Introduction: Visualizing and Visually Representing

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Welcome to the third edition of SANEjournal: sequential art narrative in education. With this publication, we have renumbered such that this and each subsequent edition will be its own volume, making this issue volume 3.1 and all subsequent issues “3+x.1.” Retroactively, volume 1.2 becomes our ex post facto volume 2 but should continue to be cited as 1.2. Initially, we embarked with an ambitious twice-a-year publication goal, but realities have suggested that publishing once annually is the best path for the journal for now. The call for issue 4.1 is under development, and hopefully you’ll be with us as we celebrate a new issue each year for years to come.

This issue is themed “Visualizing and Visually Representing” and was guest edited with Katie Monnin of the University of North Florida. Katie has been a leader in the comics and literacy movement at the k-12 level for years and is a dear and trusted colleague of mine, impeccable, passionate, outgoing, and knowledgeable. She often refers to me as her mentor, a kind designation and one that means much to me, especially since I am sure I’ve learned more from her than I could have ever hoped to offer. Katie also likes to refer to me as her “partner in crime.” Indeed, we have worked together on multiple projects and make use of each other’s work in our individual projects. She was the primary peer reviewer for this volume, and I feel she’s helped us publish an excellent edition that was always intended to connect to the notion of seeing and reseeing, visioning and revisioning. The issue may not have risen to status of criminal (alas!), but the issue represents an important contribution to those considering comics and education, and I am proud of her and to have worked with her on its construction.

Ralph Waldo Emerson uses the metaphor of the Transparent Eyeball as a means of exploring connections between God and nature. It’s a strange, paradoxical metaphor. One can easily see where it succeeds as mystic but fails as scientific. How does one see if light passes through one’s entire body? Isn’t human sight based largely on properties of reflection? Emerson’s “seeing” is more about experiencing, of course, than about base vision, an extension of the literal, scientific notion of sight into something more akin to understanding; something more akin to transcended comprehension; something more akin to… literacy.

I wonder: Do we move closer to the natural, the primal and pure, the essence of god in nature, when we integrate comics in our classrooms? After all, as many have expressed, the distinction between the pictoral and the alphabetic can be viewed as an arbitrary “evolution.” Letters are just specialized, signifie d pictographs or descendents thereof, aren’t they? It seems to me that any print-based literacy is visual literacy, even if there appears to be a lack of visual images. One never leaves images even as one “moves on” to “pictureless” books. Indeed, a truly pictureless book would be blank. Really, isn’t all literacy deeply tied to visual literacy?

Perhaps so, but we know that, over the centuries as we’ve striven to understand our world, we’ve created labels and explored genres and mediums and modes and intersections among the labeled, and often we’ve worked to parcel out niches of human
expression and worked to view each as wholly unique, for better or worse. In the English Language Arts, this division has been clear in what texts and text forms are or have been premiumed over the centuries, what definitions of reading we have favored, and how we’ve crafted standards to address teaching them.

While much current attention in k-12 ELA pedagogy is wrapped up in deconstructing the prickly Common Core Standards, it is worth noting that in 1996 a group of scholars and teachers from the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English published a set of twelve superb, perfectly fine, broad-based standards that would help teachers address English teaching effectively and progressively. The document they created, *Standards for the English Language Arts*, remains available for free PDF download via NCTE’s website even as the Common Core Standards muscle out its predecessors. Part of the authors’ work was to form a working definition of “English Language Arts,” which they decided included attending to reading, writing, listening, speaking, visualizing and visually representing. That visualizing and visual representation were included specifically is significant (as are the document’s definitions of text, reading, literacy, and being literate, but that is a discussion for another time), and it is to those components of the six-pronged definition of ELA that the authors represented in this third issue of *SANEjournal* concentrate.

They ask us to see comics and graphic novels in new ways, to envision and revision our thoughts of how they can be used in classroom settings. The three rationales – for a recent adaptation of *The Prince*, the timely but underappreciated *Zahra’s Paradise*, and the classic (dare I say canonical?) *The Dark Knight Returns*, respectively – afford the opportunity to see those comics as having direct pedagogical potentialities. Thanks to Nick Kremer, Hindi Krinsky, and Chris Snellgrove for their contributions. Dr. Monnin and I are pleased to share your work.

In our lead article, “Insights Into Negotiating Shaun Tan’s The Arrival Using a Literature Cyberlesson,” Catherine Kurkjian and Ioulia Kara-Soteriou offer a response to the calls for more research and professional development regarding teaching with comics via an exploration of an action research literacy project largely centered on Shaun Tan’s *The Arrival*. Others have written on Tan’s exquisite graphic novel in educational settings, but Kurkjian and Kara-Soteriou offer a significant revisioning and expansion of that budding opus. Jeraldine Kraver attempts to bring together what she calls the “piecemeal effect” of comics-and-literacy scholarship and research in her article “Reinventing the Composition Classroom, or How *Making Comics* Can Clarify the Composing Process.” Between these articles, Belinda S. Zimmerman and Sharon D. Kruse offer a call to action in “The Fluency Development Lesson Gets Graphic.” Within they ask teachers to consider comics and graphic novels as means to advance student comprehension.

It is my hope that these three articles and three rationales do indeed spark a call to action, one that continues to move us toward greater integration of the comics medium into various educational platforms across the globe. As we celebrate the third issue of *SANEjournal*, remember that the journal remains free, open-access, and an internet
Sincerely,

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Editor and Founder