

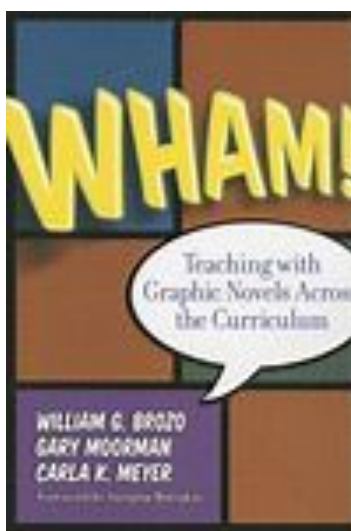
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## Review of *WHAM! Teaching with Graphic Novels Across the Curriculum*

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## Graphic Novels: English Language Arts and Beyond

In the 21<sup>st</sup>-century classroom, teachers are searching for ways to integrate literacy instruction across and within all content areas. Through a multimodal approach for literacy enhancement and integration, students gain knowledge, skills, and various tools for literacy from multiple perspectives and viewpoints, and the use of graphic novels provides access to diverse texts within multiple grade levels and all content areas. In *WHAM! Teaching with Graphic Novels Across the Curriculum*, authors William G. Brozo, Gary Moorman, and Carla K. Meyer (2014) provide various techniques for implementing graphic novels across disciplines. *WHAM!* makes the case that graphic novels hold an invaluable place in portraying rich content, which is essential for students' understanding of ideas and concepts relative to reaching an apex of synthesis needed for student mastery.

Through this text, Brozo, Moorman, and Meyer provide applicable relevant examples and opportunities for educators to broaden their knowledge and expertise of literacy instruction in a variety of content-area classrooms. These opportunities address two foci: (a) to further develop a reader's understanding of how and why graphic novels should be used and (b) to encourage the reader to move beyond the traditional English language arts (ELA) curriculum through the use of graphic novels.

### A Highly Recommended Read for All Teachers

This review is written and prepared collaboratively by members of a graduate-level, content-area literacy course: six K-12 teachers (grade levels included: Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, and secondary ELA) along with the course instructor. *WHAM!* was selected by the instructor upon recommendation of a colleague and was used to assist with the course content, discussions, strategies, instruction, and as an accompaniment to seven graphic novels read over the course of a semester. These teachers are studying within the

same program, and even though they teach various disciplines and grade levels, the class was able to use *WHAM!* as a handbook to guide them through each graphic novel selection. *WHAM!* led to extended conversations throughout the semester, both in class and online.

The authors of *WHAM!* present practical, yet valuable, vignettes and scenarios geared primarily towards adolescent learners, and more than two-thirds of the book contains chapters devoted to specific disciplines: English language arts, history, science, and mathematics. Each chapter presents a lesson detailing “essential information” that assists educators with integrating graphic novels in their content-area instruction (p. ix) and with “meeting the needs of diverse learners and achieving the goals of the Common Core State Standards” (p. forth cover). *WHAM!* is comprised of seven chapters, three of which include standards-based, precisely detailed lessons that incorporate graphic novels, such as the lesson based on using *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb* by Jonathan Fetter-Vorm in a science classroom.

Throughout the specific content-area chapters, readers gain not only ideas for graphic novel selection but also discover a means of delivering each novel in a meaningful and effective manner. The concluding chapter provides the authors' final thoughts and the following helpful tips for incorporating graphic novels into one's instruction: (a) Read graphic novels for your own enjoyment; (b) Read graphic novels you think your students would like and will fit into your curriculum; (c) Talk to the school and local librarians; (d) Talk to students about graphic novels they are reading; (e) Discuss the use of graphic novels with colleagues in your department; (f) Start a graphic novel book club; (g) Review the graphic novel selection at local bookstores; (h) In the era of mandated curriculum and scripted lesson, get your principal and other administrators on board; (i) Talk with parents about using graphic novels; (j) Seek out funding; and, (k) Attend state, national, and international conferences (pp. 120-121).

Additionally, *WHAM!* includes three detailed appendices: “Graphic Novels by Discipline” (pp. 123-125), “Graphic Novel Resources” (pp. 126-130), and “Graphic Lessons Tied to the CCSS” (pp. 131-135). These appendices provide enhancements that can be easily accessed for varied lessons or content adaptations. This class collaboration includes shared thoughts regarding the strengths and weaknesses of *WHAM!* and suggestions for how K-12 teachers are able to connect this text to daily instruction.

### **Chapter 1: What is *WHAM!* Teaching with Graphic Novels Across the Curriculum?**

Navigating how to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or other state-adopted standards into everyday classroom practices plays an immense role in the lives of educational stakeholders. Chapter 1 focuses on the impact that graphic novels can have on bringing updated practices into the learning environment across various disciplines. The main discussion throughout this chapter is centered around the use of graphic novels to impact students’ fluency of concepts and ideas and the diversification of literacy practices throughout various subject areas. The authors posit that the integration of multiple literacies is conducive to accessing students existing schema. By integrating graphic novels, teachers can enhance an existing curriculum and build on students’ multimodal schemas. *WHAM!* suggests that the integration of graphic novels will help educators build an environment rich in diverse content, thus providing access to a wealth of knowledge while also producing an enjoyable learning experience for both teacher and student. In addition, Brozo and colleagues highlight the differences between comic books and graphic novels and describe the overall nature of graphic novels. An argument is made that “human beings are naturally visual learners” (p. 5) and that the use of “words, speech bubbles, pictures, format, color, and other graphic features” (p. 14) can assist educators in capitalizing on innate processes. The multimodality of graphic novels creates a scenario in which diverse information and stories are accessible to students of all levels.

### **Chapter 2: Guidelines for Using Graphic Novels in the Content Classroom**

A comprehensive discussion about the specific logistics of bringing graphic novels into the classroom is presented in Chapter 2. The authors provide detailed descriptions of a plethora of graphic novels, an inclusion that helps scaffold a teacher’s search for materials suitable for nearly any discipline. Brozo and colleagues advocate for the integration of graphic novels as a “powerful medium” (p. 21) that can “enrich teaching and learning in the content classroom” (p. 21). Acknowledging that “in the era of [CCSS], traditional school textbooks are no longer considered the ideal, singular source material for teaching students how to read complex prose” (p. 21), allows the authors to emphasize the importance of selecting and implementing graphic novels for effective disciplinary instruction.

By using graphic novels, an educator can reach much further than a single source, such as a textbook. When pairing a graphic novel with a textbook or foundational documents, educators can assist in unlocking a deeper understanding of our world as well as the universal themes that have overwhelmingly commanded mankind. Graphic novels are not written in a dry manner; rather, they are crafted in an engaging form that typically contains dialogue, illustrations, and different print features, which allows students to enjoy the learning process. The integration of graphic novels helps to expand students’ thinking, creativity, and reflexivity. Additionally, it provides the tools for academic and real-world survival beyond the constructs of education.

### **Chapter 3: Using Graphic Novels to Teach English and the Language Arts**

In this chapter, the first of four that focuses on the use of graphic novels in specific disciplines, the detailed examples provided can be used by ELA teachers of all grade levels. The teacher in the vignette pairs a graphic-novel version of *Romeo and Juliet* in conjunction with the original play, a

combination that supported students' comprehension of the text. Similarly, primary teachers strive to develop students' passion for reading while creating a memorable experience. *WHAM!* shows teachers how to do just that by using graphic novels to provide concrete examples and to guide personal narratives.

#### **Chapter 4: Using Graphic Novels to Teach History**

*WHAM!* proceeds to describe how graphic novels can be used within the content area of history. All too often, textbooks in history and other content areas may lack the ability to hold the interest of the reader, partly due to the density of the content (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Throughout this chapter, Brozo and colleagues address problems with history textbooks, as they are generally written in an omniscient manner with an invisible narrator and present facts that are to be read as the sole truth. The authors describe the need for students to research multiple interpretations of historical events, foundational documents, and past perspectives and their importance to our existence, cultures, and relationships. *WHAM!* successfully emphasizes the need for the use of graphic novels in order to engage and motivate students to think historically and read critically while learning about history. According to the authors, "Many in education believe that teachers can use graphic novels and comics to scaffold students' abilities to read critically and think historically while motivating and engaging the students in the process" (p. 57). This chapter not only makes the need for graphic novels apparent, but also it describes the different ways they can be integrated into the history curriculum. It includes helpful step-by-step lessons, methods for Socratic seminars to generate class dialogue, the rationale for taking two column notes, and the steps for forming a graphic novel book club, with a complete list of the graphic novels used. Overall, Brozo and colleagues advocate throughout chapter 4 that by integrating graphic novels and facilitating cognitively stimulating activities, an instructor can create an environment

conducive to enhancing students' curiosity for our shared history.

#### **Chapter 5: Using Graphic Novels to Teach to Science**

In all areas of content-specific instruction, there is a continued need for advanced literacy instruction, a condition that is particularly critical in science instruction. According to Shanahan and Shanahan (2012), students need "specialized knowledge and [the ability] ... [to] create, communicate, and use knowledge within each of the disciplines" (p. 7). Chapter 5 answers this call and focuses on how graphic novels are used by teachers to engage and provide students with access to science.

In this chapter, the authors work to broaden the reader's options or even challenge the reader's skepticism about how to incorporate graphic novels into science classrooms. The authors describe using read-alouds for biology with *Genome: The Graphic Novel*, written by Andrew Glasgow and illustrated by J. M. Schichtel (n.d.). According to Brozo (2015), this graphic novel provides teachers with another text option for teaching units on DNA. In this example, the classroom teacher Brozo (2015) observed had trouble engaging the students in the book and topic. It was through this text and the DNA unit that the teacher was able to involve the students in a writing strategy ("*SPAWN*: Special powers, Problem solving, Alternative viewpoints, What if, and Next"; Brozo, 2015, p. 20; Brozo et al., 2014, p. 80) that prompted them to write whether the story in the book could become a reality.

Another lesson example included the book *T-Minus: The Race to the Moon*, written by Jim Ottaviani and illustrated by Zander Cannon and Kevin Cannon (2009). This selection details the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and the ultimate journey of landing on the moon. One particular advantage of this graphic novel is the focus on both science and history and how content-area instruction could be served by more than one discipline with this text. It is through such examples

that Chapter 5 prompts readers to expand upon their knowledge of using alternative texts, read-alouds, and writing strategies in disciplinary courses.

### **Chapter 6: Using Graphic Novels to Teach to Math**

Chapter 6 encourages a refreshing critical analysis of the hybrid marriage of math and literacy intersectionality. The chapter examines the need for educators to push through the barrier and foster literacy without sacrificing the curriculum, high stakes testing, or time constraints. The vignette lessons presented implement an array of tools with a fundamental approach of scaffolding to promote efficiency for all learners. For example, a geometry lesson used several types of graphic novels to assist students in comprehension. Multiple strategies were implemented to increase engagement with those concepts (e.g., gallery walk, discussions and brainstorm, discussion sheet quadrants [Fisher, Zike, & Frey, 2007]).

This chapter also describes how graphic novels aid in inquiry and problem-solving applications through visual and spatial aspects and connections to real world scenarios, all of which combine to dramatically increase student engagement. Math instruction is then moved from rote memorization to new dynamics of incorporating multiple intelligences and differentiated instruction which utilizes “reading, writing, and real-life parallels” to support higher order thinking and “inquiry-oriented” learning while increasing student engagement and participation (Brozo et al., 2014, p. 101).

### **Conclusion**

From the beginning of *WHAM!*, readers are prompted to make predictions in an anticipation guide coupled with an after-reading self-assessment tool. The authors creatively support the reader through examples, vignettes, and lessons that are realistic and practical for the teachers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This structure benefits a range of education

professionals, from pre-service teachers to practicing classroom teachers to university professors.

*WHAM!* provides the reader with an array of information and ready-to-use lessons. First, the anticipation guides at the beginning of each chapter provide adult learners a scaffold for their own learning. Next, the authors provided in-depth vignettes to demonstrate the planning for graphic novel integration. Even though the books sampled and used in the vignettes are not quite appropriate for early elementary students, the detailed appendix offers suggestions and additional sources that are suitable. These examples revealed the possibilities of using graphic novels in multiple instructional settings. Often, the discussion and the juxtaposition of the examples used in the chapters helped the reader to see the use and integration for varied contents, learners, and grade levels. Overall, *WHAM! Teaching with Graphic Novels Across the Curriculum* is a valuable tool for expanding teacher’s perspectives for using graphic novels and building upon the interests and needs of all students.



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