

COMICS IN EDUCATION

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Presented to the
Department of English & Communications
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

American University of Armenia
Yerevan, Armenia

May 21, 2019

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Abstract

Comics have been considered as an inappropriate type of reading ultimately. Many parents were not letting their children read comics as they were thinking of comics as a cheap way of entertainment. Many researchers conducted studies to understand whether the comic book influence was positive or negative. The paper will look at the studies and show how comics can be effectively used as an education tool.

Also, several famous authors revolutionized comics and graphic novels. The analysis of those examples revealed much essential information about the stylistic, characteristic, and language choices which were necessary for the execution of their ideas.

The findings will be conveyed through personalized comics. The creative work will show what important aspects were taken into consideration while creating it.

Introduction

Thirty-two centuries ago Egyptians were honoring their royals with images depicting certain scenes. They were also depicting everyday life scenes, where people were doing their tasks. Those images resembled early comics.

The lack of confidence and the lack of motivation have always been significant problems in children and adults as well. Most of them searched for a safe place, somewhere they can feel understood and not weak. Comics have been a significant source of empowerment throughout the years, as people of all ages tried to find themselves in fictional characters. For many of them, their first best friend was a comic book character. There is a chance that the person they identify

themselves with is still a comic book hero. In the 1940s and 1950s, many researchers have studied comics to find whether or not they were an appropriate type of reading. The results were not promising. Comics were long regarded as a piece of literature with poor vocabulary. Parents were not considering comic books as appropriate reading for their children, because they found comics distracting. Even though it was a long time ago, it is essential to include the previous perceptions about comics to later compare to the nowadays perceptions of comic books.

Comics have more to offer than pure entertainment. Since comics have both drawings and a little bit of writing, they are easier to comprehend. Magritte's painting, called *Treachery of Images*, is a great example. The caption of the painting says, "This is Not a Pipe". It might seem confusing, as the painting is portraying a pipe, but the caption says the opposite. On the computer screen, it will not be considered as a painting. It will be a digital version of a painting of a pipe. The drawing of a flag is not a country; the swastika is not Nazism; the bubble is not the voice, and so on. These are the things that the brain automatically comprehends and decodes. One does not even think twice while reading a comic book. One does not even realize that they know far more than they are presented. For instance, while looking at the drawing of a man with glasses, no one suspects the man does not have eyes. The brain makes one believe that there is something underneath, and it is just a realistic way to show it. Anything can be better understood if presented in a comic book form. It gives more space for the imagination than any other readings.

Even the most complicated topics are easier to read in comic book format than in ordinary literature. The famous authors Art Spiegelman, Marjane Satrapi, and Riad Satouff, used the comic book format to explore both their personal and other political issues that influenced their lives. They had their remarkable approaches and techniques, including color schemes,

character choices, and vocabulary. Due to the rise of the Internet and the development of new technologies, people started reading comics more and more, which lead to an increase in popularity of the comic book medium. The Internet made comics more accessible, and the demand increased as well. This research aims to show how comic books can effectively be used as a tool for education using the combination of the visual and the textual components.

Literature Review

Many people, if not everyone, have seen, heard, or encountered comics. Comics are usually defined by its appearance: drawings with bold linework. It is also evident that comics are a unique type of narrative. As a narrative, it is unique, because of the combination of a story and pictures to illustrate. When comics first came out, they were famous. Everyone liked reading comics, especially children and young adults. However, what are comics? Can they be defined? In their essay called “What Are Comics?” According to Greg Hayman and Henry John Pratt, comics are defined as a “pictorial narrative.” According to Aaron Meskin, Hayman’s and Pratt’s definition might seem correct, but they left out many nuances.

Since comics are not just pictures and text, other people tried to define comics as well. Among those people was David Kunzle. According to Kunzle, a comic strip is made of “a sequence of separate images” with “a preponderance of image over text” that appears and was initially intended to appear in a “mass medium” and tells “a story which is both moral and topical” (Meskin, 2007, p. 369). However, this is debatable because if most of the comic strips are presented in a mass medium, it does not mean that they should be there. In the same way, the predominance of images over text in comics makes sense, but that is not the reason to be called comics. The story of the comics can be understood without text, but the text cannot be

interpreted without images. Scott McCloud defined comics as juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence that can convey information or be aesthetically pleasing (McCloud, 1994).

Comics as a type of reading

In the past, there was a controversy over the suitability of comics as reading for children. Parents thought that comics are not favorable for children to learn. In 1949, Harvey Zorbaugh conducted a study based on some three thousand personal interviews in places of two thousand five hundred population and over. 65% of adults thought that newspaper comics were favorable for children as reading, whereas 36% of adults thought that comic magazines are beneficial for children as a reading. The newspaper comics are more academic than comic magazines, that is why the majority of the parents preferred those over comic magazines. The criticism of the adults was mainly directed towards adventure comics due to the danger of developing a mental illness and being negatively influenced by cultural development (Zorbaugh, 1949).

In 1982 there was another research developed to understand whether comic books can influence students' desire to visit the library. The other concern for the research was whether an increase in the number of library visitors increase circulation of noncomic book materials. The research was done in West Junior High School in Columbia, Missouri by Dr. Dorrell and Dr. Southall (1982).

It might seem immature for many educators to use comic books to educate about history and wars. Despite the negative opinions, some teachers had tried to convey history through comics. A case study was done by Alicia Decker and Mauricio Castro. Alicia is an instructor of American History, whereas Mauricio is an instructor of African history. As a comic book lover himself, Mauricio realized that compared to the comics of his time, the new ones are more mature. His own experience with comics as an education tool was when he was in the second

year of graduate school. As a part of his classes, Castro took women's studies course on militarization with Decker. It changed his mind. Castro was given the example of DC comic book character Wonder Woman (Amazon woman), and he realized that comics could be more than just primary sources. Later, he came across other comics called "The Unknown Soldier," which was about Ugandan wars. That comic book became the reason for Decker's and Castro's collaboration (Decker & Castro, 2012).

On the contrary, according to Dale Jacobs, the children who are bad at reading tend to look at comics. They are not reading, but just looking at the pictures to avoid engaging in elaborate processes of learning to read (Jacobs, 2007). It is not a surprise when at younger ages, teachers use images to help students remember the concepts easily. The most exceptional example is the word "apple" illustrated with an apple next to the word. In the same way, it is much easier for people to enjoy the plot of the story when it is a movie. However, when it comes to reading, people are much lazier and get bored very quickly. If combined with pictures, the text is much more effective. The example of comic books. There is very little written, but a lot is drawn. If there is no text, the plot is still understandable.

On the contrary, if there are no images, the text is meaningless. The problem with comics is that people see them as simple images. However, to be able to understand comics, one should know linguistic, visual, gestural, and spatial conventions. People do not complicate comic books because they are used to word-based literacy (Jacobs, 2007).

Comics, along with cartoons, have plenty of pedagogical opportunities. The only thing needed is to put comics into historical, aesthetic, educational, and empowering contexts to give comic books a new approach. That strategy is an aid to students to develop artistic skills and involve students in art appreciation (Berkowitz & Packer, 2001). Many art teachers state that

many of their students have claimed that they cannot draw anything. However, in other classes, those students have notebooks full of drawings. It appeared that they were interested in comic books. Instead of drawing in a 40-minute art class, they were drawing comic book characters for hours.

Scott McCloud (1993) has done sophisticated analyses of comic books, concluding that there is a link between traditional art and comic books. Students can learn about traditional art concepts through the history and design of comic books. For example, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles fans will be pleasantly surprised to find out that the names of the Turtles are names of real artists like Michelangelo, Donatello, Raphael, and Leonardo). Batman fans would be interested to know that the original costume is from Leonardo da Vinci's drawing (Berkowitz & Packer, 2001). According to Caputo (1997), comic books sales have exceeded \$4 billion worldwide in recent years.

Comic books are cheap, available, highly engaging, and familiar medium to entertain students and guide them in many areas. They are touching aspects such as gender equality, political issues, issues of racism, and so on.

There are some reasons why comics are useful as teaching tools: students are very interested in the genre, comics are cheap, and the vocabulary is easy to read (Wright & Sherman, 1999). The teachers who are skillful and knowledgeable enough to understand the ways of using comic books in the classroom will succeed. Even though there are so many reasons why comic books are suitable as an education tool, many educators cannot accept comic books as a serious medium. As Jacobs (2007) claimed, teachers and adults need to get away from restricted and formalized forms of language. According to Thierry Groensteen (2000), comics existed for 150 years, and people have always resisted accepting comic books in education and art sphere.

Historically, comics were considered a piece of art. However, in recent years, comics became more like media type (Williams, 2008).

Famous Comics

Among the most successful graphic novels is Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. *Maus* is a revolutionary graphic novel since it is precarious and touches upon topics such as Holocaust and family trauma. The entire comic book is based on his interview with his father, who was a Holocaust survivor. It comes in two books, but only the first one is analyzed. The piece is unique due to the author's character choices and drawing techniques (Spiegelman, 1986).

Along with the original graphic novel, several scholarly articles providing detailed information about the criticisms are used. As Spiegelman's characters were depicted as animals, many scholars argued about that. Samantha Zuckerman pointed out that many scholarly critics were against Spiegelman's character choices. She observed others' opinion, and based on that she supported Spiegelman's ideas by showing what was brilliant (Zuckerman, 2008). Thomas Doherty implied that Nazis called any asymmetric art as a degenerate art. According to Doherty, the Nazis' perception of art was the exact reason why Spiegelman's anthropomorphic characters were a valid choice.

Another important graphic novel is Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*. *Persepolis* is based on Satrapi's childhood and takes its way to her teenage years and adulthood. She used *Persepolis* to tell about the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which played a major role in her growing up. An important part of her story is the hijab, which is the representation of her struggle to fit in her

country (Satrapi, 2003). Emma Tarlo also analyzed *Persepolis* in terms of the representation of the country's regime, particularly the way women were forced to wear a hijab (Tarlo, 2007).

Sattouf, just like Spiegelman and Satrapi, also wrote an autobiographical memoir, which is called *The Arab of the Future*. It was based on his young age in France, Lybia, and Syria. The name of the graphic novel was inspired by Sattouf's father's perception of him as growing up the Arab of the Future (Sattouf, 2015). Lindsey's analysis of *The Arab of the Future* brings up several important points about it, such as the symbolism of rubbing the nose (Lindsay, 2016).

Research Questions

What are some ways comic books can effectively be used in the classroom?

Now that the definition of comics is identified, it needs clarification about the way they can be used. This question is the most crucial research question related to the topic. The basis of my project is several ways comic books can effectively be used in the classroom. During my research, I found out many ways that comics can be used as a tool for education. An analysis is done on several comics, and the tools their authors used are emphasized. Also, I tried to convey some of those ways in my creative project (the comic book I have drawn).

Will comic books be a suitable way to study?

This question complements the first one. If comics can be effectively used in the classroom, they can also be suitable. Once the ways are shown to people, they will consider it.

Methodology

Since the topic is about comic books, the best way to make the proposed idea convincing is to have both written and visual components.

The critical part

Since comic books in Armenia are a rare topic, there is no evidence of academic articles about comics as an education tool in Armenia. Instead, the academic articles about comic books in different spheres will be used. Most of the critical will be based on the analysis of three different comic books – Spiegelman's *Maus*, Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Satuf's *Arab of the Future*. For the research part, the initial reaction of parents about comic books will be presented. That statistical information is found from the study done in 1949 by Harvey Zorbaugh. Two other articles will be analyzed to show some reactions in classrooms. A course called Graphic Novel is offered Spring 2019 semester, which helped with the necessary knowledge about the origin of the comics. The comics mentioned above are part of the course material, and I used the knowledge I gained from that class while creating my comics. The instructor has experience in graphic novels (as he had his first graphic novel published recently). He very carefully explained all the nuances one should know to make an original graphic novel. Besides that, we had four assignments that we had to do using StoryBoardThat website. It is a platform that allows instructors to teach their students to create comic strips. The four assignments had specific areas of research we had to follow. With that course, I became aware of both technical and ideological

details that one needs to consider to have a successful graphic novel. The research has a complimentary creative part, which drew by myself.

The creative part

The time that was available during winter break and the time I spent in the Graphic Novel classroom, let me find out different comic book drawing styles. The storyline is relevant to Armenia and has aspects specific to Armenia. However, I have a different approach. Instead of complicated topics, such as politics, history, and other, I tried to concentrate on the other issues, such a being polite and respectful. I included my encounters with the Armenian-ness of people: things that are common in Armenia and are personal for me. For the drawing part, I used my 10.5-inch iPad Pro and an Apple Pencil. The specific application for the drawing is Procreate. I have a specific brush set for comic drawing, and I used comic storyboard templates. Color palettes were chosen according to the storyline, to emphasize the feeling conveyed in the story. One of the significant influences is Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*. However, my comics are not black and white. I read the comic book to see how did she try to talk about a topic as hard as hers. The drawing, the other visuals, and the textual were complementing each other, which is what I tried to do in my comics. Also, I looked over many other contemporary artists' drawings and tried to draw something of my own. The main character is the storyteller, and she is based on me. Many thoughts that occurred to me led me to an idea of narrating the comics. I tried to make her resemble myself. The hair and the colors of her clothes are of my personal preference.

Research findings and Analysis

Research findings

In the past, there was a controversy over the suitability of comics as a reading for children. A study was conducted based on some three thousand personal interviews in places of two thousand five hundred population and over. 65% of adults thought that newspaper comics were favorable for children as reading, whereas 36% of adults thought that comic magazines are favorable for children as a reading. 18% of adults thought that newspaper comics are qualified reading for children, and 27% of adults thought that comic magazines are qualified. Only 8% of adults thought that newspaper comics are not favorable for children, and only 9% did not have an opinion. Whereas, 23% thought that comic magazines are unfavorable for children and 14% did not have any opinion. In the framework of this study, volunteered criticisms were conducted. The criticisms were divided into two groups: comics are dangerous to the child's character (17% newspaper comics and 44% comic magazines), and mental health and comics are an undesirable influence on the child's cultural development, plus poor English (6% newspaper comics and 15% comic magazines). For other reasons were 5% newspaper comics and 6% comic magazines. In another study done about reasons for approving comics as reading for children, 8% of adults thought that newspaper comics educate, teach reading and vocabulary and 10% of adults thought that comic magazines educate, teach reading and vocabulary. These statistics lead to an idea that comics should not be taken seriously because the majority of parents did not consider comics favorable for their children (Zorbaugh, 1949).

Forty years after this, in the 1980s, Dr. Dorrel and Dr. Southall conducted another research in West Junior High School in Columbia, Missouri. They aimed to find out whether students might visit the library more if comics were available for circulation in the library and whether the increase in the number of visits might increase the number of circulations of literature other than comics. The data was collected from October 15, 1979, for a control group to January 16, 1980, and a treatment group from January 17, 1980, to May 7, 1980. The only students included in this research for comparison were the students that came to the library by themselves. All the other students that came as a part of the classroom were recorded each day and subtracted from daily totals. The results showed that student traffic grew from a daily average of 272.61 to 496.38, which is approximately 82%. Such a considerable amount indicated a significant increase in visits to the library. During the comic book treatment, noncomic book material circulation increased from a daily average of 77.49 to 100.99, an increase of 30%.

In conclusion, their research suggests that the availability of comics in the school library resulted in 82% increase in library visits and 30% increase of circulating books other than comics.

Alicia Decker and Mauricio Castro did a distinct study by presenting a comic book about the Ugandan war in their history classroom. Castro prepared his students beforehand by giving them readings regarding the topic. Since the graphic novel was very violent and had many historical aspects, Castro had to give the students additional readings and assignments. He assigned them the *Unknown Soldier* during the second half of the semester when he assumed students already had enough information. Students were asking many questions, and some of them were interested in the topic, so they were asking for more.

To conclude, despite the challenges, the *Unknown Soldier* is suitable to be included in a history lesson (Decker & Castro, 2012, p. 181). It is affordable, and the contextual gaps can quickly be filled with pedagogical professionalism.

Analysis

It is important to understand what comics are and how do they work, to understand why comics are effective for education. According to Scott McCloud, comics are juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer (McCloud, 1994, p. 20.) Comics are different from other types of literature as they have Comics have specific ideological lenses, such as political, environmental, feminist and so on.

Due to complex cognitive functions, the human brain can convert images that people encounter in their everyday lives without knowing the scientific explanation to that phenomenon people unconsciously decode those images. For example, most of the time, the clouds can resemble different animals. The same thing happens when people are reading comics. A photograph of a human does not seem weird to the viewer because they are already aware of what it is. The comic version of the photograph is a simplified version of a face; dots for eyes, a line for the mouth and a round shape for the head. However, the human brain manages to quickly recognize a human face among those dots, lines, and circles. That phenomenon is called amplification through simplification (McCloud, 1994, p. 30).

The process of reading comics has two parts, the explicit one and the implicit one. The explicit one involves only reading. The implicit reading works like the applications on the phones. When the application is closed (or minimized), it still is working in the background, performing many functions. The implicit reading happens because the brain can perform

different functions without visible traces. In other words, the process of associating symbols with ideas heavily depends on the brain's ability to decode, which happens when we read comics.

The revolutionary examples of comics: analysis

Comics should be put into historical, aesthetic, educational, and empowering contexts to have a new approach. History is an important topic, as the present is shaped by the past. However, trying to learn that history might be exhausting. The abundance of dates, events, and places constitutes to the complexity of the topic. The reason for this misconception is that everything related to history has always been taken too seriously. For example, the approach of teaching it has always involved memorizing. With the lack of illustrations, it might be impossible to engage students in the learning process.

Several people broke the stereotypical perception about history, using the comic book format, and that approach turned out productive. Art Spiegelman illustrated the Holocaust from a different angle as he created *Maus*. The ideological lens for *Maus* is the political one. *Maus* is an autobiographical memoir in the form of a graphic novel, written from his dad's Vladek's point of view. It comes in two issues. Spiegelman's parents were survivors of the Holocaust. His mother committed suicide when he was little, and he wanted to explore his parents' past to understand his parents' trauma. The author wanted to represent the unrepresentable, which is the horror of the Holocaust. His choice of telling his dad's story through comics received much criticism from his fellow comic book artists and different literary critics. It received more backlash because of his use of anthropomorphism (human characters presented in the form of animals) to depict the characters than of anything else. Jews were portrayed as mice, Germans as cats and Poles as pigs.

The traditional Holocaust commentators (Zuckerman, 2008, p. 59) of that time argued that by portraying his characters as animals, Spiegelman reduced them to stereotypes and completely dehumanized Jews, as he compared them to rodents. Moreover, the use of cat vs. mouse metaphor to describe the committed horror was a risky choice, as Nazis were portrayed as predators and Jews as the prey. Hillel Halkin, a traditional Holocaust commentator, argued about that, “The Holocaust was a crime committed by humans against humans, not – as Nazi theory held – by one biological species against another...To draw people as animals is doubly dehumanizing, once by virtue of the symbolism and once by virtue of graphic limitations” (Zuckerman, 2008, p.59). However, at the beginning of *Maus*, Spiegelman intentionally put Hitler’s quote about Jews, “The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human” (Zuckerman, 2008, p.60). Having Hitler’s quote in the opening part of the graphic novel was both a self-explanatory and smart move. While Spiegelman is portraying Jews as the prey, he is also sarcastically pointing out to where that attitude comes. The mice had human bodies. Furthermore, the animal characters were engaged in human activities, such as dancing, having discourse, dressing up, and so on. All those character traits make them feel less animalistic and at the same time, more human.

Fascist art displayed only symmetry and utopian aesthetics regarding physical beauty. Anything other than that was considered inferior in quality and was destroyed. Therefore, Spiegelman used comic art, what Nazis called *entartete “Kunst”* (a degenerate art) (Doherty, 1996, p.72). Compared to the art, that Hitler admired and spread in Nazi Germany; comic art was nothing close to symmetry. It was another cause for Spiegelman to take the comic form of art.

On the other hand, Spiegelman also did not want to divide this issue further the nationalistic or racial lines (Zuckerman, 2008, p. 59). If his characters remained humans, it

would not make sense, as it would seem nationalistic, as if he is trying to pinpoint to something. It was not the case for him. He just wanted to pass on his family's story and teach others something valuable.

Given the above, Spiegelman used other techniques to make his story successful as well as compelling. Besides the fact that the characters were animals, *Maus* stood out by its historical accuracy. As the graphic novel portrays the process of the author interviewing his dad Vladek, it might seem that Spiegelman only used his dad's memories as a reference. Memories, on the other hand, is tricky. Vladek was already very old and had been through a lot; his memories might not be a valid source. Spiegelman did thorough research on the topic and his dad's second wife Mala helped him translate texts from Polish. He also included the parts in between the interview, when he was being a son and not an interviewer. It is another crucial stylistic aspect of the comic book. The main focus of the book was Holocaust and how Vladek and his family survived.

In *Maus*, Vladek was hesitant of his son to include all the everyday life situations, such as them having a conversation, or including his affair with another woman before marriage. "But this what I just told you – about Lucia and so – I don't want you should write this in your book. It has nothing to do with Hitler, with the Holocaust!" (Spiegelman, 1986, p. 23). Moments like this make the graphic novel more human and more realistic. Some of them even help to understand the personality traits the characters have. Moreover, those situations give background information about the story and make it more relatable for the reader.

Another thing Spiegelman does in *Maus* is not correcting his father's grammar. Vladek was a Polish Jew, and his English was not very good. In panels where he is talking about his experience in Auschwitz, he has a specific Yiddish-English accent. "By October 1937, the

factory was going, and *it was born my first son, Richieu.*” (Spiegelman, 1986, p. 30). He wanted to tell his dad’s story the way it happened, so the grammar is poor.

Several panels in the graphic novel include symbolism. The swastika is used many times as a symbol of terror. In the panel where Spiegelman’s parents see the Nazi flag for the first time, the swastika is drawn very big, inside a white circle on a black flag. “I remember when we almost arrived, we passed a small town. Everybody – every Jew from the train got very excited and frightened. Here was the first time I saw, with my own eyes, the swastika” (Spiegelman, 1986, p.32). On the same page, the characters have terrified faces. Their eyes are big, and the pupils are small, as they first encounter the Nazi symbol. In some other panels, the swastika is the background image, almost as if it is the sunset, the sunset for Jews. Sunset is often associated with a negative end of something. One panel has the word *Juda* with the Star of David painted with something that looks like blood, but it is unclear as the colors are only black and white.

The black & white drawings represent another symbolism. It is connected with the cat vs. mouse metaphor or predator vs. prey metaphor. According to common conception, black represents what is dark and evil, and white is the opposite. The panels in which Nazis invade Jews, black is the dominant color as if the representative of the ideology and “the dark times.” On that same panel, one mouse is holding a sign that says, “I am a filthy Jew” (Spiegelman, 1986, p. 33). The Nazi cats forced the mouse to do it. Spiegelman used that sign to illustrate how were the Jews treated. On page 125 of *Maus*, the road is drawn in the shape of a swastika. The caption says, “We walked in the direction of Sosnowiec – but where to go?” (Spiegelman, 1986). The image and the caption together show how desperate the characters were at that moment. Several panels have drawings of the Star of David. When Vladek is trying to pass in front of the Nazis unnoticeably, he is wearing a badge in shape of a star. “Will I walk slowly, they take me...

Will I run; they can shoot me!” (Spiegelman, 1986, p. 81). In panic and under the pressure of his thoughts, Vladek Spiegelman is enclosed in the Star of David. It symbolizes his inner struggle.

Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* is another complete autobiographical graphic novel, which comes in two books. It is about Satrapi’s early ages during the Islamic Revolution in Iran and its influence on her throughout her teenage years and adulthood. *Persepolis* is holding both a political and feminist ideological lenses, as she explored both the situation in the country and showed how powerful women could be, especially in stressful situations. Similar to *Maus*, it is also in black & white. The characters in *Persepolis*, unlike in *Maus*, are human. The white color is mostly used for the faces, while the black color is used to depict the clothes, the shades, the darkness, and when something horrific is happening in the panel. Black also symbolizes the veil or the hijab, which is the turning point of the graphic novel.

The first chapter of *Persepolis I* includes imagery of female children wearing hijab with sad facial expressions. The heading of the page has a black rectangle that says “The Veil,” and it has a small white part with eyes. It illustrates a female wearing a hijab. To deal with the topic that was uncomfortable for her, Satrapi is using irony. “We did not like to wear the veil, especially since we did not understand why we had to” (Satrapi, 2003, p.3). The caption is accompanied by a drawing of a scene where female children are playing with their hijabs. It gets evident in this panel that the veil is an unlikely part of the children’s life in school. “A chaotic playground scene reveals just how alien the headscarf was to children from modern educated backgrounds in Tehran, while at the same time conveying the regimes incapacity to keep young imaginations in check” (Tarlo, 2007, p. 347). The author does portray the invalidity of the ideology prominent in Iran at that time. The representatives are not only unable to explain to

children why do they need to wear the hijab, but they also cannot keep them from misusing it. The children in that scene use the veil as a jumping rope, as a horse halter and many other things.

On page 5, Satrapi depicts a protest, where the Islamic religious women were screaming, “The veil! The veil! The veil!” and the non-religious women were screaming, “Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!” (Satrapi, 2003). The religious women were wearing hijabs, and their eyes were closed, which implicitly suggests that they were blindly following the orders from their religious representatives. The non-religious women, on the other hand, had angry facial expressions, eyes directed to the opposite side of the argument. The women with veils did not show any forms of body. “I didn’t know what to think about the veil. Deep down, I was very religious, but as a family, we were very modern and avant-garde” (Satrapi, 2003, p.6). The caption is describing the image of young Satrapi, who is face and body are divided in half. The left side illustrated her modern self with a ruler, a hammer, and other mechanisms, whereas the right side illustrated her spiritual side with the hijab and tangled traditional ornaments. It is peculiar to note the way she perceives her both personalities, the modern and the religious ones.

The irony as a tool is used in many other panels in *Persepolis*. However, the work is from the child’s perspective, which makes it pure and sincere. The author continues exploring her both personalities, starting with the religious one. “I was born with religion. At the age of six, I was already sure I was the last prophet” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 6). She illustrated herself as a human with the Sun instead of her head. Satrapi’s imagination is so uncorrupted that she portrayed herself as a divine light. She even made fun of other male prophets, who in her illustration, seemed skeptical of women being prophets. As a prophet, young Satrapi had her religious book. One of the rules was that pain was forbidden for older people. Including memories like this made *Persepolis* so innocent and relatable. The majority of children dream of becoming heroes. For a

religious little girl being a prophet was like being a hero. Drawing herself as a prophet was both an unusual and risky step for her. As women cannot be prophets, she had to lie to her parents that she wants to become a doctor.

As Satrapi was exploring her spiritual side, she drew her meetings with God, whom she passionately believed. Despite the fact how religious people can be, no one ever saw God in person, other than they just imagined his presence. Children have wild imaginations, and many of them keep playfully talking to themselves. In the same way, the author believed in God and imagined how she meets him every day, and they talk about her becoming a prophet. A prevalent thing for children is guilt. When the older people, usually the ones they love and care about, expect something from them, and they fail to accomplish, they feel a sense of guilt. It was a smart move for Satrapi to illustrate the moment where her young self meets God and explains to him why she lied. “No, no, I will be a prophet but they mustn’t know” (Satrapi, 2003, p.9). What seems like a hypothetical situation is just young Satrapi’s intimate conversation with herself. At young ages, children are deprived of all the adverse side effects of the world, which is why they mostly see everything the way it happens.

The panels where the author portrayed her young self as a protester were both adorable and influential. She managed to show her rebellious personality without even mentioning the word rebel. To make the story more convincing, she drew her favorite influencers, such as Fidel Castro and the revolutionaries of Iran. Descartes and Marx were among her favorites. “In my book you could see Marx and Descartes”, (Satrapi, 2003, p.12). The caption has an illustrated sequence where Marx and Descartes were debating over a topic. Satrapi made it engaging and entertaining as she drew how they argue with each other and how Marx throws a stone at Descartes trying to prove a point. From the first panel, it was evident that the author was

religious. As a child, she was pretty smart and read many books. Marx was her inspiration. On page 13, she drew Marx and God facing each other. “It was funny see how much Marx and God looked like each other. Though Marx’s hair was a bit curlier” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 13). It is very ironic to compare an atheist with God, but it showed Satrapi’s spirit. She is a rebel by choice and by her understanding.

Satrapi was a very mature and yet genuine child. Her parents were openly talking to her about dangerous things. On page 22, she finds out that her grandpa was a prince (Satrapi, 2003). The surprise on her face is as pure as the sparkles in her eyes. For a child, it was a magical fairy tale to find out that her grandpa was a prince. Satrapi did not fail to show that excitement in the panel where she drew her grandfather as a prince. Shortly after which she finds out that her grandfather was imprisoned even though he was a prince. To express her real sadness, she goes to a long bath, the way she calls it. Everything is from a child’s point of view, as she is taking a bath with God. Children often tend to imagine themselves with certain characters. She was very close to God, and drawing God talking to her next to the bath, emphasized the author’s choice of presenting the story from a child’s point of view. On page 25, Marji comes out of the bath, and her hands are wrinkly (Satrapi, 2003). As she mentions, they were as wrinkly as grandpa’s hands. What a childish thing to do – to imply the connection between wrinkles and age.

Satrapi did not like the Shah as a kid. She tried to portray in the funniest ways. On page 28, Shah goes to Cyrus’s tomb, and the large sculpture of Cyrus under the ground looks very angry at the Shah, who is standing in his ground (Satrapi, 2003). She tried to show how much she hated him and she drew Cyrus being upset with Shah. A dead decomposed body could not be angry at anyone, but Satrapi portrayed an angry statue looking underneath the ground and cursing with his facial expression. The intention was to show how even a long-time dead king’s

statue can hate a lousy leader. Satrapi illustrated the Shah as the devil in the panel where her parents were talking about the freedom after Shah had resigned (Satrapi, 2003, p. 43).

Riad Sattouf's virtuoso graphic style captures both the immediacy of childhood and the passionate flow of political idealism in his graphic novel called *The Arab of the Future*. Sattouf's story recounts his extraordinary childhood, which he spent in rural France, in Gaddafi's Libya and Assad's Syria. He zooms in to his father's Pan-Arabism and zooms out to his stressful childhood and how much he hated the idea of going back to Syria.

Sattouf's work received much criticism, mentioning that it is too racist to portray Arabs so behind. "The source of much of the book's narrative tension is a series of sharp disparities: between what young Riad is trying to understand and what the older Riad and the reader know; between a time when Arab nationalism held allure and promise, and its current hollowed out state; between a family's original wholeness and its subsequent splintering (Sattouf's parents separated; he returned to France with his mother and didn't visit Syria for many years); between the "Arab of the future" dreamed by young Riad's father and a successful Parisian cartoonist hung up on his origins and allergic to all forms of nationalism" (Lindsey, 2016). The author did not intentionally portray his Arab characters undeveloped. He was trying to explore what he saw with his eyes as a child, and the whole book is about his inner battle to understand what he has already understood as an adult.

The most noticeable aspect of his stylistic approach is the colors. Each country that the characters travel to have distinctive colors. Blue symbolizes France; yellow symbolizes Libya, and reddish symbolizes Syria. In the graphic novel, young Riad travels back-and-forth from France to Libya to Syria. Each panel with France is blue, with Libya is yellow and with Syria is reddish. France feels like blue, as the color blue dominates its flag. The yellow depicts the

deserts in Libya, and the reddish color is for all the blood that was shed in Syria. In many panels, where little Riad is having nightmares or is just afraid of the darkness, there are red bubbles with sounds, such as sounds of wolves, an indistinct prayer or someone shouting. Red, in this case, symbolizes the terror (Sattouf, 2015, p. 77). The green color also appears in the book excessively. Sattouf used it for the background of the TV when he and his father are watching a cartoon about an ape doctor (Sattouf, 2016, p. 38). Green is also used to depict the swear words (p.24) and sometimes loud voices (p.36). The author tied the concept of color with the concept of the sounds, and they cannot be separated after that.

Sattouf's characters are distinguished. Young Riad and his father have sausage looking noses, whereas his mother's nose looks like an acute angle. Riad's Syrian relatives all have specific details that make them look like Syrians. The uncle is wearing male religious clothing, the grandma has her hair covered, and other women in Syria have coins & other jewelry in their hair. The grandmother also has a very wrinkly face, which suggests of her age (Sattouf, 2015, p.32). Under the bubbles, the author wrote clarifying notes in a different font, resembling handwriting. Sattouf illustrated a scene when his father was drawing a Mercedes. He wrote, "*He held his pencil incorrectly when he drew*" (Sattouf, 2015, p.26). With this note, he wanted to show that as a kid, he understood that his father was drawing incorrectly, but his father would not accept that.

All three graphic novels successfully incorporated the ideas their authors had in mind. The authors managed to reach their success by using specific stylistic approaches. All the details were peculiar to the topics and characters. All three of them are prominent proof that graphic novels and comics can successfully be used to educate people of all ages.

The creative work

When I was thinking about the topic of my capstone, I was sure that it would be related to drawing. I am a self-taught artist and have been drawing for several years already. Seeing my progress was the best prize for myself. Moreover, in the recent few years, I found interest in comic book-based movies. They motivated me and gave hope for a better future. Thus, I thought of researching about comics and showing how significant their influence can be on people. I had no idea that my capstone could be creative work, and when I was informed, I undoubtedly agreed to draw my comic book.

The ideas were shifting in my mind about the topic. Firstly, I was thinking to create an Armenian female hero, but I already knew someone with the same idea, so I rejected that idea. The search for the topic was complicated. However, I got inspired when I had a ride in the metro. Each time people approach the receptionist, they toss the 100-dram coin and wait for the women to give the plastic coin. In my head, it was unacceptable because whenever I approach the receptionist, I always greet her and then politely ask for one plastic coin. The inner lightbulb in my brain lit up. My comics definitely should have been about respect and the importance of not wasting one's life.

The main character of the story is me. I am the storyteller, like in fairy tales – there is always one storyteller that appears just once and then is just talking. In the first two pages of the comics appears Julieta (me). She introduces herself. It was imperative for me to introduce myself, because that also shows a lesson of being polite to people. Julieta then uses sarcasm, as she implies about her lack of feet. In creative writing, Chekhov has this beautiful quote, which says, “Remove everything that has no relevance to the story. If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter, it absolutely must go off. If it

is not going to be fired, it shouldn't be hanging there” (Chekhov, 1889). It has always been my favorite quote, as you can apply it to everything. The idea of not including unnecessary details in work was the reason why my storyteller does not have legs. She is just a storyteller, who is purpose is to convey the message through her standing pose. She was not going to walk or run.

Another important thing was the language choice. Julieta is talking in a very casual and friendly way to make people be more comfortable with her and trust her. She is also very confident and open. I wanted to show that Armenian girls can also talk about things confidently without fear of being confronted.

As I had the opportunity to read remarkable examples of graphic novels, such as *Persepolis*, *Maus*, and the *Arab of the Future*, I learned many things about comic books. One particular feature is manipulating the story with colors. In the analysis part, I mentioned that Sattouf used different colors to portray different countries. In the same manner, for the first two pages, I used two colors. Half of the page diagonally is the calmest shade of yellow; the other half is light green. The purpose of these colors is that they are not tiring one's eyes. Yellow and green symbolize the positivity – yellow for the rays of the sun and green for the grass on the meadow. As a child, I always imagined grass with relaxing and enjoying life. It was because at that time people were too much engaged in television and mobile phones. They still are now. That idea is slowly incorporated in the comics. The vivid pink of the dress is related to my personal choices. Pink is my favorite color.

All pages have four panels each, except for the first two and the last one. Each of the panels inside the pages has specific message directed towards people. There are also certain metaphors, such as the metaphor of clock symbolizing the value of time and a lit candle symbolizing life. Each of them works as a reminder to do positive things and to be positive.

Several panels have real-life inspirations, such as photographs of our yard and a photograph of a dog outside.

One major step was developing the main character, Julieta. She appears on the last page in completely different clothes and says goodbye. She also uses her sarcastic tone, mentioning that she already has legs. Julieta points out that it is essential to respect people and mentions her inspiration, Captain America.

Conclusion and Prospects for Future Research

The thorough analysis of the devices used to transmit information through comics, and graphic novels revealed an evident possibility of successfully using them as an education tool. The character choices, the specific language, the color schemes, and everything suggest a specific idea that comics ideally communicate ideas which are harder to do in common literature type.

Creating a successful graphic novel requires much research. All the analyzed pieces were obvious examples of hard work and passion put into research and execution of their ideas. It is essential to point out that the opposing ideas of people regarding comics might be because of lack of information.

The limitations of the research are mainly related to the region. Armenia does not have a substantial number of comics. Only several comics were created lately. However, most of them are very political and sarcastic. On the other hand, those might be useful to compare for the differences in other regions.

The questions presented in this paper have more potential and elaboration, but only when people in Armenia will have any idea of what comics are.

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Appendices



BE GOOD

About respect and important things in life.

By Julieta Gyurjyan

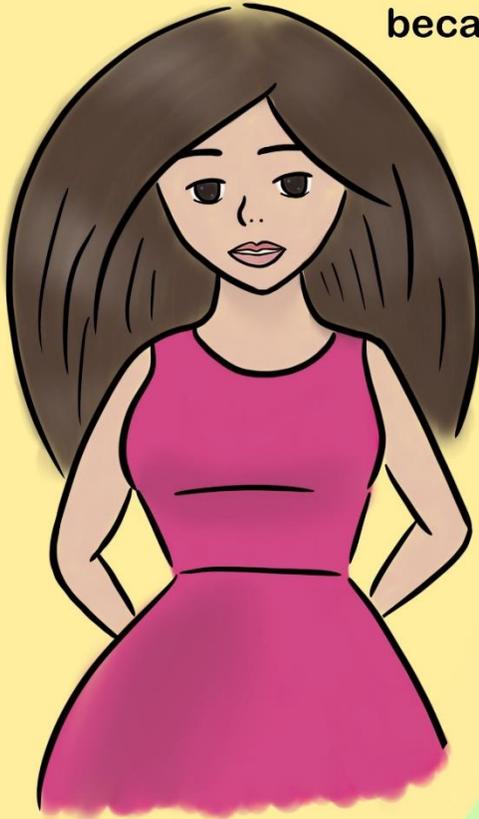


Hi! I'm Julieta.

**I'm the artist
behind this comic strip.**



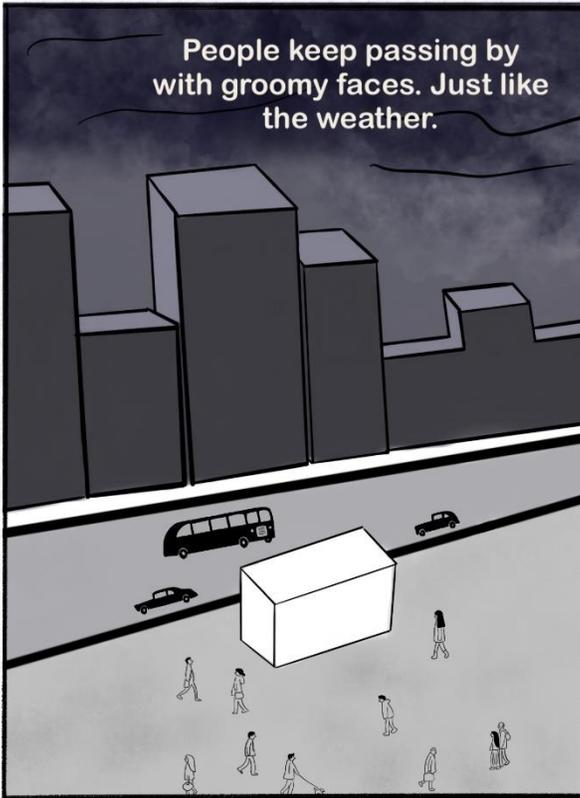
You might wonder why I
don't have legs. Well it's
because I am not a human.
Just a drawing.



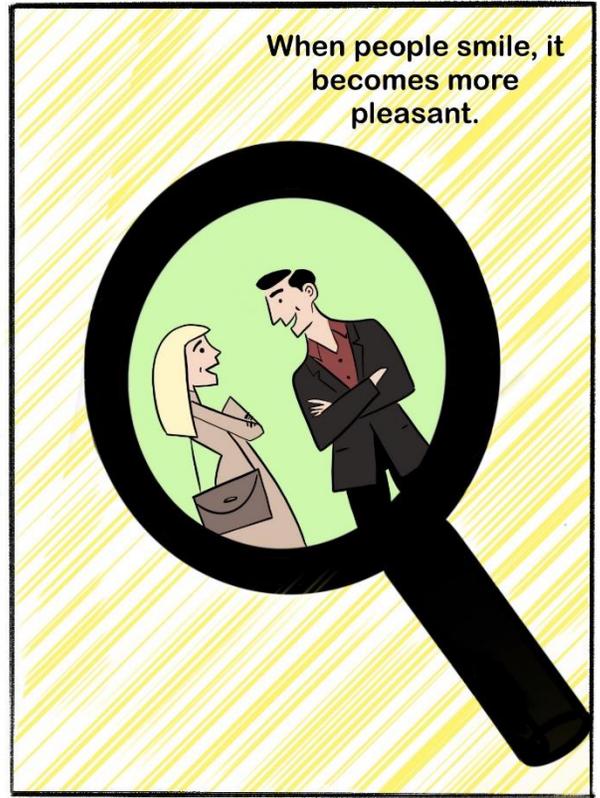
Anyway, I am here to
remind you about the
important things .



People keep passing by with gloomy faces. Just like the weather.



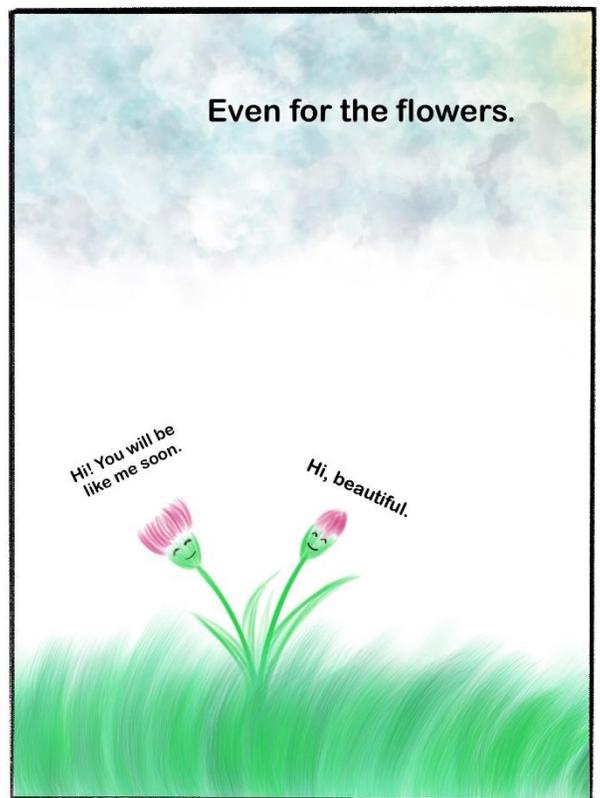
When people smile, it becomes more pleasant.

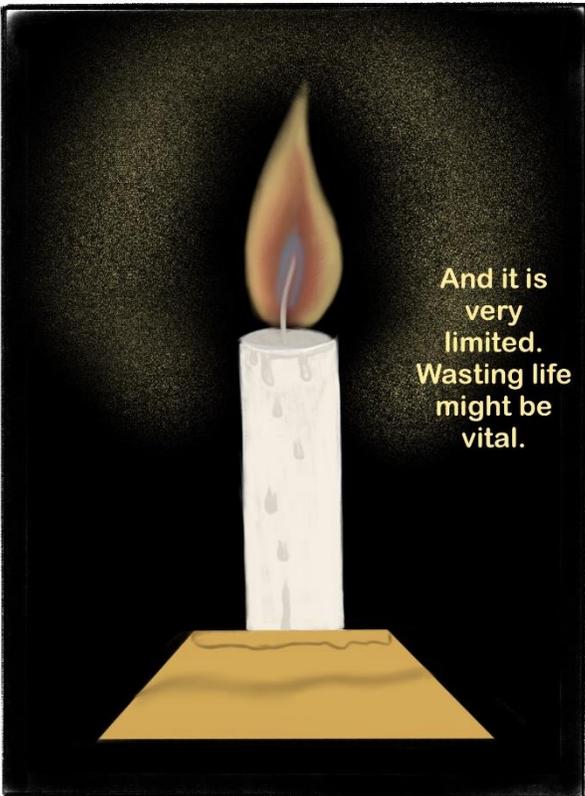
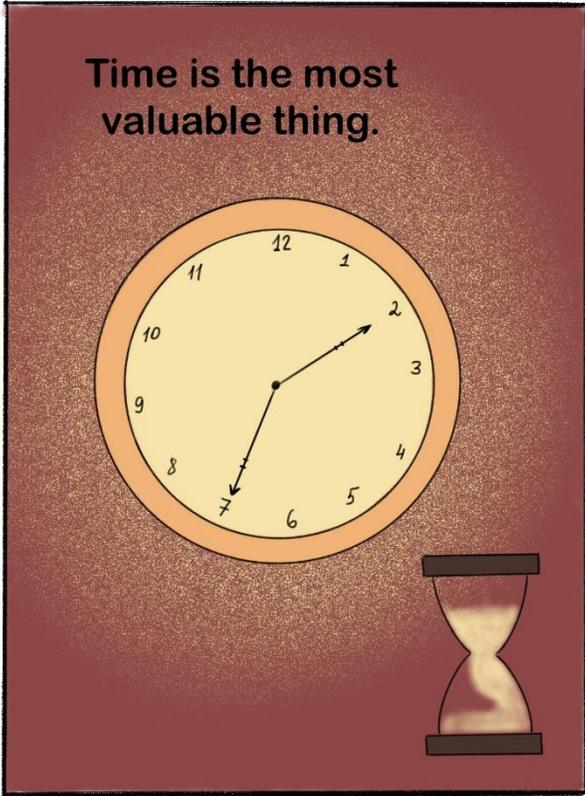
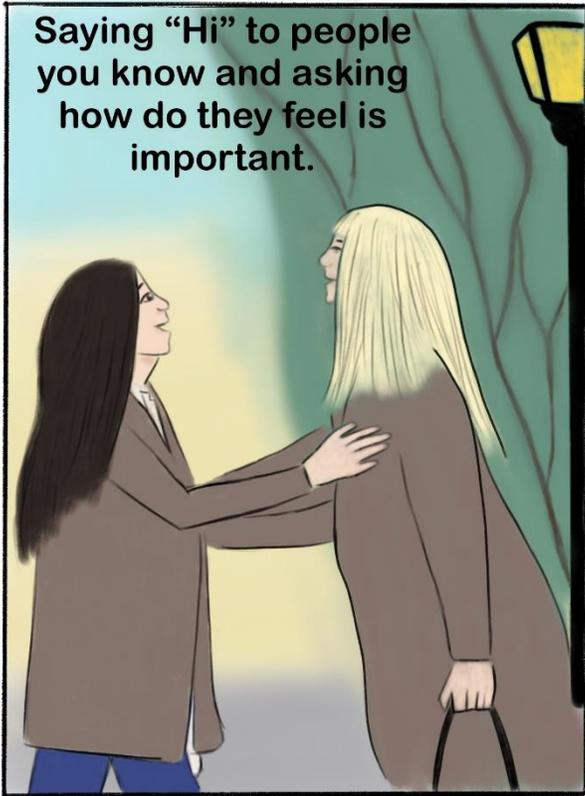


One smile changes many things.



Even for the flowers.





Noticing homeless dogs
and feeding them is
noble.



Greeting the women at
metro reception desk will
make their day better.

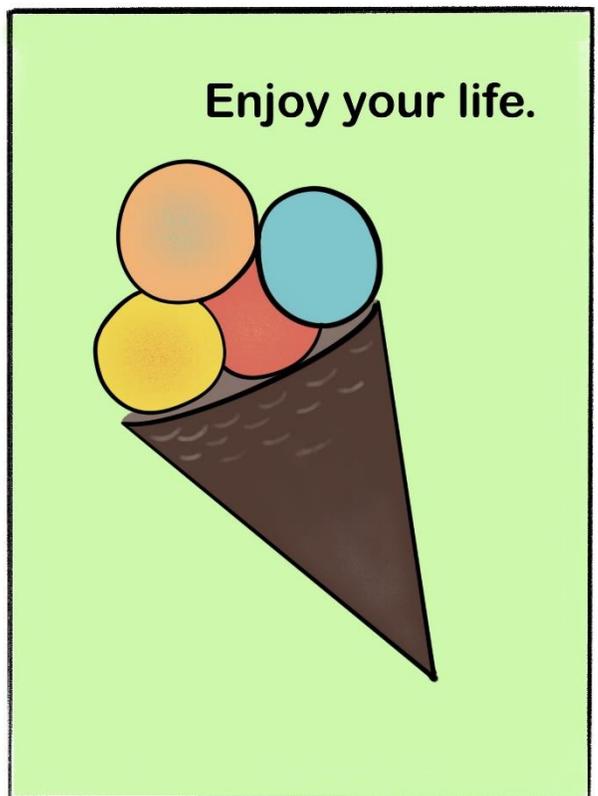
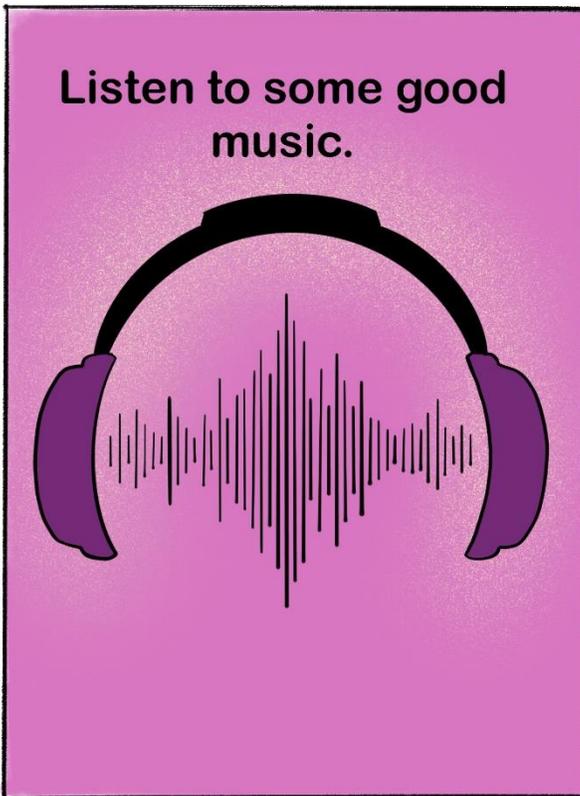


Throwing the garbage in the bin is
not lame.

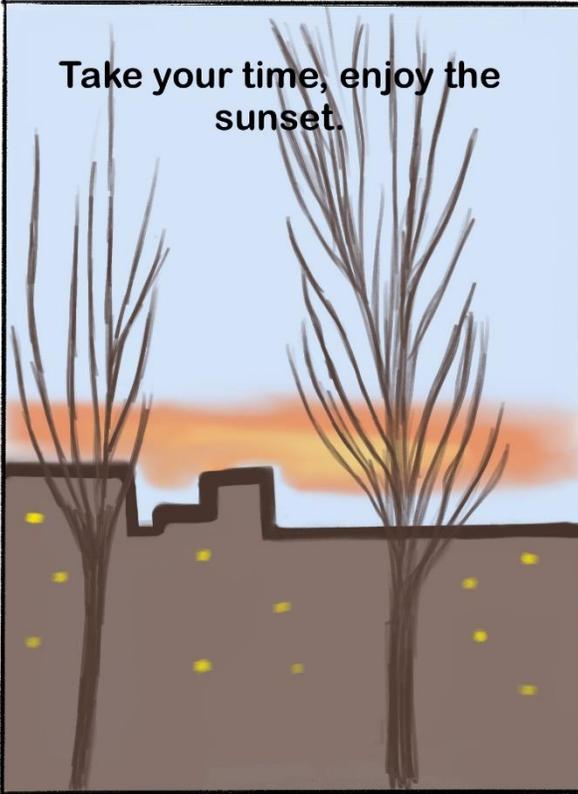


Drinking outside and breaking
the bottles, leaving them on the
ground is not a manly thing to
do.

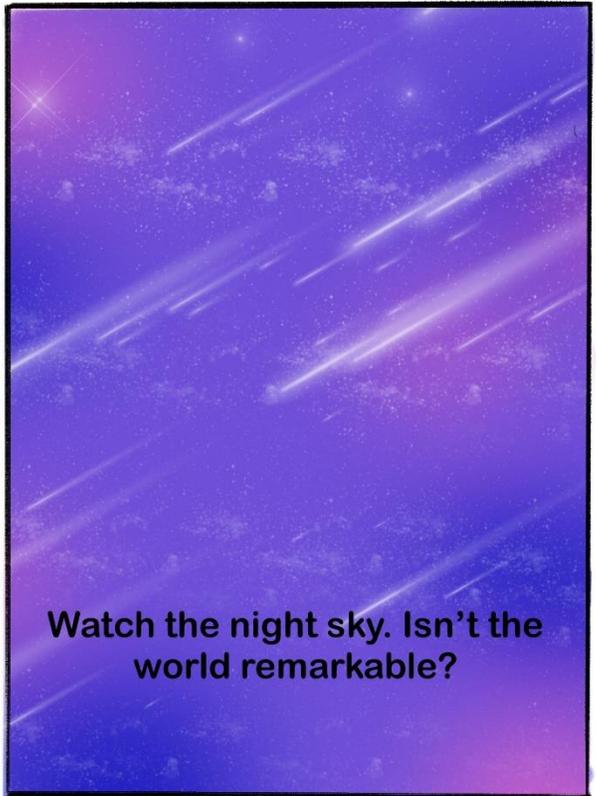




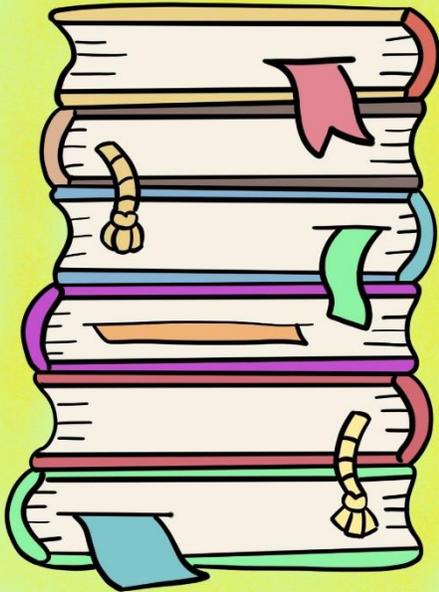
Take your time, enjoy the sunset.



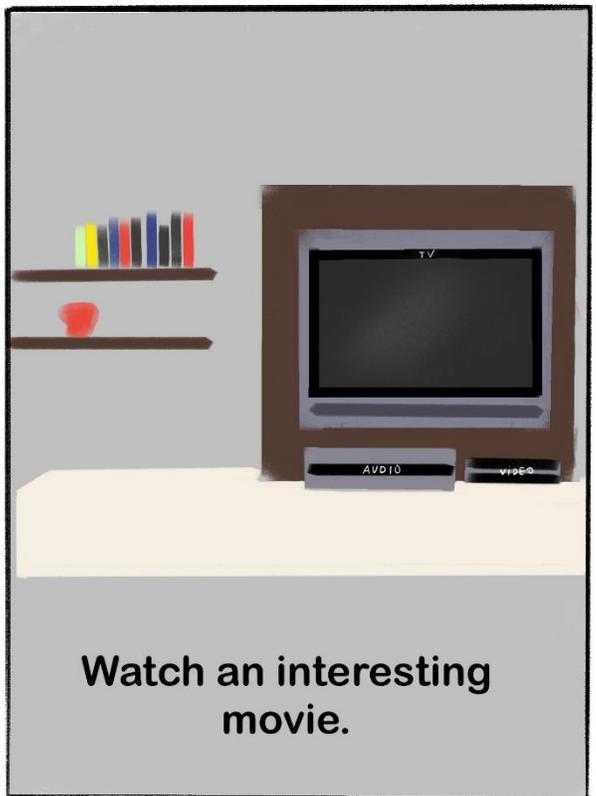
Watch the night sky. Isn't the world remarkable?



Read interesting books.



Watch an interesting movie.



That's me again. Came back to show you that now I have legs. This is a goodbye from me. And don't forget to respect others. That's what I learned from Captain America.



**“ Life is too short
to be mean”**

