

WHAT ELSE CAN WE LEARN FROM A COMIC PANEL? MATERIAL CULTURE

Directions: One of the obvious benefits of using a comic strip format to present history is that the artist/writer can give the reader a lot of information in pictures that would be difficult to convey in words alone.

Kids often enjoy word-search or picture-search activities in which they have to hyper-focus on a graphic space in order to uncover things that are hidden. You might challenge your students to look at panels you feel are particularly rich in historical information, say about the *material culture* (what buildings looked like, what things are made of, how people dress, their hairstyles, the level of technology, etc.) of the time, to see what they can learn in addition to what characters are saying.

Students might work in pairs and then report out to others in the group. You might have different pairs work on different panels. That way, when you bring the group together, your students and you could generate a list of period historical observations.

Sample directions for this activity:

1. Look at the panel at the top of page 2. For now, don't read the narration or the words the two men say.
2. Make observations about the material culture that is conveyed by the artist.
3. Write your observations down in a list.
4. Be prepared to share the list with the rest of the class later on.

Sample student responses:

1. There are two large sailing ships, each with three masts.
2. The pier looks like it is made of wood, as piers often are today.
3. There is part of a building on the right. It looks like it's two or three stories high, and that part of it, the bottom part, is made of stone or brick. There is a window high up. The sloping roof might be made of shingles or tile; it's hard to tell.
4. The two men are wearing three-cornered hats.
5. They have long coats. There are buttons in the sleeves and in the back, over the vent.
6. They may be wearing stockings.
7. One of the men might be carrying a walking stick or sword.
8. Both of the men have a ponytail that is tied up with some kind of ribbon.