Graphic Narrative Writing - Composition of a Different Color in the Elementary Classroom

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Chesterfield County Public Schools
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In 2015, two colleagues and I went to the Joan Oates Institute at the University of Richmond. We had been awarded a Partners in the Arts grant to attend, and were charged with creating sustainable curriculum for our school that integrated the arts into other subject areas.

- Guiding Questions: How do you move to solve a problem you see in the world? How did solving the problem make you feel?
- Curriculum Integration:
  - 1st Grade Social Studies – Famous Americans
  - Art – Clay Animation
  - Writing – Scripting for clay animation
Graphic Narratives: The Process of Composing

Students will compose a story about an experience that will -
- Include a beginning, middle, and end (sequence and closure)
- Include details of elaboration of setting and character
- Focus on one topic

Students will engage in the writing process by -
- Participating in brainstorming activities
- Using graphic organizers to plan their writing
- Drafting recursively
- Revising for clarity
- Sharing their writing with others
Prewriting

Sketchbooks & Generating Ideas
Lesson 1: Moving to help someone else solve a problem. The Little Engine saw a train that needed help getting over the mountain.

Lesson 2: Moving to solve a problem caused by a strong emotion. Peter’s problem was his strong emotion when his parents gave his baby sister HIS things.

Lesson 3: Moving to solve your own problem. Brave Irene faced a fierce Mother Nature as she delivered the gown to the duchess.

Lesson 4: Moving to solve a problem you see in the world. Miss Fox’s class saw a problem with keeping the environment clean.
Week One

1. Launching the Graphic Narrative Unit of Study
Lesson 1 - Genre Inquiry: Readers understand stories told in graphic narrative format by looking at pictures and reading some dialogue in speech bubbles and text boxes.

Lesson 2 - Genre Inquiry: Graphic narrative writers tell their stories primarily through pictures, with some dialogue in speech bubbles and text boxes.

Lesson 3 - Genre Inquiry: Graphic narrative writers illustrate their stories to show actions and feelings using characters and setting in a sequential series of story panels.

Lesson 4 - Charting Our Final Product: Beginning with the End
After listening to the each of the mentor texts, we sketched our own seed stories. Then, we each chose the story that we knew the most about to develop into our graphic narratives!

“One time I went to the candy store with my sister. She fell off of her bicycle and hurt herself. I helped her up and we went home.”

TIP: For your teacher model, use a story that is accessible to your students...one that they can relate to and that may provide a scaffold for struggling writers.
We sketched our stories across 3 index cards.

- Index card #1 - What happened at the beginning of the story?
- Index card #2 - What happened in the middle of the story?
- Index card #3 - What happened at the end of the story?
Now, it’s your turn...
Your Problem...

× Close your eyes and think of a problem you once had to solve.
× Give me a thumbs up when you have an idea.
Once you have thought of a problem, sketch your story across three index cards.

- On the first card, sketch what happens at the beginning of your story.
- On the second card, sketch what happens in the middle of your story.
- On the third card, sketch what happens at the end of your story.
Try to include enough information in your sketch to help you remember your story later.

- What are you doing?
- What is the problem?
- Who is in the story?
- How are you feeling?
Week Two

2. Planning & Writing
● **Lesson 5** - Using Pictures to Tell a Story:

● **Lesson 6** - What Are the Parts of Our Stories?

● **Lesson 7** - Finding the Action in Our Stories

● **Lesson 8** - Building a Chronological Story From Our Action Words
Silly Lilly and the Four Seasons
by Agnes Rosenfield

- Two story panels on each page
- Each panel had one speech bubble and a picture.
- Silly Lilly was MOVING in every picture.
- Some bolded words
- Four chapters (one for each season)
- 7-8 pictures for each chapter
- Tiny picture next to page numbers
- Introductory picture for each chapter
- Silly Lilly looked the same in each picture.
- The pictures were in color.

Lesson 5 - Using Pictures to Tell a Story

Post the Mentor Text Anchor Chart for students’ reference!
Lesson 6 - What are the Parts of Our Stories?

Do a “walkthrough” of the story panels in your Mentor Text. Identify actions and choose verbs to describe the actions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Part</th>
<th>Panel</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Panel 1</td>
<td>Silly Lily makes a snowball.</td>
<td>Rolls, bends, makes, talks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Panel 2</td>
<td>Silly Lily rolls a bigger snowball.</td>
<td>Rolls, pushes, exclaims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Panel 3</td>
<td>Silly Lily throws the snowball to Teddy.</td>
<td>Throws, stands, shouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Panel 4</td>
<td>The snowball misses Teddy.</td>
<td>Sits, watches, falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
<td>Panel 5</td>
<td>Silly Lily tries to throw the snowball again.</td>
<td>Hops, throws, talks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
<td>Panel 6</td>
<td>Silly Lily hits Teddy with the snowball.</td>
<td>Hits, frowns, apologizes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Active Engagement:** Ask the students to open their sketchbooks to the story they have chosen to use for their graphic narrative. Tell them you would like to add more verbs to the class anchor chart so that it will include action words from their stories. Give them a few minutes to look over their index card drafts and identify one action word that describes what is happening in that picture. Share out and add those words to the class chart.
The teacher will:

- Look at the **first** story panel.
- Study the image for a moment, and then begin to list verbs that describe what the main character is doing. List them right on the page of the sketchbook.
Your Turn!

- Look at your first story panel.
- Study the image for a moment, and then begin to list verbs that describe what the main character is doing. List them right on the page of your sketchbook.
List the verbs that describe the actions in your sketches. Make sure to identify at least 2-3 actions for each index card.
Choose two verbs from each index card’s list of verbs. This is where you and the students will expand your stories from 3 to 6 panels, anchored by the action words.
• thinking
• glared at
• questioning
• staring

• leaning
• picking
• snatching
• smiling
• bending

• recycling
• throwing
• blushing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Maggie Difazio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verbs - Action Words</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B glared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B staring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M snatching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M smiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R glared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E throwing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E walking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student example:
Your Turn!

- Look at your list of verbs.
- Choose your anchor verbs - 2 from each index card list. Add them to your Graphic Narrative Anchor Words chart.
3. Building and Drafting
- **Lesson 9** - Connecting Our Actions to Our Feelings
- **Lesson 10** - Thumbnail Sketches - Flashdrafts Using Pictures
- **Lesson 11** - Using Speech Bubbles to Tell Our Stories
- **Lesson 12** - Drafting Our Story Panels - Anchored by Our Word Lists
Now, list the adjectives that describe the feelings that go along with the actions on your index cards. Make sure to identify at least 2-3 adjectives for each panel.
Choose two adjectives from each index card list that describe how you felt as you moved (actions). This will help students expand their stories from 3 to 6 panels, anchored now by both action and feelings words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graphic Narrative Anchor Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lesson 9 continued – Connecting Our Feelings to Our Actions
Your Turn!

- Make a list of adjectives for each index card.
- Choose the adjectives that describe how you were feeling as you moved and add them to your chart.
Now, using our Graphic Narrative Word Lists, let’s expand our stories by drafting our 6 story panels.

And let’s start with thumbnail sketches...
Lesson 10 - Thumbnail Sketches - Flashdrafts Using Pictures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Story Panel</th>
<th>Anchor Verbs (How We Moved)</th>
<th>Anchor Adjectives (How We Felt)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Panel 1</td>
<td>ride</td>
<td>happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Panel 2</td>
<td>pedal</td>
<td>excited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Panel 3</td>
<td>jump</td>
<td>scared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Panel 4</td>
<td>hurry</td>
<td>worried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
<td>Panel 5</td>
<td>pick up</td>
<td>relieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End</td>
<td>Panel 6</td>
<td>walk</td>
<td>proud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Action Word: ride
Feelings Word: happy
Speech Bubble: excited

Action Word: pedal
Feelings Word: excited
Speech Bubble: excited

Action Word: jump
Feelings Word: scared
Speech Bubble: scared

Action Word: hurry
Feelings Word: worried
Speech Bubble: worried

Action Word: pick up
Feelings Word: relieved
Speech Bubble: relieved

Action Word: walk
Feelings Word: proud
Speech Bubble: proud
Lesson 11 - Using Speech Bubbles to Tell Our Stories

Dialogue needs to add information to the story to help the reader understand what is happening graphically.
At this point in the unit, the writer has chosen two verbs and two adjectives from each of the beginning, middle, and ending index cards - extending her original 3 part story into a 6-panel story and added dialogue! This is a kinesthetic experience with the process of elaboration. Maximize the opportunity to help your young writers make that conceptual connection!!
Student example
Your Turn!

- Begin sketching thumbnails.
- Add dialogue to each thumbnail.
It is critically important for students to make the connection between the decisions they make as they add details to their graphic narrative compositions and the purposeful elaboration all writers make when telling stories to readers in any mode of writing.

You help them to do this by embedding the explicit language of the writing process in every lesson and every conference conversation you have with students!
And now we begin the final story panels....the final draft of our graphic narratives after three weeks of:

- Inquiry
- Generating ideas
- Pre-writing
- Drafting
  - Elaborating
  - Composing using a chronological story structure
Remind students that writers tell stories full of details so that their readers can “see” what is happening through the words writers put on the page.

Discuss how these picture details help your reader understand your story.
Your Turn!

- Begin first story panel.
4. Revising and Editing
- **Lesson 13** - Drawing Expressions to Show Feelings
- **Lesson 14** - Using All of the Space in Our Panels
- **Lesson 15** - Polishing Our Pictures - Keeping Our Stories Moving - Revision
- **Lesson 16** - Polishing Our Pictures - Keeping Our Story Elements Intact - Editing
Connect: Remind students of the story you told about the morning you were moving laundry from the washing machine to the dryer and slammed your elbow on the rim of the washer. Retell the story, emphasizing how much it hurt and how you were jumping around yelling, “Ow! Ow! Ow!” Repeat that you were sad and upset because your elbow was throbbing.

Which facial expression matches the emotion in my story? Which face will help my reader understand my story better?
Lesson 14 -
Using All of the Space in Our Panels

Every Panel includes details that elaborate setting, character, and action!

Success Criteria: Students will be able to revise their story panels, adding details to all of the space available in order to make their stories as clear and as elaborated as possible to help their readers understand what is happening.
Before presenting their narratives to a reader, lead the students through a “final copy” process. Since the stories are told graphically, you can’t expect students to do a typical final draft. However, there may be a need for some revising as the writers get to the publishing stage.
Ask one of the students to read your story. He or she must be able to:

- Identify the characters across the story.
- Identify the setting of the story.
- Tell the main idea of the story - What is happening? Problem/Solution?
- Tell how the characters are moving and feeling across the story.
- Identify the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story.
Lesson 16 – Polishing Our Pictures – Keeping Our Story Elements Intact

Editing Our Graphic Narratives

- Check main characters and other characters to make sure details of their hair, clothes, and faces are the same in all story panels.
- Check the setting to make sure details of the sky, ground, and background are the same in panels where the action stays in the same place.
- Check overall neatness and presentation by making sure lines are straight and outlined.
Lesson 16 - Continued
Polishing Our Pictures - Keeping Our Story Elements Intact

Character
- Hair - color, length
- Clothes - color and shape
- Face - expressions match feelings

Setting
- The sky
- The ground
- The background - houses and trees are the same in panels where the action stays in the same place

Presentation
- Lines - are they straight and outlined in black felt marker?
- Speech bubbles and text boxes - are the words written in a way for my reader to read them?
Conferring Tips:

- Side-by-Side Coaching
- Coaching, the Decision-Making Process
- Preparing for a Conference
- Anecdotal Note-Taking
- Choosing a Story That We Know Well
- Big Actions vs. Small Actions
- First Check-In - Introducing the Story
- Making Sure My Words Are Action Words
- Ensuring Story Progression
- Neatness Counts
- Adding Content to Dialogue
- Staying Organized
- Rereading Our Own Stories to Ensure Consistency
- Coaching the Reluctant Artist
- Encouraging Stamina
- Developing an Objective Eye
Mid-Workshop Teaching Points:

- Noticing Writer’s Craft - Product
- Noticing Writer’s Craft - Process
- Moving Students Toward Graphic Narrative Compositions
- Effective Partner Work
- Storytelling to Remember Every Detail
- What if I Don’t Know How to Spell a Word?
- What is My Story Mostly About?
- Stories Are About Things That Happen
- Charting Feelings Across a Story Arc
- When Feelings and Drawings Are a Mismatch
- Choosing Precise Verbs and Adjectives
- Drafting is More Than Copying
- Drawing the Many Faces of Feelings
- Splitting the Story Panel to Add Space
- Setting Some Criteria For Adding or Replacing Story Panels
- How to Be an Effective Reader (For Peer or Self)
Just a few stunning student products!!
Conner, 1st grader
Maggie, 2nd grader
Sean, 2nd grader
Natalie, 2nd grader

How could he spit his cigarette and not Ford?

When should you tell my dad? You can't get what you want.

Dad, I saw a guy spit a cigarette! Should I tell?

You should put glasses on and pick it up.

You're gonna go where you belong.

Bye bye cigarette! Hasta la vista.
Every one of these student writers could tell their story across the six panels they had composed.

Their narratives were:
- Centered around one idea; focused on one topic.
- Fully elaborated with details of character, setting, and action.
- Full of voice!
- Composed using a beginning, middle, and end structure.
- Revised for clarity.
- Edited for accuracy.

Beautiful stories composed and shared in a graphic format.
In 2004, Michael Bitz led the "Comic Book Project" out of Teachers College at Columbia University to "build literacy and artistic skills while motivating children to not only attend the sessions but to take ownership and pride in their work." (pg. 575).

Bitz found the following:

- 86% of students felt the project helped them improve their writing.
- 92% said they liked their own stories as a result of the project.
- 90% of instructors felt that their students' writing was improving.
- 90% of instructors felt that, as a result of the project, their students like to write their own stories. (p. 582).

According to James Bucky Carter in his book, Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel, "A substantial, expanding body of evidence asserts that using graphic novels and comics in the classroom produces effective learning opportunities over a wide range of subjects and benefits various student populations, from hesitant readers to gifted students." (NCTE, 2007, pg. 1)
THANKS!

Any questions?
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CREDITS

Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

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