

berly Jones thinks that the category is setting a high bar for contemporary literature and is leading the discussion on diversity, especially with the active We Need Diverse Books movement. “Conversations are happening in YA that you’re not seeing anywhere else, like Neal Shusterman’s *Challenger Deep* (HarperCollins) about schizophrenia.” The dynamic YA category is taking risks, and the adult literary world hasn’t caught up yet.

Formats, genres, topics—nothing is off limits. Hybrid works, such as fictionalized nonfiction, illustrated novels, and books

that embrace several genres at once, are on the rise. “YA is much more open to art and text interacting and still being literary,” says Goldblatt. He adds, “In the last 15–20 years, we stormed the Bastille, we took down the barriers.”

Horning appreciates the category’s venturesome creativity. “YA books really stretch readers and leave space for teens to help complete the story. I feel very optimistic about YA.”

*Shelley M. Diaz is a senior editor, reviews at SLJ.*

## DAWN K. WING | Using comics in the ELL classroom

# Graphic History

**A**s an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher at the Pan American International High School in Elmhurst, NY, I developed curricula that enabled students to practice their English skills across all modalities by reading and creating visual narratives. Here are some of my best practices for using graphic novels in the ELL classroom.

### Teaching Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*

From a beginning-of-the-semester survey, I learned that most of my 11th-grade intermediate and advanced ESL students wanted to learn more about world history. With the help of online educator resources such as the International Literacy Association’s Read Write Think website, I decided to teach Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (Pantheon, 1991), the Pulitzer prize-winning graphic novel about the journey of his father, who survived the Holocaust.

A number of students were familiar with reading manga, while others needed to learn the basic visual grammar of graphic novels. This meant providing explicit instruction of graphic novel terminology such as panels, dialogue, captions, and speech bubbles. I then chose excerpts from *Maus* for students to read aloud during class that focused primarily on the main character’s experience living in concentration camps.

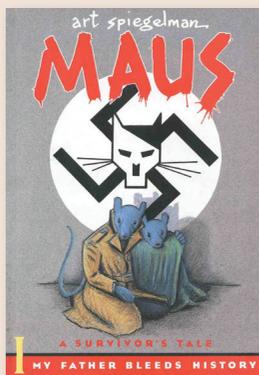
To help students understand the story’s

historical context, we did in-class activities about Polish ghetto life, incorporating PowerPoint presentations explaining the causes and outcomes of World War II, focusing on the rise and fall of Nazi powers in Europe.

During class, students enjoyed reading aloud select pages from *Maus* while writing their thoughts and responses to questions in reading guides that I’d created. They were prompted to review what happened in a scene, foreshadow what might happen later, and analyze the symbolism Spiegelman uses in the story. Students were asked why they thought the author chose to represent Jews as mice and Germans as cats and how this device was effective in conveying key concepts.

After collectively analyzing *Maus*, students were asked to write a comparative literary essay using this book and another work of literature. I created a packet that scaffolded the essay writing process that would help prepare students for the required New York State English Language Arts Regents exam. Overall, the students were engaged

throughout our selected chapter readings and discussions of *Maus*. A few extended their interest in learning about the Holocaust by opting to attend a field trip to the Brooklyn Academy of Music to view a puppet production about Auschwitz.



**Wing had her students tell their immigrant stories using comic book software.**

### Creating educational comics

If you’re having difficulty finding educational comics or visual narratives on a specific topic, you can make your own. Finding visual books that target the interests of high school ELLs, especially Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) or beginner ELLs, can be challenging. However, teachers can produce their own educational comics that cater to their students’ reading abilities. Using Microsoft Word, Comic Life, and web images, I have created custom visual reading materials about the immigration experience through Ellis Island and have adapted folklore into comic form.

Another benefit of creating one’s own educational comic is the ability to customize text for students of varying English proficiencies in the same classroom. It is a great way to differentiate learning materials.

For more resources about teaching *Maus* and making comics with high school English Language Learners, visit “Comics in the Classroom” ([comicsforells.weebly.com](http://comicsforells.weebly.com)).

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