1-1-2010

Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, and Comics

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Sequential Art,
Graphic Novels, & *Comics*

"ANYONE INTERESTED IN COMICS, FROM THE CASUAL
BROWSER TO THE SEASONED PROFESSIONAL,
WILL LEARN SOMETHING NEW BY READING THIS PAPER."

- GENE YANG*

*author of *American Born Chinese* (2007, First Second Books); *Loyola Chin & the San Peligran Order* (2004, SLG Publishing);
Gordon Yamamoto, King of the Geeks (2004, SLG Publishing); co-author, *The Eternal Smile* (2009, First Second Books)

Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, *&* Comics

Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, and Comics: A Position Paper

A Collaborative Position Paper Co-Sponsored by the **New Jersey Reading Association**, state affiliate of the International Reading Association And **Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Graphic Novels Special Interest Group** of the International Reading Association

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WHAT ARE GRAPHIC NOVELS?

Typically, graphic novels are bound books featuring sequential art. Though the phrase "graphic novel" typically suggests a genre to some readers, the phrase is indicative of a form of media which spans and supports a multitude of genres, including science fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction (Carter, 2008). They range from novellas, original novel-length narratives, autobiographies, biographies, collections of comic strips (typically around a central theme or storyline), collections of serialized comic books around a single story-arc, collections of short stories or vignettes, and compiled anthologies featuring the work of multiple authors. The purpose of works written as graphic novels ranges from evoking pleasure to informing to satirizing.

Graphic novels may be single volume (like *American Born Chinese*), multi-volume (like Buddha) or available as either multi-volume or a single-volume compilation (like *Bone*). Though this may seem unique to the format of graphic novels, traditional texts may also be single volume, multi-volume, or originally published in multiple volumes but now available in a single book, like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*. Like some traditional novels, such as Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or the works of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, many graphic novels have been serialized in other formats like comic books and even on the Internet, as in the case of *American Born Chinese* and *Grease Monkey*, prior to being bound into a book.

WHAT ARE SEQUENTIAL ART AND VISUAL NARRATIVE?

Sequential art (Eisner, 1985) features a series of panels that convey a single story. These panels can continue for a single page or for multiple pages and may or may not be framed. Eisner also coined the term visual narratives (Eisner, 1996) to refer to texts that convey stories through images and words. Single panel cartoons, frequently with captions instead of thought-balloons, may tell a self-contained story but are not sequential art. In other words, though there is a melding and interdependence of word(s) and image, there is no sequence of ideas or concepts. Because sequential art tells a story through multiple panels, the placement of panels is as significant as the placement and use of words.

The grammar of visual storytelling requires that the graphic novelist think critically about how he/she wants to tell the story (McCloud, 1993). In graphic novels employing words, emphasis on language is not displaced by additional emphasis on the image, and the two are used and combined by graphic novelists showing the interdependence of image and text. This requires that he/she pay careful attention to the placement of panels, images, and ideas as well as considering the words he/she uses. Sequential art and visual narrative require that a reader connect multiple images to multiple words, continuously integrating information of language and image from one panel to the next to comprehend an entire story (McCloud, 1993).

HOW HAVE GRAPHIC NOVELS/SEQUENTIAL ART DEVELOPED?

Will Eisner is recognized as one of the most influential writers to employ sequential art and publish in the form of graphic novels. He is remembered for works like *Contract with God* as well as the comic series The Spirit. However, Eisner (1985) acknowledges that he was influenced by the comic book industry (he had also published a comic series known as *The Spirit*) as well as the German woodcutters, including Lynd Ward and Frans Masereel. The German woodcutters published wordless texts that featured many of the same elements of a graphic novel. Typically these texts were centered around socialist themes that focused on the worker or the common man and his plight. Some of these works were censored during the age of McCarthyism because of their socialist and perhaps even anti-racist sentiments.

Some individuals may argue that books told with cartoons that are not sequential in nature, such as the Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, also fit into the category of "graphic novel." Other books often referred to as graphic novels, like Selznik's *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* or Binder's and Tetzner's *Black Brothers*, meld images to illuminate ideas contained in the text differently than sequential art. In these formats, the images are important to the storyline; however, a) the author does not rely on a melding between image and language to tell the story, b) images and text are often separated from one another, and c) the author does not use sequential (linear or progressive) illustrations/images to convey a story.

Some graphic novels, like some picture books, can be completely wordless, such as *Flotsam* by David Weisner. These books connect image to thought which is also connected to language. As readers make meaning from images, they continuously utilize language to interpret, break-down, and comprehend an image. In graphic novels, including wordless graphic novels, readers apply this skill to multiple images while also synthesizing or integrating knowledge from prior panels. Graphic novels like Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*, Milt Gross' *He Done Her Wrong*, and Sara Varon's *Robot Dreams* follow in the German woodcutter tradition of using images alone to convey a story. Readers exposed to wordless picture books would not necessarily find it difficult to read wordless graphic novels, despite the complexity of text structure.

Eisner's works, both his graphic novels and his comics (especially *The Plot*), were political, as they were written by a Jewish man in an overtly Christian country. Though many of his works included Jewish characters and, sometimes, their relationship to their religion, such as *Contract with God*, the storylines, moral issues, and characters were universal and appealed to individuals throughout the United States. With his widely successful *The Spirit* comics, Eisner reached and impacted multiple generations of readers, helping him to become one of the most successful Jewish writers in American history.

Many graphic novels today are no less political, with authors creating texts that have universal appeal while dealing with issues of forming identity. Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*, *Gordon Yamamoto, King of the Geeks*, and *Loyola Chin and the San Peligran Order* deal with universal themes while focusing on issues of racism, prejudice, bullying, and cults, issues educators need to deal with when developing lessons on character education. Students who have never witnessed the Holocaust or Rwandan genocide can scarcely comprehend the horror of these events. Images in graphic novels like, *Maus, X-Men: Magneto Testament, Deogratias*, and *Safe-Area Gorazde* help readers to visualize the realities of war and genocide.

HOW IS SEQUENTIAL ART OR VISUAL NARRATIVE ALIKE (AND DIFFERENT) FROM TRADITIONAL TEXTS?

Like traditional pieces of fiction or creative nonfiction which rely solely (or mainly) on words to tell a story, fictional or creative nonfiction sequential art features exposition, rising action, plateau, climax, falling action, denouement, and closing. It also features plot, character, theme, motif, and conflict, which may be internal and/or external. Gene Luen Yang's award-winning *American-Born Chinese* or Jeff Smith's *Bone* series are examples of fiction books written in graphic novel format. Of course, these elements are also found in graphic novel memoirs like Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Spiegelman's *Maus*. In essence, all elements of literature can be found in both fictional and creative nonfiction graphic novels and traditional texts. Graphic novels can be evaluated for the same literary elements as traditional texts, are of equal literary merit, and can be used to build background knowledge and foster intertextuality (Carter, 2007a).

Nonfiction sequential art is kin to traditional nonfiction as it presents information for purposes of educating or informing. As an example, *The Plot* by Will Eisner shares the history of the *Protocol of the Elders of Zion*, a controversial, and plagiarized, text that influenced twentieth-century history. Like a research paper or text, Eisner includes a bibliography of resources. The *9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*, presents crucial information from the actual *9/11 Report* released by the 9/11 Commission, but in an accessible and reader-friendly format. Biographies of Malcolm X, Ronald Reagan, and J. Edgar Hoover, published by Hill and Wang, are also examples of graphic novels that are nonfiction.

In children's picture books authors and illustrators typically work to create a unity between image and word, though either words or pictures may take more importance in a specific book. Even in chapter books and young adult novels like the *Edgar & Ellen* series and *Harry Potter*, authors typically frame a chapter with an image that can help readers anticipate the material contained in the chapter. In sequential art and visual narrative, however, the pictures conveyed through multiple panels work together with words to tell a story or provide information to a reader. While the image sometimes enhances the meaning of the text, frequently the image and text work in concert throughout multiple panels and are symbiotic in nature. The reader must pay careful attention to both image and word, understanding how the two work together, to clearly comprehend worded graphic novels.

When looking at Figure 1, readers attempt to reconcile the language with the image. In traditionally printed text, the use of three "hellos" may indicate fear, confusion, or frustration; the connotation depends upon prior events. However, the expression of the woman's face, including the startled eyes, helps readers to see that she is excited. The inclusion of the three "hellos" in this panel reinforces that she is anxious, showing how both image and word work together to relay a message. The contrast between light and dark in this panel also suggests a growing tension between awareness of a problem (conscious) and a growing fear (unconscious). This relationship is further suggested by the juxtaposition of the pristine outfit with the seemingly "wind-swept" or "bed-head" hair, a contrast that suggests the inner-turmoil may have moved outwardly. This panel can be read in isolation from the entire text; however, our understanding of this one image is enhanced by the events that occur prior to this scene, suggesting that context is as important in visual narrative/sequential art as it is in traditional print text.

Figure 1, from *Twilight Zone: The After Hours* © Mark Kneece & Rebekah Isaacs, Walker Books for Young Readers, 2008

Sometimes, an image tells a story without any words. The panel in Figure 2, from Hale, Hale, and Hale's *Rapunzel's Revenge*, shows the pain of a young Rapunzel as she is pulled from her mother. The expressions, posture, and position of the other characters show the unscrupulous nature of Gothel, the antagonist and villain of the story. The pain painted on the face of the presumed mother and daughter and the expression on Gothel's can create a cognitive response that may not be expressly conveyed or communicated with words. The central brightness of the image may indicate that both the mother and daughter are being pulled from their center, their happiness, and are moving into darkness. The sun effect generated by the light and the spark-like lines suggest the sharpness of the moment.

It should also be noted that both images (Figures 1 and 2) show universal emotional responses that any student, even readers struggling with English, can easily comprehend and process. The images can further develop students' conceptual knowledge of what abstract concepts, such as emotions, entail. Such knowledge can provide a basis from which students can visualize such moments in text without images.

Figure 2, from *Rapunzel's Revenge* © Shannon Hale, Dean Hale, & Nathan Hale, Walker Books for Young Readers, 2008

WHY READ GRAPHIC NOVELS?

Many visual images tell stories. When one looks at a piece of visual art in a museum, such as the world of Frida Kahlo, he/she attempts to form a connection with the image, using language to form an understanding of the artwork which a) sets the image in context, b) analyzes the components of the image, and c) tries to unveil the narrative of the image. The artist conveys the narrative by relying on metaphoric images, lines, colors, patterns, and detail. Art, then, serves as a function and form of communication and is complimentary, though not an adjunct, to language. It helps the viewer/observer/participant to frame language-based responses. Humans typically express thoughts in the form of language, and students' responses to images, though perhaps cognitively silent, still help students utilize language (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). The reader of art sees these details and explores how the author employs artistic devices to communicate his/her understandings, perceptions, emotions, or ideas, helping the voyeur to be exposed to new ways of envisioning the world and thereby increasing his/her knowledge (Arnheim, 2004).

In many cases, graphic novels use the same types of artistic devices. However, unlike traditional artists, the work of a graphic novelist or graphic illustrator moves from one canvas to multiple panels and pages of a book (McCloud, 1993). The details, though sometimes made miniscule by the number of panels and frames on a page, are still important to the story, and readers must be attuned to those details in order to fully integrate meaning between text and image. Like a traditional piece of literature in which authors choose their words carefully, the graphic novelist thinks critically about the color, line, form, shape, and detail as well as the language he/she uses. The story conveyed by a graphic novelist, then, is as intricate as a story told by a traditional author, regardless of the age group of the target audience.

It is important to note that understanding language is frequently framed by and developed in relationship with sensory connections to that language (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986). Individuals acquire language through interactions with other individuals as well as encounters with static media. Acquisition of language does not cease in childhood. Images continually support language development, and images, in turn, have a great impact on our cognition and understanding of other types of books. Images not only assist language development but become one of the ways we form understandings about what words and ideas mean. Through images we are capable of building the schema necessary for successful reading of multiple kinds of texts and documents. In other words, images frame understandings of language and help people learn to visualize and imagine.

Using images and illustrations, with or without words, is one of the many ways humans communicate. Humans are visual beings as well as oral-aural beings. We process our world not only through language, but also through viewing,

thus forming a deeper understanding of life and communication when our senses merge. Every aspect of reading, for a person with sight, is about viewing since we look at a page, view words, and process, comprehend, and evaluate the use of those words. Our increasing use of visual stimuli for different media, such as video games and websites, requires us to process, comprehend, and evaluate visual stimuli in combination with language. Graphic novels can help enhance students' visual literacy skills to deal with the increasing use of visual stimuli in today's world.

Whether graphic novels help readers to adjust their cognitive load or place more demands on our cognition remains to be researched; however, graphic novels do allow readers to more quickly visualize and track characters while monitoring their comprehension. Graphic novels do not foster a dependence on images. In fact, metacognitive awareness is necessary for successful reading of texts which require readers to synthesize between word and image.

ARE GRAPHIC NOVELS JUST FOR ADULTS?

Though many published graphic novels deal with mature themes and ideas that are appropriate for mature readers, such as Craig Thompson's *Blankets* and Charles Burns' *Black Hole*, a large number of authors and publishers are reaching younger audiences with well-written, developmentally-appropriate texts. Books like those of Mo Willems feature many comic conventions such as multiple panels and word/thought balloons, suggesting that younger readers become aware of the format and develop awareness of text structure. Graphic novels like *Owly*, *Robot Dreams*, and *Baby Mouse* are appropriate to use with younger readers. *Owly* is a wordless graphic novel for very young readers featuring a little owl who, throughout four books, assists other characters and makes new friends. Perfect for character education with young readers, this book focuses on motifs of friendship and respect. *Otto's Orange Day* is another graphic novel written for younger readers and helps promote imagination and creativity.

Books like *Laika, Rapunzel's Revenge*, and *The Twilight Zone* series are texts appropriate for middle school/junior high readers. Many of the themes embodied in these texts connect with adolescent development and maturation and connect with middle school language arts curricula. As an example, Nick Abadzis' *Laika* is a touching and powerful book that discusses the role and treatment of animals by examining the fictionalized life of the first dog launched into space. When literature focuses on exploring ethical treatment of animals, especially animals like dogs and cats – humans' companions – readers question the nature and role of humanity.

Senior high school readers can benefit from texts like *American-Born Chinese, Persepolis, Maus, The Plot*, and *Fallout*. Because these texts deal with more mature topics, like the Holocaust, the development of the nuclear bomb, war, bullying, and racism, these graphic novels have applications across disciplines. These books also help students to simultaneously utilize and acquire cultural knowledge, building their cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1988). In addition, graphic novels have cross-curricular connections beyond reading/English/language arts and visual art, including social studies (history, economics, human rights, anthropology, sociology, and psychology), science, health science, and math. A graphic novel, like *Dignifying Science: Stories about Women Scientists*, not only provides historical information about women in the field of science, but also provides information particular to different science disciplines. At the same time, students are acquiring vocabulary and developing and honing a variety of reading strategies, helping them to better comprehend text and ideas.

WHY DO KIDS LIKE SEQUENTIAL ART?

Sequential art may appear misleading to individuals who believe that books with images are not substantive. Though a cursory glance may suggest to some individuals that graphic novels are simple or simplistic, a large number of graphic novels, like comic books, deal with real-life issues. A more critical look at some graphic novels, like Gaiman's *The Sandman* series or *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*, show that the form includes texts that are elabo-

rate and require critical reading. Vocabulary in graphic novels, though less dense, can be complex and educational. In comic books, as an example, students frequently encounter advanced vocabulary words when introduced to characters (Carter, 2007b).

Very young readers enjoy graphic novels for their accessible storylines, characters, colors, and easy-to-grasp themes and motifs. This is not to suggest that comics and graphic novels are simplistic or viewed by the majority of their audience as simplistic. In fact, these texts are frequently more challenging than traditionally printed texts, asking readers to negotiate between language and image and to create a link connecting the two. Comics and graphic novels may have appropriately leveled themes and increasingly difficult vocabulary depending on grade level. Yet readers may have an easier time with the graphic novel because the pictures make the surface plot approachable while providing a gentle nudge in the direction of the inner issues.

Graphic novels and comic books for older students frequently expose adolescents to the adult world, a world different than their immediate world. Middle school and high school readers feel a sense of identity and begin to navigate this seemingly foreign world of adults – a world of adult love, deception, respect and admiration, intrigue, satire, passion, politics, war, bonds of friendship, famine, genocide, and hope. As students look at these books as accessible (perhaps with some considering the texts simple, fun and familiar) they are also developing an awareness of what it means to be an adult.

WHY DO GRAPHIC NOVELS WORK?

Motivation for reading, or lack thereof, is an obstacle many teachers encounter in English/language arts classes throughout the nation. Students who have been disenfranchised with reading, for any number of reasons, are often reluctant readers. Though some of these students have deficiencies or difficulties with reading, some are also a-literate, that is, they can read but they often choose not to. Research in the field of literacy instruction (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, 2006; Cavazos-Kottke, 2005; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007) tells us that students are reading in different mediums. They're just not reading what teachers want them to read. Validating the types of reading materials students read outside of school may reduce the number of a-literate readers in school and lead them to read other types of texts. It is, however, important to recognize the medium as literary as well as independent of other types of textual mediums and not use it solely for the purpose of moving readers to other texts.

Because graphic novels reduce the cognitive load for some struggling readers who have difficulty visualizing text, struggling readers who are typically overwhelmed by the volume of words in a text may be more willing to pick up a graphic novel and read, helping them to develop an appreciation for reading. If students feel successful as readers, they are more likely to continue reading and read other types of texts too.

Graphic novels typically work well with many different types of readers, especially young men (New Jersey Reading Association, 2007). Of course, authors and publishers have distributed a number of excellent graphic novels which work well with young women as well as both sexes. *The Twilight Zone* series captures the imagination and love for fantasy of both men and women. *Rapunzel's Revenge*, with a female protagonist, can appeal to female readers; however, the Western-esque atmosphere and setting of the book can draw in male readers as well.

Special needs learners can also benefit from the use of graphic novels. Selecting graphic novels that encourage students to articulate the story, such as wordless graphic novels, can help students pay attention to sequence and order as well as details. Graphic novels also help students develop skills related to visualization, a key facet of active reading. By looking at the text and the image together, students are able to monitor their comprehension, an obstacle when dense text may overwhelm these students with excessive cognitive load. Students who are autistic or

have difficulty understanding how language conveys emotion can readily see the expressions of characters and better comprehend emotions.

English language learners (see Cary, 2004) can also benefit from the use of graphic novels because many graphic novels introduce idioms, colloquialisms, and onomatopoeia. These texts can help students learn metaphoric language. Manga, Japanese-style graphic novels featuring illustrations similar to anime, typically have different concepts about print, opening from back-to-front and reading from right-to-left. Manga could be helpful for English language learners from many Middle Eastern countries and might help them more easily acquire reading skills in English.

Finally, advanced readers can benefit from the use of graphic novels. As discussed earlier, graphic novels are intricately designed, just like a piece of visual art or a traditional novel. Asking students to discuss the graphic novelist's use of lines and shapes to convey imagery, coloring and detail to convey tone and to discuss theme, character, and plot helps advanced readers continue to develop their reading habits, interests, and skills. Further, exposing advanced readers to graphic novels exposes them to different text structures and different forms of communication, helping them to see the world through various lenses.

WHAT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THE CLASSROOM?

Teaching graphic novels still requires that teachers practice good teaching. *Employing the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model* (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) can be beneficial when introducing students to graphic novels. Though some students will instantly understand how to read graphic novels, other students may experience difficulties. Modeling how to read a graphic novel is very helpful for students who struggle with these texts.

Graphic novels help students learn to speculate about images, an advantageous skill linked not only to imagination but also rhetoric. Students who learn to analyze images are capable of enhancing their skills of argumentation. Students learn to discuss elements of illustrations, images, and visual art in order to develop their opinions and points of argument.

To help students learn to analyze images, a teacher may want to use a classical piece of visual art, asking students to explain the narrative contained in the image. Students know how to form stories from images, but helping drawing out these stories can lead to rich conversations in the classroom.

When using classical visual images, teachers may want to question students by asking them to discuss the story conveyed through the image. Questions like (a) Can you explain how you arrived at that story? (b) Does this image represent beauty or ugliness? And (c) How might this image impact our understanding of beauty? help to frame students' critical reading of images. Though aesthetic appreciation is only aspect of analysis of visual images, teachers who use art to begin a conversation about visual images (such as cartoons and comics) help their students use language to explore values, interpretations, and aesthetics.

Asking students to reflect on how they achieved their understandings will also help them to develop metacognitive awareness. Of course, most traditional visual art is created in isolation and is not connected to any prior or future work of the artist. Sequential art depends upon prior events even though each panel may be read in isolation. However, an activity such as the one above helps students to cultivate their skills of viewing and forming hypotheses while using language to explain, clarify, and justify their opinions. It is their use of language, and their ability to think through their argument and provide a working rationale, that can help students to explore connotations of images

(such as, why is this a picture of beauty?) and to develop critical thinking skills.

After this first activity, a teacher may choose to take one panel from the selected graphic novel and ask the students similar questions. As an example, look at the panel in Figure 3 from *Twilight Zone: Walking Distance*:

What is the story in this panel? How do we know? Is there more to this story than we're aware of? How do we know?

Figure 3, from *Twilight Zone: Walking Distance* © Mark Kneece & Dove McHarque, Walker Books for Young Readers, 2008

Examining how authors develop graphic novels from panel to panel can also help them to understand character. Look at the panel in Figure 4 from *Twilight Zone: The After Hours.*

We know there is a story in this one panel, and that this one panel is interrupting a more flowing narrative of life. However, the story we see is slightly limited. What happens if we add a second panel, telling the story of this panel from a different perspective? Do we see the story the same way?

Figure 4, from *Twilight Zone: The After Hours* © Mark Kneece & Rebekah Isaacs, Walker Books for Young Readers, 2008

Have we learned anything new about the character, the setting, or the situation from the addition of a second panel? Teaching students to discuss color, shape, line, boundary, words, placement, and detail can help them to discuss character, plot, and setting in new ways. Let's take a look at the final panel from the same page.
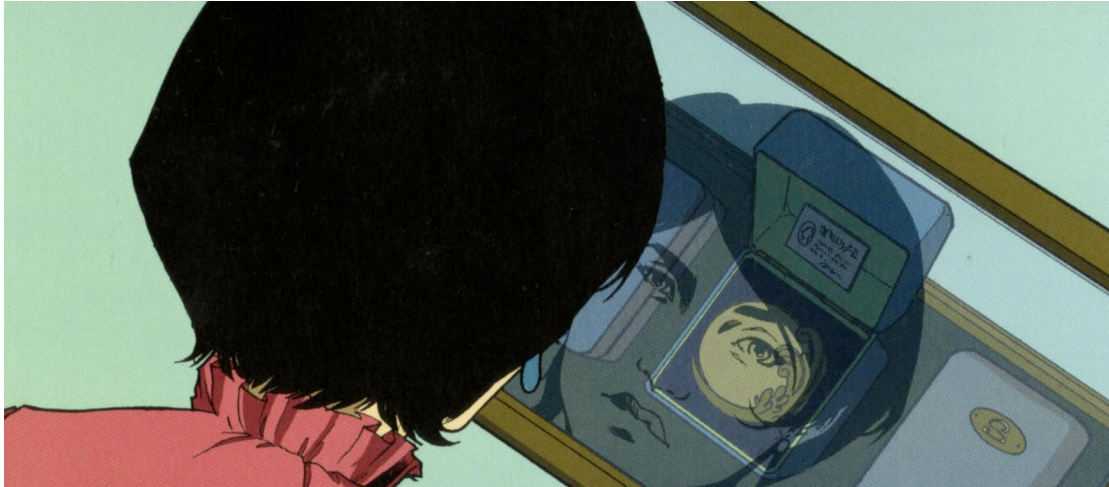

Figure 5, from *Twilight Zone: The After Hours* © Mark Kneece & Rebekah Isaacs, Walker Books for Young Readers, 2008

The situation in the last panel shows a more detailed setting with multiple stories converging around the protagonist, Marsha. In isolation, moving from one panel to the next, even with no words used by the author, our understanding of context drastically changes. We begin to see fuller bodies, more elaborate details of clothing, and a greater amount of detail for setting.

Figure 6, from *Twilight Zone: The After Hours* © Mark Kneece & Rebekah Isaacs, Walker Books for Young Readers, 2008

Let's examine the full page, shown in Figure 8, as it was published. Note that the second panel overlaps the first and last panels. Does this indicate that the second panel, by location and overlap of the other two panels, has a more central role in forming our understanding of the text and the character? Asking the students to engage in these discussions helps them to develop an appreciation for visual communication, but also helps them to foster critical

Figure 7, from *Twilight Zone: The After Hours* © Mark Kneece & Rebekah Isaacs, Walker Books for Young Readers, 2008

thinking skills. In many ways, questions we ask about framing or positioning of panels are very similar to questions we ask students about syntax and its importance to meaning-making.

Figure 8, from *Rapunzel's Revenge* © Shannon Hale, Dean Hale, & Nathan Hale, Walker Books for Young Readers, 2008

Finally, before the class reads a graphic novel as a whole group, a teacher may choose to work on a series of panels.

Figure 9, from *Rapunzel's Revenge* © Shannon Hale, Dean Hale, & Nathan Hale, Walker Books for Young Readers, 2008

Ask the students to explain the story contained in the eight panels contained in Figures 8 and 9. Ask them to describe what they learned about the character. Then ask them to explore the details in those panels. Why does the illustrator include four Rapunzels in panel one? What is the significance of the leaves or the carvings? What does the illustrator convey by the holes in the tree? In panel eight, why does the illustrator provide a "bird's-eye" view? Also, encourage them to develop their own questions. Again, we are promoting language by asking students to express, through words, their responses to visual images, helping them to continue to develop cognitive skills which will impact reading performance and achievement.

Each of the techniques described above helps students connect the visual text with the printed text. Our goal is to move students from a single image to multiple panels, helping them to understand that graphic novels build panel by panel. By beginning with a single piece of visual art (modeling and sharing), we teach students to discuss one specific image, helping students who are learning the process of analyzing images focus in and hone those skills. We also help them to acquire the language of visual analysis by demonstrating not only meaning but also application. Moving from a work of visual art to a single panel from a graphic novel helps a student recognize how tools of visual analysis carry from one medium to another. Here, again, we model and share, helping students to practice these skills. Asking students to slowly piece their interpretations of single panels together helps them practice the skills necessary for integrating multiple image-text relationships. By asking our students to interpret graphic novel panels and piece those interpretations together, we guide our students to complete a task necessary for successful reading of sequential art – the task of integration. Our final step allows the students to work independently or in small groups to practice the skill of interpretation and integration.

In some cases, students learn that the image tells the story without words, helping students to understand that they need to pay attention to each panel. In other cases, students have to be certain they match word with image and recognize how the two operate together. Though this frequently happens quickly and, perhaps unconsciously, in our discussions with students, we want them to think about the strategies they use to comprehend the text. As such, our walk-through helps students become aware of the steps involved in reading a graphic novel, helping students who may struggle with this medium find a successful formula for reading text structure.

At the lower grades, teachers can still work with students on the development of concepts about print. Most graphic novels have the same concepts about print as traditional picture books. There is a progression of front-to-back, left-to-right, top-to-bottom. Since concepts about print are central to reading, even (or especially) for manga ensuring that students have appropriate abilities to move from panels and to even hold the book and flip pages should not be undervalued. .

Young students also typically rely on the illustrations in picture books to read a story. They might open a book which parents/guardians have read to them before and begin play-reading. This is an important step in the development of reading. Their readings typically feature elements of conflict, character, and plot and show the burgeoning awareness of narrative. Providing wordless graphic novels, such as Owly, can help inspire students' creativity and can help them practice with story structure while also encouraging them to explore the link between language and thought.

DO ACTIVE READING STRATEGIES STILL MATTER?

Yes. Teaching students to engage in activities that help them function as active readers is still important when working with graphic novels. In fact, any lesson on graphic novels should emphasize or include instruction on text structure.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES
are also still important for reading, regardless of grade level.

PICTURE WALK:

Asking students to complete a picture walk through a graphic novel, even at the high school level, can help students to activate their schema or prior knowledge.

PRE-READING DISCUSSION:

Talking about the title, the cover, and the blurbs on the back of the book also help students to access prior knowledge.

ANTICIPATION GUIDE:

Anticipation guides (which would be especially useful for nonfiction or informational graphic novels) help teachers to monitor their students' prior knowledge.

ESTABLISHING A PURPOSE FOR READING:

After accessing prior knowledge, helping students to develop a purpose for reading (by using a graphic organizer such as a K-W-L Chart [Ogle, 1986, 1989] for nonfiction or information text) encourages students to stay focused and actively read.

PRE-TEACHING IMPORTANT VOCABULARY WORDS:

Like traditional books, graphic novels may feature difficult vocabulary words. Pre-teaching key vocabulary words can help students be successful with reading.

DURING READING ACTIVITIES
help students to monitor their comprehension.

READING JOURNALS:

Asking students to complete reading journals while they read teaches them skills for note-taking. Reading journals could be composed in dialogue journal entry formats or could ask students to jot down answers to specific questions. Reading journals also help students prepare for discussions about the graphic novel by asking them to record key ideas, personal reflections, quotes, questions, or points for discussion.

SKETCH RESPONSES:

Students can also sketch reactions to the book, helping them to practice interpreting the text or conveying ideas by creating images.

ANNOTATION:

Annotating the graphic novel (point out key ideas or literary elements) helps students to engage the text actively. They can pose questions to the author in their annotations, helping them to question why the graphic novelist employed certain techniques or pointing out discrepancies in the text. Annotation, though typically done on the pages of the book itself, can also be accomplished with post-it notes.

QUESTIONING:

By developing questions about the graphic novel as they are reading, students stay active in the reading process. These questions can be about character, plot, technique, etc. Students can also write down questions about ideas or concepts for which they need clarity. Asking students to compose three types of questions (literal [i.e., what happens], analytical [i.e., author technique],

or global [i.e., connections to self, other books, or world events]) helps students to think about the novel more critically.

CONNECTING:

Forming connections with characters, events, or scenarios while reading helps students to not only actively read the text, but to also critically respond to the text. Text-to-Self, Text-to-Text, and Text-to-World Connections can all be recorded in their reading journals.

POST-READING ACTIVITIES
help students engage the book with peers or the whole class.

CONFERENCING:

In classrooms in which students practice Reader-Response (Rosenblatt, 1965), conferences can help teachers to monitor comprehension. After reading, a teacher can ask students to explain their response to the text as well as ask how he/she achieved that response and can intervene when students demonstrate difficulties with comprehension.

DISCUSSION:

Asking students to discuss their responses to the text helps them to participate in communal discussion. By utilizing discussion groups, literature circles (Daniels, 1994), or Socratic seminars, teachers help students to negotiate meaning about a text. After working with a peer or small group, engaging students in whole class discussions helps the class to discuss the theme of a graphic novel, characters, plot, author technique, etc. Students can use their reading journals to ask questions, discuss connections, or raise points for discussion.

COMPLETING GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS:

Graphic organizers such as the Venn Diagram (for comparisons), a T-Chart (for cause-and-effect or problem-solution), the K-W-L chart (Ogle, 1986), or the Comprehension Windows Strategy [Bass & Woo, 2008] for nonfiction or informational text can help teachers monitor student under standing after reading.

CREATING:

When students create based on what they read, they are not only demonstrating that they compre hend the text, they are also reflecting on their comprehension. Asking students to create stories from other characters' points-of-view, especially as a graphic novel, can help students think about the process of writing. Utilizing the writing process and Writer's Workshop helps students to learn the stages of writing and the process for publication, helping them to see that writing takes time. This will also help students respect how authors, especially graphic novelists, create books. These works could then become classroom books which can be used for reading lessons. As an example, students can use the genre of Rapunzel's Revenge (a fractured fairy tale) to write their own graphic novel about a fractured fairy tale.

RETELLINGS & ASSESSMENTS:

Retellings of a completed chapter, story, or novel, even with a graphic novel, help teachers to moni tor student comprehension. Assessments such as tests and quizzes, if appropriately designed, can also help assess comprehension. Assessment of comprehension also occurs in conferences or discussions or by examining reading journals, annotations, or graphic organizers.

NOTE: With a lengthy graphic novel, a teacher may repeat the pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading activi-ties based on their students' needs.

CAN WE EXTEND GRAPHIC NOVELS TO PROMOTE CRITICAL LITERACY?

Some graphic novels are excellent tools for continuing student learning beyond the classroom. Non-fiction and informational graphic novels like *Persepolis, Maus*, and *Safe-Area Gorazde* can be quite helpful in extending student learning. Teachers also recognize that, especially with controversial or political non-fiction texts, it is important to introduce students to multiple perspectives to an issue. As such, it is strongly encouraged that teachers pair controversial works with other texts offering differing opinions of the same issue.

Engaging students with fictional graphic novels, like *American-Born Chinese*, can encourage students' critical thinking and help them develop projects which focus on stereotypes, bullying, and adolescent angst. Some graphic novels help students think about socio-cultural or sociopolitical issues in new ways, and many students may actually be moved to action to improve situations when confronted with these issues through engaging books.

CAN GRAPHIC NOVELS WORK FOR GUIDANCE COUNSELORS AND SOCIAL WORKERS?

Some graphic novels, like some traditional books, may work wonders for art therapy and bibliotherapy. Counselors and social workers can provide students with graphic novels which can help students to work through trauma or which have characters in similar situations. Also, there are some graphic novels which deal with issues like bullying, gay/lesbian identity, HIV/AIDS awareness, child abuse, sexual assault, peer pressure, or even anxiety about school, such as *Pedro & Me, The Amazing True Story of a Single Teenage Mom*, and *The Tale of One Bad Rat*. Having these books readily available in a guidance office library (with staff members trained to help students) may be just what some students need. (Again, it is important to read these books and be aware of the content.)

Creating graphic novels can also help students to reflect on their community, their personal lives, and their ideas about the world. The Comic Book Project out of Teachers College of Columbia (Bitz, 2004a, 2004b) has engaged urban and inner-city school students in such activities. Sample comic books created by these students can be seen at: www.comicbookproject.org.

WHAT ROLE DOES THE SCHOOL LIBRARY/MEDIA CENTER PLAY?

School libraries and media centers have a responsibility to provide materials to students that excite their reading interests, validate their reading interests, and help students to think inwardly and outwardly. Not all of the books contained in a school library/media center would be appropriate for use in the curriculum because not every book has connections to the materials students need to learn. Graphic novels are no different. Some graphic novels are written to inspire students or to make students laugh, but they might not have a purpose in the classroom. However, school libraries/media centers should have a larger collection of graphic novels available as they are books students will check out. Some books contained in the school library or media center might deal with social issues not appropriate for the classroom.

HOW DO GRAPHIC NOVELS FIT INTO MY CLASSROOM LIBRARY?

Graphic novels can be stored in the classroom library just like in the school library/media center. Some of the books contained in the school library/media center might be good for social issues or adolescent development, but may

not be appropriate in a classroom library. However, stocking books in your classroom library for students to borrow, especially during sustained silent reading (SSR) or 100-Book Challenge, may encourage student reading and may motivate students to read.

HOW DO I KNOW IF GRAPHIC NOVELS ARE APPROPRIATE?

As with any other curriculum material, whether a traditional novel or a textbook, teachers need to ensure that the

graphic novels they select are appropriate for school. As with traditional books, not every graphic novel a teacher comes across will be of interest to students, nor is every book appropriate for classroom use. Before choosing to use a graphic novel in the curriculum, either in language arts or another discipline, teachers and/or curriculum supervisors first need to read the novel thoroughly. It is also important that teachers think about their school community as well as the community in which their students live. Also, though a graphic novel worked with one grade level group of students the previous year, it is important to think about the development and maturity levels of current students when selecting a graphic novel. In most schools, these procedures are also used when selecting novels to integrate into the curricula, so teachers and curriculum supervisors are familiar with this process.

When selecting a graphic novel, as with other pieces of literature, it is important to think about the purpose of the text.

- Why are you using this graphic novel?
- Is the graphic novel supplemental to another text, or is it a classroom text?
- How does the graphic novel fit into the curriculum?
- Is there a benefit to using this graphic novel instead of another text?
- Who are the students you are working with, and are they developmentally ready?
- Is the graphic novel used for independent reading, buddy reading, shared reading, small group reading, or whole class instruction?

That said, there are a large volume of graphic novels available, many of which are developmentally-appropriate for a wide-range of students. Though one graphic novel might not work, another may work.

Teachers should take special care with manga, Japanese graphic novels. Japan is culturally different from the United States, so discussion of sexuality or depiction of nudity or partial nudity may exist in manga. As stated, teachers should always be careful to read fully any book, including manga and graphic novels, prior to incorporating them into the classroom or curriculum. T his is not to say that sensitive issues should warrant censoring a book. To the contrary, awareness of sensitive issues allows a teacher to adequately prepare for questions or concerns and to prepare appropriate defenses of the books. Educators may want to visit http://www.graphicnovelreporter.com/content/tools-you-can-use-resources for more information about the types of manga which are produced.

HOW DO I KEEP UP-TO-DATE ON THE LATEST GRAPHIC NOVELS?

The School Library Journal regularly features recent releases of graphic novels as well as reviews. Publications by the National Council of Teachers of English (English Journal and Language Arts) sometimes feature articles on graphic novels and their use in the classroom. Publications by the International Reading Association (The Reading Teacher and Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy) sometimes publish research articles on the efficacy of using graphic novels in the classroom. Subscribing to publishers' newsletters and catalogs can also help you stay up-to-date on recent and forthcoming publications. The IRA also has a Special Interest Group on Science Fiction, Fantasy, and

Graphic Novels which publishes a seasonal newsletter titled Alternate Realities in which members publish reviews of or articles about graphic novels. Membership to the SIG is open to any member of the IRA. You can also contact your school library media specialist, public youth service librarian, or your local book or comic book store for assistance in identifying new titles. Your students are also likely to be very knowledgeable about new titles.

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WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS FOR REVIEWING DRAFT VERSIONS AND PROVIDING COMMENTARY, INSIGHT, AND SUGGESTIONS:

This paper is an official position paper of the Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Graphic Novels Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association and the Executive Board of the New Jersey Reading Association as well as the Legislative and Professional Standards Committee of the NJRA.

Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, & Comics