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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2013 Volume I: Picture Writing

Our Visible Social Contract

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What does a graphic novel have to do with civics?

This unit teaches students about the origin of governmental powers through an engaging and powerful graphic novel, *The Girl Who Owned a City*. The graphic novel outlines major themes in understanding the development of government such as theories about the state of nature and the social contract, instances of self-preservation, population growth, and structures of leadership. The essential question for the unit is, "Why does a government have certain powers?" By the end of this unit, the students will understand that the citizens agree to give up some of their personal freedoms to ensure that society is orderly and to protect their rights. A major component in this unit involves building a framework that the students can use when reading and discussing visual media. I will begin by teaching them about sequential art, and then I will introduce Scott McCloud's categories the relations of words to pictures. Finally, we will take a look at Williams Moebius's "Introduction to Picturebook Codes" to allow for in-depth conversations related to the composition of visual media.

(Developed for Social Studies, grade 6; recommended for Social Studies, U. S. History, and English Language Arts, grade 6-8)

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