

COMICS AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL OF TEACHING ENGLISH

Currently, the focus in education is on increased student learning. Therefore all curriculum materials and teaching techniques are receiving careful review. Just as education begins to emphasize standards and achievements, there is a considerable interest in innovative methods of teaching reading and writing. Recognizing that capturing the attention of young readers is an essential component of effective teaching practices, many teachers are turning to comic books as a tool to win students who are new learners of the English language.

Comics icon Will Eisner considered **comics** to be sequential art, which he defined as, "a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea" [4, p. 11]. Scott McCloud defines **comics** as, "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" [8, p. 20]. A **comic** is a paper full of comic strips [1, p. 92]. A **comic strip** is a series of drawings telling a story, especially a funny one [1, p. 92].

The discussion over the most appropriate term will likely continue for some time. McCloud, in reference to his definition of comics, states, "to define comics, we must first do a little aesthetic surgery and separate form from content! The art form – the medium – known as comics is a vessel which can hold any number of ideas and images" [5, p. 6]. Comic books employ a complex interplay of text and images that gives them the potential to effectively convey concepts and motivate student engagement [5, p. 311].

Comics are not only motivating, but support struggling for readers, enrich the skills of accomplished readers, and are highly effective at teaching sometimes

“boring” material. Melissa Taylor offers the following reasons to use comic books in teaching English: 1) comics are fun to read; 2) comics provide built-in context clues; 3) reading a comic is a process of reading using a lot of inference; 4) we’re a visual culture and the visual sequence makes sense to kids [7].

Tracy Edmunds consider that “Reading comics can help students develop the critical skills necessary to read more challenging works, including the classics” [3].

Wright and Sherman have reported that teachers should use comic strips in classrooms for three reasons: 1) their study reveals a high level of interest in the genre; 2) the wide circulation of comic strips makes them an economically viable source of material; 3) most comic strips have low readability levels, with words and sentences which are linguistically suitable for elementary and middle school readers [8, p. 68 – 69].

Incorporating visual rhetoric into curriculum will also make students practise higher learning critical thinking and analytical skills. The reading of both visuals and text together usually necessitates inference skills and a synthesis of a number of clues presented both on the page and as a pattern throughout the book [2].

It is extremely important to note that all proponents of the use of comic books in the classroom stipulate that comics are to supplement current materials, not replace. Therefore no one should see the use of comics as eliminating current grade appropriate reading materials.

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