

Graphic Novels in Middle & High Schools Classrooms

What & Why

I. What:

A. Definition(s)

Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the reader.

McCloud, Scott. (1993) *Understanding Comics: the invisible art*. New York: Harper Perennial.

An original book-length story, either fiction or nonfiction, published in comic book style or a collection of stories that have been published previously as individual comic books.

Gorman, Michele. (2003) *Getting Graphic!: using graphic novels to promote literacy with preteens and teens*. Worthington, OH: Linworth Publishing.

A Graphic Novel is usually a monographic work that has a storyline with a start and a finish. It is typically in bound book format.

A Graphic Novel is a book made up of words and pictures: typically the pictures are arranged on the page in sequential panels, while the words are presented in speech bubbles (for dialogue) or text boxes (for narration).

“Graphic novel” is a word that describes a **medium**, not a **genre**: graphic novels can be histories, fantasies, or anything in between.

Graphic Novels are not collections of comic strips

B. Milestones in Graphic Novel World

1. 1978-Will Eisner coins term “graphic novel” to distinguish his book *A Contract With God* from traditional comic books. (Although the term and others similar to it were used previously, this was the GN that facilitated adoption of the term on an “official” level).
2. 1986-*Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* written by Frank Miller and published by DC Comics, is released. This reintroduced Batman to the general public in his more psychologically dark 1930s era conception. This new incarnation was “dark” and troubled and ushered in an era of “grim and gritty” superheroes.
3. 1987-*The Watchmen* by Alan Moore (illustrated by Dave Gibbons), is published by DC Comics. One of the first superhero graphic novels to present itself as serious literature, it’s the only graphic novel to ever win

the Hugo Award. It is also the only graphic novel to appear on Time Magazine's 2005 list: *The 100 Best English Language Novels from 1923 to the Present*.

4. 1992-Maus: A Survivor's Tale written by Art Spiegelman, wins the Pulitzer Prize Special Award for Letters.
5. 2005-"Graphix" Scholastic's graphic novel imprint for children is launched.
6. 2006-Gene Yang's American Born Chinese is a National Book Award finalist in the category of Young People's Literature.
7. 2007-Gene Yang's American Born Chinese wins the Michael L. Printz award for excellence in Young Adult literature.

C. Major types of graphic novels:

Superhero story: Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman

Manga: Death Note, Fullmetal Alchemist

Non-fiction: Palestine, Pedro & Me, Cancer Vixen, Maus, The Amazing True Story of a Teenage Single Mom

Adaptations or Spinoffs: Graphic Classics series, Metamorphosis, Poetry in Motion series, Star Wars, Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Satire: Tony Millionaire's Sock Monkey, What's Michael

Fantasies: Castle Waiting, Ex Machina

Personal Narratives: Perspeolis, Aya, La Perdida, The Quitter, Mom's Cancer, American Splendor, Fun Home, The Tale of One Bad Rat

II. Why

- A. As many as 6.3 million secondary school students are reading below grade level. The WNY drop out rate increased 47.8% from 1998-2003. Locally, 30% of adults operate at minimal literacy. Countywide, 20% of adults operate at minimal literacy.

Graphic Novels:

Are great for engaging reluctant readers & ESL students.

Are great for increasing reading comprehension and vocabulary.

Can serve as a bridge between low and high levels of reading.

Provide an approach to reading that embraces the multimedia nature of today's culture, as 2/3 of a story is conveyed visually.

Provide scaffolding for struggling readers.

Can serve as an intermediary step to more difficult disciplines and concepts.

Present complex material in readable text.

Help students understand global affairs.

Help to develop analytical and critical thinking skills.

Offer another avenue through which students can experience art.

Can be as simple or complex as any other literature.

Are astoundingly popular with kids and young adults.

- B. In various subjects, Graphic Novels can facilitate comprehension and help students become more engaged in the subject material.

English-literary terms, literary techniques, dialogue writing, bridge to classic literature (Mystery of Mary Rogers, Graphic Classics, Poetry in Motion)

History- historical events in more accessible format, visual historical record, (A Contract with God, Captain America, Barefoot Gen, 9/11: Artists Respond, Pride of Baghdad, Cartoon History of the Universe, Maus, Bluesman, King, Unsung Hero, Palestine, Persepolis, Deogratias: a tale of Rwanda)

Global Studies -global issues & events easier to understand, a face put on individuals from other cultures. (La Perdida, Aya, Pyongyang: a journey in North Korea, To Dance: a Ballerina's graphic novel)

Current Events-easier to understand, a face put on individuals from other cultures. (Deogratias: a tale of Rwanda, Pedro & Me, The Tale of One Bad Rat, In the Shadow of No Towers)