Comics Activities for Classrooms and Libraries

Reading Comics

Comics and graphic novels are great literacy tools for readers of all levels. For beginning or struggling readers, visuals create context and support their reading of the text. For accomplished readers, decoding the complicated interplay of text and visuals together promotes higher-level thinking. The comic format is very effective for teaching subject content like social studies, math, and science, too.

The easiest way to share a comic with a group of students is to project it in a large size for everyone to see. You could use a document camera, project pages from your computer (webcomics are great for this), or show them on an interactive whiteboard. Or, you could copy comics onto transparencies and use a good, old-fashioned overhead projector.

Dave Roman (*Astronaut Academy*) and Raina Telgemeir (*Smile, Drama*) host a great site that will walk you through projecting comics for Readers Theater. Check it out at:
        http://yaytime.com/resources/readers-theater-tips/

Your Comics Out Loud materials include two lessons from the creator of *Owly*, Andy Runton, and his mom, teacher Patty Runton. *Owly* is an award winning wordless graphic novel that appeals to readers of all ages. These lessons can easily be adapted for use with any comic. You can download the entire Owly Teacher Guide here:
        http://www.andyrunton.com/teaching/

Here are some more comic reading activities to try with your students:

Between the Panels
Show students two sequential comic panels; choose panels that show the beginning and ending of some action. Invite volunteers to take up frozen poses mimicking the first panel. When you shout, "Action!" students can act out what happens in-between the panels, ending in a frozen pose mimicking the second panel. Then, students can create different versions of the action and compare.

Sequence
Make copies of comic pages, and then cut apart the panels. Have students reassemble the panels, first in the right order, and then in a different order to tell the story in a different way.

Fill in the Blanks

Blank out the lettering in a comic (use sticky notes cut down to size), make copies, and then have students write in what they think the characters are saying. Next, read the comic together with the original text and have students compare to what they wrote. Finally, have students write completely new text to tell the story in a different way. You can also do this activity in reverse: read aloud or hand out copies of just the text from a comic. Ask students if they can tell the story. Have students create their own pictures to go with the text. Then, give them text and pictures together and have them compare their stories to the original.

Zounds!

Read a comic with lots of sound effects and talk about onomatopoeia. Have students write their own onomatopoeic words on poster board and try to make the text visually represent the sound in color, size, and shape. Students can draw borders or bursts around their sound effects with markers or paint, then cut out them out and hold them while acting out the sounds. Take pictures! When finished, display the sound effects and photos around the library or classroom.

Bubble, Bubble

Use comics to teach punctuation. Give students a comic and have them write the story in prose, placing quotation marks around the text from speech balloons and thought bubbles.

Creating Comics

Creating comics can help students practice all aspects of the writing process. Have them create comics as prewrites for longer writing, as book reports or responses to literature, or to synthesize and analyze subject content (math, science, social studies). Students can create all kinds of comics: instructions, current event reports, book reports, interviews, biographies, autobiographies, story adaptations, new versions of familiar stories, reflections on experiences of their learning process, vocabulary definitions, song lyrics or poems…anything they could write in words, they can create as a comic.

Cartoonist and teaching artist Jerzy Drozd offers a free, comprehensive guide to creating comics with students called *Lead A Comics Workshop Even If You Can't Draw,* which is jam-packed with great ideas. Download this great resource here:

http://comicsaregreat.com/images/CPTL_PACKET.pdf

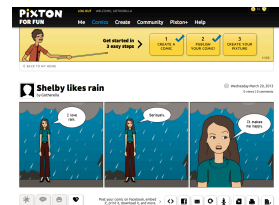Click the pictures below to access free online comic creators!

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