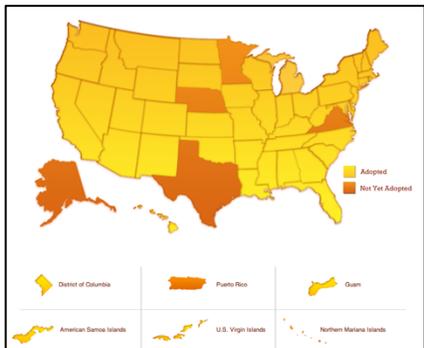


# Integrating Comics Into the Common Core

Initially presented at  
the 2013 San Diego Comic-Con  
by Tracy Edmunds, M.A. Ed.

## What are the Common Core State Standards?



- Identify the skills and knowledge students will need for college and the 21st century workplace
- Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics
- Developed by teachers, parents, administrators, and experts, led by the National Governors Association
- Forty-five states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted the Common Core State Standards.

## What do the Standards say about texts?

- **A focus on results rather than means.**

*"Teachers are...free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards."*

- **A range of text types and increasing complexity**

*"One of the key requirements of the Common Core State Standards for Reading is that all students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through school."*

**This means that the Common Core State Standards encourage teachers to include a range of text types in instruction, including graphic texts.**

\*All text in quotes and italics in this document comes directly from the Common Core State Standards

## Reading: Text Complexity

The Standards require students to read and analyze increasingly complex texts. How is complexity measured?

**Quantitative** evaluation of the text

**Qualitative** evaluation of the text

- Levels of meaning
- Structure
- Language conventionality
- Knowledge demands

Matching **reader** to text and task



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## Quantitative Evaluation of the Text

- Quantitative measures of text complexity, such as word frequency and sentence length, are typically measured by computer software.
- CCSS cautions about relying on quantitative measures alone: *Grapes of Wrath* measures at Grades 2-3.
- Graphic texts often have a higher rare word count than other types of texts. (University of Oregon)
- Graphic texts often have a smaller word count over all and a shorter average sentence length. They can be missing some text conventions such as "She said," because dialogue is presented in word balloons.
- Lexile<sup>®</sup> uses a special code for Graphic Novels (GN). "The impact of the pictures on reading comprehension is not captured in the Lexile<sup>®</sup> measure of a graphic novel."

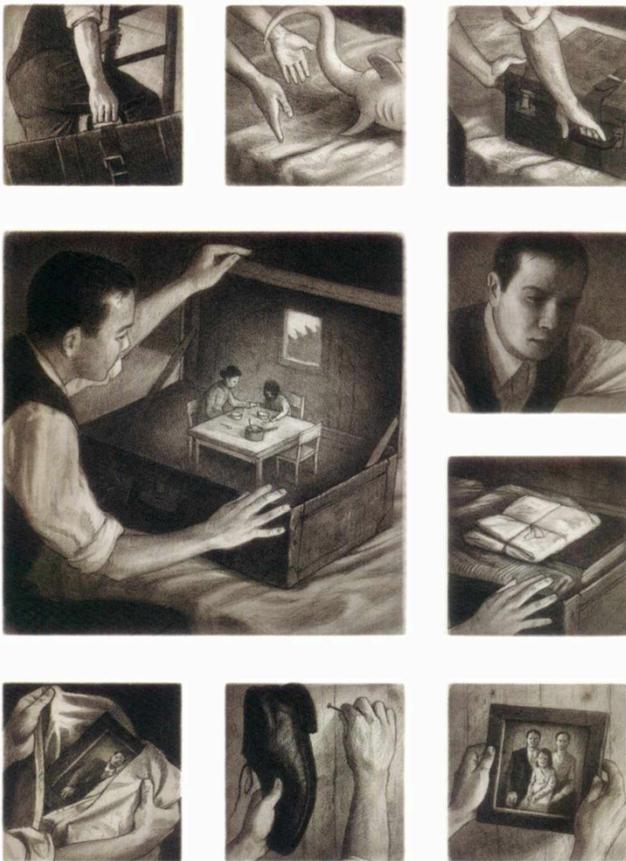


Qualitative evaluation of the text

## Levels of meaning

"Literary texts with a single level of meaning tend to be easier to read than literary texts with multiple levels of meaning."

In *American Born Chinese*, by Gene Yang, several stories intertwine to create a multi-layered, complex story. Readers must analyze and interpret the separate story lines to make sense of the whole. This half-page alone contains many layers of meaning: the boxes stacked in the back seat, indicating that the family is moving; the symbolism of the toy representing the friends Jin is leaving behind; Jin's tears and longing looks at the toy, showing his emotions; and the mother's parable, which the reader must interpret and apply to Jin's situation.



This page from *The Arrival*, by Shaun Tan, illustrates multiple levels of meaning that can be analyzed even by the youngest students. We see a man unpacking and settling into his new home. Is his family really in the suitcase? What is the author trying to tell us?



## Qualitative evaluation of the text

### Structure

"Complex literary texts make more frequent use of flashbacks, flash-forwards, and other manipulations of time and sequence"

"...texts of high complexity tend to have complex graphics, graphics whose interpretation is essential to understanding the text"

In this page from *Rapunzel's Revenge* by Shannon and Dean Hale and Nathan Hale, placement in time and parallel story structure are shown through the style and positioning of the panels and images. How does the artist make clear which scenes took place in the past? Not only does he show Rapunzel clearly at a younger age, but also uses desaturated colors and line work to give the images a fuzzy, memory-like quality. These panels are used not only to show Rapunzel's returning memories, but also to explicitly draw parallels between the past and the present; the mirroring of the characters' positions in the panels shows that they have been through this experience before. Hale even goes so far as to tie the matching panels together in a common background panel. Note also the parallel of the mother dropping her bucket of water when she realizes that this is her long-lost daughter, and Rapunzel dropping her pink party hat (which she had been using as a cup for water) when she begins to remember her mother.



To decode this single panel from *The Secret Science Alliance and the Copycat Crook*, by Eleanor Davis, readers must do some fairly complicated mental gymnastics along with the characters to figure out the timing of their plan. Interpretation of this complex graphic is indeed essential to understanding the text!



## Qualitative evaluation of the text

### Language conventionality and clarity

"...texts that rely on figurative, ironic, ambiguous, purposefully misleading, archaic or otherwise unfamiliar language or on general academic and domain-specific vocabulary"

Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales series is chock full of historic vocabulary. The panel here, from Big Bad Ironclad, includes the words "rebel," "schooner," and "blockade-runner." These domain-specific terms are embedded in the story and supported by the graphics so that students get a full picture of their meaning.



Neil Gaiman's Sandman series is rife with metaphor and personification. The principal characters, The Seven Endless, are living embodiments of universal concepts: Dream, Death, Destiny, Delirium, Desire, Despair, and Destruction. Language on this page refers to Destiny's "garden," and "book," which, of course, are not truly a garden and a book, but representative of the concepts of destiny.



## Qualitative evaluation of the text

### Knowledge demands

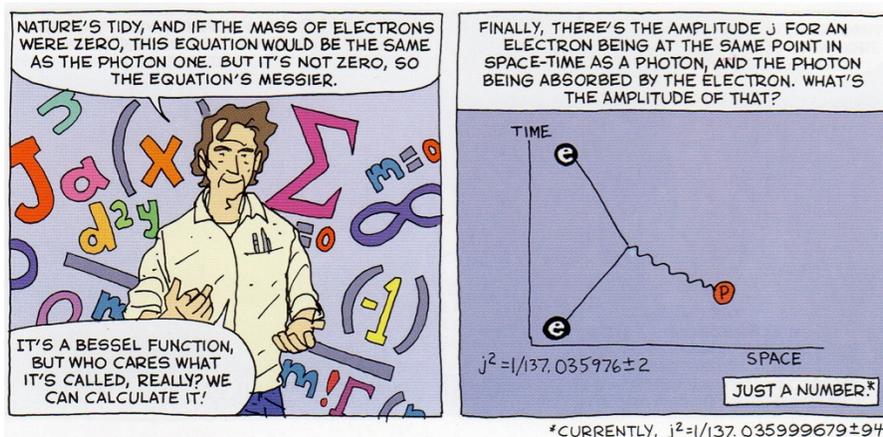
"Literary texts that feature complex or sophisticated themes, multiple themes, multiple perspectives, perspectives unlike the reader's, and experiences distinctly different from the reader's experiences."

*The Photographer: Into War-torn Afghanistan with Doctors Without Borders*, by Emmanuel Guibert, takes readers into Afghanistan through both photographs and illustrations in the graphic novel format. This text certainly contains perspectives and experiences different from most readers' own.



"Informational texts that require extensive, perhaps specialized discipline knowledge."

The biographic text *Feynman*, by Jim Ottaviani and Leland Myrick, imparts a great deal of physics knowledge and makes great cognitive demands of the reader.



## Matching reader to text and task

"...educators will employ professional judgment to match texts to particular students and tasks."

"Students' ability to read complex text does not always develop in a linear fashion."

"Students reading well above and well below grade-band level need additional support."

"Even many students on course for college and career readiness are likely to need scaffolding as they master higher levels of text complexity"

Reader variables:

Interest and motivation: Comics are less intimidating to some readers than large blocks of text. Many students who say they don't enjoy reading do enjoy graphic novels, and the love of reading they develop spurs them on to read more traditional texts. Research shows that kids who read comics enjoy reading and read more of all kinds of books. (Krashen & Ujjiie, 1996)

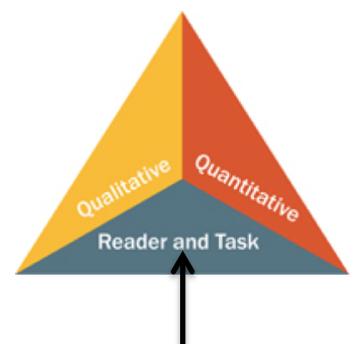
Visualization: Graphic texts provide scaffolding for students who have trouble visualizing as they read. In the graphic format, not all images are provided; readers must still interpret what happens between panels, which encourages extended visualization.

Vocabulary: The images in comics provide a scaffold for decoding text, which is an advantage when encouraging struggling or reluctant readers or English learners. The graphic format allows students to enjoy more complex, compelling stories than they could in text alone, and helps expand their vocabularies.

Critical analytic ability and inferencing: The interplay of words and images inherent to comics requires students to use higher-level thinking skills such as inference and synthesis as they not only read the text, but also analyze how the text and images work together and infer what happens between panels. The more complex the text and images are, the higher the level of analysis and inference required from the reader.



Classical Comics offers classic novels and Shakespeare's plays in three versions: plain text, quick text, and original text. These texts provide the scaffolding needed by readers at different levels to access these classic works. Examples here are from *Romeo and Juliet the Graphic Novel*



# Specific references to graphic novels in the Standards

## Grade 5

"Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5.7: Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., **graphic novel**, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem.)*"

## Grades 6-12

"Students in grades 6–12 apply the Reading standards to the following range of text types, with texts selected from a broad range of cultures and periods."

Stories	Dramas	Poetry	Literary Nonfiction and Historical, Scientific, and Technical Texts
Includes the subgenres of adventure stories, historical fiction, mysteries, myths, science fiction, realistic fiction, allegories, parodies, satire, and <b>graphic novels</b>	Includes one-act and multi-act plays, both in written form and on film	Includes the subgenres of narrative poems, lyrical poems, free verse poems, sonnets, odes, ballads, and epics	Includes the subgenres of exposition, argument, and functional text in the form of personal essays, speeches, opinion pieces, essays about art or literature, biographies, memoirs, journalism, and historical, scientific, technical, or economic accounts (including digital sources) written for a broad audience

## Standards Applicable to Graphic Texts: Reading

<p><b>Key Ideas and Details</b></p> <p><a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1</a> Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</p> <p><a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2</a> Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.</p> <p><a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3</a> Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.</p> <p><b>Craft and Structure</b></p> <p><a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4</a> Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.</p> <p><a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5</a> Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.</p> <p><a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6</a> Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.</p> <p><b>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</b></p> <p><a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7</a> Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.<sup>1</sup></p> <p><a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8</a> Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.</p> <p><a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9</a> Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.</p> <p><b>Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity</b></p> <p><a href="#">CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10</a> Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.</p>
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**Graphic texts are texts, and can be used in the same ways as traditional texts.**

## The Takeaway:

Graphic novels are complex texts,  
uniquely suited for addressing  
Common Core State Standards.



Much more information at [TracyEdmunds.com](http://TracyEdmunds.com)