

GRAPHIC NOVELS AND COMICS

NARRATIVE

GRADES 6-12



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this guide, students will:

- Interpret historical events and recreate them in comic book form.
- Bolster reading comprehension by interpreting words and phrases.
- Assess a character's point of view, and how that will define the content and style of a text or artwork.

1. ABOUT THIS GRAPHIC NOVEL AND COMICS RESOURCE

This teacher's resource is an introduction to the process of making comic books and graphic novels. Comic books and graphic novels fuse multiple disciplines into a completed work of art. In the creation of a comic book or graphic novel, visual art and creative writing are joined. In this resource, you'll find two different artists and four artworks. This includes introductions to the artists and a glossary of terms related to comic books. This resource can help K–12 teachers create short, modifiable lessons for their students. The language and themes in some artworks may be most appropriate for grades 6–12.

2. ABOUT THIS COLLECTION

This collection consists of original comic book and graphic novel art created by artists and distributed by publishers. The collection offers the unique opportunity to compare the artist's draft to the final, published comic book or graphic novel. Students can see where artists added dialogue, corrected mistakes, or changed direction. Through this collection students are introduced to art, writing, and storytelling.

3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this guide, students will:

Interpret historical events and recreate them in comic book form.

Bolster reading comprehension by interpreting words and phrases.

Assess a character's point of view, and how that will define the content and style of a text or artwork.

4. PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

Choose a comic book or graphic novel to read with students. You can discuss artistic choices, story, narrative, and how they all connect with students.

Have students research a historical figure and create a small comic or write a paragraph on an important moment from the life of their subject.

Collect comic strips from the local paper, then cut them apart and have students put them back together in the right order to study narrative.

5. VOCABULARY

Comic Book

A paper or digital publication that tells a story through artwork and writing.

Graphic Novel

A broadly used term that describes comic books collected in a single volume or a story or miniseries collected in a volume or multiple volumes. Graphic novels are usually longer, larger, and printed on higher quality paper than comic books.

Non-Photo Blue Pencil

A special pencil used in the graphic design and comic industry. The “lead” is a particular blue that is not recognized by scanners and cameras. Artists often use this pencil to sketch out ideas or figures. Editors will use this pencil to leave notes to other people working on the comic book. When the comic book is produced in the final form, the blue marks do not show up, but they are visible on the original page.

Page

The main media on which comics are created. The entirety of a comic is drawn on multiple pages, either a physical piece of paper or a digital canvas.

Panel

The sectioned areas on a page where the action or story is drawn. The story advances through the artwork/story in the panels.

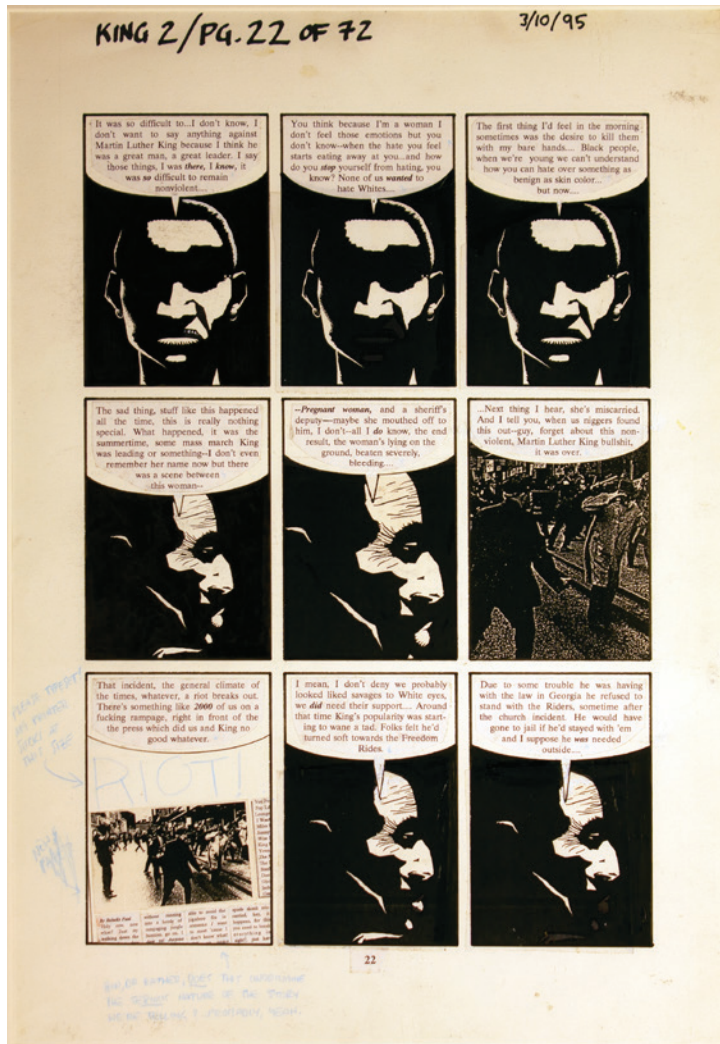
Speech and Thought Bubbles

Sometimes also referred to as balloons, or conversation clouds. The bubbles contain the characters’ dialogue and inner thoughts to tell the story.

Splash Page

An entire page covered in artwork. The artwork on the page is usually dramatic and without speech or thought bubbles. The splash page sets the mood and tone for the next few pages of the comic book or graphic novel.

6. OBJECT DESCRIPTIONS **HO CHE ANDERSON**



Ho Che Anderson (British, 1969–)
King, Volume 2, Page 22, Fantagraphics Books, 1995
 Non-photo blue pencil, ink, pencil, paper, photocopied photo,
 13 x 19 in.
 Stanley School Programs Collections, GNC.6

Ho Che Anderson has been in the comics industry since the early 1990s. He is affiliated with Fantagraphics Books and is one of the most prominent artists of Black American comics. He wrote *King*, a biography of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 2003, and *Scream Queen* in 2005. His most recent graphic novel, *Godhead*, was released in 2018, and explores a dystopian sci-fi world rife with corporate intrigue and social issues.

Anderson spent six months researching documentaries, newspapers, biographies, and journal articles about Martin Luther King, Jr. before he wrote *King*, a graphic novel told in three volumes. The whole project took ten years to complete. Unlike most comics and graphic novels that invent characters and worlds, *King* explores the life of the iconic Civil Rights leader and key events of the 1950s and '60s.

In *King* Vol. 2, Page 22, witnesses reflect on race relations in the early 1960s in the South and recall the inner conflict to respond to oppression by authorities with violence or non-violence. Media coverage of the protests brought the Civil Rights Movement to the forefront of American life and helped repeal some of the many racist laws and policies, known as Jim Crow laws. The bottom-left panel has multiple entries of **non-photo blue pencil** notes made between artist and editor. Non-photo blue pencil is sometimes used by comic book artists to sketch ideas and leave notes because this pencil will not show up when it is copied or reproduced in its final form.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How does Anderson convey the speaker's feelings through his drawing style? Facial features and pose? Word choice?

How does Anderson's choice to make the speaker in the panels female affect the reader's reaction to her?

Ho Che Anderson presented Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life in graphic novel form. What other compelling historical people could be created into a graphic novel or comic book? Discuss historical figures and moments with classmates and why they would make a great comic.

6. OBJECT DESCRIPTIONS **JEFF LEMIRE**



Jeff Lemire (Canadian, 1976–)
Tales from the Farm, pg. 5, Top Shelf Productions, 2007
Pencil, ink, pigment, paper, staples, 22 x 14 ½ in.
Stanley School Programs Collections, GNC.1

Jeff Lemire currently lives in Toronto, where he wrote his most famous works: *The Complete Essex County* (2008), *The Nobody* (2009), and *Sweet Tooth* (2009). *Sweet Tooth* was made into a mini-series by Netflix in 2020. He is known for his moody, humanistic stories, and a stark black and white, loose, and expressive drawing style. Lemire won a Xeric award early in his career, which helped him self-publish *Lost Dogs*. He then won an Eisner award for his work on *Black Hammer* in 2017.

The Complete Essex County includes *Tales from the Farm*, *Ghost Stories*, and *The County Nurse*. These three stories follow one family through different eras and generations. In *Tales from the Farm*, Page 5, Lester, the main character, gets orders from his uncle to do his chores. We also see Lester in his superhero costume for the first time—an introduction to his alter-ego. If we study the background, we can see it is fall. Looking at the other three pages, we can see the seasons changing as the story progresses. Comic books and graphic novels use not only the words on the pages, but also the places and settings in which the characters interact and the actions that propel their stories.

Jeff Lemire *Tales from the Farm* continues on page 6.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Look at the three comic pages by Jeff Lemire. What can we deduce about Lester from the limited information on just those four pages? How would you describe his personality? What does he like? What are his dislikes?

In this collection we have pages 41 and 44 of *Tales from the Farm*. Page 41 is a splash page setting up page 44. Describe, write, or draw what you think happened in pages 42 and 43.



Page 44 is unique there is a piece of paper taped over the bottom-left and bottom-center panels, covering up earlier drafts of artwork. Using the same dialogue in these two panels, redraw the scene using different perspectives or points of view.

6. OBJECT DESCRIPTIONS JEFF LEMIRE



Jeff Lemire (Canadian, 1976–)
Tales from the Farm, pg. 41, Top Shelf Productions, 2007
Pencil, ink, pigment, paper, 22 x 15 in.
Stanley School Programs Collections, GNC.2

Tales from the Farm, Page 41, is a **splash page**. On this page, Lester watches silently as his uncle, with whom he lives, takes a chicken to be slaughtered. Lester wears a mask from his superhero costume. His imagination is one of the few entertainments he has in his lonely life on the farm. The emotional tension and long shadows on the page prepare readers for the next pages.



Jeff Lemire (Canadian, 1976–)
Tales from the Farm, pg. 44, Top Shelf Productions, 2007
Paper, ink, pencil, non-photo blue pencil, pigment, masking tape, 22 x 15 in.
Stanley School Programs Collections, GNC.3

In *Tales from the Farm*, Page 44, Lester realizes he can't reason with his uncle. His uncle will take the chickens to slaughter that Lester had raised from newborn chicks. Lester cries as his uncle explains they have already sold the birds. When we look closely at Page 44, we can see that it is two separate pieces of paper. The bottom left and center **panel** are taped over two failed, or changed, panels by the artist. This page also features **non-photo blue pencil** where Lemire tried out different sketches on the bottom left and center panels.

7. POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES

The pages we provide in this guide have limited information, but they evoke certain emotions when people look at them. Have students look at a page and make observations on what the artist was trying to make the reader feel.

Choose one of the pages above and have students recreate the scene at the front of the room. The rest of the students can sketch the scene. Students can also set up their own scenes. Switch out students and use props from around the room to set up the scene.

Students can create a splash page. Remember to draw the character in a dramatic pose, use the whole page, and no gutters or speech or thought bubbles.

8. STATE STANDARDS

Teachers can adapt the lesson to apply to a number of state standards. We included a few standards that the lesson meets below.

VISUAL ARTS - CONNECTING

Anchor Standard 10

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Enduring Understanding

Through artmaking, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.

Essential Question(s)

How does engaging in creating art enrich people's lives? How does making art attune people to their surroundings? How do people contribute to awareness and understanding of their lives and the lives of their communities through art-making?

IOWA CORE: STANDARDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem). (RL.5.7)

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

Conduct research to answer a question based on multiple sources of information. (EE.W.7.7)

9. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Drawing Words and Writing Pictures

A textbook by Jessica Abel and Matt Madden.

A comprehensive guide on everything needed to create comic books and graphic novels. This includes creative needs such as story, worlds, and artwork as well as physical objects to complete a comic book project.

Comics in the Curriculum:

<https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/comics>

An online comics gallery by Columbia University Libraries titled Comics in the Curriculum. Compares and contrasts historical works of art with comic books. Warning: mature content and themes in this gallery.

Comics Forum:

<https://comicsforum.org/>

Comics Forum places the educational value of comics as its starting point. The goal is to increase the visibility and accessibility of comics scholarship through an academic conference that brings together scholars, artists, and fans in a spirit of mutual cooperation and development. Updated frequently with postings and articles on comic books.