KAPOW! SUPERPOWER YOUR SCHOOL-AGE LANGUAGE TREATMENT WITH COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

Summer Loehr, MA CCC-SLP Monterey County Office of Education | Marybeth Sterner, MS CCC-SLP Governor Mifflin School District | Jonathan Rogers, MA CCC-SLP University of Memphis

INTRODUCTION

School-based SLPS often need to address multiple goals, reading levels, and deficit areas in a single group. Comic books, graphic novels, and other graphic narratives can be a versatile and easy to implement tool to engage students, meet diverse group needs, offer visual supports, and address narrative, semantic, and pragmatic goals.

WHY COMICS?

Why are comics good for students?
Students may see comic books as easier and more fun to read than a traditional novel (Brenna, 2013; Lam, 2011). Further, students with reading difficulties will be able to **read books at their Lexile level** without feeling embarrassed or patronized (Lam, 2011).

Why are comics good for SLPs?
Graphic narratives are very information-dense, with text focusing on dialogue and exposition, with the setting, plot, and character development driven by pictures. This density allows several pages to be read quickly during the session, with rich opportunity for questions and discussion. Graphic narratives' relative brevity lets them be quickly applied to graphic organizers to support comprehension, an approach with a strong evidence base (Pyle et al., 2017).

PRAGMATICS AND INFERENCES

Each new panel shows an action and/or reaction, giving the clinician many opportunities to ask questions. For instance:

- What does Princess Amira think about Princess Sadie's singing?
- How do we know Emily is very excited about going to the seaside? Does Reggie feel the same way? How do you know?
- How do the speech bubbles change based on how Reggie and Emily are feeling?
- Does Reggie like it when Emily yells?
- What do you think will happen next?

NARRATIVES

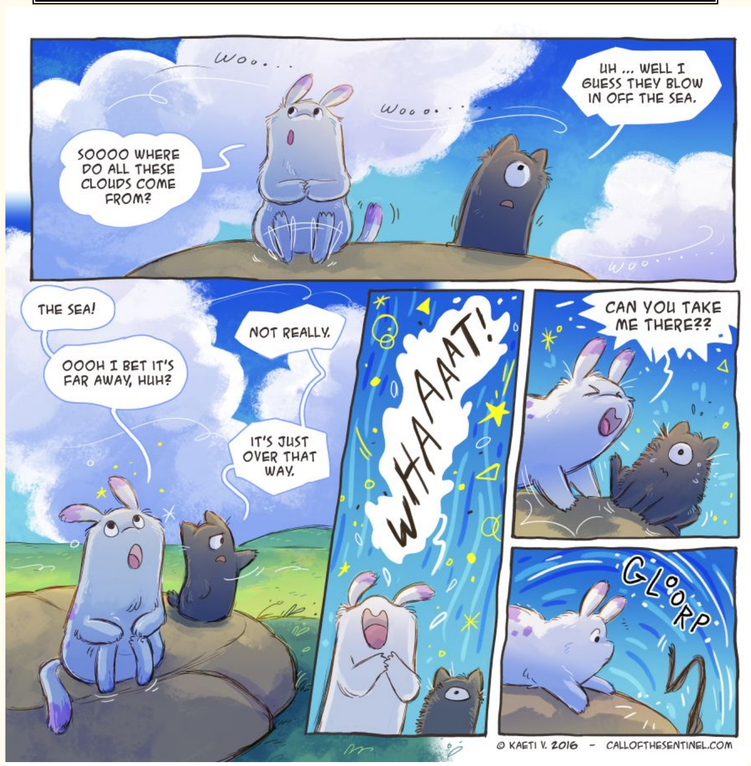
Story grammar tools can be used across multiple chapters or entire books, of course. But for a time-constrained school SLP, using only one or two pages allows for efficient use of treatment time. We can apply the "somebody/ wanted/ but/ so/ at last" story grammar tool to the comics "Princess Princess" and "Call of the Sentinel," (both reprinted with author permission) ("SHARE2empower," 2018).

PRINCESS PRINCESS

On an early page of "Princess Princess," **Somebody**, (Princess Amira) **wanted** to rescue Princess Sadie, **but** Princess Sadie was in a tower and didn't think Amira would be able to do it. **So** Amira told Sadie why she was different from the other would-be rescuers. **At last** (on the following page) Sadie consented to being rescued.

CALL OF THE SENTINEL

In "Call of the Sentinel," **somebody** (Emily) **wanted** to go to the beach, **but** she didn't know how to get there, **so** she asked Reggie to take her and **at last** he did.



NON-LITERAL LANGUAGE

Non-literal language like metaphor, idioms, puns, and sarcasm can be addressed in joke-heavy comic strips, like those found in Sunday newspapers. Graphic novels aimed at middle school and up, like *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* (Reeder & Montclare, 2016) are rich with sarcasm. Squirrel Girl comics feature frequent wordplay as she talks her way out of fights with the Marvel universe's biggest baddies (North & Henderson, 2016).

FINDING COMIC BOOKS

Start with some reliable sources:

- *School Library Journal* reviews comics on its "Good Comics for Kids" blog
- NPR has robust graphic novel coverage, including coverage of the nationwide Free Comic Book Day event held annually on the first Saturday of May ("Free Comic Book Day 2018," n.d.).
- Scholastic publishes a number of wonderful middle-grade graphic novels, particularly under their Graphix imprint.
- Many popular cartoons, like *My Little Pony*, *Teen Titans Go*, *Spongebob*, and *Adventure Time* also put out comic books featuring the same characters having new adventures.

Comics Content Ratings

- School-appropriate comic books will be labeled **"all ages,"** the comic book equivalent of a "G" movie rating.
- If you have time to familiarize yourself with the content, books labeled **"T"** for "teen" may be school appropriate for middle school or older students; it is roughly the equivalent of a "PG" or "PG-13" rating.
- **T+** may be suitable for some young adults, but **M** is for mature audiences only.

AUTHORS' NOTES

Special thanks to Lori Fromowitz, CCC-SLP for her tireless support and clinical expertise.

Thank you to the authors at Callofthesentinel.com and StrangelyKatie.com/PrincessPrincess for allowing reprints of their work.

Disclosures: Summer Loehr maintains and has a financial interest in the blog SLBeeps.com

References and Recommended Reading:
SLBeeps.com/asha18
or scan QR code