Lesson/Unit Title: Comics in the Classroom

Grade Level: 5th – HS (Proficient and Advanced)

Lesson/Unit Overview: Create graphic narratives (aka comics) to visually tell a sequential story.

Duration: This unit can take anywhere from 6 - 20 sessions, depending on how involved the students are and how much they already know. Be sure to allow an appropriate amount of time for pre-instruction on topics like perspective and proportion/figure drawing.

Enduring Ideas: Artists tell stories, both real and imagined, through visual imagery.

Objectives/Outcomes: Learners will:
• be able to visually communicate a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end through the medium of comics.
• incorporate various methods of perspective and character point of view in their comics.
• clearly incorporate effective dialogue to support their visual images without unnecessary narration.
• include a variety of “shots” (close up, establishing, two shot, extreme close up, etc.) to vary their storytelling and create emphasis when needed.

Content and Achievement Standards:
* Select relevant standards specific to the grade level of your class. Additional content area standards may be applied as well, if another subject is integrated into this lesson.

NCVAS Visual Arts Standards 5th-12th
Creating: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work (Investigate/Plan/Make)
Creating: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work (Investigate)
Creating: Refine and complete artistic work (Reflect/Refine/Continue)
Connecting: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art

CA Visual Arts (Framework)
Creative Expression: Creating artworks
Aesthetic Valuing: Responding, analyzing
Connections, Relationships, Applications: Apply, communicate, problem solve

Linked Standards Addressed (for Interdisciplinary Connections):

English Language Arts Standards
Writing 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
Writing 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Materials/Resources:
4” white squares for initial practice
Comic panel templates
Newsprint or scratch paper
Scissors
Pencils & erasers
Rulers
Shots lists
Black construction paper 9”x12”
White drawing paper, precut to various panel sizes
Glue sticks
Comic books as resources (for students to view)
Scott McCloud’s Making Comics and Understanding Comics (as resources for the teacher)
Jessica Abel & Matt Madden’s Drawing Words & Writing Pictures (as resources for the teacher)

Procedure:

Prior to teaching this unit on graphic narratives, be sure to teach any lessons that may needed to successfully complete the comics. For example, lessons on various forms of perspective (i.e. overlapping, size, placement, one, two, or three point perspectives), figure drawing, proportion, and shading.

Lesson 1 - introduction
To introduce students to the format of graphic narratives, have them spend some time exploring a variety of comics. You can have them talk in pairs or small groups to annotate different components or features of the comics (i.e. panels, images, dialogue, storyline, beginning/middle/end, etc.) Post ideas where students can refer back to them throughout the unit.

Ask students to think of a very short story that they can tell in 6 pictures. It will need a beginning, middle, and end. It can be a familiar story or one they make up. Give them each six 4” white squares and have them illustrate the story using NO WORDS. The images alone must tell what is happening (and it must be school-appropriate) This activity should be repeated regularly at the beginning of class for practice. If students finish one story, have them share it with three people and then move on to another illustrated narrative.

Lesson 2 – basics of storytelling
Students will need to select a story to make a comic about. If this is an integrated subject lesson, it might be connect to Social Studies, Language Arts, Science, Math, etc. and you (the teacher) may already have a story focus for them. It could also be open-ended – if students have a difficult time coming up with their own ideas, they might alter an existing story, giving it a different outcome or changing the characters, etc.

Once stories have been selected, students will need to write a synopsis of the characters, setting, plot, conflict, and resolution. Then they will need to write out the story with all details (this helps them keep everything clear for the illustration process).

Lesson 3 – elements of comics: panels, shot lists, dialogue
Show the video “How I Make Comics Part 1” by Mark Crilley on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JF0Y2Thbsw

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kvtaylor13@me.com and anneuphoff@gmail.com
Discuss the various kinds of panels used in comics. Sometimes comic artists/writers “break” the panels, overlapping them with other panels, dialogue bubbles, or change the shapes of panels for variety. Each panel contains a different kind of “shot” or image view. (See attached “shot list descriptions” handout; provide enough for students to share and use). This brings variety to each panel and helps tell the story effectively. Wider shots (establishing or EST) are used to show settings and action, while closer shots (bust shot, close up, extreme close up) focus on specific details or expressions that are important to the storyline. Dialogue should be used to help clarify action in the panels, but it should not be narrative, telling what is happening. It is important to use dialogue as communication of internal thoughts or interactions between characters. Dialogue is read from top to bottom, so whoever speaks first has a dialogue bubble above any others. It should flow naturally downward.

Students may practice adding dialogue to their 4” practice panels, as well as any other skills learned (i.e. perspective, character POV, etc.)

Lesson 4 – applying comics skills to selected story
Have students begin breaking down their story into specific panels: What action will happen in each panel? What kind of shot will be in each panel? What size panel will they need for each shot? This does not need to be illustrated at this point; rather, students should make a written list of this information. They can also make thumbnail sketches of each type of panel and a note of what action will be in the panel.

Lesson 5 – drafting comic
Provide students with precut strips from comics panel templates and a copy of the rubric. The panels are preset to fit horizontally and should be cut across as such. Students may select a variety of different strips to use for their comic draft. Have them illustrate their story in the panels they’ve chosen. A tip for making sure the panels are in the correct order is to write the panel number on the back of each panel. Have them tape or glue them onto a separate piece of paper in the correct order.

Students must have their comic draft reviewed by two students using the checklist provided for feedback. Remind students of the importance of valid feedback; if something doesn’t make sense or is missing, they must note it and provide a suggestion for revision.

Lesson 6 – final comic
Provide students with precut white drawing panels in the various sizes as shown on the comics panel template. They should be glued (with a glue stick) onto a black piece of construction paper with even spaces in between as a border. Students will illustrate their final story, including dialogue and any revisions made based on peer feedback. They must also create a cover with an illustration that includes the title of their comic and the author/illustrator’s name.
Assessment:

Formative Assessment

Student checklist: have students give their comic draft and checklist to two peers for review. Students will need to revise/refine anything marked as “no”, based on peer feedback, before starting their final draft.

Criteria for Graphic Narratives (aka Comics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name __________________________</th>
<th>Date ______________</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drawings clearly tell the story</td>
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<td>No narration</td>
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<td>Clear dialogue – can tell who is speaking and when; written text is legible</td>
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<td>2 full pages minimum</td>
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<td>Use of perspective is clear and varied (more than one)</td>
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<td>Character POVs are clear through expressions, poses, and dialogue</td>
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<td>Transitions are used appropriately as needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Includes a variety of shots (CU, EST, ECU, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cover is complete with title and author/illustrator</td>
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<td>Edited/reviewed by two people</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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Suggestions for revision (editor 1) ____________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
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Suggestions for revision (editor 2) ____________________________________________
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### Summative Assessment

*Use the rubric provided here: 25 points possible*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drawings</strong></td>
<td>Clearly tell the story with many details, including setting and characters.</td>
<td>Tell the story with some details, including setting and characters.</td>
<td>Tell the story with few details, including setting and characters.</td>
<td>Tell the story with only one or two details throughout. Either setting or characters are missing or not clear.</td>
<td>Story cannot be understood through the drawings.</td>
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<td><strong>Dialogue</strong></td>
<td>Clear, easy to understand, and does not include narration outside of speech/thought bubbles or transitions.</td>
<td>Mostly clear, fairly easy to understand, and does not include narration outside of speech/thought bubbles or transitions.</td>
<td>Somewhat clear or easy to understand. Comic does not include narration outside of speech/thought bubbles or transitions.</td>
<td>Not very clear or easy to understand. Comic does not include narration outside of speech/thought bubbles or transitions.</td>
<td>Comic cannot be understood or dialogue is missing altogether OR comic includes a lot of narration.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>More</strong></td>
<td>More than 2 full pages are turned in with a complete and detailed cover, including author’s name and title.</td>
<td>2 page minimum is met and a cover is included with author’s name and title.</td>
<td>1 page comic is turned in. A cover is included but is missing author’s name OR title.</td>
<td>1 page comic is turned in but is missing both author’s name and title. OR 2 pages are turned in but with no cover.</td>
<td>1 page comic is turned in with no cover.</td>
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<td><strong>Perspective</strong></td>
<td>Use of multiple methods of perspective is very clear.</td>
<td>Use of two methods of perspective is clear.</td>
<td>Use of one method of perspective is clear consistently throughout.</td>
<td>Use of one method of perspective is clear but not consistently throughout.</td>
<td>Perspective is not used at all (i.e. everything is flat, etc.).</td>
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<td><strong>Character POVs</strong></td>
<td>Character POVs are very clear through expressions, poses, and dialogue.</td>
<td>Character POVs are mostly clear through expressions, poses, or dialogue.</td>
<td>Character POVs are somewhat clear through expressions or dialogue.</td>
<td>Character POVs are not very clear through expressions or dialogue.</td>
<td>Character POVs are not evident throughout the comic.</td>
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Student examples:

6th, 7th, 8th grade
process drafts
8th grade advanced student's final comic