FUN WAYS TO TEACH WITH GRAPHIC NOVELS!

BY MATTHEW HOLM
SO, I GOT SOME GRAPHIC NOVELS FOR MY CLASS . . .
. . . NOW WHAT DO I DO?

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED
WHAT'S ALREADY OUT THERE FOR ME TO USE?
Using Graphic Novels in the Classroom and Library

What are graphic novels and how can they be used in the classroom and the library?

Simply, graphic novels are a logical extension of the comic book. They tell a story using pictures in sequence. Although the format has been available for centuries, graphic novels are becoming more and more part of the mainstream collections in schools and public libraries. The number of graphic novels has grown astronomically over the past several years. Now there are graphic novels available for all ages of readers. For elementary and intermediate students who want to read books similar to their older peers, these new novels offer teachers and librarians new resources for working with readers.

How can graphic novels be utilized?

First and foremost, graphic novels are perfect for students who are less-than-avid readers. Students who have limited English proficiency and students who struggle with vocabulary and comprehension deficits are also prime candidates for graphic novels. The illustrations and relatively linear story lines support struggling readers. They provide context for the text as well, assisting those readers who struggle with print. Offering students the option of graphic novels can be essential to helping them develop a love of reading.

Reading these graphic novels—Lunch Lady, Babymouse, and Stone Rabbit—is a stepping stone to other books, including other graphic novels.

A lot of publishers, like Random House, have teacher’s guides for their graphic novels.

http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/guides
Andy Runton, who creates the wordless GN “Owly”, has made his own 30-page lesson plan book.
Distributor Diamond Comics and Disney have created a special “Comics in the Classroom” initiative with the state of Maryland. They have sample plans online. Diamond also has lots of other lesson plans online, most created by educators just like you!
One of the easiest ways to get kids into comics is to do a “complete-a-comic.” We have a number of them available for download at Babymouse.com.
HOW CAN WE PLAN OUT A COMIC STORY?
You can LITERALLY show your kids what you mean by a “story arc”. Start by drawing an arc!
PLANNING A STORY

STORY ARC

BEGINNING

TURNING POINT

ENDING

Now mark the main points on the arc
Then have them start figuring out where various plot points will go.
You can number them for convenience
... and then use them to write a storyboard. Use a “panel” or two for each numbered plot point (depending on how long your story is going to be).
This is how we use storyboards with BABYMOUSE. It’s handy for separating the text and the pictures, so that you make sure you give full attention to each in turn. But you can also have you kids sketch the scene above all this text.
MAYBE I COULD ADAPT A STORY INTO GRAPHIC NOVEL FORM . . .
In middle school, my class adapted Beowulf into comic book form. It’s a great way to demonstrate, very concretely, that the kids comprehend what they read.

As an aside, this is kind of what we do for Babymouse’s fantasies! Of course, they end up more as “fractured fairy tales.”
Narration goes into boxes! Ask kids, What needs to go here? Does the scene NEED narration? What sort of info. do you try to convey here? (Quick scene-setting info., time changes, perhaps explanations of things happening “off-camera”)
Adapting a story

Dialogue

Comics are a great way to demonstrate “dialogue” to kids, since it’s all pulled out into speech balloons. (Remind them that this goes into quotation marks in chapter books.)
ADAPTING A STORY
SHOW EMOTION

STEP #1.
I DON'T EAT CUPCAKES.
BUT THEY'RE REALLY YUMMY!

STEP #2.
I DON'T LIKE TO READ.
BUT IT'S REALLY EXCITING!

Whatever isn’t put into narration or dialogue has to be SHOWN. Emotion is the most important thing, but action, setting, etc., can also go into the pictures.
ADAPTING A STORY
WORK IN TEAMS!

HERE, WILSON!
LET ME DO THAT!

ONE PERSON CAN WRITE THE STORY,
ANOTHER CAN DRAW IT.

Great way to get art-interested kids engaged in the task, and to take the pressure off of kids that may not be as confident in their drawing skills.
HOW DO I DESIGN AND DRAW CHARACTERS?
Characters
Who is she? How do you know?

Draw BM in several poses; diff. emotions. Ask: What is she feeling? How do you know?
CHARACTERS
WHO IS SHE? HOW DO YOU KNOW?

HAPPY

[Drawing of a character with a bow and a happy expression]
CHARACTERS
WHO IS SHE? HOW DO YOU KNOW?

HAPPY

...BUT DEMURE
How do you know she's a mouse?
How do you know she's a girl? Why not a boy? Why not a grown-up woman? Trying to communicate information with limited tools--not much space, only simple black-and-white lines, not too much detail, little or no color, little explanation. Use cliches and stereotypes to your advantage.
CHARACTERS
FIRST PROBLEM

There are practical issues--if a character can’t do everything a person can, then it limits them too much to be very useful.
Characters
First Problem

Hi. My name is Squish. I'm an amoeba.

You look like a blob.

I'll have my very own graphic novel soon—Squish: Super Amaeba!

I love graphic novels!! And slime mold!!!

Summer 2011.

Character needs to look and act like a person, but also needs to look and (sometimes) act like an animal.

Turn other things into hands
SHOW THAT CHARACTER’S AGE, GENDER, JOB.

What clues do we have? Setting, height, props
(SOMETIMES, YOU CAN CHEAT.)
CONVEY THAT CHARACTER’S EMOTIONS
CHARACTERS
THIRD PROBLEM

CONVEY THAT CHARACTER’S EMOTIONS
CHARACTERS
THIRD PROBLEM

CONVEY THAT CHARACTER’S EMOTIONS
Expressions, body language (often exaggerated; rely on cartoon conventions; look in the mirror!)

Props (including clothing)

Setting (put a librarian in the library)

Stereotypes (they're convenient, but they're also a problem)
DO YOU HAVE ANY CHARACTER DESIGN EXERCISES?
CREATE THREE SETS OF CHARACTER ATTRIBUTE CARDS

CHARACTER DESIGN EXERCISE

GRAB BAG
CREATE THREE SETS OF
CHARACTER ATTRIBUTE CARDS

1. ANIMAL

2. ROLE

3. EMOTION
# CHARACTER DESIGN EXERCISE

## GRAB BAG

<table>
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<th>ROLE</th>
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<td>Lawyer</td>
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Write one on each card. Can do multiple sets for groups larger than 10.
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Pick one of each!
CHARACTER DESIGN EXERCISE

GRAB BAG

PICK ONE CARD FROM EACH SET, AND DRAW!

Angry Crocodile Phys. Ed. Teacher
HELP! I CAN'T DRAW!
HELP! I CAN'T DRAW!

THAT’S OKAY.

THERE ARE OTHER WAYS TO MAKE COMICS.
HELP! I CAN'T DRAW!

Comic Life

WE COME UPON THE CREATIVE BROTHER AND SISTER TEAM OF MATTHEW AND JENNIFER HOLM AS THEY SHARE THE STORY OF HOW BABYMOUSE: DRAGONSlayer CAME TO BE . . .

SO MATT, I THINK WE SHOULD DO SOMETHING WITH DRAGONS!

JENNI, THE OLDER AND WISER SISTER.

HER BROTHER, MATT.

WHY DRAGONS?

USED TO PUTTING UP WITH A BOSSY BIG SISTER.

JENNI, AGE 10.

D & D MONSTER MANUAL
HELP! I CAN'T DRAW!

COMMIC LIFE

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$24.95/
PRE-INSTALLED ON SOME MACS
HELP! I CAN'T DRAW!

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http://plasq.com/comiclife
WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

MatthewHolm.net