

Teaching Literary Devices with Comics

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Grade Levels: English Language Arts grades 6-8, 9-12

Lesson Objectives:

- Identify literary devices used in texts, such as metaphors, mood, tone, plot structures, symbolism, irony, etc.
- Incorporate identified literary devices in original writing

Lesson Description: Students will learn about literary devices featured in narrative texts and analyzed by readers to understand the meaning of the text. Choice of literary devices for these lessons is left to the teacher, who uses picture books or comics used to model analysis of the focus elements. Students then use the software program Comic Life to create their own comics featuring literary devices taught in the class. (See <http://plasq.com/> for more information about this inexpensive and award-winning software program.)

Time Required: 2-3 class periods

Equipment Required: Overhead or data projector, copies of picture books or comics chosen for the lesson, a collection of digital photographs, and computers with the Comic Life program installed.

Project Implementation**Lesson 1**

Teacher Modeling: Begin by introducing the literary device selected for this unit. For example, the literary device of foreshadowing involves techniques the author uses to provide clues to an event that will occur later in the story. Explain that readers look for details that may suggest a future plot turn. In addition, readers pause during the reading to recall previous clues that may have first seemed insignificant, but now have taken on importance. Authors use a number of techniques to foreshadow, including dialogue that reveals a character trait, describing the behavior of one or more characters, a plot turn that alters the circumstances for a character, or a brief setting change that divulges information that will become crucial later in the story.

The Caldecott-awarding winning picture book *Tuesday* by David Wiesner (1991) is an ideal example of foreshadowing. Introduce this wordless picture book to the

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students, displaying the illustrations. The first page sets the stage: “Tuesday evening, around eight.” Read each page with students, looking for the ways in which the illustrator foreshadows a strange event that is about to occur. The second page consists of three panels, zooming in on a scene of a turtle sitting on a log, eyes turned to the sky in alarm.

Guided Instruction: Continue reading each page with the students, pointing out where foreshadowing is occurring. In a few pages they will understand that flying frogs are up to minor mischief in the local town. Once finished, read Tuesday together again, this time asking students to identify the ways in which the how the illustrator/author foreshadowed events in the story. Compare these to the ways in which a writer uses techniques to foreshadow in prose text.

Collaborative Learning: Now that students are comfortable with the literary device and techniques used, give students examples of other comics or excerpts from graphic novels that contain similar techniques. Two excellent teacher resources are both by Will Eisner, often called “the grandfather of graphic novels.” *Graphic Storytelling* (1996) and *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985) both feature detailed explanations of the techniques used in visual narratives, and how they are linked to prose novels. Invite students to work together to select a comic or graphic novel excerpt and discuss the literacy device(s) used. Ask partners to compose a written summary of the story, with the attached comic. Remind students that they will create their own visual narrative using a software program.

Lesson 2

Teacher Modeling: Use a data projector to show students how to use the Comic Life software program. Users need only a collection of digital photographs such as those stored electronically in iPhoto. Visual narratives are easily composed using this program because users can select the grid pattern (including number of frames needed), design dialogue boxes, and apply artistic treatments to the selected photos to create a visual narrative in comic form.

Guided Instruction: Construct a simple comic using Comic Life with students. Ask them to make decisions about the storyline as well as the formatting.

Collaborative Learning: Over one or two class periods, ask students to work in pairs to review digital photos and construct a story using the literary device you have been

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teaching. Students should produce a visual narrative that features the device, along with a written summary of the story.

We've included a visual narrative entitled, "Black and White," written for a lesson on foreshadowing by two of our students using the Comic Life program. Note that the students used dialogue to provide clues about the subject in panels 1-3, followed by a scene change in panel 4 that features a black and white animal print. Panel 5 switches back to the original setting, but it is only in the final panel that it becomes apparent that what caused the white and spotted cats alarm was the presence of a black cat. As our students explained to us, "People stop and whisper sometimes when we're walking in a neighborhood where there's not a lot of African-Americans. We can spot the clues early, like foreshadowing. Those clues tell us what we can expect."