NOISE: Comic Art for the Curriculum
Lesson Plan
Maeve Clancy *September 2011*

Objective:
Use comics as a tool to engage teenagers in learning for a variety of subjects

What makes comics suitable for learning across the Curriculum/ How can they be used with the Curriculum?

•Young people are open to reading and using comics

•Comics use techniques of storytelling and explanation that are also common to film and animation
These are familiar to young people: they watch multiple films, videos and clips online every day. Visual storytelling may come easier to them than it does to many adults as a result.

• All of the elements of a comic make them ideal tools for explaining a topic in a way that is very easy to understand to people of all learning styles

•The universal appeal of comics also means that people will read a comic about something while they would never even begin to read an article on the same subject.

• Comics can break down a topic into a **verbal**, **visual** and **diagramatic** explanation, so it can be used in many of the secondary school subjects. For example:

- **Geography and Science** would use a lot of diagrams, perhaps maps and potentially a narrator to add interest
- **History** a combination of word and visuals, potentially dialogue as well as explanatory text
- **English and Art History** would promote the sophisticated use of tone and pacing in telling a story with words, dialogue and visuals

Students will learn to:

• Think visually about a school subject
• Use research skills to prepare assignments
• Complete their work/assignments in a way that engages them and encourages them to think independently
• Create work from from ideas and designs to storyboard and completion of a finished comic
• Communicate their ideas through a new medium
• Combine research and their imagination to create comics that cover their coursework
• Create work that can be used again by the teacher to introduce topics to later students
• Approach subjects in a fresh visual way
• Gain an enthusiasm for exploring subject assignments through comics
• Use existing comics as inspiration

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Activity:

Choose **one** brief from the list below:

History- Explain the events of the 1916 Rising in a two page comic

Geography- Explain how U-shaped Valleys are formed

Science-   • Choose one major scientific discovery and explain how it came about
            • Explain the Photo Electric Effect

Art History - Write a two page comic biography of any artist from Art History

English- Chose any Irish poet and discuss in comic form how their life influences/influenced their work

You will find with this Lesson Plan the following documents for use in this activity:

01- Character/Cast sheet
02- Layout/background sheet
03- Storyboard document
04- Comic document

Time all of the sections of this activity:

i Sketch/Design the character(s) or cast for your comic   **3 minutes**

(These drawings can be stick figures, cartoons or figurative drawing)

Are they people, animals? Do they talk to each other in the comic or is there a 'voiceover' panel text? Do you have a narrator-type character who explains what is going on to the reader? A scientist with a clipboard? Yeats taking us on a tour of Innisfree? The possibilities with comics are endless, so encourage the students to let their imaginations run free.

ii Sketch/Design the layouts or backgrounds   **3 minutes**

Where is the action situated? City or country? Is the location relevant? If the comic is about a geographical feature, the backgrounds are the main character. Setting such a short time frame stops people from hesitating and they draw the first thing they can think of. This is ideal, as a comic works well with simple, lively designs. How do we see the layouts- straight on, from

above, through a keyhole? Think about how we see backgrounds in film: the camerawork is often very creative and we can use many of those tricks in comics. Add layers to the drawings to give some depth to the setting.

iii Use the Storyboard doc to sketch out your story roughly in 6 panels**5 minutes**

Quickly put in your characters as stick figures, your backgrounds/layouts as simply as possible. Over the 6 panels of the Storyboard, you need to get your comic across. Reducing it to such a short sequence forces you to be sparing with the detail and so you focus on the main point of your comic.

Include dialogue and other text here

Once drawn, go back over the Storyboard with a red marker and make a note of some sections where you may want to make several panels from the one storyboard image. For example, you have one character pointing a gun at another in the storyboard for a history comic. It's very likely that we will need a wideshot and a close up in the final piece, so we draw one frame around the entire image and a second around the hand holding the gun, labelling them 1 and 2. Thus we know when we go to draw our final comic that we want to make 2 panels from that one image.

iv Use the Comic Document to draw in your simple rough comic   **9 minutes**

You decide how the panels are to be ordered. They can be any size or shape and the way that you use them influences the pace that the reader reads the comic. You can emphasise more important images with a close-up or establish the setting of the comic with a large wideshot at the beginning. The easiest way to understand this is to look at a few different comics and see how they lay out their panels.

Add characters, dialogue, speech bubbles, explanatory text and background.
Finish your comic and pass it to your neighbour. Do they understand it? Do you understand theirs? Comics are a way of communicating ideas and learning through telling a story. It's worth testing your comic on the person next to you to see if you are communicating to them what you had hoped. Take in their suggestions and make changes where you see fit.

* NOTES
When setting a comic project in your own subject, give the assignment with an emphasis on what you are looking for, ie: for Geography a comic page on the formation of Ox Bow Lakes would include a lot of diagramatic explanation. Is this what you're looking for? If you want a more discursive approach, stipulate that the students include a character/narrator as part of their comic. For example the explanation of the formation of a geographical feature could be 'presented' by their comic character in the format of a news broadcast, or as a scientist with a clipboard.

Lesson Plan designed by Maeve Clancy, www.maeveclancy.com

The above is timed out for a single class whirlwind introduction to making a comic. It can be worth going through the entire process very quickly in one class, in order for the student to see how that works. You can then give them a comic story assignment to complete over a longer timeframe. The stages should remain the same, the above activity is expandable from a simple comic to a much more detailed and involved study of a subject.

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Ways the Activity could be expanded:

As I mentioned above, this activity is designed so that it can be used to suit the time and inclination of the teacher. The longer you leave for each of the four stages, the more detailed and finished the resulting comic will be.

You can make a project in which each person's comic is one part of a larger study of a topic. For example: a brief to research one of the Renaissance artists and make a two page comic about them could be used within the larger context of study of that period in Art History. The finished comics can be reproduced for the entire class to use or could be printed as a resource for the Art History department in future years.

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Cross Curricular Links:

These Activities can be used in many subjects. I'm sure that there are many uses here that I have not mentioned, being unfamiliar with many of them. The skills utilised in producing a comic on a topic can be applied to any subject, aiding training in research, fitting together of generated ideas and the production of a finished piece of work.