

Graphic Novels in the Classroom:
Suggestions for Appropriate Multimodal Writing Projects in Graphic Novel Units
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Abstract

While the NCTE (2008) definition of 21st century literacies is several years old now, the role of the ELA teacher continues to include helping students learn to read and make meaning from a variety of texts and text-types. However, much of the use of multimodal texts in ELA classrooms remains centered on reading and not on student composition. In this article, we address the multimodal composition component of NCTE's definition, by including reading and writing. We argue for using graphic novels within instructional units, and as mentor texts, to create multimodal texts. First, we discuss the current literature on graphic novels in the ELA classroom. Next, we provide reading suggestions for students, as they learn to interact with and make meaning from graphic novels. Then we offer suggested multimodal composition projects teachers can utilize within a unit including graphic novels. Finally, we discuss options and considerations for multimodal assessment.

Introduction

As both educators and perpetual students of English studies, it is important to understand—and embrace—how our discipline, particularly what it means to be literate in the 21st century, is changing. Recently, the National Council of Teachers of English posited that proficient 21st century readers and writers should be able to "create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multi-media texts" (par. 1). While this does not explicitly mark the end of the traditional text—that is, printed/bound alphabetic texts such as books and student essays printed on 8.5 by 11 inch paper—it does indicate that as responsible educators, we should

start to challenge what reading, writing and analyzing texts currently means. As Bronwyn Williams writes in his introduction to *Multimodal Composition*, “we should [...] regard the ability to use multiple modalities of communication as a call to examine how new ways of conceiving of literacy and composing produce new possibilities for different rhetorical situations” (xi).

As such, educators have a responsibility to help students understand not only *how* to consume, compose and communicate in multimodal ways, but also the *possibilities* and *importance* of consuming, composing and communicating in a multimodal manner. To that end, we should strive to create units—or at least build in multimodal aspects—that can help our students read, interpret, and construct texts beyond the traditional novel and essay to become literate in a 21st century world.

One possibility for crafting such a unit would be to center it on graphic novels, as graphic novels consistently blend image and word (two distinct modalities) to form a cohesive narrative, story, or argument; several ELA teachers are already doing this, which can be seen through several stalwart texts, including Katie Monnin’s *Teaching Graphic Novels: Practical Suggestions for the Secondary ELA Classroom* (2013), Maureen Bakis’s *The Graphic Novel Classroom* (2012), and James Bucky Carter’s *Building Literacy Connections With Graphic Novels* (2007), among others. However, the published research primarily examines graphic novels as a text that supports students’ ability to critique and analyze multimodal texts. While this is certainly an important use for graphic novels—and an important skill for students—it does not completely address NCTE’s definition of the 21st century literate individual. That is, NCTE also demands that 21st century individuals be able to *create* multimodal texts. Given the nature of graphic novels, we assert that a complete

unit on graphic narrative and multimodality should not only teach students to read and critique this kind of text, but also be able to produce a multimodal composition. As such, in this article we argue that units including graphic novels can also serve as a mentor or gateway text to get students composing in multiple modes. First, we address the literature on graphic novel use in the classroom to show the value of units centered on such texts; secondly, we offer suggestions for student-appropriate readings regarding how to understand graphic novels; thirdly we offer multimodal writing project ideas that would complement a unit centered on the graphic novel; and finally, we discuss options for assessing these text-types.

Literature Review—Graphic Novels in the ELA Classroom

Currently, research examining the potential benefits of graphic novels in the English language arts (ELA) classroom is on the rise. Over the previous two decades, scholarship has increased, as multiple voices—including English educators and teachers—have created a dialogue surrounding the use of graphic narratives in education. One of the more enduring strands of graphic novel scholarship focuses on how graphic narratives can be used to teach traditional literary elements, such as protagonist and antagonist, conflict, point of view, plot, motif, and so forth (see the work of Nancy Frey and Gretchen Schwarz for sound examples of this argument). Robin A. Moeller asserts that graphic narratives can also foster interest in and appreciation for literature, by meeting students' needs and helping them to engage in narrative and literary study (482). To that end, Francois Mouly suggests that graphic narratives provide visual contexts for unfamiliar concepts and words, helping students to use visual context clues for understanding (13).

Perhaps one of the more dominant conversations on graphic narrative focuses on how this text-type can serve as both traditional and multimodal literacy sponsors for adolescent readers. Rocco Versaci argues that graphic narratives, by their very nature, require readers to actively participate in literacy practices and facilitate literary analysis at multiple levels: standard literary devices (e.g., point of view, conflict, theme, etc.) and multimodality (i.e., the combining of—and effect of—texts and visuals) (63-64). As traditional literacy sponsors, graphic narratives can engage students, teach them analytical and critical thinking skills, and allow them to take stances on literature and literary merit. Dale Jacobs describes the advantage of this literacy sponsorship as the ability to transfer value to other forms of literacy and literacy practices (i.e., transfer of skill, which is given huge import in education) (188).

Additionally, graphic novels have become what Jacobs describes as complex, sophisticated sites of multimodal literacies (185). Students today live in a visual culture, and Schwarz suggests teachers can capitalize on these components of graphic narratives to help students become visually literate and multimodally literate (262). Versaci reminds us that creating meaning from words and images (multimodal texts) is a high-level, complicated task (62). Engaging with the medium of graphic novels, for example, can foster development of media literacy by helping students to analyze the use of images to display stereotypes, the ways in which angles and points of view affect perception and the use of color and line to depict emotion and tone (Schwarz 263).

Recent research also suggests the potential benefits of graphic narratives with regard to student reading comprehension. To date, two empirical studies (both dissertations) have been conducted which specifically investigate the relationships

between graphic narratives and students' reading comprehension. Alex Russell Kaulfuss found in 2012 that students who read a graphic novel scored significantly higher on a reading comprehension test than their peers who read a traditional text (78). Likewise, he found a positive correlation between student engagement with graphic texts and reading comprehension scores (83). Similarly, Michael Cook found that students reading a graphic text, whether in isolation or in conjunction with a traditional text, had significantly higher reading comprehension scores than those students who only read the traditional text (86).

Graphic novels have certainly received increased attention over the previous few years. The research and discussion to date offer a good starting point and rationale for both teachers and English educators to begin experimenting with graphic novels in their ELA instruction to scaffold instruction and facilitate learning in all students, not simply with reluctant readers (see the work of James Bucky Carter; Douglas B. Fisher and Nancy Frey; and Maureen Bakis, among others). However, the literature shows how much of the conversations are focused on the benefits that graphic novels have for comprehending, critiquing and analyzing both multimodal and traditional texts; comparatively fewer studies have been composed that addresses how graphic novels can serve as mentor texts to multimodal writing. The pedagogical suggestions offered within this article are meant to further these discussions by providing practical examples for teachers to consider when implementing graphic narratives into their existing instruction and curricula.

Reading Graphic Novels

Though the primary focus of this article is to help instructors construct multimodal writing projects that further the inclusion of graphic narratives in units, we think it is important to examine strategies for introducing students to graphic novels and, by

extension, multimodal composition/multiliteracies. While it is common knowledge that adolescents live in a multimodal world and interact with multimodal texts daily (and hourly for that matter), it is equally clear that many students have not been taught to interact with (i.e., read) graphic texts. Because of this and before any educator drops graphic narratives into their current literacy instruction, teachers must provide students the know-how and the preparation to read graphic novels in meaningful ways. First, providing this instruction gives students who are unfamiliar a primer on reading comics and graphic novels. Second, it equips a class with a universal vocabulary to talk about graphic narratives. Third, it will give students the critical tools necessary to talk about the relationship between image and text.

Providing this instruction can take many forms. Teachers know their students and their literacy skills and are, thus, best suited to make relevant pedagogical choices. It is, however, important to offer readers suggested texts and starting points in making the transition from a traditional ELA classroom to what Bakis describes as a graphic novel classroom. There are numerous texts and voices out there, each capable of contributing to the multimodal literacy instruction of students, but a comprehensive list is outside the scope of this article. Instead, we offer a range and variety of texts teachers can evaluate against the needs of their students in selecting the appropriate text(s) for their own classrooms.

One very popular and useful text is Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. In his groundbreaking text, McCloud provides readers a detailed look at specific aspects of graphic narratives (e.g., gutters, transitions, speech bubbles) and the ways in which readers should approach these texts. For example, teachers might find it

helpful to use chapter 2, “The Vocabulary of Comics,” to provide their students with the necessary vocabulary for discussing comics. Likewise, Mario Saraceni’s text, *The Language of Comics* can provide a wonderful starting place for teaching students to read graphic narratives in ELA classrooms. In chapter 2, “Words and Pictures,” Saraceni provides students an age-appropriate and complete look at making meaning from both words and images in comics. Similarly, in chapter 3, “Between the Panels,” he offers students helpful information on the organization of panels as well as making inferences between panels. Alternatively, Hollis Rudiger’s article, “Reading Lessons: Graphic Novels 101” offers an engaging and informative look at how to analyze and make meaning from the layout of graphic texts. Specifically, Rudiger draws from the language of photography and film to show how students can read a comic book page cinematically; this particular piece is especially accessible and might be a good choice for teachers who are seeking a short, time-friendly piece for reading comics.

Graphic Novels as Mentor Text: Multimodal Projects Inspired by Reading Graphic Novels
Multimodal Assignments

To further the discussion of multimodal texts, such as graphic novels, in the classroom, we offer three possible writing projects that work to evaluate what students have learned from graphic novels, while also fostering an understanding of and awareness about multimodal design and composition. The first, wikis, is intended to represent a “during-reading,” formative assessment method. The second, graphic narratives, offers students the opportunity to put “theory” into practice. Third, multimedia presentations, can be used to have students add yet another communicative mode to an already multimodal text. To facilitate each project, we suggest pairing students with a peer to increase

opportunities for learning. Together, partners can discuss topic, purpose, and audience (among other topics) to collaborate in the creation of multimodal texts. These projects are meant to allow students to manipulate language by using a range of modes and media to make real world connections within their English curriculum. As part of these assignments, students have the opportunity to learn new platforms/modes for composing, while thinking about potentially familiar technology in new ways, as opposed to simply relying on the technology (and ways of utilizing it) the way they use it outside of school.

Wikis

For those who are unfamiliar with wikis, they are websites anyone can edit. Matt Barton writes that “communities rather than individual authors author them [...] wikis seem to offer the most to writers interested in collaboration and consensus-building” (178). Wikis, then, are a platform for students to collaborate, while striving for consensus and a communal voice (Barton 178). In most wikis, any individual can write or edit an existing wiki; additionally, there are usually spaces for discussion and conversation to place in the editing page. This allows individuals to debate content, while also creating a sort of “to do” list.

Wikis have been used with great success in the ELA classroom. Michael Glassman and Min Ju Kang use wikis to create learning networks, foster abductive thinking and problem solving, while also focusing students on the process of thinking (104). Additionally, Janet Murphy and Robert Lebens found the use of wikis in classrooms to increase student engagement (141). In their examination of the use of wikis with secondary school students, B. Mak and D. Coniam found students produced substantially more text than expected, writing increased in complexity, students were greater involved

in the writing process, confidence in writing was boosted, and student creativity was tapped in new ways (452-453).

It is important to note, given the focus of our article, that wikis can be multimodal in nature. Though contributors to a wiki page primarily work with one mode—the written, alphabetic text—many wiki entries contain images as well (examining a random *Wikipedia* entry will support this assertion). Students contributing to a wiki, then, must decide a) when it is appropriate to add an image to an entry, b) what kind of image (e.g. chart, graph, photograph, cartoon, graphic, and so forth) to include c) how many images are reasonable to utilize in one entry and d) deduce the appropriate placement and size of the image. These are important discussions to have, as students will be guided to reflect on how images may best facilitate meaning-making for the reader.

Using WikiSpaces (wikispaces.com), a popular, free wiki site, students can engage in rigorous, during-reading assessments that allow teachers a formative look at their learning. Focusing on the use of wikis as collaborative spaces in a literacy program, S. Ferris and Hilary Wilder found wikis to be beneficial to students in multiple ways—to create and share information, as customized project spaces, etc.—and fostered student consideration of how to organize information, ultimately helping them to better understand print text (pars. 21-23). Thus, one use of the wiki-space would be for students to collaboratively create a wiki based on the graphic narrative they are reading. They may be asked to model *Wikipedia* entries on literary works, which often include plot summaries, an overview of characters, a brief examination of criticism, and perhaps even a dabbling in theme. Perhaps more exciting—and more directly related to the *graphic novel*—students would be forced to make some interesting and important decisions regarding which panels (or panel

sequences) to include in their wiki to make their entry truly multimodal. Students would be asked to consider which panels best represent a character, or which panels best represent a theme. These are interesting choices for students to make, and shows not only their ability to critique a multimodal text (the graphic novel), but also create a multimodal text (inserting images to support, complement, or exemplify the written word).

Yet another possibility for the wiki would be to have students collaboratively create a wiki that serves to analyze the graphic novel the class read together. For example, we've asked students to create a wiki that explicates McCloud's theory for reading comics, paying particular attention to his six transitions (aspect-to-aspect, moment-to-moment, scene-to-scene, subject-to-subject, action-to-action, and non-sequitur) and then finding examples from the text that demonstrate the aforementioned transitions. This not only helps determine how well students are able to critique and analyze a multimodal text, but it also forces students to create a multimodal text themselves. In this respect, we'd use the wiki platform for students to create collaborative, analytic hybrid essays.

We've found wikis to be a low-stakes activity to gradually help students become comfortable composing with multiple modes; many students are already familiar with the wiki platform, as consumers of *Wikipedia* or *Wikibooks*. It is important to scaffold, as we cannot assume our students are comfortable or will immediately gravitate towards this method of creating texts. Starting with a platform that students are at least peripherally familiar with lessens the intimidation factor, which cannot be overstated. Moreover, students have appreciated the collaborative nature of the wiki.

Graphic Narrative

Perhaps it seems overtly obvious that a unit including a graphic narrative text would also ask students to compose a graphic narrative themselves. In *Teaching Visual Literacy: Using Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Anime, Cartoons, and More to Develop Comprehension and Thinking Skills*, the editors Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher note that award-winning teacher Jerome Burg has had students craft graphic narratives based on traditional narratives with great success, as he finds it demonstrates their understanding of a work (12). However, we have found that a similar assignment can be utilized following the reading of a graphic narrative. While there are numerous options for this assignment, a sample prompt for the multimodal essay might read as follows (this was following a unit on the hero, which included Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*):

For this assignment, you will craft a short, graphic narrative. Specifically, you are being asked to respond to one of the following four short prompts: (1) provide one additional scene to *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, (2) re-write one of the scenes in the graphic novel, (3) craft an epilogue to *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, or (4) create a short original graphic novel that takes on the same themes as *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. Regardless of which option you pursue, consider how the themes we discussed this unit are fleshed out through multiple modes (language, image, color, sound, etc.) and how each of these contributes to your understanding; then use these same concepts to help your audience better understand your multimodal text.

While we chose *Dark Knight Returns* as our graphic novel, please note that there are a range of texts that would work well for a unit on graphic novels as multimodality (for instance, see Diamond Comics' list for suggested graphic novels in K-12 classrooms). We

chose *Dark Knight Returns* because it is a text that (a) actively challenges students' pre-conceived notions of heroism and super-heroism and (b) it challenges the potential of graphic narrative through its unique panel layout.

Not only does this assignment help us better understand how students interpreted the overall tone of the text, but once again it gets students thinking about crafting a multimodal text. This is a slightly more advanced multimodal project, as it asks students to consider how many panels per page they need, what kind of panel shapes they should use, what kind of panel transitions are appropriate, which images will best convey a single moment, how to best present any written text (captions or word balloons), how color should be used, and so forth. Essentially, we're asking students to put the theory they read—whether McCloud, Saraceni, Rudiger, or another appropriate primer on reading comics—into practice.

Though the above project may seem advanced, there are several free resources and tools available to students that can simplify the graphic novel composing process. One such tool is Comic Life; though typically Comic Life is a software that comes with a nominal fee, there is a free thirty-day trial period that should be sufficient for this project. Comic Life is an extremely user-friendly software that operates on the “drag-and-drop” principle. Comic Life offers authors a wide array of page and panel layouts, so students do not have to use a stock 4 x 4 grid. Similarly, Comic Life offers users a wide array of speech balloons and captions; the result of these options is that authors can easily customize their comic book to be exactly what they desire. Usually, photographs are used as the images, though students can also upload their own drawings, scanned images from other texts (such as magazines or pre-existing graphic novels), and so forth. These images can simply be

dragged onto the interface and dropped into the panel you desire. Comic Life then gives the author several artistic filters (e.g. “black and white,” “sepia,” “colored pencil,” “stained glass window,” “night-vision”) to choose from, which allows users to give their image a “comic book” feel. Given the ease of using Comic Life, more time can be spent on rhetorical decisions, such as the aforementioned page and panel design, and how to best manipulate their images to achieve a desired effect.

Another possibility would be Toondoo (toondoo.com). Toondoo is a free comic strip creator offering hundreds of stock characters, settings, props, text bubble and box types, and clip art. Users can also upload their own images and then edit by reshaping, distorting, and so forth. Additionally, students can create their own characters—digital versions of themselves or of literary characters they have read about. Unlike Comic Life, Toondoo offers a wider array of image usage options, which more advanced students may find useful.

Like Comic Life, students are provided panel number, size and layout options, allowing them the freedom to make intentional design and composition decisions that best address their purpose. Through a user-friendly interface, coupled with an impressive array of edit tools (including drag and drop), students are provided multiple style and layout options, including horizontal and vertical layouts of between one and four panels of varying sizes. Panels can be combined to form individual comic strips or books (i.e., collections) of multiple comics. As part of Toondoo, students can publish and share their graphic narratives via URL and/or embed codes. Classmates can also read and comment on one another’s strips using the feedback tool. One consideration for teachers is that Toondoo requires the creation of an account (by providing an email address). Teachers, however,

can register an entire class by contacting Toondoo administration if individual registration is an issue.

We have found this to be an extraordinarily valuable project. Though we do not expect perfection from our students—and indeed, we have found it useful to reassure students that we are not grading on artistic ability—it still allows us to see how they are able to craft a graphic narrative/multimodal composition of their own—making key rhetorical decisions focused on image selection, word selection, and so forth.

Multimedia Presentation

Using the affordances of multimodal presentations, students can explore the unit theme by creating layered projects that combine an array of modes (e.g., visuals, audio, and alphabetic text). There are several useful tools that each offer unique possibilities for this type of assessment (for example, Prezi, VoiceThread, digital essays, etc.). For our purposes, we suggest and discuss using Microsoft PowerPoint, an oft-used tool that is easily accessible, user friendly, familiar to teachers and students, and amenable to multiple modes of communication. Research supports the use of PowerPoint as multimodal projects. Nancy M. Bailey, examining the use of PowerPoint with ninth grade students to create and present multimodal presentations, found that students better learned the curriculum and began to see themselves as better understanding their own literacy practices (215). In addition, teachers reported curricular value in the new literacy formats. Examining the use of technology to promote students' engagement in new literacy practices, Cathy Burnett et al. found that students were engaged and interested in the challenge of working with technology to create multimodal texts (26).

Certainly, teachers could consider assigning the traditional PowerPoint presentation that asks students to analyze a theme or character within the graphic novel. However, we've also found that the following assignment has proven to be quite successful:

For this project, you will be asked to take one scene from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and turn it into a multimedia presentation. Specifically, you will be asked to narrate the panels, while also adding any relevant sound effects. Time will be spent in class showing students how to record narration onto slides and how to add sound-effects using Microsoft PowerPoint.

In our multimedia project, we're asking students to take an already multimodal composition—graphic narrative—and add another modality to it: sound. Additionally, we encourage students to consider playing around with PowerPoint's transitions and timings to also give their remediated graphic narrative an element of motion. A bit of preparation is needed for this project, though, as we need to help students scan images from the graphic novel into PowerPoint; in this regard, this contributes to students' functional computer literacy. An important component to this prompt is leading informal or formal class discussion that invites students to reflect how sound (and potentially motion)—additional modalities—added or detracted from the original telling of the story. This, then, allows students to begin discovering which modes are the most effective for certain text-types and purposes.

Benefits of Multimodal Writing Assignments

Students experience myriad benefits from engaging in multimodal composition projects. One such benefit is that for some, multimodal composition better parallels the lives students lead away from school. Frank Serafini, among many others, points out the

disparity that exists between the literacy education students receive in school and the literacy practices they engage in outside of school; incorporating multimodal texts and composition allow teachers to intentionally bridge that gap (348). Asking students to compose in multimodal ways requires that they harness the affordances of each mode to maximize their ability to communicate (Kress and van Leeuwen 11). In other words, the use of varied modes (e.g., text and image) working together allows students to create sophisticated and complex compositions (Brooks 233).

Richard Selfe and Cynthia Selfe provide four reasons for using multimodal composition with students: (1) multiple modes of communication drive our interactions and learning daily; (2) literacy is dynamic, rather than static; (3) literacy and the ways in which we communicate in the workplace have and continue to evolve; and (4) we live and communicate in a global world (84-86). Through multimodal composition, students gain a deeper understanding of what they can accomplish with their writing (George 12). An additional benefit of multimodal composition stems from the advantage of incorporating multiple rhetorical devices (e.g., words, images, sound, etc.) to enhance communication (Anderson et al. 59). Likewise, Serafini suggests that students benefit from three components of working with multimodal texts; these include composition, perspective, and visual symbols (346). Furthermore, using digital tools and multiple modes to compose helps teachers begin to recognize the importance and utility of multimodal composition to engage their students (Doering, Beach, & O'Brien 58).

We would close by encouraging instructors considering multimodal units to intentionally and carefully choose projects. While the projects we outline all make use of digital tools, it is important to note that not all schools—or indeed, not all students—will

have access to computers to work on these kinds of *digital* projects. Thus, we find it imperative to emphasize that there are print-options for multimodal projects. That is, teachers interested in implementing multimodal units need not shy away due to limited digital tools. For instance, in lieu of creating a graphic novel using Comic Life or ToonDoo, students could craft a graphic novel by hand (even if using stick figures) and still think about the relationship between word and image.

Assessing Multimodal Writing

Multimodal writing projects support students' new literacy practices. Questions and challenges, however, exist with regard to assessing students' multimodal products. Traditional methods of assessment create some of these challenges. Because of this, creating and using assessments like the ones we have described above will require that teachers rethink and develop new assessment methods. With that said, it is important to consider elements beyond the traditional when assessing students' multimodal creations. The creation of multimodal rubrics can help with the transition. Considering the question of how to assess multimodal texts, Claire Wyatt-Smith and Kay Kimber suggested six concepts that provide possibilities for assessing multimodal texts: design, visualization of literacy, modes and modal affordances, transmodal operation, cohesion, and staged multimodality (72-80). They also provided three principles for multimodal assessment: (1) students (and teachers) require a common language and metalanguage; (2) assessment should involve dynamic tools; (3) assessment should involve the learning process, not just the product (87).

With regard to rubric creation, there are multiple elements to consider: content, organization, cohesion, rhetorical moves, informed selection of modes, narrative, process,

and so forth. Using rubrics to assess student work can serve both formative and summative purposes and allows for teachers to provide meaningful, useful constructive feedback. While there are numerous rubric design options available, we offer one suggestion for designing a rubric. Here, we describe four elements to include.

First, linguistic design is important to include. While multimodal projects can potentially include non-traditional modes, traditional, alphabetic text will always hold importance in literacy, communication and English curricula. When considering linguistic design elements, it is important to examine whether or not the text was coherent, well structured and logically organized, and beneficial to purpose and communication. Second, visual design parallels students' engagement with the graphic narrative and is therefore a useful design element in students' multimodal products. When assessing students' uses of visual design, teachers should examine the ways in which the visuals used add to cohesion and the construction of meaning in the text, as well as how they added to each student's ability to effectively communicate. Third, given that one of our suggested assessments was a presentation, which includes narration, the ability to assess auditory design becomes useful. With regard to the assessment of sound use, it is important for teachers to examine how sound is incorporated with regard to author purpose. Similarly, assessment should include how the use of auditory design partners with other modes to create a cohesive and meaningful text, and the ways in which it ultimately affects communication. Fourth, when designing multimodal rubrics, teachers should consider the overall design of the product. The purpose of using multiple modes, after all, is to create a layered and coherent text. When assessing overall design, teachers should consider whether or not the author made informed decisions and how those decisions created a combination of modes which led to a

coherent (successfully tied together) and thoughtful text. Finally, the use of additional elements in the design of a quality rubric may prove helpful. For example, teachers may be interested in assessing students' use of spatial design and their own writing process(es).

For the purposes of quantitative assessment, we suggest the use of a continuum-style scale (e.g., Likert). Using a scale of 1 to 5, total scores, out of 25 can be calculated and easily converted to a traditional 100-point scale that better matches school practices. The proposed scale would range from 1 (poor cohesion) to 5 (excellent cohesion). This scale can be applied to each of the rubric elements (linguistic, visual, audio, and overall, as described above).

In addition to using multimedia project rubrics for teacher assessment, students can use the rubrics for self- and peer-evaluation. Empowering students with the knowledge and opportunity to assess themselves and their peers increases the opportunity for learning. First, it fosters an understanding of and awareness about multimodal design. Second, through self- and peer-evaluations, students begin to develop a metalanguage to use when reading, discussing and writing about multimodal texts.

A description of multimodal assessment and rubrics would not be complete without a discussion of the potential constraints that come with such an assessment. Evaluating multimodal products is difficult, in large part because of the lack of familiarity with non-traditional writing in schools today. Likewise, the creation and use of multimodal assessments and rubrics involve complex decisions and design. As a result, questions often arise regarding what to assess and how to ensure the assessment method matches the literacy task and mode(s) being used. To achieve success, teachers must intentionally design and implement new, multimodal literacy projects. One additional note of

importance: rubrics are not necessarily transferrable between tools, modes and assignments.

Conclusion

In this article, we've argued that units centered on reading graphic novels should also include a multimodal writing project. By doing so, we believe that at the end of such units, students will be able to not only critique and analyze multimodal texts, but also produce rhetorically savvy multimodal texts. It is important to note that our proposed projects do not need to only be done in conjunction with a graphic narrative; rather, we've found these three projects to be effective conclusions to a unit on multimodality. It has helped our students meet the challenge put forth by NCTE to critique, analyze, and create compositions that utilize multiple channels of communication. Moreover, our suggested projects can foster further discussion of appropriate and relevant methods of assessing students' engagement with and understanding of texts of varying modes. Furthermore, our rubric design suggestions are meant to provide teachers with an example by which to contextualize their own classroom, students, and writing assignments.

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