

Personal Narrative Comic

By: Emily Rickett

Introduction

Every student is taught how to read and write throughout their life. Each year they learn a little more than the prior year. Writing is an essential task that students need to learn in order to be successful in life. No matter what career path students take, they will have to be able to write. Writing is a crucial skill needed but students often find it undesirable. I cannot count the number of times I have said “It’s writing time!” and the response I get from students is an eye roll or a sigh, followed by “I hate writing.” This unit is an engaging unit where students will learn about graphic novels and comic books and be able to implement what they have learned into their own comic strip.

Many of the students at Highlands Elementary School have limited access to books outside of the school and their local neighborhood libraries. Many of them come from low-income families who cannot afford books. Some students might not have the background knowledge of graphic novels or comics because they may not have been exposed to these types of books. Teachers need to develop the background knowledge of these genres because some students might find these types of books much more appealing than other forms, thus leading to their love of reading.

In this unit, I will create a fun way for students to engage and enjoy writing a personal narrative. I will use a variety of mentor texts to expose students to many different graphic novels and comic books. Students will have the opportunity to read these books on their own and some will be read to them during whole group. Using these mentor texts, students will develop background knowledge on how these books are written and illustrated. Once students are conversant with these books, they will create their own comic strip. First, they will create a basic three panel comic strip to get them used to this style and technique of writing and drawing. Students will also be able to explore a variety of art supplies as well. Once students feel confident in creating a comic strip, they will create a personal narrative comic strip.

Demographics

The Red Clay Consolidated School District was established in 1981 and is located in Northern New Castle County. It is the largest school district in the state of Delaware. The district consists of 28 schools located in both suburban and urban settings. There are fifteen elementary schools, six middle schools, five high schools, and two special education schools. Approximately 16,000 students attend the Red Clay School District.¹

Of those students, about forty-two percent are Caucasian, about twenty percent are African American, about twenty-six are Hispanic, and about six percent are Asian. Red Clay School district services a variety of students. Of those students, about fourteen percent are students with disabilities, about fourteen percent are English language learners, and about thirty-one percent have a low socio-economic status.² There are over 1,100 certified teachers working in this district.³

I am a fourth-grade teacher at Highlands Elementary School. Highlands is a small public school located in Wilmington, Delaware. Highlands Elementary School is part of the Red Clay Consolidated School District, serving students grades kindergarten through fifth grade. There are approximately three hundred students. Of those students, about sixty-four percent are African American, about twenty-six percent are Hispanic, and about five percent are Caucasian. Highlands is a Title 1 school where about seventy percent of the families are identified as low-income.⁴

My role as a fourth-grade homeroom teacher is to plan and teach engaging lessons in all content areas. The content areas I teach are math, reading, writing, science, social studies and PATHS. PATHS is a social-emotional curriculum that stands for Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies. It is a “comprehensive program for promoting emotional and social competencies and reducing aggression and behavior problems in elementary school aged children while simultaneously enhancing the educational process in the classroom.”⁵ At Highlands, we teach PATHS three times a week. The population at Highlands is very diverse and students often have a challenging home life. Having this PATHS curriculum has helped students socially and emotionally.

Rationale

Many of my students enter fourth grade as confident artists. Whenever they are asked to draw a picture, they usually do so with excitement, but when asked to write, they are not as confident. I often hear a sigh when students are told it is writing time. I hope this unit will have students creating their own personal narrative comics and help maintain student’s confidence in drawing, while also gaining confidence in writing.

In earlier grades, students are often asked to draw a picture to go with a story they have written. Having this background knowledge of drawing will allow for my students to draw pictures more naturally. I hope to maintain students’ confidence in drawing by giving them opportunities to explore drawing. In this unit, students will have to draw a three-panel comic of a personal event that has happened to them. I want to try and challenge my most confident artists by having them explore different drawing materials (crayons, ink, markers, paint, colored pencils, watercolors, etc.).

Students often do not enjoy writing when they find it difficult. Most students enter fourth grade being fluent readers. This takes time and practice. Students learn to love

reading. I want students to learn to love writing, just as much as they love reading. I think students will really enjoy this writing unit because it is not the traditional writing unit and it builds upon their strength in drawing. This unit will be at the beginning of the year. I hope having this unit at the beginning of the year plants a positive seed in their mind that writing can be fun and creative. My goal is for them to enjoy writing as much as they enjoy reading and drawing.

Students in fourth grade tend to struggle with writing because they do not know what to write about. We often have students write a story and then illustrate a picture to go with it. I have found it much easier for students to first draw a picture and then write about what they have drawn. Students sometimes get stuck on trying to figure out how to spell words and while doing so, they have forgotten what they wanted to write about. I can help eliminate this frustration and make this writing unit more engaging and interactive by having students create a personal narrative comic, where they start by drawing their story first.

When teaching writing I have found that students are not as engaged because they find it difficult. Students find writing more engaging when I use mentor texts. Mentor texts are books or texts that I read with the students. I have always enjoyed mentor texts because it allows students to see what they are learning about in the real world. Students, especially fourth graders, love having books read to them. In this unit I will have a variety of mentor texts that will allow students to see and hear examples of what they will eventually be creating.

Background

Graphic Novels

What are graphic novels? According to the Merriam-Webster a graphic novel is “a story that is presented in comic-strip format and published as a book.”⁶ Graphic novels are often about science fiction or fantasy but have expanded to cover a full range of topics from the Holocaust to civil rights, medicine and health.

I remember reading The Baby-Sitters Club chapter books when I was in grade school. I loved reading these books, but unfortunately younger children do not enjoy them as much. I think they do not like them because they judge the book by its cover. They are older books and the front cover is not appealing to children. While talking in seminar, I learned that they have created this series into a graphic novel series. While teaching fourth grade, I have noticed many of my students picking these books to read during independent reading and when getting a book from the library. They really enjoy these books! When asked why they like it, they often say they enjoy the style of the book and the vibrant colors and illustrations.

Comics

What is a comic book? According to Merriam-Webster, a comic book is “a magazine containing sequences of comic strips – usually hyphenated in attributive use.”⁷

The first thing that comes to my mind when I think of a comic is the funny comic strips from the newspaper. I remember sitting at my great grandmother’s house bored, while my parents made brunch on Sundays. My great grandmother received the newspaper every day and would save them for my parents. Since she saved them, there was always a pile waiting for us every Sunday. I would try to read the paper but found it very boring until I found the comic section. I loved reading them because they had pictures. Every Sunday, I would read the comic section of the newspapers.

For others the first thing they think of when someone says comics is the superhero comic books. I believe they are the most common in part of the genre. Both Marvel and DC comics have had very successful movies and television shows based on these comics. Many of these movies have broken records in sales on the day of their release.

Mentor Texts

What are mentor texts? Mentor texts are great for teaching writing. According to Dr. Joanne Meier from Reading Rockets “a mentor text is a published piece of writing whose idea, whose structure, or whose written craft can be used to inspire a student to write something original.”⁸

Are mentor texts really helpful? Mentor texts allow for students to see what they are learning in the real world, actual books that many people have read. When learning about writing a graphic novel or comic some students will not be able to visualize what you are teaching them until they see an example, a mentor text. When using mentor texts, the point is to model the writing. Therefore, when teaching with a mentor text, it is a slow process and should not be rushed. Edutopia suggests asking questions about content, technique, and style. This is much different than what students are used to. Students are typically answering comprehension questions when reading a story, not content, technique, and style questions. This will take practice and may need to be modeled and scaffolded before students can do it independently.⁹

What should I use for mentor texts? Mentor texts can be any form of writing, not just books. It does not matter the format, as long as it represents what is being taught. Lynne Dorfman is the co-director of The National Writing Project. She defines mentor texts as:

“are pieces of literature that you – both teacher and student – can return to and reread for many different purposes. They are texts to be studied and imitated...Mentor texts help students to take risks and be different writers tomorrow than they are today. It helps them to try out new strategies and formats.

They should be basically books that students can relate to and can even read independently *or* with some support. And of course, a mentor text doesn't have to be in the form of a book – a mentor text might be a poem, a newspaper article, song lyrics, comic strips, manuals, essays, almost anything.”¹⁰

Lessons

Key Concepts

In this unit, I will be using a variety of mentor texts, listed below in resources. Students will also have the opportunity to read graphic novels and comics during independent reading time

Unit Essential Questions:

What is a comic book?

What is a graphic novel?

What is a personal narrative?

How can I create a personal narrative comic?

Unit Objectives

Students will be able to construct a three-panel comic of something that has happened to them.

Student will be able to draw detailed pictures that display meaning.

Student will be able to organize a list of events from beginning, middle, and end.

Student will be able to write a personal narrative.

Teaching Strategies

Partner Reading

Students will pick a partner to read a graphic novel or comic book with. While working together, students will have to agree on a story where they will quietly find a spot in the classroom to read. Students will take turns reading a page. Both students will be holding a book, so there has to be two versions of the book. That will allow the partner to help if a student struggles with a word or accidentally reads the wrong word.

Whole Group Reading

Students will pick a graphic novel or comic book to be read to them aloud. I will read the book during regrouping time and at the end of the day. If available, I will use an ELMO projector so the students can see the book on the SmartBoard as I read it aloud. If an

ELMO is not available, I will read each page and then walk around the room to show the students the illustrations.

Independent Reading

During reading centers students have a center called independent reading where they choose a book from the classroom library, school library, or bring a book from home and they read independently. During this unit the books in the classroom library will be graphic novels and comic books. Students will choose a book from a variety of authors and series and read the book independently. If students do not find a book from the library that interests them, they will have the option of finding a graphic novel or comic book from the website MyOn. MyOn is a website that Red Clay Consolidated School District pays for. On this website are hundreds of books students can read or have the website read them the book. I like to use this website for students who struggle reading because it reads the books to the students and highlights each word as it is being read. This allows the student to follow along and comprehend the story.

Illustrations

Students will have the opportunity to practice drawing with a mixture of art supplies. Students will be given blank comic panels where they can illustrate anything they would like. This will give students a chance to try something new and allow them practice. I will have an assortment of panels where students can choose which type of panel they would prefer working with. This will help students prepare for the final project, a personal narrative comic.

Students will also be given the opportunity to practice drawing on index cards if they choose instead of the blank comic panels. Each index card acts as its own cell in a comic. Students tend to draw in the center of the paper and could have more control if given a smaller drawing space. Students could then use the index cards to play with sequencing when creating their personal narrative comic.

Peer Editing

In the beginning of the year students learned about editing and how to peer edit. The class gets divided into eight teams, three students per team. Each team will be given a peer editing worksheet that has questions for them to ask and a checklist of what they are looking for. Each student in the group will peer edit each other's work. In the end, two students have edited a completed project. Peer editing gives students a chance to see other students work and provides an opportunity to build teamwork.

Students will be given the opportunity to help peer edit drawings. I will photocopy the student's original drawings so that students can edit each other's drawings, without feeling like they're drawing on top of somebody else's work.

Classroom Activities (30-minute writing block)

Day One: Exploring Personal Narratives

Essential Question:

What is a personal narrative?

Essential Outcomes:

Students will be able to identify and define what a personal narrative is.

Materials:

After the Fall How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again or personal narrative mentor textbooks (see resources)

Instruction:

I will start by reading *After the Fall How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again* written by Dan Santat. After reading the story students will be split into groups to discuss how this book is a personal narrative. Students will then discuss what a personal narrative is and be given five to ten minutes to explore a variety of personal narrative books from my personal library, school library, and public library (these books will be available to students throughout the entire unit during reading and writing.)

Day Two and Three: Exploring Comics and Graphic Novels

Essential Questions:

What is a personal narrative?

What is a graphic novel?

What is a comic?

Essential Outcomes:

Student will be able to identify what makes a graphic novel and comic book. Students will be able to identify what a personal narrative is.

Materials:

Comic books (see resources), blank paper, *After the Fall How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again*, whiteboard, expo markers, eraser, paper, pencils

Instruction:

Day 2: Students will vote between two or three *Dog Man Series* books. After voting on which book, they would like for me to read to the class, I will read them part of the book. After reading some of the book, we will discuss what genre book this is. The class will create a Venn diagram on the dry erase board describing the differences and similarities between the *Dog Man* book and *After the Fall How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again*.

Day 3: I will continue to read a couple pages of the *Dog Man* book the class selected. After reading, students will be put into groups to explore a variety of comic books by different authors. Each group will have three different comic books by three different authors. Students will discuss with their group the similarities and differences between all three books. After discussing the differences, students will write down some of the things they discussed to share with the whole class.

Day Four and Five: Model of a Personal Narrative Comic

Essential Questions:

What is a personal narrative?

What is a comic?

How can I create a personal narrative comic?

Essential Outcomes:

Students will be able to identify a topic for their personal narrative. Students will be able to explore a variety of art supplies.

Materials:

Dog Man book, whiteboard, expo marker, index cards, anchor chart paper, anchor chart markers

Instruction:

I will continue to read a couple pages of the *Dog Man* book the class selected. After reading, I will explain the personal narrative comic that the students will create. Students will have to create a three or more-panel comic.

Before students create their own personal narrative comic, I will model an example for the students. I will ask the students to pick something we have done together (field trips, after school activities, or going outside to do a science experiment). If students cannot

think of something, I will give them ideas on what we have all done together. Students will brainstorm some ideas and I will write them on the whiteboard. After coming up with a couple ideas, students will pick one we want to create a personal narrative comic on together. I will then model a three-panel personal narrative comic. I will talk through my thinking as I show an example on the board. I will model that the first panel is the beginning of the story, the second panel is the middle of the story, and the third panel is the end of the story. Once we have finished our class example, I will take a picture and create an anchor chart for students to reference throughout this unit.

After modeling a personal narrative comic, students will brainstorm ideas on what they want to create. They will write a couple ideas on an index card. After writing their ideas on an index card they will work with a partner to narrow down their topic to one idea. After coming up with their idea, students will conference with me to make sure that they can create a three-panel personal narrative comic from their idea. I will keep the students index cards in case they forget what they wanted to do.

Day Six: Exploring Drawing Materials

Essential Questions:

What is a personal narrative?

What is a comic?

What is a panel?

Essential Outcome?

Students will be able to explore a variety of art supplies. Students will create a drawing of their choice.

Materials:

Dog Man book, parchment paper (extra from previous science kit), ink, crayons, markers, colored pencils, watercolor paint, different size paintbrushes, water, paint, index cards, blank white paper, white construction paper, cream construction paper, soap

Instructions:

I will continue to read a couple pages of the *Dog Man* book the class selected. After reading, students will be shown the variety of art supplies. I will hold up each item and explain what it is and how to use it carefully. I will review with the students the rules and expectations during this lesson. Students will have the opportunity to explore a variety of art supplies on different types of paper. Students can draw a picture or just doodle on the paper. The goal of this lesson is to get students used to different types of art supplies that they can use for their personal narrative comic strip.

Each student will get a piece of parchment paper to cover the top of their desk in case of any accidents or spills. Students will be given index cards, blank white paper, white construction paper and cream construction paper. Students will then have a chance to explore the art supplies on their own.

When the time is up, students will clean up their area, put back supplies, and wash their hands. When all of this is complete, we will regroup to discuss the difference in the art supplies. Students will discuss what they liked and what they didn't like and why. After, students will think about which art supplies they would like to use for their personal narrative comic strip.

Day Seven and Eight: Rough Draft 1 – Drawing the Comics

Essential Questions:

What is a personal narrative?

What is a comic?

What is a panel?

Essential Outcomes:

Students will be able to draw a three or more-panel comic. Students will be able to add details to their drawings. Students will be able to add color to their drawings.

Materials:

Dog Man book, parchment paper (extra from previous science kit), ink, crayons, markers, colored pencils, watercolor paint, different size paintbrushes, water, paint, index cards, blank comic strip, pencils, erasers soap

Instructions:

Day Seven: I will continue to read a couple pages of the *Dog Man* book the class selected. After reading, students will cover their desk with parchment paper. Students will be able to draw their three-panel personal narrative comic. Students can pick from a variety of blank comic strips or index cards to draw their pictures. Students will first draw with a pencil. This may take more than one day depending on time allotted.

Day Eight: I will continue to read a couple pages of the *Dog Man* book the class selected. After reading, students will take out their drawings and use special art supplies to go over their pencil drawings. This may take more than one day depending on time allotted.

Day Nine and Ten: Rough Draft 2 – Adding Dialogue and Words

Essential Questions:

What is a personal narrative comic?

Essential Outcome:

Students will be able to add dialogue and words to their comic strip.

Materials:

Dog Man book, parchment paper (extra from previous science kit), ink, crayons, markers, colored pencils, watercolor paint, different size paintbrushes, water, paint, index cards, blank comic strip, pencils, erasers soap

Instructions:

Day Nine: I will continue to read a couple pages of the *Dog Man* book the class selected. After reading, I will review with the class dialogue and onomatopoeia. We will discuss how we can incorporate this into the comic strips. Students will take out their comic strip or index cards and add dialogue and words to their drawings with pencil. This may take more than one day depending on time allotted.

Day Ten: I will continue to read a couple pages of the *Dog Man* book the class selected. After reading, students will take out their comic strips and use special art supplies to go over their dialogue and words. This may take more than one day depending on time allotted.

Day Eleven and Twelve: Rough Draft 3 – Peer Editing

Essential Questions:

What is a personal narrative comic?

Essential Outcome:

Students will be able to peer edit each other's comic strips respectfully.

Preparation:

Before this lesson, I will photocopy each student's comic strip and hold onto the original. Students will get the photocopy version of their comic strip for peer editing. They can

edit each other's comics without feeling like they are drawing on top of somebody else's work.

Materials:

Dog Man book, a photocopy of student's comic strip, pencils, erasers

Instructions:

I will continue to read a couple pages of the *Dog Man* book the class selected. After reading, students will get a photocopied version of their comic strip. Students will be assigned partners for peer editing. Students will peer edit each other's comic strip.

Day Thirteen and Fourteen: Putting it all Together – Final Copy

Essential Questions:

What is a personal narrative comic?

Essential Outcome:

Students will create a personal narrative comic.

Materials:

Dog Man book, parchment paper (extra from previous science kit), ink, crayons, markers, colored pencils, watercolor paint, different size paintbrushes, water, paint, index cards, blank comic strip, pencils, erasers, soap, peer-edited personal narrative comics, original personal narrative comics

Instruction:

I will continue to read a couple pages of the *Dog Man* book the class selected. After reading, students will be given their original and peer-edited personal narrative comics. Students will have time to finish their final copy of their personal narrative comic. All supplies will be available to students for final touches.

Day Fifteen and Sixteen: Presentations

Essential Questions:

What is a personal narrative comic?

Essential Outcome:

Students will create a personal narrative comic. Students will present their personal narrative comic to the class.

Materials:

ELMO projector or document camera and final personal narrative comics

Instructions:

Students will present their final project to the class using the document camera.

Resources

Mentor Texts:

After the Fall How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again by Dan Santat

Dog Man Series by Dav Pilkey

The Babysitter Club Graphix Series by Raina Telgemeier and Ann M. Martin

Fairy Tale Comics: Classic Tales Told by Extraordinary Cartoonists by Chris Duffy, Gilbert Hernandez, David Mazzucchelli

Nursery Rhyme Comics: 50 Timeless Rhymes from 50 Celebrated Cartoonists by Chris Duffy, Jules Feiffer, Roz Chast, Leonard S. Marcus

Chalk by Bill Thomson

Harold and the Purple Crayon by Crockett Johnson

What Do Authors and Illustrators Do? By Eileen Christelow

What Do Illustrators Do? By Eileen Christelow

Appendix

Unit Standards:

This unit covers a variety of Common Core standards in writing, speaking and listening, as well as, language- conventions of standard English and knowledge of language.

W.4.2d – Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

W.4.3 – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

W.4.3a – Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize and event sequence that unfolds naturally.

W.4.3b – Use dialogue and description to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.

W.4.3d – Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.

SL.4.1 – Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.

L.4.3a – Choose words and phrases to convey ideas precisely.

L.4.2b – Use commas and quotation marks to mark direct speech and quotation from a text.

Annotated Bibliography

“Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-Trusted Online Dictionary.” Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster. Accessed October 20, 2019. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>.

Dictionary by Merriam- Webster is a proper source for word definitions.

“District Profile / District Profile.” District Profile / District Profile. Accessed October 20, 2019. <https://www.redclayschools.com/domain/183>.

This website was used to find the demographic information that the district reports.

Gil, Christina. “8 Tips for Teaching With Mentor Texts.” Edutopia. George Lucas Educational Foundation, June 1, 2017. <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/8-tips-teaching-mentor-texts-christina-gil>.

This is an article that supports mentor texts and how to use them within the classroom.

“Government and Services.” State Report Cards - Delaware Department of Education. Accessed October 20, 2019. <https://reportcard.doe.k12.de.us/detail.html#aboutpage?scope=school&district=32&school=244>.

This website was used to find the demographics of Highlands Elementary School.

“Research Guides: Graphic Novels & Comics: What Is a Graphic Novel?” What Is a Graphic Novel? - Graphic Novels & Comics - Research Guides at University of Maryland Libraries. Accessed October 20, 2019. <https://lib.guides.umd.edu/comics>.

This website defines what a comics and graphic novels are.

“Stories.” National Writing Project. Accessed October 20, 2019.
<https://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/4090>.

This is an article that supports mentor texts and how to use them within the classroom.

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on May 18, and Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on April 23. “Mentor Texts.” Reading Rockets, November 13, 2013.
<https://www.readingrockets.org/blog/36813>.

This is an article that supports mentor texts and how to use them within the classroom.

“The PATHS® Curriculum.” PATHS. Accessed October 20, 2019.
<http://www.pathstraining.com/main/curriculum/>.

This is the website used for the school’s social emotional curriculum. This website was used to define PATHS and their mission statement.

Notes

¹ “District Profile / District Profile,” District Profile / District Profile, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.redclayschools.com/domain/183>)

² “District Profile / District Profile,” District Profile / District Profile, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.redclayschools.com/domain/183>)

³ “District Profile / District Profile,” District Profile / District Profile, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.redclayschools.com/domain/183>)

⁴ “Government and Services.” State Report Cards - Delaware Department of Education. Accessed October 20, 2019.
<https://reportcard.doe.k12.de.us/detail.html#aboutpage?scope=school&district=32&school=244>.

⁵ “The PATHS® Curriculum,” PATHS, accessed October 20, 2019,
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⁶ “Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-Trusted Online Dictionary,” Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>)

⁷ “Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-Trusted Online Dictionary,” Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>)

⁸ Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on May 18 and Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on April 23, “Mentor Texts,” Reading Rockets, November 13, 2013, <https://www.readingrockets.org/blog/36813>)

⁹ Christina Gil, “8 Tips for Teaching With Mentor Texts,” Edutopia (George Lucas Educational Foundation, June 1, 2017), <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/8-tips-teaching-mentor-texts-christina-gil>)

¹⁰ “Stories,” National Writing Project, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/4090>)