Beyond *The Diary of Anne Frank*:
Middle Grades Literacy and the Teaching of the Holocaust and Genocide

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This session is intended to accomplish three purposes:
1. Argue for an extension of the content coverage of the Holocaust and genocide in the Middle Grades beyond the “traditional” coverage.
2. Argue for the judicious use of graphic novels and comic books as entry points into the topic and as supplements to traditional literature.
3. Share numerous resources that promote literacy through the lens of the above two approaches.

Alternative formats of literature are rising in popularity. But just because they’re hot does not mean that they are devoid of educational value. In fact, graphic novels can provide amazing opportunities to engage reluctant readers and teach deep analytical thinking. By using such captivating texts, teachers can serve more as coaches and students as workers, particularly in areas of literary criticism and visual analysis. Multiple forms of non-traditional literature help to hook students into learning through which teachers can push students to become deeper critical thinkers and storytellers; even those who typically struggle with reading, writing or analysis. By using various literary points of entry, students can facilitate their own learning and create complicated analysis through a much more accessible medium than typical texts. Participants will leave this workshop with materials, practical ideas and resources to utilize non-traditional literature as a tool for deeper thinking, reading and writing in the classroom.

Handouts (in order of appearance) REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT

- J. Stassen, *Deogratias*
- J. Sacco, *Safe Area Gorazde*
- L. Ung, *First They Killed My Father*
- I. Beah, *A Long Way Gone*
- C. Filloux, “Exile in the Cradle” from Skloot, *The Theater of Genocide*
- Wu and Pran from Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower*
Web-based Resources

**ReadWriteThink**, by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, has a wealth of lesson plans using graphic novels.

**Teachingcomics.org**, from the National Association of Comics Art Educators, has exercises, lesson plans, study guides, handouts, and syllabi.

**Using Comics and Graphic Novels in the Classroom** (Council Chronicle, Sept 5), from the NCTE.

Pedagogical Resources


- Jacquelyn McTaggert, “Graphic Novels: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly”
- James Bucky Carter, “Comics, the Canon, and the Classroom”


- Angela McRae and John T. Guthrie, “Increasing Opportunities to acquire Knowledge through Reading”


Barbara Moss and Diane Lapp, eds., *Teaching New Literacies in Grades 4-6: Resources for 21st-Century Classrooms* (Guilford Press, 2010).

- Chris Wilson, “Using Comic Literature with Older Students”
Graphic Novels and Comics

J.P. Stassen, Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda

Marvel Comics (Greg Pak, Carmine di Giandomenico and Matt Hollingsworth), The X-Men: Magneto: Testament, issues 1-5.

Art Spiegelman, Maus: A Survivor’s Story, Vols. 1 and 2

Marjane Satrapi, Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood.

Joe Sacco, Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia, 1992-95

Joe Sacco, Palestine

Guy Delisle, Burma Chronicles

Ari Folman and David Polonsky, Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story

Jessica, Abel, La Perdida

Grady Klein, Lost Colony

Readings

Ishmael Beah, A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier (FSG, 2007)

Khamboly Dy, A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979), (DC-Cam, 2007)


Robert Skloot, The Theater of Genocide (Wisconsin, 2008)

Loung Ung, First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers (Harper, 2000)


Brendan January, Genocide: Modern Crimes Against Humanity (TFCB, 2007)
Talk Outline

A. Welcome and Introduction

My position, background and experience with alternative texts (graphic novels, plays, responsive writings).

B. Literacy

As teachers who want to get their students to read we have several key goals:

1. Get them to read **widely** and read **frequently** (McRae and Guthrie, 2009)
2. Provide numerous OtR “Opportunities to Read”
3. Ensure that there is strong **contextual support**
   a. Content and background knowledge is extremely important in attaining reading proficiency
4. Provide them with the opportunity to develop **intrinsic motivation**
   a. Guthrie (1997) demonstrates that those who are so motivated spend 300% more time reading—practicing the craft—which is the highest correlation of any contributing successful factors.
   i. “Student engagement with interesting texts, defined as those relevant to the learner and approached with authentic purpose, is the single most important factor in the motivation to read” (McGill-Franzen and Botzakis, 102).

C. Why graphic novels and “alternative” formats?

Many teachers are skeptical, for good reason, of moving into new formats. But we should not be. There are as many justifications for alternative “texts” as for traditional.

1. Teach multiple aspects of literacy
   a. **Content**
      i. Middle Grades is a **transitional time** between learning to read and reading to learn; graphic novels are the perfect medium
   b. **How to “read” multiple sources**
      i. “The contemporary view of literacy, then, is changing such that texts are no longer considered simply works on a page, but anything in the surrounding world of the literate person. And the literate person is one who can ‘read’ these various texts, whether written or visual, one who can read the word and the world” (Carter, 2010; Freire and Macdeo, 1987).
   c. **Contextual support is “built in”** with images and depictions.
d. All kinds of readers naturally **gravitate** towards imagery or connections
   i. ELL
   ii. Increased OtR
   iii. “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” (Carter, 2010, p. 1).

2. **Different types of literacy**—a “multi-literacy experience”
   a. combine several ‘languages’ or forms of communication
      i. visual images (still)
      ii. written language
      iii. conversational language
      iv. reflective language
   b. experience with a wide range of types of books **supports more highly developed reading skills**
   c. **Literary devices** are equally present, such as allusion, allegory, flashback, foreshadowing, irony, satire and symbolism.

3. **Pedagogical understanding** of the different modes of using graphic novels
   a. reading comprehension
   b. interpretation
   c. evaluation
   d. alternative depictions
   e. appreciation
      i. Graphic novels, plays, alternative sources give students an opportunity to **reflect on different interpretations** and share their **different ways of seeing** the text
         1. Use of images to make inferences
         2. Need to create scene and setting themselves
         3. Panel shifts or character shifts or perspective shifts allow them to make inferences
         4. Changes in presentation to make inferences
      ii. Students are more at ease making inferences (predictions, observations, etc) when they have images upon which to build (McGill-Franzen and Botzakis, 113)
         iii. “The use of comics format ... provides a more comfortable, nonthreatening entry into more complex thinking and learning” (McGill-Franzen and Botzakis, 113).

4. **Transcend genders**
   a. Young male readers are especially attracted to reading in these different formats
      i. Especially in graphic novels
   b. Many young girls (though by no means all) also respond well

5. **Any level**, any topic
a. Alternative texts “enable the struggling reader, motivate the reluctant one, and challenge the high-level learner” (McTaggart, p. 32, 2010).

D. Classroom strategies

How can we most effectively use these forms of new literature in our contemporary classrooms and still make sure we address the real and pressing needs of our students and mandates of our profession?

1. Format suggestions
   a. Hook / attention grabber
   b. Enhancement of a more traditional lesson
   c. Foundation for the lesson (element of the Rule of 3s)
   d. These do not replace any or all other formats, rather it is just another available format to use
      i. Multiple texts creates great analytical and critical reading of all texts

2. Use Excerpts
   a. Even with graphic novels, you may not wish to use the entire work. This is especially true with the topic of genocide/mass violence.
   b. To avoid some of the language and violence, only use certain panels and pages

3. Modeling
   a. The first few pages/selections should be read as a whole class until the students have mastered the unique format and language.
   b. Reflection writing is its own genre and needs careful guidance to be seen as something more than just an opinion.

4. Group performance
   a. Plays are not just to be read by taking turns and assigning roles
   b. Engage the play—it’s words and emotions, not necessarily its scene requirements

5. Link to our world
   a. Students can then compare the events from newspaper, internet and broadcast news accounts to the same event as depicted in the new format.
   b. It is a basis for research

E. Challenges

As with any kind of teaching and all literature, there are challenges that come with this approach.

1. Activation of prior knowledge is difficult and must be constantly monitored
   a. Historical content
   b. Storyline of the series
   c. Keeping on task
2. **Maturity of many themes**, topics and depictions  
   a. There are some very mature themes and inappropriate images that must be either edited out or proper preparation developed  
   b. Inform administrators and parents  

3. **Resistance**  
   a. “You’re teaching what!?”  
   b. Parents and Administrators  
   c. Seen as something “lesser” than traditional  

F. **Advantages and Strengths**

Just as there are potential challenges and pitfalls, there are also some real rewards to be had.

1. **ELL students benefit** from use of images to promote understanding of language  
2. Having choices of format, having multiple formats present in one presentation speaks to the contemporary student who consumes information in simultaneous, multiple formats  
3. **“Making the Leap”**  
   a. Examine the differences between a graphic novel and the writings of the “next level”  
   b. Research shows that students are more aware of the format, more capable in using its multiple facets, and more deft at moving to understanding  
   c. Examples include:  
      i. Priest’s Grotto  
      ii. The Cambodian Genocide  

4. Alternative literature shrinks the sheer enormity of these events; gives them manageable pieces.

G. **Why go beyond Anne Frank and why Genocide and Holocaust at all?**

This is not meant to downplay the Holocaust, that argument is settled, rather it is to open up the conversations to wider examples through use of themes, issues, and by relating to others.

1. Proven (I hope) above that *Diary of Anne Frank* should not be our sole choice  
   a. Boys do not identify with Anne Frank  
   b. The experience of the Holocaust is so much broader and complex  

2. Holocaust v. Genocide or Holocaust and Genocide?  
   a. Can have both and not make it a competition  
   b. Sad reality is we *need* more than Holocaust  
      i. Failure of “Never Again”  
      ii. Modern school populations may have greater connection to other events  

3. Civic engagement
a. Social Studies is about creating an informed citizenry
b. We should engage them in broader concepts
c. Options, options, options
   i. More diverse populations in the schools, more choices that speak to their heritage and background
   ii. Such events are on-going and these connect with those that are more present in time and (sadly) contemporary
4. Teach social studies better
   a. Comics, plays, graphic novels often address important developmental aspects and contemporary issues—elements that are at the crux of creating better citizens
   b. Current, relevant social issues extend into our private lives and the format helps us better work with the “social monsters” in our collective, global and civil closets. (Wilson, pp. 127-128).
5. Concepts, not just the events
   a. “It is not the act of reading itself that gives students something; rather it is through reading that they get the chance to interact with a topic or other people” (McGill-Franzen and Botzakis, 107).
   i. To teach topics other than the Holocaust is the only way to provide exposure
   b. Conflict
      i. Internal
      ii. With the wider world
      iii. Among peoples and nations
   c. Growing up under less than ideal circumstances
   d. Hatred, racism, bias

H. Thank you and Q & A