

Using Graphic Novels to Teach English Majors in Bangladeshi Universities

ATM Sajedul Huq

Abstract: *The paper examines the existing misconceptions about graphic novels and explains how this medium of art can be used to teach graduate students majoring in English Literature. Graphic novels can be a great aid for students who are pursuing degrees in English, yet struggling with language acquisition. The lack of vocabulary is one stumbling block which can be averted by the illustrations of a graphic novel that both exemplify the context and contextualize the narrative. The inclusion of graphic novels in syllabi across the globe, the paper argues, can be replicated in our local universities.*

What most educators in our country are completely unaware of is that Graphic Novel and Comic Book studies are not only established courses in most universities in North America and Europe but also an integral part of the K12 curriculum in the USA and Canada. Japan and most Southeast Asian countries are way ahead of the western world in that they have been using 'Manga' in education for decades. Although today's graphic novels are a recent phenomenon and the term itself was not coined till 1978 by Will Eisner, it is generally accepted that the comic book movement in the 1960s led to the existence of graphic novels as we know them at the hands of writers who were looking to use the comic book format to address more mainstream or adult topics.

This particular way of storytelling is nothing new and has been used in various forms for centuries – early cave drawings, hieroglyphics, and medieval tapestries can be thought of as stories told in pictures. However, though the term 'graphic novel' is now generally used to describe any book in a comic format that resembles a novel in length and narrative development, Gorman (2003) describes graphic novels as an original book-length story, either fiction or nonfiction, published in comic book style or a collection of stories that have been published previously as individual comic books. Comics, in production, publication, and consumption, are essentially serials. Graphic novels, on the other hand, act as monographs and serve as distinct volumes within a collection; anthologies of comics can serve the same function.

There is some debate as to this name even today, as many graphic novels are actually works of non-fiction (not technically novels) or comic strip series collected into one bound copy (Gravett, 2005). Graphic novels tell a single, self-contained story with more pages than a single issue comic, usually written and/or drawn by the same writer or artist. However, there is room for overlap between the two forms; both *Watchmen* and *The Sandman*, for example, are graphic novels originally published in serial comic book form. Though a comic and a graphic novel are told via the same format, officially called *sequential art*: the combination of text, panels, and images, there is one major difference. Whereas comic books may stretch a story out to about

thirty pages, graphic novels can be as long as six hundred pages and are published and bound in book form with quality paper as opposed to comics.

Because many teachers in Bangladesh are quite unfamiliar with graphic novels, upon discovering that graphic novels are actually comic books (though far more serious), they very often tend to suffer from the following misconceptions, that *comics and graphic novels are for children, they are all full of violence and explicit sex, are only about superheroes, are for reluctant readers, and that they aren't "real" books*. It is also true that many people tend to confuse the term "graphic novel" with a genre. They fail to realize that "graphic novel" is a term that describes a **medium**, not a **genre**. And just like any other medium, graphic novels have a variety of genres, such as:

- Fiction
- Nonfiction
- Mystery/thriller
- Fantasy
- Memoir
- Historical Fiction
- Adventure/Action
- Superhero (Heroes Journey)
- Adaptations of traditional or classic literature

While most people in our country, if asked, will admit they have no idea what a graphic novel is, they will be able to name at least one or two comic books, like *Archie* or *Tintin*. Most children will be able to identify at least one superhero. It is no surprise that they equate the format with children's books. Just like audio books, videos, and television, sequential art is simply another way of telling a story, with different demands on the reader, and is not a genre. People tend to view graphic novels as a genre and this is why they may assume they are the same as comics and perhaps dismiss them with this in mind (Brenner, 2004). While comic books may have started off as no more than modern day morality plays about the war between good and evil, they have evolved.

Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986) was arguably the first graphic novel to reach a wide audience, including people who were not already comic book fans, when it was first published in 1986. Its mixture of aesthetic quality and narrative sophistication established an audience for practitioners of so-called "adult" graphic novels and also for autobiographical storytelling in a sequential art style (Gluibizzi, 2010). It was only after *Maus*, based on Spiegelman's father's survival of Auschwitz, went on to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 that graphic novels began to be accepted as 'real' literature.

In 2006, The Royal Society of Literature, Britain's oldest literary society whose fellowship boasts some of the most eminent playwrights, novelists and poets in the world (Tom Stoppard, Seamus Heaney, Harold Pinter, and Doris Lessing are among the current fellows), devoted the front cover of the annual RSL magazine to two graphic novelists, Posy Simmonds and Raymond Briggs, who were made fellows of the society - the first graphic novelists to receive the honor. Neil Gaiman, winner of the 1991 World Fantasy Award for the *Sandman* issue, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," is listed in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* as one of the top ten living post-modern

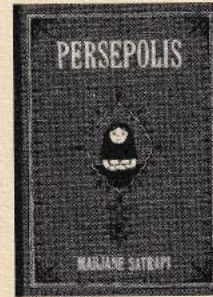
writers. Erudite, allusive, complex and ambitious, *The Sandman* is undoubtedly the finest writing the mainstream comic book industry has ever seen. This epic comic series is a revolutionary series that helped establish comic books as a serious literary format. Comics finally emerged as a medium worthy of study in and of itself, with the establishment of both undergraduate and graduate programs in comics at the Savannah College of Art and Design (Sturm, 2001).

Today it has become commonplace to hear critics from the literary and arts worlds celebrating graphic novels as accomplishing critical reorientation of their respective fields. Meanwhile, comics scholarship has taken off from within the comics' world, with Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices* and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, both comics works that engage academic readership of the medium.

Graphic novels have today not only earned their place as a respected literary form, but are now the strongest sector of growth in publishing in the US. It is interesting to note that some of the better-known graphic novels are published not by comics companies at all but by mainstream publishing houses (Pantheon, for example) and have put up mainstream sales numbers. *Persepolis*, for example, Marjane Satrapi's story which relates the events of the Islamic Revolution in Iran through the eyes of the author as a young girl, has sold almost 500,000 copies worldwide so far.



We have only to look at our own students in Dhaka to realize this undeniable truth. One would be hard put to find more than a handful of students in any university or college who do not have a Facebook account or own a cell-phone. A decade or so ago as teachers, we only had to compete with television. Nowadays, we have to constantly compete with Facebook and YouTube for students' attention. Teaching methods that may have been tested and true then can no longer make that claim (Huq, 2013).



Having grown up immersed in technologies such as the Internet, iPads, tablets and cell phones, most of today's undergraduates are "digital natives" and therefore enter our classrooms with different experiences, expectations and learning styles than previous

generations of students. The way they view the world is very different from those of other generations. We must accept that 21st century students, whether in Dhaka or Dallas, are screen addicts and that they learn differently and therefore we need to look for new ways to motivate, engage, and inspire them. As teachers we need to harness the wealth of visual media available to us and incorporate them into our teaching (Huq, 2013).

Today's students and classrooms are becoming more diverse and unique each day. In an increasingly visual culture, the boundaries of the concept of literacy itself have been expanded to account for multiple intelligences and skills important in the 21st century (Beers, Probst, and Rief, 2007). In fact, according to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), twenty-first century readers and writers need to:

- Develop proficiency with the tools of technology
- Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes
- Manage, analyze and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multi-media texts
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments

Keeping this in mind, graphic novels with their poignant text and captivating art, are inherently stimulating and offer an abundance of learning possibilities (Monin, 2010). According to Tabachnick (2009), “. . . the form is uniquely suited to a modern audience, classroom and student, and how the medium lends itself to useful employment in literature, art, history, composition and film adaptation studies . . . it is truly a form for all seasons.”

Recent studies have shown that roughly 80% of undergraduates studying in universities in Dhaka have a pre-intermediate English language proficiency level (there are one or two universities which do not fall into this category). The English majors, whether studying Language or Literature, are only slightly better. Expecting students with such a limited grasp of the English language to read, comprehend, analyze, let alone critique on the literary classics, or any of their prescribed texts for that matter, comprehensively, is no more than wishful thinking at best. To most Bangladeshi students, English is a foreign language. Everyday English is hard enough for them; the language of Shakespeare well nigh unintelligible. It is to be expected that these English language learners will become reluctant readers. Therefore, the obvious question arises, how can we present serious literature to a generation of students that is intensely visually aware but often reluctant to read? (Huq, 2013) According to Eisner (1985):

For the last hundred years, the subject of reading has connected quite directly to the concept of literacy; . . . Learning to read . . . has meant learning to read words. Recent research has shown that the reading of words is but a sub set of a much more general human activity which includes symbol decoding, information integration and organization. . . Indeed, reading – in the most general sense – can be

thought of as a perceptual activity. The reading of words is just one manifestation of this activity; but there are many others – the reading of pictures, maps, circuit diagrams, musical notes....”

Bill Templar, in “Graphic Novels in the ESL Classrooms” (2009) refers to S. Canagarajah who “has noted new paradigms in EFL teaching, reflecting a conceptual shift from ‘treating competence as rational to developing it as multisensory [...] from communication as solely verbal to multimodal or polysemiotic [...] These conceptual shifts portend significant changes to the way we practice language teaching.’” In his book, *Every Person a Reader* (1996), Dr. Steven Krashen states that free voluntary reading is an effective way to foster reading improvement. He goes on to cite several studies that show that students who read for pleasure will naturally progress in the amount and level of reading that they engage in. With regard to comic books in particular, Krashen notes that “middle school boys who did more comic book reading also read more in general, read more books, and reported that they liked reading better than those who did less comic book reading.” In 2005 he went on to say that there was growing evidence that plenty of readers of graphic narratives become better readers in general, so comics and graphic novels can serve as a “conduit to harder reading” (Krashen, 2005).

Though there are many reasons why our English language learners are struggling, it would be fair to say, that because our students have little or no background knowledge of the language they are studying, along with its unfamiliar vocabulary, which they do **not** use in their lives outside of the classroom, they find English language learning to be a de-motivating experience, which has no connection to their reality. However, research has shown that graphic novels and comics are effective in helping English language learners (Carter, 2007).

Graphic novels can not only help improve reading development for students struggling with language acquisition, as the illustrations provide contextual clues to the meaning of the written narrative, but also help to understand overall concepts and themes, even if they have not yet mastered all the relevant vocabulary.

Taking all this into account, graphic novels can be extremely effective in ESL classes because:

- They are visual ...they facilitate and support visualization of complicated text and content. Visual messages alongside minimal print help ease frustrations of beginning or struggling readers (Gorman, 2003);
- They are relevant ... they allow the reluctant or emergent reader to emotionally connect with the text;
- They are manageable ... they reduce the overall text load, decreasing student anxiety and lowering students’ affective filter;
- They are engaging ... they capitalize on the success and engagement of the format and its popularity with students;
- They are positive ... they increase student motivation and desire while promoting positive associations with reading. (Liu, 2004) found that “the reading comprehension of the low-level students was greatly facilitated when the comic strip repeated the information presented in the text.”
- They are 21st century ...they promote the development of 21st Century Literacy skills;

- They are communicative ... they also serve as a format for student language production (student authored comics and graphic summaries);
- They are brain-based ... they access one of the ways the brain learns best, through visual processing (60,000 times faster than text); and
- They are cross-curricular ... they offer opportunities to teach content across the curriculum (history, social science, etc.).

Graphic novels are also beneficial for our students because they can see how colloquial English is actually used and thereby expand their vocabulary skills and understanding of slang and idiomatic expressions.

Teachers may also find it useful and motivating to use graphic novels in writing instruction. According to Morrison *et al.* (2002) in their article “Using student-generated comic books in the classroom,” “constructing a comic book requires students to determine what is most important from their readings, to re-phrase it succinctly, and then to organize it logically.” This same article provides step-by-step instructions for students to create their own comic books based on a variety of subjects and provides research-based evidence for success. They go on to say that, “Writing comic books and graphic novels can help students with story mapping, organization, re-phrasing, character development and editing.” As O’English (O’English *et al.*, 2006) puts it, graphic novels can also be beneficially used for writing instruction. When students read graphic novels, they become familiar with tone, mood and especially dialogue techniques, which can be transferred to their own writing. Teachers can even get students to use comic making software like Comic Life and Strip-Generator to do assignments on topics such as:

- Timelines (history, events, sequences)
- Historical figures (history of, life of)
- Instructions (step by step, details, illustrations)
- Dialogue punctuation
- Character analysis
- Storytelling

While there are many graphic novels that are true to their comic book predecessors, written about superheroes, science fiction and fantasy, many have also been written about history, including past and recent wars, politics, civil rights, and more personal issues such as abuse, disabilities and family relationships (Gorman, 2002). Many classics have been rewritten in graphic novel form. Graphic versions of canonical literary works such as Eisner’s (2001) *Moby Dick*, Kuper’s graphic versions of Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (2003), and Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (2005) have been published while Classical Comics adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, *Henry V*, and *Romeo and Juliet* are now available in a versatile form: a simplified ‘quick text,’ ‘plain text,’ and original dialogue editions. These editions can be used both with pre-intermediate and more advanced students, with a choice of British or American English (Templer, 2009).

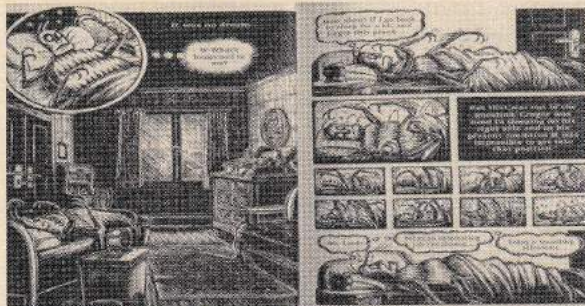


Original text, plain text and quick text in Classical Comics adaption of *Henry V*

Educational comics are nothing new. Most of us who grew up in Dhaka in the 70s will remember the ‘Classics illustrated series,’ which was delivering comic-book versions of English literature classics back in the ‘50s. Classics Illustrated, for those who are not familiar with them, was a comic book series featuring adaptations of literary classics such as *Moby Dick*, *Hamlet*, and *The Iliad*. However, in spite of their obvious contribution, they were regarded by most educators as not much more than graphic ‘Cliff’s Notes’ at best.

Yet, if we were to examine why Bangladeshi literature students still flock to ‘Cliff’s Notes,’ generic Indian ‘Study Guides,’ or the more recent ‘SparkNotes’ in the first place, we would find that the answer is simple. Our students simply do not have the level of proficiency required to comprehend or analyze the original texts. In order to get a satisfactory grade, they have no other recourse than to skim through summarized study guides, ending up with an incomplete understanding of the original text. In looking at how students comprehend texts, Booth (2009) notes that visualization is a significant cue that students must use when reading. He reminds us, however, that not all students are able to generate images in their minds while they read and the lack of this comprehension skill can negatively impact students’ understanding of what they read.

The solution is to use teaching strategies that ensure students gain understanding (Bull & Anstey, 2006). Through the use of graphic novels, students can make associations between the images and the text to help simplify the reading process and aid comprehension. Imagine the difficulties our students face when they read Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* for the first time. Getting through that first page, visualizing what is happening is almost impossible for most of our students, but if they were to be given visual clues, they would definitely find it easier to comprehend.



Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* adapted by Peter Kuper

It also cannot be denied that sometimes the sheer volume of prescribed texts is what intimidates and pushes our students towards generic ‘study guides.’ At the same time, because more graphic novel titles can be taught in the same amount of time one would have to spend teaching lengthier print only texts, students can be exposed to a wider variety of stories and genres that keep them engaged in reading. It is important to note that students actually ‘read’ graphic novels, and they do not need to rely on a study guide to provide them with summaries. As Bakis (2011) states:

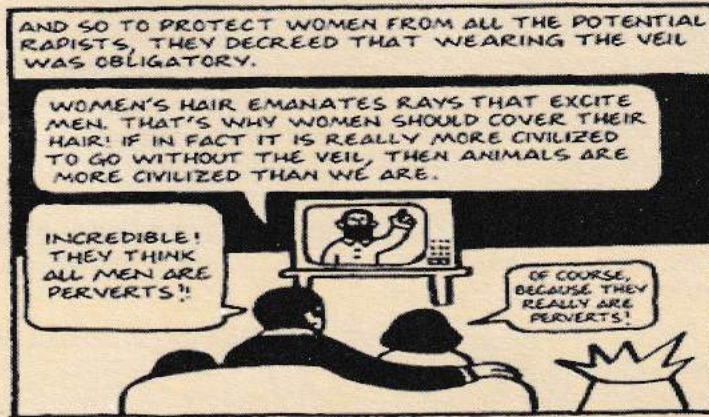
- Students find the aesthetic experience with visuals pleasurable (as opposed to more typical anesthetic experiences associated with common types of school-based reading);
- Because images are open for interpretation, this prompts rich discussion, stimulates problem solving, and builds social meaning;
- Graphic novels challenge weak and strong readers alike;
- Students must exercise more skill (reading images and text), not fewer when reading graphic novels.

Many readers, when confronted with solid pages of text, become intimidated and overwhelmed and just give up. Getting our students to read graphic novels will at least ensure that students will have an understanding of the texts in their entirety.

Graphic novels allow for a new approach to diction, imagery, syntax, structure, and language. For example, many graphic authors frequently emphasize words by making them boldface, italic, or underlined, practices applied sparingly in traditional texts. Graphic novels also substitute figurative imagery with the images themselves, but the interplay of what is written and what is drawn makes for an important point of analysis. Often, graphic novelists exploit the dual expressions of text and visuals to create puns, irony, and paradox. Syntax also becomes an examination of both sentence structure and panel and object structure (Cohen, 2008).

Overall, students can not only discuss the same topics and practice the same skills they would have used in classic literature, but they also develop new media literacy skills involved with understanding the comics medium and graphic novels (Monin, 2010).

Reading texts like Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God*, Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comic*, Alan Moore’s *V for Vendetta*, Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis I and II*, Art Spiegelman’s *Maus I and II*, and Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese*, students can discover, discuss, and write about what it means to be human, explore themes like fate, identity, and survival as well as environmental, societal, and familial influences on an individual, just as other students do reading traditional world literature (Monin, 2010). One of the most noted praises for graphic novels as a literary genre is that many of them have been written about issues of cultural diversity and different world view points. Graphic novels have branched out into themes representing cultures and ethnicities around the world. They are able to make serious comments about culture in a way that is accessible to a wide audience. Examples of this include graphic novels such as Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*, the story of a young girl growing up in Iran and her family’s suffering following the 1979 Islamic revolution. Marjane’s experiences are not difficult for our Bangladeshi students to relate to.



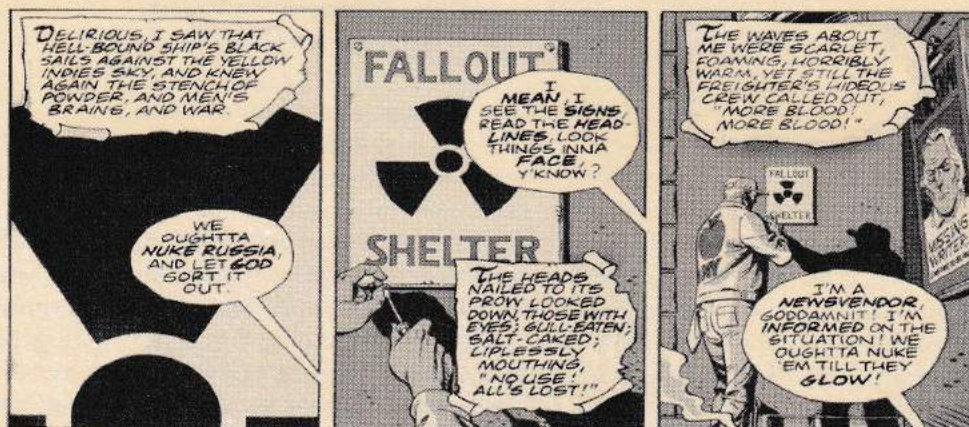
Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi

One of the common arguments against graphic novels has always been that literature is not just about the text, it is about imagination and that if the pictures are doing all the 'imagining' for the reader, then there is no point in reading literature. However, it is a fact that good graphic novels actually require more imagination on the part of the reader, because in this case, the reader not only has to read and interpret the images presented in the panels, but needs to further imagine the action taking place between the panels. Unlike prose, where frequent amounts of exposition are necessary, quality graphic novels leave much up to the imagination of the reader where inference is a critical skill. The reader has to not only interpret the images, but then infer information from the ways in which the images and text work together to communicate a message. The images provide the comprehension support needed to ensure that students can do the work of imagining everything else that is happening.



From *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* by Scott McCloud

In fact, in many ways, comics require more thinking than mere prose. A quality comic contains text and images seamlessly interwoven. More thinking is involved because the reader has to actually ‘study’ the complement of words and images to make meaning. The most significant difference of a comic is that the text is both written and visual. Every part of each frame plays a role in the interpretation of the text, and hence, graphic novels actually demand sophisticated readers. Graphic novels and comics push beyond the boundaries of illustrated books to the point where illustrations and text are equivalent, each driving the other, rather than the illustrations supporting or attempting to explain the text. Text in comics can serve as dialogue, narration, sound effect, commentary, clarification, image, and more.



Watchmen by Alan Moore

As we can see from the first three panels of the third issue of Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, without any text, the panels would simply depict a man hanging a sign, pushing back from the extreme close up in panel one to a medium shot of the same action in panel three. With the text, however, the panels develop a complicated interplay of different elements. There are three distinct types of text here: the text boxes, the speech balloons, and the sign and clothing text.

The **text boxes** contain narration from a pirate comic book, which we discover a panel later is being read by a teenage boy at a newsstand. The language and shape of the text boxes indicate their distance from the principal narration, but the parallel text provides an ironic commentary on the main scene. The speaker behind the **speech balloons** is indicated in the third panel: a news vendor expressing his fear and anger about the cold war. Some words are in bold, giving a sense of spoken emphasis and volume. Finally, the **sign text** is an instance of text as image. While the "Fallout Shelter" text simply mirrors the nonverbal icon on that sign, the "Missing Writer" sign in the third panel gestures toward another part of the narrative (the writer turns out to be a character, introduced several issues later). The "NY" under the apple on the workman's jacket places the scene quickly.

More important than any of these three in isolation, however, is how they all work together. The horrifying imagery of the pirate story gives a mediated image of the potential destruction of nuclear war endorsed by the news vendor's dialogue, while the likelihood of such a war is given iconic reference through the fallout shelter sign. A lot of people perceive graphic novels as just "frozen films." However, the difference

between films and graphic novels is that the action in the latter takes place inside illustrated panels as well as in-between the panels. With a film, the audience sees only what the director wants to show. With a graphic novel the audience actively personalizes the experience by, say for example, imagining the voice of each character. They can linger over images and revisit any image or text. They can go to the end before they start at the beginning or they can jump from page to page. A movie forces the viewer to sit passively and watch that world unfold, but the graphic novel actively engages the reader/viewer.

There are many graphic novel adaptations of classic literature, from *Beowulf* to *Moby Dick* (Gorman, 2003). Yet, as McGrath (2004) states, the graphic novel is not just like the old Classics Illustrated series, an illustrated version of something else. It is its own thing: an integrated whole, of words and images both, where the pictures do not just depict the story, they are part of the telling. Not only are these entertaining to students, but they also provide the same stories without the intimidation often found from such lengthy and complicated classics. By using these and other graphic novels, teachers can still follow the curriculum and cover the same required concepts and standards while maintaining student interest and excitement in the classroom.

Some educators may feel that graphic novels, as nontraditional texts, may take away from time that could be spent with more accepted books. Little (2005) states that the most prominent reason for teachers' reluctance to use graphic novels is, "most teachers either don't know what comics do, or aren't familiar enough with the medium." Based on the author's conversations with faculty from different institutions and personal experiences at numerous conferences, interestingly enough, the greatest resistance to using graphic novels seems to come from literature teachers. Yet a good literature class should not exclude anything that can foster reading, writing, listening, speaking, and critical thinking. A literature class devoted entirely to one type of reading or one genre is probably, in most cases, a poor idea. If the goal is to understand literature, then you necessarily must include multiple media forms and a variety of genre and styles in your curriculum (Bakis, 2011). This resistance seems to stem from an unfounded apprehension that graphic novels will somehow be used to replace literary texts. However, graphic novels should **not** be seen as a replacement for prose but instead should be taught alongside or as supplements to traditional texts.

There is another misconception that comics or graphic novels do not have enough rare vocabulary or enough text to benefit students. The reality is, however, that graphic novels or comics include close to 20% more rare vocabulary than a typical chapter book for children and 40% more than a typical conversation between a child and an adult (Krashen, 2005). It should also be noted that there are a huge number of comics out there that have as much, or even more text, than many prose-only books that our students are reading. For example, the "Death of the Family" Batman story arc has over 690 pages with word counts ranging from between 50 to 250 per page, which is actually more words than many classics. Today, graphic novels are considered to be valuable resources at institutions of higher learning. Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith have written the book on how to teach the history, impact, importance, and cultural significance of comics at the university and college level. Their book, *The Power of Comics*, delves deeply into the teaching of comics at the higher level and offers other professors a structure for setting up their own intensive comics courses, whether they are an introduction to Comics or something more specific. *The Power of*

Comics is a good introduction for undergraduates if they know nothing about the medium, and it is also a useful tool for graduate students because it is an introduction to the past research.



Graphic novels today are used across the curriculum in ways we never thought possible—they are used in science, math, business, medicine, history, journalism, economics, statistics, law, archeology, and even philosophy. Researchers at the University of Toronto recently started using graphic novels as a teaching tool to communicate the ethical and emotional complexities of illness, disease and trauma to medical students. “Cartoons and comics were dismissed as a trivial medium, but we realize now they are extremely sophisticated,” says Allan Peterkin, associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Toronto.

Jeremy Short, professor of management and Researcher of the Year in 2010 for the College of Business at Texas Tech University, has written and introduced graphic novel textbooks as teaching tools in his courses. “Textbooks are just plain boring,” said Short. He said that he wanted to create a textbook that would get the necessary points across while keeping students engaged. *Atlas Black: Managing to Succeed* was his first attempt at a graphic-novel textbook; it covers, Short says, all the bases of what his students need to learn, while telling a story in panels about a college student named Atlas and his friends. It is interesting to note that the Atlas Black series is being used in undergraduate and M.B.A. classes.

In *Economix: How Our Economy Works (and Doesn't Work) in Words and Pictures*, Michael Goodwin explains the progression of Western economic theory in the context of political history, and brings a lively visual sensibility to this intensely abstruse subject matter without condescending to the reader or dumbing the ideas down. *Logicomix: The Epic Search for Truth*, written by Doxiadis, Papadatos, and Di Donna and *The Stuff of Life: A Graphic Guide to Genetics and DNA* by Schultz, Cannon and Cannon, are both science graphic novels that have received rave reviews and accolades, and have been used in education from the primary school level to graduate courses.



Indeed, recent studies have shown that a science comic book used in addition to traditional instructional materials could improve student learning and content knowledge at both introductory and advanced courses, particularly in the case of non-majors (Hossler, 2011). It cannot be denied that, today, graphic novels are major players in the literary world. They are extremely popular in libraries, have entire sections in chain bookstores and are reviewed and discussed by many mainstream newspapers and internet sites, including the New York Times, and Amazon.com. Closer to home, the Malaysian government recently honored Lat, author of *Kampung Boy*, who pioneered the genre in Southeast Asia, by bringing out a set of commemorative stamps.

These days there are very few reputed universities anywhere in Europe, North America or Australia that do not offer courses in Comic Book or Graphic Novel Studies. Yet in our country, educators barely know they exist. By excluding graphic novels from our curricula, as educators we are missing out on an opportunity to reach **all** our students, reluctant or otherwise. It is high time that we, English teachers, realize the value of using these exceptional academic tools and incorporate them in our classes regardless of whether we are teachers of Literature or English Language Teaching (ELT). English departments in Bangladesh should seriously consider using them not only as teaching tools for English Language Learners, but also include them in 20th century novel courses, and hopefully in the not too distant future introduce courses on teaching the Graphic Novel itself.

As historian Paul Buhle (2007) observes: "The possibility that the lowly comic-format could become a vehicle for non-fictional versions of the big stories as well as the personal tale marks a turning point of sorts, for scholars with an inclination in that direction, but perhaps also for generations of students to come." Perhaps the panel below from Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* describes the future of graphic novels in Bangladesh best:



References

- Anstey, M., & Bull, G. (2006). *Teaching and Learning Multiliteracies: Changing Times, Changing Literacies*. Kensington Gardens, SA: ALEA.
- Bakis, Maureen (2011). *The Graphic Novel Classroom: Powerful Teaching and Learning with Images*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Booth, D. & Lundy, K. G. (2007). *Boosting Literacy with Graphic Novels*. Austin, TX: Rubicon Publishing.
- Beers, K., Probst, R. E., & Rief, L. (Eds.). (2007). *Adolescent Literacy: Turning Promise into Practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Brenner, Robin (2004). "Interview with Robin Brenner" [internet], San Francisco. Retrieved from <http://www.teenlibrarian.com/rbrenner.htm>.
- Buhle, P. (2007). *History and Comics. Reviews in American History* 35(2), 315-323.
- Carter, J. B. (Ed.). (2007a). *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Cohen, S. Lisa. But This Book Has Pictures! The Case for Graphic Novels in an AP Classroom. Retrieved from http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/courses/teachers_corner/158535.html.
- Doxiadis, A., Papadimitriou, C., Papadatos, A., Donna, A. D. (2009). *Logicomix: An Epic Search for Truth*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Duncan, R. & Smith, M. (2009). *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture*. NY: Bloomsbury.
- Eisner, W. (1985). *Comics & Sequential Art*. Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press.
- Eisner, W. (2001). *Moby Dick*. New York: NBM.
- Gaiman, Neil. (1988). *The Sandman*. DC Comics.
- Gluibizzi, Amanda. (2010). *The Handbook of Art and Design Librarianship*. Neal-Schuman.
- Goodwin, Michael. (2012). *Economix: How Our Economy Works (and Doesn't Work) in Words and Pictures*. NY: Abrams ComicArts.
- Gorman, M. (2002). What Teens Want. *School Library Journal*, 48, 42-47. Retrieved on January 29, 2013, from the H.W. Wilson Company/WilsonWeb.
- Gorman, M. (2003). *Getting Graphic: Using Graphic Novels to Promote literacy with Preteens and Teens*. Worthington, OH: Linworth.
- Gravett, P. (2005). *Graphic Novels: Everything You Need to Know*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Hosler, J. & Boomer, K. B. (2011). Are comic books an effective way to engage non-majors in learning and appreciating science? *CBE Life Sciences Education* 10:309-17.
- Huq, A.T.M.S. (2013). Visualizing the Classics: Using Graphic Novels to teach Shakespeare. Unpublished article.
- Krashen, S. D. (2005). The 'decline' of reading in America, poverty and access to books, and the use of comics in encouraging reading. *Teachers College Record*. Retrieved from www.sdkrashen.com/articles/decline_of_reading/index.html.
- Kuper, P. (2003). *Kafka. The Metamorphosis*. New York: Crown.
- Kuper, P. (2005). *Upton Sinclair, The Jungle*. New York: NBM.
- Lat, D. (1979). *Kampung Boy*. Kuala Lumpur: Berita. [New York: Firstsecond Books, 2006].
- Little, D. (2005). In a single bound: A short primer on comics for educators. *New Horizons for Learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/literacy/little.htm>.
- Liu, J. (2004). Effects of comic strips on L2 learners' reading comprehension. *TESOL Quarterly* 38(2): 225-243.
- McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Kitchen Sink Press.
- McGrath, Charles. (2004). Not Funnies. *New York Times Magazine*, July 11, 2004.

- Moore, Alan. (1987). *Watchmen.*, DC Comics.
- Monnin, Katie.(2010). *Teaching Graphic Novels: Practical Strategies for the Secondary ELA Classroom.* Maupin House.
- Morrison, T. G., Bryan, G., & Chilcoat, G.W. (2002).Using student-generated comic books in the classroom.*Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 45(8): 758-767.
- O'English, L., Matthews, J. G., & Lindsay, E. B. (2006). Graphic novels in academic libraries: From *Maus* and beyond. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 32(2):173-182.
- Satrapi, M. (2007).*The Complete Persepolis.* New York: Pantheon.
- Short, Jeremy. (2009). *Atlas Black: Managing to Succeed.* NY: Flat World Knowledge Retrieved from http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2010-08-20-IHE-graphic-novels-biz-school20_ST_N.htm.
- Spiegelman, Art. (1986). *Maus: A Survivor's Tale.* Pantheon.
- Sturm, J. (2002). Comics in the classroom.*The Chronicle of Higher Education*.Retrieved from <http://www.teachingcomics.org>.
- SchultzM.,CannonZ., &CannonK. (2009).*The Stuff of Life: A Graphic Guide to Genetics and DNA.*New York: Hill and Wang.
- Tabachnick.S.E. (2009).*Teaching the Graphic Novel* (Ed.).Modern Language Association of America.
- Templer, Bill. (2009). Graphic Novels in the ESL Classroom.*Humanizing Language Teaching website magazine*, 3.
- Yang, G. L. (2007).*American Born Chinese.* New York: First Second Books.

