

# INTE 6710 ~ Creative Designs for Instructional Materials

## Project 3: Stand-Alone Presentation Design Document

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### 1. Significant Purpose

In order to effectively teach reading and writing, a teacher must have student engagement. Too many students are not engaged during literacy instruction and therefore are only skimming the surface, and not experimenting with various reading strategies. I would like to change the way teachers look at literacy instruction, especially for boys. Using this presentation, I want to inform teachers and parents that comic books and graphic novels are not just dumbed-down, disposable literature. Graphic novels possess a great deal of academic integrity and often engage the imagination more using panel to panel inferencing.

I anticipate resistance to using comic books and graphic novels in the classroom. It is very difficult to communicate a new (sometimes even seen as radical) idea to a veteran teacher who has taught literacy for a number of years. What these teachers often forget is how visual their students are when learning. As Medina (2008) states, "vision trumps all other senses." In fact, "the more visual the input becomes, the more likely it is to be recognized and recalled" (Medina, 2008, p. 233). Therefore, I feel that a very visual communication tool, the stand-alone presentation, will best communicate my message. I will not only impress teachers with the educational potential of graphic novels, but I will remind them that pairing pictures and words is a powerful way to teach.

### The Problem

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, literacy means more than just reading novels and textbooks. Boys of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are turning to other outlets, such as television, video games, and the Internet for pleasure. Any teacher can tell you that the boys in his/her class have an average of five to fifteen hours of screen time per week. There is obviously a high level of engagement for this media. However, teachers feel that these students are forgetting the beauty of reading words because they are saturated with images. "Words are the most subtle symbols which we possess and our human fabric depends on them" (Murdoch, 2001, p. 33). Words are essential. Absolutely! However, if teachers can adequately harness this engagement to images, and redirect it towards academic means, gaps in achievement will begin to disappear. Comic literature significantly and positively impacts the reading motivation, reading skills of students, and leads to reading of other modes such as novels, short stories, and poetry. Using visual media, such as comic books and graphic novels as supplemental literacy instructional tools, is a creative and innovative way to reach any struggling student and simultaneously challenge advanced readers with rigor.

## Learning Audience

My learning audience will mainly be educators looking to both liven up their literacy instruction and/or engage struggling readers in their classroom. I would show this presentation during a staff meeting or any staff development related to literacy instruction. However, this presentation is really a call to any school's teaching community (parents, teachers, administration, board members, etc...) that "not reading never leads to reading. Reading leads to reading (Wilson, 2012). Literacy instruction needs to change with our students, and right now, students are reading more visual media with better attention than traditional text. Since "better attention always equals better learning" (Medina, 2008, p. 74), and we want students to read more, why not use comic literature to teach reading strategies? The learning audience will leave the presentation convinced of the potential of comic literature in the classroom.

## 2. A Picture of the Future

I designed this presentation to communicate to my learning audience to importance of using visual media in the classroom. Since "any problem can be made clearer with a picture" (Roam, 2008, p. 13), I will use pictures to speak to my audience about using comic literature in the classroom. This presentation is not designed, however, to give teachers specific lesson plans for using comics in the classroom. Instead, I want the audience to leave convinced to the learning potential comic literature possesses, and asking questions about how they can begin using comic books and graphic novels immediately.

Since this is a stand-alone presentation with no speaker present, it will be difficult assess how my learning audience (students) have accomplished the learning goals. For presentation purposes, I plan on presenting this in a staff meeting and/or literacy professional development. I will be present, but will remain silent throughout the presentation. At the end, I will be available to answer questions and begin a discussion about comic literature in the classroom.

"There is no such thing as a passive audience" (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 210). My learning objectives are meant to provide inspiration to the audience that will ultimately lead to actively using comic books and graphic novels in the classroom. I want this presentation to spark a lot of conversation and discussion and story-telling. I will share my own stories about how I have used graphic novels successfully, but also what has not worked in the past. "Stories contain wisdom" (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 205) and I want my audience to leave benefiting with the collective wisdom of each other.

## Learning Objectives

I will refer to my audience as *students* to simplify the presentation's learning goals.

1. Students will be able to communicate one fact about comic books and graphic novels and literacy.
  - a. I will determine that students have accomplished this goal by asking the audience to write down any one thing they remember from the presentation. This will also give me valuable

feedback regarding the design elements of the presentation and how well I communicated my message.

- b. This will potentially lead to a discussion about the statistics I mention in the presentation.
2. Students will be able to identify how they might begin incorporating comic books and graphic novels into their literacy instruction.
  - a. Again, I will determine if this goal is met by engaging in a discussion with the audience about how they envision using comic literature in the classroom. I will be able to answer any clarifying questions regarding logistically how comic literature fits into a literacy lesson.
3. Students will analyze their current literacy instruction in order to determine where and how comic literature will fit.
  - a. I will determine if this goal is met by engaging in a discussion with the audience about their current literacy instruction. We will use a Circle Map to chart what students use to teach reading and writing. I will be able to answer any clarifying questions regarding logistically how comic literature fits into a literacy lesson.
  - b. We will also use a Double-Bubble Map (Venn diagram) to compare and contrast literacy instruction with and without comic literature.

Ultimately, I want my presentation to be a conduit for the creative energy of a room full of teachers. Creative energy is often suppressed due to standardized testing and decreased instruction time. I want my audience to make mental breakthroughs for how comic literature can be used effectively to increase student engagement and achievement.

### 3. Clear Design Values

“Stories contain wisdom” (Heath & Heath 2008, p. 205). I want to persuade my audience to view graphic novels and other comic literature as quality literature that can engage the imagination of any reader. Graphic novels and comic books have a long-standing reputation of being a disposable medium. Many still see graphic novels in the same light as the Sunday comics: printed on newspaper, poor quality, and no storytelling.

In order to teach my learning audience about the learning potential of graphic novels, I need to convince them that graphic novels can be used to tell stories effectively.

#### Design Decision #1

I begin with a simple question: *Does this ever happen to you?* I want my audience to be immediately engaged. Sometimes, a direct question will spark an interest because it creates a gap in their knowledge. Their brains are uncomfortable with having a question presented and not answered immediately. Heath & Heath (2008) refer to this as “gap theory.” It is unexpected and forces the audience to ask themselves the same question I am asking.

I begin my presentation with a very generic, boring slideshow. I am beginning to engage my learning audience’s visual thinking. Roam (2008) describes the process of visual thinking as “looking,

seeing, imagining, and showing (p. 37). People begin with looking: collecting and screening information; and seeing: selecting and clumping information together. They are looking for patterns. My first six slides show an image of an old, black-and-white teacher at a dilapidated chalkboard. She is teaching; just as the learning audience does every day. She is teaching and no one is listening; just as this inevitably happens to every teacher. The slides progress and begin to feel boring. They are purposely dull and not creative. I want my audience to understand that this is oftentimes how students view their teachers.

Slide eight, again, engages the audience in another question; this time, however, it is rhetorical: *Ever wonder how you can engage our students through reading?* All teachers want 100% engagement from their students. At this point, I feel that my audience is paying attention, but only with enough engagement to look for the quick answer to the original questions presented. This is where I “break [the] pattern” (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 64). I surprise my audience on Slide 10: Dress like this... The image is of an overly muscular male teacher, costumed in a cape, utility belt, and a light saber. The title is *Captain Spectacled Jedi*. People “naturally pay attention to—and in many cases are stimulated by—things that change due to differences created” (Reynolds, 2009, p. 180). Although at this point this picture does not appear to have relevance to my core message, I am luring my audience into the world of graphic novels.

## Design Decision #2

I now begin my story. A good storyteller “describes what it is like to deal with opposing forces or problem[s] that must be worked out” (Reynolds, 2009, p. 181). “There is a way to engage ALL of your students. Slide 13 is a brightly-colored shot of a retro comic book from the 1950’s. The caption reads: Use Graphic Novels! This is a sharp contrast to the black-and-white images of the teacher before. I am now showing my learning audience (as visual thinkers) what a graphic novel is and how I am using it to convey information.

The second third of my presentation is told completely in for form of a retro graphic novel. I wanted to contrast the boring presentation slides with a full-color example of graphic novels. However, I also want to creatively play with the misconceptions of comic books. Most adults think of comic books as either Superman and Batman today, or Dick Tracy and Rip Kirby of the fifties and sixties. They see these sequential images as artistic, without meaning. Since graphic novels use sequential art to tell a story, I am using these comic book images to tell my story. I am training my audience to think with their eyes because “visual thinking is learning to think with our eyes” (Roam, 2008, p. 20).

## Design Decision #3

Now that I have my audience’s complete attention, I want my images to be simple and effective. Reynolds (2009) discusses how “bleeding” an image offers a larger impact. When you “bleed” an image, you “fill the entire slide area with the image [making it] more compelling; [drawing] the viewer in” (p. 100). I chose images that fill the screen completely. As I am showing my audience slide after slide, telling them the story of how important it is to use comic literature in the classroom, their visual cortexes are looping this information back onto itself. The audience is looking, seeing, imagining, and showing themselves my core message. These four steps are not always linear, “in fact, the whole process plays out more like a series of loops” (Roam, 2008, p. 43). I want my audience to constantly imagine how they can take the information I am sharing, and manipulate it to best suit their classrooms. I want them asking: *How could I use graphic novels during my literacy instruction?*

NOTE: My images do fill each page entirely; however, when I saved my presentation as a PDF file, it cropped each slide. This gives the appearance that my images are not bleeding outside the margins of the page. When I project this presentation onto a screen, it gives the audience my desired effect.

## Design Decision #4

I also want my audience to be drawn into comic books. I am taking a risk by designing each of my slides to look like pages from actual comic books. Each of my images is framed within a comic panel, while the outlying panels run off the screen. It looks as though one is looking directly at a page from a comic book, but focusing on a center panel image. “A full-bleed or full-screen image gives the illusion that the slide is bigger than it is. This is especially true if part of the subject in your image runs off the screen” (Reynolds, 2009, p. 100). Although my central picture is framed within a panel, I view the entire comic-book slide as a greater image, designed to give the audience the feel of reading a comic book. For examples of this, see pages 13-18, 25, and 30-32.

Scott McCloud (2006) discusses a graphic novel artist’s “choice of frame” and “choice of image.” The frame is designed to view particular moments in a way that best tells the story. The image renders objects and characters clearly so that the viewer understands how they relate to the story. My images and characters propel my opinion on the efficacy of using graphic novels in literacy instruction.

I understand how comic book panels can seem distracting, especially to one who is unfamiliar with the medium. However, I want my audience to see and feel the stark contrast between the boring black-and-white presentation slides and the vibrant comic book slides. It is unexpected and “breaks a pattern” (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 64) all the while keeping the viewer’s “guessing machines” engaged (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 72).

## Design Decision #5

Slides 44-50 begin my use of research to add credibility to my presentation. Heath & Heath (2008) discuss the importance of having credibility when delivering a presentation so that your messages are sticky and remembered. I chose to have a combination of statistics, which reflect expert authorities (i.e.: Stephen Krashen, Scott McCloud, and University of Illinois) and jaw-dropping statistics. One example of a jaw-dropping statistic is from Brunnel & Linnakyla (1994). They studied the effects of reading comic literature in Finnish society. It is well-known that Finland has an almost idyllic educational system. However, not everyone knows that Finland also has the highest proportion of comic book reading students out of 32 countries.

To illustrate this, I added motion to two slides in order to make a point. Reynolds (2009) writes “we humans—and virtually all other animals—are wired to notice movement above all else” (p. 192). I want to focus my learning audience on Finland and their literacy rate. Slides 44-46 introduce the audience to Finland. Slides 46-47 use motion to orient the audience as to where Finland is located in Europe. It is a subtle use of highlighting; however, I feel it is very effective in “emphasiz[ing] part of [my] visual (Reynolds, 2009, p. 192).

Since “people forget ninety percent of what they learn thirty days outside of class” (Medina, 2008, p. 5), I use this Finland visual to repeat another statistic: *Finland has a ninety-nine percent literacy rate!*

## Design Decision #6

The visual on Slide 48 is a large circle graph illustrating Finland’s amazing literacy rate. It is a simple black-and-white image that is used to make a comparison. “Simplicity is a fundamental tenet in all aspects of design and communication. Simplicity is particularly important concerning the creation and display of quantitative data” (Reynolds, 2009, p. 131). I only use two circle graphs in my entire presentation, and therefore, want them to have a high “signal-to-noise ratio” (Reynolds, 2009, p. 132). My core message is the signal I am trying to broadcast to the audience. I do not want a lot of background noise distracting them from my concrete message.

I compare Slide 48 (Finland's ninety-nine percent literacy rate) to Slide 50 (Finland's percent of comic book reading students). The circle graphs are the same size and use the same black-and-white color scheme. They are separated by a collage of four simple photographs and the text: *they also have the highest proportion of comic book reading students*. The next slide shows sixty percent shaded. I want to show my visual-thinking audience this information clearly (Roam, 2008, p. 37).

### Design Decision #7

The military has been using informational comic books to communicate for years. Whether or not my audience knows this fact, I want to give them a fact that “hit[s] people in the gut” continuing to establish my credibility (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 143). The United States Military Academy at West Point requires that all cadets read *Persepolis*, an autobiographical graphic novel by Marjane Satrapi. In it, she depicts her childhood and young-adulthood in Iran during and after the Islamic revolution. I feel that this statistic does two things for my presentation: (1) It tells the audience that the U.S. government acknowledges and supports the use of high-quality graphic novels in training cadets; and (2) It illustrates how a graphic novel can be so well-written, that it accurately describes what life was like during the Islamic Revolution, thereby giving us insight into current Islamic culture. This statistic passes the “Sinatra Test” (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 151). If *Persepolis* can work effectively in the military, it can work well in any classroom. I want my audience to go out and test the credibility of this statement by using comic literature in their classroom.

### Design Decision #8

I choose to revisit the old black-and-white teacher standing at the chalkboard in Slide 57 because I want to signal to my audience that closure is approaching. “Stories are like flight simulators for the brain” (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 231). As I conclude my story, and the flight simulation, I want to remind my audience that they should rethink their current literacy instruction. At this point in the presentation, however, I anticipate the audience's reluctance to try something new. I have had conversations with colleagues who enjoy listening to my anecdotes of using comic literature in my classroom, but balk at the idea of actually using some in their own classroom.

Slides 58-59 remind teachers (using Batman as an authority figure and a metaphor) that comic literature, especially graphic novels, are just another tool one can use to engage students during literacy instruction. I do not want my audience to think they need to throw out all of their old literacy materials for new graphic novels. I do want to inspire creativity. Nancy Duarte (2008) emphasizes the importance of making one simple point per slide, all the while emphasizing creativity within a presentation. The last slides of my presentation each make one simple point, which leads up to my take-away message: *when teaching, you take advantage of the tools available. Even if it means using a graphic novel*.

## 4. Formative Evaluation Response

I view my Stand-Alone presentation and its purpose similarly to how I view graphic novels and their purpose: to tell a story using art. Graphic novels are often seen something foreign, almost subversive. The term *graphic* elicits a taboo practice that is most certainly inappropriate. So, in order to shatter these preconceived notions, I thrust my audience into the middle of a graphic novel. This is risky because not everyone is familiar with or even enjoys reading graphic novels. I wanted my feedback to center around this comfort and the readability of my slides.

1. *The purpose of my presentation is to give teachers an alternative to traditional literacy instruction. I want teachers to come away from the presentation able to envision how they might use graphic novels in the classroom. How effective am I at this objective?*

## Why

I ask this question because I want to understand how my audience will react (instructionally) to my presentation. Will they immediately start to plan how they can use graphic literature in their classroom? I want to gauge how explicit at detailing instructional strategies I need to be versus inspiring the audience to think for themselves creatively.

## Peer Review A

I feel like your presentation effectively inspires teachers to incorporate graphic novels into their reading curriculum. I think the 'especially boys' slide was distracting, but I think that's just a personal thing with me. I've been an activist for gender equality for a long time and I always get a bit put off when I see anything that labels children by their gender. Personally, I feel physical gender is not and perhaps, should not, be directly attached to our gender identity, which I feel is spectrum-like and easily affected by the socially constructed idea of gender at this time. I'm not sure if this is a major concern for most teachers, so if that is the case, it probably wouldn't serve as much of a distraction for them.

## Peer Review B

I'm not sure how effective you are in telling teachers how they might use graphic novels, but more that that understand that they should consider using graphic novels as a form of instruction (perhaps I'm splitting hairs here). I think you very effectively inform viewers that graphic novels are a very solid, research proven form of instruction (based on your Finnish statistic).

## Comments

- 2. What is one fact you remember from the presentation? How effective is the fact placement within the presentation?*

## Why

I need to establish credibility relatively quickly in this presentation, especially since the topic is in its own way controversial. I do spend some time acknowledging the stereotype of graphic novels and superheroes, but I do so for humor only.

Within the first third of my presentation, I include factual evidence to support the use of graphic novels. I begin with a definition of graphic novels, immediately mentioning Will Eisner, the most renowned graphic novelist. His name has a lot of credibility within the comic literature community. My hope is that his name, along with others, will increase the credibility of my presentation.

I want to know what facts my audience remembers because this will tell me where my audience focuses during the presentation. This will help me determine if I have designed a presentation with the correct amounts of narrative, factual information, and humor.

## Peer Review A

I remember students in Finland test well and they statistically are more likely to have read graphic novels. I think this fact points to a larger issue of allowing public schools to be more flexible and more inclusive of different types of instructional materials. The folks in Finland probably aren't hung up on test scores and funding issues for supplies because they are a small country. Does our country have any potential reasons as to why graphic novels aren't part of the norm for our children's reading experiences? What I like best about what I remember is that it causes me to think further.

## Peer Review B

The Finnish statistic stuck out to me... was very effective. My only comment with the fact is that I don't think you need two slides in a row that say "...revealed that" (even though one slide has Finland highlighted). Seems to me that you could eliminate one of the slides with Finland outlined, and keep the one with Finland filled in blue.

## Comments

I anticipated that this statistic would stick with the audience. The Finnish educational system as impressive facts around student achievement both in the classroom and on standardized tests. It is often difficult to compare Finland with the United States, considering we have such different views on education; however, I was pleased to discover that the use of graphic novels and other comic literature is relevant in both countries. In the United States it is more of a grassroots movement to promote graphic novels as legitimate literature, whereas in Finland it is more accepted and appropriate pedagogy.

I wanted to go into more depth with the *why* of this statistic (as referenced in Peer Review A); however, I felt the presentation would be too long. When I show this presentation to staff members, I plan on being present (although silent) to continue the conversation after the last slide.

- 3. I wanted the presentation to look like one was reading a graphic novel and zooming in on particular frames. Is this CARP friendly? What is one piece of design advice you could give me to make this more CARP effective?*

## Why

Robin Williams (2009) outlines four basic design principles: Contrast, Alignment, Repetition, and Proximity. When reading a graphic novel, I worry that many elements that are effective in graphic novel storytelling are not always effective design elements. For example, many comic color schemes are designed to contrast certain characters with their backgrounds. Narrative text boxes hold important text, which advances the story. Many do not find these aesthetically pleasing. So, when I choose to create a presentation that looks like a graphic novel, I risk making certain design decisions that may contradict Williams (2009).

I wanted to get feedback from my audience, who I assumed was a non-comic book reader. Once they got past the idea of reading a comic book, what elements did not please the eye?

## Peer Review A

I think this is where I struggled the most with your presentation. You use Comic Sans with another, more authoritative font family and I don't feel they mix well. To keep your tone cohesive in your text, I'd recommend choosing one font family with different options for light, bold, etc. My other issue was with the photographs of famous films and cover art. I understand why you made the choices and they are fun, but I think they also add a generic quality that slightly diminishes your original work. I also think it limits how many people you could share this with and how you could distribute this presentation for the future as there might be copyright issues using the films, books and cover artists to promote your cause. I think the subject matter of your presentation makes it much more difficult to have ample white space to enhance your text, so I'm not sure how to get around that.

## Peer Review B

I'm 50/50 on the use of the actual comic panes and their effectiveness. On the one hand, I felt a little distracted by the images, but on the other hand, I found them unique and interesting. I think that the first time I viewed the presentation, I was trying to make sense of the comic panes... that they related to one another (in context), not in what they say. I was trying to make sense of the art vs. the text behind the art. Once I realized they were stand alone panes, I focused less on them. I hope that makes sense.

One piece of CARP advice is that your fonts differ quite a bit throughout the presentation. I'm not sure if this is intentional, but I could not find a rhyme or reason to the different fonts. Was one the "teacher" speaking, and the other the computer spewing out facts? I found the two different fonts to be a tad distracting if so.

## Comments

I read two common themes from my peer reviewers:

- Inconsistent or unreliable typefaces

I intended to use two different typefaces throughout this presentation: one for the narrative and factual information, and another font for the comic panel slides. I used Georgia typeface for the regular type and Comic Sans for the comic panel slides. I absolutely agree that there is a disconnect between these two fonts. I would like to keep the Comic Sans for the slides that are designed to look like a graphic novel, but I need to find another font from that same family that compliments Comic Sans.

I believe that using Helvetica will work better to compliment my use of Comic Sans. "It's generally accepted that sans serif fonts work better on computer screens as they lack the counter

strokes and thin lines of the serif typefaces that can be hard to read at low resolutions” (Reynolds, 2009). I decided to use one typeface (Helvetica) throughout the entire.

- Comic panels/pictures to tell presentation story.

I wanted to design my stand-alone presentation to look like an old, half-tone comic book from the era of Rip Kirby, Dick Tracy, and The Spirit. This art style is unique to 1940’s and 1950’s due to the fact that newspaper publishers could only use a limited number colors when printing. Lately, half-tone art has become popular when trying to create a “retro” look.

When one thinks of comics, I believe that this art style comes to mind most easily. I wanted to capitalize on this, giving my audience a something familiar. I also wanted my presentation to sharply contrast the boring presentation, which symbolizes old literacy instruction.

It looks as though my peer reviewers were distracted by this style. Peer Reviewer B accepted it after a second look at my presentation. Peer Reviewer A felt that the combination of the half-tone artwork with the graphic novel cover artwork made my presentation cliché and diminished the original works of art.

4. *Graphic novels use sequential art to tell a story. How effective am I telling my story?*

## Why

A Stand-Alone presentation is meant to speak for itself with no narration. Good storytelling is key to making this type of presentation successful.

## Peer Review A

I think you've told the story excellently. I like how you brought the teacher back into the presentation to bring the story to a conclusion. Generally, it's a fine presentation of your persuasive argument.

## Peer Review B

You very effectively told the story throughout (such that I panicked about my own story telling abilities!).

## Comments

My peer reviewers felt that I successfully told my story. Since there are no suggestions, I will keep my persuasive narrative the same.

5. *What is your take-home message from this presentation? How do the slides support the message you remember most?*

## Why

Heath & Heath (2008) discuss the importance of “communicating the core” message when presenting material to any audience. I want to test my audience for what they determined the “core message” to be.

## Peer Review A

My take-away is that graphic novels are a great way to teach children to read. The Finland slides are the ones I remember the most.

## Peer Review B

My take home message is that graphic novel handouts should be considered a worthy form of literary instruction (and, one I'd never heard of before this class, personally). Overall, the slides are very effective in telling the story. I like that you mixed up the slides and offered a variety on how they appeared (again, caused me to doubt my own layout choice :-)

Very nicely done, Adrian. One last comment is that a couple of slides are cut off at the bottom. The one that I particularly remember is the very first slide -- the bottom of the question mark is cut off. Might be something you clipped out. If so, I wonder if you could add in the piece to complete the question mark... might not be worth in the end for the amount of time it will take.

## Comments

My commander's intent (Heath & Heath, 2008) was that if I communicate nothing else to my audience, I would tell them that graphic novels and comic literature can be used to effectively teach reading. Both reviewers received this message and my Finland statistic slide supported this statement.

If I had more time, or if I could narrate this presentation, I would delve deeper into specific strategies teachers can use with graphic novels. First, however, I needed to tell my story to the audience and make them believe in the legitimacy of graphic novels. I believe I have accomplished this.

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