



By Terry Thompson

Embracing Reluctance When Classroom Teachers Shy Away From Graphic Books

So, you've bought into the idea that graphic books can be both motivating and valuable to students, but you're having a difficult time getting the teachers in your building to buy in as well. You aren't alone! Despite the genre's recent explosion in popularity, it seems that many classroom teachers are still hesitant to embrace the idea of using graphic books in their classrooms. Luckily, with the support of a good media specialist, reluctant teachers will begin to open their minds to the many possibilities graphic books offer. This is where you come in. It won't take long for you to notice that one of the main reasons teachers are reluctant to use graphic books is a simple lack of information. A media specialist who is well versed in the power of graphic books and eager to share that knowledge can act as an agent of change to influence an apprehensive teacher's mindset. Offering teachers solid, explicit reasons for using graphic books can encourage them to begin to open the door to all that the genre has to offer.

Are Kids Really That Interested in Graphic Books?

Teachers will be drawn to the idea that comics and graphic novels are popular and entertaining. One only needs to take a moment to think about all the movies coming out of Hollywood in the past few years that have been based on comic books and graphic novels to see the purity in the idea that graphic books are popular with our students. We know that Hollywood both dictates and reflects popular culture in our society. The popularity of graphic books draws our students to the media and can serve as a motivating factor to get them to read more.

Aren't Graphic Books Bad for Kids?

Many teachers remember graphic books from a time when comics and graphic novels were viewed negatively. True, our nation's history has seen graphic books

blamed for a multitude of sins from illiteracy to delinquency and, just as you might do with any genre, even current comic books and graphic novels need to be screened for appropriateness. However, hesitant teachers will be glad to know that comic books and graphic novels are gaining a greater amount of respectability and are bouncing back from that bad reputation. From the 1992 Pulitzer prize-winning graphic novel, *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman, to the 2004 cover story of the *New York Times* claiming that graphic books could be the next new literary form, comic books and graphic novels are beginning to take their rightful seat at the table of quality literature of our time. Many of the major publishers of children's literature have jumped on board, creating a frenzied production of child-friendly graphic books.

Aren't Graphic Books Dumbed-Down Reading?

Often, teachers shy away from graphic books, citing a fear that they are too easy to read. For some students with certain texts, this may well be the case—but not always. Truthfully, comics and graphic novels are written at such a wide variety of levels of reading and around so many different areas of interest that opportunities for student interaction with the text at various instructional levels are plentiful. Even if it were true that the genre is too basic a form of reading, current best practices in reading recognize the value of both light reading and wide reading on comprehension, fluency, and endurance.

How Can Graphic Books Help My Students Learn to Read?

Struggling students can find comic books and graphic novels less threatening, because the pictures in the graphic format offer that additional support needed to help students understand the meaning of

the text, figure out new and unknown vocabulary words, and move the story line along. One of the greatest benefits of using graphic books in the classroom is the way that the pictures in the genre model visualization. The illustrations work interdependently with the text and offer a symbolic example of what good readers do to create mental images as they read. Additionally, graphic books can be used to model authentic use of colloquial phrases for English Language Learners, teach complex content area concepts, and motivate struggling readers who are disinterested in other genres. Moreover, because a great deal of the graphic books available are skewed toward boys' interests, this powerful genre can help classroom teachers gain access to that population of male nonreaders that so many of us remain concerned about.

Are Your Teachers Still Reluctant?

A few minutes researching the topic of using graphic books in the classroom will yield some interesting findings for those teachers who need more evidence that this genre can encourage young readers. Many teachers will remain reluctant. The shift towards full acceptance of graphic books in their classroom will take some time, and this could be a good sign. Teachers today are savvier than ever. They are more reflective and more intentional when it comes to using something unfamiliar. As a media specialist, offering information about the benefits of using graphic books may be just the support cautious teachers need to give them a try. ■

Terry Thompson is a literacy coach at Jack M. Fields Sr. Elementary, a Title 1 school in Humble, Texas. He can be reached at Terry.Thompson@humble.k12.tx.us.

Copyright of *Library Media Connection* is the property of Linworth Publishing, Inc. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.