



Cast Away on the Letter A

CCSS-aligned Lesson Plan & Teacher's Guide

TOON GRAPHICS FOR VISUAL READERS



Cast Away on the Letter A:

A Philemon Adventure

by Fred

A TOON Graphic

ISBN: 978-1-935179-63-4

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THE TOON EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH TEAM:

Hsin Yu Chao, an illustrator and comic artist in her native Taiwan, is currently pursuing a master's degree in Arts Administration at Teachers College, Columbia University. Chao has worked for numerous galleries as well as for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Sasha Steinberg, who holds a BA in Comparative Literature from Vassar College and an MFA in Cartooning from the Center for Cartoon Studies, was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to study political art in Russia.

TOON Graphics are comics and visual narratives that bring the text to life in a way that captures young readers' imaginations and makes them want to read on—and read more.

The very economy of comic books necessitates the use of a reader's imaginative powers. In comics, the images often imply rather than tell outright. Readers must learn to make connections between events to complete the narrative, helping them build their ability to visualize and to make "mental maps." A comic book also gives readers a great deal of visual context that can be used to investigate the thinking behind the characters' choices.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE ARTIST'S CHOICES

Look carefully at the artwork: it offers a subtext that at first is sensed only on a subliminal level by the reader and encourages rereading. It creates a sense

of continuity for the action, and it can tell you about the art, architecture, and clothing of a specific time period. It may present the atmosphere, landscape, and flora and fauna of another time or of another part of the world.

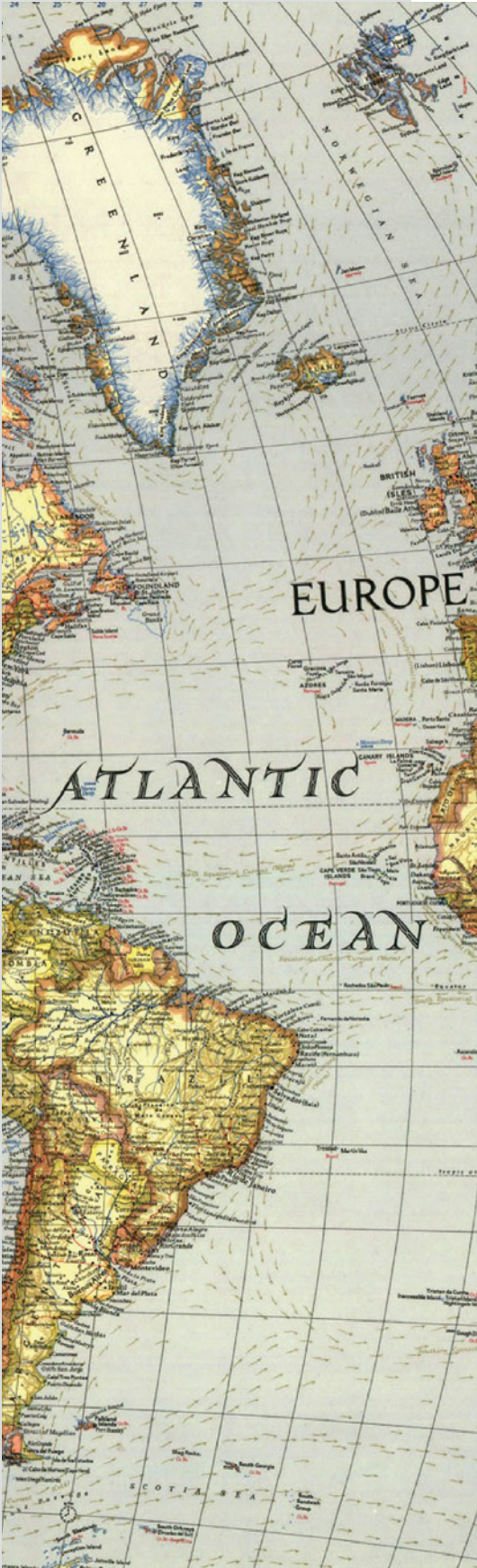
Facial expressions and body language reveal subtle aspects of characters' personalities beyond what can be expressed by words.

READ AND REREAD!

Readers can compare comic book artists' styles and evaluate how different authors get their point across in different ways. In investigating the author's choices, a young reader begins to gain a sense of how all literary and art forms can be used to convey the author's central ideas.

The world of TOON Books, TOON Graphics, and of comic book art is rich and varied. Making meaning out of reading with the aid of visuals may be the best way to become a lifelong reader, one who knows how to read for pleasure and for information—a reader who *LOVES* to read.





LITERACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In addition to providing students with the tools to master verbal literacy, each TOON Graphic offers a unique focus on visual learning. The 21st Century has seen a shift where literacy has been redefined to include visual literacy. Our unique lesson plans and teacher's guides help instructors and students alike develop the vocabulary and framework necessary to discuss visual expressions, structure, and meaning in the classroom.

For schools that follow the ELA Common Core, TOON Graphics lesson plans offer examples of how to best utilize our books to satisfy a full range of state standards. The Common Core's learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade, and were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live. Though this book can be used in any grade, we focused this lesson plan on state standards for grades 4 and 5. Questions included in this guide fulfill the following standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Reading: Literature (RL).4-5.1-10
Students build skills in reading and comprehending literature independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Reading: Informational Text (RI).4-5.4, 9
Students determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text. Students integrate information from several texts in order to speak knowledgeably on a subject.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Speaking and Listening (SL).4-5.1
Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

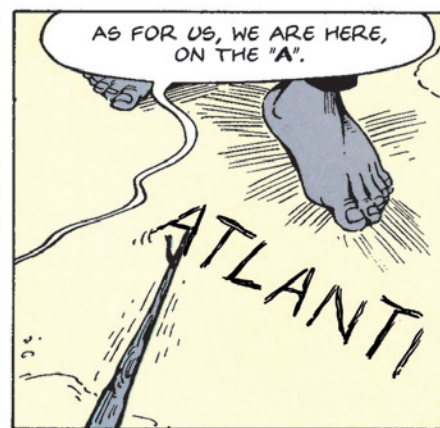
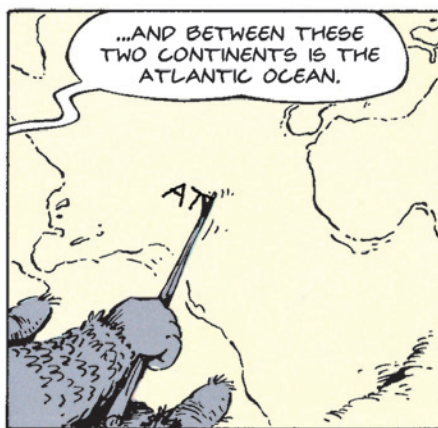
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Speaking and Listening (SL).4-5.2
Students summarize a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Speaking and Listening (SL).4-5.4
Students report on a topic or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes.

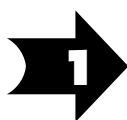
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.1
Students write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.2
Students write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.7
Students conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.



- Black = potential questions for course plans
- Gray = feedback for teachers.



Verbal Expression

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1
Refer to details and example in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3
Describe in depth a character, setting or event in a story, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1
Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text, including how the characters in a story or drama respond to challenges; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3
Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

**The standards listed on the right are fulfilled by every question in this section. Additional standards may be listed in the gray sidebar on the left for particular units listed below.*

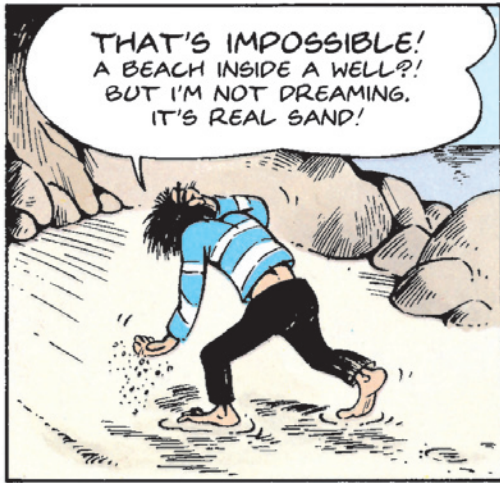
Characters



- ◆ Describe the personality of each character. Many of them fall into certain patterns of response and behavior, saying the same words again and again, or adopting the same attitudes. Why do you think they do that?

Philemon repeats “that’s impossible,” speaking mostly in the form of a question; Bartholomew repeats “you can’t say I haven’t” several times (pages 21-22), trying to sort out the logic of the island and re-define for himself what is “real”; Friday manages to see the negative in every situation, and constantly interrupts with “bah” and “phooey”; Philemon’s Father Hector is always shouting and his donkey Anatole provides classic side commentary (not unlike Friday, the other four-legged creature in the story). Ask students to use biographical information we have about these characters (along with environmental factors) to guess why they respond in these ways again and again.

Words and Metaphors



CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

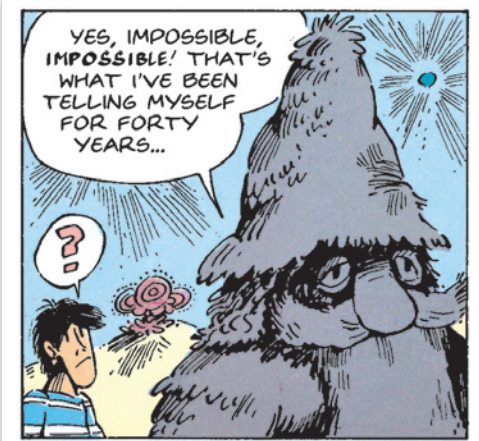
◆ What does “impossible” mean? Why is this word used so frequently in the story? In what ways is it important? Think about the phrase “seeing is believing.” Do you believe that this is true? In what ways is the idea that “seeing is believing” related to the content of the story and the reactions of the characters?

◆ What does it mean for something to be “real” or to “exist”? Explain what you usually mean when you say that something “really exists.”

Have students look at Bartholomew’s assertion on page 24 that “since this island doesn’t exist, no one can see it” and on page 29 that “on an island that doesn’t exist, anything can exist!” Ask students to try to explain this contradiction in logic. How can someone even be in a place that “doesn’t exist”?

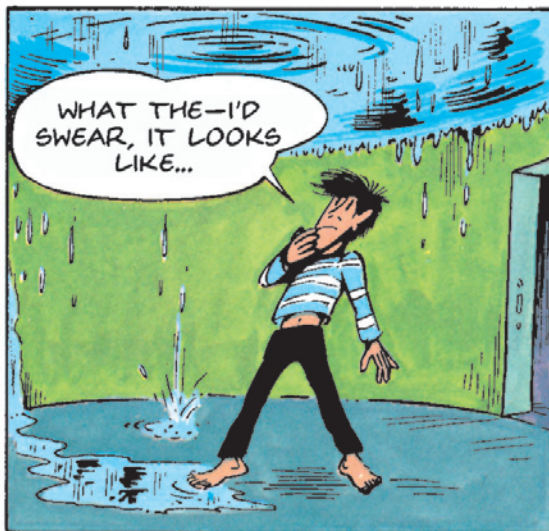
◆ Who defines what is “possible” and what is “impossible” in this story? Are the “impossible” things truly “impossible”? Or are they just “unimaginable”? What is the difference?

Have students look at the misunderstanding that appears on page 23 (Bartholomew misunderstands what Philemon is referring to when he says “but that’s impossible”). In this story everyone has his or her own sense of what is possible, based largely on past experience.



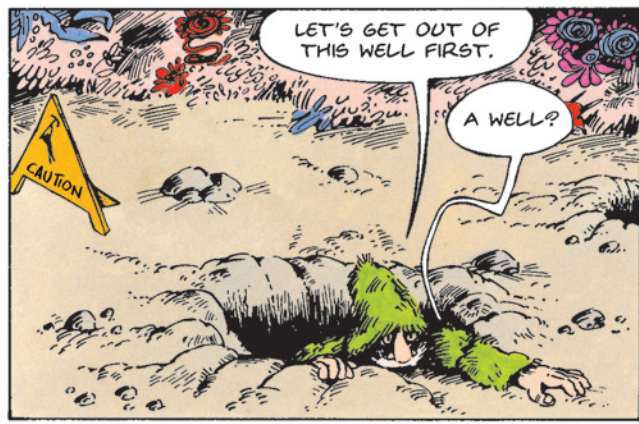
◆ Find some verbal expressions that are related to the word “impossible.” Try to explain the nuanced differences in their meanings.

See, for example: “berserk” (page 12), “dreaming” (page 18), “amazing” (page 19), “crazy” (page 19), “doesn’t exist” (page 24), “unbelievable” (page 34), “serious” (page 42).



◆ What is the role of “water” in this story? How many instances can you find when water (or something connected to water) propels the action of the story? What do you think the author wants us to see about water? Are we supposed to look at it in a new way?

Note that the entire story unfolds because Philemon's father Hector can't get water from the pump (page 11). As the story proceeds, water ferries Philemon into stranger and stranger environments, until finally, on page 41 (where it appears in a pool on the ceiling), it brings him back to the beginning. Ask students to reflect on their own feelings about water. Does it seem magical? Why might Fred, the author, have given it such importance in this story?



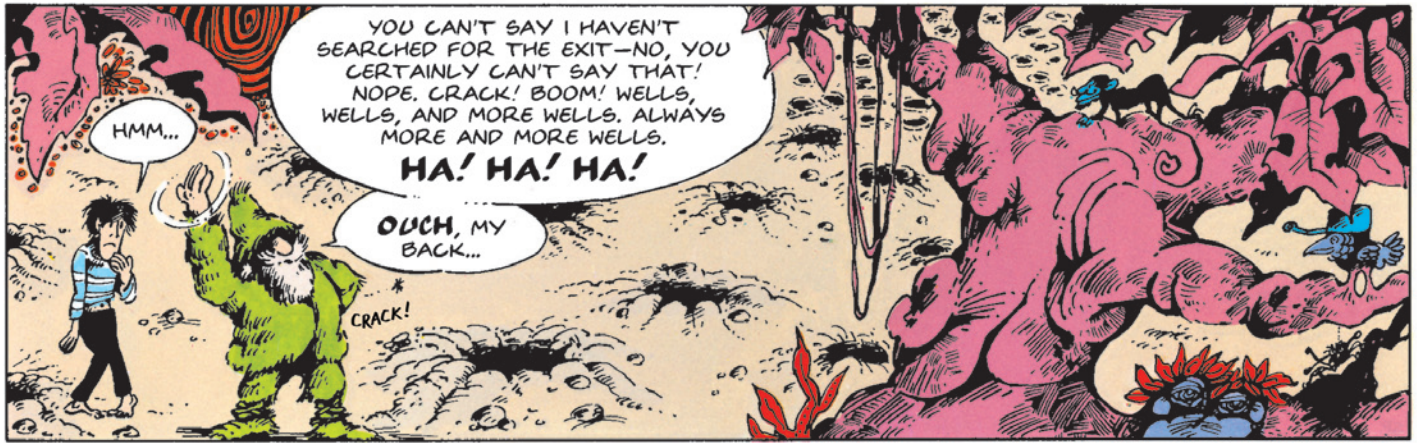
- ◆ What does a “well” do in the story? How would you describe the physics of the wells? How does Philemon travel through them?

Ask students to describe how gravity works in the wells (see pages 15, 29 and 41). Have students compare Philemon's two experiences in the well (at the beginning and at the end). Does the same well connect to different places in the Atlantic Ocean?

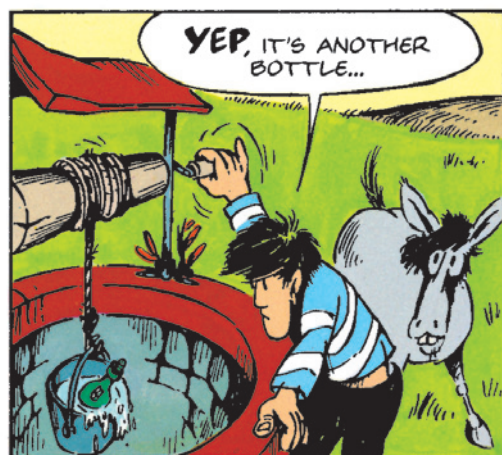
- ◆ Compare the well with other time- and space-travel devices (from literature and film). Which do you think are the most “believable,” and why?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4-5.9
Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics and patterns of events in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.

In addition to fictional references, introduce students to the idea of a black hole. Do they see any similarities between black holes and Philemon's well? All of this may be an opportunity to discuss multi-universe theories (bubble universe theory, porous universe; the theory of universes with different physical constants).



- ◆ What is the function of the “bottle” in the story? What is in the bottle(s)? Why do the bottles grow on a bottle-tree? What do you think they author is trying to say through the metaphor of the “bottle”?



Throughout, bottles are a kind of life-saving device, but also a means of transportation. Along with the messages in the bottles (page 13) and the bottle tree (page 23), we are even introduced to a ship in the bottle (page 32). In the world of the islands, bottles are a way to get places, and also a form of protection (see the whirlpool incident on page 38). This tells us something about the aquatic nature of that world, where many things have adapted to thrive in water. Ask students to find other places in the story where water plays a determining role in the surreal environment (see, for example, page 28, where Bartholomew reveals that his entire house is built, in a sense, through watering).



Visual Expression

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7
Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.5
Explain major differences between poems, drama, prose, etc. Refer to the structural elements when writing or speaking about a text.

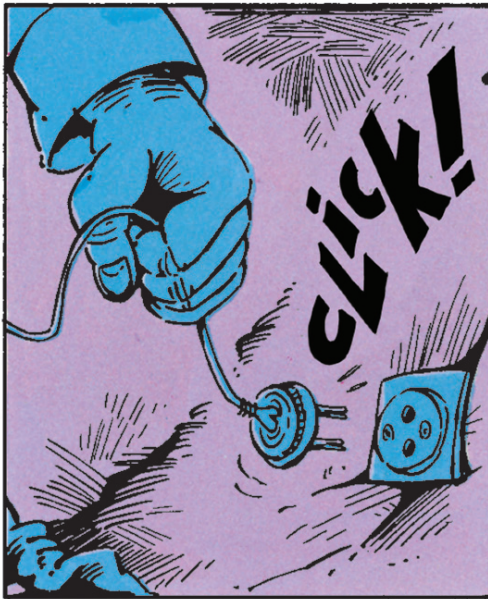
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.4
Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text. (Here, art and comics vocabulary)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7
Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5
Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, stanzas, etc. fits together to provide the overall structure of a story.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4
Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text. (Here, art and comics vocabulary)

**The standards listed on the right are fulfilled by every question in this section. Additional standards may be listed in the gray sidebar on the left for particular units listed below.*



Colors

- ◆ Make a list of the dominant colors on each page. You will notice that the colors transition consistently as the book progresses. Why do you think the author/artist did this? Do the colors match the atmosphere of the story and environment?

Page 11 is largely blue, pages 12-13 are green, pages 15-19 are light blue, page 20 introduces red, page 25 transitions to a more yellow composition, page 31 pairs this yellow with deep purple; page 36 returns to blue, and pages 40-41 transition back to lighter colors and, ultimately, “realistic shades.” Ask students to think about our cultural or personal associations with certain colors. Is there a connection between color and emotion?

- ◆ Look carefully at the color composition from pages 15-19. If you were the artist of this book, what color(s) would you choose to depict this dramatic scene? Why?

Word Balloons and Lettering

- ◆ The signature of the artist “Fred” is hidden on many pages. Try to find all of them! Why did he place his signature on these pages?

Talk about how this story was originally serialized in the French comics magazine *Pilote*. Can the students figure out where the story was originally broken into chapters? Ask them to imagine what it was like to wait for the next issue in the story. Would there have been exciting cliff-hangers?



- ◆ Look at the various kinds of word balloons in this book. Note that there are many different shapes, sizes, textures, etc. How do these different shapes and styles make you feel? How do they fit into the story? What do they tell you?

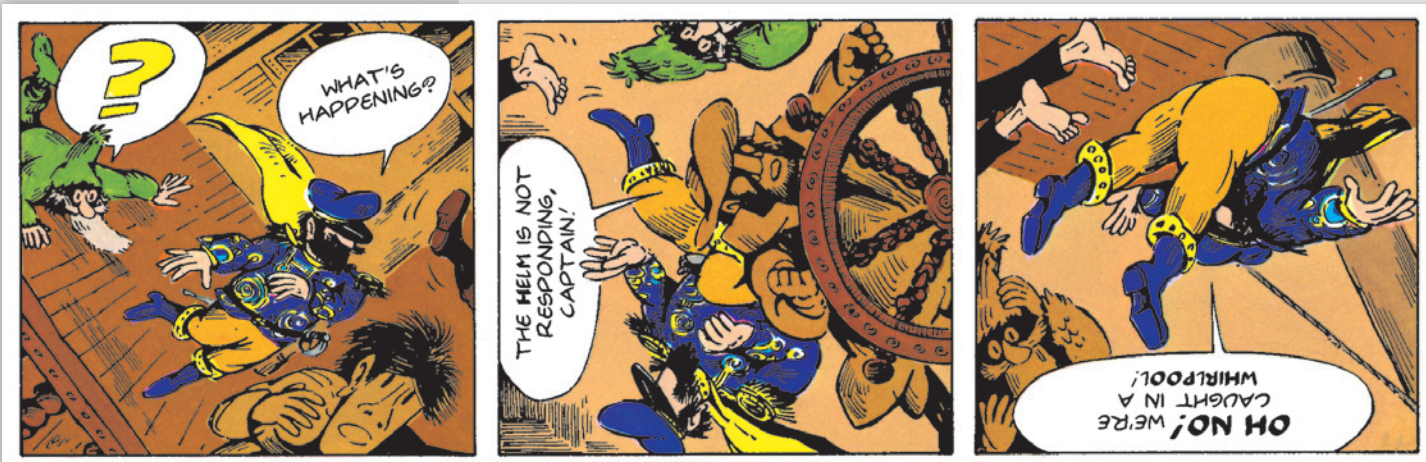


On page 11, panel 8, Philemon's father is out of the panel so his word balloon has a tail that guides reader's eyes to the edge of the page and out of the panel. On page 24, Bartholomew's unclosed word balloon indicates his endless stream of curse words. On page 29, there are cloud-shaped memory balloons that become panels.

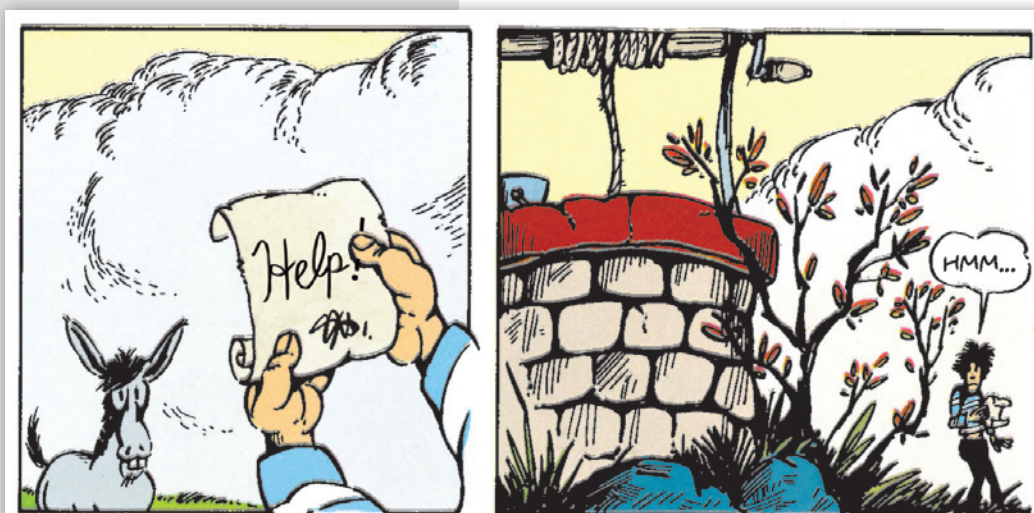
- ◆ Find some different examples of the visual expressions enclosed in the word balloons, like cursing or explanatory images. Why do you think the artist chose to present language with pictures instead of words in those instances. In what ways do the pictures resonate with the illustrations?

The best examples of this are on page 29, where the word balloons become panels, and throughout the book (pages 11-12, 15, 20-22, 24-25, 28-29, 34), where curse words are illustrated in the word balloons.

- ◆ On pages 11 and 38, there are rotated panels and upside-down word balloons. On page 29, word balloons become panels. Examine these and discuss the artistic choice. Why did the artist represent the story in this way? Note that these panels follow the same proportions, even though they have an unusual appearance.

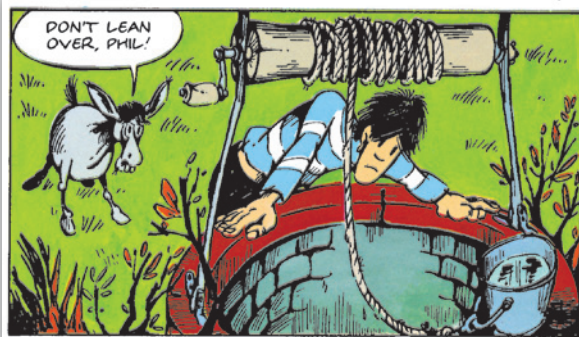


- ◆ Look at the sound effects. Note that they vary in both size and texture. Is there any particular one you like the best? Why? Note that some sound effects are included in the word balloons, and some are imposed over the image. Do you think the characters actually say these as words? Or are they were included for some other reason? If so, why?



Composition

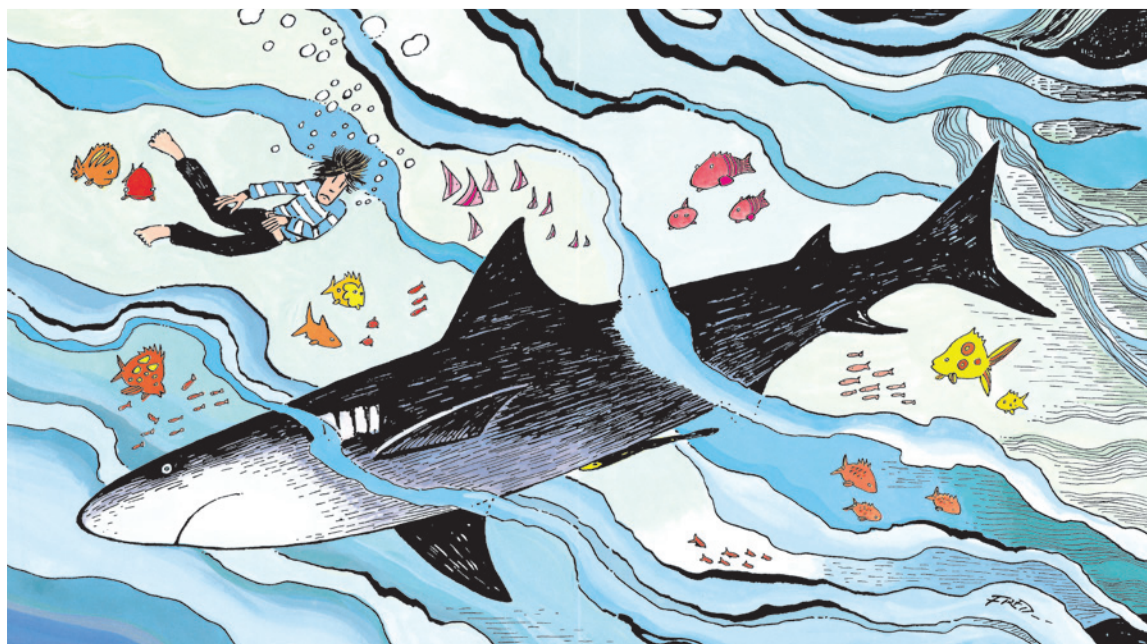
- ◆ Find places where the artist uses a “close-up shot” to tell the story (pages 11 and 13, for example)? Why does he do that? Where does he use far-away, distant, or “long lens shots”? Why does he use those? How do these things affect the story, and how do they make you feel as a reader?



◆ Examine the well scenes in pages 12-15. Compare the “shots” from above with the “shots” from below (page 13, panels 9 and 5). What do you think of these 2 panels? How do the different angles effect your perception of the well?

◆ Pages 16-17 are a huge single panel, or “double-page spread.” Do you think it was necessary for the artist to take up so much space for this scene? Why or why not? Where else does the artist do this? Why?

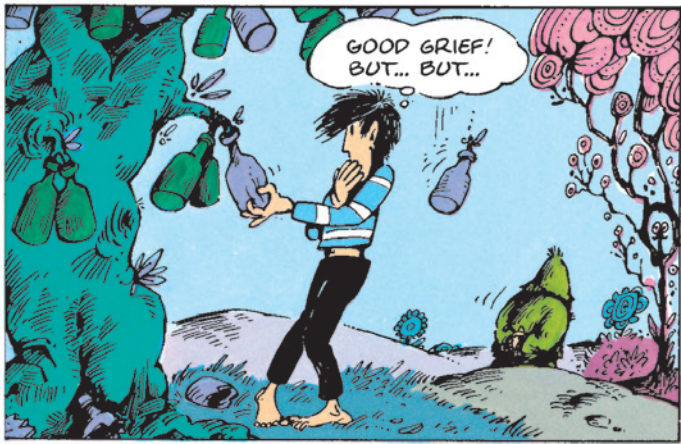
On this page, Philemon is facing right (following the left-to-right direction of the story and the book), while the shark is facing left. Perhaps “facing right” in the book signifies that the character is getting out of a situation or place while “facing left” indicates that they are entering. Are there other examples of this? (Look at page 15).



◆ Look carefully at the lines and make note of their different strokes. How does the artist utilize the width and the texture of the lines to make different expressions?

The line work of the water is soft and gentle but at the same time bold and thick; the lines of the shark are certain and solid, and the line work for Philemon is animated and clean.

◆ Look at the size of the shark in comparison to Philemon. Is this the actual size of a shark? If not, why is it so big? Is the shark drawn in a realistic way? How about the fishes? Why did the artist draw them in this way?



CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text, including how the characters in a story or drama respond to challenges; summarize the text.

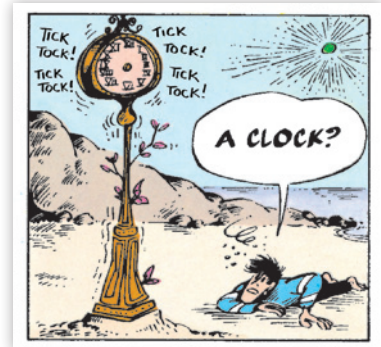
Setting

- ◆ Make note of all the strange plants in the book. What do they look like? How do they support the story?

The plants on the islands fall into one of two categories: a fusion of animals and plants, or a combination of inorganic objects with organic matter. The plants help set the stage for the action. In some cases, they contribute to the plot of the fantasy adventure; in other cases they provide unique background details that help with world-building and context clues.

- ◆ On page 19, a clock-tree appears from the ground. What is the purpose of this scene? Refer to the text as well. Why does the clock explode? What does is the role of “time” in this story?

Note that the speed of time on the A is different from time on the world where Philemon and his father live. Time is distorted, but has it been “exploded”? Ask student if they think that the clock is really “broken” after the explosion. Even though the clock-function is destroyed, it still functions as a plant, after all. But how can Philemon tell the clock is a plant? Make sure to note the punny “time-bomb” joke here!



Further Research

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4-5.9
Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.1
Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.2
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.7
Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.6
Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6
Describe how a narrator’s or speaker’s point of view influences how events are described.

- ◆ Choose one of the major characters (Philemon, Bartholomew, Friday). Examine this character throughout the course of the book. How do they change or develop? What external forces (including other characters) contribute to these changes? Summarize your findings in a written report.

- ◆ Choose one of the entries in the index (pages 44-45) and expand on it with your own research project. Do you think that the author, Fred, is intentionally referencing these external works in the story? Why or why not? Why do authors often reference other works, or borrow ideas from other writers and artists? Does it enrich your reading experience to research these references? Explain why in a written report.