Use this guide to explore characteristics of graphic novels. Examine the graphic novels provided for you. Use separate pieces of paper to write and draw your numbered responses under each heading. Identify title, version, and page number when you use examples from books.

1. What shape is usually used for frames or panels?
2. What other shapes are used? Could any shape be used?
3. Why might a graphic novel illustrator use different shapes? Give examples from the books.
4. How are panels arranged? In what order should you read them?
5. Are all panels the same size? How is variation in size used?
6. Find a graphic novel that uses interesting angles or perspectives to suggest something about the action. Describe it.
7. Find a graphic novel that uses facial expressions to tell something about the character or the action. Describe it.
8. Find a graphic novel that uses lines, shapes, or symbols to show action or emotion. Tell what you think they mean.

1. Find a graphic novel done mostly in one color. Why do you think the author/illustrator made this choice?
2. Look through several graphic novels that use full color throughout. How does this choice help tell the story?
3. Find a graphic novel that uses color in interesting ways. Describe the use of color and explain what you think it adds to the book.

1. Narrative text is usually shown in a rectangle below or in the frame. Look for narration shown in other ways. Describe one of them.
2. How are spoken words of characters usually shown? How can you tell whose words they are? How do “speech balloons” vary? Describe two ways.
3. How are thoughts of characters usually shown? How can you tell whose thoughts they are? How do “thought bubbles” vary? Describe two ways.
4. Find and describe two examples of “sound effects” in a graphic novel—letters or words chosen to convey the sound of the action in the frame.
5. Different fonts can signal emotion, scene changes, or shifting characters. Find two examples and describe them.
A graphic novel conveys information or tells a story using a series of frames or panels of pictures that show action, with help from narrative text and characters’ words or thoughts.

1. What shape is usually used for frames or panels? (Rectangles)
2. What other shapes are used? Could any shape be used? (Many shapes! Probably any simple geometric shape)
3. Why might a graphic novel illustrator use different shapes? Give examples from the books.
4. How are panels arranged? In what order should you read them? (Left to right, top to bottom, with variations; some Manga styles read right to left)
5. Are all panels the same size? How is variation in size used?
6. Find a graphic novel that uses interesting angles or perspectives to suggest something about the action. Describe it. (Legends of Zita the Space Girl, Hereville, To Dance…)
7. Find a graphic novel that uses facial expressions to tell something about the character or the action. Describe it. (Joey Fly, Private Eye)
8. Find a graphic novel that uses lines, shapes, or symbols to show action or emotion. Tell what you think they mean. (Legends of Zita the Space Girl, Joey Fly…)

Words appear in graphic novels as narration, directed at the reader, or as the words or thoughts of characters. Some graphic novels use little or no narration.

1. Narrative text is usually shown in a rectangle below or in the frame. Look for narration shown in other ways. Describe one of them.
2. How are spoken words of characters usually shown? How can you tell whose words they are? How do “speech balloons” vary? Describe two ways.
3. How are thoughts of characters usually shown? How can you tell whose thoughts they are? How do “thought bubbles” vary? Describe two ways.
4. Find and describe two examples of “sound effects” in a graphic novel—letters or words chosen to convey the sound of the action in the frame.
5. Different fonts can signal emotion, scene changes, or shifting characters. Find two examples and describe them.

Some graphic novels use only one or two colors. Others use full color throughout the book. Still others use color changes to show scene or mood changes.
Choose one prose book and one graphic novel that tell the same story. Use separate pieces of paper to write your numbered responses under each heading. Identify title, version, and page number when giving specific examples.

1. How many pages does each book have? (Do a rough count and estimate if pages are not numbered in your graphic novel.) Are the pages close to the same size?

2. Choose a chapter or scene from your prose book. How many pages long is it? Identify the same content (chapter or scene) in your graphic novel. How long is it?

3. If your prose book has illustrations, how much of the total page space do illustrations take up in the book? In the scene or chapter you compared?

1. Read the first chapter or scene of your graphic novel, where you meet the main character. Make two columns on your paper. In the first column, describe the main character as completely as you can. What does he or she look like? How old is he or she? How does the character act? What do you know about his or her personality? Life experience? Relationships? Opinions?

2. Read the same chapter or scene in your prose book. In the second column, describe the main character and answer the same questions, using details from this book.

3. Compare the two descriptions. How are they similar? How are they different? Which gives more detail? Which lets you understand the character better?

1. Choose a chapter or scene from the middle of the graphic novel. Make two columns on your paper. In the first column, describe the action. What happens? What questions, tensions, or conflicts unfold? How do characters relate to each other?

2. Read the same chapter or scene in your prose book. In the second column, describe the action and answer the same questions, using details from this book.

3. Compare the descriptions. How are they similar? How are they different? Which gives more detail? Which makes you feel the pace and follow the action better?

1. Read the last chapter or scene of your graphic novel, in which conflict is resolved and the action brought to a close. Make two columns on your paper. In the first column, describe the setting as completely as you can. Where does the action take place? How does the setting affect the action? Describe the emotional tone of the chapter. What feeling does it leave you with?

2. Read the same chapter or scene in your prose book. In the second column, describe the setting and tone, and answer the same questions, using details from this book.

3. Compare the descriptions. How are they similar? How are they different? Which gives you a stronger sense of place? Which leaves you with a stronger sense of the book’s emotional tone?

Conclusion: Write a brief essay comparing the different strategies and strengths of prose and graphic novels. Include your thoughts about specific stories, or kinds of stories, that might best be told in prose or as graphic novels.
**Understanding Graphic Novels**

Try this with prose and graphic novel versions of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, or with Graphic Classics series titles and their prose originals for upper grades, or titles in the History's Kid Heroes series, from Graphic Universe, and their related early chapter books by the same authors, from Carolrhoda Books, for younger students.

**Length/Use of Page Space**

Graphic novels generally convey information or tell a story in a more compact way—in fewer pages—than a traditional prose book.

1. How many pages does each book have? (Do a rough count and estimate if pages are not numbered in your graphic novel.) Are the pages close to the same size?
2. Choose a chapter or scene from your prose book. How many pages long is it? Identify the same content (chapter or scene) in your graphic novel. How long is it?
3. If your prose book has illustrations, how much of the total page space do illustrations take up in the book? What about in the scene or chapter you compared?

**Characters**

Graphic novels and prose use different strategies to introduce, describe, and help readers relate to characters.

1. Read the first chapter or scene of your graphic novel, where you meet the main character. Make two columns on your paper. In the first column, describe the main character as completely as you can. What does he or she look like? How old is he or she? How does the character act? What do you know about his or her personality? Life experience? Relationships? Opinions?
2. Read the same chapter or scene in your prose book. In the second column, describe the main character and answer the same questions, using details from this book.
3. Compare the two descriptions. How are they similar? How are they different? Which gives more detail? Which lets you understand the character better?

**Plot**

Graphic novels and prose use different strategies to convey and move along the action in the story.

1. Choose a chapter or scene from the middle of the graphic novel. Make two columns on your paper. In the first column, describe the action. What happens? What questions, tensions, or conflicts unfold? How do characters relate to each other?
2. Read the same chapter or scene in your prose book. In the second column, describe the action and answer the same questions, using details from this book.
3. Compare the descriptions. How are they similar? How are they different? Which gives you feel the pace and follow the action better?

**Setting & Tone**

Graphic novels convey settings and tone differently. They describe and suggest how places and people feel and influence the action differently.

1. Read the last chapter or scene of your graphic novel, in which conflict is resolved and the action brought to a close. Make two columns on your paper. In the first column, describe the setting as completely as you can. Where does the action take place? How does the setting affect the action? Describe the emotional tone of the chapter. What feeling does it leave you with?
2. Read the same chapter or scene in your prose book. In the second column, describe the setting and tone, and answer the same questions, using details from this book.
3. Compare the descriptions. How are they similar? How are they different? Which gives you a stronger sense of place? Which leaves you with a stronger sense of the book’s emotional tone?

**Conclusion:** Write a brief essay comparing the different strategies and strengths of prose and graphic novels. Include your thoughts about specific stories, or kinds of stories, that might best be told in prose or as graphic novels.
Season Slips

SPRING

Name: ___________________________
I read about spring because:

Title and author of spring book:

Here is one thing I learned about the spring season:

SUMMER

Name: ___________________________
I read about summer because:

Title and author of summer book:

Here is one thing I learned about the summer season:

FALL

Name: ___________________________
I read about fall because:

Title and author of fall book:

Here is one thing I learned about the fall season:

WINTER

Name: ___________________________
I read about winter because:

Title and author of winter book:

Here is one thing I learned about the winter season: