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Viewing Life Rhetorical Context

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Created in Nate Holic's Spring 2022 ENC 3375 Rhetoric of Comics

Abstract

Originally submitted as a final portfolio for Professor Holic's Rhetoric of Comics class, *Viewing Life* by Riah Smith is made for both blind readers and readers seeking education on what it is like to be blind. This comic is written in both text form and in braille, and it is both a personal narrative and a monologue. Overall, this project addresses the cultural and physical issues that those visually impaired may face, and how we may respond to those issues in a way that is culturally sensitive. Considering life holistically, *Viewing Life* brings uniqueness to the reader within the comic form. Many rhetorical strategies could not have taken place if it weren't for the visual nature of this project, making the comic form a necessity and an opportunity for exploration when communicating to an audience that comics cannot usually speak to.

Context

While sketching, penciling, and inking this comic, I was around a large group of people at my friend's house. One by one, people would come up and look at the sequence of images and say, "Does it tell a story?" or "What does this mean?" I explained to them the purpose of the comic, who my audience was, and why the panels looked the way that they did. I told them that without words, these objects in the panels would not make much sense, but that is exactly what I am going for. For someone who is blind, life does not make sense without words. Even down to the "randomness" of the panels when not subdued with text, I have attempted to make this comic submerge visual readers into a story that is close to a story that is experienced by someone who is blind. It is faceless, colorless, and when only observing objects, seemingly meaningless. I wanted the visual reader to experience this story as if they had no ability to see surroundings. I wanted to take away the gift of image-based closure in comics, which is something that is a privilege to us who can see and react accordingly. Further, every detail of the

stories within this comic are actual events and actual questions that have been asked. Whether it is the story that my dad told me, or my encounter with Ayesha, it is all truthful and not dramatized for any rhetorical effect.

The audience for this comic is both the visually impaired and those in higher-level education seeking to understand. Specifically, it is first and foremost for those who are blind. This narrative includes many examples that they may find satirical and intriguing, as well as personal messages to them. For those who are not blind, it could be for disability studies majors studying communication strategies, for comic artists looking for examples to reach the visually impaired, or even for those with a blind family member or friend looking to find ways to communicate and connect. This comic carves its own niche through its topics. Because of that, it could be shown digitally through a blog or web publication for those who are reading it to gain communication strategies, and in print for those who are blind and reading this comic.

The genre of this piece is personal narrative. I am telling two different stories that help the reader gain perspective on what life with, and life of, the blind may consist of. The pages are laid out in the same way that a translation of a book is laid out. One type of text on one side, another type of text on the other. We will call them the “visual” side and the “braille” side. Because, obviously, the right side is completely written in braille. For a technical note, the side written in braille is an exact translation of what is text on the visual side of the comic. There is no description of the pictures nor extra narrative.

If ever published, this comic would be stamped in braille so that those who are blind can read; I would want to have some stamped or 3-D outlines of some of the shapes on the visual side so that the blind reader can also get a small understanding of what sequential art is. The visual side is landmarked by objects that enhance the words of the story. There is bound to be much more “telling” than “showing” in this comic, as there is nothing to show to someone who cannot see. There is no face associated with the narrator, but the narrator will say “my dad” or “my friend” to signal who they are in association to the story to aid in comprehension.

Watching how others reacted to the sheer imagery of this comic showed me that it accomplishes its goal. It gives the visual reader the ability to understand a story in the same way a blind person would, and it gives the blind reader the opportunity to take part in a medium that is not remotely available to them. I would not be able to give the visual reader this kind of experience if it weren’t for a comic—it would just, then, be a story. But cerebrally, this comic gives us the opportunity to comprehend narrative using objects and words in tandem.

Who knew that the highly visual comic form could be the only way to build a bridge between sight and story?

VIEWING LIFE.

BY RIAH SMITH

[illegible]

SAID HIS FRIEND.

[illegible]

MY DAD SAID THAT HE HAD NEVER HAD A HARDER TIME ANSWERING A QUESTION, REALIZING THAT EVERY ANSWER HE GAVE ONLY LED TO MORE QUESTIONS.



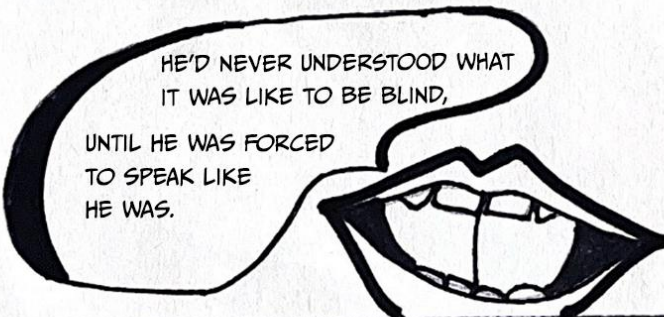
הוא אף פעם לא חשב על כך שיש
שאלות שאי אפשר להשיב עליהן
באופן חד משמעי. כל תשובה
הוא נותן מביאה איתה עוד
שאלות. הוא חשב על זה הרבה
פעמים, אבל לא הצליח למצוא
תשובה חד משמעית.

SUDDENLY IT WAS TWO FRIENDS,
IN THE SAME CAR,
GOING TO THE SAME PLACE,
BUT NOW THERE WAS AN
ABYSS OF CONNECTION
BETWEEN THEM.



בפתאומה הם היו שני חברים
באותו הרכב, הולכים לאותו
המקום, אבל עכשיו הייתה
אbyss של קשר ביניהם. הם
היו שם הרבה זמן, אבל לא
הצליחו ליצור קשר אמיתי.

HE'D NEVER UNDERSTOOD WHAT
IT WAS LIKE TO BE BLIND,
UNTIL HE WAS FORCED
TO SPEAK LIKE
HE WAS.



הוא לא הבין עד אז מה זה
לחיות כחלוש, עד שהיה צריך
לדבר כמו חלוש. זה היה
הרגע שבו הוא הבין את
המשמעות של המילה.

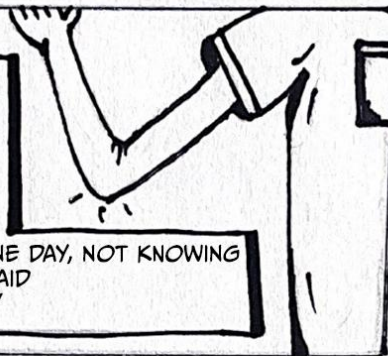


I HAD A SIMILAR
EXPERIENCE WITH
MY FRIEND
AYESHIA.

I had a similar
experience with
my friend Ayesha.

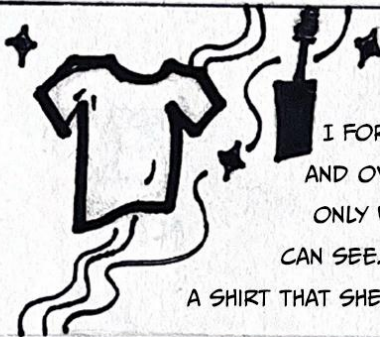
I WOULD TOUCH HER
ELBOW AND SAY HI
EVERY TIME I
SAW HER. SHE WOULD
ALWAYS SAY HI WITH A

SMILE ON HER FACE. ONE DAY, NOT KNOWING
WHAT TO SAY NEXT, I SAID
"UH, I LIKE YOUR SHIRT!"



I would touch her
elbow and say hi every
time I saw her.

One day, not knowing
what to say next, I said
"Uh, I like your shirt."



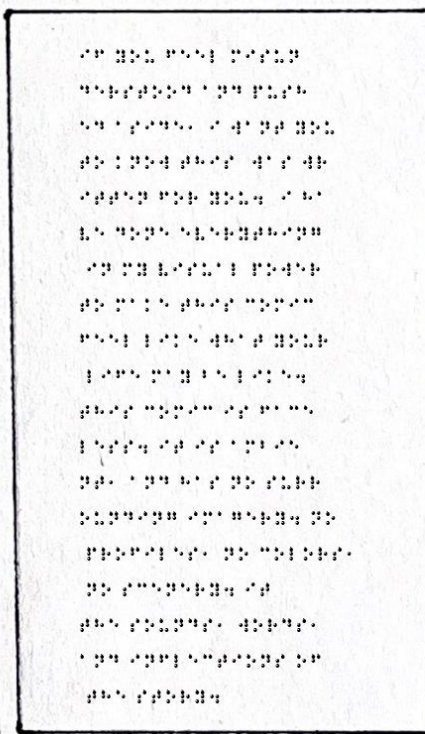
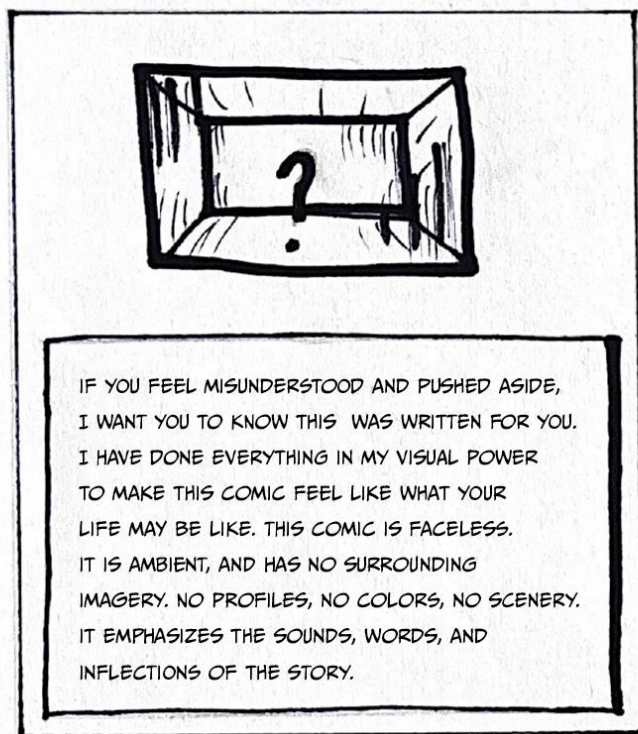
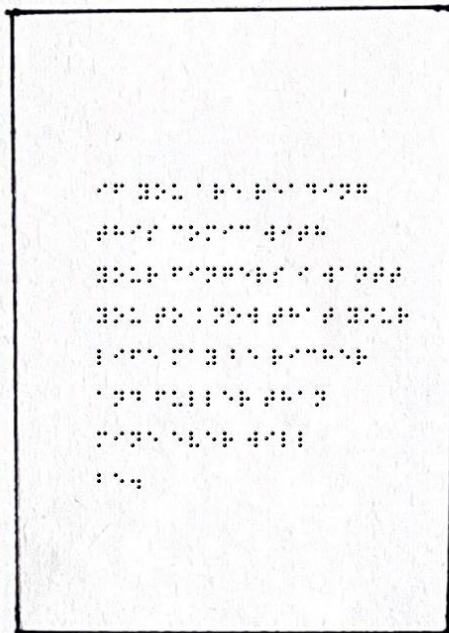
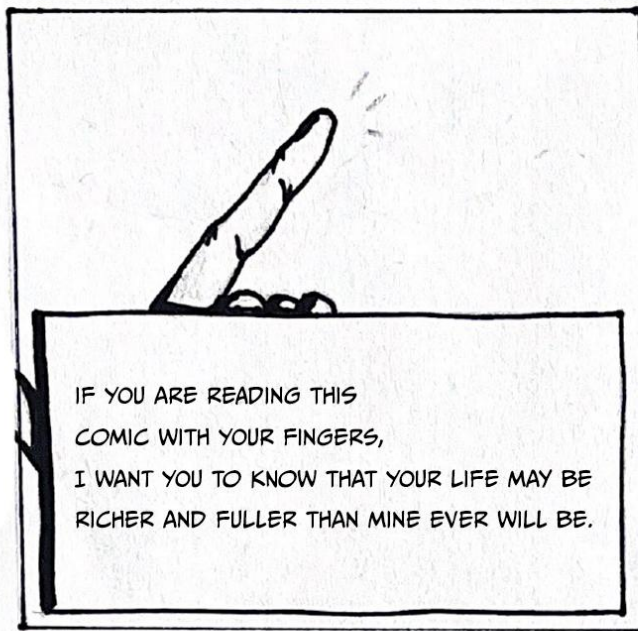
I FORGOT THAT SUPERFICIAL
AND OVERUSED COMPLIMENTS
ONLY WORK ON PEOPLE THAT
CAN SEE. I JUST COMPLIMENTED
A SHIRT THAT SHE HAS NEVER EVEN SEEN!

I forgot that
superficial and
overused compliments
only work on people
that can see.
I just complimented
her shirt she has
never seen.



AYESHIA REPLIED
WITH A "THANK YOU!"
AND I WALKED AWAY,
FEELING EMBARRASSED
AND
MORE SURFACE-LEVEL
THAN I THOUGHT
I EVER COULD BE.

Ayesha replied with
"Thank you!" and I
walked away, feeling
embarrassed and
more surface-level
than I thought
I ever could be.





IF YOU ARE READING THIS COMIC WITH YOUR EYES, YOU WILL MOST LIKELY NEVER UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE BLIND. BUT I ENCOURAGE YOU TO PRESS INTO DIFFICULTY AND REALIZE HOW MUCH OF YOUR LIFE IS SURFACE LEVEL.

IF YOU ARE READING THIS COMIC WITH YOUR EYES, YOU WILL MOST LIKELY NEVER UNDERSTAND WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE BLIND. BUT I ENCOURAGE YOU TO PRESS INTO DIFFICULTY AND REALIZE HOW MUCH OF YOUR LIFE IS SURFACE LEVEL.



DON'T LEAVE THIS COMIC VIEWING LIFE DIFFERENTLY. DON'T EVEN VIEW LIFE AT ALL. *FEEL LIFE AND FEEL IT WHOLLY.* COMMUNICATE INTENTIONALLY, AND SEEK TO UNDERSTAND OTHERS DEEPLY.

DON'T LEAVE THIS COMIC VIEWING LIFE DIFFERENTLY. DON'T EVEN VIEW LIFE AT ALL. *FEEL LIFE AND FEEL IT WHOLLY.* COMMUNICATE INTENTIONALLY, AND SEEK TO UNDERSTAND OTHERS DEEPLY.

NOT VIEWING LIFE DOESN'T MAKE US LACK ANYTHING. IT MAKES US MORE HUMAN.

NOT VIEWING LIFE DOESN'T MAKE US LACK ANYTHING. IT MAKES US MORE HUMAN.

Smith



Hello! My name is Riah Smith, and I am currently pursuing a degree in Writing and Rhetoric with a minor in Legal Studies. I am a junior here at UCF, and the third in my family to be a Knight! I am passionate about creating rhetoric that impacts people and benefits communities, and I have found that sequential art and multimodal text is the way I accomplish that. I hope that my comic, *Viewing Life*, impacts your everyday experiences.