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2017 Volume I: The Illustrated Page: Medieval Manuscripts to New Media

Minds in the Gutters and Bleeding on the Page: Literacy and Civil Rights History through the MARCH Comics Trilogy

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Gutters: the margins between frames in comics.

Bleeding: images or text running off the edge of a comics page.

Introduction

The challenge: a reading project that will engage 60 students, ages 15-21, in a shared experience. It should keep them curious, inspire them to action, or at least thought, and help them learn and share a variety of literacy skills. As readers they're mostly unmotivated and under-skilled; as citizens they're pretty disengaged, and regarding curiosity—not so much. The solution: *March*, the graphic trilogy by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell. Its challenges and inspirations will be unexpected, as the work is cloaked in dramatic images and active dialogue. My students—disengaged as they are—have a nose for an authentic story, and this is truly one. If this trilogy can't pull us together to learn and be inspired, well then, I just don't know. . .

This unit also grew from our seminar, "The Illustrated Page: Medieval Manuscripts to New Media" with Jessica Brantley. In it we studied a variety of image-texts, all with varying ratios of image to text, covering centuries of Western art, history, religion, and literature in a variety of forms, from tapestry to digital-born. One of our key questions was how does the combination change the experience of reading? In addition to the potential power of either text or image, the combination could speak to more audiences with potentially more meanings. Key texts for the seminar included the Bayeux Tapestry, St. Alban's Psalter, William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (we spent a morning with original Blake prints at the Yale British Art Center), *March* and Allison Bechdel's *Fun Home.*

I came to this unit with a few nagging questions: What gaps do comics bridge? And *March*? Do we think of comics for a younger crowd? For a mostly white readership? Mostly male? Considering all of these questions, will my students reject the text? Some of these answers I found while reading about the history of comics. Only recently has the exponential proliferation of comics for all kinds of content and audiences made room for all readers, it seems, so what will the outcomes be when my students find *March* on the menu? The genre will

be new to them as something besides simple entertainment. While *Maus* and *Persepolis* have been taught in some Tulsa schools, my students tell me they have not been exposed to them. However, a few students read Manga, and superhero movies "are okay." Comics professionals agree, though, that "comics can yield a body of work worthy of study and meaningfully represent the life, times, and world-view of its author."[1] I'm certain I'll find *March* relevant in my own classroom.

About the unit

March is a three-part non-fiction comics series that documents the life of John Lewis, U.S. Representative currently serving from Georgia. His life of service follows the arc of the civil rights movement, as he participated in the Montgomery bus boycott, was arrested more than 40 times, and eventually was an architect and speaker at the 1963 March on Washington. He is considered one of the biggest leaders of the Civil Rights Movement from the mid-sixties, one of the Big Six, in fact. Moving back and forth from past to present, the books cover his life, leading up to the inauguration of President Barack Obama in 2009. His life is inspiring, and he epitomizes the ability of one man to make a difference, and an even greater one when united with others of the same passionate mission.

During this unit, students will develop visual and written literacy skills, tidy and expand their knowledge of American civil rights history, explore the possibility of comics promoting social action and justice, and create frames and comics of their own that reflect their knowledge of skills and analysis from the unit's work. We will also read primary documents in the form of both Lewis's speech from the DC march and the original comic that instructed their practice of nonviolence, *Martin Luther King and the Montomery Story*. The Resources section will include other possibilities like video, photographs and websites for creating comics. All of the included reading and activities will take place over one six-week semester in a class that meets two or three times a week. More time will go into the first book in the series as we learn what we can about context and genre. Although in my use it will be supplementary to English classes, this unit will satisfy Oklahoma high school English language arts objectives as well as Common Core objectives for middle to lower high school grade levels (documented later).

School and students

My school, Phoenix Rising, which meets a primary probation requirement, was created to serve adjudicated youth; it is the last stop for most of our students academically. It is a therapeutic, not punitive, program with the intention of breaking the cycle of suspensions and absences that have come from litany of small and large offences that—rather than academic progress—have marked our students' school experience. Often our first priorities for our students are for them to learn how to be students and feel safe and successful again. We want to send them on as productive, engaged citizens who are on the better side of the social justice system. Decisions about the structure, philosophy, and content of the curriculum are made with our students' specific needs, deficits, and strengths in mind. Two pieces of this philosophy are essential for students with histories of life trauma or chronic academic frustration. The first of these is relationship-building. Students' learning is

weakened in situations in which they do not feel safe or comfortable; conversely, students' learning is enhanced in environments where they do. The second is relevance; reluctant students are more inclined to strive for academic success when they see its relevance to their lives, needs, and personal interests. This is one reason we often include social justice elements into class content and student projects, as with this unit. They should feel safe, empowered, and challenged by work we assign to them.

My students are amazing young people who have endured struggles that many cannot imagine. Their lives, at least temporarily, have been defined by situations beyond their control. Near 100 percent are victims of poverty and trauma, whether chronic or singularly devastating. Often they are substance abusers, have poor sleep habits and poor nutrition. Many have living situations that are non-traditional, to say the least, and are often inadequate or temporary. Many also face the problems, such as living in food and transportation deserts that go along with being a member of a minority in a very segregated city. These conditions have significant negative influences on the quality and quantity of learning. The students tend to be years behind their grade level in academic skills and credits, especially with math and reading. Needed interventions for behavioral problems or social service appointments will interrupt the unit flow for some students, but our flexibility allows for accommodations.

Our status as an alternative school gives us the liberty to create schedules that we hope are good for our students. Because so many are behind in credits, we now teach six-week semesters with two core subjects each day. Advisory, an additional class woven into the week, is a time for students to work on online classes, individual projects, and post-graduation work, all with an emphasis on literacy. Most years we do school-wide literacy projects. This unit is to be used school-wide, with all four advisories, in partially mixed-age groups (grades 8-12) and very mixed literacy skills.

Many contemporary high schools, especially in high-poverty or inner city situations, encounter similar students; they just do not have criminal records or have not found their way into alternative education environments. All or parts of this unit would be appropriate for any students facing these realities.

Content objectives

Comics: a brief history

When one sets out to learn about the history and evolution of comics as a genre, Scott McCloud immediately emerges as the most essential and complete authority. This brief history, unless otherwise documented, is derived from his work. He adds his own words to Will Eisner's phrase "sequential art" to come up with this complete definition of comics as a serious genre: "Comics is juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer." The definition arguably applies to familiar historical and cultural documents, including the Bayeux Tapestry and Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. More modern versions like *March* and *Fun Home* owe credit to Rodolphe Töpffer, who, "while neither artist nor writer—had created and mastered a form which was at once both and neither."[2] The captioned cartoon panels he published in 1837 resemble modern cartoon strips.

There is truth to the stereotypes of comics appealing to "adolescent power fantasies" of young white men.[3] Late 19th and early 20th century comics forms were more vaudevillian in nature and aimed to be "humble

entertainment" for the young and uneducated.[4] More serious themes like war appeared in comics in the late 1950s, but they were still in the "sensational style and format that young men were used to."[5] While many of the comics' creative minds during the 20th century were Jewish, content reflecting Jewish history and culture doesn't show up with any force until Will Eisner and Art Spiegelman. Eisner coined the term "graphic novel" with his collection of short stories *A Contract with God,* 1978. "Graphic novel" seemed to sound more like a permanent book and less like a disposable comic, subtly endowing it with added literary clout. Readers know already about *Maus*—Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize winning tale of his father's escape from a German concentration camp. Its first complete volume was published in 1986; he won the Prize in 1992, his being the first graphic novel to do so. With *Maus*, Spiegelman set new, exacting standards and seriousness of purpose with "uncompromising dedication of execution."[6]

Where were the women? In fact, they had a few successful strips in early part of the century, before World War II. They were sassy and feminine. Rose O'Neill created the original Kewpies in 1909 and became the first female illustrator for *Puck Magazine.* Photographs became more prevalent, and men came home from the war, sending female creators back to the kitchens.[7] Men picked up where they left off, but underground, over the next decades, a pool of women writers and illustrators slowly populated the comics network until they had so many styles that their work couldn't be called a "movement" any longer[8]

Comics that appealed to more minority audiences became more available in the late 1990s when Milestone Comics formed an alliance with DC Comics. Milestone represented minority writers and subjects; this alliance gave them access to a wider distribution and credibility. Incidentally, in 1993 Ho Che Anderson, a Black Canadian creator introduced his *King*, a graphic novel about Martin Luther King, depicting him as a complex, fallible, and real but motivating leader.[9] By that time, McCloud and other comics critics agree that "comics could appeal to and be made by more than just straight white males."[10]

When McCloud assesses the current state of global representation in comics, he says, "Whatever the category—the disabled, the politically marginalized, the poor, the despised—there has probably been an attempt to get the word out through comics."[11] Success among them wasn't likely, but the audiences were catching on to the possibilities. By the time *March*, which addresses the struggle for social justice in African American history, was published in 2013, its popularity and urgency caused it to eclipse other comics sales. Its value in the school canon is unquestionable.

Comics and social justice

Literature and art without question can shape opinion and call people to action on social justice issues. Jacob Riis and Charles Dickens drew attention to immigrants and the urban poor with their writing, both fiction and non-fiction. They drew tourists and their attention to the tenements. Riis is credited with influencing reform to make tenements more clean and livable.[12] Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* drew the public's attention and ire to the inhumane working conditions and unsanitary setting of the meatpacking industry in 1906 Chicago. The Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act were results.[13] Picasso's iconic *Guernica* is recognized ubiquitously for its ability to question the need for war, as well as its outcomes.

Also, it is not a new phenomenon for comics to reflect or to influence social action. Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury* has inspired and frustrated contemporary political thought. John Lewis includes in *March* how his peers were influenced by a comic called *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story.* Lewis called it the "Bible of the movement."[14] Published by the Fellowship of Reconciliation in 1957, it served as a sort of

motivational handbook for practicing nonviolent resistance. In addition to MLK, other characters included Mahatma Gandhi and Rosa Parks. This comic "would later surface in South Africa, in Latin America translated into Spanish and, after a translation into Arabic, on Tahrir Square in Egypt in 2011."[15] Watts suggests that the dramatic impact of image-texts lends itself to "subject matter related to struggle, conflict, (and) injustice. . ."[16] I suspect often this is because of McCloud's concept of amplification through simplification. The author has a variety of mixtures or simplefications of images and text to find the most dramatic, clear conveyance of conflict or concept.

In the case where the content might be unfamiliar to the reader, such as an historical event or social issue—like the civil rights movement, attention to closure may lead the reader to better understanding and empathy. Consequently, graphic texts become a safe and effective vehicle for teaching social justice issues and learning about unfamiliar groups of people.[17] Closure is facilitated (and amplified) by simplification of character presentations and settings. A less physically developed character will appeal to more readers than one who appears to be a specific type or stereotype or ethnicity, for example.

Presently, "Lewis' hope is that *March* reaches the youth of today who are more interested in comic books than history lessons and inspires them to speak out against injustice. . ."[18]

Comics in the classroom

English and social studies teachers are probably most aware of the increasing popularity of comics—which don't look like Marvel or DC Comics—finding their way into summer reading lists, AP workshops, and regular classroom use over the last decades. David Low articulates what we already know: We should embrace them "since the comics medium is popular with many students and has received increased attention from teachers, researchers, and curriculum developers during the multimodal and multiliterate turns of the past decades."

The same struggle, conflict, and injustice Watts speaks of are present among most of our urban students; however, they are not often willing to share their experiences in an academic setting. Doing so through graphic texts helps them to objectify their experience through images and the characters they create, without depending on the language with which they are still struggling.[19] We are bombarded with imagery all day. It makes sense that we include critical "seeing" along with our critical reading. We know the importance of this multimodal literacy for struggling students. My students—especially those who struggle—are very responsive to still and moving pictures. Image fills in gaps in understanding and reinforces strategies for analysis. Some see form or tone in image more clearly than in text. They learn to slow down and see details as they are not inclined to do with text. The learned skills can translate to finding meaning in text or other forms of media and provide a sort of hermeneutic approach to understanding. The text will verify or contradict their predictions, leading to new layers of meaning.

There is more to reading comics in several ways, but lukewarm students are likely to find them less threatening than some of their text-only experiences. We teachers of struggling readers and students know already that they are often more readily engaged by image than text. And they are familiar with the form of comics from various non-threatening interactions with them—from Sunday comics to cartoons pervasive on social media. They may be aware of these things, but they might be surprised at how much more this new genre is asking of them. This unit explores the skills necessary for eliciting full meaning from comics as well as terms and concepts, such as closure and amplification through simplification, that help to suggest how much more students can reap from such image-texts.

Reading comics

Conflict and setting, narrative structure and character development are generally the same in comics as in verbal narratives. Just as in prose, speech can be dialogue or narration. But additional or different "units" are used to tell the story, some of which provide added opportunities for the artist. Dialogue or narration can be framed, for example, by the shape of a text box or letter size and boldness. When a comics writer also uses images, gutters, and other visual techniques, she can add to or reinforce the literary message. For example, on page 68 in *March*, there is no narration or dialogue, but the images convey Lewis's anxiety as he travels across the state to meet Martin Luther King for the first time. A single, frameless car in motion across the top of the page indicates passage of time and space. Each of the successive six pictures shows the subject a little closer. The front of the church, a glance up at the spires, shapes of men walking from the other end of a long hall, the descent down a shorter staircase, then finally closing in on the office. At the bottom of the page the edge of this panel around Lewis is jagged and dark in contrast to others on the page. Subtly changing until Lewis knocks on the office door at the top of the next page, 69, on which the pictures become brighter and more representational. The reader experiences some satisfaction with the clarity of the page after a selection of more shadowed, seemingly arbitrarily chosen images.

When I first took an art history course, I was faced with a new vocabulary to guide how I would see and how to make meaning of what I saw. *Chiaroscuro, avant-garde, fresco, triptych, pediment*—these words along with many others created a framework for seeing and understanding works that I may have previously viewed but never thought about. Beginning my research by reading Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, I was introduced to a new set of terms and concepts that I would need to employ to understand and teach comics as a sophisticated literary form. By the time I'd read his *Making Comics* and *Reinventing Comics,* I felt quite the authority on this new form, and certainly empowered as a reader. Just as with other literary forms, there are strategies and terms that will serve to be the tools of the ambitious reader of comics in many forms. See the list of terms below.

Terms

The Big Triangle created by Scott McCloud is a useful tool for students and teachers. The three corners are Reality—bottom left, Picture Plane—top, and Language—bottom right. An image fits somewhere along the bottom from realistic at the left corner, towards center where images become more cartoony by "stripping away details, conceptualizing forms, exaggerating features, etc..." Towards language at the far bottom right is iconic abstraction, but meaning here is still apparent. In fact, text and words are in the clearest, non-pictorial form in the bottom right corner. From bottom to top images become more simplified to their most basic shapes and colors. From left to right images move from complex to simple, realistic to iconic, objective to subjective, and specific to universal. The universality of images to the right could explain their appeal to many readers. In their panels artists may use images from anywhere on the triangle for effect and emphasis. Scott McCloud explains this more clearly with visuals in his TED Talk *The Visual Magic of Comics.* See the resources section below.

Panel is the term for a segment of a comics page. It is usually but not always symmetrical; it may or may not have a border. There may be any number of panels (or frames or boxes) on a page. A panel's shape, size, and placement may suggest space or time in a story. On page 36 in *March*, Book 1, for example, the center panel spans and bleeds off the page. In the center is a car traveling down a dirt road; in fact, the car is part of Lewis's pending, long journey, and we first learn this from the panel, not from the text.

Bleeds are images, scenes, language that run off the page, affecting the reader's sense of time and space.

Closure, according to McCloud, is “observing the parts but perceiving the whole.”[22] It is the cognitive work the reader does to fill in meaning in a seemingly simple set of images and gutters, requires “a high level of reader ” creating a stronger emotional impact.[23] We can’t see the Wizard behind the curtain, but our ability for closure tells us he is there. It’s a little exciting that way, right?

Balloons come in different kinds: speech balloons have tails that connect the dialogue to a character. Caption balloons contain the narrator voice, a character’s thoughts, or other information.

Narrative density: the amount of information conveyed through text and image on a page or panel. A writer could provide more obvious meaning or density with more visual or narrative detail, more panels, more actions. Less of these things may give an image, panel, or text more import. Contrast pages 58 and 78 in *March*, Book 1, for example.

Amplification through simplification became a fascinating concept to me. More iconic images and less text convey only the essentials, leaving more to the imagination. Closure carries us through the rest. Comics amplify through simplification compared to densely written texts. Within a comic, one panel or page may be a better example of this than other. “’The Montgomery Story’ in particular resonated with many. Through the frugal use of words and images, comic book writers and artists can quickly guide readers through complex social issues and emotions.”[24] Lyons attributes some of *March’s* success to amplification through simplification. My seminar leader pointed out that this is similar to the boiling down of a concept issue to a slogan. Consider from common ads: Can you hear me now? (You know you find yourself saying this all the time because your cell service is inadequate. You feel a little chagrined.) Or Just do it! (Shoes won’t make you win the race or lose that twenty pounds, but this slogan will make you think they can.) On a more specific level, a cartoon character with details stripped away (picture Calvin without Hobbs) is more universal. To paraphrase McCloud, the message is clearer when the reader is less distracted by the messenger. Without specific features, Calvin can reflect more children (and adults) who may not identify with a more physically detailed character but do identify with his childhood antics.

Back story

Working for Rep. John Lewis as an aide beginning in 2008, Andrew Aydin began to hear his boss’s stories about the civil rights movement and learned that he’d been motivated by the comic *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*. He speculated that Lewis’s life had the making of a momentous comic, as well. He and Lewis collaborated on the text and found Nate Powell to illustrate. Powell was a well-known and award-winning comic artist. For this series he created innovative new styles of text and page coverage.

March, Book I synopsis and analysis

The first book in the series begins with a scene from the relative present. In the hour before President Obama’s inauguration, visitors to Lewis’s congressional office find him in a story-telling mood. The three books return to this frame as Lewis continues to tell his story to the young boys in his office. He begins with his childhood in the early 1940s in Pike County, Alabama, where his parents were former sharecroppers who owned their land. As a child, Lewis was enamored with three things: the family chickens, preaching the gospel, and school. He preached to his chickens that he treated like his own children and snuck away from the farm to get to school when he was forbidden during tough work times. He clearly was not like his peers, but his nature as one who protected and sought justice appeared early. His sense of equity was shaped by the death of Emmett Till and the Montgomery Bus Boycotts. He was shaken to action after hearing Martin

Luther King preach on the radio. It was a new kind of sermon for him; it came to be called the "social gospel." As he moved through school he participated in and organized lunch counter protests in Nashville. His practice and philosophy were informed by what he called the "Bible of the movement," a 16 page comic book called *Martin Luther King and Montgomery Story,* relating the how-tos of non-violent resistance. Book I ends in Nashville, where many arrests and protests later, the lunch counters were desegregated and Lewis experienced one of his first victories towards desegregation.

A few key pages for analysis using our tools are 42, 68 (described earlier) and 73. On page 42, a young John enters Buffalo, New York, his first big city experience, with his uncle. His awe is showcased by his face in two frames at the top of the page. In the first his face is smaller and further into the car. In the second, he is fully close up, eyes wide, framed by the car window. The progression from the first to the second panel indicates his dynamic, not static, reaction to the city and lights around them. Even these two smaller frames, though, are surrounded by a bleeding page of city streetscape. All four sides run off the page in ecstatic lights, horns, and pedestrians. Four words are centered in the center of the page: "I was not disappointed." In contrast to the electric page around it, the understatement is more effective. Page 73 is uniquely divided: a frameless image of Lewis making the long walk across the page to the mailbox down the road. His small frame and shadows tell us this. The center three small panels slow us down further. A letter slides into the mailbox across the gutter; a simple picture of Lewis's stark frame walking away follows. He tells us of the importance of this letter, but the close-up, slowed-down image drives it home for the viewer. The entire bottom of the page is drawn from the mailbox. Lewis is small in front of his house and tree down the road. In addition to some foreshadowing language in the top half of the page, the largest two words are all caps—KNOCK, KNOCK. These draw us to the action on the next page. Below them is a speech balloon that bleeds onto that next, turned, page. We can't wait to see who the speaker is by now. This page is an example of amplification through simplification. Reduced, simple figures in a vast background suggest more complex emotions Lewis might be having like uncertainty or impatience or loneliness in his situation.

Nate Powell does some interesting and innovative things with text and image. In an effort to reflect the scratchy AM radio sound on page 55, he left splatters on the page and uses rougher text.[25] On page 27 Lewis is taken by a verse from the Bible. The verse literally and figuratively fills him as Powell inverts white text to fill young Lewis's silhouette. Below, when he preaches to the chickens, Powell scripts the Biblical passages in a fancy cursive, to show that "they are coming from something that, from his perspective, is *beyond.*"[26]

March, Book 2 synopsis and examples

Black Southerners may have been able to eat at lunch counters, but although segregated buses were outlawed in 1961, bus drivers continued to force them to sit in the rear. In addition to their non-violent insistence to be able to see movies in white theaters, Lewis and others formed the group of Freedom Riders that would organize and motivate people from the north and south to share seats in busses traversing the south, despite constant arrests and beatings and a bus explosion. White antagonists on the side of the law, like Birmingham's chief of police Bull Connor, become regular characters throughout their efforts. SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, of which Lewis is to become the director) and other student groups along with the NAACP agree to shared goals of breaking down Jim Crow laws and ensuring the right to vote for all black Americans. As they begin to plan the March on Washington, their agreement on methods begins to blur. Another conflict develops with the Kennedy administration as they plan the 1963 March on Washington. The march is covered here, but the book ends with the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. . .

The joyful present and tragic past are sewn together on pages 176-7 of book 2. On the left side of a nearly white two-page spread, President Obama being his inaugural speech. A piece of his speech bleeds into the right page, ". . . mindful of our sacrifices born of our ancestors. . ." On that same page, with the vague shadow of the church above him, an innocuous man at a telephone booth is unaware of the sacrifices to be made on the next page. On the other side of the turn, page 178 is an abstraction of sound, chaos, and terror. This spread is worth analysis using the Big Triangle and discussion of Powell's use of text—or lack thereof. A few details stand out—tragic ones—but the chaos in the abstraction of much of the page says just as much, students might find, as they trace these images across the bottom of the triangle. Book 2 also includes the original draft of John Lewis's 1963 speech for the march on Washington.

March, Book 3 synopsis and examples

As support for the nonviolent movement in the south has grown, so has resistance from white agitators, still violent and dangerous and more cunning as legal challenges against them become more savvy. In Book 3 the goal is the right to vote, without restrictions, threats, exams. Without the right to vote Lewis and his friends across the south know they will always face legal and illegal but condoned discrimination. With the death of President Kennedy, their allies in Washington are unknown. Innovative projects like the Freedom Vote, a powerful mock election, and the Freedom Summer keep energy high and volunteers coming. The ultimate conflict is an "all-out battle for the Democratic party."[27] They are successful. The final scene is a conversation after the 2009 inauguration between Lewis and Andrew Aydin, who brings up the idea of this comic book. . . Book 3 is longer, denser, generally busier and more complex as the battles move from physical ones to political ones. Greater use of dialogue helps to move the more nuanced political conflicts along.

Pages 48-49 are good examples of narrative density. Discussion about why might bring about answers like Lewis wants to honor Fannie Lou Hamer with more dialogue; he clearly respects her. Or it slows the pace before the announcement over the radio that Kennedy has been shot. The Democratic Party convention on 124-5 is a spectacle. Tension is sustained over the next few pages as density of text and image decrease and there is amplification through simplification. The only image on the white background is a small, distant airplane. The few words include "SNCC was falling apart. We were burned out."

Strategies

Image to text

On some pages, the balance of energy falls towards text, such as on pages 71 and 75 of book 1, where what is being said is important. The images change only subtly down the page. On others, the balance falls to image. Page 73 is the mailing of Lewis's letter to which he owes his fate (see above). Page 79 is another of these pages. Facial expressions and close-ups dominate this page. If the captions and balloons were not present, could readers predict what might be said or discussed? Could they identify tone, mood, or conflict among specific characters? To encourage close reading of image using the terms and techniques we learn, we will "annotate" the pages for leading details. Students will be responsible for turning in their annotations and filled caption and speech balloons. This may be done in small groups, but we will recap as a class. Of course, this activity could be done in reverse, with students providing image to go with provided text using close reading strategies we use in class already.

Read-think-wonder

This strategy originated (for me) with a Fellow in my seminar. The See-Think-Wonder strategy encourages readers/viewers to slow down, see, focus on details, then to think about the significance of these details. Usually we move from questions to answers, but the third step here is the question set. What questions do viewers have once they have seen and thought? Why is that page so dark? Why are there no words? Why are all of their faces close up? One way to include this strategy in this unit might be to separate image and text for several pages. Some students will See-Think-Wonder with the images minus text. Others will Read-Think-Wonder with only the language, no image. We'll come together for a full class discussion of the contrasting outcomes. Another product from such an activity might be to eliminate text from a page and have students "translate" the image content to narrative next. (A version of this is included in David Low's activities.)

Making comics—with Scott McCloud's *Making Comics*

Another way to capitalize on the complex, multiple literacies students have been developing is to create their own using the language and tools they've been studying. They have to make decisions about setting, theme, character development, and style, with text and image possibilities. The narrative, generated mostly by image, is supplemented with flourishes of comics conventions. In *Making Comics,* McCloud's essential "Five Choices" section should set us up for cohesion and completeness. In addition to questions I will lead with, including choice of character(s), conflict, setting, they will settle on McCloud's five: choice of moment, choice of frame, choice of image, choice of word, and choice of flow. As they learn do draw simple expressions and body language, they will have more control over these five things.

In *Making Comics* McCloud spells out each and every step one should consider and take while creating an original image-text. My students will study other pages from his text, as well, and practice executing elements so that they may better understand how to get full meaning from *March.* Several activities can come from this strategy set of McCloud's.

Activities

Plot and Image

In *Making Comics*, page 12, McCloud explores how simple image can progress the plot, and how a reader can "read" a story with only images and the use of gutters and closure. To illustrate this, and to get students thinking about the role of image when they are used to text-only, I'll use this activity early on. I'll borrow 8 panels from Scott McCloud and cut them apart. Each small group will receive a set of these 8 panels. They will have to put them in plot order and write a short "translation" of the plot and why they are sure this is the correct order. As a follow up, students can create short image-only comics for their friends (stick-figures are fine if there are enough details) and have their peers do the same. They have to consider the details that will inform the reader's sense of closure.

Reading and creating faces

With histories of trauma, many of my students tend to be sensitive and unsure about the actions and

reactions, measured by facial expression and body language, of those around them. In pages 80-96 of *Making Comics* McCloud illustrates dozens of faces depicting a range of emotions, not all of which my students may be familiar with, such as aversion and indignation. We will do a quick read of the faces and discuss the emotions first, then go to page 90 where he begins to look closely at the facial muscles and lines that contribute to specific emotions. Students will be able to draw faces with emotion using McCloud's techniques. I intend for this to be a fun, unjudged activity as my students learn how much control they have artists of characters themselves. A hopeful byproduct will be greater awareness of facial expressions in the people around them and what they might indicate.

Read-see-wonder

As we read Book I, we will stop reading together on page 78, when Lewis has an epiphany. Skipping pages 79-81, to which we'll return after this, we'll begin the activity with page 82. Students will be paired, then separated. One of each pair will be given a copy of Book I, page 82, with all the text removed, but with the bubbles for narrative and dialogue intact. Those students will study the images in the page closely and do their best. At the same time, their partners will be given blank panels on the same black background, with only the text in place. They will study the text and do their best to draw images that support it. After both sides have completed their tasks, they'll return to their pairs to compare and contrast the actual pages of the text with their own attempts to complete the content. I'll encourage their discussions to go to seeking why the author made his decisions about text and image for this page.

We'll do the same for page 90, in the diner where a waitress refuses to serve the nonviolent protestors. Depending on my class size that day, I could also have half of the pairs to page 82 and the other half do page 90, then report back their results to the whole class.

Draw to understand

David Low and others suggest having students draw the use of the terms they're learning to help them understand both the terms and how those concepts might be used or varied. For example, give students a blank sheet of paper and have them draw three panels with a pencil. Have them settle on a mood for their content. After explaining the term gutter, give them time to make a variety of adjustments to their gutters (space, outline, shape, etc.). After introducing bleeds, have them run an additional panel off of the page. We'll do this in one of our first class meetings of the unit. Note that David Low offers several valuable strategies and activities in his article *Spaces Invested with Content…*

Teacher resources

Comicsforbeginners.com is a site with free templates for formats and character types. It has several helpful videos and other tools for all stages of comics creation.

Scott McCloud's website, scottmccoud.com, has links to key information on all three books in this bibliography. It contains graphics that might be helpful in teaching terms and concepts to a class. All three books, *Understanding Comics, Reinventing Comics, and Making Comics* are essential to one starting to learn about reading and teaching comics.

TED Talk by Scott McCloud entitled *The Visual Magic of Comics* has McCloud explaining the picture plane or Big Triangle. It begins

just after 7:45 minutes in.

Various graphic organizers online. These are easy to find. One I found particularly rich and helpful is Kym Francis's Getting Graphic.[28] It contains graphic novel lists, a resource list to great online interactive sites, background and scholarship.

The *March* Trilogy, as explained throughout the unit. Book 2 contains the original draft of John Lewis's speech from the 1963 March on Washington.

Endnotes

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1. McCloud, Scott. *Reinventing Comics*. New York: Harper Collins, 2000, 10.
2. McCloud, Scott, and Mark Martin. *Understanding comics: the invisible art*. New York, 16.
3. McCloud, Scott. *Reinventing Comics*. New York: Harper Collins, 2000, 11.
4. Ibid., 27.
5. Ibid., 27.
6. Ibid., 29.
7. Ibid., 101.
8. Ibid., 102, 104.
9. Ibid., 107-8.
10. Ibid., 11.
11. Ibid., 110.
12. Allen, Frederick Lewis . ""The Other Side of the Tracks"." In *The Big Change*, 51-55. New York, NY: Bantam, 1961, 54.
13. Morris, Edmund. "The Treason of the Senate." In *Theodore Rex*, 437-38. New York, NY: Random House, 2001, 437-8.
14. Lyons, J. Michael. "From Alabama to Tahrir Square." *Journalism History* 41, no. 2, 103.
15. Ibid., 103.
16. Watts, Pam. "Graphic Novels Offer Diverse Perspectives, Narratives." *Education Digest* 81, no. 2 (October 2015): 38-41. Accessed July 14, 2017. Academic Search Premier, 40.
17. Watts, Pam. "Graphic Novels Offer Diverse Perspectives, Narratives." *Education Digest* 81, no. 2 (October 2015): 38-41. Accessed July 14, 2017. Academic Search Premier, 39.
18. Sperling, Nicole. "MEDIA: Drawing in a New Generation; Rep. John Lewis Hopes to Inspire Today's Youth with 'March,' a Comic Book on His Childhood, Activism." *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 2013. Accessed June 20, 2017.
19. Watts, Pam. "Graphic Novels Offer Diverse Perspectives, Narratives." *Education Digest* 81, no. 2 (October 2015): 38-41. Accessed July 14, 2017. Academic Search Premier, 41.
20. Low, David E. ""Spaces Invested with Content": Crossing the 'Gaps" in Comics with Readers in Schools." *Children's Literature in Education* 43, no. 4 (2012): 368-85. July 21, 2012. Accessed June 23, 2017.
21. Ibid.
22. McCloud, Scott, and Mark Martin. *Understanding comics: the invisible art*. New York, 63.
23. Watts, Pam. "Graphic Novels Offer Diverse Perspectives, Narratives." *Education Digest* 81, no. 2 (October 2015): 38-41. Accessed July 14, 2017. Academic Search Premier, 39.
24. Lyons, J. Michael. "From Alabama to Tahrir Square." *Journalism History* 41, no. 2. (Summer 2015): 103-11. Accessed July 14, 2017. Communication and Mass Media Complete, 105.

25. Taylor, Michael Ray. "Drawing March: A Conversation with Nate Powell." *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies* 47, no. 1 (April 2016): 3-14. Accessed May 6, 2017. Academic Search Premier, 10.
26. Ibid., 9.
27. Lewis, John, Andrew Aydin and Nate Powell. *March, Book 3.* Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions, 2016, inside cover.
28. Francis, Kym. "Getting Graphic: Using Graphic Novels in the Language Arts Classroom." Getting Graphic. Accessed August 4, 2017.

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Allen, Frederick Lewis . ""The Other Side of the Tracks"." In *The Big Change*, 51-55. New York, NY: Bantam, 1961.

Francis, Kym. "Getting Graphic: Using Graphic Novels in the Language Arts Classroom." Getting Graphic. Accessed August 4, 2017. http://gettinggraphic.weebly.com/.

There are probably lots of sites like this out there, but Kym's resources list of

helpful website links will be helpful to teachers looking for interactive and creative sites for comics. Many other things, as well.

Hunt, Jonathan. "A Long Road." *School Library Journal* 59, no. 9 (September 2013): 44. Accessed May 6, 2017. Academic Search Premier.

Jacobs, Dale. "More than Words: Comics as a Means of Teaching Multiple Literacies."

English Journal 96, no. 3 (2007): 19. Accessed June 23, 2017. doi:10.2307/30047289.

Multiple literacies, literary criticism, history of attitudes towards comics, promise. Good background source.

Lewis, John, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell. *March, Book I*. Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions, 2013.

Lewis, John, Andrew Aydin and Nate Powell. *March, Book 2.* Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions, 2015.

Lewis, John, Andrew Aydin and Nate Powell. *March, Book 3.* Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions, 2016.

Low, David E. ""Spaces Invested with Content": Crossing the 'Gaps" in Comics with Readers in Schools." *Children's Literature in Education* 43, no. 4 (2012): 368-85. July 21, 2012. Accessed June 23, 2017.

Using comics for literacy in upper level classrooms. Emphasis on gutters and meaning. Pedagogical resources and activities for the classroom.

Lyons, J. Michael. "From Alabama to Tahrir Square." *Journalism History* 41, no. 2. (Summer 2015): 103-11. Accessed July 14, 2017. Communication and Mass Media Complete.

"Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story: How 50,000 Negroes Found a New Way to End Racial Discrimination." In *Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library*, 1-16. New Haven, CT: Beinecke Rare Books Library, 2017.

This comic is referenced throughout my unit as a source document. It may be worth including in your own study of *March*. The

contrasts are clear between this 1957 comic and the 2013 *March*, so they might be a rich discussion source.

McCloud, Scott. *Reinventing Comics*. New York: Harper Collins, 2000.

Scott McCloud is the essential authority on the reading, creation, and understanding of the comics genre.

McCloud, Scott. *Making comics: storytelling secrets of comics, manga and graphic novels*. New York: Harper, 2007.

Both Scott McCloud books are essential for understanding and writing comics. If you want to teach comics or graphic novels, begin here.

McCloud, Scott, and Mark Martin. *Understanding comics: the invisible art*. New York, NY: William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2014.

Morris, Edmund. "The Treason of the Senate." In *Theodore Rex*, 437-38. New York, NY: Random House, 2001.

Reiker, Melissa . "The Use of Picture Books in the High School Classroom: A Qualitative Case Study." Master's thesis, 2011. *Masters of Liberal Studies Theses*, 2011.

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Inspiring, short background of how the three writers came together and their intentions.

Taylor, Michael Ray. "Drawing March: A Conversation with Nate Powell." *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies* 47, no. 1 (April 2016): 3-14. Accessed May 6, 2017. Academic Search Premier.

Watts, Pam. "Graphic Novels Offer Diverse Perspectives, Narratives." *Education Digest* 81, no. 2 (October 2015): 38-41. Accessed July 14, 2017. Academic Search Premier.

Academic standards

Oklahoma has new English language arts standards. They are easy to cross-reference with other academic standards. As written, they vary little, if at all, among 9-12 grade levels, so I have included only 10th grade.

10.2.R.1 Students will summarize, paraphrase, and synthesize ideas while maintaining meaning within a logical sequence of events within and between texts.

10.2.R.2 Students will analyze details in literary and informational/nonfiction texts to connect how genre supports the author’s purpose.

10.3.R.1 Students will evaluate the extent to which historical, cultural, and/or global perspectives affect

authors’ stylistic and organizational choices in grade-level literary and informational genres.

10.3.R.3 Students will analyze how authors use key literary elements to contribute to meaning and interpret how themes are connected across texts: ● character development ● theme ● conflict (i.e., internal and external) ● archetypes

10.3.R.7 Students will make connections (e.g., thematic links, literary analysis) between and across multiple texts and provide textual evidence to support their inferences.

10.3.W.1 Students will write narratives embedded in other modes as appropriate.

10.4.W.2 Students will select appropriate language to create a specific effect according to purpose in writing.

10.7.R.1 Students will analyze techniques used to achieve the intended rhetorical purposes in written, oral, visual, digital, non-verbal, and interactive texts to generate and answer interpretive and applied questions to create new understandings.

10.7.R.2 Students will analyze the impact of selected media and formats on meaning.

10.7.W.1 Students will critique the sources of multi-modal content.

10.7.W.2 Students will create visual and/or multimedia presentations using a variety of media forms to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence for diverse audiences.

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