

## ACTIVITY 5 – GRAPHIC POETRY



**Description:** Students read, examine, and create graphic poems, and consider both the implications of using the visual in connection with poetry, and whether an artist or poet/artist can visually represent the intricacies of literal and figurative language. The hope is that students will recognize the beauty of graphic poetry and thereby develop a greater fondness for and appreciation of poetry proper.

**Skills:** Self Awareness, Metacognition, Critical Thinking, Navigation Skills, Making Connections

**Purpose:** By the end of the activity, students should see that there is something to be gained and something to be lost in marrying a poem with its graphic illustration. What is gained is a visual context that the reader can use to help him or her understand what is actually happening in a poem. What is also gained is the recognition of what art can and cannot do with pictures in order to mimic or represent the figurative. What is lost, perhaps, is precisely what is lost when the curtain rises for the presentation of play and we see the gradual unfolding of the directorial decisions that will define how the performance in front of us will interpret the stage directions and dialogue of the playwright.

## Critical Thinking Questions

- When I read a graphic poem, how do the illustrations make my experience different? Are there certain poems that illustration would help me understand better than others?
- Does graphic poetry have to be more than just an illustrated poem? Can it be less?
- Does graphic poetry detract from the poem by providing a visual interpretation that might not be in accordance with the reader's?

## Self Awareness and Metacognition Questions

- When I read graphic poetry, do I actually enjoy the experience? Do I personally prefer this experience to the one of just reading a poem itself?
- When I write and illustrate a graphic poem, how do I decide what kinds of illustrations I will make? How do I decide where the text goes on a page, and whether I use comment bubbles, thought bubbles, narrative boxes, or something different altogether?

## Navigation Skills and Making Connections

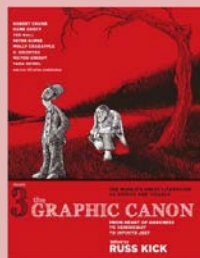
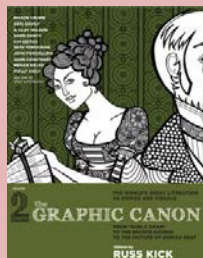
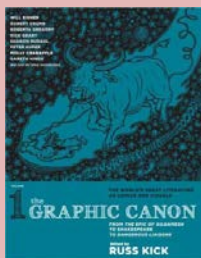
- If I were to create an animated poem in which the visual illustration actually moves and breathes, would that change the visual narrative I would construct?
- How can the visual component of a graphic poem echo the poem's use of literary devices and figurative language, like metaphor and repetition.
- How is graphic poetry like a play in performance or the filmed version of a novel? Does it have similar advantages and drawbacks?

## How Can Visual Narrative Foster Inquiry in This Activity?

Reading graphic poetry can help students to make sense of some of the complexities of the poems they examine, even if those complexities are what is literally “happening” in a given work. In my experience, though, a student is far more likely to want to bring their critical thinking and inquiry skills to bear on a poem that they believe they understand than one they don't. As students move through the process of reading, analyzing, and creating graphic poetry, it is essential that teachers encourage students to develop an ongoing dialogue with the work they are studying.

## Recommended Read for the Teacher

*The Graphic Canon, Volumes 1-3*, Edited by Russ Kick



This three volume set takes classic works of literature in poetry and prose and shows what award-winning artists can do with great writing. It is a must-read for anyone who appreciates the beauty, power and potential of a visual literary canon.