

Grade level: 9th-12th Grade

Subject: Language Arts

Rationale:

Students will examine the use of visual imagery in the Manga Classics adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*. Students will be asked to consider specific illustrations in the novel and consider how the artist creates meaning with the visual medium of a graphic novel.

Instructional Duration: 3-4 hours

Objectives:

Students will:

- ✓ Read the graphic novel *Les Miserables* and consider it as a visual adaptation of a classic piece of literature.
- ✓ Use images from the novel to answer specific essential questions.
- ✓ Understand the concept of imagery as it pertains to a graphic novel adaptation of a classic text

Front-loaded information / understanding:

Imagery - Students should be able to define and identify imagery in the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Symbolism – Students should be able to define and identify one or more symbol from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Theme - Students should be able to define and identify one or more themes from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Manga – Many students have not been exposed to this type of reading. Prior to assigning any reading in the Manga Classic Text, instructors should cover the “How to read manga” section at the beginning of the book with their students to ensure understanding.

Instructional Strategies:

NOTE: The lessons contained below assume that students are reading the Manga Classic adaptation after having already been exposed to all or some part of the original text. If you are using the graphic novel adaptation as an alternative to reading the original novel, the lessons can still be utilized with modifications.

Students should have read the original novel *Les Miserables* by Victor Hugo. Have them share with the class what they know about the text itself. Specific attention should be paid to how students visualize some of the more crucial moments of the text including, but not limited to, character appearance, conflict, thematic elements, and symbolism.

Activity #1 – Pre-reading Carousel

Students should be asked to recall their experiences reading Hugo's *Les Miserables*. Instruct them to think about what parts of the novel stood out to them and why. Take five separate sheets of chart paper and hang them up at strategic locations around the room. Write one of each of the questions below on the chart paper and break the class into five groups. Give each group a different colored sharpie. Station each group at one of the questions and give them 5 minutes to write as many answers and/or comments to other answers as they can in that time. At the five minute mark, call out for students to rotate clockwise to the next station. Repeat the process until each group has returned to their first station. Go over the results of the activity with the class as a whole and keep the chart paper handy for future reference.

1. Which character do you feel had the most compelling story and why?
2. Which event in the novel do you think was described most vividly?
3. Which character did you hate the most and why?
4. Which symbolic element of the text was one that stuck with you and what did it represent?
5. What is one of the novel's most important themes?

Activity #2 – Pre-reading Minicomic

Ask your students which among them enjoy drawing or have some aptitude at sketching. Ideally, at least half or more of the class can see themselves this way. If not, tell students that the next activity will involve some drawing and some writing and ask for volunteers to be the "artists." Once you have a 1:1 ratio of artists to those who don't want to draw, have them pair off appropriately.

Assign each pair a section of the novel and have them identify what they think is the scene which contains the most descriptive language and imagery. Using the text as a roadmap, have students draw a short minicomic of no more than four panels to recreate that scene. Use a document camera to share each pair's comic and have them explain their artistic process.

After this is complete, have students look at page 5 in the Manga Classics text and explore the foreshadowing silhouette on the bottom half of the page. Ask them if they can identify any of the characters among the shadowy figures.

Activity #3 – Post-reading Comparison

Once students have had the opportunity to read the text, have them return to their minicomics and compare how artist SunNeko Lee's depiction of their event differs from their own rendition. Use this as an opportunity to talk about the concept of adaptation and how different approaches to a text yield different, but ultimately satisfying results.

Activity #4 – Imagery Identification

Select specific points in the novel where the artwork was particularly compelling. For example:

Page 32 – The candlesticks and cross
Page 69 – Fantine's realization
Page 78 – Tasting the whip
Page 98 – The weight of guilt (giant apple)
Page 136 - Jean Valjean discovers Cosette
Page 200 – Marius and honor
Page 246-247 – Revolution!
Page 269 – Eponine's death

Or any others where you feel the artwork creates a visual representation of the imagery of the novel that you find particularly compelling. Have students answer the following question about the image with a short essay:

What elements of the artwork bring a strong understanding of the actions on the page that text alone could not?

Final Assessment:

Students should choose a Book from the text and explore the use of visual imagery as a means of storytelling and connect it with the same book from the original text. They will write a short compare and contrast essay where they look at how each medium depicts this information and which one they see as most effective. If the instructor chooses, a film or stage production of the story could also be included in this mix.

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