

5 WAYS TO USE MANGA AND OTHER GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THE CLASSROOM

By Adam Sexton

1. Examine the relationship between words and images on any page of a manga or graphic novel. Ask students the following:
 - a. What information is conveyed to the reader strictly by means of an image or images? (The ways in which characters and settings look, for example, and the things characters do in those settings: the story's dramatic action)
 - b. What information is expressed strictly by means of words? (Characters' speech and their thoughts – vs. their feelings, which we can often see in their facial expressions and body language)
 - c. Are there any unique effects created by the combination of the two? (A character might smile at another character while thinking, "I can't stand this person!")
 - d. Would it be possible to communicate the meaning of the chosen manga page with words alone? (Yes – storytellers have been doing this since the time of Homer.) Pictures alone? (Sometimes – though words add detail, subtlety, and internal material. Even silent movies usually feature sub- or intertitles.)
2. Choose one scene from a manga or graphic novel adaptation of another work. (Recommended: the famous balcony scene from the Wiley title *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: The Manga Edition* and the text of the play it is based on.) Compare the original and the adaptation. Then, if possible, compare both to the same scene from a film adaptation of the same work. (Recommended: Franco Zeffirelli's film of the play.) Ask students what storytelling effects are best achieved by means of...
 - a. Words?
 - b. Pictures?
 - c. Words and pictures (manga/graphic novels)?
 - d. Motion pictures (film)?...and why?
3. Ask students to think of three effects unique to the manga/graphic novels/comics. (Examples might include thought balloons, breaking the frame around an action-containing panel, perspectives so distorted that they are physically impossible, etc.) Are there things that only books can do? Only movies?
4. Ask students to pick a short scene from a novel, short story, or play with which the class is familiar, and adapt it as a mini-manga. Students can pair up, with one student choosing the words to include (cutting from the text is not only allowed, it's necessary!) and another drawing the pictures.
5. Screen a film (*The Road to Perdition*, *Ghost World*, *The 300*, *Persepolis*, e.g.*) adapted from a manga or graphic novel. What has been gained in the transition from one medium to another. Has anything been gained?

*Viewer discretion advised on all four