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Graphic Novels at UNLV An Exploration of Their Relevancy and Your Freedom to Read

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Graphic Novels at UNLV
An Exploration of Their Relevancy and Your Freedom to Read
Our Panelists Today

- Katherine Keller
  - Evening & Weekend Supervisor, Teacher Development & Resources Library
  - Board Member, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
- Amanda Melilli
  - Head, Teacher Development & Resources Library
- Jean Munson
  - Instructor with UNLV Art Department
  - Founder, Plot Twist Publishing
- Jarret Keene
  - Assistant Professor, UNLV English Department
Censorship is the Obscenity

Katherine Keller, TDRL Evening & Weekend Supervisor
Board Member, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
What is the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund?

- The CBLDF is a First Amendment organization that:
  - Protects creators
  - Protects retailers
  - Protects publishers
  - Protects teachers & librarians
  - Protects your freedom to read

CBLDF Logo found at: http://cbldf.org/
Comics Are for Kids!

▪ This (wrongheaded) idea dates to the 1954 Comics Code

▪ There is one First Amendment & it protects Comics, Art, Books, & Motion Pictures equally.

CCA Logo found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Approved_by_the_Comics_Code_Authority.gif
Challenges at the College Level

- Yes, they DO happen.
Diary of a Teenage Girl

Challenged:
Suffolk Community College, NY
Challenged:
Duke University, NC
Crafton Hills College, CA
Persepolis

Challenged:
Crafton Hills College, CA

Image found at:
Sandman: The Doll’s House

Challenged:
Crafton Hills College, CA

Image found at:
https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/Sandman:_The_Doll%27s_House_(Collected)
Current (Disturbing) Trends

▪ 2014-2018 ALA Top 10 Banned/Challenged Books:
  ▪ 11 Graphic Novels
  ▪ 23 Books contained LGBTQ+ content

Comics & LGBTQ content are disproportionately represented.

▪ Identity Censorship
  ▪ Multiple incidences of LGBTQ+ creators being suddenly disinvited from events – Most recently Lilah Sturges in Leander, TX.
  ▪ Multiple incidences of creators being invited to talk, except about their LGBTQ+ content books.
Policies in Fabulous Las Vegas: CCSD

- **Policy 6150 & 6150-R**
  - Curriculum, Collection Development, & School Libraries

- **Pros:**
  - Specifically says that materials should reflect diverse cultural, ethnic, & religious backgrounds
  - Says that challenged materials must be considered as a whole, “without judging passages out of context”

- **Cons:**
  - Gives school principles the final authority in most cases
  - Gives no mention (or protection) to LGBTQ+ content
  - No mention of procedure for those schools w/o a library.
Policies in Fabulous Las Vegas: LVCCCLD

- LVCCCLD Collection Development Policy

- Pros:
  - Materials need to be reflective of the community
  - Contains the ALA Library Bill of Rights, ALA Freedom to Read Statement, & ALA Statement on Labeling
  - “Request for review” does not give one person power to remove materials

- Cons:
  - Does not state that sections must be taken in context of the whole.
  - Does not mention LGBTQ+ materials
Policies in Fabulous Las Vegas: UNLV Libraries

- University Libraries
  - Materials are chosen to support the research needs of students and faculty in alignment with departments & curriculum.

- Teacher Development & Resources Library
  - “Because the critical evaluation of learning resources is central to a teacher education program, controversial materials are an important component of this collection. “

University Libraries has no review/challenge policy
How to Handle a Challenge

- **“Soft” Challenge** – not yet a formal challenge
  - Listen & address concerns
  - Many issues are resolved at this stage

- **Formal Challenge**
  - Know your collection development policy
  - Know your challenge/review policy
  - Know your rights

You can reach out to an advocacy organization & any stage of an ongoing challenge.
First Amendment 911

- Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF)
  - www.cbldf.org
- ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom (ALA-OIF)
  - www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/oif
- National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC)
  - ncac.org

Reporting is confidential
Democracy is Not a Spectator Sport

The First Amendment/Intellectual Freedom is the foundation upon which all other freedoms & the creation of knowledge rests.
Graphic Novels in Teacher Education

Amanda Melilli
Pronouns: She/Her/Hers
Head of the Teacher Development & Resources Library
What I do...

Who I Teach Graphic Novels To...
★ Pre-Service P12 Educators
★ Current P12 Educators
★ School and Youth Services Librarians

What I Teach About Graphic Novels...
1. Debunk the Myths
2. Importance to P12 Students
3. Format Complexity
Debunk the Myths

Graphic Novels Are...

- ❌ Not “real reading”
  - ★ “Real reading” is based on the implicit bias of the individual

- ❌ Just super heroes
  - ★ Are a format, not a genre

- ❌ Cheating
  - ★ Require inference, visual literacy skills, and verbal literacy skills in order to decipher the text.
Words with Images Can Serve Different Purposes

Early Reader

I have my backpack and lunch bag, too.


Picture Book

There are questions we all ask when we are learning what it means to be human.


Who invented my hands? Why wasn't I born with wings? And does the moon ever get lonely?
2. Importance to P12 Students

4 Categories of Students

★ Undiscovered Readers

★ English Language Learners

★ Students with Disabilities

★ “Readers and Achievers”
Undiscovered Readers = “Reluctant Readers” or “Struggling Readers”

- Places the responsibility on the educator.
- Not a permanent label.
- Does not rely on “real reading”
- Makes space for student reading choice

Graphic Novels offer Undiscovered Readers:

- Less intimidating reading experiences with developmentally appropriate materials.
- Wide variety of genres/topics.
- Opportunities to build reading confidence and endurance.
- Community building.
- Classroom participation through Literary Adaptations.
- Increase comprehension in content areas.
Graphic Novels offer English Language Learners

- Less intimidating reading experiences with developmentally appropriate materials
- Wide variety of genres/Topics.
- Opportunities to build reading confidence and endurance.
- Community building.
- Provides Visual Context
- Increase comprehension in content areas.
- Cultural relevancy for both their home and US culture
Graphic Novels offer Students with Disabilities

- Less intimidating reading experiences with developmentally appropriate materials
- Wide variety of genres/Topics.
- Opportunities to build reading confidence and endurance.
- Community building.
- American Sign Language
- Socialization
- Facial Expressions
“Readers and Achievers”

Benefits:
- Meet English Language Arts standards
- Literary criticism instruction
- Writing instruction
- Diverse voices
- Quick reading experience; can cover a lot of content/perspectives.
- Introduce content area vocabulary
- Increase text comprehension
3. Teach Format Complexity

Graphic Novels are a Complex Reading Experience...

★ Requires fluency for understanding
★ Inference based on transitions
★ Inference based on representation of time and place
★ Cultural Fluency
The two subjects of this scene are never seen together, yet we can infer that they are powerfully linked.
Dear Kitty, It seems like years since Sunday morning. So much has happened. On Sunday afternoon I came back home from a stroll with Helga, and found Margot and Mother on the couch. Margot was crying and Mother was hugging her. Mother never lets her.

We all knew what a call-up from the Nazi SS meant...

But I also knew Father would never let it happen.

**TRANSITION — SCENE TO SCENE**

The second panel represents a different place in time and space. Additionally, we must infer that this is in Anne’s imagination.
Despite not seeing the characters in any of the panels, we can infer that they have gone off to bed and are sleeping.
Perception of Time

Panels do not have to represent a single moment in time. Here we must use visual literacy skills to interpret the span of an entire party in one panel.
Perception of Place

Two scenes are happening simultaneously with the dialogue belonging to characters in a another place.

Cultural Fluency

Not only read from right to left, but requires Japanese visual literacy skills to understand the content.

How much can you learn from a single graphic novel page?

Worldbuilding:
- Race issues: Arcanic vs. Humans
- Race issues: water vs. land Arcanics
- Nekomancers can enslave souls
- Nekomancers look like cats: The more tails, the more powerful.

Character building
- Kippa
- Ren
- “Miss”

How many conversations happened on one page?

How were we able to experience this many conversations without becoming confused?

Bonus: What image do you have in your head? Is it of the entire deck of the ship even though you never saw it in its entirety?

“Every student needs to know the power of a reading life. Dickens simply won’t matter to most twenty-first-century teenagers unless they have developed a love of books first -- a trust that even the most difficult ones can be worthwhile.”

Penny Kittle

*Book Love: Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Readers*
The Personal is Comical
ACCESSIBLE ART MAKING IN EVERYDAY STORYTELLING
Censorship in Our Art Practice

Communities
For example...
-Will my community frown upon my critique of pop culture? Politics? Every day issues?

Oneself
For example,
-My stories are not good enough

Value of our Work
For example,
-My art style will not be liked, shared, or validated
Growing into a Graphic Novel
Kate Beaton & Aminder Dhaliwal

Joan of Arc goes to war

HARK! A VAGRANT
KATE BEATON

Woman World

Can you trim my hair?
Why don’t you let it grow out?
It was because long hair indicated good health for baby making.
And in some cultures complex hairstyles on long hair were a status symbol.

Yeah in the past hair length was proportionate to femininity.

So you should consider letting it grow out?

Do you really care about my hair?
Oh, do you just not want to get up?
I will literally say anything not to move.

That’s our girl.

I am the hand of God.
The smiling one
Not the Olive Branch one.
I know it’s hot and cold with that cap, but it’s all in the game, bang!
Webcomic Fan Following: 100,000+ following

Blobby N Friends on Tumblr & Instagram
Loving our Locals
Gina Parham & Ken Lamug
To Do List:
In each box/panel draw 4 things you did today.

Hint: It’s Ok to go off script.

Favorite Things!
In each box/panel draw 4 things you did today.

Hint: It’s Ok to be quirky

Free Thinking
First Panel: Establish setting & character

Second Panel: Plot Twist

Third Panel: Punchline
Personal Story about Present Day Censorship

Created
Story about being a student leader in high school.
Themes of high achieving burnout, stress, & suicide
Paired with a Hero Complex

Self Published
From 2011-2015 made and distributed story in the Las Vegas area.

Book Banned
Visited Guam and banned from my high school on teaching and talking about comics issues still affecting students there today.
WE TALK ABOUT THE BANNING OF GRAPHIC NOVELS, BUT AT WHAT POINT DO WE BAN OUR PERSONAL NARRATIVE?

WHEN DO OUR CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CREATIVE INADEQUACY HALT?

WHEN DO WE BEGIN TO CREATE AND FIND IMPORTANCE IN OUR VOICE?

HOW DO WE SUPPORT OTHER CREATORS IN THEIR QUEST TO PRESERVE THEIR VOICE?

NEGATIVE REMINDERS INCLUDE: LACK OF RESOURCES, MOTIVATION, REGIONAL SUPPORT SCENE CAN HINDER OUR ART MAKING/ NARRATIVE STORYTELLING

WHEN DO WE GET IT DONE?
How to find Jean Munson?

► On Campus: Women's Research Institute of Nevada & Art Department

jean.munson@unlv.edu
702-895-2902
WRI A 220
Unlv.edu/wrin
Class ART 107

► Off campus: Plot Twist Publishing

info@plottwistpublishing.com
702-204-1016
112 S. Water St Suite 101 Henderson, NV 89015
@plot_twist_publishing
Facebook.com/plottwistpublishing
U.S. Graphic Novels as Literature

Jarret Keene
Assistant Professor in Residence
UNLV English Department
Comic Book or Graphic Novel?

• Since the 1950s, U.S. comics have long been suspected of inciting juvenile delinquency and homosexuality.

• In 1954, psychiatrist and author Frederic Wertham claimed Wonder Woman’s strength and independence made her a lesbian, and detected something unsavory in the relationship between Batman and Robin.

• Still, crime and horror comics were what had him and parents worried.

• With competing genres censored, superheroes flourished under the Comics Code Authority (1954-2011).
Marketing term

• “Graphic novel” is a marketing term in the U.S. and England—in nations like France and Japan, bandes dessinées (BON-day, deh-see-NAY) and manga are considered art.

• Will Eisner (creator of the Spirit) preferred the term “sequential art.”

• The crackdown on comics stunted the audience, limiting the market to children eager to read Superman.

• Marvel Comics, led by the late Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, succeeded in telling literary tales in a sub-literary medium neutered by the Code.
What was comics literature?

• Classics Illustrated (1941-1971) successfully adapted literary classics into comics.

• Even today, comics publishers continue to adapt great works of literature—but the idea of sugarcoating Jane Eyre for unwashed Marvel readers is condescending.

• U.S. comics stole from cinema with impunity—but so did TV westerns.

• Comics didn’t strive for literary effect (ideas over narrative) until Stan Lee and Steve Ditko introduced Spider-Man in Amazing Fantasy #15 (1962).
Spider-Man: Unlovable Wallflower

- The debut of Spider-Man is arguably the greatest, most important comics story ever written, its 11 pages defining not just the Marvel superhero but also the last half-century of U.S. comics.

- “With great power comes great responsibility” wasn’t just an inspirational and moral slogan; it was a metaphor for American Exceptionalism, which can result in senseless death (the murder of Peter’s uncle, Ben) if not applied toward just and proper ends.
The Hero with a Thousand Flaws

• Parker is spoiled, his own worst enemy: He’s a purveyor of fake news, taking photos of himself in action as Spider-Man and selling them to the *Daily Bugle* to cover the cost of college tuition.

• We love Parker for his flaws, though, and for his commitment to overcoming them.

• We cherish his humanity even as we’re thrilled by his brawls with violent predators like Kraven the Hunter, bulky crime boss Kingpin, hideously armed Doctor Octopus.
Family Dysfunction

- Fantastic Four is a dysfunctional family and superhero team.
- Reed Richards bathed his wife (Sue Storm) and brother-in-law (Johnny Storm, hot rod-obsessed juvenile delinquent), and his best friend (Ben Grimm), with cosmic rays.
- They blame Reed; he blames himself.
- The acrimony and resentment are palpable despite their love for one another. (Sound familiar?)
Avengers (Dis)Assemble!

• The Avengers are an incompetent team.

• The Avengers spend as much time struggling to tame the Hulk as they do fighting villains; eventually the Hulk leaves.

• Ant-Man often ignores the Wasp, who loves him and yearns to make Hank Pym jealous.

• Tony Stark and Thor—man of science vs. Norse god—have an uneasy friendship.

• An old WWII hero, Captain America, appears and assumes leaderships of the team.
X-Men: The Original YA Novel

• Professor Xavier’s School for Gifted Youngsters is the template for everything from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children.

• The teens are restless, violent, horny.

• The teens fight each other in the Danger Room until Professor X says: Enough!

• The X-Men fight to protect humans, who hate mutants, from evil mutants who believe humans are stupid and must be exterminated.
Ancient Literature and Comics

- Gilgamesh and Enkidu—the first Batman and Robin, the original Captain America and Bucky—appear in The Epic of Gilgamesh, an epic poem from ancient Mesopotamia deemed the earliest great work of literature.
- Gilgamesh is a flawed king, a terrible person, until he encounters the wild man Enkidu.
- Together they go on fantastic adventures.
- Enkidu dies, causing Gilgamesh to weigh his own mortality—he embarks on a journey.
Bickering Heroes

• If you recall, Homer’s Iliad opens not with Greeks battling Trojans, but with an argument involving Greek commander Agamemnon and the mightiest Greek soldier, Achilles.

• Achilles is horrifically flawed, removing himself from the battle, content to watch his comrades die under Trojan blades for the sake of his ego, his pride.

• By the end of the poem, Achilles will be transformed after meeting with King Priam, father of the dead Trojan warrior Hector, who killed Achilles’ best friend Patroclus. Very Marvel!
The Odyssey

- Homer’s poem opens with Odysseus trapped on Calypso’s island.
- Meanwhile, his son Telemachus is marooned on his own estate surrounded by diabolical suitors eating and drinking his inheritance.
- Howard the Duck is trapped in a world he never made; the scientist Bruce Banner is trapped within the Hyde-like berserker form of the Hulk.
- Tony Stark is living on borrowed time, the metal splinter lodged next to his heart will eventually kill him, and he can never escape death.
- How can you become a man if you are compromised?
- The journeys of these Marvel characters are remarkable.
1960s Underground Comix: Robert Crumb

• In the 1960s, underground comix were small press or self-published comic books that were aggressively satirical, depicting the dark side of the counterculture—drug use, sex, violence.
• Robert Crumb was at the forefront of the underground comix revolution.
• Underground comix were mostly sold in head shops and record stores.
Jack Kirby, Comics Auteur

• In the early 1970s, Jack Kirby (co-creator of the Marvel Universe) defected to DC Comics, where he created a slew of great properties, including New Gods, Forever People, OMAC, Kamandi: The Last Boy on Earth, and Mister Miracle.

• Kirby returns to Marvel in the late 1970s, and creates even more iconic properties like Eternals, Devil Dinosaur, and Machine Man.
DC Comics and the 1980s

• Frank Miller’s Robin and Batman: The Dark Knight Returns. Literary comics that owe as much to Kubrick and Kurosawa as they owe to Kirby.

• A Brit who found success in U.S. comics, Alan Moore deconstructs superheroes with Watchmen, the ultimate postmodern comic.

• DC continued to innovate with Neil Gaiman’s Sandman, Alan Moore’s Swamp Thing, Suicide Squad, Crisis on Infinite Earths, and Green Arrow.
Art Spiegelman and the 1990s: “Comics Aren’t Just for Kids Anymore”

• In 1992, Art Spiegelman’s Holocaust memoir Maus wins a Pulitzer Prize, creating an entirely new category of independent comics that springs from, but has little to do really, with the self-indulgent hippie comix of the 1960s.

• Maus is the blueprint for nearly every memoir comic published in the 30 years since: Persepolis, Blankets, and so on.
1990s and Alternative Comics

• Love and Rockets—Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez, the former focused on characters in a fictional Central American village called Palomar, the latter relating tales about a social group in punk-rock Los Angeles.

• Daniel Clowes’ Eightball—Satirical self-contained stories mixed with serial narratives

• Peter Bagge’s Hate—Chronicles the life of Seattle slacker Buddy Bradley

• Jessica Abel’s Artbabe—Standalone stories that focus on marginalized characters, beautifully done
Understanding Comics (1993)

• Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art by Scott McCloud explores formal aspects of comics and its basic vocabulary.
• McCloud shares theoretical ideas about how comics function as an art form and a medium of communication.
• Understanding Comics is itself a comic book!
Since the 2000s, graphic novels have never been better! Read one today!
The Believer
Comics Lit Today!

My sons reading graphic novels for young people in Alternate Reality near UNLV.
Questions?