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Discuss this issue of Knowledge Quest on Facebook! Visit <https://www.facebook.com/aaslala> to post your thoughts on personal learning networks in the KQ Forum.
When I learned that the focus of this issue of Knowledge Quest would be centered on comic books and graphic novels, the very first thing that entered my mind was the word “heroes.” This is because, for whatever reason, I generally associate the comic book and graphic novel genre with heroes. While I realize that this is a bit of labeling on my part and that comic and graphic novels are populated with much more diverse characters, nonetheless the word “heroes” was the one that resonated. It also brought to mind the line from David Bowie’s rock song Heroes “We can be heroes, just for one day” (Bowie and Eno 1977), though it occurs to me that for the school librarian, this equates to everyday heroes because every day we have the opportunity to demonstrate the abilities that transform us from “mild-mannered” to possessing powers that allow us—like Superman—to change the course of mighty rivers—that is, if you consider the fact that in a very real sense, we work with kids as they navigate their way along mighty rivers of ideas and information. Our efforts can help them to steer a true course. Our skills also allow us to make headway to address the gap that H. G. Wells noted when he observed, “Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe” (1920). We have a unique skill set that we can call upon to make progress in that race and ensure that our students are also equipped with what it takes to cross the finish line.

On a daily basis, and in so many ways, as we interact with the members of our learning communities, we amaze them with simple, yet extraordinary, feats of heroism. Whether we recognize our work as remarkable or not, I am certain the beneficiaries of our efforts do! Think of what it means to the student who is down-and-out, picked on, bullied, and considered by peers to be different or odd to find sanctuary and understanding in the school library. Even for those students who may not need a safe haven, our physical spaces represent a welcoming place, unlike any other in the school, where all students feel comfortable to gather, connect, and collaborate with one another. The migration of services and resources to 24–7 virtual spaces is surely one that awes students, teachers, and parents when they arrive at the understanding that we know what they need—and how to serve it up with a cherry on top!

We can also feel good about what we do and represent to a kid who has a burning question or a passion about a particular topic when we step up to help satisfy this need with the right resources, at the right time, so that the student fills up with ideas and is able to construct his or her own meaning and sense of things. And how about the many students for whom we represent the first, and often only, opportunity to have access to modern technology? We level the playing field for these kids and ensure that digital equity is addressed, and we do so with culturally responsive support to use these resources safely and effectively for educational and economic opportunity. While they may not shower us with their accolades, the fact that we are able to watch learners discover the world right before our very eyes is a gold-medal moment.
I, for one, can certainly agree that the peace and prosperity of a school culture and the academic success of its students may well be related to how many school librarians are in place to serve the needs of the learning community.

In so many other ways, our daily work translates to heroic deeds—surely each of us has come to the rescue of the student who procrastinated and is desperate for help with an assignment. We all know that a part of what we do is to help students to be responsible and develop dispositions like time-management. However, even as we underscore that message, we can’t resist helping the student pull a rabbit out of the hat. And the same can be said of our teacher colleagues, too. How many times have they needed something at the eleventh hour? However, when it comes to our teacher colleagues, our greatest accomplishment is through instructional collaboration and coteaching. Though getting there is often a struggle, and creating a culture and climate that promotes this practice is sometimes difficult, once a teacher has experienced the process and seen the learning benefits, that person’s view of us is changed forever, and our stature is elevated considerably.

I think it fitting that I wrap up my thoughts with a view expressed by the character Lucien, Chief Librarian of the Dreaming, in Neil Gaiman’s classic comic The Sandman. Incidentally, Lucien’s library contains “every book ever conceived, written or dreamt of” (1989) How cool is that?

“Most people don’t realize how important librarians are. I ran across a book recently which suggested that the peace and prosperity of a culture was solely related to how many librarians it contained. Possibly a slight overstatement. But a culture that doesn’t value its librarians doesn’t value ideas and without ideas, well, where are we?” (1989)

Where are we indeed? I, for one, can certainly agree that the peace and prosperity of a school culture and the academic success of its students may well be related to how many school librarians are in place to serve the needs of the learning community. As noted on the AASL website:

“Today’s school librarian works with both students and teachers to facilitate access to information in a wide variety of formats, instructs students and teachers how to acquire, evaluate and use information and the technology needed in this process, and introduces children and young adults to literature and other resources to broaden their horizons. As a collaborator, change agent, and leader, the school librarian develops, promotes and implements a program that will help prepare students to be effective users of ideas and information, a lifelong skill” (n.d.).

Though you may not own a cape, or be noted for a catch phrase like radio and TV’s Superman with his “Up, up and away!” when it comes to helping kids and teachers succeed, you are true everyday heroes, and you are remarkable!

Susan D. Ballard is the president of AASL. She is a school library media educator and consultant, and an adjunct professor in the Simmons College GSLIS/ITL program.

Works Cited:


Visit Knowledge Quest Online at <www.ala.org/aasl/knowledgequest> for additional resources and information about graphic novels in school libraries.
An ironic passage from Walter Dean Myers’s memoir, *Bad Boy*, takes place when a nosy neighbor confronts Myers about his love of reading comic books. Myers was known as the Comic Book King in his neighborhood, but not all of his neighbors approved of his reading habits. Mrs. Dodson was known as the Wicked Witch of West Harlem, and Myers wrote that she “worked very hard to ruin my life.” One time, “she cast her evil eye on my comic books.” “They’re a road map to the jailhouse,” she said. “I was told that I could no longer bring comic books into the house. The Wicked Witch said that one day I would thank her for saving me” (Myers 2001, 23).

Mrs. Dobson’s prediction about Myers’s doomed fate as a voracious comic book reader could not have been further from the truth. Rather than going to jail, Myers, the current National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature, became the renowned author of two Newbery Honor books and of three finalists for the National Book Award. He has won ALA’s Margaret A. Edwards Award, Michael L. Printz Award, and five Coretta Scott King Book Awards. Clearly, reading comics as a child did not harm Myers’s literary DNA.

Until recently, many educators and parents shared Mrs. Dodson’s sentiments about comic books and graphic novels being a form of sub-literature and detrimental to the literacy development of young readers. Fortunately, the tide has turned, thanks to a growing body of research and soaring graphic-novel circulation statistics that cannot be ignored. Today, the burning question regarding graphic novels is not whether or not school librarians should use them in schools and libraries, but “How can graphic novels—including nonfiction graphic novels—best be used to support the curriculum and develop lifelong readers?”

This issue on graphic novels includes articles and artwork by talented librarians, teachers, educators of librarians and teachers, authors, and illustrators who demonstrate that graphic novels are alive and well in schools and school libraries across the nation. Whether graphic novels are just making their way into your collections, or you are a full-fledged otaku (obsessive manga/anime fan), you will find something in this issue to help you learn more about the exciting and engaging world of graphic novels. In keeping with the Learning4Life (L4L) guidelines—Think, Create, Share, Grow—the articles in this issue will provide you with ways to improve your graphic novel collections and to enhance the use of graphic novels in your libraries and schools.

Think

Before school librarians can use graphic novels effectively with students, they need to think about the types of learners who will be using them. Some librarians are quick to pigeonhole graphic novels as a tool for struggling readers; however, in her article, Kat Kan shows that their appeal is far broader. Graphic novels present information in ways that are more enjoyably understood by a wide variety of readers.
As curriculum leaders, school librarians should also be thinking about the ways in which graphic novels support the standards. Linda Gann outlines how graphic novels meet the standards identified in Standards for the 21st-Century Learner and Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs, and Katie Monnin’s article describes how to align graphic novels with the Common Core State Standards.

In another article, Brian Sturm helps us think about readers interpreting the “space between the panels” in comics. He uses panels from the graphic novel Squish (Holm and Holm 2011) to demonstrate how readers of graphic novels fill in information gaps to form a story.

Create

Graphic-novel circulation figures demonstrate that students are voracious consumers of graphic novels; however, students can benefit from being comic creators as well. For example, Meredith Keeter developed an activity for students to create their own comic-book pages. In another article, Kendra Albright and Sarah Petrulis describe their work with incarcerated youth who created a graphic novel on HIV/AIDS. Heather Moorefield-Lang presents a technological perspective in her article about using “create your own comics” websites with students.

Share

As literacy leaders, school librarians know the importance of collaborating with teachers to use resources in meaningful ways across the curriculum. In this issue, two teachers (Chris Wilson and Maureen Bakis) and an educator of teachers (Stergios Botzakis) present their viewpoints on why and how they collaborate to teach comics in their schools.

Grow

Today’s graphic novels, including nonfiction graphic novels, represent a wide range of subjects and grade levels in an engaging format that can facilitate learning. Several articles in this issue demonstrate the potential of graphic novels for “growing” student achievement. Sue Kimmel presents strategies for using graphic novels to teach science, technology, education, and mathematics (STEM) in grades K–5. Some ideas for using graphic narratives as a writing instruction tool are presented in Elizabeth Friese’s article. Mindy Tomasevich shares graphic-novel lesson plans that can be used by middle and high school librarians and teachers.

Robin Moeller’s article presents the research and professional resources that justify growing graphic novel collections in school libraries. School librarians can grow their library programming with Robin Brenner’s article that provides a wealth of anime and manga activities.

In stark contrast to Mrs. Dodson, who viewed reading comics as a road map to the jailhouse, the authors and illustrators in this issue have provided school librarians and teachers with a road map to success through the use of graphic novels. In addition to presenting compelling reasons for using graphic novels in schools, they have shared strategies for using the power of curriculum-based graphic novels with students. Contributors to this issue have also made the case that graphic novels are as valuable a literacy tool for college-bound students as they are for struggling readers.

When school librarians use graphic novels to coteach the standards, their actions enable students to become lifelong learners, well prepared for college and careers. The authors, illustrators, and I hope that after reading this issue you will agree that graphic novels are an increasingly popular visual literacy resource that can help all learners Think, Create, Share, and Grow—by leaps and bounds!

Karen Gavigan is an assistant professor in the School of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina. She and Mindy Tomasevich are coauthors of the Connecting Comics to Curriculum column in Library Media Connection, and coauthors of the book Connecting Comics to Curriculum: Strategies for Grades 6–12 (Libraries Unlimited 2011). Karen is also Chair of AASL’s Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force.

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THIS ARTICLE IS INTENDED FOR THOSE OF US WHO HAVE SAID, "GRAPHIC NOVELS AREN’T MY THING," OR WHO WORK WITH TEACHERS, PARENTS, OR ADMINISTRATORS WHO HAVE SAID SOMETHING LIKE "GRAPHIC NOVELS ARE NICE BUT THEY’RE NOT REAL READING." AS SOMEONE WHO SPEAKS WITH SCHOOL LIBRARIANS, TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND ADMINISTRATORS ABOUT USING GRAPHIC NOVELS IN SCHOOLS, I HEAR VARIATIONS OF THESE TWO STATEMENTS QUITE OFTEN. THE AIM OF THIS ARTICLE IS NOT TO CONVINCE THE NAYSAYERS TO LOVE GRAPHIC NOVELS THEMSELVES, BUT TO DEMONSTRATE WHY GRAPHIC NOVELS ARE IMPORTANT TO LITERACY AND EDUCATION, AND TO GIVE EDUCATORS TOOLS TO DEFEND INCLUSION OF GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY CURRICULUM AND COLLECTION. IN OTHER WORDS, I’D LIKE TO HELP TURN THE NAYSAYERS INTO “YAYSAYERS.”
Making an Argument for Graphic Novels

An important point to note at the outset of any discussion about the legitimacy of graphic novels (including manga) is that graphic novels are truly a format for literature, not a genre. Graphic novels include genre fiction such as romance, mystery, sports, etc., but also relay nonfiction information as well. Graphic novels are a format the same way that audiobooks are a format for literature.

Similarly, just as the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) and the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC) have created the Odyssey Award for audiobooks, graphic novels have their own recognition in the form of the Great Graphic Novels for Teens booklist published annually. In a presentation at ALA Annual Conference in June, Karen Gavigan (2012a) noted that the creation of the Great Graphic Novels for Teens booklist in 2007 followed on the heels of past significant graphic-novel triumphs, such as a special Pulitzer Prize being awarded in 1992 to Art Spiegelman for his book *Maus*. Other major awards being granted to graphic novels for youth in recent years include: National Book Award Finalist *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang, Sibert Honor book *To Dance* by Siena Cherson Siegel and Mark Siegel, Scott O’Dell Award winner *Storm in the Barn* by Matt Phelan, and Coretta Scott King Author Honor winner *Yummy* by G. Neri. These books and others have also appeared on the book/media award lists published by YALSA and the Association for Library Services to Children.

Not only do critics consider some graphic novels appealing; sales records show that kids do too. *Publisher’s Weekly* reported that sales of graphic novels in 2011 reached $340 million and included a rapidly growing market of graphic novels for children. Additionally, the sales of digital graphic novels have doubled since 2010 (MacDonald and Reid 2011).

Intellectual Freedom and Graphic Novels

Comics and censorship have a long and storied history together. Unfortunately, the term “graphic” in graphic novels sometimes causes those unfamiliar with the format to think of notices from various media regulators that movies, music, etc. contain graphic language, sex, or violence. I was confronted with...
this unfortunate amalgamation of concepts when I began conducting research for my dissertation. I wanted to speak with high school students about a sample of graphic novels I had chosen from the Great Graphic Novels for Teens booklist. To be permitted to speak with the students, I needed to obtain approval from the school district’s assistant superintendent. The assistant superintendent denied my request, stating that graphic novels were too violent and explicit to show to high school students. I resubmitted my request and attached copies of sample pages from each of the graphic novels I would use, demonstrating that the only “graphic” aspects to these graphic novels were the illustrations. The administrator then approved my request.

That incident impressed upon me the need for school librarians to be able to talk with the school community about what graphic novels are, what role they hold in our students’ pursuits of education and enjoyment, and why they deserve a place in our schools. Appearing at the end of the article is a list of online resources that focus on graphic novels and censorship. The first link listed is “Graphic Novels: Suggestions for Librarians,” a brochure coauthored by the National Coalition Against Censorship, the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF) and ALA. This brochure gives suggestions about, among other things, where to shelve graphic novels and how to handle challenges. The CBLDF also
supports librarians by providing "legal referrals, representation, advice, assistance, and education" to help protect our patrons’ First Amendment rights (CBLDF 2012).

What Research Tells Us About Graphic Novels and Education

The inclusion and use of graphic novels in the school library and curriculum is no longer a matter of "if" but "how" (Gavigan 2012b). Researchers have demonstrated that graphic novels help make the curriculum more relevant for students by allowing them to connect with and explore popular culture (Alvermann and Xu 2003; Schwarz 2006; Xu, Sawyer, and Zunich 2005). Educators can also take advantage of the way in which children communicate with each other today. As our students text, tweet, and send photos of themselves to each other, they are using both text and images to create and process ideas and information. The way in which these different modes of presenting information work together to create meaning is very similar to the way that graphic novels use text and image to convey meaning.

As AASL has noted, “Multiple literacies, including digital, visual, textual, and technological, have now joined information literacy as crucial skills for this century” (2007, 3). The use of graphic novels in the curriculum can help us better prepare students for the literacy demands of their futures.

In his many studies concerning research on youth literacy, Stephen Krashen has found that comics and graphic novels offer 20 percent more rare vocabulary than traditional chapter books (2004). Krashen has also discovered that graphic novels are beneficial to the literacy development of English Language Learners (ELL) and low-level reading students (Ujiie and Krashen 1996), and that graphic novels help students develop a taste for reading and serve as a bridge to other types of literature (Krashen 2004; Ujiie and Krashen 1996). Writing independently, both Stephen Cary (2004) and Stephen Krashen (2004) found that boys often choose graphic novels when given the opportunity to select reading materials.

Concerning the way that graphic novels relate to gender, research indicates that males respond positively to the image/text combination of graphic novels because they are more visually/spatially oriented learners (Ontario Min. of Ed. 2004; Smith and Wilhelm 2002). Karen Gavigan (2011) found that those struggling male adolescent readers who engaged with graphic novels felt more confidence as readers, and were encouraged and motivated to read more often. I have found that male and female high school students enjoyed reading graphic novels, but to varying degrees, with male students expressing more enjoyment in understanding the author and illustrator’s full intention through text and visuals, and female students conveying that they preferred to switch their graphic novel reading with traditional novel reading to more fully exercise their imaginations (Moeller 2011).

Various other facets of individual students’ learning needs have also been connected to reading graphic novels. Studies have shown that engagement with graphic novels has increased the reading interests among students with disabilities (Gavigan 2011; Smetana and Grisham 2012) and that the high-interest topics and visual support of graphic novels were beneficial to ELL students (Cary 2004; Chun 2009; Liu 2004; Ranker 2007). Finally, research in learning and brain activity shows that we engage both the back and frontal cortex functions of the brain as we create meaning with the use of visuals, making this type of learning highly brain-compatible (Zull 2011).

Graphic Novels and the Common Core Standards

Most of education today has turned its attention to how to help students fulfill the Common Core Standards. In addition to these standards, school librarians also need to look for opportunities to incorporate AASL’s Standards for the 21st Century Learner (<www.al.org/aasl/standards>) into student learning. "Understanding the importance that the AASL and the Common Core Standards Initiative place on graphic novels can help librarians and their stakeholders value the role that graphic novels
can play in supporting their school’s curriculum” (Gavigan 2012a).

Karen Gavigan has described a few examples of the Common Core Standards that could reflect the use of graphic novels:

Grade 2, Reading Standard 7: Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

Grade 5, Reading Standard 7: Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

Grades 6–12, Standard 10: Range, Quality, and Complexity of Student Reading. Includes the subgenres of adventure stories, historical fiction, mysteries, myths, science fiction, realistic fiction, allegories, parodies, satire, and graphic novels. (Gavigan 2012b, 21)

AASL’s Standards for the 21st-Century Learner (2007) emphasize that the definition of “information literacy” has been transformed to include multiple literacies such as textual, digital, technological, and visual. This recognition of the importance of multiple literacies can be found throughout the standards. The following are a few examples:

1.1.6 Read, view, and listen for information presented in any format (e.g., textual, visual, media, digital) in order to make inferences and gather meaning.

2.1.6 Use the writing process, media and visual literacy, and technology skills to create products that express new understandings.

3.1.4 Use technology and other information tools (I would include such information skills as visual literacy) to organize and display knowledge and understanding in ways that others can view, use, and assess.

4.1.4 Seek information for personal learning in a variety of formats and genres. (2007, 4, 5, 6, 7)

As school librarians are concerned with both student learning and student access to information, it is important to keep in mind the valuable role that graphic novels can play in our curriculum and collections.

During a recent presentation, Josh Elder, founder of the organization Reading with Pictures, said, “by synthesizing words and pictures, comics convey information more efficiently than words alone” (Elder 2012). Essentially, graphic novels allow educators to do so much more and do things differently than using only traditional texts. With the support of research, awards, and curriculum connections, you can make “yaysayers” of graphic novel naysayers.

**Selective Bibliography of Professional Resources**


Online Professional Resources for School Librarians and Teachers

Comics in Education <www.humblecomics.com/comicsedu/index.html>

Comics in the Classroom <comicsintheclassroom.blogspot.com>

Graphic Classroom <www.graphicclassroom.org>

Graphic Novel Reporter <www.graphicnovelreporter.com>

Graphic Novel Resources <www.graphicnovelresources.blogspot.com>

Great Graphic Novels for Teens (YALSA) <www.ala.org/yalsa/ggnt>

Librarian’s Guide to Anime and Manga <www.koyagi.com/Libguide.html>

No Flying No Tights <www.noflyingnotights.com>

Reading with Pictures <www.readingwithpictures.org>

Robin Moeller is an assistant professor of library science at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. Before becoming a professor, she was a high school librarian who became interested in graphic novels. Her research interests involve visual representations of information as they relate to youth media and schooling.

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CREATING
SUPER LEARNERS

brining
GRAPHIC NOVELS
INTO 6-12 INSTRUCTION

Mindy Tomasevich
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After a decade of debate, graphic novels are permanent fixtures in most school libraries. Many school librarians and teachers have come to see the educational benefits of graphic novels after observing highly engaged readers with improved literacy skills. Using graphic novels within the school curriculum to increase student learning, however, is a relatively new concept. Educators, as they create lessons, are always on the lookout for fresh resources that will motivate and inspire students. With the tremendous popularity of graphic novels, along with the great variety of high-quality titles, the next step seems obvious. It is time to bring graphic novels into classrooms.

Graphic Novels and Literacy

Studies show that when students choose their own reading materials, based on their interests, they become better, more passionate readers (Krashen 2004). Often, graphic novels are what students want to read. A growing body of research has demonstrated the educational value of using graphic novels with males, reluctant readers, English Language Learners, special needs students, and children of varying ability levels (Carter 2007; Cary 2004; Gavigan 2011). In addition, visual literacy plays an important role in both reading comprehension and effective communication (Frey and Fisher 2008). Today’s adolescents are surrounded by images and must be adept at interpreting them. Graphic novels can be effective tools to make students more literate and, as a result, more successful in school.

Over the past several years, the number of graphic novels for children and adolescents has grown exponentially, as people accepted their place in bookstores, libraries, and schools. Prestigious children’s book awards, like the Printz, Scott O’Dell, and Sibert Awards, helped librarians, teachers, and parents acknowledge graphic novels as “literature.” Students have become accustomed to finding the graphic novels they crave in their school libraries. The role of graphic novels in classroom instruction, however, has just begun to be examined.

Creating Superlearners

The increase in exceptional curriculum-related fiction and nonfiction graphic novels for adolescents has made it easy to use graphic novels for student learning. Graphic novels can make the leap into classrooms in two ways: as a subject-area resource and as an instructional strategy.

Selecting graphic novels for curricular content is easier than ever. Print and online reviews are plentiful, and there are many “Best Of” lists of titles. School librarians don’t need to be graphic novel experts to easily include them on their purchase lists. But school librarians are curriculum experts and are good at matching resources to teachers’ lessons and students’ needs. The easiest way to begin adding graphic novels to instruction is to include subject-related nonfiction graphic novels when locating resources for teachers or recommending books for specific topics.

Don’t assume that graphic nonfiction does not cover curricular topics to the same depth as tried-and-true nonfiction books; nonfiction graphic novels just cover the topics a bit differently. Differentiation is something good teachers and school librarians do all the time, finding the best resources and strategies for the success for all students. Every day, educators seek out video clips, abridged classics, authoritative websites, and high-quality books that are tailored for their diverse population of students. A graphic novel, given to the right student, is one more creative tool.

Graphic novels can also be used as part of an instructional strategy to teach specific skills. Use a graphic novel as an exemplar when teaching a complex skill, such as...
finding main ideas, comparing and contrasting, or evaluating the quality of a piece of writing. Sequential art offers a wealth of visual examples to use when breaking concepts like these down into a series of steps.

Curriculum Connections

How can school librarians get teachers on board? By means of the same methods used with any new strategy—working first with teachers who are open to innovative ideas and collaboration. Quote Bloom’s Taxonomy to them and convince them that using graphic novels will require students to apply higher-level thinking skills like evaluating, synthesizing, and analyzing. Offer to adjust existing lesson plans or create new ones. Here are a few ways to easily incorporate graphic novels in lessons that are commonly taught in grades 6–12.

- Use the illustrations from wordless graphic novels like Shaun Tan’s The Arrival, Sara Varon’s Robot Dreams, and the Korgi series by Christian Slade as writing prompts for creative-writing assignments.

- Integrate a few graphic novels into literature circle reading groups. They can be especially effective for students who struggle with comprehension and for English Language Learners.

- Teachers often use picture books to teach analysis of common literary elements (setting, theme, symbolism, foreshadowing). Use graphic novels to offer additional examples.

- After a lesson on the elements of nonfiction text (captions, headings, main ideas, glossary, index), practice identification of those same elements using nonfiction graphic novels.

- As an introduction to reading a classic, or as a follow up, have students read the graphic adaptation of the classic, comparing the two versions.

Bringing Graphic Novels into Instruction

The following lesson plans, some adapted from Connecting Comics to Curriculum: Strategies for Grades 6–12 (Gavigan and Tomasevich 2011), offer specific ideas to harness the power of curriculum-based graphic novels when used with students in grades 6–12.

Middle School—Social Studies—The Holocaust

Historical graphic novels bring the past to life. The illustrations give detailed information about the time period, and can especially inspire students with little background knowledge. After an introduction to the Holocaust, have students read from these graphic novels, practicing deep, active reading activities such as pre-reading, annotating, and small group discussion.


Pair these with a class reading of a text-only novel about the Holocaust, such as Hans Peter Richter’s Friedrich, Jane Yolen’s The Devil’s Arithmetic, or Jerry Spinelli’s Milkweed: A Novel. If time permits, allow students to research topics of interest, exploring these websites:
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum <www.ushmm.org>
Anne Frank House <www.annefrank.org>

Encourage discussion, with questions such as:

- Should those who mistreated the Jews be excused from their actions by claiming they were only following orders?
- Could a Holocaust happen today?
- What kinds of things could we do to prevent, or stop, another Holocaust?

Middle School—English Language Arts—Fairy Tales, Folktales, Myths, and Legends

Traditional literature has experienced a new popularity, thanks, in part, to Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson series. In addition to the usual resources, add some spice to a unit on the elements of fairy tales, myths, and legends by including these graphic novel adaptations.


Have students write their own myths, legends, fairy tales, or folktales, including the elements of
that genre while using a modern-day setting, or different cultural perspective. Let them share their stories, and discuss these questions:

Why did people create myths, legends, and folktales?

Why was oral storytelling an important tradition in the past?

Do we have any modern-day equivalents of these genres?

High School—American History—Civil Rights

The following exceptional graphic novels about the Civil Rights era have a focus that is different from sometimes-dry textbooks, and can lead students toward a deeper understanding of people and events. Note that some titles are historically accurate in their inclusion of racial epithets commonly used at the time.


ENGAGE STUDENTS,
ENCourage DEEP THINKING,
AND MAKE COMPLEX TOPICS
MORE ACCESSIBLE

Creating your own
SUPER LEARNERS

BY BRINGING
GRAPHIC NOVELS
INTO INSTRUCTION
After learning about the Civil Rights era, let students choose a person or event and develop an essential question. Students can then use books, databases, and websites to research their topics. Require them to locate primary-source documents and photos, and steer them toward these websites:

National Park Service’s “We Shall Overcome” <www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights>


Have students create presentations or write papers, focusing on the answers to their essential questions. As an extension activity, read Phillip M. Hoose’s Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice.

High School—Political Science—The U.S. Constitution

Students often struggle with challenging topics, such as the complexities of the U.S. Constitution and its amendments. The sequential art in graphic novels breaks the topic down into more-easily understood parts and is particularly helpful with English Language Learners, who may be new to our country. Use these titles to help students gain insight into the creation of the Constitution, how it has changed over time, and how it impacts the lives of citizens today.


Baer, Nadja. 2012. The United States Constitution: A Round Table Comic Graphic Adaptation. Mundelein, IL: Round Table Comics.

These websites offer primary source documents:

National Archives <www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html>

National Constitution Center <http://constitutioncenter.org>

Have students locate recent news articles and participate in a debate about some of the constitutional issues faced today.

Creating Superlearners

Graphic novels motivate students and bring a fresh perspective to lessons, offering teachers and school librarians a powerful educational tool. Engage students, encourage deep thinking, and make complex topics more accessible—creating your own superlearners—by bringing graphic novels into instruction.

Mindy Tomasevich is the school librarian at Mills Park Middle School in Cary, North Carolina. She is coauthor of Connecting Comics to Curriculum: Strategies for Grades 6–12 (Libraries Unlimited 2011). She also cowrites the “Connecting Comics to Curriculum” column for Library Media Connection.

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FEATURE

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VISUAL NARRATIVES
READING AND WRITING THROUGH THE PAGES OF GRAPHIC LIFE STORIES
A Snippet from My Classroom

It happens every semester, without fail. At least one of my students, who are pre-service teachers, will argue, “We (educators) want to get the students away from books with pictures, and up into books with only words.”

I respond, “Why?”

The student replies, “The fewer pictures in a book, the harder the book is to read.”

This short exchange is repeated in each children’s literature course I teach. In the middle of several months spent inquiring into literature, media, and children’s reading, I place a mixed pile of books on each table of four students. Each group’s job is to organize the jumbled array of picture books, graphic narratives, novels without images, informational texts, and other books in order “from easiest to hardest.” Students must debate their choices with each other within their small groups, and then share their decisions with the class.

As you might imagine, this exercise is an impossible task for several reasons. The most pressing of these reasons is that we don’t know who the readers of these books will be. We don’t know their language skills, their background knowledge, or their reading preferences, all of which factor in to the challenges that might exist between a specific book and a particular reader.

Still, the exercise is an interesting way to bring to light some of the (previously) unchallenged assumptions my students carry about different kinds of books. A prevailing assumption in every group of these pre-service teachers is that books without pictures are the more challenging texts students should strive to be reading. A corollary assumption is that pictures are an aspect of books that readers need to be weaned from in their quest to achieve mature literacy.

My students aren’t the only ones who seem to see pictures as either a reader’s crutch or a sign of a simpler text. I hear variations of these sentiments all the time, perhaps especially in terms of popular conversations about graphic novels. Most often, I find these perceptions hidden in article titles and other conversations that target graphic novels as books for “reluctant readers.” This seems to imply that graphic texts are an inferior type of reading, or something to get young readers interested in books, with the hope that they will eventually move on to more acceptable (read: word-only) texts.

My Own Journey into Reading Graphic Literature

I admit it; I used to think this way myself. I thought of graphic novels as a gateway to “more legitimate” reading—until, of course, I sat down to actually read one.
I remember this experience clearly. In part because graphic novels were becoming so popular in school libraries, I decided to start reading them along with a professor at my university. I began with what some might consider a “classic” graphic narrative, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. I flew through the comic-style pages, zooming along with seemingly little to stop me. I found myself wondering what the big deal was, and why people liked these books so much. I didn’t even understand half of what was going on.

Then it hit me: My wondering was more true than I knew. I honestly didn’t understand half of what was going on in the book because I was reading only the words. I wasn’t reading the pictures. As I reached for more and more graphic texts, I realized that, like my pre-service students, I prized the word over the picture as both a reader and a teacher.

With a graphic narrative, to read both the words and the pictures, I had to consciously slow down, over and over again. I had to relearn to read, approaching each page differently and developing an appreciation for the way words and pictures worked together. Instead of an inferior type of reading, I realized that graphic narratives represent a more sophisticated, multimodal form of reading than alphabet-only texts. Once I figured this out, I was hooked.

You may have noticed that I often use the term *graphic narrative* to refer to these texts (Chute and DeKoven 2006). As I read these books with my colleague, we puzzled over what to call them. After reading a number of graphic texts, I realized that my favorites weren’t novels, perse, but graphic memoirs. Instead of superheroes and imagined characters, I found myself absorbed in books like Art Spiegleman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* and Craig Thompson’s *Blankets*. I passed by the shelves of manga series and serials to the “single book” graphic
Graphic Life Stories and Writing

The benefits of graphic texts for reading are relatively well established. Along the many examples of research into reading comics, Stephen D. Krashen (2004) heralded comics and other "light" reading as important elements in developing literacy. Looking at older readers of comics, Stergios Botzakis (2009) described the rich, critical-literacy practices that these texts inspire. Given the substantive body of work supporting graphic texts in reading development, I'd like to shift my focus a bit and address the possibilities of graphic memoirs and writing. (As a side note, it always seems unnatural to separate the deeply interconnected process of reading and writing. My primary goal here is to extend the reading-dominated conversation about graphic narratives to more directly include the work of writing.)

Writing Personal Narratives

Personal narratives, or memoirs, are a mainstay genre in writing instruction around the United States. Writing personal narratives is expected across the K–12 spectrum. To teach writing, many teachers are using mentor texts as examples of effectively written pieces (Dorffman and Capelli 2007). Graphic narratives have become excellent mentor texts to teach numerous aspects of writing, fitting in alongside picture books as an important element in instruction.

Some teachers and school librarians might be concerned about students seeing these texts as appropriate only for recreational reading. However, if you are worried about graphic narratives being seen as unserious or inferior mentor texts for writers, be comforted by Ashley Dallacqua’s finding that her students approached these graphic texts as serious academic tools when they were presented as such in the classroom (2012). With this in mind, I’ll share several different ideas for using graphic novels to enhance personal-narrative compositions.

Drawing as a Pathway into Writing

For many writers, drawing can be an important point of entry to composing life stories. We know this is true for many of our younger authors (Horn and Giacobbe 2007), but just as my college students often overlook the complexities of books with pictures for older readers, older writers can also benefit from drawing images as a way into writing. Heart maps (Heard 1998) are a well-known way to start discerning potential personal writing topics. Sharing short excerpts from graphic memoirs such as Raina Telgemeier’s Smile or Peter Sis’s The Wall can inspire students of all ages to author their own personal narratives of small moments.

However, these visual experiences are not just an entry meant to inspire text writing. In her recent book In Pictures and in Words (2010), Katie Wood Ray explores the importance of using visual mentor texts in writing instruction. Ray, a writing scholar and educator, makes the helpful distinction of teaching students “into illustrations” (2010, 15) as opposed to teaching out of them. In a parallel argument to the one I set before students each semester, Ray states that illustrations aren’t a stage in writing that students should be encouraged to leave behind. Instead, illustrations can add another layer of depth and meaning to a writer’s text. Ray teaches students to decode drawings in published works to understand the way illustrators map changes in time, point of view, or

area, where I discovered memoirs and biographical treasures like Emanuel Guibert’s The Photographer: Into War–Torn Afghanistan With Doctors Without Borders, Jason Lutes and Nick Bertozzi’s Houdini: The Handcuff King, Sabrina Jones’s Isadora Duncan: A Graphic Biography, Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón’s Anne Frank: The Anne Frank House Authorized Graphic Biography, and many more. So, another discovery I made along the way was that “graphic novels” aren’t just novels. A wide variety of graphic texts are available to suit the tastes of all readers. As time passes, the variety and volume of graphic texts continues to expand.
mood. Pairing a traditional text version of a book with its graphic version might be a way for students to understand how different media communicate the same kinds of moods, more or less effectively.

Literary Elements and the Grammar of Graphic Literature

The grammar of comics can help students enhance their own memoirs in a number of ways. As Scott McCloud points out in his excellent primer, *Understanding Comics* (1993), comics and other graphic texts have their own logic and grammar. However, many of the techniques used in comics are also used in text pieces, and recognizing these techniques can make some attributes of text-only writing easier to understand and envision for ourselves as writers.

In a classroom-based example, Dallacqua (2012) used graphic narratives such as Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival* with fifth-grade students to develop understandings of literary devices like flashback, foreshadowing, symbolism, mood, and more. Although Dallacqua did not focus on the transition to writing, it is not hard to imagine that understanding these techniques in graphic texts could enhance the work of these young writers, as well.

In another example, dialogue is a hallmark characteristic of narratives. Many life stories include dialogue as a way to give the characters voice. Reading a graphic life story is an easy way for students to see how characters have distinctive voices. Although the book is not a memoir, the main characters in Gene Luen Yang’s life-narrative *American Born Chinese* are excellent examples to demonstrate dialogue and unique voices. *Smile* provides many panels with inner dialogue, another attribute of effective memoir, using thought bubbles to show us a character’s inner voice.

Another interesting narrative text using graphic conventions is Dan Gutman’s *The Day Roy Riegels Ran the Wrong Way*. This book is a hybrid, imposing the panels characteristic of graphic texts over the full spreads of a traditional picture book, adopting the “story within a story” approach to personal narratives. Although these layered storylines can be confusing in a text-only book, the graphic texts make them easier to comprehend and to consider employing in personal writing. Understanding and using graphic conventions can enrich student writing, both with pictures and without.

Show, Don’t Tell

For some students, one of the more difficult aspects of excellent writing is understanding how authors “show, don’t tell” their readers about characters’ actions or feelings, time passing, and other aspects of effective personal-narrative writing. In a concrete way, graphic narratives can help us to understand how authors employ facial expressions and other body characteristics to show their readers that a character is, for example, frustrated. We can then help students translate that visual depiction into a description of reddening cheeks, knotted brows, and clenched jaws and fists. Actually storyboarding their own graphic vignette may help students visualize how to show a reader with words.

This is not to say that graphic narratives are good only as stepping stones to text-only pieces. Certainly, students could write their own graphic memoirs as examples of personal narrative. The numerous digital design programs for developing graphic texts, some of which are very sophisticated, offer possibilities for composing and publishing student memoirs.
There is little doubt that visual media are becoming a key part of the way children read and write across media. Thus, incorporating images and drawing into writing memoirs makes sense as we teach children literacy skills.

Graphic Narratives in the Classroom

I have suggested that graphic memoirs are worthy texts to enhance both reading and writing in schools. Due to their relatively recent rise in popularity, many teachers may not have had the opportunity to read or study graphic texts in their teacher-preparation programs. Although I won’t argue with the idea that these texts are excellent invitations for “reluctant readers,” my hope is that this brief piece presents possibilities for using these texts as exemplars for deepening study and engagement in the memoir-writing process. In a world where visual information abounds, students benefit from knowing how to use visual techniques as a part of understanding and telling life stories. The expanding array of graphic narratives can provide concrete examples of what might otherwise be abstract elements—elements that students can then apply to their own memoirs, whether they are written in pictures or in words.

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Recommended Books:


Whenever someone asks me “What kind of kids read comics?” the old jingle for Armour Hot Dogs starts running through my mind: “Hot dogs, Armour hot dogs, what kinds of kids eat Armour hot dogs? Big kids, little kids, kids who climb on rocks, fat kids, skinny kids, even kids with chicken pox …” My version goes something like: “Comics and graphic novels, what kinds of kids read graphic novels? Eager readers, kids who hate all books, gifted kids, struggling kids, kids who need a reading boost …” Here are a few kids I’ve encountered in my career of promoting comics in libraries.

**Eager Readers**

We’ll start with myself. I started reading when I was about four years old; as a way to practice her English, my Japanese mother read to us kids when we were very young. I can’t even remember how I started; I just remember looking through books before I could read the words. And I started reading comic strips in the newspaper when I was in kindergarten. By first grade, we were living in Japan again (my father was in the Air Force), and I started asking my parents to buy comic books on our weekly trips to the Base Exchange. That was the beginning, and I never stopped reading comics; they just became part of the reading mix in our house. I read just about anything—poetry, picture books, fiction, history books, mythology, magazines, newspapers—if it had text on it, I would read it. By fourth grade, I was on the honor roll at school; in high school I was taking AP classes (English, biology, French) by my junior year. I was one of those nerdy types before that word ever came into use. I did very well on standardized tests, mostly because I read so much, and even earned a National Merit Scholarship. I read literary classics, but I also read Tarzan, lots of science fiction, Sherlock Holmes and other mysteries, and of course comics. I was a DC Comics fangirl and loved Green Lantern, Hawkman, and Batgirl (Barbara Gordon, who was a librarian back then). There were several reasons I became a librarian, and Barbara Gordon’s civilian profession was one of them. Then, as a librarian working with children and teens, I realized that I could use my love of comics in my job.

**A Tale of Two Kids**

My sons have grown up with comics in the house, and both of them are readers of comics. When my older son was in seventh grade, he read my copy of *Ranma ½*, a manga action comedy about a boy martial artist who, because of a curse, becomes a girl when splashed with cold water. My son loved this book so much that he took it to school with him one day. Apparently, he showed it to his friends in class, and soon just about everyone in his class had read it. My copy came back to me in pieces because it had been read so much. Because so many of the kids liked it, they went on to read more volumes of the series and then branched out to read other manga. Now, this all
happened in a parochial school in Hawaii; while the school was run by the church, most of the students didn’t go to church. In the public libraries, we were facing challenges and complaints about sexism and nudity in *Ranma ½*. When I asked my son about those and other aspects of the book, he said that he and his classmates knew it was all for fun, “and, Mom, it’s all make-believe anyway!” I never heard a single complaint from any parent of a student in that seventh-grade class. My older son still loves manga and anime, and married a young woman who also loves manga and anime; their son is doomed.

In the early 1990s I worked as a young adult librarian at the Aiea Public Library, a branch of the Hawaii State Public Library System. I started getting superhero comics into the collection because I wanted to attract more of the teen boys into the library and into reading. This strategy worked very well, but I also ended up helping a middle school girl. She loved superhero comics, especially *Excalibur* comics (about a British superhero team similar to the X-Men). Her older brother worked at a local comics shop, and he told her something to the effect that “girls don’t read superhero comics.” She came into my library after school one day to find me at the reference desk, surrounded by teen boys looking through the new graphic novels I had brought in: X-Men, Batman, Spider-Man, and others. And when she found out that I liked superhero comics, she went home and told her brother, “Girls DO read superhero comics; my librarian reads them!” She was so happy to find an adult woman who liked the same kinds of comics that she did. She came in almost every school day, and we’d talk comics in between my helping people with reference questions.

**ESL and Comics**

When I worked in Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in the late 1990s, our Young Adults’ Department carried lots of graphic novels and manga. The town was the new home for many immigrants from Malaysia, Burma, Vietnam, and Korea. The children and teens from those immigrant families used our library a lot, and they borrowed lots of the manga. One of the teens told me she loved the manga because the books made it easy for her to understand what was going on, and so she was learning more English.

A few years later, my younger son started attending St. John Catholic School in Panama City, Florida, and one of his fifth-grade classmates was another new boy, whose family had just moved from Mexico. This boy was struggling to learn English, and during that first year at the school, he had a tutor who stayed with him for the whole school day. The teacher wanted the boy to do a book report along with the rest of the class, and the school librarian gave him a graphic-novel biography that I had donated to the library. The boy was able to complete the book report, and went on to read more of the graphic novels that I had donated. By eighth grade, he was reading English rather fluently, even tackling *Eragon*. 
Struggling Kids
The niece of James, my local comics-shop owner, is developmentally disabled and has had to attend special education classes; she wants desperately to join her friends in “regular” middle school, but reading has been an obstacle. She had struggled so much with reading, she had come to hate it. Then James said he gave her a comic-book adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz*, the one published by Marvel Comics, for a Christmas present in 2011. At first she wouldn’t open it because it was a book, but, eventually, she ventured a look at it and realized it wasn’t like the other books at home—it was a comic book! She ended up finishing the graphic novel over Christmas break, and then asked her uncle for more. Encouraged by her success at finishing the graphic novel, she decided she would practice more reading, and now is up to fourth-grade level—and she accomplished all this in seven months. He told me she is now reading the DC Super-Pets chapter books, among others.

Kids Who Don’t Like Books
My younger son likes to read, but he doesn’t like fiction. He struggled with AR programs in school because they all focused on fiction, although he liked to write his own stories. However, he enjoyed reading all kinds of nonfiction books, and he has always loved comics. As I did, he started reading comics in kindergarten because our house contained so many comics. He would do the required summer reading for school, and then he’d pick up some comics for fun. He’s done this for years, and as a high school senior (2012–2013), he appears ready to continue the practice. Some teachers have considered him to be a reluctant reader because he doesn’t care for prose fiction, yet he does well in language arts classes. The summer before his freshman year of high school, I gave him the new graphic-novel adaptation of Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (from Hill and Wang, an authorized adaptation). He read it, and he came into the kitchen that evening, asking me the kinds of questions any English teacher would want students to ask. He connected to the story in all the right ways, but he did so with the graphic-novel version. In his junior year he read the original novel for his language arts class, and he said it was easier than usual to read it after having read the graphic novel. Ever since kindergarten, I have asked him to read for an hour a day; during the summer, he reads an hour of required reading, then reads at least another hour for fun. This is a reluctant reader?

All Kinds of Kids Read Comics
I’ve been the librarian at St. John Catholic School for the past five years, and for three years I’ve run Lunch Time Book Club for grades 3 to 5 and for middle school. We meet twice a month during lunch time. It’s very informal; the students aren’t required to read particular books. I share new books I’ve received from publishers because of my main job with Brodart Books & Library Services; I receive advance-reading copies and review copies of fiction, nonfiction, and lots of graphic novels. Until they started coming to Lunch Time Book Club, most of the students in the group had not read comics, other than the newspaper comic strips and various comic-strip collections in the library. The students, both boys and girls, who come to book club range from struggling readers to eager, gifted readers, and they all grab the comics before anything else. They respond to great stories; they love the art, and some of them even try their own hand at drawing their favorite
characters from the books when they write letters to the creators. (They write the letters for fun, not for grades.) They’re reading such books as adaptations of Rudyard Kipling’s *Just-So Stories*, *Super Dinosaur* by Robert Kirkman, *Resistance* and its sequels by Carla Jablonski, the *Jinx* series from Archie Comics, the *Dance Class* series from Papercutz, *Mal and Chad* by Stephen McCranie, *Smile* by Raina Telgemeier (this was a HUGE hit and went “viral” through the school in 2010), *Meanwhile* by Jason Shiga (another huge hit—I had to buy two copies), the new Mameshiba series from Viz Media, and many more (see Figure 1).

In the spring of 2012 the new second-grade teacher at St. John discovered the small collection of graphic novels for primary grades; they are intershelfed with the easy nonfiction. She pulled out a couple of the books and then decided the library should display them; she pulled all the books off the shelf and showed them face-out on top of the shelves (see Figure 2). When she did so, the second-grade students started borrowing them, and the books went out on constant rotation for the rest of the school year. I plan to expand the “easy graphic novels” collection over the next school year (and will continue to display some on top of the shelf).

**Conclusion**

What kinds of kids read comics? All kinds of kids read comics. The format won’t appeal to everyone, but so many different genres of comics are available that school librarians should be able to find something to appeal to almost anyone. Just remember to look beyond superheroes and find the wonderful books being published by independent publishers, trade publishers, and even educational publishers. Whether kids are attracted by the colorful art, the nonthreatening look of fewer words on the page, or great stories, comics present another format that will promote reading—especially reading for fun.

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**Kat Kan** started reading comics when she was five years old and never stopped. She earned her MLS in 1981 from the (then) School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Hawaii–Manoa. She worked in the Hawaii State Public Library System from 1983 as a children’s and young adult librarian, and she managed the Young Adult Section for the Hawaii State Library until leaving in 1997; she worked in the Young Adults’ Services Department at the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana, from 1997 through 2002. She has worked in the Collection Development Department for Brodart Books & Library Services as the collection development librarian/graphic novel specialist since 2005, and has worked for St. John Catholic School in Panama City, Florida, since 2007. Kat has written the “Graphically Speaking” graphic novel column for Voice of Youth Advocates since 1994, and she also reviews graphic novels for Booklist.

**Figure 2.** Graphic novels for primary grades are popular, too.

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Whether kids are attracted by the colorful art, the nonthreatening look of fewer words on the page, or great stories, **COMICS PRESENT ANOTHER FORMAT THAT WILL PROMOTE READING—ESPECIALLY READING FOR FUN.**
We have all faced those who prefer text-only literature and judge graphic novels as being "less-than-appropriate" reading material. Sometimes, even when I step into libraries that do contain graphic novels, I think, “These people are simply not aware of the diversity and depth of graphic novels.” Many school libraries are filled with manga and graphic-novel series with mainly supernatural themes. Plenty of kids love these; however, sometimes overlooked are fantastic standalone titles that can induce as much emotion and personal connection as any prose novel. I am always amazed at how Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival* can convey so many universal emotions without using any words at all. The creators of these graphic novels are masterful artists and accomplished writers who know how to make every word and line count.

In celebration of a big graphic-novel competition, I wanted to put my middle school students in the position of creators of graphic novels. At the time, I was interning at a middle school in Columbia, South Carolina. The school had a small group of graphic-novel readers, but the collection in the school library was also relatively small. So, we ordered a big shipment of graphic novels. I booktalked them to English classes who came in for book checkout, and I developed a comic-book competition. My friend Alex Tisdale, a graphic-novel illustrator, agreed to draw a five-page comic-book story with speech bubbles but no text. The students would have a daily competition; they could make text suggestions for the speech bubbles and possibly win a candy bar the following morning. I gave Alex free reign, but I did ask that no superheroes be in the story; I was trying to reinforce the fact that graphic novels are not just superhero comic books.

Alex called the pages “a doodle,” but I was blown away by his artistic ability, and the students recognized that the pages could have been straight from a comic book. He scanned and e-mailed the pages to me. I printed each day’s page as large as possible (usually spanning four pieces of paper) for the students to look at and make text suggestions (see Figure 1). I also printed out smaller copies of the pages to hang in the halls, advertising that a new page was available for suggestions.

Considering that it was the first year of the competition, I will deem it a success. I have since typed the words onto the pages, but I simply wrote them in for the competition. It did not require too much time out of the day because my only tasks were to choose the best suggestion, add it to the page, laminate it, and put up the next day’s page. The following morning, the student whose suggestion was chosen was rewarded with a candy bar, delivered to his or her first-period class. And the story would continue with another drawn page. The students had to stick with the same characters and continue building the story without knowing what was going to happen next. It was especially fun to see the point where a male suggestion was chosen because suddenly all of the characters were saying “dude” a lot.

Each day the number of suggestions I received grew. Males and females (see Figure 2) from all ethnic backgrounds got involved. A different student won almost every day. Delivery of the candy bar in the morning definitely piqued some interest so I tried to make it a big to-do. Students returned each day to see if they had won, and I would
encourage them to try again. Each day some students did struggle with not winning; one girl was clearly getting discouraged. Of course, kids need to know that they cannot always win, but I encouraged her to try again each day. I mentioned a fun twist to one of her previous submissions to show that I was reading all of the suggestions, and I explained in more detail how the winners were chosen. More than anything else, I put the focus on students participating because there was no harm in trying. Many students asked why I was doing the competition, and I would reply with “in celebration of all the great new graphic novels in the library” or “because it seemed like it would be fun to write a comic book with all of the Busbee students.” It was fun for me to watch them create this book as a whole school, and students need opportunities to be creative without the pressure of grades.

Of course, I had plenty of reasons for wanting to do this competition. It encouraged the idea that the school library can be a fun place to visit. It embraced an often-overlooked type of literature. It reached out to all students while teaming all of the students together (see Figure 3). Plus, the competition encouraged critical thinking and literacy.

One boy was not a frequent visitor to the school library before this competition but really wanted a candy bar. He made suggestions daily for the first four days of the competition but never won. On the fifth day, I asked why he wasn’t submitting anything. He replied, “It is too much to read.” (At this point, he would have been reading only four comic-book pages.) I replied, “You know this story and these characters. You have been following along every day. What do you think Joe would say next?” He did make a final suggestion; he had to consider character development, conflict, and word choice. At the end of the competition, I had some extra candy bars so I brought one to him and another to his friend because they were the most dedicated and submitted the most suggestions throughout the competition.

I hope the students felt ownership over the book. The competition has been requested again, and the students did seem to enjoy it. If I repeated it, I would do more on promoting the competition before beginning; of course, this would be easier the second year since we have an example. I would also encourage students to be the artists. As I am sure you have noticed, I have been using the term “comic book” and “graphic novel” interchangeably in this article. A five-page comic book would never be considered a graphic novel, but I wanted to show the correlation to the graphic novel’s storytelling elements. Plus, I was trying to use the competition to promote the new batch of graphic novels recently added to the school library collection. I would consider doing a longer book competition; I believe the student interest could have been extended another three to five days. And, ideally, this activity would be a nice pairing with an author visit. I would definitely repeat the competition with a few improvements. Now that I am working in a high school, I may try the competition at this level, but I would again want it embedded in some bigger graphic-novel celebration.

The full book Dragon Evolution (created by middle school students as described above) can be found on my high school webpage at <http://nmbh.horrycountyschools.net/pages/nmbh/Academics/Media_Center>. I would like to say a special thanks to Alex Tisdale, who took my jumbled explanation of the project and created the perfect pages through which my students could build a story.

Meredith Keeter is a recent MLIS graduate from the University of South Carolina. She is beginning her career as the North Myrtle Beach High School librarian.
FEATURE

GRAPHIC INFORMATION

VISUALIZING STEM

ELEMENTARY
In my elementary school library, I partially solved the lack of an assistant or other help to re-shelve books by sorting some of the more popular books in baskets or bins for children to comb through. Two of the baskets I maintained were graphic novels and The Magic School Bus series. In addition to their immense popularity with kids, the books in these baskets were similar in their presentation of content. Both were highly visual; both employed speech bubbles to convey content, and both asked the reader to engage in the complex activity of “reading” across both images and text. The Magic School Bus series was one of the first to present science content in a new and relatively sophisticated graphic format that Eliza Dresang characterized as a “radical change” in children’s literature (1999).

Dresang described an emerging shift in books published for children—books that reflected the digital world in which they had been immersed since birth. She characterized this change as being about connectivity, interactivity, and access evidenced in changes in format, perspectives, and boundaries in books published for children. Dresang noted that graphic novels were one of the formats reflecting these radical changes, but she also identified hybrid texts such as The Magic School Bus series—with its mix of speech bubbles, narrative text, and numerous small “sound-bites” scattered throughout the book—as leaders in this graphic shift in informational books for children. Dresang defined “graphic” as including generous use of color, a predominance of pictures, maps or graphs, words placed on the page in a way that conveys meaning, or a printed message superimposed on a picture.

A dozen years later, we have seen a surge in graphic publishing for elementary-aged children. Beyond The Magic School Bus series, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) content can now be found in popular graphic-novel series such as the Lunch Lady series and Babymouse series that include school themes. In The Lunch Lady and the Mutant Mathletes, the lunch ladies save the mathletes team from mutant members of another school’s team of competitors. In Babymouse: Mad Scientist, Babymouse tries to find a good science fair project. Squish, an amoeba, is featured as Babymouse’s science project. The scientific method is briefly introduced and Einstein, Galileo, and Marie Curie have cameo appearances. These titles use common STEM experiences in schools as vehicles for humorous and engaging stories but don’t really include much in the way of math or science content. Babymouse, for example, does little to overcome the stereotypes of girls in science. Squish: Super Amoeba, a spin-off from the Babymouse series, features an amoeba as a main character and some information about amoebas is provided. With such an unusual protagonist, it’s not too much of a stretch to think that some young readers will be inspired to learn more about these microscopic creatures and will remember this series later when they are introduced to amoebas, paramecia, and flatworms in biology classes. School librarians collaborating with teachers could clearly promote these fun and engaging titles to introduce or complement STEM lessons and units.

A few series have emerged that employ the graphic-novel format to introduce science or mathematics.
content. Max Axiom is a superhero scientist who uses his powers to introduce a huge range of scientific concepts from food chains to genetics and cell biology. Acclaimed for their clear explanations and use of scientific vocabulary, this is a series that will carry youngsters beyond the elementary school science curriculum and into middle school. Monster Science, another series, features zombies, vampires, and other creatures popular with youth. In Zombies and Forces and Motion Newton’s three laws of motion are introduced with funny pictures of zombies lurching after victims, falling out of trucks, and accelerating down hills with the final advice that if you see a zombie, “run in the equal and opposite direction.” In this example from the Monster Science series, facts are illustrated with antics of zombies, bound to appeal to many readers, and presented in a slim book attractive to elementary school students.

In the Manga Math Mystery series, the mathematical content is needed to solve the mystery. In The Lost Key: A Mystery with Whole Numbers, logic and an understanding of whole numbers are needed to discover what’s been stolen from a school’s athletic cabinet. The math is integrated throughout the story as a necessary component of the narrative.

Nonfiction Criteria and Inquiry

Sandi Cooper, Suzanne Nesmith, and Gretchen Schwarz (2011) reported that educators were often critical of mathematical and science graphic novels for the frequent mix of fact and fiction, the lack of clarity or authority, and the need for background information to appreciate the content. They make the important observation that we should expect the conventions of good nonfiction, such as the table of contents, glossary, and suggestions for further reading found in the Monster Science series. These researchers also noted the lack of interactivity such as science experiments or other opportunities for readers to engage in their own STEM inquiries.

A few exceptional titles do truly engage the reader with STEM inquiry. For example, Jason Shiga’s Meanwhile begins with the question, “Chocolate or vanilla?” and branches into a choose-your-own-adventure-type hyper-tale with 3,856 possible story paths. Here is an immediate experience of permutations, and the reader who becomes immersed in this world of possibility will come away with a concrete understanding of mathematical branching and permutation. Raymond Briggs’s Ug: Boy Genius of the Stone Age is on the surface a funny story about stone-age characters who wear stone clothing, sleep under stone blankets, and eat raw meat from animals they have to hunt. Ug asks great, truly scientific questions about the properties of matter, the meaning of scientific exploration and invention, and about technological possibilities. This hilarious treatment of the topic could be used in classrooms and school libraries to provoke conversation about the importance of questioning and inquiry in STEM. HowToons is another graphic novel that encourages exploration and inquiry as a brother and sister lead the reader through numerous do-it-yourself-type projects from making ice cream through building a terrarium. There are many science and mathematical connections to be made in this book, and the playful and hip tone will encourage the direct engagement of young explorers.

Hands-On Experiences with Drawing and Writing

Do-it-yourself projects often involve the application of STEM competencies. Collaborating to create a geometry lesson, the school librarian might suggest engaging youngsters in creating their own comic strips. Drawing books are as popular as graphic novels in elementary schools, and these art books can be used to talk about using geometric shapes to create the images and frames in students’ own comic strip creations. Adventures in Cartooning (Sturm, Arnold, and Frederick-Frost 2009) is a great guide to the creation of cartoons or comic strips; this is also a book that could be used to promote the critical reading of the format to understand how artists use various techniques to convey meaning. Project a page of a graphic novel on the interactive whiteboard or screen, and have students pick out the ways the author used relative size of the frames or objects in the frames to convey point of view or relative importance.
Another possibility is to show Jason Shiga’s YouTube video demonstrating paper engineering and creating your own interactive comic book <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9Er7kmcPcl&feature=related>, and then guide students through the process themselves. They’ll be hooked on the idea of using their own creative skills to tell a story.

Exploring Processes and Patterns

Collaborating with teachers, a school librarian could also suggest that the sequential format of a comic strip is ideal for showing the steps in a process. In the cookbook Salad People and More Real Recipes, each recipe is accompanied by a double-page spread showing the steps through a series of framed pictures. Cooking is also a great application of mathematical concepts such as measurement and fractions, as well as science concepts including mixtures and states of matter.

Students could use the visuals and sequencing of a comic strip to show the steps in a process. In the water cycle, life cycles, the changing seasons, or moon phases. In many grades students plant seeds and watch them grow. After they have recorded pictures of the growing plants in their journals, they could create a comic strip to summarize the changes, demonstrating an understanding of the gutter (space between the panels) in a comic strip to show the passing of time. The comic strip could be made into a booklet employing a splash page to show the final plant. Similarly, students could use a comic strip to present their daily records of the changing weather.

In mathematics students might find creative ways to visually show how to simplify a fraction, perhaps finding examples beyond the tried-and-true division of a pie or pizza. Much of mathematics involves patterns and sequencing; both can be illustrated visually through a series of connected images. Take a counting book and turn it into the frames of a comic strip, reinforcing for young students the conventions of reading top to bottom and left to right. Have students create a visual pattern with a minimum of six frames and then ask a partner to describe the mathematical pattern, such as plus four or times two.

Fun Exercises in Critical-Thinking

An introduction to manga for older elementary students can be presented as a challenge to our conventions of reading left to right. An eye-opener and exercise in critical thinking would be to ask students to draw a sequence from right to left, reversing the convention familiar to them. Collaborating teachers will welcome these engaging ways for students to present their understanding of STEM content.

Mathematics employs a highly symbolic language that is often visual and graphic. As young children in the elementary grades learn to read the combination of text and images in a graphic novel, they are sharpening skills needed in mathematics and science classrooms where symbols and images are often used to convey or enhance the presentation of information. A natural connection between the school library and the elementary math curriculum has always been the creation and interpretation of information or data in graphic format. This is a skill often applied to real-world data, including the results of scientific investigations.

Infographics for Sharing Facts

Recently there has been a profusion of infographics, a sophisticated distillation of many of the features of graphic novels. Infographics use color, images, and text to visually convey a snapshot of information that even elementary children can begin to deconstruct and understand. Reading Rockets’ blogger Joanne Meier has compiled a collection on Pinterest that can be used with younger students <http://m.pinterest.com/readingrockets/infographics>.

Kindergarten teachers will probably comprehend this seemingly new phenomena as well as anyone. They
have been creating pictographs with their students since the first day of school with columns of buses, cars, and feet that visually demonstrate how students travel to school. Collaborating with teachers across the grades, school librarians could suggest taking a collaborative lesson about creating graphs in Excel to the next level through an infographic that draws on those kindergarten experiences with pictographs.

One graphing activity to share with elementary students would be the results of a beginning of the year reading-interest survey given to one or more grade levels. Ask a few simple questions about reading interests and use graphs to compare different classrooms or boys and girls, and their interest in various genres or formats. Have students think through how to present these findings as a concise infographic to be shared on the school’s webpage or as a bulletin board display.

Development of Skills for the Digital Age

With the popularity of graphic novels, other forms of sequential art, and infographics, we are experiencing a new wave of emphasis on writing and reading through both text and visual elements. This “radical change” is one driven by the digital age into which our students were born. Preschool and early-elementary teachers have always understood the importance of visual information for pre-readers new to the world of print and have relied on the school librarian to recommend outstanding picture books and other media to convey STEM concepts.

The current shift in format requires that we maintain these early-literacy practices throughout the grades and encourage students to become more critical readers of both visual and text messages. The use of graphic novels throughout the curriculum is an appealing and powerful means to do this. School librarians can introduce graphic novels with STEM-related content and suggest ways to incorporate comic strips and infographics into classroom lessons and units. Not only will kids respond with enthusiasm and interest, they will develop the critical literacy needed by future consumers and producers of information.
They can also create their own comic strips that show the steps in the water cycle, life cycles, the changing seasons, or moon phases.

Recommended Resources:


Works Cited:


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Over the past six years in my job as a public librarian, my most enthusiastic group of teens crowding into the Teen Room and attending programs have been the members of my Japanese manga and anime club. Out of all the teens and programs I coordinate, the manga and anime club members can be counted on to attend and then clamor for more events highlighting and exploring their favorite mediums.

Japanese manga (print comics from Japan) and anime (animation from Japan) continue to be popular formats with my teens from middle school on through to college. At the most basic level, manga are comics: stories told in sequence across the page using panels, text, and word balloons familiar to U.S. readers from comic books and graphic novels. Anime is animation including feature films, television series, and direct-to-video releases. Both mediums share a history, and anime is frequently adapted from popular manga series.

Manga are strongly cinematic, relying heavily on inventive panels, editing, pacing, and sound effects to indicate mood and detail. Stories run for hundreds, if not thousands, of pages, allowing extended storytelling and character development. Manga read from top to bottom, right to left on the page. Page sequence in Japanese manga is from the back to the front of the book, and getting used to the page flow takes practice. Culturally defined symbols and gestures are key to understanding stories, and while some symbols are defined in translation notes, many are learned from context and with experience.

Manga and anime are frequently long-running serial stories filled with adventure, humor, and romance. Manga require complex and active reading to create a narrative from the separate elements. Readers of comics know the real story of a comic is found in the transitions from panel to panel and text to image, and reading Japanese manga necessitates learning a whole new set of signals. Many fans study Japanese, explore Japanese history and...
Manga require complex and active reading to create a narrative from the separate elements. Readers of comics know the real story of a comic is found in the transitions from panel to panel and text to image, and reading Japanese manga necessitates learning a whole new set of signals.

These categories mean editors focus their stories, but also allow creators to leap from demographic to demographic when they have a new story to tell.

Just like any other format, manga can and does include all kinds of stories. Popular genres include mysteries and thrillers, science fiction, fantasy, slice-of-life stories, romances, and historical dramas. Take a look at a brief sampling of the titles out there, here paired with similarly appealing titles from our own shores.

- For sweets fans: Kitchen Princess by Miyuki Kobayashi, paired with Close to Famous by Joan Bauer
- For sports fans: Whale Talk or Athletic Shorts by Chris Crutcher, paired with REAL for drama, Slam Dunk for comedy, both by Takehiko Inoue
- For your near-future science fiction devotees: Little Brother by Cory Doctorow or Rhapsapocalypse by Daniel H. Wilson, paired with 20th Century Boys or Pluto by Naoki Urasawa
- For those in need of an adorable laugh: The Ramona series by Beverly Cleary, paired with the Yotsuba&! series by Kiyohiko Azuma
- For your romance addicts: Dash and Lily’s Book of Dares by Rachel Cohn and David Levithan, paired with High School Debut by Kuzune Kawahara
- For getting-through-school drama: The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie or The Misfits by James Howe, paired with The Flower of Life by Fumi Yoshinaga
- For perspectives on World War II: Maus by Art Spiegelman and We Are on Our Own by Miriam Katin, paired with Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms by Fumiyo Kouno

So how do we channel all this enthusiasm, history, and art into activities? Aside from the most obvious programs tied to the world of manga and anime—a manga and anime club where members discuss manga and watch anime—activities from origami to cooking will engage your manga and anime fans.

culture, and investigate Japanese symbols and myths to better understand their favorite series.

Manga production dramatically outpaces the U.S. comics industry. While comics represent a tiny portion of the print market in the U.S., in Japan manga accounts for 38 percent of the magazine and book market (Gravett 2004, 13).

Manga are created for five general target audiences:

- Kadomo: children
- Shonen: guys middle-school age through high school
- Shojo: girls middle-school age through high school
- Seinen: guys college-age and up
- Josei: girls college-age and up
Recycled Origami

One of the most familiar Japanese crafts for teens to tackle is origami, the art of Japanese paper folding. Inspired by using recycled materials in the innovative book Trash Origami by Michael G. LaFosse and Richard L. Alexander, I brought out both traditional patterned origami paper and recycled pages from discarded comics and magazines to mix it up a bit. We made traditional masu boxes (see figures 1 and 3), one of the most basic box forms. The teens adored making boxes from old Calvin and Hobbes pages, and we had teens stockpiling boxes to take home at the finish.

A similar adventure in paper folding led to my showing the teens how to make art out of recycled books by folding them in to book hedgehogs. Though our first hedgehogs were not manga characters but the complete roster of Marvel Comics Avengers for a special event, everyone was eager to see how the hedgehogs were created. A complete hedgehog takes around an hour of repetitive but simple folding, and falling-apart manga editions are about the perfect size and number of pages to make adorable book companions (see figures 3 and 4).

Origami Tips

Teens may or may not have done origami before, so be prepared to demonstrate clearly.

Make examples ahead of time that can be unfolded or examined.

Consider the weight and slickness of the recycled paper. Thicker paper can be harder to fold, but it also makes sturdier boxes.

Origami Books

Trash Origami by Michael G. LaFosse and Richard L. Alexander
Easy Origami by Didier Boursin

Cupcake Decorating, Anime-Style

Hands down, my most successful programs have been cupcake-decorating programs, a circumstance that is especially exciting in that I gather attendees of both genders and all ages.

When I decided to host a special cupcake-decorating event for my manga club, we chose the popular Death Note series for inspiration. Plans for our evening included a screening of the live-action film Death Note, an invitation to dress in character costume (costume play, usually shortened

Figure 1. Participant-made masu boxes used for their traditional purpose: holding food.

Figure 3. Basic “hedgehog” and hedgehog Captain America made from a recycled book.

Figure 3. Calvin and Hobbs masu box.

Figure 3. Calvin and Hobbs masu box.

Cupcake Tips

Teens don’t care about the quality of the cupcakes. Make a box mix!

Use a heavy/stiff frosting, like buttercream, as anything light or whipped just melts and isn’t good for shaping decorations.

Mix your colors ahead of time. Keep food coloring away from the main event; some teens aren’t aware of what food coloring is, and they might try to use it to decorate!

Teens are not likely to be practiced in cake decorating, so find simple ideas for them to try, as well as the more complex designs from the Hello, Cupcake! book, so novice decorators will feel less intimidated.

Give each teen one cupcake at first. Once you’re sure how many attendees you have, distribute more.
as “cosplay”), and a chance to decorate (and eat!) cupcakes.

I chose to limit the color palette of possible decorations to black, white, and red, in keeping with the manga’s art style and dramatic storyline. As with all of my cupcake-decorating programs, I provided unfrosted cupcakes and a wide selection of frosting, candies, and tools. The only rule was the same as for my other cupcake programs: Decorators must take a photo of their final creations before eating them (see figure 5).

Death Note is not the obvious theme for sweet desserts, but it turned out that the challenge was embraced by the teens. Most dressed for the occasion, in variations of the styles of the main characters of the story (see figure 6), and when it got to cupcake decorating, they went to town.

The added benefit of programs with hands-on activities is that they encourage fans to move beyond the passive activity of watching a favorite anime series to getting into discussions. My teens debated story lines, adaptations, and the finer points of character and plot. A straightforward discussion can be intimidating for some, but if everyone has something else on which to focus creative energy, whether it’s assembling the perfect costume or being inventive with frosting, you get a pressure-free zone for discussion.

Cupcake Books

Hello, Cupcake! by Karen Tack and Alan Richardson

Crazy about Cupcakes by Krystina Castella

Hey There, Cupcake! by Clare Crespo

Cupcake Supplies

You will need:
- 50 cupcakes
- 1 bucket white frosting (Wiltons), two 16 oz. tubs chocolate frosting
- food coloring (gel works best for frosting); pre-mix your colors!
- colored fondant (for cutouts and sculpting, like clay!)
- 10 bags of various candies for decoration
- various cookies for both crumbs and building
- optionally, marshmallows, donut holes, and mini-cupcakes to add structure and texture
- chocolate chips
- optionally, melting wafers and a heat source if you want to create anything with melted chocolate
- small plates
- any other decorations that catch your eye!
- plastic knives and frosting spatula
- wax paper for working surfaces for each participant
- small cookie cutters for shaping fondant and cake
- icing bags, which you can make from plastic freezer bags; cut off one bottom corner and reinforce this “nozzle” with plastic tape
- 40 one-quart freezer bags for icing bags (they’re sturdiest)
- plastic tape
- scissors
- a jumbo pack of paper napkins
We’re All Mad Here!

When considering a special event for the manga and anime club last fall, my teens clamored for an opportunity to 1) dress up, and 2) eat (no surprise on either front). Inspired by the frequent references in manga and anime to Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland, I suggested a traditional—but slightly mad—tea party. The teens exploded with approval, and over the next few meetings they planned their outfits and debated which versions of characters they wanted to try. Many manga creators—including QuinRose and Soumei Hoshino, creators of the recent popular Alice in the Country of Hearts series—draw inspirations from Carroll’s world, but I reassured everyone they wouldn’t be critically judged based on the authenticity of their outfits. I encouraged club members to go back to the source and consider Alice’s original adventures, as well as manga, for costume and character ideas.

To give the teens a traditional tea experience, I recruited volunteers and colleagues to help me provide all of the traditional elements. Thus, staff lent teapots, donated lace decorations, and suggested attendance by our very own doormouse. I decorated miniature top hats from my local craft store with ribbons for our table decorations (see figure 9), as if left behind by our very own Mad Hatter. I made cucumber sandwiches, broke out the sugar cubes, and my fellow hostesses (my wonderful core group of volunteers from our local library school program) brought in freshly made scones, chocolate covered strawberries, and truffles (see figure 7).

The teens arrived in high style, some directly—and elaborately—inspired hostess to keep the tea flowing and the food (fairly) circulating. Party stores are filled with all kinds of fun add-ons to such an event, but consider using materials you can print out or already have on hand. I printed out confetti featuring the four card suits and sprinkled them across the table rather than purchase table confetti.
Inspired by the frequent references in manga and anime to Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland, I suggested a traditional—but slightly mad—tea party.

**Tea Party Supplies** You will need:
- teapots, large if possible
- tea (either in bags or loose with paper tea bags or metal tea balls for pots)
- traditional tea-party treats including scones, lemon curd, clotted cream, tea sandwiches, chocolates, and fresh berries
- teacups, saucers, creamer, sugar bowl, sugar-cube tongs
- doilies or lacey paper settings and checkerboard patterned plates or napkins
- a plush doormouse or an equivalent
- a pocket watch, playing cards, red and white artificial roses—almost anything Wonderland-ish can be added for atmosphere!

**Make Your Food Cute! Bento Making**

One common visual in manga is characters settling in to enjoy their box lunches, known as bento. These artistic homemade lunches are judged for being cute as well as being tasty (see figure 10). In romantic manga, characters make bento to show affection and romantic interest. The ability to make a bento beautiful and tasty can win or lose characters the object of their affections.

Hosting a bento-making event is similar to cupcake decorating, but it does require more work ahead of time. Basic bento recipes can be found in books like The Manga Cookbook, Bento Love, and Kawaii Bento (see list below). In our staff kitchen, I taste-tested a number of recipes in small batches before I made the final selection of elements for the teens.

Onigiri (rice balls), a very common snack food, are seen throughout manga and are an easy first step for teens unused to cooking. I started out my bento program by showing the attendees the basics of filling and shaping onigiri into their customary triangle shape. We then went through the process for making chicks out of hard-boiled eggs using carrot pieces and black sesame seeds as decorations (see figure 14). Both recipes and techniques were drawn from The Manga Cookbook.

I then walked the teens through what was available for them to use, from the basic rice, egg, and ham to the smaller elements of vegetables, apple pieces, and black sesame seeds. I distributed photos of bento, including everything from simple designs to elaborate designs inspired by the film My Neighbor Totoro.

From there, I distributed small plastic lunch containers, each with its own lid, so teens could take home their creations (see figure 12). As was evident during the cupcake programs, the teens’ experience with cooking varied, and they were refreshingly creative. By the finish of the program, we ended up with a charming Totoro made from ham (see figure 11) and a delectable zombie egg (see figure 13).
Bento-Making Tips

Think through any allergies or dietary restrictions you may have to work around and make the elements of bento lunches palatable and varied.

Try to strike a balance between what teens might want to try because of reputation, like the Japanese favorite umeboshi (salty pickled plum) filling, and what is more familiar to participants, like egg or ham.

Make batches of rice early in the day to use for an afternoon or evening program.

Bento Books

The Manga Cookbook by Yoko Ishihara

Bento Love by Kentarō Kobayashi

Kawaii Bento Boxes by Ikuko Mitsuoka and Mieko Baba

Yum Yum Bento Boxes by Crystal Watanabe and Maki Ogawa

Bento Supplies

You will need:

- a rice cooker, if you can get one!
- plastic wrap (for hand covers essential for making onigiri without getting red, sore palms)
- sharp knives (just make sure you have a few and everyone is careful!)
- small cookie cutters or fondant cutters for cutting up veggies/cheese
- bento papers and dividers: if you have a Japanese or Asian market nearby, you can get special bento supplies like paper cups, dividers, plastic wrappers for onigiri
- sushi rice (plain Koshihukari rice, for example, not the “sushi rice” that has had vinegar added)
- fillings made ahead of time: sapporo pork (or any cooked ground meat), scrambled eggs, tuna salad
- sliced ham and turkey, sliced cheese (for shapes)
- sliced bread (for shapes)
- fresh veggies and fruit of all kinds, but especially carrots, cucumbers, pea pods, radishes, apples, strawberries, grapes (anything small or brightly colored)
- salt
- nori (the edible seaweed/algae that sushi rice is rolled in)
- hard-boiled eggs (small quail eggs are traditional, but I used more-readily available chicken eggs)
- black sesame seeds

If you have a Japanese grocery store nearby or don’t mind ordering food online from establishments like Asian Food Grocer, get Japanese snacks like Pocky, gummies, soda candy, and chewy candies to give out for dessert. For one event, I had a friend who lived in Japan at the time send me a box of the unfamiliar varieties of Kit Kat flavors available in Japan, and we had a Kit Kat taste test contest to see who could identify all the flavors, like soy sauce, yuzu (citrus) with pepper, and sweet potato.
Recommended Books:


Figure 13. Zombie egg for bento.

Figure 14. Decorated hard-boiled eggs to use in bento.


Robin Brenner is a reference/teen librarian at the Brookline (MA) Public Library. She is the creator and editor-in-chief of the graphic-novel review website No Flying No Tights (<www.noflyingnotights.com>). She wrote *Understanding Manga and Anime (Libraries Unlimited 2007)*, a guide to Japanese manga and anime, and was nominated for an Eisner Award in 2008. She contributes reviews and features to publications including Library Journal, School Library Journal (Good Comics for Kids group–blog contributor), VOTA, and EarlyWord. She has also been lucky enough to serve on a variety of committees for TALSA, including Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults, Great Graphic Novels for Teens, and as chair of the Margaret A. Edwards Award Committee. She was a judge for the 2007 Eisner Awards. Robin gives lectures and workshops all across the country on graphic novels, manga, and anime.

Works Cited:

ALIGNING GRAPHIC NOVELS TO THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

AN EXCITING AND UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

Katie Monnin
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The title of this article is sincere. Contemporary teachers and school librarians are, indeed, living and teaching during a unique time—the most exciting in the history of literacy education (Buckingham 2003; Kist 2004, 2010; Kress 2003; New London Group 1996). Modern literacy scholarship claims that we have never before been challenged to redefine on such a massive scale the ways in which we teach reading. And, to strengthen not only our own character, as Mr. Wells suggests, but also that of our students (and their future selves and that of their children and grandchildren), contemporary literacy educators must increase their knowledge and awareness of the uniqueness of our own current time and place in history. Happening daily, probably down to each and every second that passes, our modern literacy-learning world is quickly moving forward and advancing; most likely, something about literacy has been updated while you just read that last sentence (Kist 2004, 2010).

In the midst of what has been deemed the greatest communication revolution of all time, educators—including school librarians—do, indeed, have the unique and exciting opportunity to respond to and redefine the ways in which modern readers and writers will learn to read and write in a shifting literacy climate (Kress 2003; Carter 2007). Second historically only to the 15th-century invention of the use of movable type in printing, our current communication revolution is the most significant, for it is not driven by one single innovation (like the introduction of movable type allowing sharply reduced printing costs) but, instead, by an unquantifiable succession of literacy advancements (Buckingham 2003; Kress 2003; Hobbs 2007; New London Group 1996). No matter where you live in the world, literacy now means to simultaneously read and comprehend both printed text and graphic methods of presenting ideas and information. To help myself better understand just what this means for librarians and language arts educators I like to picture what I refer to as “The New Literacy Stage.”

In the past, traditional literacies have been the star of the show. But why? Who made this decision? Almost one hundred and twenty years ago, in the 1890s, a committee nicknamed “The Committee of Ten” was formed. This group of individuals was charged with deciding what all young adults should read, especially those students who wished to prepare for a career or college. Ultimately, the committee’s decision and recommendation rested in the hands of their chairperson, the president of Harvard University, Dr. Charles Eliot, who felt that the answer was simple. After all, he was a scholar and had climbed the academic ladder like so many young 19th-century students now wanted to do for themselves. In his opinion, every sixth- through twelfth-grade language arts student should be reading—both in the library and during school hours—the titles on the five-foot bookshelf he had in his very own office. And although Dr. Eliot probably had good intentions and students’ best interests in mind, his five-foot bookshelf placed a very narrow perspective on what began to be counted as acceptable and valuable literature in American schools and libraries.

Today is a new day, however, and contemporary literacy educators and school librarians must consider the prolific number of literacies now available to our students both in and out of school (Hull and Schultz 2002). In essence, new literacy scholarship has begun to look back in time and question the committee’s five-foot bookshelf recommendation. As we do so, we find numerous calls to widen Dr. Eliot’s five-foot bookshelf: the
Today’s teachers and school librarians are the first generation of educators to set the stage for defining what will count as valuable literature for generations to come. Along with a host of other new literacies and formats (such as ideas and information delivered via the Internet, text messages, zines, video compositions, media literacies, online gaming, and so on), teaching with graphic books is ready to audition. Because they rely on both traditional print-text literacies and image literacies, graphic novels are strong contenders for educators’ consideration.

With that said, however, I am often asked, “Under more and more standardized management from things like the Common Core Standards, how can we fit a new literacy format like the graphic novel into our 6–12 classroom pedagogy and curriculum demands?”

First of all, to teach to the standards does not mean that we must teach only to the standards. In fact, the foundational text that defined standardized management, Ralph Tyler’s Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction (1969), advocated that teachers embrace more than just one method of instructional assessment, such as teaching to standards, and, instead, embrace a host of formal and informal assessments. And believe it or not, the growing implementation of the Common Core Standards fits extremely well with teaching a realistic shared literacy. Combined print–text literacies and image literacies, like those found in graphic novels, are reflected and valued in the Common Core Standards.

To help teachers and school librarians better understand just how friendly the Common Core Standards are to print–text literacies and their new costars of new literacy, graphic novels, let’s take a look at the following table.

**PAIRING THE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL TEXT-ONLY BOOKS WITH GRAPHIC NOVELS CAN SUPPORT OUR EFFORTS TO ENGAGE EVERY STUDENT AND TO HELP ALL STUDENTS LEARN AND GROW.**
**COMMON CORE STANDARDS FOR READING IN GRADES 6–12**

**STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO...**

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TWO SUGGESTED 6–12 GRAPHIC NOVELS FOR TEACHING SPECIFIC CCSs</th>
<th>TWO SUGGESTED 6–12 TRADITIONAL LITERATURE PAIRINGS TO ILLUSTRATE THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING A SHARED MULTI-LITERACY STAGE WITH THE CSSs</th>
<th>BRIEF EXPLANATION AND LESSON IDEAS FOR LINKING THE COMMON CORE READING STANDARDS WITH SUGGESTED GRAPHIC NOVELS (the highest-selling contemporary and multi-literacy text for young adults)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity Crisis by Meltzer, Morales, and Bair</td>
<td>Creature Tech by TenNapel</td>
<td>The suggested graphic novels and traditional literacy pairing listed beside the CCSs both present teachers with high-quality texts for teaching inference, especially reliance on textual evidence that builds to support plot twists and turns. That said, I would recommend that teachers and school librarians develop a T-chart handout for their students. On the left side of the T-chart ask students to list the “INFERENCES” they are forming as they read. Then, on the right side of the T-chart, students can list the “TEXTUAL EVIDENCE” that supports their inferences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Homeland Directive by Venditti and Huddleston</td>
<td>Foiled written by Yolen and illustrated by Cavallaro</td>
<td>As students read the graphic novels or traditional literary pairings, ask them to make a list of the top five themes or central ideas they notice in the texts. Then ask students to work collaboratively in small groups, a team-building endeavor. Ask each team to review their lists and develop a graphic organizer that lists their top five central ideas or themes. Alongside their themes or central ideas, students can next summarize and present the key supporting details from the text by noting the developments in the texts and rationales for students’ choices of themes and main ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alice in Wonderland by Carroll</td>
<td>The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy by Adams</td>
<td>For this CCS I encourage students to complete the following activity: Draw a picture and write a description of the two most important characters. Next to each drawing and description, ask students to list the events and ideas related to this character.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native Son by Wright</td>
<td>Pride and Prejudice by Austen</td>
<td>Finally, have students write reflective paragraphs that explain how these characters, events, and ideas interact over the course of the text.</td>
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### Lesson Ideas That Link Graphic Novels to Traditional Literary Pairings and the Common Core Reading Standards

**Common Core Standards for Reading in Grades 6–12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Craft and Structure</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Students Should Be Able To...</strong></td>
<td><strong>Two Suggested 6–12 Graphic Novels for Teaching Specific CCSs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Two Suggested 6–12 Traditional Literature Pairings to Illustrate the Importance of Teaching a Shared Multi-Literacy Stage With the CSSs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.</td>
<td>Shakespeare’s <em>The Merchant of Venice</em> adapted by Hinds</td>
<td>Zahra’s <em>Paradise</em> by Amir and Khalil</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Sherlock Holmes: The Trial of Sherlock Holmes, Volume 1</em> by Moore, Reppion, and</td>
<td><em>The Last Dragon</em> by Yolen and Guay</td>
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<td>Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.</td>
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<td>A collection of <em>Emily Dickinson’s poetry</em></td>
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<td><em>Gulliver’s Travels</em> by Swift</td>
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**Brief Explanation and Lesson Ideas for Linking the Common Core Reading Standards with Suggested Graphic Novels**

- Before your students read any of these texts, review and pull out all of the words and phrases you feel are important to overall meaning or tone of the story.
- Provide this handout to students and ask them to read the text on their own and brainstorm why these words and phrases may be so significant.
- Finally, as a class, discuss the students’ ideas, being sure to also clarify the significance of any words or phrases students may have missed.

- As a class, brainstorm what the word “structure” might mean in terms of storytelling. Next, ask students to read one or more of the assigned texts and take notes on any unique structural decisions that they feel influence the story.

- Present students with a blank four-square boxed handout (if needed, present each student with a couple of these handouts). Before they read, ask students to brainstorm—at the top of the handouts—what they think the title of the text might tell them about point of view. Next, while reading, ask students to place a character’s name in each box and explain that character’s point of view.

Visit AASL’s Essential Links (<http://aasl.ala.org/essentiallinks>) to find additional resources on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
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<tr>
<th>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</th>
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<th>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.</td>
<td>Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.</td>
<td>Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.</td>
<td>Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Whatever Happened to the World of Tomorrow?</strong> by Fies</td>
<td><strong>Amulet</strong> by Kibuishi</td>
<td><strong>Maus I</strong> by Spiegelman*</td>
<td><strong>Still I Rise: A Graphic History of African Americans</strong> by Laird, Laird, and Bey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dotter of Her Father’s Eyes</strong> by Talbot and Talbot</td>
<td><strong>The Metamorphosis</strong> by Kafka and adapted by</td>
<td><strong>Superman Birthright</strong> by Waid, Yu, and Alanguilan*</td>
<td><strong>Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Bluest Eye</strong> by Morrison</td>
<td><strong>To Kill a Mockingbird</strong> by Lee</td>
<td><strong>The Outsiders</strong> by Hinton</td>
<td><strong>“I Have a Dream” speech</strong> by King</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Giving Tree</strong> by Silverstein</td>
<td><strong>The Metamorphosis</strong> by Kafka</td>
<td><strong>The Diary of a Young Girl</strong> by Frank</td>
<td><strong>The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin</strong> by Franklin</td>
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Each of these texts has its own unique way of presenting its message or content. To help students notice each of these unique formatting choices, take a book-walk as a class, pointing out each time you noticed a unique formatting choice. Students should be encouraged to take notes on each of your examples. Then, as students read the texts on their own, ask them to go on a treasure hunt of their own, searching for even more unique formatting choices and decisions made by the author. As a class, have students share and explain their finds and rationales.

Ask students to use a Know-Wonder-Learn (KWL) chart as they list what they KNOW about the claims being made in the text. Then, have students explain what they WONDER about the validity of each claim, and, finally, ask students to list what they LEARNED about the relevance and sufficiency of each claim and its validity.

Perfect for pairing a graphic novel with a traditional text-only novel, this CCS is best handled by encouraging students to create a Word or Excel document that highlights the themes or topics found in each text. When their Word or Excel documents have been completed, ask students to write an essay that compares that the approaches of each author.

* This graphic novel is part of a series.

Each of these suggested texts are rich in information and literary complexity. To make sure students grasp the importance of the information and complexity of the texts, ask students to first read independently and then as a class. While the class reads together, note on the board students’ questions and comments about the information in the text or its literary complexity. Write out and discuss each of these points on the board, and encourage students to take notes as you move through the text together.
Further Thoughts on Pairing Graphic Novels with Traditional Text-Only Literature and the Reading CCSs for Grades 6–12

Although some teachers cringe at the word “standards” and may unjustly stigmatize the Common Core Standards, the CCSs are broadly and uniquely written. They permit a wide range of interpretation and creativity. For this reason, though I am an admitted opponent of my own state’s over-reliance on (or as I like to say “addiction to”) standardized management, I’ve concluded that the CCSs may actually be a step forward. As we work together to implement these standards, they can serve as a middle ground where proponents and opponents of standardization can come together and create an entirely new way of making sure that no child is left behind. In the process, we can also ensure that all types of literacies and schematic experiences have a home. Pairing the study of traditional text-only books with graphic novels can support our efforts to engage every student and to help all students learn and grow. As Stan Lee, the writer of the Spider-Man series famously said, “With great power comes great responsibility.”

Katie Monnin is not only the proud parent of two wiener dogs, but also an assistant professor of literacy at the University of North Florida. While not pampering her dogs and treating them like children, she has managed to write numerous articles on teaching with comic books and graphic novels. She has also, in her spare time, written four books (published by Maupin House) about teaching with comic books and graphic novels: Teaching Graphic Novels (2010), Teaching Early Reader Comics and Graphic Novels (2011), Using Content-Area Graphic Texts for Learning (2012), and her favorite book (but don’t tell the others) Teaching Reading Comprehension with Graphic Texts: An Illustrated Journey (2013). Her fifth book proved she has too much time on her hands and is entitled Get Animated! Teaching Children’s Cartoons in Grades 1–6 (2013).

Katie’s complimentary webinar for AASL members “Aligning Graphic Novels to the Common Core Standards.” The webinar, based on this feature, will take place Feb. 16 at 7 p.m. EST.

Works Cited:


Graphic novels are immensely popular with children. While some critics have denounced the format as superficial and trite, others have acknowledged it for its stimulation of reading for reluctant readers and boys. Reading graphic novels is a very complex process that combines decoding what is provided in the text and pictures with filling in the gaps in the story left by the author and illustrator. This article explores the immense creativity inherent in the process of reading a graphic novel, as the reader fleshes out the story world that is suggested by the author/illustrator in several panels of the children’s graphic novel *Squish: Brave New Pond*, and it suggests several activities to encourage children to be active cocreators of these stories in comics format.

**Creativity**

Creativity has been defined as the ability to form “novel combinations of old ideas” (Boden 1994, 75) and the ability “to produce work that is both novel (i.e., original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful, adaptive concerning task constraints” (Sternberg and Lubart 1999, 3). For a process to be considered creative, then, it must introduce new ideas that are applicable to the situation at hand. Research on creativity has taken four basic perspectives:

- **Product**
- **Person**
- **Process**
- **Environment** (context) in which the creation takes place (Mooney 1963, 331).

Analyses of the creative product focus on how an object meets established criteria of creativity. The people-centric approach develops lists of personality traits in an effort to characterize highly
creative process approach examines the work strategies and habits of creative individuals to determine whether there are replicable processes that others could use to become more successful, and the environmental approach explores the impact of one’s surroundings on the process and products of creative acts.

Scott McCloud explores this issue in his detailed analysis of sequential art. He explains that comics work by leaving some of the story untold—the space between panels known as the “gutter”—so that the reader must fill in the gaps in the story. When readers encounter a comics story—or any story, for that matter—they are confronted with the task of making a cohesive narrative from fragments presented by the author. This process of “observing the parts but perceiving the whole...[is] called closure” (1993, 63). Readers must rely on past experiences and associations, and known pictorial and textual conventions of the comics genre to fabricate this unified story line, and, in the process, readers become cocreators of the ultimate narrative. This is why the reading experience is unique for different readers, and why rereading a story often elicits new emotions and ideas; the reader’s cocreated story depends on knowledge and contexts that are constantly changing. As Wolfgang Iser explains, “It is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism” (1972, 284). The unwritten part of the book, then, is where the creative potential of the reader is evoked.

McCloud lists six kinds of transitions that can exist between comics panels in order of increasing demands of closure (i.e., the reader must do more “work” to make sense of the connections).

- Moment-to-moment transitions are the easiest for readers to understand, as the time lapse between panels is very short and usually focused on a single subject. For example, several panels showing a person blinking.
- Action-to-action transitions depict a slightly more extended time lapse between frames while still emphasizing one subject, and often show an initiating action and its consequence. For example, a panel depicting a speeding car on a bridge, and a subsequent panel showing the wrecked car in the ravine below.
- Subject-to-subject transitions move from a panel depicting one person or object to a completely different—but closely related—person or object. For example, a panel showing the speeding car on the bridge followed by a panel showing a person looking on with a horrified expression.
- Scene-to-scene transitions involve large time and space changes as the pictured scene jumps from one locale to another, often relying on the words for connection. For example, a panel showing the speeding car on the bridge followed by a panel of a mother anxiously awaiting her son’s arrival.
- Aspect-to-aspect transitions add descriptive detail to a scene, allowing the eye to wander over various aspects, perspectives, or objects within a scene. For example, the wrecked car in the ravine followed by several panels showing other details of the setting (the creek, some wildlife in the nearby bushes, etc.).
- Non-sequitur transitions require the most closure on the part of the reader, as there are no obvious, logical connections between panels. The reader is forced to extrapolate a connection and impose it on the panels concerned, thereby taking most of the initiative in generating a meaningful narrative (1993, 70–72).

Mario Saraceni also addresses the connections between the panels—which he calls “cohesion”—and explains that creators of comics use several techniques to help readers make sense of these transitions. “One fundamental way in which two or more panels are linked together is by having elements in common. These can be the same characters, objects, buildings, background, or even very small details” (2003, 37). The repeated elements in the two panels help the reader understand the connection, and the new elements in the second panel move the story forward. Saraceni also mentions “semantic field,” a unifying theme or concept across multiple panels that helps situate...
Children who recognize their involvement in the “storying” process are much more likely to read since they feel a sense of ownership of the reading process.

All of the disparate panels in a common-knowledge area. His illustrative example is one of several different panels depicting running horses, spectators, and bettors, representing the semantic field of a horse race. Finally, Saraceni explains that connections between panels rely on the reader’s ability to infer what has been left out, and that ability is dependent on the reader’s “world knowledge and contextual clues” (2003, 52). For child readers, “the story should flow very smoothly, with many repeated elements indicating links among panels...for [children’s] reading should not normally require any extra effort. In such comics, the gutter is only a blank, empty space between the panels, which readers can skip effortlessly. When there is a change of scene, normally there is also a caption which guides the readers in the right direction” (2003, 55).

Children reading comics must merge what is given in the story with prior knowledge to cocreate a cohesive narrative, but analyzing what a child must bring to a story is difficult because each reader is unique and children have varying degrees of knowledge. My interest, then, is not to examine what is missing for a particular reader, but to explore more generally what creative interpretation the average child reader might need to bring to the process of forming “novel combinations” between several panels of the children’s graphic novel Squish: Brave New Pond.

Creative Work in Interpreting Squish

Squish is the main character in a series of graphic novels for children, by Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm, about the daily life and trials of a school-aged amoeba. In the second installment (Squish: Brave New Pond 2011), the intrepid main character must deal with the typical school issues of belonging to particular cliques, loyalty to friends, and bullying. Squish receives guidance related to his school encounters as he reads about a comic book superhero Super Amoeba, who faces similar problems, though on a galactic scale. By imitating Super Amoeba, Squish learns to cope with his real-life problems. Squish’s daily life is drawn in shades of green, while the superhero sequences are drawn in gray tones.

At one point in the story (pages 45–50), Squish wants to join the cool clique, the Algae Brothers. In his comic book, he reads how Super Amoeba has just been recruited by the heroic Team Protozoan, and how the superhero goes to the city to see the Hall of the Protozoans for the first time. This gray-tone sequence is composed of fourteen panels, but I will focus on only the first seven. The first shows the city with skyscrapers looming and, indistinct in the background, a road with cars vanishing into the middle of the picture and lines radiating from that central point, several blimps hovering in the sky, and the words “New Pond City Limits” in the middle of the image. Should child readers be familiar with comics’ conventions, they would know that this is an “establishing shot,” a distant viewpoint to set the overall scene. The second panel is one of...
the city’s skyline in the background with a moderate close-up of the Hall of the Protozoans. The repetitive elements that help readers connect these two images are 1) the two blimps in the sky (which, due to their unusual quality, signal that the second panel is the same city as the first), and 2) the city skyline, which, while not exactly replicated, is close enough to the original panel since “small changes will not obstruct the reading, because they are not considered as radical inconsistencies of the represented world” (LeFèvre 2009, 160). Understanding that an object remains the same despite small changes in size, shape, color, or perspective is called “perceptual constancy” and is evident in infants but develops as children grow. This repetition also requires that the reader have a sense of “object permanence,” or the understanding that an object continues to exist even when removed from one’s ability to sense it.

Knowing the convention that lines radiating from the center of a panel usually signify either intense light (which would make no sense in this instance) or movement, the reader surmises that, during the space between panels one and two, the story characters have entered and traversed part of the city to find the location in the second panel. This moment-to-moment “zoom” effect is one of the easiest forms of closure for the reader due to the presence of repeated elements in each panel. This panel, however, does require some extra-diegetic (outside the story) knowledge from popular culture for complete understanding because the Hall of the Protozoans is a close visual replica of the Hall of Justice, the superhero meeting spot of the Super Friends in DC comics. Knowing this, readers assume that the building depicted in the second frame is a superhero meeting space, and therefore, they expect certain things (costumes, weapons, computers, etc.) to be associated with it.

Due to the central location of the Hall of Protozoans in this second panel and its contrasting color (white on gray) and shape (round versus the rectangular background), the reader’s eye is drawn to it as the focal object in the panel. The open doorway of the building invites the reader forward and into the hall, making the transition to the third image easier. Using the cues provided in these two panels, the reader fills in missing actions (journey across the city), forges connections between similar elements, relies on object permanence and perceptual constancy, negotiates the passage of time, and applies prior knowledge of illustrative conventions in comics to transition between these first two panels.

The third panel is of an interior hallway lined with cases of futuristic weapons and leading toward a room whose walls are covered with computer displays, so the assumptions from the prior panel are met in this image. The reader must make the leap from outside to inside (a more difficult scene-to-scene transition), with the assumption that the inside hallway and room are related to the prior shot of the building’s exterior. The reader must also understand that time has passed, though this is a convention of most panels in comics (other than the aspect-to-aspect and non-sequitur transitions), as the characters are assumed to have walked into the building.
The fourth panel shows the room at the end of the hallway, repeating the elements of the table and wall displays, but adding detail to them all. One of the computer displays shows the city skyline, confirming the reader’s assumption that the room is, indeed, located in the same city depicted in the original establishing shot. The final panel in this five-part sequence is a close-up of the table, an aspect-to-aspect transition made easier by the depiction of one end of the table in the prior panel and the repetition of the same computer wall displays as in the prior panel. The small lines radiating from the center of the table seem to make it “shine” adding an emotional element (a feeling of novelty, wonder, and awe), and the empty chairs seem to foreshadow an important meeting that Super Amoeba may be attending. The reader, then, must bring to the reading of these five panels: a knowledge of popular culture, a knowledge of comics and pictorial conventions, an understanding of space-time relationships, and an understanding that panels in sequence form a narrative just the way sentences in sequence do in word-only texts.

The transition to the sixth panel is by far the most difficult. Panel six depicts a mid-range close-up of Super Amoeba, eyes agog and mouth wide open, with a dialog bubble that reads, “Wow.” The gaps between panels five and six are enormous, and the reader must work hard to make sense of this sequence. First, there has been no indication of Super Amoeba’s presence until this shot, so the reader must infer that the preceding panels were not just zooming camera shots of the Hall of Protozoans or a slide show of static pictures, but rather the “camera” was inside Super Amoeba’s head, and the reader “saw” those scenes through his eyes. In other words, he does not simply appear in panel six out of nowhere; he has been traversing the city and hallways, and showing the reader what he sees. The reader, then, must fill in the missing actions to get Super Amoeba from his home to the Hall of Protozoans. Knowing from earlier in the story that Super Amoeba can fly, the reader then reinterprets the first image of the city (panel one), shown from an aerial perspective, to mean that Super Amoeba probably flew into the city before landing and moving through the Hall of Protozoans.

The second difficult element of this transition from the fifth to sixth panel is the shift from a fairly emotionless series of images of scenery to a highly charged close-up of a character expressing awe. As Heike Jungst explains, “Close-ups of characters’ faces are very emotive….the character in question is designed for maximum emotive impact and often for maximum identification with the reader. Every feeling he or she has can be seen in the picture” (2010, 202). This emotional leap is mediated somewhat by the wonder suggested by the image of the shiny table, but the reader must still bring to panel six an emotional involvement that was previously nonexistent.

The third element contributing to the difficulty of understanding this transition is the lack of repetition between panel five and six; with no common background to help connect the two images, the reader is left to infer where Super Amoeba really is. Readers’ new comprehension of the first-person perspective of the prior scenes helps them guess that Super Amoeba is in the Hall of Protozoans, but confirmation must await the following panel (panel seven), showing him with the computer displays in the background.

The fourth challenging element of the transition is that, with panel six, the camera perspective shifts from first-person to third-person, and the reader sees Super Amoeba for the first time in this series of seven related panels. A reader familiar with the comics conventions of “shot/reverse-shot” (which mirrors the turn-taking of conversation) and “shot/reaction/shot” (which sets a scene, then depicts a character’s reaction to it, before moving on to a new image) would have less trouble with this transition because both are at work between panels five and six. The camera’s shift from looking through Super Amoeba’s eyes to looking at his face forms a “shot/reverse-shot,” and the “shiny table/Wow/scene of Super Amoeba backed by computer displays” serves as a “shot/reaction/shot” sequence. Despite the aids given by the author and illustrator, the transition between panels five and six is a difficult one.

The final panel in this analysis (seventh of this sequence) depicts Super Amoeba and one of the members of Team Protozoan looking at a computer display on the wall. The Team Protozoan member is explaining “this map shows us wherever there is trouble in the city,” and Super Amoeba responds, “Cool!” This final panel maintains the third-person perspective, so the reader is spared that change in the space between panels. While the camera angle moves to behind Super Amoeba—resulting in the need for the reader to make the mental shift of perspective—the repetition of Super Amoeba’s hairstyle, cape, and gray-tone color let the reader identify him without difficulty. The appearance of the member of Team Protozoan requires some work to understand (Why was he not pictured in the room as Super Amoeba entered?), but the reader infers that he either
just arrived in the room, or he was with Super Amoeba the whole time, just out of camera view (i.e., Super Amoeba did not look at him). Either way, the reader gets a clear understanding that the two are now together in conversation in the Hall of Protozoans.

Conclusions
Despite being in a children’s graphic novel, these seven panels begin to show the extensive creative effort that child readers must bring to bear on the space between panels in comics. They must fill in gaps in the action and negotiate changes in location/space, changes in time, altered points of view, and changes in the facial expressions and emotions of characters or the moods of different settings. They must also have acquired basic developmental proficiencies in object permanence and perceptual constancy.

Teachers and school librarians, as the purveyors of this format, can help readers of graphic novels enjoy the decoding process by exploring with them the ways they fill in the gaps in stories. Children who recognize their involvement in the “storying” process are much more likely to read since they feel a sense of ownership of the reading process. They are the ones who bring the story alive; they are the ones who get to add their personal touches to the unfolding story. One activity to showcase this process would be to have a group of students read a story (whether in graphic-novel format or not) and then ask each individually to describe more completely a particular setting or character. Asking students to “tell me more about…” is an effective way to get them to add layers of detail to an existing story. For Squish: Brave New Pond, librarians might ask, “Tell me more about what the city looked like that Super Amoeba was flying through,” or “tell me about the colors/smells/people/animals Super Amoeba might have seen while flying through the city.” Librarians could ask students to “tell me more about what you think the Hall of Protozoans looked like,” or “tell me more about how Super Amoeba felt when he first saw the Hall of Protozoans.” Sharing these personal details with small groups or with the whole class then shows the uniqueness of each child’s vision of the story. It is important to emphasize that no child’s interpretation is “better” or “more correct” than any other’s. Each reader brings part of himself or herself to the reading process, and teachers and school librarians can celebrate that contribution.

Asking children to draw several pictures that would fill in the gutter between two panels is another activity that would show readers what has not been covered by the text and illustrations. This storyboarding activity is a unique way to combine an art class with an ongoing literature unit. It is my hope that others will begin to explore this “space between” in graphic novels because, to paraphrase William Makepeace Thackeray, “...it is the unwritten part of books that ...[is]... the most interesting” (1945, 391).

Brian W. Sturm received a Master’s in Library Science in 1991 and a PhD in Library and Information Science in 1998, both from Indiana University in Bloomington. He is currently associate professor and director of the MSLS program at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he teaches and conducts research on storytelling and children’s literature.
Chris Wilson  
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**WHY I TEACH COMICS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

**A Personal Narrative about the Transformative Effect of Comics Literature**

Why would a technology lab instructor—someone whose job description is to teach the tip-tap of the keyboard, PowerPoint design, Internet safety, and the like in an elementary school—specifically teach reading in his classroom and run an after-school literacy club using comics?

I teach reading—specifically comics literature—to my students because I used to hate reading. During my days of kid-dom, teenager-ism, and even young adulthood, I found reading a burdensome chore consisting of reading, re-reading, falling asleep reading, and reading while having no recollection of the three previous pages. The process was so frustrating.

I have always loved stories. In fact, throughout my entire existence I was consumed with stories of adventure, myth, monsters, and heroes. I spent many hours playacting stories in the yard with makeshift props, and reenacting stories with my toys. I dressed up, wore capes and cowboy hats, wielded light-sabers and battle axes, and carried shields made out of aluminum snow-saucers and magic pouches full of pretend amulets or elixirs. I embraced play-pretend long after my friends grew out and away from such childish notions. I simply hid my props and toys and costumes under the bed and quietly played with that lone friend who got it. Now I proudly display my toys in my classroom, come what may.

In essence, I have always been interested in those devices that brought my fantasy mind-stories. It’s just that I didn’t read them. I played them. Acted them. Changed them in my head. In my adult life I wrote them. Words. I did interact with words, just not in the traditional book sense—until later. Disliking reading was not enough to keep me from earning a Bachelor’s degree in English, which required a lot of reading and persevering through a lot of struggles, but I focused on writing. Librarians and teachers know good writers must be good readers, yet I resisted this reality until mature adulthood when I discovered the wisdom in the reading-writing advice I had received and discarded earlier.

My Transformation

Even the poorest of prediction skills should lead one to see what changed my reading mentality: comics. It harmoniously merged the two parts of my heretofore dichotomy: my love of story and my consternation toward reading. I went from the rare instance of reading for fun (The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and The Lord of the Rings) to reading for my own personal enjoyment on a monthly, weekly, and even daily basis. Comics, you see, changed my life. Pardon the puffery, but the truth is comics really did rewire my brain and heart, and turned me into a reader. Not just a reader of comics but also a reader of, well, everything.

When I became a teacher as a late-in-life career change, I knew what comics had done for me, and I wrote my Master’s thesis on the subject of comics in education, started The Graphic Classroom (www.graphicclassroom.org) and proclaimed in my elementary-school job interviews that I wanted to start a comic book club. My
personal monomyth towards lifelong readership is but one such journey in a sea of mythic life changes for students of mine, and, it turns out, for many other adults as well. Comics scholarship has turned into a serious educational effort with significant research backing the use of graphic texts in K–12 and beyond.

My Ally

Of course, it was my school librarian who was the first supporter and cosponsor of the Hall of Heroes comic book club. She was one of the only teachers who did not discard my comics idea as foolish. Together, she and I made literary history in our school. Parents freely share stories of student transformation from reading-hater to bookworm who chooses reading over video games. During recess students ask to check out comics from my lab. Teachers send students to us when all other interventions are failing or having minimal effect. Kids wear superhero shirts when they come to the technology lab. Our district’s board of education asked our club to speak at a board meeting this past year.

Most importantly, kids read because they want to read. On the playground, they talk about what they are reading and share it with us. They beg to check out comics before and after school, and ask to read when their work is finished in their grade-level classrooms.

Lifelong Readers

When I speak at conferences, I always remind the participants: “Not reading never leads to reading.” Many kids—struggling readers, reluctant readers, proficient readers, advanced readers, below-basic readers, kids of all kinds—when they read comics, fall in love with reading. In time, that love branches out into all types of literature and creates lifelong readership for enjoyment.

Why do I teach comics in school? I cannot conceive of a legitimate, research-based reason why I would not.

Chris Wilson is the Editor of The Graphic Classroom <graphicclassroom.blogspot.com> and a full time graduate student in the college of education at Missouri State University. He previously worked as the Managing Editor for a weekly newspaper then as the Director of a non-profit for people with disabilities.
Over the nine years I have been teaching high school English, I have heard students describe how they have made it through many high school English classes without ever really reading. Their efficient system of avoiding reading sometimes involves a skimming and scanning process that enables them to earn top grades, even in honors-level and advanced-placement classes. Assigned reading in high school English, it seems, is less of an opportunity for students to immerse themselves in great stories or to think deeply, and more about doing what is necessary to receive a desired grade. Unfortunately, this approach to reading in school excludes pleasurable lingering over interesting passages or images, rereading, or thoughtful reflection that can lead to interesting discussions and authentic learning.

To counter such inauthentic literacy practices among my students within our classroom and to motivate students to embrace more authentic forms of literacy and learning, I decided to assign course content comprised of graphic novels and other forms of sequential-art narrative. The first person I enlisted to help was my school librarian.

Teacher-Librarian Collaboration

No better resource exists when it comes to understanding positive, authentic reading behavior in teens, for school librarians have ample experience observing the habits, dispositions, and interests of students who come to their libraries. School librarians see students from a unique angle. They are authoritative with students but in ways different from teachers and parents. School librarians are not perceived by students as gatekeepers or assigners, but rather people who create an open, safe space within which students can make their own choices about titles without judgment, accountability, or grades. By providing requested texts and maintaining a private and public space for all students, school librarians provide learning opportunities, including academic, personal, and social. Librarians are the ultimate matchmakers between students and stories; on a daily basis over many years, school librarians observe the social act of students talking about stories they enjoy, whether those stories are in the form of video-game narratives, comic strips, manga, novels, magazines, or video blogs. My school librarian had the circulation numbers to prove that kids at our school were reading, rereading, and requesting graphic novels and manga.

In an attempt to make my classroom and my pedagogical approach to teaching reading a little bit more library-like, I assembled a list of graphic novels. I not only consulted ALA’s recommended reading lists and other published articles about graphic novels for academic use, I attended the 2010 ALA Annual Conference in Washington, DC, to meet librarians who specialized in comics and graphic novels, as well as visiting cartoonists and publishers. I learned that ALA and its librarians had been in the graphic-novels business for a long time, matching students to texts successfully, and building reading lists of graphic novels for various age groups. Their work in this area provided the foundation for my rationale for teaching graphic novels in the classroom, and the school library staff and I continue to collaborate regularly to support students’ literacy learning.

Learning through Graphic Novels

My school librarian’s knowledge and experience with books and teens helped me leverage student learning in my classroom. My twelfth-grade graphic novel course is in its fourth year, and we visit the school library regularly so students have ample opportunities to read comics.
and graphic texts beyond those assigned for the course. Learners read independently and conduct group-based, collaborative activities around their reading. Through regular collaboration with our school librarian, suggested reading lists and news about new titles are constantly updated. Our librarian participates as an active member of our course’s social-network site, sharing with us virtually by providing students with links to titles, technology for making comics, and research databases to assist students in meeting course requirements and to extend their interest in all-things-comics. Collaborating with my school librarian to continually shape our graphic novel course curriculum is like having an extra teacher in my classroom.

Results

Because students were genuinely interested in reading graphic novels in our classroom, I was able to foster deeper, more authentic forms of reading. Reading carefully and reflectively served as foundational for students, enabling them to more willingly and ably conduct rich, thought-provoking discussions with one another, with me, and with others outside our classroom space. They corresponded with students in Istanbul, Turkey, about graphic novels and asked intelligent questions of graphic novelists via Skype conversations.

Authentic reading also enabled students to practice writing more often and in more meaningful ways. Because students were not merely scanning for answers to a quiz or test, but were genuinely interested in graphic novels’ form and content, learners were practicing both traditional and new literacies authentically. In contrast to what I had heard previously from students about avoiding reading, after I had taught with graphic novels, students described their reading as interesting, fun, and as something they might freely choose to do as a pleasurable activity.

In addition to other assessments I used to measure students’ skills and knowledge development, requests for recommended reading titles from former students in the course provided an informal indicator of success. Other signs included requests to create graphic-novel projects for our school’s annual internship program, requests to create comics and manga clubs, and e-mails from former students about their enrollment in comics courses in college or their reading of assigned graphic novels in various undergraduate classes. These students thanked me for enabling them to be leaders in reading, analysis, and discussion of comics among their peers and professors. I never received such correspondence from former students before I began teaching with graphic novels.

Part of creating a classroom space in high school English that would nurture authentic literacy practices required that I implement what works so well in the school library: matching relevant texts with students’ interests, providing a trusted space to read and reflect, and producing helpful resources for learning. I could not have addressed the inauthentic-reading problem among my high school English students without the collaborative efforts of my school librarian and the ALA resources about teaching and learning with graphic novels.

Maureen Bakis is an English language arts teacher at Masconomet Regional High School in Topsfield, Massachusetts.

She is also author of The Graphic Novel Classroom: Powerful Teaching and Learning with Images (Corwin 2011).
Finding Truth, Justice and Literacy with Graphic Novels

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Working with students at the University of Tennessee, I use comics in two different contexts, with undergraduates in a general education seminar and with graduate students working toward initial licensure and advanced degrees. In both arenas, I teach using comics and graphic novels because I see their usefulness as literature, as texts that help teach students about literacy, and as content-area resources.

My most-taught freshman seminar is Truth, Justice, and Superheroes. In this course we read collections of classic comic books series such as Frank Miller, Klaus Janson, and Lynn Varley’s The Dark Knight Returns, and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’s Watchmen, along with newer comics such as Brian K. Vaughan and Tony Harris’s Ex Machina, and Brad Meltzer, Rags Morales, and Michael Bair’s Identity Crisis. Along the way, we have discussions about power, justice, and ideologies. These works all touch upon complex societal themes of how power circulates and what defines justice. Beginning with the story of a disillusioned Batman returning from retirement to become a type of friendly fascist and ending with the tale of a superhero who hung up his costume to take on the arguably more difficult job of mayor of New York City, we talk about the ethics of vigilantism, the effectiveness of government institutions, and how the choices people make define their lives.

In this class we look at comics as literary texts that offer complex characters and intense political configurations, using characters that readers recognize from cartoons, movies, and comic books. We build from the familiar but veer into new territories, examining why the concept of superheroes would and would not work in our world.

One example of an activity from this class deals with Watchmen. This book about a superhero team with very strong personalities allows the class to speak about the complexities of justice. I ask the students to write a response to two questions, “Who is your favorite character?” and “Who is the most just character?” The corresponding conversation raises many interesting points as many of the students gravitate toward liking Rorschach, a violent, paranoid, and strident vigilante with a very troubled past. When it comes to who is right, though, I typically see much divergence. Some students lean toward Dr. Manhattan with his distant view of humanity as a random life-form and the world as an uncaring place. Some see Ozymandias as a person who does what is best for the common good, even at the cost of great sacrifice. Some see the Comedian as a realist, forced to make tough decisions in a harsh world, while many others side with Night Owl, who seems the most centrist and reasonable character. Despite whom they side with, members of the class have a rich discussion that always could extend well past class time as participants defend their views. This book, with its stark contrasting characters, offers an excellent opportunity to discuss, in the context of a fictional work, government and political stances that also apply to people’s everyday lives. Not everyone agrees with the solutions the characters offer via their actions, but students do have lots of fodder for thinking and speaking.
Looking at Literacy from a Different Perspective

Although I do not always use comics to examine ethical and political situations in my education classes, I do use them with students to examine their views about literacy in general. Each year I choose a sequence from a graphic novel, such as Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese* or Gareth Hinds’s *The Odyssey*, and ask students the seemingly simple question, “What happened?” Usually they start by explaining what they see going on, and I ask them how they know they are correct. This quickly turns into a discussion of the sequential art medium. We talk about the panels, the gutters, the word balloons, the use of negative space, and shorthand symbols such as color changes, sweat beads, or lightning bolts. We also end up talking about the authors’ intentions with the art, and the reasons why they chose to include various words, images, and visual information. This ad hoc visual-grammar lesson usually takes turns that allow us to talk about how we break down and understand texts, how we work with struggling readers, and how we deal with readers’ attitudes.

First, reading comics is not something that many of my students who are, or soon will be, teachers are familiar with. I have seen that the years of children reading and swapping comic books might be well gone at this point, as most confess they have never read a comic book, though many still will say they read or have read comic strips in the newspaper. I try to capitalize on their discomfort with the format conventions to show how they might similarly break down texts to be more easily understood by their students, according to text structures and content expectations. Often these in-service or pre-service teachers are very comfortable with their content areas and do not consciously recognize the assumptions they make about reading their subject matter or doing work in their specific content areas. It is one thing to say that they need to scaffold their texts, but being in the position of novice often draws more attention to the need for them to work to make their texts and content more accessible to students who may not be so comfortable navigating them.

Second, the discomfort with reading comics also puts some of my students into the position of being a struggling reader. Not only do the educators get to think about how they might scaffold reading in their own classes, they also get to talk about the effects of attitude on their reading abilities and stamina. Oftentimes, this means I get a vocal contingent who tells me that they hate comics and would never use them; members of this group do not understand comics. I do not take this personally, but I try to turn this talk into how they might work with students who say the very same things about the texts they have to read for their classes. The reality is that many students might not have the patience or willingness to keep up with schoolwork when they struggle or find themselves confused, so they require particular types of attention. Reading comics unsettles some university students, who might be otherwise very capable and knowledgeable, and offers a chance for looking at struggling readers in a different, more distinct and personal light.
Focusing on Resources for Students of All Ages

Aside from classroom readings and activities, I have another way to engage my students in all the classes I teach: my blog, Graphic Novel Resources <http://graphicnovelresources.blogspot.com>. The blog is for anyone interested in reading or using graphic novels. In it, I offer reviews, summaries, and additional resources about a variety of graphic novels and comics. I see this blog as a nexus of my teaching, a place where I can simultaneously display texts of interest while also providing potential teaching connections.

I tag posts by subject area, interests, and reader level, and I try to post about a wide variety of books. I highlight works by authors who write about content-area subject matter, such as Jay Hosler and Jim Ottaviani in science or Rick Geary and Nick Bertozzi in history. I also touch on works that might pair easily and well with required readings such as The Resistance series about France in World War II by Carla Jablonski and Leland Purvis. I include works for younger readers, such as Michael Rex’s Fangbone series as well as more complex adult works like Asterios Polyp by David Mazzucchelli.

From my work in classrooms and on my blog, I endeavor to demonstrate that comics offer much in terms of literary, entertainment, and content-area learning for all types of readers, elementary to higher education. Reading comics can help us analyze how we interact, learn, and conduct ourselves as citizens. They are a potentially powerful educational resource.

Books Mentioned:


Visit <http://www.ala.org/aasl/knowledgequest> for an Exclusive List of Recommended Graphic Novels for All Ages by Knowledge Quest Editor and lifelong comic book reader Markisan Naso!
The art we as readers know as comics have been in existence since the nineteenth century, around the same time as the earliest films and motion pictures began attracting attention (Meskin 2011). Comics have continued to grow in popularity with audiences both young and old. Graphic novels and comics are a wonderful mix of pictures and words for students who are visually oriented. Librarians have been collecting graphic novels for their collections in recent years because they recognize the importance of books that rely on sequential art (Crilley 2009). Comics and graphic novels are now used as a means for delivering entertainment, social and political commentary, and instruction. School librarians and other educators know that graphic novels and comics can be wonderful tools to motivate reluctant readers, engage multiple literacies, and draw in all types of learners (Gavigan 2012). These are also tools that can attract students to the act of writing. In this article, online tools for creating comics and graphic novels will be discussed, along with how these tools can be used in the classroom and school library.

**Students will take pleasure in sharing these comics and graphic novels, and they will want to create more.**

**Go Graphic**

**CREATE YOUR OWN COMICS**

Heather Moorefield-Lang | hmlang@vt.edu

The art we as readers know as comics have been in existence since the nineteenth century, around the same time as the earliest films and motion pictures began attracting attention (Meskin 2011). Comics have continued to grow in popularity with audiences both young and old. Graphic novels and comics are a wonderful mix of pictures and words for students who are visually oriented. Librarians have been collecting graphic novels for their collections in recent years because they recognize the importance of books that rely on sequential art (Crilley 2009). Comics and graphic novels are now used as a means for delivering entertainment, social and political commentary, and instruction. School librarians and other educators know that graphic novels and comics can be wonderful tools to motivate reluctant readers, engage multiple literacies, and draw in all types of learners (Gavigan 2012). These are also tools that can attract students to the act of writing. In this article, online tools for creating comics and graphic novels will be discussed, along with how these tools can be used in the classroom and school library.

**Sites to Consider**

**Comic Master**

<www.comicmaster.org.uk>

Recently included in the AASL list of Best Websites for Teaching and Learning, Comic Master is an online tool intended for upper elementary and middle school students who want to create their own short graphic novels. Users can add backgrounds, create characters, and add dialogue, special effects, and more. Supported by Reading for Life and National School Partnership, this is an interactive site where students can write comics, share their work, and read the work of their peers. (Grades 5–8)

**Strip Generator**

<http://stripgenerator.com/strip/create>

Strip Generator is one of the easiest comic-strip-creation tools to use. The comic strip template is provided immediately—no sign up.
or log in. Students can then use the intuitive interface (see Figure 1) to create their own comic-strip stories, complete with characters and text, and have the option to add more frames. If students like their strips once they have been completed, young authors can sign in or create a login and save the creation as their own. (Grades 4–7)

**Make Beliefs Comix**
<www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix>

Make Beliefs Comix is another strip-based comic creator. Students title their comics and enter their names or initials to get started. Users can scroll through a host of different characters and write dialogue or thought balloons. Make Beliefs makes it really easy for users to add props, color, and new scene blocks to the comic strip. This is a very intuitive site (see Figure 2) that students will enjoy using. When the comics have been completed, teachers and school librarians can print or e-mail final pieces to share in class. The comics can be loaded into presentations or printed to be shared as part of a class bulletin board. (Grades 2–4)

**Professor Garfield’s Comics Lab**
<www.professorgarfield.org/pgf_comics_lab.html>

Complete with sound effects, Professor Garfield offers many different types of activities, one of which is Comics Lab. Another comic-strip creator, this site focuses solely on creating comics that feature Professor Garfield and his friends. Students click on a box in the comic strip, choose characters, props, backgrounds, and dialogue balloons. When finished, users can print and save. One of the options is to save as a JPG or PNG for embedding in presentations or documents. Professor Garfield’s Comics Lab comes complete with videos and lessons for instruction and site integration for educators. (Grades 2–4)

**Pixton**
<www.pixton.com/create>

Pixton is a comic- and graphic-novel-creation site. This website allows users to create their comics with a drag-and-drop interface. The definite draw to this site is the versatility. Students can create a one-row traditional strip comic, or they can move to the more advanced manga vertical style. They have the option to do a freestyle comic for which there are no rules, or they can move to the comic book/graphic novel. This site has a multitude of options. The work of fellow-artists is also shared on Pixton, so not only are students creating, but they are also able to read and gain ideas from the work of others. This site does require an e-mail sign in for individual users. A fee-based option allows educators to set up an account for fifty students in a group. A thirty-day free trial is available. (Grades 7–10)

**Using These Sites in Your Classroom and Library**

Creating their own comics and graphic novels shows students that writing is not boring (Grilley 2009). Each of the sites listed in this article takes users step-by-step through the process of creating a story with a beginning, middle, and end. These sites and tools help students create characters, dialogue, locations, and situations, and aid students in the practice of storytelling. That is what comics can do; they can show young people how a story can be told (Lamb and Johnson 2009). Having students produce in these media not only allows them to explore the depths of their storytelling skills and creativity; these assignments also let students read the creations of their peers. It’s incredibly affirming to have a fellow-student read and enjoy something that a student has written. Students will take pleasure in sharing these comics and graphic novels, and they will want to create more.
HERE ARE A FEW IDEAS:

1. When doing a report about a person or family member, have students do the research or investigation, gather the materials, and report their research in a sequential-art form (Lamb and Johnson 2009).

2. Have current students introduce the school to new students through a graphic handbook that includes all the rules, as well as advice from older students.

3. Encourage students to create their own “comic-strip story of me.” This could be a strip telling about a great day in each student’s life, or a great day from the current school year, or a day they would like to have, etc. Then have a wall of comic strips where students can share.

4. Work on instructional comics that show how something should be done. Have students instruct others in a step-by-step, beginning, middle, and end method of how a process should be completed. Any type of instruction will work. Howtoons (www.howtoons.com) is a great example of this type of comic.

**Going Professional**

Using these sites, and incorporating the writing and reading of comics and graphic novels in the school library and classrooms is going to generate interest. You will discover talented writers and gifted artists in your school! Group projects and partnerships are always a good idea. These assignments might inspire young artists and writers to enter the field of comic—book and graphic-novel writing and illustration. When you hear students talk about the possibility of pursuing these careers, you can pass along some information from a professional in the field.

J. Torres (see Figure 4) has been writing professionally in the comics industry for ten years, and before that he wrote for at least five years while holding down “day jobs.” When asked if he had any words of wisdom for students thinking about becoming comic or graphic-novel writers J. had this to say, “The best advice I can give is to keep writing, keep drawing, and keep reading comics. We learn through practice and by observing others. It’s the best way to get better at something, pick up on what’s good and even what not to do, and all the while enjoy what you’re doing” (2012).

![Figure 4. Author J. Torres with one of his graphic novels.](image)

J. has written in various genres ranging from slice—of—life and comedy like the Jinx series for Archie Comics to superheroes like the Teen Titans Go series for DC Comics, or a combination of the two like the Power Lunch series for Oni Press, as well as adventure and fantasy like the Alison Dare series and Avatar the Last Airbender comics, horror or suspense like Lola: A Ghost Story, and even funny animals and fables like the web—comic Funnies Farm or the new digital—comic Aesop’s Ark. When asked what inspired him to write for this genre J. stated, “I’ve been reading comics for as long as I can remember. They entertained me and inspired me as a child. I guess I simply wanted to entertain and inspire other people in the same way” (2012).

Out of the selection of sites listed in this article, J. has used only Strip Generator thus far. He thinks it’s great for someone like him who can’t draw all that well. He recommends that even if you’re a good artist, as long as you know your way around the features and functions, you can create some terrific—looking comics. It’s easy and fun and very useful.

**Developing Skills While Having Fun**

As librarians and educators we are always looking for new ways to introduce reading and writing to our students. Creating their own comics and graphic novels lets students tell and share their own stories in a highly visual and exciting way. Whether it’s with paper and pencil or with one of these exciting Web 2.0 tools, students will enjoy sharing their stories through a graphic medium.

Heather Moorefield-Lang is the education and applied socials sciences librarian at Virginia Tech. She is the former chair of the AASL Best Websites for Teaching and Learning Committee and now serves on the AASL Research and Statistics Committee.

Her research focuses on technology in libraries and arts in libraries. To read more about her work, see her website at <www.actinginthelibrary.com> or follow her on Twitter: @actinginthelibr.

**Works Cited:**


Perhaps no other single format causes more questions and even “raised eyebrows” than does the graphic novel in school library collections. While many educators have realized the value of graphic novels in the curriculum, some teachers and administrators still have doubts about the quality of graphic novels. Some educators may view graphic novels as inferior literature or substandard information sources, and certainly not something for a school library collection. For many school librarians, graphic novels may not be considered an essential part of the collection but rather an optional purchase only if extra funds are available. Furthermore, once a school library adds graphic novels to the collection, all sorts of questions arise regarding where to shelve them, how to catalog them, and how to make them accessible to students.

School librarians, however, should consider graphic novels as a unique resource for meeting standards for collection development and student learning as identified in AASL’s Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs and Standards for the 21st-Century Learner. Clearly, these national guidelines recognize graphic novels as a format suitable for meeting the needs and interests of students in the learning environment—a format that should be a part of the school library collection.

The graphic-novel format includes a variety of fiction genres (e.g., historical fiction, fantasy, science fiction, etc.) as well as nonfiction resources for all ages. Graphic materials should be selected in the same way as any other format. Standard collection-development tools and review journals regularly provide graphic novels for students in library collections is just the first step. School librarians can actively promote and use graphic novels as they instruct students in developing multiple literacies.
include graphic novels in either separate sections focusing on only that format, or intermixed with text-only works in fiction and nonfiction sections. Collection-development policies may need updating to include references to this graphic format.

Shelving graphic novels in a school library collection may be challenging. Dewey editors from OCLC have decided to place all graphic novels in the 741.5 section (OCLC 2012). In their collection-development policies and procedures, school librarians may want to make a shelving statement regarding graphic novels.

**Student Learning Standards**

Underlying Standards for the 21st-Century Learner are several common beliefs, including one focused on reading: “Reading is a window to the world” (AASL 2007, 2). The explanatory paragraph for this statement focuses on the importance of reading as a foundational skill and encourages reading in all formats. While graphic novels are not specified, one naturally can assume their inclusion since they are considered a format. The idea of reading in all formats as a lifelong learning skill provides a powerful message to school librarians as they develop collections and provide instruction for students.

The actual standards for learners support the use of graphic novels in a variety of ways. References to multiple formats, visual literacy, and a variety of resources can be found in the following statements from Standards for the 21st-Century Learner:

1.1.6 Read, view, and listen for information presented in any format (e.g., textual, visual, media, digital) in order to make inferences and gather meaning.

1.2.3 Demonstrate creativity by using multiple resources and formats.

2.1.6 Use the writing process, media and visual literacy, and technology skills to create products that express new understandings.

4.1.2 Read widely and fluently to make connections with self, the world, and previous reading.

4.1.3 Respond to literature and creative expressions of ideas in various formats and genres.

4.1.4 Seek information for personal learning in a variety of formats and genres.

4.2.2 Demonstrate motivation by seeking information to answer personal questions and interests, trying a variety of formats and genres, and displaying a willingness to go beyond academic requirements. (AASL 2007, 4, 5, 7)

These learning standards encourage the use of graphic novels in multiple reading and learning activities.

On a more creative level, the standards also encourage students to share and display knowledge and understanding in a variety of ways. Specifically, skills statement 3.1.4 states, “Use technology and other information tools to organize and display knowledge and understanding in ways that others can view, use, and assess” (AASL 2007, 6). The use of a graphic-novel format with sequential panels and word balloons certainly can apply as a means for communication of information and knowledge students have learned from research and inquiry-learning activities. With tools such as Comic Creator from ReadWriteThink, ToonDoo (<www.toondoo.com>), Pixton (<www.pixton.com>), and Kreative Komix (<www.kreativekomix.com>), students can easily share and communicate knowledge and understanding in an exciting graphic format.

As librarians add graphic novels to school library collections, they can find justification for their decisions in both Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs and Standards for the 21st-Century Learner. Providing graphic novels for students in library collections is just the first step. School librarians can actively promote and use graphic novels as they instruct students in developing multiple literacies. The AASL Learning4Life materials and Lesson Plan Database offer many resources to help school librarians plan instructional activities with graphic novels. Because of their unique format, graphic novels are ideal tools to make students Think, Create, Share, and Grow as they become lifelong learners.

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**Works Cited:**


Rather than trap my readers’ imaginations in a web of ink lines and color washes of my own choosing, my art should serve instead to set readers’ imaginations soaring.

Let Your Imagination Soar

COLLABORATION BETWEENCreators AND READERS IS ESSENTIAL

Charles Vess

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I’ve been in a room filled with my best friends. Everyone around me is relaxed and happy. A conversation begins. Someone answers one vocal outburst with another. More words spontaneously follow. And round and round an idea bounces, from one person to the next, and suddenly the collective “you” has arrived at a joke or a play on words or an idea that I would never have articulated if I’d been sitting in that same room alone, perhaps trying to reach for the very same creative idea.

We’ve all been in a room just like that one, I think.

At its best, the collaborative process involved in the creation of a book is much the same.

Of course, the friction of two creative minds rubbing hot against each other can just as easily produce a torched field, empty of life, as it can burn away any barriers that either may have tried to erect around a fragile artistic ego. If they’re both lucky, that fire will leave in its wake a “new” aesthetic persona that will inherit the combined wisdom of two lives rather than simply one.

However, with any illustrated fiction, whether it’s a graphic narrative or a picture book or an illustrated middle-grade book, another—and perhaps an even more important collaborator—is involved: the reader of the book.

Respecting that reader’s imagination is one of the most important tasks at hand for either the illustrator or the writer. Deciding which scene he or she is going to put onto a given page and how much detail will be lavished on it is crucial to the success or failure of any book. Only when the book’s illustrator and its writer allow the reader to become an active participant in their story can a book be truly successful. As an illustrator I feel that I must carefully choose what I want to show my readers; I’m always trying to balance within that image certain elements that can be clearly seen, as well as those that exist only in each reader’s imagination.

It seems to me that any illustration that is overwhelmed by detail from
corner to corner has very little to offer viewers in terms of their actively participating in the story the illustration is intended to tell. Of course, the readers’ eyes may widen with amazement in recognition of all the time spent on the lovingly rendered elements of that picture, but their minds, with little to engage them, will soon travel on to the next page and the next and eventually to another story altogether. Rather than trap my readers’ imaginations in a web of ink lines and color washes of my own choosing, my art should serve instead to set readers’ imaginations soaring:

All of these visual tropes will activate alert readers’ minds and, without their realizing it, make the story exist in a far more expansive world than readers first see on the page.

That dappled light has to come from an unseen tree or forest that grows just past the picture plane.

The twisting limb must fall from a tree that I haven’t drawn.

That unseen something exists only in the reader’s imagination as does the world that lurks softly behind the mist that rolls across the hills in my story.

Charles de Lint and I have been friends for over thirty-five years. We’d collaborated many times before on both illustrated books and graphic narratives, so when it came time to create over seventy paintings for The Cats of Tanglewood Forest, I felt pretty comfortable with our shared vision.

However, the other Charles had written an exceptionally evocative scene that appears about midway through the book. In it, three young people sit in a field of high grass; two dogs rest at their feet. Our protagonist, Lillian, is listening to one of a set of twins tell a story. Once, long ago, a young girl, the daughter of the great spider spirit, was thrown into a deep, deep well. And there she stayed until one night, thousands of spiders dropped from the sky, leaving behind tiny holes, filled with light that became our stars. With their webbing, these spiders wove a ladder with which the girl climbed from the well and overcame her captors. Later in our tale Lillian will remember this tale, and it will help her escape from her own set of captors.

Both Charles and his wife, MaryAnn Harris, expressed their anticipation in seeing how I would draw this scene.

But, in the end, I choose not to.
I decided that such a delightfully evocative image would be best left to all of our readers’ imaginations.

Adapting Neil Gaiman’s poetry into two children’s picture books (Blueberry Girl and Instructions) became a delicate trip across an aesthetic tightrope. The poems were filled with powerful symbolic metaphors, but neither offered anything in the way of a narrative impulse or a protagonist for the reader to identify with. Here my collaboration involved supplying both of these very essential elements to each book. I had to be very careful to add to—but never get in the way of—Neil’s lovely words or distract the reader from understanding those words.

And finally, I think that my chosen method of rendering an illustration is yet another collaboration—this one between my art and my reader’s mind. By using a pen outline, which I later fill in with color—a style directly inspired by such great Edwardian book illustrators as Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac—I offer a look that is decidedly not highly finished or minutely rendered. Faced with my stylistic choice, the viewers must complete for themselves the conceptual space left unfinished between my hard outlines and the color within. They, in effect, render the image into three dimensions themselves.

This collaborative process—this pact between writer, artist, and reader—provides, I think, the essential elements that, when combined correctly, will produce a book that will be read and enjoyed again and again for years to come.

Enjoy the process!

Charles Vess is a world-renowned artist and a three-time winner of the World Fantasy Award, among several others. His work has appeared in magazines, comic books, and novels including The Coyote Road: Trickster Tales (Viking 2007), Peter Pan (Macmillan 2003), The Book of Ballads (Tor 2004), and Neil Gaiman’s Stardust (Titan 1999), which was made into an acclaimed film by Paramount Pictures in 2007. Charles has also illustrated two picture books with Gaiman, Instructions (HarperCollins 2010) and Blueberry Girl (HarperCollins 2009), that were New York Times bestsellers. His art has been featured in several gallery and museum exhibitions across the United States as well as in Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Italy. He lives on a small farm and works from his studio, Green Man Press, in southwest Virginia.
Ann Ewbank

I am a proactive consensus builder who will serve as the voice of school librarians within the policy-making body of the American Library Association and across the nation. As a college administrator and faculty member, my unique vantage point helps me to see “the big picture” and the vital role that school librarians play in that big picture. I pledge to listen to and work with AASL members and leaders to forge a strong school library policy presence in ALA and across the nation. As one of the largest divisions in ALA, AASL is driven by issues such as student achievement and advocacy, both greatly important to librarianship as a profession. As AASL President, I would focus on these issues. It would be my honor to serve you.

Terri Kirk

Rising to the Challenge, the theme for the AASL 2013 National Conference of which I am Co-Chair, is an even more appropriate theme for my President-Elect candidate statement. I see our profession being inundated from every side as budget shortfalls, technology, and a focus on testing challenge us in our efforts to provide effective school library programs for our students. Many school librarians are often, like me, the only one in the school building who knows just how demanding our job can be. We understand how the work we do impacts student learning. Finding our way can be especially difficult, but we are all more powerful when we are together. And together, we can face the challenges. Through AASL’s leadership, every one of us can be a strong voice on the local, state and national stage. I’m ready to meet the challenge and I ask for your support in leading our profession into the future.