

Perspectives from Local Media Specialists and ELA Instructors on Graphic Novels in the Middle Grades Curriculum: Yay or Nay?

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Given the notion that graphic novels have the potential for instruction, this study examines the questions: In what ways do local media specialists and English Language Arts (ELA) instructors use them in their classrooms or other educational settings? If instructors use graphic novels, how do their students respond to them? Have they experienced criticisms concerning the use of graphic novels as texts worthy of analysis and exploration in the classroom? Finally, what is the connection between research and the use of graphic novels in the classroom? In this qualitative study, the authors examined 14 responses from media specialists and ELA instructors working in schools in southeastern Tennessee. Additionally, they reviewed literature related to each of these questions.

The scope of young adult literature has changed over the past several years from an exclusive focus on novels, poems, and plays to a corpus inclusive of graphic novels. Though research supports their benefits, there is still some disagreement among educators as to whether this format is of lesser quality than traditional print materials. Hoover (2012) asserted that “treating graphic novels as a format or medium, on par with more established and respected media such as print-only texts and

film, is a good first step towards unlocking their full potential and opening possibilities for integration into educational efforts” (p. 176).

Research on teachers’ use of graphic novels has mainly focused on exploring their motivational effects on children’s attitudes toward reading. Studies have shown the connection between graphic novels and the increase in students’ motivation to read (Cartwright, 2015; Conners, 2013; Edwards, 2009; Guthrie et al., 2006; Luetkemeyer, 2021; McGeown et al., 2015). Luetkemeyer (2021) explored the effects of graphic novels through a two-year longitudinal study of fourth and fifth graders. The results of this study showed that students looked forward to the readings, participated enthusiastically, enjoyed reading aloud, and increased requests for graphic novels from the school library as well as the classroom library.

Abate and Tarbox (2017) developed a collection of essays that provides substantial evidence of the value of graphic novels and the progress this format has made in a changing world. These scholars make the case that readers should navigate texts based on their own interests. Other researchers have studied the positive effect of graphic novels on reading comprehension (Brenna, 2013; Dallacqua & Peralta, 2019; Golding & Verrier, 2021; Guthrie et al., 2006; Jennings et al., 2014; Meur, 2018; Sloboda et al., 2014). The pictures in graphic novels “can support the comprehension process in many ways” (Molitor et al., 1989, p. 16). Pictures “serve as valuable teaching tools, bringing to the eye what otherwise can only be imagined” (Evans et al., 1987, p. 86). In a small qualitative study, Meur (2018) found that English learners improved reading comprehension and retained information better when reading graphic novels as compared to traditional book formats.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Considering this research, the purpose of this study was to provide insights into how local media specialists and ELA teachers use graphic novels in their schools and their perception of the impact of graphic novels on their students. The authors examined patterns of responses from 14 media specialists and ELA instructors working in schools in southeastern Tennessee. The university’s connection to schools in this area has created positive and productive relationships in research; and the presence of graphic novels in instruction in these schools aligned with the purpose of this study.

The schools surveyed represented a diverse population of middle schools all containing grades 6-8; however, 5% of them contained grades 6-12. Roughly 98% of the schools selected for the survey qualify for Title I status, meaning that 50% or more of their student body are eligible for free

and/or reduced lunch, representing varied economic populations of students. The selected schools also represent diverse ethnic populations of students from schools serving 90% Caucasian to those serving 90% African American students and even a mix of those serving 50% African American and 50% Hispanic. These schools represented urban, suburban, and rural communities across the three counties selected as well as giving attention to the diversity of the category of the school itself such as public, private, magnet, or charter. These districts have set ELA curriculums that must be adhered to across all grade levels, which impacted their responses and the access they might have to use graphic novels in the classroom. However, the media specialists are not required to have a set curriculum for any grade level and therefore have more freedom in the graphic novels they choose to use or not use. The flexibility in curriculum made the setting ideal for this study.

The authors sought to explore responses to three core questions posed to local media specialists and ELA instructors in schools in this area. An additional purpose of the article was to glean research from the literature connected to each question. As each survey question is treated with analysis and representative quotes, the authors dovetail with professional literature to build a case for the inclusion of graphic novels in ELA instruction.

METHODS

SAMPLE

Surveys were posted to 62 media specialists and ELA educators in selected southeastern public schools. This survey method resulted in 14 responses. The authors determined that the similar themes that appeared in each survey response facilitated the case for saturation, although more research may be necessary to further examine the questions in a future study. The authors contended that these major themes would likely continue, and further sampling might not be necessary.

INSTRUMENT

The instrument used to survey this topic consisted of three core questions:

1. Do you use graphic novels or comics in your classroom or other educational settings? If so, please describe how you use them. (Simon, 2012)
2. Beyond popularity, how do your students respond to these works? (Botzakis, 2009)
3. Have you had questions or criticisms concerning the use of comics or graphic novels as texts worthy of analysis and exploration in the classroom? If so, how did you respond? (Jones & Woglam, 2014)

FROM THE LITERATURE

Graphic novels provide avenues for students to self-monitor comprehension by focusing on the specific aspects of the panels. In their study of sequencing and graphic novels with primary-grade students, Chase et al. (2014) “noticed in the process of students’ telling stories is that students often self-corrected the order of the frames as they constructed a narrative to accompany the frames” (p. 439).

Boerman-Cornell (2013) explored effective ways for teachers to use graphic novels to meet the Common Core standards. According to this researcher, “The graphic novel offers another way to think about how narrative works in different modes. Images in graphic novels do not move, and they require imagination to make the leap from what is happening in one panel to the next” (Boerman-Cornell, 2013, p. 76). Boerman-Cornell (2016) also supported the use of graphic novels for teaching higher-order thinking skills.

Teaching students the skills and strategies needed to successfully read and comprehend informational texts is a critical aspect of the Common Core standards. Dallacqua & Peralta (2019) investigated the use of a Science Comics series in a fifth-grade classroom. These were considered exemplar informational texts along with other texts used. The Science Comics series supported the students in composing their own nonfiction comics, enabled them as investigators and creators, and developed their creative expertise in informational texts. The authors documented that working with the comics series supported the students’ critical thinking and ability to produce information.

Irwin (2007) studied the use of graphic novels to practice making predictions or hypotheses about what would come next. Chase, Son, and Steiner (2014) suggested the teaching strategy of covering the ending pages and having students predict “how the story will end” (p. 442). Boerman-Cornell (2016) also found other uses for graphic novels, “including summarizing a story multimodally, connecting story elements over several pages, critical analysis, responding emotionally to the text, connecting the reading with other texts and experiences, and drawing conclusions about the graphic novel format” (p. 333). Bosma et al. (2013) discovered that “besides using contextual clues, readers must interpret facial expressions, body postures, drawing perspective, tone of voice, and grunts or exclamations” (p. 62). These interpretations helped students comprehend the character in the story. Thus, “understanding cues related to the format of graphic novels appears to

be an influential component of students' comprehension when reading graphic novel form" (Sloboda et al., 2014, p. 21).

Golding & Verrier (2021) investigated visual literacy intervention as an aid in helping children ages 7-11 comprehend educational comics. The researchers assessed the children's comprehension and inferential understanding in each session. They discovered that comprehension and inferential skills improved significantly due to the comics' literacy intervention. Anecdotally, they discovered a motivation for reading the comics, because the children wanted to reread the comics after each session. Their study showed that to be fully effective, the comics should be read in conjunction with the training materials used in the study.

Graphic novels are also useful for teaching content across the curriculum. Boerman-Cornell (2013) suggested that in social studies, "images can provide quick social, economic, and cultural context through their depictions of clothing, buildings, transportation, and interpersonal interactions during different periods in history" (p. 75). Draper and Reidel (2011) stated that the visual and verbal elements of graphic novels close the gap between social studies content and multimodal texts that students use. Jennings et al. (2014) noted that "using graphic novels allows teachers to incorporate different types of text to address current topics and helps readers make connections to text through visual representation" (pp. 261-262).

Dallacqua (2020) drew from a year-long ethnographic study that documented the use of comics focused on social studies literacy. The researcher found that the comics not only supported the standardized curriculum, but also exposed the teachers and students to their typical rhythms. The collaborative engagement as students read the comics challenged their learning.

Graphic novels can be used in math to help students comprehend math concepts through visual representation. According to Boerman-Cornell (2013), "perhaps the greatest potential for teaching math through graphic novels lies in the ability to illustrate mathematical concepts by combining images with equations of the concepts under consideration" (p. 75). Bucher and Manning (2004) considered the role of graphic novels in science content by explaining how their multimodal representation of concepts helps adolescents explore difficult and confusing topics. Hoover (2012) noted, "Including graphic novels in instruction is certainly not a magic bullet for combatting entrenched views of literacy within academia, but it is one way to start chipping away at some of the barriers" (p. 177). Gerwetz (2019) provided strategies and information on how math teachers could use comics for teaching math concepts.

ANALYZING COMMENTS FROM OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

THE EDUCATIONAL USE OF GRAPHIC NOVELS: THE YAYS

Most of the respondents replied affirmatively in response to the question “Do you use graphic novels or comics in your classroom or other educational settings?” The following themes emerged indicating how the respondents use graphic novels:

- They use them for the student’s independent reading.
- They use graphic novels provided in the curriculum.
- They use them within a unit of study.
- They use them for specific projects or assignments.
- They use them because they are a part of the middle school’s collection. (See Table 1 for themes with teacher comments.)

The respondents indicated that the most common use of graphic novels is for independent reading. The ELA classroom libraries, as well as the school library, house graphic novels. One media specialist noted: “They are color-coded with a separate collection for both advanced students and our struggling readers to enjoy. Many titles are tied to the curriculum, illustrating abstract concepts taught in science and social studies. Myths and legends, languages, and mathematical equations and concepts are also explained in an accessible manner. Our special populations gravitate to this collection as well” (survey response, Fall 2021).

The respondents indicated that they use graphic novels within a lesson, unit of study, or for an assignment. They specifically use this genre to teach comprehension and inferential skills, but several noted they did not use it to teach literary elements. One teacher stated they use the graphic novel *Persepolis* (by Marjane Satrapi) to teach a unit on world cultures. Others use them for projects such as creating storyboards or comics. Finally, the respondents noted that graphic novels are sometimes included in school textbooks or the curriculum. Examples of this include *Nimana* by Noelle Stevenson and Grim Grisley’s *Frankenstein*.

One responder in this study noted how their special education populations tended to gravitate toward graphic novels. Sloboda and Kosowan-Kirk, (2014) noted that “participants described as reluctant readers identified this work as fun” (p. 19). Special education students who struggle with reading are more likely to be drawn to literature that is motivational and engaging. Sun

(2017) continued this idea by stating, “Overall, the literature concerning graphic novels establishes that graphic novels can provide motivation and/or alternative manner for students to improve comprehension, take an active role in the interpretation of the content, learn about subjects that only had a fragmentary existence in the traditional curriculum, and engage in critical thinking and reading” (p. 24).

TABLE 1
Teacher Usage of Graphic Novels

| THEMES | COMMENTARY |
|--|--|
| USED FOR INDEPENDENT READING | <p>This collection is a gateway to reading for many of our students. Titles correspond to popular TV shows and toy merchandised titles are familiar and favorites. These titles foster confidence and critical thinking as they pick up on emotional cues from the illustrations, body language and expressions. Students infer meaning from the pictures, learning, and comprehending the plot, character development, themes left unwritten between the gaps in the panels.</p> <p>I have several on my shelf for free reading and we are currently using Grim Grisley’s <i>Frankenstein</i> in class.</p> <p>(They are used in our) classroom library, and students are generally drawn to them.</p> <p>My students have access to them in my classroom library. However, I do not use them to teach literary elements.</p> <p>I encourage students to read graphic novels for their independent reading book. I think they are phenomenal choices for reluctant readers. We also use comics for inference lessons.</p> |
| INCLUDED IN THE CURRICULUM | <p>Many titles are tied to the curriculum, illustrating abstract concepts taught in science and social studies. Myths and legends, languages; and mathematical equations and concepts are also explained in an assessable manner. Our special populations gravitate to this collection as well.</p> <p>One of our texts within the curriculum is a graphic novel. <i>Nimona</i> by Noelle Stevenson. Our textbook provides a chapter, so I have multiple copies the students can check out from me.</p> <p>Our curriculum now includes a few graphic short stories.</p> <p>Students can check out graphic novels during library for independent reading time.</p> <p>I also use excerpts from different graphic novels to teach TN Standard RL.CS.5 – Analyze the form or structure of a story or poem or drama, considering how text form or structure contributes to its’ theme and meaning.</p> |
| INTEGRATED INTO A UNIT OF STUDY | <p>During a World Cultures unit, my classes have read the graphic novel <i>Persepolis</i>.</p> |
| USED FOR PROJECTS / ASSIGNMENTS | <p>They’re great for improving reading comprehension and inferring practice and are engaging. I have also had students create comics or storyboards for projects.</p> |
| ARE A PART OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL’S COLLECTION | <p>As a middle school librarian, graphic books are a critical part of our collection. They are color-coded and a separate collection both advanced students and our struggling readers enjoy.</p> |

STUDENT RESPONSE: THE YAYS

The second question posed was “Beyond popularity, how do your students respond to these works?”

Themes that emerged from 79% of the respondents included:

- Students are engaged in discussions. (See Table 2, Student Response to Graphic Novels.)
- Students are drawn to or interested in books in this format.
- Students’ comprehension is aided by graphic books.

The teachers described the difference made in discussion with comments such as:

“They engage in more meaningful discussions.”

“It allows for students to express opinions which are sometimes reserved.”

“Their boost in confidence is obvious when they’re reading this type of book; higher volunteer levels driving whole-class instruction.”

Secondly, teachers observed how magnetic these books are for students. Evidence was given through statements concerning enjoyment, interest, and love for this format:

“Students typically have expressed they like seeing pictures as opposed to a lot of text.”

“Students LOVE graphic novels, Manga, anime—I don’t have enough in my library to meet their needs.”

Finally, attention was given to the effect of graphic novels on comprehension. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents said that the use of graphic novels helps their students understand more clearly what is happening in the story. The respondents considered that graphic novels helped their students use illustration cues in the novels to help them infer meaning. Through pictures, teachers indicated that students were able to better comprehend the plot, character development, and themes of the story. The students’ enjoyment of the graphic novels further helped them with the depth of discussion and continued building of comprehensive reading skills.

TABLE 2
Student Response to Graphic Novels

| THEMES | COMMENTARY |
|--|---|
| STUDENTS ARE ENGAGED IN DISCUSSIONS. | <p>My students are very engaged when we read from Noelle. They are disappointed that our text only provides a chapter.</p> <p>...higher volunteer levels during whole-class instruction.</p> <p>...They engage in more meaningful discussions.</p> <p>Students are usually more engaged in the text and willing to participate because it isn't as much 'reading'. I think it helps struggling readers to comprehend better because they can visualize the text.</p> |
| STUDENTS ARE DRAWN TO OR INTERESTED IN BOOKS IN THIS FORMAT. | <p>...it also allows for students to express opinions, which are sometimes reserved.</p> <p>Students typically have expressed they like seeing pictures as opposed to "a lot of text."</p> <p>I feel most of my students really are interested in this type of genre. It seems to really intrigue them and grasp their attention.</p> <p>Students LOVE graphic novels, Manga, anime—I don't have enough in my library to meet their needs!</p> |
| STUDENT COMPREHENSTION IS AIDED BY GRAPHIC BOOKS. | <p>The visual formatting increases accessible for some students...</p> <p>I feel that the images paired with higher interest provide potential for better comprehension and depth of discussion.</p> <p>They enjoy them and engage in discussion and valuable activities which build reading skills.</p> <p>Several students benefit from this style—many lower-level readers prefer this option due to the pictures—their boost in confidence is obvious when they're reading this type of book...</p> <p>Typically they help students understand what is actually happening.</p> <p>I teach 7th grade, so my hope is for my students to (sic) and they enjoy more complex books, but I have noticed they still enjoy reading graphic novels (or similar-like <i>Diary of A Wimpy Kid</i>).</p> |

RETURNING TO THE LITERATURE

Jennings, Rule, and Vander Zanden (2014) conceded that “graphic novels not only motivate students to read but use of graphic novels has been shown to improve students’ reading comprehension by motivating them through complex materials and providing other modalities for learning” (p.261). McGeown et al. (2015) supported the correlation between motivation to read and success in reading. They discovered that “adolescents’ reading skills correlate significantly with their reading motivation” (p. 555). In connection, Cartwright et al. (2015) found that “Students who perceive themselves to be successful readers and value reading will exhibit a higher motivation to read, engage in reading more

frequently, and develop better reading skills” (p. 59). They also discovered that, “even in primary school, children who are more motivated are already reporting reading more than their less motivated peers” (Cartwright et al., 2015, p. 81). This statement indicates that motivation to read should begin early in the child’s life. Leutkemeyer (2021) found that the use of graphic novels resulted in positive impacts on students’ engagement and motivation to read.

Several studies have established that graphic novels can provide motivation and/or alternative manner for students to improve comprehension (Golding & Verrier, 2021; Meur, 2018; Sun, 2017). McVicker (2007) found that “the visual representation of the text provides the reader with a deeper comprehension of the author’s intended message” (p. 87). This visual element can also help the striving reader. “To read websites, advertising, magazine articles, and other sources, students need to learn to decode words, images, and other modes all at once” (Boerman-Cornell, 2016, p. 327). As technology continues to affect society, “new media alter how meaning is constructed-how language is used, and therefore, what literacy involves” (p. 11).

Several researchers encouraged teachers to use graphic novels to teach inferential skills (Brenna, 2013; Chase et al, 2014; Irwin, 2007; Sloboda et al, 2014; Wallner, 2019). Graphic novels are an excellent means for practicing these skills since much of the information must be inferred through visual details along with textual information. Studies show that when students use graphic novels, they effectively build comprehension (Boerman-Cornell, 2013; Downey, 2009). Richardson (2017) compared graphic novels to traditional texts to see which enhanced better comprehension. This researcher discovered that students scored higher on final projects involving graphic novels than on projects from novels in traditional print. This research indicates that if motivation is an important factor in a student’s reading success, teachers should consider those formats that highly impact their motivation.

Another important consideration is that students tend to lose motivation to read between upper elementary grades and middle school (Edwards, 2009). Edwards noted that reading graphic novels could help prevent this loss of interest. Several researchers found that with the use of graphic novels, students enjoyed reading more, improved reading skills, and enjoyed reading the format of graphic novels (Edwards, 2009; Thomsen, 2018; Dallacqua & Peralta, 2019; Reid, 2020; Luetkemeyer, 2021).

Wallner (2019) moved closure of the gutter, empty space between comic panels, from the cognitive to the social interactive aspect. Through video analysis, he demonstrated how four third-

grade students and their teacher co-constructed the gutter as a meaningful narrative space. He showed the importance of comics as visual sequential material for working with narratives. This researcher's work blended comics theory, narrative, and psychological themes.

CRITICISMS OF GRAPHIC NOVELS: THE NAYS

The last question addressed negative feelings or questions about this format: "Have you had questions or criticisms concerning the use of comics or graphic novels as texts worthy of analysis and exploration in the classroom? If so, how did you respond?" Twenty-nine percent of the teachers responded in the affirmative and indicated they discussed the benefits or other concerns with the parents. An analysis of the responses reflected three themes: Challenge to comprehend, teacher discontent, and parents' negative perceptions.

Challenging to Comprehend

One teacher responded that sometimes the inability to distinguish iconic meanings in graphic novels is more challenging for students than word comprehension.

Teacher Discontent

Four respondents noted that some in their ELA departments would like to avoid graphic novels, though the respondent attempts to explain their importance and the ease of aligning them with the standards. Two respondents did not see them as appropriate, but rather as abridged versions of stories. Only one respondent did not think they were beneficial in the classroom. One respondent also noted that they were cost-prohibitive.

Parent Discontent

Two respondents noted that parents have asked whether graphic novels were good for struggling readers.

A few parents have asked if this is a 'good thing', especially for struggling readers. I typically encourage these parents that any exposure to reading is beneficial, especially when we're dealing with a kiddo that 'hates' or very much struggles with comprehension. (Respondent A)

Yes, but mostly from parents concerned that 'that's all I can get my kid to read!' I explained the above benefits and worked with the students and parents to also find other texts appropriate for each child that he/she will enjoy. (Respondent B)

RETURNING TO THE LITERATURE

Though literature is replete with the benefits of graphic novels, there is criticism among some teachers and parents on their use in educational settings. Most responses criticizing them were based on parental concerns that graphic novels are not challenging enough for students. Some teachers and parents see them mainly for reading pleasure and not for serious learning. They tended to have a problem with the abridged nature of graphic novels and viewed them as “fun to read,” but limited as teaching material.

Graphic literature has a history of being stigmatized as unworthy for the minds of children. According to Lopes (2006), “For many critics, the ‘transgressive’ mix of image and text in comic books undermined the supposedly superior quality of print culture as well as the unique qualities of visual culture” (p. 404). He continued that integrating image and text, for the critics, produces a less valuable piece of literature. He found this interesting since separately, image and text have their own departments in higher education.

In a project on comics in composition studies and education, Issa (2018) noted that comics have the potential to develop college students’ multimodal literacy, prepare them to meet today’s rigorous English composition requirements, and develop their skills to become future producers of comics. The project not only serves as a guide for higher education professionals, but also provides lesson strategies for “foreign language teachers, teacher-trainers, textbook designers and materials developers” (p. 310). Issa’s work shows that comics go beyond simply promoting text-based literacy.

FINAL REMARKS

Finally, the authors would like to share the perspective of one media specialist who has seen the growth of this genre in their media center over the past 16 years:

When I arrived in 2005, there were no graphic books in the collection; now we have over 1,100 titles and growing! At the time few people knew what graphic books were. Today graphic books are a well-respected, innovative genre. Many adults enjoy these books. Students are exposed to many challenging subjects in a way that appeals to their visual strengths; making images, paired with words that appeal to their visual strengths; making images, paired with words a teaching device that deepens their knowledge. Some teachers

do want their students to practice their reading skills with a chapter book to also build up the child's reading endurance.

According to Hansen (2012), one of the most difficult challenges for teachers is to instill a passion for learning in their students. They need to consider each student's interest level and be prepared to use a variety of modalities to fuel that interest and motivate their desire to learn. If a student is interested in reading graphic novels, the teacher's attitude about them can influence their view. Hansen noted that novels in the 18th Century inspired many people to engross themselves in reading during that time. He purported that each child should have the same opportunity to be motivated by graphic novels.

A powerful motivation can evolve when students experience composing their own images. Thomsen (2018) demonstrated how facilitating the integration of images and words in the classroom can empower students as they develop their individual skills. Images and words must be intertwined in developing good pedagogy. Reid & Moses (2020) explained that multimodal literacies instruction recognizes the variety of ways that students can communicate their thinking visually and in writing. They demonstrated how a fourth-grade teacher used a writers' workshop to help students interpret and analyze published comics before constructing and publishing their own comics text.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The authors were interested in discovering how graphic novels were used in the local middle schools and high schools in southeastern Tennessee. The media specialists and ELA teachers surveyed provided a snapshot of their perspectives as well as the perspectives of their students and some parents. There were more yays than nays for graphic novels in the ELA curriculum from the survey respondents as well as from the review of related literature.

As creative work in the culture becomes increasingly more multimodal, it is only natural that graphic novels would be a popular format among students. They are also popular with teachers who recognize that they are complex and academically challenging as well as rich with literary elements. Yet, students still get signals from parents and other adults that graphic novels are not on the same level as traditional text material. Students must be able to think critically about various texts. This means that teachers must be able to teach with a variety of texts. They should be open-minded to multiple literacies, not only in ELA classrooms but in other content areas as well. For teachers who

are not sure how to get the most out of guiding students through graphic novels, there are helpful sources and experts in the format who can guide them.

DeHart (2018, 2021) helps teachers and future teachers discover the depth of graphic novels and how they can stimulate their students to have rich discussions not only with the text but with the pictures as well. He dispels the idea that graphic novels are too simple. There is deep learning and analysis to be had. He also provides ideas on how to teach a graphic novel series. He guides teachers as they guide students through ways to go deep into the meanings of the words and images within the graphic novels they read.

In response to parents and teachers who are discontent with the idea of using graphic novels, the authors suggest reading articles by teachers and researchers who have successfully implemented them in their programs. Discontent appears to stem from the misconception that graphic novels are too simple and fall short of complex reading material. The authors encourage drawing from those who have written extensively on distinctive teaching opportunities for helping students learn deeply from graphic novels. Studies show that for readers to comprehend graphic novels requires a range of complex reading skills. Naysayers should be aware of the tremendous possibilities for the use of graphic novels. From narrative to expository reading, graphic novels should be an essential literacy tool in every classroom.

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