

Personal Reflection on Literacy

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Comics: 21st Century Literature in the Classroom

As a Library Media Specialist/Teacher-Librarian, I am fortunate that visual literacy has always played a crucial role in my training, education, and teaching. My very first semester as a Library Science student at Simmons College's School of Library and Information Science, I took a class on Children's Literature that was essentially a crash-course in visual literacy, the sometimes complex interplay between text and words, and how our understanding of stories told through pictures, words, or both, evolves from childhood to adulthood. Although I no longer teach very young children, the course did make me think a lot about how we as human beings tell stories with pictures, and how visual art can enhance or convey information outright, and I still use that understanding in my instruction. For example, I think most people know that the [Caldecott Award](#) is given to the best children's picture book of the year. Most people, however, do not realize that the illustrator is the sole recipient of the award; the author of the text does not win it alongside the artist. The Caldecott Medal is all about how effectively the artist creates illustrations that support the story; it is not awarded for the text. Starting with the very first books we read, pictures, and the relationship between pictures and story, matter.

Additionally, as I have previously mentioned, I received my undergraduate degree in Film and Television, with a minor in Art History—both very visual fields of study. I have always been a visual person, but I only began thinking critically about images during my studies in college. I personally learn best through images, and I think I teach better when I use images and multimedia in my instruction. In my best lessons, my students think critically, too. There is a reason the word “media” persists in my job title—when I teach information literacy skills to my students, I teach visual literacy skills alongside traditional text literacy skills. [21st Century Teaching and Learning standards](#) for Library Media

Specialists/Teacher-Librarians dictate that we teach [information literacy skills](#). When librarians talk about “information literacy,” we are not talking about reading and comprehending words on a printed page. We teach students to think critically about information in all its forms: text, illustration, photographs, videos, and so on. We strive to educate our students to be effective users of information, no matter what form that information takes. In the 21st century, it is simply not enough to be solely text-literate (if such a thing is even possible). Navigating daily media requires visual literacy.

The more I think about visual literacy, my own understanding of it, and how I use it in my instruction, the more likely I think it is that if my school ever provides in-service training on visual literacy, I may be assisting with the training. I had not previously given much thought to how my specific educational background would so directly relate to teaching graphic novels. Now that I have reflected on it, I am extremely enthusiastic about honing what I know into more concrete modes of supporting the teachers in my building.