

Lesson Plan: Introducing comics-based learning in the classroom

~ Dr Priyamvada Agarwal

Anahita Lee, the author of a popular ELT series by Oxford University Press, when asked why she included graphic stories in the design of her coursebooks said, “Like so many others, I grew up reading popular Indian comics and that sparked my love for graphic stories. So, when I was working on choosing stories that children would love and appreciate, I felt the books would be incomplete without a graphic story.” A well-written and illustrated graphic story helps in comprehension. The illustrations reinforce the language and serve in providing context and background, particularly for emergent readers. Graphic stories are fast-paced and give children a much-needed scaffolding, especially those who find reading challenging. It allows them to experience a sense of accomplishment. Reading and comprehending pictures is a complex and vital critical thinking skill. Above all, graphic stories are joyful and simply lovely.

There is a plethora of activities that can be done using graphic novels or comic books which are based on educational content. After all, creativity has no bounds. Here are a few suggestions on how comic books or graphic novels can be used in teaching-learning. Before we look into the activities that can be done using comics or graphic novels, let us first understand a few of their universal features.



Panels		A panel contains one scene of a story. They can be of different shapes and sizes. Generally, they are rectangular.
Captions or Narrative Box		They provide useful background information through which the story is narrated. It may talk about what has happened before this point in the story or provides time references in a story. The dialogues and thought bubbles are in direct speech whereas in narrative box it is in reported speech.
Balloons: Can be of two kinds	Thought Bubbles	They tell what any character is thinking.
	Speech Bubbles	It consists of text dialogues that the characters are saying to each other.
Gutters		The white space between panels.



The activities suggested below can be used in both offline or online mode. They are not specific to any grade level or subject. Teachers may adapt them as per their requirement. Just like we divide any reading lesson into three stages, we may also design activities based on the reading of comics using those same stages: pre-reading, while reading, and post reading.

Use only the visuals

1. Show only the first panel and ask students to predict what the story will be about, if you choose a fiction.
2. Just like jigsaw reading, give the panels in a jumbled order. Put students in groups in a breakout room and let them read the jumbled panels together. Then in their respective groups they can unjumble it in the right order or the order they think is right.
3. Use a highlighter to hide all the text and show only the visuals. Let students guess the story.
4. Let one set of learners describe a panel and while others guess which panel is being described.

Use only the text

1. Encourage students to work in virtual groups to write a story using specific key words.
2. Create a word cloud with just the key words and let students predict the end of the story and its characters. There are many free word cloud building websites. One such example is [Free Word Cloud Generator](#).

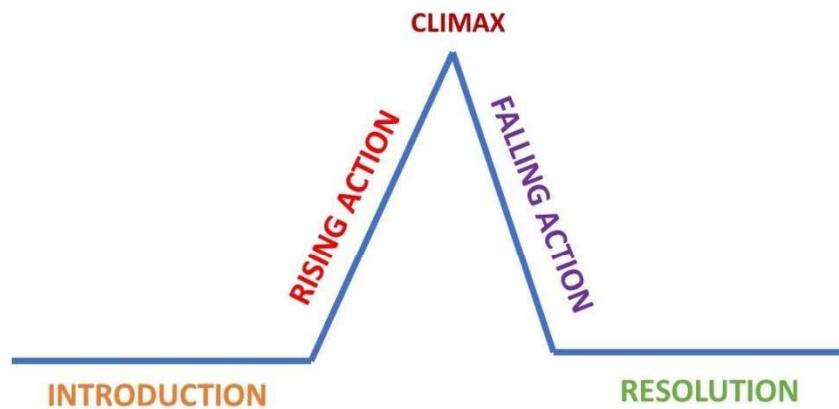
- If the graphic novel or comic story is theme-based like in science, social studies, mathematics, or computers, use a KWL chart and make them fill out the respective columns. Here is an example:

Pre reading What I know	While reading What I want to Know	Post reading What I have learned

How to make this prediction activity work in mixed ability classes or with students of multiple intelligences?

Divide the class into groups and assign them specific breakout rooms. Give one group only the text, or keywords, or the word cloud while to another group give just the visuals. Let each group discuss among themselves and predict the story. Once they make their predictions, assign any of the following activities at the while and post reading stage:

- Read and confirm/compare your predictions.
- Match the text and the visuals.
- Read and make a flow chart of the main events.
- Each group create a set of comprehension questions and pose them to the opposite group.
- Summarise the story in your own words.
- Come up with an alternate end to the story. (*This is a very good strategy to develop students' imagination and creativity.*)
- Narrate the story from the perspective of any character you liked or disliked.
- Write three questions you would want to ask any of the characters and explain why.
- Imagine you are one of the characters and narrate what is going on in the mind of that character at a given point in the comic.
- Let's identify the key events in the story and plot them on the story map. (*This activity will help students in creative writing later.*)



11. Arrange for a role play based on the comic in online class.
12. Come up with alternate dialogues for a few panels and see how it brings a change in the story.

Tell us about your experience!

Have you been using comics-based chapters in your classrooms? With which grades do you use? For which subject do you use? How has been your experience so far? Would you want to share any activity that you did using comics-based chapters? We would be happy to hear from you. Please write at OTTIndia@oup.com.

Dr Priyamvada Agarwal, founder of TakeAnEdge, is an experienced ELT specialist. Her passion includes teaching, training teachers, and material development. She has worked with organisations like NCERT, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Delhi University, Times of India, etc. Currently, she teaches at Ambedkar University, New Delhi.