

Recension d'ouvrages / Book Review

Mark Thurman and Emily Hearn. (2010). *Get Graphic: Using Storyboards to Write and Draw Picture Books, Graphic Novels, or Comic Strips*. Markham, ON: Pembroke. 94 pages. ISBN: 978-1-55138-252-4.

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A lively combination of writing and illustration that supports practical classroom application, this is a handbook that will find its way into classrooms bent on multimodal explorations, pairing graphics and text. Alternating its audience between teachers and students, *Get Graphic* begins with an introduction to the importance of reading prior to writing picture books, graphic novels, or comic strips, and includes references to various suggested titles before moving into the main focus: techniques for drawing that create optimum 'bang for your buck.' The publication is timely because "the world is becoming increasingly reliant on visual culture and visual literacy" (Park, 2010, p. 173) and, in response, teachers are demanding support for students in terms of what Carter (2009) calls "sequential art narratives" (p. 68). *Get Graphic* may find a place guiding intermediate-grade mini-lessons on storyboarding as part of a wider, teacher-prepared unit on graphic texts, and teachers will find particularly apt the individual sections on drawing, including investigations on shading, the use of light and shadow, and employing collage. The resource may also find a home in a classroom writers' workshop, where middle-years students self-select learning materials based on individual interests.

Thurman and Hearn's handbook is, unfortunately, not the research-based resource educators need to address the gamut of topics it introduces, and therefore this title will find limited application. Although it

nicely addresses a call from teachers interested in ideas to support authentic composition, the text is uneven, its strong suit—considerations for artists—overpowering weaker sections such as the recommendations for classroom reading material. Because it uses a teacher-centred approach to classroom lessons, the possibility of inductive learning is overlooked, and the included book lists are thin and disconnected to the points the authors make about book making. Interestingly, the seemingly arbitrary list of picture books contains primarily Canadian titles and yet is followed by a compilation of ‘popular’ graphic novels/comic strips that entirely excludes Canadian talent. Where are the likes of Liam O’Donnell, Joseph Torres, and J. Bone, among others? In addition to these disappointments, lax editing supports errors in recommended titles and authors, and other wobbles occur when the narrator’s voice varies from “I” to “We.”

Connections between research and practice are needed as teachers strive to create lessons where investigations with well-chosen graphic texts prompt students to consider elements of composition, leading into the process activities so vividly drawn in Thurman and Hearn’s handbook. Thurman and Hearn exemplify what happens when the development of classroom materials occurs without attention to research, and what happens when such research is not readily available to authors whose gifts lie in personal practice rather than scholarly application. The book’s flaws, potentially correctible, are somewhat mitigated by the usefulness of the text in conducting mini-lessons with students regarding storyboarding and the use of graphics. Although I have reservations about Thurman and Hearn’s promotion of an educational stance that treats students as vessels to be filled with information, rather than active partners who co-construct ideas through rich experiences with subject matter, there is a place in classrooms for direct teaching, and the suggestions in *Get Graphic* do ring with authentic artistic advice from a well-known author/illustrator team.

My criticism of this text opens a space for future research regarding student explorations of story representation in graphic form, and suggests fundamental questions in terms of how educators may integrate graphics into classroom programs. Will an emphasis on graphics replace or complement a focus on reading instruction? How might a focus on

graphics advance students' reading skills? And, is a study of graphics, i.e. graphic novels, more appropriate for some students, at some ages, than others? Classroom studies that investigate how students make meaning as they explore graphic novels are important in how such investigations may illuminate authentic ways to connect reading and writing. The revelations that occur as children examine how artists use graphics to develop tension, advance plot, and support or replace narration, for example, may assist educators to facilitate a translation of knowledge about written texts into textual creation.

Further research in classrooms will thus support the practical lessons in high demand by teachers, hopefully inspiring a broader handbook from practiced talents such as Thurman and Hearn. Collaboration by artists and researchers is necessary if literacy educators are to move graphic forms over the doorstep and into classroom practice within a framework that supports student-directed learning.

REFERENCES

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