

Spring 2006

Using Comic Books to Motivate Literacy Development in the Classroom

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<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2006.EDU.02>

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Real, Adolfo Jr., "Using Comic Books to Motivate Literacy Development in the Classroom" (2006). *Education | Print Theses*. 293.
<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2006.EDU.02>

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**Using Comic Books to Motivate Literacy Development
in the Classroom**

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Science in Education

Division of Education

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San Rafael, CA

May 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I'd like to express my sincere gratitude towards for helping me complete this project. First I would like to thank my professor Madalienne Peters, an amazingly patient and witty individual.

I want to thank my friends, especially my roommates, who kept me on track by keeping me fed and keeping me company by hanging out with me in my room, working on their own projects while I worked on mine. Their presence really helped calm my nerves and keep my focus. I also want to thank The Coterie, who understood that I couldn't go out to slay the Abyssals because I was slaying the deadly thesis, but still kept my d10s ready for me.

I also want to thank my co-workers and familia. They helped me do research, and they helped me keep my sanity while working on this project.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading about the exploits of those with powers far beyond those of mortal men has been a hobby of a variety of readers for decades. Reading about what they do and being able to see that come to life on the page is amazing. Some readers are entranced by the artwork, seeing their heroes perform amazing stunts. Others are lost in the story, imagining a world filled with powerful creatures in tights. But the combination of art and story captures the attention and the interest of readers all over the world.

Comic books have been read by children of all ages since the 1930s (Morrison et al., 2002). Throughout the decades they have risen up and down in popularity, at one time, coming under attack for "corrupting the innocent minds of the American youth." (Morrison et al., 2002, P. 259). In the past decade comic book graphic novels have started to get recognition. Art Spiegelman won the Pulitzer Prize for *MAUS*, a graphic novel relating the experience of his father during the Holocaust, and *Pedro and me: Friendship, Loss, and What I Learned* won the Robert F. Sibert Award Honor Book (Morrison et al., 2002). This new award is presented by the American Library Association for the "most distinguished informational book(s) for children"

published in the preceding year (Morrison, Bryan, and Chilcoat, 2002, P. 759).

Yet, something that kept appearing in the research is that teachers tend to be very reluctant on letting children read comic books. Most teacher and educators look down on comic books as not appropriate reading material, a waste of time. Parents felt the same way, which created the image of a child reading in their blankets at night with their comic book and flashlight. But what the teachers and parents missed was the fact that their children were reading. They were reading, willingly, and on their own. Reading of any kind is a good way to improve one's literacy skills, and reading comic books is no different than reading magazines or a good book. It makes the reader think, interpret the language, and makes them use their literacy skills.

I was always a good reader and reading comic books only increased my love of reading. When I was done with my latest novel or serial, I would quickly go and find the next comic storyline that I would capture my interest. I noticed that a lot of my friends who were also comic book readers were big readers themselves. Obviously as a kid that didn't really mean much to me. But thinking back from the perspective of a future teacher, I can see how comic books helped my literacy skills.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Many teachers deal with student's lack of motivation when it comes to reading. Developing new and interesting ways to get students interested in literacy is a tricky problem for teachers. One has to create a curriculum that is both engaging and educational, preparing for the various levels of ability in classrooms. After deciding to use comic books as a new medium, one has to think about how to use them appropriately. In what areas of content can they be used? Which comic book resources would be appropriate material for the grade of the class? Deciding which comic books are and are not appropriate is something that a teacher has to be careful in. There are various comics now directed toward a younger audience, but are these titles appropriate to use in a classroom?

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this review of the literature is to examine ways of using comic books as a new medium to help increase students' motivation to read and increase their skills in literacy. Comic books are no longer just fantastical stories about superheroes vs. supervillains. They cover social aspects of current society. They make historical events come to life. They entertain, but can also teach. Comic books have a vast potential for classroom use. The intent of this paper is to identify methods to incorporate the usage of comic books into the curriculum, based on the academic level or grade of the student(s). Exploring which aspects of literacy comic books can be used in will also be explored.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How do teachers help students improve literacy development in the classroom? Can comic books help motivate literacy development in an elementary school classroom? Can using them as a new visual and educational medium in literature studies help motivate students to read and write? I believe that they can. I believe that comic books are a good way of motivating students to read more and to write. I also believe that using comic books in lessons, in various ways, can be an asset to teachers in their literature curriculum.

THEORETICAL RATIONALE

This research is based on the theory that a child's interest influences their reading comprehension suggested by Steven R. Asher, Shelly Hymel, and Allan Wigfield (Asher et al., 1978). They explain that research indicates "children comprehend more of high than low interest material when each child is given a mixture of both types of material" (Asher et al., 1978 p. 45). This states that when children are interested in the material, they are more prone to learn from it and to comprehend it better.

ASSUMPTIONS

This review of the literature/project is intended to focus on the importance of motivation in literacy and how comic books can be used to increase that motivation. I believe that comic books are a valuable medium that can be and should be used. We will focus on how comic books can be used and explore ideas of their usage.

BACKGROUND AND NEED

Renninger (1992) conducted multiple studies revolving around the theory that student learning is influenced by interest. In her study "Individual Interest and Development" she conducted various projects and observed their outcomes. In one project she took the individual interests of children and observed how they affect children's actions. She observed the effect of interest on children's attention and memory. In her second project, she took the individual interest of fifth and sixth graders and applied them to reading comprehension and mathematical world problems.

From these two projects, Renninger (1992) came to these conclusions:

"(a) all children can be identified as having individual interests and noninterests; (b) among children, objects of interest and noninterest vary; (c) interests and noninterests do affect the way in which children engage and perform on tasks, as well as the demands and potentials which they understand these tasks to include; (d) interest influences the content of information the child has for subsequent activity; (e) interest influences the process of children's play

with others, especially under conditions that require persistence" (p. 375).

Noticing that children have a range of interests is something teachers have observed in all classrooms. Using a child's interest in the subject allows the child to connect more with the subject, and thus causes the child to pay attention, and learn more.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focuses on the importance of getting children motivated to read as well as the importance of having the children interested in the materials that are to be read. Taking a look at comic books, and why and how they may be a possible means of motivating students to read will also be discussed. The following topics are addressed in the review: motivation and interest, and comic books in the classroom.

MOTIVATION AND INTEREST

One of the more difficult tasks as a teacher is getting the student interested in the material being taught. According to Asher's (1978) work, a student's interest affects their level of reading comprehension. In a study of a class of 5th graders, half the children were presented with low interest content, and the other with high interest. The method used to determine the levels of interest was the children were presented with pictures. They were asked to rate the pictures, and the top ones were chosen. The pictures of high interest were used in a written passage and a writing exercise.

Seventy-five children participated in this study, 38 boys and 32 girls. The entire fifth grade population was

used, except for four children who were absent. Twenty-five slides were shown to the children showing various topics. Afterwards, 25 passages from the Britannica Junior Encyclopedia were used (Asher et al., 1978). Two different teachers gave the interest assessment and the reading comprehension test on two different sessions one week apart.

The results of the study show that the boy's scores were highly affected by the interest level of the subject, while the girls were only affected minimally. On low interest material, boys scored much more poorly than girls. On high interest material, the children did better, but the similar scores in boys and girls. "It appears that those seeking to assess children's competence in reading comprehension have reason to consider carefully their selection of passage topics. Assignment of passages based on individualized assessment of children's interest appears to facilitate children's reading comprehension" (Asher et al, 1978 p.45).

Anderson (1982) states "if one were to ask school teachers why they prefer to use reading material that children find interesting, they would say because the children will pay more attention and learn." (p.17). In Anderson (1982) also found that "important text information

is better learned than less important information because readers devote more attention to important information" (p.1). There were three factors that were taken into consideration while performing this research were using a combination of adjunct questions, the interestingness of the reading material, and the assignment of perspectives prior to reading. "The definition of importance was deliberately broad in order to provide a quick route for establishing, or rejecting, a parsimonious general theory" (Anderson, 1982 p. 14).

In Anderson's study, thirty fourth graders were used. They read 36 sentences. "The measure of learning was the percentage of content words in the sentences that could be recalled to a gist criterion immediately after reading, giving the subject noun phrases as clues" (Anderson, 1982 p. 17).

It was found that children were more focused on interesting sentences and that they learn more from such sentences due to the fact that they were paying more attention. "Children do pay more attention to interesting sentences and they do learn more [from] interesting sentences" (Anderson, 1982 p. 26).

COMIC BOOKS

Kay Haugaard (1973) looked at the influence comic books seemed to have had on her children in the article "Comic books: Conduit to Culture?" She states that her three boys were not initially interested in reading (Haugaard, 1973). They were in fact all in the low reading group in their classes, and had been for a while. It was a constant struggle to get the boys to read, let alone enjoy reading. But one day, her oldest son picked up a comic book, and read it from start to finish, over and over again. He would ask for more issues and he would read them all.

When her oldest son moved on to other types of literature, the young child picked up the old comic books and would read them, often times asking the mother to help sound out words and find out their meanings. He read them all day and was as excited about reading new ones as his older brother was.

The youngest child soon picked up this habit of reading comic books and enjoying them. He proudly told his mother that he was able to read a whole comic book by himself. Haugaard was weary of letting her boys read comic books at first, always hearing them talked about with a negative connotation. But by the time she saw how much her

boys loved comic books, she stated "If educators ever find out what constitutes the fantastic motivating power of comic books, I hope they bottle it and sprinkle it around schoolrooms" (Haugaard, 1973, P. 140)

The motivational factor of comic books is examined in Norton's (2003) work. Norton used had two pilot projects: The first study used 34 student teachers and the second used a small group of *Archie Comic* readers. Each project included questionnaires and interviews. She asked the student workers what they thought of *Archie Comics*. The majority of the workers had read the comics themselves as children, but stated that they were "unsuitable reading material. The characters were dismissed as superficial and shallow, and the stories were perceived to give children the wrong ideas" (Norton, 2003, p.141).

The readers of *Archie Comics*, a group of young children, disagreed with their statements, and spoke with high praise about the comics. When the question arose whether the children thought that the comic books were a "legitimate text" they replied "No, [legitimate texts] were not supposed to be fun" (Norton, 2003 p. 145)

After these initial projects, the author decided the best way to gain insight on *Archie* readers was "very simply, to ask them" (Norton, 2003, p. 141). Some common

responses to the questions posed by the researcher were that they liked reading *Archie Comics* because of the humor and that they were fun to read. This forced the researcher to question how seriously educators value the enjoyment children gain from the books they read. Is their entertainment an important factor in their learning?

Norton (2003) found that students reading for fun have a sense of control in the reading process. If they get to select the reading material, they can focus more on it than if they are required to read it. But even if they spend time reading, *Archie Comics* in this case, parents and teachers may not approve of the material. Parents and teachers alike were asked whether they thought *Archie Comics* were worth reading. Most responded that they were a waste of time. When children were asked if they thought it was a waste of time, they said yes because their parents and teachers would rather they spend time on homework and other worthwhile activities. During silent reading time, it was discovered that though it is technically free time to read what the child chooses, children don't really consider reading *Archie Comics* appropriate because that is something they feel should be done on their own free time, because of the stigma attached to the comics themselves.

In the end, the researcher asked that more research be done in the area of comics. Why do educators dismiss comics frequently and *Archie Comics* more specifically? Why were the student teachers in the first project dismissive of the comics as garbage even though they themselves enjoyed them as kids? She hopes that further research will be done answering these questions.

Seeing that comics do indeed motivate certain readers, how do we as educators use this knowledge and implement it into our curriculum? In the article "Using Comic Books to Teach" Jim Parson and Kathy Smith they list ways that comic books can be used in the classroom. They recognize that comic books are not considered literature by the population at large, some even insisting that they can "warp the minds of innocent young 'victims' and implied that anyone who read comic books was doomed to a life of problems and woe" (Parson and Smith, 1993, p.2). They created this list from a perspective where a) they believe comic books are read by a wide variety of students and b) teachers should become more aware of what their students are reading and should use what the children are reading in their favor, to teach, and use it in their teaching (Parson and Smith, 1993, p.2).

The authors give 30 suggestions on how to incorporate comic books in the classroom. These ideas range from

subject to subject. The ideas use comic books themselves, as well as comic strips like Garfield and Bizzaro. Some of these ideas are class projects, while others are used for discussion, analysis, and field trips.

One example of a project is to gather one type of comic, independent of genre. Use the comics to discuss the political ideas of the main character or the author. Discussions like these can lead to discussions of what the student beliefs with regards to politics and society.

Another example is comparing superheroes in comic books. Teacher can facilitate a lesson where student input helps to create a comparison chart of character weaknesses. You can do this also by comparing known superheroes with real superheroes, such as fire fighters, policemen, or even actors.

Studying the concept of good versus bad is also another way to encourage discussion within the classroom. Students can list a number of heroes and their villains and then comparing heroic acts versus evil ones.

LESSON PLANS

The following are lesson plans that use the medium of comic books as a means of teaching the student various concepts. Some were created by the author, while others were compiled from various other sources. Each lesson has an example located in the appendix.

Superhero ABCs

Grade: Kindergarten

Topic: Language Arts

Content: Writing words/learning more about the ABCs

Time: 40-45 Minutes

Standards:

Reading

- Follow words from left to right and from top to bottom on printed page.

Writing

- Use letters and phonetically spelled words to write about experiences, stories, people, objectives, or events.

Writing

- Write by moving from left to right and from top to bottom.

Writing

- Write uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet independently, attending to the form and proper spacing of the letters.

Written and Oral English Language Conventions

- Recognize and use complete, coherent sentences when speaking

Listening and Speaking Strategies

- Understand and follow one- and two-step oral directions.
- Share information and ideas, speaking audibly in complete, coherent sentences.

Goals:

To help the child understand the sounds letters make when put together, as well as learning to spell words with or without the help of a dictionary

Objectives:

Finish given worksheet, have students share their work with classmates

Materials:

- "Superhero ABC" by Bob McLeod

- Worksheet
- Pencil
- Crayons
- Dictionary

Introduction:

For story time, read "Superhero ABC" to the class. Ask children to help recognize letter on each page.

Explain that each superhero starts with the letter that's on the page. Now they are going to come up with their own heroes. Give examples of possible superheroes, and focus on the letter that they begin with. Have children pick random letter from hat.

Differentiated Instruction:

Have student work with adult helper. Have student use dictionary to help create a superhero.

Expansion Activities/Early Finishers:

Create a sentence using their superhero.

Assessment:

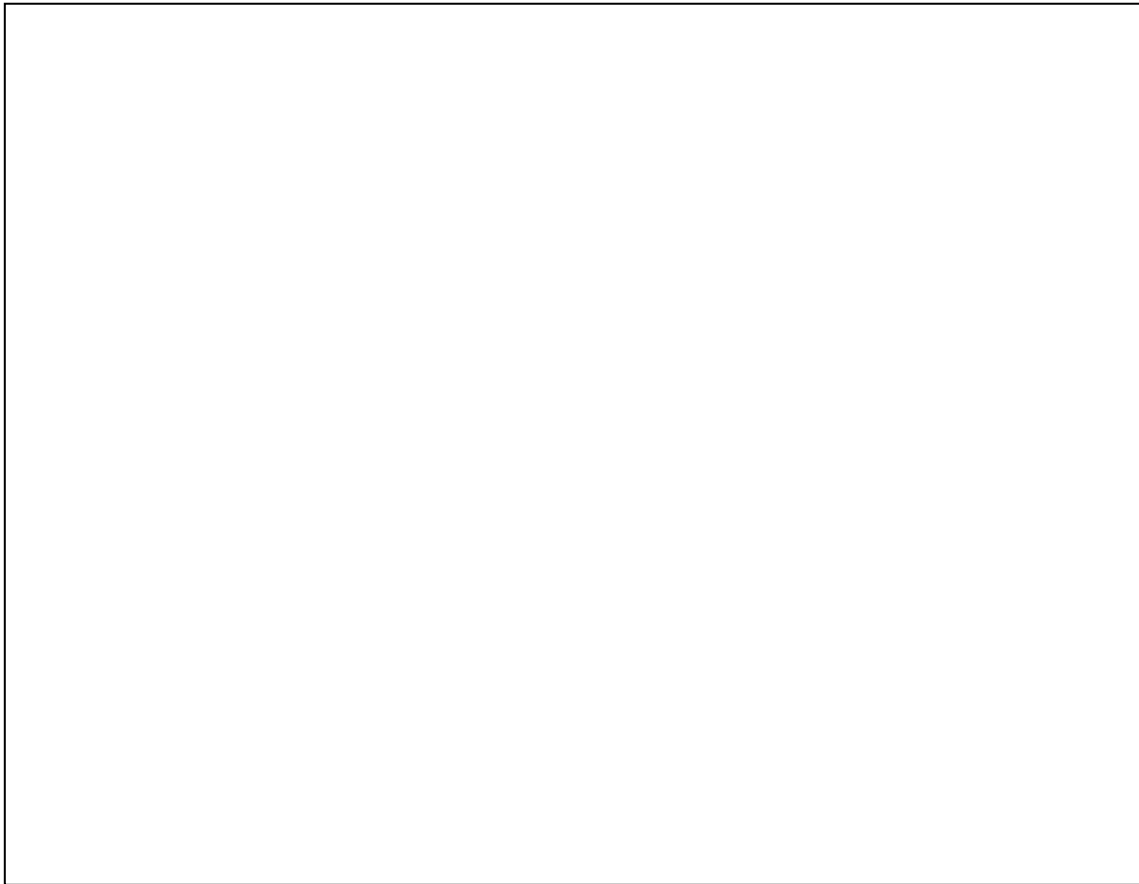
Students can read their superhero's name. Look at the worksheet to determine if child spelled word correctly. Ask child to explain idea and concept of his creation.

Closure:

Have willingly students present their characters to the rest of the class, and what they can do. Ask them what letter the Superhero starts with, or focuses on.

NAME _____

Superhero A,B,C's



Beginning, Middle, End

Grade: 1st

Topic: Language Arts

Content: Listening/Responding to questions/Writing

Time: 40-45 minutes

Standards:

1. Literary Response

- a. Identify and describe the elements of plot, setting, and character(s) in a story, as well as the story's beginning, middle, and end.

2. Writing Strategies

3. Select a focus when writing.

- a. Use descriptive words when writing.

4. Written and Oral English Language Conventions

- a. Write and speak in complete, coherent sentences.
- b. Capitalize the first word of a sentence, names of people, and the pronoun I

5. Listening and Speaking

- a. Listen Attentively.

Goals:

To help the child understand the elements of a story, including beginning, middle, and end, as well as being able to retell and illustrate parts of the story.

Objectives:

Discussion of the story read. A finished worksheet.

Sharing the picture and sentence with the group.

Materials:

5-6 copies of the same comic book (Suggested: Walt Disney's Mickey and Donald)

Introduction:

Break children into a small group of 5-6. Have a helper there to pass out the comics. Helper reads the story with the children following along. Discuss with the group what events happened during the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Pass out worksheets. Have children draw their favorite scene from the story. Child will write sentence about why they liked this scene.

Differentiated Instruction:

Have the helper write out the sentence so the child can copy it.

Expansion Activities/Early Finishers:

Child can write an extra sentence. Have child read it to a buddy.

Assessment:

Ask the child when did the chosen scene happen, in the beginning, middle or end.

Closure:

Read the sentence to a buddy and share with the rest of the group. After one child finishes reading, ask the others when did this part happen.

Out from Boneville

Grade: 4th - 5th

Topic - Language Arts

Content: Writing

Time - 40-45 minutes, extended to homework assignment

Standards:

Writing:

1. Create multiple-paragraph narrative compositions:
 - a. Establish and develop a situation or plot.
 - b. Describe the setting.
 - c. Present an ending
2. Create multiple-paragraph expository compositions:
 - a. Establish a topic, important ideas, or events in sequence or chronological order.
 - b. Provide details and transitional expressions that link one paragraph to another in a clear line of thought.
 - c. Offer a concluding paragraph that summarizes important ideas and details.
3. Writing Applications
4. Write narratives:
 - a. Establish plot, point of view, setting, and conflict.
 - b. Show, rather than tell, the events of the story.

5. Write response to literature:

- a. Demonstrate an understanding of a literary work.
- b. Support judgements through reference to the text and prior knowledge.
- c. Develop interpretations that exhibit careful reading and understanding.

Goals:

To have students write clear, coherent, and focused essay.

Objective:

To have students finish a narrative story based on the reading.

Materials:

Bone #1: Out from Boneville by Jeff Smith

Writing Paper

Writing utensil

Introduction:

- After reading Bone #1: Out from Boneville, begin discussion regarding the story, asking questions such as what happened during the story, what major events do you think happened, and what do we still need to learn about the characters? Then put the writing assignment on the board. Have the students make up a story about why think the Bone Cousins were run out of

Boneville. Go over the clues that the first story gives and use those to form an idea of why it happened.

Differentiated Instruction:

Help the student remember the clues given and go over the characters personalities so they can write about the characters true to form.

Expansion Activities/Early Finishers:

The students can draw a scene from their story.

Assessment:

The finished story, after rough drafts have been edited.

Buzz! Whiz! Bang! Using Comic Books to Teach Onomatopoeia
(Gerrard, 2006)

Grade: 3-5

Topic: Language Arts

Content: Literary Response and Analysis

Time: Three 60 Minute Sessions

Literary Response and Analysis

- Distinguish common forms of literature
- Recognize the similarities of sounds in words and rhythmic patterns (e.g., alliteration, onomatopoeia) in a selection.
- Identify the speaker or narrator in a selection.

Writing Strategies

Revise drafts to improve the coherence and logical progression of ideas by using an established rubric.

Goals:

Students will be introduced to onomatopoeia, which describes words that imitate the natural sound associated with an action or an object. Using comic books and strips, students will find onomatopoetic words, develop a vocabulary list from the words, and discuss why writers, especially writers of comics, use onomatopoeia.

Objectives:

Students will

- Increase their knowledge of literary terms and how they are used in everyday writing by defining *onomatopoeia* using comic strips or books
- Demonstrate comprehension of onomatopoeia by locating onomatopoetic words in comic books
- Explore the effect onomatopoeia has in comic books and other narratives through a class discussion
- Apply their knowledge of onomatopoeia and the structure and narrative form of comics to create their own comic strips containing onomatopoetic words

Materials:

- Copies of comic books or strips
- Comic Strip Planning Sheet
- Comic Strip Rubric
- LCD or overhead projector c
- Chart paper and markers

Introduction:

Session One

1. Show the sample comics you have chosen to the class using the transparencies or LCD projector. Tell students that you will read the comics aloud and that as you do so, they should listen for words that imitate the natural sound associated with an action or an object, for example *bang* or *slam*.
2. When you are finished, ask students to tell you what words like this they heard. Highlight these words by writing them on chart paper or using a marker on the transparency.
3. Explain that words like this are examples of *onomatopoeia*. Write *onomatopoeia* on a piece of chart paper or the board so that students can see how it is spelled.
4. Reread the comic with the whole class, instructing students to read the onomatopoetic words using sound effects and emphasis. For example, have them read a word like *boom* loudly, with emphasis placed on the rounded vowel sounds created by the double /oo/.
5. Have students write the word *onomatopoeia* in their personal dictionaries with this basic definition: words that make the sound of the action or object. If

any of the words you located in the sample comics are unfamiliar to students, they should add these as well.

The definition of onomatopoeia could also head a word wall made from the chart paper list. This word wall should be posted where students can easily see it while they work on their own comic strips later in the lesson.

6. Talk about why writers of comic strips would use onomatopoeia and what function these words serve in a narrative. Questions for discussion include:
 - a. What effect does using onomatopoeia have in a story?
 - b. Why are comic strips a good place to find examples of these kinds of words?
 - c. What kinds of synonyms can you find for these words? (i.e., *close hard* instead of *slam*) How does it change the story if you substitute the synonym?
7. Pass out copies of the sample comic strips you have printed for students to use in locating onomatopoeias. Allow time for students to find the onomatopoeias and to share the humor and story of the comics with each other.

8. Close the lesson by discussing new or unusual onomatopoeias students found in their comics; add these to the class word wall or have students add them to their personal dictionaries.

Session Two

1. Review the definition of *onomatopoeia* and the list of onomatopoeic words from the previous lesson, using the word wall if you have posted one. Ask students to think of any onomatopoeic words that are not included in the list; add any that they are able to come up with.
2. Ask students to remember some of the ways they saw onomatopoeias being used in the comics they looked at in the previous session. What are some of the ways they might use these words in creating a comic strip of their own?
3. Give each student a copy of the Comic strip planning sheet. Explain that they are to use this handout to help them brainstorm a six-panel comic strip. Talk about how, like a book, a comic strip tells a story and has a plot, characters, and action. For each panel, they should list the landscape and props they will use (chosen from the list on the sheet), the

characters present in that panel, the actions that take place, the caption or words the characters speak, and any onomatopoeias they plan to use.

4. Give students the rest of this session to work on their planning sheets. Allow students to work individually or in pairs to create their comic strips. Encourage discussion and sharing of ideas of how to use onomatopoeia. Circulate among the students to monitor progress, provide support in writing, and to assess their understanding of onomatopoeia. Students should save their planning sheets to use in Session 3.

Session 3

Share students' comics with the entire class by projecting them on an overhead or displaying them on a board. Discuss students' use of onomatopoeia. Questions for discussion include:

- How does onomatopoeia work in this comic strip? What does it add to the story?
- How would the comic strip be different without using onomatopoeia?
- Can you think of any additional ways this student could have used onomatopoeia?

Differentiated Instruction:

Expansion Activities/Early Finishers:

- To help develop reading fluency, assign roles and make copies of the comics with the respective parts of the dialogue highlighted. Have students practice reading the different parts out loud. Present the comic panels on an overhead projector while students read the parts dramatically for the whole class.
- Organize a comic book convention for students to read and critique fellow students' comics.

Assessment:

- Informally assess students' understanding of onomatopoeia, their ability to locate onomatopoeic words, and their grasp of how and why onomatopoeia is used during the discussion in Session 1 and while you circulate as students are writing their own comics.
- Use the Comic Strip Rubric to assess understanding and use of onomatopoeia in the student-created comic strip panels.
- Assess students' abilities to locate onomatopoeic words by giving them another comic strip or book (or

some other form of text) and asking them to identify and record the onomatopoeias they find.

COMIC STRIP PLANNING SHEET

For each panel, list the landscape and props (chosen from the list below), the characters, the actions that take place, the caption, and the onomatopoeia you use (if any).

	Landscape and Props	Characters Present	Actions that Occur	Caption	Onomatopoeia
Panel 1					
Panel 2					
Panel 3					
Panel 4					
Panel 5					
Panel 6					

Landscape options: horizon line, interior room, lake, mountains, road or river, blank, cave, city

Props: book, rock, castle, chair, cloud, computer, table or bench, house, lightning bolt, crescent moon, notebook, musical notes, pencil, pine tree, radio or CD player, school, spaceship, sun, leafy tree, television

COMIC STRIP RUBRIC

Student's Name: _____

	4	3	2	1
Action	Action makes sense from one panel to another	Most of the action makes sense from one panel to another	Some of the action makes sense from one panel to another	Action does not make sense from one panel to another
Characters	Characters are believable in all panels	Characters are believable in most panels	Characters are adequate in some panels	Characters are not believable
Landscape and props	Landscape and props relate to the action and characters in all panels	Landscape and props relate to the action and characters in most panels	Landscape and props relate to the action and characters in one panel	Landscape and props are not chosen or do not make sense
Captions	Captions are well written and edited for punctuation, grammar, and usage	Captions make sense and are edited for punctuation, grammar, and usage	Captions may or may not always make sense; some are not edited for punctuation, grammar, and usage	Captions don't make sense and are not edited for punctuation, grammar, and usage
Onomatopoeia	Onomatopoeic words are used correctly in five or six panels	Onomatopoeic words are used in two or three panels	One onomatopoeic word is used	No use of onomatopoeia in the comic

Comments:

Comic Book Character Gender Stereotypes

Grade: 5-7

Topic: In this lesson, students look at how male and female characters are depicted in comic books. Using a Comic Book Analysis sheet, students will record the attributes of male and female comic book characters. As a class, students will record common attributes on a master sheet and discuss what messages about men and women are reinforced. In groups, students will be asked to design and create a non-stereotypical comic book character.

Time: 1 hour

Goals: Students will:

- recognize that the media construct reality
- understand that the representations made by the media are not always accurate
- understand how their own gender perceptions are affected by the media

Materials:

Have students bring in an assortment of comic books. (Make sure there is at least one comic for every two students.)

- Photocopy Comic Book Analysis Sheet. Make an overhead master-sheet

Introduction:

- Have students read a comic with a partner and jot down answers to the questions on the *Comic Book Analysis Sheet*.
- Mount your *Comic Book Analysis Sheet* master sheet on the overhead and have students choose a male and a female character from their sheets to add to it.

As a class, share and discuss ideas and observations.

Referring to the overhead, ask:

- Are there any similarities shared by female characters? (e.g., are many of them 'victims' who need saving? are many of them described or drawn as 'sexy'?)
- Are there any similarities shared by male characters? (e.g., are many of them involved in 'heroic' activities? Are many of them described as 'tough' or 'strong'?)

- What is *missing* in the portrayal of men and women in these comic books? (Strong, heroic women? Peaceful, sensitive men?)
- What is the *message* about men and women that you get from these comic books?
- Speaking as a boy or a girl, how do these comic books make you feel?

Divide class into groups of boys and girls. Ask the groups of girls to create a non-stereotypical female comic book character and the boys to create a non-stereotypical male comic book character.

- Draw or paint a picture of your character
- Identify what your character does
- List the words that you would use to describe your character

Have students present their new character to the class.

Assessment:

Analysis Sheets, Comic Book Character Presentation

Student Handout #1

Comic Book Analysis Sheet

1. What is the title of your comic book?
2. What type of comic is it? (Examples: war, fantasy, science fiction, superhero, horror, funny.)
3. As you and your partner read the comic together, jot down the names of the main characters on the charts below. Beside each name, list the main activities the character engages in and give one word to describe that character.

Men or Boy Characters

Name	Activities	Describing Word

Genre: Fantasy

Grade: 3-5

Topic: Language Arts

Time: Two 1 hr sessions

Goals: To better understand the types of genre used in writing, and in comic books.

Objectives: To create a fantasy world, a full story, using the comic book format.

Materials: Comic books for examples, paper, pencils, crayons, markers

Introduction:

1. Discuss

- a. What would make up your perfect fantasy world?
- b. If you could spend a day in a magical fantasy world, what kinds of creatures and other animals or things would you see there?
- c. When would you like to enter your special fantasy world? When would you leave the fantasy and return to real life?

2. Write/Illustrate

Compose a story about a "superchild" who lives in an ordinary environment, i.e. at home with family, or at

school with friends. This child seems human on the surface but has superhuman powers that he/she keeps well hidden. Draw a colourful fantasy picture to go with your story.

3. Fantasy Characters' Dream Team

In small groups, each student takes on the role of a fantasy comic character who wants to create a more perfect world. The characters hold a meeting in a fantasy setting to share their ideas on how to create a more perfect world.

Each character will:

- identify his/her own powers and special characteristics
- Define his/her idea of "a more perfect world"
- Identify possible problems in creating it.
- As a group, the characters decide how best to combine their skills effectively to create more perfect world.
- Present your solution to the class. (Use costumes, charts, illustrations as desired.)

Fantasy Comic Poster

Working in pairs or groups, create a comic poster to advertise a new fantasy character.

Divide up the work: One student might draw the character; another the objects and environment; another might do the lettering.

Use color (e.g. red signals anger, danger), detail and setting to create a magical effect. Decide on the action and words to convey your message. Draw an appropriate border for the comic image (e.g. snakes, spiders, talismans, flames etc.).

OLD STORIES; NEW TWISTS

Grade: 5-8

Topic: Language Arts

Time: Two 1 hr sessions

Introduction:

Critics have linked comics with various forms of folk literature. Many comic stories are similar to the fable, the tale or parable. Children can get turned on to reading literary classics from an initial introduction to classics in comics. A study of traditional stories and characters depicted in comic books provides a familiar and innovative learning approach.

1. Discuss

- a. What folk or fairy tale would you like to see changed into a modern-day story?
- b. What is the magical or make-believe element in the story?
- c. Who are the good characters and who are the evil characters?
- d. What changes would you need to make to the setting, the characters' appearances and the overall storyline to modernize the tale?

2. Count The Sounds

To express an action in a comic, the writer/illustrator uses colorful words (e.g. vroom, bang, zap, gasp, argh.) to heighten the drama. When the sounds of words imitate the sense of action they convey, this is called onomatopoeia.

- a. Choose a story from a comic book and count all the sound words. (onomatopoeia)
- b. Next to the word write a sentence describing the full action that has just occurred.
- c. What kind of punctuation is commonly used after these words?
- d. Rewrite an exciting part of a familiar story or fairy tale, using lots of sound words.

3. Create A Folk/Fairy Tale Comic Strip

In this exercise, each student chooses a familiar tale. They then use the elements of the tale -fantasy, magic, a hero and a moral in the ending - to create a new comic strip.

- a. Each students give a partner an oral summary of his/her modern-day folk tale. Focus on dividing the story into a beginning, a middle and ending.
- b. Using the comic frames at the end of this lesson plan, draw the story. There should be an equal

number of beginning, middle and final frames. The minimum for each segment is two frames; the maximum for each segment is six. Photocopy the comic template as necessary.

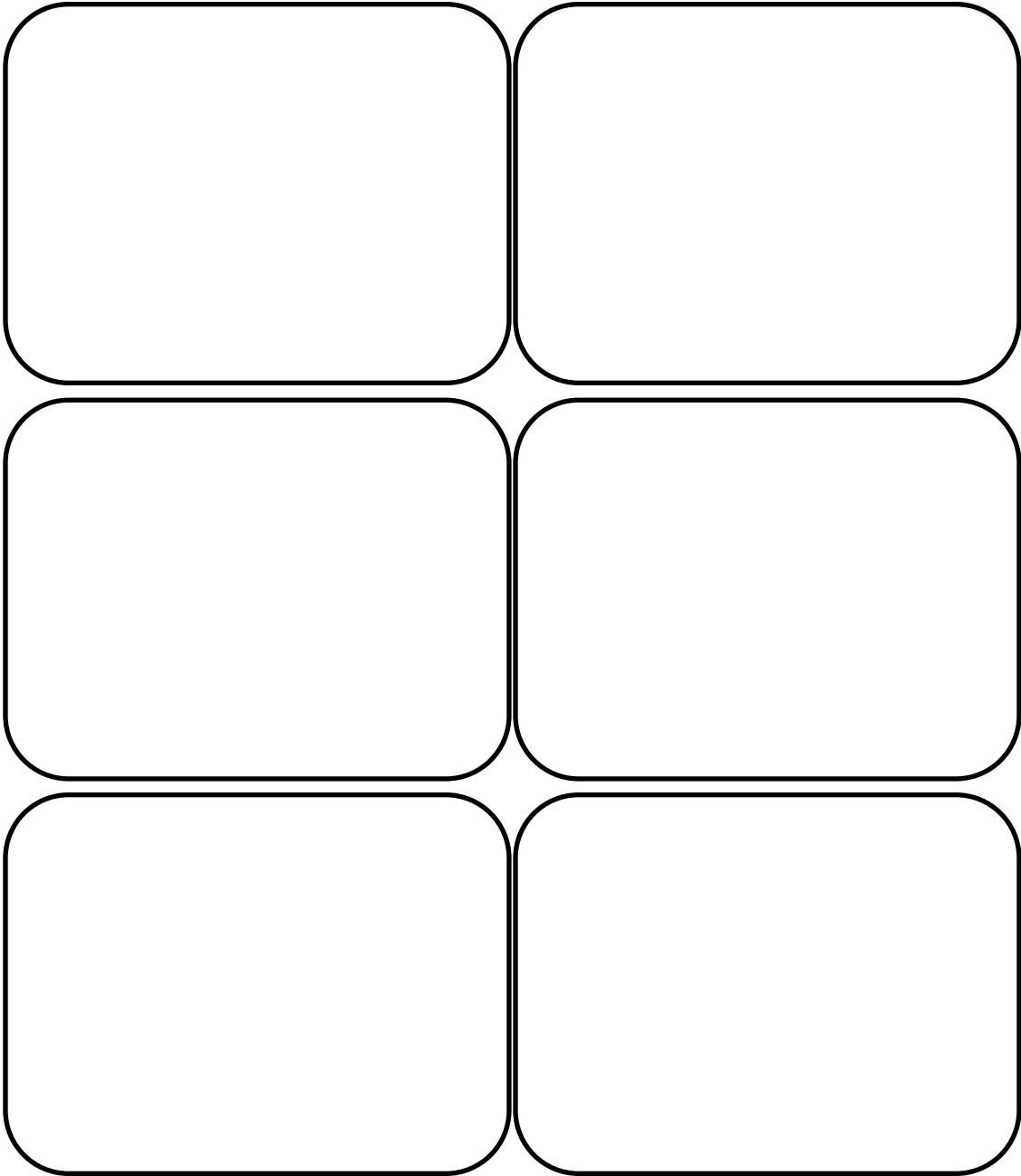
- i. Beginning frames = introduce characters and setting.
- ii. Middle frames = show problem or conflict of the story.
- iii. Final frames = conclusion and moral of story.

A successful comic blends two elements: pictures and language. Using recognized comic conventions the words, pictures and other icons tell the story in the most precise and economical way. For example, the icon of the balloon is a symbol of both language and thought. A light bulb expresses a bright idea, while a dark cloud expresses grief or despair. Use your understanding of colour codes to depict emotion and action.

Show the modern-day comic strips to the class and describe the similarities and differences between the new story and the original folk/fairy tale.

COMIC TEMPLATE

(Use these frames horizontally or vertically.)



VILLAINS

Grade: 5-8

Topic: Language Arts

Content:

Time: Two 1 hr sessions

Introduction:

In this guide a hero is one with great strength or ability who takes risks to help others. An anti-hero or villain is one who lacks heroic qualities and acts alone for his or her own selfish gain.

Many comic-book creators feel that the concept of a hero has changed and now the good characters are doing wrong or "evil" acts. They believe the traditional sense of heroism is dead and the villain has become the focus of the story.

1. Discuss

- a. Do you enjoy reading stories about completely evil, villainous characters? Why? Explain your answer.
- b. Should the evil character(s) be allowed to win the fight and be the hero(es) of a story? Always? Sometimes? Never?
- c. Should only the good characters be the heroes and the winners of the story? Explain.

- d. What makes a villain likeable? What makes a villain cool? How can we make the hero equally cool?
- e. Think of an example of a comic villain. Would his/her way of solving problems work in reality? How could you rewrite the comic so the villain's solution would work in real life?

2. Make A List

- a. In small groups by brainstorming ideas:
 - i. Name as many comic heroes as you can
 - ii. Name as many comic villains as you can
- b. **Summarize:** Do you know more good heroes or anti-heroes?
 - i. As a class compare the names on the lists.

3. Brainstorm

Comic creators spend a lot of time developing character. The personality quirks and physical traits of a character are as important as the storyline. The writer must spend as much time developing the bad characters as the good ones.

- a. Working as a group, divide a large piece of paper in half and write two titles: Physical Traits / Character Traits. Brainstorm and record some of

the common characteristics of an evil character or villain.

- b. Draw a picture of the most evil villain you can imagine. Point out to the class some of the features that make this person villainous.

4. Role play

- a. Working in pairs, one partner is the villain and the other is the interviewer.
- b. As the interviewer it is your job to find out why the villain kills and destroys everything in sight. Find out if the villain feels justified or guilty about what he/she does.
- c. As a villain, you must develop a story about your unhappy family life, which explains your illegal actions and violent behaviour.
- d. Switch roles.
- e. Write a report that describes what was said, and determine which evil character was most convincing.

5. Draw

A cartoonist draws a comic strip with the simple instruments of ink, pen, pencil and paper. However, advances in computer and space technology have greatly increased the variety and complexity of the way

villains think and behave. Using imagination and attention to detail, a cartoonist can create creatures and villains of unimaginable proportions.

- a. Using three comic panels at the end of this lesson plan, draw a villain in three different time periods. Here's how:
- b. Label three squares: PAST PRESENT FUTURE
 - i. In each square draw a villain as he or she would appear at a specific time. Note the changes in dress and technology that affect the villain's appearance.
 - ii. Use both dialogue and picture to show the different time periods.

6. Drama: Who Am I?

Many of the comic superheroes originating in the 1940s hid their true identities. Such characters as Superman and Batman lived ordinary human lives as well as the lives of crime fighters, devoted to the pursuit of truth and justice. Villains tried to uncover the hero's true identity and expose it to the world.

- a. For this activity, each student should think of a well-known superhero who has special powers and a secret identity.

- b. One at a time, each student sits at the front of the class while the others ask questions to help uncover his/her true identity.
- c. Questions to be considered include: the superhero's appearance, family background and history, super abilities, and enemies and friends.

CONCLUSION

Comic books being used in the classroom open up a wide variety of possibilities. Using this underused medium gives teachers a way to get their students interested in literacy. They bring the lessons to a level where their students will be able to relate, and most likely, be interested in the subject matter. Using comic books to motivate literacy development combines literacy, art, and pop culture and brings them together to help students gain new skills, refresh old ones, and motivates them to learn more.

Comic books are not the be all and end all, though. It is simply another way of teaching that teachers can incorporate. Comic books cannot be used in every subject, nor should they. They should be used when the teacher deems it appropriate, uses them when he thinks they will do the most good. But teachers do have to be careful. There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of comic book titles out there. Some are very appropriate for the classroom. Others should not be mentioned nor given to their students. But teachers know their students best, and they know what would be deemed appropriate. They just need to take the time to do some research, talk to experts like the comic shop owners themselves, and see what their students are

reading on their own. Using comic books in the classroom is not a new idea, but it is a fresh one, and an underused one. If something can help our students, help them grow and develop new literary skills, it should be important to teachers to explore this medium, and see what the fuss is all about. Teaching our students is a teacher's top priority. Learning new methods to teach should be one as well.

APPENDIX

NAME _____

Superhero A,B,C's



Figure 1 Superhero A,B,Cs



Figure 2 Lions, Tigers, and Bears by Mike Bullock and Jack Lawrence

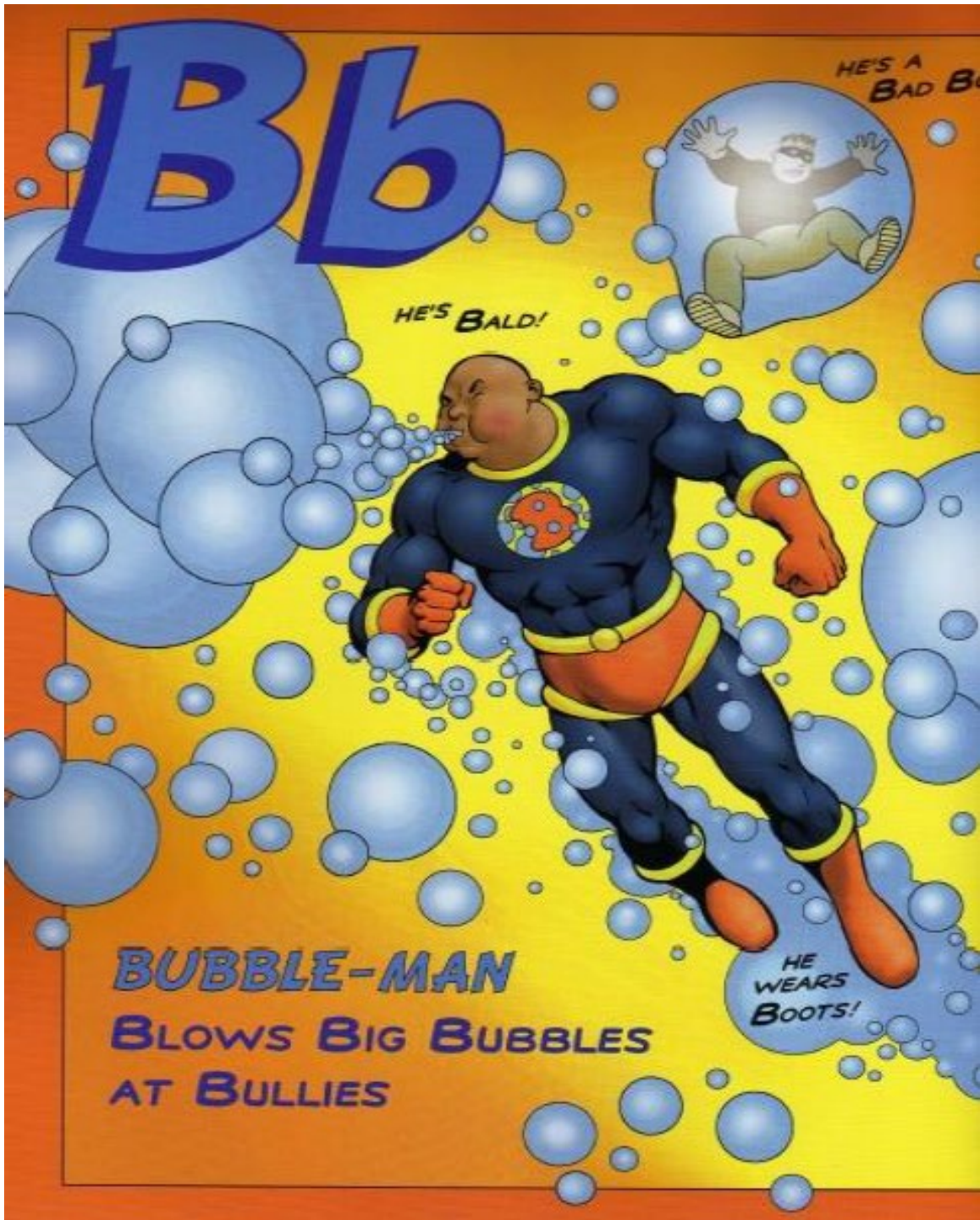


Figure 3 Super Hero ABC by Bob McLeod



Figure 4 From Out fo Boneville by Jeff Smith

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