

Educators Teaching with Graphic Novels (Comics) & Seeking Global Representation

The following lists provide a starting point for teachers interested in teaching with comics in their classrooms. The varying representation of voices and experiences in many comics can support students in finding their own voices as diverse people and as learners in the classroom. I encourage anyone interested in teaching with comics to look beyond this list as they prepare for activities in their own classrooms/spaces.

Teacher Resources

- *Understand Comics: The Invisible Art* by Scott McCloud
- *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels* by Scott McCloud
- *Reinventing Comics: The Evolution of an Art Form* by Scott McCloud
- Teaching Comics by the Center for Cartoon Studies
- Comics Teacher's Guide by UNICEF
- *Autobiographix* (Anthology of short comic books that demonstrate comic books as a medium for personal storytelling)
- Using Comics for Serious Learning by Jason DeHart (Edutopia)
- Comics in the Classroom by Jabari Sellars (Harvard)
- 80+ Multicultural Graphic Novels for Children & Teenagers
- *Multicultural Comics: From Zap to Blue Beetle (Cognitive Approaches to Literature and Culture Series)* by Frederick Luis Aldama
- Superhero Diversity: Improving Diversity in Comic Books by Brent Moeshlin
- The 10 Most Diverse Comic Book Characters of All Time by Mayra Garcia

Examples of Graphic Novels

- *The Arab of the Future* by Riad Sattouf
 - *Ms. Marvel 1: No Normal* by G. Willow Wilson
 - *Ms. Marvel 2: Generation Why* by G. Willow Wilson
 - *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* by Sherine Hamdy & Coleman Nye
 - *Yes, I'm Hot in This: The Hilarious Truth about Life in a Hijab* by Huda Fahmy
 - *Huda F Are You?* by Huda Fahmy
 - *Daytripper* by Fabio Moon & Gabriel Ba
 - *They Called Us Enemy* by George Takei
 - *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi
 - *March: Book One* by John Lewis
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Lesson Plan

The following lesson plan was created for a 9th grade ELA class (two sections). The lesson was added to an existing poetry unit from the SpringBoard Curriculum.

Focus Standards

1. W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
2. W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
3. W.9-10.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Students were given the first chapter of *Ms. Marvel: No Normal* to read over the weekend. They were told the upcoming lessons would be centered around comics.

Part One

Bellwork: Students are asked to recall what they read and what they noticed as they were reading. This could include summarizing, discussion of comic elements, and/or questions they have about the reading.

Before moving into a whole-class discussion, students were asked to discuss what they shared in their bellwork in their table groups for five minutes. The goal of this was to engage students in low-risk discussions of what they read to prepare for the whole class discussion.

Once table groups wrapped up, Mrs. Issa and Mrs. Leclerc brought the students all together to have a whole-class discussion. They began the discussion by asking students to share what they discussed in groups.

- Sample scaffolding questions to prompt further reflection:
 - What resonated with you as you read chapter one of *Ms. Marvel*?
 - How was the reading experience different from previous fiction you've read?

Students began to share out story parts of the reading and while doing so, Mrs. Issa and Mrs. Leclerc prompted students to reflect on the elements of the comic that helped them understand the plot of the chapter along with the characters and setting.

- Sample scaffolding questions:
 - What did you notice about the various text boxes in the chapter? What did they mean?

- What were some ways sound was created in the chapter?
- Why do you think they gave some scenes full pages while other scenes had less space?
- Why did some scenes have clear boxes while others overlapped with each other?
- Did you notice any color changes throughout the chapter? What might have been the purpose of this?
- How were you able to learn about the characters and their actions/feelings? (This question requires a bit more unpacking – focusing on the visual components of comics and gaining detail through images rather than words)

By spending time focusing on the elements of the comic book, Mrs. Issa and Mrs. Leclerc considered this a way to begin bridging the elements of comics with poetry, especially in creating plots, details, and aesthetics in creative ways outside of traditional writing experiences.

- Your goal in this unit is to complete a poem and analyze a poem for an embedded assessment... In what ways can you begin to apply the creative elements of comics to the poems you plan to write? What ideas can you transfer between these genres of writing?

Next Steps: Students were asked to begin brainstorming their own short comics. If you had to create your own story using elements of comics, what would you pick?

- Examples:
 - Visualize the poem you plan on writing for your Embedded Assessment #2 → Is it possible to turn it into a comic?
 - Create your comic using genres you enjoy reading yourself. Some students chose autobiographical experiences while others chose fictional genres like Ms. Marvel.
 - What's a book, movie, show, or social media post you saw that can inspire a comic?

Students were given ten minutes at the end of class to begin brainstorming. They were asked to go home and complete their brainstorms for class the next day.

Part Two

Students came to class with brainstorms and used the first ten minutes of class sharing with peers in their table groups.

Mrs. Issa and Mrs. Leclerc brought the class together and provided white pieces of paper, markers, and other materials to encourage students to put forth their full creativity with these comics. Students were given the opportunity to use their Chromebooks to seek ideas online and the class was formatted in a workshop session so that students could actively speak to each other as they worked (with the hopes of sharing ideas and inspiring each other).

Mrs. Issa and Mrs. Leclerc used this workshop session to provide one-one support with students. They actively worked with students throughout the session and provided a space for students to think through their ideas.

The goal of creating their own comics was for students to experiment with this different genre of writing to create their own narratives that have all the elements of successful writing.

While students were not completed with their comics by the end of class, they were given the opportunity to share with their peers what they had so far (optional to students, but many volunteered).

Next Steps: Students were given an additional class period to work on these comics before being asked to take this home and work on before submitting them. Ultimately, students were given the option to use these pieces as part of their Embedded Assessment #2.

Reflections & Suggestions

Motivation through Creativity

- Students are typically encouraged to write in traditional formats that include words in paragraphs, details through sentences, as well as tone and speech through punctuation marks. Comics provide a creative outlet for students to explore and build upon their writing skills. This two-part lesson proved to be extremely effective with students who oftentimes are bored with existing curriculums. Nearly all students were excited to read *Ms. Marvel*, discuss as a class, create their own comics, and share with their peers.

Representation through *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*

- The demographics of the students in the classroom this took place are approximately 90-95% Muslim as well as Southwest Asian North African, African, and/or Southeast Asian. U.S. mainstream curriculums many times forget to include a portrayal of students in their lessons, which SpringBoard is not immune to. *Ms. Marvel* portrays a Muslim Southeast Asian teenage girl who is the child of immigrants living in New Jersey. The content of this comic proved to be extremely relevant to the students reading the first chapter of the comic. Many were able to build personal connections and provide analyses using their own background knowledge. Mrs. Issa and Mrs. Leclerc would encourage educators to consider adding materials to their classroom lessons that bring representation to the forefront of learning experiences.

Turning Lesson into Unit

- Mrs. Issa and Mrs. Leclerc believed that by having students partake in this learning experience, but only as a two-part lesson, they were not able to do everything they wished they could have done. This includes other activities, learning targets, and student

engagement. Moving forward, Mrs. Issa and Mrs. Leclerc have planned this summer to work this into a full unit for the next academic year. They believe the benefits of teaching with representation and using creative genres such as comics will motivate students to challenge themselves with new skills and content.

Stronger Connections to Goals

- While the Focus Standards of this learning experience were directly used from the SpringBoard curriculum (Poetry Unit - Embedded Assessment #2), Mrs. Issa and Mrs. Leclerc noticed that the students had a tough time connecting what they were learning with comics to the goals of the unit. For this reason, future workshopping of this lesson would better integrate the lesson to the learning standards that are being reached.

Reflection of Fellowship Experience

Being a part of the LATTICE fellowship took me beyond my graduate work in MSU's CITE program and allowed me to reenter the classroom that inspired my decision to get into educational research. As a minoritized student, teacher, and researcher in the United States, I've often felt a responsibility to bring representation in the spaces I spend time in. This responsibility felt natural through this fellowship by granting me the opportunity to explore a passion of mine, comic books, as a catalyst for student learning. By creating a list of resources and examples of diverse comic books teachers can bring into the classroom, I hope that we can begin to use this underused format of literature to engage students. This goal is foregrounded through the diverse representation in this literature, in which students can begin to interact with as often minoritized voices in society and in the literature they read.

This process was further inspired by a partnership between Mrs. Leclerc and I. Mrs. Leclerc is a high school English Language Arts teacher at the school I used to teach at, where most students are Muslim, Southwest Asian North African, and multilingual immigrant/refugee-background. Together, Mrs. Leclerc and I, we were able to construct a two-part lesson plan that fit within a unit she was teaching (SpringBoard - Poetry). While we felt the experience was positive for students by measuring their engagement in classroom discussions, participation in classwork, and final products (their own short comics), we wished the use of comics in her classroom could have been a whole unit. Ultimately, Mrs. Leclerc and I plan on using this experience to work together to create a potential unit for the following academic year that uses diverse comics to promote student development and achievement of learning targets.