Going Graphic
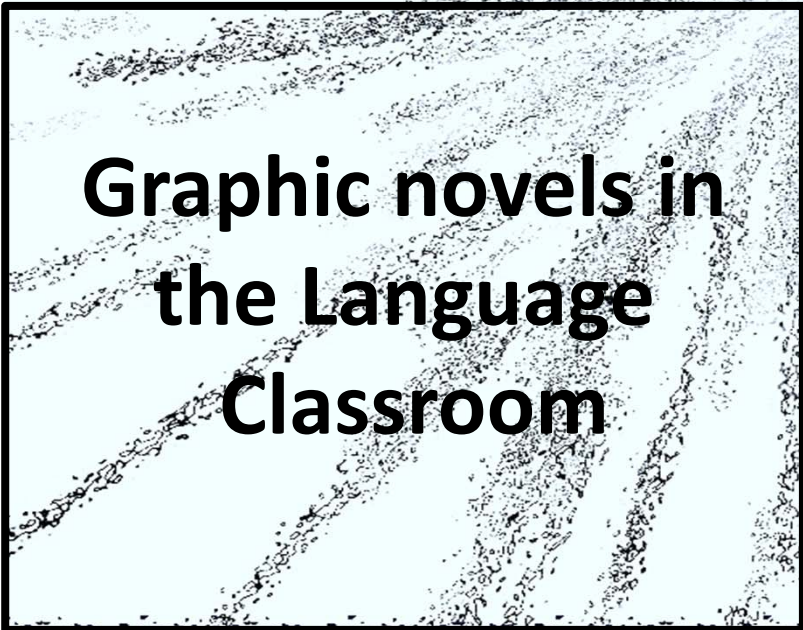
Graphic novels in the Language Classroom

Anthony Pavlik

Teaching (with) graphic novels

# Objection 1: Not proper "Literature"

- ❑ **Contain same "literary" outcomes as traditional texts (and add some more!)**
  - ❑ **play a significant role in learners' understanding of literary elements such as symbolism, setting, character, plot, foreshadowing etc.**
- ❑ **invite readers to consider the narrative events in a different way - the visual techniques of films with the classic storytelling approach**
- ❑ **"Literary literacy" - our definition of literacy benefits from acknowledging, rather than denying, the skill it takes to read and comprehend a graphic novel.**
- ❑ **Language learning, not literature, is the goal**
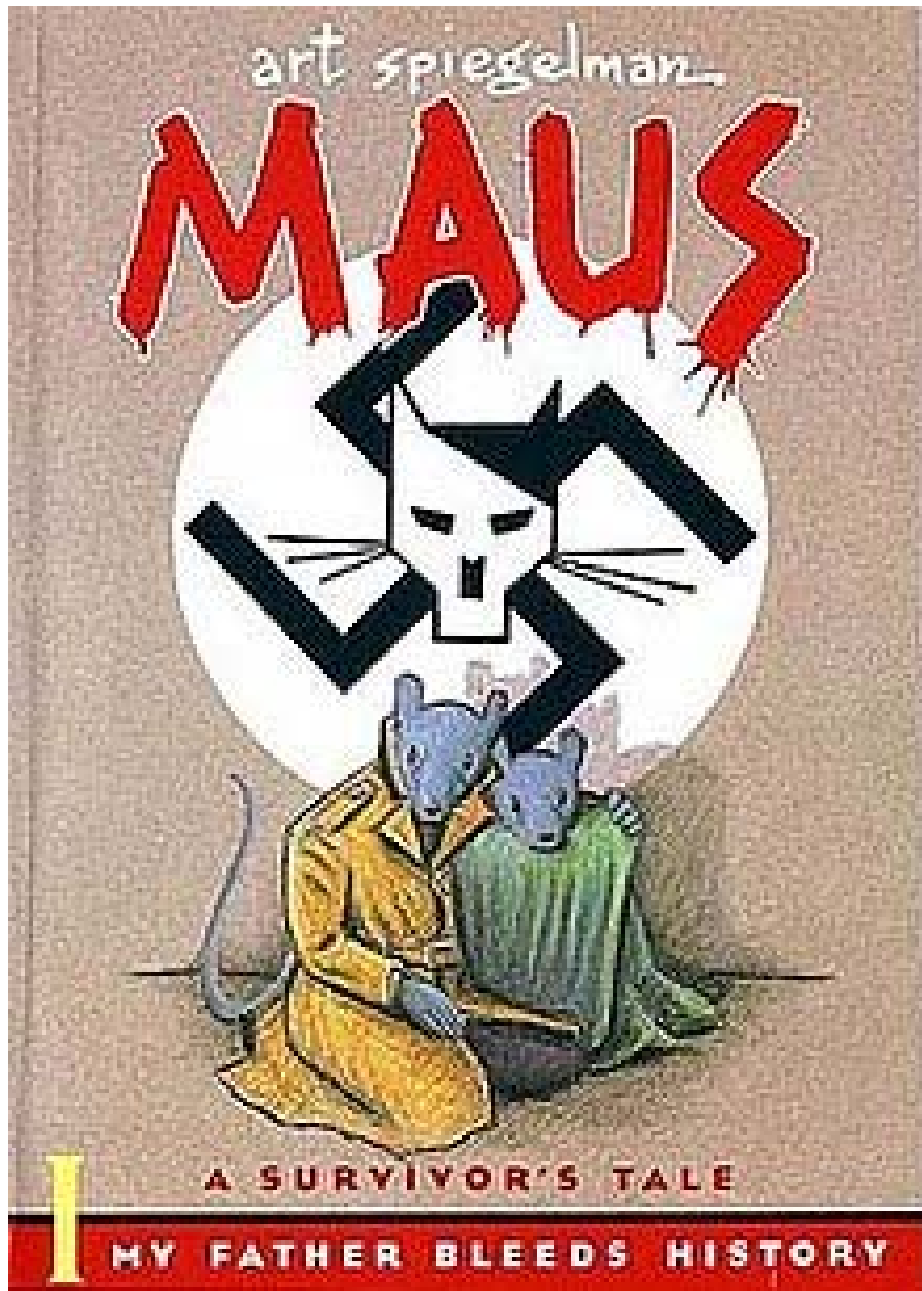
*Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1991) by Art Spiegelman
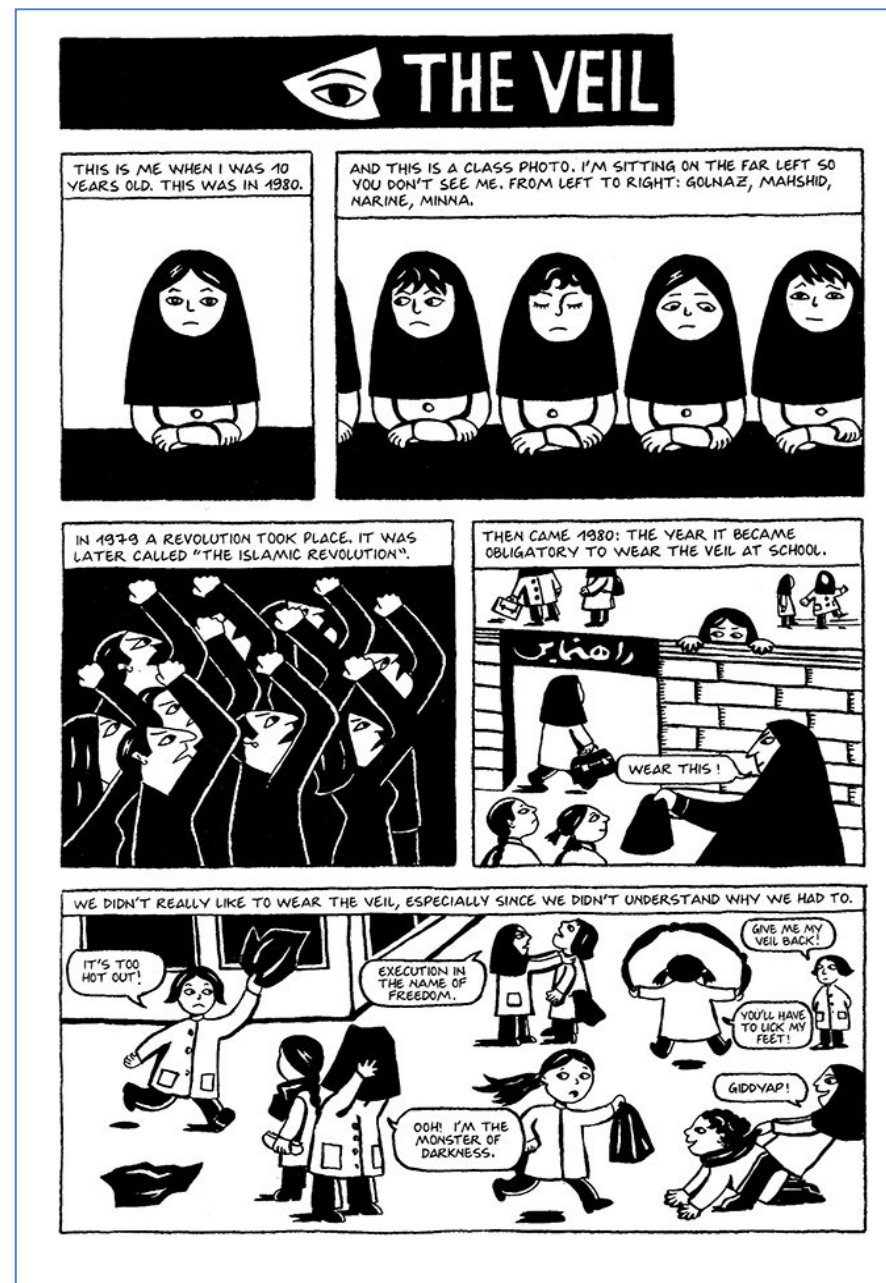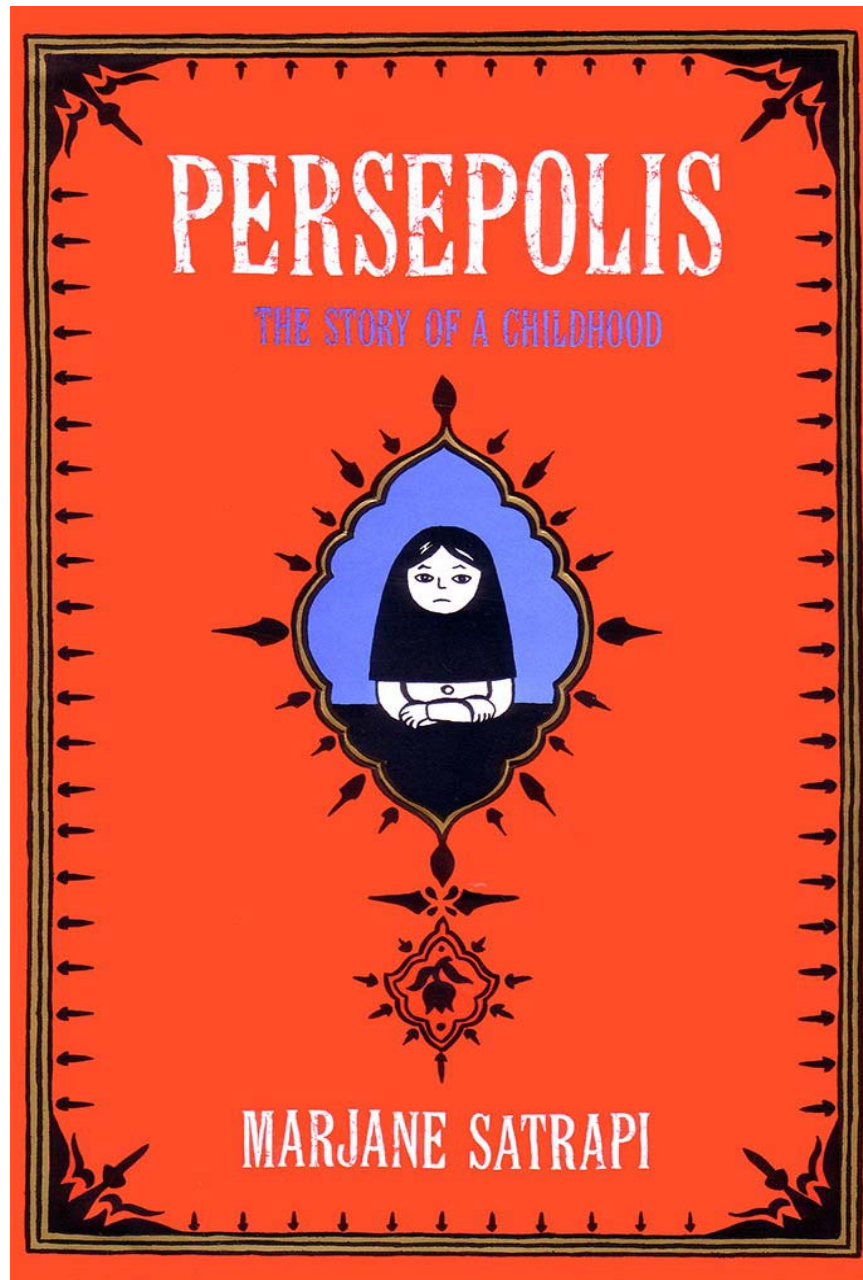
Persepolis (2003) by Marjane Satrapi
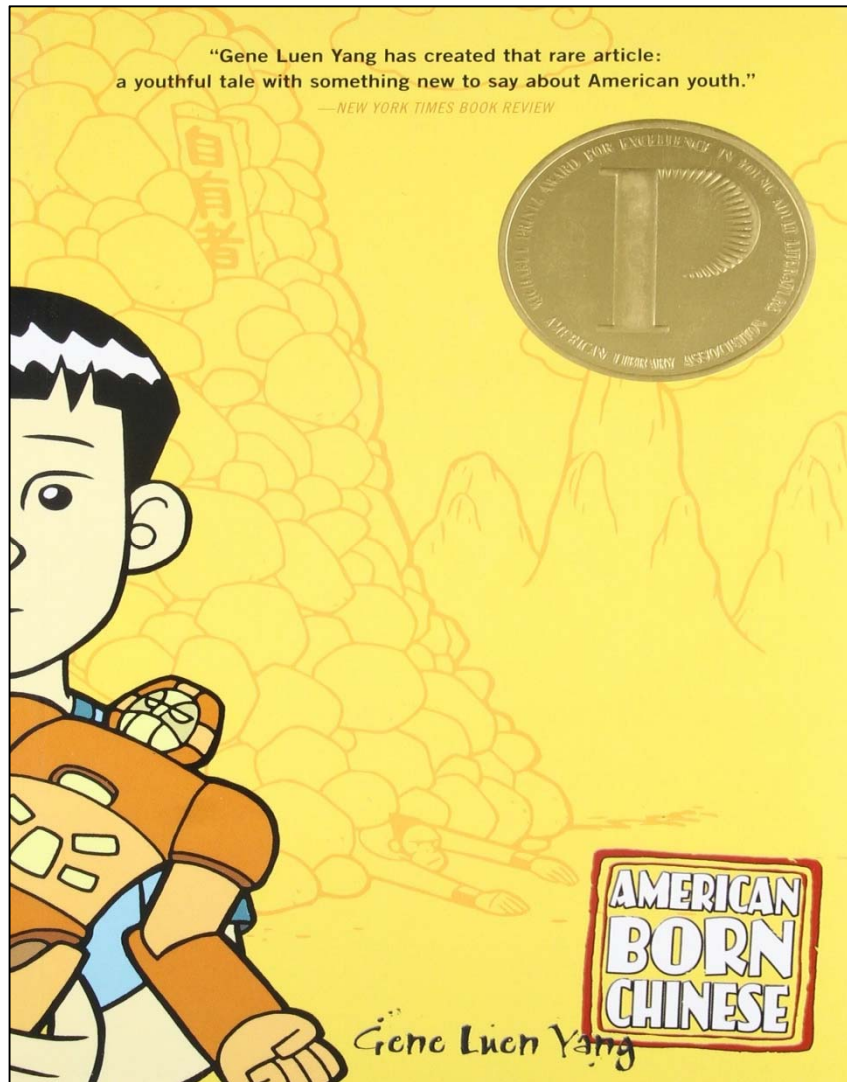
American Born Chinese (2006) by Gene Luen Yang

Objection 2: Not sufficiently intellectual

❑ require cognitive ability to fuse images and text to get fuller meaning of the story - higher level of thinking and analysis

❑ can improve inferencing skills and critical thinking

❑ equally as good as textual novels in terms of developing skills in comprehension, textual discussions, analysing comparison-contrast or cause-effect relationships etc.

❑ appeal to learners' visual senses and yield more discursive insights compared to traditional "plain" literary texts
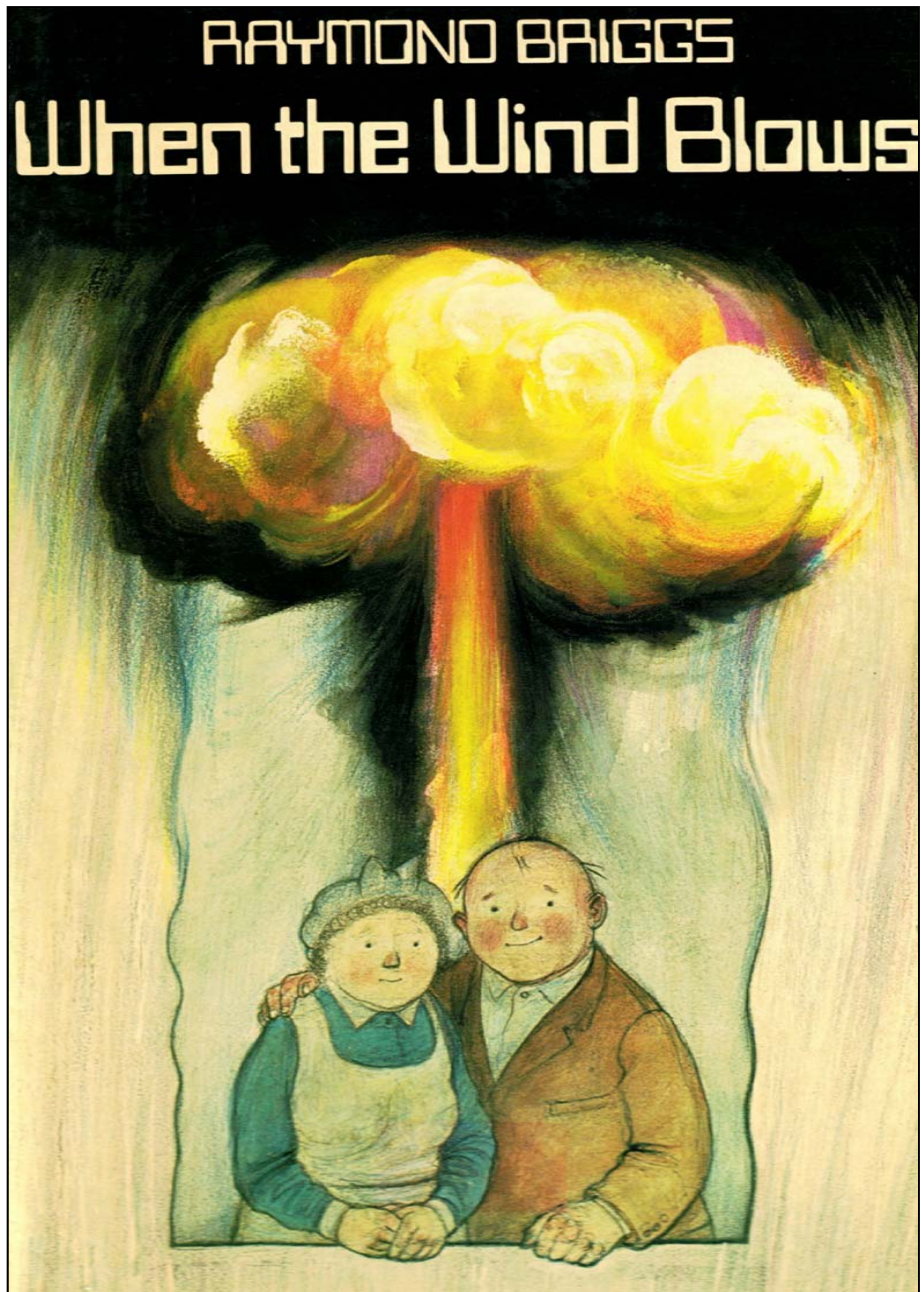
When The Wind Blows (1982) by Raymond Briggs

Objection 3: Inappropriate Content?
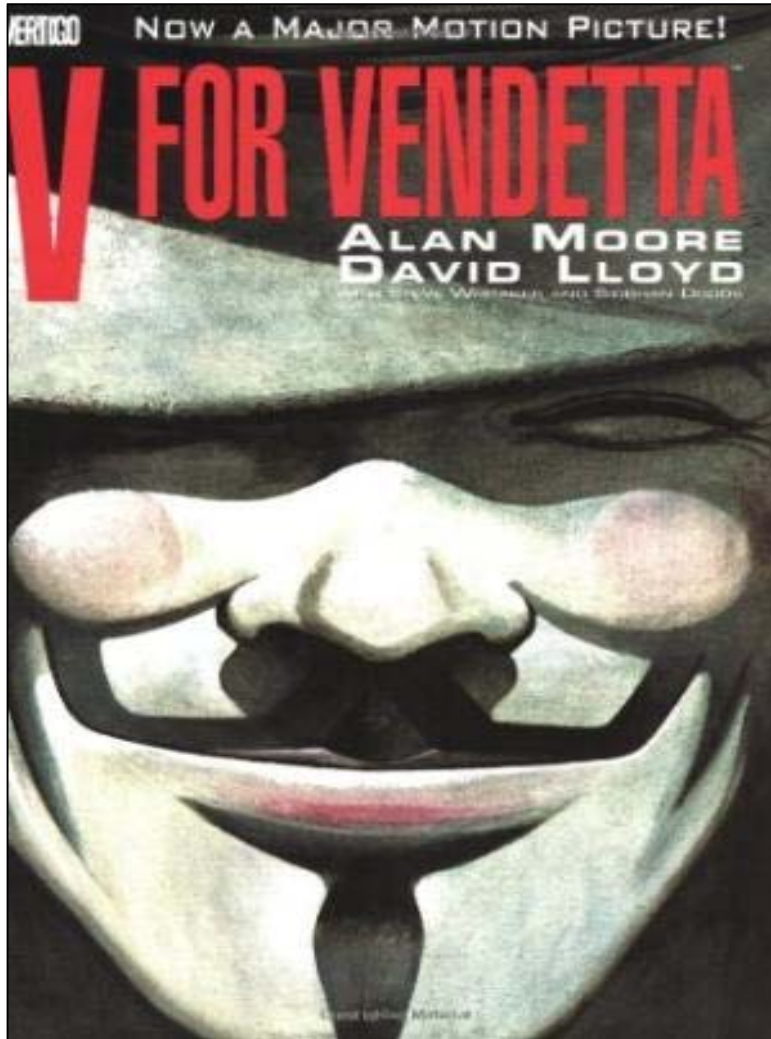
V for Vendetta by Alan Moore and David Lloyd (1982–1989 & 1995)

An anarchist revolutionary's revenge against the Nordic supremacist Norsefire party that rules Britain as a neo-fascist police state.

Macbeth

Beowulf
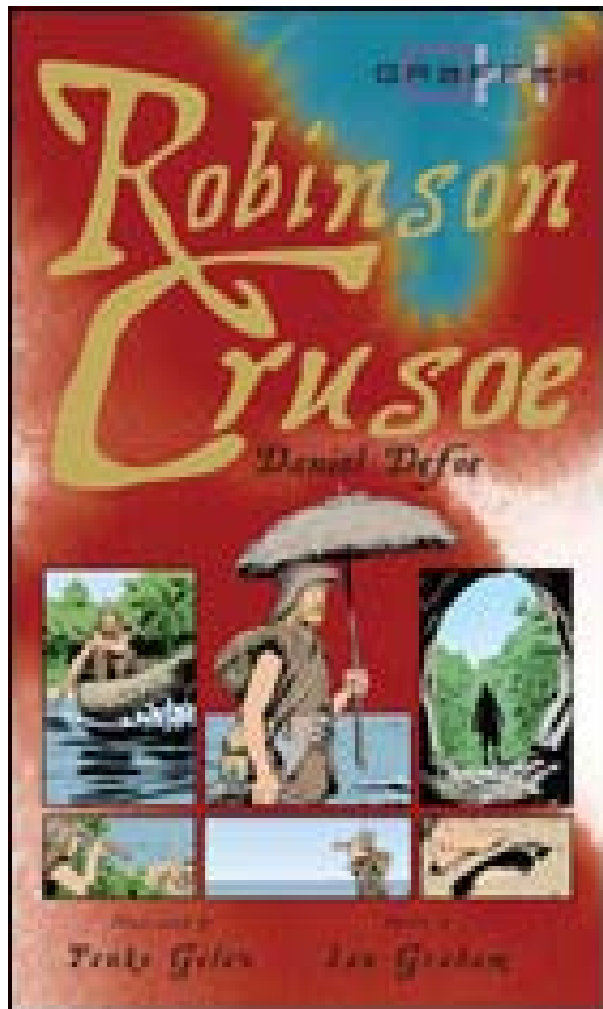
Robinson Crusoe
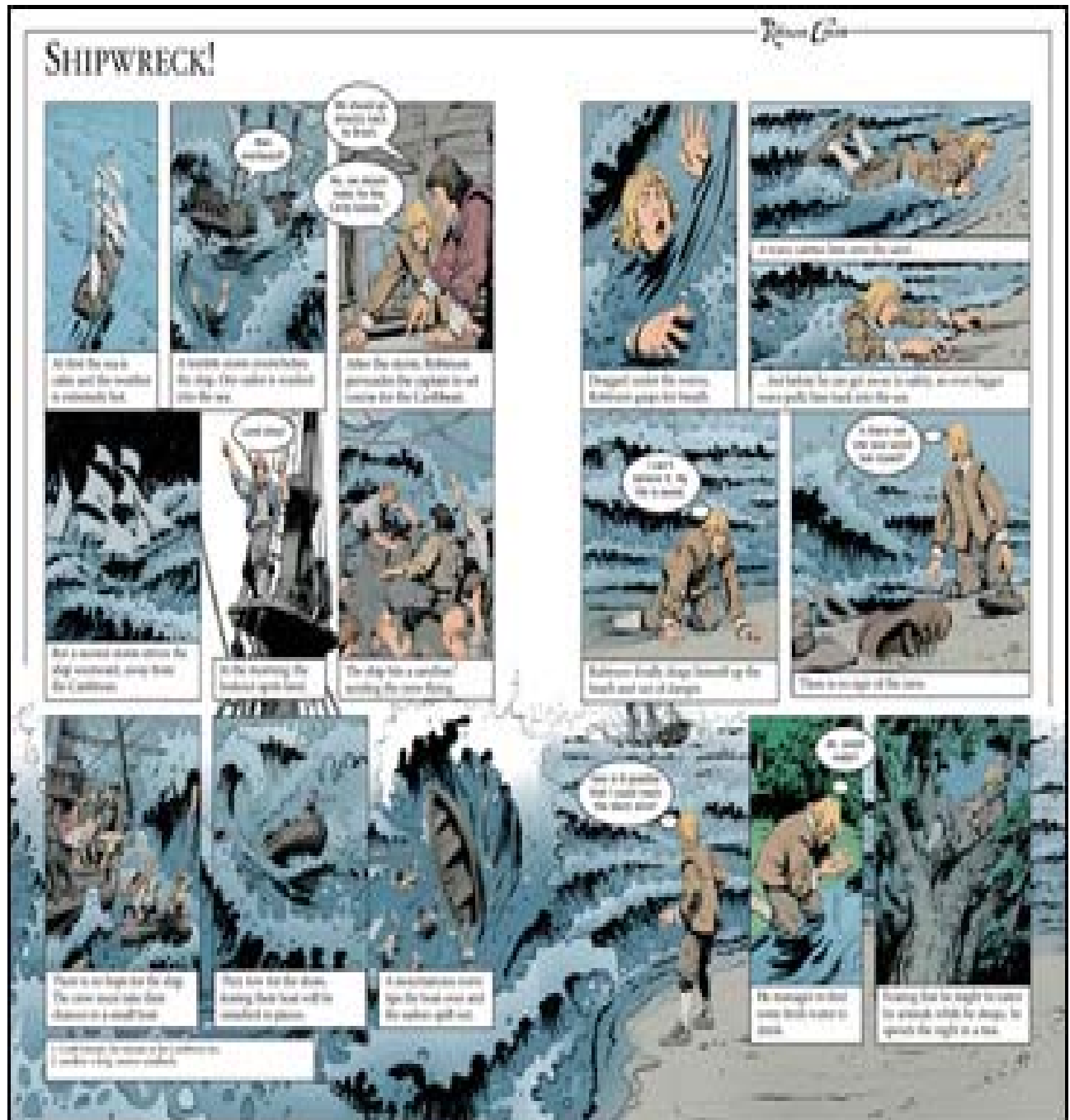
Frankenstein
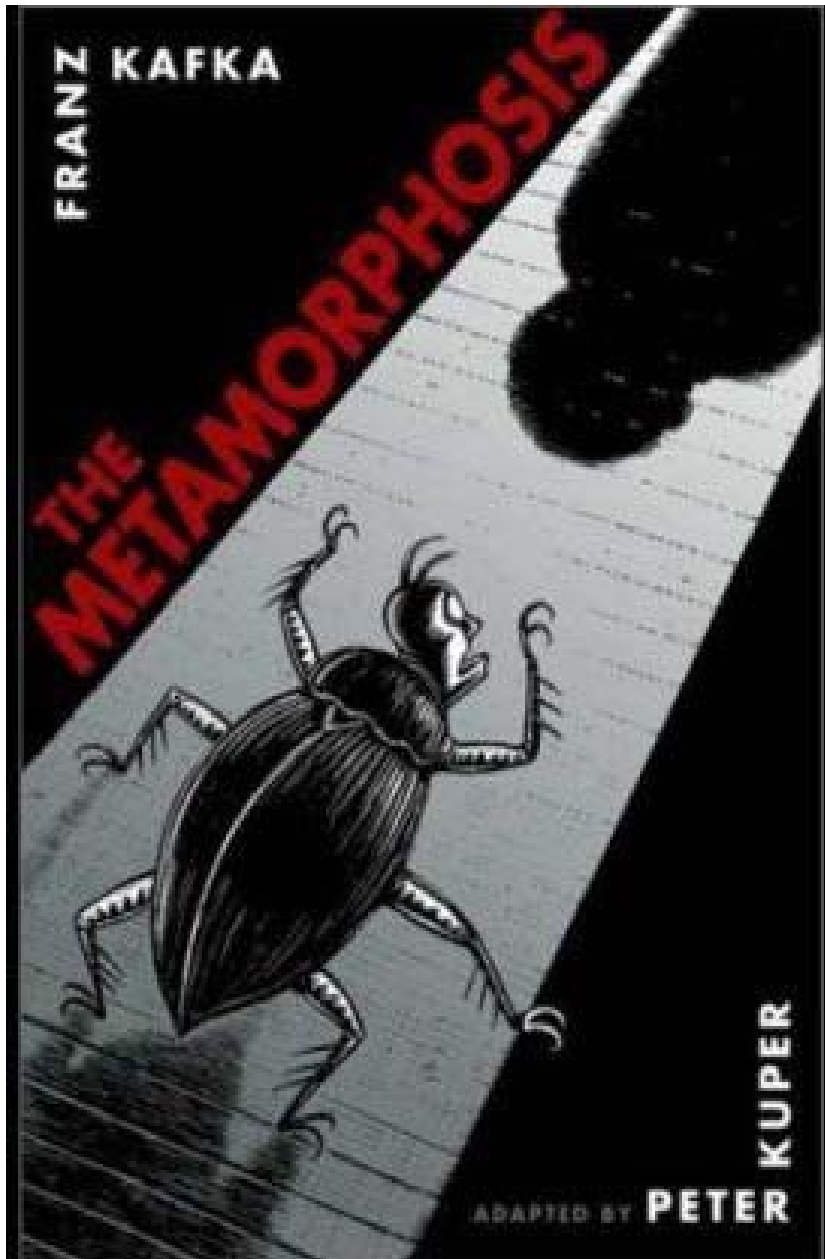
Metamorphosis
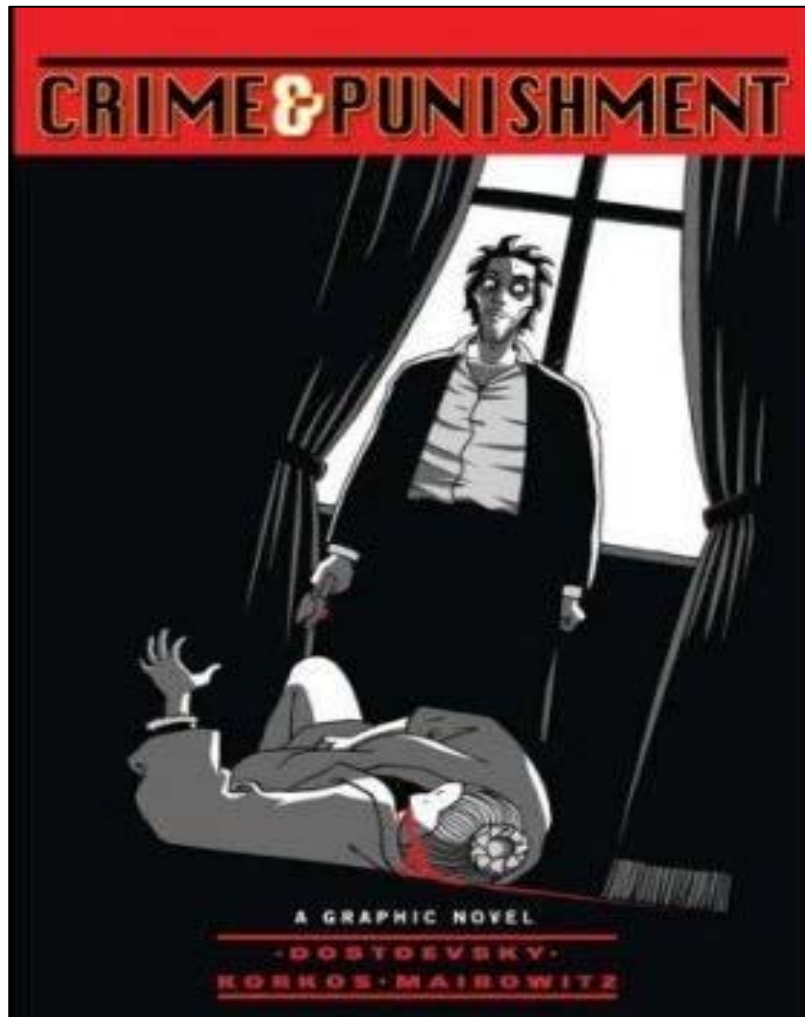
Crime and Punishment
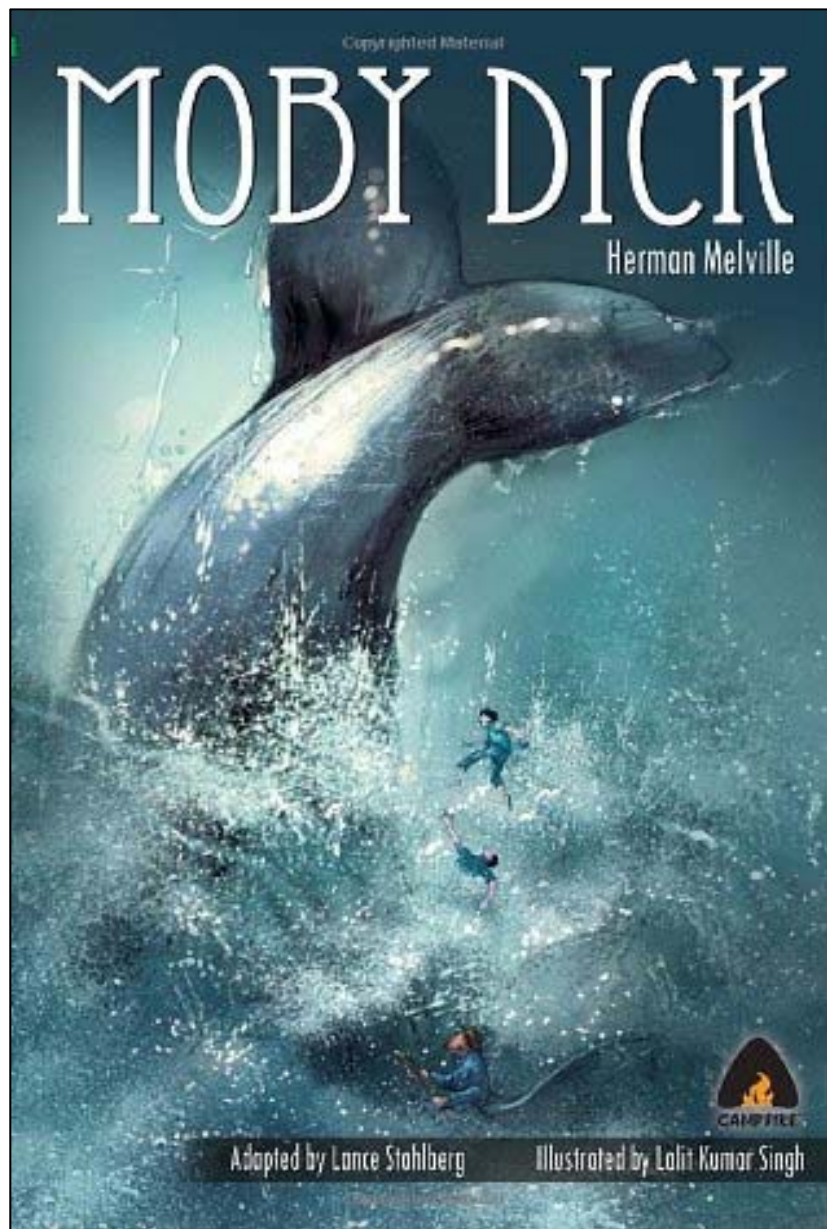
Moby Dick
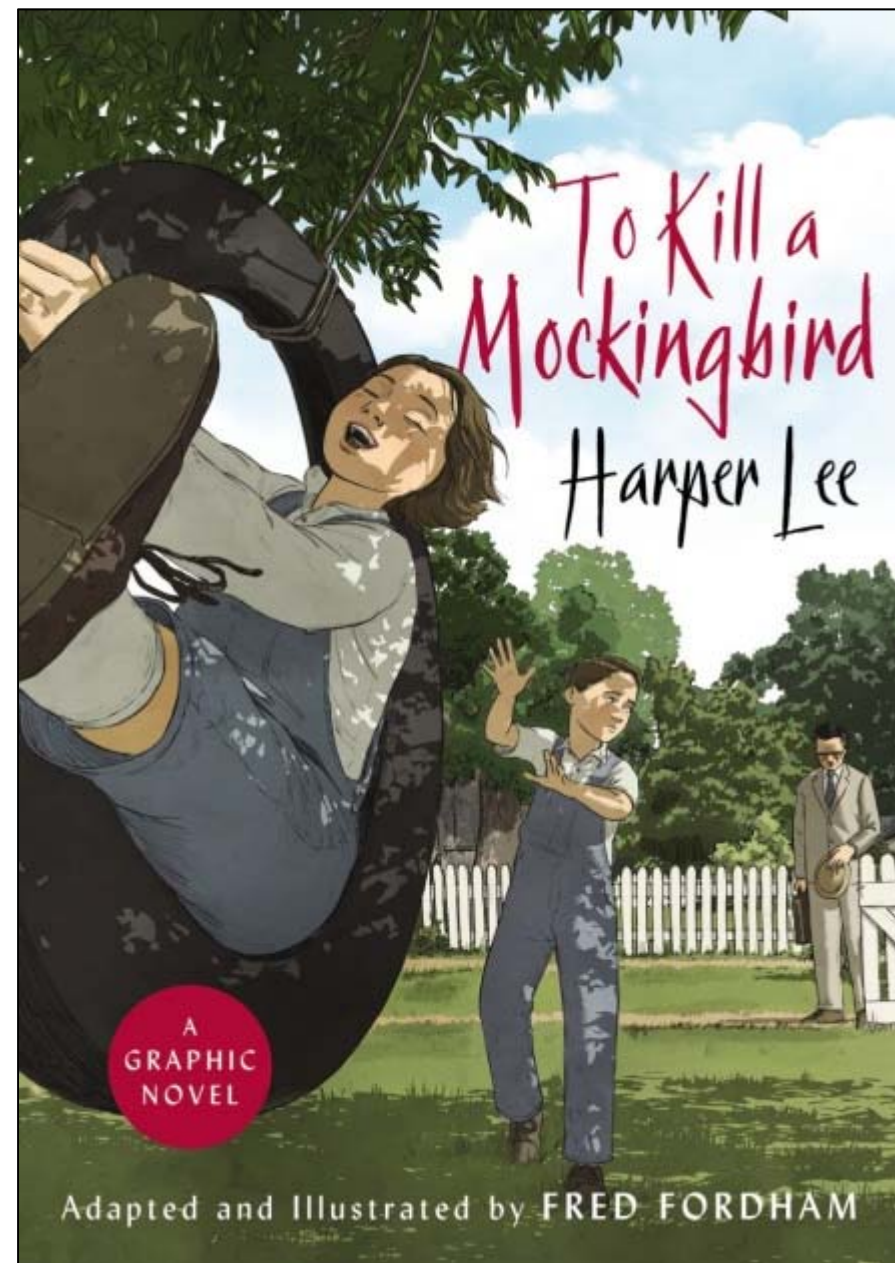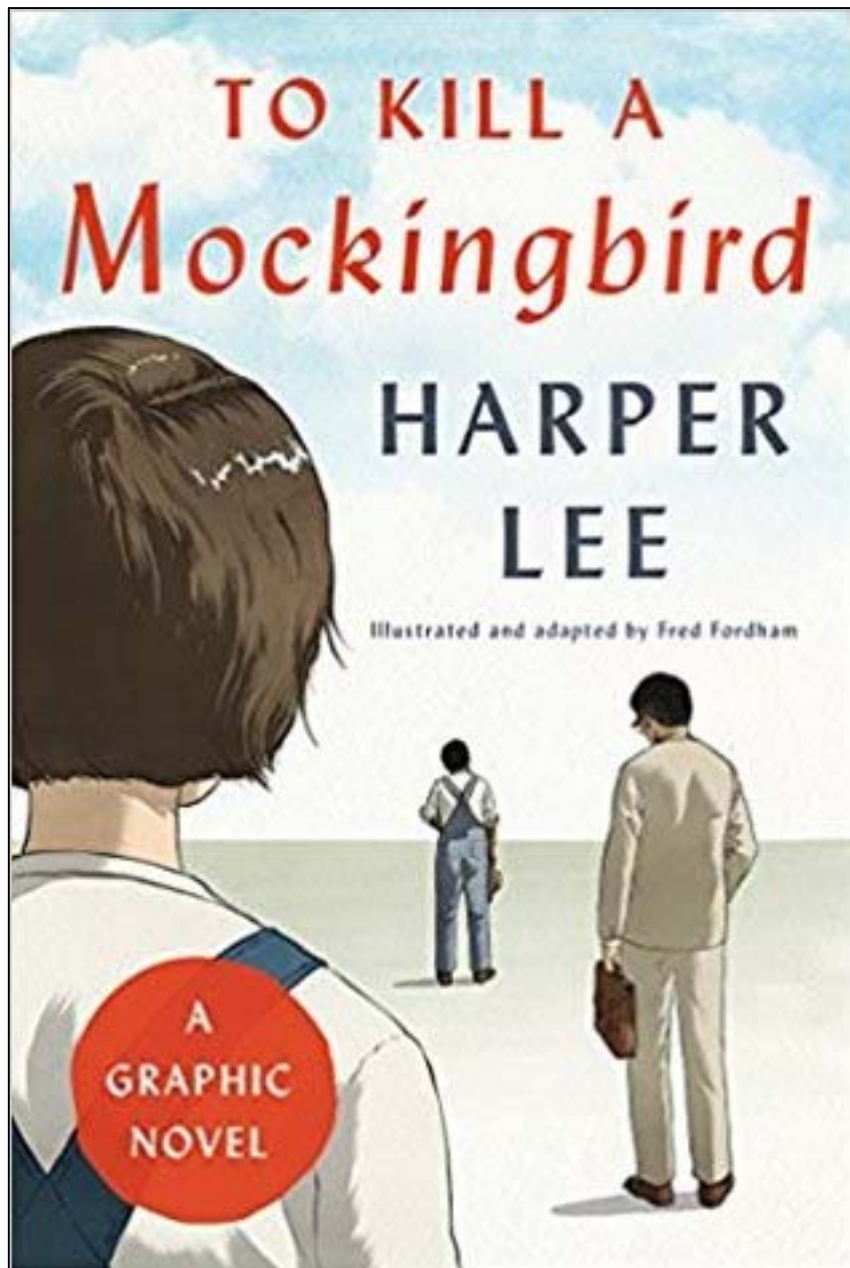
To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee/Fred Fordham – out October 2018

Many modern novels, especially young adult and children's novels, have graphic novel versions
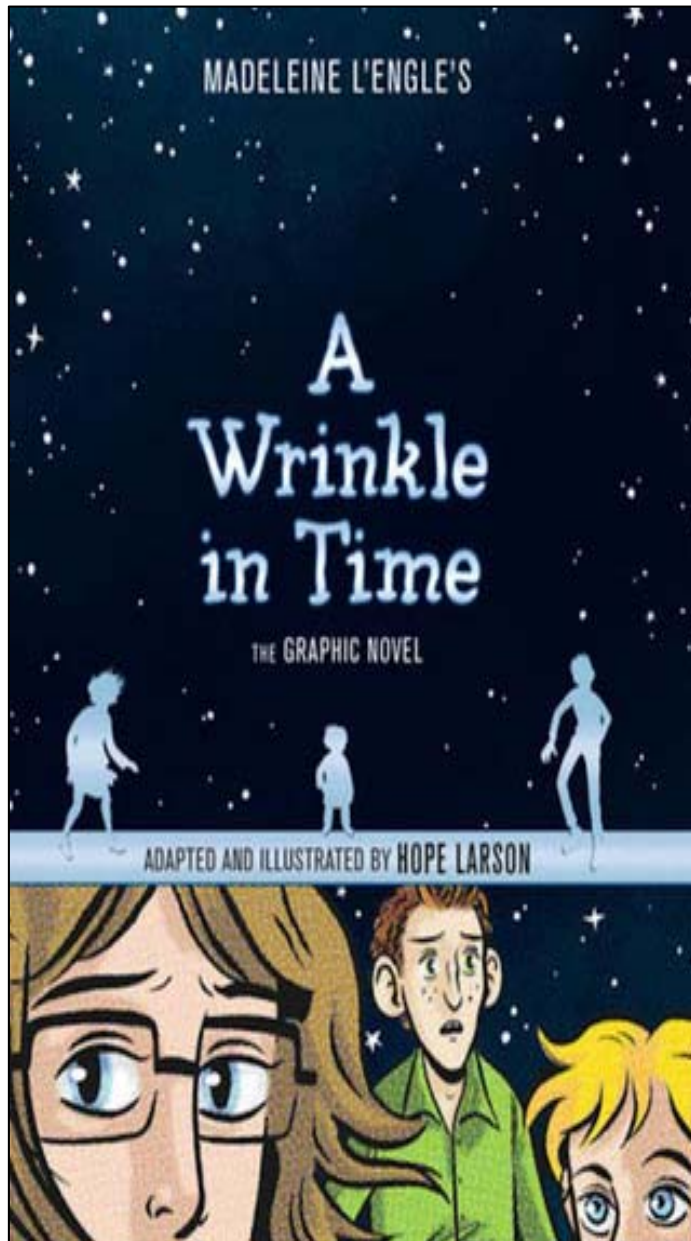
A Wrinkle in Time: The Graphic Novel (2008)
by Hope Larson (Madeleine L'Engle)
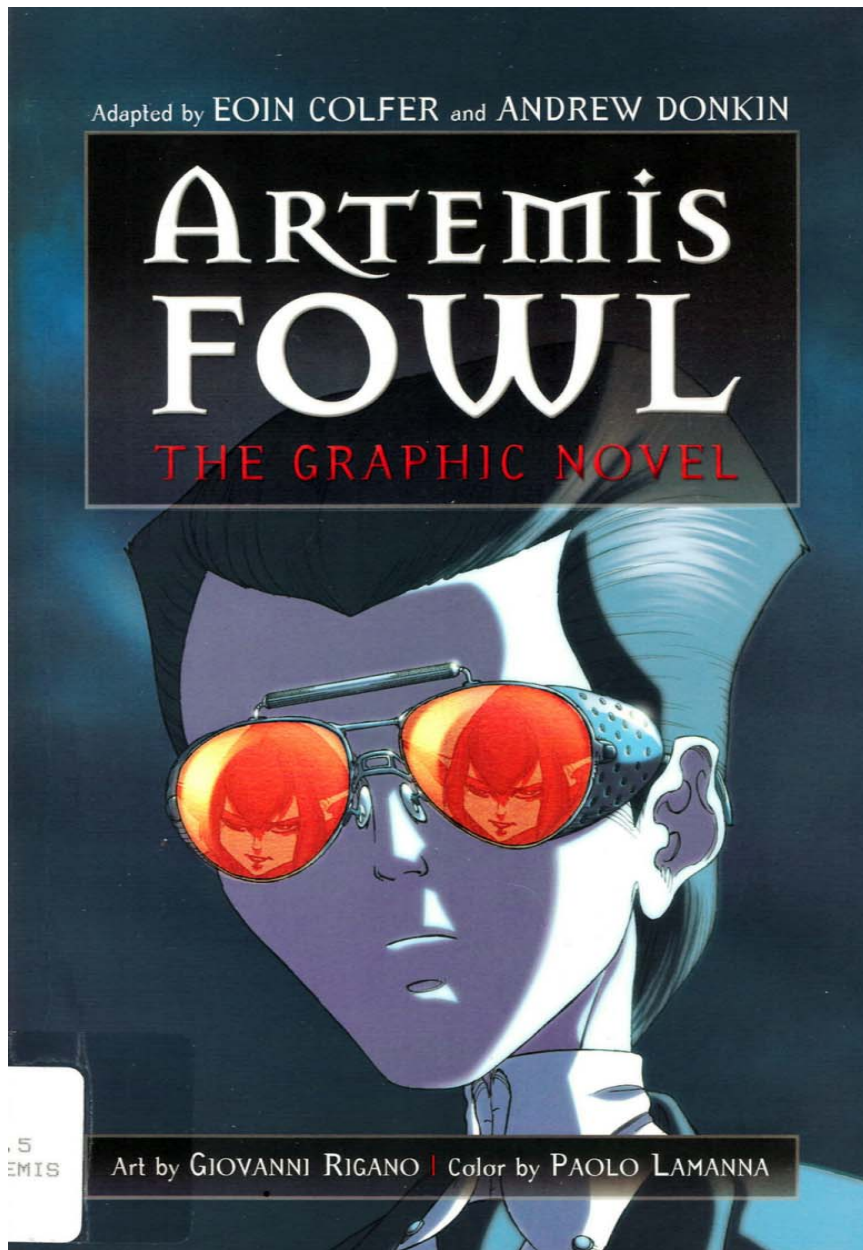
Artemis Fowl: The Graphic Novel (2007)
by Eoin Colfer and Andrew Donkin
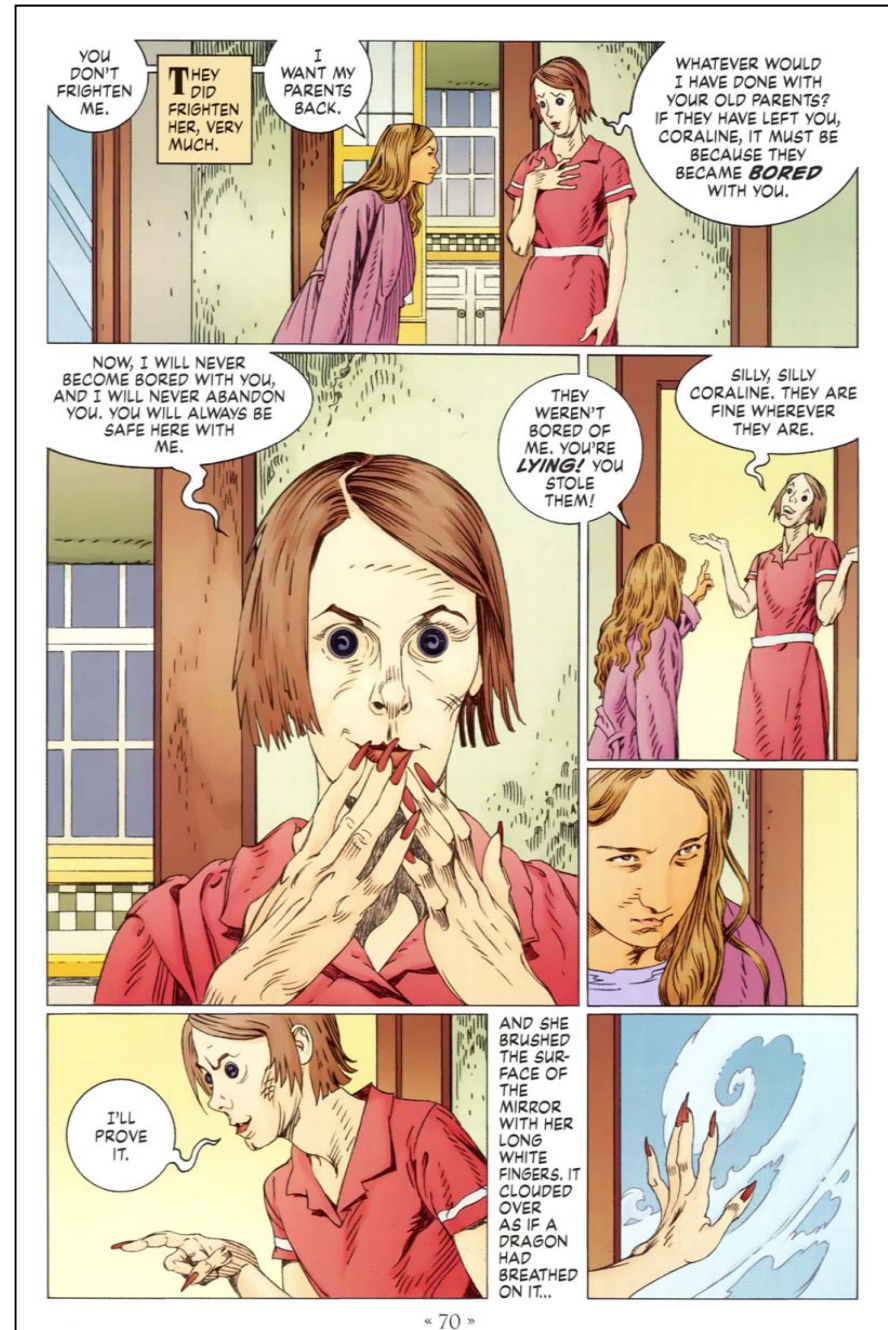
Coraline (2008) by Neil Gaiman (adapted by P. Craig Russell)
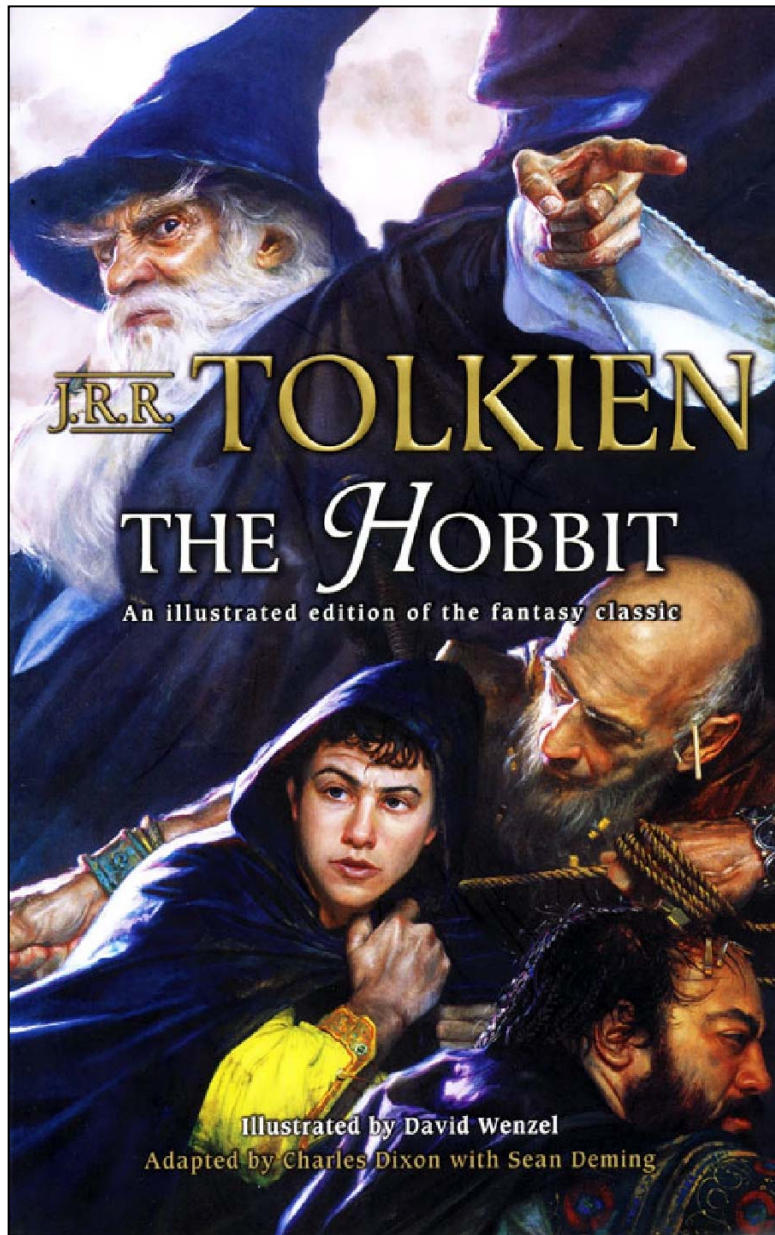
The Hobbit

Language Learning Benefits

- ❑ **Beneficial for low-level L2 readers (Krashen, 1996)**
  - ❑ **Cognitively appropriate without difficulties of language above learners' level**
- ❑ **20 more rare vocabulary items than a typical chapter book (Krashen, 1993).**
- ❑ **Engage reluctant readers (especially adolescent males) - can connect to them in a way they can't with text-only books**
- ❑ **Gateway to literacy - help develop a taste for reading/bridge to other literature (Krashen, 1994, 2004)**
- ❑ **As with novels, offer opportunities for raising intercultural awareness and discussing issues etc.**

General learning benefits

❑ **Provide a reading experience that embraces the nature of today's multimedia culture: improving visual literacy and multimodal literacy**

   ❑ **Modern media integrates text and images in new ways, (TV & film, Internet sites, video games).**

   ❑ **Graphic novels have elements that are similar to everything from picture books to video games to traditional prose.**

The Theory Bit

DCT encourages use of both linguistic and visual elements - coding an input two different ways increases the chance of remembering that item.

Dual Coding Theory
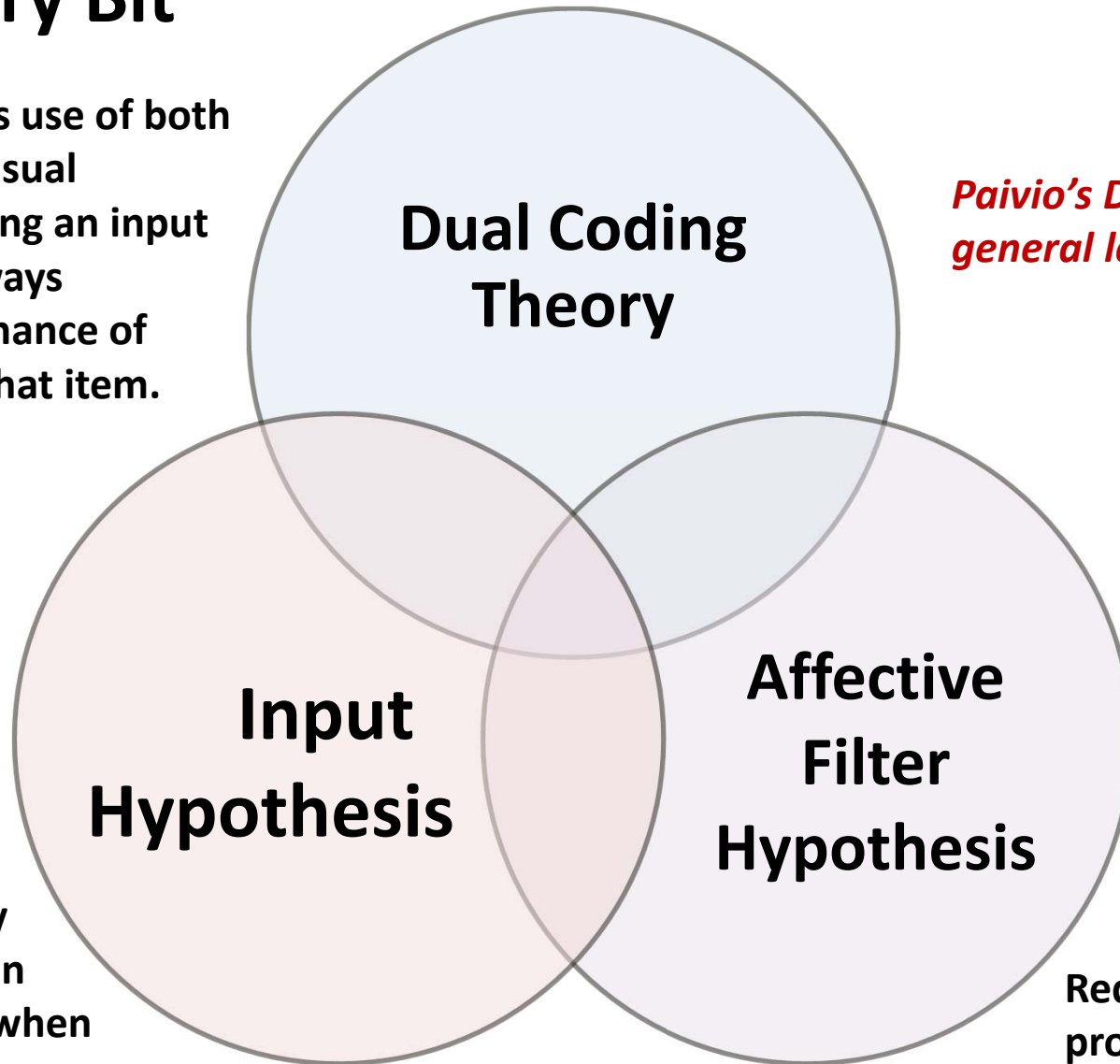
Paivio's DCT: focus on general learning

Krashen: focus on language learning

Input Hypothesis

Affective Filter Hypothesis

Comprehensibility - new language can only be acquired when accompanied by comprehensible input

Reduced anxiety promotes learning and improves engagement with input

SMART Teacher benefits

- ❑ **Synergy – adaptable to curriculum needs and various literacies**
- ❑ **Motivation - different levels of motivation towards reading/reading in English**
- ❑ **Aptitude - different levels of language ability in the same class: some students make rapid progress, others struggle along more slowly.**
- ❑ **Relevance - many graphic novels already have cult status and a large fanfiction following, very often in English, so taps into extra-mural English learning and connects to learners' life-worlds**
- ❑ **Time value - need to increase exposure and value of time available**

Synergies: Cross-curricular opportunities/ potential

English across the curriculum

Content & Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

- ❑ **Graphic novels/format as an aid to content learning: Integration with other materials/texts**

Non-fiction Graphic Novels
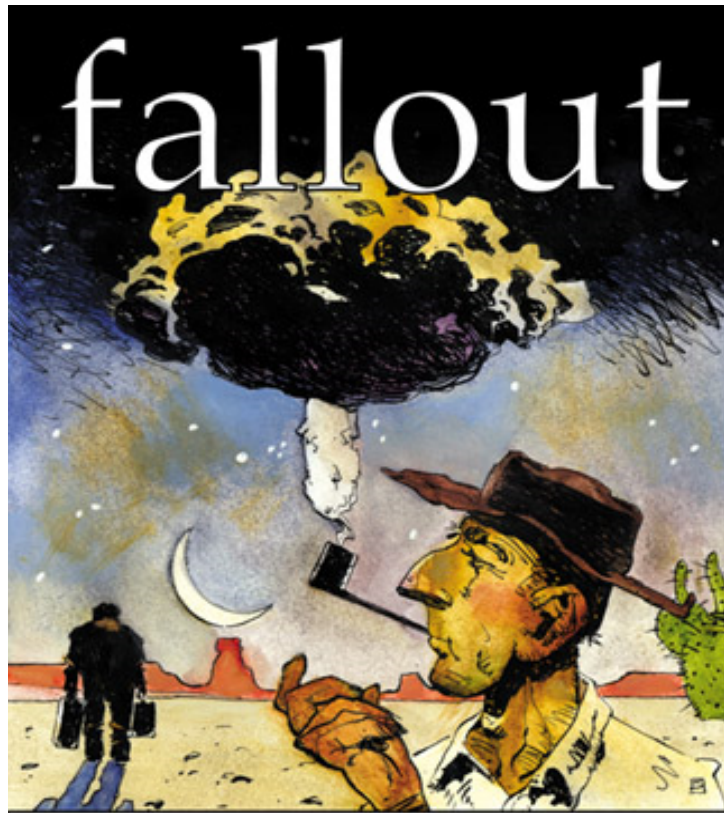
Fallout
(science & politics of first nuclear bomb)
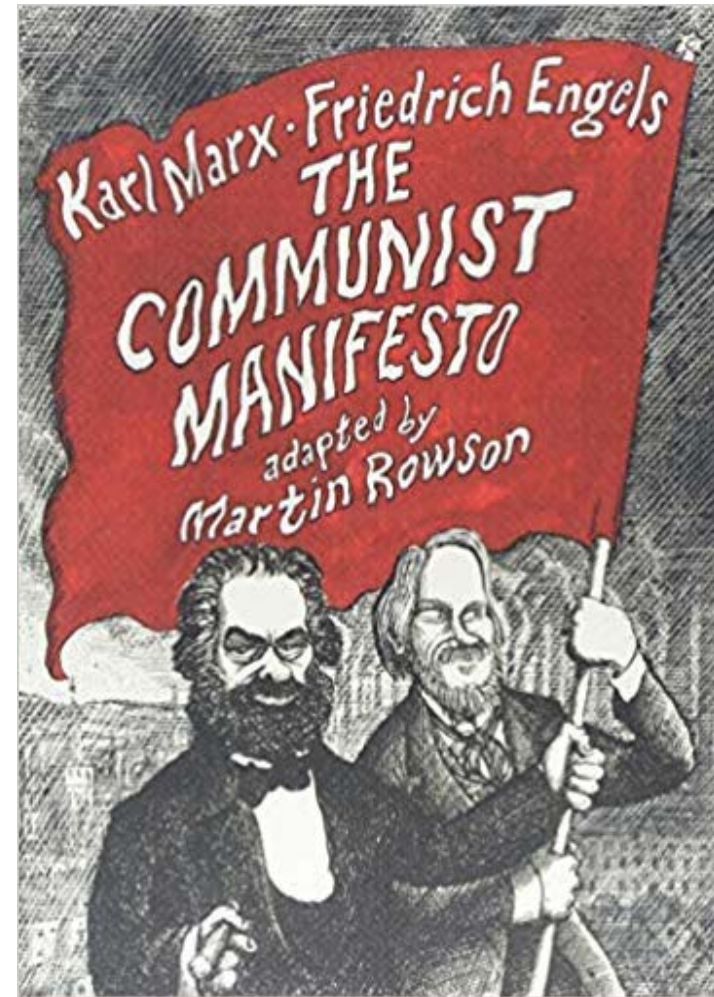
The Communist Manifesto
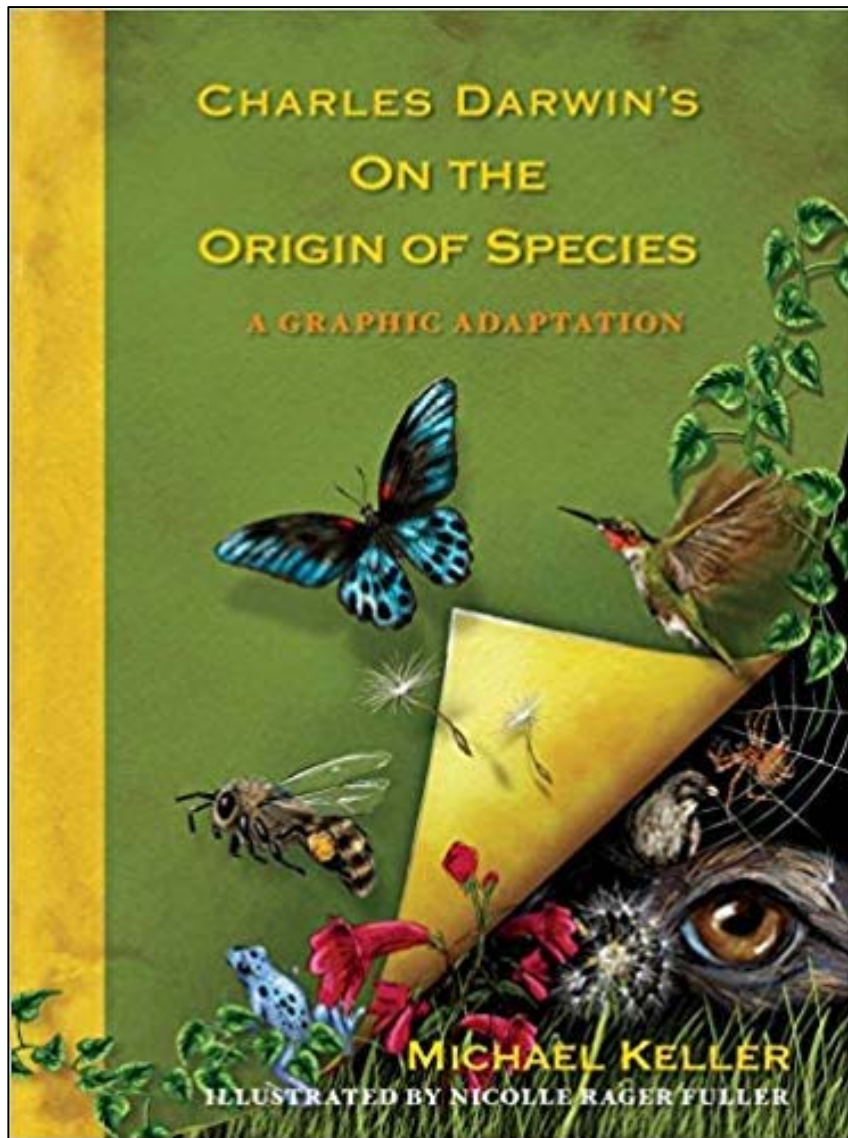
Charles Darwin's on the Origin of species: a graphic adaptation (2009) by Michael Keller and Nicolle Rager Fuller.
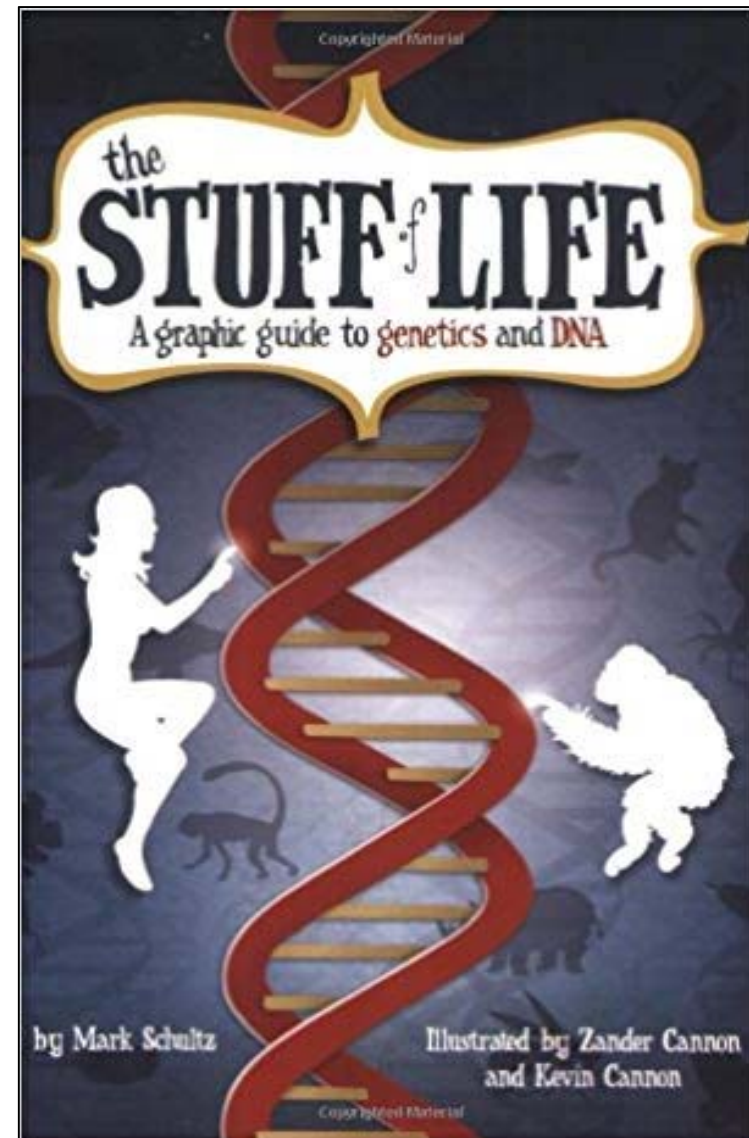
The Stuff of Life: A graphic guide to genetics and DNA (2009) by Mark Shultz, Zander Cannon and Kevin Cannon.

Hybrids and New Formats
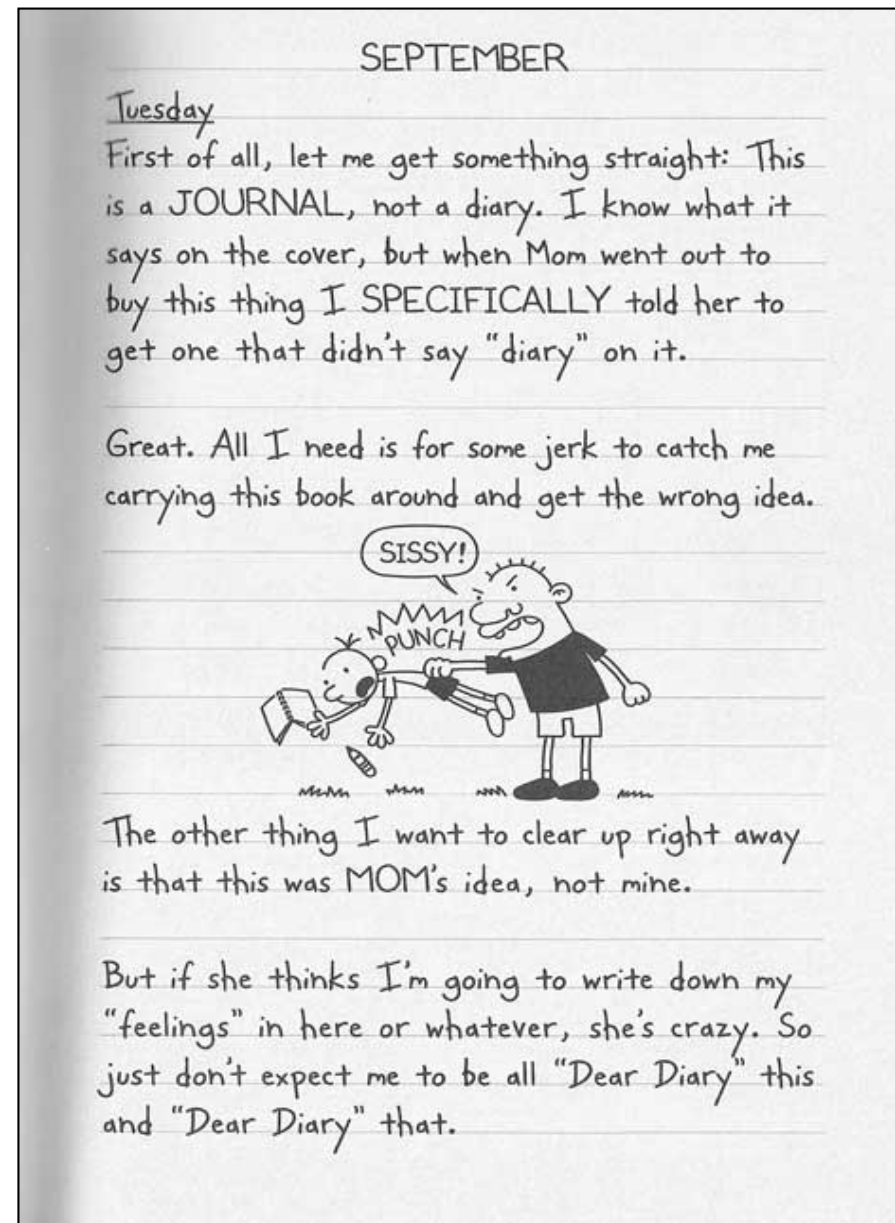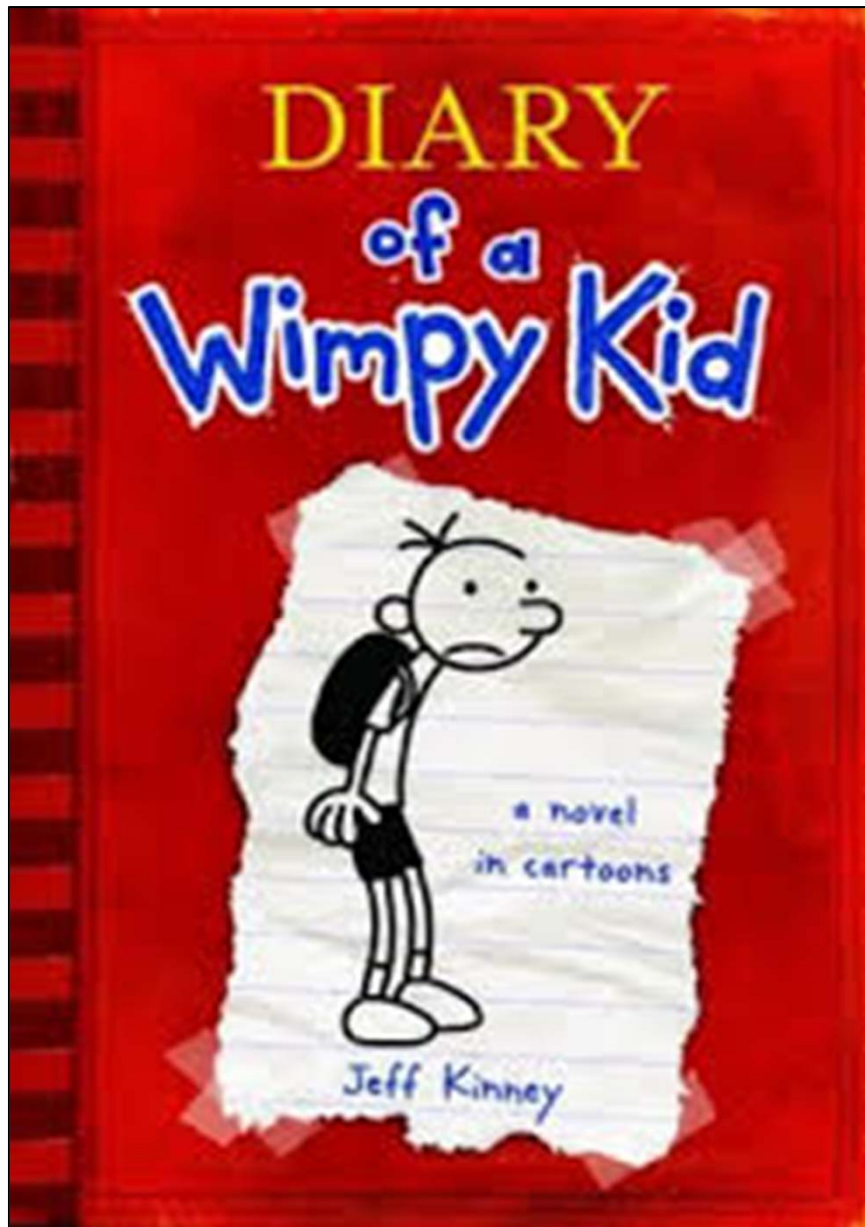
Diary of a Wimpy Kid series (2007 – present)
by Jeff Kinney

The Invention of Hugo Cabret (2007) by Brian Selznick
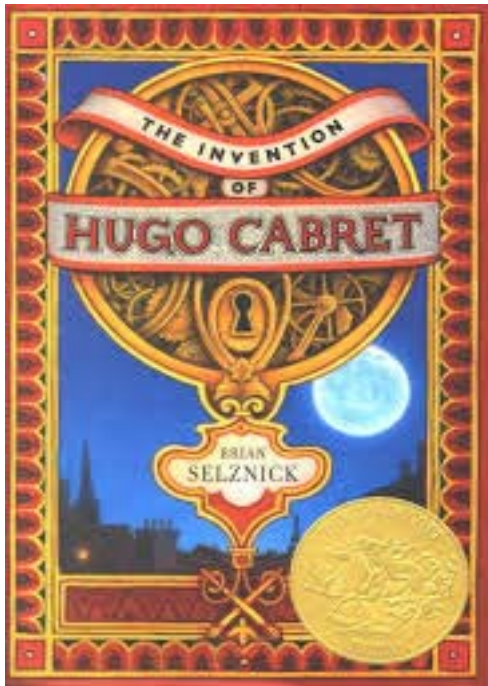
"…not exactly a novel, not quite a picture book, not really a graphic novel, or a flip book or a movie, but a combination of all these things" (Selznick).

Hugo then made sure the gears and levers were moving accurately, and he checked that the time was correct on the miniature dial built into the back of the clockworks. Next he moved through the hidden passageways to the ring of clocks around the train platforms, and then to the backs of the smaller clocks that faced the interior offices, including the Station Inspector's. Looking through the numbers, Hugo could see the Station Inspector's desk, and in the corner of the office, the cage of a small jail cell that sat waiting for any criminals caught in the station. Hugo had seen men and women locked up in there, and a few times he had even seen boys no older than himself in the cell, their eyes red from crying. Eventually, these people were taken away, and Hugo never saw them again.

From the offices, Hugo followed a long, hidden tunnel to the back of the clock opposite the old man's toy booth. He wished he could avoid this clock, but he knew he couldn't skip any of them. Peering out through the numbers, Hugo spied the old man again, alone in his toy booth at the end of the hallway, looking through the pages of Hugo's notebook. Hugo wanted to scream out, but he didn't. He oiled the clock and listened to it carefully. He could tell it wouldn't need to be wound for another day or two, so Hugo kept going, until all twenty-seven clocks in the station had been attended to, just the way his uncle had taught him.

3

Snowfall

THE OLD MAN SLOWLY SHUFFLED to the front of the toy booth. He was beginning to close up shop, lowering the front wooden grate, when Hugo approached him from behind. Hugo knew how to walk silently, but he let his feet fall loudly on the tiles to let the old man know he was there.

"Pick up your feet, boy." The old man glanced over his shoulder. "I hate the sound of shoe heels clicking on the floor." The old man continued to close the grate and lock it.

The halls of the station were nearly empty. Hugo
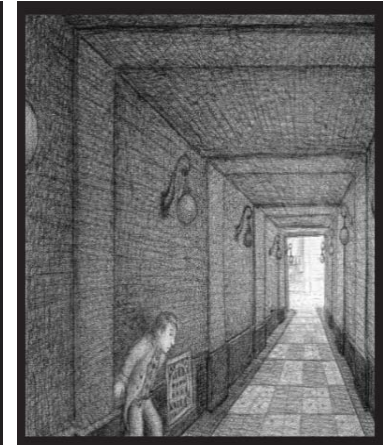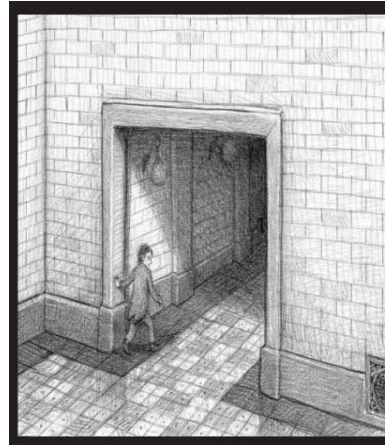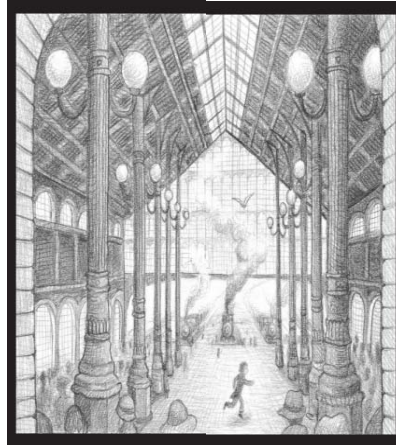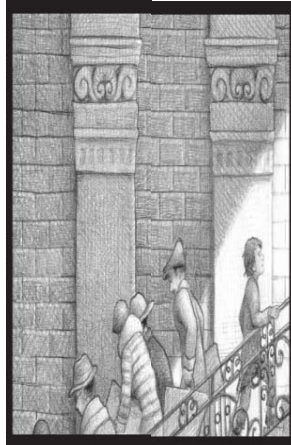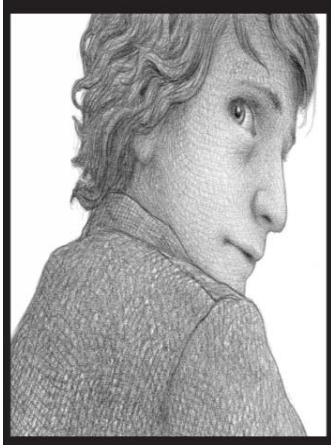
Use graphic novels in tandem with text-only versions - supplement and/or replace

❑ **Combining graphic novel version and text-only version so can focus on key parts of text (for language use, etc and/or thematic discussion) in an extended reading experience**

❑ **Compare the grahic and the textual versions**
   ❑ **working with visual/multimodal literacy showing different ways information can be transmitted and the different effects and emphases inherent in these different media forms**

How different is the reading experience?

CHAPTER ONE

How Nobody Came to the Graveyard

THERE WAS A HAND IN the darkness, and it held a knife.

The knife had a handle of polished black bone, and a blade finer and sharper than any razor. If it sliced you, you might not even know you had been cut, not immediately.
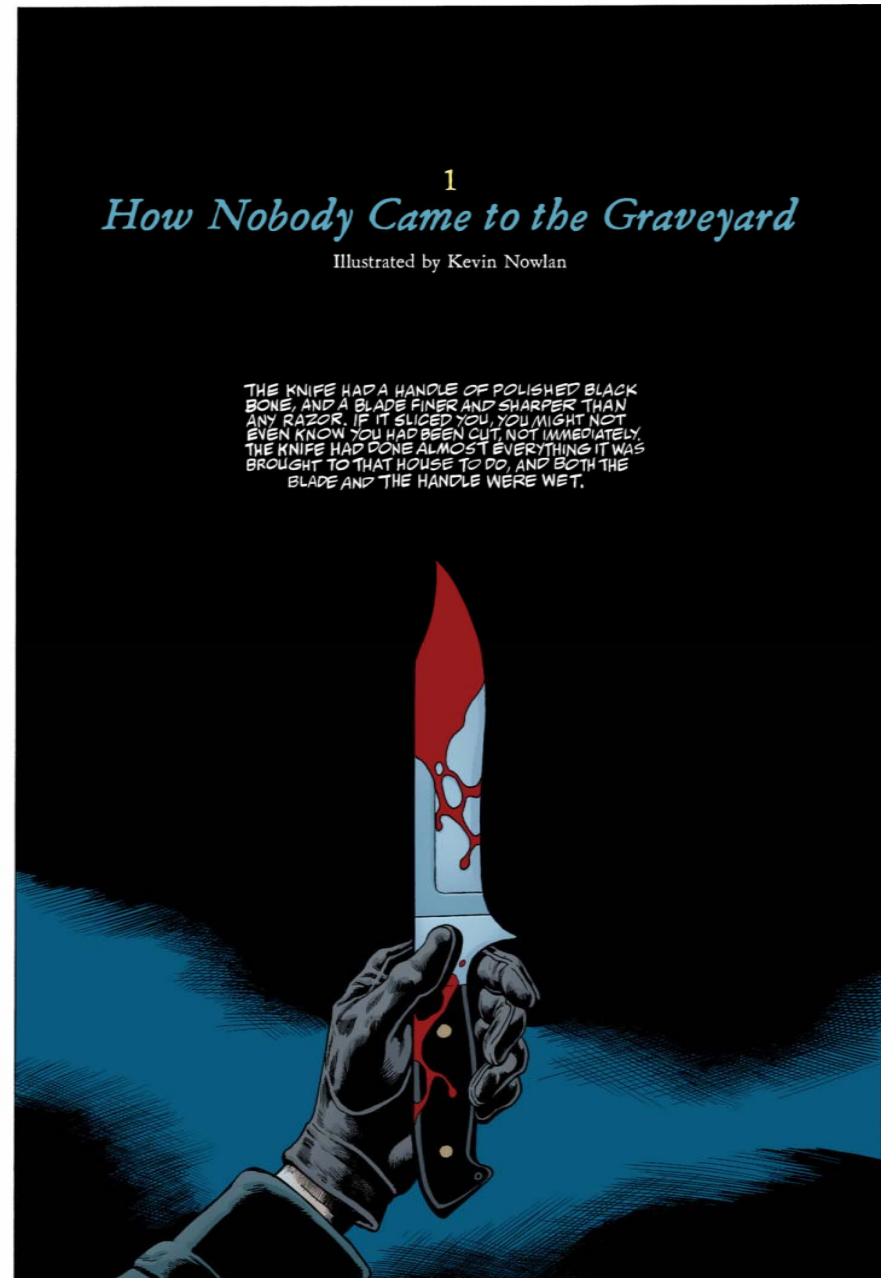
From *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman

The knife had done almost everything it was brought to that house to do, and both the blade and the handle were wet.

The street door was still open, just a little, where the knife and the man who held it had slipped in, and wisps of nighttime mist slithered and twined into the house through the open door.

The man, Jack, paused on the landing. With his left hand he pulled a large white handkerchief from the pocket of his black coat, and with it he wiped off the knife and his gloved right hand which had been holding it; then he put the handkerchief away. The hunt was almost over. He had left the woman in her bed, the man on the bedroom floor, the older child in her brightly colored bedroom, surrounded by toys and half-finished models.
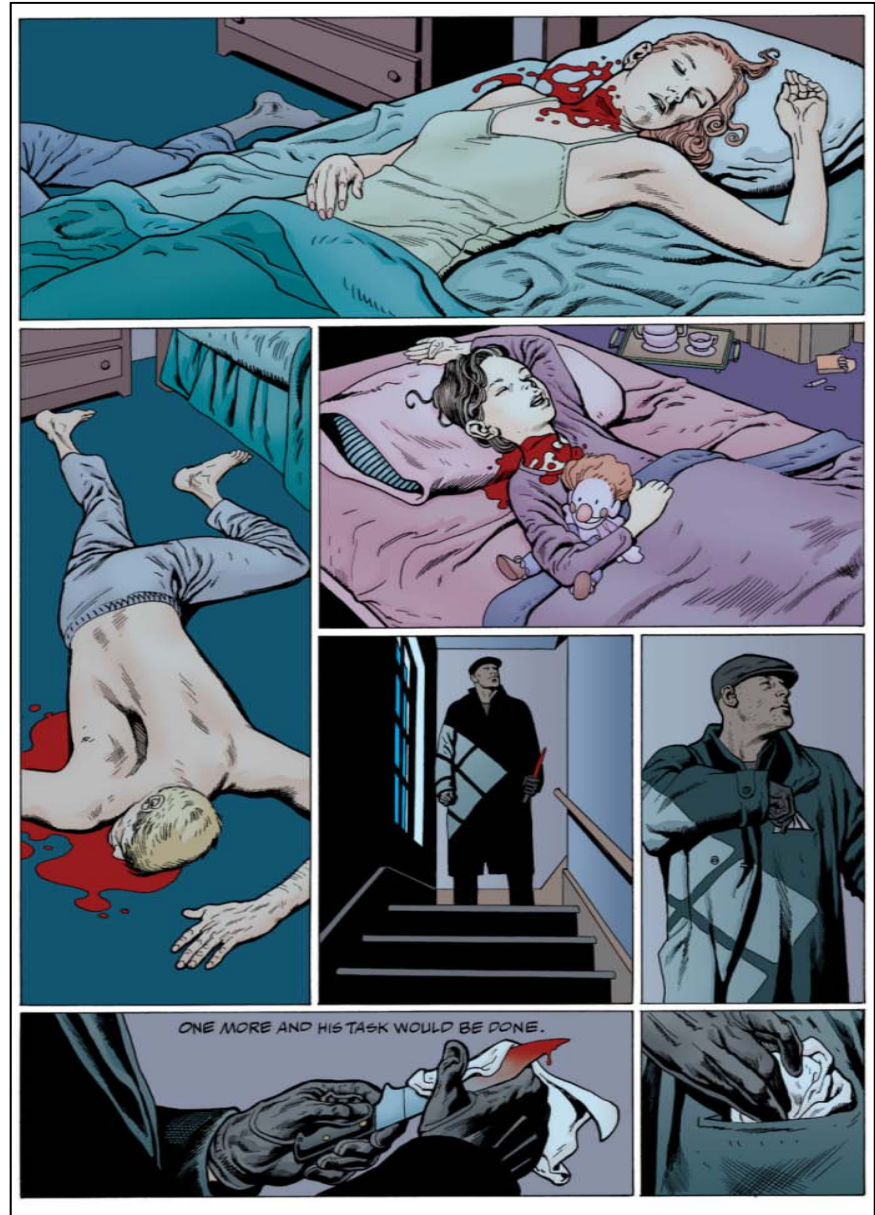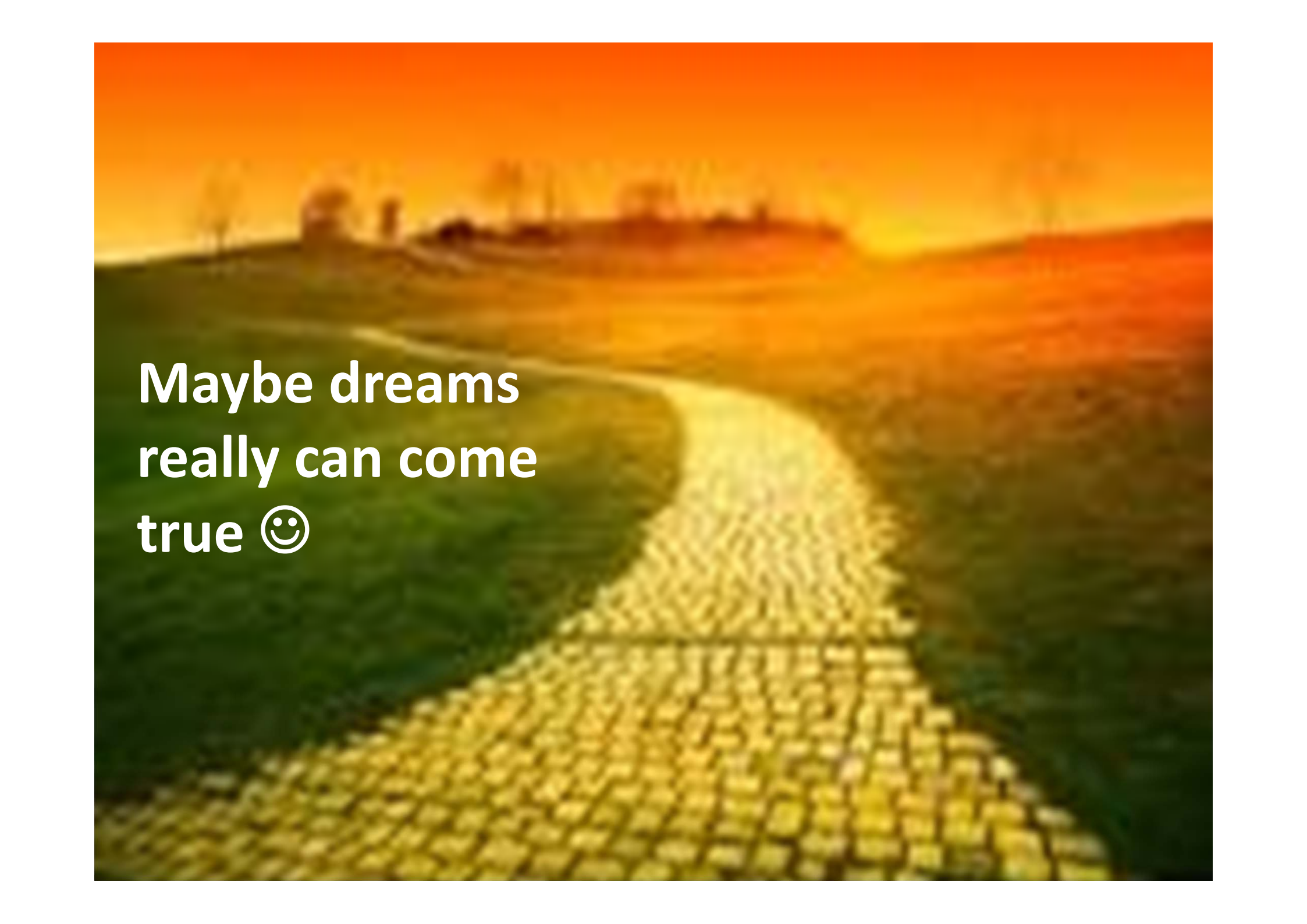
Here, a whole page of text from the book is rendered almost totally pictorially in the graphic novel version

That only left the little one, a baby barely a toddler, to take care of. One more and his task would be done. He flexed his fingers. The man Jack was, above all things, a professional, or so he told himself, and he would not allow himself to smile until the job was completed.

His hair was dark and his eyes were dark and he wore black leather gloves of the thinnest lambskin.

Compare the different information about the same scene conveyed by the different formats

Teachers "should consider embarking down this road to alternative graphic multimodal textual worlds. Most students will welcome any experiments at 'going graphic' in the English language classroom - and, for that matter, other areas of the curriculum, such as history and current affairs" (Templer 2009).

Maybe dreams really can come true ☺

Appendix

Talking about Graphic Novels

Reading Graphic Novels

❑ **Graphic novels are (usually) read left to right, just like traditional texts. Changes to this pattern can be made for effect**

However, there's no right way to read a graphic novel, and many readers go through them differently.

    ❑ **Some readers will look at the images and words together, panel by panel**
    ❑ **Some will read all the text on the page and then go back to look at the pictures**
    ❑ **Some will look at the pictures first and then go back to read the words**

Graphic novels constitute an art form that has become increasingly sophisticated.

Understanding the artist's techniques and style can enrich our appreciation of the work and help us to make wise book selections for learners:

- Terminology such as *panels, gutters, speech bubbles, thought balloons,* and *sound effect etc.* are specific to comics and graphic novels (although they can transfer to other domains)

- It is important that these concepts and terms are explicitly taught to students in order for connections to be made and comprehension to occur.

- Learners should be guided in understanding how the stories are being told.

The Technical Elements of graphic novels:

- Panels

- Gutter

- Word/Speech balloons (thought and speech)

- Narration

- Sound effects

- Motion lines

- Background colours

Caption/Narration
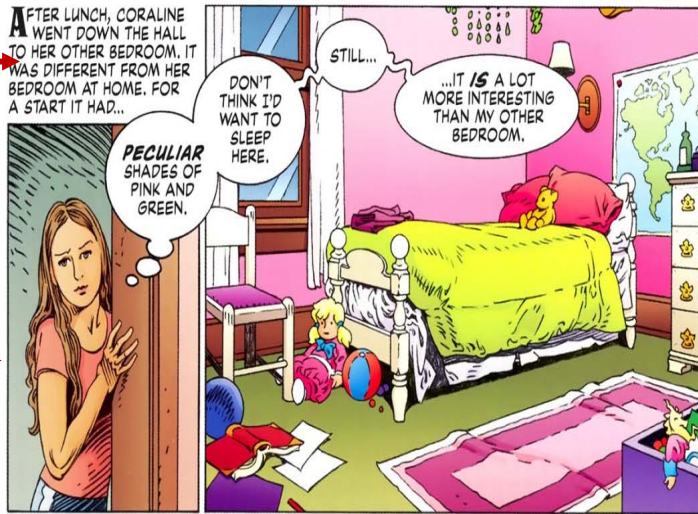
Panel

Gutter

Thought Balloon
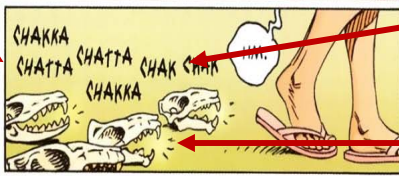
Sound Effect

Motion Lines

Speech Balloon

Bleed

AFTER LUNCH, CORALINE WENT DOWN THE HALL TO HER OTHER BEDROOM. IT WAS DIFFERENT FROM HER BEDROOM AT HOME. FOR A START IT HAD...

PECULIAR SHADES OF PINK AND GREEN.

DON'T THINK I'D WANT TO SLEEP HERE.

STILL...

...IT IS A LOT MORE INTERESTING THAN MY OTHER BEDROOM.

THERE WERE ALL SORTS OF REMARKABLE THINGS IN THERE SHE'D NEVER SEEN BEFORE...

WIND-UP ANGELS.

BOOKS WITH MOVING PICTURES.

CHAKKA CHATTA CHATTA CHAK CHAK CHAKKA

...AND A WHOLE TOY BOX FILLED WITH WONDERFUL TOYS.

THIS IS MORE LIKE IT!

...AND RETURNED, DRAGGING THE KEY BEHIND IT.

From Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

Elements of a Graphic Novel Page Layout

Panels (Frames) - usually squares or rectangles containing a single scene. Can also be "Open" (where one or more, or all, of the panel's sides are open to show dramatic effect), or "Splash" (where one panel takes up the space of several panels in order to introduce or highlight an action or character)

Bleed - images spreading beyond the panel's edges

Gutters - space between panels

> Consider the size and shape of panels. How do they fit together? Do they interrupt or overlap each other? Are there any images without any panel borders? The gutters indicate a change (in how time is passing, in where you are, or in whom you're looking at or talking to). What do the gutters add to how you understand the story? What effect does an image going outside the panel border have?

Dialogue Balloons - show communication between or among characters. Read left to right and/or top to bottom as appropriate.

Thought Balloons – show a character's thoughts

Captions - contain information about a scene or character, act as narrator

> Think about how the dialogue and narration appears. Are the words different colours? Written with thicker or thinner lines? How would that sound? What about the silence when nobody is speaking? Is there any narration or description (words in boxes, but not spoken)? How is that important to how the story unfolds?

Sound Effects - visual sound clues e.g. Wham!

Motion Lines- indicate how characters or objects are moving

> Sounds set the scene, signal something off scene, and add another layer to each story. What sounds do you see? How are the sounds written—does how they're written reflect what it actually sounds like? What gestures do you see? How do motion lines create an illusion of movement? How do they add to the visual effect of a static image?

Art – design features, symbolism, fonts and lettering style, perspective

> Each creator has their own style. Is the art realistic or cartoonish? What can you tell from the expressions on faces, the gestures and movement of characters, the background and its details? If there is colour, how does that change over the course of a page or a chapter?

Panels

Perspective

The shape of the panel and the use of perspective within it can be manipulated to produce various emotional states in the viewer.

Panel A

In this example the oblong shape of the panel combined with the 'worm's eye' view from below evokes a sense of threat. The reader feels confined and dominated by the monster.
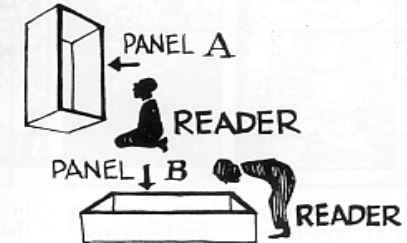
The same scene but viewed from 'a bird's eye' view from above and set in a wide panel stimulates the sense of detachment. The reader has plenty of elbow room and above it all. There is little threat or involvement.

Panel B.
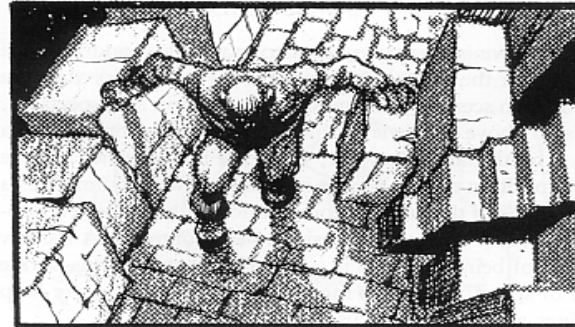
Time

The passage of time can be represented in how panels change (e.g. lots of small panels in a row, lot of large panels in succession). Time, in how fast or slowly it seems to pass, is represented in how panels change.

Many elements of graphic novels are similar to what you see in films.

Close-up

Images that are shown in a large view. Frequently, close-ups focus on a character's face, but they can be used to highlight anything.

Extreme Close-up

Images that are shown in very large view, often focusing on a small portion of a larger object or character.The image in a comic is drawn as if the artist as zoomed in very closely on the object or character

Longshot Images that show objects fully, from top to bottom.

When a longshot focuses on characters, the panel shows the characters from head to toe. Readers can see the character's full body.

Extreme Longshot

Images that show objects or characters in very small scale. Frequently, extreme longshots are used to show a full landscape or a crowd of characters.

Reverse Images that are in reverse position from the previous panel.

This technique is often used to show changes speaker or point of view.

The effects of different Panel-to-Panel Transitions

❑ **Moment-to-Moment**

Very little has changed in the panels, very little information needs to be filled in, we don't need to use our imaginations very much.

❑ **Action-to-Action (Most common type of transition)**

The change sticks to one subject and one action in progress, we see step by step what is happening to one person. We have to use our imaginations a little, but still not very much.

❑ **Subject-to-Subject (2nd most common type of transition)**

We stay with one scene or idea, but we switch to different subjects, going from one person to another. We have to use our imaginations more now. We have to fill in what's happening between the two subjects

❑ **Scene-to-Scene (3rd most common transition)**

A lot of time or space is crossed. We have to use our imaginations quite a bit to fill in huge gaps in the story.

❑ **Aspect-to-Aspect**

We stay in the same scene, but we see a different aspect of it, the change is in what were looking at within the scene. E.g., we may get a close-up on something in the scene.

❑ **Non-Sequitur**

There's no logical relationship between the images at all, the panels don't go together, but we still try to connect them. Our imaginations still try to make a story out of the images and figure out what happens in the gutter.

The Gutter: the white "space" between the panels.

❑ The gutter is one of the most important elements in graphic novel design. Action happens "in the gutters," or in the spaces between each panel as well as inside the panels.

❑ It is the space where the reader's imagination can create what is not shown. The gutters are where the action and movement of the story occur in the mind - the reader uses his/her imagination to figure out what happens in that white space.

❑ Our imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea. Readers connect the images in the panels to construct a continuous story. McCloud calls this "closure" - when the mind pieces together cues or evidence given to create a complete image or story.

"Its all in the eyes. Within these panels, we can only convey information visually. But between panels, none of our senses are required at all. Which is why all of our senses are engaged." (McCloud p. 89)

A graphic novel creator can be like a film director in deciding what each panel and page shows.

- ❑ What are you seeing in each panel?
- ❑ What are you not seeing?
- ❑ What about the "camera angle"?
- ❑ What about the distance from the subject of the panel?
- ❑ Are there any sound effects?
- ❑ Why did the creator make those choices?

In prose works, the reader finds details in the textual descriptions. In graphic novels, details are in the images in the background, character design, clothing, and objects. What does each detail tell you about the characters? The place? The world?

- ❑ Think about what is learned from just the words. Then think about what is learned from just the images. Are they telling you the same information, or are they giving you different information? How do they work together?
- ❑ If you take out any one of these, what do you lose? Can you still understand the story?

For creating comics/graphic novels of your own (teachers or learners)

http://www.toondoo.com/

Registration (free) required

References/Further Reading

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