

Beyond Empathy: The Importance of Developing Compassion Through Realistic Narratives

“Understanding the situation of others through their stories in order to be able to deliberate and make decisions that affect a polity” is the first step, according to Andreea Ritivoi, in “moving beyond spectatorship and toward action.” Developing empathy through common bonds is an important step in understanding their immigrant peers, but children need to understand the differences between their somewhat secure lives in Democratic countries and those of children like Miller-Lachmann’s Daniel who lived under the military regime in Chile or Senzai’s Fadi, a refugee from war torn Kabul. Using realist narratives to convey their stories, authors of children’s immigration stories can challenge their readers to use imaginative reconstruction to broaden horizons and move beyond an individual bond with the protagonist to a more active compassion for immigrants overall.

Although some of the accounts in refugee and immigration narratives are uncomfortable and often horrific, this realism is necessary for young readers to comprehend the difference between empathizing events; separation from a parent due to divorce and the loss of a parent through political torture and imprisonment are both painful events for a child, but drastically different circumstances that might instigate illegally immigrating. Understanding this difference is paramount in motivating a young person to positive action, or activism. Compassion (which is more active than empathy) for others in these dire circumstances can be inspired through narratives with young relatable subjects. In this essay I will focus on the importance of realism as shown in N.H. Senzai’s *Shooting Kabul* and Lyn Miller-Lachmann’s *Gringolandia*, along with establishing the distinction between empathy with individual characters and compassion for the cause in general as a key factor in developing activism in young readers.