Graphic Novels in the Classroom

by

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For my incredible wife Valerie…

…and for everyone else who lovingly

poked, prodded, and pushed me through this.

Thank you.

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Chapter One

Problem Statement

While studying and teaching English literature, I have never been more enamored and intrigued than I have been with the copious amounts of books presented and taught to me. Equally, at times I have never been more bored than with the books presented to me. It strikes me that there is more to the expanse of literature published in the English language than what is taught in a college classroom, and certainly much more than what is taught in a high school classroom. The issue with the canon of English literature is that it is becoming too narrow – it is doing a poor job of meeting the needs of modern students, who are used to being presented with a variety of media. The means for an expanded canon are out there: every day film becomes more intelligent and interesting, the world's most brilliant minds share their knowledge freely on blogs, podcasts, and internet videos, and the methods of distributing a literary text keep increasing. In an effort to expand the canon used in the high school classroom to better serve the needs of students, teachers need to expand both what they are familiar with and what they bring into the classroom as a teaching tool.

Significance

In proposing this project, I have a main area of concern I wish to address. The primary problem is an English canon that is not expanding to meet the needs of the current crop of students. With an explosion, and complication, of communications,

advanced media, content delivery, and the ideology behind that delivery, students are increasingly being done a disservice in the classroom. There is a lack of materials and methods that appeal to student interest, to a sense of immediacy, and to the need to be able to decipher modes of communication that didn't even exist when they were born, let alone when their teachers were born.

The main issue, then, is not a new one: time passes, educators don't keep up, and it begins to seem that students are one step ahead of what teachers know about and understand. Being born in 1983, I feel out of touch with my peers entering teaching fresh out of undergraduate work at the age of 21 or 22. Even though I pride myself on an ability to "keep up," even given my best efforts I am starting to fall behind the times. That five years is enough for me to have missed an immense amount of twenty-something zeitgeist, let alone what is experienced by teens and pre-teens. It is natural for adults to stagnate culturally as we become older, to replace what is coursing through the veins of youth with children, mortgages, and careers. This is done, though, at what cost to the students that we teach? If the teachers lose their finger from the pulse of student identity, how can they effectively deliver the immediacy students crave with the material they are used to? I am not proposing, of course, that the modern educator need delve into the underbelly of teen life; I don't wish for this concept to be misunderstood as a means to recapture some form of lost glory. Instead, I simply find it necessary for teachers to become more aware and more familiar with the means and needs of students as they interact with a world growing much faster than ours.

In that sense the English canon has not grown with students, but instead has stagnated and is now out-of-touch. In teaching *Lord of the Flies* during student teaching, this problem cropped up as a main issue in all discussions on the book. As an English teacher, I understand that *Lord of the Flies* is one of the most important works of the 20th century, that it's the perfect mix of allegory and symbolism, of textual layering, of variation on meaning, and an observation on the human condition. I get excited about these things. I see the inherent value of such an outstanding book, I was excited to re-explore it, and I was enthusiastic in relaying my observations and interpretations and reaching out to the students for theirs. Unfortunately, this is where the enthusiasm ended. The females in my class shared an almost universal dislike of the novel. They couldn't relate at all to the all-male ensemble. The males were split: some enjoyed the idea of moral dilemmas and understood the translation and application to modern society, and others were hung up on how unrealistic, stodgy, and plodding the novel was. I couldn't help but think that there was a better way to present the same material, either as a replacement or as a supplement. I began to consider whether or not some aspects of the television show “LOST” wouldn't fit into a discussion on some of the moral questions left to the characters of the novel. I found an episode of “The Simpsons” parodying the events of the book, and thought that an examination of that simplified story could help the students tackle the similar, yet more complicated ideas in the novel. I began to understand that where my students felt discouraged with the material presented, I didn't have to share their feelings and plod forward doing my best: I had to overcome them in a manner they better

understood. It is our responsibility as teachers to present these alternate ways to look at concepts, and present them as a means to help students understand.

The corollary idea is that alternative literature has a place in this new, expanded world. Books, with film as a supplement, are not the only means to convey literary concepts. Other texts can be just as useful and valid, however misunderstood or derided they may be. The ELA canon needs to be updated to fit a drastically changed world, and it needs to be done in a way that includes not only more modern traditional texts, but alternative texts as well.

Purpose and Rationale

One of the major issues I have run into during my time in the education masters program is that, unlike most of my peers, I didn't go into education during my undergraduate work. I graduated with an English degree, with no education experience and not certified to teach in the spring of 2007. Instead of searching for a teaching position, teaching, and then seeking my masters, I found myself applying to start the masters process as an alternate certification candidate, bringing along certain advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage being that I have always been heavily invested in English literature, seeking a degree in it alone over any educational aspirations. The main disadvantage has been that I have never taught any more than what student teaching has allowed me to experience, it being a "training wheels" situation; I don't have a classroom currently and I haven't gone through the growing pains of curriculum design and modification in the real world setting that

only having your own classroom can provide. Yet, being extremely interested in the practical applications of what I have learned about literature and its interpretations, uses, and value in a classroom setting, a project seemed a more natural route for me to not only explore those applications, but as a means to produce something valuable in my career immediately and have something of my own to tinker with and edit as I discover the realities of a living classroom.

The question then becomes, what interests me and what do I see as a major problem in education that I can help to remedy? As far back as I can remember, I was always interested in what else English literature had to offer: “these books are great, but what else?” I took history classes to help give myself a context for the literature I was reading. I took film classes. I took a science fiction class. I took a class on the Bible. All of these things interested me beyond the traditional texts they offered: I was intrigued by the different ways they brought my understanding of literature to new places, set new levels of understanding, and gave me new contexts. When I began to pursue education, the desire to find the “other” side of English was an idea that stayed with me. What was there that I, someone interested in the alternative side of the subject, could offer as course material? It had to be something new, something I hadn't seen while observing classrooms, something that was possibly a bit controversial – what things are brilliant that have never been controversial?, and something that could approach my main issue with ELA curriculum, a limited canon and the expansion of it? This all became abundantly clear a few years ago when a good friend handed me his copy of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' graphic novel

Watchmen. He told me I had to read it, and that it would blow my mind. I read it. It blew my mind. Then I read it again, and again. I knew instantly that this book represented something that, first and foremost, was true literature, and secondly was new, interesting, exciting, and most importantly, teachable.

It was through *Watchmen* that I came to discover the graphic novel as something that could be very valuable in an ELA classroom. Its thematic content is decidedly literary. It deals with moral ambiguities, gray areas, and ethical dilemmas as well as, if not better than, any other book I have ever read. Yet its format allows it to be so much more. It explores parallelism through alternate texts presented as part of the overarching story, it plays with continuity and time in ways that emphasize the story instead of marginalizing it, and it offers stunning visuals that enhance instead of distract. The format offers a true feast: visual, textual, and intellectual. The format of the graphic novel lends itself to introducing and exploring standard literary themes in a whole different way than books do. It is a medium instantly familiar to anyone who has ever seen a Saturday morning cartoon or a Sunday newspaper comics page, which provides a gateway to the student not present in standard canonical texts. Subject-wise, graphic novels were born of superhero comics, and many still deal with these characters, albeit in new and different ways. A conceptual graphic novel unit on "The Superhero" in a class could deal with issues of power, humanity, justice, and responsibility – the "superheroes" in many of the best graphic novels don't have the infallibility of a Superman, but are just ordinary people who must deal with the issues of a cruel and unjust world. Graphic novels of this nature, like *Watchmen, V for*

Vendetta, and Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, are often philosophical and questioning, offering a key lead-in to discussions, activities, papers, or projects connecting the novels to the world that the students find around them. These superhero comics are not the kiddy fare one might expect, they are complex novels that explore the ills of the world. Social issues are also easily approached through the graphic novel. For example, a book like Art Spiegelman's *Maus* explores the events of the Holocaust and the prejudices still lingering in our world through the point of view of animals, evoking a natural comparison to *Animal Farm*. Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* chronicles the life of a girl growing up in revolutionary Iran. This approach to students that are just becoming socially aware offers a new avenue of thought on issues that when presented through a traditional text seem obscure and distant. In this case, the graphic novel offers an up-close view to times they can and should relate to in a manner they can better understand.

Graphic novels, in this sense, can be added into the classroom in a number of ways. Most importantly, the teacher is not required to teach a unit on "graphic novels," which offers no context to the books at all. Ideally, the teacher would teach them as part of a conceptual unit with a focus on a certain topic or central question. The graphic novel would then be combined with books, short stories, films, poems, artwork and other texts to study the central theme. This benefits student understanding of key ELA concepts, as well as teaches a bit of media literacy, along with offering a break from standard texts. A teacher could also teach a graphic novel as a companion piece to an important work of literature. If the graphic novel shared

some key concepts and themes, it could reinforce the ideas of the book. Additionally, a teacher may teach the graphic novel as an extension of current studies. A science fiction class may study the *Star Wars* films, and then delve into a graphic novel based in the *Star Wars* universe, examining how the world was further developed through a new medium and how or if this changes the meaning and importance of the original films. Finally, a graphic novel that is deep and complicated enough may be taught as any standard canonical text might: integrated into the core curriculum as a centerpiece and not a supplement.

Definition of Terms

Graphic Novel – A graphic novel is a long-form novel or other narrative that contains not only text, but artwork that accompanies the text in the fashion of a comic strip. There are often two distinct entities that create a graphic novel: the author, in charge of the story, and the artist, in charge of the artwork. The narrative is typically told from panel to panel in the graphic novel format, which may or may not be linear or sequential, and consists of text in the form of dialogue and exposition woven into the graphic panels. There is no standard art style, narrative style, subject matter, or definitive format that defines a graphic novel. The novel is typically bound in a single collection, but may be released serially and collected later. The thematic content of a graphic novel is typically of a more mature nature than a comic book. A graphic novel may be referred to as a graphic novel, a novel, or a book.

Comic Book – A comic book typically features artwork similar to the graphic novel and is released serially in a shorter length. While a graphic novel comes together to tell an overall story, the comic is usually open-ended and may contain many story arcs within a single series with a good analogy being an American soap opera. They may or may not be bound as a cohesive collection upon completion. Comic books have historically been targeted at adolescents, consisting of more juvenile and simplistic thematic content than a graphic novel. However, as comic books have entered the mainstream, their content has become similar to the graphic novel in that it has become difficult to pinpoint distinct identifying characteristics beyond length and nature of release.

Panel – The panel is an often drawn, but sometimes implied, box in which the text, dialogue, and art in a graphic novel is contained. However, not all three have to appear in every panel. There is no set standard for the amount of panels that appear on a single page, and it is left solely to the creator's vision.

Gutter – The gutter is the space between panels. It is most commonly just white space outside the clearly defined panels. However, the author can choose to have text or visuals break out of a panel and into the gutter, or forego the gutter altogether in favor a full page panel.

Canon – In this project, the canon takes on two meanings. In the broadest sense, the "canon" consists of the books generally regarded to be the ultimate examples of Western literary thought. Much like the defining characteristics of graphic novels, the defining characteristics of this canon are hard to identify

concretely and change over time, but historically have consisted of traditional texts by white, male authors. The second meaning of canon is to refer to traditional texts generally taught in American schools. While this canon has also changed over time and is not a concrete list, it is much more likely to contain certain texts, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and the works of William Shakespeare.

Summary

In my own enjoyment of reading alternative texts from alternative sources, I have often posed the question to myself, “why aren't kids reading cool stuff like this?” There is not a question in my mind that there is an issue with what students are reading in the classroom. Not with subject matter or content, but with the actual materials. It's not as varied as it could be, and certainly not as up to date or in touch with students needs and wants as it could be. I fell in love with the graphic novel format for its depth and complexity and for its richness and vibrancy: for all the same reasons that make the format fun to read for anyone. While graphic novels are definitely being taught, I feel as though more could be done with connecting them both to student's lives and the other literature they read. My goal in this project is to do just that, to link students to graphic novels and link both to other forms of literature, and to expand on how these novels can be useful in the classroom.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

When discussing the literature relevant to the scope of this project, it is important that I focus my discussion on three main areas: first, the canon itself, and what is said about its current state and expansion; next, a bit about graphic novels themselves; and lastly, classroom application. Each of these three topics is vital to gaining a more complete picture of the graphic novel's place in the classroom. In deciding to take on this topic, I came to understand that it is a relatively new one, as graphic novels are just beginning to find their place in the classroom. I was surprised, however, to find that many teachers and college professors have written about their successful implementation of a curriculum that includes graphic novels. I feel that first-hand accounts of success and implementation are very valuable resources when deciding to create a project that showcases the ways graphic novels can be used, so much of this narrative will belong to a critical response to those teacher's theories and practices regarding their implementation of graphic novels. Less time will be devoted to the exploration of the canon and to the art form itself, but I do think it is important to give a brief overview of these topics as they are directly relevant to the project.

I'll start with a brief overview of the canon and the need for its expansion. I defined the canon in two ways in my “Definition of Terms” in Chapter 1, but the most relevant definition for this overview is the one regarding the school canon, or the literature that is most often taught in schools. It is the problem of a sacrosanct canon that Jim Burke writes about in his essay entitled “Canon Fodder.” He talks

about the position most new teachers are in, having been exposed in college to books that were new and different, “books that were alive and current and showed, most important, that literature was a living, breathing thing that did not die after Harper Lee wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird”* (Burke 57). There is a certain frustration level that builds then, when a new teacher comes upon a canon that seems unchangeable, archaic, and staid. The canon becomes something of an obstacle to be fought against, because, as Burke puts it, “there are no such things as sacred books when it comes to works of literature, no particular books that are truly mandatory reading for one to claim to be a whole person” (Burke 57). That line of thinking becomes discouraging when you consider the implications it has on how students view the literature they read, that their experiences as children in a different time and place are invalid because they are un- or under-represented in the literature that they are presented. Offering *The Great Gatsby* to a student may be offering an example of great literature, but how are they supposed to relate to a time when their grandparents weren't even alive? Not to say there is no value there, as English teachers understand the importance of the book as an example of craft, and in some form of historical context as a “great American novel,” but offering only *Gatsby* is detrimental. This is the central argument that Burke makes, and one that is central to the whole argument that the canon needs to be expanded. The texts become a limiting factor for students in this sense, instead of an enlightening one, or as Burke says, “what we are doing by offering such old, used goods is saying to students that nothing has been written since *Lord of the Flies* that is worth reading; we are saying that life as we know it in the

United States has not changed since *A Separate Peace"* (Burke 57). But what can a teacher do to fight this? The biggest way that teachers can help themselves is what brought this struggle to my attention in the first place. He states, "the English teacher must read, and read steadily. I know many if not most do read; but we must challenge ourselves to keep abreast of the field so that we can lobby effectively to get the latest books into the schools, so that we can be convinced that there is a book worth using in lieu of *Catcher in the Rye*" (Burke 58).

The idea of canon expansion is that, ideally, there are books out there that more than match what the canonical books offer to a curriculum – books that are current, relevant, and immediate to student interests. Burke's point, that there is an onus that falls upon the teacher to stay current, is an important one. How are we as teachers supposed to fight for material that best suits student needs if we fall behind on what is current? It is this focus on reading and staying abreast of trends and new literatures that led me to graphic novels in the first place, and their practical application in teaching modern students. It is this idea that graphic novels can teach students who have needs different than what canonical texts offer that Gretchen Schwarz writes about in "Expanding Literacies through Graphic Novels." She argues that there is more than just the need for students to study traditional books, as "Increasingly, scholars and teachers realize that in a media-dominated society, one traditional literacy – reading and writing of print – is no longer sufficient. Today's young people also have to read films, TV shows, magazines, and Web sites" (Schwarz 59). There is more to what students need to know in order to have a well-

rounded, complete ability to analyze their lives. With the advent of new means of communicating ideas that are unique to the last twenty years or so, the teacher's responsibility is to find something that addresses these new analytical needs. The graphic novel fills this void in the curriculum, and accomplishes the wider goal of expanding the canon in the process. Schwarz states that “the graphic novel is a medium that combines the visual and verbal as do films, TV, and even pop-up ads” (Schwarz 59), all being fronts on which students are assaulted by an ever-widening range of subjects that require new methods to make sense of it all. We see it every day, as advertising and the media find new ways to reach and then exploit their viewers, reinforcing the need to have some sort of critical thinking training for a visual medium. Schwarz argues that the graphic novel fills this role, as “the graphic novel offers teachers the opportunity to implement critical media literacy in the classroom - literacy that affirms diversity, gives voice to all, and helps students examine ideas and practices that promulgate inequity” (Schwarz 62).

I believe that, when it comes to the canon, there are two areas that need to be addressed in schools. The first is that there are limitations of the canon in reaching out to students. Burke argues that the canon is a stagnant entity, one where there has been little progressive movement in the modernity of offerings in schools. This hinders student acceptance of the material, and by extension, their learning. If the student sees no value in a text that doesn't value his or her own experiences, he or she won't learn much from it. Schools, and specifically teachers, need to offer more in the way of interesting, engaging, and immediately relevant content to their students. The second

area is that the traditional canon is not meeting new student needs. Schwarz takes Burke's argument a step further and states that there are literacies that are not being served by the traditional canon. There is a visual literacy that is fast becoming the predominant literacy in our society that can't be learned from a traditional text. Graphic novels offer the best of both worlds in presenting something as literary as a traditional text, while going beyond that limitation and expanding into new literacies.

With my thoughts on canonical expansion out of the way, and before I move into the theory and practice of inserting graphic novels into the curriculum, I think it would be beneficial to talk a little about graphic novels themselves, as something of literary merit. One complaint that seems to crop up anecdotally when I mention I'm doing a project on graphic novels is that they have no merit as an art form worthy of consideration. People can't shake the connection they have with superhero comics from their youth, placing graphic novels in the same scrap heap as those decidedly less deserving counterparts. Andrew D. Arnold, speaking on the history and merit of graphic novels as art in his essay “Comix Poetics,” states that “The comic-book craze that began with the introduction of Superman in 1938 did about as much harm as good for the medium. While massively popularizing the comics' language, cheap comic books also commodified it, leading to a stultification of the form as a mode of personal expression” (Arnold 13). This commoditization of the form landed anything comic related firmly among the ranks of detective fiction and Harlequin novels and it is this association that holds back the graphic novel as something ill fit for the classroom in the eyes of those that have never picked one up and gave it a thorough

read. Arnold does argue, however, that while graphic novels may never reach the heights of Shakespeare or Eliot (Arnold 12), it's not from “lack of merit or ability” (Arnold 12) and that the comic form reaches into poetic ground. He uses the example of George Herriman and his comic *Krazy Kat* to explore the ideas of poetic language and composition seeping into the comic form, offering Herriman's usage of patois language in voicing his characters and the composition of frame as examples: “In a single page, Herriman creates not a traditional poem but its comic-art equivalent. It has playfulness about both the language (“dee dee diary,” “dokk, dokk night”) and the images (the background changes from panel to panel though the foreground remains consistent)” (Arnold 13). Arnold offers the type of reading that graphic, sequential art deserves, one that treats it as legitimate and attempts to root out the qualities that make it that way. He does, however, concede that graphic novel artists “have traditionally hovered in the artistic hierarchy somewhere above pornographers but below children's book authors . . . There are more comic poets today than at any time before, thanks to the comic medium's explosive growth in the last five years” (Arnold 15).

While Arnold speaks to the qualities that make comic creators legitimate artists, what about the literary quality of the stories told within the pages? Jan Baetens offers insight into how the literariness of the graphic novel is formed through its visuals in his article “Graphic Novels: Literature Without Text?” Baetens believes that there is not an inherent literary aspect to the graphic novel, but it has to build its literary quality through the ways that the visual aspect of the storytelling works with

and independently of the written aspect. To him, a good, literary piece is one where "each picture tells a story, yet not all aspects or elements of a picture do so, and a literary graphic novel attempts to maintain a healthy tension between these two forces" (Baetens 80). The literariness to him, then, is more defined by how the visuals work in conveying meaning to the reader. The story must be contained within the image, but not be dominated by it. This balance that the illustrator weaves between using the image to further the story, yet letting it exist as a lone entity is reminiscent of the layering involved in complex narrative storytelling in traditional texts. The added element of visual dynamics just offers more for the author to layer, more for them to explore. This means, as Baetens states, that "good visual storytelling, i.e., story-telling capable of competing with the best practices in literature, has to exploit the narrative possibilities of the images themselves" (Baetens 81). The images in a graphic novel are its central pieces of differentiation from traditional texts, so it stands to reason that a literary graphic novel would need these images to be the strongest piece, as they are the crux of whether or not the work functions well. If the book's images fail to keep their structural independence from the text, the book will not be as literary (Baetens 80). So through Arnold and Baetens we see both sides of the graphic novel explored as literary, Arnold speaks of the poetry of the form and how the best graphic novel artists fuses their language and visuals to form a new kind of poetry, while Baetens claims that in order for a graphic novel to achieve literary status its images must function independently of the text as a separate entity but still maintain the balance of being set pieces as well. While these ideas may seem to be at

odds, they reveal a cohesive picture of what creates the literariness: the author must be good at balancing both their visuals and words, of creating independent yet complementary scenes with both these tools. Simply put, an author and/or illustrator has to be able to handle complex layering, creating a visual and verbal feast for the reader to sample, course by course.

Finally, I'd like to talk about the most relevant topic to this project: how teachers are actually using the graphic novel in the classroom. I've covered the work on the "why" of using graphic novels in examining the need for broadening the canon and in discussing how the novels can achieve a literary status, but these pieces are only a small part of the puzzle: the rationale. The most interesting part of the topic is the "how" of actually using the novels, how they can fit in the curriculum and how they work in practice. I've selected a number of educators that have had experiences teaching graphic novels to students, and want to discuss their findings.

Adam Martin's piece "Graphic Novels in the Classroom" offers an excellent broad overview for how graphic novels are used in the classroom. Martin relates a story of a student struggling with the classic *Beowulf*, and how a graphic interpretation helped his student understand and follow the story while remaining true to the literary conventions behind the original (Martin 30). His story segues into a concise listing of the three main ways to implement a graphic novel in the classroom, which will be a main point of this project. Martin's three uses are Curriculum Support, Thematic Connections, and Research (Martin 30). Curriculum Support is the idea that "graphic novels can be used to help struggling readers access information in

a different format” (Martin 30). Martin's initial anecdote is one that plays on his idea of curriculum support, where a student having issues with difficult content can find a copy of the difficult text in an easier to understand one. He asserts that “works like *Beowulf, Moby Dick,* and *Frankenstein* are available and provide a different way to read the work without altering the characters, themes, and tones” (Martin 30). The allure of graphic novels for struggling readers is one I've stayed away from in this proposal, because while it is entirely valid, I feel that it is both beyond the scope of this project and, in some small way, takes away from the perceived validity of the format. If graphic novels are seen as something that is only valuable to struggling readers who need help understanding the main source material, it is unlikely those people will see graphic novels as capable source material themselves. Certainly, however, Martin's point is one worth consideration to teachers with struggling readers. I have seen graphic novels in a “Read 180” class for students with learning disabilities who have trouble reading. The graphic novels were placed at a lower reading level than the novels or text based adaptations and simplifications themselves, and were seen as a stepping stone, albeit an effective one. Martin also makes the point that having graphic novel interpretations of traditional canonical text can “prove that classic stories never tire” (Martin 30) by creating a newness to the classics, which is a key component of meeting students needs through an expanded canon, which is Burke's argument.

Martin's second use for graphic novels in the classroom is the most powerful, and the one that pushes graphic novels into their desired place in the canon: Thematic

Connections. Martin's desired use for graphic novels in this sense is to include them in a thematic unit, where they can mix and mingle with other traditional and non-traditional texts to provide a cohesive picture of a certain theme. He argues that “teachers already connect similar ideas found in poetry, art, music, and prose to each other, so adding graphic novels could reveal even more insight” (Martin 30). This idea of combining different texts spread across an entire unit is a powerful one: it not only treats all texts as equals, it teaches the students that these texts are all equal and have value. While the subversive but useful nature of using graphic novels in a support role makes them seem secondary, using them in a thematic unit gives them value, and asserts to the student that alternative forms of literature can be just as good as traditional ones in terms of educational weight. Martin offers that graphic novels can be and should be used in a more prominent role in a thematic unit, as they “are complex, and should be used to study old themes in a new way” (Martin 30).

The last use Martin offers is also the one that I feel is most debatable or questionable, that of Research. He suggests being able to use the content of graphic novels to research topics in the classroom, such a social issues and current events (Martin 30). While the idea is a solid one, it must be noted, as Martin fails to do, that research in these fields with graphic novels should be limited to using them as primary accounts, like tales of the Holocaust in *Maus* or life in post-revolution Iran in *Persepolis*. While I'm not doubting that factual information does exist in the graphic novel format, unless it is selected as an example by a teacher or librarian it probably should not be left up to the student to find and use a graphic novel as a source of

solid, factual information. I certainly won't state that there is no merit to doing fact finding out of a graphic novel, just that I don't trust most students to arrive at these solid, factual sources and I don't trust school or community libraries to even have them on the shelves. However, if a graphic novel is chosen by the teacher and used as a supplement to more traditional research forms, it could prove valuable. Stephen Weiner describes a few of these books suitable for research in “Show, Don't Tell: Graphic Novels in the Classroom.” He explains that research of the form itself can be done from a graphic novel such as *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud, as it “combines fresh information with a fast-paced, thought-provoking read” (Weiner 115) about the history and significance of comics in relation to other formats. Also, he states that there is journalistic work being done in books like *Palestine* by Joe Sacco, who details his trips to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in a journalistic narrative (Weiner 115). Even Schwarz chimes in on the topic of doing research in a graphic novel with her mention of Joel Andreas' *Addicted to War*, but reiterates that this asks “students to analyze information and persuasion in different ways” (Schwarz 61), which suggests a knowledge that the medium may not be as unbiased as other sources. My attitudes towards research materials and towards literature differ, of course, as one is open to a wide interpretation and is not necessarily representative of fact, while the other shouldn't be that interpretive and is representative of fact.

Given Martin’s three frameworks for fitting graphic novels into the classroom, where does a teacher begin to explore the topic and find places for graphic novels in their curriculum? James Bucky Carter offers suggestions for delving into the medium

in his article “Going Graphic.” “Some [teachers] believe that graphic novels are too risky to bring into the curriculum,” says Carter, “others resist any form of new literacy altogether, and many think that sequential art narratives are only useful for remedial or reluctant readers” (Carter 68). Carter explains that sequential art narratives, as he terms them, have been around for as long as cave paintings, however, and need to be accepted by teachers for they can “be of great use in increasing library circulation, creating new readers, helping English language learners, motivating male readers, and even assisting gifted and talented students” (Carter 68). It is this broad appeal that leads him into his discussion on how to best use the novels in the classroom. Carter is a proponent of Martin’s usage of Thematic Connections, stating that he feels that “integrating comics into existing thematic units can be more effective than studying the form in isolation” (Carter 69). The value in studying the graphic novel format with others thematically similar is again seen as an ideal way to bring the novel to the students. When they are taught to see the connections between the texts they read normally and alternative texts, they create a more complete picture of the literature. “Teachers should weigh their decision to teach comics through study units focusing solely on the form,” Carter states, “with the possibly more expansive and connection-building method of using this material to supplement existing curriculums” (Carter 69). In this sense he uses supplement to mean a “side-by-side” teaching of the texts. Carter also reminds us that “accepting [graphic novels] as books is a nice start, but writing and drawing graphic novels is an authentic composing activity” (Carter 71), an excellent idea that should be considered

a vital piece of the graphic novel experience and an excellent way to create a truly authentic assessment of any graphic novels taught in the classroom. Students must acquire certain skills complimentary to any literary ideas in order to understand the graphic novel format, so asking them to create one puts them much closer to the top of Bloom's and Krathwohl's taxonomies than an essay or test.

Along with Carter's insight into how to bring the texts to the classroom, he offers a warning to teachers wishing to do so. Without downplaying their significance, he acknowledges that teachers often make mistakes while making the incorrect assumption that due to the comic-book appearance of the graphic novel the content matter is geared towards children (Carter 70). He relays the mistake of a teacher allowing her 4th grade class to read the graphic novel *Persepolis*, which contains "explicit visual depictions of violence" (Carter 70). Teachers must be intimately familiar with what they teach, and know exactly what they're getting themselves into, free of the assumptions that lead to that brand of mistake. Carter suggests that "writing rationales for texts that someone is likely to challenge is a smart way for teachers to help protect their students, themselves, their parents, and their school leaders, and this is especially true for graphic novels" (Carter 70). A rationale is an excellent idea to combat not only what may be perceived as inappropriate content due to the visual nature of the book (even though an accepted book may contain a textual depiction of the same act), but also can be a defense to parents and administrators against the possibility of a book's perceived worthlessness.

I’ve discussed much regarding the theory behind implementing graphic novels in the classroom and how to read them, but I haven’t talked much about writing beyond what Carter recommends about the authentic experience in creating a graphic novel. Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher, in their piece “Using Graphic Novels, Anime, and the Internet in an Urban High School,” chronicle how they created writing exercises from graphic novels. Theirs is a practical example of how paying attention and staying on top of trends forged a new bond between students and their literature. They describe the process of finding graphic novels that fit a specific need in their classroom, the relation of students and their urban surroundings (Frey 20). Through the graphic novels of Will Eisner, they found the ability to match student writing with the visuals of the novels, allowing students to explore their own world in the written word using the artwork of the novel as a guide. Frey and Fisher had students narrate and add dialogue to panels with visuals only, narrating the story and making it their own. In this way, they found that “visual stories allowed students to discuss how the authors conveyed mood and tone through images. We could then discuss techniques for doing so through word” (Frey 21). Graphic novels and writing, in this case, went hand in hand. The teachers found a way to tie what they were reading into what they *could* be writing, while taking into account that the students' understanding of the visual aspects of the narrative could be translated into helping them find the correct words for what they saw and wanted to tell. A writing activity like this is unique to the visual arts, where students can see what they need to write about and use their knowledge of these items to paint the picture, creating the valuable skill of visualizing

what they're reading. It's a logical transition for the skill to manifest itself while reading traditional textual novels.

Frey and Fisher also had the same idea as Carter in regard to an authentic creation experience. They designed a culminating experience in their classroom that was "a fascinating lens on popular culture and its artifacts in adolescent writing" (Frey 23). The project Frey and Fisher designed is an example of how to incorporate alternative texts not only into a reading environment, but a writing environment as well: they "encouraged students to apply alternative texts and nontraditional information sources to their works" (Frey 23), including the internet, photographs, original artwork, examples from picture books, and panels from the graphic novels themselves. They built upon the writing assignments they had used before to expand into a full length creation where students were in charge of the entire narrative. While Frey and Fisher focus specifically in an urban environment with reluctant and struggling readers, their found usage for graphic novels is a revelation that could apply to all classrooms, and all levels of learners.

Chapter Three

Part I: Familiarizing with the Genre

While there are many potential issues facing the introduction and proper usage of graphic novels in the classroom, including issues on many levels among other teachers, parents, administration, and school boards, the main issue facing teachers seeking to expand their in-class curriculum is that of familiarity. Teachers may not know that graphic novels even exist, may have already dismissed them due to misconceptions about what the graphic novel format entails, or may simply not have seen enough to convince them one way or another, instead leaning on the familiar and traditional texts of the canon. The first step, then, to advocate for the inclusion of graphic novels in the classroom becomes to introduce or re-introduce graphic novels to educators with an eye on explaining their unique characteristics, methods of story-telling, and inclusion of literary conventions. Obviously, the first step is to have a desire or inclination to expand the definitions of what constitutes a text within the classroom. This stems from the teacher's understanding that the texts being offered to students are lacking in some area. Whether it be from observations of student learning, an understanding of student needs, or simply a desire to introduce choice and ownership into the classroom environment, there may come a time when the traditional canon is questioned and becomes in need of expansion.

There are many formats that can fill this void. It is often filled by film or television programming, supplementally supporting a traditional text. For example, if a group of 10th graders are reading William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, they may

then watch the film as supplemental material to the original work. While film is a particularly common form of non-traditional text, those texts can take many other forms as well: modern prose and poetry, particularly works by women; non-whites; and gays, visual art, news media, and electronic formats, which can be as varied as e-books to blogs. Moving past traditional texts, then, means not only expanding the definition of "text," but also becoming familiar with a wide array of new formats – formats that may not have been invented or mainstream while the teacher was going through their education, to formats that have often been thought of as having little to no literary merit. Graphic novels fit firmly into this category. Even though the base form of graphic novels, comics, have existed in a popular form for hundreds of years, the format as a literary one simply has not existed until recently. This section will introduce the graphic novel as a format. It will also explore the medium itself, looking at common layouts, formats, styles, and the terminology used to describe the novels. It's also important to discuss taking the first steps into the world of graphic novels.

One of the main problems surrounding the acceptance of graphic novels in the classroom is a cultural stigma associated with the relation that the form has to comics and comic books. Long seen by the populace as the simple, idle diversion of the nerdy and childish, the comic has a certain reputation as being of little significance. In fact, the history of comics shows a varied and vibrant array of story-telling, both serious and light. First, the term comic should be defined. A comic is a drawing usually, but not always, accompanied by text that seeks to tell some sort of story. A comic has no other obligations to be a larger work, but often is. This larger work can

take many forms, such as a comic strip, or a series of short comics that expand into a larger body. An example of a popular and typical American comic strip is Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes*, which was told in a traditional comic strip format of three to five black-and-white panels running daily in a newspaper with a longer, color version on Sunday. Each *Calvin and Hobbes* strip would run either as a self-contained, short story or a story arc spread out across a week or weeks.

Another is the comic book. Comic books take on many forms and cover many genres, and they are hard to fit into an exact definition. However, the format is typically longer, consisting of many more than the three to four panels of a strip and introducing pages, usually ten or more and in color. It is also an open ended story, and often serialized with an issue being published monthly and a perpetual story line featuring story arcs. A typical example, in the superhero genre, would be Marvel Comics' X-Men series which began with *X-Men #1* in 1963 as is still being published today.

While there are certainly other forms of comics that have been created, these are the two that are directly responsible for the current format of the graphic novel. Much like the comic book before it, the graphic novel as an art form is hard to pigeonhole into an all-encompassing definition. It has taken on so many different art styles, narration styles, and layouts that the term graphic novel can only be defined in a broad sense: a long-form – the term novel length can be used here, generally 100 pages or more – narration or story that is released as or collected into a single volume. In this sense, many comic books may be collected and released as a graphic novel.

The format is conducive to many different narration styles, including styles not feasible in prose narration, and formats often associated with film. An analogy would be a “jump cut” in film, where there is a sudden shift within the narrative that is disorienting with the visual aspect. The author has leeway in mixing a traditional narrative structure with a different visual one.

When physically looking at a graphic novel page, it may be disorienting for those with little experience with comic books. While most are familiar with the daily comic strip presented in the newspaper, having to follow it in a longer format is not always a natural extension. Graphic novel authors and artists use different techniques when constructing the page layout. Typically, graphic novels are read panel to panel, left to right, and top to bottom. As with all things in this format, there are exceptions to the rule, but when presented with a standard graphic novel page, the action follows the traditional conventions of written text. Things become tricky, however, when the creators throw wrenches into convention. Before we discuss some of the more complex aspects of the form, it is important to learn some basic terminology about what is presented.

First, each page is a series of panels. This word has been written before, but perhaps not fully defined. The panel is the space in which the action takes place within the novel. The panel is typically a self-contained rectangular unit, usually bordered in black, and easily identifiable. Again, if the reader is familiar with a newspaper daily cartoon, they should easily be able to identify a panel. Text and visuals live within the panels, and rarely overlap the boundaries constraining them.

When this is done for stylistic or purposeful reasons, they overflow into what is called the gutter. The gutter is the empty white space that exists between the panels, separating them from each other and the edges of the page. Contained inside each panel is the artwork and the text, which is represented in three distinct ways. Since the story is most often progressed by the characters depicted in the artwork, the most common representation of text within the graphic novel is speech. Speech balloons, or bubbles, are almost always a white oval with a conical point, the tail, pointing to the person talking. The text inside is either hand drawn by the artist or is computer typed with a font that approximates hand drawn characters. When two or more characters are speaking in the same panel, speech may become slightly confusing to follow, as speech balloons can be squeezed in together, confusing the reader as to who the speaker is. However, following the same method of reading panels, left to right/top to bottom, and allowing the eye to find a natural flow from one balloon to the other, the order of the balloons becomes apparent.

While speech is the most often used balloon and conveys the most often used method of presenting text, there are other balloons that convey information to the reader (see Fig. 1.). The thought balloon conveys the inner, subjective thoughts of a character. The thought balloon is also usually white, but is represented differently than speech. Where speech balloons are characterized by their “hard” geometric oval shape and straight conical tail, thought balloons are usually white and “cloud-shaped” with a series of bubbles decreasing in size as the tail. The text is presented in the same way as a speech balloon. The other balloon that conveys unspoken information is the

narration balloon. This balloon is a hard rectangle either connected to the border or set just away from it. It narrates events or fills the reader in on information not gleaned from conversations or thoughts, and moves the story along. The narration balloon is usually filled a different color to set it apart from thought and speech, and text is presented in the same way as thought and speech. There is no tail, as the text is narrated and not directly attributed to a character.

There are numerous other types of balloons, used to indicate various types of speech. While the types listed above are almost universally standard, these types may deviate a bit from artist to artist. Balloons that indicate shouting are similar to a speech balloon. Instead of a solid, clean line forming the oval, the border is jagged and the text is larger and/or bolded. Whisper balloons retain the clean lines of the oval only the border is instead dashes and the tail becomes a dashed line. The text is often smaller. Technical speech, which is any speech produced by technological means, like a television or a radio, is represented by the oval shape of the speech bubble but with a lightning shaped tail. If the artist has done his or her job correctly, all non-standard balloons should be easy to decipher contextually.

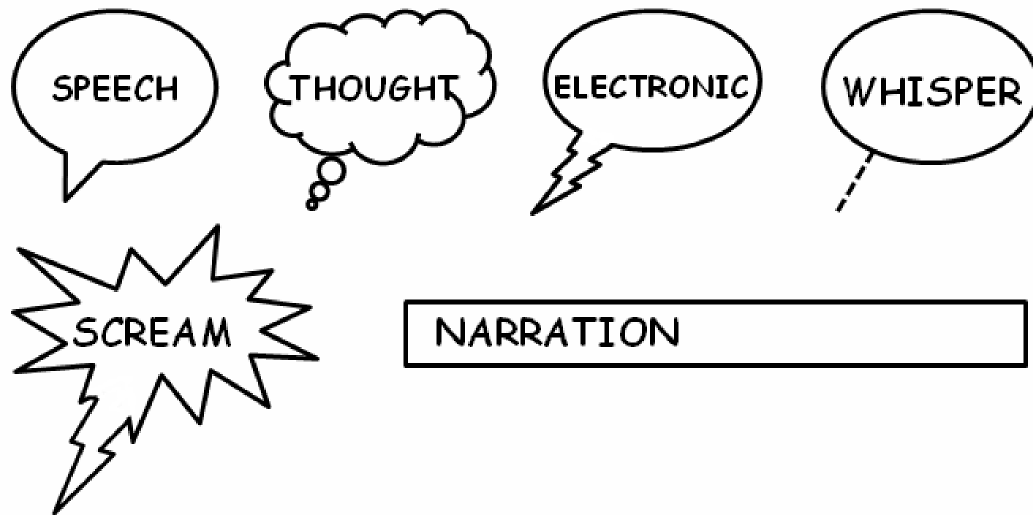

Fig. 1. Common speech bubbles/balloons.

Once the reader becomes familiarized with the way text is presented, it is important to reconsider the panels. Panel layouts can be as mundane as a simple grid. Complexity, however, only grows from there. Despite this, a page layout will nearly always give way to user readability. The left to right, top to bottom rule holds fast here, even in an extremely complex panel layout (see Fig. 2.). Also, much like text, the reader can usually find a logical path through the page. The visuals will lead to where the reader should look next. It would be impractical to explain the multitudes of panel layouts here, due to the varying styles of artists. Generally, though, panels will remain a rectangle. Sometimes the panel will take up the entire page without a gutter in order to emphasize a setting or scene, with inset panels in the corners; if this is the case, follow the logical pattern and read the background artwork where it fits.

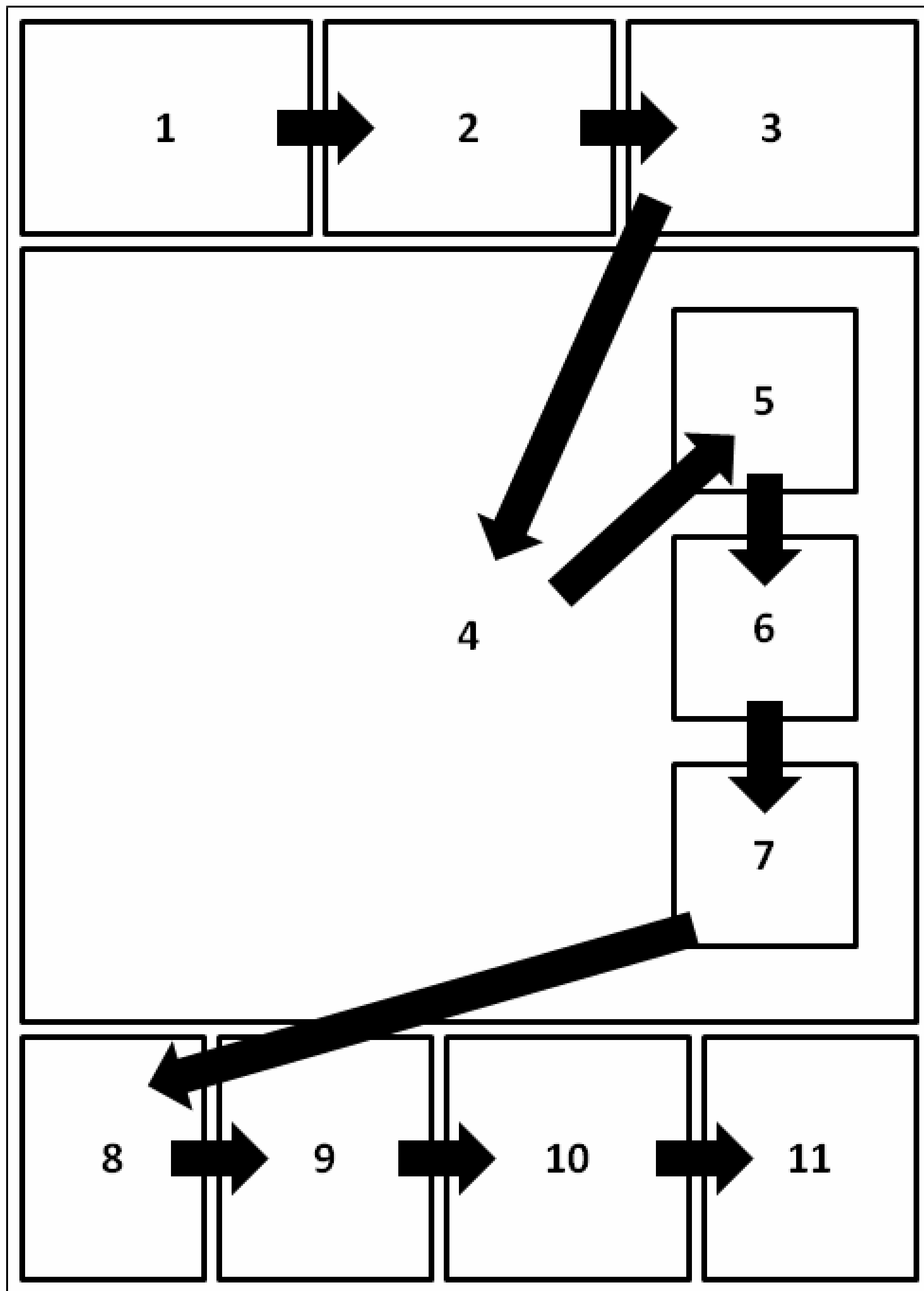

Fig. 2. The flow of a complicated panel layout.

To continue on in learning about the graphic novel format, the easiest route from here is to simply dive in and experience one. If there is a particular graphic

novel that has piqued your interest in learning more about the genre, or if a friend or colleague has been hounding you to go and read one of their favorites, do it! There is no better way to really see what graphic novels are all about than to experience them, and there's a wide variety to experience. However, if you're having trouble finding one or would like to have a sort of survey of essential titles, there are a few places to start.

In 2005, *Time* magazine critics Lev Grossman and Richard Lacayo drew up a list of the 100 Best Novels published since 1923. Despite publishing a separate list of Top 10 Graphic Novels, they included one graphic novel on both that list and the overall top 100: Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen*. There are countless access points to graphic novels, but if only one were to picked, *Watchmen* would have to be it. *Watchmen* was first published in 1986 as a 12-part comic which was later collected into a single volume of work. Layered and complex, it is "told with ruthless psychological realism, in fugal, overlapping plotlines and gorgeous, cinematic panels rich with repeating motifs, Watchmen is a heart-pounding, heartbreaking read and a watershed in the evolution of a young medium," according to Grossman. Indeed, much about *Watchmen* screams masterpiece, whether on the first read-through or the fifth. *Watchmen* is, at its core, a superhero comic – in it a group of "superheroes" investigates the death of one of their own. Thematically, however, Moore and Gibbons hit higher notes: it is a deconstruction of the superhero, of the genre, and of comics themselves; a metaphor for cold-war anxiety; and a deep look at the human condition. The storytelling is non-linear, with time and space shifting throughout the

novel, along with having two parallel stories told concurrently. Despite this, it is surprisingly easy to read and contains deeply buried complexities that reward a second look and beyond.

Really, though, any graphic novel is a good place to begin. There are so many quality graphic novels that there is guaranteed to be something to pique the interest of any reader. The *Time* Top 10 Graphic Novels list is a good place to start, as is the graphic novel section of your school or town library. Or, you can try one of these recommendations:

- *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. Frank Miller's story featuring a Batman that comes out of retirement and returns to crime-fighting.
- *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*. Chris Ware's story of a socially awkward man and the life he invents for himself.
- *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. Art Spiegelman tells the story of his father's experience as a Jew in World War II Poland.
- *Persepolis*. Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical tale of growing up as a girl in revolutionary Iran.

Part II: Selecting Graphic Novels

By this point, you have hopefully found and enjoyed one or two graphic novels for yourself. Certainly, if you have, you have probably noticed a few things: first, the possibilities for application in the classroom are great. Second, the format can often present not only mature themes, but mature imagery. While it is not

necessarily the job of the educator to be the arbiter of what is in good taste and what is in poor taste, it is their role to be a gatekeeper to the material with classroom, district, and community standards and practices in mind. Much like similarly controversial traditional texts, the content of a graphic novel can inspire just as much attention from parents and schools.

It may go without saying, but it can't be said enough: the number one thing you can do in order to select an appropriate graphic novel is to read it. Since you are the gatekeeper, it ultimately has to pass through you to get to students. As a teacher, you must have a plan as to how the book is going to be implemented, and you must then know about any objectionable material in the book and have a well-formed rationale as to why you have chosen the book and why it is appropriate. Multiple readings are a good way to accomplish this goal. The first read through of any book may be for pleasure, or to pinpoint themes and ideas that fit into a particular part of your curriculum. In this first read-through, as with any book, your focus may not be on the entirety of the work. You may ignore certain things after becoming wrapped up in the story, you may be skimming looking for certain pieces of information or certain ideas, or you may be reading it in chunks, perhaps forgetting bits and pieces after periods of time away from the book. This first read through may not be as critical towards all aspects of the text as you need to be when vetting the contents. A few re-reads may be in order. You may have a vague idea from the first read-through as to what you noticed as being questionable, but may require a little more thought or a second opinion. It is a good idea to make a list and keep notes as you read through

the book again, making sure to mark page numbers and thoughts you have regarding the content. Also, try to concentrate specifically on imagery or text. Be sure to bear in mind what has passed as acceptable before and under what circumstance or in what context. Dealing with the appropriateness of written words should be a familiar exercise for any teacher, and the rules regarding what is and is not acceptable for the classroom should be somewhat familiar.

For example, in the novel *Watchmen*, as the story begins moving fast there comes a point where one of the main characters, Doctor Manhattan, reforms his body over a period of months after a scientific accident. In the scene where he finally puts himself completely back together again, he is shown as a naked blue humanoid form. For only a few panels, a penis is shown, albeit in the least graphic sense possible. It is this nudity, which might be missed or thought of as not a huge issue on the first reading, which could cause trouble down the line if not caught. Of course, a basic shape that appears in a few panels, vaguely resembles, and is in the same place as the male reproductive organ may or may not be cause to dismiss the book. This is dependent on many factors: the values of your district and community, precedent, board approval, department approval, and the willingness of you, the teacher, to push the issue. These considerations are unique to each district, individual, and specific situation, so catch-all advice isn't easily dispensed. The call is ultimately yours, but erring on the side of caution is always prudent.

Reading through for language, nudity, violence, and mature themes is critical in selecting an age appropriate, defensible graphic novel. This job can be made a bit

easier if you know the right places to look for graphic novels as well. Making sure any graphic novel meets your standards as a teacher along with the standards of the district is of the utmost importance, and impossible without being able to find and see graphic novels.

It's possible that you have never bought a comic book or graphic novel before. You may have noticed the section at a book store and just kept on walking, or glanced quickly and never gave them another thought. Now is the time to stop on your next visit and take a long look. Major book stores, such as Barnes and Noble, will have a decent sized selection of the most popular and recognizable titles in the genre. Browsing through the titles can lead to some great discoveries, and might lighten your wallet a bit. The issue with a major bookstore is that what is stocked is just a small portion of what is actually available. You are going to find the most popular and time-tested literature and not much else. Lost is the new, the niche, and the under-appreciated. While it's certainly an excellent place to begin and helps satisfy your fix for a book if you need it immediately, there are other places that you can search for graphic novels:

- Your local independent bookstore might have a better, or at least more diverse, selection of graphic novels to choose from. It's a good chance they're run and staffed by employees that are passionate about books and the myriad options available to readers. Stopping by to browse or ask staff about the latest in graphic novels might yield better results than in a chain bookstore.

- Your local comic-book shop is an overlooked resource to teachers in search of the niche selections that you may not be able to find anywhere else, at least locally. The employees at comic book shops know and love the format, and often have rarer, specific titles that others may not have heard of or can't get. Along with graphic novels, comic-book shops are a great resource for, of course, serialized comics that don't quite fit into the title of graphic novel. Like the graphic novel itself, comics are evolving to cover more serious topics and issues, only in a format that is constantly current. If you don't think your city or town has a comic book store, chances are good that it actually does. It may be hidden away in a basement shop, or perhaps caters to sports collectibles as well. Just look around.
- The internet is the definitive source for everything that slips through any cracks in your quest for the perfect graphic novel for your classroom. On top of countless review and recommendation sources, which will be covered shortly, the internet is the world's biggest book store. Major sites like Amazon and smaller sellers can be used to find everything you could want, and will ship them to your door.

There may be no better all-around resource to use in your hunt for graphic novels than the internet. Even if you are a voracious reader with near unlimited means and time, it would still be impossible to consume every graphic novel there is. However, if it exists and someone has read it, chances are there is information about

it on the internet. Any simple internet search for "graphic novel reviews" or "graphic novels in the classroom" will get you started in finding a copious amount of information on the choices available to you as a teacher. As with any internet source, you need to make sure that the site has good or credible information before continuing to use it. Seeking a review for a book you have already read on the site, trying to find out who writes or publishes it, or searching for the name of reviewers or finding a blog network you have used and trusted in the past are good ways to find trusted information. Savvy teachers should have little trouble determining if a site is legitimate, and the desire to fool people seeking graphic novel reviews is low, but as with all things on the internet be sure to use your best judgment. Also be sure to keep in mind that all reviews shouldn't be taken at face value; there is nothing that can take the place of reading the book itself and comparing it to your school and community standards. Reviews are excellent guidance. They will give you a great indication as to the content of the novel, so you can make the decision as to whether or not it's worth your time to seek a book out and read it. Be sure to check out sites like:

- The Graphic Classroom – graphicclassroom.org
- Comics Worth Reading – comicsworthreading.com
- Graphic Novel Reporter – graphicnovelreporter.com

There is also, of course, a resource hidden right inside your school district: the library. The library in your school, and the school's librarian, are excellent places to search for graphic novels that are appropriate, approved, and available to your

students. The selection of graphic novels may not be as good as a book store, but everything is free for you to use; there's no need for you to whip out your credit card here. The chances are excellent that your school's library has a decent selection of graphic novels already on the shelves and ready for students to read. While the seep into the classroom has been slower, librarians have become very aware of students' desire to read graphic novels, and should have plenty stocking the shelves. It also is an excellent idea to use the librarians themselves as a resource. On top of any research and reading you have been undertaking as you seek out different graphic novels to teach or stock in your classroom, your librarian is doing the same for the school's library and will be able to share their knowledge with you. In addition to helping you as a teacher in your search for graphic novels, the librarian may also be employed in helping students in their search by creating displays of popular graphic novels and suggesting them to your students or hosting your classes in the library for a graphic novel book discussion.

Whether you're just dipping your toes into graphic novels or are a veteran, expanding your horizons on what types of graphic novels are most appropriate for your students and where to find them is an important part of expanding your curriculum. You must remember that you, as the teacher, are the initial "line of defense" in determining which graphic novels your students see.

Part III: Introducing Graphic Novels

Familiarizing yourself with the graphic novel format and working on selecting appropriate and relevant novels are an integral part of the process of integrating them into your curriculum. Perhaps the most important part, however, is introducing the format to your class. Without proper introductory lessons and explanations, a unit integrating graphic novels will have a difficult time being successful. An introduction can take the form of many things, and is probably most effective in stages. One of the most important and first aspects is having graphic novels and comics around the classroom to read. If your school does a silent sustained reading program (SSR), it's helpful to find graphic novels and comics to help stock or re-stock your classroom library at the beginning of the year or of your unit. Students will often forget to bring books, or "forget" them, and having graphic novels in the class library is an excellent way to allow students to begin working with them and thinking about them. Aside from any SSR programs, any study hall or homeroom periods provide students with an excellent opportunity to choose a graphic novel or comic and peruse at their leisure. Adding them to your classroom in this manner, of course, won't reach every student, or even most, but it will provide all of them an opportunity to get a jump start. It also provides them the opportunity to mention them to the class. Reading a graphic novel yourself is a great start, but it extends into your classroom when you start a conversation with your students about a graphic novel you have read and can relate to them. As a teacher, you never know how or when what you say conversationally to your class will have an impact on them. Don't forget to mention

that you happen to have the very same book in the back of the room on your bookshelf!

Aside from having the graphic novels in your classroom and trying to let your students know about them, there's that other great resource in the school that you should know and love: the library. You may have already had a meeting with a librarian to discuss graphic novels or asked him or her to set up a display or for recommendations, but you also have the means to get your students down to the library. A class spent in the library where the students get a short presentation on popular graphic novels and what the library can offer, along with a chance for students to pick out their own book afterwards, can go a long way toward a student choosing to read a graphic novel. Of course, there are other ways to introduce graphic novels to students; you can be as creative as you'd like. If your school has a student-run newspaper, you may approach the advisor and see if there are any students that may be interested in doing a graphic novel review. The same would follow for a student-run television station. You can create posters outside your room for students to view as they walk by. You could even start a graphic novel club. The options for spreading information and awareness of graphic novels to your classes and in your school are many, and limited only by what you can imagine.

While these ideas are an excellent way to plant seeds in the students' minds, you may face the very real possibility of being on the verge of presenting a graphic novel to the class as part of a unit when few of the students have read, or have even seen, a graphic novel. Dumping an entirely new form of literature on students, no

matter how much you have tried to get to them to read one, would be an ineffective means of presenting material – in that scenario, it would probably be best if you didn't use a graphic novel at all. Preparation for graphic novels is an essential part of the introductory process. Students need to be guided around the idea of the graphic novel and its implementation. Students may look at a graphic novel and think that a comic will be easy to read and understand, but they can be difficult, foreign, and daunting. You need to have a game plan on how you will prepare students for reading graphic novels. This can be accomplished through an introductory lesson or set of lessons, depending on your class, that cover the ins and outs of reading, analyzing, and appreciating graphic novels as art and literature.

Think back to the first time you opened up a graphic novel. Even being familiar with comic strips or comic books, as you most likely were, the idea of those short works being expanded into a longer format must have seemed odd. Where was the story going? How did it get there? These are questions your students will have as they read through their first graphic novel as well. Your introduction must shepherd them through the book, through its oddities and twists and turns. You should re-read a bit of some graphic novels you plan on using in your unit. What confused you? Where did you find yourself lost as to what was happening? What struck you as interesting or odd? These are the areas your students will probably find peculiar and frustrating as well. They will have questions about the text and how the page flows, where to read, when to read, how dialogue works, who is speaking and when, how time works, and many other aspects of a story that the graphic novel can play with.

The best way to explain these aspects of the format is hands-on with material, so examples will be a must in any introductory lessons. Of course, by now you should have at least a few graphic novels and comic books lying around the classroom.

You can take all this into account and build a lesson (see Appendix A). The main goal of this lesson is to give the students a crash course on what you expect them to get out of graphic novels in your classroom going forward. It is not intended to be an all-encompassing diatribe on everything they should be looking for in the books. Every graphic novel is going to be slightly different in terms of style, tone, characterization, coloring, etc. There's no way you could address all of these different aspects of every graphic novel in an introductory lesson. However, once students have a firm grounding in the basics, then the deeper aspects of the graphic novels can be brought up and taught later, as you run into them. As you teach each book you should introduce the artist and author of the book and take a look at the tone and style of each. However, a lesson like this one allows them to see a few of the basics. First, you want students to know how to read the novel. It shows them the basics of the page and defines some key terms and concepts of the layout. It allows them to see traditional text presentation and page layout. It allows them hands-on time with comics and graphic novels so they can practically use the information they just learned. And lastly, it allows them to apply the knowledge through creation, which lays the groundwork for a section you'll see later on: authentic assessment.

Ultimately, this lesson's styling and presentation are up to you. You know your class best and can best decide how many examples, how much reinforcement,

and how many explanations of the content that they'll need. If you think they need to be walked through a few pages of a graphic novel or comic book, by all means do so. If you feel that they just need a brief refresher course, that's fine too. However, your lesson shouldn't skimp on hands-on time with the actual material. The choice of what to use is up to you. Comic books are shorter, cheaper, and convey the same basics of style and layout you're trying to teach your students, although they tend to be shallower and perhaps less cohesive as a story. If you'd like to use graphic novels to give them an idea of the length and depth that they can expect to see in the future, that's fine as well. Hands-on examples should be kept to manageable chunks, however, to keep the lesson moving. The practical application of the students creating their own work should be a must if you plan to implement an authentic assessment, discussed in a later section, in your unit. It allows the students to get a feel of what it's like to layout, draw, and add dialogue. While it certainly won't be a shining example of what you want to see in a final product, it will allow students to begin experimenting with the inner-workings of comic design. Even if you don't wish to implement this project down the road, there is value in allowing the students to mimic what they see in the comic or graphic novels they are reading for this lesson: it familiarizes them with the technical details. It allows them to identify and implement gutters, panels, dialogue balloons, backgrounds, characters, and to layout pages. All of these skills are valuable in reading a graphic novel as well as creating one.

A lesson like this gets students ready for what comes next. It is a lesson that's only a day or two long, and allows them to see what they're going to be getting down

the road. It does not have to be exhaustive or extensive. It simply has to provide a small amount of guidance to a format that can be a bit confusing. With the use of a well designed introduction to the material, hopefully some of the daunting nature of a long, complicated comic will wear away, and students will become interested in venturing into a new and exciting form of literature.

Part IV: Teaching Graphic Novels

Now that you've found numerous graphic novels, read a few, and understand how the novels convey their meaning, it's time to look at how they can be implemented into your classroom. While there are endless possibilities for bringing graphic novels into your units, generally they will fall into three categories: reading the novel as primary material, incorporating it as supplemental material, or allowing the students to use it during research. The most obvious of the three is to treat them like any other text. The graphic novel is inserted where it fits, and is planned and taught as if it were a traditional text. It becomes primary material in your unit. Graphic novels chosen for this task need to be books that can support at least a few weeks worth of discussion, activities, and assessments. In choosing a novel for this task, two factors should be at the forefront of your decision. The first is length. Obviously, the book needs to be long enough where students aren't plowing through it in a few nights. Some students will, though, just as certainly as some students will only read the bare minimum. In this case, you're also looking for a graphic novel that has depth. The novel should be complex enough and present difficult themes and

ideas in a way that ensures that although a student may be able to finish it in a few days, they'll need to spend more time with the material to flush out anything of great value. You'll know these novels when you come across them. Like an excellent book, they will captivate and inspire, and you'll want your students to learn from them. Planning for these novels should be easy, as you are striving to treat them mostly the same as any other novel. Of course, there is the added visual layer that makes them unique and adds more to the text as a whole, but that should be easily incorporated into lessons.

Ideally, you will find a way to break the novel down into easily planned chunks. The book length novels might already be sectioned into chapters or some other discernible parts due to the fact that they were once serialized and combined into a single volume, or were specifically designed that way by the author. However, some books may not be like this and you will have to determine the best places to make breaks in the novel through a thorough reading. It's important to note that while a book length graphic novel will be enough to sustain one to two weeks of a unit, it's probably no more than 100 to 150 pages of material. This should be taken into consideration – there is a limit to the number of reading assignments that can be given to students. It should be expected that you will get roughly eight to ten nights of readings out of the novel. Once you've divvied up the novel, planning can begin as normal. A novel that is taught as primary material should include all the parts you would include if planning for a traditional text in your unit: reading assignments, homework, supplemental lessons and materials, and assessments. The overall mantra

to take into planning is that this graphic novel you have chosen is the same as any other text in terms of how you will plan and design lessons for it. For example, in a lesson centered around the moral and ethical ambiguity in the novel *Watchmen* (see Appendix B), you can easily focus on the actual material, instead of the fact that it's a different kind of material that you're teaching. Obviously, students realize that they're learning from something new. Your lessons don't need to point this fact out. A subtle reminder can be given to be sure to check for visual clues as well as textual ones, and from there you can allow the material can stand on its own.

Another option to consider is treating the primary graphic novel as part of a larger, thematic unit. While the graphic novel can stand on its own, it functions very well as part of unit where you've chosen to incorporate a theme. It's important to understand that while the novel functions just fine by itself, there are inherent limitations. As noted above, they don't stretch like traditional novels, which can create 20 to 25 reading assignments for a single novel, if a single chapter is considered one reading assignment. Incorporating a theme allows you to add in more material while still teaching a single unit and a cohesive concept. For example, a unit on the human experience during war time may contain a traditional text, a graphic novel, a film, poems, news stories, essays, and historical documents. Your traditional text, graphic novel, and film could all function as primary materials and the poems, essays, news stories, and documents would supplement them. This format allows you, if you have concerns, to mitigate the downside of graphic novels being shorter while making the same or a greater impact by incorporating more material into your unit.

Along with teaching the graphic novel as primary material, you can choose to incorporate it as supplemental material. Dealing with graphic novels as supplemental material may be the most convenient of the three methods. While students will still need an introduction to the material, you are presenting it alongside other texts, and the graphic novel won't be taking center stage or taking up a large block of time. It becomes a helper. Instead of preparing for a full unit of material, supplemental graphic novels show their versatility by coming in and being used in much the same way as a single poem, a film clip, or an essay. It's a short burst of material meant to combine with other information and illustrate a broader point. This allows you to incorporate a lot of graphic novel material into your units. Instead of looking at the book as a whole, you pull relevant information from the graphic novel and use it to support a main point or primary text.

In a unit on "War and People," for example, the use of a graphic novel as supplemental material makes for part of a break-out or standalone lesson (see Appendix C). For this example, there is no main text being supported but a main theme, how war affects the people that live through it. In this case, instead of reading a larger text about 9/11, a broader picture is painted by piecing supplemental information together: news stories, "live" video recorded during the event, and a graphic novel adaptation of the 9/11 commission report full of factual information. The use of the graphic novel takes the place of the larger 9/11 commission report, a book that while captivating to adults is likely too large and unwieldy to effectively be used in the classroom. The graphic adaptation is much shorter, is clearly sectioned

into tidy portions that students can easily pick through, and most importantly, can be presented in part in a short amount of time instead of as a whole over a longer period. The most obvious benefit in including graphic novels into your curriculum in this manner is flexibility. Graphic novels add an extra dimension to your lessons without a significant investment in time teaching their use.

While using the novels in this way comprises one type of supplemental use, there is another that merits mention. While supplementing a main idea or text through standalone lessons, the graphic novel is used by the entire class as a vehicle for learning. However, there are graphic novels that can supplement texts for a single student or group of students concurrently with the main lessons. There are many graphic adaptations of works commonly used in classrooms that simplify or present the material being taught in a less complex and easier to digest fashion. A student struggling with a text could be assigned a graphic adaptation to be read along with or instead of that main work. The student still learns the material as the graphic novel supplements the main text for him or her. This can be particularly useful for extremely difficult texts like the works of Shakespeare, where a student that is struggling can easily become lost in the text if they are unable to visualize the play in their head and unable to follow the action due to the language. Graphic adaptations take care of the visualization problems, and there are versions that can present the actual text in a modern language, offering struggling students a chance to succeed.

Out of the three most prominent uses for graphic novels in the classroom – as supplemental material, as primary material, and as research material – the one that stands out as most difficult to implement and use regularly is research. Research in any context is tricky, especially at the high school level. Students are just coming around to recognizing what exactly the broad term of "research" means, what sources are, how to determine reliability and credibility, how to implement what they find, and a plethora of other problems that only get increasingly difficult. As teachers, you should be making it a goal to instill in students research habits that will help them not only with moving into what colleges and universities expect, but also what will help them answer questions in their everyday lives. Research is not simply something someone does when it comes time to write a paper, after all; research is a critical thinking skill. The issues with graphic novels as research material, then, should be fairly obvious in terms of what makes any research material difficult. There can be a prejudice against it. It hardly passes anyone's test of face validity. Who is going to, circumstances unknown, decide that information contained in a graphic novel is equal to information culled from a more traditional source, or even the internet? Also, graphic novels are typically works of fiction and not sources of factual information, unless you were doing research on graphic novels themselves. Graphic novels, however, do contain valid information. The material is out there, waiting to be found and used.

Using graphic novels as research material in a classroom is doable, but not preferable under certain circumstances. Teaching research is hard enough. A teacher

should never have to awkwardly shoehorn a graphic novel in if it doesn't easily fit the circumstance – there's no need to have one just to have one. If you haven't stumbled on a suitable graphic novel or can't easily find one, don't bother. It's not worth the trouble and the confusion that it may cost the students trying to make the idea work. If the students can't see a clear connection between the graphic novel and the research subject, it may create the perception that having a graphic novel is important and remove the focus from the information. This is the last thing you want to do to prevent confusing your students. Instead, the graphic novel format should only be used when a clear link is made between the topic and the source material. If the graphic novel covers the topic but doesn't necessarily offer a useful or impartial viewpoint, then it should be avoided as well. Strong political or religious statements should also be avoided.

Ultimately, how you choose to incorporate graphic novels into your curriculum is up to you. These three methods are broad strokes – the easiest way to connect graphic novels and students. There are other, unique ways to make this work, specific to topic or situation. The spirit of incorporating graphic novels is about adventure: finding new ways to share universal material. If you find a new way to present a graphic novel to a student, do it! You may be able to reach a child who hasn't been able to "get it" yet.

Part V: Crafting an Authentic Assessment

We've seen that in many ways, the graphic novel allows teachers to put a new spin on the same old classroom activities, opening doors to students who frown on reading and studying from traditional texts. While teaching graphic novels in the classroom goes a long way toward solving some of the issues students have with those traditional texts and instruction, the question that begs to be asked is, "what else?" What else can the graphic novel do to spice up the learning process? There is an area of instruction that can be well-served by some spicing, sprucing, or maybe a general overhaul. Assessment is, perhaps, the most staid part of teaching. Students dread taking the same familiar multiple choice tests and teachers dread making them. Essays, if they ever were fresh, lose their luster over time. The teaching of graphic novels can remedy this. What if the graphic novel was to become the assessment? The student gets to become creator, in a different way than they're used to in school. Instead of crafting an essay, they get to craft art. The act of creation is under-rated in traditional assessments. Multiple choice, at its simplest, asks only regurgitation. Students have more to offer than what they can flush out of their busy heads through simple recall. You've seen many different ways to present a graphic novel to a student, teaching them the ins-and-outs of how to read one, stylistic choices, how the art can be as meaningful as the words – now it becomes time for the student to apply that knowledge. Plus it can be really, really fun.

The basic principle of assessment is that you want students to apply the knowledge they've learned so that you can evaluate their progress, and this creation

idea fits nicely into that principle. Instead of evaluating sheets of circled A's, B's, C's, and D's, you'll be evaluating what they've done on paper as a final product, the process they used to get there, and how well they can present their choices. The final product can be many things – it's really up to your imagination as a teacher and the dynamic of your classroom. The most obvious choice is to have each student craft their own short graphic novel about the topic at hand. An ideal length is something manageable while still allowing for depth and exploration of the topic. It's probably best to advise students to stick to a conventional narrative structure, but leave the scope and exact subject to them and be able to offer focus and guidance if need be. Another idea, one that can bring a classroom together through the process, is that of a class novel. It allows you as the teacher to promote a more fully realized work, doling parts off to students to create a small portion of a whole. The novel can come together with a similar art style to be one narrative or be a collective of separate short stories revolving around a similar theme. If you're feeling particularly adventurous or have an advanced class, students can even create their own story with many students all telling the same tale, like an alternate history. There are many possible ideas and combinations.

Another serious consideration is whether or not you want students to work in groups. While some teachers and students are averse to group work, either as a whole or part of an assessment, it can be beneficial for a number of reasons. This can appear to be a daunting task, creating an entire graphic novel from nothing to something they will be sharing with other students and the school community. It may be hard for

students to cope with this type of project by themselves and you may receive sub-par work as a result. A group offers a division of duties – and with a graphic novel there are many – so that each student is doing something that they find more complementary to their skill set. For any group, you will need an artist, a writer, and someone to do layout work and plan. All of these are essential to the creation of a quality graphic novel. The students can decide on a direction and a style together, and then coordinate as they go along. It allows for natural teamwork since the tasks involved are so complementary. Certainly, if you want more out of your students, more depth or a longer, more polished piece, then a group allows for more even sharing of responsibilities to enable students to handle more. However, the usual pitfalls of group work apply in this case as well. Group members have a propensity to lean on a single individual to handle the bulk of the work. Often, the student being leaned on is resentful and not much is accomplished. Also, in-class time needs to be scheduled for students to collaborate on the project. Students may have unavoidable conflicts outside of school time, and need to be provided with time to see each other face-to-face.

The war experience was a topic for a lesson on supplemental material and it holds up well as a topic for students to more fully explore that idea through the process of creation. Since the idea of war is one every child born since 2001 has known for the entirety of their lives, it’s an idea that becomes easy to relate to and see as a common experience they’ve had with the past. Adaptation will be the means of creation for this assessment (see Appendix D). In asking the students to examine a

novel, break down the information, and then reformulate it into a different medium, they must complete some higher order thinking that they may not get to do in a different context. This particular assessment is aimed at underclassmen in high school, with the thought that total control over subject matter may be something that is slightly beyond what they reasonably would be able to do. Again, this is all based on the class itself. While envisioned for 9th or 10th graders, it could easily work for upperclassmen or advanced middle-school students with tweaks in the amount and specificity of guidance. What this assignment seeks to do is challenge the students to create work without saddling them with a burden, or something they are not easily able to achieve.

Many students often get tasked to read *The Diary of Anne Frank* as either a historical work or a literary one at some point while in school. In the English classroom it becomes a lens that can be used to further explore racism, war, and human rights. It's an undoubtedly valuable text that every student should be reading. However, in terms of an adaptation, it's set in a world that students probably have little experience with, their visual interactions with the time period being second-hand, in black and white. It helps students to have a solid base to begin such a project, one they can relate to. *Zlata's Diary*, by Zlata Filipović, is in the vein of Anne Frank, but it is possible to show the students a more updated view of war and the effect it has on people. Ideally, for this project, the students will be given some sort of visual reference to work from – since the graphic novel is a visual format, it helps immensely for the students to see and work with images from Sarajevo and the

Bosnian war. This can be accomplished through a brief history presentation, or it also offers an excellent opportunity for some inter-disciplinary work with the history department in your school. Students should come away from any lesson with a deeper understanding of the visual aspects of Zlata's world so as best to translate that to the drawn page. As a class, you should decide on an appropriate color palette and visual style, while still allowing for students to have some choice in how they present the material.

In doing a graphic novel creation assessment like this one, English teachers should always remember that this isn't an assignment for an art class, but should expect some deal of quality and a cohesive visual style. Expectations regarding art should be clearly defined from day one, with students understanding that while they aren't expected to draw like a professional, their work is going to be bound and shown to others. The idea that their work will be published in some way should push students to put in a bit of extra effort to create an excellent graphic novel. In terms of the actual publishing, if you ask for high quality from your students you should deliver in turn. Copying their original work onto a glossy paper and having it bound will give the impression to students that they have truly created something worthwhile.

The idea behind this lesson and project is that not only are you assessing students' knowledge of what they have read in *Zlata's Diary*, but what they know about how literature works and how graphic novels function. A graphic novel adaptation is a great process for allowing students to distill the most important parts

of what they read, twist it around, and then create something original from it. The process of creation can fuel your students, and this is a project that can bring a class together as a better community. You don’t need to have the students read a graphic novel to incorporate them into your classroom – you can let them create!

Part VI: Modern Form, Modern Practice

Now that you've seen some of the main ways that graphic novels can be used in the classroom, it's a good time to head back and revisit why we're introducing graphic novels at all. Whether you're deciding to use them as research material, as the star of the show, or as a supplement to what you're currently teaching, there has to be a reason for you to be using them in your classroom. Surely, any traditional text can convey the same basic information to your students. That traditional text is probably already set up in your school district, and ready to be used with less work than a graphic novel would take. So why do teachers use the graphic novels? The answer is within the students: traditional texts may not reach them the way a graphic novel or other non-traditional texts would. Graphic novels are a format that is familiar, interesting, and immediate to the interests and needs to students. Utilizing such texts in the classroom is an important way to better connect with the students you teach – but should it be the only one? Is there more you can do in order to foster the sense of immediacy that students crave? The answer is yes. The real question, however, is how. Worksheets, presentations, and essays are all fine ways to connect with texts you use in the classroom. However, they can become old and stale when they are not

updated. As you go through and update texts in your curriculum, you might also take the time to update the methods you use to reinforce the texts: modern texts, modern practice.

One of the biggest ways you can incorporate more modern practices into your teaching is through technology. Technology can mean many things, and not all of them are useful and applicable to the way you choose to teach your chosen graphic novels. You must choose what is most relevant without being gimmicky. Let's take a look at some things that can be done that might update your practice a bit.

Social Networks. This term can strike fear into the hearts of some educators, who see social networks as nothing but trouble for teachers, something that they should leave well enough alone. However, students are flocking to social networks, and they are quickly becoming an integral part of the students' experience outside of the classroom. Whether they share their likes on a site like Facebook (facebook.com), their fleeting thoughts on a site like twitter (twitter.com), or their pictures on sites like tumblr (tumblr.com) or flickr (flickr.com), teachers need to be able to tap into the idea of the social network for its potential use in the academic setting. While it may not always be practical to use the actual sites, they provide familiar frameworks for which to base activities and projects around. Some basic types of social networks that can be useful in your teaching are blogs, photo-sharing, and life-streaming services. You may already be familiar with blogs. They are becoming omnipresent in the media and have been around for a number of years. Blogs, short for web logs, are for long-form communication: articles, columns, reviews, ruminations, story-telling, and

reporting. They are more immediate than traditional means of publishing similar information – think newspapers or magazines – due to their nature of having no set publishing schedule and being "always on," or constantly accessible. Also, they are a decentralized means of publication, so anyone can start and publish one. Life-streaming services are similar to blogs but are short-form, where snippets of information, on any topic, are shared between people who follow one another. Photo-sharing sites are simply for sharing photos.

When it comes to incorporating these types of services into your plans, it might not be possible to use the actual sites, so you may just have to borrow the premise and design to adapt. Take, for example, *Watchmen*, from a few chapters ago. A book so rich in characterization lends itself very, very well to the social networking treatment. We can imagine how this might work: take each of the main characters from the novel. Each character has a strong arc throughout the novel and much more to say than what is actually in the art and words. Each student would be assigned a character that they would follow throughout the twelve chapters. It would be their job to root out this characterization and write as the character they're studying. This type of project lends itself well to a blog format: you want the students to dig deep into the characters and bring out what they find there. The short format of a life-stream type post doesn't provide the length required to get the most out of student analysis, and photo sharing doesn't help with what this type of activity is trying to accomplish.

Another feature of social network-style assignments in this manner is the social aspect. As students are blogging as characters, it should become apparent that

each student is not doing so in a vacuum. Whether you've chosen to use an online blogging service like tumblr or blogger (blogger.com), or if your district offers a content management system, like Moodle or Blackboard, your students will have the ability to read each other's blogs. This creates the opportunity for students to not only share what they have to say, but to respond to other students' comments and blog posts. What blogging in this fashion creates is a community where every student is not only creating their own original content, but is writing for a wider audience than just the teacher, is reading and responding to other students' works, and is responsible for fostering discussion. The blog opens up all these opportunities that a simple paper or worksheet does not. The level of engagement required in order to write for an audience greater than the teacher, and also to have that audience be an active one that can challenge the author, is far greater than other activities can offer.

Another social networking-related activity that asks students to analyze characters in the novels is one that makes use of the sharing aspect of online communities. Social networks are built to utilize information that people decide they want others to know. This information fleshes out their online identities, and lets others get a more complete picture of them as a person. What if this was extended to fictional characters? What would a social network of characters from a graphic novel, or from any book, look like? An excellent project for your students would be to explore the world of the novel you're studying by creating a social network for it. A project like this could take many faces and incorporate many parts but will probably have some key components.

First are the profiles for each character from the story. The easiest way to accomplish this is to allow the students to actually set up profiles on the social networking sites themselves, but there are barriers to this route. Schools are often opposed to students using social networking sites during school time. Even in an educational capacity, this could be a tough sell and not worth the trouble. Also, even if you did get approval, most social networks have rules that require the people that join to be real. Instead, it may be a better approach to copy the styling of social networking profiles and have it be a pen and paper activity, such as a poster where the student has a template of the profile and fills in the relevant information and adds appropriate content. It would also be possible to design this digitally and have students do the same work on a computer. This profile building allows the students to explore the characters through deconstructing them: What do they like? Dislike? Where are their favorite places? What would their favorite books be? Who would they be friends with? What pictures would say the most about them? Through this sort of character study, the students come to learn more about how the characters relate to each other, and how that relates to the text.

Aside from social networking, there are other ways to incorporate some modern technologies and modern practices into your teaching of graphic novels. Many schools have facilities for audio and video production and the computer facilities to digitally edit raw footage and recorded audio. If you have access to these facilities, and are knowledgeable about editing or willing to learn, this opens up the possibility of having your students podcast or vodcast. Podcasting came to

prominence with Apple's iPod music player – which is not a requirement – as a means to bring non-live talk radio to users so that they could stay entertained and informed away from a live connection. The format has evolved to the point where there are podcast "shows" for every topic under the sun, from fantasy baseball to poetry to running. Users download the shows from one of many central registries, such as iTunes or Podcast Alley, and listen at their convenience. While the format of podcasts varies wildly, they are typically less than half an hour in length, broken into segments, and focus on a topic of interest in their genre. A show about fantasy baseball, then, may have an introduction, an opening monologue, a discussion on current player news and upcoming games, a statistics breakdown, reader questions, a guest interview, and a signoff.

As you can imagine, vodcasts are extremely similar. Instead of just speaking about the selected topic, in a vodcast the students get the opportunity to appear on camera as well. The vodcast format lends itself to being a little more creative, as they get the opportunity to do wardrobe and set dressing in addition to writing a script or producing a show. Vodcasts, however, tend to be more entertainment than information, so if you allow students to produce vodcasts on the selected topic it would be wise to monitor the process a bit more closely to see that the majority of time is educational and not discussions about costume and scenery. However, vodcasts do offer students a more immersive experience. They can dress up in character and assume a role better than what would come across in an audio production. This opens up many choices for how a student production could function.

Imagine a talk show that interviews the characters from the graphic novels, a news program, or a round-table discussion. Anything is possible.

Aside from learning audio and video production, introducing podcasts and vodcasts to your students allows them the opportunity to explore graphic novels in a different format than a traditional assignment. When the students can read their novel, and then get together as a group, plan a show, and produce it – where they can talk about characters, make connections to other works that they've read, predict what's coming, or create a review – they connect more deeply with the work and with each other. Creating these shows is an inherently collaborative process which gives the students a strong goal to work toward. Each group of students will be working for each other to produce something that will be experienced by a wider audience. Whether you arrange the productions to be screened by a class, other classes, the school's radio or television station, parents, or the internet, the students are working toward producing something that they themselves can be proud of and can be helpful for others.

Much of the way that we interact with technology now is social. We share, we collaborate, and we produce for others. Bringing this modern philosophy into the classroom is an excellent way to engage students in a manner they're familiar with and truly help them connect to the material. Allowing students the sense of familiarity with the tools of their modern world, and the awareness that what they create has a wider audience than the teacher, can produce superior results.

Part VII: Issues Surrounding Graphic Novels

It should be clear that the nature of graphic novels is dichotomous. On one hand, they are clearly useful teaching tools. On the other, they are often perceived to be inferior, non-literary, and without utility in the classroom. While using the novels well in a modern classroom goes a long way toward setting them up as a legitimate medium, problems will still crop up. There may never be a time where one hundred percent of the school community fully accepts graphic novels in the classroom. Because of this, it becomes important for teachers to craft a defense of their less traditional materials. In much the same way as a teacher would send around a permission slip and explanation for students to watch a film with questionable content, it is a solid plan to do the same with graphic novels. Permission sounds like a dirty word in this context, and the idea of seeking approval for something that you as the teacher may find not only perfectly acceptable but normal may seem a bit preposterous. It is important, however, to remember that teachers are accountable for all that they do, and change is often resisted. In that vein, asking for permission from parents may be a necessary process. It should be much more than a simple check-yes-and-sign form; the teacher can use the opportunity to explain, to educate, and to include parents in a process, that of choosing curriculum, that they often feel distant from.

When you bring up the term defense, it conjures memories of senior class debates on controversial issues, or politicians spouting half-truths on the floor of congress. A defense, in this scope, is none of those things: there's no debate, there's

no rules of order, there's no discussion. A defense is simply a document that explains your position and your direction, and outlines important information. For a graphic novel, you want to very clearly and simply explain why it is that you're teaching that specific novel, what it does better than a traditional text, what it contains that may be considered objectionable, and what you hope your students will take away from it in the end. The format for such a document is up to the teacher, but ideally it should be informational enough to distribute if necessary, but concise enough that only the most relevant information is presented. It may even be a good idea to keep a longer defense for your own reference and usage, and a short version to distribute to parents.

In order to write your defense, you should have fully planned out all your lessons for the graphic novel, thoroughly read and considered any objectionable content, and have a firm grasp on where your unit is going. Before moving forward with any examples, it may be prudent to talk about objectionable content. Every district is going to have different standards that they expect teachers to uphold when it comes to the content of what they teach. However, it is also important to consider that not all important works are squeaky clean. There will always be some amount of friction surrounding controversial material. Graphic novels compound this issue more due to the inclusion of visuals to accompany the text. Instead of a small passage that has a curse, a graphic novel could include the same curse and show an associated gesture. Instead of a short passage that may be sexual in nature, the graphic novel may actually show something sexual. These factors have to be weighed in the selection process. Again, this is subjective and it can't be stressed enough how

important it is to be familiar with your district and community. It often helps to think about how graphic novels compare with films when considering what is or isn't objectionable, and how objectionable it is. While there is no rating system for graphic novels, the idea of text and image combined makes for an easy comparison to films and their rating system is one that parents, administrators, and the community would be familiar with. Thinking of what a reasonable PG-13 film or an R rated film might contain will help you find content in your selected novel that others may find disagreeable. In graphic novels you will often find cursing, violence, and nudity. It is your job to pinpoint it, document it, and relay the information to parents and the school, as well as to make your case as to why the book is valuable beyond the objectionable content.

Take, for example, the graphic novel that we used earlier, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen*. While *Watchmen* is a great book, it is rife with violence, has a few scenes of brief nudity, depicts attempted rape, and shows scenes of mass destruction. It is still, though, an important text. It deconstructs superheroes in the American mythos. It has a compelling story to tell us about humanity and the people we choose to be our heroes. Its attempt to tackle the issue of superheroes, their flaws, and their inherent humanity is unequalled. The book can be an important tool in schools. However, it is best suited to upperclassmen or advanced/honors students in a high-school setting. Reading through and making a quick catalog of what you've seen and read allows you to easily place the novel at that age level, which is an important step in the selection process, as noted earlier, and also in this process. Once the age-

appropriateness has been decided, a second read-through should be made with the content standards of that age group in mind. You should be making a note of things that seem excessive: violence, language, sex/nudity, and adult situations.

Watchmen can be used as an excellent example to build a defense. After a thorough read-through for content, there are numerous scenes, images, and situations that are the standouts for the type of content you're trying to catalogue and present. This information that you've made note of is the basis for a longer document you can use for your own reference. Remember, you should also include a short bit about why you've chosen the novel and where you're going with it.

Defense for the novel *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons
Mr. Andrew Fox

Why I chose this novel:
Watchmen is a complicated and intricate novel that expertly examines humanity and the American cold-war experience through its examination of "super heroes." While it is written for a decidedly mature audience, Moore and Gibbon's are masters of their art. There is no better book that tackles the American idea of the "super hero" and few books that offer such excellent characterization and explorations of morality.

What I am teaching through the novel:

- What is a super hero? What does it mean, and what does it require, to be a hero? We'll work on deconstructing the idea of heroes.
- Moral choices. What does it mean to be good or bad? The characters in this novel occupy serious moral gray areas and will offer excellent opportunity to discuss morality and the often blurred line between good and evil.
- The book plays with some amazing narrative formats and literary devices that offer students a chance to reinforce these concepts and see them in new contexts.
- The concept of intertwining, parallel texts through the comic-inside-the-comic in the novel.

What in the novel may be controversial or objectionable?

- Violence

- Man beaten and pushed from window
    - Murder of pregnant woman (gunshot)
    - Woman is shot by an assailant
    - Man is shown with bullet hole in his head
    - Man has his throat slit
    - Mass destruction of a city with many bloody bodies
    - Man explodes
    - A woman is almost raped (not explicit)
    - Implied murder of a child
    - A dog is shown with its head split open
- Sexuality
    - No explicit sex
    - A woman's breasts are shown
    - A penis is shown (not sexually)
    - Buttocks are shown
- Language
    - No "Fuck"
    - Shit
    - Goddamn
- Drinking, Drugs, Etc.
    - Drinking
    - Smoking
    - Drug addiction

Fig. 3. An example of a defense.

Now that the foundation has been laid for the defense of your graphic novel choice, the decision must be made on whether or not permission needs to be attained to teach the novel. Permission needs to come from the school as well as the parents, and every school district can handle these situations differently. Some districts may require all material to be cleared by the board, while others may require all materials in the core curriculum to be cleared, while in others it may be left to the administration or department heads. As a teacher, you should be very familiar with the rules and regulations regarding how the process works in your district. If and when the novel is cleared, your district may require you to clear it with parents – and

even if they don't, it may be a good idea anyway. If you are teaching, for example, an elective class or a specific unit on graphic novels, you may write one blanket permission form for use for the class or unit that will cover all the graphic novels used, objectionable or not. If you are teaching a single graphic novel as supplemental material or as a standalone novel, it would be a good idea to send a note home for each objectionable novel you plan to teach.

Watchmen, as stated before, is certainly not a novel that is easily defensible as a book to be taught to a freshman ELA class. It should be taught to older, more mature classes, and your note to parents should reflect this, along with a brief abstract of why you chose the novel and what you plan to get out of it, and a brief summary of the objectionable material. Each note should be accompanied by contact information and the invitation for the parent to discuss the novel further with you, and also an invitation to read the material in question. You may even choose to have a few parent copies on hand for parents that would like to read the book. The exact content of the note is subjective. It's up to you if you want to have a standard form that you just fill in or write a specific note for each graphic novel you would like parents to approve.

Dear Parent,

My name is Mr. Andrew Fox, and I'm your son or daughter's teacher for 12th grade English Language Arts. In an upcoming unit, I am planning on teaching the novel *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. This book is a graphic novel, a novel that tells its story through drawings as well as text. While *Watchmen* is an important work in the graphic format, it's also an important novel that addresses the idea of heroes in our culture and the ambiguity of morality. While I feel strongly that this is a novel that can convey these themes as well as or better than any book, it's important to note that it does include adult language, adult situations, violence, and very brief cartoon nudity. It is a

book comparable to a Rated R film, which I would also write to seek permission before screening. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, or if you would like a copy of the book to review yourself, feel free to contact me. Otherwise, please sign below to show that you give your child permission to read this novel. Thank you!

Mr. Andrew Fox
afox@schooldistrict.org
(555) 555-5555 x555

☐ I give my student permission to study this book.

☐ I **DO NOT** give my student permission to study this book, and would like to discuss alternative options with Mr. Fox.

☐ I would like to discuss this further with Mr. Fox.

Please sign: ____

Fig. 4. An example of a permission note.

If any parents take you up on the offer to discuss the book further, you have a ready-made sheet that lists objectives, purpose, and objectionable content. You will also be ready with a copy for them to borrow if need be.

A defense is all about preparation and anticipation. You should understand your material well enough to know that there can be issues with it; we’re not all the same people with the same values. These documents help you be prepared for just such a situation, while providing a useful way to organize your thoughts on the objectionable content in the book. A thorough chronicling of your rationale, goals, and any issues you find make for a simpler experience of answering any questions that may crop up regarding the novel.

Chapter Four

Summary and Conclusions

A work like this was a bit of an ambitious undertaking. In taking it on, I was striving to write an introductory piece, a piece where a person who has never read a graphic novel before could pick this guide up, read through it, and be able to tackle a graphic novel on their own and in a classroom setting. Of course, things always end up a bit more complicated than that. A goal of mine going into the project was to portray graphic novels as something relatively new and interesting yet easily integrated and simple to use. These two things seem a bit mutually exclusive; on one hand you have this new format, a new way to tell stories, and on the other you have simplicity and ease. The former makes graphic novels seem complicated and bulky, difficult to implement and time intensive. The latter brings to mind something basic and shallow. The truth, like most things, lies somewhere in the middle: the graphic novel is at the same time something different and apart from regular classroom material, yet also is genuinely easy to teach and read once you've covered some basics. The trick is to represent this dichotomy, that the graphic novel can occupy two almost separate spaces at once. It's my hope that this project has accomplished that. I have tried to show that graphic novels are literary enough to be included in your classroom's curriculum, that they are new and engaging enough to pique student interest, and that they are easy enough to implement that any teacher should be able to do so.

I hope it should go without saying that graphic novels are worthy of a place in the classroom. A read through one of the great ones should be enough to convince anyone of that. They allow story-telling in a way that really isn't available in traditional texts, with an added visual layer that almost counts as a secondary text. The format allows authors and artists to play with aspects of story that can come off as convoluted and difficult in traditional novels. Time, character, and pacing all can be explored and manipulated through the panels and pages of the graphic novel in ways that seem natural and flow within the context of the story. This ability of the graphic novel opens up complexity and depth. While there will always be a place in the comic fan's heart for the huge-muscled heroes that duke it out in the pages of comic books, they don't necessarily have to occupy the pages of graphic novels. Instead, real and human stories can be told and explored, and the graphic novel can give us the same vision of the human experience as any traditional text.

Beyond the intellectual integrity of graphic novels, they are a whole lot of fun. They open up the kind of opportunities in a classroom that can be difficult to coax out of traditional works. Graphic novels can provide the change of pace and immediacy that students crave in the classroom while still broaching the topics and issues teachers wish to open up to their students. Additionally, graphic novels are supremely accessible. They are generally shorter than traditional texts, contain less actual text, and contain a visual element that accentuates the story. Even though this has little effect on how complex, rich, and deep the graphic novel might be, it helps students to

want to open the pages. Graphic novels don't fall prey to the dreaded "wall of text" that can make reading a chore. Instead, they are often a joy to open and begin reading.

Lastly, the graphic novel should be relatively easy to implement in the classroom. A mantra that I presented earlier, in Chapter Three, was that graphic novels can be treated the same as traditional novels in terms of lesson planning and unit building. There are no proprietary techniques to teaching a graphic novel. They are books. Teachers teach books. It's as simple as that. You can lesson plan a graphic novel like any other text that you teach. You'll be looking for the same concepts and themes from both, and for the most part you'll find the general concepts and themes included in each to be similar. You don't need to teach a unit on how to make a graphic novel work, only a class or two. Students should already be fairly familiar with them due to exposure to comics in their everyday lives. Graphic novels are just larger. What the novels do offer, besides ease of use, is a new layer to add to your teaching. On top of teaching a story you get to add the visual aspect into your plans. This opens up a world of possibilities for interacting with the text. Traditional texts allow you to take away from them only what you can divine from text. Graphic novels allow you and your students to read images as well text. It also opens the door to creation past creative writing. All teachers wish for their students to enjoy their writing, and graphic novels add the visual layer to this aspect of the classroom as well.

In tackling this subject it was my wish that I could contribute to seeing more teachers explore what's available to them beyond the stacks of books they choose

from at the beginning of the year. There are options out there to spice up the classroom, and I wanted to show that they're not different and scary. I want teachers to know that it's easy to shake things up, and it can be beneficial to both your teaching and to your classroom environment. Graphic novels are just one way to accomplish this. It's the responsibility of every teacher to keep up to date with what's going on in the world of English – a world that's rapidly moving away from what constitutes traditional literature. Today's classroom is in a period of flux, caught in between how things were traditionally done and how things are going to be done in the future. Every teacher should be looking forward to seeing where the classroom is going, and I hope that this project can contribute a small amount to the journey.

Recommendations

This project was a difficult one to research. While graphic novels have been around in a popular format since the 1980's, they haven't gotten much attention in educational circles. This is not to say that people aren't talking about them or discussing the impact graphic novels can have in the classroom; sadly, it seems to be a limited few. Most of the articles on graphic novels I found were written by educators, expounding on how they do *X* or how they have seen *X* done before. What I saw were snapshots: little pieces of information that provided a walled off bit of information about how singular teachers use graphic novels in particular situations. Although this information is valuable, especially in forming a project such as this, it doesn't paint a very clear picture on how graphic novels are being used in the wider

teaching population. I feel like anyone studying how graphic novels are implemented and used in the classroom could benefit from a wide-ranging, quantitative study on the matter. Instead of the very limited snapshot, I would love to see a panorama of how teachers in different disciplines handle incorporating graphic novels in their classes. Data on the amount of classrooms incorporating the novels, subjects, grades, school and student demographics, and methods used could be very useful in fine tuning a project like this one. I have hypotheses about how some of these numbers might look, and I can only imagine detailing a project on using graphic novels in low-income districts or addressing male literacy through graphic novels. A study like this would breed curiosity and open up a wide range of questions on how graphic novels are used that could result in some excellent and helpful focused works on the issues raised.

In addition, another area of interest that I left out of my project is how graphic novels could be implemented for students with disabilities. I decided against touching on the subject in my project for two reasons. First, it seemed too specific for the scope of the project, and second, it is a can of worms. That is to say, I easily could have lost the entire project in an endless discussion of how teaching graphic novels to students with disabilities could work. I do, however, feel strongly that there is great value in applying graphic novels to special education. For all the reasons they can help in the average classroom, they could help twice as much for students with learning disabilities and reading issues. I am struck by a memory of doing an observation in a 9th grade special education classroom during my masters program. I was allowed to

teach the class, and I decided to give Shakespeare a go. It was a lot of work and I couldn't help but feel the students were missing something when they couldn't grasp the language. I was barely able to teach Shakespeare to those students, and I can't help but think now that a graphic element would have driven the point home better than my lesson did. By either allowing them to create a graphic novel from what they were reading or bringing a graphic adaptation in to illustrate the text, some type of visual element could have really helped in a way that I wasn't able to. The special education classroom is especially in need of new and innovative methods of teaching students and reaching them where traditional methods fail. I would love to see the ideas presented here adapted specifically to the special education classroom. That type of project has the potential to do an immense amount of good and potentially revolutionize the way some texts are taught to students with disabilities.

As for the research I did find, I feel that there needs to be more of it. I would like to see more teachers writing about their experiences trying new things in their classrooms, graphic novels or some other innovative method or technology that will better address student needs than what we use now. The teachers that are trying these things need to tell others about it. Doing so gives a not-so-subtle reminder to all teachers that the classroom is changing. However, only the ability to innovate and the willingness of teachers to take chances and try new things in their classrooms in an attempt to reach and engage their students will take us there.

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Appendix A

LESSON

UNIT: NONE/ANY | LESSON: INTRODUCTION TO GRAPHIC NOVEL FORMAT

Lesson note: This lesson is not intended to take an entire class period.

Objectives

- Students will learn the top-to-bottom, left-to-right rule for reading the comic page
- Students will be able to identify the parts of the comic page
- Students will create and label their own graphic novel page

Materials

- Comic books or graphic novels
- Computer w/ projector OR overhead projector
- Graph paper
- Colored pencils

Purpose

This short lesson is intended to familiarize students with the basic parts of the comic format and how they work together. In studying graphic novels in the future, this lesson provides the basic groundwork. The students have an opportunity for some hands on time with comic books and/or graphic novels to see the format first-hand, and they will also get the opportunity to practice creating and identifying the parts of a comic page.

Anticipatory Set

When the students enter the classroom, there will be graphic novels and/or comic books strewn on desks. On the board the teacher will have written “Take one and start reading!” The students will read for roughly five minutes.

Body [Input]

The teacher will ask the students to stop reading. This will be followed by asking “who has read a comic book or graphic novel before?” The teacher will pick a student that has and ask them to explain when and which one, and whether or not they liked it. If no one responds, the teacher can say “You all just did!” and segue into the lesson. The teacher will then explain that the class will be studying a few graphic novels during the year, and that the class should have a short refresher on the comic page. The teacher will then display the comic “Bored with the Internet” and ask the students if they know how it’s supposed to be read. He can then introduce the concept of reading a comic top-to-bottom, left-to-right. The teacher can also use this

comic, or show a page from a comic or graphic novel, to help students identify the gutters, panels, and different text balloons and their functions. The teacher will label the parts on the computer/overhead and the students can take short notes.

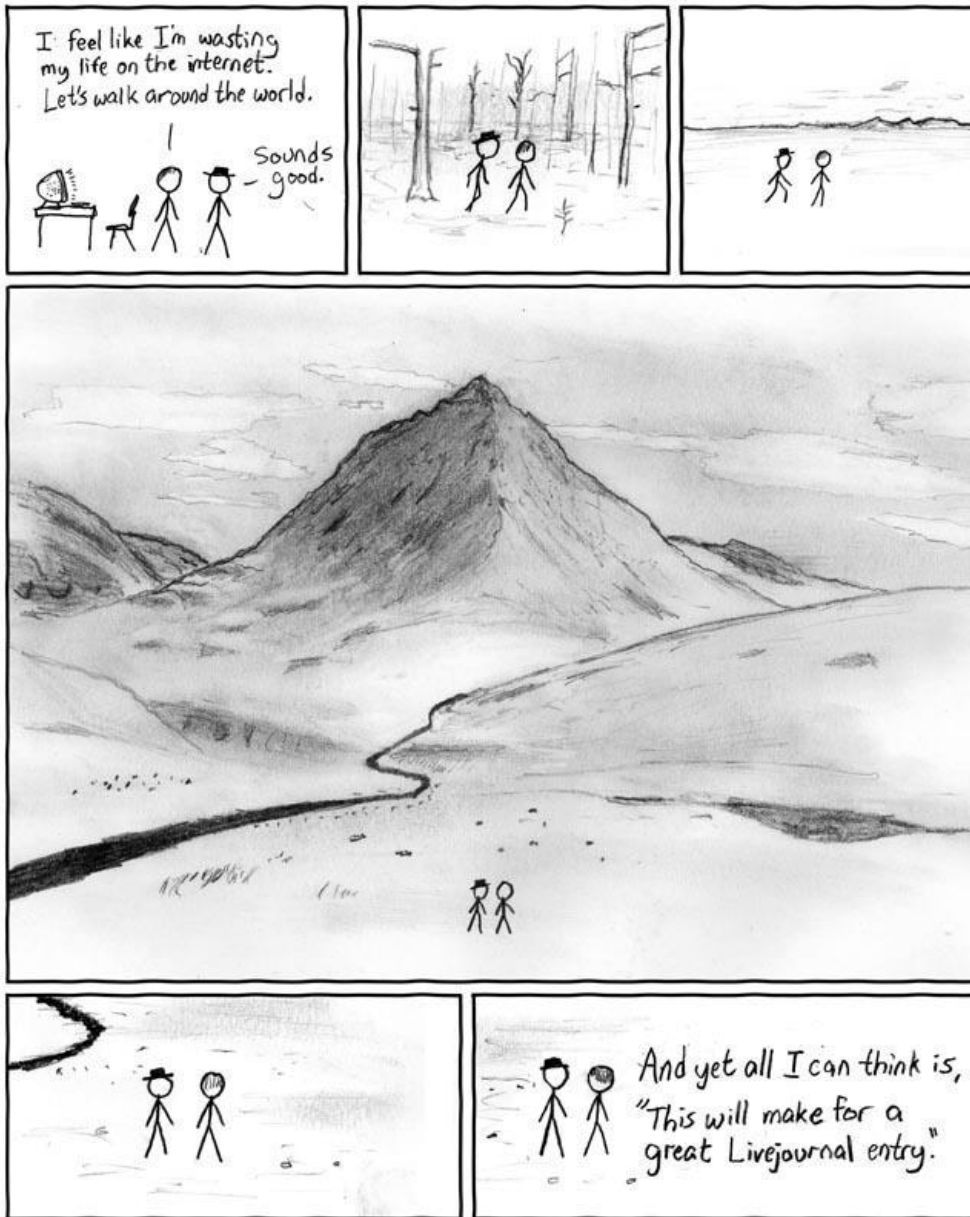
Body [Output]
The teacher will then hand out graph paper and explain that the students are going to create their own graphic novels. Students will be expected to create a single page with at least four panels and four different types of text balloons. Students are free to draw anything they choose, as long as it's appropriate. Students will also be asked to label the gutter, panels, and the types of text balloons they use.

Checking for Understanding
The teacher should circulate and check student understanding through questioning and visually checking students' work.

Assessment
The teacher can collect the drawings and assign a grade if he chooses.

Closure
This lesson should transition into another lesson, it is not intended to be a complete period. However, if this lesson falls at the end of a class the teacher can inquire further about the graphic novels and/or comics students have read, and begin to introduce which graphic novel they will be starting.

End of Lesson ■



"Bored with the Internet" –xkcd.com

Appendix B

LESSON

UNIT: WATCHMEN | LESSON: WATCHMEN ON TRIAL!

Lesson note: More fun with a gavel.

Objectives

- Students will discuss moral and ethical dilemmas in *Watchmen*
- Students will present for or against characters and their moral and ethical choices in a mock trial
- Students will form counter-arguments against the presenting group

Materials

- Computer w/ projector
- Anticipatory set powerpoint
- Ethical situation worksheets
- *Watchmen*

Purpose

The goal of this lesson is a simple introduction to discussing ethical and moral situations in a high school setting. The goal is not to lecture on philosophy or ethical theory, but to provide a forum where students can discuss troubling ethical and moral situations, both for and against. It is an environment where questioning of ethical and moral ideals can happen and help to form an understanding of ethical discourse.

Anticipatory Set

Some ethical and moral scenarios will be projected. Students will simply answer, "If you could save only one, which would you save," where students are given choices such as "Hitler or Lassie." The teacher will then survey the class for their choices and present dissenting opinions for each to the class.

Body [Input]

The teacher will break the students up into six groups and give each an ethical scenario from the book and a worksheet. The scenarios will be projected so each group can see all of them. The teacher will inform each group whether they are trying to prosecute or defend the character for their choices. Each group will act as lawyers in a "trial" where they will have to attempt to get an acquittal or conviction from the judge. The teacher will ask the group to talk the situation over and form a tight, supportable opinion. The students will have roughly 20 minutes to talk it over. The teacher should emphasize that the groups should be finding evidence from the book to support their cases.

Body [Output]
Once students are done, the "Judge" (the teacher) will start hearing cases. Students on the defense and prosecution sides of each scenario will come to the front and give a short speech or opening statement. The class will then have the opportunity to question the lawyers about the case. The lawyers can then make a brief closing statement. The teacher will ask the class how they feel about the scenario, and will make a ruling of guilty or not guilty, and move on to the next case where the process repeats.

Checking for Understanding
The teacher will move among the groups to check on progress, ask questions to spur discussion, and refocus as needed.

Assessment
Informal. Quality of the questions and answers asked and given will be assessed.

Closure
The teacher will ask the students if their understanding of morality and ethics was furthered any by the discussion. The teacher will explain that these situations are difficult, and no one is ever 100% right about ethical dilemmas.

End of Lesson ■

Anticipatory Set Powerpoint

You have the POWER!

...to save only one of each of the following. Which do you save?

a) A child or an adult

b) A stranger or your dog

c) Hitler or Lassie

d) Your spouse or a Nobel Laureate

e) A dog or a weasel

f) Your entire family or the entire canine species

g) A bottle with the cure for cancer or your brother

h) A bottle with the cure for cancer or your brother who just gave you one of his kidneys

Scenarios

Dilemma #1

Rorschach catches a pedophile who has killed a little girl. He handcuffs the man to a wood stove, hands him a dull saw, and sets the building on fire. The man does not escape.
Reference: Chapter VI (The Abyss Gazes Also), pages 17-26

Dilemma #2

With nuclear war looming, Adrian unleashes a genetically engineered monster loose on New York City. Millions of people die, but the impending nuclear war is averted.
Reference: Chapter XII (A Stronger Loving World), pages 1-19

Dilemma #3

After finding out about Adrian's plan, the Watchmen (aside from Rorschach, who is killed by Dr. Manhattan) decide to not let the world in on Adrian's guilt.
Reference: Chapter XII (A Stronger Loving World), Pages 20-30

Handout - Watchmen on Trial!

My group is discussing Dilemma #__________

We are the:

PROSECUTION   DEFENSE

Your goal now is to defend or prosecute the character or group in question! Be sure to look for any supporting evidence from the book – keep in mind visual clues as well as textual ones.

Use this space to jot down notes or clues from the book to bolster your case. Be ready to go in front of the judge in twenty minutes!

Appendix C

LESSON

UNIT: WAR AND PEOPLE | LESSON: A MORNING LIKE ANY OTHER

Lesson note: none.

Objectives

- Students will experience the morning of Septemeber 11th, 2001 through many different media sources.
- Students will collaborate with other students discussing their experiences with 9/11 and war in general.
- Students will journal about the morning of September 11th, 2001 and their own experiences of growing up during the subsequent wartime.

Materials

- 9/11 Archive website (http://www.archive.org/details/sept_11_tv_archive)
- computer w/ projector and internet access
- 9/11 news articles, from the days afterwards
- *The 9/11 Report* graphic novel
- discussion guide
- chart paper
- markers
- journals

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to expose students to the 9/11 tragedy in a way that they missed due to their age. The students will be immersed in the morning of September 11th and experience events as they happen, and will be able to discuss their recollections of that morning with each other. They will then write about the experience.

Anticipatory Set

Students will come into the classroom with network footage from the morning of 9/11 playing on the projector. Once the class period has started, the footage will run for another five minutes or so, and the students will watch the events of the morning unfold "live." Depending on time, the teacher can let the footage run until the second tower is hit.

Body [Input]

The teacher will welcome the students and tell them they're going to be talking about the morning of September 11, 2001. The teacher will ask a student to sum up the

events of that day, and then will ask if they remember where they were and what they were doing (or if they have ever heard of what their parents or older siblings were doing). The teacher will then ask if anyone else would like to share a story. The teacher will then share their own story of that morning and let students ask questions, if there are any. The teacher will then hand out copies of the graphic novel *The 9/11 Report* and copies of news articles and stories from 9/11, along with a discussion guide. The teacher will go over the directions presented on the guide and direct students to begin working.

Body [Output]
Students will read and discuss the material in their groups according to the discussion guide. They are free to use chart paper and markers to organize their thoughts and to ask and answer their own questions. The teacher will also put the 9/11 news footage back on so students may continue to watch if they wish. Once students have had sufficient time to complete the discussion guide, they can begin the journal prompt and write for the rest of the class period.

Checking for Understanding
The teacher will circulate around the room to watch groups work, ask questions to check understanding, and answer any student questions.

Assessment
The teacher will read the journals that students write and assign a grade (if desired) or simply mark the assignment completed.

Closure
The teacher will call students back together with a few minutes remaining in the class period and ask again if anyone has any questions. He can ask students if they learned anything new or interesting about 9/11 that they didn't know before or if they learned anything that cleared up any confusion about what they thought they knew. The teacher can also ask if any students would like to share a short selection from their journals.

End of Lesson ■

Discussion Guide - A Morning Like Any Other

Today you're going to be talking about 9/11 in your small group. You were probably very young and don't remember much, if anything, from that morning. That's OK. We can go back.

- *The 9/11 Report* graphic novel. This is an adaptation of the very long, very complete, definitive report of what happened on the morning of 9/11, what led to it, and what came from it. There's a great timeline and some good information about the facts of what happened that morning.
- News articles from 9/11. As you will see, there were a lot of personal stories from that morning. You'll get to see no one really knew what was happening, and no one really knew how to react.

In your groups, read through the material with the following questions. You can jot down answers and more questions you come up with on your chart paper:

1. What exactly happened that morning? This is a big question, so hit on what YOU think are the main points.

2. *The 9/11 Report* spells out exactly what happened on 9/11, but no one knew what was going on that morning. Imagine that everyone knew exactly who was responsible and why it happened as it happened. Would what came in the weeks, months, and years later have been done differently?

3. Would things have happened differently if we never found out who did it and why?

4. So many years later, we have the benefit of hindsight. So… was 9/11 preventable or inevitable? I want your opinion!

5. Do you have any other questions? Feel free to discuss them in your group!

Once we're all done discussing, you have the rest of the period to journal:

> *"Put yourself in lower Manhattan on 9/11/01. What would you have done? How have the ongoing wars affected you, your family, or your friends?"*

Appendix D

LESSON

UNIT: WAR AND PEOPLE | LESSON: CREATING A GRAPHIC NOVEL

Lesson note: none.

Objectives

- Students will select compatible passages from the book *Zlata's Diary*
- Students will decide on their roles within their team for the graphic novel project
- Students will begin to adapt the text to a graphic novel format
- Students will begin to plan for future work

Materials

- Computer w/ internet access
- Teacher examples of completed work or examples from previous years
- Final Project handout sheet
- Passage sign-up sheet
- "Storyboard" sheets for graphic novel use.
- Chart Paper
- Markers
- Colored pencils

Purpose

This lesson introduces students to the final project of a unit on war. Students have been reading *Zlata's Diary* in addition to other texts on the effects of war on civilians and will be adapting the work to a graphic novel format.

Anticipatory Set

Students will enter the classroom and on the board will be written, "What are some of your favorite of Zlata's diary entries? Pick 4 or 5, and write why you like them. Feel free to look through your books." Students will have roughly 4-5 minutes to complete this task.

Body [Input]

The teacher will welcome the class and begin by asking if anyone has a particular entry they really like and if they'd like to share. The teacher may share one of his or her own or call on a student if no one immediately volunteers. After a few students have shared their favorite, the teacher will explain that with all they have been doing in class with war and its effects on civilian communities, they will be mining this topic for a final project. The teacher will remind students of the work they've done in

graphic novels throughout the year [perhaps Maus or Persepolis in this particular unit] and inform the students the final project will be a class graphic novel. The teacher will pass out the final project handout and review the handout/explain the project, showing examples from previous years [or examples they have created] either in book form or as a digital slideshow. The teacher will take time to explain how the project is to "look and feel," citing specifics from the examples presented. The teacher will then break the students into groups [either pre-selected or at random] and hand out chart paper, markers, colored pencils, and storyboarding sheets. The teacher will explain the sign-up sheet for passages. The teacher will then take time for questions and will provide assistance once students are in their groups.

Body [Output]

Students will break into groups and begin by deciding on roles that will guide their work on the project. Students will then have time to begin planning as the teacher brings around the sign-up sheet to each group and offers guidance and assistance. Students should have a wide variety of planning resources available to them, including the chart paper, storyboarding sheets, scrap paper, and previous examples to draw inspiration from.

Checking for Understanding

The teacher will question the students on the procedure of the project and check with each group individually while he visits with the groups.

Assessment

The teacher will use an informal assessment for this lesson, gauging student understanding from their planning progress and questions asked. The teacher may ask to see groups during a study period for further guidance based on their informal assessment.

Closure

The teacher will call students back together with a few minutes remaining in the class period and ask again if anyone has any questions. He may choose a few students and ask them to demonstrate what they accomplished and how they've begun planning. The teacher should reiterate that while there will be class time given to work on the project, students need to meet on their own time to plan and accomplish their work.

End of Lesson ■

Handout - You Become the Authors!

We've been studying the effects of war on children and adults this quarter, and we've seen many different types of texts: books, poems, videos, and graphic novels. Now it's time to show what you've learned! We're going to be creating a class graphic novel around the book we just finished reading, *Zlata's Diary*.

WHO

Teams of three. You will all get together in class to design the pages and to plan the panels. You will then decide on who will draw, who will write, and who will color, or you may choose to share the duties so you each go to do a little of everything!

WHAT

A class graphic novel. You will work to adapt a portion of *Zlata's Diary* to a graphic novel format. Each team will be responsible for adapting ***7-10*** diary entries for inclusion in the graphic novel, for a total of ***10-12*** pages.

WHEN

You will have two weeks to accomplish your task. You will be given class time, and we will spend at least one class in the computer lab for you to do research and find pictures and ideas. You will need to plan as a group and work independently to bring your idea to the page.

My Team is:

____________________________ Planner

____________________________ Artist

____________________________ Designer

We have chosen the following entries:

1.____________________________ 2.____________________________

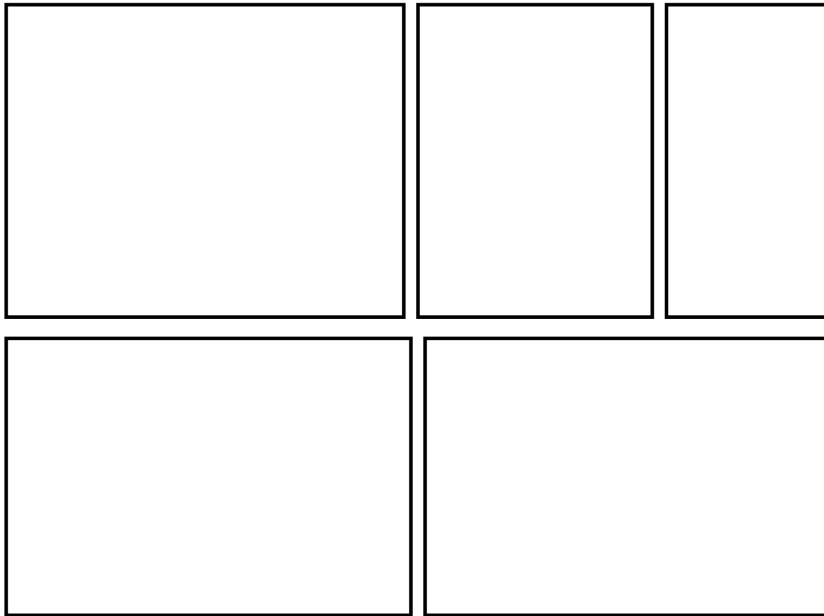
3.____________________________ 4.____________________________

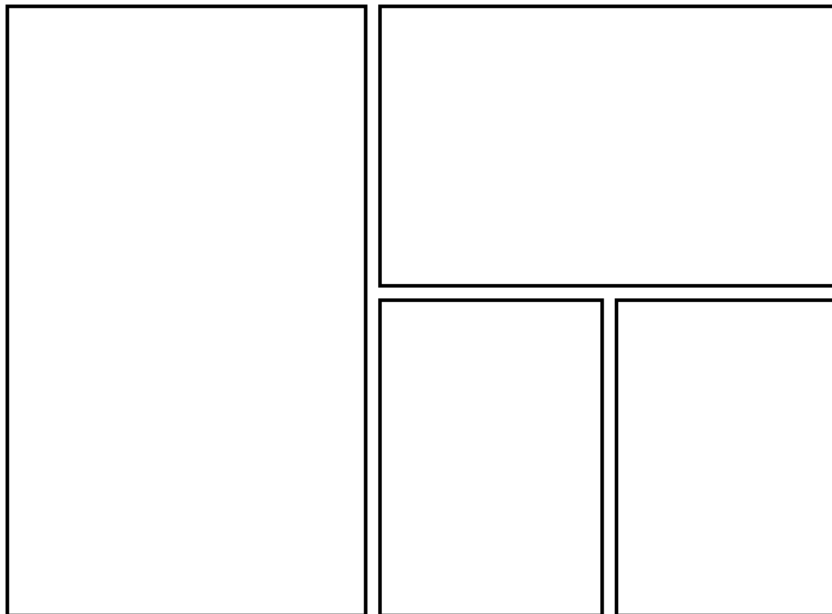
5.____________________________ 6.____________________________

7.____________________________ 8.____________________________

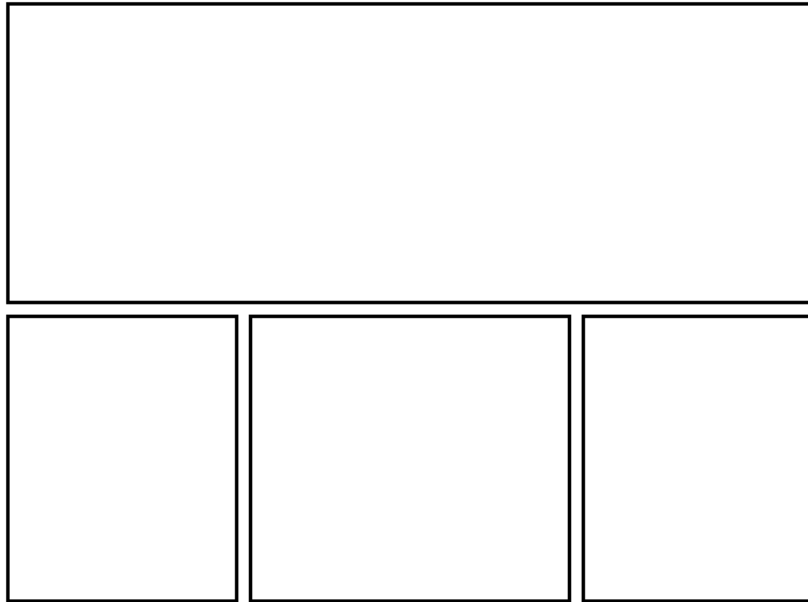
9.____________________________ 10.____________________________

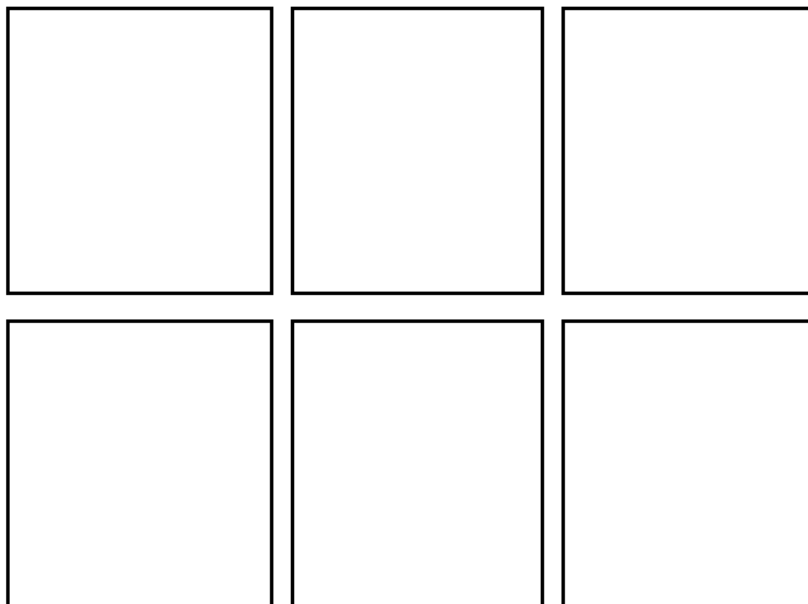
Storyboard Templates





Storyboard Templates, cont.





Appendix E

Selected Works

Filipović, Zlata. *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo*. New York: Viking, 1994.

Jacobson, Sid, and Ernie Colón. *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.

Moore, Alan, and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: DC Comics, 1986.

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