

William Lewandowski

Dissecting Graphic Novels

Length: one block class period or two 50-minute class periods

Grade: 11 – 12

Standard(s) Addressed:

11.4.5.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- (1) Identify the elements of a graphic novel.
- (2) Interpret what each element does in context to produce meaning.

Materials:

- *Hey, Kiddo* by Jarrett J. Krosoczka
- *A Guide to Reading Graphic Novels* Handout
- Copy of Page 71 to work through labeling
- Copies of pages 24, 49, and 104 for group work

Assessment:

Exemplary

(Objective 1) An exemplary identification of elements of a graphic novel will label a minimum of five parts. Exemplary identification will include labeling of these elements (amongst others): *panel*, *gutter*, and *viewpoint*.

(Objective 2) An exemplary interpretation thoroughly explains how elements of a graphic novel create context and meaning. The exemplary explanation interprets a minimum of three elements and provides a clear description of how they create meaning; the interpretation goes far beyond the definition of the elements and provides a thoughtful meaning within the context of the novel. This interpretation will include details about what the color choice does to the mood and emotion of the scene and how the layout of panels create meaning or feeling to the scene.

Proficient

(Objective 1) A proficient identification of elements of a graphic novel will label a minimum of four parts. Proficient identification will include labeling of the elements *panel* and *gutter* but lacks labeling of *viewpoint* (amongst other elements).

(Objective 2) A proficient interpretation neatly explains how elements of a graphic novel create context and meaning. The proficient explanation interprets a minimum of three elements but only scratches at the surface of how they create meaning; the interpretation goes comfortably beyond the definition of the elements and provides a solid meaning within the context of the novel. This interpretation will include details about what the color choice does to the mood and emotion of the scene and how the layout of panels create meaning or feeling to the scene.

Developing

(Objective 1) A developing identification of elements of a graphic novel will label a minimum of three parts. Developing identification will at least include labeling of *panel* and *balloons* but misses important pieces such as *gutter* and *viewpoint*.

(Objective 2) A proficient interpretation briefly explains how elements of a graphic novel create context and meaning. The developing explanation only interprets one or two elements and lacks depth or clarity on how they create meaning; the interpretation goes a little bit beyond the

definition of the elements and begins to provide meaning within the context of the novel. This interpretation should still include details about how the color choice does to the mood and emotion of the scene.

Inadequate

(Objective 1) An inadequate identification of elements of a graphic novel will label a less than of three parts. Inadequate identification may include labeling of obvious elements, such as *balloon* or *text* but fails to recognize new elements like *panel*, *gutter*, or *viewpoint*.

(Objective 2) An inadequate interpretation does not explain how elements of a graphic novel create context and meaning. If there is an attempt of explaining, the inadequate explanation lacks key components on how they create meaning; the interpretation simply defines the elements but does not provide meaning within the context of the novel.

Procedure:

Prior to the lesson, students should have read at least chapters one through three of Hey, Kiddo. This lesson is provided here so students are coming to the idea of breaking down how a graphic novel works having been exposed to a little bit of a graphic novel first.

- (1) Begin the lesson by asking students how they feel about the novel so far. When they're reading, do they focus on the words or the pictures? Or do they focus on both of them at the same time? You can take a poll as a class, have them write their answers, or share as a classroom discussion. (5 minutes)
- (2) After discussing what students focus on when reading the graphic novel, pass out or share the handout: *A Guide to Reading Graphic Novels*. Read over the handout as a class, going through all the information on the two pages. This information will not only label the elements of a page of a graphic novel, they will assist in teaching how the elements will

create meaning—especially the last two sections. When you get to “Other Decisions” and “Other Challenges,” you may want to show these using a page from *Hey, Kiddo* to explain. Page 71 is a great and simple example to use and has been attached to this lesson plan. Involve the students by asking them what each element is doing and why the author chose to do that instead of something else. By doing this, you are teaching students *how* an element is creating meaning within the novel or page.

An additional note, which students will need to jot down is *color*. How does color provide meaning? (Ask the class this and see what they come up with.) If you notice within page 71, Jarrett’s coloring is the only thing (within a vast majority of the book, actually) that has a color outside of black, gray, white, red, and the pineapple wallpaper. *Be thorough on this. If students need more time for learning the elements and how they work within a graphic novel, please do so, as for most, this will be one of their first experiences with graphic novels. (25-35 minutes)*

- (3) Students will either choose one of the following pages electronically *or* you may have printouts of each page and randomly hand them out to students: page 24, 49, 104. (You will want them to have a copy of them, as they are going to be labeling them.) (You may also use copies of a different page. I used these as they have different tones and elements but any page should do, if you decide there’s a better one.) These will produce three large groups, or you may split them up smaller. In groups or partners, students will label as many elements as they can that they see on their page. If they do not label every element that is present on the page, that is okay. They should aim for at least five. (10 minutes)
- (4) After labeling, groups or partners should move onto interpreting how at least three elements are creating meaning on the page. Remind them (to give them direction) that

color and layout of panels are a great way an author can produce meaning in a graphic novel. (20 minutes)

Differentiation:

Gifted Student: A gifted student could be given a page from *Hey, Kiddo* and a page from another work like *Maus* or *March* and compare how one graphic novel's use of elements creates meaning compared to the other.

ELL Student: An ELL student may have trouble working “beyond the text” and figuring out the meaning. This can be adapted by a para or the teacher asking the student specific questions about what the page is doing. For example: “What does the color make you feel on this page?” or “When you read this page, do the panels make the reading slower or faster? Do feel your eyes staying glued to the page or that they want to move onto the next one?” These are questions that provoke how the book is making meaning for the student while applying the terms, elements, and meaning that the lesson looks for. Alternatively, you can write these questions down for the student to answer if they are more comfortable writing their answer versus speaking it.

Citation:

This lesson is inspired by the handout by Dr. Laurie Porter and Evelyn Barker, “A Guide to Reading Graphic Novels,” *University of Texas, Arlington*, 2007.

Attachments:

A Guide to Reading Graphic Novels handout

Copy of *Hey, Kiddo* page 71 (for classroom discussion/modeling)

Copies of *Hey, Kiddo* pages 24, 49, and 104 (for group/partner use to label and interpret)