Learning in the Shadow of 9/11:

The Creation of a ‘Better-Formed Story’ in the Classroom

by

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For my parents.

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Abstract

The study of narrative is an important framework for understanding the nature and history of conflict. This thesis considers how narrative fiction can provide K-12 students the opportunity to understand and pluralize historical conflict. With a focus on the September 11 attacks, I apply Sara Cobb's narrative conflict theory to the classroom to discuss how literature is uniquely situated for the creation of a 'better-formed story' surrounding 9/11 and the ensuing Global War on Terror. A 'better-formed story' is created by complexifying narratives, highlighting their circular — or ironic — nature and locating them in a historical timeline. Prompted by Cobb's work, I found this study upon the assumption that conflict represents a "rupture in the narrative order of the world which is linked to our comprehension of the other side" (Cobb 25–26). I propose that literature is naturally suited to mend this rupture; it allows for a deep comprehension of other perspectives, and in the process, ourselves.

Schools are implicit in ossifying national historical narratives. The first chapter of this thesis provides an overview of current trends in 9/11 education; it shows that the 9/11 narrative is currently focused heavily on memorializing the attacks and constructing it as the root of the Global War on Terror. These trends maintain the current 9/11 narrative, presenting the United States as a blameless victim of incomprehensible violence and failing to teach a 'better-formed story' surrounding the overall conflict. This chapter's final section provides a fully developed summary of narrative conflict theory, emphasizing the importance of a 'better-formed story' and elaborating on why literature is naturally suited to these goals.

K-12 students today have solely lived in a post-9/11 world, forming their memory of the September 11 attacks through the words of family, friends and the media. The graphic novel medium provides students agency in how they witness and process the September 11 attacks. Chapter Two begins with a discussion of how the graphic novel's form makes it suited to simultaneously depict and discuss trauma. The chapter then studies how *In the Shadow of No Towers* by Art Spiegelman contributes to the creation of a 'better-formed story' utilizing, and oftentimes subverting, these tools.

Current 9/11 educational practices fail to deeply consider the international implications of the attacks. 9/11 literature of an international scope has the potential to decenter the United States' narrative and bring attention to these oftentimes overlooked narratives. Chapter Three discusses how this is accomplished in *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie as it considers a range of personal and geopolitical relationships between the West and the rest of the world.

These two case studies lay the foundation for a continued exploration of literature's pedagogical potential in pluralizing student understanding of the September 11 attacks through the creation of 'better- formed stories'. Such findings are especially critical at the moment of this thesis' completion as the United States constructs a narrative surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic that will be taught far into the future.

Key Words: September 11 attacks, 9/11, education, narrative conflict theory, 'better-formed story', COVID-19

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Short Titles

Chute, Hillary L. *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016.

Cobb, Sara B. *Speaking of Violence : The Politics and Poetics of Narrative Dynamics in Conflict Resolution*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

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Introduction

In time, perhaps, we will mark the memory of September the 11th in stone and metal — something we can show children as yet unborn to help them understand what happened on this minute and on this day - George W. Bush

9/11 is an era, not just a day -Cheryl Lynn Duckworth

Where were you on September 11th, 2001? Many responses to this question begin with the mundane activities of daily life: looking at the weather, driving to work, sitting in a classroom, talking on the phone. Around 8:46 a.m., the time that the first of four hijacked planes struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center, these everyday stories transformed into moments of chaos and confusion as the U.S. populace scrambled to comprehend the destruction they were witnessing. By nightfall, September 11th, 2001 was no longer an average September day but one of immense importance to a nation struck by grief, a day that needed no more description than its date: 9/11.

Marking a shift in American culture and politics, 9/11 acts as both a historical and current event. As the first widely broadcast disaster of its nature, most Americans actively witnessed the events that occured in New York, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania as it occured. The proliferation of images and media surrounding 9/11 after the fact continued to fuel the nation's emotional response, uniting them in mourning for those lost and preparing them to fight a newfound enemy — Islamic extremism. This shared experience tied with the relatively recent nature of 9/11 has embedded it within the nation's collective memory. This collective memory, defined loosely as a shared memory that underpins a group identity, has been maintained through the creation of museums, memorials and documentaries about 9/11. Today, almost 20 years later, the date of September 11th continues to hold salience throughout the United States, as the nation

has collectively created a cohesive narrative surrounding the September 11 attacks and its significance.

But what of those who did not witness the September 11 attacks? How are the generations following 2001 meant to remember an event they did not witness? For these generations, collective memory has become personal memory, as the memory of the attacks have been carefully constructed through personal narratives, official documents, images and media. Schools, as the institution responsible for edifying American values and history, are critical in creating and curating this national memory. While there is no perfect way to teach a traumatic memory like 9/11, current pedagogy surrounding 9/11 focuses on memorializing the day by creating a static representation of an event ignoring its dynamic and ongoing implications.

This form of memorialization has led to the creation of a radicalized national narrative surrounding 9/11. Radical narratives result when narrative compression is combined with the assumption of evil intent. Memorials often encourage narrative compression as they both focus on events of victimization. While memorials focus on traumatic events to honor those affected, they simultaneously lead to compressed narratives as they constantly revisit the event through a singular perspective, making it "dense with meaning and undebatable" in the process (Cobb, 51). Consequently, the annual day of remembrance on September 11 marks the nation's most effective effort to maintain narrative compression. Rather than closure, the U.S. populace continuously relives the trauma of 9/11. Both sides of a conflict form compressed narratives tied with the assumption of evil intent towards the Other side. In order to justify violence, the Other side's narrative must be silenced and their humanity reduced to pure, irrational, evil. To justify violence, compressed narratives are explained through the assumption that the Other side holds evil intent. As I will show in Chapter One, the current 9/11 narrative is a radicalized one;

maintained through memorialization in critical spaces, like schools, and contributing to the continuation of the Global War on Terror.

Throughout this thesis, I will explore the potential use of 9/11 literature as a tool to address the pedagogical challenges surrounding the September 11 attacks. I seek to shift 9/11 pedagogy away from memorialization, and the radicalized narrative it creates, towards a dynamic 'better-formed story' that provides perspective from a diverse range of viewpoints, domestically and abroad. As I will show throughout, a 'better-formed story' deliberately complexifies a conflict, forces both sides to consider themselves within the conflict and locates the conflict within a larger timeline in order to increase empathy and understanding towards the Other. When a radicalized narrative transforms into a 'better-formed story' the conflict is pluralized; it considers how a range of personal traumas contribute to the creation of national trauma on both ends of a conflict.

The creation of a 'better-formed story' will work to deconstruct the current educational goals of 9/11 through the replacement of mainstream educational tools, like the textbook and 9/11 media, and displacement of prominent themes, like Islam and the Global War on Terror. I will begin by discussing the current state of affairs in 9/11 education. This analysis will be supplemented by an introduction of narrative conflict theory and my proposal of how it should be adapted to the classroom through literature. The next two chapters will act as case studies, focusing on specific novels and their ability to pluralize aspects of 9/11 education. Specifically, I will explore how these novels are capable of creating a 'better-formed story' surrounding 9/11 by providing a complex, ironic and temporally advanced narrative on the attacks. I will then link the implications of these findings to reflect on a present day trauma — the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, I intend to contribute to the conversation surrounding the role of education in

constructing pluralized narratives that consider a wide range of domestic and international perspectives.

Specifically, the first chapter will offer a literature review of current educational practices surrounding 9/11 as well as a discussion of narrative conflict theory. This will consist of an analysis of the ideological values that underlie 9/11 education and the 9/11 narrative as a whole. I will then review the current educational practices surrounding 9/11. This study leans heavily on the work of scholars Jeremy Stoddard and Diana Hess who have spent the last two decades examining how textbooks and media portray 9/11 in the classroom. My findings will outline how state standards and textbooks currently mediate lessons about 9/11 and how teachers translate these requirements into reality. Throughout, I will highlight gaps in the current mainstream 9/11 narrative and discuss how the U.S. education system currently maintains it. Altogether, this review of 9/11 education will ground how 9/11 is currently valued and taught to students nationwide. Following this, I will provide the outline of my argument for the creation of a 'better-formed story' in the classroom. As a foundation for the rest of this thesis, this section will produce a cogent set of central themes surrounding the current state of 9/11 memorialization.

The first case study of this thesis will explore the concept of witnessing through the graphic novel form as exemplified by Art Spiegelman's *In The Shadow of No Towers*. Since media is currently used as a primary teaching tool for the September 11 attacks, the graphic novel displays the unique potential to imitate, without replicating, images of 9/11 (Stoddard 12). In the classroom, this allows for students to conceptualize 9/11 through imagery without having to witness the oftentimes gruesome photos and videos of the day. Moreover, Spiegelman is interested in melding his personal trauma with the nation's, a conversation that is necessary when considering how the cultural memory surrounding 9/11 is defined by the layers of personal

trauma it caused. My analysis of Spiegelman will be two parted, first exploring the relevance of the graphic novel in displaying trauma as discussed in *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* by Hillary Chute. This section will inform my study of the graphic novel's ability to construct a 'better-formed story' as the reader and teacher can curate how trauma is witnessed. Throughout, I will consider how the graphic novel form is uniquely capable of layering historical narratives in order to prevent a single, unifying conclusion about the meaning of an event.

Finally, my thesis will look beyond the domestic and address 9/11 literature written by British-Pakistani author Kamila Shamsie. Her novel, *Burnt Shadows,* will offer global clarity to the almost entirely domestic narrative surrounding the September 11 attacks in the United States. By asking students to consider the Muslim perspective, this novel will work to promote a sense of empathy and complexify the current understanding Islam. Unlike *In the Shadow of no Towers,* this novel will consider the complexities of 9/11 as a world event which impacted those beyond the United States. As this novel considers 9/11 through a globalized lens, it will mark the largest divergence from the present pedagogical goals of 9/11 education.

The analysis of this diverse range of novels will ultimately pluralize and redefine the educational goals of 9/11 to include, rather than be dictated by, memorialization. As I write in the midst of a global pandemic witnessing what has, and will continue, to impact every single U.S. and international institution; I wonder how the memory of COVID-19 will be constructed for those not yet born. Like 9/11, schools will be influential in this construction and I hope that this thesis will offer guidelines, or at the very least highlight themes, that should be considered as we leave the post-9/11 world for the post COVID-19.

Chapter 1

Schools are not isolated from the world. The classroom acts as the most significant space for young people to put national values and their burgeoning moral code in conversation with their surroundings. This power has led to heated debates between educators and policy makers on the role of schools in creating coherent narrative of U.S. history. As one of the most significant events in modern American history, the September 11 attacks have generated intense debate about how they should be taught and framed in school curricula. This chapter considers how literary texts can potentially pluralize our understanding of 9/11, freeing pedagogy from the pull of ideology. In order to eventually consider how 9/11 literature can pluralize 9/11 education, I will first present how American students are currently taught about the September 11 attacks. These trends, rooted in civic nationalism, reveal how 9/11 education currently contributes to a radicalized narrative on the September 11 attacks and the Global War on Terror. These findings suggest that literary texts emphasising multiple perspectives and global experiences can be used as a pedagogical intervention in 9/11 education.

Why We Remember 9/11

The yearly minute of silence that eerily rings through elementary, middle and high schools halls nationwide on September 11th is in honor of the lives lost to the senseless acts of horror that occurred on September 11, 2001. This minute symbolizes the continued national effort to memorialize, rather than discuss, the September 11 attacks. A natural extension of national efforts, like the 9/11 memorial, this silence speaks volumes to what and who the current 9/11 narrative values.

On the evening of the September 11 attacks, President George Bush spoke directly to a nation shocked by tragedy. In these five minutes, President Bush presented the United States, "the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world," in a newfound physical and ideological battle against Islamic fundamentalism, or "evil, the very worst of human nature" (George W. Bush 57). President Bush ended his remarks by asking battered citizens to "go forward and defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world" (George W. Bush 58). This call to action "framed the conflict as one between civilization and outlaw people and states" (Abu El-Haj 112)**.** Moreover, it highlights how beginning on September 11th the official government response to the attacks sought to turn the uniquely collective trauma of the September 11 attacks into an occasion for the nation to unite and destroy a newfound enemy.

President Bush's rhetoric on the night of September 11th, 2001 demanded civic nationalism, which "defines a nation in terms of who subscribes to the nation's political creed regardless of race, color, gender, language or ethnicity" (Mirel 144). A time defined by waving American flags and passionate acts of public service, the September 11 attacks united the nation around what it *felt* like to be American during a time of great instability. This narrative, which depicts the U.S. as a united whole, silences the Arab American reality during this time.

Post 9/11 civic nationalism authorized forms of both explicit and tacit islamophobia. In the seven months following the September 11 attacks, there were "twelve reported murders of Muslim, Arab or those incorrectly perceived to be Arab or Muslim" people (Mufdi 57). In addition to this loss of life, over 500 violent hate crimes towards Muslim Americans were reported to the FBI between 2000 and 2001. These acts of violence occurred during the victim's everyday lives — attacks occurred at grocery stores, gas stations and at the mall (Mufdi 58). Such violence created an atmosphere of fear for those percieved to be Muslim or Arab,

preventing them from comfortably going about their daily lives. While many Americans felt a surge of patriotic ferver after the September 11 attacks, Muslim American's were not given the opportunity to do so as they began to fear for their lives and livelihoods. As I will elaborate upon in the next sectoin, the dichotomy between the average American and Muslim American experience following 9/11 is rarely reflected upon in classrooms today with the desire to display a united populace post-9/11 continuing to dictate the national narrative.

Three years after 9/11 the official U.S. narrative was made public: The 9/11 Commission Report. This expansive report was authored by a bipartisan committee of government officials and reviewed over two and a half million pages of documents. It interprets the attacks from a militaristic perspective, casting the United States as victim and Islamic extremism as victimizer. In describing the United States as a "Nation Transformed" and the attacks "a shock, not a surprise," the report emphasizes the severity of the attacks and examines the domestic mistakes that allowed for the tragedy, forming a plan to combat any future attacks ("9/11 Commission Report, Executive Summary" 1-3). The content of the report lends itself well to patriotic rhetoric with the authors utilizing emotional and patriotic language throughout to emphasize the fear and instability felt during the attacks. Most strikingly, the executive report notes that "we are safer today, but we are not safe" limiting the ability for national closure surrounding the event ("9/11 Commission Report, Executive Summary" 16). Despite extensively reporting on how terrorist attacks will be prevented in the future, the report maintains the threat of terrorism in the U.S. imagination. This narrative therefore lends nicely to defending the United States' military actions in the Middle East as well as domestic policies like the Patriot Act. Shaped by both the geopolitical aims of the government and the fragile emotional state of the nation, the 9/11

Commission report formed a coherent narrative of 9/11 that reaffirmed the United State's identity as a victim of terror.

The Fordham B Institute, a conservative leaning think tank, has curated a collection of essays by politicians, academics, and journalists that places civic nationalism in conversation with 9/11 curricula. While today's students were unable to witness the swell of American patriotism that followed 9/11, these authors argue that it should be integrated into 9/11 education. Thus, the Fordham Institute argues for the creation of a civic curriculum that displays how values, like "freedom, democracy, an independent judiciary, and the dignity of the individual," are exceptionally American (Alexander et al. 11). In reference to the Middle East, the "victim should be blamed for his victimization" and schools "must abandon the well-intentioned but intellectually corrosive species of moral relativism that now infests public-school curricula in the name of "multiculturalism" (Alexander et al. 6, 14). Such distaste for multiculturalism is a natural extension of President Bush's message following 9/11: that terrorists "stand against us, because we stand in their way" and as the "heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century" they must be silenced, both physically and ideologically (George W. Bush 76). As I will explore in the next section, national trends in 9/11 education are closely aligned to the values espoused by the Fordham B. Institute and President Bush. My focus is on how the influence of civic nationalism on American politics education upholds a hegemonic narrative in which the United States is maintained as a victim, silencing the other side in the process and proliferating rather than mitigating conflict throughout.

How We Remember 9/11

9/11 education is both ubiquitous and heterogenous in the contemporary United States. Without national guidelines on 9/11, states are responsible for establishing educational standards on the topic (Hess and Stoddard 6). Despite the fact that standards vary greatly from state to state, certain commonalities shed light on what is currently being taught in social studies classrooms and consequently contributing to the United States' hegemonic narrative on 9/11 (Hess and Stoddard 14). In order to understand how education contributes to student understanding of 9/11, I will explore the shared themes surrounding 9/11 that have been identified among state standards and discuss how textbooks help translate these standards to the classroom. I will then consider the role of teachers in 9/11 education and their use of supplemental materials to accompany textbook knowledge. Altogether, this overview of the role of state standards and teachers combined with the use of textbooks and supplemental materials will map out how 9/11 is currently remembered and discussed in classrooms nationwide.

In the ten years after the September 11 attacks, 96 percent of state standards list criteria on 9/11 education (Hess and Stoddard 5). Most of these standards focus student learning on "the impact of 9/11 on foreign and domestic policy, to U.S. society overall and, in some cases, to everyday life" (Hess and Stoddard 7). In addition to the standards that requested a general understanding of the sequence of events that occurred on September 11, eight states require that students also understand the "causal roots of 9/11" (Hess and Stoddard 8). Promisingly, the language within these state standards on 9/11 tend to "go beyond the memorization of simple content," by asking students to consider the attacks through an inquiry framework (Hess and Stoddard 14). From a pedagogical perspective, this inquiry reflects an understanding that the complexities of 9/11 should be portrayed within its larger socio-political landscape.

Still, the great degree of variance — specificity between state standards— highlights how the overall goals of 9/11 education remain opaque (Hess and Stoddard 7). For example among the few states that explore the causal roots of 9/11, South Dakota lists 9/11 as one example of a "cause-effect relationship" in U.S. history while Washington asks their students to examine the "ramifications of mono-causal explanations" through the specific question of whether or not 9/11 is the "sole cause of the War on Terror" (Hess and Stoddard 8). This disparity between students in South Dakota, who were asked to consider 9/11 within U.S. history, and those in Washington, who were asked to critically consider 9/11's role in shaping U.S. history, underlines how the details within state standards can shape student perceptions of this event. In 2017, with all states including language about 9/11 in their educational standards, most requirements simply note that students should know the historical details of 9/11 without analyzing its causes nor impact (Stoddard et al. 10). This overall inconsistency in how students are asked to examine and understand 9/11 across the United States translates to a general lack of comprehension surrounding one of the most important historical events of the 21st century. Such inconsistencies have dangerous consequences, as the nation's youth may fall into radicalized narratives that deepen the divide between the United States and suspected terrorists.

State standards have a powerful voice in dictating the definition of terrorism within schools and it's relationship with Islam and the Middle East. While Islamic extremism, specifically Al Qaeda, acts as a throughline between 9/11 and the War on Terror, it is not the only historical example of terrorism in the United States or abroad. Only five state standards ask students to think about domestic terrorism and therefore consider cases beyond the September 11 attacks (Hess and Stoddard 9). Meanwhile, thirty state standards present terrorism as an international problem with the Middle East posing the largest threat to the United States (Hess

and Stoddard 8). This treatment of the concept of terrorism is further muddied by the fact that terrorism and/or the War on Terror is mentioned without a clear description in 32 state standards (Hess and Stoddard 9). The gray area surrounding the definition of terrorism within state standards is further complicated by the lack of clarity surrounding the causes of terrorism. Among standards documents there is "no explicit attempt to engage students in exploring the complex roots of terrorism" with only eight states requiring students to analyze the causes of terrorism (Hess and Stoddard 11). Addtionally, among the three state standards that include an analysis of the relationship between Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, there is no identification of a form of Islam not tied to terrorism (Hess and Stoddard 11).

Instead of maintaining a clear distinction between Islam and Islamic extremism, state standards contribute to the idea that Islam is, in part, defined by extremism. This is compounded by the fact that, outside of standards surrounding 9/11, most states tend to only require lessons about Islam in relation to ancient Islamic cultures or in comparison with other popular religions (Jackson 125; Saleem and Thomas 19). Without representation of the modern Islamic world beyond 9/11, state standards are at risk of implicitly leaving students with a negative perception of Islam and those who practice it (Jackson 127). Overall, the variance in the content requirements and presentation of important topics like the September 11 attacks, Islam, terrorism, and the War on Terror reveal a shocking lack of direction to classrooms on how to teach the attacks. In the states where details are provided, they lean towards negative representations of Islam and treat 9/11 as the defining example of terrorism.

Until state standards begin providing a well-balanced examination of the September 11 attacks and related themes, they will continue institutionalizing a radicalized narrative that poses the United States as a victim and the Middle East as victimizer.

Like state standards, textbooks play an influential role in 9/11 education. To students, textbooks act as their main historical source and reflect an unwavering level of ethos and objectivity. As a key teaching tool within the classroom, textbooks "are [also] important artifacts of culture [as] they reflect a national consensus regarding the dominant cultural knowledge and values that members of society want transmitted to their children" (Romanowski 27). By acting as "critical sites through which normative discourses about the nation are produced and expressed," textbooks circulate hegemonic narratives of U.S. history (Abu El-Haj 121). Thus, the content within textbooks can offer a more uniform glimpse than state standards of the events and values that are valued by the public and being imprinted upon students nationwide.

. It must be noted that the creation of textbooks is an extremely politicized process decided by an elite group of players. Since a short list of textbooks capture the industry, a small set of textbook editors and publishers are capable of dictating what and how content is included in textbooks (Hess 137; Romanowski 27; Saleem and Thomas 18). For example, Texas, which has implemented laws governing textbook selection that "require the promotion of democracy, patriotism, and free enterprise" and accounts for a large portion of textbook sales, is vocal in shaping the patriotic tone found in textbooks throughout the nation (Romanowski 27). Texas' success reflects how textbook companies, in order to increase their profit margins, tend to abide by the states with the most stringent standards in order to sell one product to the largest audience possible. Despite their sense of authority in the classroom, textbooks are primarily creations of ideology abiding by the curricular goals of a select set of state standards and group of textbook editors (Hess 149; Martell and Hashimoto-Martell 26; Romanowski 27).

The varied treatment of 9/11 in textbooks offers valuable insight on which ideological factors prevail in textbook creation. In the limited space textbooks spend on 9/11, they focus on

stressing its historical significance (Hess et al. 198). These descriptions are presented through a "framework of patriotism," as textbooks universally describe 9/11 with a focus on the American reaction during and after the attacks (Romanowski 31; Hess et al. 199). Coverage of 9/11 therefore focuses on formulating a universal understanding of its significance, noticeably under the assumption that students already know "what happened on 9/11, who was involved, [and] why it happened" (Hess et al. 200). A study of nine high school social studies textbooks, which capture an audience of approximetly eight million high school students, found that this universal lack of detail was paired with shared usage of patriotic text and imagery. While the majority of state standards requires that students learn the details of 9/11; their textbooks assume this knowledge is already well-established. Instead of providing details surrounding the September 11 attacks, textbooks focus on describing popular images like that of firefighters raising the American flag in front of the wreckage of the twin towers, the Statue of Liberty with smoke from the 9/11 attacks in the background, and American flags waving throughout the United States (Hess et al. 200; Romanowski 33).

While these images offer a stirring narrative of American unity and strength in spite of the trauma and destruction experienced on September 11th, 2001, they shed very little insight on the causes and consequences of 9/11. Altogether, preliminary scans of popular textbooks show that they prioritize capturing this sense of patriotism that arose from 9/11 over providing basic information about the September 11 attacks (Hess et al. 202).

Without pressure from state standards, textbooks offer minimal coverage of Islam outside of the September 11 attacks. Current coverage of the Muslim world takes up "no more than 3-5

percent of textbook space" with a focus on on pre-modern times (Jackson 139–42; Saleem and Thomas 19)). Meanwhile, coverage of 9/11 offers a purely negative representation of Muslims as textbooks fail to account for the overwhelmingly disapproving response to 9/11 from the Muslim world (Jackson 141). Without additional information about Islam and the modern Islamic world, there is little evidence to discourage students from labelling Muslims as terrorists. This unbalanced representation of Islam in textbooks help realize the conflation of Islam and terrorism established by state standards.

State standards and textbooks offer the widest view onto the ways that education is used to learn and remember 9/11. These glimpses identify space for improvement, as standards and textbooks are deeply politicized and fail to offer a nuanced understanding of the September 11 attacks. Moreover, the patriotic tone of both tools have greatly displaced international perspectives on 9/11 and the Global War on Terror. Without intervention, this one sided perspective is "setting the stage for future discourses and for creating official memories of the event" that align with the goals of civic nationalism (Saleem and Thomas 16). Yet, state standards and textbooks — which I define as formal pedagogical structures — do not exist alone. Teachers, and the supplemental materials they choose to utilize, are capable of expanding student perspectives and nuancing their understanding of the September 11 attacks.

Since 9/11 is not standardized throughout state curricula and mentioned briefly and sporadically in textbooks, these formal structures guide rather than dictate teachers' decisions on when and how to teach about the attacks. While the inclusion of 9/11 in state standards increases its likelihood of inclusion in classroom lessons, "there is a strong connection between teaching towards standards or high stakes testing and very 'shallow' curriculum focused on the memorization of facts with little to no reasoning, writing or authentic intellectual engagement"

(Stoddard 10). This potential division, between the inclusion of 9/11 in social studies lessons and the quality of said lessons, depends on the work of teachers who decide when and how to teach about the attacks.

It is difficult to unearth data on exactly how 9/11 is being taught in classrooms. Diana Hess and Jeremy Stoddard, who have been at the frontlines of 9/11 education research since 2003, published a 2019 teaching survey of 1,047 teachers in an effort to uncover recent trends in 9/11 education. Cheryl Lynn Duckworth, in a survey of 150 teachers, supplements these findings. While the voices of 1300 teachers offer a limited glimpse into the state of 9/11 education nationwide, the agreement between these researchers underscore the current challenges of teaching 9/11.

To begin, a lack of standardized expectations, paired with no structured curriculum, increases the burden upon teachers on how to accurately and sensitively teach about the attacks. For teachers who have chosen to completely overlook 9/11, their decision to do so is attributed to "the topics not relating to the standards for that course…a lack of curriculum resources….and worries about how students, parents, and community members might react to their lessons" (Stoddard 11). Among those that have taught about 9/11, "data suggests [that lessons about the September 11 attacks are] concentrated primarily on the anniversary of the attacks and then, for some, again at the end of the course" with limited discussion throughout the bulk of the year (Stoddard 3). In Duckworth's research, almost 70% of teachers reported teaching 9/11 once a year, on its memorial, with 23% of teachers responding that they did not address 9/11 at all (Duckworth 14). When questioned, 25% of teachers responded that they avoided teaching about 9/11 because there was not enough time in the classroom citing state standards as the largest constraint (Duckworth 56) Another 14% of respondents stated they did not teach the subject

because they did not have the necessary resources to do so (Duckworth 58). Altogether, this smaller research study confirmed the pressure teachers are experiencing from state standards and inaccessibility to resources. It seems that the sensitive nature of the September 11 attacks, tied with the lack of clear support from formal pedagogical structures and time constraints placed by state standards, make it more difficult for teachers to teach the topic than other large-scale historical events.

For those that are teaching about the September 11 attacks, many are relying on the internet or specific curricula created by non-profit and educational organizations (Stoddard 2). Their reliance on the internet and online curricula is tied to a focus in using "news articles and magazine articles on the attacks far more frequently than fiction or biographies" because of the belief that 9/11 "needs to be witnessed and memorialized" (Stoddard 9). Thus, "documentaries, current events, and personal stories dominate strategies for teaching 9/11 and the War on Terror" in schools throughout the nation (Stoddard 7). While there has not been a literature review done upon online curricula about 9/11, there is a risk that in focusing on the visual memory of 9/11, many of its complexities are overlooked. Furthermore, the opportunity to teach about the Muslim American experience in the United States in this time is not directly focused upon, with teachers favoring the personal accounts and narratives surrounding the day of September 11th (Stoddard 10).

While there is no way to know exactly what happens in every classroom nationwide, there are clear trends surrounding the lessons on 9/11. It is not easy to discuss the September 11 attacks, it remains a sensitive topic nationwide with most teachers holding personal memories of the day. The personal nature of the attacks, melded with its recent occurrence and political undertones, have led to most educators and pedagogical tools focusing on honoring the attacks

itself, often at the expense of considering its root causes and present-day implications. This maintains a hegemonic narrative, shaped by civic nationalism, that considers 9/11 as a singular event through a purely patriotic lens.

How We Can Remember 9/11: 'A Better-Formed Story'

Thus far, I have examined how the United States government and populace has formed a hegemonic narrative surrounding the September 11 attacks and maintained it through memorialization within the United States education system. This narrative, which marks 9/11 as the source of the Global War on Terror, has formulated the United States as an "exceptional victim" whose love of freedom and status as an economic power drove Al Qaeda (soon to be conflated with the Middle East, and in some cases, the Muslim faith as a whole) to unspeakable violence (Cobb 4). As the only civilian attack in U.S. history, the wake of 9/11 has indeed been exceptional, yet the simple American narrative that demarcates the U.S. as victim and Islamic extremism as victimizer fails to offer a clear or complex motive for the attacks. Instead, the United States hyperfocuses on the national trauma resulting from the attacks and has vowed to defend the nation from future threats of terrorism. In this sense, the American narrative surrounding 9/11 is a radicalized narrative; it continuously reflects on how the nation was wounded and focuses its efforts on eliminating those who wounded them without considering what, beyond ideological difference, compelled the attacks.

Sara Cobb, in *Speaking of Violence: The Politics and Poetics of Narrative Dynamics in Conflict Resolution,* considers violent conflict to be a cacophony of narratives struggling to make sense of the incomprehensible. Deeply indebted to Hannah Arendt's notion of "natality," or the right to humanity that is earned through birth, Cobb considers how current conflict narratives are

defined by the erasure of the opponent's voice and therefore life. Since the narratives we form about an event are shaped through a toolbox of lived experience and ideology; in a violent conflict, defined by trauma and instability, there is a natural desire to stabilize the meaning of an event within one's personal rationale. Yet, "once the event and the narratives that provide it with stability are fused," one becomes unmalleable to diverse interpretations of the event (Cobb 51). Over time, as these events and their ensuing narratives layer upon each other, the overarching conflict narrative is compressed to an extremely simplified, stable, understanding of difference which completely flattens the opponent's narrative. In order to effectively flatten the opponent's narrative, this Other is assumed to hold "evil intent" which is defined by three characteristics: (1) "the Others want to kill or harm the speaker or their group"; (2) "the evil or bad intention is persistent, independent of circumstances or context" and; (3) "the Other either will not listen, or that they will pretend to listen as part of their strategy to harm" (Cobb 96). With each side fortifying their perspective by refusing to consider alternative interpretations of events, the narratives become increasingly entrenched and the conflict itself more difficult to resolve as the opposing side is slowly dehumanized and assumed to embody evil intent. The overall process of narrative compression displays how erasure of opposing narratives are initially natural yet always harmful in situations of violent conflict.

In the case of 9/11, the narrative that Al Qaeda was driven to violence *simply* because they hated the tenets of democracy is a result of narrative compression. Since the United States' narrative ignores how its own actions both during and after the Cold War oppressed regions of the world and those living within them, 9/11 is interpreted as a sudden and hate-driven event without any consideration of where, or how, this hate may have arisen. This official government narrative, shaped through documents like the 9/11 Commission Report and the political rhetoric

it fostered, continues to reiterate an “exceptional victim” narrative despite the United States’ hawkish role in the Middle East that began before 2001 and continues today through the Global War on Terror.

This compressed narrative is driven by the deeply traumatic nature of the attacks. The spectre of September 11th, 2001 continues to haunt the United States whose “collective identity [has been] reshaped and recentered around the trauma such that the event [has become] a lens through which all else is seen” (Duckworth 16). The collective trauma of 9/11, in which “the boundaries between order and chaos, between the sacred and the profane, between good and evil, between life and death [became] fragile,” have never been fully resolved (Neal 5). The nation has never regained confidence in its security measures, constantly preparing to defend against another extremist terrorist attack. Furthermore, the lack of violence on U.S. soil related to the Global War on Terror has allowed Americans to define their understanding of this conflict through 9/11. As the only personal reference point to the Global War on Terror, the conflict has not been complexified beyond a compressed narrative of 9/11 — defined by unaddressed trauma and a fear of the unknown. This lack of closure has perpetuated a compressed narrative and became radicalized as the United States continued to imbue the Middle East with evil intent and maintain a narration of self-victimization.

To resolve conflict, which is propagated by narrative compression, narratives must be complexified. Narrative conflict theory, coined by Cobb, outlines how the creation of a ‘better-formed story’ can create space for reflective judgement, where one considers themselves through the lens of another, in order to form a more accurate understanding of the conflict surrounding them. The steps towards a ‘better-formed story’ are relatively straightforward:

> (a) it has quantitatively more events in the plot line — the number of events that people discuss as pertinent to the plot line increases; (b) it has a circular rather than linear logic, such that all parties to the conflict are constructed as having contributed to the problem, thus creating an *ironic* plot; and (c) it contains temporal complexity that ensures the plot has events in the past, that lead to the present, toward a future, as opposed to only a plot focused on the past or the future (Cobb 221).

It is through these avenues — the thickening of plot lines, sense of irony, and well-formed timeline — that a conflict narrative can be pushed to consider the larger story, in which they are one of many voices. In other words, transforming a monologue into a well-informed and self-reflective dialogue.

The creation of a 'better-formed story' is easier said than done. The traumatic nature of conflict, as the case study of 9/11 has shown, makes it difficult to consider scenarios where one is not a victim let alone a victimizer. Cobb, aware of these challenges, proposes the practice of "serious play" when mediating a conflict. Purposefully counterintuitive, the terms serious and play are combined to describe the act of "making the ordinary strange" through the invention of counterworlds (Cobb 281). It is within these liminal spaces of serious play that one can consider the roots of conflict with the full weight of their trauma; the playful lightness of carefully constructed counterworlds subsume their serious conflict ridden core creating a space to consider new and complex narratives.

In order to complexify the U.S. narrative surrounding 9/11, schools must engage in serious play with their students. While the U.S. education system is currently perpetuating the existing radicalized narrative on 9/11 and the Global War on Terror, it has the potential to instead

destabilize and complexify the conflict. Duckworth, in her consideration of current trends in 9/11 education, notes “a hesitancy to address in a comprehensive and critical manner some of the more taboo topics of 9/11, such as the role of the U.S. in the world, which critics see as imperial” (Duckworth 114). Yet, it is exactly these topics that must be addressed in order for students to formulate a 'better-formed story' of 9/11 and Global War on Terror; a narrative that shapes both their reality and the reality of those overseas. As this thesis argues, literature is the perfect medium for these efforts.

In an effort to complexify the 9/11 narrative, Duckworth proposes the creation of a revisionist history formed by oral history and directly challenging perceptions of the Arab world and Islam. Oral history, which immerses students in the memories and experiences of others, is a natural way to supplement the collective memory students have innately formed around 9/11. Moreover, it is a form of serious play as it allows students to explore the lives of others in order to form larger conclusions about their own lives and surroundings. Duckworth, in a teacher interview, analyzed how oral history proved effective in allowing students to “make meaning of 9/11” by the agency they held in reconstructing the attacks through a range of local oral histories (Duckworth 90). This teacher, like the most skilled of mediators, demonstrated the ability to guide the creation of a ‘better-formed story’ about 9/11 by posing meaningful questions throughout the lesson. Thus, he offered an array of worlds, or perspectives, on the attacks and guided students towards a more complete understanding of the attacks. In this case, students interacted solely with community members limiting their ability to fully consider both the American and Middle Eastern perspective. This highlights a weakness of oral history, which due to the limited accessibility of international or diverse narratives resulting from the nature of the conflict, remains one-sided. This teacher pushed back against this weakness by displaying films

or documentaries that considered Arab and/or Muslim perspectives on the attacks. Still, he felt that the "lack of knowledge (including his own) about Muslims, and a lack of contact and dialogue" made it difficult to truly instill an understanding of both sides of the conflict in his students (Duckworth 91). It was important that he brought these perspectives to the class's attention, but he was incapable of putting them in conversation with a larger, ironic, understanding of the United States' role in the Global War on Terror. Similarly, as a history teacher, he was able to create temporal complexity surrounding the attacks, "asking students what they knew about WWII's kamikaze pilots," but found it difficult to delve into the more relevant history of the "Cold War, South East Asian and Middle Eastern history, U.S. Constitutional issues, Islamic theology, and Islamophobia" due to a lack of personal knowledge on the topics (Duckworth 92). Thus, his ability to create temporal complexity surrounding 9/11 was restricted to the topics he felt well educated in. This one case study displays some of the challenges faced creating a 'better-formed story' in the classroom. While other teachers mimic aspects of this exceptional teacher's efforts, few were able to completely replicate it and therefore build anything closer to a 'better-formed story'. Without support from state standards and curricula as well as worries surrounding the sensitive nature of the attacks, this teacher is an exception to the norm. While the use of oral history and revisionist efforts are effective in creating a 'better-formed story' there must be additional ways to support teachers in their efforts to pluralize student concepts of 9/11 through serious play.

Fiction is a form of commemoration that runs parallel to oral history — both are spaces where reality and the make believe inform each other. Based on Cobb's concept of serious play, fiction is an extremely playful space to immerse students in counterworlds that often stem from reality. In many ways, fiction is more immersive than other forms of media as students are

compelled to invest in different characters and develop alongside them. Moreover, most interesting novels already include the features of a 'better-formed story'; multiple complex plot lines, ironic conclusions, and temporal complexity. Since one of the greatest challenges in 9/11 education is finding the class time to learn about the topic, reading 9/11 fiction creates a natural reason for English classes to teach this content. As another space to pluralize 9/11, literature is a valuable resource in the effort to complexify and recontextualize 9/11 in American classrooms.

Sara Cobb's research, supplemented by Duckworth's work in the classroom, outlines the potential for 9/11 education to move from a stagnated, trauma ridden, monologue to a productive dialogue striving for common understanding. In order to achieve this dialogue, the current 9/11 narrative must become pluralized. Since there is no singular concept of 9/11 or the Global War on Terror, students should be exposed to the many effects of 9/11, from September 11th 2001 to today. 'A better-formed story' is an intentionally pluralized story focused on valuing every narrative's ability to construct a full understanding of conflict and its ensuing trauma. The novel, as a natural space for serious play, is a valuable pedagogical tool in the effort to pluralize the 9/11 narrative. As the following chapters will explore, literature is an untapped resource for pluralizing 9/11 education and destabilizing the current, singular, U.S narrative.

Chapter 2

In a matter of hours, the twin towers disappeared from the New York City skyline, leaving in their wake thousands of deaths, a forever altered city, and a shell-shocked nation. As the American populace attempted to grapple with this loss and its implications authors, poets, and artists worldwide faced a dilemma: How could they articulate this unspeakable act? On the other hand, how could they leave this moment unspoken? This challenge — attempting to "[turn] the unspeakable into speech" — is apparent in all 9/11 literature (Gray 49).

Art Spiegelman attempts to visualize and verbalize the unspeakable in the graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers*. A deeply personal piece, *In the Shadow of No Towers* consists of a short introduction, ten large scale color strips and a comic supplement that is almost equal in length to the primary text. The introduction, titled "The Sky is Falling*"* details the trauma that drove Spiegelman to create this piece of work. This trauma, rooted in his parents' Holocaust experience, was provoked by the fall of the twin towers and maintained by the actions of the U.S. government which "began to move into full dystopian Big Brother mode and hurtle America into a colonialist adventure in Iraq — while doing very little to make America genuinely safer beyond confiscating nail clippers at airports" (Spiegelman "The Sky is Falling"). Self described as a "slow motion diary of what I experienced while seeking some provisional equanimity," Spiegelman depicts himself as both the narrator of and protagonist in the novel (Spiegelman "The Sky is Falling"). For ease of clarity, I will describe Spiegelman the author by his surname and Spiegelman the character as the narrator. As a graphic novelist, Spiegelman is able to share his lived experience of 9/11 and its aftermath through his narrator's eyes.

The introduction of *In the Shadow of No Towers* portrays Spiegelman as an unreliable author. In a slurry of past participles, Spiegelman shares what he had "hoped...intended..planned..[and] anticipated" to include his graphic novel (Spiegelman "The Sky is Falling"). These scenes, which include "the harrowing drive throughout a panicked city to retrieve [his] then nine-year-old son" and his daughter "being told to dress in red, white and blue on her first day" at the school she was briefly transferred to following 9/11, are not present in the text (Spiegelman "The Sky is Falling"). His references to omitted scenes beg the question: what else is missing? Combined with Spiegelman's constant references to insanity — the world ending, the sky falling, going off the deep end – there lies a sense that *In The Shadow of No Towers* is a precarious representation of Spiegelman's life on September 11, 2001 onwards. Spiegelman states that this is a natural result of the graphic novel form as "he works too slowly to respond to transient events while they are happening" and therefore fails to offer a comprehensive representation of an event (Spiegelman "The Sky is Falling"). By noting the incomplete nature of the text and referencing his insanity, Spiegelman embraces his book as a historical artifact rather than a perfectly historically accurate document. Spiegelman's awareness of his unreliability as a narrator is a mark of his authenticity. From its introduction, *In the Shadow of No Towers* is cognizant of how it complexifies the 9/11 narrative, allowing for a 'better-formed story' that pluralizes current conceptions of the attacks, without claiming itself as a dominant narrative.

While Spiegelman encapsulates the unspeakable in *In the Shadow of No Towers*, he also freely expresses opinions about the United States that were considered unsayable by Americans following 9/11. Thus, *In the Shadow of No Towers* is both a personal work, offering "significant testimony memorializing the national tragedy of September 11, 2001," and a political work

"[contributing] to the debate about American retaliatory wars in Iraq and Afghanistan abroad and the curtailment of domestic freedoms within the territory of the U.S. under the auspices of the Patriot Act" (Basu 164). Spiegelman's unwillingness to censor his reflections, which were in conflict with the American desire to curate the United States' status as "exceptional victim," meant that he was initially unable to release his work on 9/11 in the United States. It was only when "America entered its pre-election political season" in 2004 with free debate and criticism flowing freely that *In the Shadow of No Towers* found its limelight in the United States (Spiegelman "The Sky is Falling"). Rather, the graphic novel was first published serially between 2002 and 2004 in the German newspaper *Die Zeit* as well as other European newspapers and magazines. This initial publishing arrangement appealed to Spiegelman for political reasons, allowing him to create without fear of American critique or censure. As well as for artistic reasons:

> "The giant scale of the color newsprint pages seemed perfect for oversized skyscrapers and outsized events, and the idea of working in single page units corresponded to my existential conviction that I might not live long enough to see them published" (Spiegelman "The Sky is Falling").

Additionally, these large scale single page units allowed Spiegelman to stray from providing a cohesive narrative, allowing him to create ten disparate scenes from between 2001 and 2004 that were tied by themes relevant to the post 9/11 world. The freeing nature of Spiegelman's publishing deal with *Die Ziet* allowed for the creation of a text that was free of both political and artistic pressure; a text that was true to Spiegelman's 9/11 experience in its entirety. Such an unmediated piece of work would be highly valuable in American classrooms where the

September 11 attacks are viewed in complete alignment with the current, highly patriotic, U.S. narrative.

The ten colossal pages of *In the Shadow of No Towers* are tied only by "an image of the looming North tower's glowing bones just before it vaporized" and the narrator (Spiegelman "The Sky is Falling"). The first half of the novel is loosely linked by the story of how Spiegelman and his wife raced to retrieve their daughter, Nadja, who attended school near the twin towers. Spiegelman depicts each page of this sequence differently, straying from the plotlines natural chronological order and constantly changing the comic's style. This plotline fights with competing narratives as Spiegelman layers each page with vibrant colors, scenes and themes. The first page acts to describe a feeling of transition, with multiple comic strips describing the shock of 9/11. The second page is more reflective, connecting Spiegelman's personal trauma to the collective American experience on 9/11. This trauma is historicized in page three as Spiegelman compares the trauma of Ground Zero to Auschwitz. The fourth page, which is almost fully devoted to retrieving Nadja, considers the multiple ways the fall of the twin towers was captured (e.g. eye witness, photography, paint and comic). The fifth page then fast forwards to a year from 9/11 offering Spiegelman's initial reflections on the Iraq War only for the sixth page to return to the days following the attacks. Here, Spiegelman recounts the first cultural shift he experienced following the attacks: an experience with anti semitism. The seventh page provides a political analysis of the post 9/11 world, critiquing the rise in hawkish patriotism he witnessed after the attacks. This political commentary continues onto the eighth page which focuses on how the news shaped the American narrative on 9/11 and the Global War on Terror. After the political deepdive of page seven and eight, the ninth page despairs over the United States' return to "A New Normal" where the United States has reconciled the attacks through

wars fought overseas. This culminates with the graphic novel's final page, where the narrator reflects on how 9/11 has created a narrative of fear towards the Middle East and argues that the United States is equally despicable: abusing its citizens and terrorizing nations in the Middle East.

The published copy of *In the Shadow of No Towers* includes an eight page comic supplement which offers insight into Spiegelman's artistic process. In the wake of the attacks, Spiegelman found solace in 20th century comic strips for both their soothing ignorance of, yet surprising relevance to, the attacks that rocked the 21st century. The supplement's introduction provides a brief background on the variety of comic characters referenced in *In the Shadow of No Towers.* These characters — who could only be recognized by the most shrewd comic lover — link the past to the present as those untouched by 9/11 are immersed into a world consumed by the attacks. This expert use of allusion is one tool in a rich toolbox of literary techniques that Spiegelman uses to provide an intimate reflection on 9/11 within *In the Shadow of No Towers* that is unafraid to consider the far reaching consequences of the attacks.

In this chapter, I will answer two conversant questions that build from my previous discussion of 9/11 education and curriculum. First, how does the comic form recount traumatic events? I have already briefly explored how Art Spiegelman uses his medium to articulate the unspeakable and push the boundaries of traditional memorialization. I will now consider how the graphic novel medium itself is suited to recounting historical trauma. These findings will direct my response to the second question: can *In The Shadow of No Towers* contribute to the creation of a 'better-formed story' surrounding 9/11 in the classroom? To this end, I will discuss how this graphic novel offers a complex, ironic, and temporally rich representation of the September 11

attacks. These findings will exemplify the potential graphic novels hold in creating a space for students to learn about historical trauma and pluralize their conception of a sensitive event.

The Comic Form: Novel Representations of Trauma

The comic form is uniquely suited for narrating traumatic historical events. Hillary L. Chute, author of *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Film* and an occasional collaborator with Art Spiegelman, offers a two-pronged analysis of the comics' contribution to telling history. To begin, she notes how drawing offers a visualization of history that unlike photography or film is a "laborious form of seeing" in which the artist must deliberately acknowledge their observations and translate it to the page (Chute 30). This reflects a translation of reality into a larger narrative framework, as the drawing on a page provides a deliberate representation of what was witnessed (McCloud 41).

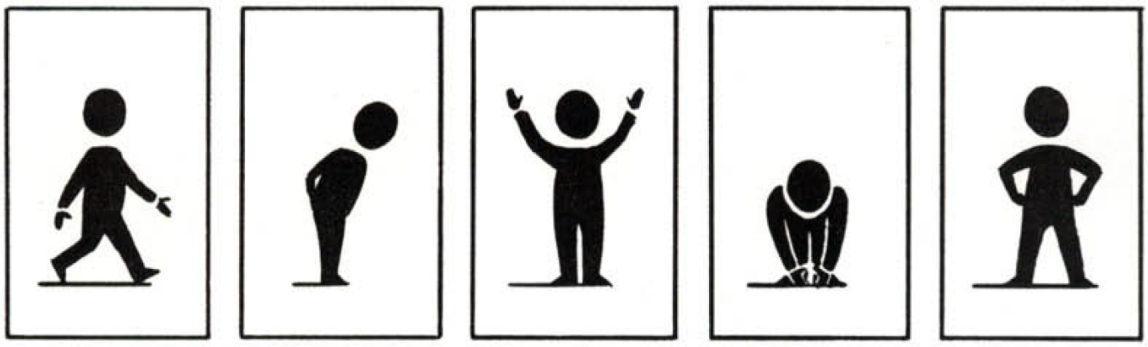
The fact that drawings are conceptual representations is valuable to the comic form as it allows for a large amount of artistic liberty. Comic writers can draw any variant of the human form, from a stick figure to a biologically accurate body, to represent their characters and world. It is this ability to fall into abstraction, while remaining true to the concepts being represented, that give comics an advantage in recounting sensitive subjects. For example, the practice of "masking" describes the use of cartoonish, unrealistic representations of characters placed in extremely realistic settings (McCloud 42). Famously used by Art Spiegelman in *Maus,* masking allowed Spiegelman to depict the traumatizing setting of concentration camps in a far less jarring manner than traditional media. In his depiction of Jewish people as mice and their German oppressors as cats, Spiegelman reconstructs the light hearted literary tensions between cats and mice to familiarize the real tensions between Nazi Germany and Jews around Europe. Both in a

figurative and literal sense, masking allows Spiegelman to layer aspects of his characters' identity and shape the reader's interpretation of characters through the mask they are placed in. Sara Cobb, in *Speaking of Violence: The Politics and Poetics of Narrative Dynamics in Conflict Resolution*, discusses "how hard it is to construct [conflict narratives] as "works of art,'" that are both approachable and maintain the complexity of every perspective. Graphic novels, assisted by techniques like masking, are capable of literally transforming conflict narratives and trauma into these complex works of art. As the comic transforms into the graphic novel, the playful nature of the comic also becomes serious, expanding the reader's comprehension of a narrative and forging space for the creation of a 'better-formed story'.

Secondly, Chute notes that when paired with a comics spatial grammar — the gutters, grids, and panels that form the architecture of a comic frame — drawings are brought to life (Chute 4). This is, in part, due to the comics' unique ability to capitalize on the concept of closure, or the "phenomenon of observing the parts [while] perceiving the whole" (Chute 17; McCloud 63). For example, when someone sees a picture of one star in the sky, they remain aware that other stars surround it. The fragment they see, one singular star, does not stop the mind from filling in the larger night sky. Likewise, the larger picture is presented through fragmented images in comics; we are able to see both the singular star and the night sky that engulfs it. While comics allow for the observation of both the whole image and the parts within it, they often leave space between these fragmented parts for the reader's imagination to fill in. It is within these spaces, titled gutters, that the "human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea" (McCloud 66). In depicting trauma, authors can capitalize on the reader's imagination to avoid certain images. Imagine, instead of showing the immediate tragedy following the bombing of a town, a comic depicts the bomb falling followed by a scene

of the city, destroyed, in the next frame. Without including the horrors that occurred when the bomb fell, the reader can still vividly visualize the moments in between these two frames.

In the comic world, the gutter also represents time passing. While comic panels are able to "fracture both time and space [to offer] a jagged staccato rhythm of unconnected moments," gutters utilize closure to "connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous unified reality (McCloud 67). As the image below, from *Understanding Comics: An Invisible Art* shows, the reader's mind is responsible for connecting the walking man's movements into a coherent scene.



Nevertheless, the reader's imagination remains within the confines of the author's use of spatial grammar. In the case of this image, the even gutter space and overall cohesive movement of the figure leans towards the fact that an equivalent amount of time is passing between each frame. If the author had chosen to make one gutter space much longer, or shown a great change in the physical form of the main character, the reader would have been tempted to fill in these spaces much differently. Likewise, if multiple frames were used to show a bomb dropping onto a town, the reader's sense of dread towards the scene would increase with each panel. In writing about

traumatic events, spatial grammar can be used to limit the details of a traumatic event without distorting the overall narrative.

The potential to transform the interpretation of an event through the use of spatial grammar highlights the author's ability to "place pressure on traditional notions of chronology, linearity, and causality" in their work (Chute 4). This makes it especially valuable for representations of historical trauma as it allows the reader to process a narrative from different temporal angles; past, present, and future. The reader's eyes can be everywhere at once moving forwards and backwards between frames while closure allows for the page to be absorbed as a whole. The gutter is critical to this process as it mimics the time guiding the reader from frame to frame. Such involvement incorporates the "reader in the construction and reconstruction of history, and specifically individual and collective memory" when consuming a graphic novel (Pines 188). This relationship, between author and reader, is unique to comics, with "no other form giving so much to its audience while asking so much from them" (McCloud 92). Let us return to the image of a bomb dropping for the final time and include an image of a fearful protagonist looking at the sky before moving on to the image of the destroyed city. Now the reader has witnessed multiple perspectives; the protagonist's experience looking at the sky moments before destruction, a bird's eye view of the bomb dropping and a historical view of the destruction itself. Additionally, the inclusion of a character reminds the reader of the many lives threatened by the bomb, investing them in the lives and well-beings of those in this imaginary world. Throughout, the reader is aware of the result of the bomb dropping, looking into the tragic future and visualizing each frame within its larger context. The development of this example presents the array of ways an author can complexify a storyline through the use of spatial grammar. When paired with historical context in the classroom, this scene has the potential to

both engage and educate a student. While the author can shape how history is presented, layering multiple perspectives and moments in time, the reader is still left with an exhilarating sense of agency in how they interact with and interpret the text.

The graphic novel medium is as well situated to teach history as it is to narrate it. The newly widespread approval of comics in classrooms shows its transformation into the graphic novel, a term that is meant to separate more serious works like Spiegelman's *Maus* or Marjorie Satrapi's *Persepolis* from zany comic strips and Marvel comics. These novels have been especially praised by educators for their ability to display and discuss difficult topics in a manner that can be easily consumed. Spiegleman's work, which he has redefined as comix, a co-mixing of words and pictures, is meant to leave the reader "careening between images and text until left speechless" (Spiegelman "Wordless!"). He spent 13 years to do just this in *Maus,* a two part comix narrating his father's experiences as a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor. A personal work that melds his father's memory with Spiegleman's role as son and storyteller, *Maus* is Spiegleman's interpretation of a series of events he neither witnessed nor experienced. Spiegelman is therefore skilled at translating cultural and collective memory, even when he is not a witness. His melding of words and pictures, memory and history, opinion and fact are what move *Maus* and *In the Shadow of No Towers* from traditional comic into the realm of the graphic novel. Consequently, I conflate co-mix with the graphic novel, as both describe complex works that touch on serious themes and subject matter through the comic form. As a form of serious play, graphic novels allow for students to process trauma, oftentimes from multiple perspectives, without projecting trauma upon them. This has been proven by the popularity of graphic novels like *Maus* and *Persepolis*, which discuss the traumatic events of the Holocaust and the Iranian Revolution respectively, in the classroom. I will argue over the span of this chapter that it is time

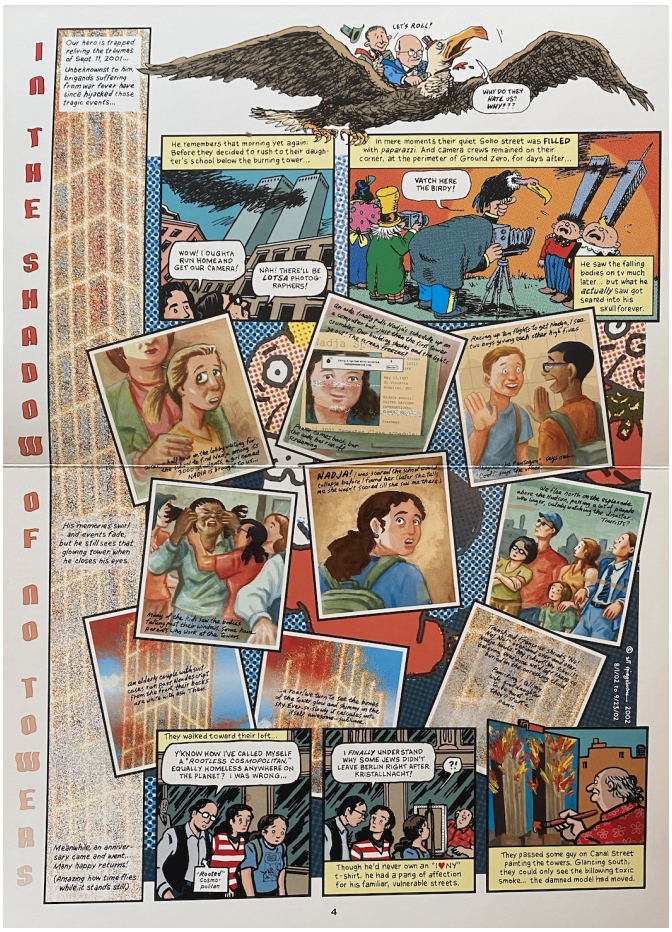
to include a graphic novel about 9/11, exemplified by *In the Shadow of No Towers,* in educational spaces.

Capturing the Complexities of 9/11

So what happens when we bring a novel like Speigelmen's into the classroom? For one, the moment the reader opens the cover of *In The Shadow of No Towers* they are whisked away from the sober sight of a New York skyline marked by the loss of the twin towers after 9/11 to the oversized, brilliantly colored and chaotic inner workings of Art Spiegelman's mind. Traditional uses of spatial grammar collapse acting as a visual representation of the twin towers' destruction and embedding the reader within the author's disrupted emotional and mental state. Inspired by the comics original medium, newspaper, Spiegelman explains how the "collage-like nature of a newspaper page encouraged [his] impulse to juxtapose [his] fragmentary thoughts in different styles" (Spiegelman "The Sky is Falling"). In combination with a shift away from traditional uses of spatial grammar; the multiplicity of story arcs, drawing styles and allusions effectively prevent the reader from easily finding closure. They cannot easily envision how each fragmented frame contributes to a cohesive whole. This is invaluable in the effort to complexify the narrative of a hegemonic historical event like 9/11. The difficulty to achieve closure in *In the Shadow of No Towers* alienates the reader from the well-known 9/11 narrative allowing for the legitimization of a diverse array of perspectives and opinions that have been previously overlooked.

The fourth page of *In the Shadow of No Towers* is the only time the pattern described above is broken, devoting itself to one major plotline and offering clear closure. Here, Spiegelman complexifies the concept of witnessing and documenting trauma by depicting the

variety of experiences that were present in one location and at one moment on 9/11. At the top of the page, the narrator's wife exclaims “Wow! I oughta run home and get our camera” to which the narrator, looking up at the smoking towers, responds “Nah, there’ll be lotsa photographers!” `(Spiegelman 4). Despite their lack of physical photographs, the author provides a photographic rendition of his memories using a set of polaroid-like frames to bring the reader to the moments before the twin towers fell as he and his wife desperately retrieved their daughter from Stuyvesant High School. These haphazardly placed photograph-like frames offer a glimpse at the variety of staff and student experiences at Stuyvesant High School on September 11, 2001: A girl who was mistaken for Nadja, fear and confusion glazing her eyes; a school aide who “[runs] off screaming” when the fall of the first tower shakes the school building; two boys, mid high five, gleefully discussing how “cool” it is that “they hit the Pentagon” and the many students witnessing “bodies falling out their windows,” with some worrying about their parents who worked at the World Trade Center (Spiegelman 4).



Spiegelman, after confirming at the top of the page that he did not have a camera on 9/11, treats his memories like a form of documentation offering static images of a wide variety of experiences on 9/11. While the captions on each frame contribute to the chronology of the

narrator and his wife searching for Nadja, the aspect to aspect transitions throughout the page "sets a wandering eye on different aspects of" the space, creating a sense of what Stuyvesant High School looked and felt like on 9/11 (McCloud 72). This further pluralizes the reader's understanding of the attacks, as they interact with a range of reactions and perspectives on 9/11.

As the newly reunited family runs home, they pass a new set of witnesses: those calmly watching the disaster from afar; those in ashen business suits running away from the attacks and "some guy on Canal street painting the towers" right before they collapse in front of him (Spiegelman 4). In contrast to those running away from the twin towers, some witnesses treat the attacks like a spectacle. In response to this observation, Spiegelman includes a frame on the far right corner of the page where those documenting 9/11 are described as "paparazzi" forcing two sobbing children adorned with the smoking twin towers atop their heads to pose for them. This offers a subtle critique of those who treated 9/11 as a spectacle, racing to document rather than save themselves or others from danger. As a witness of 9/11 who has chosen to reflect on the attacks through the comic form, Spiegelman's homage to other forms of documentation creates space for a conversation on if and how violence of 9/11's nature should be documented.

These pages push today's students, who have only experienced 9/11 second-hand to consider how present photos, paintings and eye-witness records relate to the event itself; they place those running for their lives away from the towers in contrast to those eagerly running *towards* them, camera in hand. Spiegelman capitalizes on the power of the comic form, which "lies in their ability to derive movement from stillness—not to make the reader observe motion, but rather participate actively in its genesis" to complexify the act of documentation (Chute 22). By pushing back the curtain on the act of witnessing and documentation, Spiegelman demands all his readers to approach representations of 9/11 with a watchful eye.

An Ironic 'New Normal'

Thus far, I've considered how *In the Shadows of No Towers* complexifies reader understanding of 9/11 by creating a space in which there can exist a variety of experiences within a singular event. This is primarily executed by the fragmented nature of the novel which prevents literary closure and consequently forms a world where many narratives can coexist. On page four, where literary closure is provided for the first and only time, Spiegelman complexifies reader understanding by providing an array of perspectives in the creation of a cohesive whole. Moreover, he provides a dynamic portrayal of memorialization as the scene brings the act of witnessing and documentation to life. While these forms of complexity are key to creating depth in one's understanding of 9/11, complexity alone cannot create a 'better-formed story'. Rather, there must be some form of targeted complexity in which a narrative is forced to reflect on their role as both victim and victimizer in a conflict narrative. Spiegelman injects a plentiful dose of irony within *In the Shadow of No Towers* through his critical review of the American response to 9/11 both domestically and abroad. Irony, in the context of a 'better-formed story', describes the creation of a narrative "in which responsibility is both external, in the actions of Others, and internal, a function of the limitations of each speaker, as a party to the conflict, as an actor in the drama" (Cobb 214). As a direct victim of the attack on the twin towers, the narrator spends the bulk of the first half of the novel recounting the trauma endured on September 11, 2001. As time goes on, however, the narrator begins to reject the narrative established by the Federal government that positioned the United States as a victim—the narrative required to justify the Global War on Terror. Two motifs, 'the shoe dropping' and 'the new normal' embody these observations following the attacks. Driven by his ideological beliefs rather than defined by them,

Spiegelman melds art, text and experience to uncover the role the United States plays in contemporary violence domestically and overseas.

From the novel's outset, Spiegelman addresses the feeling of inevitability towards future terrorist attacks that blanketed the United States post 9/11. He does so by reconstituting the idiom "waiting for the other shoe to drop"— a saying that was popularized among 19th and 20th century tenement renters in New York City due to the shared experience of hearing those above

them taking their shoes off, one by one, and loudly dropping them onto the ground. The inevitability of the second shoe dropping came to represent the general feeling of expectation, oftentimes in a negative sense. On the top of the first page, a traditional comic strip called "Etymological Vaudeville" turns this idiom on its head. The strip follows an exhausted man returning home and loudly removing his shoe to the annoyance of his downstairs neighbor. In response to his neighbor's complaint, the man makes a show of dropping his next shoe down silently. After falling peacefully asleep, the man awoken to his frustrated neighbor shouting angrily "drop the other !*&$ shoe so we can go to sleep" (Spiegelman 1). Since the downstairs neighbor had expected to hear the loud bang of the second shoe dropping, he was enraged rather than pleased when it never came. This beautifully encapsulates the irony of both dreading and

expecting what is perceived as the inevitable to occur. In conversation with official American narratives, like the 9/11 Commission report, the neighbors expectation that the second shoe will drop is reflective of the United States continued expectation that there will be another terrorist attack at the scale of 9/11.

Spiegelman leaves little space for interpretation surrounding the meaning of the first shoe. Near the bottom of the first page, he provides a realistic image of a shoe with a cartoon-like fuse at its heel falling into a crowd of terrified faces. Some of these faces are familiar, as a zoomed in version of them were in the background of the novel's introduction looking up at what had been presumed to be the twin towers. In reality, these faces are part of a larger crowd which look up fearfully at this lifelike shoe, described as "Jihad brand footwear" (Spiegelman 1). At the top of the circular frame lies a bright white caption titled "waiting for THAT OTHER shoe to drop" acting as an apocalyptic advertisement of the future after 9/11 (Spiegelman 1). It is difficult to detach the concept of "the other shoe dropping" from the inevitable collapse of the twin towers, with one tower falling before the second inevitably did the same. Likewise, the reader must go through the rest of the novel with a sense of unease waiting for the other shoe to drop, for "THAT OTHER" terrorist attack (Spiegelman 1).

As "Etymological Vaudeville" foreshadowed, the second shoe drops silently upon the American populace as they ring alarms for another 9/11 that never occurs. At the end of the novel, American cowboy boots, embossed with eagles and dollar signs, rain down on a helpless

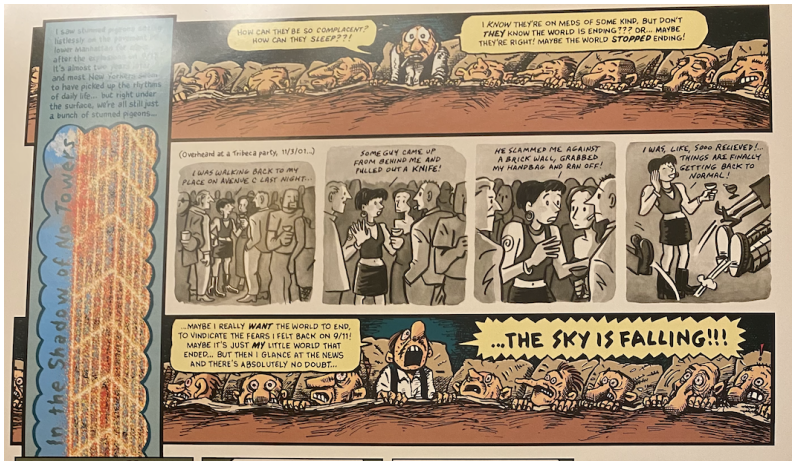
crowd. Spiegelman's ironic interpretation of the idiom "waiting for the other shoe to drop" comes to fruition with the narrator in his mouselike form reaching towards the reader amidst a crowd of uniquely masked characters.

In contrast to the frame with the first shoe dropping, where the characters are drawn uniformly and aware of the shoe above them, the narrator and his peers stand uncomfortably listless. In a doubling sense of irony, this frame sits within a larger page constructed to look like the twin tower; further reflecting how the American obsession with 9/11 has led to a radicalized narrative that "squandered chances to bring the community of nations together" (Spiegelman 10). The crowds overall lack of awareness, tied to the texts focus on commemorating 9/11, highlights a worrying reality in which the second, American shoe is overlooked despite the fact that its consequences are as severe as the first, "Jihad," shoe.

This metaphor provides a "reflective judgement" on the United States regarding 9/11 that "[explores] its consequences on perpetrators and victims alike (Cobb 138). In Spiegelman's eyes, the United States weaponized 9/11 for it's gain, instigating violence overseas and continuing to oppress and limit the action of its citizens domestically. Throughout the novel, the narrator is perplexed by how clearly he can see these wrongdoings while the rest of the United States populace enters a state of normalcy. Defined as 'the New Normal,' Spiegelman's analysis of the reaction, or lack thereof, towards American injustice provides a final perspective into an ironic 9/11 narrative.

The new normal is exemplified on page nine, where Spiegelman overlaps five distinct comic strips in order to create one coherent narrative. At the top of the page sits a satirically drawn narrator next to a dozen sleeping men exasperatedly wondering "how can they be so complacent? How can they sleep" as the "world is ending" (Spiegelman 9). The reader's natural gaze follows this strip to the middle of the page, overlooking a similar scene, as the narrator wakes up his sleeping neighbors by shouting "THE SKY IS FALLING" after questioning whether his fears of the world ending come from a selfish desire to "vindicate the fears [he] felt back on 9/11" (Spiegelman 9). While these two strips make sense read sequentially, they are provided valuable context by the scene in between them where a chic woman recounts her relief at getting mugged in New York City months after 9/11 because it confirmed that "things are finally getting back to normal" (Spiegelman 9) . Without this glimpse of the outside world, Spiegelman's fear of complacency seems unfounded; the inclusion of the second frame shifts Spiegelman's distress in the third frame from an unfounded cry to an urgent reaction. This expert use of fragmentation locates the middle strip in a larger conversation surrounding how New York City residents, and the nation as a whole, coped with the September 11 attacks. As a moment of great disruption, the September 11 attacks had the chance to provoke significant changes in the United States. Instead, it created a desire for a return to normalcy, as the nation embraced efforts to make the nation safer through the Global War on Terrorism but failed to consider how or whether things had changed domestically. By viewing this scene through the eyes of the narrator, who completely rejects this normalcy and allows 9/11 to consume him for years, the reader is forced to consider whether the United States processed and reacted to 9/11 appropriately. Since current K-12 students were all born in the post-9/11 era they only know the "new normal." This

page remarks on the shift from pre-9/11 to post-9/11 in an ironic sense, considering the ongoing trauma of the September 11 attacks.



Whether or not the reader agrees with Art Spiegelman's politics or point of view, *In the Shadow of No Towers* immerses the reader into an ironic 9/11 narrative. By the end of the novel, the United States is not only a victim of the attacks but a proponent of violence and injustice. As "waiting for the other shoe to drop" shows, understanding the full 9/11 narrative requires "circular rather than linear logic" in which the second shoe dropping — an American reaction — is inevitable. Meanwhile, the concept of the "new normal" places a question mark on today's reality, as Spiegelman wonders how the United States returned to normalcy without ever addressing how the sense of normal before 9/11 contributed to the attacks. Next, I will evaluate how Spiegelman weaves in events prior to 9/11 to create a temporally complex narrative of which 9/11 is an event in a long line of history rather than a singular event.

From the Holocaust to 9/11

Comics, like history, are collaborative project between past and present. Spiegelman's 9/11 experience is formatively shaped by his parent's past; as "Auschwitz survivors…[who had] taught [him] to always keep his bags packed," the feelings linked to Spiegelman's generational trauma overwhelm him as he attempts to process the September 11 attacks (Spiegelman 2). This layering of trauma creates both a historical reference point — between the Nazi death camps and Ground zero — and literary reference point — between *Maus* and *In The Shadow of No Towers* that Spiegelman refers to throughout the novel.

Spiegelman's most notable reference to *Maus* is the periodic transformation of him and his family into mice throughout *In the Shadow of No Towers.* The first incident of this is on page two, in a small grayscale strip titled "Notes of a Heartbroken Narcissist*."* In this vertical panel, Spiegelman creates four symmetrical panels of himself looking into a handheld mirror. The first panel, a lifelike image of a clean shaven Spiegelman is captioned "before Sept. 11" (Spiegelman 2). The frame right below shows Spiegelman with a scraggly beard that he "grew...while Afghans were shaving off theirs." Here, the mirror aggressively responds "IKH" to Spiegelman's changed face, a response that can be linked to the third frame where Spiegelman lies newly clean shaven, albeit with a fresh cut on his face, in response to "some bad reviews" from the mirror or those behind it (Spiegelman 2). It is the fourth frame in this short strip, however, that links Spiegelman's changing form to his generational trauma. A newly formed mouse mimicking the style he used to represent Jews in *Maus*, Spiegelman looks desperately into the mirror for approval. Cited as

"issues of self-representation" in this final frame, Spiegelman's reference to *Maus* in both his mouse-like depiction and the grayscale tone used in this singular comic strip locates himself as a

victim of tragedy (Spiegelman 2). His Jewish identity and position in the public eye are consequently used throughout *In The Shadow of No Towers* to explain how his self image shifted after the September 11 attacks.

In his references to *Maus* and the Holocaust, Spiegelman creates a conservation between historical events. This presents trauma and the memories that caused them, even those that are witnessed second hand, as multidirectional and "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" (Rothberg 3). By using another historical lens to digest the memory of an event, Spiegelman broadens the implications of remembering 9/11.

A mouse is not the only way Spiegelman chooses to represent himself, as he moves from realistic to cartoonish forms throughout the text. In the comic supplement, located at the end of the book, Spiegelman confides that many of his more cartoonish depictions are direct references to famous comics from the early 20th century. These comics were all that gave Spiegelman solace following the attacks, as he became mesmerized by the "vital, unpretentious ephemera

from the optimistic dawn of the 20th century" that somehow touched on issues and sentiments that remained relevant in 2001 (Spiegelman "Comic Supplement"). Instead of keeping these characters' safely within their own time, Spiegelman adapts them to his. It is therefore strategic to make the comic supplement a supplement instead of an introduction. With most readers initially failing to understand the role of these cartoonish forms other than as masks which detach Spiegelman the author from Spiegelman the narrator, they are introduced to these characters within the context of 9/11 and then unable to abandon this perspective as they interact with the characters in their original form. By layering obscure textual and historical references and placing them in the context of 9/11, Spiegelman is continuously remodeling the reader's interpretation of the text, continuing to create a sense that 9/11 is as much a culmination of moments as a moment in itself.

No matter what style Spiegelman uses in his self-depiction, he can always be identified by the cigarette dangling from his mouth. The cigarette, which is enlarged and aligned opposite from a disintegrating North Tower on page three, represents both Spiegelman's internal anxieties, which are in some part a response to generational trauma, and newly toxic surroundings. As he prepares a cigarette in his mouselike form, Spiegelman "[remembers his] father, trying to describe what the smoke in Auschwitz smelled like…[with] the closest he got was telling [him] it was…'indescribable" (Spiegelman 3). After a deep breath of his cigarette, the narrator exclaims "that [this scent] is exactly what the air in Lower Manhattan smelled like after Sept 11!" (Spiegelman 3). Without having ever truly understood the smell of Aushcwitz, he is immediately able to recognize it in his own surroundings. With each inhalation of his cigarette, Spiegelman is slowly consumed with wisps of smoke as he discusses the "asbestos, PCB, lead, dioxins, and body parts" that made Lower Manhattan's air...a witches brew" (Spiegelman 3). As

these wisps of smoke accumulate around Spiegelman's smoking image they can be associated with the familiarly toxic smell of cigarettes while representing the unfamiliar, indescribable, scent of destruction. It is as the narrator ironically declares that in a post-9/11 world, "he may not live long enough to be killed by cigarettes," that he is able to fabricate and familiarize an aspect of the 9/11 experience that was proxy to a select percentage of the American population — its scent (Basu 167). Notably, this sensory reading is difficult to achieve without a combination of text and image. The ability to translate the cigarette motif in a visual familiarized the toxicity of Ground Zero while Spiegelman's comparison of the area to the Holocaust placed this scent on a larger timeline of historical trauma and tragedy.

The graphic novel, which can easily layer textual and visual references, is the perfect medium to create a temporally complex narrative. Accordingly, they are a valuable tool in classrooms where lessons surrounding 9/11 currently focus on teaching it as a monolithic event. Unlike photography and film which are oftentimes too sensitive to show in classrooms and offer students little agency in interpretation, graphic novels allow students to control how they read trauma. *In The Shadow of No Towers* exemplifies this experience, as it acts to memorialize 9/11 while also considering how identity shapes one's encounter with trauma. By introducing historical and textual cross references, *In the Shadow of No Towers* acts to destabilize current notions of American cultural memory, pushing back against the single narrative currently produced in classrooms and linking 9/11 to a wider array of world and national events.

Conclusion

In The Shadow of No Towers is packaged as a memorial. Originally published in *The New Yorker* in September 2001, the cover of *In The Shadow of No Towers* represents Spiegelman's

first attempt to grapple with the tragedy of 9/11. A matte black background embossed with a glossy black outline of the twin towers; the cover denotes the overwhelming presence of what had been lost. The satin finish of the towers reflect the reader's face, a reference to the memorial of another American tragedy — the Vietnam War. Moreover, the ability to see one's face in the towers (and the glossy images of cartoon characters falling on the back cover page) enmeshes the reader with the towers' shadow and therefore 9/11 itself. Not only does this somber cover page "shadow the eerie and reverberting silence that follows a deafening explosion," it begins with reference to the present before addressing a time when the Twin Towers still stood tall (Pines 192). It is notable that *In The Shadow of No Towers*, a bright, fragmented and controversial piece of work, begins with this somber, almost patriotic, pause to honor what has been lost.

While the cover of the novel reflects on what was lost, the text itself is grounded by the image of "the looming North tower's glowing bones right before it vaporized" (Spiegelman "The Sky is Falling"). Represented on all ten pages, this central image which was "burned onto the inside of [Spiegelman's] eyelids" was not "photographed or videotaped into public memory" and offers a new perspective to the broad library of 9/11 documentation (Spiegelman "The Sky is Falling"). The decision to connect his narrative through an image of an ephemeral North Tower leaves the reader constantly within the shadow of the towers, bringing them back in time to 9/11 throughout. Moreover, it reflects on the September 11 attacks as an event, which Spiegelman reacts to in the moment, and a memory that he continues to reflect upon long after the event has passed. It is through the comic form that Spiegelman is able to articulate this contrast between stability and instability, the consistent image of the North Twin tower amidst an otherwise non-linear narrative, as well as visualize the paradoxical nature of time both passing and freezing with the disintegrating tower which never falls.

The September 11 attacks are currently taught as a static event; a terrible day in history. This novel provides a compelling argument for a dynamic reading of history in which the United States is continuously acting in the shadow of 9/11. The narrator's mental instability throughout the novel is symbolic of the nation—both of their actions are dictated by the attack, they live in its shadow. Our current education system struggles to teach how this shadow continues to loom over the nation guiding policy and hardening narratives. Spiegelman provides a 'better-formed story' in his depiction of life within this shadow. Still, he exists almost completely within the domestic framework, writing as an American about America. As the next chapter will show, 9/11 cast a shadow beyond New York City and the United States.

Chapter 3

Burnt Shadows is an expansive family drama that travels across three generations and over five countries: Japan, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States. Hiroko Tanaka Ashraf, the only character present throughout the novel, survives the United States' bombing of Nagasaki losing her entire family and German born fiancee Konrad Burton in the process. With few ties left in Nagasaki, Hiroko travels to Delhi where Konrad's sister Elizabeth lives with her British husband James. Upon her arrival, Hiroko witnessed Indian independence from British rule and consequently the partition of India and Pakistan. While Hiroko's initial introduction to India is through the Burton family, language lessons with James' employee Sajjad unveils a different side of India. Hiroko and Sajjad's relationship eventually turns romantic and culminates in marriage. This union grows alongside their newly christened home — Pakistan — when the Muslim Sajjad is forced to leave Delhi with his new wife. As the Ashrafs begin to create a home in Pakistan, Elizabeth leaves her husband and England for New York City.

Raza Ashraf, the only son of Sajjad and Hiroko, is the multicultural product of the first half of the novel. His Burton counterpart, Kim, grandchild of Ilse and James, is an American child with British roots. Her father Harry who works for the CIA in Pakistan ties the children together when his fond childhood memories of Sajjad reconnect him with the Ashrafs. These ties become strained when a misguidance from Harry leaves Raza disillusioned about his future and seeking solace from an Afghani refugee, Abdullah, who is adamant about joining the Mujahadeen. A series of events ensue with Raza briefly entering the Mujahideen camps and miraculously returning home safely only to find his father was killed while searching for him.

Such tragedy is linked to the actions of both Harry and Raza further entwining the Burton and Ashraf families.

Sajjad's death indebts Harry to the young Raza leading him to enlist Raza as a translator in his new flourishing line of work: private military contracting. Shortly after 2001, the two men are working in Afghanistan while their loved ones — Hiroko, Elizabeth and Kim — orbit around each other in New York City. In a shocking twist, Harry is murdered in Afghanistan and Raza is framed for the crime. In order to evade punishment for a crime he did not commit, Raza throws away his identification papers and endures a torturous migration process to Canada. He arrives in time to greet Abdullah, his friend who was last seen in the Mujahadeen camps, who is preparing to return home after 9/11 threatens his safety in the United States overnight. In some ways, this interaction was planned by Raza as his guilt over his actions years prior compelled him to contact Abdullah's family and support him in his efforts to escape the United States due its hostile environment. Unknown to Raza, however, is Kim Burton's role in dropping him off at the border. This is soon discovered when police officers called by Kim enter the restaurant the two are seated at, arresting Raza rather than Abdullah in a moment of confusion. Here, Raza and Kim come face to face for the first time with Kim realizing the grave mistake she made in a moment of deep prejudice and Raza accepting the inevitability of the United States by locating and imprisoning him. Kim is forced to further face the brunt of her decision when she returns to Hiroko in New York City. As Hiroko stands both alone and alongside young Kim, it becomes fully transparent how family lines in *Burnt Shadows* unveil the reality of Southern Asia's relationship with its colonizers, both formal and informal, including the United States.

Although *Burnt Shadows* is a novel about 9/11, the reader never sees the towers fall. This seems deliberate, as Shamsie focuses on the traumatic wake of 9/11 overseas rather than the

direct American experience. In an interview, Shamsie was prompted to consider the political significance of de-centering the United States and 9/11 in *Burnt Shadows:*

> "The very fact that the book 'skips' 9/11 and picks up with the war in Afghanistan and the Indo/Pakistan stand- off knowingly undercuts the mythologizing that has taken place around 9/11 and given it a narrative primacy over all other world events of the last few decades." (Morey 200)

This awareness and refusal of narrative compression locates Shamsie's intentions alongside that of a 'better-formed story'. Moreover, Shamsie publicly reiterates that the last violent conflict recounted in *Burnt Shadows* is the Global War on Terror, in which 9/11 is one event of many. By considering the Global War on Terror— on both Afghani and American soil— Shamsie not only decenters but pluralizes the history of 9/11 leading to a new form of comprehension surrounding its status as a cataclysmic global event.

Shamsie's treatment of 9/11 encapsulates the way that history is reconceptualized in *Burnt Shadows*. While describing the novel, Shamsie expresses a sensitivity to "how there were earlier stories feeding into the story of 9/11, so there [was] no possibility [she] would write a novel that look[ed] at that one date as if history proceeds from it but doesn't precede it" (Singh 158). In other words, although *Burnt Shadows* is not a book about 9/11, it is a book that accounts for 9/11 as part of an interlocking chain of conflicts, conquests, and historical traumas. This emphasis on the constant intersections of a continuous world history allows not only for a complex, ironic and temporally dynamic 9/11 narrative but for a globalized one. This is a very different perspective from Spiegelman's in Chapter Two, whose experience witnessing the twin towers fall meant the novel rose out of the attacks and the American experience on 9/11.

Shamsie's conscious decentering of 9/11 history further contributes to her efforts to decenter the United States and create a 'better-formed story' in the process.

Significantly, the expansive nature of *Burnt Shadows* and Shamsie's goals in writing the text is conducive to a 'better-formed story' specific to the task of 9/11 education. This chapter will offer close reading and analysis of the novel and how it forms a complex, ironic and temporally dynamic understanding of 9/11. I will begin by exploring how the nuanced portrayal of Islam and Southern Asian history presented in Burnt Shadows can complexify student understanding of the Muslim world. Next, I will show how Shamsie encourages her audience to examine The United States ironically through both a Western and non-Western lens. Since the basic premise of *Burnt Shadows* relies on temporal complexity, there is no moment where the past and future are not infused into the narrative. Consequently, I will weave into my analysis an account of the temporal complexity that defines the novel. Altogether, this chapter will examine the tools, themes and techniques Shamsie utilizes to create a 'better-formed story' of 9/11 that has the potential to pluralize student understanding of the attacks.

Complexifying the Other

In Sara Cobb's argument for a 'better-formed story', complexity is defined as increasing the number of events in a plot line. We have seen how literary representations of 9/11 allow for this form of complexity in *In the Shadow of No Towers*. *Burnt Shadows* does something different; it increases the number of events in the standard U.S. narrative surrounding 9/11 by providing a global and deep historical perspective. Additionally, the novel complexifies American interpretations of the Muslim world by providing various presentations of Islam in a predominately South Asian context. As explored in Chapter One, current educational trends

provide students with little information on Islam, oftentimes leading to its conflaion with terrorism. This lack of understanding contributes directly to narrative closure, as students are led to assume that Islam itself drives extremism. *Burnt Shadows* opposes this narrative through its cast of muslim characters which provide a "more nuanced sense of the multiple possibilities for Muslim identities in the modern world" (Morey 184). This section will further explore how *Burnt Shadows'* ability to complexify the American 9/11 narrative is two fold: increasing student comprehension of Islam, an important 9/11 theme, while also contributing an international perspective on Islamic extremism.

The first Muslim character introduced, Sajjad Ashraf, is a man guided, rather than defined, by his religious and cultural beliefs. Treated as a servant in his British place of work, Sajjad finds solace in his predominantly Muslim neighborhood where religion represents community rather than a specific spiritual practice. An imperfect Muslim who fails to pray consistently, partakes in the occasional alcoholic drink and marries a non-Muslim woman; Sajjad's religious beliefs continue to underpin his kind and peaceful nature. This explains, in part, why he struggles to comprehend the logic driving the violent partition of India and Pakistan and is reluctant to leave his beloved home of Delhi. Sajjad displays a moment of critical self awareness in considering this conflict, "[realizing] that atrocities committed on Muslims touched him far more deeply than atrocities committed by Muslims—[knowing] this to be as wrong as it was true" (Shamsie 89). While Sajjad locates himself in a victimized in-group, similar to how American's processed 9/11, his awareness of the tension between his personal biases and sense of morality displays a recognition of the narrative compression that naturally results from his identity. Rather than allowing this bias to form into a radicalized narrative, Sajjad reflects and considers why and whether his biases should exist. As discussed in Chapter One, modern Islam

is oftentimes conflated with 9/11 and the extremism behind the attacks. Consequently, the presentation of Islam as an aspect of Sajjad's identity rather than his *entire identity* is invaluable to complexifying student understanding of the Muslim world.

In the end, Sajjad's choice surrounding the conflict is made for him as his family forces him and Hiroko to forge a new life in the growing nation of Pakistan when life in India becomes too dangerous. As "one of the Muslims who chose to leave India," Sajjad is stripped of his family and hometown and required to remake his life in Pakistan (Shamsie 102). This glimpse at the inner conflict Sajjad feels over the partition of India and Pakistan displays the perspective of the millions of voiceless people impacted by the conflict. Here, the Muslim community is presented as the victim of religious difference complexifying American notions of victim and victimizer post-9/11. Moreover, Sajjad's religious beliefs are introduced as an aspect of his identity, rather than a defining characteristic. While the other national traumas discussed in *Burnt Shadows* are known in the United States — the World War II bombing of Nagasaki, British colonialism of India, the 9/11 attacks and the Global War on Terror — the partition of India and Pakistan is not given any attention in the classroom or beyond. The opportunity to bring this important event to the limelight in the classroom, and discuss how a group of Muslims were both victims and and victimizers of violence in the region can provide a valuable understanding of geopolitical relations that will influence student understanding of the Global War on Terror.

Before Hiroko and partition enveloped Sajjad's life, marriage was at the center of his mind with his family searching for his perfect match. Here, the Western reader is introduced to an unfamiliar practice: arranged marriage. Shamsie presents arranged marriage as a traditional process in which people are matched by their values. To Sajjad, who was raised listening to historical stories of "powerful women who led troops and sat in council with men," it is

important to have “a modern wife” (Shamsie 53). When Sajjad shares this with his mother, there exists a clear sense of deference towards her as matriarch of the family. While provided from a squarely male perspective, Sajjad’s valorization rather than objectification of women pushes back on imagery of “the bearded Muslim fanatic, [and] the oppressed, veiled woman,” both “stereotypes that have emerged [in the United States] with renewed force since 9/11” (Morey and Yaqin 3). These conversations also present the idea that one can have a modern marriage through the arranged marriage scheme. With every Western marriage in the novel ending in divorce, Shamsie discreetly insinuates that arranged marriage can be both modern and effective. Not necessary to the novel’s plot line, the conversations surrounding arranged marriage display the practice as a norm in the region. While Sajjad eventually decides against arranged marriage, the practice is never presented in a negative light.

Marriage in the Islamic world is further expounded upon by the Ashraf brothers in their discussion on polygamy. In the hours following Sajjad’s mothers death and mere months before British withdrawal from India the consider whether or not one of Sajjad’s older brothers, Iqbal, can take a second wife.The most devout sibling, Sikander, shares that he can only take a second wife if “[he] treat them both as equals and receive[s] [his] first wife’s permission” (Shamsie 105)**.** As one of the few scenes that cite the Quran, Sikander’s response holds a sense of ethos as the accurate interpretation of polygamy. This interpretation displays a practice that is oftentimes viewed as oppressive to emphasize equality and some sense of female agency. Instead of mulling on this topic, Shamsie uses the debate that ensues between the five brothers to display a wide range of personalities: patriarchal, devout, patriotic, detached. This allows for a pluralization of the Muslim man, a display of the difference among a group that in the post 9/11 world is oftentimes painted as a “homogenous, zombie-like body, incapable of independent thought and

likely to be whipped into a fever at the least disturbance to their unchanging backward view" (Morey and Yaqin 1). The fact that every brother holds both negative and positive attributes brings a depth to the Muslim man that is oftentimes not provided in U.S. representations of Muslim men.

In her brief discussion of arranged marriage and polygamy, Shamsie normalizes these foreign concepts for a Western classroom. Additionally, she complexifies student understanding of these oftentimes negatively presented practices by discussing them in an overall positive light. Whether or not the audience is swayed by Shamsie's presentation of these topics, the novel creates space for this conversation with clear examples of positive interpretations of arranged marriage and polygamy. Rather than "[defining Islam] negatively as that with which the West is radically at odds," Shamsie discusses these themes in their original context without direct consideration of the West (Morey 4). The question of positive and negative representation of Islam is further explored through Abdullah, an Afghan refugee adamant to join the Mujahideen.

In Sohrab Goth, a "village on the outskirts of Karachi, where nomadic Afghans lived in makeshift homes during the winter months" before the Soviet invasion, Raza finds a town bustling with the lives and struggles of those forced out of Afghanistan. This Afghani extension of Karachi becomes a liminal space where Raza and Abdullah, despite their different backgrounds, can become brothers. Meeting regularly for English lessons, Abdullah offers a discouraged Raza an escape from his everyday life; Raza transforms from Raza Ashraf, a misfit struggling to progress academically, into 'Raza Hazara' who can "experience the exhilaration of serving the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan" (Morey 207). This violent anti-Soviet narrative stems from Abdullah, who early in their friendship displays an eagerness for violence handing Raza an AK-47 and stating "you can't drive out the last Soviet without knowing how to use this"

(Shamsie 202). The violent potential of the AK-47 is contrasted by Abdullah's childish nature, as he desperately seeks his older "brother" Raza's approval. The narrative Abdullah recounts of courageous battles against the evil Soviet invaders attracts Raza to consider "[spending] a day or two in the camps…[listening] to the mujahideen stories, [and learning] to fire a rocket launcher" before finding an excuse to return home (Shamsie 204). While Raza views his time with Abdullah as a playful distraction from reality, he is indoctrinated to believe that joining the Mujahideen camp would be an exciting and meaningful experience. The fallacy in this line of logic is painfully obvious to the reader with a sense of dread arising when the two boys mount a truck towards the camp.

Up to this point, a radicalized narrative has been created surrounding the Mujahideen camps and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan. In the reader's eyes, charming Abdullahis brainwashed in his adamance towards violence in the name of Afghanistan. The reader is introduced to Abdullah's true context when he sees the refugee camps at the Pakistan/Afghanistan border. As Abdullah looks at the camps where "people [live] like animals" he shares that he "was forgetting why there is no option for [him] except to join the mujahideen" and how "the boys growing up in the camps... won't forget. They'll look around and know, if [the refugee camps are] the better option that must mean our homeland now is the doorway to hell. And we must restore it to Paradise." (Shamsie 219). Suddenly, Abdullah's radicalized narrative is rooted in his traumatic refugee experience rather than blind hatred or ignorance. After 9/11, Americans were indoctrinated to believe that Islamic extremism is founded in a pure, uninstigated and inexplicable, hatred of democracy. As Abdullah's experience shows, this narrative is not reflective of reality.

Like Sajjad, religious and geopolitical conflicts have led Abdullah out of his beloved country. In contrast to Raza's peaceful father, Abdullah has processed and responded to the trauma of his displacement with violent aspirations. While he joins the Mujahadeen, an explicitly religious organization, he is not driven to violence through his religious beliefs. Rather, Abdullah's extremist views are founded in his desire to free his country from the seemingly unjust Soviet invasion. This section explores the radicalized narratives that drive extremism, with little mention of religiosity, and uncovers how trauma can drive even the most innocent and loving child towards violence.

Both the Ashraf family and Abdullah allow for a nuanced and complex understanding of Islam and the Muslim world. In a notably non-Western context, students can witness how religion is entangled in geopolitics. These geopolitical factors, notably the partition of India and Pakistan and Soviet intervention of Afghanistan, provide valuable insight on how extremism has bred in South Asia and forces the reader to rethink what beyond religion plays into these radicalized narratives. In the long run, the first step towards creating a 'better-formed story' is complexifying both sides of a conflict. Until the history of South Asia and the Middle East is addressed in the classroom, an aspect of the 'better-formed story' will be lost. This novel, which immerses the reader in a diverse range of Muslim perspectives and addresses the 20th century history of South Asia, allows students to consider this region within its own context rather than considering it solely through the American perspective or completely ignoring it.

From the American Dream to American Disillusionment

Nine days after 9/11, President Bush announced in his widely broadcasted State of the Union address that Al Qaeda's goal was "remaking the world— and imposing its radical beliefs

on people everywhere" (George W. Bush 66). In the same speech, President Bush made an announcement that continues to guide our nation today: "[Our War on Terror] will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated" (George W. Bush 69). This warning, which was extended to nations suspected of housing terrorist groups, was driven by the overwhelming impression that the values of "progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom" were under attack and therefore in need of protection (George W. Bush 70). After two official declarations of war and countless military and political interventions, have these values been honored in the Middle East and South Asia? Have they been honored towards Muslim populations domestically? *Burnt Shadows* provides one answer to these questions, examining the disparity between the United States espoused values and the ethics of its actions in Southern Asia, specifically Afghanistan. In direct conversation with the narrative created by the Bush administration and sustained by following administrations and the U.S. education system, Shamsie asks the reader to consider in what ways the United States is an ideological and physical threat rather than a safe haven.

Pluralism embodies the idea that various diverse groups can peacefully coexist. A proud "melting pot," the United States is defined by its pluralistic approach to democracy with historically open borders and a broadcasted willingness to embrace all immigrants as Americans. This pluralistic nature has been key to the construction of the American dream, or "the ideal by which equality of opportunity is available to any American, allowing the highest aspirations and goals to be achieved" ("American Dream"). Such promise, which espouses that the only requirement for success is to be American, has created an international pull towards the land of freedom and opportunity. In *Burnt Shadows*, the American dream is an American disillusionment — rather than embracing those of South Asian descent, the nation discriminates against and

detains them. Raza experiences this sense of disillusionment twice — once in his youth and again during his final days of freedom. This two-fold disappointment is rooted in the ever-evolving form of pluralism in the United States where certain populations are steadily discriminated against. In addressing the failure of the United States to meet the ideal of tolerance it promotes, Shamsie forms an ironic narrative that reflects the true character of the United State's actions both before and after 9/11.

The reintroduction of the Burton and Ashraf family in Pakistan is one of pure coincidence. Harry Burton, whose CIA position is never personally revealed to the Ashrafs, is welcomed with open arms by Sajjad, Hiroko and Raza. Harry is thankful of their generosity and takes special interest in Raza: "the dreamy eyed young man with a gift for language [and] an ache for something to believe in" (Shamsie 189). At the time of their discussion, Raza has strayed from his parent's lofty expectations for law school and works in the factory his father manages. Harry offers to teach Raza how to cope with the test anxiety preventing him from applying to law school. In an effort to further encourage the struggling young man, he turns the conversation to the United States which is "full of universities who'd love to add a bright, inquisitive Pakistani to their student body" and would even "pay for [him] to go there" if he "did well in their entrance exams" (Shamsie 189). After offering to "help Raza out with all the application stuff," Harry pauses to consider whether he should have discussed this proposition with Raza's parents. He consoles himself with the fact that "he couldn't imagine they'd be anything but grateful for the suggestion, given the high premium placed on an American university education in the middle class homes of Pakistan" (Shamsie 189). Thus, the United States is presented to Raza as an approachable and realistic destination rather than an untouchable dream. While Harry briefly considers whether he should have so offhandedly

planted this dream in Raza's mind, he comforts himself with the widespread narrative that life in the United States is always the best option.

Raza is initially cautious of Harry's proposal questioning whether he could become American without looking like Clint Eastwood or John Fitzgerald Kennedy (Shamsie 189). Harry rebutts this worry informing Raza that "everybody can be American. Even you. I swear it" and describing his love for the United States where he was able to immediately shed his English roots (Shamsie 189)**.** Yet again Harry pauses after sharing this to consider whether his promises will ring true for the young man in front of him with "features that would go unnoticed in many Central Asian states and parts of Afghanistan" **(**Shamsie 189**)**. And yet again, Harry pushes his doubts over the United States' pluralistic nature to the back of his mind. To Raza, who struggles to locate himself aesthetically and socially among his Pakistani peers due to his mixed background, these words give him hope for a world in which he is accepted (Shamsie 194). Harry convinces Raza that the United States is a pluralistic society in which his multiethnic and religious background will not contain him and so the American Dream becomes a destination, a safe haven, for Raza to thrive in. This image of the United States as a welcoming utopia willing to embrace and educate Raza is founded in the global perception of the American Dream, endorsed by Harry, and familiar to readers nationwide.

It is only when Harry is asked to keep his word that Raza learns the limitations of his American Dream. After announcing Harry's promise at the dinner table, Harry clarifies that he did not promise Raza "he would get an American University to pay for him to go there," rather that he was willing to "help [him] figure out the admissions process" and "even look over his personal statement" (Shamsie 196). In sharp contrast to their earlier conversation, the United States becomes a pipe dream: difficult to access and harder to succeed in. Such recusal of the

American Dream is especially painful because Harry himself created it. While he was comfortable painting the picture of a pluralistic and welcoming United States, he was incapable of making it a reality. In rescinding his offer, this scene requires one to reconsider who the American Dream is accessible to and why that may be so. By interacting with the inner dialogue of both Harry and Raza, the reader witnesses the transformation of the American Dream to disillusionment from both an American and International perspective; through a personal relationship between an American mentor and his Pakistani mentee, the reader visualizes what the U.S. represents overseas and how, in reality, it may not be as pluralistic it seems.

Harry's deception strikes a cord with Sajjad. In an unfamiliar moment of outrage, he turns to Harry exclaiming "you're just like your father, Henry, with your implied promises that are only designed to bind us to you" (Shamsie 197). Sajjad's anger is rooted in his relationship with James Burton who promised to support Sajjad's professional aspirations only to take them with him when Britain left India. This history of disappointment, which is rooted in James and Sajjad's relationship and continued by Harry towards Raza, acts as a metaphor for the complex dynamics tied to Western colonization and decolonization. In relation to a 'better-formed story' in the classroom, the strains in the symbiotic relationship between the Burtons and Ashrafs provides an easily comprehensible, and touching, example of the impact of Western colonization and decolonization. Consequently, it equates the American disillusionment Raza experiences to a larger history of Western intervention in the East.

Years later, in an effort to redeem himself to the Ashraf family, Harry offers Raza a translating position at his military contracting company Arkwright and Glen. In this position, both Harry and Raza further unveil the dark underbelly of the American dream. While Harry originally attempts to provide Raza stability in his position at the company's head office in

Miami, he cannot keep Raza in the States when Arkwright and Glen is contracted by the United States government to work in Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks. While in Afghanistan, Harry is reintroduced to his former CIA coworker, Steve, whose intolerance of non-Americans is almost palpable. As the only American in the novel unattached to the Burton/Ashraf lineage, and perhaps uncoincidentally, the novel's largest antagonist; Steve, who conflates all Arabs with Al Qaeda, fails to comprehend Harry's friendliness towards Raza and the company's third country national (TCN) employees while also idealizing him as a "pioneer" in private military corporations which he considers to be the "future of warfare- fighting and reconstruction" (Shamsie 285). The business model he lauds haunts Raza who struggles morally with his employment when it became apparent "that [Arkwright and Glen was] in business with murderers and thugs" (Shamsie 285, 312). This burgeoning narrative surrounding private military corporations, in which they are both described as both the future and an unethical practice, provides a perspective on the war in Afghanistan that is overlooked in the current U.S. narrative on 9/11. As both the facilitator of Raza's American Dream and a contributor to conflict, Arkwright and Glen is posed ironically as both the harbinger of opportunity and warfare. An extension of the U.S. government, the introduction of private military contracting can pose a larger investigation into the United States' activities in the Middle East for K-12 students.

Shockingly, Harry is murdered in Afghanistan. In the midst of the All-American game of baseball with a notably un-American team of TCN's, Harry is targeted, shot and killed. In response, Steve launches into action accusing Raza of participating in the death and seizure of the Arkwright and Glen operation in Afghanistan. Steve, who witnessed Raza decades prior "[send] Harry Burton from [his] house accusing him of being the cause of [his] father's death"

formulates a new narrative for Raza claiming that Raza is an untrustworthy, dangerous terrorist, a grown up Raza Hazara (Shamsie 310).

Steve's actions further strain the ideal of American tolerance. He does not give Raza the opportunity to vindicate himself, and instead creates his own radicalized narrative surrounding Harry's death. Steve connects Raza's calls to the Taliban and the belief that he "saw [him] signal the gunman and [he] saw [him] duck just before he opened fire" (Shamsie 311-312), and makes his conclusion. Raza is unable to explain his calls to the Taliban — an effort to locate and help Abdullah; nor why he ducked down as shots were fired — to pick up a stray baseball. The reader, who has internalized both Steve's radicalized narrative and Raza's reality, can only witness these events. Having had access to Steve's inner dialogue and actions throughout the novel, they are hyper aware of Steve's unwillingness to trust any word that comes out of an Afghani's "diseased mouth" and his special distaste for Raza whom Harry was so fond of (Shamsie 309). While Harry is deeply flawed, his upbringing in India and love for the Ashraf family opened his heart to those that were different then him. Steve does not share this sense of tolerance, showing a complete lack of trust and empathy towards the entire Middle East. While Harry was finally able to provide Raza some form of the American dream through Arkwright and Glen, Steve strips this from him through the same channel.

Steve's charges lead Raza on a torturous immigration journey towards the nation he is running away from. Raza, who is "not nearly desperate enough to survive the journey of the destitute" smartly packs a large sum of money before "[tossing] out his passport and green card" and feeling the "terror of unbecoming" from Pakistani-American to stateless (Shamsie 337, 314). These funds fail to protect him from feeling like "his mind had broken apart" as he experiences different forms of dehumanization; travelling in a box of suffocating cabbages, underneath a boat

filled to the rim with other refugees that remind him of the "mass graves in Kosovo" and silently crouched inside a life-like gorilla (Shamsie 342). As his mind falls apart, Raza thinks of Abdullah who "had made this journey once, [and] would make it again" wondering how he could travel "Across the Atlantic like this— it wasn't possible. No one could endure this. What kind of world made men have to endure this?" (Shamsie 343). Moreover, what country would make someone endure this twice? This final question is far from rhetorical, pointing at the United States whose lack of tolerance has forced Abdullah to make this journey twice; once in pursuit of the American Dream and once fleeing from it.

While Raza travels towards the United States, Abdullah prepares to leave. New York City, where one can hear "Urdu, English, Japanese, German all in the space of a few minutes," is transformed after the September 11 attacks; Abdullah is no longer welcomed nor safe (Shamsie 293). In a tense conversation between Raza and Kim surrounding Abdullah's status, they discuss the Patriot Act which "can indefinitely detain someone with just minor visa violations if they have even the vaguest suspicions about them" (Shamsie 305). Since Abdullah ran away from the FBI, he provided the "paranoid nation...evidence of terrorism" and is consequently at risk of immediate arrest (Shamsie 305). The consequences of the Patriot Act are unveiled through Abdullah's experience reflecting legalized forms of intolerance in the United States. With "New York [casting nets] to the wind, seeking for any Muslim to ensare," Abdullah has no choice but to leave his self-described home and family of taxi drivers for a nebulous future in Afghanistan (Shamsie 359). As discussed in chapter one, details surrounding important implications of 9/11 — like the Patriot Act — are rarely given much space for discussion in the classroom. Consequently, controversies surrounding the Patriot Act are rarely brought to light. Abdullah's

experience with the Patriot Act brings to light a set of critical questions surrounding how tolerance is, and isn't, embedded in the United States legal system.

In perhaps the most poignant crossroads of the novel, Abdullah shares with Hiroko the series of events that led him to the United States:

> "I was with the Mujahideen until the Soviets left. But then peace never happened. And Afghan fighting Afghan, Pashtun against Hazara...no. So I went back to Karachi. Yes, for four years… I was a truck driver. Every time I went to the fish harbour I'd have one eye watching for Raza Hazara. But my brothers said one of us had to go to America where you can earn a real living. I was the youngest, the most fit—I had the best chance of making the journey across. And I was just married, so there was only a wife to leave behind and no children." (Shamsie 319)

A gentle man whose circumstances have been decided for him by outside sources from the moment the Soviets entered Afghanistan; Abdullah is no longer the "boy who drew Raza into a life of violence but only a man who understands lost homelands and the impossibility of return" (Shamsie 319). It is therefore a bitter irony that Abdullah's return to Afghanistan will be a return to a war maintained by the United States. Not only had the American Dream failed him in New York City, the United States had contributed to further destruction of his homeland. All the while framing *him* as the enemy. The stark irony of Abdullah's American experience puts the image of a tolerant United States into question.

Abdullah's experience in the United States provides valuable insight on how radicalized narratives spread following 9/11. Moreover, it highlights the Muslim and Arab American experience post-9/11 which is oftentimes overshadowed by the nation's civic nationalist agenda.

In his final days in New York City, Abdullah is battered by the negative assumptions and stereotypes that lie behind American eyes. The thoughts behind these eyes are voiced by Kim, Harry's daughter, whose anger over the loss of her Father and the recent September 11 attacks provoke her to call the police on Abdullah after dropping him off on the Canadian border per Hiroko's request. After a tense car ride, where Kim began "attacking Islam" after Abdullah tried to share his experience "being an Afghan here. About war" they leave on unstable footing (Shamsie 358). Kim is specifically shaken by Abdullah's farewell, where she catches only the word "Allah" followed by "I won't forget what you've done" and allows her assumptions to consume her (Shamsie 353). Instead of interpreting Abdullah's farewell for what it is — a thank you — she views it as a threat. Similar to Harry and Raza's miscommunication years before, the reader witnesses how contradicting radicalized narratives lead to conflict. Despite Abdullah's complete kindness, Kim is incapabable of viewing his humanity and locates him and his message among those who murdered her father and 2,977 other lives on September 11, 2001.

In the classroom, Raza and Abdullah's experiences with American disillusionment provide an ironic interpretation of the United States in a temporally complex and international manner. The multiple, overlapping, radicalized narratives introduced in the text provide an invaluable foundation for teachers to discuss an array of ingrained American narratives. Why does Kim make the assumptions she makes about Abdullah? Why does Steve do this towards Raza? Moreover, what events put Abdullah and Raza, and their identities, under American scrutiny? Answers to these questions, among many other, could push students to consider how the United States currently treats difference, specifically Islam, and how, as Americans, they could create a 'better-formed story' surrounding current conflicts and embrace true tolerance.

Conclusion

Burnt Shadows pluralizes and personalizes the tragedies that followed in the wake of 9/11. Many of these tragedies are defined by death: the death of Konrad Burton and Hiroko's father in the 1945 bombing of Nagasaki, the death of Sajjad Ashraf's neighbors and family in Delhi due to the violence of the India-Pakistan partition, the death of Abdullah's family members due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the death of Henry "Harry" Burton and almost 3,000 civilians on 9/11 due to Islamic extremism. The shadows of this loss, among others, haunts the Burton/Ashraf lineage throughout the novel. As these tragedies shed light on how national trauma, in these causes caused by the West in the East, always leads to personal trauma. The shadows of these national tragedies continuously lay the foundation for radicalized narratives that eventually translate to further tragedy.

It is critical that we consider this range of tragedies in the classroom; the U.S. education system must think beyond the domestic and consider the shadow of 9/11 overseas and among oft-silenced domestic populations. *Burnt Shadows* does this in an accessible way, melding the geopolitical and the familial to create a 'better-formed' story of national trauma in general, with a specific focus on the Global War on Terror. Unlike *In the Shadow of No Towers*, which considers the immediate shadow of the lost twin towers, *Burnt Shadows* revolves around a temporally complex string of tragedies and the shadows they leave. Still, both allow for students to visualize how radicalized narratives, rooted in hate, that currently dictate their lives and consider how to best combat said narratives.

Ending Remarks

The way a nation remembers a war and constructs its history is directly related to how that nation further propagates war - Marita Sturken

The scale of deaths that we're seeing on a daily basis, it's like 9/11 every day. - Catherine Mas, NPR on the COVID-19 Pandemic

Where were you on March 11th, 2020? In a chilling echo of September 11, 2001, responses begin with the ordinary activities of daily life: listening to the news, studying for an exam, eating at a restaurant, travelling internationally. By evening, the day had turned extraordinary as international borders closed and the economy came to a pause. With the American populace forced indoors amidst widespread panic, confusion escalated over the seemingly sudden arrival of the highly contagious COVID-19 virus.

How does COVID-19 spread?

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Who is most at risk when contracting COVID-19?

Without any clear responses to these questions, many leaned on a xenophobic narrative that began forming years prior, renaming COVID-19 the “Chinese Virus” and questioning whether the natural spread of the disease was in fact an act of deadly bioterrorism. The question of the “Chinese Virus” has led directly to violence with the reporting of over 3,800 hate crimes towards Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) since the beginning of the pandemic and the mass shooting of six AAPI women in Atlanta (Nuyen, “Anti-Asian Attacks Rise”; “8 Dead in

Atlanta Spa Shooting"). This rise in hate towards AAPI is simply one way in which the response to COVID-19 has mimicked the post-9/11 rise in violence towards Arab and Muslim Americans.

Finishing this thesis almost exactly a year after the initial COVID-19 outbreak in the United States and 20 years after the September 11 attacks, I have witnessed U.S. media consistently equating the loss of life on 9/11 — 2,977 lives — to one day of deaths at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. One national trauma is being used to comprehend another. It is therefore difficult to consider the September 11 attacks without reflecting on its resonance with the current tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic.

National trauma is not the only parallel between 9/11 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Like 9/11, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the creation of "hard-lined narratives" that "contain an injunction against recontextualization and a mandate for compliance" (Cobb 82). Dependent upon narrative compression, hard-lined narratives arise when one side convinces themselves that they are a victim of a situation and refuse to consider the Other's perspective. While hard-lined narratives are simplified storylines that limit an actors ability to consider the Other's perspective, radicalized narratives purposely exclude the Other's voice by assuming evil intent. By creating a "one against all" mentality, radicalized narratives "enslave the reader" and "silence the author" (Cobb 83). They enslave the reader by forcing them to agree with the narrative in order to be accepted within society, making it impossible to be subversive to a narrative without being viewed as sympathetic to the Other. Meanwhile, the Other is excluded from contributing their perspective to the narrative and are therefore silenced. Unlike 9/11, where a sense of patriotism united the nation against a common enemy, the hard-lined narratives formed in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic pitted Democrat against Republican, Black against white, citizen against citizen.

These narrative constraints were rendered evermore vivid in 2020 as the widespread disruption caused by COVID-19 placed pressure on existing inequities and frustrations, fueling radicalized narratives. In the summer of 2020, thousands came out in protest of police brutality and systemic racism with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The national debate upon whether these protests were peaceful demonstrations or violent riots highlights the narrative compression that occurred on both ends of the conflict — some focused on the act of violence that instigated this wave of protests, the cruel murder of George Floyd, while others became attached to the rise in looting and vandalism that coincided with certain protests. The U.S. government, headed by former President Trump, declared these protesters "thugs" and "criminals," arresting them at large and creating a national narrative that demonized protestors and lauded police officers.

Soon after BLM, lives were lost when armed supporters of former President Trump stormed the nation's Capitol in protest of a fairly won election. Democrats, who widely described the belief that the 2020 presidential election had been rigged in favor of President Biden as "the Big Lie," were violently confronted by a cohort of Republicans who felt obligated to reclaim the executive office for former President Trump. Throughout, science itself was under question as millions refused to respect national guidelines presented to limit the spread of COVID-19. These three seismic shifts in American history — COVID-19, BLM and the January 6th Resurrection — will continue to shape American politics and actions for the foreseeable future. *How* they shape history depends heavily on whether or not the U.S. populace is capable of forming a complex, ironic, and temporally conscious narrative surrounding these events.

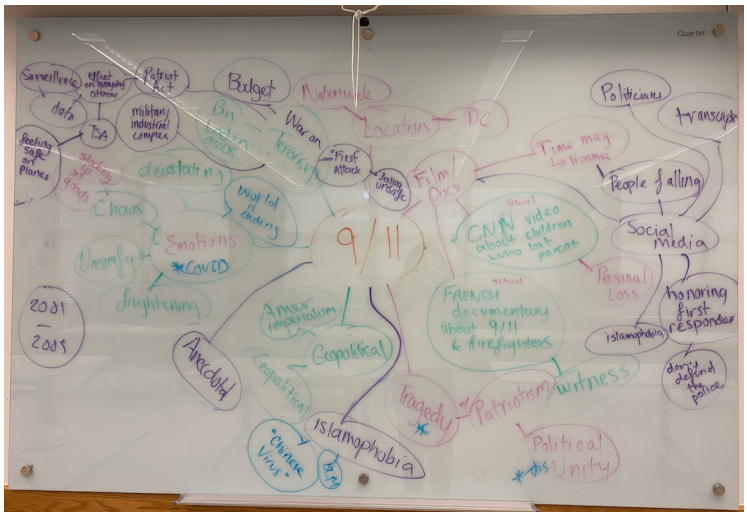
Radicalized narratives are most prominently utilized in justifications for war. Unlike hard-lined narratives, which are the result of the natural tendency towards narrative compression,

radicalized narratives act as the "prospective justification for violence" and are oftentimes exploited by governance systems, like the United States, where "modern state bureaucracies, faceless yet inexorable in their violence," can be placed in "direct contrast to the particular, personal, and localized authors that become the face of the Other" (Cobb 116). In the case of 9/11, the United States formed a radicalized narrative around Osama Bin Laden which extended to Al Qaeda and the Middle Eastern countries suspected of housing terrorists. This radicalized narrative, which argued that Islamic extremism was a threat to democracy itself, has legitimized decades-long conflicts in the Middle East and transformed the lives of millions overseas. As I discussed in Chapter One, this radicalized narrative has become the national narrative, implicitly maintained by the U.S. education system which fails to complexify the current narrative on 9/11 by focusing on memorializing the September 11 attacks and citing them as the root of the Global War on Terror.

Presently, the 'War on COVID-19' overshadows the ongoing Global War on Terror. President Biden has compared the national effort to vaccinate the nation to World War II, placing the country on a war footing in order to "beat the virus." This concept — beating the virus — is currently the nation's leading hard-lined narrative. Yet, this enemy is as faceless as it is deadly: it is already among us, within us and spread by us. It has exacerbated existing fractures in the nation's social, economic and political narrative base and, like 9/11, will continue to linger among us, instigating fear and violence long after the nation has formally "beat the virus."

Six months after the initial COVID-19 lockdown, three months after my University announced that the Fall semester would consist of a hybrid combination of online and in-person learning and seven months before the nation began its wide scale vaccination effort, I prepared to teach a college-level course for the first time. The course, titled "Memorializing 9/11," led

students through an interdisciplinary review of 9/11 and its implications, ending with a three week discussion of *In The Shadow of No Towers.* In the weeks leading up to the novel, students were asked to consider the September 11 attacks from a political/historical, cultural/memorial, and educational perspective. On the first day of class, they were asked to share the various topics and themes they could connect to the September 11 attacks. As the image to the right suggests, my students immediately considered many aspects of 9/11 from the personal to the collective, the domestic to the international, the historical to the present-day. This web underscores the variety of perspectives and considerations one could take in discussing the September 11 attacks. Remarkably, the students were most struck to find a multitude of parallels between the trauma of 9/11, which they had only seen, heard and read about, and that of the COVID-19 pandemic, which they were actively living through as they sat, masked and socially distanced, in their first semester of college.



As my students and I witnessed, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced the nation to enter a state of national trauma last experienced on September 11, 2001. For the first time in almost twenty years, a noneconomic crisis had disrupted the social system "to such a magnitude that it [commanded] the attention of all major subgroups of the population" (Neal 5). While the reverberations of 9/11 had been felt internationally, the direct impact of COVID-19 has been felt worldwide as every continent has placed their citizens in lockdown and struggled to cope with

the immense loss resulting from COVID-19. When tied with the radicalized narratives that have surrounded them in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, my students were participating in the construction of a national trauma narrative alongside me and the rest of our university.

In order to prepare for their reading of *In the Shadow of the No Towers*, the class had to situate themselves in the historical, political and cultural context of 9/11. To begin, the class read and discussed the contents of key documents, like the 9/11 Commission Report, analyzed the rhetoric of important speeches from President Bush in 2001 and listened to oral histories surrounding the September 11 attacks. Additionally, the class learned about the details of the Patriot Act, the Global War on Terror and the role of schools in shaping cultural memory. The inclusion of these lessons highlight that English education, like all education, should not occur in isolation from other subjects. For students to gain the most from 9/11 literature, their reading must be supplemented with historical background. It is the role of the teacher, who is ideally well versed in this topic, to weave the complexity, irony and temporality of a novel into an understandable narrative that supplements their historical foundation.

In our effort to create a 'better-formed story' on 9/11, my students were asked to question the current hegemonic narrative surrounding the attacks. Confirming my findings in Chapter One, my students reported that they had spent the majority of their time in K-12 classrooms memorializing rather than critically discussing the September 11 attacks. While many of them had an advanced understanding of the attacks, their memories about 9/11 in the classroom consisted almost entirely of watching news reports, listening to witness testimonies and reading about the attacks in textbooks. It was only when my class began reading *In The Shadow of No Towers*, a novel that directly questions the United States narrative of 9/11, that students were

pushed to synthesize the course's academic readings into a complex, ironic and temporally diverse narrative.

When my class turned to reading *In the Shadow of No Towers*, they were impressed by Art Spiegelman's ability to combine many aspects of our months-long discussions into one, dense page. This reflection offers a unique synopsis of an individual experience teaching *In the Shadow of No Towers* and in no way replicates the K-12 environment nor the value of learning from a trained professional. Still, the intentional nature of my curriculum and the lengthy time we spent on *In the Shadow of No Towers* sheds light on the potential pedagogical value of the novel.

Notably, my class also struggled with certain aspects of *In the Shadow of No Towers*. To begin, many of my students were not well-versed in comic analysis and struggled with aspects of our close readings. This came to light when reading one strip in which the narrator is masked as another famous 19th century comic book character. Since my students failed to notice that this character was meant to represent Spiegelman, their interpretation of the conversation between the character and his wife was skewed. In this situation, it was my role as teacher to question whether the character was, in fact, Spiegelman and consider as a group whether this transformed our interpretation of the text. Additionally, my students found Spiegelman's ability to crack jokes in the face of widespread death and trauma ill-fitting, specifically discussing Spiegelman's sarcastic tone in relation to sensitive imagery (like the image of the falling man) throughout the text. This led to a discussion about what was and was not appropriate in depictions of 9/11 and whether Spiegelman would have been capable of sharing certain messages without the use of sarcasm. Moreover, it forced us to consider *why* Spiegelman felt compelled to utilize graphic

imagery in this way. These are two small examples of challenges that I faced in my initial teaching of *In the Shadow of No Towers.*

These challenges did not dilute the ability of *In the Shadow of No Towers* to compel students to question the current 9/11 narrative and collectively create a 'better-formed story' of the attacks. Throughout this thesis, I have advocated how literature can compel students to ask *why* of the mainstream narratives that surround them. Students should be pushed to question why the September 11 attacks are memorialized in a certain way; why the Global War on Terror is not adequately discussed in K-12 classrooms nationwide; why, as a nation, we continue to translate national trauma into radicalized narratives that provoke violence rather than peace. As Chapter Two and Three show, literature can be a valuable pedagogical tool in efforts to create 'better-formed stories' surrounding 9/11 in the classroom. The novels, which touch on the themes of 9/11 rather than the exact details of history, provide readers with the unique opportunity to immerse themselves in a complex, ironic and temporally elaborate narrative about an event that has shaped the 21st century. They can push students to ask *why.* While aspects of my teaching experience flag that more research is required to identify how to best incorporate 9/11 literature in the classroom, my overall findings have shed light on the real potential that literature holds in pushing students to question mainstream narratives and, in the process, create a 'better-formed story'.

On March 11th, 2021, an exact year after the world shut down, President Biden brought a card out of his pocket during a national address to state the number of deaths resulting from the pandemic — 572,726 deaths. After he looked at this card, which accounted for "more deaths than World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and 9/11 combined," he promised that the nation would "beat the virus" by "putting the nation on a war footing" to successfully

vaccinate the populace (Biden, “Remarks on the the COVID-19 Shutdown”). With these words, there exists a day in sight where I am not required to wear a mask, remain socially distant and constantly worry for the wellbeing of my loved ones. Still, it is impossible to ignore Spiegelman’s warning of the “New Normal” and the fact that, one day, this pandemic will be history rather than a current event. Moreover, there is a chance that this historical moment will transform the nation for the worse rather than the better.

While I was teaching my class, this same thought continued to cross my mind. I was struck by the idea that in twenty years someone may teach a college level course on COVID-19 to a class of students who, like my class with 9/11, were not there to witness it. For these students, it is imperative that we formulate ‘better-formed stories,’ especially in influential spaces like the classroom, so that the cultural memory of COVID-19 is a complex and ironic reflection of a historical event that is tied to a longer history of interlocked actions and moments. As I have shown, literature is one effective way of doing so, but it must be a part of a larger effort; one in which the government, schools and media align around an effort to create a ‘better-formed story’ through their own mediums. Until then, I hope that an array of authors will continue to translate their trauma into words and that teachers will continue to bring these words to life for students to absorb and develop their own pluralized narratives.

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