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English 112B

April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Unit of Study: Incorporating Graphic Novels into the Curriculum

**Introduction/Why teach graphic novels?**

Some might consider graphic novels as comics or cheap reading material for children, but it was not so long ago that people had the same idea about the novel, which is now one of the popular forms of literature. Graphic novels, one of the many emerging formats in new media, presents a chance at a new way to get students and readers more engaged in literacy. There are many graphic novels that would be great to pair with other novels if they share themes that are taught in the classroom. There are even graphic novel adaptations of many classical works, some of which are from Shakespeare's many plays. Graphic novel adaptations of Shakespeare's plays can be a useful tool for students to better understand Shakespeare's popular plays, since his plays are meant to be seen rather than read, and the artwork in graphic novels better mimics the stage than just a cold reading, and the same can be said for many other important pieces of literature. Graphic novels are not to be mistaken as a new type of genre, but as a new format because the world of the graphic novel has now covered over many genres such as: non-fiction, historical non-fiction, science fiction, realistic fiction, fantasy, comedy, horror, mystery, romance and the list of genre goes on. The graphic novel is a great tool to use to promote students' interests in literature. Things to watch out for if using graphic novels in the classroom, there may be some serious drawbacks such as the predominance of violence and sexual images in some

graphic novels. Besides that drawback, there are many other graphic novels that are appropriate for school use, and the limited amount and level of text, and use of popular culture would be serious help for struggling readers or students, since they may come better matched to their reading levels.

### **Before Unit of Study:**

Before assigning the centerpiece graphic novel, teachers new to teaching graphic novels should first find the link in building literacy connections with graphic novels. Graphic novels can hone the students' inference skills, since the students will make inferences based on artwork and bits of text. Studying graphic novels should help the students to better understand literature skills and knowledge. Graphic novels are not tools, they are meant to be fun, and if utilized properly, may help students get a wider grasp of literature and a better appreciation of it. The text that covers all this and more is *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel* edited by James Bucky Carter.

### **Centerpiece:**

The canonical work that I chose for my main graphic novel is *Marzi: A Memoir* by Marzena Sowa, which will be the centerpiece for this unit of study. The graphic novel is about a little girl named Marzi whose world takes place ten years before the end of communism in Poland, before the fall of the wall, living through a family's cramped existence behind the Iron Curtain. The graphic novel is a historical non-fiction, since the entire graphic novel is the actual memoir of the author Marzena Sowa, depicting the harsh realities of life behind the Iron Curtain, and a story showing how she maintained the every day wonders and curiosity of childhood. Using *Marzi* is the perfect way to show students

that a graphic novel can be more than just super-beings in spandex since the author has chosen to use the graphic novel medium for something as intimate as a memoir, and that the graphic novel can showcase plenty of emotions from reader and author just as they would from reading a novel.

### **Launching the Unit:**

After reading *Marzi*, students should have a better understanding of the power of storytelling through the graphic novel medium. The unit of study will be launched with a class assignment that pairs with the graphic novel. The students will draw and write their own memoir as a graphic novel. The assignment should be fun for the students, so page requirement should have a minimum of 3 pages. The students can choose any subject or time period in writing their memoir. Students are encouraged to do the activity, but some may feel reluctant to draw, they may write out a movie script for their memoir, which should include captions and panel descriptions, in which case the page requirement should have a minimum of five pages.

### **Extending the Unit:**

After finishing *Marzi* and the graphic memoir assignment, the unit of study will then be extended by assigning several more graphic novels, some of which will have assignments. The graphic novels are: *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman, *Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow* by James Strum and Rich Tommaso, *Pride & Prejudice: Issue 1* adapted by Nancy Butler & Hugo Petrus, and *As You Like It* adapted by Richard Appignanesi.

The second graphic novel, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman, will be similar to the centerpiece unit in some aspects, in which it should help transition them to other

corners of graphic novels. *Maus* is a historical non-fiction just like *Marzi*, except the artwork for the two graphic novels are entirely different in style, for the people in *Maus* are portrayed as mice and cats. *Maus* is a graphic novel that follows a series of interviews with his father about being a Jew in Nazi occupied Europe during World War II. *Maus* is creative in its artwork, portraying the Jews as mice and the Nazis as cats, and shows how stories can be done through a graphic novel and how creative artwork and storytelling can further enhance a reading. An idea for an assignment is to have the students do a SSW (sustained silent writing), on a compare and contrast for *Marzi* and *Maus*. One of the topics can be how the choice in artwork affects the reading experience of the two historical non-fictions.

The third novel, *Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow* by James Strum and Rich Tommaso, is a historical non-fiction is the story of Leroy “Satchel” Paige, a sports hero who defied the segregation and Jim Crow laws to play the game his own way. The “Jim Crow” that Satchel Paige strikes out is a series of laws that enforced segregation. Some of these laws were written down, like literacy tests and poll taxes to suppress, and many others laws were unwritten and assumed. The Jim Crow Laws were more of an etiquette that African Americans had to follow, or else risk their life for so much as talking back to a Caucasian person. Students who enjoy sports, particularly baseball, will enjoy the sports commentary, slang and game stats. There is also movie based on Jackie Robinson, who is a African American baseball player who played for the first mixed baseball team, which should garner more interest for reading the Satchel Paige novel.

The fourth graphic novel, *Pride & Prejudice: Issue 1* adapted by Nancy Butler & Hugo Petrus, is an adaptation of a popular canon which is widely read and taught in the high school curriculum, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. What caught my attention with this

book is what the adapter of the novel had to say about graphic novels. Nancy Butler points out that many graphic novels are great reads, with plenty of genres, but that Western Comics lack a strong female fan base. Many comic stores, particularly those that have less graphic novels and more Marvel and DC superhero comics, have a lot of posters of impossibly buxom she-heroes, which is probably what alienates female readers. Butler chose *Pride & Prejudice* because it is a novel that has lasted two centuries, was still studied in high school and college literature classes, had been adapted into many movies and TV shows, has plenty of online sites and had a huge fan base, a huge fan base which has a strong number in females. It's about time to have both genders enjoy comics and graphic novels and this title should appeal to girls and women as well as men.

The fifth and last graphic novel, *As You Like It* adapted by Richard Appignanesi, is an adaptation from one of Shakespeare's many plays. *As You Like It* is a romance comedy that follows Rosalind and others in several love triangles and gender bending, a great story to end the unit of study with. The graphic novel adaptation of novel for this unit of study will be the companion novel of the original by Shakespeare, but the twist is that the graphic novel adaptation will be read first. This can be done at home as a homework assignment, and students can then make inferences and comparisons of both versions in the classroom. Instead of the having the teacher explain what is happening during the play, students can take out their graphic novel adaptation of the play to make their own inferences by looking at the pictures and text. This way the students will be better prepared for reading and comprehending Shakespeare's play, since his plays are meant to be seen rather than read, and the artwork in graphic novels better mimics the stage than just a cold reading, and the same can be said for many other important pieces of literature.

### Works Cited

- Carter, James. *Building Literacy Connections With Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel*. North America: National Council of Teachers of English, 2007. Print
- Sowa, Marzena. *Marzi: A Memoir*. New York: DC Comics; Mediatoon Licensing, 2011. Print
- Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986. Print
- Sturn, James; Tommaso, Rich. *Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2007. Print
- Butler, Nancy; Petrus, Hugo. *Pride & Prejudice Issue I*. New York: Marvel Worldwide Inc, 2010. Print
- Appignanesi, Richard. *As You Like It*. New York: Amulet Books, 2009. Print

# **Unit of Study: Incorporating Graphic Novels Into The Curriculum**

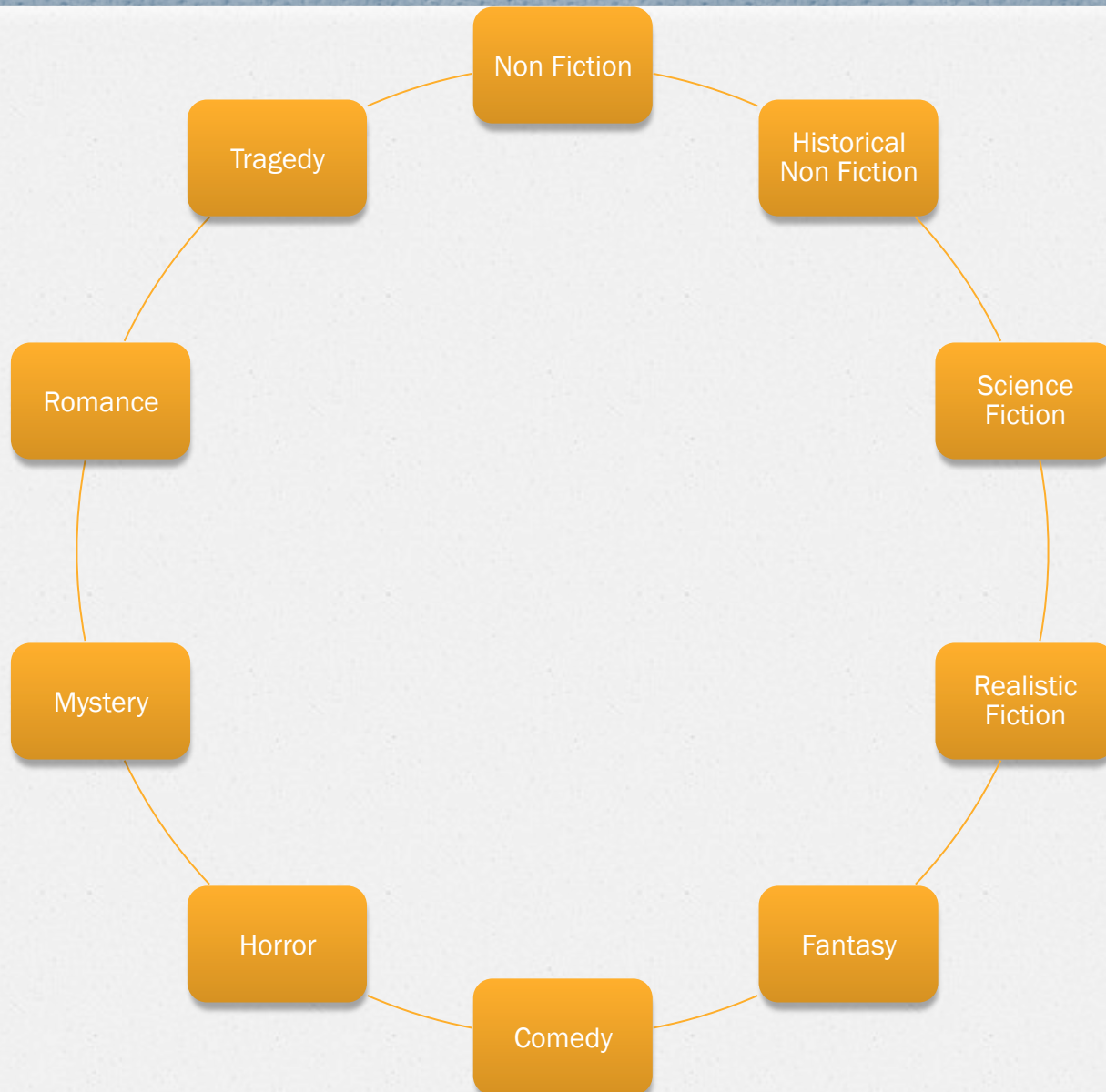
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# Intro: Why Teach Graphic Novels?

- 1<sup>st</sup> of all, are you kidding me? Aw yeah...
- Presents a new way to get more engaged in literacy
- There are even graphic novel adaptations of many classical works
- There are many genres, and the list continues

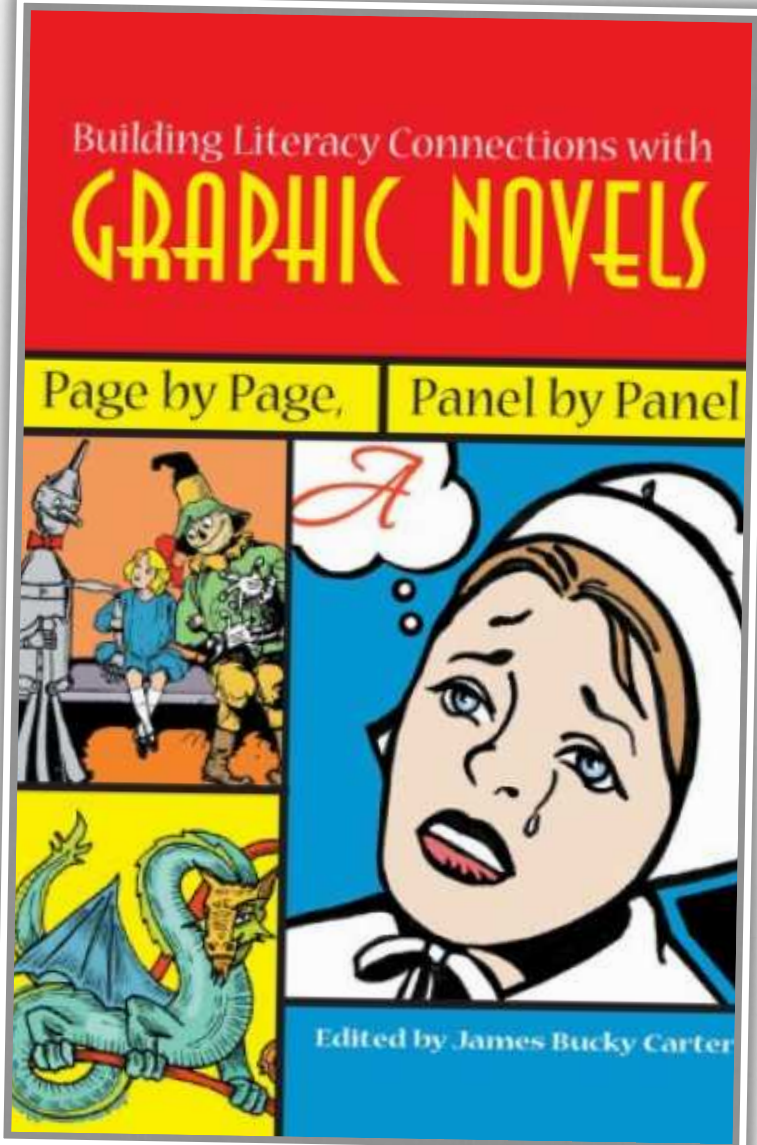




## Before The Unit:

Teachers new to teaching graphic novels should first find the link in building literacy connections with graphic novels.

The text that covers all this and more is *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel* edited by James Bucky Carter.





## CENTERPIECE WORK

The graphic novel is a historical non-fiction, since the entire graphic novel is the actual memoir of the author Marzena Sowa, depicting the harsh realities of life behind the Iron Curtain, and a story showing how she maintained the every day wonders and curiosity of childhood.





# LAUNCHING THE UNIT

- o After reading *Marzi: A Memoir*~
- o The students will draw and write their own **memoir** as a graphic novel
- o Minimum of **three** pages
- o Or write out a movie **script** for their memoir
- o Include **captions** and **panel** descriptions
- o Minimum of **five** pages



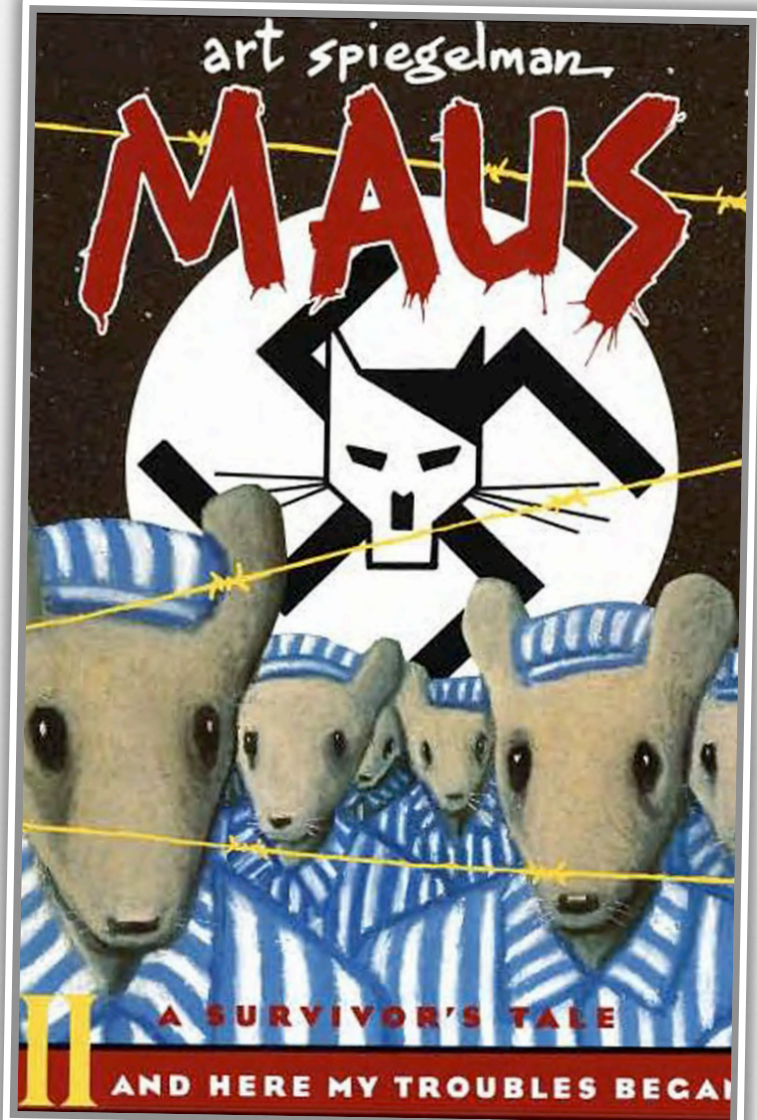
# Extending The Unit





## Historical Non-Fiction: Interview

*Maus* is a historical non-fiction just like *Marzi*, except the artwork for the two graphic novels are entirely different in style, for the people in *Maus* are portrayed as mice and cats. *Maus* is a graphic novel that follows a series of interviews with his father about being a Jew in Nazi occupied Europe during World War II.





# ASSIGNMENT FOR MAUS

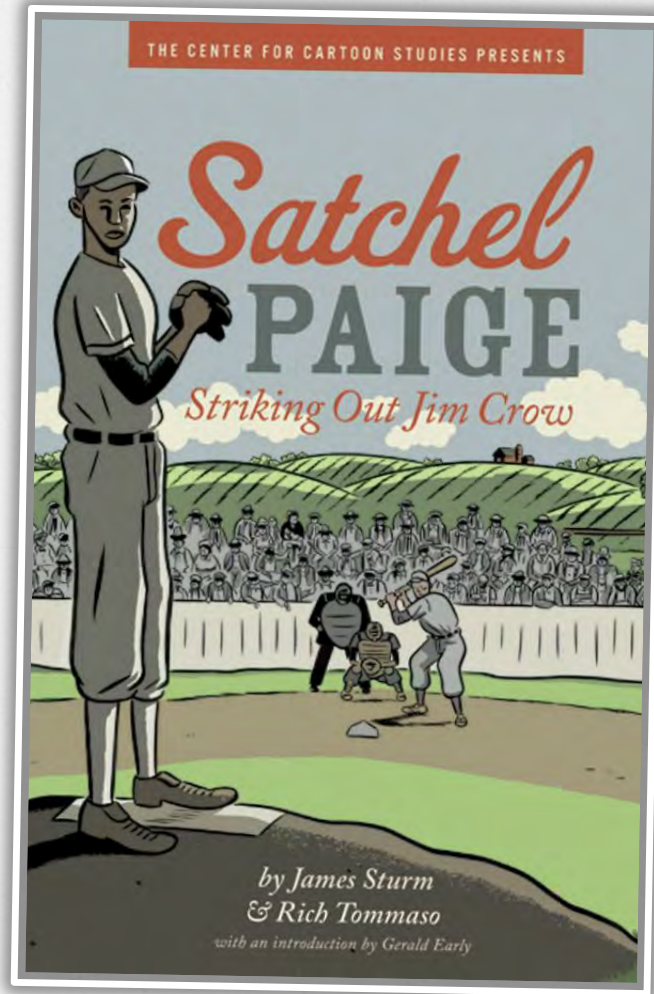
- *Maus* is creative in its artwork, portraying the Jews as mice and the Nazis as cats, and shows how stories can be done through a graphic novel and how creative artwork and storytelling can further enhance a reading.
- An idea for an assignment is to have the students do a SSW (sustained silent writing), on a compare and contrast for *Marzi* and *Maus*. One of the topics can be how the choice in artwork affects the reading experience of the two historical non-fictions.



## Historical Non-Fiction

The story of Leroy "Satchel" Paige, a sports hero who defied the segregation and Jim Crow laws to play the game his own way. The "Jim Crow" that Satchel Paige strikes out is a series of laws that enforced segregation. Some of these laws were written down, like literacy tests and poll taxes to suppress, and many others laws were unwritten and assumed.

Enjoyable for sport enthusiasts





## Fiction: Romance: Adaptation

Nancy Butler points out that many graphic novels are great reads, with plenty of genres, but that Western Comics lack a strong female fan base.

Butler chose *Pride & Prejudice* because it is a novel that has lasted two centuries, is still studied in high school and college literature classes, had been adapted into many movies and TV shows, has plenty of online sites and had a huge fan base of both genders, a huge fan base which has a strong number in females than in traditional hero comics.





## Fiction: Romance/ Comedy: Adaptation

An adaptation from one of Shakespeare's many plays. *As You Like It* is a romance comedy that follows Rosalind and others in several love triangles and gender bending, a great story to end the unit of study with.





# An End & A Breather

- The graphic novel adaptation of novel for this unit of study will be the companion novel of the original by Shakespeare, but the twist is that the graphic novel adaptation will be read first.
- Students can take out their graphic novel adaptation of the play to make their own inferences by looking at the pictures and text while reading the original by Shakespeare.
- This way the students will be better prepared for reading and comprehending Shakespeare's play, since his plays are meant to be seen rather than read, and the artwork in graphic novels better mimics the stage than just a cold reading, and the same can be said for many other important pieces of literature.

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- o Butler, Nancy; Petrus, Hugo. *Pride & Prejudice Issue 1*. New York: Marvel Worldwide Inc, 2010. Print
- o Appignanesi, Richard. *As You Like It*. New York: Amulet Books, 2009. Print
- o Images for P.P found on Google