

# GETTING TO KNOW COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS: A Pre-Reading Activity

## INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

This classroom activity is designed to be implemented before students embark on reading *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*. Please note that the student-facing handout for this activity is available [here](#).

This activity introduces students to a shared language and terminology for exploring a comic or graphic novel in class and lets them practice a close reading of this medium, so this activity is recommended before they start reading *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*. Though this comic is shorter than a graphic novel, it reflects many of the characteristics of one. So this activity draws on two resources designed to help educators use graphic novels effectively in the classroom.

First, ask your students how many of them are familiar with or read comics and/or graphic novels. You may have students with some real expertise that you can draw on as you walk the class through the slide deck, "[How to Read a Graphic Novel](#)." This brief presentation provides a helpful primer on the elements of a page in a graphic novel and how to read them. Give students a handout of Slide 3 to keep as a reference. Check in with students for any questions or clarifications, encouraging them to add any notes from discussion to the handout.

A note about one of the graphic novels of which a few panels appear in the slide deck. *American Born Chinese* is a widely acclaimed graphic novel by Gene Yang that takes on issues of anti-Asian racism and stereotyping. The author (and illustrator) explains this at length in [this interview](#), but be aware that for some people of Chinese descent, the images and caricatures in the novel can be considered offensive.

With this orientation in mind, students are ready for a close reading activity based on a page from the graphic novel *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. This [student handout](#) and the [accompanying video](#) were developed by Shveta Miller. You can find a PDF of the page being analyzed [here](#). Together, these resources provide students with a chance to practice their own close reading, gain insight from the modeling provided by the video (accompanied with students' own note taking on the handout), and discuss questions and conclusions with their peers. These will help set students up for observant and thoughtful reading of *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*, especially if they are less familiar with the graphic novel medium.

Since your students are not reading the full graphic novel *Persepolis*, you can highlight the very brief introduction and context provided in the video. You may also find it appropriate for your students to abbreviate the analysis of all of the panels reviewed in the video. As preparation for reading a different comic, the level of detail focused on the content of *Persepolis* may be more than your students need or than your class time permits.

When you and your students do start to read *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*, keep in mind whatever student interest in or expertise with comics or graphic novels you discovered in this lesson. Your initial exploration of the FOR comic is a great opportunity for comparison and contrast between it and more contemporary examples of the medium. Based on feedback we received from young reviewers on this project, you might consider questions like: What stands out to them about the illustrations? What are the similarities/differences between the 1957 illustrations and those your students know today? What are the similarities/differences between how comics in different eras use text - both in terms of formatting and language?