

Gene Yang

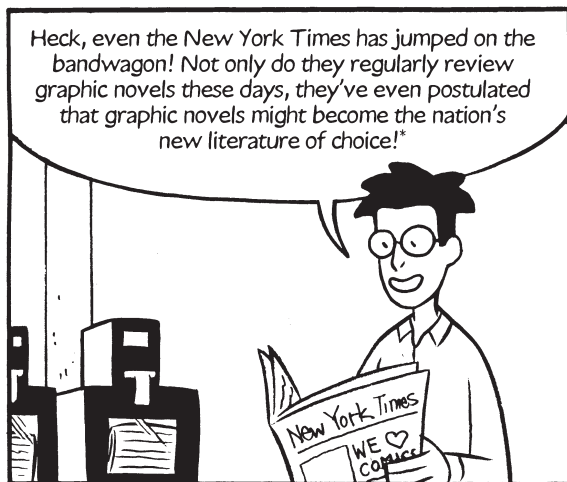
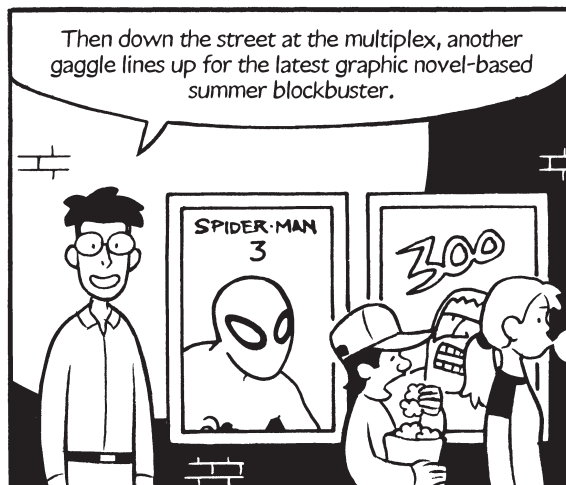
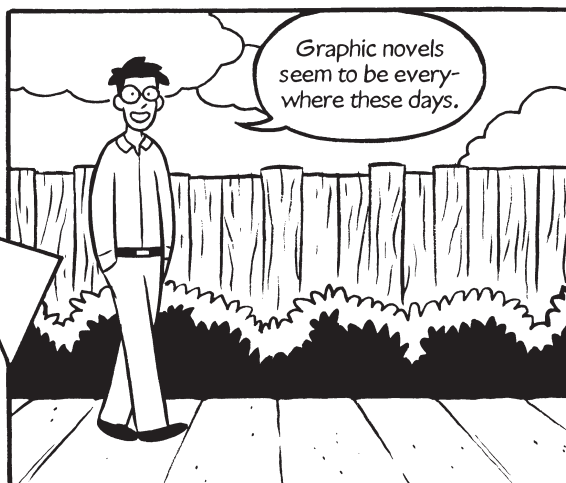
Graphic Novels in the Classroom

In this article, in what is one of the first-ever journal articles in graphic novel format, educator and graphic novel author Gene Yang makes a case for using graphic novels in classrooms.

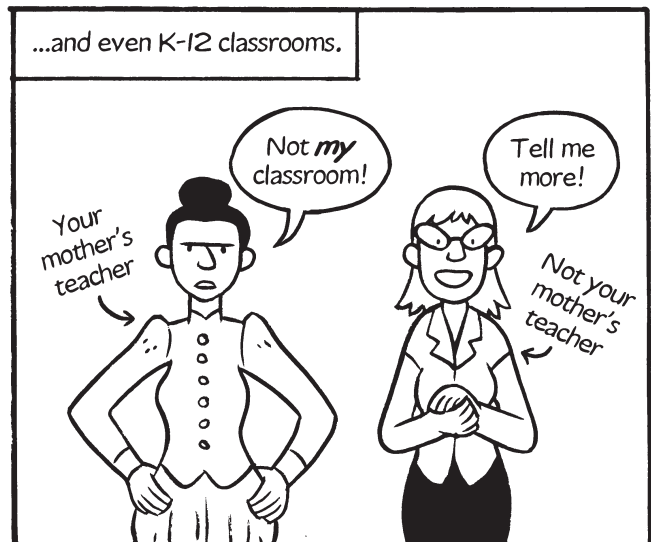
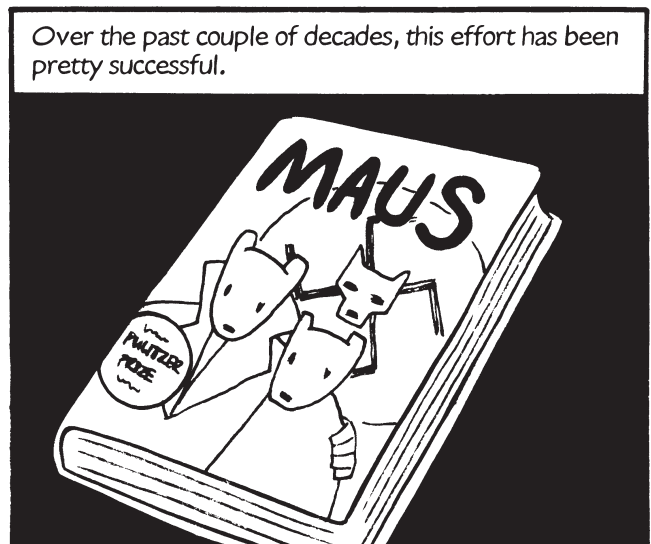
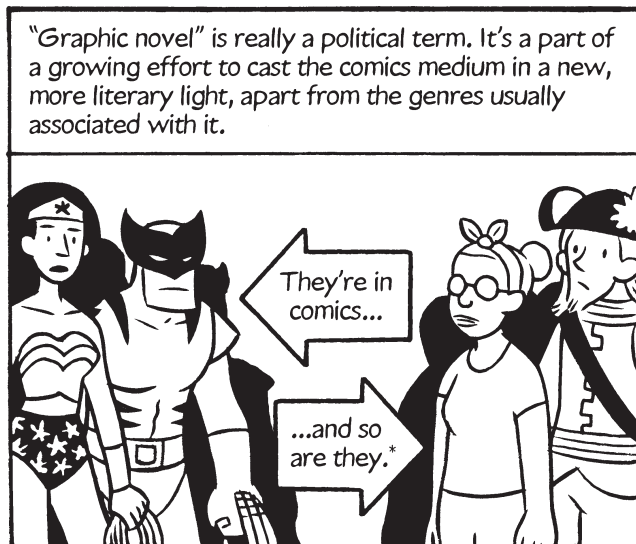
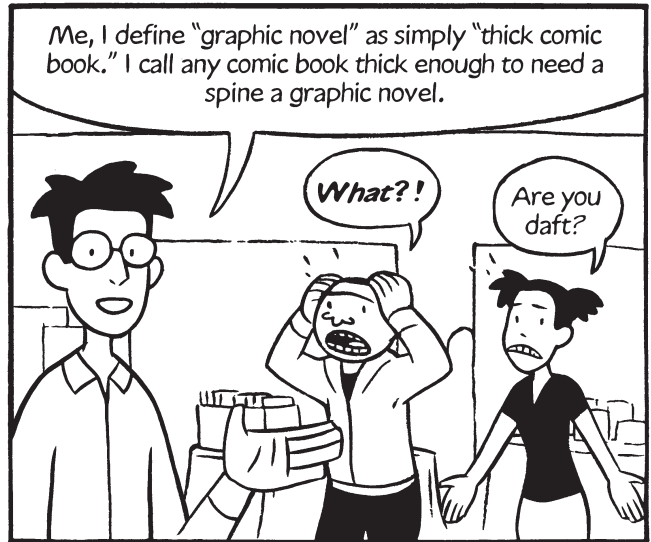
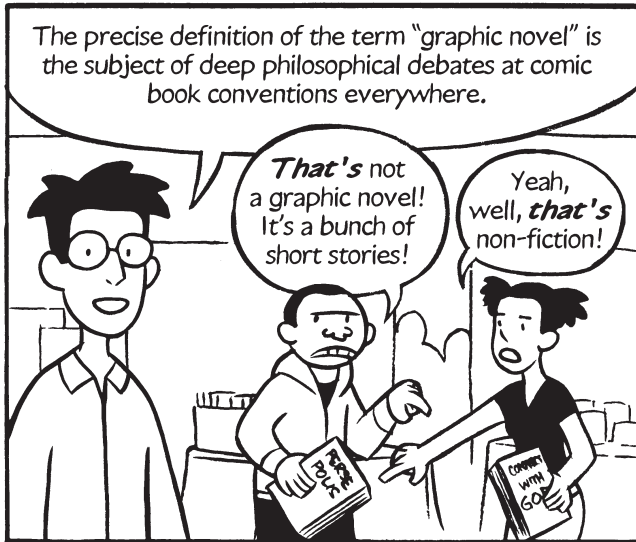
GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THE CLASSROOM

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An essay in panels by Gene Yang,
high school teacher and cartoonist



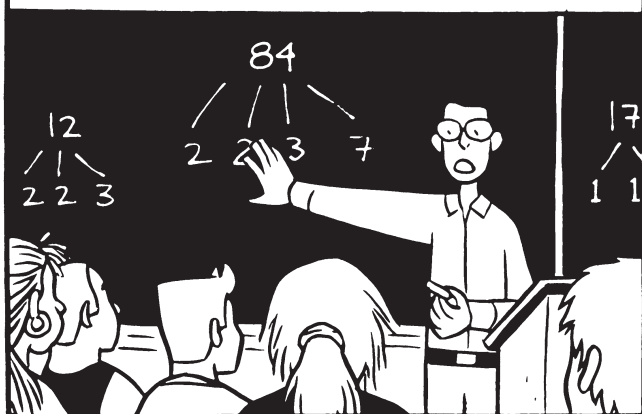
*Check out Charles McGrath's article "Not Funny," published July 11, 2004!



*That's Wonder Woman and Wolverine on the left, Lynda Barry and *Journey Into Mohawk Country's* van den Bogaert on the right.

Spiegelman, A. (2003). *The complete Maus*. New York: Penguin.

The comics medium can be a powerful educational tool. I discovered this personally while teaching an Algebra class several years ago.



My duties as the school's educational technologist required that I miss a couple days of class every two or three weeks. To make up for it, I drew "comics lectures" and asked my sub to pass them out to the students.



It was a hit.

I really like those comics, Mr. Yang! Better than when you're here in person, even!

Uh... thanks?

So why were the comics lectures so effective?

When I questioned my students about this, two strengths of the comics medium as an educational tool emerged. First, graphic novels are **visual**, and our students **love** visual media. After all, they're immersed in it.



By combining image and text, graphic novels bridge the gap between



media we watch

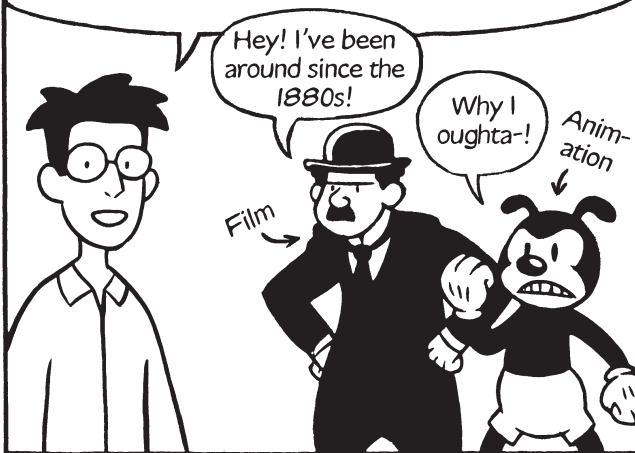
and media we read.

Image and text share narrative responsibility. Because of this, many teachers have found great success using graphic novels with ELL students and struggling readers.*

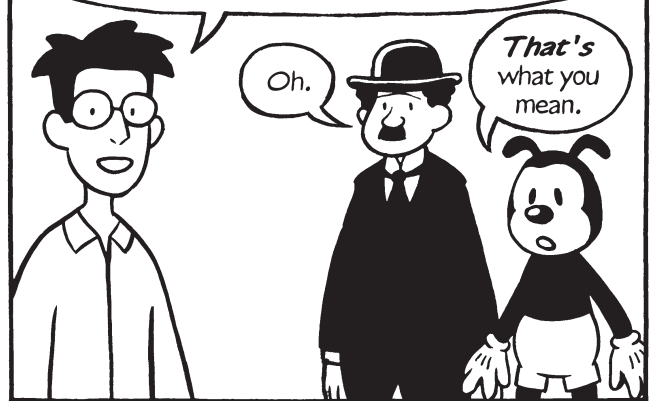


*Stephen Cary's *Going Graphic: Comics at Work in the Multilingual Classroom* is a great resource for this!

Second, in comparison to other visual media like film and animation, graphic novels are **permanent**.



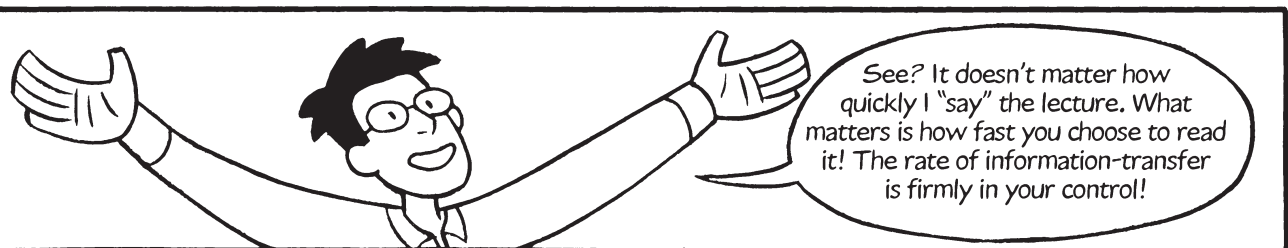
Now, my use of the word "permanent" needs some explanation. You see, language and actions in film and animation are time-bound. They're on screen one minute, and gone the next.



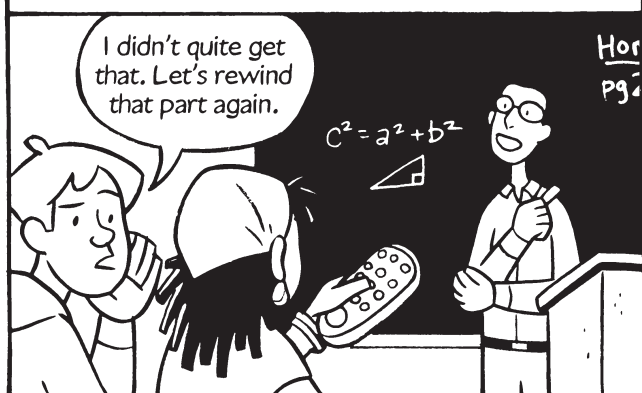
Graphic novels, on the other hand, have a "visual permanence" to them. Time progresses only as quickly as your eyes move across the page. Let me show you what I mean.

I'm going to give the same lecture twice, first as fast as I can...

...and then as slow as I can.



When I did my Algebra lectures as comics, it was like giving my students a remote control. They could rewind and fast-forward the lectures whenever they wanted.



Besides being visual and permanent, graphic novels are great for education in so many other ways!



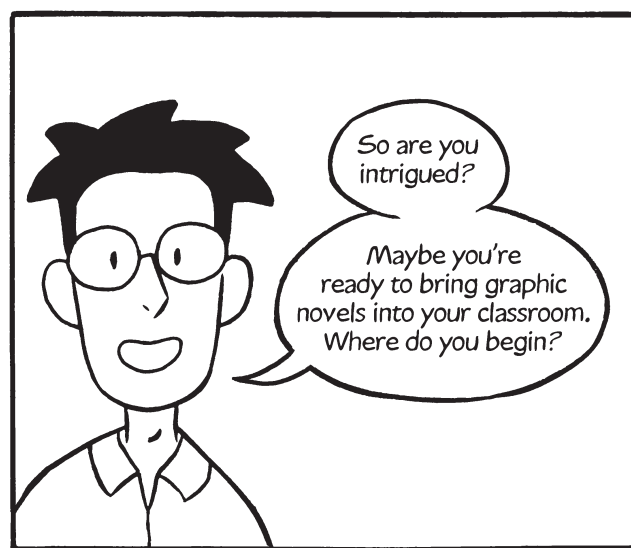
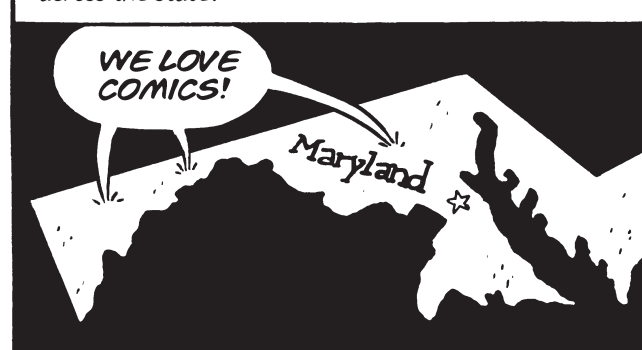
I identified several more when I did my final project for my Masters in Education on this very topic. You can find it online at <http://www.geneyang.com/comicsedu>

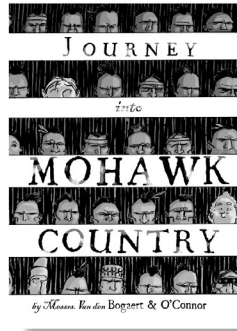


And I'm by no means alone in my interest. Teachers all over the world are creating innovative learning experiences with graphic novels!

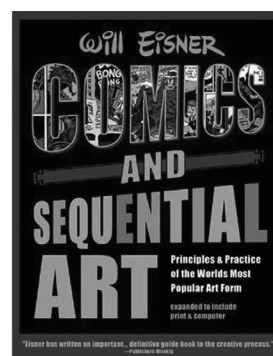
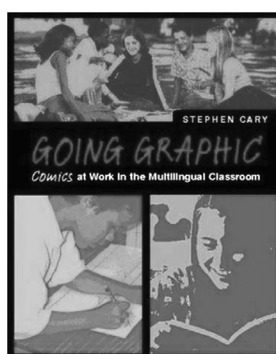
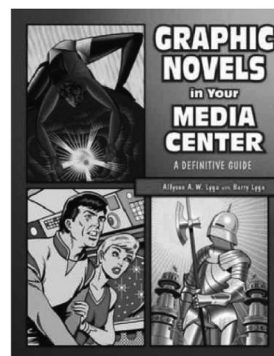
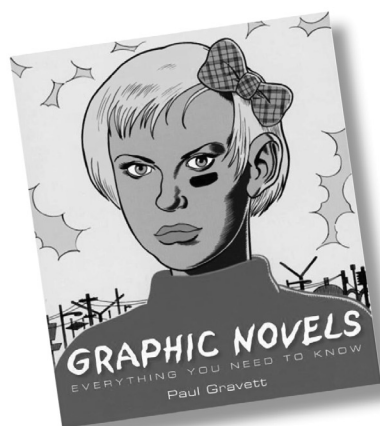


As just one example, the Maryland State Department of Education recently teamed up with Diamond Comics Distributors to form the Maryland Comic Book Initiative. They're making graphic novel-based lesson plans available to K-12 teachers across the state!





Bibliographic information is provided in the order books are shown: O'Connor, G. (2006). *Journey into Mohawk country*. New York: First Second Books. • Guibert, E. (2006). *Sardine in outer space* (J. Sfar, Illus.). New York: First Second Books. • Trondheim, L. (2007). *Tiny tyrant* (F. Parme, Illus.). New York: First Second Books. • Fallar, R. (2006). *The adventures of Polo*. New York: Roaring Book. • Runton, A. (2004). *Owly: The way home & the bittersweet summer* (vol. 1). Marietta, GA: Top Shelf. • Smith, J. (2005). *Bone: Out from Boneville*. New York: Scholastic/Graphix. • Renier, A. (2005). *Spiral-bound*. Marietta, GA: Top Shelf. • Siegel, S. C., & Siegel, M. (2006). *To dance: A ballerina's graphic novel*. New York: Atheneum/Richard Jackson. • Crane, J. (2005). *The clouds above*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics.



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Gene Yang teaches computer science at a high school in Oakland, California. He has written and published comic books and graphic novels since 1996. His most recent graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*, won the 2007 American Library Association's Printz Award.