



Curriculum Laboratory

Graphic Novels in the Classroom

Suggested Teaching Strategies & Resources

Compiled by Beth Cormier

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University of Lethbridge

Faculty of Education Curriculum Laboratory

(403) 329-2288

Online at www.uleth.ca/education/currlab/handouts.cfm

beth.cormier@uleth.ca

@currlab



Contents

Why Graphic Novels?	3
Teaching the Parts of a Graphic Novel	4
Introducing Graphic Novels.....	5
Suggested Teaching Strategies	7
Great Sources For More Information	9
References	

Why Graphic Novels?

The term Graphic Novel refers to a format, not a genre. Historical fiction, mystery, memoir, non-fiction, realistic fiction etc. can all be represented in graphic format, allowing for a rich exploration of literature. Because the work's message is communicated partly (or wholly) through sequential art, graphic novels add an exciting layer to the enjoyment of literature.

The Erie & Buffalo County Public Libraries list ten ways graphic novels benefit students on their excellent site www.getgraphic.org (2007):

Reading graphic novels:

- Engages reluctant readers & ESL students.
- Increases reading comprehension and vocabulary.
- Can serve as a bridge between low and high levels of reading.
- Provides an approach to reading that embraces the multimedia nature of today's culture, as 2/3 of a story is conveyed visually.
- Provides scaffolding for struggling readers.
- Can serve as an intermediary step to more difficult disciplines and concepts.
- Presents complex material in readable text.
- Helps students understand global affairs.
- Helps to develop analytical and critical thinking skills.
- Offers another avenue through which students can experience art.

Get Graphic, 2007

In *Teaching Early Reader Comics and Graphic Novels* (2011), Dr. Katie Monnin describes the graphic novel experience as essential to 21st century communication skills.

“Today’s students live in a new media age, a world where it is critical to be able to read words and images together. Thus, today’s reading teacher must teach a shared literacy stage that places emphasis on screen and/or image literacies– computers, televisions, smartphones, email, vmail, videogames, online magazines, the Internet, graphic novels, and comics– alongside print–text literacies”.

Monnin, 2011

Teaching the Parts of A Graphic Novel

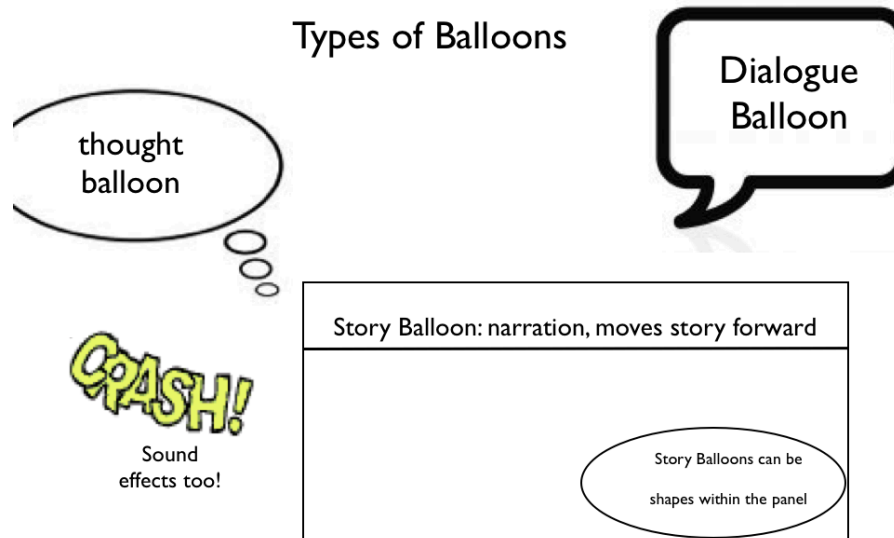
Students will engage more deeply with a graphic novel when they understand more about the format.

Dr. Katie Monnin's *Teaching Early Reader Comics and Graphic Novels* (2011) begins with basic definitions, based on Scott McLeod's definitive *Understanding Comics* (1993), an engaging graphic novel that teaches about comics.

Panel: The boundary and the contents within it that tell a piece of the story.
Gutter: The space between the panels where readers connect two or more ideas into one idea.
Balloons: Usually found inside of a panel, balloons typically create visual boundaries that progress the story in terms of dialogue, thought and/or sound.
Monnin, 2011

Toon, publisher of graphic novels for early readers, also offers examples suitable for younger students in their helpful guide: *How to Read Comics with Kids*. Available online as a free PDF at <http://www.toon-books.com/tips-for-mom--dad.html>.

The following visual was created for this handout and illustrates the types of balloons found in sequential art.



A More Advanced Look at the Parts of a Graphic Novel

Dr. Katie Monnin's guides for teachers also build on basic terminology to encourage deeper reading and response:

Types of Panels: Conflict panel, character panel, setting panel, rising action panel, climax panel, resolution panels

Types of Gutters: Moment to Moment (action continues to progress with little resolution) , Action to Action (a single subject goes through specific transformations), Subject to Subject (ie. focal point/ P.O.V. shifts but single idea stays the same), Aspect to Aspect (Tone/ Mood).

Types of Balloons: Story balloons (advance the plot)- can also be "balloonless", Thought, dialogue, "

Monnin, 2011

Introducing Graphic Novels to Your Students

Don't assume your students know how to read or write graphic Novels. Once you have introduced the basic parts of a graphic novel (above), you'll students to practice reading text and image together. The following are suggested ways to introduce students to the format.

The Mechanics of Reading a Graphic Novel

Graphic Artist Hannah Berry offers some good explanation and illustrations on how to follow panels and dialogue bubbles in a 2012 blog post titled *How to Read Comics: A Beginner's Guide* at UK site BookTrust <http://www.booktrust.org.uk/books/writing/online-writer-in-residence/blog/387/>. We are reminded to read from left to right.

Guided Reading Exercise

Benjamin Bear In Fuzzy Thinking, by Phillippe Coudray: A series of Comics that show Benjamin Bear finding creative solutions to everyday problems. Each story has a slight twist or puzzle for readers to decipher. The stories work well to engage students of all ages in reading images and text together, with each panel representing a complete thought. Sample pages are available at <http://www.toon-books.com/benjamin-bear-in-fuzzy-thinking.html>. A lesson plan with suggested discussion questions is also included at the Toon Books site.

Guided Reading Exercise for Secondary Students

Daisy Kutter, by Kazu Kibuishi: The March/April 2006 issue of the Horn Book Review Magazine published an excellent article titled *Reading Lessons: Graphic Novels 101* by Hollis Margaret Rudiger. She goes through the opening (wordless) panels of Kibuishi's work and illustrates how various techniques and images are used to create complex meaning. <http://www.readingwithpictures.org/2012/03/reading-lessons-graphic-novels-101/>

Visual Literacy and “Reading” Images

Understanding Comics, by Scott McLeod, is a comprehensive look at the comics are created. It includes extensive examples of how styles of lines, colours, backgrounds, shapes etc. can be used to convey mood, character, setting and other elements that create meaning in the story.

Creating Sequential Art

Students can use sequential art not only to share stories, but to explore and demonstrate knowledge in many different subjects. Once students understanding the basic parts and a few techniques, they are better equipped to write their own. Two suggestions for engaging students in writing their own sequential art:

Round Robin Comic: As seen in the online Educator Tools for Benjamin Bear in Fuzzy Thinking <http://www.toon-books.com/benjamin-bear-in-fuzzy-thinking.html>, A round robin comic challenges students to create a comic together. Use pictorial writing prompts (such as on <http://www.pinterest.com/selsmith479/writing-picture-prompts/>) to get them started. One student creates the beginning, then passes to the second, and then the third creates the end.

Comic Book Scripting: James Bucky Carter provides some excellent lessons on creating sequential art at readwritethink.org. His *Comic Book Scripting Sheet* is attached to the activity *Comics and Graphic Novels* and is a great way to get students planning their ideas.

Suggested Teaching Strategies For Full Class Instruction

ELEMENTARY LEVEL: Many approaches to teaching graphic novels incorporate deep reading strategies, grouped into pre-reading, guided/ active reading and after-reading. Listed here are some specific examples drawn from recent high quality guides and articles on using graphic novels with elementary school children.

Pre-reading

Exploring Theme: With the theme of the story in mind, ask students what they know about that theme. Keep a list on the board. Then, have students each make a drawing to represent what they know (their own ideas or their peers) (Monin 2009).

Guided Reading/ Active Reading

Active Reflection: Divide the story into the “beginning”, “middle” and “end”. After reading each section, have students write and draw about the events so far. Share responses and explain (Monin, 2011).

Reading aloud: When reading aloud as a group or small group, have students “read” the print text as well as the visual text. I.e: for each panel, follow the printed words with a simple explanation of what is seen (the monster is hiding the hat in a hole) (Monin, 2011).

Prediction Strategy: Have students stop reading at predetermined points that lend themselves well to making a prediction. Have them create panels, balloons, drawings etc., predicting what will happen. Have them compare their responses at the end of the reading.

After-Reading

Guided Response: Write or draw about aspects of the story, such as the main idea or a significant moment or event. Use panels, gutters and balloons when drawing (Use questions to guide student responses) (Monin, 2011).

Readers’ Theatre: Give groups of students a small portion of the story and have students retell it. Suggest options such as dialogue, poster paper with balloons and images, or acting out the events (Monin, 2011).

Reflecting on Characters: “If you could be a character in the story, which would you be? If you could “jump into” the story, at what point would you jump in? What would you want to say to other characters”? (Monin, 2011).

Rewrite the story: What would you change if you could rewrite the story? Have students discuss in small groups then have them retell it through the Readers’ Theatre strategy suggested above (Monin, 2011).

Sequencing: Photocopy and cut out select panels. Have students reorder the panels and justify their choices in writing. Or--scan images of characters, balloons, settings, and plot points in the story and display out of order on an IWB. Have students help you re-order the images (Alternative- felt board characters) (Monin, 2011).

Visual Timeline: Have students suggest significant points from the story. Keep a list on the board using panels. As a group, decide which five are the most important. Order these five events along the timeline (Monin, 2011).

Response to the Theme: Following the story, reflect on the major themes. In small groups, have students select themes, and come up with an original story on their theme. Write a multiple page comic or graphic novel on their theme (Monin, 2011).

Other examples of Teaching with Graphic Novels in Elementary level

Literary Elements: Use Graphic Novels to teach common literary elements (setting, characterization, theme etc.) (Tomasevich, 2013).

Contextual Clues: Erase dialogue from the bubbles and have students use contextual clues to recreate. Have them justify their choices (getgraphic.org, 2007).

Study of Non-Fiction: Use a non-fiction graphic novel to teach non-fiction elements such as headings, captions, glossary, index etc.) (Tomasevich, 2013).

Summarizing: Once students become comfortable with panel storytelling, have them create graphic summaries instead of written (GetGraphic.org, 2007).

Creative Writing Prompts: Use wordless graphic novels as prompts (eg. Owly, Robot Dreams).

Descriptive Writing: Help students understand the importance of “show vs. tell” to develop character, setting and other elements (Friese, 2013).

GREAT SOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

BOOKS

Teaching Early Reader Comics and Graphic Novels, by Katie Monnin. An excellent source for encouraging deeper reading of visual texts. Monnin gives a great framework for teaching the parts of a graphic novel as well as some specific lessons for grades K-6. (Maupin House, 2011)

Adventures in Graphica, by Terry Thompson. Focus is on using Graphic Novels in reading instruction and provides examples of teaching specific skills: visualization, self-monitoring, making inferences, vocabulary, and fluency. The titles he refers to tend to be leveled titles specifically for the school market as opposed to established selections of graphic literature (Stenhouse Publishers, 2008).

Understanding Comics, by Scott McLeod. Every introductory guide for teachers refers to this graphic introduction to comics- the history, variations of the format, and the deep psychological layers comics can embody. Highly readable, light and a must-read for truly appreciating the art of comics. Good for sharing with secondary students especially (William Morrow, 1993).

The Graphic Novel Classroom: Powerful Teaching and Learning with Images, by Maureen Bakis. Written by a high school English teacher and includes strategies and examples from specific graphic novels, including *Persepolis*, *V for Vendetta*, *American Born Chinese*, *A Contract with God* and *The Arrival* (Corwin, 2012)

Teaching Graphic Novels: Practical Strategies for the Secondary ELA Classroom, by Katie Monnin. As with her text for younger readers, this highly practical guide shows teachers how to engage students in a rich exploration of literature using graphic novels (Maupin House, 2009).

Teaching Graphic Novels in the Classroom, by Ryan J. Novak. Includes numerous types of graphic texts, including superhero and genre-specific. Includes a section on creating graphic texts. (Prufrock Press, 2013).

Using Content Area Graphic Texts for Learning: a guide for middle-level educators. Jaffe, Meryl, and Katie Monnin. (Maupin House, 2012)

ONLINE

TOON into reading- TOON BOOKS. <http://www.toon-books.com>. Fabulous resource for gr. K-2. Includes free well-written lesson plans and activities with contributions by Dr. Katie Monnin (Teaching Early Reader Comics and Graphic Novels, 2011). Click on the pdf images to download. Also includes Online Readers- under *For Parents and Kids*. This selection of 12 TOON titles can be projected to a group or read independently with optional narration.

Saturday Morning Webtoons (<http://saturdaymorningwebtoons.com>). Weekly installments by notable graphic artists.

Get Graphic (column), by Librarian Michele Gorman. Michele's regular column appears in the publication *Library and Media Connection*. You can access the full text articles with a Chinook Arch Public Library card at www.chinookarch.ca through the *Academic Search Elite* Database (Under Digital Content-General). Do an author search for Michele Gorman. Her "Best of [year]" columns are an excellent way to keep up with new titles, and she sorts them according to grade level.

Graphicclassroom.org. Started by teacher Chris Wilson to review and recommend graphic novel titles for classroom use. Includes recommended lists by age range. Also visit graphicclassroom.com, a separate site with good links to other material on graphic novels in the classroom.

Recommended Graphic Novels Lists. Curriculum Lab Web Page at www.uleth.ca/education/currlab . View the *Literature Tab / Children's and Young Adult Literature Handouts* to find the lists.

Google! Search [*graphic novel title*] *lesson plans*. For the majority of titles listed above, you will see at least some lesson material, offered mostly at publisher and author websites. Some established titles also yield excellent examples of work by other teachers.

Graphix Teacher Site (Scholastic) <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/collection/graphix-teacher-site>: The recently posted web-cast features 3 prominent authors for Gr. 5-8. There is also a link to their helpful teaching guide, *Using Graphic Novels with Children and Teens*.

Readwritethink.org: Sponsored by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. This site is a great resource for English Language Arts material. Search for the term *graphic novel* to find some useful ideas.

Makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/ An easy-to-use online comic creator. Diverse characters with multiple poses for each. Limited to choices available, but will appeal to some students. No registration; free.

Printable Blank Panels for Student responses/creations. <http://donnayoung.org/art/comics.htm> Scroll down this page to find a variety of printable cartoon panels.

Diamond Bookshelf. Publisher site with a link to lesson plans. Search by title. Most plans are fairly brief but include suggested themes for pursuing with students.

Book Trailers-Short promotional videos designed to preview the work and hook readers. These are great classroom tools! Search Google for [*title*] *book trailer* or access Teachingbooks.net (see next entry).

LearnAlberta.ca Use the *Online Reference Centre* tab to access *Teachingbooks.net*. Type in a book title to get support info. such as author interviews, links to lesson plans and book trailers.

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