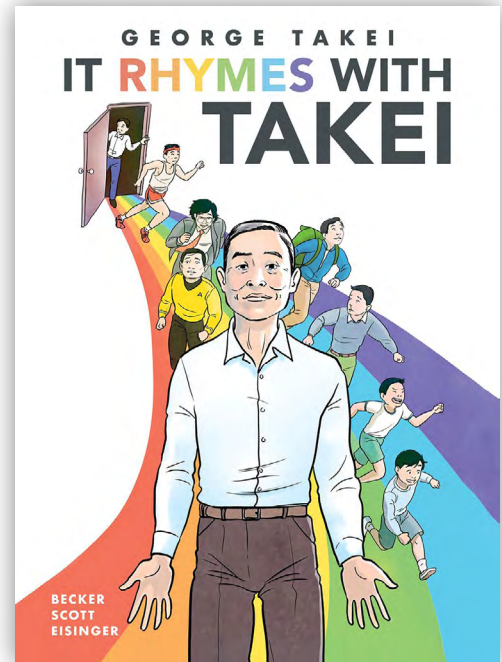




A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO GEORGE TAKEI **IT RHYMES WITH TAKEI** BECKER • SCOTT • EISINGER



Why Teach *It Rhymes with Takei*?

Can you imagine offering your students a front-row seat to some of America's most transformative moments, seen through the eyes of someone who not only witnessed them but also helped shape them? George Takei's new graphic memoir, *It Rhymes With Takei*, does exactly that, inviting readers on an extraordinary journey that spans from World War II to the digital age, from Hollywood soundstages to the front lines of 21st-century social change.

Because it challenges students to analyze social and historical situations through multiple lenses, Takei's graphic memoir is a masterclass in critical thinking. Students develop essential analytical skills as they:

- Connect Takei's personal choices to historical events
- Discover how different historical moments intersect
- See how individual voices align with collective action to create change
- Learn to evaluate complex situations from multiple perspectives

As Takei's narrative unfolds, students become literary witnesses to a deeply human journey of identity formation. Like young people learning to navigate their own paths of self-discovery, Takei candidly shares his experience of feeling both celebrated and marginalized, of balancing public expectations with private truths. Though his circumstances may be extraordinary (from internment camps to Hollywood stardom and political activism) his core story of finding an authentic voice resonates powerfully with students as they too discover their own place in the world.

The contemporary relevance of Takei's story speaks directly to students' lives today. His experiences demonstrate how finding one's voice can contribute to larger conversations about justice and equality. When students see how Takei transforms personal challenges into opportunities for advocacy, they too will begin to recognize their own potential to effect social change. This graphic memoir serves as an exceptional teaching tool precisely because students can engage deeply with parallels between Takei's journey and their own experiences of navigating complex social landscapes, building relationships, and discovering their place in an evolving world.

This guide, aimed primarily at grades 9-12 and college classrooms, was developed by Dr. Katie "Sam" Monnin, an education consultant and graphic novel scholar whose books include *Teaching Graphic Novels*. Each lesson is aligned to Common Core Standards as well as social-emotional learning (CASEL) skills.

Lesson 1 — Stepping into the Spotlight: Prediction and Prologue

Students analyze the cover art of Takei's graphic memoir and read the prologue (pages 1-16) to explore how visual elements and text work together to introduce key themes.

Objectives: Students will:

- Analyze cover art symbolism
- Make predictions about the story
- Connect visual and written elements
- Identify emerging themes

Common Core Standards Alignment:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2: Analyze theme development
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5: Analyze structure
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1: Participate in discussions

CASEL Competencies:

- Self-awareness: Understanding one's emotions, personal identity, goals, and values
- Social awareness: Recognizing the perspectives of and empathizing with others
- Relationship skills: Communicating effectively and working collaboratively

Materials:

- Front cover of *They Called Us Enemy* ([digital](#) projection or physical display)
- Paper and writing tools

45-Minute Lesson Plan:

1. Cover Analysis (15 minutes)
 - While looking closely at the cover, students write responses to:
 - What catches your eye first?
 - How many versions of Takei do you see?
 - What might the doorway represent?
 - What story might this cover tell?
 - What do you think your answers to these questions are telling you about your upcoming reading of Takei's graphic memoir?
 - Share observations in small groups
 - Class discussion of key points
2. Reading & Response (20 minutes)
 - Read prologue (pages 7-16)
 - Students note:
 - Connections to cover imagery
 - Surprising details
 - Questions that arise
 - Predictions about themes
3. Class Discussion & Notes (10 minutes)
 - Compare initial cover predictions with prologue insights
 - Identify emerging themes
 - Discuss significance of doors/doorways metaphor

Assessment:

- Class participation
- Written observations
- Reading responses

Extension Option: Students create their own “doorway moments” timeline, representing their own significant life changes and their own multiple identities.

Lesson 2 — The Art of Comics: Visual Storytelling Techniques

Students explore how visual elements enhance Takei's memoir, analyzing how panel layouts, color choices, and symbolic imagery deepen the narrative impact.

Objectives: Students will analyze visual storytelling techniques and evaluate their effectiveness in communicating meaning.

Common Core Standards Alignment:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5: Analyze how structural choices create meaning
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.7: Analyze multiple interpretations of a story
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2: Integrate multiple sources of information

CASEL Competencies:

- Self-awareness: Understanding emotional responses to sequential art (visuals)
- Social awareness: Recognizing how art shapes perception
- Responsible decision-making: Analyzing artistic choices

Materials:

- Paper and writing tools
- Colored pencils/markers (optional)

45-Minute Lesson Plan:

1. **Visual Element Hunt** (15 minutes) Students work in pairs to find examples of:
 - Panel layouts that create rhythm or emphasis
 - Color choices that establish mood
 - Symbolic images that represent deeper meanings
 - Character visualizations and/or gestures that reveal personality
 - For each example, students note the page number and briefly explain its impact on the story.
2. **Group Discussion** (10 minutes) Class shares discoveries, discussing:
 - How panel arrangements control pacing
 - Ways color affects emotional response
 - Symbols that appear throughout the memoir
 - How character design reveals personality traits
3. **Artistic Redesign** (20 minutes) Students select one panel or page to redesign by:
 - Sketching a new layout
 - Suggesting different colors
 - Adding or changing symbolic elements
 - Writing a brief explanation of how their changes would affect the story's impact

Assessment:

- Element identification
- Discussion participation
- Redesign creativity and rationale

Extension: Compare visual techniques in *It Rhymes With Takei* with another graphic memoir like *American Born Chinese* (Yang), *Fun Home* (Bechdel), *March* (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell), *Maus* (Spiegelman), *Persepolis* (Satrapi), *The Best We Could Do* (Bui), and/or *They Called Us Enemy* (Takei, Eisinger, Scott, & Becker).

Lesson 3 — The Power of Structure: Takei's Three-Part Journey

In this post-reading activity, students explore how Takei organizes his life story in three parts, examining how this structure shapes the memoir's meaning and impact.

Objectives: Students will:

- Analyze three-part story structure
- Identify key moments in each section
- Connect structure to meaning
- Create their own three-part story

Common Core Standards Alignment:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3: Analyze impact of author's choices in story development
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5: Analyze how structural choices create meaning
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3: Write narratives using effective technique and structure

CASEL Competencies:

- Self-awareness: Understanding personal growth journeys
- Social awareness: Recognizing how experiences shape development
- Responsible decision-making: Analyzing choices and consequences

Materials Needed:

- Paper and writing tools
- Sticky notes (3 colors) or other annotation tools

45-Minute Lesson Plan:

1. Introduction to Three-Part Structure (5 - 10 minutes)

- Explain Takei's basic structure for the graphic memoir and define each term for students' notes:
 - Part One (setup and exposition): Pages 17-118
 - Part Two (confrontation and rising action): Pages 119-269
 - Part Three (resolution, transformation, & impact): Pages 270-333
- After a quick book walk through each section, divide the class. Students can work in three large groups (each covering one part of the book) or in small groups of three students (with each student responsible for a different part).

2. Mapping Takei's Story in Small Groups (20 - 25 minutes)

- Students use sticky notes to mark the following in their assigned readings:
 - Color #1: Key events
 - Color #2: Character changes
 - Color #3: Emotional moments
- Create simple timeline showing how events, character changes and emotional moments connect
- Share observations with class

3. Personal Three-Part Story (15 minutes)

- Students outline their own story following same structure:
 - Part 1: Important life event (setup and exposition)
 - Part 2: How it changed them (confrontation and rising action)
 - Part 3: Lasting impact (resolution, transformation, & impact)
- Write brief explanation for each part

Assessment:

- Class participation
- Timeline completion
- Written explanations

Extension: Compare Takei's structure to other graphic memoirs or stories students know. In addition to the graphic memoirs listed at the bottom of Lesson 2, consider prose titles such as Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* and Elie Wiesel's *Night*.

Lesson 4 — “I Began to Speak”: Finding My Voice

This lesson explores the pivotal moment at the end of Part Two when Takei says, “Then I began to speak” (page 269). Students examine how this decision to speak openly about his experiences marks a turning point that leads to his public advocacy and marriage to Brad.

Objectives: Students will:

- Analyze key moments of personal transformation
- Connect individual voices to social change
- Examine the power of speaking up versus staying silent

Common Core Standards Alignment:

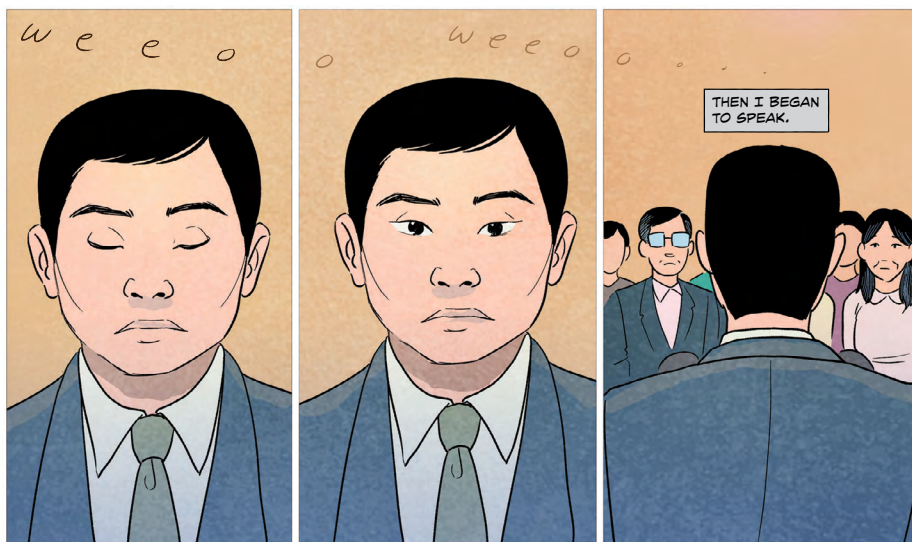
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3: Analyze impact of author’s choices in character development
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6: Analyze point of view and how it shapes content
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3: Write narratives about significant experiences

CASEL Competencies:

- Self-awareness: Recognizing personal power and influence
- Social awareness: Understanding impact on others
- Responsible decision-making: Making ethical choices

Materials:

- Sticky notes (3 colors) or other annotation tools
- Paper and writing tools



45-Minute Lesson Plan:

1. Close Reading (15 minutes)

- Re-read pages 252-287, with special attention to page 269
- Use sticky notes to mark:
 - Color #1: Takei’s thoughts/feelings
 - Color #2: His actions/speech
 - Color #3: Impact on others
- Discuss: What is the literal meaning of “Then I began to speak” within the immediate context of the scene — the opening ceremony of the Japanese American National Museum? What additional meanings could the sentence take on within the wider context of the book and the transition from Part Two to Part Three, or within the context of Takei’s life? What topics does Takei speak, and not speak, about? When, how, and why does he change how he uses his voice?

2. Ripple Effect Map (15 minutes)

- In pairs, create a “ripple” visualization:
 - Draw Takei in the center of your paper
 - Draw 3 concentric circles around him
 - In the first circle, write how his decision affected his internal life
 - In the second circle, note changes to his career and relationships
 - In the outer circle, describe impacts on society and the wider world
- Add 1-2 specific examples in each circle
- Share observations with class

3. Personal Reflection (15 minutes)

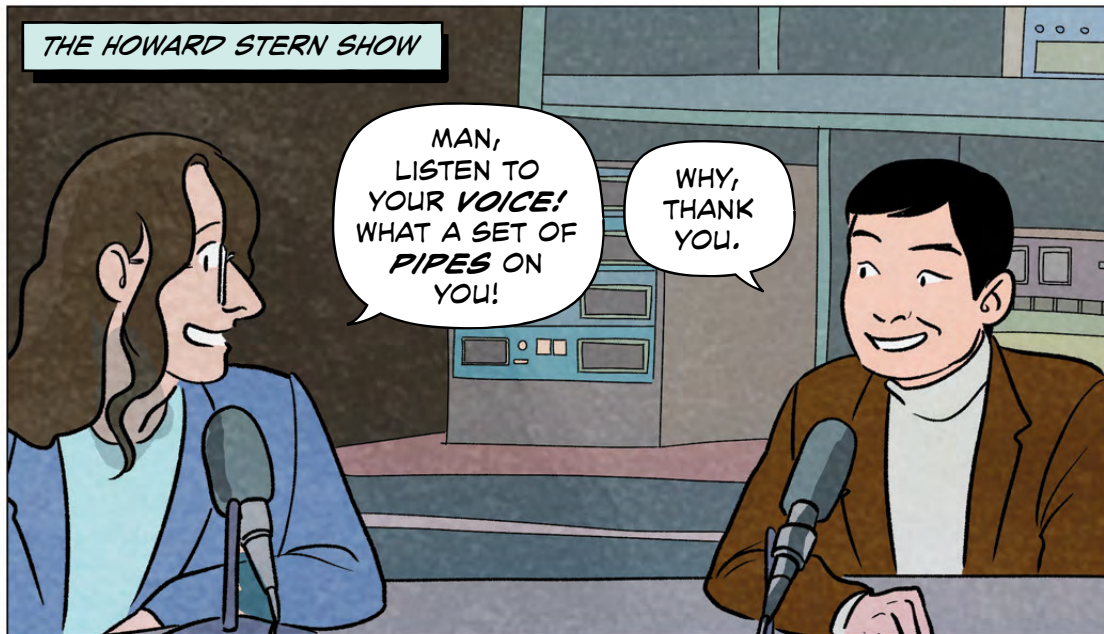
- Students write about:
 - A time they spoke up or stayed silent
 - The consequences of their choice
 - What they learned from the experience

Assessment:

- Text annotations
- Ripple effect maps
- Written reflections

Extension Activities:

- Research advocacy stories like:
 - [Harvey Milk's coming out and political activism](#)
 - [Malala Yousafzai's education advocacy](#)
 - [Jazz Jennings' transgender visibility work](#)
- Create a “Speak Up” campaign for a school or community issue



Lesson 5 — Infinite Combinations: *Star Trek's* Vision of a Future World for All

By connecting Takei's journey as both Sulu on *Star Trek* and as an advocate for representation, this lesson explores Takei's statement that "**unity in diversity** is the core of America's future." Students examine how entertainment can reflect, challenge, and change societal norms.

Objectives: Students will:

- Analyze how media representation impacts society
- Identify examples of diversity in entertainment
- Connect fictional stories to real-world change
- Evaluate the relationship between entertainment and advocacy

Common Core Standards Alignment:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1: Cite strong textual evidence
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.6: Determine author's purpose
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1: Write arguments analyzing text and demonstrating reasoning

CASEL Competencies:

- Social awareness: Understanding diverse perspectives
- Relationship skills: Working effectively with others
- Responsible decision-making: Evaluating social impact

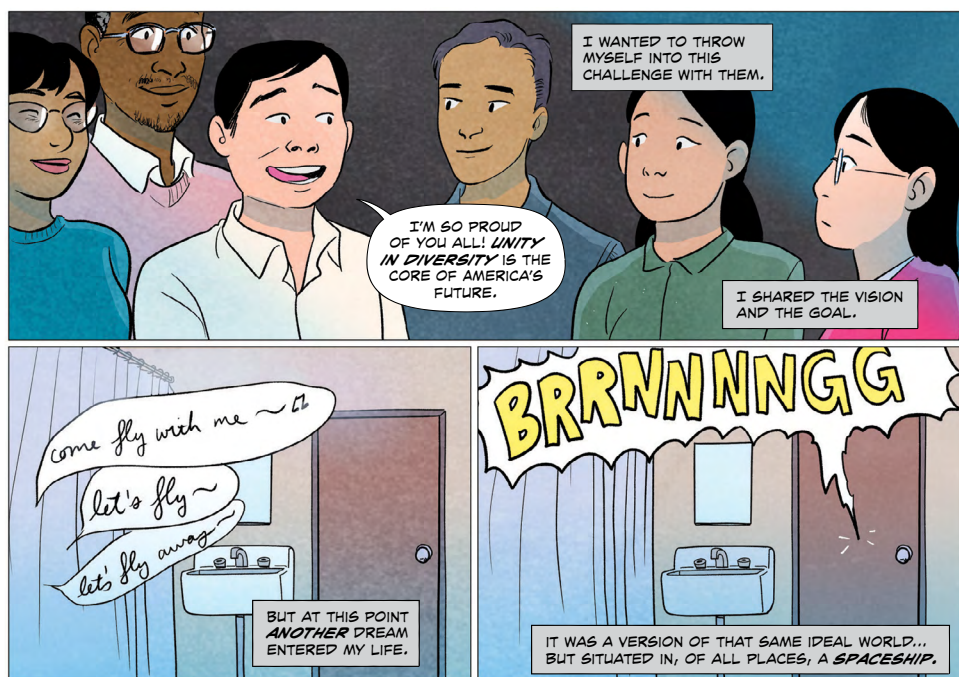
Materials:

- Paper and writing tools

45-Minute Lesson Plan:

1. Text Exploration (20 minutes)

- In pairs, students find and discuss three passages where Takei discusses *Star Trek's* vision of diversity, his experience playing Sulu, and/or how his Japanese American and gay identities intersected with the show.
- Share findings with class
- Teacher records key quotes on board



- If time remains, read/watch and discuss a recent interview where Takei talks in greater detail about *Star Trek*'s philosophy on "Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations" (IDIC):
 - [CBC "Q" interview clip](#) (4 July 2025)
 - [Philadelphia Inquirer interview](#) (24 June 2025)
- 2. Character Impact** (15 minutes)
 - Students write brief responses about:
 - Why Sulu was an important character
 - Challenges Takei faced in this role
 - How this role connected to his activism, both before and after
 - Discuss in small groups
- 3. Media Connections** (10 minutes)
 - Students respond to:
 - "Thinking about *Star Trek*'s philosophy on diversity, can you identify any examples in current media of infinite diversity in infinite combinations?"
 - "In what ways do you think these types of media representations impact society and societal thinking?"
 - Share responses with class

Assessment:

- Written responses
- Class participation
- Text evidence selection

Extension Activities & Further Resources:

- Research other groundbreaking TV characters
- Compare *Star Trek*'s vision to current shows
- Create a proposal for a new inclusive character



Lesson 6 — Frame Stories: The Howard Stern Effect

After reading the book, students analyze how Takei uses Howard Stern Show appearances as a framing device throughout his memoir, reflecting and commenting on his character growth and increasing comfort with self-disclosure.

Objectives: Students will analyze frame stories as narrative devices and evaluate how context shapes self-expression.

Common Core Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5: Analyze how structural choices create meaning and achieve artistic effects
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3: Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly and convincingly

CASEL Competencies:

- Self-awareness: Understanding the impact of authenticity versus self-censorship
- Responsible decision-making: Evaluating the consequences of truth-telling
- Social awareness: Recognizing how social contexts influence self-expression

Materials:

- Paper and writing tools

45-Minute Lesson Plan:

1. Reading & Notes (20 minutes)

- In small groups, review sections, focusing on the Howard Stern scenes:
 - Part 1: pages 18-118 (Stern pages 23-26)
 - Part 2: pages 120-269 (Stern pages 120-121)
 - Part 3: pages 271-333 (Stern pages 271 and 285)
- While re-reading Stern show scenes, students write notes documenting:
 - The date (year) of each interview: 1990, 1994, 2005, 2021
 - The interview questions
 - Takei and Stern's interpersonal dynamics
 - Takei's tone and comfort level
 - How each Stern interview foreshadows, reflects, or comments on the content and themes of each section of the book

2. Analysis & Performance (25 minutes)

- In small groups, students next:
 - Identify 2 key moments showing Takei's transformation
 - Select the most powerful interview questions and / or moments to perform
 - Write a brief script including dialogue from word balloons
 - Add performance notes for non-verbal elements (facial expressions, posture, panel composition)
- Groups perform while others observe and discuss how the frame story reveals character growth

Assessment:

- Collection notes
- Script creation
- Performance participation

Extension: Create a podcast episode or write an online article analyzing another celebrity's evolution through interviews. Potential celebrities may include: Madonna, Elliot Page, Lil Nas X, Ellen DeGeneres, Anne Heche, Michael J. Fox, Michael Jackson, Lady Gaga, Jamie Lee Curtis, Caitlyn Jenner, Tiger Woods.

Lesson 7 — Legacy Conversations: Dialogues Across Time

This culminating lesson uses the cover art showing Takei at different ages to explore how his past and future selves might interact. Students create evidence-based dialogues between different versions of Takei before applying this concept to their own lives.

Objectives: Students will analyze character development across time and create dialogues that reflect personal growth and social impact.

Common Core Standards Alignment:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1: Cite strong textual evidence
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3: Analyze character development
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3: Write narratives with well-developed experiences

CASEL Competencies:

- Self-awareness: Understanding personal growth and identity development
- Social awareness: Recognizing influences on identity formation
- Self-management: Planning and working toward future goals

Materials:

- [Front](#) and [back](#) cover of *They Called Us Enemy* (digital projection or physical display)
- Paper and writing tools

45-Minute Lesson Plan:

1. **Cover Analysis** (10 minutes)
 - Examine both front cover (9 images) and back cover (15 images) of Takei
 - Discuss: How do these images show Takei's evolution?
 - Note differences in expression, posture, and appearance across ages
2. **Dialogue Creation** (20 minutes)
 - Students select two versions of Takei from different time periods
 - Find 4 quotes from the memoir (2 from each time period) that reveal his thoughts
 - Write a short dialogue between these two versions of Takei
 - Examples of possible pairings:
 - Internment camp child and marriage equality activist
 - *Star Trek* actor and political candidate
 - Closeted young man and newlywed husband
3. **Personal Application** (15 minutes)
 - Students write a brief dialogue between:
 - Their current self and future self (10-20 years older)
 - OR their current self and younger self (5-10 years younger)
 - Include hopes, challenges, and advice
 - Share with a partner

Assessment:

- Dialogue quality and textual evidence
- Understanding of character development
- Personal reflection depth

Extension: In comic strip or mini-comic format, create a visual representation of your personal dialogue across time.