

# Using Historical Graphic Novels in High School History Classes: Potential for Contextualization, Sourcing, and Corroborating

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**M**ODERN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS are multimodal—meaning that they combine words and pictures. Usually, however, this means that when a student reads a history textbook, they are dealing with both the narration that runs in a block through the whole chapter (the primary textual flow) as well as the separate captions, charts, primary sources in sidebar boxes, photographs, political cartoons, maps, and so on (secondary textual flows) that the reader has to disengage from the primary textual flow to check out.

Imagine a section of a textbook that deals with the 1992-1995 War in Bosnia. The primary textual flow might be describing the hardships of the war for the civilians, along with a sidebar might contain a photograph of a Bosnian schoolteacher and text that describes how he had to hike over the mountains in the bitter cold winter to buy food, and then carry it all the way back to feed his extended family. Such image-text construction allows flexibility for the history book to incorporate both closely related images and those that are ancillary. It also means to draw students into the text, much the way a magazine does. A significant disadvantage of this approach, however, is that many students read either the primary flow or the secondary flow, but not both. So while the reader might depart

from the text to look at the images, he or she may not spend enough time with the images to gain all the important information from them, or he or she might depart from the primary textual flow to look at a picture or caption, then follow the secondary flow through the rest of the chapter (looking at pictures, maps, and graphs on each page) and never return to the primary flow of text.

Graphic novels (book-length works of fiction or non-fiction that use the conventions of a comic book to tell a story or convey information) can embed images within that primary flow. The text boxes and recurring images of the single graphic novel flow can incorporate maps, photographs, timelines, primary sources, and images within the panel structure of the page. This means that a map, for example, is not separated from the primary flow by the way it is positioned and the box drawn around it, but rather the map is within a panel that is embedded in several other panels that make up that page. Because graphic novels are read in a prescribed left-to-right, top-to-bottom order, the panel containing the map is as much a part of the primary flow as a paragraph in the main text of a standard textbook. So the reader not only avoids skipping over it, but also further reads that map in the context of the narrative—seeing what the author wants to show. In addition, graphic novels often overlap text boxes of the narrative within the map. For example, in the historical graphic novel (HGN) *Safe Area Gorazde*,<sup>1</sup> a panel in the upper half of page 38 contains a map showing the Yugoslav republics that achieved independence in 1991, and within that map is a text box that contains exposition that extends from the previous panel about how Bosnia had to choose between remaining in Yugoslavia with Serbia and Montenegro, or seek independence. In a similar way, HGNs can embed timelines, photographs, and political cartoons so that readers encounter them within the primary flow and with the voice of a text box to help them connect the map, timeline, or image with the rest of the primary flow. This technique, found in a majority of the corpus of HGNs examined in this study, is one example of a new and potentially valuable affordance for both geographic and temporal contextualization that is not available in a standard text approach.

Graphic novels convey meaning through a way of bringing together images and pictures that has been in use for well over one hundred fifty years,<sup>2</sup> and possibly almost a thousand years.<sup>3</sup> What began as a sequential telling of stories on cave walls and tapestries with words on banners flying from figures' mouths, evolved into single-panel political cartoons, then comic strips, then comic books, and finally into longer, more fully developed stories, told through graphic novels. Graphic novels use a language of facial expressions, the shapes of word balloons and thought balloons, and pictorial elements such as speed lines, sweat drops, and panel

spacing to help readers understand the emotion, intent, and context central to comprehension of communications.

The term “graphic novel,” however, is a misnomer. Graphic novels are neither exclusively graphic, nor are they necessarily novels—the format includes fictional stories, informational texts, essays, reports, memoirs, biographies, and even philosophical treatises told using text and image through the conventions of a comic book. The format of a graphic novel is a cultural tool, and as such, it has both “affordances” and “constraints,” to use the terms developed by James Wertsch.<sup>4</sup> These affordances and constraints allow us to carry out some teaching tasks more efficiently in some ways, and less so in others. Keith Barton and Linda Levstik explain, “In history education, then, we need to know not just what tools are available for students, but how those tools simultaneously enable and inhibit their activity.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Research Question**

This study considers what opportunities and barriers, if any, HGNs offer high school history teachers to teach students to contextualize, source, and corroborate. In order to investigate that, we need to start with the HGNs themselves. Do HGNs, as a close blending of images and words, allow students to read history in a way compatible with the goals of history instruction? How can HGNs support disciplinary literacy instruction in history?

### **History-Specific Strategies**

Students of history need to be able to build a clear mental model of history, and be able to articulate the connections between related events and participants.<sup>6</sup> History-specific strategies include being able to contextualize, corroborate, and source across multiple texts.<sup>7</sup> *Contextualization* refers to the reader’s ability to locate historical actors and actions in space and time.<sup>8</sup> The reader must go beyond merely comprehending the individual words in the document and be able to connect to a fuller awareness and familiarity with the historical period in question.<sup>9</sup> *Corroboration* occurs when the reader can use intertextual links to check different accounts against each other to determine the validity of the arguments those accounts make. *Sourcing* involves identifying and understanding the opinions, positioning, and bias of the author of a particular document. Sourcing can also be a term meant to refer to how trustworthy the reader considers the document in question.<sup>10</sup> Sam Wineburg identifies contextualization, corroboration, and sourcing as skills that historians use constantly as they read.

While it is not reasonable to expect high school students to be able to create meaning from primary texts with the same facility that historians do, it is reasonable to expect students to learn to see the problems that historians deal with, and to recognize the components that historians consider as they tackle those problems. Doing so might encourage critical thinking in other areas of life, as well as prepare students for the demands of reading in a multimodal environment. Wineburg acknowledges:

[E]xperts and novices do not represent different stages on the same continuum because they are not drawn from the same population in the first place. In other words, the differences between students and historians may, in fact, be evident in certain cognitive activities but have their roots elsewhere. Thus any facile claim about the roots of these differences should be avoided. In the meantime, it can be said with some assurance that able high school students can know a lot of history but still have little idea of how historical knowledge is constructed.<sup>11</sup>

Teaching students to read in a variety of different useful ways prepares them to understand a wider range of texts and messages and to approach those messages more critically.

### Methodology

To determine what graphic novels could offer high school social studies teachers and students, this study examined ways that HGNs, through their unique format, could provide additional contexts and additional ways of questioning the text. Content analysis helped make clear not only what types of scaffolding HGNs can provide, but also how frequently that scaffolding is present, both in terms of frequency within a particular HGN, and spread over the entire sample of twenty HGNs.

#### *Selecting the Sample to be Analyzed*

Though graphic histories are growing in number and range with each passing year, when the sample was selected, the field of possible texts was small enough to be analyzed in its entirety. The sample for this study (**Figure 1**) was a collection of all published HGNs that fit the following four criteria.

Graphic Novel Format: The source must be a book-length text that combines verbal text with images to tell a story using the conventions of a comic book, including panels, speech bubbles, and narration boxes. This excludes comic books (including the extensive Classic Comics series) and picture books that use selective conventions of a comic book (for example, Shawn Tan's *The Arrival* uses panels that resemble a comic book, but no other conventions).<sup>12</sup>

<b>Title</b>	<b>Creator(s)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Genre</b>
<i>King: A Comics Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.</i> <sup>19</sup>	Anderson	2010	Biography
<i>Nat Turner</i> <sup>20</sup>	Baker	2008	Primary Source Account
<i>Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography</i> <sup>21</sup>	Brown	1999	Biography
<i>08: A Graphic Diary of the Campaign Trail</i> <sup>22</sup>	Crowley & Goldman	2009	Reportage
<i>The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam</i> <sup>23</sup>	Fleming	2007	Biography/Research Description
<i>Alan's War: The Memories of G.I. Alan Cope</i> <sup>24</sup>	Guibert & Cope	2008	Biography
<i>Blood upon the Rose: Easter 1916: The Rebellion That Set Ireland Free</i> <sup>25</sup>	Hunt	2009	Historical Summary
<i>The 9-11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation</i> <sup>26</sup>	Jacobson & Colón	2006	Adaptation of Government Report
<i>Fax from Sarajevo</i> <sup>27</sup>	Kubert	1996	Historical Narrative through Correspondence
<i>Still I Rise: A Cartoon History of African Americans</i> <sup>28</sup>	Laird & Bey	1997	Historical Summary
<i>Houdini: The Handcuff King</i> <sup>29</sup>	Lutes & Bertozzi	2007	Biography utilizing Creative Non-Fiction Technique
<i>T-Minus: The Race to the Moon</i> <sup>30</sup>	Ottaviani	2009	Historical Summary
<i>Fallout: J. Robert Oppenheimer, Leo Szilard, and the Political Science of the Atomic Bomb</i> <sup>31</sup>	Ottaviani & Johnson	2001	Historical Summary including Primary Source Material
<i>Unsung Hero: The Story of Robert McNeill</i> <sup>32</sup>	Pekar & Collier	2005	Biography
<i>Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History</i> <sup>33</sup>	Pekar & Dumm	2008	Historical Summary and First-Person Accounts
<i>Palestine</i> <sup>34</sup>	Sacco	2001	Reportage
<i>Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995</i> <sup>35</sup>	Sacco	2002	Reportage
<i>Maus (I and II)</i> <sup>36</sup>	Spiegelman	1986 1991	Biography using Creative Non-Fiction Techniques
<i>Journey into Mohawk Country</i> <sup>37</sup>	Van den Bogaert & O'Connor	2006	Primary Source Account
<i>A People's History of American Empire</i> <sup>38</sup>	Zinn, Konopacki, & Buhle	2008	Historical Summary

**Figure 1:** Historical graphic novels (HGNs) included in sample.

Inclusion of History Content: For the purposes of this study, the graphic novel must address historical content appropriate for high school students. To identify HGNs, a search was conducted that included bibliographic publications.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the key words “Graphic Novel” and “History” were searched on Amazon.com, and the site also offered recommendations based on searches for other HGNs. Colleagues and acquaintances also forwarded reviews, newspaper and magazine articles, and recommendations about potentially appropriate HGNs.

Year of Publication: The search was limited to HGNs published after 1985 and before January of 2010 for two reasons. First, the HGN really began to hit its stride after the 1986 landmark publication of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*,<sup>14</sup> the first critically recognized HGN. Second, it followed that high school history teachers using HGNs as supplementary material would be interested in more recent material to hold the reader’s attention. Because the final list was compiled in January of 2010, the study only includes HGNs written prior to that time.

Non-Fiction: This study is limited to non-fiction graphic histories, straight informational graphic histories, and biographical graphic histories. Although there are some excellent historical fiction GNs—including, for example, Mat Johnson and Warren Pleece’s *Incognegro*<sup>15</sup>—they have little chance at achieving the goals of Disciplinary Literacy Instruction as defined by Wineburg<sup>16</sup> (contextualization, corroboration, and sourcing) because the fictionalized nature of the works makes it hard for students to separate accounts and sources from what is done to serve the story. Although they are more properly considered creative non-fiction, two HGNs, *Houdini*<sup>17</sup> and *Maus*,<sup>18</sup> were included in the final study because they had much more in common with historical biographies than with fiction texts.

**Figure 1** lists the resulting twenty HGNs that met these four criteria. These HGNs were then subjected to a quantitative analysis of the features described above.

### *Determining the Categories to be Applied and Outlining the Coding Process*

This study breaks Wineburg’s heuristic of contextualization, corroboration, and sourcing into a series of subcategories. After an initial reading of the first five HGNs, some of the subcategories were modified to more accurately reflect ideas about the coding that emerged during those readings. Those five HGNs were then re-coded to reflect the modified system. **Figure 2** shows the final set of categories employed in this study, structured around Wineburg’s heuristic.

**Contextualization:**

**Geographic Contextualization** (How does the reader come to understand where the event takes place and how the geography of the area influences history?)

*Embedded maps*

*Long shots/Establishing shots* (Image[s] of an area seen from a distance, allowing the reader to get the big picture of how locations of individual scenes are related.)

*Iconic images/Motifs that establish place* (e.g., a scene with the Statue of Liberty in the background establishes that we are in New York. An image of an elevated train signals the reader that the scene takes place in Chicago.)

*Narration boxes and other texts that establish place*

**Temporal Contextualization** (from Lee and Ashby) (How does the HGN help the reader become aware of what preceded and followed this particular event in history?)

*Timelines*

*Juxtaposition of two similar events separated by time*

*Image-based time references* (e.g., panels showing a stopwatch to show how much time has elapsed or using images of the phases of the moon to indicate that a month has passed.)

*Narration boxes and other texts that establish time*

**Social Contextualization** (How does the HGN help the reader understand the relationships between individuals and groups of people?)

*Positioning of characters* (e.g., where characters stand in relation to each other, how close to each other they are standing, whether they are part of a larger group.)

*Visual references to ethnic or social groups*

*Visual references to cultural practices*

**Political Contextualization** (How does the HGN inform readers of the political convictions of key figures, and how political movements affected historical movement?)

*Political references by image* (Images of iconic or well-known political figures or symbolic reference—e.g., using a donkey to indicate the Democratic Party, or an elephant to indicate the Republican party.)

*Political affiliation by physical positioning* (e.g., a main character present in a crowd of people cheering for a candidate or a character with hands on hips and an angry expression facing a political poster.)

**Sourcing:** (What is the source for facts and arguments reported in a historical account?)

*Embedded documents* (e.g., memo, correspondence, journal entry, speech, photograph, etc.)

*Lettering and word boxes to establish voice, identity*

*Images that indicate authorial bias* (e.g., Spiegelman's depiction of Nazis as cats and Jewish people as mice or Kubert's depiction of Bosnian soldiers with squinting, angry faces.)

**Corroboration:** (How do different accounts of historical events support or contradict each other?)

*Parallel accounts of the same event linked by image or motif* (e.g., Sacco often includes multiple eyewitness accounts of a single event, but links them by the talking head shot with distinctive lettering at the beginning of each account.)

*Agreement/Non-agreement by other characters (shown by expressions, embedded text, etc.)* (e.g., an eyewitness might be describing an event to a reporter, while behind them, the author might show other people indicating their disagreement through their facial expressions or body stances.)

*Collaborative report showing different data sources* (e.g., *The 9-11 Report* summarizes many different eyewitness accounts and indicates when there were some accounts at variance with others.)

**Figure 2:** Historical graphic novels (HGNs) coding categories.

### *Determining Inter-Rater Reliability*

Another researcher coded a ten-page section from each of three randomly selected HGNs from the corpus using the entire coding system summarized in **Figure 2**. Degree of reliability was determined by calculating the total number of panels in each of the ten-page sections and considering how each of the twenty categories in the coding system was applied in each panel. The averaged reliability from the three HGNs was 95.3, which was considered strong.

### **Results: Opportunities for Contextualization, Sourcing, and Corroboration across the HGNs**

This study found that though HGNs offer opportunities for high school teachers to include contextualization, collaboration, and sourcing, 1) HGNs do not offer opportunities for all three of these elements to equal degrees and 2) the degree to which each of these elements is present varied considerably from HGN to HGN.

First, the HGNs do offer opportunities for students to engage in every one of the categories of contextualization, corroboration, and sourcing. But by far, the most opportunities were for contextualization compared to corroboration and sourcing. Second, across the three categories, only slightly more than half (11 of 20) of the HGNs have opportunities in all three categories (*Students for a Democratic Society*,<sup>39</sup> *Safe Area Gorazde*,<sup>40</sup> *A People's History of American Empire*,<sup>41</sup> *Long Tack Sam*,<sup>42</sup> *T-Minus*,<sup>43</sup> *Maus*,<sup>44</sup> *Unsung Hero*,<sup>45</sup> *08: Campaign Trail*,<sup>46</sup> *Louis Riel*,<sup>47</sup> and *Palestine*<sup>48</sup>).

### *Contextualization*

The results indicate that there are ample opportunities for readers to engage in contextualization across all five subcategories and that almost all of the HGNs offer these opportunities (see **Appendix** for breakdown of analysis).

**Geographic Context:** When a reader opens a book of any sort, one of the first questions he or she might ask is, "Where am I?" The answer is not, however, as simple as merely knowing the name of the town or region where the event takes place. Rather, contextualization includes knowing how the terrain may have affected historical events; what other regions, towns, and states the location is near; what connections exist between the people of that region and their place; and much more detailed issues, like how sight lines and elevation might have affected the outcome of battles.

HGNs use embedded maps as one way of doing this. As mentioned in the introduction, an HGN can use text boxes to continue the primary



narrative flow through a map, rather than positioning the map as a separate item for the reader to look at (or not look at). On page 15 of the HGN version of *The 9-11 Report*, for example, in a chapter titled “The Rise of Bin Laden,” the first panel on the page shows angry young men rioting in the streets and explains that the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan in 1979 resulted in “young Muslims from around the world com[ing] to Afghanistan to join a jihad against the enemy.”<sup>49</sup> The next panel describes how Osama bin Laden was among them. The third panel shows a young bin Laden shaking hands with a banker in western dress. The captions describe how bin Laden set up a financial support network across several Middle Eastern countries. The final panel on the page shows a map of the Middle Eastern region with eight countries highlighted, and a text box explains how bin Laden’s money flowed through a chain of charities and other non-governmental agencies located in these countries. The arrangement of the page invites the reader to follow the argument straight through, rather than viewing the map as an unrelated sidebar. While embedded maps do not appear in every HGN, and while they vary considerably in frequency of use, they do appear to be present in sufficient numbers for history teachers to employ them in discussing geographic context.

HGNs can also convey geographic context through images. Within this subcategory, there is a particular kind of image that deserves closer examination. A long shot (sometimes called a splash page) is when the HGN uses an entire full page to allow the reader to get an overall view of the place where the historical events occur. In HGNs, long shots help readers determine the vantage points of other panels in relation to each other. In Joe Sacco’s *Palestine*, one particular long shot gives an overhead view of a Palestinian neighborhood, allowing the reader to get a sense both of the layout of the homes, but also a clear picture of how densely packed the buildings are, and how desperate the conditions are.<sup>50</sup> With this overhead view, the readers get the chance to see the old tires holding down the corrugated metal roofs, the pond-sized puddles that make the road impassible, and the labyrinthine layout of the area. Readers can even imagine themselves trying to move through that environment. Such a splash page invites readers into the context of the narrative, to imagine themselves in that setting. Joe Sacco uses long shots sparingly, but when he does use them, they tend to get the reader’s attention. Though long shots are used less commonly, they nonetheless are a useful way to broaden students’ senses of geographic context.

When considering the subcategories within geographic contextualization collectively, every HGN exhibited some form (and usually several forms) of geographic contextualization that one would not find in conventional books. Therefore, HGNs do offer high school teachers some new

affordances for teaching geographical context within a multimodal format.

**Temporal Context:** History is about events in time. Temporal context is the way in which a work enables the reader to consider the event they are reading about in terms of other events that came before and after it. Temporal context can also orient the reader if it is necessary for the narrative to jump from one time period to another.

HGNs can embed timelines directly into the panel-by-panel narration, encouraging readers to engage with the timeline before reading on. Though the use of embedded timelines was not frequent in this sample of HGNs (only three HGNs employed them), nor extensive, when embedded timelines are used, they are remarkably effective.

Consider the HGN, *The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam*.<sup>51</sup> This HGN is about the author's search for information about her great-great-grandfather, who was a Chinese-American vaudeville magician. As she conducts interviews and encounters documents and artifacts—and relates her investigative journey—she frequently inserts timelines in the HGN layout to give readers a sense of what was happening culturally, politically, economically, and internationally. Since the timelines are embedded, like the map panels mentioned before, the reader is not able to consider these as separate pieces, apart from the regular narrative flow.

HGNs also use the juxtaposition of similar images to call attention to parallels between different events that may be separated by days, months, years, decades, or longer. For example, in *Journey into Mohawk Country*, a panel showing Dutch explorers leaving a Native American shelter is later duplicated as an image showing the same shelter burnt to ashes.<sup>52</sup> The two panels, though separated by many pages, use the same vantage point and panel proportion to link the two panels in readers' minds. Though this technique is not one that was employed with great frequency in the sample, when it is used, it tends to get the reader's attention.

HGNs navigate through time in a way similar to how they navigate through space—by using narration boxes. Narration boxes usually contain a single date or time reference (for example, a box from *Maus* indicates “About a week later, early afternoon”<sup>53</sup>). Every HGN in the study evidenced use of narration boxes. Five HGNs averaged at least one narration box per page. One reason for the prevalence of this technique is that it is relatively unobtrusive in terms of the flow of the historical narration.

**Social Context:** Another important aspect of contextualization is social context. In reading about any given historical event, readers need to know about the social groups involved and the nature of their interaction with each other.

Social context can also be revealed through visual references to culture. In some cases, different groups of people might look similar, dress similarly, and, in general, behave similarly, yet have different family, religious, and traditional beliefs and behaviors. Twelve of the twenty graphic histories contained visual references to cultural context. *Palestine*<sup>54</sup> made the most frequent use of this aspect with multiple references to culture. The least frequent was *Safe Area Gorazde*.<sup>55</sup> Both graphic histories are written and drawn by Joe Sacco, and both focus on largely Muslim populations. When reading the two, however, it becomes clear that in *Palestine*,<sup>56</sup> variations in Muslim culture in public are emphasized through different styles of head scarves. In *Safe Area Gorazde*,<sup>57</sup> the Serbs and Bosnians are depicted as coexisting so well for so long because they seemed to keep their individual cultural traditions and religious observances in the private sphere. Visual references to cultural context were present in over half of the HGNs, and use within those HGNs was present if not constant.

In social contextualization, the multimodal nature of graphic histories allows for information about ethnicity and culture to be conveyed visually, again, without having to stop the narrative flow. On the one hand, this might allow readers to plunge more deeply into the argument and engage with information from photographs, charts, and other visual means of expression. On the other hand, it might be that readers carried along by the narrative might not stop to consider critically what they are reading. Research is needed to determine how readers engage with social contextualization in HGNs as opposed to conventional texts.

Overall, HGNs seem to offer a wide range of robust opportunities for students to engage in contextualization, across the five subcategories.

### *Sourcing*

Sourcing involves understanding a document in terms of the opinions, positioning, perceived trustworthiness, and context of that author. To describe what HGNs have to offer the high school student in terms of sourcing, this study considered two subcategories: the use of embedded documents, and sourcing through explanatory notes.

**Embedded Documents:** Historians make a distinction between primary sources—documents written at the time of the event by a person who had some sort of first-hand knowledge—and secondary sources, which include history textbooks and other summaries of events written at a later point in time. As was discussed regarding embedded maps, HGNs have the potential to embed primary sources (such as letters, documents, eyewitness accounts) into the narrative so that they are more salient for readers and, thus, more likely to be read. Although history textbooks often

include primary source documents, they frequently appear in sidebars that students can easily skip.

As a category, sourcing offered fewer distinct affordances than contextualization. The most powerful examples of affordances that the quantitative coding revealed were in the extensive use of embedded documents. As with embedded images, maps, and timelines, embedded documents offer students the chance to encounter a document within the narrative flow to which it applies. To then use that document to engage in sourcing, the reader would have to derive from that document information that would support its veracity; clarify the motivations, perspectives, beliefs, and circumstances of the author; and contrast that information with other sources. While there were HGNs that provided that affordance, they did not do so in a way that was different from how a conventional text would do so.

Though sourcing is not a very rich category in terms of number of opportunities, or in terms of embedded documents, the opportunities described above suggest largely unrealized potential.

### *Corroboration*

Wineburg defines corroboration as checking the details of accounts against each other before accepting them as plausible or likely.<sup>58</sup> Corroboration entails employing intertextual links to determine validity in a historical argument. This analysis considered only intertextual links within each HGN, though in some instances, two or more HGNs were dealing with the same historical topic (*Safe Area Gorazde*<sup>59</sup> and *Fax from Sarajevo*,<sup>60</sup> for example, both deal with the Bosnian War) and so could be used in tandem for students to investigate corroboration. In considering corroboration within HGNs, this analysis considers two subcategories: parallel accounts and collaborative reports.

Parallel Accounts: An HGN has the potential to combine different accounts of the same event by giving the reader visual cues of whose account is being presented at any given time. For example, Joe Sacco's work employs images of the speaker's head with a distinctive lettering style identifying them beneath to signal to the reader that we are about to follow this person's account of a particular event. Of the twenty HGNs analyzed, eight used parallel accounts. Quantitative coding revealed that opportunities in parallel accounts and collaborative reports were far less common than opportunities in contextualization, but were still present.

## **Implications for Teaching and Further Research**

HGNs offer rich and varied affordances for high school history teachers and their students to engage in contextualization, corroboration, and

sourcing, but more research is necessary to determine how practical and beneficial these affordances are when used in the high school history classroom. For high school history teachers, however, this does not mean abandoning the traditional history textbook in favor of the HGN on the grounds that HGNs are new and multimodal, and so will engage students. What is at issue here is not so much engaging students, but rather what happens in conjunction with students' initial engagement. Classroom practitioners should consider how particular HGNs can help them reach their goals. Just as many history teachers incorporate trade books or primary sources to supplement the traditional textbook—they do not (or perhaps should not) incorporate a trade book simply because it is a good idea overall to include that format in their teaching, but rather because a particular trade book helps help them reach their specific teaching goals.

As we speak of using HGNs in the classroom, we must recognize that we are talking about a range of different kinds of texts. In the corpus of 20 HGNs that this study looked at, there were 5 memoirs, 5 event histories, 3 biographies, 2 primary sources, 2 historical surveys, 2 works of reportage, 1 adaptation of a government report, and 1 personal history. Obviously, as with regular trade books, the teacher must help the students understand the particular opportunities and limitations of each genre. Primary sources, for example, have the advantage of being written in direct proximity to the historical event. This means that descriptions offer a sense of authenticity, and more extensive details provide the historian with more concrete information to seek to corroborate. At the same time, though, readers must cope with a syntax that sometimes needs to be contextualized to be understood, and with a perspective of the event that lacks the overall understanding that comes from the ability to look back on history. Similarly, though memoirs offer both the detail of memory and the perspective of time, they can exhibit the sentimentality and revisionism that comes with a personal view of past history. Teachers must help students consider the genre of the work they are reading.

Using HGNs in the classroom will not necessarily be an easy adjustment for teachers. The very thing that gives HGNs their semiotic power—the multiplicative complexity of integrating text and image—also adds a layer (or perhaps multiple layers) of complexity. At times, teaching high school students involves trying to simplify difficult concepts. In such cases, using HGNs may complicate the concept being taught rather than clarify it. This is a very real potential hazard.

At the same time, once students have a solid grasp on a subject, HGNs could offer an opportunity for teachers to challenge students to engage in contextualization, sourcing, corroboration, and other difficult yet important aspects of what history is really about.

## Notes

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3. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 12.
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10. Wineburg, 73-87.
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## Appendix

**Opportunities for Contextualization, Sourcing, and Corroboration  
Across All HGNs**

Title (page count)	Contextualization		Sourcing		Corroboration	
	Frequency	Density	Frequency	Density	Frequency	Density
<i>Alan's War</i> (336)	247	1.3	30	11.2	-	-
<i>The 9/11 Report</i> (115)	264	.43	-	-	1	115
<i>Mohawk Country</i> (144)	270	.53	1	144	0	-
<i>SDS</i> (208)	422	.49	11	18.9	11	38.7
<i>Safe Area Gorazde</i> (227)	576	.39	15	15.1	46	12.5
<i>History of American Empire</i> (264)	572	.46	132	2	6	44
<i>Long Tack Sam</i> (153)	234	.65	16	9.6	4	38.3
<i>T-Minus</i> (123)	206	.59	68	1.8	7	17.6
<i>Maus</i> (166)	493	.34	7	23.7	1	166
<i>Still I Rise</i> (205)	669	.31	3	68.3	-	-
<i>Unsung Hero</i> (79)	200	.38	15	5.3	3	26.3
<i>Nat Turner</i> (188)	244	.77	6	31.3	-	-
<i>08: Campaign Trail</i> (155)	728	21.3	13	11.9	13	11.9
<i>King</i> (236)	508	.46	51	4.6	3	78.6
<i>Louis Riel</i> (272)	422	.64	13	20.9	1	272
<i>Fax from Sarajevo</i> (180)	214	.84	67	2.7	-	-
<i>Fallout</i> (205)	267	.76	-	29.3	-	-
<i>Houdini</i> (82)	54	1.5	3	27.3	-	-
<i>Palestine</i> (285)	714	.4	9	31.6	34	8.4
<i>Blood upon the Rose</i> (48)	59	.81	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,363</b>	<b>1.73 (mean)</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>25.5 (mean)</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>69.1 (mean)</b>

1. Frequency = total instances.
2. Density = 1 instance per X pages.
3. - indicates null density.