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Rotten Bananas, Hip Hop Heads, and the American Individual: Teaching Eddie Huang's Memoir *Fresh Off the Boat* and Its Tropes of Literacy

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Abstract

This essay focuses on *Fresh Off the Boat* as an eminently teachable coming-of-age story, provides critical contexts and directions for teaching this ideologically suggestive text, and sets forth the interpretive argument that the structures and themes of the memoir are fundamentally shaped by the literacy narrative at its core. As such, the text enters into conversation with other literacy narratives that have become so foundational in the teaching of multiethnic literature in the U.S. Moreover, Huang's tropes of literacy draw from enduring, mythified Americanist discourses that are suggestive of a masculine individualism that, while not unique, is recognizable, instructive, and even problematic as an illustration of a powerful discourse of self-formation. In an effort to speak not only to specialists in U.S. multiethnic literature but also to nonspecialists/generalists, this discussion offers a tripartite approach to teaching this memoir: opening the unit with a sustained, critical, and creative discussion of genre(s), including traditional and popular forms; then inviting students to hone their critical thinking skills through careful rhetorical and ideological analyses of the text's representations of race, identity, assimilation, and resistance; and ultimately setting forth a focused, conceptual argument about *Fresh Off the Boat* as a "literacy narrative" while placing the text within a broader U.S. literary history and discourse about the American individual.

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