Whether you are an English, Creative Writing or Art teacher, Librarian, Scout Leader, or Parent, YOU can help encourage your students, child or troops to do a graphic novel. And maybe even do one yourself!
This publication contains the opinions and ideas of its author. It is intended to be helpful and informative on the subject matter and to be used as a teacher’s companion to YOU CAN DO A GRAPHIC NOVEL. It is given free of charge with the understanding that the author is not rendering professional services in the book. If the reader requires personal assistance or advice, please contact the author @ www.barbaraslate.com
Since you are already reading this, then chances are great that you are a believer in the importance of graphic novels. But just in case you need some ammunition with a principal, spouse, boss, who thinks comics are a waste of time, bad for the environment or just plain dopey, here are some facts to sway the nonbeliever.

Today it is a career path. School systems are incorporating graphic novels as part of their curriculum. Learning how to create a Graphic novel is a powerful tool for advertising, movie making, and many other creative fields that involve sequential art.

Creating characters and story lines is empowering. It keeps teenagers focused on ideas. They are masters of this universe.

Teens who do graphic novels develop skills in logic, teamwork, problem solving, and completing a task. They also form strong bonds with each other and create a community within a school.

The more they write and draw, the better they get. Being an artist is cool. It helps with self-esteem.

Creating Graphic Novels is therapeutic. Teens learn to express thoughts and feelings. A teenager at the drawing board instead of being bored is a beautiful thing.
The Top 10 Graphic Novel Questions

1. **What is a Graphic Novel?**

   A Graphic Novel is a Comic Book only longer. The big difference is that when you write a comic book, it is usually put out in monthly installments. In graphic novel form, the book is complete. Whatever you call it, it’s simply storytelling with the art *advancing* the story, rather than illustrating the text, as in the classic storybook.

2. **Do you have to know how to draw to do a graphic novel?**

   You do not have to know how to draw, but you do need to find your unique style. The art in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, one of the most popular graphic novels out today, is all stick figures. It’s the *combination* of art style and writing that is unique to graphic novels.

3. **Which comes first, art or story?**

   It doesn’t matter. Everybody works differently. Some start with story, others with art, and still others write and draw at the same time. The idea is to just get going.

4. **How do I get started?**

   Doodle.

5. **What is more important, Art or Story?**

   This is one of those questions that you can debate forever and still not come up with the answer. Of course you need a good story because nobody likes a boring one, and you need interesting art to keep the reader intrigued. It’s the chicken and the egg all over again.
6. Can I make a living doing graphic novels?

Today more than ever. But it still isn’t easy. Of course talent is important, but willing to get your work out there and show it to the world is what is going to give you a real shot.

Knowing how to do a graphic novel expands into other fields such as advertising, movie making and TV writing.

7. Any creative tips?

Never leave home without a pencil and paper. You never know where or when inspiration will come.

8. How do you know what to write about?

Write what you know about.

9. How do you break into the business?

Going to a Comic book convention is a good start. There, you can talk to professionals and get your portfolio evaluated. Get connected through your local libraries, art teachers, events around town.

10. Is the creative block real?

Of course it’s real. But be careful not to use it as an excuse if you’re just being lazy or reaching a difficult time in your story. Sometimes what feels like a creative block is really just you going through your process and getting ready for a breakthrough.
RECOMMENDATION:
Minimum of 6 sessions.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:
Each student has the book, *You Can Do A Graphic Novel*. (YCDAGN) You have this teacher’s guide, and plenty of Pencils and Paper. (Make copies of page 11 for those who want to work with panels.)

TIP: Standard 8.5x11 paper is good to use. However, if you can add different kinds of paper-- larger, smaller, some with a grip, newsprint, etc. and also add crayons and colored pencils to the mix, that will help with creativity.

WHAT THEY ACCOMPLISH:
Each student explores their creative process. In doing so, they discover things about themselves that they never knew before.

Each student completes a Bible about their character. A Bible is *Everything you need to know about your character such as name, age, background, powers, fears, etc.*

Students study “How to Plot” their story by color coding.

Each student completes at least a two page layout of a comic book/ graphic novel. (See pages 36-37 in this guide)
Everything is process.

Learning about themselves will take a lifetime, but students get a head start if they begin to understand their own process. Not only is it important creatively, but also on a daily basis.

Some students may already have characters and story that they’ve been working on for years. Others may have sketches, doodles, or writings in their sketchbooks, binders, or heads. They are encouraged to use whatever they have. If they don’t draw at all, they can doodle. In the doodles they may discover a character. Except when the student is reading, they are encouraged to be drawing, doodling or writing.

The goal is to complete all eight steps of this guide. You will go at your own pace. If you are planning a 6 session program then you will move faster than you would if you were planning an 8 session one. A 12 session or more allows more time for process. The more time students have to discover their process, create characters, do a plotline, and work on layout, the better.

Each step is a building block to create a finished work of art (*a double page spread*) to be shown at the Graphic Novel Show (p. 38). The show does not *have* to go on, but displaying the student’s work is a way to get parents, students, faculty and the local press to look at art and see the creative process at work. Having students’ work published in the Newspaper is not only great for their sense of pride and recognition, but also when applying for art school and college. Oh, putting on a show is lots of fun too!
STEP ONE

The Creative Process

YOU ASK:

How many are Morning People?
Who is a Night Owl?
Do you like being alone?
How do you react to criticism?
Who likes to listen to music while they work?
What music inspires you?
Do you have one spot that you always go to when you work?
Can you create anywhere?
Who remembers their dreams?
Who thinks they don’t dream? Everybody dreams.

There are endless questions you can ask! Most students like talking about their process. Try to spend more than ten minutes, unless you are planning to do more than 8 sessions. In which case, you will most likely enjoy lively and enlightening conversations!
STUDENTS READ: Open YCDAGN to Chapter Three. Each student reads a creative tip out loud. You have already completed the first tip by asking questions about Process so begin with Creative Tip 2. Some tips will inspire more conversation/projects than others. Following are suggestions to get the creative juices flowing.

Creative Tip 2. Keep a journal

PROJECT: The students make a journal. They are encouraged to write in their journal about their process.

Fold paper in half

...then again.

One staple in the spine. *If you don’t want to use a stapler, you can improvise.*

Sketch a title

HOMEWORK:

YOU SAY:
Discover something about your process that you never knew before. Write, draw, or do a cartoon of it in your journal. If a student already uses a sketchbook or journal, then they can use it.
Creative Tip 4. *Inspiration is everywhere.*
YOU ASK:
Who has been inspired lately? What inspired you?

Creative Tip 6: *Make lots and lots of mistakes.*
YOU ASK:
Who hates to make mistakes? Are you a perfectionist?

Creative Tip 8: *Don’t throw anything away until you are finished with your graphic novel.*

PROJECT:
The students make an Idea box from a shoe, tissue, corrugated, or gift box. This can either be a class project or something they do at home.

Creative Tip 11. *Collaborate*
YOU ASK:
How many like to write? Draw? Both? (*Artists may want to collaborate with writers and writers with artists.*)

Creative Tip 14. *Moment of Inspiration*
YOU ASK:
What does your moment of inspiration feel like?

WHAT THEY LEARN:
To pay attention to their process.

REMEMBER:
Always provide plenty of paper and pencils. Some students may already be writing/drawing and others may want to start right away working on their graphic novel. Copy the panels from the next page for them to use. They can work from left to right, or right to left if they are doing the Manga style.
Before you begin Step Two ...

YOU ASK:

Are you writing in your journal?

Did anybody get inspired? What inspired you?

Anybody collaborating?

Are you character driven? Story driven? Or are you just driven?

Do you want to forget about your homework and only work on your graphic novel?

Who had a breakthrough?

What have you learned about your process?

These are suggested questions. You may want to add your own. Spend about 10 minutes unless you are planning more than 8 sessions.
STEP TWO

Story

YOU ASK: How many of you like a boring story?
Of course, Nobody likes a boring story.

YOU ASK: Would somebody tell a boring story?
If nobody volunteers, YOU tell one. (See below for my boring story.)

I got up, brushed my teeth, got dressed, made my breakfast, toast and coffee with a little milk in the coffee and oh! I almost forgot, a little sugar too and then I sat down at my kitchen table and ate, and when I was finished, got in my car and went to the gas station for gas and drove--

TIP: The more boring your story, the better. Many students will be inspired by your boring story and will tell their own. YOU yawn and compliment their boring stories. This can be fun but don’t let it go on too long because it can get boring!

STUDENTS READ: Chapter One, pages 3-16 from YCDAGN. This should take about 10 minutes. When they are finished, the students continue to write, draw or doodle.

YOU ASK: What does every story have to have?
Beginning, middle, end and twist. The twist is the surprise,... the unexpected.

YOU ASK: Can somebody tell a good story in 3 to 5 sentences?
TIP: This is much more difficult than telling a boring one. If you get volunteers, look for the beginning, middle, end and twist. This may be the most difficult part of a graphic novel! If the student does not have a story, they continue to think about it for the following weeks.

HOMEWORK: Reread Chapter One. Think of a story, with a beginning, middle, end and twist. Write it in the journal.

WHAT THEY LEARN: It’s easy to tell a boring story but not so easy to tell a good one.
Before you begin Step Three ...

YOU ASK:

What have you learned about your process?

Are you writing in your journal?

Did anybody get inspired? What inspired you?

Any ideas come to you in your dreams?

Do you know the twist in your story?

Do you want to forget about your homework and only work on your graphic novel?

Who had a breakthrough?

Who remembers their dreams?

Is anybody stuck on what to write?

Who started their story?

Try to spend no more than ten minutes, unless you are planning to do twelve sessions or more!
STEP THREE

A Successful Story

Make copies of the following two pages to do in class, at home, or both.

STUDENTS READ:
Chapter One, pages 6, 7, and 15 from YCDAGN. When they are finished, the students continue to write, draw or doodle.

YOU SUGGEST:
A movie or story that most or all the class has read/seen. Analyze the story, picking out each event. The students can keep their books open to pages 6-7.

YOU ASK:
What is the Beginning of the movie/book?  
What is the Rising Action?  
TIP: There usually are three events that happen during the Rising Action, leading to the Climax. Try to find those events.)  
What is the Climax?  
What is the Falling Action?  
What is the Resolution?  
What is the Ending?

YOU SUGGEST:
The same movie or story that most or all the class has read/seen. The students can keep their books open to page 15.

YOU ASK:
Who is the Protagonist?  
Who is the Antagonist?  
What is the Conflict in the story?  
What is the plot?  
What is the theme of the story?  
What is the setting?

WHAT THEY LEARN: How to identify the structure of a story. Learn the parts of a successful story.
Write the plan for your story. (See page 7 in You Can Do A Graphic Novel Whatever you don’t know on these 2 pages, leave blank and fill in as you get to know your story.)

Beginning:

Rising Action:

Climax:

Falling Action:

Resolution:

Ending:
Answer these questions about your story.
(See page 15 in You Can Do A Graphic Novel)

Who is your Protagonist?

Who is your Antagonist?

What is the Conflict in your story?

What is your plot?

What is the theme of your story?

What is the setting?
STEP FOUR
Creating a Character
Make copies of the next four pages. Do not hand them out yet.

YOU ASK:

Who has a plot for their story?

Do you know your Protagonist? Antagonist?

What’s your character’s name?

Where is your character from?

What is your character’s biggest fear?

Favorite music?

Does your character have super powers?

Any Side-kicks? Pets? Siblings?

STUDENTS READ:
Chapter Five, Creating Characters, pages 55-67 from YCDAGN. This should take about 10 minutes. Then hand out the copies. They can start writing and drawing in class and then continue at home.

ALERT:
When I first started teaching, I was shocked when so many of my students (most from loving homes) created characters with tragic stories of deceased parents. Then I realized that they just wanted independence for their main character!
Draw your Protagonist and Antagonist (See page 15.) Stick figures are fine.
CHARACTER BIBLE

Professionals call *everything you need to know about your character and more!*... the Character Bible. Write about your character. You can add more character traits on another sheet of paper. The more you know about your character, the easier it will be for you to write dialog. Do not worry if your bible changes. This one is not written in stone.

NAME:

AGE:

SIBLINGS:

PARENTS:

BACKGROUND:

BEST FRIEND: (or sidekick)

EDUCATION:

OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTIC:

BIGGEST FEAR:
EMPLOYMENT: (if any)

POWERS: (if any)

LEISURE ACTIVITIES:

CLOTHING STYLE:

LOVE LIFE:

FAVORITE COLOR:

FAVORITE MUSIC:

GOAL IN LIFE:

PERSONAL MOTTO:
My character would say ...

My character would think...

My character would whisper...

My character would shout...
Barbara says ...

Everybody works differently.

The creative process is different for everyone. Some students may want to do the bible first, others will want to draw the character while still others will go back and forth between writing and drawing. It doesn’t matter where they begin as long as they get going.

For those who think they cannot draw:

YOU SHOW: The popular graphic novel, *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. (That is all drawn with stick figures.)

YOU SAY: Doodle.
TIP: Everybody doodles. Ask them to look for doodles in their binders, book jackets, or on scraps of paper at home. In the doodles they may discover a character. Or you may see a doodle that looks interesting. Encourage the student to make a family in that style of doodle!

For those who draw too well: *That is they are perfectionists, and are afraid to make mistakes.*

YOU SAY:
Switch hands.
TIP: They draw for about five minutes with the opposite hand. Although they may be frustrated, it will help loosen them up.

For those students who have their story (*beginning, middle, end and twist*) and are developing their characters, they may be ready for feedback. Either you or the student shows a character or talks about a part in their story. The classmates react and offer opinions.

ALERT: Although most feedback will be helpful, be careful for negative feedback. Although not everyone is going to like the drawings/writings, there is a positive way of giving negative feedback. In the end, it is important to stress that it is up to the artist/writer to take the critique, or reject it. They are the masters of this universe.
Before you begin Step Five ...

YOU ASK:

Are you writing in your journal?

Who dreamed about your character?

Is your character talking to you?

Do you know what their voice sounds like?

Is your character taking over your brain?

What is your character’s biggest fear?

Do you know the twist in your story?

Did anybody leave home without a pencil and paper?

Who had a breakthrough?

Is anybody stuck on what to write?
STEP FIVE

See as if for the first time

YOU ASK:
Who is from Mars?
Of course, that question will get some strange looks. Usually several students raise their hands.

YOU SAY:
If you are not from Mars, then pretend you are. You have just landed on earth and are seeing things for the first time. Look around the room. Do you see something new? Something you’ve never seen before? Really look.

STUDENTS READ:
Pages 18-24 in YCDAGN. This should take about ten minutes. When they are finished, they draw, sketch, doodle.

PROJECT:
Set up ordinary objects-- Erasers, pencils, vase, books. Have the students draw the objects as if they have never seen them before.
TIP: If a student is sketching with their head down, then they are drawing what they think they see rather than what they see. They should be looking at the objects.

HOMEWORK:
Continue to see as if for the first time. Pass out copies of the following page. This can be done in class, at home, or both.

WHAT THEY LEARN: A new way of seeing.
Sketch in a scene of your character getting up in the morning. You can use your own panels or the ones below. You can start from left to right, or right to left if you are drawing Manga. Make your panels sequential. (see page 181) *Stick figures encouraged!*
Before you begin Step Six ...

YOU ASK:

How many of you are getting to know your process?
How many saw something *as if for the first time*?
Did anybody leave home without a pencil and paper?
Has anybody read the entire book, YCDAGN?
Who had a breakthrough?
Who dreamt about their character?
Anything about your process you would like to change?
Are you writing in your journal?

These are just several of the endless questions you can ask. You may want to walk around the room and hold up a drawing or talk about something in someone's bible that you found interesting. Spend about 10 minutes unless you are planning more than 8 sessions.

**GOAL:** The students pay attention to their process.
STEP SIX
The Plotline

PROJECT:
Step by step, the students begin to plot. Plotting can be done in class, at home, or both. It can take several sessions, depending on the students and the number of sessions.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED: See pages 74 and 75.

STUDENTS READ TO THEMSELVES:
Pages 74-86 in YCDAGN.

ALERT: Page 78 in YCDAGN. The first sentence says to refer to my Angel Love plotline on pages 100-101. It’s really on pages 90-91. (Sorry about that!)

STUDENTS READ OUT LOUD:
Pages 87-89. Each student reads a Plotting Pointer. Some points will inspire more conversation than others.

Following are suggestions to get the creative juices going:

Keep the twists and turns coming

TIP: Some students may be frustrated that they don’t know where their story is going. See Creative Tip 3, page 27 and Creative Tip: 15 (pages 36 and 37)

Get feedback

YOU ASK:
How many of you shown your work to parents? Brother? Sister? Dog? Cat? Somebody in this room? Anybody want feedback now?

TIP: A student may want to get feedback by reading a page or showing their character to the class. It is good to get to everybody, however, if you have a limited amount of time, you may have to go on. Try to get to them next session.

Have fun!

YOU ASK:
How many are having fun? Who’s not having fun?
Barbara says ...

There is no doubt about it, plotting is not easy. Reading and rereading Chapter Six, the Plotting Chapter, will help. Each time, something new will click in. The great thing about learning how to plot is that once the students get it, they will be so grateful to have gotten it!

Plotting is an essential part of doing a graphic novel. The reason plotting is so important is because most students get stuck somewhere in the middle of their stories and get so frustrated, they give up. If the students organize their stories, they have a much greater chance of completing them.

Plotting a story may take years! The student is not expected to have the entire plotline figured out. This exercise is to understand how to plot. This is to just get something up on the board. Chances are great that the plotline will change many times before the students complete their graphic novel. My Angel Love plotline is very different than the actual comic book series.
Before you begin Step Seven...

YOU ASK:

Did anybody get inspired?

Did you dream about your characters?

Have your characters started talking to you?

Do you want to forget about your homework and only work on your graphic novel?

Who’s collaborating?

Who had a breakthrough?

What have you learned about your process?

Did anybody leave home without a pencil and paper?

Do you know the twist to your story?

Did you take the pop quiz?

Who got feedback about their work?

How many saw something as if for the first time?
STEP SEVEN
WRITING

YOU SAY:
Close your eyes. Try to block out any sounds, thoughts, or voices in your head. Give that about 20 seconds. Now, picture your character. What is he/she/it saying? What does the voice sound like?

STUDENTS READ:
Pages 93-99. This should take about 10 minutes. Make copies of the next two pages to be used in class, at home, or both.

READ OUT LOUD: Each student reads a writing tip. (Pages 100-109)
TIP: Some of these tips are much longer than others so you may want to divide it between two or three students. As always, the students are encouraged to be sketching or doodling. Some tips will inspire more conversation than others. You may not get through all the tips. If that is true, then the student reads them for homework.

Following are suggestions to get the creative juices flowing.

Writing Tip: Ask how your character is feeling
YOU ASK:
Have you ever felt two emotions at once? Three? Can you name them?

Writing Tip: Write a script.
If the student is a writer, collaborating with an artist, then the writer is encouraged to write a one page script (see pages 106-107). The artist then draws from the script.

Writing Tip:
YOU ASK:
Who hates to make mistakes? Are you a perfectionist?
In the top panel, write a Narrative Voice (See Pages 98 and 99) In the bottom panel, select a scene from your plotline and draw it. *Stick figures encouraged!*
Before you begin Step Eight ...

YOU ASK:

- Anybody write a script?
- Anybody draw from a script?
- Did anybody get inspired?
- Did you dream about your characters?
- Have your characters started talking to you?
- Do you want to forget about your homework and only work on your graphic novel?
- Who had a breakthrough?
- What have you learned about your process?
- Did anybody leave home without a pencil and paper?
- Who got feedback about their work?
- How many saw something as if for the first time?
- Who wants to show their characters?
STEP EIGHT

LAYOUT

Make copies of the following two pages to do in class, at home, or both.

STUDENTS READ:
Pages 112-121 from YCDAGN. This should take about 10 minutes.

READ OUT LOUD: Each student reads a Layout Tip. As always, the students are encouraged to be sketching or doodling. Pass out the following two pages. Some tips will inspire more conversation than others. If they do not finish the tips in class, then they finish at home. Following are suggestions to get the creative juices flowing.

Layout Tip: Make a Big Splash!
YOU ASK:
What is the Splash Page? What is on it? Why is it so important?

PROJECT: Create a SPLASH PAGE. (see page 122) See student work on page 152. On this splash page you are immediately drawn into the setting. “The Hidden” is a dark, mysterious story. The mood is set. The splash page on 148 immediately tells the story of a rock band, conflict, and the chance for a big break.

Dialogue balloons are part of your art.
YOU ASK:
Whose handwriting stinks?
TIP: Using a font from the computer is a good idea. Many students get so wrapped up in the drawing and writing, they forget that somebody has to read it!

PROJECT: Practice, practice practice drawing dialogue balloons!

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:
Each student is given copies of the following 2 pages. Look at your double page spread as a giant canvas. Take a scene from your plotline and design a page.
Take any scene from your story and create a double page spread. You may use your own panels or the ones below. Ask yourself, *What do I want to achieve?* Visualize your beginning and ending panels. Draw quick sketches to design your layout. TIP: Get 3x5 cards, and quickly sketch your panels. By using cards, you will be able to move your panels around to design your pages.
YOU SAY:

How much information did you give away? Make it the splash page. Answer as many of these questions as possible:

- Time
- Date
- Setting
The Graphic Novel Show

Below are invitations to a Graphic Novel Exhibition, held at the Columbia County Council on the Arts and the Troy Public Library.

This show was up for over a month and was their best attended exhibition.

Facing page: Full page newspaper article about the Millerton Library Graphic Novel Show.
CREATIVE MINDS GET GRAPHIC!

By Cory Allyn - Staff Reporter

MILLERON - On the back of Brenda McSwain's desk sits a pitcher adorned with a Harry Potter enamel pin, a testament to her love of the magical world of books. She is not alone in this passion, as the library is filled with vibrant posters and book covers that add a splash of color to the otherwise quiet space.

The library's collection of graphic novels is a testament to the diverse interests of the students and staff. From classic superheroes to beloved characters like Pokémon and Star Wars, there is something for everyone. "It's a great way to engage with the material," said McSwain.

Recently, a group of students, led by teacher Mr. Johnson, embarked on a project to create their own comic book. They spent weeks brainstorming ideas, developing characters, and practicing their art skills. "It's a great way to express creativity and learn about different aspects of storytelling," said Johnson.

The final product is a testament to their hard work, with each page filled with intricate details and vibrant colors. "We're really proud of what we've accomplished," said one student.

As the project comes to a close, the students are excited to see their work on the shelves of the library. "It's a great feeling to have created something that will be enjoyed by others," said another student.

Overall, the project has been a huge success, and the students and staff are looking forward to the next one. "We can't wait to see what they come up with next," said McSwain.
Pictures from the Graphic Novel Exhibitions.
Barbara Slate has done over 300 comic books and graphic novels. She takes you through the process of combining text and images to tell a story, from creating the premise to the finish. You’ll learn how to:

- Create characters—everything you need to know about them and more.
- Develop a plotline that holds the reader’s attention.
- Lay out your pages to keep the story moving forward.
- Get to know your Process—what works best for you.
- Confront the Creative Block. Is it real? If you think you’re blocked, how do you get over it?
- Make lots of mistakes.

“Barbara Slate has captured the creative process with all its tortures and delights, and produced a great guidebook to anyone who wants to unleash their inner creativity.”

Paul Levitz
President and Publisher, DC Comics

Along with all your art supplies, favorite chair, and a good light over your drawing board, you must keep a copy of Barbara Slate’s new book YOU CAN DO A GRAPHIC NOVEL close by. Every chapter is a little gem to help any young (or old) artist/writer.

Stan Goldberg
Legendary Artist

“Get ready! Barbara will get your creative juices flowing.”

Victor Gorelick
Co-president/Editor-in-chief Archie Comic Publications, Inc.