet another comic that uses a great deal of shades of blue. How and why is blue used in this comic, and if you have read others in this series that utilize the color blue well, how is the use similar?
3. One of the most powerful panels in the comic is when Terence's grandmother is writing the numbers in a cleaning solution on page one. What does this panel work

to do in the context of the story? Discuss what is shown in the panel and how it is shown.

*Homa Naficy*

1. Libraries are magical places! What are some of your best memories of libraries? Why do you think these memories have stuck with you?
2. Take another look at the bottom panel of the first page of the comic. There is a lot going on in this panel. As you take another look at it, discuss what you notice about the unique visuals. How do the words and visuals work together to help Homa make her point?
3. In the second to last panel of the comic, Homa stands in front of the word “Why” written in many different languages. What is the purpose of this, and is it effective in getting her point across?

*Rajesh (Raj) Ramesh Panjabi*

1. This is a powerful story, but it is large, and the two-page narrative lends itself to lots of story being left untold. What part of this particular story would you like to see expanded? Why?
2. How does the opening line “No condition is permanent” show up throughout the story?
3. Because there is so much happening on these two pages, the art in many of the panels is powerful. Select what you feel to be the most impactful panel of the story and explain why you feel this way.

*Maria Elena (Mel) Lagomasino*

1. How does Mel’s last line, “But it’s still standing,” reflect earlier themes and ideas found in the comic?
2. After some time has passed, Mel goes back to Cuba in an attempt to find her family’s home. She finds it occupied, but it is still there. What’s a time in your life where you went back to a place, either physically or mentally, and found that it had changed? How did it make you feel? What connections do you feel to Mel’s story?
3. Here is another story with more narration than dialogue. Why do you think that is? If you were telling an impactful story from your life (pick one), do you think you’d have more dialogue or narration? Why? And if you selected narration, would you be the narrator, or would it be a third-person narration?

*Yann Lecun*

1. This comic has a higher percentage of large panels compared to most of the other stories in this collection. As you think about how an author or artist envisions their pages, what are some of the benefits and detriments to using large panels? Which do you prefer in your comics reading? Why?
2. There are three large green-and-black panels in this comic. Why do you think that those panels are constructed and colored the way that they are? What is Yann attempting to do here?
3. Explain the significance of the cat in this story. How is the cat introduced in the first panel, and why is it important?

*Paul Muldoon*

1. “If you live in a society, you are bound to reflect what happens in a society.” This powerful line ends page one. Do you agree or disagree with this quotation and why?
2. The story opens with children in Ireland in 1959 playing “Cowboys and Indians” because that’s all they knew of North America. Limited television, books, and radio were where most people received their information in 1959. With the help of the internet and social media, have people grown to not be so closed off to other cultures? How have society’s leaps in information changed the way we see others? How is this different for teens than adults?
3. This comic has detailed backgrounds. Spend some time exploring the backgrounds and take some notes about some of the more interesting things that you find. Why does the artist add those items to the backgrounds? What do those items say? How do they help the story?