



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

© 2015 TOON Books, all rights reserved

www.TOON-BOOKS.com

Please get in touch with your suggestions at

mail@TOON-books.com

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.

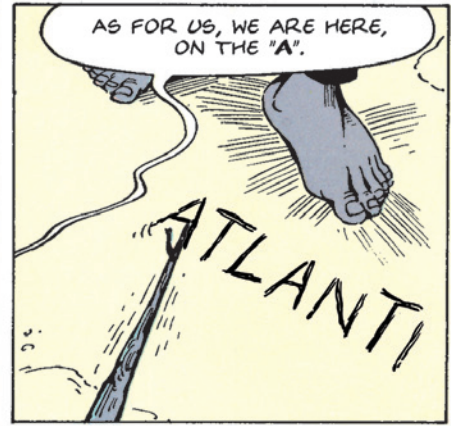
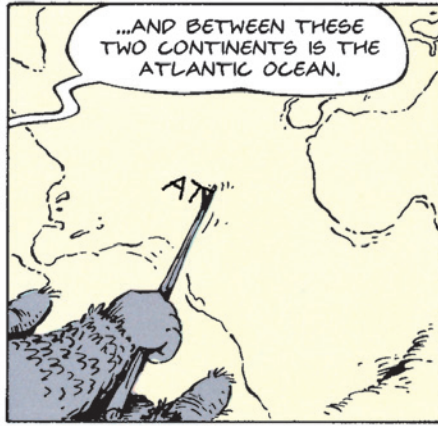
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Speaking and Listening (SL).4-5.2
Students summarize a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

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.

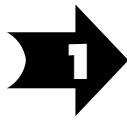
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.1
Students write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

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.*

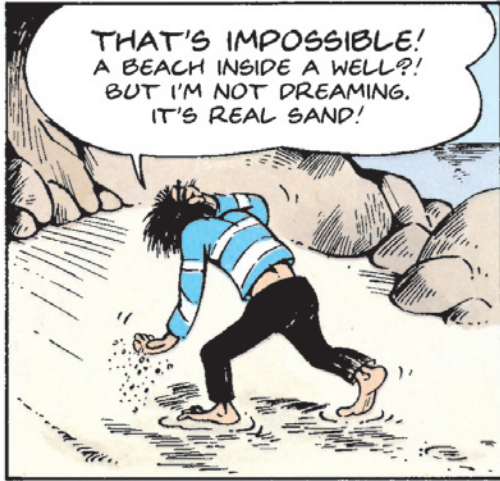
Characters



- ◆ 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.

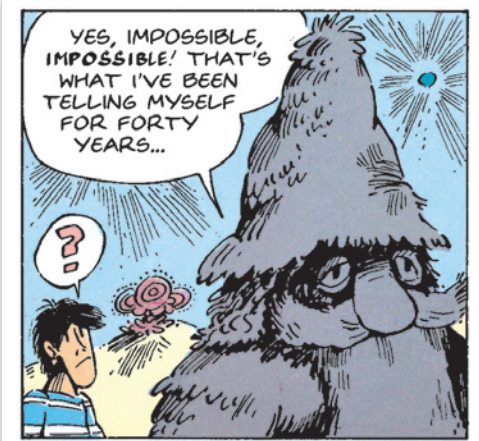
◆ What does “impossible” mean? Why is this word used so frequently in the story? In what ways is it important? Think about the phrase “seeing is believing.” Do you believe that this is true? In what ways is the idea that “seeing is believing” related to the content of the story and the reactions of the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

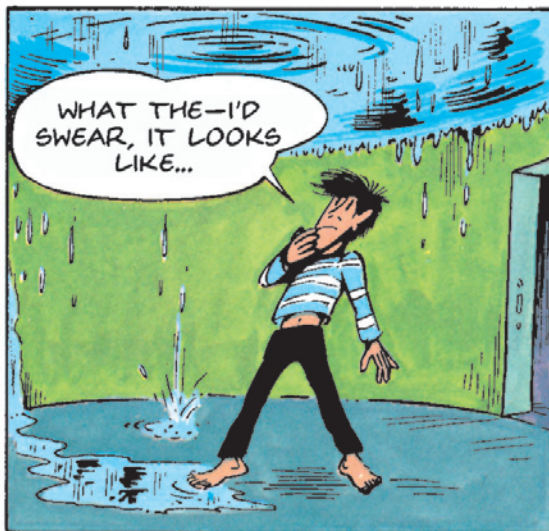
◆ Who defines what is “possible” and what is “impossible” in this story? Are the “impossible” things truly “impossible”? Or are they just “unimaginable”? What is the difference?

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.



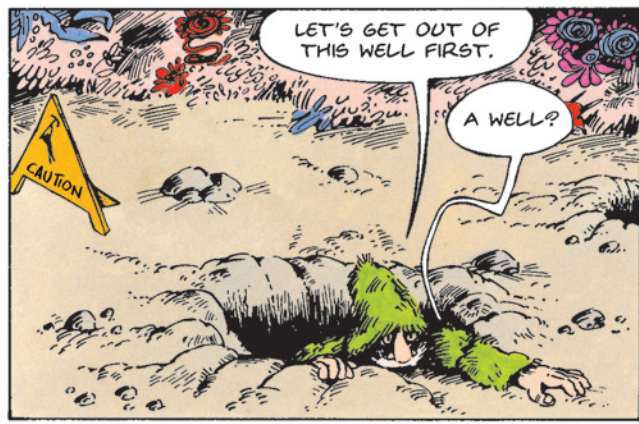
◆ Find some verbal expressions that are related to the word “impossible.” Try to explain the nuanced differences in their meanings.

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?

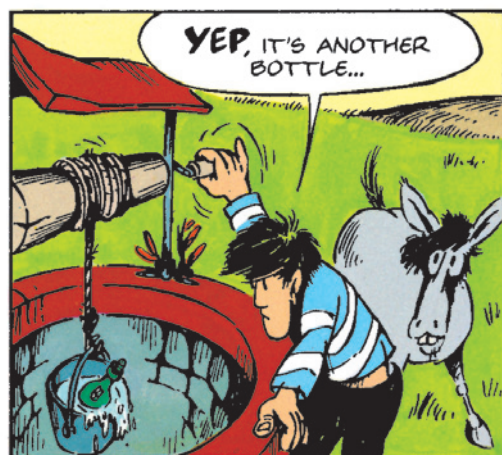
- ◆ Compare the well with other time- and space-travel devices (from literature and film). Which do you think are the most “believable,” and why?

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?

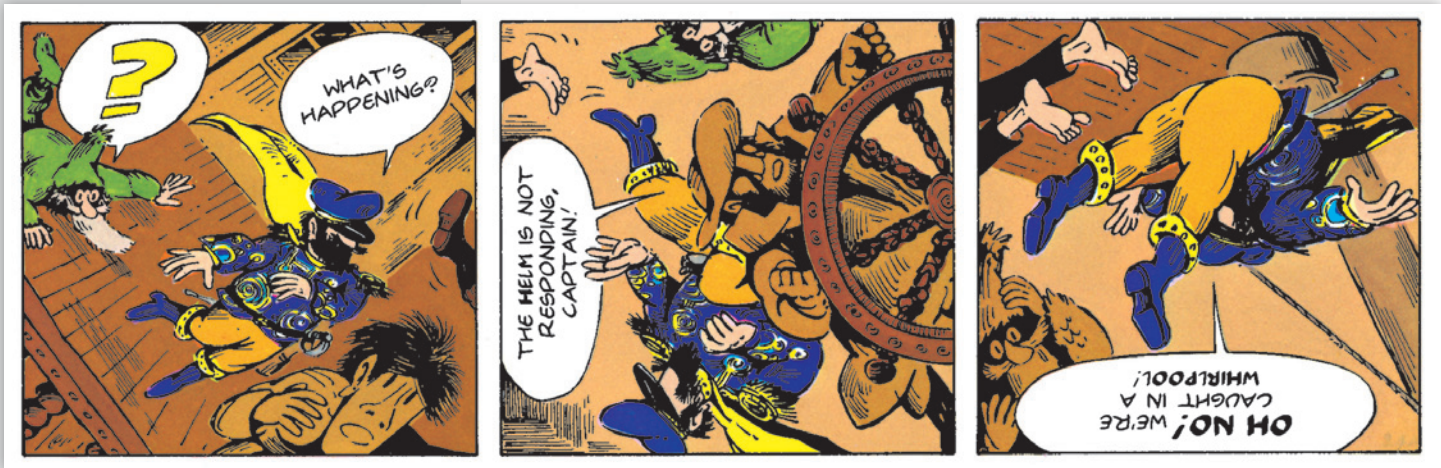


On page 11, panel 8, Philemon's father is out of the panel so his word balloon has a tail that guides reader's eyes to the edge of the page and out of the panel. On page 24, Bartholomew's unclosed word balloon indicates his endless stream of curse words. On page 29, there are cloud-shaped memory balloons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

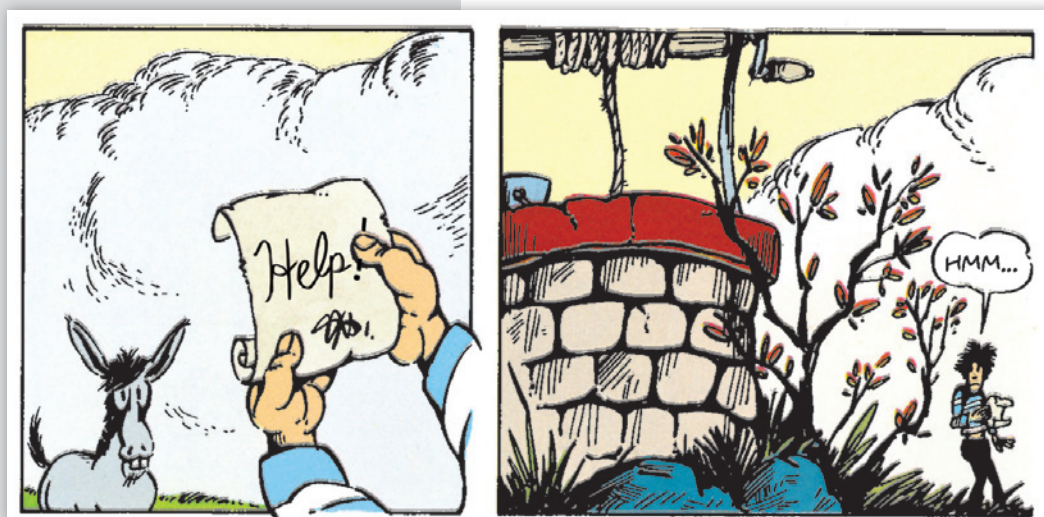
- ◆ Find some different examples of the visual expressions enclosed in the word balloons, like cursing or explanatory images. Why do you think the artist chose to present language with pictures instead of words in those instances. In what ways do the pictures resonate with the illustrations?

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.

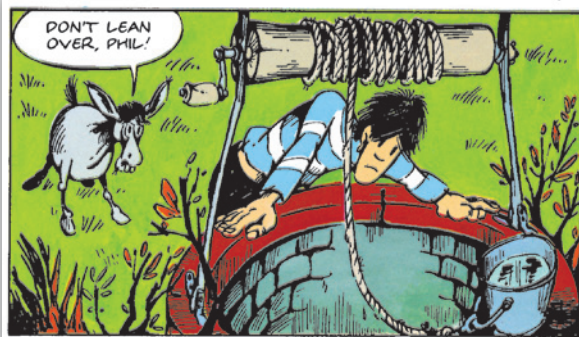


- ◆ Look at the sound effects. Note that they vary in both size and texture. Is there any particular one you like the best? Why? Note that some sound effects are included in the word balloons, and some are imposed over the image. Do you think the characters actually say these as words? Or are they were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



Composition

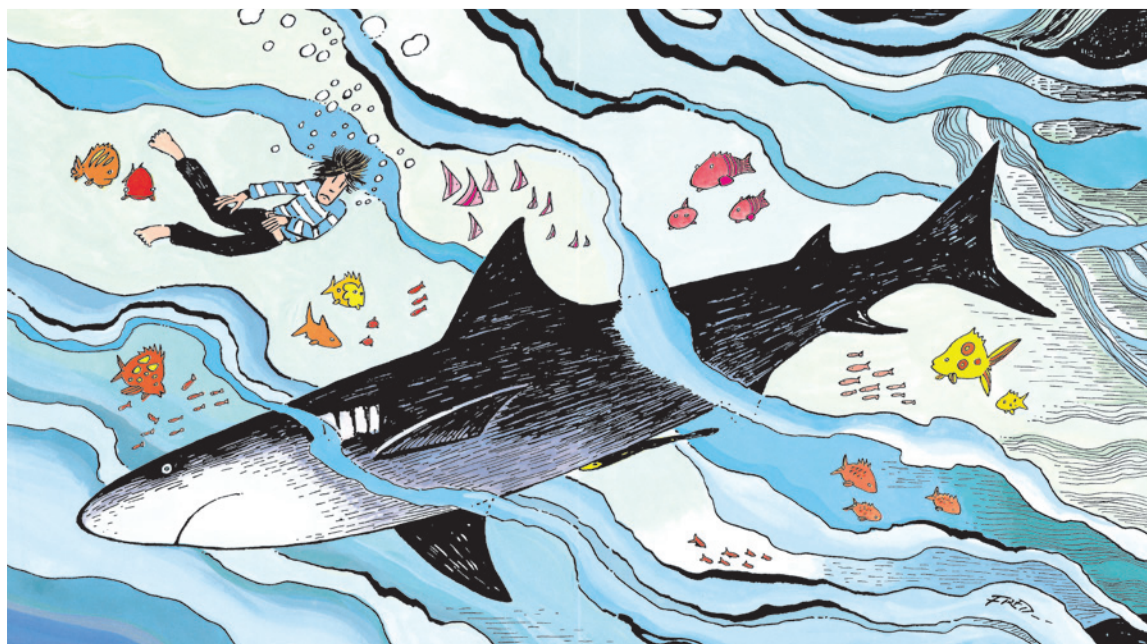
- ◆ Find places where the artist uses a “close-up shot” to tell the story (pages 11 and 13, for example)? Why does he do that? Where does he use far-away, distant, or “long lens shots”? Why does he use those? How do these things affect the story, and how do they make you feel as a reader?



◆ 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?

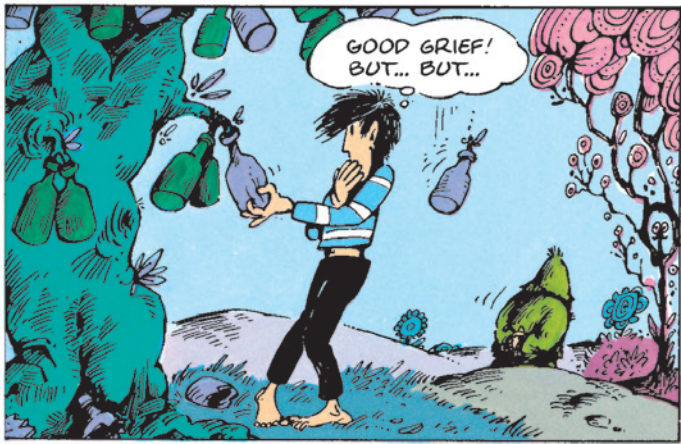
On this page, Philemon is facing right (following the left-to-right direction of the story and the book), while the shark is facing left. Perhaps “facing right” in the book signifies that the character is getting out of a situation or place while “facing left” indicates that they are entering. Are there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

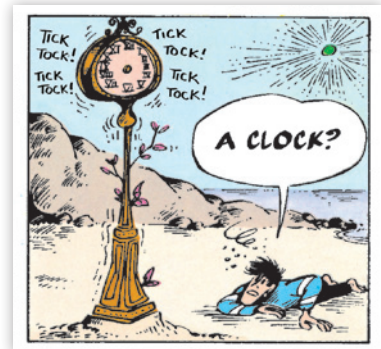
Setting

- ◆ 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.



The Wild Piano

CCSS-aligned Lesson Plan & Teacher's Guide

TOON GRAPHICS FOR VISUAL READERS

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.

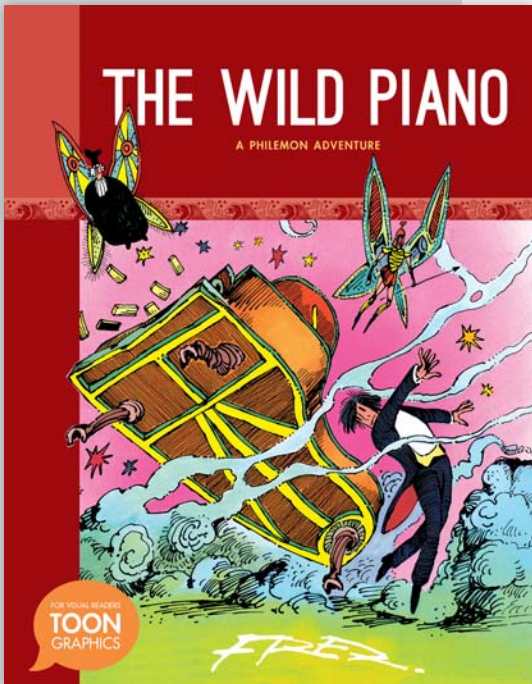
can tell you about the art, architecture, and clothing of a specific time period. It may present the atmosphere, landscape, and flora and fauna of another time or of another part of the world. Facial expressions and body language reveal subtle aspects of characters' personalities beyond what can be expressed 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.

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



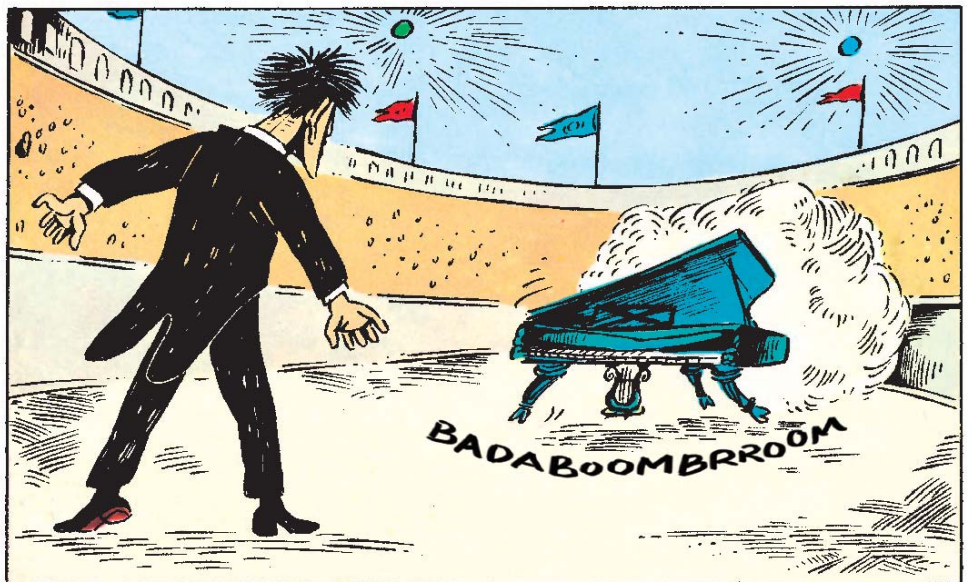
The Wild Piano:
A Philemon Adventure
by Fred
A TOON Graphic
ISBN: 978-1-935179-83-2

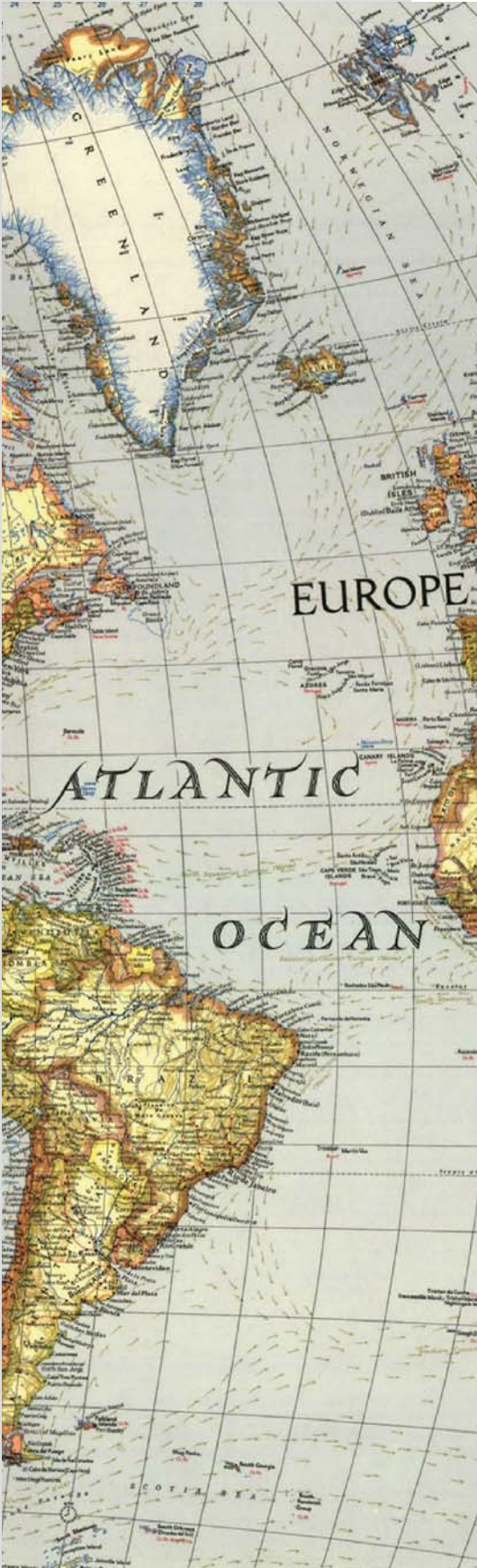
© 2015 TOON Books, all rights reserved
www.TOON-BOOKS.com
Please get in touch with your suggestions at
mail@TOON-books.com

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.





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.

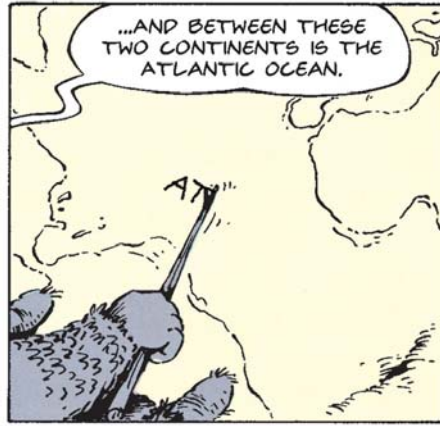
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Speaking and Listening (SL).4-5.2
Students summarize a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

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.

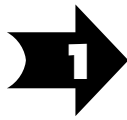
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.1
Students write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

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 examples 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.*

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.

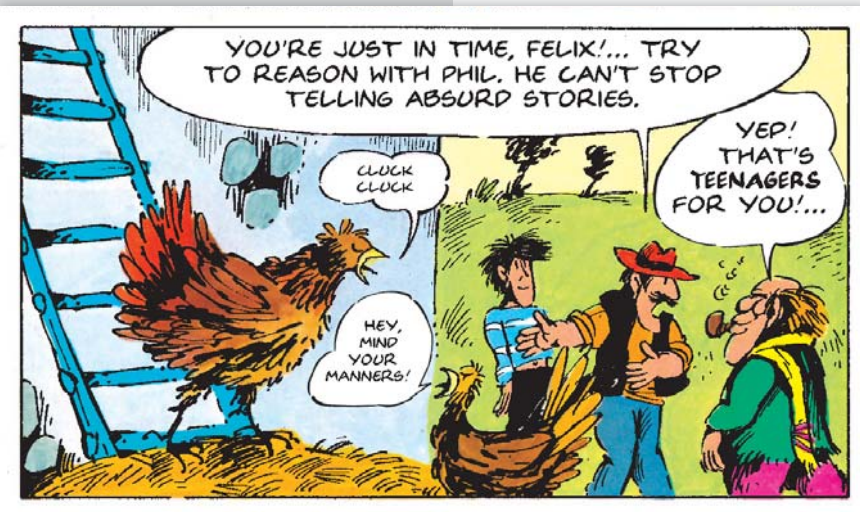
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6
Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

Characters

- ◆ How do the four central male characters (Philemon, Hector, Bartholomew, Uncle Felix) differ? What do their speech patterns tell you about their personalities?

Philemon often seems to be trying to make sense of the world. He tries to sort out the facts ("That's strange. He never spoke about you" - page 12) and explain his point of view ("But I went there, Uncle Felix. That's where I met Bartholomew" - page 13), despite being constantly interrupted.

Uncle Felix, a source of those interruptions, seems jolly at first ("Ha ha ha! Trips and all kinds of stuff...hee hee!" - page 12) but he quickly changes when the subject of the islands is raised. After, Felix becomes a bit withholding. He never fully answers Philemon's questions (page 13), and sends him into danger with very little warning or explanation (page 15). Philemon's father, Hector, by contrast, is the most straightforward. His dialogue is constantly grumpy, and we have the distinct impression that he is always screaming. When we meet Bartholomew at the end of the book, he seems dazed and confused ("mmhmm...What's going on?" - page 33). Students may be interested in comparing this characterization with his confident persona in the previous book (*Cast Away on the Letter A: A Philemon Adventure* ISBN: 978-1-935179-63-4).



◆ At the beginning of the adventure (page 11), Philemon is eager to return down the well to the mysterious islands. Why?

Philemon feels obligated to return because he was not able to take Bartholomew back with him to the farm. Bartholomew was the reason he went down the well to begin with (after he received a message in a bottle in *Cast Away on the Letter A*). Ask students how they would feel in Philemon's position. Why do they think Philemon hasn't tried going back down the well to rescue him? On page 14, it almost seems like he was too scared to go back by himself. Once he feels like he has support

from his uncle, his bravery increases ("let's go!" page 14)

◆ On pages 12-13, we meet Uncle Felix for the first time. What do you think of his character? How is he similar to his brother Hector (Philemon's father)? How is he different?

The two brothers are depicted with similar bodies and facial features, but their personalities are very different. Felix is good-humored and talkative, whereas Hector is deeply impatient and angry. On pages 12-13, however, the two share one noticeable trait, which is that they both keep silencing Philemon (although the reasons are different). Students familiar with the first book may be surprised to meet Felix, because there was no previous mention of him. Remind them that the comic was originally published in serialized form in the magazine *Pilote*, so it's unlikely that the story was planned in advance. Ask students to put themselves in the position of the writer. Why would they have added a character like Felix? How is he necessary to the plot?

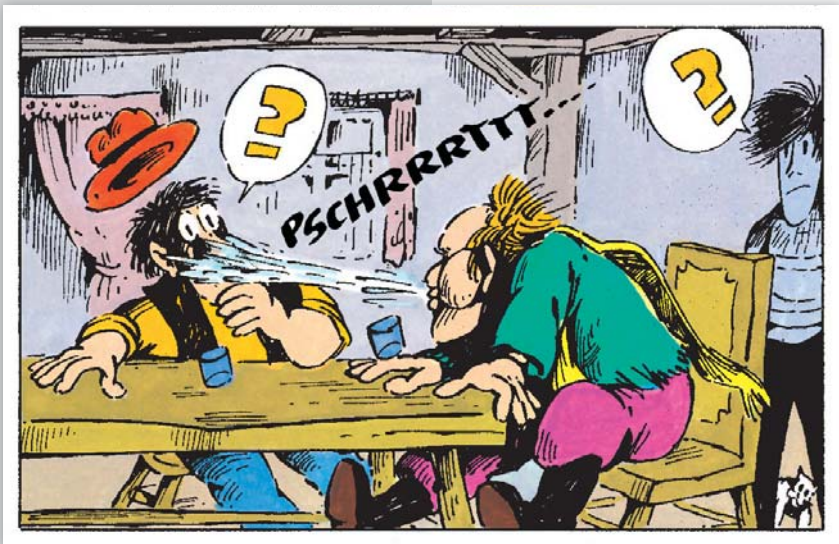
◆ Why doesn't Felix want Philemon to talk about the island of the "A" (pages 12-13)?

Felix doesn't want Philemon to talk about the island in front of Hector. We don't learn the exact reason for the secrecy. Ask students to draw some possible conclusions. Is it, for example, because Hector is very skeptical, and Felix knows that he will not believe them (which is exactly what does happen)? Is it because Felix has an entire secret life that he doesn't want his brother to know about ("I'm something of a magician" page 14)? And so on...

◆ Find all the moments when Philemon has misunderstandings with the characters

he meets on his adventure. What do these moments have in common? If you were in Philemon's position, how would you respond?

Students should pay special attention to the interactions with the water hiker (pages 17-19), the courtroom of the "N" (pages 24-25),





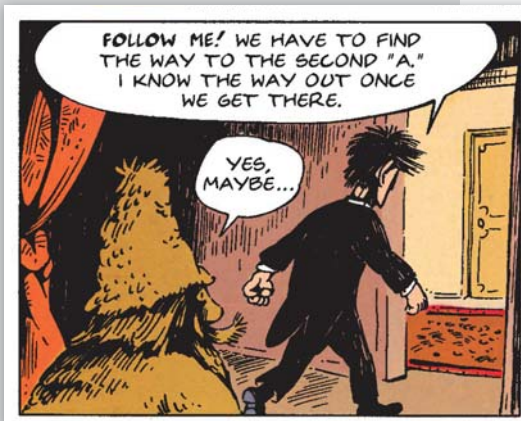
and the organizers of the “concert” (pages 29-32). In each of these cases, Philemon struggles to make sense of a world that doesn’t follow traditional rules of logic. In some cases, words that make sense to Philemon have a different (or no) meaning to others (such as “drown,” page 17).

◆ On page 33, when Philemon finds Bartholomew, the latter is asleep in a strange bedroom (inside a labyrinth). Why is he asleep? How did he get there?

At the end of the first book, we find out that what seemed like days on the island was only a few hours on the farm. How long do you think Philemon was on the farm in between adventures? How long was Bartholomew lost in the labyrinth? Remember that Bartholomew has no way to keep track of the passage of time. In his state of endless confusion, sleep may be the only way to assert some order and to break up the monotony.

◆ How does Philemon change over the course of the book?

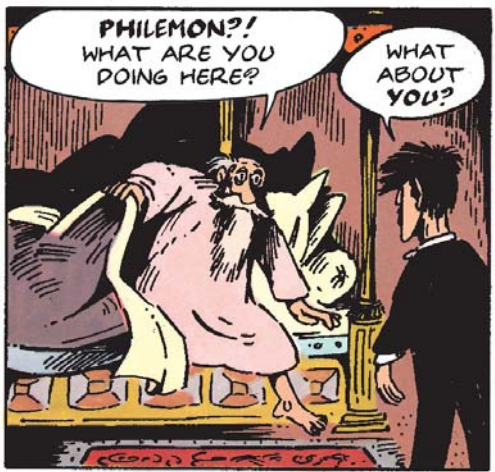
Philemon becomes increasingly confident over the course of the book. We’ve discussed (above) his hesitation at the beginning of the book to venture back to the islands. Once he is transported there, we see this hesitation manifested as fear. In his first two interactions, he latches onto



others and asks them to help him (pages 17 & 20). Once he’s placed on trial, he begins to independently stand up for himself (“let me EXPLAIN!” page 24). Up until this point, he’s still trying to make sense of everything, or rather, apply rules of logic and sense to a world that simply does not follow them. On page 30, facing the wild piano, he finally exclaims that it all “makes no sense. It’s crazy!” After he admits this, he actually is much better off. He somewhat randomly defeats the wild piano (page 32), randomly finds Bartholomew (page 33), and randomly leads them home (“we can always try...” page 37). It isn’t just his outfit that is different by the end. He seems to have gained a great deal of confidence and clarity. That being said, he still occasionally tries to apply logic where it doesn’t belong (“I know the way out once we get there” page 34).

◆ Find all the animals in the story. How are animals represented? How do they interact with the central characters? How do they interact with the narrative of the story?

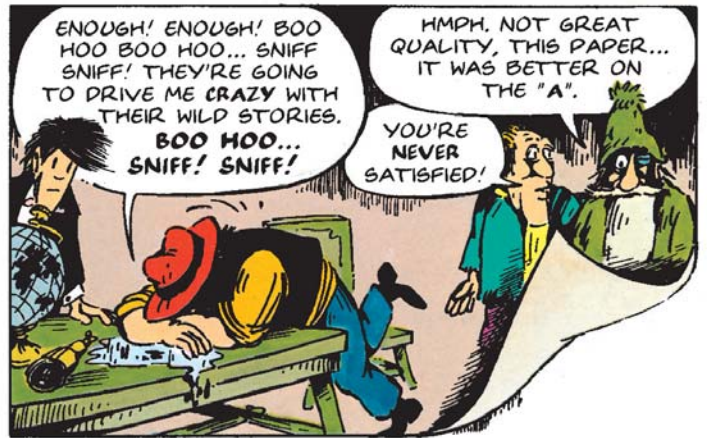
Aside from Anatole (Philemon’s pet donkey), the most notable animals in the story are: the chickens on Hector’s farm (page 11), the white cat



inside the house (pages 12-14), and the zebra jail (pages 27-28). All of the animals are given both animal sound effects and written verbal dialogue, although it is unclear whether the humans can hear them talking or not. Philemon definitely acts as if Anatole can talk to him (pages 28 & 39), but is this just the fantasy of a young man and his favorite pet? In many cases, the animal world seems to be a kind of parallel to the central characters. On page 11, the chickens are fighting with each other (“mind your manners!”) just like Philemon and his father. On page 14, the white cat takes on the annoyed tone of Hector, after he leaves (“They’re making me dizzy!”).

- ◆ The book ends with Philemon and Bartholomew returning to Uncle Felix’s house. Hector screams and cries when they try to tell him about their adventure. Why does he respond in this way?

Hector is overwhelmed by the “impossible” stories that the people around him continue to share. He is outnumbered by characters who challenge his reality. Ask students how they feel about Hector. Do they feel sympathy for him? Do they think he is being selfish and stubborn? Do they think he is good comic relief? Do they think he’s meant to be the classic comedic “straight man” (the person in a comedy group who is intentionally not funny in order to make the humor of the other characters more hilarious and absurd)?



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

Some feel that “real” describes things that you can see with your own eyes. But in our “real world,” most people believe in concepts that cannot be “seen” (justice, logic, religion). Many of these are very important and have a large impact on how our society and psychologies are structured. In this story, Hector denies that the world of the islands (which he hears about constantly from his son and brother) can be real. Why is he so certain? Perhaps because the world of the islands directly contradicts foundational beliefs about the world that he knows (logic, science, geography, etc.). Ask students what they would do if they came face to face with something that contradicted their beliefs about reality. How would they respond?

- ◆ Take a look at the trial scene from pages 23-27. How does the tone



of speech change during this scene? Look especially at the “scroll” on page 25. How would you describe the kind of language used in this document and how does it make you feel?

The trial scene directly confronts the “official language” of our world and parodies it by robbing it of traditional meaning and purpose. In the world of the islands, words like “assault and battery,” “act of rebellion,” “witness,” “defense,” etc. carry the same importance, but not the same meaning. In this case, they are simply tools of punishment, that can be applied loosely by those with power. In the case of the scroll, the author uses a very serious tone to lay out an utterly absurd and impossible history. Like many “absurdist” writers, Fred (the author) likely has negative feelings about systems of power (like the “law” or “history”) and wishes to lampoon them with silliness. Can you think of other books or films that do this (*Monty Python*, *Christopher Guest films*, *Lemony Snicket*, *Alice in Wonderland*, etc.)?

Logic and Absurdism



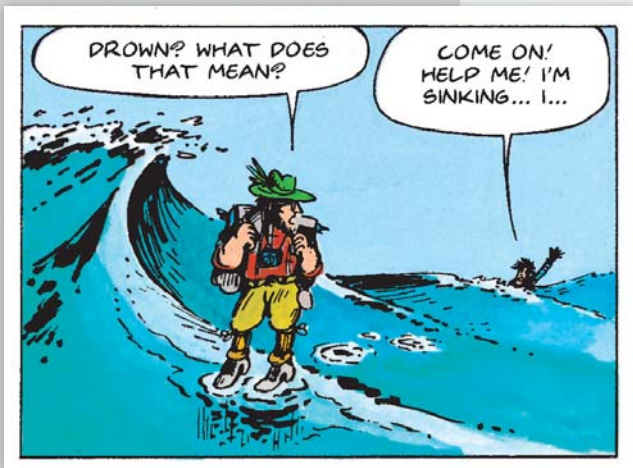
- ◆ List all the ways that Philemon can travel between the farm and the islands (that we know of so far). How are these places connected? What do these methods of transport have in common (if anything)?

Philemon travels to and from the islands using: the well, the spyglass and globe, and finally the wardrobe in Uncle Felix’s house. The main thing that these have in common is that they are relatively ordinary and commonplace things in our world. What are some other ordinary objects that you could imagine being secret portals to another world/dimension? Some teachers may want students to expand this into a written or oral presentation..

- ◆ What is the “logic” (if any) of the mysterious world of the letter-

islands? List all the elements that depart from our own reality and try to identify what they have in common.

Although there are many departures from reality in the world of the islands, some of the most important include: the two suns (page 17), walking on water (page 17), people with wings (page 22), and a piano with bull's legs (page 31). One of the themes of this world is adaptation. Ask students to identify all the cases in which humans, plants, and animals seem to have changed to better suit their environment (see pages 17 and 25 specifically).



◆ How do the people who live on the islands see the world, as compared to Philemon? Do they have different expectations (or senses of what its “normal,” “safe,” “okay”)? Why do you think that might be?

Have students take a look at pages 17-19 for an excellent example. Note that the hiker doesn't understand what “drown” means (page 17) and he can't understand why Philemon is frightened of the storm (page 19). Because they have different past experiences (the hiker has always seen water as a kind of safe flat surface), their world views are very different. This is paralleled in the interaction between Philemon and his father (page 13). What seems impossible to one may seem completely probable to another, simply based on experience. Ask students if they have encountered this phenomenon in their lives.

◆ Who defines the laws of “right” and “wrong” on the letter N? Who defines those laws in our own reality?



Although we learn that certain laws were decreed from above (page 25), this happened long ago. The world of the islands (especially the letter “N”) is indeed very rule-bound (and with some very strange rules at that!), but there does not seem to be a single group of people enforcing these rules. Instead, it is the people themselves who police each other, recite the rules, and keep things in their place. Ask students if they have ever experienced this in their own lives...in school, in society, etc. In our reality, who decides what's “right” and “wrong” and where do those ideas come from?

◆ What is the role of the “absurd” in this book? What does that word mean to you? What do you think it means in art and literature? Can you think of other stories, films, or comics that are “absurd”?

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 literary theory, absurdism describes a story about many many meaningless actions or events, meant as a critique of the very ideas of “good,” “bad,” “right,” “wrong,” “real,” or even “the truth.” Most absurdist pieces depict relatable central characters that are struggling to make sense of a philosophically absurd surrounding (Kafka, *Alice in Wonderland*, Nikolai Gogol, etc.). *The Philemon Adventures* are great examples of absurdist literature, and students may recognize similar themes at work in contemporary works such as *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *Family Guy*, *30 Rock*, and even *The Matrix*, or in the prose of Haruki Murakami, Kurt Vonnegut, and Christopher Moore.



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)

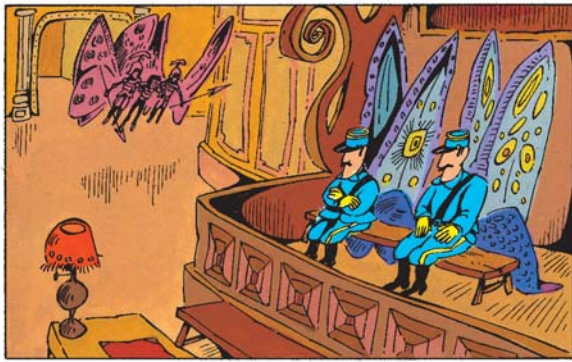
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7
Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text

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 spread. 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?

Pages 11-14 are mostly in balanced in color (and are more “realistic” narratively). Pages 15-20 are purple and dark blue, pages 21—23 introduce brown and orange colors, pages 24-27 are extremely brown, and finally, after a brief transition back to blue, pages 30-36 are quite yellow (transitioning in the final moments to lavender before returning to “the real world”). Ask students to think about our cultural or personal associations with certain colors. Is there a connection between color and emotion? Some students may note that brown is often considered an “ugly” color, which lends the trial scene an immediate unpleasant atmosphere.

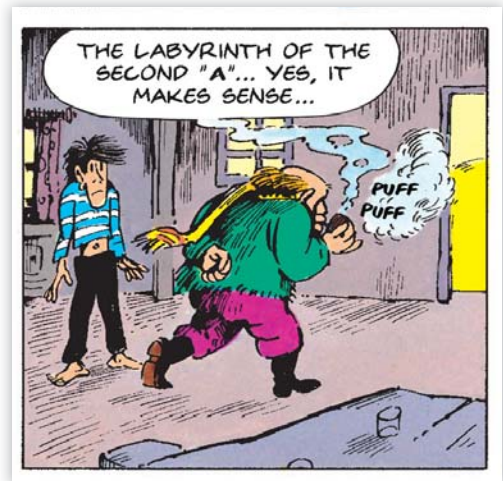
Panels, Word Balloons, and Lettering

◆ Look at the different types of panels used in the book. Find all the examples of panels (and especially panel borders) that depart from the standard format (thin black lined box). Why did the author choose a different design in these instances?



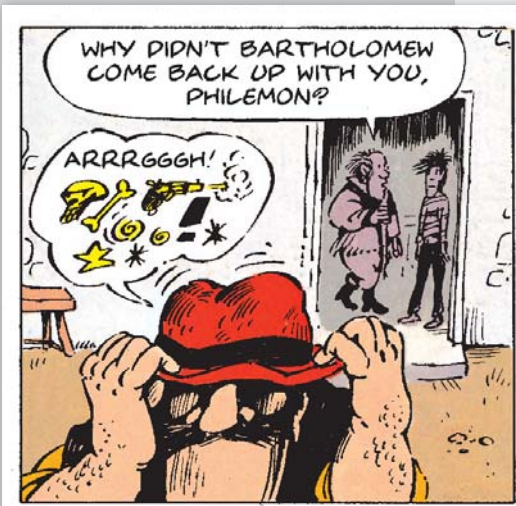
Students can find non-traditional borders on pages 14 (borderless), 16 (through a telescope), 21, 23, & 26 (borderless), 27 (a giant sound effect), 28, 29 & 37 (borderless), and 38 (pulling up the corner—see the question on this below). Each of these instances underscores a crucial transition (often the passage of time, or the movement between different realities). Visually, different-looking panels break up the story, and give readers a “interlude” from the intensity of the adventure.

◆ 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?



The best examples of this are on pages 11-14, where Uncle Felix's pipe smoke becomes the tail of his word balloon and on page 21 where the balloon disappears behind the rope of the hot air balloon. In addition to being rather playful, these designs help to integrate the text with the images (in a very literal way!).

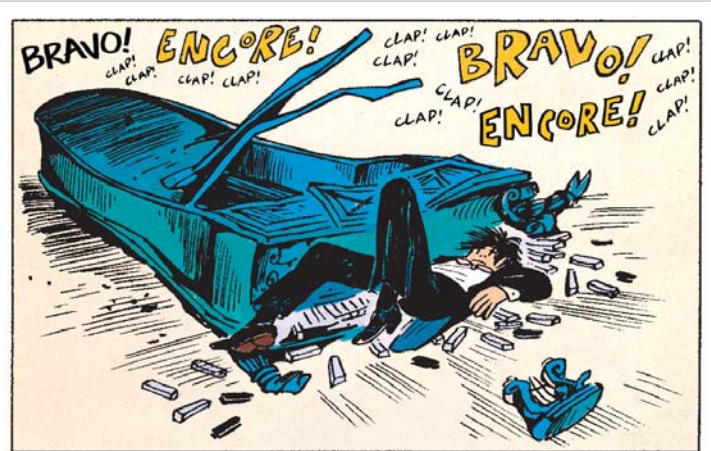
◆ Find some different examples of the visual expressions enclosed in the word balloons, like cursing or explanatory images. Why do you think the artist chose to present language with pictures instead of words in those instances. In what ways do the pictures resonate with the illustrations?



Most of the cursing happens when Hector is speaking (pages 11-13). Students may also note the musical notes that appear when a character is singing (pages 18, 25). Ask students how these symbols make them feel. Are they more or less clear than what could be said in words? Do the symbols encourage the readers to use their imagination in a different way?

◆ 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?

Students may note that some of the sound effects represent spoken words ("Bravo" - page 32, "stop" - page 38) while others represent sounds ("pschrrttt" - page 12). These sound effects, together with the expressive question marks and stars, etc. (indicating pain or surprise), add large colorful signs that communicate to the reader that something important is happening.





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.



◆ On page 15, the dialogue lettering gets very small when Philemon shrinks in size. How does this help to clarify the scene?

In the case of pages 15-16, the letters shrinking into nothingness help to illustrate Philemon's physical transition (and his disappearance from the "real world.")

◆ Some cartoonists refer to expressive symbols or lines that emanate from a character's head as "emanata." What are some examples of "emanata" in this book, and how do you interpret them.

The best examples of this are on pages 23 (Philemon's back), 27 (Philemon's head), 35 (Bartholomew's eye), and 37 (Philemon's head). In these cases, the stars, circles, and asterisks indicate physical pain and emotional shock/confusion. Other good examples of emanata in the book include: bouncing lines (page 22), slurping lines (page 26), door slam lines (pages 36). Emanata are often used to try to communicate things that are difficult to communicate in a drawing (movement, emotion, texture).

Characters

◆ Compare the faces of Hector and Uncle Felix (who are brothers). Can you find ways in which the artist highlights their relation? Look at their costumes. What do their costumes communicate about their characters?

Students may note that Felix and Hector have almost identical bodies and posture, similar face shapes, but slightly different features (and different hair). The real difference, however, lies in the way their hair and costumes are colored. Hector is shown in very "natural" colors (the same colors used on the farm itself—orange, red, blue, black). Felix, by contrast, is in very saturated and surreal colors reminiscent of the island world (the same green appears in the color of the ocean and the same violet appears in the color of the hot air balloon). These color choices mark Felix as unique and other-worldly.

◆ What does Philemon's costuming (and the way it changes throughout the book) communicate about the character?

Philemon's costume is very boyish and provincial. Students should note that he never wears shoes! On page 29, he is dressed in a tuxedo (with shoes) before his concert. Although this functions as a way of making fun of suits (presenting it as part of an inhumane torture, and having everyone on the farm laugh at it), it also marks Philemon's transition to being more of a leader. Dressed in more adult clothes, Philemon saves the day at the end of the book—finding Bartholomew and bringing him home.



- ◆ Find all the “authority” figures in the book and describe their physical appearance. What do you think the author is trying to communicate with the costumes, colors, and design?

The best example of this are the costumed judge (pages 25-27) and the “Grand Judge” on the scroll (page 26). The latter appears to be some kind of prisoner wearing a clown wig. The former—with his wings, wig, hat, cloak, personal harpist, and giant train—is the epitome of excess. By costuming “authority” as a superficial buffoon, Fred pokes fun at systems of power. Ask students to identify “authorities” in their own lives. Could such characters be drawn and costumed in a way that would make their power seem ridiculous?



Setting

- ◆ On page Philemon is imprisoned inside a “zebra jail.” What do you make of the zebra jail? How does it fit within the logic of the island? What further information does it give about the environment?

The idea of a zebra jail is a whimsical joke about a zebra’s appearance (the black stripes resemble both bars and a prison uniform). It also underscores the linkage between the world of the islands and the world of paper, art, and comics. In an illustration, a zebra really is hollow, because the white does not have to be painted. Just like the letters on a map that become literal islands, the zebra jail may lead some readers to see the world of the islands as a kind of metaphor for the artistic imagination.

- ◆ At the end of the adventure, Philemon finds himself in a labyrinthine hallway full of doors. How does this scene make you feel? How does it fit in within the overall environment.

If the world of the islands is a metaphor for the artistic imagination, then the hallways beneath them represent the vast archive of creative possibility. Getting lost in the halls might be like struggling with writer’s block—overwhelmed with the endless possibilities.

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

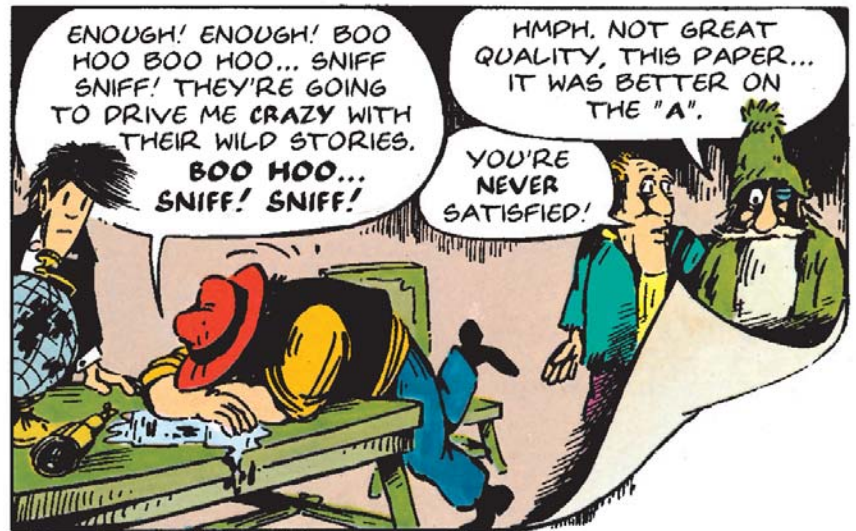
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text, including how the characters in a story or drama respond to challenges; summarize the text.



◆ This book contains several different collages using old drawings and photographs. Find all instances of these. How do you interpret these moments? What further information do they give about the environment?

The best examples of these are on pages 25 and 35. In both cases, Fred adds absurd dialogue to a very serious illustration, completely changing the meaning. This accomplishes at least two important things: first, it makes fun of “traditional” or “educational” texts that might feature such historical illustrations (a classic absurdist parody of authority) and second, it stands as a testament to the comics imagination, which

uses the interplay between image and text to inscribe new meanings, challenge first impressions, and craft a dynamic story.



◆ On the final page of the story, Bartholomew comments on the paper of the book itself. How does this make you feel? Why do you think the author chose to do this?

In literary theory, scholars refer to something called “metafiction,” which occurs when a work of literature calls attention to the fact that it is an artifact—a book, a piece of fiction. Instances of metafiction can be traced as far back as *The Odyssey*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and *Don Quixote*. Metafiction raises questions about the relationship between fiction and reality, and therefore perfectly complements the themes of *The Philemon Adventures*.

3

Further Research

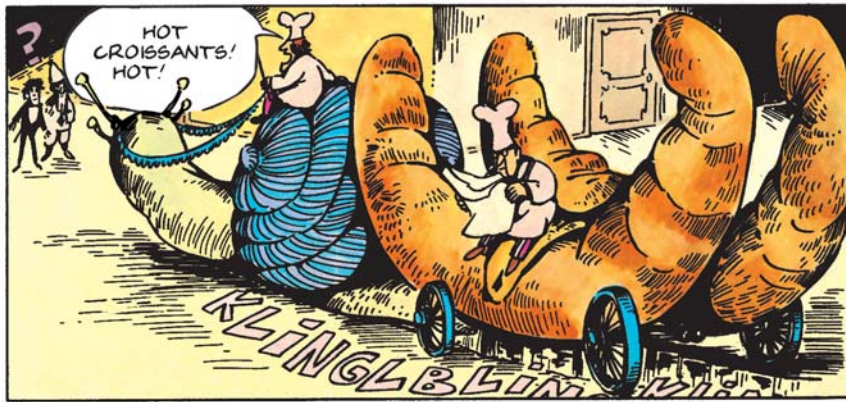
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4-5.9
Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

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.



◆ Choose one of the characters that Philemon meets on his journey (the hiker, the balloonist, the judge, the zebra jail, the giant, the croissant delivery-man, etc.). Write a story about their life and adventures. Try to match the storytelling style of *The Wild Piano*.

◆ Writing Project: choose any of the questions from the Verbal or Visual Expression sections. Write a short piece explaining your answer clearly, using reasons and evidence from the text.

◆ Readers' Theater: read various scenes aloud in class. Pay attention to their inflection. If possible, try out multiple roles and be sure that you adjust your performance accordingly. Try to incorporate visual information from the images into your performance. Have fun!

◆ Choose one of the entries in the index (pages 40-45) 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.





The Suspended Castle

CCSS-aligned Lesson Plan & Teacher's Guide

TOON GRAPHICS FOR VISUAL READERS

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

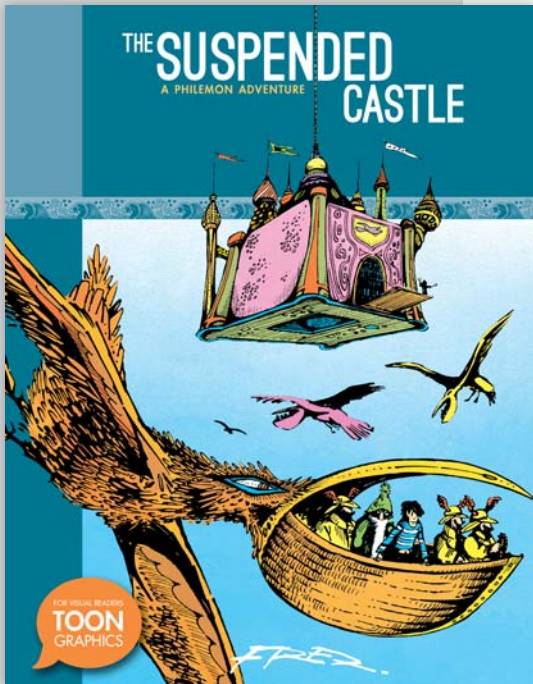
Look carefully at the artwork: it offers a subtext that at first is sensed only on a subliminal level by the reader and encourages rereading. It creates a sense of continuity for the action, and it

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.



The Suspended Castle:
A Philemon Adventure
by Fred
A TOON Graphic
ISBN: 978-1-935179-86-3

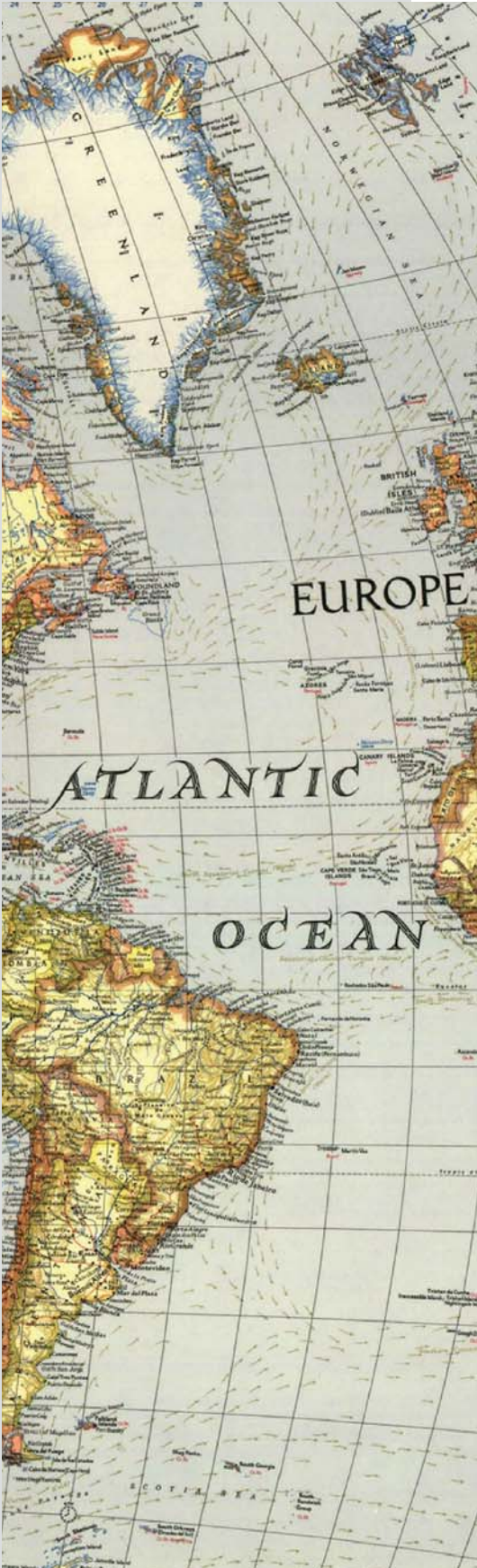
© 2015 TOON Books, all rights reserved
www.TOON-BOOKS.com
Please get in touch with your suggestions at
mail@TOON-books.com

THE TOON EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH TEAM:

Richard Kutner is a translator of both prose and graphic literature with a thirty-three year background in education. He holds degrees from both New York University and Yale, and was the 2014 recipient of a Hemingway Grant for his work with TOON.

Genevieve Bormes holds a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design and is an illustrator based in New York City.





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

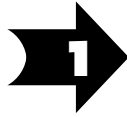
Students write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

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 examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from 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).

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

Characters



- ◆ Bartholomew was stuck on the “A” of the Atlantic Ocean for forty years and wanted desperately to get back to the “real” world. (See *Cast Away on the Letter A* and *The Wild Piano*.) Now that he’s back he’s feeling glum. Why?

Bartholomew is bored. He feels homesick for the “A” and finds life in the “normal” world disappointing. He misses his castle, his “A” clothing, his centaur, and all the strange things he had gotten used to, like the bottle trees and the two suns.

- ◆ How would you describe the character of the king (pages 17-21)? Why do you think his moods change so quickly?

The king is welcoming and good-humored at first. When Bartholomew asks him if he’s sure they’re on the dot on the “i”, he becomes belligerent (first panel page 18). Then he reveals his pride, followed by a silly, poetic description of what would happen if there were no owl-lighthouse. He even starts to dance. After that, he’s back to being angry. On page 20, he remarks about how clueless Philemon and Bartholomew are. In the end, he helps them to use the luminous pathway. (Why do you think he says “luminous pathway” instead of simply saying “ray of light”?) He is pompous, temperamental, affected, and unpredictable, and he feels superior to other people. Perhaps Fred is satirizing royalty or people in power in general.



◆ Contrast the characters of the captain of the whale-galley and the captain of the Suspended Castle. How are they different? Do they speak differently?

The captain of the whale galley appears to be vain, smug, and egotistical. He brushes off his uniform after being caught underneath the gate and straightens his hat (page 31). He threatens and shouts at Philemon and Bartholomew (page 27). The captain of the Suspended Castle is concerned about the welfare of his fishermen (second panel, page 47) and goes down with his “ship” (panels 3 and 4). He speaks calmly (no boldface exclamations) and acts nobly. He even looks noble (see below).



◆ How does Philemon show kindness to Bartholomew?

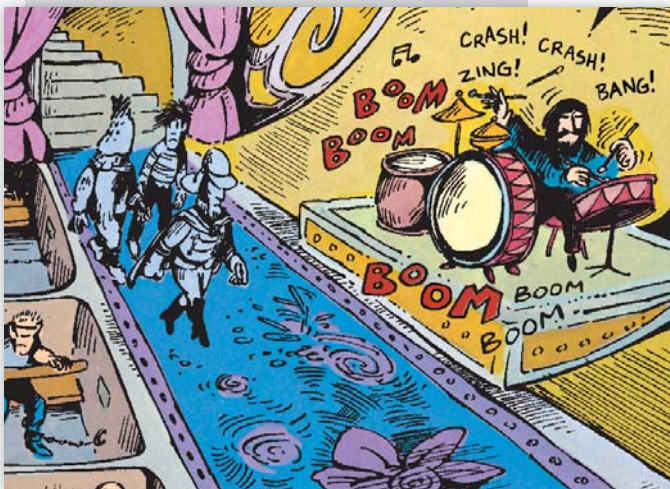
Philemon is worried about Bartholomew (page 12, panel 3) and asks him why he’s unhappy. He suggests to Bartholomew that there might be a way to go back to the “A.” He’s concerned that Bartholomew forgot his hat (last panel, page 15), which is how he himself gets back to the “A.” He rescues Bartholomew when he’s about to fall off the “luminous pathway.” Bartholomew returns the kindness on page 41 when he asks Philemon if he’s okay (next-to-last panel). He’s also worried that he might never see him again (page 40, panel 4).

◆ In the second Philemon adventure, *The Wild Piano*, Philemon gains courage. How do we see this in *The Suspended Castle*?

It’s Philemon’s idea to return to the “A.” He doesn’t hesitate to suggest it to Bartholomew. Philemon doesn’t appear to be afraid to walk on the “luminous pathway” (pages 21-22). On page 41, Philemon seizes the prison guard and tells Bartholomew to take his keys.

◆ Why is there a man playing the drums and cymbal in the big panel with the rowers on page 28?

Often on galleys, a man banged a drum to keep the rowers rowing at a steady, fast pace. Fred may be making fun of this idea--or maybe it’s logical in this illogical world.



Words and Metaphors

◆ Fred loves to create two-word nouns using words that usually have little to do with each other: an owl-lighthouse, a whale-galley, and pelican-whalers. Why do you think he does this? What does the first word of each name have to do with the second?

The juxtaposition of unrelated words is part of the humor and absurdity of Fred’s parallel universe. Notice that in all three examples, one of the words is an animal.

An owl can see well in the dark, so it is a good animal to make into a lighthouse. It has large corneas and pupils, and since its eyes are on the front of its face, it can see in three dimensions with both eyes at the same time.

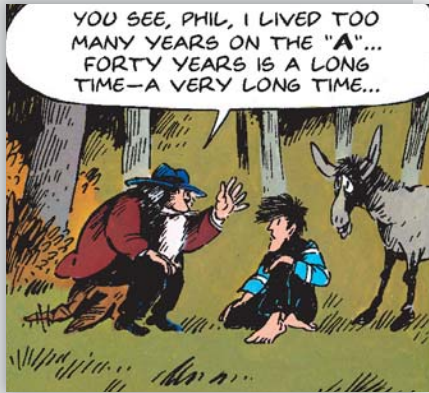
A galley is a large boat, so comparing it to a whale seems logical.



A pelican is a large water bird. Since it is a predator, it is a good choice of an animal to use for hunting, and, in this book, its large throat pouch, usually used to catch its prey, is roomy enough to hold the captain and crew.

Time

◆ On page 13, Bartholomew says, “Forty years is a long time—a very long time.” The king, on page 17, says, “I haven’t had a visitor for at least 327 years ... That’s a long time.” On page 43, the fisherman says, “A long time ago—a very long time ago ... 2,327 years ago to be precise ...” How do you think Fred thinks about time? What is a long time for you?



For Bartholomew, a man from the “real” world, forty years is a long time. For the king and the fisherman, who live in the world of the “A,” time is as unreal as everything else (although real for them). When Philemon is on the “A,” only a very short time has passed in the “real” world. Time is relative depending on your frame of reference. Maybe Fred was familiar with the work of Einstein!

Notice that he used 327 and 2,327.

◆ Have you noticed that time seems to pass quickly when you’re on vacation but slowly when you’re doing something less pleasant (like taking a math test)? Do you think this is what’s really happening? Do you think time really exists, or is it something we have constructed to help us understand reality and be able to live our daily lives?



Lead a discussion about this. Talk about different divisions of time—seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks (why seven days in a week?), months (based on the moon), years, decades, centuries, millennia. Is a millennium a long time (see previous question)? It’s only as long as the lives of ten people living to be 100 years old.

◆ We measure our year as the amount of time it takes the earth to revolve around the sun. How do you think the year is measured on the “A,” where there are two suns? Maybe this is why the clock explodes in *Cast Away on the Letter A*.

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

Some feel that “real” describes things that you can see with your own eyes. But in our “real world,” most people believe in concepts that cannot be “seen” (justice, logic, religion). Many of these are very important and have a large impact on how our society and psychologies are structured. Throughout the Philemon series, Hector denies that the world of the islands (which he hears about constantly from his son and brother) can be real. Why is he so certain? Perhaps because the world of the islands directly contradicts foundational beliefs about the world that he knows (logic, science, geography, etc.). Ask students what they would do if they came face to face with something that contradicted their beliefs about reality. How would they respond? Tell them that, later on, when they study a branch of science called physics, many things they learn will contradict their everyday beliefs.



For most of us in a Western industrial society, our reality includes a home, food, clothing, and education. For most of the world's children, reality means none of these things. Children should think about this.



Inferential Thinking

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6

Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8

Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

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.RI.4-5.4

Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text (here, art and comics vocabulary).

- ◆ The cutting of the rope holding up the Suspended Castle is a joyous event, releasing its inhabitants from their curse. However, the castle ends up falling into the sea and sinking, putting the fishermen in danger. What do you think of this? Are Philemon and Bartholomew saviors or not?

Fred may be trying to show us that things don't always turn out the way we plan. We need to be equipped emotionally to expect the unexpected and deal with it. Even the cutting of the rope proves to be more complicated than anyone thought. Life is a mixture of good and bad, and even a happy event can have problems attached to it. Besides, in Fred's world, it's normal for logic to be turned on its head.



3

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

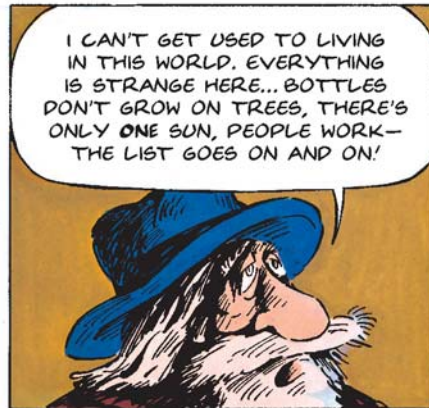
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5
Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, stanzas, etc. fits together to provide the overall structure of a story.

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).

Colors

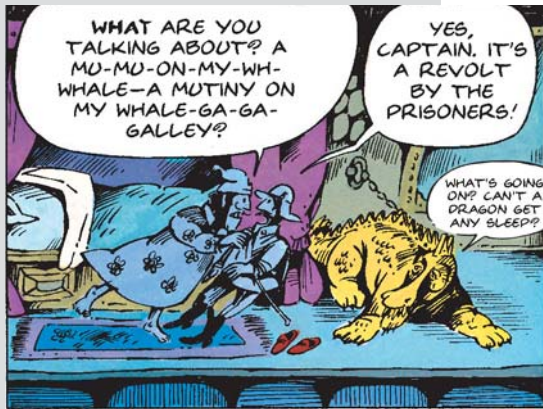
◆ *Cast Away on the Letter A* and *The Wild Piano* begin with a bright yellow sky and cheerful colors. Look at the first five pages of *The Suspended Castle*. Why do you think the artist chose to use dark, gloomy colors?

The dark, gloomy colors probably reflect Bartholomew's state of mind. He is unhappy with his life back in the "real" world, and it is this unhappiness that sparks the return to the world of the "A". The color palette begins to change in the sixth panel on p. 16, as Bartholomew is on his way to the world of the "A".



◆ In this book, there are pages that are mostly blue, purple, pink, or yellow. Why might this be? Do different colors give you different feelings or create different moods? How are the "real world" colors different from the colors in the world of the "A"?

Since the "A" is another world, it has another, less "realistic" color scheme to separate it from the "real" world. These colors may reflect the mood of the situation. Dark purple is often associated with sinister things in this book—night, the uniform of the man who watches over the rowers, the prison guard's uniform in the *Suspended Castle*. The bright, cheerful, yellow sky on pages 34-37 and 44-47 give a promise of freedom, as the characters fight to save themselves from the pelican-whalers or cut the



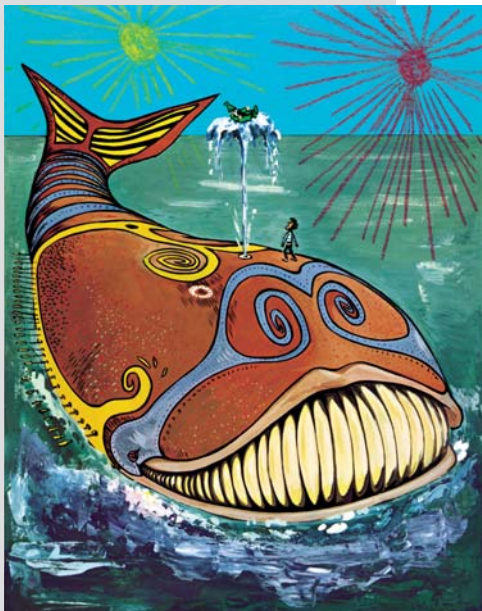
rope holding up the Suspended Castle. The acid blue of the sea (pages 32-38) makes it seem malevolent. Each important character has his own color clothing (Philemon: blue, white, and black; Bartholomew: burgundy and black at first, then green; the captain of the whale galley: red; the fishermen: orange; the prison guard: purple). These colors may give indications of the characters' personalities or roles in the story. Discuss this with children and see what they think.

◆ What do you think of the captain's pink pajamas with blue flowers (fifth panel on page 30)?

The captain's dainty pajamas don't match his tough attitude or bright red uniform. The contrast is funny. Maybe it's meant to show the captain's softer side, as when he accepts the workers' demands.

Page layout, Frames, Composition, and Lettering

◆ Look at the full-page picture of the whale-galley on page 24 and the one of the Suspended Castle on page 38. Why do you think the artist put in big pictures at these points of the story?



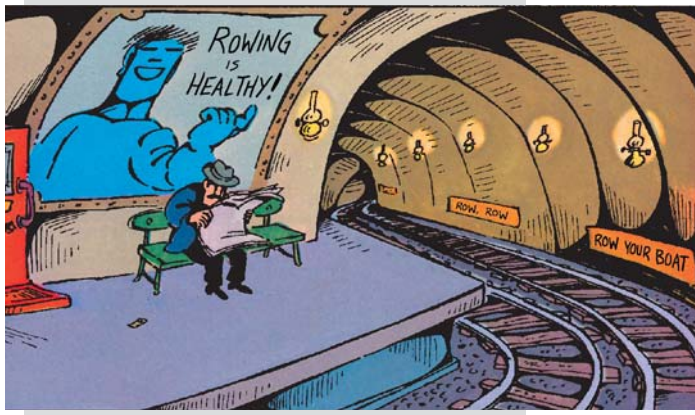
Full-page pictures and two-page spreads slow down the reading process and make us stop to reflect on what is happening. The whale-galley is a shocking sight, and we need time to think about what might happen and how we feel about it. We also get the opportunity to imagine what Philemon is feeling. The Suspended Castle picture also shows us a remarkable sight, and the dramatic juxtaposition of colors (pink, yellow, teal) add to the strangeness. We also get a scary view of the pelican-whaler with its nasty harpoon. The dark shadows on the underside of the pelican-whaler make it seem even more ominous. Slowing down the reading here helps us to think about the drama and the danger of the situation. Notice also how the long third panel on page 29 slows down the reading, giving us a moment of rest as the sun sets on the horizon.

◆ Notice the frameless word "SUDDENLY," written in dramatic purple against black, on p. 30, and how the word "ALERT!" crosses the next two frames. Why might the artist have made these choices?

The word "SUDDENLY" is not confined in a frame. Things that happen suddenly, without warning, do not occur in a way we can hold onto or contain. The word "ALERT!" crossing the frame line enhances the drama and suddenness of the moment, and makes the alert message break directly into the captain's cabin with no interruption.

◆ Notice the curved artwork for the subway inside the whale (p. 26-



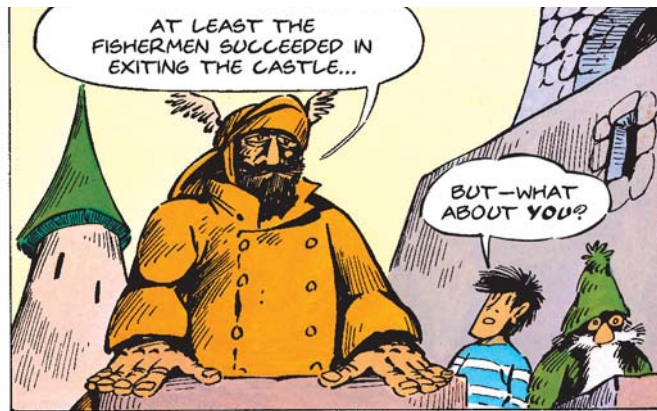


27). Any idea why the artist presented the subway this way?

Fred was French. The Paris subway has curved stations and tunnels, unlike the New York subway. The curves also reflect the structure of the whale, which is curvy both inside and out. Even the big word “ROW” is curved in the last panel of p. 26. Notice the tree and the cows in this panel.

◆ The captain of the Suspended Castle is viewed from below in the second panel on page 47. Why might this be so?

Viewing him from below accentuates his size, heroism, and nobility. It makes us “look up” to him. Also look at how big he is compared to Philemon and Bartholomew. Notice his resolute stance and big, powerful hands.



◆ Look at the fifth panel on page 41. Why does the author have us look down on Philemon and Bartholomew in their prison cell?

Looking down on them makes them appear small, helpless, and vulnerable. They seem far away from anyone or anything that could help them. The “CLINK! CLANK!” adds to the foreboding feeling of this image.



◆ Notice the curved walls and heavy stones of the prison cell on pages 40-43. How do they make you feel?

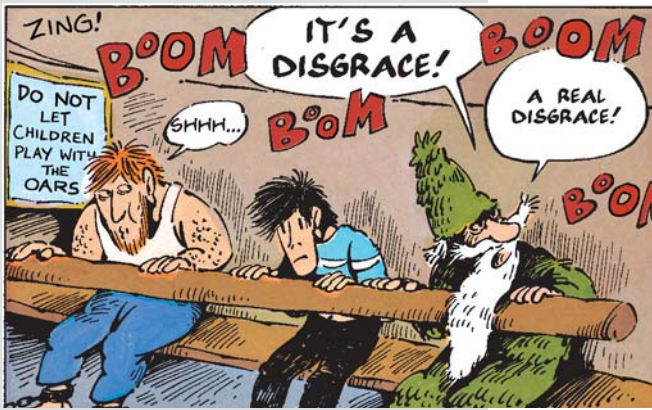
The curved walls and heavy stones create a claustrophobic feeling. If Fred had made a square or rectangular cell, readers would not experience the same emotion.

◆ What is your favorite frame of this book? Why?

Students should justify their choice with specific ideas or feelings that are evoked.

◆ How does the size of the writing in the speech balloons affect your understanding of what is being said and how it is being said?

Words written in a large font, especially if it is a colorful one, show strong emotion or urgency and give us clues as to how the characters feel and how to read what they are saying with the proper expression and intensity. Notice the fourth panel on page 28, when Bartholomew says, “It’s a disgrace!” in large writing, then says “A real disgrace!” in smaller print. The first time is a bold statement; the second is a bit more timid, indicating perhaps that he’s not as courageous as he thought or that he has realized



that it is not a good idea to speak out in his situation. Look also at the third panel on page 22, when Bartholomew (whom you can't see) calls out "Philemon!" in large, pink letters. He's in a dangerous situation and needs help immediately. The lettering shows this. Also take a look at the second and third frames on page 42, the way the prison guard's words are expressed. You can sense his emotion from the size and/or color of his words. Have children find other examples throughout the book and ask them what they think the print size and color are expressing. Colored letters are even more expressive than ones written in boldface.



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.SL.5.5

Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.



◆ How would the story have ended if Philemon and Bartholomew had not been able to cut the rope holding up the Suspended Castle? Write a new ending based on this situation.

◆ For discussion: Satire is using humor, exaggeration, or ridicule to criticize people's foolishness or vices, especially in contemporary politics and institutions. For a long time, French workers have made demands for shorter working hours, better working conditions, and longer vacations. In this book, Fred satirizes this by inverting the situation: He has the workers demand to work on Sundays rather than just Monday through Saturday. This makes sense in a world where logic is inverted. Compare this to the satirization of the justice system in *The Wild Piano*, where Philemon's lawyer, although not present at his crime, is a witness against him, and the judge accuses Philemon of assault and battery when he smashes his own finger with his gavel. Relate this to *Alice in Wonderland*, when, during the Knave of Heart's trial, the Queen of Hearts says that the sentence should come before the verdict. Does our real justice system sometimes invert reality?

More satire is coming up in *The Impossible Voyage*.

◆ Choose one of the characters that Philemon meets on his journey (the whale-galley captain, the captain of the Suspended Castle, the prison guard, one of the rowers, the king, etc.). Write a story about his life and adventures. Try to match the storytelling style of *The Suspended Castle*. Draw your own illustration(s).

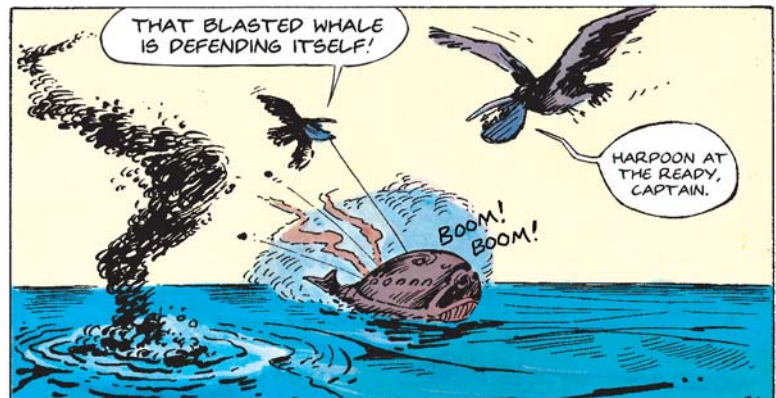


◆ Writing Project: choose any of the questions from the Verbal or Visual Expression sections. Write a short piece explaining your answer clearly, using reasons and evidence from the text.

◆ Readers' Theater: read and act out various scenes aloud in class. Pay attention to their inflection. If possible, try out multiple roles, and be sure that you adjust your performance accordingly. Try to incorporate visual information from the images into your performance. Have fun!

◆ Choose one of the entries in the references section (pages 50-53) 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.

◆ Whaling was an important part of the American economy for many years. Research how whaling was done and how people used different parts of the whale. Report your findings to the class.



◆ Many cities around the world have subways: New York, Washington, Kolkata (Calcutta), Moscow, Paris, Tokyo, to name a few. Research some of these subways in small groups and report on them to your classmates. When were they made? How many miles long are they? How many stations and routes do they have? What do they look like inside and out? What do the subway stations look like? What can we learn about the people of these cities from their subways?

◆ Invent a character and create your own eight-panel adventure to another world. Pay attention to dialogue, color, panel size and shape, writing size, and composition to express your ideas. You may use more panels if you like.