

**CUSF Master Grant Proposal:
Integrating Graphic Novels into a New American Studies Curriculum.**

Proposal Summary:

This grant is an attempt to integrate higher interest reading material into a new American Studies curriculum at the 11th grade level. Urbana High School has committed to creating a new American Studies course that involves true collaboration across the history and English curriculums. The teachers involved in this new class would like to use four graphic novels over the entirety of the one-year course as a way to engage student learning at a higher level. These novels would be balanced with traditional novels, supplied by UHS, and students would be instructed in the appropriate way to read and process information through the innovative graphic novel format. Our desire to use graphic novels in the classroom on a more systematic basis comes from a need to create more historical empathy on the part of our students, and the importance of helping our students understand new and innovative ways to engage with reading. Thus, the novels we would like to purchase all focus on the experience of individuals caught up in the history of their time, and are all highly rated novels that encompass a variety of graphic styles. These novels include:

1. Understanding Comics by Scott McCloud
2. The Arrival by Shaun Tan
3. Kings in Disguise by James Vance and David Burr
4. Last Day in Vietnam by Will Eisner
5. Pride of Baghdad by Brian K. Vaughan

The specific goals of this proposal are:

1. Creating learning opportunities for students that go beyond the typical novels used in an American Studies course, with the intent of deepening the understanding of American history and literature.
2. Incorporate instruction in the reading of graphic novels into traditional American literature 11th grade curriculum.
3. Deepen understanding of historical events through the use of graphic novels that focus on the everyday people who experienced those events.
4. Assist students in creating a synthesis of learning by using graphic novels, primary and secondary sources, and classroom instruction to create persuasive essays that answer debatable questions from American history.
5. Create opportunities for students to engage with and critically evaluate contemporary literature.

The specific outcomes of this proposal are:

1. Increase student interest in reading and contemporary literature.
2. Increase student understanding of historical events and their effects on the people involved in those events.
3. Improved student analysis of primary and secondary sources related to the graphic novels in this proposal by giving students an accessible base of information from which to begin.
4. Improved student persuasive writing.
5. Increase in ability of students to critically analyze contemporary and traditional literature.

**CUSF Master Grant Proposal:
Integrating Graphic Novels into a New American Studies Curriculum**

Description of proposal based on selection criteria:

INNOVATION:

This proposal is extremely innovative, as it seeks to incorporate new ways of looking at literature and history into a new American Studies curriculum at Urbana High School. The research that has been completed around the use of Graphic Novels in the classroom shows clearly that this is a new and legitimate medium (Eggers 2000) that works to create high interest in text reading (Lavin 1998). It also promotes literacy (Weiner 2002) in new and engaging ways for our students. This is innovation that is proven effective.

IMPACT:

The use of graphic novels in the classroom can have a dramatic and important impact on our students. Given the chance to engage with text and history outside of the methods of textbooks and traditional novels, students show higher interest in the content (Bruggeman 1997) and the development of more complex cognitive reading skills (Weiner 2002). This particular proposal has the added impact of being part of a new American Studies program at Urbana High School. This program will impact Urbana's social studies students for years to come, and is setting a foundation for new ways of learning in Urbana.

NEED:

Currently the 11th grade American Studies curriculum at UHS is based on a series of traditional novels that many students do not find particularly interesting. Our goal with this proposal is not to supplant all of the traditional novels that are taught at the 11th grade level just because students find them a little boring. Instead, we seek to replace a select few novels and integrate these higher interest graphic novels in their place. For example, students are often asked to read Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* during their junior year. This is a novel that is often taught at the collegiate level, and can be challenging for the average 11th grader. We would like to teach select excerpts from *The Jungle*, coupled with *The Arrival*, which is a high engaging graphic novel about the immigrant experience. It is our belief, and the research shows that our students will have a higher level of engagement and a deeper level of understanding through this method.

Frankly, the reason these kinds of methods have not been used in the past is more monetary than anything else. We know what to do to engage students in reading and understanding these historical events, but we simply do not have the funding to make it happen. The need for this grant is therefore very immediate and very great.

DURATION:

The novels purchased with the monies from this grant will have a long-term impact on the students of Urbana High School. By purchasing books that supplement the curriculum in this fashion, we expect that at least five to ten years of students will have access to these books (if not more). Since we will teach two sections of this course every year that means about 50-60 students per year will use the books, and at least 500-600 students will be impacted over the life of the books. Since this is also a new American Studies class, and the administration at UHS has committed to expanding

the program in the future, it is feasible that this initial purchase of the novels will help to create a curriculum based around the use of graphic novels that will impact many more students, school-wide. It is our hope that establishing the use of graphic novels in the 11th grade American Studies curriculum will lead to the adoption of these methods by other sections of this course in the future. We hope this will be the beginning of a high interest English and history curriculum that will engage our students and increase their learning for years to come.

FEASIBILITY:

This proposal is designed to be particularly realistic in scope and time. Since UHS has already agreed to create this new American Studies course for the 2009/2010 school year, the graphic novels from this proposal will be used in the classroom starting in September of 2009 and extending through May of 2010. This course will then repeat, successfully implementing innovative curriculum changes into the UHS social studies and English departments for many years to come.

PLANNING:

This proposal is the result of several years of research by the teachers involved. As graphic novels have become more accepted in American literature and American society, they have also become an innovative part of America's classrooms. The research is now quite clear that students who are properly prepared to read and understand graphic novels demonstrate expanded literacy skills (Lavin 1998) and higher interest in reading (Weiner 2002).

Therefore, our proposal is designed to give our students appropriate instruction in how to read graphic novels. Instruction will begin with an exploration on the graphic novel format, using *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud, and *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan. This instruction will correspond with the historical time period of study, as *The Arrival* is a novel about the immigration experience.

After students have an appropriate basis for understanding the genre, they will be expected to read three other novels over the course of the year, with each novel focusing on a specific historical era in American history. Their second novel, *Kings in Disguise*, focuses on the experience of Americans during the Great Depression, which is the core unit of the second quarter. The third novel, *Watchmen*, is an exploration of the tensions undergirding the Cold War. And the final novel, *Pride of Baghdad*, is the story of the Iraq War from the view of four lions who escaped from the Baghdad Zoo. Thus, each novel covers an important period in American history, and builds on the skills acquired from the original instruction and each successive novel.

BUDGET:

Our budget, included with this proposal, will be supplemented by money from both the UHS Language Arts and Social Studies departments. Specifically, the departments will be providing money and professional development for further training in the teaching of graphic novels. Also, the CUSF grant would be integrated into the curriculum that will use new books that have been purchased through the Language Arts department. CUSF would be responsible for the purchase of the student copies of each graphic novel, and UHS would be responsible for all of the teacher training and materials.

FULFILLMENT OF THE CUSF MISSION:

We believe that this proposal fits the mission of CUSF extremely well. By providing the funding for the use of graphic novels in the social studies and English departments, CUSF will be helping UHS to implement cutting-edge instruction that will be provided to a wide variety of Urbana students. As this is a brand-new, research driven course we expect that the money provided through the grant will help us teach Urbana students in innovative ways. And we know that this program not only be successful during the 2009/2010 school years, but for many more years to come.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES:

The goal of the new American Studies course is to help students achieve higher reading comprehension and analysis skills, and to improve their writing of persuasive essays. To that end, we will design both formative and summative assessments that will accurately and repeatedly measure student achievement in these core areas. Specifically, student progress in reading comprehension and analysis will be measured from the beginning of the year to the end and results will be categorized and analyzed quarterly and at the end of the year. Students will also be expected to write at least one 3-5 page persuasive essay about the topics covered in each graphic novel every quarter, which will be graded with consistent rubrics. The persuasive essays will be taught in accordance with UHS Write Traits standards, and our literacy and writing partners will be very involved in this stage of the course to ensure the highest quality of instruction. We expect dramatic increases in student writing abilities by the end of the year, as the use of the graphic novels has been shown to deepen student knowledge about the material, which translates into better writing.

PARTNERSHIP:

As this course is based upon the idea of collaboration, our partnerships are crucial to the success of the proposal. Our most important partnership will be between the Language Arts and Social Studies departments at UHS, and with American Studies teachers from both departments. We will also utilize the expertise of literature specialists at both the University of Illinois (Phil Wilder), Urbana High School (Carol Casbeer) and Urbana Free Library (Carol Inskeep). Finally, we will partner with an Assistant Professor from the University of Illinois Department of English (Spencer Schaffner) who will assist both the teachers and the students in better understanding how to use graphic novels in the classroom.

ADAPTABILITY:

This project is designed to be a seed program for a bigger change in the curriculum at Urbana High School. We hope to create a course that will be adopted by other teachers in our department. We are also hopeful that success in this course will lead to presentations at regional and national conferences where we intend to push the idea of graphic novels as a tool for deeper knowledge of both history and literature.

TECHNOLOGY:

This proposal does not require the use of technology, but we expect to use the software program "Comic Life" to assist our students in their understanding of the graphic novel medium.

**CUSF Master Grant Proposal:
Integrating Graphic Novels into a New American Studies Curriculum
Itemized Detailed Budget:**

Books for the Classroom (based on expected enrollment of 60 students):

1. Understanding Comics by Scott McCloud
Description: *"This detail-packed book includes a history of comics that reaches back to pre-Columbian picture manuscripts and Egyptian monuments and a running analysis of comics as art, literature, and communication."*
List Price: \$22.95 / 20% PFAA Discount = \$18.36 ea = \$550.80 for 30 copies (class set only)
2. The Arrival by Shaun Tan
Description: *"Tan captures the struggles and joy of the immigrant experience through clear, mesmerizing images which tell the story of a man who leaves his homeland and his family to build a better life."* List Price: \$19.99 hardcover
20% Retailer Discount = \$15.99 each = \$479.70 for 30 copies (class set only)
3. Kings in Disguise by James Vance and David Burr
Description: *"Story of a young man's adventures and coming of age during the Great Depression."* List Price: \$16.95 paperback
20% Retailer Discount = \$13.56 ea = \$813.60 for 60 copies
4. Watchmen by Alan Moore
Description: *"It all begins with the paranoid delusions of a half-insane hero called Rorschach--but is he really insane or has he, in fact, uncovered a plot to murder super-heroes and possibly millions of innocent civilians? Following two generations of masked super-heroes from the close of World War II to the icy shadow of the Cold War comes this groundbreaking comic story--the story of The Watchmen."* List Price: \$19.95 paperback
20% Retailer Discount = \$15.96 ea = \$957.60 for 60
5. Pride of Baghdad by Brian K. Vaughan
Description: *In the spring of 2003, a pride of lions escaped from the Baghdad Zoo during an American bombing raid, roaming the streets in a desperate struggle for their lives. "Pride of Baghdad" raises questions about the true meaning of liberation--can it be given or is it earned only through self-determination and sacrifice?"* List Price: \$19.99 hardcover
20% Retailer Discount = \$15.99 ea = \$959.40 for 60

Teaching Resources:

1. Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative by Will Eisner
List Price: \$22.95 / 25% PFAA Discount = \$17.21 ea = \$34.42 for 2 copies (UHS)
2. Getting Graphic: Using Graphic Novels to Promote Literacy With Teens by Michele Gorman
List Price \$36.95 / 25% PFAA Discount = \$27.71 ea = \$55.43 for 2 copies (UHS)

Graphic Novels: CUSF Master Grant Proposal: **\$3761.10**

Teaching Resources: UHS Language Arts and Social Studies Departments: **\$89.85**