

Graphic Novels: Youth Media for the Content Classroom

ANTICIPATION GUIDE

Directions: Read each statement carefully and decide whether you agree or disagree with it, placing a check mark in the appropriate Before Reading column. When you have finished reading and studying Chapter 1, return to the guide and decide whether your anticipations need to be changed by placing a check mark in the appropriate After Reading column.

	BEFORE READING		AFTER READING	
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
1. Graphic novels are another name for comic books.				
2. Graphic novels can build schema for disciplinary content.				
3. Graphic novels are commonplace in most content classrooms.				
4. Graphic novels should be used in disciplinary instruction because of youths' high interest in this medium.				
5. Graphic novels can be used to improve reading skills and critical literacy abilities.				

Integrating graphic novels into my curriculum has been one of the best choices I have made as a teacher of both high- and lower-level students.

—Lisa Cohen, *But This Book Has Pictures!*
The Case for Graphic Novels in the AP Classroom

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING two teaching scenarios. Both are examples of excellent teaching. Both teachers are considered experts and are highly regarded by their colleagues and supervisors. Their teaching reflects current best practices and their instructional strategies are data based. Students in their classes master course content, achieve goals related to the course, and perform well on end-of-course testing.

Scene One: Traditional High School History Classroom

Experienced history teacher Ms. Jones begins the lesson on the pre-Civil Rights era in the United States by showing an overhead of a graphic organizer that provides students with a visual representation of key vocabulary and concepts. After a brief explanation, she moves to a discussion of a study guide that students completed when they read the chapter assigned for homework the previous night. Most, but not all, students have completed the study guide. Ms. Jones then delivers a lecture that includes the use of overheads, the blackboard, and references to the graphic organizer. Students have the textbook on their desks and take notes using pen and paper. At the conclusion of the lecture, the class is engaged in a discussion. The discussion follows a recitation format, where Ms. Jones poses a question, a student volunteers an answer, and Ms. Jones provides feedback and then asks the next question. A limited number of students volunteer to answer questions; however, most students try to pay attention, as Ms. Jones has stressed that a test on the chapter will be given the next day. As class ends, students are encouraged to review their notes and reread the assigned textbook chapters to prepare for the test.

Scene Two: 21st-Century High School History Classroom

During that same class period, just down the hall, students in another American history class are having very different experiences with a newly minted teacher, Mr. Brown. Younger and active in participatory popular cultural media, Mr. Brown incorporates a variety of texts and media into his lessons, including graphic novels.

During their study of the pre Civil Rights period, students learn from the textbook broad facts and statistics on Jim Crow, racial segregation, and lynchings of African Americans, especially in the Deep South. Mr. Brown also

introduces the class to *Incognegro* (Johnson & Pleece, 2009). This graphic novel gives a name and face to a Black man facing a lynch mob banging at the jail-house door after he is wrongfully accused of murdering a White woman in Mississippi. Mr. Brown's inclusion of graphic novels in history has produced greater enthusiasm for learning and careful, elaborated processing of textual information. Mr. Brown employs other activities related to graphic novels, including having his students rework important scenes of history into their own illustrated panels, with present-day talk and slang. For students without skill in drawing, Mr. Brown shows how to use sites such as DAZ 3D, Animotions, and Renderosity and download the models, figures, props, and costumes they need for their digital graphic novels. In this way, students do not need artistic abilities to draw, ink, and color their own book panels.

Although these two classrooms have common goals, Mr. Brown is fluent in the language of newer technologies and media. His 21st-century literacy-oriented teaching heightens engagement and learning for his students by (1) eliminating barriers between their outside-of-school interests and literacies and his classroom practices and (2) allowing students to combine the technology and media they increasingly use in their everyday lives with textbook content.

Since this is a book about graphic novels, you are no doubt aware of our preference for the type of teaching presented in the second scenario. This is not to say that we don't recognize the power of the more traditional form of teaching, and in fact we have long advocated the kind of teaching described in the first scenario. We also acknowledge that, at least for the present, there is no research base that unequivocally demonstrates that using digital media, graphic novels, and other print sources will result in greater achievement. We do, however, strongly believe that the 21st-century classroom offers two clear advantages over the more traditional classroom. First, from our viewpoint, one of the overarching goals of education is to help students become highly skilled, enthusiastic, lifelong learners. We live in a fast-paced, highly technical, rapidly changing, global environment. Success demands independent learning and social skills more than knowledge of facts. Second, it is our experience that using graphic novels makes the teaching experience richer and more satisfying. Reading graphic novels is just plain fun, and that's equally as true for teachers as it is for students.

WHY GRAPHIC NOVELS?

<----START HERE

In the first peer-reviewed professional article published in a graphic novel format, Yang (2008) begins with the panels shown in Figure 1.1. In the article, Yang illustrates the power of graphic novels, a power derived from their visual nature.

Figure 1.1. Gene Yang's Introduction to Graphic Novels



Human beings are naturally visual learners. Prior to the first writing systems, which appeared about 5,000 years ago, our ancestors relied on visual learning for survival. Jump forward a few millennia, and today's youth have grown up in a highly visual, highly technological environment. They are comfortable with and adept at visual learning. Graphic novels provide today's youth with the opportunity to learn in a medium with which they are comfortable.

For our purposes, we subscribe to Gorman's (2003) hybrid definition of a graphic novel, as "an original book-length story, either fiction or nonfiction, published in comic book style" (p. xii). Carter (2009) suggests that, far from being a new phenomenon, graphic novels as sequential art narratives are as old as ancient cave paintings. Comic books, the precursors to graphic novels, emerged from comic strips that began appearing in newspapers late in the 19th century. The first comic books appeared in the 1920s, and the first superhero comic introduced American youth to Superman in 1938. The 1930s is also when studies of comics in education and sociology journals began to appear (Inge, 1990; Krashen, 2004; Wright, 2001).

Will Eisner's *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*, a series of four stories about his life growing up in the tenements of Brooklyn in the 1930s, was the first book to be labeled a graphic novel when it debuted in 1978. In 1987, *Nam*, a graphic novel by Doug Murray, won the Best Media of the Vietnam War Award, given by the Bravo Organization, a veterans group. Perhaps the most widely known graphic novel is Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986). In comic book format, this novel presents the horrors of the Holocaust. Immediately, Spiegelman draws readers into this gripping narrative by anthropomorphizing cats as Nazis, mice as Jews, pigs as Poles, and frogs as French. Upon its original release in 1985, *Maus* was acclaimed as a "quiet triumph . . . impossible to achieve in any medium but comics" (Scholz, 1985, p. BW18). Spiegelman was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for *Maus*. This honor went a long way toward legitimizing and validating graphic novels as a serious literary form, and other serious graphic novelists soon followed (McTaggart, 2005).

Because graphic novels are illustrated and formatted like comic books, confusion persists over the difference between the two. Indeed, the term *comic book* is problematic when used together with *graphic novel* because of the associations with comic strips such as *Peanuts* or *Doonesbury* and light fare from childhood, such as *Archie*. Some helpful distinctions are that graphic novels are usually lengthier and have more complex story lines that make them attractive to mature audiences (Botzakis, 2011). This length, typically between 50 and 175 pages, makes it possible for creators to explore topics and themes in intricate narratives—not possible with the much shorter comic book versions (Gravett, 2005). Graphic novelists are more likely to take on issues and concerns similar to those found in traditional literature. Graphic novels are stand-alone stories, unlike comics,

which are often serialized in consecutive parts. And because graphic novels are a dynamic blend of image and word, with illustrations that enrich and extend the text, readers are not only required to decode the words and images but also to identify events occurring between the visual sequences (Simmons, 2003).

The popularity of graphic novels with youth is undeniable. It's the fastest-growing type of young adult literature, with overall sales in the United States and Canada approaching \$400 million in 2009 (Reid & Macdonald, 2010). The enthusiasm for graphic novels among youth and adults, as well as their financial success for publishers, are helping to dispel "an aura of seediness and/or violence" (Mackey & McClay, 2000, p. 191). Because the perceptions regarding graphic novels are changing, their numbers continue to grow in public and school libraries (Hajdu, 2004). Educators have now begun to explore the role graphic novels can play in secondary classrooms. This includes enticing adolescent readers into the pages of more canonical texts (Cromer & Clark, 2007) and, as we contend in this book, incorporating them as central texts in content area classrooms.

The research evidence to support the efficacy of using graphic novels to teach history, science, math, and literature still has much room for growth (Gavigan, 2010; Thompson, 2008). We argue that this is due to what Cromer and Clark (2007) characterize as the "very recent journey of this genre towards cultural legitimacy" (p. 575). It is clear that this genre has rich potential for teaching, and the time has come to begin exploring how graphic novels fit into content area instruction.

STOP #1-->

TRANSITIONING FROM TRADITIONAL TO 21ST-CENTURY TEACHING

The traditional approach to teaching we refer to is based on a narrow view of instruction in which content covered on end-of-course assessments serves as the de facto curriculum (Sipe, 2009). With this emphasis on covering the content, teachers often resort to mentioning rather than teaching (Alexander, 2007). In other words, teachers feel pressure to superficially address content with students so they can cover the content prior to the state-level assessment (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Many teachers feel constrained by this narrow view of instruction (Musoleno & White, 2010). We believe that an in-depth and inclusive approach to teaching better serves today's student. There are several key ingredients that can lead to a shift in the educational environment toward a more relevant approach to teaching and learning. In this section, we will provide very brief descriptions of three elements we consider foundational: theoretical perspectives, the goals of education, and the role of teachers in 21st-century schools.

Theoretical Perspectives

We strongly believe that research-based theory should guide instruction. The field of literacy boasts nearly a century of solid thinking spanning learning to read and write and learning from reading and writing. We have identified two theoretical perspectives as powerful frames of instruction for today's students: schema theory and sociocultural theory.

A schema is a metaphorical place in the mind where knowledge is stored (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Rumelhart, 1978). Every individual develops schemas based on personal experiences. When new information is encountered, no matter in what form, it is assimilated into existing, related schema. For example, when children first encounter a dog, they create a "dog schema." Each new encounter with a dog enriches the existing schema. Other schemas, for example cats or pets, are related through experience. A good way to look at schemas is that they form a complex filing system. Understanding new information or learning new knowledge is the process of relating the new to the known. From this perspective, teaching is the process of building a bridge between the content to be learned and students' existing schemas or knowledge structures. Learning is accommodating, that is, adjusting, both the new information in relation to what is already known and what is already known to the new information. From our viewpoint, too much of current curriculum efforts, including the Common Core State Standards, focuses only on new content. Graphic novels can help teachers refocus attention on the often rich, but also often impoverished, knowledge structures that students bring with them to school.

A foundational assumption of sociocultural theory is that all learning is social and culturally based. The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1962, 1978) pointed out that as children learn to speak their native language they begin to use language not just to communicate but to think. Early, in most children by age 3 or 4, language and thought become irreversibly intertwined. All complex ideas appear twice, first socially through oral or written language, then personally, through internalized language. Our personal thoughts amount to an internal, nearly nonstop dialogue with our self. Learning is the process of putting ideas into language, first in social settings (in school, for example), then individually as language is used to further process ideas. Teaching, then, is the process of engaging students in dialogue rich in the language of each discipline, then assisting them in creating unique ideas through their own speech and writing. It is particularly important that students be given ample opportunity to express their thinking through both oral and written language.

Taken together, schema theory and sociocultural theory provide teachers with a number of important principles of instruction. First, it is critical to find out what students already know about the topics being taught. Closely related

to this is the interest factor: Students are more familiar with things they are interested in. Providing instruction that is relevant and related to students' lives outside of school is the cornerstone of good teaching. Finally, teachers must realize that language is the first tool of learning. Since humans use language to think with, it is crucial that students be given rich opportunities as well as instruction in both receptive language (listening and reading) and expressive language (speaking and writing).

STOP # 2-->

The Goals of Education

One ingredient lacking in current educational debates is a serious exploration of the broad overall goals of education. The goal of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was to have all children reading and performing in mathematics at grade level. This goal was based on a false understanding of the concept of grade level (which is the average score of all children at a particular grade) as well as of the reality of wide variance of performance on any learning activity. In reality, not all children can be above average. The stated goal of the current Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative is to make all students career- and/or college-ready upon graduation. While this is a laudable and more reasonable goal to guide our educational system, it still, in our opinion, falls below the higher-order goals necessary for modern schooling.

In America, our school system was founded on the premise that education is crucial for a democratic form of government. The Founding Fathers recognized that majority rule by an uneducated population would end in mob rule. History has proved them correct; successful democracies have highly functioning school systems, and attempts to impose democracies on countries with low educational levels are uniformly unsuccessful. Therefore, a primary goal of education must be to assist students in becoming responsible citizens in a democratic society, and increasingly in an emerging global community as well.

The idea of global citizenship is tied to the reality of a rapidly changing economic and political reality. We live in an era where change is the only constant. Many of today's best jobs did not exist 10 years ago. Technology and research open new doors of understanding every day. For example, in medicine, surgeries that used to require invasive procedures and extended hospital stays are now routinely done arthroscopically on an outpatient basis. The economic opportunities that new knowledge and technology provide are open only to those who are lifelong, enthusiastic learners and readers.

In summary, two overarching goals provide the navigation for the thinking that guided the writing of this book. First, that schooling must prepare students to be active, well-informed citizens of a democratic society and global community. And second, that schooling must assist students in becoming lifelong, enthusiastic learners and readers.

STOP # 3

The Role of Teachers in 21st-Century Schools

It is crucial, from our perspective, to view teachers as professionals and teaching as a complex activity that requires ongoing, in-context decision-making. One of the most damaging trends in current educational policy is what many refer to as the deskilling of teachers (e.g., Baumann, 1992; Kraft, 1995). This refers to tying teachers to predetermined curriculum and scripted lessons. In contrast, we believe that the best teaching occurs when teachers operate within accepted guidelines but with the freedom to adapt in-class instruction based on the needs and background of their students. The kind of creative teaching we advocate in this book is impossible if teachers are handcuffed by local, state, or federal mandates that limit their decision-making.

In this section we have developed a theoretical framework justifying the integration of graphic novels into disciplinary classrooms. Obviously, this will require major changes in the way most teachers manage their classrooms and implement instruction. We recognize that the current political context in education as well as traditional approaches to teaching will make the changes we recommend in this book difficult. We do not encourage a dramatic, overnight change. Teachers need to be thoughtful and deliberate when making substantive changes. We encourage you to think in terms of evolution, not revolution.

THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

We sense and hope for a change in the educational environment. We believe that the CCSS invite the integration of graphics novels into the curriculum. The CCSS increase the expectation for students to not only acquire information but to utilize a variety of thinking skills to analyze the information as well (Rothman, 2012). The CCSS provide literacy standards for English/language arts as well as literacy standards for the history/social studies, sciences, and technical subjects and were designed to help students attain the skills and knowledge needed for college and career readiness in the 21st century (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). We believe the time is ripe for content teachers to embrace instruction that will help all students engage in learning through a variety of texts, including graphic novels. The following are a few examples of how the integration of graphic novels and the literacies required to read graphic novels align with the Common Core. These standards focus on students in grades 6–12 and include standards from both English language arts as well as standards for literacy in history/social studies, science, and the technical subjects. We believe that graphic novels integrated into thoughtful, well-planned lessons can address any of

the CCSS Anchor Standards for Reading. However, the use of graphic novels explicitly addresses the following anchor standards:

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Standard 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as words.

Standard 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes and topics in order to build knowledge or compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

Standard 10: Read and comprehend complex literary and information texts independently and proficiently.

Incorporating graphic novels into the content classroom provides an engaging platform for teachers to address the demands of the CCSS. To further investigate this, let's look at Standard 7. Graphic novels tell a story through prose, dialogue, and visual images, so graphic novels are a natural fit to help students learn to comprehend, evaluate, and integrate information ascertained through media other than traditional print. We also believe that graphic novels used in tandem with traditional forms of text will foster students' ability to analyze multiple texts as required in Standard 9. Finally, high-quality graphic novels have evolved into extremely complex works of literature that fulfill the CCSS guidelines for text complexity. For example, *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb* (Fetter-Vorm, 2013) addresses both the quantitative and qualitative complexity demands of the CCSS. Careful planning and integration of graphic novels will ensure that the reading and task demands are met as well.

STOP #4-->

GRAPHIC NOVELS, MULTIPLE LITERACIES, AND TODAY'S YOUTH

In this section, we ask disciplinary teachers to take a new look at the possibilities for teaching using a variety of texts, specifically graphic novels. There are two compelling factors behind this request. First, today's students are the products of a social environment radically different from that of any time in history. Today's students have grown up with computers, cell phones, and other digital technology. Prensky (2005–2006) refers to them as digital natives, fluent in the language, skills, and attitudes of a high-tech environment. We would argue they are the best-read and the most well-informed generation ever. Consider these

characteristics of 16- to 29-year-olds taken from a study done by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Zickuhr, Rainie, Purcell, Madden, & Brenner, 2012):

- 83% read at least one book in the last year.
- 95% have cell phones; 80% have a desktop or laptop.
- 96% use the Internet.
- Mean number of books read in the last year is: 17.
- Americans under age 30 are more likely than older adults to do reading of any sort.

Any systematic analysis of today's adolescents leads to the conclusion that they bring to school a different and highly sophisticated set of learning skills and attitudes. We have every reason to believe that students will become even more well-informed, literate, and technologically sophisticated learners in future generations.

The second compelling factor is the increasing demand that the 21st century is making and will continue to make in terms of literacy skill and expertise. Consider that in 1940, less than half the U.S. population had completed 8th grade and only 6% of males and 4% of females had completed college (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). Thirty years ago cell phones came in briefcases and the Internet was accessible only to individuals who could write computer code. Obviously, times have changed dramatically, along with the knowledge and skills necessary for success. Current expectations are that students will leave school with high levels of reading skill. But more importantly, it is clear that literacy entails more than just reading and writing. Success as adults certainly will require high-level literacy skills with print media. But it will also require visual and technical literacy. Outside of school, students live in a complex social and economic environment centered on computers, the Internet, and other digital technologies. So in many ways today's youth are up to the ever-increasing demands they face. Their use of digital technology to access information, engage socially, and solve problems is impressive. The world of knowledge is at their fingertips.

-----STOP #5

Today in most traditional upper-grades classrooms there remain two ever-present, authoritative information sources—the teacher and the textbook (Walker & Bean, 2002). Yet youth of the digital age have access to and facility with a wide array of richly informative print and multimedia sources. Furthermore, it has been asserted that providing content in a variety of forms of representation increases students' abilities to think and communicate using different symbol systems (Collier, 2007; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Schwarz, 2002) and develops critical visual literacy (Cromer & Clark, 2007).

We know from our own experiences and those of our innovative middle and high school colleagues that when graphic novels and other alternative texts and information sources are given legitimacy in content classrooms, youth are more eager to explore disciplinary topics and learning is more memorable. These

sources, while going largely untapped in traditional school settings, may hold the key to engaging adolescents in meaningful reading and learning as well as elevating their achievement. Thus, we do not advocate suppression of textbooks but the inclusion of graphic novels to enrich teaching and learning in the content classroom. Graphic novels accompanied by a variety of supportive technology tools have the potential to transform bland, textbook-centered learning environments into exciting venues for authentic exploration of disciplinary topics.

According to Kist (as cited by Collier, 2007), "Out-of-school (and work-place) literacies are becoming more divergent from in-school literacies" (p. 5). Yet skillful use of the sources and practices of youth literacies may be the way to capture students' interest in traditional school topics (Chun, 2009). Teaching with graphic novels, an alternative to traditional instruction, can develop and draw on students' multiliterate practices. Moreover, with our increasingly complex global information and communication systems, students can only benefit from exposure to and grounding in multiple modes of representation. A multimodal text like a graphic novel would seem to be ideally suited to this purpose.

Only within the past 2 decades have researchers begun to focus on the variety of ways youth learn literacies, the interconnecting contexts in which literacies are learned, and young adults' multiple purposes for engaging in literate practices. This scholarship has emphasized the role of multimodal forms of representation and meaning-making in the lives of young people (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Vasudevan & Campano, 2009). Multiliteracies are defined as "the multiplicity of communication channels and media" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). Those on the vanguard of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) argue that "literacy pedagogy must now account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies" (p. 60). Many (Alvermann, 2002; Dredger, Woods, Beach, & Sagstetter, 2010; Goodman, 2003; Kajder, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Zenkov, Bell, Harmon, Ewaida, & Fell, 2011) urge schools to make room in language and disciplinary curricula for students' different experiences that are expressed through a variety of media. Graphic novels with their multimodalities and their engaging content can be used to encourage students to build knowledge, read more deeply, and think more critically about both print and image.

Calls for secondary schools to honor the literacies and discourses of youth derive from the realization that we live in a mediasphere (O'Brien, 2001), "a world saturated by inescapable, ever-evolving, and competing media that both flow through us and are altered and created by us" (Brozo, 2005, p. 534). Adolescents are the most active participants in the mediasphere, creating forms of discourse that should be integrated into school settings, since competency in these new forms of communication will benefit them later in life (Lankshear & Knobel, 2002; Vasudevan & Campano, 2009). The discourse worlds that most teens inhabit offer them a kind of "language of intimacy" (Dowdy, 2002, p. 4) that if validated in schools and classrooms could increase engagement in

literacy and learning. Secondary classrooms are the setting where youths' multiple literacies—digital, graphic, and aural—can lead to understanding, critical analysis, and reinterpretation of concepts and content.

Another reason to create room in the curriculum for out-of-school competencies with new literacies and media relates to developing academic knowledge and skills. For example, Chun (2009) used multiliteracies pedagogy with Spiegelman's *Maus* in a class of English language learners (ELLs). He found that the graphic novel nurtured students' critical awareness of their world. Using the ELL students as a resource, Chun explored the graphic novel's power to teach them to make meaningful connections to their own lives and reflect critically on how the themes of racism and power in *Maus* operate in their own worlds. Chun summarizes his work by asserting:

Using a graphic novel like *Maus* in the classroom to teach how language works both for and against people can enable students to acquire the necessary critical literacy that will, as Freire and Macedo (1987) affirmed, aid them in the important tasks of reading both the world and the word. (p. 152)

It's clear that those responsible for providing adolescent and content literacy instruction need to know more about the funds of knowledge, discourse competencies, and textual practices that youth bring with them to middle and secondary school classrooms (Jetton & Dole, 2004; Strickland & Alvermann, 2004). Coming to know students in this way will lead to more responsive instruction that integrates in- and beyond-school literacy and learning experiences (Lee, 1997; Moje et al., 2004; Schultz, 2002).

THE LITERACY DEMANDS OF GRAPHIC NOVELS AND COMICS

<START HERE

With the popularity of graphic novels among today's youth, it is safe to say that many secondary students already have experience reading them. Some of them may be expert graphic novel readers, and teachers should turn to these experts to help identify and integrate good graphic novels into their classrooms. However, teachers cannot assume that all students are graphic novel experts. We believe that in order for teachers to successfully integrate graphic novels into their instruction, they must first learn to be expert readers of the format themselves.

Reading Graphic Novels

Novels, picture books, film, and poetry all tell us a story in their own unique ways. Novels tell a story in linear narrative, picture books through text

supported by illustrations, film through moving images and dialogue, and poetry through written imagery. Graphic novels are a distinct form of storytelling that combines elements from all these media. Unlike these media, graphic novels use all these techniques to tell a story (Scholastic, 2013). The reader must simultaneously process both print and artwork to follow the narrative. Navigating this format requires a different set of literacy skills.

As professors, we often ask our graduate students, who are usually practicing teachers, to read graphic novels. For some of them, it is the first time they have read a graphic novel. We usually teach an introductory lesson in which prior to any instruction, we ask our students to read from a self-selected graphic novel for about 15 minutes. For the students who have never read a graphic novel, this activity proves to be quite challenging. We often hear phrases such as “I read too fast to get any meaning,” and “I didn’t pay close enough attention to the illustrations.” These graphic novel novices do not recognize that the format requires the reader to approach the text and illustrations in tandem. The words and pictures in graphic novels must be carefully analyzed because the authors/illustrators of high-quality graphic novels make purposeful choices in relation to the words, speech bubbles, pictures, format, color, and other graphic features in their book.

Expert readers of traditional text focus on print in order to comprehend a story. When reading graphic novels, it is necessary to slow down and give attention to the many different elements of a story. In addition to the printed text, visual images, color, font style and size, visual perspectives, and other graphic elements convey important information. The reader must also identify focal points of the visual images and determine the directionality of the frames. Being able to make inferences is also crucial in understanding a graphic novel. When learning to effectively navigate graphic novels, readers must develop a set of skills that allows them to process all elements of the medium to make sense of authors’ stories. As teachers, learning these skills will help you to better incorporate graphic novels into your classroom instruction.

STOP # 6-->

The Language of Graphic Novels

To read, discuss, and write in a specific content, the learner must have command of the language associated with the content (Jetton & Alexander, 2004). The same holds true for reading, writing, and discussing a specific genre or format of literature. In order to successfully integrate graphic novels into their instruction, teachers must pay particular attention to the language and structure of this format. Entire books have been dedicated to understanding comics and graphic novels (e.g., Eisner, 2008). In particular, McCloud (1994) deeply delves into the language of graphic novels. Since our intent is to help you integrate graphic novels into instruction, we can dedicate only a small

portion of space to this topic. If you are interested in learning more, we recommend further reading on this topic.

Using the McCloud (1994) and Eisner (2008) books as well as a website (No Flying No Tights, 2013), we have identified the words shown in Figure 1.2 as key introductory terms for this format. When presenting these key concepts, visuals often help to build a stronger conceptualization for the terms. For

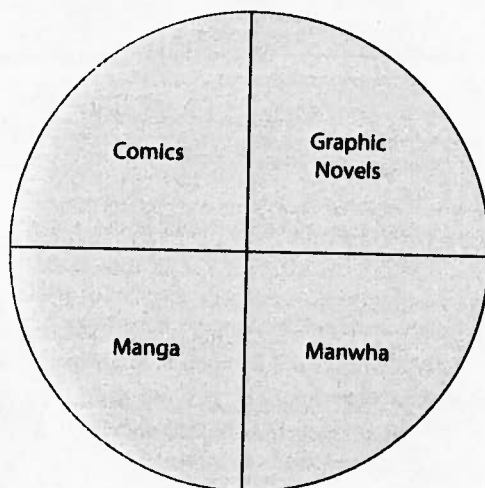
Figure 1.2. Key Graphic Novel Terminology

Key Graphic Novel Vocabulary	Novice-Friendly Explanation
Sequential Art	Images displayed in succession to convey information or a story.
Comics	Cartoons, comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels are all examples of sequential art.
Manga	The Japanese word for comics. In the United States, manga is often associated with anime, a Japanese form of animation.
Manwha	The Korean word for comics. Manwha shares a similar style with manga.
Panel	Picture or image usually laid out within a border. Panels are often an equivalent to a scene from a movie or TV show.
Frame	The border or edge of a panel. While typically a rectangular shape, the author may change the shape to convey meaning to the reader.
Gutter	The white space between frames. The gutter is one of the most important narrative tools in comics.
Bleed	When the art runs off of the page instead of being contained by a border. A bleed is sometimes used to convey space or emphasize action.
Graphic Weight	Describes how certain images draw the reader's eye more than others.
Sound Representation	Sound effects represented without speech bubbles and usually written or drawn in a way that highlights their nature (e.g., BAM!, SPLAT!).
Speech Balloon	A graphic tool used to convey ownership of dialogue by a particular character.
Thought Balloon	A graphic tool used to convey ownership of thought by a particular character.
Caption	A narrative device used to convey information that cannot be presented through art, speech, or thought.

<--STOP #7

example, the graphic organizer shown in Figure 1.3 represents the semantic relationship between the forms of sequential art. In addition, showing examples of panels with key word examples can help reinforce key terminology associated with this medium, as shown in Figure 1.4.

Figure 1.3. Sequential Art Vocabulary Concept Circle



LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD

In this chapter we argue that graphic novels are a form of youth media whose time has come as a teaching and learning tool in secondary content classrooms. They are a versatile teaching resource that when put in the hands of skillful teachers can heighten student engagement, build knowledge of disciplinary topics, and expand students' literacy capacities. We illustrate how graphic novels relate to the literacy practices of youth outside of school and to the multiliteracies crucial for success in today's social, economic, and political environments. Finally, we discuss the literacy skills required to expertly read graphic novels and comics.

Chapter 2 provides general guidelines for their use in content classrooms. Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 are devoted to developing instruction in the disciplines of English/language arts, history, science, and mathematics, respectively. In these chapters, we also suggest additional graphic novels related to the disciplines. In Chapter 7 we provide perspectives and suggestions for moving forward and integrating graphic novels into your instruction. In each chapter we include study questions that can be used to further discuss and explore ideas presented in the

Figure 1.4. Sequential Art Vocabulary Visuals



chapters. Finally, we include three appendices: Appendix A provides extended lists of graphic novels organized by discipline; Appendix B suggests additional resources you can access to further your exploration of graphic novels; and Appendix C illustrates how the instruction we present in Chapters 3 through 6 interfaces with the Common Core State Standards.

Study Group Questions for Chapter 1

- **Why would integrating graphic novels into content area instruction benefit today's students?**
- **What theoretical perspectives guide your instruction?**
- **How is reading a graphic novel different from reading a traditional novel?**
- **Imagine you are presenting a rationale for using graphic novels to your school board. What would you include in your argument?**