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JMC100

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Week 4, Homework 2 - Graphic Novels

The visual and graphic nature of graphic novels makes the author's task of storytelling easier and more powerful in a couple of ways. The most obvious is they don't have to rely solely on their writing skills to convey meaning; secondly, visual representation has an emotional immediacy (Hanson, 2021). Either way, the idea that good writers show, not tell, is pretty common (McCloud, 1994).

Drawings can reflect emotional experiences that, in my opinion, young people often do, like energy, confusion, and optimism.¹ Specifically, Beaton's drawings could reflect a simplified or exaggerated world that implies the mindset of someone working for the first time—someone who still has plenty of idealism and hope (McCloud, 1994).

I assume the publisher's motivations are to make money and improve accessibility, including reaching some niche audiences—specifically, those who find pure text intimidating. But they might also be pushing for the spotlight on underrepresented stories. Nonetheless, graphic novels are a powerful and meaningful tool for teaching, and there seems to be a trend towards their use in schools (Seyfried, 2008).

Absolutely, graphic novels can handle serious themes just fine and many times better than text alone. Spiegelman's *Maus* and John Lewis' *March* are good examples of how to do this. Both handle the topics without trivializing them, which is the most important reason and argument for graphic novels. Beyond that, some teachers highly recommend graphic novels for

¹ Aside from those poor sufferers of aphantasia, who can't visualize things in their mind.

their usefulness in education, especially in discussing sensitive or difficult subjects (Butcher & Manning, 2004).

Again, absolutely, if it's done thoughtfully and not otherwise horribly misrepresented. Some graphic novels use visual metaphors in the same manner often seen in children's cartoons for things they may not understand.²

I read *Maus* as one of the few books employees at Hasting's video in the early 2000s. After verifying it was supposed to be in the history section, I flipped through it. I then realized it wasn't glorifying Nazis or trying to misrepresent history, and I was blown away. It deepened my understanding of the Holocaust, certainly, and it has always stuck with me.

I have read several hundred comic books and graphic novels (or more) thus far.³ I assume most of the kids at UNK probably have, too, but in much smaller quantities.

Back in 2017, I tested this idea. I've read most literary classics, but two weighty tomes mocked my inability to finish them. They were the *Count of Monte Cristo* by Dumas and *Moby Dick* by Melville. I remember thinking that graphic novel versions should count, too, and I bought the most unabridged versions I could find. They helped immensely not only to understand what in the hell was going on in *Moby Dick* but motivated me to keep reading parts that I liked in the graphic novels. My findings don't stand alone, as this subject has been researched extensively. They seem to suggest my own conclusions: graphic novels improve the reader's experience and motivate them to continue reading (Gunnar, 2020; Cochell, 2020).

² One of my working theories in psychology is that in many ways, deep down all adults are still the frightened children they once were. Besides, any adult who can't appreciate a comic book or cartoon probably shouldn't be trusted anyway.

³ I have several first edition and other rare comic books that will hopefully aid my retirement fund in a big way one day.

In conclusion, I don't think there is a force in this universe that can get me to finish reading about that damned white whale.

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