



Societal Concerns Addressed Between the Panels (or in the “Gutter”)

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
English Language Arts I in Grade 9

Keywords: police brutality, teenage experience, discrimination, societal concerns, canonical literature, visual literacy, graphic novels, comics, panel, frame, gutter, speech balloon, thought balloon, caption

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: The narrative of racial difference in the United States has long been a haze that contaminates many communities and deprecates people of color. It began when white settlers came to this continent and destroyed masses of native people, stole their land, and labeled them as barbaric or savage. That same narrative promoted the existence of 200 years of enslavement of African people who were beaten, abused, sexually exploited, and denied human rights. The Thirteenth Amendment did not bring an end to these injustices and only promoted the evolution of these practices. This unit is designed for ninth grade students to encounter an inquiry process in which they explore novels, essays, and other forms of media to ultimately determine the theme of *I Am Alfonso Jones* and express through writing, discussion, and other collaborative activities why that message is important. Students will take on these tasks to answer the questions: What makes an opening powerful? What makes you want to keep reading a book? How can understanding a book's context help you understand the book? Why are the answers to these questions important? Students will return to these questions throughout the unit to understand the impact of societal flaws and express their understanding through writing and creation of visual projects that convey a specific meaning that can better their human experience and to promote change in humankind.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 100 students in IB MYP English I (9th Grade)

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Introduction: Rationale, School Student Demographic, and Unit Goals

Introduction

I Am Alfonso Jones provides students with a narrative that addresses white privilege, police brutality, the criminalization of black men, youth activism, and the Black Lives Matters movement while providing historical content to support themes attached to the aforementioned societal concerns. Students interact with different institutions in their communities every day and need to understand that there are and can be positive and negative outcomes that exist because of those systems or more importantly the people assigned to those systems. By understanding the larger themes in novels and short stories students will be able to address concerns associated with systems, know how to impact those systems, and most importantly understand how to navigate the world understanding what it means to be human. Our country was founded upon and is supported by diversity in culture. I want to ensure my students understand how and why this came to be, but also remove any naivety that comes with understanding the world and their orientation in it. The use of the graphic novel should help students attach visuals to societal issues that exist in their communities and world and be able to share those experiences with students who either feel voiceless or are simply unaware of these social crises. The synthetic nature of text and image in the graphic novel provides an opportunity to teach through perspective and empathy. I want students to leave the unit learning to think critically and to be more aware of the world they live in while also being able to convey ideas through the use of language and visuals.

Unit Goals

The goal of this unit is to inform students of the devastating effects of police brutality and injustice on the United States including their local communities while offering them the opportunity to learn through different perspectives and life experiences. Students will examine the graphic novel, *I Am Alfonso Jones* for specific themes and explain how the author and illustrators develop those themes throughout the novel. This unit is designed to teach students to be intuitive readers and analysts of graphic novels through a variety of active reading strategies. Activities explore the relevance of setting, character, and conflict as they relate to the development of the novel's themes. Students examine these elements as the means by which the author and illustrators create, develop, and convey the social and cultural uncertainties that exist within the setting of the novel, as well as how those cultural factors align with current times. Both contexts are central to the students' engagement and experience of and with the graphic novel.

Demographics

I work as a 9-12 grade English teacher at Myers Park High School in Charlotte, North Carolina. Myers Park High School is in South Charlotte. It is the largest public school in the state of North Carolina with nearly 3,600 students on a 62-acre campus that consists of 10 buildings and mobile classrooms. It first opened in 1951. The student body is approximately

60 % white, 21 % black, 13 % Hispanic, 3 % Asian and 3 % other, representing over 25 countries. Myers Park offers a comprehensive array of support services and resources designed to help all students succeed. The highly qualified faculty consists of approximately 246 faculty and staff, including: a principal; four assistant principals; three deans of students; an International Baccalaureate Diploma Coordinator; eight counselors, an Exceptional Children Compliance Coordinator, two social workers, a nurse, an Instructional Accountability Coordinator; three Career and Technical Education Coordinators; three Communities in Schools staff, two 504 counselors; a media specialist; two psychologists; and a speech/language pathologist. I have been a member of the staff for 4 years entering into my fifth year. I am currently serving in the role of Professional Learning Community Lead for IB MYP English I and I am responsible for ensuring that curriculum is implemented in alignment with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools design and pacing. I hope to utilize my curriculum unit to promote reading of literature that addresses social concerns that impact the world and the local community. Students are open minded but often do not see the world through the perspective of others and their experiences. The opportunity to show students the problematic application of policing and how it impacts certain groups within the United States will serve as a tool for self-improvement, community involvement, and self-reflection while promoting empathy which is a great conduit for learning. The graphic novel provides students with literature that is not diminished by an emphasis solely on text. Illustrations, text, and structure (the panels) provide readers with an involvement and intimate connections with characters which often result in a clearer understanding of the major themes and authors choices.

Rationale

Diversity is not a word that many Charlotteans might associate with Myers Park High School, but the numbers do not tell the whole tale. When we start to look into the classroom and beyond ethnicity, it is evident that diversity exists on many different levels at Myers Park High School, such as socioeconomic status, family dynamic, values and goals, and life experiences. Considering this makes the challenge worth the while and achievable. The students at Myers Park High School have assorted life-experiences and those experiences will be essential in their connection to the graphic novel and their understanding of thematic constructions in *I Am Alfonso Jones*. The students at Myers Park High School are very involved in their communities and are aware of how they impact their communities. This graphic novel will provide students with the opportunity to operate and navigate societal transgressions that may not impact them directly, but about which they are intensely aware. Using this graphic novel, students will discuss and collaborate on activities that create the opportunity for self-evaluation, reflection, and personal growth. transgressions will resonate with students if faced with the reality that other citizens from their communities and high school are suffering due to police brutality, discrimination, and an unbalanced justice system. Young people at Myers Park High School are passionate about issues that impact them, and their communities and I often see them advocate for students who might be uncomfortable doing that for themselves. They are accepting and

knowledgeable about the world in which they exist and are alert to the fact that the society and politics are in constant flux. the variety of life experiences that can be utilized as fuel for discussion, collaboration, and independent work related to the topics and themes that exist in this graphic novel. This unit will serve as an opportunity to help students see the world through the eyes of each other, be reflective, grow personally, and apply that learning to their day to day lives. That is why I find and see value in teaching students this Curriculum Unit.

Content Research

This unit will focus on the societal issues associated with police brutality and police shooting incidents. The topic is both important and polarizing as some might find it a difficult subject to discuss, some may not want to discuss it at all, but its importance and significance is vital to the human experience and the condition of society. Within a year following the murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020, 1,050 civilians and law enforcement personnel have died in police encounters (Brennan 1). Although the death totals have decreased since then, the numbers of deaths are disproportionate at an alarming rate. Members of the black community are three times more likely to be killed by police than their white counterparts (Brennan 1) and “Twenty-eight percent of people killed by police in 2020 were Black, despite Black people making up 13 percent of the population (Brennan 1). With these alarming numbers it is imperative that youth are afforded a fair opportunity to navigate their communities and the world and education serves as a gateway to that opportunity.

Specific life experiences can escape certain communities of students at all socioeconomic levels, and using graphic novels the attention of any student can be captured utilizing visuals along with words. This will serve to provide students with a lens into the universality of conflicts and themes in literature, which can be applied to students of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. Textbooks and traditional literature tend to communicate these themes through characters that are predominantly of the majority which means that Black, Indigenous, & People of Color (BIPOC) students generally are alienated from the text because they don’t see themselves in them. Graphic novels often give us characters that aren’t identified by race and ethnicity thus removing one element of that experience, providing students with the opportunity to examine imaginary characters with no human likenesses, but with problems and conflicts that speak to significant political and social issues in contemporary culture.

Novels and short stories have been the method to express important themes in literature for hundreds of years and they still are still valuable texts in the classroom. There is power in words and canonical literature has long been the method by which ideas have been delivered to readers and students. Different methods of mediation have been found to be reliable resources, and some have even improved student outcomes. For instance, the theme of power which has fascinated humanity is a universal theme that has appeared in different novels. George Orwell’s

1984 and *Animal Farm*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* are examples of this concern, but often these novels do not appeal to younger readers. Dolores D'Angelo suggests that "For some learners and in some situations, the use of graphic novels carries more impact than traditional texts. Sequential art narratives are a way of reaching some students who have previously been reluctant readers" (138). Howard Gardner adds that "the use of graphic novels in English education reflects an appreciation of student learning styles and the multiple intelligences they bring to the classroom; the use of a variety of methods and approaches enables us to reach more students." (Gardner 1993) Both experts' thoughts and ideas align with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools goal of providing equitable quality education to every child. By using the graphic novel in English there is built in differentiation. Students will have access to both language and imagery that provide meaning and offer a look into societal issues and concerns that are present in their communities.

Teachers of language arts have long been reluctant to resort to using the graphic novels as a resource in teaching, but the transformation of the graphic texts from pages that were once sexually explicit or filled with gore into serious and philosophically minded works have many teachers reconsidering their options. "Today, graphic novels are something else entirely," notes Gallo, they have become "elaborately illustrated stories that look like high-class, book length comics." (Gallo 114) Because graphic novels include images, they may also serve to connect the reluctant reader to the text and convey meaning more deliberately than a canonical novel. Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* suggests that graphic novels and comics provide the reader a more immersed reading experience due to closure. (63-69) To reach closure the reader must obtain visual cues from the panels while also deciphering language and making inferences about what happens between the panels or in the gutter. This process creates more involvement with literature and might provide the opportunity to attract an audience of readers that might not be enthusiastic or even interested in reading. Another important element of comics that is not typically seen in canonical novels is the appeal created from the intermingling of words and pictures. (Gallo and Wiener 115)

Graphic novels and comics also have other uses in the classroom; as Gallo and Wiener state: "To encourage narrative description, teachers could copy part of a story, eliminate the illustrations but include the dialogue for the last several pages, and ask students to describe the characters' actions." (117) This activity itself creates the opportunity for in-depth discussion and exchanges between students. Several other methods exist that may improve student engagement but a well-rounded course that uses several different methods of delivery text promotes equitable and all-inclusive learning opportunities. One such method is using both a canonical novel and a graphic novel as outlined by Gorlewski and Schmidt. This "comparing" activity can be assigned based on the reading of a classic text and the graphic novel adaptation of the novel. "Students could consider the strengths and weaknesses of both versions and then using evidence, recommend a version." (Gorlewski and Schmidt 105) This activity can create the opportunity for students to learn rhetoric and argumentative writing.

Addressing social change and justice through education and literature can be difficult but is necessary in ensuring that students face life issues informed and equipped to navigate situations as a positive contributor to the human experience. *I Am Alfonso Jones* by Tony Medina, Stacey Robinson, and John Jennings is a resource that acknowledges the existence of the disparities associated with police shootings and the injustices that are common worldwide. The use of visuals or images has long served as symbols for social justice and change. Carter details these instances by writing, “Consider flowers in gun barrels, raised fists, or that activist cartoon educator Paulo Freire used cartoon images to help teach literacy and social justice entwined concepts to poor peasants in South America.” (51) Other images that resonate with society are the peace sign of the sixties and seventies and the rainbow of the more modern LGBTQ community. By using images and text in *I Am Alfonso Jones*, the author expresses concern for the lives of many who are unable to address the disparities in lives and the problem that exists in a system that is meant to protect the lives of all and not just a designated few. Almost everyone knows *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and many praise it for its examination of the Holocaust and how the people in his life were impacted by it. The graphic novel is valuable and just as *Maus* helps people make sense of things that still resonate today, *I Am Alfonso Jones* will do the same.

Carter suggests that “teachers need a suitable lens through which to view these works if we are to use graphic novels to expose injustice and examine complex social issues.” (51) He argues that the three ways to do this is cross-curricular, employing graphic novels as complements to traditional texts already used in the English classroom, and using contact zone theory. I will use the graphic novel in combination with a traditional text, *If You Come Softly* by Jacqueline Woodson and use contact zone theory as a tool to address the issue of police brutality and other social issues that plague communities and the world. Contact Zone Theory is a concept coined by Mary Louise Pratt to describe narrative techniques where social spaces are created for the purpose of cultural meetings, clashes, and grappling leading to a student learning and sometimes resolution. Perspective can sometimes be a great method to use for learning and understanding. Jacqueline Woodson examines many different topics in *If You Come Softly* ranging from familial roles and expectation, interracial/forbidden love, racism, gender roles, racism, and police brutality. *I Am Alfonso Jones* will serve as a supplement to look at the themes based on police brutality and how it impacts the lives of the students (if it does) and examine the mindsets of the students within the classroom. One way to ensure that engaged reading occurs, according to Carter, is to “challenge ourselves to continue to see beyond traditional notions of literacy and to embrace the visual.” (52) By doing so we will connect our students to issues that they face, experience, or hear about routinely. The graphic novel is a gateway to help students encounter common themes through images and words which is a dramatically different experience from simply reading traditional texts.

It is imperative to take notice of what students read for fun and then apply what we learn from that to curriculum design and classroom instruction. By using texts that embody themes, characters, and structure that students are familiar with, instructors can then look to literature that

can be applied to life and student experiences. Students should see characters in situations that they can conjure in their minds or that they see day to day but, despite their interest, still seem unfamiliar. This disconnect can create anxiety in students and ultimately distance them from reading, but it can also be used to stimulate an interest in new topics that will prepare them to become productive and valuable human beings. Graphic novels are great for students to examine the realities of the world by associating images with text, dialogue, and by reading what is in between the panels of the comics creates the opportunity to visual and make predictions about the action that will occur in the next panel.

In Chapter Five of *Understanding Comics* Scott McCloud details how emotions can be rendered and conveyed using images, symbols, and icons (118-137) and observes that “Kandinsky and his peers were searching for an art that might somehow unite the senses and in doing so, unite the different artforms which appealed to those different senses” (123). This idea is called synaesthetics and it bolsters Howard Gardner’s ideas surrounding multiple intelligences. Graphic novels pique the interest of students, contain valuable themes and ideas that can be found in traditional texts and applied to daily life, while using varying methods to delivery that meaning substantially increases the opportunity to capture reluctant readers. The opportunity to use graphic novels as a resource should not be overlooked because many of the ideas and themes expressed in these works are aligned valuable and necessary aspects of North Carolina’s Common Core Standards. The graphic novel will provide opportunities for students to use multiple modes to critically think about the themes that are conveyed and their role in either perpetuating or solving these problems innately. Carter suggests that “the English classroom that integrates graphic novels will be and is becoming a classroom with books that suggest the class is a place of acceptance, diversity, deep and multifaceted reading, and discussion that does not shy away from challenge.” (52) As an educator the diversity in learning opportunities that graphic novels present for students promotes inclusiveness and supports differentiation.

Graphic novels represent one of the fastest growing and most popular types of young adult literature and resonates with students because of their visual approach to examining most of the same issues that are addressed in traditional school reading. The newness of the genre creates hesitation in some educators to implement and design curriculum based on graphic novels in the classroom, but there is an anomalous enrichment opportunity that exists with the use of graphic novels. The opportunity for teaching outside of the traditional boundaries that are created by canonical literature exists because “many young adults enjoy graphic novels because the genre differs so dramatically from the books that educators traditionally have encouraged adolescents to read.” (Bucher and Manning 67) Variations of all types should be considered when deciding what genres of literature to implement into the classroom and graphic novels are an important part of the variation that exists. “Too often educators exclude graphic novels,” Bucher and Manning lament, “solely because of the format or the erroneous impression that all graphic novels focus on supernatural horror stories or are expressions of the male power fantasy.” (Bucher and Manning 68) I suggest that quality choices can be made to implement

graphic novels that examine and convey most of the same themes and societal concerns that are addressed in canonical literature.

What are some other reasons teachers should consider using graphic novels in the classroom? Rachel Marie-Crane Williams writes that “There are at least three reasons why comics and graphic novels are useful teaching tool: (1) there is a great deal of student interest in this genre; (2) they are inexpensive to obtain; and (3) the vocabulary is not difficult to read.” (13) Although, all of these reasons may not be accurate considering the valuable commodity that graphic novels have become, there are numerous other reasons why graphic novels should be and can be implemented into classroom curriculum. Williams develops her stance by arguing that

teachers who skillfully use comics and graphic novels in their curriculum present numerous opportunities for students to deconstruct these texts on multiple levels. This layered deconstruction may include examining the story, the creator’s intention, characters, and context, as well as the relationship between the design, words, and images. (13)

By engaging in such an enriched and involved reading experience students will access and develop multiple intelligences. Through the development of multiple intelligences teachers are able to develop students into individual critical thinkers and productive members of their communities and societies.

Graphic novels are not as simplistic and straightforward as some may think. The complexities that exist in graphic novels are present in both the text and the visuals. A relationship that exists in comics that does not exist in canonical literature which makes the reading experience much different. Paula Griffith details this relationship and its impact as follows:

The artistic rendering of the story contributes to half the ability to comprehend it fully; therefore, the illustrations are equally as important as the text. The illustrations add the information and detail missing from the text. Although the clues may be evident or subtle, the illustrations enable the reader to make inferences and judgements separate from the reading and understanding of words. (183)

For a long time, educators have insisted that the simplicity of the graphic novel is what makes it problematic as part of classroom curriculum. Research exists and is readily available that suggests that the graphic novel has advanced as a genre and contains complex themes, character interactions, and teenage experiences that mirror those that many of our students are facing and living through. These qualities make the graphic novel a pronounced option for teenage students across all disciplines. Kasey Garrison believes and writes ardently that “Graphic novels offer young adults a unique provocative perspective, with the combination of illustrations and text telling the story with art and symbols.” (10) This ultimately leads to the advancement of visual

literacy, but there is also value in the words, the symbolism, and advancement of ideologies, civilizations, cultures, and social groups that is not routinely captured in canonical texts.

Considering the complexities of reading graphic novels, the well-developed and sensitive themes, and complexities; along with the life experiences of your students, it is imperative that teachers research and are aware of which graphic novels are valuable and provide the best opportunities for student growth. There is a silence that lies between the panels and in the gutter that allows readers to advance their thinking, and this promotes a connectedness that can't be obtained through reading traditional school texts and literature. McQuillan advances this ideology when he argues that "Gutters invite us to fill them with allusion and voices—that is, they become intertextual" (46). The silence that exists in the gutter is intentional and used as a tool by authors and artists to encourage the reader to make sense of—and to synthesize-- both the images and the words. This exercise in reading creates a visceral impact that is not normally experienced when reading prose. Graphic novels expand the limitations of readers and create the opportunity for personal growth through recognition of themes, characters, and conflicts that readers may be unaware of or unexposed to in their own life experiences. The graphic novel is also helpful in examining other literary elements such as figurative language, plot structure, character development and motive, conflict, and author's craft. The reader is not limited by the panels and the gutter but given permission to process what is occurring between them, ultimately leading to an understanding of what is happening both in the panels and between them promoting a connection to the novel that is much more fulfilling. The reader in this instance feels as if they have taken part in the creative process. Elizabeth Downey expresses the value in graphic novels by writing that "they also have a social use, introducing students to diverse peoples and cultures they might otherwise not encounter." (183) The exposure gained by students hopefully will lead to a love for reading that extends beyond the classroom and lasts a lifetime.

Integrating graphic novels into classroom curriculum will be demanding and teachers need to be well prepared and knowledgeable while developing lessons and activities that are meaningful, challenging, and impactful, while supporting student needs and interests. "The combination of text and illustrations in graphic novels," writes Garrison, "can engage readers in a deeper understanding of the story as they use both traditional literacy and visual literacy strategies to read and enjoy books." (Garrison, 11) The panels, the gutters, the speech balloons, the thought balloons, and captions all contribute to the overall experience of reading a graphic novel and that experience is much different when reading canonical literature, or traditional classroom texts.

Rachel Marie-Crane Williams summarizes what one of the major goals of this unit is by noting that "it is important to create compassionate students who can comprehend the reasons that each person is essential to our world." (18) In addition, the goal of the unit is to inform students of the existence of police brutality, the statistics surrounding accidental or intended deaths due to police involvement and make them aware of their orientation in the community.

Questions that should be asked are but not limited to: How does this impact me? What influence do I have on the existing problem? and What can I do to impact a change? These questions promote thinking beyond the classroom and are designed to foster an environment where students feel safe to voice their ideas and their stance on a specific topic. Both *If You Come Softly* and *I Am Alfonso Jones* address issues that teens can relate to either from their own experiences, the experiences of their peers, or examples that they have seen in other media. The graphic novel in this instance provides a clear and concise mode to address the issue and promotes reading for learners at all levels.

Instructional Implementation

The unit is designed to make use of several pedagogical techniques to ensure student understanding and comprehension. The delivery of information in different modes will also be a real-life demonstration to students showing the effects of various modes and the value in all of them. In my daily classroom practices, I try to incorporate various methods of delivery to ensure student involvement, engagement, participation, and comprehension. Examination of social justice and police brutality will require the integration of various methods to ensure that students understand the importance of the issues, the impact that those issues have on them as well as on the people they love, their communities, and the world. Students will conduct inquiry into background knowledge surrounding police brutality and social justice, while having open discussions about their findings and collaborative activities that help them to understand how Tony Medina, Stacey Robinson, and John Jennings convey those specific themes in *I Am Alfonso Jones*. By adopting cognitive reading strategies students will read the graphic novel for the purpose of comprehension and analysis. Students will identify what the author is saying and what the author is doing.

The overall implementation and success of this unit will be based on individual students' work ethic, attention to detail, collaboration, and ability to work independently. This unit should give students the freedom to make determinations about the text with little to no teacher input or influence. This is exactly what is called for in the philosophy behind Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID). AVID provides scaffolded support that educators and students need to encourage college and career readiness and success. This unit will not be filled with the exercises typically seen in traditional classrooms. There will not be any lengthy presentations (maybe one), quizzes, or tests. Students tend to learn more through conversations that take place with their peer groups and can typically be easily distracted while listening to long lectures. Lectures that take place will be limited, short, and used to focus the thinking processes or to share new information. The goal is to elicit conversations between students that are meaningful, extensive, and consequential. The themes addressed in the graphic novel will certainly do that because they are attached to a specific group of students, but the images that represent social justice and police brutality have been made available to everyone through various media sources, ranging from television to movies. The graphic novel, *I Am Alfonso*

Jones, serves as the mode this time to address these societal issues, to discuss literary elements, and to teach skills that are outlined in the North Carolina Core Standards for English Language Arts.

Modes of Instruction Delivery

Videos

To further comprehension of social injustices and police brutality, playing videos often provides a different perspective. Unlike narratives, video can provide substantial information some students would be unable to acquire due to time constraints and reading limits. Lack of resources could limit students from accessing necessary tools and videos are a quick way to teach background knowledge, historical context, and major influencers of the topic. Biographies and videos about specific cases can be shown to develop context while also attaching faces and voices to the issue. Students will also gain a knowledge of

Daily Digital Journal Entries

Students will be asked to write daily in a digital journal about questions that relate to the novel and to life. Placing students in relatable situations always gives them the opportunity to think about how they might respond, what they might, or who might come to their defense. This is an activity that is currently in place and serves as a warm-up for instruction and gives the class an opportunity to construct responses that are meaningful and specific to their environment, culture, and community. Five minutes is regularly allotted for students to free-write and compose their ideas, before I ask a few students to share their responses.

Literature Circles

Students will use literature circles as an opportunity to discuss their reading, their ideas about the topics, and answer reading-related questions. There will be text-based questions in three different categories “Right There” questions, “Think and Search Questions,” and “Author and Me” questions. All three question types are of different levels and create an opportunity for students to share their experience with the text and provide perspective to students that may have difficulty analyzing the text. Students can collaboratively answer questions, as well as express their ideas independently, coming to terms with what they found within the literature. This will also serve as an opportunity for students to clash and resolve those clashes which makes for great debating skills, conflict resolution, and self-expression. Literary circles will be closely monitored, and questions will be designed to ensure that students are reading and comprehend what they are reading. These skills are aligned with the North Carolina Common Core Standards and promote individuality, critical thinking, respectful dialogue, and socioemotional learning.

Socratic Seminars

Socratic Seminars are designed to promote whole class discussion about a novel based on specific questions with the teacher ensuring that the conversation remains on topic and focused but without hindering honest and authentic communication about the text. This activity will help to deepen student understanding of complex concepts through intentional and purposeful discussion. Students will prepare through reading and have guiding questions that facilitate the discussion. There will be little to no involvement by the teacher and students will be responsible for providing insights, sharing ideas, commenting on other students' ideas respectfully, bringing new thoughts and ideas to the discussion, and questioning other students when they are unclear about a specific idea or concept that is discussed about the text. Students will be provided with questions 1 day prior to the seminar and need to come to class prepared to discuss what they learned and have seen in the text. Some of the concepts that will be examined is authors tone, the use of dialogue, literary devices, setting, characterization, and plot structure.

Multimodal Project

In a multimodal project students will demonstrate and convey their ideas about a chosen societal, community, or local issue that resonates with them. Students will create a graphic novel that captures the societal, community or local issue using one of several free book creator applications that can be found online. The graphic novel needs to include complex characters, a conflict, and a resolution or anticipated solution to the conflict. As part of the assignment students will include a 250–500 word essay that explains and details why the issue and a resolution is important to the advancement of humankind. Students will record a video reflection expressing how the novel impacted them, why the message is important to them, and their key takeaways. They should also detail why or why not the novel resonates with them. This should be detailed using vocabulary terms that will be introduced to the students early in the unit related to both the *I Am Alfonso Jones* and *If You Come Softly*. Specific terms that students should know are literary devices, figurative language, plot structure, characterization, symbolism; just to name a few.

Daily Instructional Design

The First Day

The first day activities in any major project are crucial to the project's success. The unit will begin with a poll based on student understanding of what graphic novels are, their interest in them, engagement or disengagement with them, favorite title, and why they believe graphic novels are not regularly used in the academic setting and classroom. We will utilize this day to build background knowledge about graphic novels. A short video that outlines the characteristics of graphic novels and a short history will be played for students, a word wall will be formed using [graphic novel terms](#) that students might be unfamiliar with, and students will have the opportunity to look at some samples of graphic novels. Before introducing the novel to students, we will develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posting questions such as:

How do you define justice? Discuss one example of the injustices in your community. What do you think racial justice means? Students will create a one three panel strip that embodies elements from their favorite book, television show or movie. Students will respond to a writing prompt to end the class in order to check for understanding.

Day Two

On day two, students will apply their understanding of the graphic novel *I Am Alfonso Jones* by responding to teacher prompts and questions. The overall discussion will center around how the images, dialogue, and setting contribute to the overall themes of the graphic novel. Students should be prepared in advance to answer the questions based on their understanding of graphic novels. They should process the images, language and author's craft while sharing their understanding collaborative groups; responding and discussing their key takeaways while fostering academic and social awareness based on personal experiences, perspective, and their orientation in their communities. The guidelines will be set and established prior to the commencement of the literature circle. Students are encouraged to be honest, respectful, and on task during this process. There will be a digital journal warm-up that helps to focus students on the ideologies associated with the topic and then they will work independently to accomplish the task. Student roles within their literature circles will rotate so that they do not repeat the same roles daily.

Day Three

On day three, students will apply and further their understanding of the graphic novel *I Am Alfonso Jones* by responding to teacher prompts and questions. The overall discussion will center around how the images, dialogue, and setting contribute to the overall themes of the graphic novel. Students should be prepared in advance to answer the questions based on their understanding of graphic novels. They should process the images, language and author's craft while sharing their understanding in collaborative groups; responding and discussing their key takeaways while fostering academic and social awareness based on personal experiences, perspective, and their orientation in their communities. The guidelines will be set and established prior to the commencement of the literature circle. Students are encouraged to be honest, respectful, and on task during this process. There will be a digital journal warm-up that will help to focus students on the ideologies associated with the topic and then they will work independently to accomplish the task. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the novel by picking and recreating one image from their reading that encompasses one of the many themes of the graphic novel. Creative liberty is allowed and encouraged. The premise of these activities is to allow students to share how they feel about the topics and themes while promoting open academic discussions and applying their understanding of vocabulary, author's craft, and elements associated with graphic novels and the major differences that exist between graphic novels and traditional literature.

Day Four

Day 4 will serve as the last day for Literature Circle in preparation for a student lead Socratic Seminar. The overall discussion will center around how the images, dialogue, and setting contribute to the overall themes of the graphic novel. Students should be prepared in advance to answer the questions based on their understanding of graphic novels. They should process the images, language and author's craft while sharing their understanding in collaborative groups; responding and discussing their key takeaways while fostering academic and social awareness based on personal experiences, perspective, and their orientation in their communities. The guidelines will be set and established prior to the commencement of the literature circle. Students are encouraged to be honest, respectful, and on task during this process. There will be a digital journal warm-up that helps to focus students on the ideologies associated with the topic and then they will work independently to accomplish the task. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the novel by picking and recreating one image from their reading that encompasses one of the many themes of the graphic novel. Creative liberty is allowed and encouraged. The premise of these activities is to allow students to share how they feel about the topics and themes while promoting open academic discussions and applying their understanding of vocabulary, author's craft, and elements associated with graphic novels and the major differences that exist between graphic novels and traditional literature.

Day Five

Socratic Seminar is a formal discussion, based on specific text, where students are asked to answer open ended questions. Within the discussion students will listen carefully to the comments of other students, thinking critically for themselves and then sharing their thoughts by adding to the comments of classmates, sharing their own developed ideas, or questioning the ideas of other students. The rules of engagement will be laid out in advance and students will be aware of the dos and don'ts as follows:

- Be prepared to participate and ask focused questions. The quality of the Socratic Seminar is diminished when participants speak without preparation.
- Show respect for differing ideas, thoughts, and values—no put-downs or sarcasm.
- Allow each speaker enough time to begin and finish his or her thoughts—don't interrupt.
- involve others in the discussion and ask them to elaborate on their responses.
- Build on what others say—ask questions to probe deeper, clarify, paraphrase, add to, and synthesize a variety of different views in your own summary.
- Use your best active listening skills—nod, make eye contact, lean forward, provide feedback, and listen carefully to others.
- Participate openly and keep your mind open to new ideas and possibilities.
- Refer to the text often and give evidence and examples to support your response. Discuss the ideas of the text, not each other's opinions or personal experiences.
- Take notes about important points that you want to remember or new questions that you want to ask.

Appendix 1

Teaching Standards

English Language Arts

RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama.

RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly engaging.

RL.11-12.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to construct specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its effect on the reader.

W.11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

W.11-12.5 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Appendix 2

Journal Entries

Students will respond to the writing prompts daily thoroughly in their digital journals. After completing their responses, we will engage in a short conversation to help focus our thinking and share out thoughts, emotions, and realizations. Writing prompts are listed below:

Day One

Identify a societal, community, or social issue that resonates with you. Why is this issue important? How does this issue impact you or someone you know directly or indirectly? What do you think is the solution to this issue? How does the existence of this issue impact the human experience? Complete your response in five to seven well-structured sentences.

Day Two

How much does your neighborhood and/or community define who you are? Explain your response in specific detail. Why do you feel this way? Do you believe that your community can be changed? Yes or No. Why? How might you create change within your neighborhood or community? Complete your response in five to seven well-structured sentences.

Day Three

Is struggle essential to happiness? Have you ever faced a challenge in your life? Did you overcome it? What was the whole experience like? What did you feel during and after your struggle? Complete your response in five to seven well-structured sentences.

Day Four

How should parents teach their children about racism, social injustice, and inequality? How did you learn about racism? Did you have any conversations with parents or family members at home? What was talked about, and how did the conversation start? Describe what you can remember. Complete your response in five to seven well-structured sentences.

Day Five

Describe your feelings after reading *I Am Alfonso Jones*? What have you learned from your reading and your conversations with classmates? What have you learned about yourself? How can you use what you've learned in real life? How do you think what you have learned will impact your human experience? Complete your response in five to seven well-structured sentences.

Appendix 3 Teacher and Student Resources

I Am Alfonso Jones Book Trailer

https://youtu.be/5rmLR_CJM8E?si=5iKiP10f0GnpdyvJ

Lee and Low Books https://www.leeandlow.com/books/i-am-alfonso-jones/teachers_guide

What is a Graphic Novel?

<https://youtu.be/Xe-FYIqrZrI?si=Txur43aqSFAuX0N5>

"What is a Graphic Novel? (Part I)": A Literary Guide for English Students and Teachers

<https://youtu.be/SPES7Z2fjIY?si=WESFOiFcJ3AUiaEB>

44 comic book ideas and examples to get you started

<https://www.blurb.com/blog/comic-book-ideas/>

Graphic Novel: Terms and Vocabulary Slides (Audio could be added at the teacher's discretion.)

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1__-RmvNfZp6dtnAFtYTh4dG2QzIVcjK_W4K-dM6y9cc/edit#slide=id.g299dd69f900_0_5

I Am Alfonso Jones. Tony Medina, Stacey Robinson, John Jennings & Damian Duffy at SF Library <https://youtu.be/RUe4-24GySk?si=OVaaMMe7wdWa-RMu>

Literature Circle One

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_gr2u2w8GX9W9F0mbmhcHbdhvtugS4ErZ_QAYX9dHeI/edit

Literature Circle Two

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1A021rUzwK8LFJsbSONYZFniR1PwkBZcpWzWTuKCIJpQ/edit>

Literature Circle Three https://docs.google.com/document/d/17n_r2x3L_liDHLdQBguDTQziE-KvdenLPY4jVqkq5fGY/edit

Literature Circle Four

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ieo9GMAWfOw3Q9GLdjamTUuuj_j94CvMN8jdVjq8RVk/edit

Socratic Seminar Rubric https://docs.google.com/document/d/1w0kml3KcjP_zl9uV1_X62-vu6sAWoVYN7CE1xh1Rwoc/edit

Digital Journal

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/168fi4pWVco77vkrbD8NHKUiu9Iw9K0yK_6IjVvwB8Cc/edit#slide=id.p

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