Sequential Rhetoric: Using Freire and Quintilian to Teach Students to Read and Create Comics

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Abstract

Our comic combines visual literacy, progymnasmata, and critical pedagogy to showcase a classroom study that used comics production to teach visual literacy. The comic first looks at comics criticism, visual rhetoric, and comics scholarship to set a base to build a methodology build in critical pedagogy and ancient rhetoric. Critical pedagogy’s tradition of inviting students to find meaning in the origin of ideas fits in with having students design and study a medium that’s often overlooked during their college experience. Such an approach echoes Freire’s ideas of using critical strategies as an effective model for change. Progymnasmata, and Quintilian’s work in general, allows students to approach the new medium of comics through reading and production through an ancient rhetorical practice that relies on a step-by-step process. Looking at Quintilian’s pedagogy, we demonstrate a modern classroom study that uses progymnasmata to make the strange familiar while introducing visuality. The actual study is briefly discussed as well. This amalgamation of ancient rhetoric, comics studies, and critical pedagogy is the basis of the research behind this pieces’ goal of exploring comics as a multimodal means of composition.
TOM AND ROB PRESENT:
Sequential Rhetoric: using Freire & Quintilian to teach students to read and create comics
Figure 3.

CLASS, NOW THAT WE'VE FINISHED READING AMERICAN BORN CHINESE, WHAT ARE YOUR INITIAL IMPRESSIONS?

BASED ON A TRUE STORY, IOWA STATE, SPRING 2012.
Figure 4.
Figure 5.

This was really good, but I mean, like really good. In AP English, we had to read a bunch of literature books, and this book felt equal to those ones.

I even read it twice.
YOU ACT SURPRISED BY THIS EMILY. DO YOU MIND IF I ASK WHY?
Figure 7.
Figure 8.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE IN THINKING THAT WAY EMILY.

LOTS OF SMART, CRUCIAL AMERICANS DISHES COMBS AS BEING SILLY.

AND ARE AS SURPRISED AS YOU WERE THAT COMICS HAVE A LOT TO OFFER.
I, too, was a hesitant convert to the medium of comics. Aside from perusing a few as a kid, I didn’t really start taking them seriously until my late twenties.

But many people in critical and academic circles are fighting those notions. Let me demonstrate on the chalkboard.
When the Comics Code ruled American comics primarily producing obedient-to-authority superheroes saving damsels in distress, Will Eisner worked to elevate the medium. Eisner played a key role in legitimizing comics, as he was one of the first to explore instructional comics. He called these stories to instruct.

His work in PS Magazine combines instructional materials with humor, entertainment, and shockingly sexist notions. His comics and his written theory about comics (e.g., comics and sequential art and graphic storytelling and visual narrative) paved the way for later discussion.
Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* has had a huge influence in both comics and academic circles in making the case for comics’ legitimacy. What makes McCloud stand out is he argued for comics using comics.

Similar to this Digital Humanities Quarterly special issue, McCloud’s book is a comic book advocating for using comics. McCloud’s definition is also widely cited as the definitive comics definition.

Figure 11.
MANY OTHER COMICS PRACTITIONERS HAVE LABORED IN FOR ADVOCATING COMICS AS WELL. ALISON BECHDEL, FAMOUS FOR CREATING THE BECHDEL-WALLACE TEST, ADVOCATES FOR WOMEN, HOMOSEXUALS, AND OTHER UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS FROM TRADITIONAL COMICS HISTORIES AND LIFE IN GENERAL. HER WORK, AMONG MANY OTHERS, IS INVALUABLE. IT’S ESPECIALLY RELEVANT CONSIDERING THE CRITICAL PEDAGOGY ASPECT OF THIS PIECE.
OUTSIDE OF COMICS, ARTISTS, MANY OTHERS HAVE BEEN ARGUING FOR BOTH COMICS LEGITIMACY AS WELL AS ITS POTENCY FOR PEDAGOGICAL PURPOSES.

IF THE READER IS INTERESTED IN READING MORE ABOUT THIS, THESE NAMES ARE A GOOD PLACE TO START (GEORGE DURRESS, TIMOTHY MORRISON, GREGORY BRYAN, GEORGE CHIQUIT, DAVE JACOBS, KEVIN BROOKS)
But, comics' legitimacy isn't our goal, nor is focusing on classroom anecdotes. Rather, we are using comics to promote visual literacy in order for students to create visually effective, rhetorical documents. Although research that supports comics' educational power and efficiency in teaching as well as rhetorical critiques of the art form is invaluable, it makes up only a small portion of our own.
WE FOCUS ON HAVING STUDENTS USE COMICS TO INFORM AND/OR INSTRUCT THEIR AUDIENCE THROUGH VISUALS. CREATING EFFECTIVE VISUALS HAS BECOME A NECESSARY SKILL IN MODERN WRITING STUDIES. HOWEVER, WHEN WE ASK STUDENTS TO USE IMAGES THEY OFTEN TURN TO IMAGE SEARCHES OR BORING CLIPART WITHOUT DOING ANY ORIGINAL DESIGN PRODUCTION.
COMICS DOES THIS BY HAVING STUDENTS INVENT A NARRATIVE THAT COMBINES IMAGES AND WORDS. WHILE OTHER ASSIGNMENTS CAN ACHIEVE THIS AS WELL, COMICS OFFERS A BROAD RANGE OF TECHNOLOGY (FROM MINIMAL TO ELABORATE SOFTWARE) APPROACHES BASED IN A FAMILIAR, CREATIVE APPROACH. ON TOP OF THIS IT EFFECTIVELY TEACHES JUXTAPOSITION, CORE WRITING SKILLS, AND HIERARCHY IN A CASUAL AND INTUITIVE FASHION THAT MAY BE UNIQUE TO THE MEDIUM.
Figure 17.

Students have to think about what visuals they will use to represent their information and how it correlates with their words, all while engaging in a remediation process. Their chosen production modes can leap over the digital divide because comics can be created through simple technologies (e.g., pencil and paper) or more complex technologies (e.g., software, apps, digital design).

The differing processes produce a similar product while achieving the same goal: competent visual literacy. Students engage in design by using multiple modes to create various informative media, such as hand-drawn, digitally drawn, juxtaposed, sequential, and photographed stories.
IN THIS COMIC, I’LL RELY ON AN EMPIRICAL CLASSROOM STUDY THAT TEACHES COMICS AS A FORM OF VISUAL-RHETORIC AND MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATION.

THE STUDY INCORPORATES CRITICAL PEDAGOGY TO SUPPORT STUDENTS COMPOSING IN AN UNFAMILIAR MEDIUM AND PROXYNARRATION TO ENABLE STUDENTS TO CREATE AND ANALYZE COMICS IN A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS TO PROMOTE VISUAL LITERACY.
To create a theoretical background that justifies teaching students visual literacy by designing comics in the classroom, we amalgamate three theories into a cohesive framework. First, we examine visual rhetoric. Second, we discuss multimodality. Third, we address the digital divide, or concerns about technology access.
VISUAL RHETORIC IS COMPLEX, AND AS JO ALLEN MENTIONS WITH DEFINING PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION, GIVING IT A FIXED DEFINITION MIGHT HURT THE MOVEMENT (75). STILL, RELYING ON VARIOUS SCHOLARS, WHOSE NAMES I AM WRITING HERE, WE CAN FIND AT LEAST THREE UNIFYING PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS TO THE SCHOLARSHIP: USING GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY DESIGN ELEMENTS, DEMYSTIFYING DESIGN, AND USING TECHNOLOGY AS A TOOL.
GESTALT PRINCIPLES—LIKE REIFICATION, MULTISTABILITY, INvariance, CLOSURE, PROXIMITY, CONTINUATION, AND SIMilARITY—are a big part of VISUAL RHETORIC PEDAGOGY AND ALL CAN BE TAUGHT WITH COMICS (MOORE AND FRITZ 389).
MANY SCHOLARS, LIKE BERNHARDT AND BRUMBERGER, DISCUSS THE WORRY
STUDENTS HAVE IN DESIGNING WORK. BUT INTRODUCING STUDENTS TO
DRAWING THROUGH STEPS LIKE PROCESS PEDAGOGY AND PROBYYMNASMATA
CAN CATER TO THIS.
WE DON'T WANT TECHNOLOGY TO "SABOTAGE STUDENT LEARNING BY TRUNCATING THE INVENTION PROCESS AND CURB THE STUDENT'S INCLINATION TO THINK CREATIVELY" (KOSTELNICK 286). COMICS ALLOWS MULTIPLE WAYS TO BE PRODUCED WHERE TECHNOLOGY SERVIES A TOOL, NOT A CRUTCH.
This might be due to multimodality referring to the process of design itself, not just its final product (see Gunther Kress, 28%). For example, in comics, the modes might be pen and paper or software. These are the things used to make the product, which is referred to as multimedia. While a comic book would be multimedia, the process of creating the comic with pens, paper, software, scanners would be multimodal. The product often matters more in technical communication than it does in composition, so the term multimedia might be preferable. In my study, the modes are as important as the media in creating a comic.
It's become more and more difficult to categorize what writing means in the 21st century (Lunsford 65 - 66). Is it this traditional concept depicted here? Is it new-media based? Something else?

Multimodality offers the term "design" to describe the "potentials and constraints for making meaning" (Bezemer and Kress 237). Because of this, we often use the verb design in this comic.
CHARLES MORAN WARNS ABOUT ACCESS ISSUES AND THE NCTE ADVISES INSTRUCTORS AND DEPARTMENTS MUST "BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE, PROVIDING ACCESS AND RESOURCES FOR ALL STUDENTS" (29). WE WANT TO TEACH TECHNOLOGY BUT THE DIGITAL DIVIDE SEPARATES THIS GOAL.
Smart phones and cheaper technology are helping to do this, but comics can achieve this goal because the process, or mode, in creating comics can be extremely complex (Adobe CS) or extremely simple (pen and paper) with similar results.
TO DO THIS, IT'S NECESSARY TO BASE THE RESEARCH IN VARIOUS SCHOLARLY TRADITIONS. FIRST, IN ORDER FOR STUDENTS TO UNDERSTAND WHY STUDYING AND COMPOSING IN A LESS-COMMON MEDIUM IS A WAY OF INTRODUCING THEM TO ALTERNATIVE MINDSETS, WE'LL USE CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND, IN PARTICULAR, PAULO FREIRE'S WRITINGS.
SECOND, IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH THAT THE PEDAGOGY OF TEACHING COMICS CAN BE BASED IN ANCIENT RHETORIC AND FIRMLY ESTABLISHED SCHOLARSHIP, WE’LL RELY ON THE TEACHING METHODS OF QUINTILIAN AND THE PRACTICE OF PROSYMNASMATATA.
AND FINALLY, WE'LL TURN TO COMIC BOOKS THEMSELVES. DRAWING ON EXAMPLES OF TECHNICAL AND ARGUMENTATIVE COMICS, AS WELL AS FICTIONAL AND THEORETICAL COMICS, WE'LL SHOW THAT THERE ARE CURRENT COMICS THAT SERVE AS EXAMPLES OF TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION, PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION, AND COMPOSITION SCHOLARSHIP.
Paulo Freire is widely considered the founder of the critical pedagogy movement. After his death, his friend and colleague Henry Giroux would laud his work and effort. He would also define critical pedagogy as “the educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action” (Giroux). Paulo Freire initialized this movement by publishing his work among the lower class in Brazil, titled The Pedagogy of the Oppressed.
Freire worked with what he called the oppressed class, striving to both understand their worldview while helping them understand the influences in their own lives that gave them that viewpoint.
His book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, would explore the complex relationship between how oppressors rule the world through power and how the oppressed accept it as a part of life. He would relate this to the classroom through power struggles and worldviews.

"The pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be developed by the oppressors. It would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defend but actually implemented liberating education" (Sh).
“AUTHENTIC TEACHING, THINKING THAT IS CONCERNED ABOUT REALITY, DOES NOT TAKE PLACE IN NORMATIVE ISOLATION, BUT ONLY IN COMMUNICATION” (77).

“IN PROBLEM-POSING EDUCATION, PEOPLE DEVELOP THEIR POWER TO PERCEIVE CRITICALLY THE WAY THEY EXIST IN THE WORLD WITH WHICH AND THROUGH WHICH THEY THEMSELVES THEY COME TO SEE THE WORLD NOT AS A STATIC REALITY, BUT AS A REALITY IN PROGRESS, IN TRANSFORMATION” (83).

Figure 35.
The book would become an international bestseller. One of its early readers and adopters was the aforementioned Henry Giroux. Giroux would begin to adapt the text in his own writings, becoming a friend to Freire and introducing his ideas to academia in the United States.
“Educators need an understanding of the meaning their festivals have as an integral part of the culture of resistance. A respectful sense of their piety in a dialectical perspective, and not only as if it were a simple expression of their alienation. Their piety, their religiosity, must be respected as their right, regardless of whether we reject it personally” (239).

[For this method of teaching to work] will be found not in its insistence on a doctrinal truth as much as its ability to provide the theoretical and structural conditions necessary to help students search for and act upon the truth” (86).
OTHER SCHOLARS, LIKE IRA SHOR AND DONNA QUALLEY, WOULD JOIN IN THE CONVERSATION. THE MOVEMENT WOULD TAKE ON MANY FORMS AND NOOKS, BUT WOULD BE KNOWN AS CRITICAL THEORY OR CRITICAL PEDAGOGY.

MANY WOULD ARGUE FOR IT AND OTHERS CRITIQUE IT, BUT MANY OF THE MOVEMENT’S GOALS WOULD BE TO HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION BY STEPPING BACK AND REFLECTING ON WHERE THEIR OWN IDEAS COME FROM.
In order to teach comics to students it's important to help them reflect on their own ideas of how knowledge should be presented. Is it in a traditional book, essay, or online site? Do certain mediums carry certain affordances over others?
Is there room for comics to be used in the classroom? Could we write an argument or compose a description in comics form?

While not explicitly mentioned in most critical theory writing, the mediums themselves can either benefit or suffer from many of the same oppressed or oppressed roles students themselves experience.
Most likely, students will have knowledge of comics in a vague sense (although there will probably be a fan or two). When pressed, they will admit their prejudices of the medium include that they don’t even consider it a medium. Instead they’re kids’ books that entertain either by being hilarious or by being about superheroes.

This is where critical pedagogy becomes important. Students should become aware of why they have these preconceptions of how materials and knowledge are presented.
HOWEVER, CRITICAL PEDAGOGY CAN BECOME A PARODY WITH A STRAW MAN TEACHER SHOUTING "POLITICS" WITH NO SUBSTANCE (SEE FISH'S SAVE THE WORLD ON YOUR OWN TIME). ONE CONCERN THAT ARISES IS THAT ECHOES BY GREGORY JAY AND BERNARD GRAFF, "IN THEORY CRITICAL PEDAGOGY SPEAKS OF DIALOGUE AND STUDENTS' AUTHORITY TO INITIATE AND FREELY PURSUE CRITICAL ANALYSES, IN PRACTICE SUCH A PEDAGOGY MERELY REAFFIRMS THE AUTHORITY OF THE TEACHER WHO HAS THE 'POLITICAL CLARITY' (THE TERM IS FREIRE'S) STUDENTS LACK" (100).
We're using critical pedagogy as a theoretical post to teach visual argument through comics. Let's turn to this map for the next step in the research process.

Figure 43.
WE NEED TO REFOCUS OUR ATTENTION TO ANCIENT ROME AND TURN BACK THE CLOCK A FEW THOUSAND YEARS.

Figure 44.
We turn to the teaching practice of probymnasmata, outlined by Quintilian in Institutes of Oratory, and further explained by modern rhetoricians. While at first glance, this teaching method, which will be explained, may seem at odds with critical pedagogy, there are similar elements that allow both approaches to be used side-by-side to teach comics.
“Let him adopt, then, above all things, the feelings of a parent to his pupils” (I.2.4).

Although Quintilian is primarily known for his child-based teaching approaches and his concepts of the good man in oratory situations, one of the elements that would resonate through the centuries was his inclusion and reliance on the teaching method of progymnasmata.
"LET HIM NEITHER HAVE VICES IN HIMSELF, NOR TOLERATE THEM IN OTHERS. LET HIS AUSTERITY NOT BE STERN, NOR HIS AFFABILITY TOO EASY, LEST DISLIKE ARISE FROM THE ONE, OR CONTEMPT FROM THE OTHER" (1.1.25).

JAMES J. MURPHY POINTS OUT THAT QUINTILIAN WAS "LESS THAN THOROUGH" WHEN DESCRIBING THE PROSYMNASMATA BECAUSE IT WAS COMMON PRACTICE TO HIS ROMAN AUDIENCE. IT WASN'T Until LATER RHETORICIANS CAME ALONG, LIKE HERMOGENES OF TARSUS, APHTHONIUS, AElius THEON, AND NICOLAUS. THEY DEFINED THE NITTY-GRITTY ELEMENTS. YET AUBREY SWYNN OPINES, "QUINTILIAN IS STILL THE BEST AUTHOR ON THE SUBJECT" (2012). BUT THIS STILL HASN'T ANSWERED WHAT PROSYMNASMATA IS.
Murphy explains that they are a "set of graded composition exercises . . . [whose] name comes from the function of the exercises: if the highest form of school training are the declamations or fictitious speeches (gymnasmata in Greek), then that which prepares for them is pre-declamation (pro-gymnasmata)" (54).

Michael Mendelson also emphasizes the pro, or pre, of the gymnasmata by defining them as "literally, 'pre-training' activities, preliminary in the sense that they lead to the full-dress arguments of declamation and, beyond that, to the kinds of deliberative, forensic, and epideictic speech" (187). Which means...
"Let him not be of an angry temper, and yet not a conniver at what ought to be corrected. Let him be plain in his mode of teaching, and patient of labor, but rather diligent in exacting tasks than fond of giving them, or excessive length" (II.2.8).

...the progymnasmata was a step-by-step process for Roman students to learn valuable oratory and rhetorical skills one step at a time by using materials they were familiar with. It was a process that built on familiarity and worked into the strange.
Using playmats to teach comics production and critical pedagogy to justify alternative texts can be supported with the New London Group's design elements. The New London Group argues four major design concepts: overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice.

Situated practice is defined as "immersion in experience and utilization of available discourses, including those from the students' lifeworlds and simulations of the relationships to be found in workplaces and public spaces" (207). Both in design and study, having students start with the familiar and work to the strange helps them adapt available discourses.

Figure 50.
OVERT INSTRUCTION IS "SYSTEMATIC, ANALYTIC, AND CONSCIOUS UNDERSTANDING" THAT "REQUIRES THE INTRODUCTION OF EXPLICIT METALANGUAGES, WHICH DESCRIBE AND INTERPRET THE DESIGN ELEMENTS OF DIFFERENT MODES OF MEANING" (ZOTT). PROSYMNASMATA INTRODUCES NEW LANGUAGES AND DESIGN INCREMENTALLY IN A PROCESS THAT BUILDS ON ITSELF, WHICH CATERS TO THE DEFINITION OF OVERT INSTRUCTION.
Critical framing means "interpreting the social and cultural context of particular designs of meaning. This involves the students' standing back from what they are studying and viewing it critically in relation to its context" (207). While progymnasmata can achieve this goal, critical pedagogy is especially effective in carrying out this goal.
TRANSFORMED PRACTICE MEANS TO "TRANSFER IN MEANING–MAKING PRACTICE, WHICH PLUGS THE TRANSFORMED MEANING TO WORK IN OTHER CONTEXTS OR CULTURAL SITES" (207). STUDENTS TAKE THE CRITICAL IDEAS THEY’VE LEARNED FROM THE MATERIALS AND THE MEDIUMS OF PRODUCTION AND APPLY IT TO A COMIC THAT THEY DESIGN.

CRITICAL THEORY AND PROXYMNASMATO WEAVE TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL. ONCE STUDENTS HAVE CONSIDERED THEIR WORLDVIEW AND DONE SELF-REFLECTION THEN MOVED THAT CRITICAL THINKING STRATEGY TOWARDS COMIC BOOKS IN GENERAL, IT’S TIME TO TEACH THEM HOW TO EITHER WRITE TECHNICALLY OR COMPOSE AN ARGUMENT WITH COMICS.

Figure 53.
To start with, students need to work on understanding what comics are. To do so, we turn to the proyamnasmata approach by starting with something they're familiar with and working up to something extremely complex. Starting with web and newspaper comics, students look at what they're familiar with.

These examples above are some of the sharpest web comics available right now and provide ample examples to introduce students. More traditional methods from newspapers work as well.
THE NEXT STEP IS TO BUILD ON THE SMALLER STRIPS INTO A FULL-LENGTH, BUT FICTIONAL, COMIC STRIP. SINCE WE ARE WORKING WITH FICTIONAL STORIES, THIS IS THE LOGICAL BUILDUP. AMERICAN BORN CHINESE IS A FANTASTIC EXAMPLE OF FICTION DEALING WITH HEAVY TOPICS. THIS NATIONAL BOOK AWARD NOMINEE REALLY DRIVES HOME THE HEAVY MATTERS THAT COMICS CAN DEAL WITH. AS A BONUS, IT DEALS WITH WORLDVIEW PARADIGM SHIFTS.
Next we leap from fiction to non-fiction. This is a crucial switch for students to see how the medium they’ve seen primarily handle fiction can be used to present non-fiction topics—and heavy ones at that. It’s not necessary to read the whole book of Understanding Comics in this case, but to focus on chapters one and two where McCloud defines comics and then disseminates visuals and icons. It helps students toward the end goal of achieving visual argumentative or visual instructive means.
Now the curriculum splits for composition or technical communication. Luckily, there are plenty of examples of comics for both. First off, we'll enter the technical communication doorway, where the goal is to teach students to create descriptions and instructions visually.
THE MOVE TO INSTRUCTIONS IS GUIDED FIRST BY THE CHILDREN’S BOOK HOWNTOONS WHICH COMBINES STORYTELLING ELEMENTS FAMILIAR TO FICTION WHILE INTRODUCING INSTRUCTIONAL ELEMENTS.

SECOND, CULKIN’S WORK ARDUINO! IS A MORE INSTRUCTIONAL PIECE, BUT STILL FEATURES A FAMILIAR AVATAR.

THIRD, ALTMA, NORDGREN, AND KEYZER’S SOLDERING IS EASY GOES MORE INTO THE TECHNICAL ASPECT OF THINGS BY HAVING NO NARRATOR—JUST INSTRUCTIONS.
NEXT STUDENTS RETURN TO THE NOW FAMILIAR MCCLOUD DEALING WITH A TECHNICAL DILEMMA: TRANSLATING GOOGLE ENGINEER SPEAK INTO SOMETHING THE MASSES CAN CONSUME. GOOGLE CHROME IS A BALANCE BETWEEN INSTRUCTIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS AND SHOWCASES MULTIPLE NARRATORS TRYING TO INSTRUCT ON HOW TO USE GOOGLE CHROME. YET, THE CATCH HERE IS MCCLOUD IS ALSO DEALING WITH COPYWRITING—SO ADVERTISING COMES INTO PLAY TOO.
THE FINAL BOOK TO GUIDE STUDENTS INTO COMPOSING TECHNICAL COMICS IS THE 9/11 COMMISSION REPORT: A GRAPHIC ADAPTATION BY SID JACOBSON AND ERNIE COLÓN. HERE IS A GOVERNMENT-APPROVED ADAPTATION OF A THICK, STUFFY 500+ PAGE BOOK INTO A DIGESTIBLE COMIC BOOK. STUDENTS CAN SEE THE ETHICAL REPRESENTATION OF FAMILIAR GOVERNMENT FIGURES AND HOW SENSITIVE MATERIALS AND TOPICS CAN BE TASTEFULLY REPRESENTED. THIS IS A FINE EXAMPLE OF ETHICAL COMICS-BASED TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION.
Taking a step back from where technical comics can lead students, let's return to the realm of visual arguments and comics that persuade. These are the books used in teaching comics to composition students.
The first step toward persuasive comics is a fictional comic, Uncle Sam by Steve Darnall and Ales Ross. The journey here is a fictional one of Uncle Sam walking through modern America trying to sort out his memory from patriotic speeches, atrocities done in wars, and other complicated aspects of American history.

While fictional, the book actually relies on sources and the work of scholars to present its tale—which is far more persuasive than most fiction. Because of this, it’s also a bit on the nose.
Launching from Uncle Sam, students will get a primarily non-fiction reading of a similar theme. Now, instead of the fictional representation of alternative American histories, they get the source material from historian Howard Zinn. This is a chance to tie in critical self-reflection while learning about American history through an argument. Zinn’s view is presented through scholarship and biography. It also allows students the chance to see the problematic way in which characters can be represented in comics. Compared to 9/11, the representation of historical figures here is clearly manipulative and problematic.
HERE IS AN ARGUMENT DONE IN COMICS FORM. WITH LITTLE TO NO RELIANCE ON BIOGRAPHY OR NARRATOR STORIES, THIS BOOK PRESENTS A VISUAL ARGUMENT CONSTRUCTED THROUGH COMICS. IN HEALTH CARE REFORM, JONATHAN GRUBER ARGUES FOR HEALTH CARE REFORM AND PROVIDES A CLEAN, USEFUL EXAMPLE FOR STUDENTS TO CREATE THEIR OWN ARGUMENTS.
Now the stage is set for students to create their own visual arguments.

They've been schooled in critical pedagogy to view how information can be presented in privileged forms that relates to their own lives and world.

They have been given a step-by-step approach to how it can be done through pro gymnasamata.

Students now rely on one of their works from earlier in the semester, either a traditionally written persuasive essay or a technical description or instruction. They're going to remediate it visually.
BEFORE THE ADAPTATION, IT’S HELPFUL TO LOOK AT JEFF RICE’S POINT OF WRITEING ABOUT IMAGES NERATES WRITING WITH IMAGES: “IN MUCH OF TODAY’S PEDAGOGY, THE PREFERENCE IS FOR WRITING ABOUT IMAGES, NOT WITH IMAGES.” RICE RELATES THIS PROBLEM TO COMICS SPECIFICALLY IN SAYING IF COMICS ARE MENTIONED BY TEXTBOOKS, THEY NEVER ASK STUDENTS TO PRODUCE THEM, JUST TO CRITIQUE AND ANALYZE THEM (151 – 152).

IN THE SAME WAY STUDENTS WERE INTRODUCED TO READING COMICS, THEY BEGIN CREATING THEM, STARTING WITH THEIR ORIGINAL WORK DONE EARLIER IN THE SEMESTER, TURNING IT INTO A SCRIPT, SKETCHING IDEAS, AND FINALLY CREATING THE COMIC.
HOWEVER, WHEN STUDENTS BEGIN THIS PROCESS THEY USUALLY RESPOND WITH THE FOLLOWING:

WE CAN'T DRAW!
Figure 68.

This is the classic knee-jerk reaction. Now is the chance to remind students that composition is the goal here, not the artwork. That said, a good composition is vital and there are many tools to do it. There are websites like Pixton and Toondoo and software like Comic Life 3 (which has a free month trial), or they can use traditional Adobe Creative Suite methods. If access concerns are at stake, or if electronic composition is at stake, then a traditional paper and pencil can get the job done. The goal here is for the visual connection.
AFTER STUDENTS FINISHED THEIR COMICS I GAVE THEM A QUESTIONNAIRE ASKING FOR THEIR REACTIONS TO THE PROCESS. THEIR RESPONSES WERE FASCINATING AND COPIOUS. IT LED TO MULTIPLE THEMES AND CONCEPTS THAT APPEARED THAT I FULLY EXPLORED IN MY DISSERTATION. BUT FOR THIS COMIC, I WILL FOCUS ON FIVE THAT ARE EITHER UNIQUE TO OR ENHANCED BY COMICS.
THE FIRST KEY IDEA IS WRITING ELEMENTS, SUCH AS TRANSITIONS, PLANNING, AND ORGANIZATION, WHILE TAUGHT IN OTHER ASSIGNMENTS, COMICS ADDS VISUAL TRANSITIONS (FEW MEDIUMS CAN TEACH STUDENTS TO DESIGN WITH VISUAL TRANSITION AS EFFECTIVELY) AND HIERARCHY IN EACH PANEL, HIERARCHY FOR EACH PAGE, AND GLOBAL HIERARCHY IS A REQUIREMENT IN EVERY STAGE.
The second key idea is core writing. While taught by other assignments, comics adds mandatory concise writing (panels limit the amount of text and students have to plan on every stage to adapt their message both visually and textually), remediation skills due to multiple adaptations of students’ own work in multiple stages (by participating in a new medium, students remediate technical communication genre), and plagiarism curbing (due to the rarity of technical comics as well as the three-step process of writing, it becomes next to impossible to plagiarize).
The third key idea is visuality exploration, such as using original graphics and original design. This one isn’t always taught by other assignments. Additionally, comics adds original graphics (students can’t rely on clip art or Google images as easily as with other assignments. With comics they have to create their graphics to fit their goals) and document design (students can rely on software templates, but they have to decide on the best way to visually incorporate their information into an assignment).
The fourth key idea is tone and narration. While taught by other assignments, comics adds writing in a conversational style (this style helps writers become aware of the traditional authorless tone of most technical communication) and challenging accepted genre conventions.
The fifth key idea is Juxtaposition. Students have to completely engage in juxtaposing graphics within one another and design them so they form a cohesive story. Not only do they design each image, but they have to place it within a larger story and text—comics may teach this skill better than any other medium or genre.

Juxtaposition also applies to slide presentations in that they teach that images and texts working together to present one message, not repeating each other.

It also teaches general Juxtaposition (the value of text placement, multiple visual elements within each visual, and each visual forming a larger visual is extremely valuable).
Comics may not be the ultimate solution for teaching visual literacy and technical writing, but we've shown that comics should be taken seriously as educational tools.
My study has shown that reading and designing comics can teach visual literacy techniques effectively. It teaches visuals, multimedia, visual rhetoric, juxtaposition, transitions, and document design.
My goal was to showcase comics' power in teaching visual literacy, both in the reading and in the design stage.

Many traditional elements of writing are still found in designing comics, so the concern that a visual medium will replace writing skills isn't necessary. Comics offer unique aspects that make them advantageous and worth further exploration.
MY GOAL WAS TO SHOWCASE COMICS' POWER IN TEACHING VISUAL LITERACY, BOTH IN THE READING AND IN THE DESIGN STAGE.
COMICS OFFER UNIQUE ASPECTS THAT MAKE THEM ADVANTAGEOUS AND WORTH FURTHER EXPLORATION.
THIS STUDY AND ITS CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND PROGYMNASMATA METHODOLOGY IS ONLY THE BEGINNING.
LOOKING AT THE POTENTIAL FOR COMICS IN THE TECHNICAL CLASSROOM HAS POTENTIAL AND FURTHER APPLICATIONS AND STUDIES IN THE TOPIC ARE WELCOME AND ENCOURAGED.
The potential in comics production in academic settings is just being tapped. But this next step is up to you and me, dear readers.
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Figure 83.
Creator's Statements

We decided to present our argument through an omniscient narrator that mimics the tone and moves of the academic genre’s tones and invisible (and partially objective) narrator. This means that instead of relying on a traditional avatar like most comics do, it relies on academic writing and technical instruction techniques (like Jody Culkin, Mitch Altman, Andie Nordgren, and Jeff Keyzer have done), where the narrator occasionally shows up, but primarily lets the findings and arguments do the work. That said, the teacher that bookends the story serves in many ways as the narrator as do some of the characters.

Ideally, our comic would have been done by an artist, someone like Jeff Lemire, Emily Carroll, Alex Ross, Scott McCloud, Richard McGuire, Seth, Kate Beaton, Vitaly S. Alexius, Hope Larson, Gabriel Rodriguez, or any other talented artist. However that defeats the purpose of our argument: that students and instructors can engage in the comics medium and gain from its affordances. This is why the art relies on a simple style based in examples of the medium, but done with inadequate art training. However, this isn’t a weakness; instead it embodies the call of the paper to get students and scholars to write visually no matter the skill level involved.

Original Contribution of Work

The goal of many contemporary compositionists, rhetoricians, and professional/technical communication scholars is to incorporate multimodal elements and visual rhetoric into the classroom. Research in this area, as well as the desire to use multimodal texts, is nothing new or unique, but the practice itself has been adopted slowly. Many reasons for this exist: courses are already brimming over with content, competing mediums don’t carry sufficient academic weight, and
accessibility concerns abound. These are legitimate critiques; multimodality is complex and taxes an already crowded composition and technical communication field. Yet, a simple form of multimodality already exists and has legitimate research to support it — comics. Comics is a medium capable of handling many genres and incorporating comics as a form of multimodality in research, composition, rhetoric, and professional communication is a practice that is simple. Since publishing in comics is usually not at option, in order to justify the analysis and creation of comics in the classroom — and in turn, academia — one can turn to established practices, in particular, critical pedagogy and the ancient rhetoric practice of progymnasmata.

**Comic Studies**

Comics in academia isn’t a new idea either, though it’s usually limited to being the subject of rhetorical analysis in published articles or as a catalyst for analysis in the classroom. If it’s used as a means for composing or creation, it’s primarily for reflective and autobiographical writing. These approaches are helpful and important, but comics can be used in other academic formats, including peer-reviewed research. Comics use rhetorical skills to teach important lessons and students can compose with comics to create arguments and instructional texts. In the process of composing with comics, students learn visual rhetoric and effectively realize multimodal writing. This isn’t the end though. Teaching students to compose with comics is the first step toward arguing that comics can be a means of publishing research in addition to the traditional essay.

Comics studies is a steadily growing trend in academia across multiple disciplines. The medium was once considered merely pulp-art or a children’s genre (and in some audiences still is), but many scholars (both in popular culture and in academia) have worked for years to show its potential and depth. Research has already been done proving comics’ usefulness in the classroom (from elementary to higher education) as a medium to teach from and to analyze. Although many have argued for comics’ positive influence, and there are comics that have been accepted as textbooks and readers (see McCloud; Losh, Alexander, Cannon; Gonick; etc.), the majority of instructors and scholars are either unaware such a movement exists, indifferent to the movement, or unconvinced it’s legitimate.

**Important and Academic-esque Comics**

Usually titles like *Maus*, *Persepolis*, or any of McCloud’s non-fiction work come to mind when serious comics are mentioned. These are a great start, but they are only the surface of many more works that deserve further exploration. The non-fiction genres that stray from memoir and lie on the margins of academic scholarship are a great place to start. These pieces include Colon and Jacobson’s 9/11 pieces (the first a graphic adaptation of the 9/11 commission report and the second a history of the wars that followed), the journalism cartoon movement (including Sacco’s books), McCloud’s *Chrome* instructions (and earlier work), Paul Buhle’s editorial work on multiple academic-themed comics — including historical texts like Zinn’s adapted *People’s History* — biographies, history tomes, technical communication done in comics format (like Eisner’s work and other instructional comics), post-modern philosophical debates like in *Logicomix*, and the textbook *Understanding Comics* done in comics form (see Losh, Alexander, Cannon). This is the line where entertainment and scholarship blur, which are explored in the justification in our piece.

**Comics, Progymnasmata, and Multimodality**

Although the overall goal is to see the acceptance of comics as a means to publish research findings (not to replace the essay format, but to be a companion when appropriate), this piece focuses on the initial steps — teaching the idea to students as a goal to teach visual rhetoric and multimodality. This piece looks at a method of teaching that draws on critical pedagogy, analyzes comics that read like scholarship, and has students compose in that format. Critical pedagogy’s tradition of inviting students to challenge the authority and looking below the surface level to see where meaning lies fits in with the idea of having students compose in and study a medium that’s often overlooked during their college experience. Such an approach echoes Freire’s ideas of using critical strategies as an effective model for change. He writes, “the teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, an re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own” [Freire 1993, 81]). In order for an acceptance of new media and mediums to occur, it’s often necessary to engage students in the process of discovering. Empirical evidence based on
students’ experiences can provide valuable evidence to support the bigger goal of having the larger academic community accept such a medium as a way to compose arguments.

Progymnasmata, and Quintilian’s work in general, make up another significant section of our piece. Combining ancient rhetorical pedagogical practices with comics studies hasn’t been explored. In addition, this piece draws on critical pedagogy concepts of otherness and oppression, in this case making a literal observation of the inherently “other” medium of comics compared to the safer essay and textual pieces. This amalgamation of ancient rhetoric, comics studies, and critical pedagogy is the basis of the research behind this pieces’ goal of exploring comics as a multimodal means of composition.

 Works Cited


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