

# FROM MICKEY TO MAUS:

## DECONSTRUCTING AND RECONSTRUCTING COMICS FOR USE IN THE CLASSROOM

a workshop for SmART Schools, Everett, MA, 2014

designed & facilitated by Catherine Davis Hayes

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- To consider the use of sequential art, comics, and graphic novels as resources for range, quality, and complexity of text types in the classroom curriculum.
- To explore the structures of sequential art as a means for students to demonstrate understanding of academic content across the curriculum.
- To demystify the process and make some sequential art.

### **TEXTS AND IMAGES:**

- *The Arrival*, by Shaun Tan
- *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman
- *Persepolis, The story of a Childhood*, by Marjane Satrapi
- *Understanding Comics*, by Scott McCloud
- *The Dark Knight*, by Frank Miller
- *The Complete Frank Miller Spiderman*, Marvel Comics

### **INSPIRATION:**

“Always be yourself. Unless you can be Batman....then, always be Batman.” -anonymous

### **WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES:**

#### **ACTIVITY 1:**

#### **SHAPE → OBJECT → ICON**

Participants build a foundation for understanding the structures of comics and sequential art. Working in small groups they create meaning from simple compositions of shape and line then transform that meaning as shape becomes object then icon as layers of visual information are added.

30-45 minutes

#### **Standards:**

- Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework: Standards 2.10&11, 3.5&7, 4.4&5  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/arts/1099.pdf>
- CCSS Writing Standards Grade 6: Standard 3  
<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/6/3>

#### **Enduring Understandings:**

- By stripping down an image to its essential “meaning”, one can *amplify* that meaning.
- By de-emphasizing the appearance of the physical world in favor of the idea of form, the cartoon places itself in the world of concepts.

#### **Essential Questions:**

- How does an image convey meaning?
- Can we respond to a cartoon as much or more than a realistic image?

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### Student Work/ Evidence of Understanding

Participants break into groups of 3 or 4

1. For Image #1 groups respond to the question “What do you see?” and then, “What could this represent?”
2. For Image #2 groups respond to the question “What do you see?” and then, “What could this represent?”
3. For Image #3 groups respond to “What could THIS represent?” Reflect on what changed and how it changed the meaning of the image.
4. For Image #3 flip the image over.... “Now what could this represent?” Again, what changed, how did it change the meaning of the image and why?
5. On image #4 add simple details to create more specific meaning.
6. Take the new image from step 5 and “drop” it into the 3 box comic organizer (choose any box). Complete a 3 box sequential story by filling in the remaining 2 boxes with either “What happens before”, or “what happens after” changes to the original image.

**Final Exhibition:** Share results with other groups and debrief. Were there meanings that were the same for each group? Different? Were there universal icons created? Original icons?

### Short break & reading from *Understanding Comics*, by Scott McCloud, chapter 2

10-15 min

### **ACTIVITY 2:**

#### **THE ARRIVAL:**

#### **SEQUENTIAL ART AS PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCE MATERIAL**

Participants dig in to uncover and compare a fictional wordless graphic novel with two autobiographical (& award winning) graphic novels as potential resources for curriculum connections.

30-45 minutes

#### **Standards:**

- CCSS Reading Standards for Literacy in History/ Social Studies: Grades 6-8: 1, 2, 5, 6, & 8  
<http://www.corestandards.org/ela-literacy/rh/6-8>
- CCSS Reading Standards for Literature: Grades 5: 1,2,4,5,6,7,9,&10...Grade 6: 1, 2, 9, 6, & 10:  
<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/5>  
<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/WHST/6-8>
- Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework: Standard 5.6:  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/arts/1099.pdf>

#### **Enduring Understandings:**

History is built on the accounts of endless “Arrivals”.

#### **Essential Questions:**

Why would you give up all that you have to venture to an unknown place?

Why might you sacrifice anything to hold on to all you treasure?

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### Student Work/ Evidence Understanding:

Participants break into groups of 3 or 4

- Take 5-10 minutes to study the images and then answer the following prompts for the panels from *The Arrival*, by Shaun Tan: “What do you see?” “What could this represent?” What is the evidence for your interpretations? Be very specific! How would you summarize these images? Create an iconic symbol or image to represent your summary.
- Groups share their findings and attempt to reconstruct the bigger story. What is the order of events?... Use your group pictures to create a sequential summary of this story. Reflection...How did you come to this conclusion?
- Take 5-10 minutes to compare the graphic novel panel excerpts from *Maus* and *Persepolis*. How did the addition of text influence your understanding of the narrative? What is the relationship between text and image in the panels? Create an iconic symbol or image to represent your summary.

### Final Exhibition:

Share panels of summary images and debrief.

### Bonus Activity (if time permits): What are they saying? (or thinking)

Simple comics inspired activity for quickly analyzing the meaning of a visual resource such as a photograph, painting, or illustration. Select source material (ex. The Mona Lisa) Add word or thought bubbles to the people and even animals in the image. Share group responses and discuss why choices were made. Extension: Create a 3 box comic using the theme: What happened before? What happens next?

### Lunch Break

### ACTIVITY 3:

#### SUPERHEROES AND THEIR EVER FAITHFUL VILLAINS....IN THE REAL WORLD

A workshop tackling comics would be grossly errant to omit the powerful potential of the superhero and villain genre. In this activity participants design a superhero and arch villain to demonstrate the relationships in a contemporary real world social, environmental, or political conflict.

120 minutes

### Standards:

- Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework: Standards 2.10&11, 3.5&7, 4.4&5  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/arts/1099.pdf>
- CCSS Writing Standards Grade 5.1-7, Grade 6.1-7  
<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/6>  
<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/5>

### Enduring Understandings:

- The relationship between good and evil, oppressor and the oppressed is complex, and sometimes so is the ambiguity of the line drawn in between.

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- There are and have always been heroes and villains in the world. Understanding the motives of each can help us all be our inner hero.

### Essential questions:

- Is a hero without flaws?
- Is a villain always wrong?
- How do we decide which side we are on?

### Student Work/ Evidence of Understanding

*Participants break into groups of 3 or 4*

- Groups select a social, environmental, or political issue of personal concern. Within the group identify your “*population or victims*” to be “*saved*”. (Quotes designed to emphasize opinions that will need justification by evidence later on).

*The following activities can be done either as a whole group or in sub groups...*

- Design a superhero that can defend and protect the cause of the mass population or victims of the villain.
- Design a villain whose sole purpose is to systematically destroy all that the mass population and the hero stand for.
- Construct an outline for the escalation, climactic confrontation, and aftermath of the superhero and villain’s clash on the issue at hand.

Time permitting:

Advanced content on organizing graphic panel cells to maximize story telling constructs such as time and space.

### Final Exhibition:

Character sketches and panel outlines for conflict confrontation.

### WRAP-UP:

Reflections, questions, classroom connections.....

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Comics and the Common Core:

<http://www.slideshare.net/aedwright/comics-the-common-core-new-york-comic-con-2013>

<http://www.readingwithpictures.org/2013/10/reading-with-pictures-releases-common-core-graphic-texts-list-for-elementary-grades/>

More by the master of understanding comics:

Making Comics, by Scott McCloud

my email: [cdhayes@risd.edu](mailto:cdhayes@risd.edu)

example project:

<http://steampoweredschool.wordpress.com/>