

Monkey King: Journey to the West Lesson Plan 3

Translating Monkey King into Comics

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Overview:

This lesson asks students to compare Lovell’s translation with visual translations of the Monkey King story. The lesson will open with a short introduction on graphic novels and a class activity that asks students to analyze a few panels from *American Born Chinese*. Students will be asked to discuss how the panels illustrate scenes from *Monkey King*. Students then will be assigned a chapter from the day’s reading and will identify a key moment in the chapter. Ultimately, they will create a comic strip that illustrates the moment in the text and will share their artistic decisions with the class.

This lesson is designed to follow the “Examining Translation” lesson and focuses on chapters from the latter half of the novel, but it can be adapted to work for earlier lessons.

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Define key elements of graphic novels.
- Visualize characterization in *Monkey King*.
- Create a short comic strip adapting a scene from *Journey to the West*.

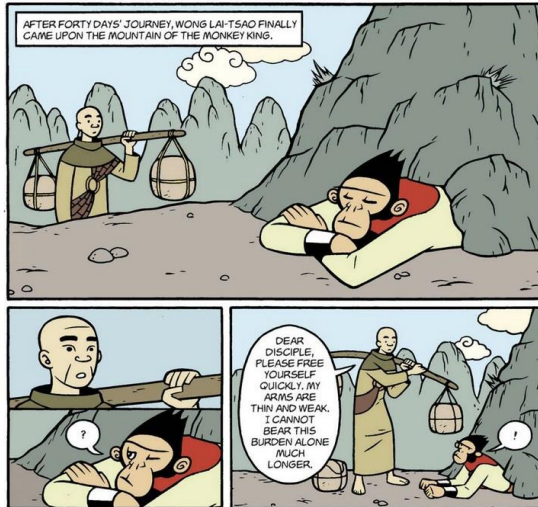
Class Structure:

15 minutes: Reading graphic novels

- Use Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* to introduce a few basic elements of graphic novels. For instance, you might discuss:
 - *Amplification through simplification:*
“Stripping down an image to its essential ‘meaning’” by “focusing on specific details” over others to “amplify that meaning in ways that realistic art can’t” (30).
 - *Closure:*
the term for how the subtractive nature of comics requires readers to take in panel fragments and make a narrative whole out of them (63, 85).

15 minutes: Compare *Journey to the West* to *American Born Chinese*

- Present students with the following two pages from *American Born Chinese*, chosen to demonstrate the flexibility students will have designing their panels:



- With each, ask students the following questions:
 - What immediately stands out to you when looking at the page? Which panels draw your attention first?
 - Why do these elements stand out to you?
 - What is the mood and the tone of the image? How do you know?
- Ask students to analyze the samples with the following questions:
 - What ideas from *Journey to the West* did Yang emphasize in his panels?
 - What do we learn about characters through graphic novels (through narration, dialogue, character design, font choice)?
 - What visual elements seem most important to you?
 - What can we learn about characters through graphic novels (through narration, dialogue, character design, font choice, etc.)? What elements seem important to you? Why do those elements stick out to you?
 - What do we gain or lose by encountering Monkey King through a visual format rather than a textual one?

10 minutes: Small group activity

- Divide the class into small groups of 2-3 and assign a scene from the day's reading to groups.
- Introduce the day's activity: Students should select key moments from their assigned chapter that they feel best represents the 'heart' of that chapter (that is, the moments that best relay the chapter's content and themes).

15 minutes: Comic Sketching

- Students work in their groups to sketch out what they consider to be the most important moments in their assigned chapter.
- Students should produce at least one panel of their chosen scene.
- (Optional): For an additional exploration into how characterization and comics are connected, students can use the [Character Design Worksheet](#) to design the characters for their panel.

20 minutes: Discussion

- Students share their work to a Google doc displayed on the classroom projector. Alternatively, students can post to an LMS discussion board.
- Questions:
 - Which passage did you choose?
 - How did your group choose your passage?
 - What did your group find most important in the passage?
 - How did you represent those choices in your illustration?
 - What are the differences between how groups draw certain characters and scenarios?

Sources:

Dong, Lan. "Reimagining the Monkey King in Comics: Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*." In *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature*, edited by Julia Mickenberg and Lynne Vallone, 2011, pp. 231-251.

Lovell, Julia, translator. *Monkey King: Journey to the West*. By Wu Cheng'en. Penguin, 2021.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*. Northampton, MA: Kitchen Sink Press, 1993.

Yang, Gene Luen and Lark, Pien, *American Born Chinese*. New York, First Second, 2006.