

UNDERSTANDING GRAPHIC NOVELS

PART ONE: CHARACTERISTICS OF GRAPHIC NOVELS

Use this guide to explore characteristics of graphic novels. Examine the graphic novels provided for you. Use separate pieces of paper to write and draw your numbered responses under each heading. Identify title, version, and page number when you use examples from books.

SEQUENTIAL ART

A graphic novel conveys information or tells a story using a series of frames or panels of pictures that show action, with help from narrative text and characters' words or thoughts.

1. What shape is usually used for frames or panels?
2. What other shapes are used? Could any shape be used?
3. Why might a graphic novel illustrator use different shapes? Give examples from the books.
4. How are panels arranged? In what order should you read them?
5. Are all panels the same size? How is variation in size used?
6. Find a graphic novel that uses interesting angles or perspectives to suggest something about the action. Describe it.
7. Find a graphic novel that uses facial expressions to tell something about the character or the action. Describe it.
8. Find a graphic novel that uses lines, shapes, or symbols to show action or emotion. Tell what you think they mean.

COLOR

Some graphic novels use only one or two colors. Others use full color throughout the book. Still others use color changes to show scene or mood changes.

1. Find a graphic novel done mostly in one color. Why do you think the author/illustrator made this choice?
2. Look through several graphic novels that use full color throughout. How does this choice help tell the story?
3. Find a graphic novel that uses color in interesting ways. Describe the use of color and explain what you think it adds to the book.

TEXT

Words appear in graphic novels as narration, directed at the reader, or as the words or thoughts of characters. Some graphic novels use little or no narration.

1. Narrative text is usually shown in a rectangle below or in the frame. Look for narration shown in other ways. Describe one of them.
2. How are spoken words of characters usually shown? How can you tell whose words they are? How do "speech balloons" vary? Describe two ways.
3. How are thoughts of characters usually shown? How can you tell whose thoughts they are? How do "thought bubbles" vary? Describe two ways.
4. Find and describe two examples of "sound effects" in a graphic novel—letters or words chosen to convey the sound of the action in the frame.
5. Different fonts can signal emotion, scene changes, or shifting characters. Find two examples and describe them.

UNDERSTANDING GRAPHIC NOVELS

TEACHER NOTES

SEQUENTIAL ART

Good overall examples: *There's a Princess in the Palace*, *Atomic Ace (He's Just My Dad)*, *Joey Fly...*, *Legends of Zita the Space Girl*, titles in the *History's Kid Heroes* series, *Hereville*, *To Dance...*

A graphic novel conveys information or tells a story using a series of frames or panels of pictures that show action, with help from narrative text and characters' words or thoughts.

1. What shape is usually used for frames or panels? (*Rectangles*)
2. What other shapes are used? Could any shape be used? (*Many shapes! Probably any simple geometric shape*)
3. Why might a graphic novel illustrator use different shapes? Give examples from the books.
4. How are panels arranged? In what order should you read them? (*Left to right, top to bottom, with variations; some Manga styles read right to left*)
5. Are all panels the same size? How is variation in size used?
6. Find a graphic novel that uses interesting angles or perspectives to suggest something about the action. Describe it. (*Legends of Zita the Space Girl, Hereville*)
7. Find a graphic novel that uses facial expressions to tell something about the character or the action. Describe it. (*Joey Fly, Private Eye*)
8. Find a graphic novel that uses lines, shapes, or symbols to show action or emotion. Tell what you think they mean. (*Legends of Zita the Space Girl, Joey Fly...*)

COLOR

Good overall examples: *Joey Fly, Private Eye*; *The Strongest Man in the World*; *The Storm in the Barn*; *To Dance...*; *The Meeting*; *Hereville*; *Gandhi: His Life...*

Some graphic novels use only one or two colors. Others use full color throughout the book. Still others use color changes to show scene or mood changes.

PART ONE: CHARACTERISTICS OF GRAPHIC NOVELS TEACHER NOTES

1. Find a graphic novel done mostly in one color. Why do you think the author/illustrator made this choice? (*Lunch Lady* or *Babymouse* series titles)
2. Look through several graphic novels that use full color throughout. How does this choice help tell the story?
3. Find a graphic novel that uses color in interesting ways. Describe the use of color and explain what you think it adds to the book. (*Joey Fly...* uses color to signal setting changes; *The Storm in the Barn* evokes *Dust Bowl* grime and griminess with color)

TEXT

Good overall examples: *The Storm in the Barn*; *Atomic Ace (He's Just My Dad)*; *Into the Volcano*; *Legends of Zita the Space Girl*; *Joey Fly, Private Eye*; *Binky the Space Cat*

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UNDERSTANDING GRAPHIC NOVELS

PART TWO: COMPARING GRAPHIC NOVELS TO PROSE

Choose one prose book and one graphic novel that tell the same story. Use separate pieces of paper to write your numbered responses under each heading. Identify title, version, and page number when giving specific examples.

LENGTH/USE OF PAGE SPACE

Graphic novels generally convey information or tell a story in a more compact way—fewer pages—than a traditional prose book

1. How many pages does each book have? (Do a rough count and estimate if pages are not numbered in your graphic novel.) Are the pages close to the same size?
2. Choose a chapter or scene from your prose book. How many pages long is it? Identify the same content (chapter or scene) in your graphic novel. How long is it?
3. If your prose book has illustrations, how much of the total page space do illustrations take up in the book? In the scene or chapter you compared?

CHARACTERS

Graphic novels and prose use different strategies to introduce, describe, and help readers relate to characters.

1. Read the first chapter or scene of your graphic novel, where you meet the main character. Make two columns on your paper. In the first column, describe the main character as completely as you can. What does he or she look like? How old is he or she? How does the character act? What do you know about his or her personality? Life experience? Relationships? Opinions?
2. Read the same chapter or scene in your prose book. In the second column, describe the main character and answer the same questions, using details from this book.
3. Compare the two descriptions. How are they similar? How are they different? Which gives more detail? Which lets you understand the character better?

PLOT

Graphic novels and prose use different strategies to convey and move along the action in the story.

1. Choose a chapter or scene from the middle of the graphic novel. Make two columns on your paper. In the first column, describe the action. What happens? What questions, tensions, or conflicts unfold? How do characters relate to each other?
2. Read the same chapter or scene in your prose book. In the second column, describe the action and answer the same questions, using details from this book.
3. Compare the descriptions. How are they similar? How are they different? Which gives more detail? Which makes you feel the pace and follow the action better?

SETTING & TONE

Graphic novels convey settings and tone differently. They describe and suggest how places and people feel and influence the action differently.

1. Read the last chapter or scene of your graphic novel, in which conflict is resolved and the action brought to a close. Make two columns on your paper. In the first column, describe the setting as completely as you can. Where does the action take place? How does the setting affect the action? Describe the emotional tone of the chapter. What feeling does it leave you with?
2. Read the same chapter or scene in your prose book. In the second column, describe the setting and tone, and answer the same questions, using details from this book.
3. Compare the descriptions. How are they similar? How are they different? Which gives you a stronger sense of place? Which leaves you with a stronger sense of the book's emotional tone?

CONCLUSION: Write a brief essay comparing the different strategies and strengths of prose and graphic novels. Include your thoughts about specific stories, or kinds of stories, that might best be told in prose or as graphic novels.

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TEACHER NOTES

Try this with prose and graphic novel versions of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, or with Graphic Classics series titles and their prose originals for upper grades, or titles in the History's Kid Heroes series, from Graphic Universe, and their related early chapter books by the same authors, from Carolrhoda Books, for younger students.

PART TWO: COMPARING GRAPHIC NOVELS TO PROSE TEACHER NOTES

LENGTH/USE OF PAGE SPACE

Graphic novels generally convey information or tell a story in a more compact way—in fewer pages—than a traditional prose book.

1. How many pages does each book have? (Do a rough count and estimate if pages are not numbered in your graphic novel.) Are the pages close to the same size?
2. Choose a chapter or scene from your prose book. How many pages long is it? Identify the same content (chapter or scene) in your graphic novel. How long is it?
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CONCLUSION: Write a brief essay comparing the different strategies and strengths of prose and graphic novels. Include your thoughts about specific stories, or kinds of stories, that might best be told in prose or as graphic novels.



Season Slips



Name: _____

I read about spring because: _____

Title and author of spring book: _____

Here is one thing I learned about the spring season: _____

SPRING

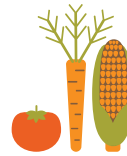
Name: _____

I read about summer because: _____

Title and author of summer book: _____

Here is one thing I learned about the summer season: _____

SUMMER



Name: _____

I read about fall because: _____

Title and author of fall book: _____

Here is one thing I learned about the fall season: _____

FALL

Name: _____

I read about winter because: _____

Title and author of winter book: _____

Here is one thing I learned about the winter season: _____

WINTER