Comprehending and Creating Graphic Novels and Comics

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Introduction

One of requirements at the start of our seminar was to keep a journal to track our observations and actions: list seven things we did, seven things we saw, one thing we heard and one thing we would draw. We had to do this everyday for the first five weeks of seminar and share each week what we drew. In hearing the idea, I was excited to attempt drawing again! The last time I took an art class where we were expected to draw was in high school. I remember really enjoying the class even though I thought I wasn't the best at drawing. So, when Professor Shelnutt asked us to do this activity, I was excited to experience that same joy from high school art class. Over the first week of journaling, I was successfully able to list what I saw, heard, and did, but it came to the drawing aspect…I panicked and blanked. This feeling of doubt and insecurity overwhelmed me in that I worried my drawings were not going to be good. I began to question, "What are my peers going to think of my drawings?" "Will I get frustrated with the task and give up?" There were days I blanked on what I should be drawing and it took a lot of motivation to get past that mental block and complete the journal for that particular day. In reality, are there rules for what is "good" art and "good" sketches? The intentions of the task were for us just to draw; it did not matter whether those illustrations were "good" or not. It's just the idea of trying. Allowing this way of thinking to sink it, the journaling became easier and it broadened my thinking in a different way. It was fascinating to take a personal experience of that day and find a way to interpret that into a sketch. It allowed me to visualize my thinking and comprehension of an event better and to reflect more thoughtfully on the circumstances.

Having this personal experience puts my students into better perspective. To be honest…it reminded of what I felt like back in middle and high school doing and "out of the box" activity or a task that I considered to be too difficult. I notice that many of my students who struggle with reading—especially my special education and English Language Learners—they follow the same approach I did when faced with a text that has a higher lexile (grade level). When they see a harder, longer text, they immediately give up before event attempting to comprehend due to their insecurities with the reading. However, if I create activities that allow student to pair images with what they are reading or vocabulary, they should be more inclined to read a difficult text since they can connect with it visually. With this unit, I want my students to better understand more difficult text and complex topics with the use of images and graphic novels to build comprehension of a time period: the Holocaust.

Demographics

Conrad Schools of Science (CSS) is a unique school in the Red Clay School District housing grades from sixth to twelfth. The school is considered a magnet school with a primary focus on

mathematics, science and technology. The high school courses offered are meant to lead into various pathways: Allied Health, Sports Physical Therapy, Engineering and Biotechnology. All students now have to apply and interview in order to be accepted into the school. I am currently teaching 6th grade English/Language Arts and Special Education. In the past couple years at CSS the Special-education component was served using the inclusion model. Since I am dual-certified in teaching special –education and middle school English, I would teach a group of regular education students with the special-education population in the same class. The past school year, I have co-taught in in sixth grade English/Language Arts class where I am considered the content teacher while I had another special-education teacher assist on one day while an English Language Learner (ELL) specialist would come in the next day. Going into the 2019-2020 school year, I will continue to teach sixth grade English in an inclusion setting. However, this school year we will be implementing the change that English/Reading and Language Arts/Writing will be split into two separate classes and we will have an Honors Program offered at the sixth grade level. Prior to this school year, Honors English did not begin until seventh grade. I will be the primary teacher that will focus on reading comprehension to the entire sixth grade of one hundred and seventy students.

For this curriculum unit, I will focus on creating activities that will benefit my special education and proficient students as well as generating specific activities that focus on my Honors Reading classes. This means that in each of my classes I have students that are able to fully comprehend high school material and generate connections; on the other hand I have students that are barely able to read at a third grade level in the sixth grade and struggle with comprehension. Since my classes will be an arranged in an inclusion setting, the reading content and lessons will focus on differentiating instruction so that the gifted students as well as the classified special-education students and the ELL students in the class will be able to comprehend the material. This unit has been made to fit a block schedule of 90 minutes classes.

Rationale

Throughout our years of schooling, we are expected to remember how to make inferences about what we read, accurately summarize the main ideas of text that is three times higher than their grade level. We are also asked to determine the cause and effect relationships within an informational article determine the author's purpose and cite evidence stating why. Then, students must determine the major conflict within a text, explain the theme of a story, know which….the list of necessary skills goes on and one…and that is just the knowledge needed to pass sixth grade English/Language Arts. As adults, we have already acquired much of the knowledge and skills we need to function day to day. However, the memory demands for school-age children are much greater than they are for adults. My students are constantly bombarded with new knowledge in multiple topic areas in which they may or may not be interested. Although the knowledge base for some fields such as technology changes rapidly, the new information is generally highly specific and builds on existing knowledge. Additionally, students are expected to both learn and demonstrate the mastery of this knowledge on a daily basis. Thus, an effective and efficient memory is critical for school success.

Many students, especially my students with special needs, have memory problems. Students who have deficits in registering information in to their memory often have difficulty remembering instructions or directions they have just been given, what was just said during conversations and class lectures and discussions, and what they just read. Students who have difficulty with working memory often forget what they are doing while doing it; imagine what happens when we expect these students to remember point blank how to understand the three-step direction they were just given, but forget the second and third steps while carrying out the first step. But if students are provided a visual model or example, students are better able to recall the steps needed.

Enduring Understandings:

Students will understand that the roles of the characters in the story *Maus* that are represented as a cat and mouse; the mice are a depiction of the Jewish people while the cats are the Nazi Regime. Mice are naturally the weaker end of the food train and are seen as the prey while cats are the predator; relationship of a cat-mouse act as an allegory to the match the roles the Jewish people and Nazi Soldiers. The Jewish people acted as a scapegoat/prey for the Nazi Regime so and were used to place blame for the economic troubles of Germany and the lost of World War I.

Students will also come to understand how a graphic novel is created, the vocabulary terms associated with comics/graphic novels, how the proper placement of images to relay meaning and event sequence; they will use this knowledge to create their own comic strip.

Essential Questions

Throughout this unit, these are the essential questions we are going to focus upon: What are graphic novels and how are they created? How did Art Speigelman use the dynamic relationship of a cat and mouse to portray events of history? How can we use our knowledge of graphic novels to create our own? How can we create our own graphic novels that teach positive character traits to young readers?

Using Graphic Novels in the Classroom

The History of the Graphic Novel

"Arguably one of the most significant transformations that took place in the realm of literature for children and young adults during the twentieth century was the resurgence of comics geared toward youth readership."[1] Over the last couple years, graphic novels have grown in popularity amongst young readers. Librarians cannot keep the shelves stocked fast enough! Many of my students ask if we can complete a book project in class that allows them to read a graphic novel. But what are graphic novels?

The difference between comics and graphic novels has been a long, grueling debate since the 1970's. *Comics* are often seen as children's literature where each issue represents one single storyline; the next week, the next story will be published the following week. A *graphic novel* is defined as a long, comic/illustrated narrative that is meant for more mature audiences; graphic

novels can be published in hardback and softback, purchased in a books to read and discuss more serious themes and sophisticated artwork. Christopher Murray states in his explanation of the graphic novel:

> "It's still debated what is the first graphic novel, many experts hold Eisner's *A Contract with God, and Other Tenement Stories* to be one of the most important early examples of the graphic novel in the United States. Books like Eisner's made clear the demand for more sophisticated comics, and the result was something of a boom in so-called adult comics in the mid- to late 1980s, which was centred around three works: Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), Alan Moore's *Watchmen* (1986–87), and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus* (1980–86) by Art Spiegelman. The defining attribute of each was a formal control of the medium—which is to say, a highly sophisticated degree of control over the use of panel transitions, layout, and so on to achieve certain narrative effects—coupled with artistic innovation and a literary quality in which the authors announced their individual style." [2]

The twentieth century has seen a huge emergence of the graphic novel enough to be describe as the Golden Period for graphic novels. A wealth of new, enriching material has been coming to the market and the young adult crowd couldn't be more pleased. I am hoping to use my students' love of graphic novels to implement into my classroom as a way to teach more difficult and complex topics.

Why Graphic Novels are Beneficial Tools for Reading

Over the last couple of years, the need for teachers coming into the profession understanding visual literacy has been in high demand. Shelley Hong Xu, associate uses comics as apart of her classes in teaching literacy methods to her college students, asking them how the use of images better helps with comprehension of text, especially since the need for awareness of visual literacy has intensified. Universities have come to realize what a great medium comics and graphic novels have to offer as a gateway into reading.

Public school librarian and teachers are also seeing the benefits of using this visual medium to assist with reading and comprehension. Jesse Karp, a public school librarian based out of New York City, points out that "comics appeal to k-12 curriculum developers because they reinforce the left-to-right sequence and images aid in word/sentence comprehension and provide a deeper interpretation of the words and story." [3] Also, young readers build confidence in their reading and interacting with comics. Below, I'm going to further discuss reason why implementing graphic novels is beneficial in the classroom.

Graphic Novels Help Students Make Connections Through Imagery

Storytellers in all media forms know that know that the true indicator of audience involvement is the degree to which the audience identifies with a story's characters.[4] With cartoon characters, the combination of use of a highly recognizable character and a realistic background allows the reader to mask themselves in a character and safely enter a sensually stimulating world. Since

viewer-identification is a specialty of cartooning, the use of a well-recognize character and a visually appealing setting, cartoons have a historically held an advantage in breaking into the world of popular culture. [5] Thus, "the more cartoony a face is, the more people it could be said to describe"[6] which allow cartoons and comics more universal. Multitudes of people on various reading comprehension levels who read who read and see cartoons or comics generally are able to maintain a better memory of the character due to the imagery.

Pictures are received information where we can easily interpret the message of the image just by looking at it; writing on the other hand is perceived information. It takes our brain time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols that form language and words on the page. For instance, our brain can process the intake of an image the same has words when the words are simplistic, bolder, more direct since they require lower levels of perception. Often, the more abstract from 'reality' the picture is, it requires greater level of perception to interpret the message (much like more distinguished, higher order vocabulary). Comics have the ability to unite less abstract images and more direct wording to allow for faster perception and comprehension. [7]

Graphic Novels Help Students Make Inferences and Draw Conclusions

Comics are a valuable tool to help struggling readers learn how to generate inferences. Shelly Hong Xu, associate professor of teacher education at California State University highlights the ability of the comics medium to teach about making inferences, especially since readers must rely on pictures and just a small amount of text . [8]

When it comes to creating and illustrating comics, the box where the illustrations are drawn are called *cells* or *panels*. The cell is a very distinct rectangle on the page, typically one to three panels per page but there can be more. In reading these panels, you are to rad the page left to right (much like a typical book). These very distinct boxes can also be called panels; when seeing the arrangement of the cells and panels on a single page, there may be space in between the panels. It is in this space in between the panels were the readers are expected to create inferences between events. Rather than using the word inference, comics call this the act of *closure*. The empty space between the panels is what comics call *the gutter*".
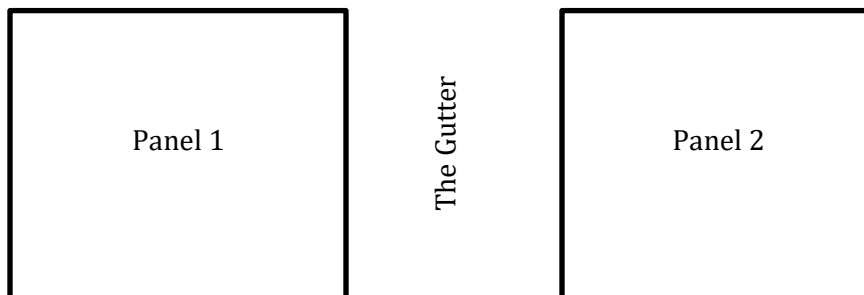Refer to figure one below:

Figure One: Drawing by M.Wiedenmann

The gutter is a where a piece of the story is visually removed and "plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics." [9] Essentially, an event or shift has happened in between panel one and panel two, this leaves the reader having to generate an inference to determine what has happened in between (or while in the gutter). Students or readers are being forced to use what they see and their imagination to forge together what has happened in that missing element of time.

   "Comic panels fracture both time and space offering unconnected moments; closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality." The panel-to-panel transitions in comics can happen in one to six distinct categories. The first category is called *moment-to-moment* where there is a very little that has happened from the first panel to the next; example, the character's eyes are open in the first but then they are closed in the second panel. The second category is *action-to-action* where a single action the one character is performing is happening. McCloud uses the example of a baseball player: the first panel you see the player ready at bat and see the ball coming towards him. In the second panel, the baseball player sung and is seen making contact with the ball. The third category is subject-to-subject. With this type of transition, we are staying with the same scene or idea but the focus of the scene may shift to feature something else or a different subject. For example, we may see two characters fighting in the first panel but we only see the words representing the action in the next panel (not showing the fact the one character died). This requires the reader to infer a bit more about what is happening in the gutter. The fourth category of transition is *scene-to-scene* transports the reader across significant distances of time and space. Reader has to use the skill of inferences a lot more to interpret how much time has lapse or where the characters are appearing in the storyline. *Aspect-to-aspect*, the fifth type of transition ignores the aspect of time and sets what McCloud calls a 'wandering eye' on different aspects of a place, mood, or idea. The sixth transition, *non-sequitur*, offers no logical relationship between the panels. It is up to the reader to determine sequence the storyline is following. [10]

   As McCloud states in his book, "Closure in comics fosters an intimacy surpassed only by the written word, a silent secret contract between creator and written word."[11] As we see in the different ways of transition from panel to panel, comics offering a variety of ways for students to create inferences and draw conclusions; the necessity of drawing conclusions can be very little such as in moment-to moment or require more such as the aspect-to aspect type of transition. This is beneficial for my struggling readers since they have visual elements to help generate the inference needed to have the story make sense when reading a graphic novel or comic. With words, often they focus so much on what the word is saying rather than the relationship of the words together to generate the inference. Comics take out that extra step or comprehension aspect needed since there is a visual present to help be better acquainted with the storyline.

Graphic Novels Assist Students Making Deeper Personal Connections

   Another reason why comics and graphic novels are beneficial for struggling readers is due to the fact that comics are a mono-sensory medium. Comics rely on one of our five senses to convey a lot of meaning (as McCloud states a 'world' of meaning!). Comics are exclusively a visual representation; inside the panels everything has to be visual. However, outside of the panel or between each panel none of our senses are required to be used. In the end, all of our senses are

engaged due to having our imagination activated by what is 'missing' from the panel. And the reader is not bored or confused by what is missing because the next panel is arranged immediately to follow. The reader is required to put in some effort to fill in the missing pieces but not so much effort that they become lost.

Comics not only use transitions between panels to help the reader identify what is happening in the plot. There are certain visual vocabulary terms such as *background, icons,* and *symbols* that help the reader get a better understanding of character. Comics are filled with visual, recognizable *symbols* that also help struggling readers. For example, we know that if a character has an 'x' placed on both of their eyes we the reader comes to the know that character is dead. It is a universal understanding that remains consistent in comics or cartoons. These symbols act as a visual vocabulary that allows for the reader to grow their understanding of events. Symbols also have the power to describe the invisible realm of senses and feelings as well.

Background is another aspect of visual vocabulary that helps readers interpret various ideas, particularly the emotions of the characters. For example, behind the character in the background we see a large spiral circle forming (like someone is being hypnotized). This shows to me as the reader that the character is in a blank state of mind. The picture of this type of background can induce strong feelings in the reader; they may be left wondering what is exactly happening since it is not directly stated in words. However, words lack that immediate personal connections and emotions that an image can cultivate in the reader. Which is why Scott McCloud states: "together words and pictures are miracles." [12]

By using comics and graphic novels in my classroom, it will allow students to develop their ability to draw conclusions about content and text, especially when the content is something that is in the distant past. The Holocaust is a unit that I used to teach in my classroom seven years ago before we changed and adopt a new curriculum. This new curriculum is based on reading short stories, speeches, and informational science-based articles. However, students are expected to read lengthy, dense readings such as novels where the topic has a serious tone as they progress to high school. This is difficult for my struggling readers since they hate to read, especially when it comes to content where they lack background knowledge. With this curriculum unit, I want to use the graphic novel *Maus* as a tool to help them learn how to comprehend a tougher topic; this way they will be exposed to a reading that is of a sixth grade reading level or higher but has the compliment of pictures to allow my struggling readers to make the necessary inferences and conclusions. Along with this reading, my students are going to need to gain a background knowledge of the events that happened in the Holocaust to be able to understand what Art Speigleman's father is recollecting in the graphic novel.

Graphic Novels Help With Visual Memory

As I stated above, I have certain students with special needs and learning deficits that affect their memory and retention of information. This truly affects their ability to comprehend text since the focus so much on what the words mean rather than comprehend what is being said. But if students are provided a visual model or example, students are better able to recall the steps needed. Michelle Brill wrote an article entitled "Teaching the Special Needs Learner: When

Words Are Not Enough" discussing how visual aids and images paired with text used in classrooms benefit students with learning deficits. Often, students with disabilities have strong visual skills. In her article, she refers to autism specialist Linda Hodgdon:

> "Strong visual learners understand what they see better than what they hear. These strengths can be capitalized on with visual supports such as objects, photographs, and picture symbols that improve understanding and the ability to communicate. Visual tools assist students with processing language, organizing their thinking, and many other skills necessary to participate effectively."[13]

Visual memory is defined as "a form of memory which preserves some characteristics of our senses pertaining to visual experience. We are able to place in memory visual information which resembles objects, places, animals or people in a mental image."[14] It is natural for the human race to create images in everyday things that we see; it is our mind's way of making personal connections and storing memories. For instance, when you look at the front of a car, we tend to see the headlights of the car as the car's eyes, the grill would be the mouth and the remainder of the car creates the rest of the 'face'. We assign identities and emotions to everyday objects where none actually exist.[15] We use the visual we see everyday to help build our visual memory.

For seminar, we were required to read Scott McCloud's book "Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art". McCloud goes on discussing in the second chapter that when you enter the world of cartoons, you have a tendency to see yourself.

> "I believe this (tendency to see yourself in cartoons) is the primary cause of our childhood fascination with cartoons though other factors such as universal identification, simplicity, and the childlike features…thus, the cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled…an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm. We don't just observe the cartoon, we become it."[16]

When you see a descriptive, realistic drawing of a face your mind immediately sees it as face of another person. Later in the chapter, McCloud states that: "Cartooning isn't a way of drawing; it's a way of seeing. The ability of cartoons to focus our attention on an idea is, I think, an important part of their special power, both in comics and in drawing generally." [17] In this way, graphic novels are a good tool for classroom to help struggling readers visualize and improve their visual memory.

The Holocaust: Necessary Background for Students

The Holocaust is known as the time period of 1941-1945 when Nazi ruled Germany were responsible for the mass murder of six million European Jews as well as million of Gypsies and homosexuals for being seen as 'undesirables'. Adolf Hitler— the anti-Semitic leader of the Nazi regime—saw Jews and these other select groups as an inferior race and an alien threat to Germany. With his goals of establishing racial purity and expanding the community, Hitler's "Final Solution" was a well-planned and maneuvered policy to get rid of the Jews that were thought to be illegal immigrants in Germany and in the surrounding areas of Europe. The plan

called for the construction of concentration camps and mass killing centers throughout Nazi-occupied Poland.

Though, Hitler was not the first to bring anti-Semitism to public light; there is evidence that proves a long period of hostility towards Jews that dates back to the 17th and 18th centuries. Historians state that the negative ideology of the Jews began when they were forced to leave Palestine by the Romans and have come to be seen as an "alien" race infiltrating areas of Europe as refugees. As the anti-Semitic feelings have endured, they have oddly taken on a racial character rather than being purely based on religion. Historians are not exactly sure where the roots of Hitler's particular brand of ant-Semitism came from; however, he was one of many anti-Semites in Germany that blamed the Jews for losing World War I and bankrupting Germany in 1918 (Germany had to pay 31.4 Billion dollars in damages and take sole blame of World War I on behalf of the Central Powers according to the Treaty of Versailles).

While in prison in 1923, Hitler wrote the memoir and propaganda text "Mein Kampf"(My Struggle) in which he predicted a European war that would result in "the extermination of the Jewish race in Germany."[18] Hitler also discussed his idea of the superiority of the "pure" German race and the need for that race to expand and establish more living space. His book became a top seller in Germany and many citizens of Germany followed what he was preaching, especially the working class of Germany that were heavily impacted by the outcome of World War. As a result, Hitler was named chancellor of Germany in 1930 then later name himself "Fuhrer" or supreme ruler of Germany after the death of President von Hindenburg in 1934.

Following this election, the government began isolating the Jews from society and boycotting all Jewish-owned businesses. The Nuremberg Laws were enacted which were anti-semitic and racial laws taking away the civil rights of Jews in Germany. Under these laws, Jews were further isolated and persecuted. On November 9, 1938, Jewish businesses and other buildings were destroyed throughout Germany and Austria which became known as *Kristallnacht.*

In 1939, Germany invaded Poland (triggering World War II) and began deporting Jews to ghettos that were meant to further segregate them from society. Eventually, thousands of camps and detention centers were established across German occupied Europe as Hitler conquered Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France.

Beginning in September 1941, every person designated as a Jew in German-held territory was marked with a yellow star, making them open targets for persecution and deportation. Tens of thousands were soon being forced to leave their homes and deported to the Polish ghettoes and German-occupied cities in the USSR. From the ghettoes, Germans began mass transports to the concentration camps, first starting with those who the Germans viewed as weak and not useful: the sick, weak, elderly and very young. They were first sent to Belzec to test out the mass gassings; due to that success five more killing centers were created in Poland.

From 1942-1945, the Jews were being deported to the concentration camps and killing centers from all over Europe. More than two million people were murdered at Auschwitz (the largest camp) alone resembling more of a large-scale industrial operation. Jews were killed in the gas chambers, though thousand of others were worked today dying of starvation and disease.

Germany was losing ground to the Allie Forces1945, but not before thousands of people died. As the camps were siege by the Allied Forces, Nazi soldiers were ordered to empty the camps and force the prisoners to march to their death (one last attempt of getting rid of all the Jews and the evidence) resulting in the deaths of some 250,000 to 375,000 people.[19] Adolf Hitler killed himself May 8, 1945 and the German leadership began dissolving. Germany surrendered a week later

The wounds of the Holocaust were slow to heal. Survivors of the camps found it nearly impossible to return home since they had lost their families and belongings to the Germans. Also, many Jewish survivors had been denounced by their non-Jewish neighbors and felt displaced. As a result, the late 1940s saw an unprecedented number of refugees, POWs and other displaced populations moving across Europe. The Nuremberg Trials of 1945-1946 were held to punish those involved in the Holocaust and brought Nazi atrocities to horrifying light.

Over the years, I've noticed that the Holocaust has been removed from school curriculums. Many middle school students will enter high school not knowing this event in history has happened; high school students will also not learn about this event in their history classes. In eighth grade, students are meant to read the *The Diary of Anne Frank* but due to the force time restraints and rigid English Curriculum they have no knowledge of what forced the Franks into hiding. Also, our high school World History classes skip this section of the curriculum due to time constraints. With this current culture and the era of social media reigning, it seems as if people show a lack of empathy for others and we see many people treating people of different races and cultures so negatively. I often see this attitude in my student where they treat each other so harshly based on their differences. I want to use this unit as a way to help my students develop empathy

Using the Graphic Novel Maus *to Teach about the Holocaust*

The Graphic Novel *Maus* captures the true story of Vladek Speigelman, a Jewish Survivor of the Holocaust and Hitler's Nazi Regime. Vladek Speigelman is also the author/cartoonist's father. There are two stories embedded into this one graphic novel. One, of the Jewish young man and wife who survived Hitler's corrupt rule and that of his son trying to come to terms with his father's personal history. Author Art Speigelman uses the dynamic relationship of a cat and mouse to represent historical figures of the Holocaust. As a part of his research, Speigelman saw several Nazi Propaganda films that stated Jews were "vermin" which inspired his use of the mouse to represent the Jews in his comic. Cats usually are kept to kill mice hence using that persona to represent the Nazi. The Polish people that were not of Jewish descent were depicted as pigs.

> "By using talking animals, Spiegelman allows his readers just enough emotional-safety distance to be able to follow a story that takes place during the Holocaust. Before you know it, you are with Vladek, unmoored and slipping into the cruelest pits of hell."[20]

What turned into a two-year project took Speigelmann thirteen years to create. Speigelman began interviewing his father in 1978 about his experience during World War II and his account of the Holocaust which the memoir is based upon. It begins with the start of World War II and ends with his parents' liberation from Auschwitz. The two volumes chronicles his the real-life event of when Speigleman's father met his mother in the years that the Nazi Regime was gaining power and influence over Germany. His father goes in depth about the various examples of persecution he faces from his neighbors, his deportation to a ghetto and then to Auschwitz. Luckily, his wife Anja (Speigelman's mother) survived Auschwitz as well and he shares some of their secret letters they bribed Nazi officers to deliver back and forth. Michael Canva of the Washington posted stated that

> "Spiegelman drew "Maus" in black-and-white hatched panels, intentionally using a simple style that heightens the blunt impact of the content. And the cartoonist deftly employs many subtle tricks and literary devices — from visual foreshadowing to well-timed flashbacks — that gather cumulative force." [21]

His efforts proved worthy since he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 after the publication of the second volume. The graphic novel found a lot of success, especially in Germany. German schools adopted the novel and used to teach within the classroom about their dark history as a country.

For this unit, I want to read with my students Maus to help them better learn about events of the Holocaust but in a more visual format. I believe the visual format will have more of an impact on my students by using the visual representations of animals and reading of a comic book that they all truly enjoy.

Teaching Strategies

Collaborative and Ability Grouping

Collaborative learning can occur peer-to-peer or in larger groups. Peer learning, or peer instruction, is a type of collaborative learning that involves students working in pairs or small groups to discuss concepts, or find solutions to problems. Students are matched based on interest level, learning style, or by ability level. By grouping based on ability, I use reading Lexile levels (reading levels based on testing and classroom assessments) to match students in groups. Sometimes I will place students that match their same reading level and differentiate instruction based on ability (for instance, students who are low-reading level may get a different question set than my higher reading level students). Other times, I will match students with students that have different Lexile levels to help get lower-achieving students motivated by having a good peer model.

Students will be working together in groups of 2 to 4 to first learn about various types of natural disasters and create a presentation on each type. For this activity, students will be matched based on ability level and are matched with students who have a similar reading level to discuss, analyze, and interpret the imagery of the events in the chapters. This will also allow me to differentiate what questions I provide students.

Think-Pair-Share

Think-Pair-Share is a specific type of responding to questions strategy. It allows for collaborative learning in that students think and generate their own conclusions about a prompt or question. They then pair up with their assigned partner (or a peer of their choice) and share the conclusions they each came up with. The Think-Pair- Share strategy will be implemented to allow the students to collaborate and share their ideas on the author's intentions and use of imagery. We will use this technique when students share their thoughts on the discussion forum on Schoology.

Schoology

Schoology is a learning management system that acts as an online classroom. This system allows teachers to create and manage lessons for our academic courses that that is geared towards technology advancement.

Red Clay School District is a 1:1 technology school district where each student will have access to their own laptop; the middle school students and older are able to take this technology home with them to use as a tool to assist with their learning process in the classroom and teachers are able to develop online lessons using Schoology. For the purpose of this unit, I will be using Schoology as a way for my classes to discuss the topics at hand in an online discussion forums of essential questions for activities, journaling, online assignments incorporating the use of Google Docs and Slides, use of media folders for images regarding the Holocaust and understanding/interpreting *Maus.*

Google Docs/Presentations

Google Docs is a free Web-based application in which document s and spreadsheet s can be created, edited and stored online. Files can be accessed from any computer with an Internet connection and a full-featured Web browser.

We are a 1:1 technology school where students will be each getting their own Google Chrome book to use at home and in classes. With this added feature in the classroom, I want students to use Google Docs and Presentation to collaborate and work in groups. Google is unique in that multiple students can work on the same document, at the same time, and from different computers. Students will work together using Google Docs when answering reflection questions about certain sections of *Maus*

Teacher Resources

The following items are needed to complete this unit of study: classroom set of Graphic Novel *Maus*, chrome books or access to a computer for Google Docs, composition book or notebook for reflections, art/color supplies

Classroom Activities

Activity One: Characterization for Maus

For the first activity, students will need to identify various character traits that are associated with each character. Students will be presented a chart/graphic organizer on a Google doc. Within the graphic organizer, there were will a column representing each animal that is present in the graphic novel: cat, mouse, pig. In the first column, images of each character from *Maus* will be placed. In the second column, students will summarize traits that are associated with that animal in real-life. In a third column, students will have to describe how the character is describe in the text but providing examples of their actions.

   As a wrap up to this activity, I will post a discussion board on our classroom site on Schoology and reflection question: How do the character traits of each animal compare to their counterpart in the graphic novel *Maus?*

Activity Two: Reflection Journal

Along with comprehension questions that students will answer for each chapter of the graphic novel, students will be expected to keep a refection journal similar to one that was required of me in this seminar. In this journal, will be asked to reflect on their emotions as they are reading about the events in each chapter. Students will need to draw by hand their refection/emotions. With the illustration, they will have to write a summary of their reflection

Activity Three: Creating their Own Comic Strip

When visiting the Holocaust Museum, I purchased a poster that listed various positive attributes that people should embody such as humor, kindness, respect, responsibility, leader, etc. On the poster, there are thirty different attributes. Students will choose one of these attributes to use as the theme of their comic strip.

   Students will work to create a series of nine panels that tell a story of someone embodying their chosen word. They are going to create a character, plan events, and develop of theme of their comic that explains the importance of embodying their chosen attribute. They need to make their comic strips appropriate for a younger audience since the plan is to share these comic strips with an elementary school in the district.

Annotated Bibliography

Abate, Michelle Ann, and Gwen Athene Tarbox. *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults A Collection of Critical Essays.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017.

This book is a collection essays reviewing different graphic novels and how they are beneficial to use in the classroom. I found a lot of the articles very valuable.

Cavna, Michael. "Why 'Maus' Remains 'the Greatest Graphic Novel Ever Written,' 30 Years Later." The Washington Post. WP Company, April 27, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/comic-riffs/wp/2016/08/11/why-maus-remains-the-greatest-graphic-novel-ever-written-30-years-later/.

Newspaper article published discussing the highlights of using the graphic novel *Maus* in the classroom.

Daniels, Joseph, Chris, Dorain, Cindy Michel, David Spruill, Laura Jewell, B. Stewart, and Heather Ewing. "10 Strategies to Enhance Students' Memory." Reading Rockets, November 12, 2013. http://www.readingrockets.org/article/10-strategies-enhance-students-memory.

Article discussing different strategies to help special education students, especially those that are visual learners. I found it useful in finding different strategies that can help me implement the use of graphic novels in my classroom.

History.com Editors. "The Holocaust." History.com. A&E Television Networks, October 14, 2009. https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/the-holocaust.

A valuable website that summarizes accurately the events of the Holocaust; I'll refer to this as a good guide when creating a history timeline of events when we are reading *Maus* in my classroom.

McCloud, Scott. *The Invisible Art Understanding Comics*. NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994.

This was the book we were required to read for seminar; it gave us a valuable understanding of comics, how to read them, and how to implement them into our teaching.

Murray, Christopher. "Graphic Novel." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., May 2, 2017. https://www.britannica.com/art/graphic-novel.

This website offers a very comprehensive understanding of the history of graphic novels; I used to help me better understand what graphic novels were to help my students.

Notes

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[1] Gwen Athene Tarbox and Michelle Abate, *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults, pg. 3*

[2] Christopher Murray, https://www.britannica.com/art/graphic-novel

[3] Gwen Athene Tarbox and Michelle Abate, *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults,* pg. 141

[4] Scott McCloud, Understanding Comics, pg. 42

[5] ibid pg. 42

[6] ibid pg. 32

[7] ibid pg. 49

[8] ibid, pg. 141

[9] ibid pg. 66

[10] ibid pgs. 70-72

[11] ibid pg. 69

[12] ibid pg. 135

[13] Michelle Brill, "Teaching the Special Needs Learner: When Words Are Note Enough", 2011

[14] www.Dictionary.com

[15] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, pg. 31

[16] ibid, pg. 36

[17] ibid pg. 36

[18] History.com

[19] ibid

[20] Washington Post, "Why Maus Remains The Greatest Graphic Novel Ever Written"

[21] ibid