A Critical Vocabulary for Talking about Graphic Narratives
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Five Ways to analyze Graphic Narratives (from MacMillian 2017):
- **Art / Images**
- **Text**
- **Story** – Character, setting, plot (conflict, climax, action)
- **Genre** – history, biography, superhero, myth, etc.
- Other literatures – film, text, television, other graphic narratives, etc.

Panel (also see MacMillian 2017)
- "a frame or border that forms a visual boundary around a narrative element" (McClanahan 41)
- A division of time and space in narrative (McClanahan 41)
- Helpful for showing character, setting, plot or story (McClanahan 41)

Consider using theatre terms when describing a panel:
- **Upper / Lower / Middle**
- **Left / Right / Center**
- **Foreground, Background**
- **Lighting, Shadow, Color, Perspective**
- **Proximity:** near / in front of / next to / behind / etc., between X object and Y object
- **Action**: exactly *who* is *doing what* to *whom*

Gutter (also see MacMillian 2017)
- "the empty space between panels" (McClanahan 42)
- Requires readers to "extrapolate the connection between one panel and the next" (McClanahan 42)
- Can demonstrate changes between (McCloud 1993, Serafini 2014 in McClanahan 42):
    - Moments / Movements
    - Actions
    - Subjects
    - Scenes
    - Aspect / Perspective
    - Non-Sequitur (usually foreshadowing or symbol)
- Also consider the width of gutters, anything possibly occupying gutters, etc.

Balloon (also see MacMillian 2017)
- The text on a graphic narrative
- Indicating dialogue, thought, narration, or sound (McClanahan 42-43)
- Consider shape, size, placement of balloon

- Consider font, size, capitalization, etc. of text

Consider how the graphic text makes deliberate *choices* when telling its narrative (McCloud 2006, in Schendlinger 48):
- Which **moments** are shown (in panels)
- **Frame** points of view – angle, distance
- **Image**: character, objects, surroundings
- **Word**: dialogue, narration, sound, text in environment (signs, labels, etc.)
- **Flow**: arrangement of moments, "speed" of narration

See a panel that seems odd, confusing, or is making you think?
- Create a chart with 2 columns: "What I see" / "What I think it means" (McClanahan 46)
- Scan several panels of the text (McClanahan 47):
  - "black out" 1 copy the text and focus only on the images
  - with the 2nd copy "black out" all the images, and leave only the text

Sources
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