The next two chapters deal exclusively with the creation of comics. The assignments in this chapter cover a wide range of topics which include: historical situations and historical fiction, illustrating skills/dispositions/values and citizenship, emotional context, worldbuilding/geography, pop culture considerations, mythmaking, current events, and museum education. These topics are by no means exhaustive, and I encourage users of the book to create new assignments.

Before getting into specifics, I think it important to make a note about panel construction. It might make sense to simplify certain aspects of the assignments and have students use predetermined panel sizes or simple three panel strips when creating their comics. Professors and teachers could even distribute premade panel strips for convenience. However, as Sousanis (2015a) notes, drawing panels and understanding their impact is an important decision for comic creators. If teachers chose to have students create a comic strip with three equal frames or predetermined panels, students may not utilize the full storytelling potential of the panel (Sousanis, 2015a). So, teachers will have to balance this aspect. For some of the shorter class assignments, I had students simply use three equal boxes, but for the larger assignments (see the culminating activity in Chapter 5), I spent a great deal of time discussing panel size.
Historical Situations and Historical Fiction

Perhaps the most obvious way for students to draw the social studies is for them to draw factual historical episodes. The possibilities are literally endless, from ancient Rome, to revolutionary France to the Soviet Union. Chilcoat (1993) argues for the benefits of using the comic format in the social studies classroom, specifically by having students research historical information and create a comic from their research. Chilcoat (1993, 2) noted: “The comic book allows students to take verbal-linear-analytical information from various primary and secondary sources and, through a visual-aesthetic-creative means, construct this information into personal interpretations and conclusions.” The comic medium can also allow students to approach history like a historian. Students can construct a history, just like historians and understand the role of interpretation in this process (Banks, McGee-Banks, & Clegg, 1999; Getz & Clarke, 2011).

Students can also create historical fiction or utilize fictional elements in their comics. Chapin (2015) argues that history can be read like a story. Students creating their own historical fiction in comic form can exploit this natural storytelling potential. The historical facts can be a starting point from which students can create their own interpretations. Narrative/story arcs could be introduced here as well (Abel & Madden, 2008; Potts, 2013). Students could use historical details and facts to create a narrative with a protagonist and this protagonist would have to endure a series of events and trails to remedy some type of situation. Here, a healthy mix of historical accuracy and student creativity can be blended together to form a new unique creation. Professors and teachers could work with students to ensure a fruitful blend. Even if students are striving to create an accurate historical episode students may still have to decide on elements which they cannot know, such as what certain characters wore, their emotions, interior rooms, and the like (Getz & Clarke, 2011). Asking these types of questions and deciding on historical details can be an excellent historical exercise for budding historians and teachers can work with students to highlight this process.

Following Miodrag (2013), students can also utilize language in unique ways and capitalize on creative juxtapositions of language and image. Students, who may not be great artists but who are adroit with language can use this ability in their comics as well and be encouraged to do this in conjunction with the storytelling aspects elucidated above.
Another important aspect of using language is the importance of vocabulary in the social studies (Chapin, 2015). Teachers may require that students use specific terms and vocabulary of the lesson in their comics.

As noted in the first chapter, one of the key features of comics is that of art in sequence (Eisner, 2002; McCloud, 1994). The notion of sequence is also important for an understanding of history. Chapin (2015, 191) argues for the notion of “historical thinking skills” which are “chronological thinking, historical analysis and interpretations, and historical research capabilities.” Further, these skills “include awareness of historical significance, evidence and causation” (Chapin, 2015, 191). Chilcoat (1993) also notes how the comic assignment can help students convey a sense of chronology. In regards to chronology, I urge my students to not only look at connections for specific events, but also for connections and sequences over longer stretches of time. I think this “stretching” of chronology really helps to get them thinking about the connections between distant historical events.

Of course history is not a rigid sequence. Cromer and Clark (2007, 583), as noted earlier, argue that comics can also help students understand the “messiness” and complexity of historical events. Even when discussing power and oppression, social studies teachers cannot see oppression as a simple phenomenon (Kincheloe, 2001). The causes of oppression are always varied and intersecting. We are not objective machines which can be studied like scientific objects. Of course, Kincheloe (2001) argues that this is precisely what happens. Since the time of Descartes and the Enlightenment, European rationalism has reduced human beings to machine-like entities (Kincheloe, 2001). As a result, researchers try to diagnose and then fix the problem in a mechanistic way. But reality is not a linear phenomenon. Reality and human life are messy endeavors. Social studies teachers need to recognize this feature (Kincheloe, 2001). While reading and creating a comic book will not magically alert the student to this nonlinearity, the comic may at least help students call into question this machine-like metaphor of reality. The comic medium with its features of braiding and translinearity, multilinearity and multidirectionality, and holism (Cabero, 2019; Groensteen, 2013) may be a place to begin to view this messiness (Cromer & Clark, 2007). In his work Unflattening, Sousanis (2015b, 62) argues something similar:

While comics are read sequentially like text, the entire composition is also taken in – viewed-allatonce. Thierry Groensteen likens this organization of simultaneous images to a system or network. A connected space, not reliant on a chain-like sequence linearly proceeding from point to point…”
Sousanis (2015b, 62) goes on to note how comics are both “sequential and simultaneous.” Of course, the above quote loses some of its power because I have only relayed the words. The panels where the words come from feature plants and animals. A little further down the page (the page is all one image but broken up into nine frames) is an image of a sitting Buddha with a speech bubble that reads “one with everything” (2015b, 62). The point here is that students need to see reality and history do not operate from this “chain-like sequence” (2015b, 62).

Both the sequential nature of the comic’s form, as well as its non-linear potential, can be applied to historical thinking. Students do need to consider chronology and the order of events, but also understand the complexity of history as well. The sequential nature of comics can call attention to the chronology and sequence of historical events while at the same time the nonlinear functions of comics to call attention to how messy and complex history can be. Students can also consider the page itself as a tool of expression (Cohn, 2009).

Teachers can also add a class discussion to some of the assignments below so students can reflect as a class on their own comics and their classmate’s comics (Chilcoat, 1993). Reflection is an important part for these types of assignments (Barone & Eisner, 2012) In the class discussion of comics teachers can direct students to examine main characters, give a summary of their stories, look at similarities in other students comics, and ask students what they learned (Chilcoat, 1993). I also added online discussions and reflections for many assignments, including this one. The online component I think helps students understand how to express their ideas in the digital arena along with the face to face to setting.

**Historical Situations Assignment**

**Directions:** Students are to create a comic strip which illustrates different populations (e.g., women, African Americans, those with disabilities, the poor and the lower classes, those on the frontier) and access to education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The comic must be at least three panels.

1. Show cause and effect with the comics form. Each panel should build off the previous panels. You must show a progression or story or chronology. Here you must encapsulate different scenes from history we learned about. You can look at a specific event, or events
over a much longer period of time. Part of understanding history is understanding a sense of chronology. In addition, with this assignment, I am trying to get you to think of which events to show and omit. Similar to the notion of encapsulation, historians must make this decision all the time.

2. You must utilize facial expressions and body language to convey moods and feelings. For example, how might a lower class person might have felt upon entering a school for the first time?

3. Use color to convey mood.

4. After you finish the strip, write a justification of the facial expressions, scene choice, how the scenes are related and colors used. Why did you pick these scenes and colors and expressions? Be specific!

I assigned this assignment to my doctoral history of education course. (The assignment was slightly modified from what is given above). Regarding the stretching aspect noted above, one student depicted the instruction and education of African Americans from their arrival in America in 1619, through the nineteenth century and up until the 1954 Brown decision. The student had to weave a number of chronological but distant events together. Note: For the exercise below, the instructor can assign a historical topic or let students chose. For the purposes of this book, I have assigned a topic which has many causes: the Common School movement in America. I could also have used the First World War or the French Revolution. In addition, this may be an assignment where the teacher might want to provide an example. Cabero (2019) is a nice accessible article which talks about multilinearity and multidirectionality. Cromer and Clark (2007) specifically talk about the comics form and the study of history. In addition, Sousanis’ (2015b) graphic novel would work well here too. These resources could be given to students prior to this assignment. In the appendix, some of my own graphic novels make use of some of these notions. I would show this to my class and use this as an example. Teachers could also find other historical graphic novels and show interesting page configurations as examples.

**Multilinearity Assignment**

**Messy History Assignment**

**Directions:** History is messy. There are almost always multiple causes to events. Things do not happen in nice tidy sequences. *The use of comics can help us visualize this messiness.*
1. First, view the excerpts from Sousanis and Cabero. Consider how the comics page, specifically the directionality and multilinear aspect, can be used to visually represent the multiple causes and motivations of the Common School Movement.

2. Consider the different page configurations first (from question 1). How can you use different patterns and configurations to show the various motivations, obstacles, and founders of the Common School Movement?

   (a) Some examples and different ideas to consider: You could use a circular or swirling pattern, you can have a page with overlapping panels, you can have some events in panels and some out of panels, you can invert the reading order (right to left, up and down), you can have two stories happening (one from right to left another up and down).

   (b) Think also of what scenes you will need to encapsulate and what text, if any, you will have.

I assigned this assignment to my undergraduate class. While I had many interesting variations, Fig. 4.1 stood out to me. My students created a game board, and each person in the Common School Movement had a different path to take. I thought this formulation truly showed a nonlinear take on some of the complexities of the Common School Movement. In one box, my students wrote that immigrants had to walk 10 miles to school. When I reviewed the assignment, I questioned them about this piece of information, it seemed excessive. After hearing my student’s justification, I decided to leave it, despite my initial reservations. I believe my student was trying to make a point about the plight of immigrants. The point here is that this type of interpretive assignment can help generate these important content-related discussions between student and instructor.

**Buddhist Superheroes**

Teachers can have their students do a simple Google search of “Buddhist superheroes.” The class can analyze the results. Teachers may want to direct students to specific websites or articles, preview certain websites, or give them free reign to explore. Again, discretion is needed. Question two references the information provided in this book regarding Buddhism
Fig. 4.1  Student example of multilinearity assignment
in general and Buddhist leadership (see Chapters 2 and 3). Teachers can discuss these ideas with students as well.

The main purpose of the assignment is to create a Buddhist superhero or at least the main character, and put this main character in opposition to a more Western style antagonist. Students do not have to make the Buddhist a “good guy,” although they can. The point is simply to use the comics medium to illustrate the tensions between Buddhist political thought and Western political ideas, as well as to show any similarities. Students can resolve this or come to some sort of compromise, or they can leave the tension as is.

Create a Buddhist Superhero Assignment

Directions: You will first review existing Buddhist themed superheroes and characters in comics by doing a simple Google search. Write a brief summary. Also, note how Buddhist superheroes have been portrayed in the medium.

1. Review the notes and handouts on Buddhism. Write a brief summary of what you find.
2. Create a Buddhist hero (or villain?) for yourself. You can mix and match ideas you read about for question 1, or rework a hero you read about in question 1. Think what your character stands for. Brainstorm some story ideas and situations for your character.
3. Create a short strip where your hero or villain faces some sort of trial which pits his or her (or its?) Buddhist mentality and beliefs against more Western conceptions. (E.g., does your hero eschew politics to the chagrin of a political activist?) The point is to use the comic’ medium to compare and contrast the two political mentalities. You may choose to resolve this tension or leave it unresolved.

Illustrating Skills, Dispositions, and Values and Actions

Art can also be used to visualize the skills and dispositions of citizenship as well as the content. Skills and dispositions are a little different than concrete historical episodes. It is probably easier to show the
of Louis XVI than it is to show cooperation or critical thinking. But precisely because of the complexity of skills and dispositions, they might be well suited to comic art. Following Kelley (2010, 6) the art is not simply an “adjunct” to the text, rather, art is a type of communication. So, with this in mind, students can use the power of art and words to show skills and dispositions. For instance, can students create a comic which illustrates the disposition of responsibility? Or the skill of collaborative capacities (Cohen, Pickeral, & Levine, 2010)? As noted above, students can use historical actors (E.g., Thomas Jefferson) or create their own historical (or contemporary) fiction. Is there a story a student could create, using their knowledge of how graphic novels are constructed, which illustrates social trust? Teachers can use the comics form to facilitate student thinking about how to visualize these complex notions.

The teaching of skills and dispositions/values should not be mechanistic, however. It should never be the case where citizenship is reduced to performing certain actions—citizenship is much too complex. So, teachers must exercise caution and always be clear that the teaching of skills and dispositions is a useful guide, a way to think about citizenship, but citizenship is just too complex to nail down into a few precepts.

Students can also begin to work out how those skills and dispositions may look in different situations. This is perhaps the most important aspect. The skills and dispositions are not general prescriptions to be applied universally in all situations. Cooperation will look different in different contexts and situations (e.g., cooperation by American founding fathers in the Continental Congress will look different than anti-war protestors in the 1960s). Students can begin to visualize different situations—and illustrate them—in order to locate different skills and dispositions. Kincheloe (2001) talks a great deal about the specifics. What works in one class may not work in another or at least will need to be modified. There are no universal prescriptions in teaching. The same may hold true for skills and dispositions. Further, comics can help students to visualize and showcase these differences. Again, we should always be wary of universal prescriptions.

**Draw a Skill or Disposition Assignment**

**Directions:** Draw a skill or disposition.

1. Consider the list of skills and dispositions that we have studied in class. Select at least one skill or disposition. Think of a historical
occurrence where this skill or disposition was present. (e.g., the Founding Fathers needed to cooperate).
2. Now, illustrate how this skill or disposition may look in a historical situation. Use at least two sequential frames to illustrate the skill or disposition.
3. Now, illustrate the same skill or disposition, but in a completely different historical situation. Use at least two sequential frames to illustrate the skill or disposition.
4. Finally, think of contemporary America. Draw the skill or disposition again in contemporary America. Use at least two sequential frames to illustrate the skill or disposition.

Civic Participation Assignment

One of the main goals of the social studies is to foster civic actions and participations (Banks et al., 1999; Chapin, 2015). As noted in Chapter 1, Larson (2017) asserts that knowledge and civic action are crucial. The purpose of the exercise below is to get students thinking about civic action.

Civil Participation Assignment

Directions: Answer the questions below:

1. Research an example of someone taking political action (e.g., Rosa Parks) or think of any political actions you have taken.
2. Use sequential art to depict this action. Your comic must be at least three successive frames. Think of how each frame builds off each other to portray this action. How can you use the art to show things that may be hard to depict in words? What emotions do you think the person was feeling (or were you feeling) when he/she or you took action?

As described in Chapter 2, sequential art can also be used to examine Shealy’s (2014) notion of a Version of Reality (VOR). The assignment in Chapter 2 had students look at existing comics and examine the VOR of depicted characters. The last question of that exercise had students construct their own VOR using the comics medium. I have included an example of this assignment from one of my students in this chapter.
The questions read:

Consider your own VOR. Try to construct it, reflect on how your own VOR impacts your behavior (try to be specific). Now actually depict this visually with sequential art. Use sequential art to show how your VOR might induce actions. (see the professor’s example)

**Emotional Context**

Another way that art can be used is to visualize emotions. McCloud (2006) and Duncan, Smith, and Levitz (2015) note how comics are an excellent arena to convey emotions in characters and generate emotions for the reader. In addition, McCloud (2006) speaks of the ability of gestures and body language to convey meaning. Eisner (2002, 103) asserts: “By far the most universal image with which the sequential artist must deal is the human form.” Another relevant concept is that of emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence centers on how people can perceive and understand the emotions of others and themselves and then utilize knowledge appropriately (Woolfork, 2016). The use of emotions to convey ideas and messages, as well as the fostering of emotional intelligence might be aided by the comic form. Teachers can guide their students to think about how certain historical actors reacted in certain situations and how to use emotions to convey ideas. How did Loyalists react to the reading of the Declaration of Independence? Can students imagine and capture this sentiment? Students can learn to draw emotions and through peer editing and collaboration, can decipher the emotions of peer’s characters. In the opening chapter, I argued that emotions are crucial to politics. It might be a great disservice to portray politics and social studies solely as a rational, objective endeavor.

Whatever the merit of using emotions in politics, the fact is, they must be contended with. Politicians can appeal to emotions in a number of ways. Further, this appeal can be depicted with comics, with a number of different devices which I have students consider. In real life politicians can use emotional language and appeals, they can integrate props and symbols, they can also use gestures and facial expressions. All of this can be shown in comics. In comics, the use of encapsulation, or the selective showing of events, can also be utilized. What politicians chose to say or show, or chose to not say or show, can have a huge impact. If we are only
told part of a story, it may inflame our emotions—the redacted part might provide more clarity and we may be able to understand why someone acted the way he or she did. The sequential nature of comics also lends itself to this. What is said first? What follows? How do politicians build their stories or speeches?

For this assignment, students are to get their hands dirty with the emotional context and then draw it. Students are to find a news article, video clip, or television clip where a politician is obviously feeding on emotions. This can be an article from a present politician or past, such as Hitler. Again, like many of the assignments in this book, the teacher may want to supply these, at least at first. Teachers may also want to model an example as well and instruct them on what a thumbnail is (Abel & Madden, 2008). Essentially, students are to map out the emotional features of a news article in comic form, specifically in a thumbnail.

Emotion Thumbnail Assignment

Directions: Answer the questions below.

1. Pick a news article, video clip, or television clip where a politician is specifically appealing to the emotions of his or her constituents. Argue why you think this is the situation. What evidence can you provide that the politician or public figure is utilizing emotion?

2. Draw a sequence of the speech or rally. Map out what is said and how it is said. How do the politicians utilize emotions to get his or her message across? What emotions specifically is the politician appealing to? How might readers react (look at the comments here as well) or how do the attendees react? Why do you think this? Write your answers.

3. Try to depict the answers to question two in a thumbnail. If constituents are shown reacting draw that. If they are not shown, how would you imagine them reacting? Some points to consider:

(a) Facial expression
(b) Body language and gestures
(c) Words and verbal appeals
(d) Symbols
(e) Sequentially: what is said first, what follows? How does the politician build their speeches or rallies?
If the class or a group is assigned the same article, members can then compare their thumbnails upon completion. Students could also be made to present their ideas to the class and show how and why they drew what they did.

**Worldbuilding and Geography**

Another essential plank of comics is worldbuilding (McCloud, 2006). Thompson (2018) also stresses the importance of worldbuilding in comics. McCloud (2006) outlines some strategies for effective worldbuilding in comics, specifically by focusing on the angle of the shot, attention to depth, the level of detail in the drawing and the absence of word balloons, which gives the impression of silence (Thompson, 2018). Through a social studies lens, worldbuilding can be related to an understanding of geography, place, environment, and human interactions in the environment. Students can use art to describe and understand places and the interaction of people and places (see the National Council for Social Studies standards for the importance of geography in the social studies). In his *Geography of Nowhere*, James Howard Kunstler (1993) argues that modern architecture, road building, and city planning can work to destroy the notion of public and civic spaces and any idea of the public good, because we are locked in suburbs and cars. If there is truth in this statement, students can use their comics as a way to design new places, with an eye to creating public and civic spaces and promoting the common good. There may be a fruitful intersection between geography and comics. Students can draw the places they know. They can use these places to build worlds in their comics. From Kunstler’s work, I began to understand the link between geography, democracy, and citizenship. The ways that cities and towns are planned and laid out has a crucial impact on how citizens can interact with each other. The existence or lack thereof of public spaces is an important consideration. Reading this work made me think of my own house and neighborhood, and more specifically, the civic potential my neighborhood might possess. This became the foundation for the assignment below. Below is an example of how students can consider the civic potential (or lack of it) of their neighborhood.

I live in a modest-sized house. I am not in a development, but I am surrounded by other houses, yet my house is somewhat secluded by strategic landscaping. Nevertheless, my back yard is open and not divided from my neighbor’s yard on the left if one were standing in the street, facing the
house (but we are divided from our other neighbor on the right). Their children (of the people on my left) and my children utilize the open yard for all sorts of activities from sledding in winter to slip and slide in the summer. We live about a mile away from the center of town. My children can walk to the little locally owned drug store on the corner and buy cheap toys and snacks with their money. They can ride their bikes into town and go to a local restaurant and buy sodas. There is another local bakery close by. We also live about a mile from my daughter’s elementary school. In the summer we ride our bikes there and go to the playground. The point is that we have the opportunity for interaction with others and access to public space. This is not necessarily a public square, and of course there are whizzing cars on the main road, but the town does have a sidewalk. My children are not secluded in our house; they can walk into town. This may not seem like a huge benefit, but I think it is important that my children have access to some type of public place and local business. I give this example in class and draw it on the board.

Geography is obviously a crucial plank of the social studies. Geography looks at the relationship between environments, places, and people (Chapin, 2015). Chapin (2015) argues that historians consider time, while geographers consider space, but of course these notions are linked. If history is the study of time and geography is the study of space, then comics can help to chronicle both. More specifically, students can use comics to study the history and geography of local places. Local history and geography is something I came to appreciate by accident. I lived on the east coast of the US state of Virginia for 11 years. This is also where I taught social studies. Here, I was inundated with history, from Colonial history, to Revolutionary War history and through the American Civil War. Now I live in Maryland, five miles from the Mason–Dixon Line. Again, I am inundated with history (Gettysburg National Military Park is roughly a 40-minute drive and union soldiers camped out in my little hometown prior to the battle). However, one does not have to have these monumental battle sites to teach local history and geography. Any locality can be used for this purpose (Marino & Crocco, 2012). It just takes a little research and prep work to figure out what happened in any given place. The point is, social studies teachers can and should utilize all of the resources available to them. Moreover, their locality is a tremendous resource with easy access (Chapin, 2015).

Marino and Crocco (2012) offer a case study for integrating local history into classroom instruction. They posit four points for students to
consider when assessing local history; events, themes, people, and buildings. Instead of just considering events, students can look at themes and situate the locality in larger themes that were affecting the country, such as urbanization or industrialization for example (Marino & Crocco, 2012). Looking at different groups of people that live in a community can be especially pertinent to study immigration (Marino & Crocco, 2012). Looking at buildings can also be very fruitful. Marino and Crocco (2012, 234) argue that the “it happened here approach” is a starting point, but it should not be the end. Acknowledging that something important happened in one’s locality can be a way to spark interest, but students can go much deeper than this (Marino & Crocco, 2012). Students can look at the actual location and consider different geographic questions such as distances to major cities and how travel was different in earlier centuries (Marino & Crocco, 2012). Students can create timelines of their locality as well as perform a “neighborhood quest” where they examine different features of their neighborhood such as local businesses and buildings (Marino & Crocco, 2012, 239). Students can create a “then and now” project of a street. They can obtain a photograph of how a street or building used to look and compare this photo to a modern photo (Marino & Crocco, 2012, 239). Chapin (2015) similarly argues that students can contextualize the changes experienced by a local community in larger national and international trends occurring at time.

Smith (2018) calls attention to the issues of mapmaking, and the phenomena of street names, both of which can help students in the assignments below. Smith (2018) argues that maps, by necessity, are untruthful. This is because maps must include certain details and omit others in order to be of use. While this feature is unavoidable, mapmakers can at least mitigate it in certain ways (Smith, 2018). There are also more purposeful lies that mapmakers tell, however; maps can be used to establish a preferred vision of space and silence competing accounts. Specifically, Smith (2018) looks at the importance of street names, and how these street names, which must be officially sanctioned by a government, convey preferred histories and versions of events which may be problematic. If maps must include certain details and omit others, this process of inclusion and omission can also be likened to the notions of encapsulation, as well as syntagmatic and paradigmatic choice.

McCloud’s (1994) aspect to aspect frame transition can be useful to get students thinking about place. McCloud (1994, 72) notes that the aspect to aspect transition “bypasses time for the most part and sets a wandering
eye on different aspects of a place, idea or mood.” Students can use the aspect to aspect transition to highlight different aspects of a local place. Or students can look at the intersection of time and space. Eisner (2002, 46) featured a cartoon called “A Short History of America,” by famed cartoonist R. Crumb. On the page there are 12 frames. Each frame shows the same place, just at a different time. We go from a pasture to a bustling intersection. This or a variation of this assignment can be a great way to teach local history and geography. This activity also aligns somewhat with Marino and Crocco’s (2012) then and now activity. Finally, the nonlinear potential of the comics form (Cabero, 2019; Miodrag, 2013) can also be utilized in these assignments, by allowing students to think outside of strict sequence and linear causation in regard to place. Below, I offer some examples of assignments which utilize the ideas above.

Note: The example referenced in the assignment below is the verbal description and quick sketch of my own neighborhood that I provide to my class, which I outlined above. There is tremendous variation for the second question.

**Draw Your Neighborhood Assignment**

**Directions:** Consider the Kunstler reading and the example provided. Do the same for your neighborhood.

1. First, give a brief written account of your house and neighborhood (like I did). Some things to consider: Do you have access to any public space? Are there sidewalks or public parks? Are you in walking distance to any local businesses or other points of interest? What are some barriers that might limit civic participation or at least simply meeting and talking with other people? If possible, consider the names of streets and their meanings.

2. Drawing on McCloud’s (1994) notion of aspect to aspect transitions, create a page where you show different aspects of your neighborhood. You may want to create a traditional nine-panel grid page (or you may want to use a different variation of frames, it is your choice). In each panel, draw an aspect of your house and neighborhood. Use text to give a brief explanation. Remember, the pictures are not just an add-on. Use the pictures to show what cannot be adequately expressed in words. Show the civic potential,
do not just state it. You can include people in the drawings as well. Think also of the angle you utilize to show the geographic location.

3. Remember, you are encapsulating an area. You must by necessity omit and include certain details. Think about what you include and omit and why you do this. Write a brief description of how you went about this process.

Pick a Local Spot Assignment

Directions: Answer the questions below:

1. Pick a spot in your hometown with local significance. This should be a place that you can easily visit.
2. Research the event. Use historical placards, the internet and talk to town residents. Also, if possible, consider any relevant names of the streets or areas and if and how this information plays into the history of the event or historical understanding of the place. Create a one-page comic illustrating this local event. Utilize the sequential nature of the comic medium to show cause and effect and successive frames.
3. Here, you must also try to capture what the place looked like when the event happened. You will have to use your research for this. However, depending on when the event happened, you can also use details from the present. Even if the event happened a century ago, you can still determine what has changed and what has stayed the same. For the things that have changed you must try to sketch them as you think they looked based on your research. For things that are similar, be meticulous and sketch them as best you can from real life.

Place Through the Years Assignment

Directions: Answer the questions below:

1. Review the handout which contains the cartoon from R. Crumb. Consider how places change over the years.
2. Pick a place in your hometown. Divide your page up into 10 frames. In each frame you must draw the same place. However, in each frame, a certain number of years must have elapsed. So, a frame
page, where each frame is equivalent to 10 years, would show change over a century.

3. You obviously cannot see what the place looked like in the past. For this, you will need to research. You can consult old photographs, talk to town residents or the town historian and use the internet. For the things that have changed you must try to sketch them as you think they looked based on your research. For things that are similar, be meticulous and sketch them as best you can from real life.

4. Write a brief reflection on the changes that you sketched. What changes did you see? Why do you think these took place?

5. Finally, create another 10 frame page. Sketch what you think the town will look like in 100 years (This does not have to be 10 frames. It might be difficult to sketch 10 different decades for this component of the assignment. This could be limited to two or five frames). Write a brief reflection and discuss why you sketched what you did.

6. Think about all of the changes and consider Kunstler’s ideas. How has the civic potential of the place grown or decreased with the changes? Can you sketch one more frame to show how the civic potential of the place could be enhanced?

The next exercise is meant to be done at a national park or state or county historical site. Field trips can be wonderful opportunities, but teachers must exercise great care and planning, as well as make sure field trips are meaningful and related to instruction (Banks et al., 1999). As noted earlier, and as it pertains to local history, Marino and Crocco (2012) posit that examining larger themes and situating a locality in those themes can be fruitful. For this assignment, students are to go to a historical site and create a short sequence of events that took place at the site. This could also be done with the use of a virtual field trip (Chapin, 2015). Of course, the teacher will need discretion here because different sites will require different types of sequences (so, the sequence drawn at the Battle of Gettysburg site will look different than the sequence at the Brown versus Board of Education site). The next question has students draw a large circle around the sequence (large enough to draw more pictures inside). Inside the circle, students are then to draw wider themes that were affecting American society. The point here is to think beyond the event and situate the event—visually—in those larger themes. I also think that this exercise can at least touch on the notions of nonlinear considerations, as well as demonstrate nonconventional reading patterns. The
large circle around the sequential events may help students think larger than the sequence.

**Visit a Local Attraction Assignment**

**Directions:** Answer the questions below:

1. Draw a sequence that could have taken place at this site. Use the information you learned from placards, tours, and brochures to construct this sequence. Think here of what actually to encapsulate.
2. Next, draw a large circle around your sequence. Make sure to leave enough room inside the circle to draw some more pictures.
3. Consider what time period your sequence took place in. Think about what larger events could have been taking place in the United States at that time and how those larger events may have impacted the events in your sequence. In the larger circle, draw some of those events.
4. Link the events in sequence to the larger circle with some phrases/text. However, do not write too much.
5. Comment on one other classmate’s cartoon.

I assigned this exercise to my social studies methods class and have included one of my student’s drawings (Fig. 4.1). We visited the Hampton House in Towson Maryland, which was owned by a prominent family in Maryland, the Ridgely family. The Ridgley family also owned a large number of slaves (see the details here: https://www.nps.gov/hamp/index.htm). As the assignment instructed, my student first drew a sequence where he depicted different scenes from the history of the house, such as slaves working and the Butler performing tasks. In the wider circle, he drew wider themes, such as the American Civil War and the Great depression. In the space for reflection, he commented on each frame and picture by utilizing what we learned in the house. I believe that he was able to situate the specific events of the house in the wider actions and themes taking place in America at the time. Further, he was able to utilize the information from the tour in a creative way (Fig. 4.2).
Comic books have always had a relationship with wider culture and society. Wright (2003, xiii) argues “to critically examine the history of comic books is to better understand the changing world of young people as well as the historical forces intersecting to shape it.” Comics are also a commercial and profitable endeavor. They need to make money to keep going (Wright, 2003). In order to turn a profit, comic book creators search for formulas or certain themes and stereotypes which become stories (Wright, 2003). These formulas must appeal to the intended audience and are shaped by those who produce comics and those who consume them, but also by “historical conditions” exerted on these groups (Wright, 2003, xv). Wright (2003, xv) asserts: “Formulas, therefore, are essentially historical constructions, and they are central to understanding comic books as history.” One such formula was the notion of Superman. The consideration of these formulas can be an important consideration...
for students. What sells? Why does it sell? What themes are present? What do these themes and ideas say about our society? Ultimately, comic books (like any other lucrative business) must appeal to the customers. The customers and consumers are indispensable in understanding the impact of comics.

Another intersection between comics and wider society is that of fan culture. The notion of fan culture may also be a fruitful area of study for citizenship. For one, many fans are not simply passive spectators, but maintain a “participatory presence” (Alaniz, 2016, 70). Moreover, Duncan and colleagues (2015, 299) define a fan as “someone who wants to take part in the dialogue about the medium.” Moreover, this dialogue takes place in a community of fans, either in person or online (Duncan et al., 2015). Fans of comics actually create a culture even if they do not create the characters (Duncan et al., 2015, 322). And as has been noted throughout the book, the meaning of texts is highly dependent on individual readers.

Furthermore, fans can be political. Jenkins (2014, 65) calls this “fan activism,” which is essentially when fans utilize their common knowledge as a means of civic participation. Jenkins (2014, 66) specifically examines the notion of “cultural acupuncture,” in which features of a fictional universe are mapped onto real life. Cultural acupuncture allows for fans to utilize their common language and metaphors to help describe and make sense of a situation. Fans of a particular story or universe draw on the shared symbols or the “cultural currency” of the story to frame events and act politically (Jenkins, 2014, 68). Jenkins (2014) shows how this mapping is accomplished with the Harry Potter Association (HPA). The HPA, composed of volunteer and part-time employees, and works for political change in a number of causes, all while utilizing the language and ideas of the Harry Potter Universe. One example is the use of “Walmart” to critique Walmart. Full disclosure: I am not a Harry Potter fan, I just never got into the franchise. However, even I know enough about it to understand the points that Jenkins makes. Even as someone who has not read any of the books, I still immediately understand the connection. The HPA has used similar devices to critique other phenomena and call for action.

Jenkin’s arguments about the HPA can be applied to comic book universes. I have specifically argued that they can be applied to the Batman universe and other such rich and complex universes in comics. I presented some of these ideas at the Batman in Popular Culture conference held
at Bowling Green State University in April of 2019. I have also spoken about these ideas on the Sectarian Review, which is a podcast that deals with all sorts of pop culture issues and trends and their relation to wider society (https://www.sectarianreviewpodcast.com/episodes-and-show-notes/episode-124-civics-art-and-batman). This podcast broadcasts out of Mt. Aloysius college and is on the Christian Humanist Network. The founder, Danny Anderson, interviews professors and other experts on a wide range of pop culture issues. There are some excellent podcasts which deal specifically with comic book issues. I mention the conference and podcast because they are excellent examples of pop culture resources for students to utilize.

Wright’s (2003) arguments also form a nice compliment to Jenkins (2014). In a sense, I read Wright’s arguments as using comics as a mirror of society, whereas drawing on Jenkins’s arguments, we can use comics as a map of society. As such, the assignment below draws on both Wright and Jenkins. As with most of the assignments in this book, this assignment could be done in a number of different ways. Instructors will have to decide how much material and instruction to provide. For the exercise below, I have students reading an excerpt from Wright and from Jenkins. I also focus on the Batman universe, but a teacher could have students pick their own fictional comic universe or assign different ones. This may be an assignment where students should select what they love. If students are not comic readers, an alternate assignment could be given or a universe assigned. This assignment might work best as a take-home project or paper. Finding comics and using them as primary sources (as Wright did) is a form of research and students could be made to understand this (plus it is fun!).

**Pop Culture Assignment**

**Directions:** Answer the questions below:

1. Read the excerpt from Wright (2003). Find a Batman comic (or at least an excerpt) from each decade starting in the 1940s online. For each comic, give some examples of how it might reflect larger cultural trends. Use the text and pictures to serve as examples of wider trends which you have read about and studied in class.
2. Read the excerpt from Jenkins (2014). Look through the comics you selected for question 1. In addition, look through the excerpts
from these important Batman comics: The *Killing Joke*, Batman *White Knight*, Morrison Comics, etc. as well as any other Batman comics that are relevant. Read fan blogs, letters to the editor, etc. (see: http://www.42entertainment.com/work/whysoserious and https://numberonebatfan.wordpress.com/ as examples). Read the conference proceedings to the Batman in Popular Culture Conference. You can visit the DC Comics website to better understand the characters in the Batman universe.

3. Now, use the Batman mythos and its shared meanings to critique some aspect of society. Here, think of the Batman universe as a “map,” which can show where the flaws in our own society exist. Use the shared meanings of the Batman Universe to accomplish this task.

From my experiences implementing these activities in class, I found that providing students examples of what is required is good practice. Following Thompson (2018) and Carter (2013), it is also good practice for professors to create along with their students. Question three, the heart of the assignment, may be overwhelming and vague. So, for this exercise, I created my own example to show students. I have also shown this example at the Batman conference. Part of this artwork is also featured on website for the Sectarian Review.

Again, the point here was to utilize the Batman universe in two ways. First, to see it as a mirror of our own society, and secondly, to use it as a map to critique existing society. I created an example of a map or the practice of cultural acupuncture. Fans have presence and power, they discuss comics, and they can be political. This assignment utilizes these ideas. For my example, I worked from Alan Moore and Brian Bolland’s *The Killing Joke* and utilized the Joker to make a political critique. Of course, I am not the first to do this. A Google search of “Uncle Sam Joker” yields a number of different images and variations, some with comic covers featuring the Joker in that position. Wessels and Martinez (2015) examine how many in the Tea Party movement utilized the image of the Joker to critique what they saw as shortcomings of the Obama presidency. In addition, Heldenfels (2015) argues for a Marxist reading of the Joker, while Litsey (2015) views the Joker in Nietzchean terms. The point is that there are a number of political and/or philosophical arguments that can be made of the Joker. As a fan, I utilized elements of the Batman universe
to make my political points. So, I situate my analyses of the Joker in this context.

My use of the Joker is not an isolated image, but one that relies on sequence and an already established reference (the Moore/Bolland comic). I focus on the comics. I utilized the page when Joker becomes the Joker. He just finished his swim in the toxic chemicals. I kept the same overall panel structure and layout. But, I “mapped” what I saw as Joker’s transformation (into the Joker) and his nihilism to aspects of American government and society. In the background of the first panel, I have the capitol building. I changed the last panel of the page, the panel where we see the Joker for the first time. Instead of Joker running his hands through his hair, I have the Joker dressed as Uncle Sam, pointing at the reader with a hideous smile. There are also newspapers swirling around with images of the military and the stock market. I used specific images for this mapping. I used the Capitol Building to symbolize government and politics (I made a deliberate choice to use the capitol building and not the White House, as I wanted this to be a bipartisan critique), I used Uncle Sam Joker to criticize the transformation of our government. I also have written new words in the panels which read: We are watching/the transformation/of democracy/into/a joke/or maybe/its just returning/to its natural state/maybe/this is the truth. I saw Joker and his transformation as a symbol of our own democracy. I was trying to convey the notion that our republic is a joke, or transforming into a joke. But this transformation may really be its natural state revealing itself. Of course readers can interpret these words any way they want. There is also obvious crossover with the symbolism and imagery in this chapter, and this assignment could plausibly have been included in the next chapter.

Prior to completing question three, it might also make sense to lead a discussion of how certain elements of a particular fictional universe can be used to critique a society. This can be a fun exercise (which I undertook at the conference). Below, I have listed some ideas. Batman is a vigilante, and as such, he breaks the law. However, this situation could be used as a way to discuss political theory, specifically legitimate government as posed by John Locke. In a nutshell, citizens have a responsibility to follow the dictates of their government when that government is legitimate. Governments are legitimate when they uphold the citizens’ natural rights of life, liberty, and property and these governments require the obedience of the people (Uzgalis, 2019). If the government does not uphold these rights, its end of the social contract, citizens can revolt (Gutek, 1995; Uzgalis,
Perhaps the government of Gotham City is not upholding their end of the contract because it does not protect the citizens, and Batman is a type of revolution.

Batman’s wealth is criticized in the graphic novel *Batman: White Knight*. In this book, Batman is not seen as some savior, but as a greedy capitalist who does not defend the citizens of Gotham City, but rather, protects the capitalist order and the riches of the 1%.

As mentioned earlier, Poison Ivy’s actions can be used to critique environmental issues. Poison Ivy is an eco-terrorist and she puts the welfare of plants and the earth above those of humankind. This is an interesting prospect.

There are a number of legal issues that abound in Batman, from the use of violence and the death penalty to corruption and the use of psychiatry in the legal system. All of these can be mapped to our society.

Batman’s philanthropy can also be used as a point of critique. Wealthy philanthropists such as Bill Gates wield tremendous power in today’s society (as did the Carnegies’ and Rockefeller’s of the past). How much should we rely on government action and how much should we rely on philanthropy to solve social problems is a question worth exploring. There is a great scene in *White Knight* where Gordon says to Batman “If you really wanted to stop crime, you’d give me a fleet of batmobiles and thousand utility belts so I could distribute them to the real heroes out there—the men who are brave enough to show their faces!” (Murphy, 2017). Batman and the exploits of Bruce Wayne can be mapped to this question.

These are some examples. Teachers can lead their students in discussion before the assignment so students will have some idea.

**Mythology**

As also noted previously, comics and stories in pop culture can be thought of as a modern form of myth (Cook & Frey, 2017; Halsall, 2018; Novak, 2014; Vandiver, 2000). Vandiver (2000) asserts how many of the stories in pop culture, such as the *Terminator* movies, share similarities with ancient myths. She contends that this familiarity is part of the appeal of these stories. We as a society have been inundated with mythical stories for 2500 years. She (2000, 192) writes “These stories are appealing because twenty-five centuries of repetition have made them familiar and have built them into the texture of our minds.” In addition, as also mentioned in Chapter 2, Vandiver (2000) argues that our mythmaking
impulse has been turned to the future, toward our descendants. She also ponders what other genres besides science fiction might utilize mythmaking. With this in mind, students can use the comic book form to create their own myths. However, an important element in this creation could be the reliance on pre-established myth as a sort of template. In practical terms, this reliance on a template can also ground the assignment in the curriculum and standards that many teachers must teach.

There are some practical concerns of this assignment that the teacher must consider. Will this be a larger assignment which spans a few class periods, or a smaller one which only spans one or two? The example below is for a shorter assignment but this could easily be expanded. As with many assignments in this book, teachers will have to decide how much time they will use to explain and discuss relevant information with their students that pertains to the assignment (e.g., Vandiver’s arguments that mythmaking is now turned to the future, comic terms such as encapsulation, etc.). The other consideration is similar to Chapter 2 and deals with the use of a graphic adaptation. For the exercise below, I am using Hinds’ *Odyssey*. However, if no graphic adaptation exists for a specific myth, teachers can modify the questions. Question two can be eliminated. I have only included it so students can get a sense of encapsulation. I assigned my own children a variation of the assignment below when I homeschooled them during the COVID-19 crisis. My 6-year-old daughter, who was enthralled with the story of the Helen of Troy, created a short comic where a beautiful woman leaves her husband.

**Modern Mythology Drawing Assignment**

**Directions:** You will create your own myth, using an ancient myth as a template. You are trying to answer the question: *What does your myth say about your society?* Keep this in mind at all times. Your new myth is a visual answer to this overarching question.

1. You should now have a basic understanding of the *Odyssey*. If you had to condense the story to only a few lines, what would you say? Write this condensed version down. This should be no more than a paragraph.
2. Look at Hinds’ graphic adaptation of the *Odyssey*. Consider his encapsulation of the story. Select five scenes that Hinds decided to
represent. Why do you think he chose to include these events and why do you think he represented them the way he did?

3. Now take that condensed version you wrote in question 1 and use it as the basis for a new story, set in the distant future. How can you rework the elements of the story to say something about our own culture and society? You can hug the story closely or deviate. But the basic story should be of someone trying to get back to someone and facing a number of obstacles. Write a brief description.

4. Take the description you wrote in question three and use it to create a thumbnail of at least five sequential panels. After you create your thumbnail, write a brief description justifying why you chose to represent the scenes you did.

5. Exchange comics with a classmate. Compare it with what you have done. What scenes did you choose to encapsulate as compared to what your classmate chose? What are some of the effects of choosing the scenes you did as opposed to what your classmates chose?

**Current Events and Political Cartoons**

Political cartoons are powerful mechanisms to convey political messages and can be used in social studies education (Chapin, 2015; Wolsey, 2008). So, there is obviously a natural link between the visual and the text in representing and understanding historical and current events. The exercise below builds on this link. I utilized this exercise in my Education Law Class. That class centers on Supreme Court case law. I wanted students first to consider political cartoons, which many have familiarity with, and then build off that familiarity and move on to sequential art. I had discussed pertinent ideas about the comic’s medium with them, and had given them the cheat sheet.

**Sequential Law Assignment**

**Directions**: Answer the Questions Below.

1. Consider the many cases we have examined so far. In addition, consider the underlying legal themes of those cases. Here some examples of themes:
• Freedom and speech and its limits/forums
• Compelling state interests
• Free expression and establishment clause
• Right to privacy
• Technology and the law
• Others?

2. Consider the long history of political cartoons and the use of cartoons in the political arena. Read the excerpts. Discuss as a class. Use a mobile device and search for some political cartoons for inspiration. Also think of the images we looked at in class (e.g., Nettie Hunt and Bellamy Salute).

3. Next, consider how some of these themes or ideas might be able to be represented visually. You can think of these themes more generally or as they relate to your school. I want you to go beyond a cartoon and actually try your hand at sequential art. Consider some of the points from the cheatsheet. The objective is to use images and text to tell a story or at least convey an idea differently than could be done using academic language alone.

I assigned this activity to the class, but gave until the next class to complete it. I also had students present their comics in class which helped to generate some great discussion. One student visually represented three court cases we had studied which dealt with free speech (see Fig. 6.2). The student used a sequence to show these cases in order. I examine this comic in more detail in the assessment section in Chapter 6.

Some journalists have turned to comic’s journalism (Nyberg, 2012). Nyberg (2012, 116) asserts “As a genre of nonfiction comics, comics journalism combines the form of comics with the conventions of journalism.” One notable comics journalist is Joe Sacco, who created graphic novels from his time spent covering the events in Bosnia and Palestine. Discussion of current events can also be valuable in the social studies classroom (Chapin, 2015). From my own experience as a social studies teacher for 11 years, I heavily utilized current events in my modern world history classes. Students had to hand in current events for the entire year. I had students find two articles, summarize them, and then link the articles to something we have studied in class. (I once had a student link an
impending snowstorm to Napoleon’s defeat in Russia.) I believe that this assignment bridged the gap between the past and present.

The assignment below combines all these elements and has students utilize the comics format for the current events assignment. Teachers may want to provide an example.

Comics Journalism and Current Events Assignment

Directions: Answer the questions below.

1. Review the excerpts from Sacco. Look for other examples of comic journalism.
2. Select an article from a major newspaper. Identify the main point of the article as well as the important details. Turn the article into a graphic narrative/comic strip.

Museum Education

Taking students to museums offers a great opportunity to learn (Chapin, 2015; Winstanley, 2018). Moreover, Winstanley (2018) asserts that John Dewey saw museums contributing to civic life. While it is generally accepted that museum education is very beneficial, there are still questions on how best to approach and maximize the educational potential of museums (Winstanley, 2018). This situation may be ideal for the utilization of the comics form. (I also argue something similar for field trips in the next chapter.) The exercise below does not speak to modifying the actual museum experience however, rather it simply provides a different way for students to interpret what they see at the museum. Winstanely (2018), argues that students need to reflect on their experience in the museum to make it worthwhile. Drawing off Dewey, “reflection entails making connections and relationships between the existing activity and previous knowledge, ideas and experiences, helping people to create meaning” (Winstanley, 2018, 428). The use of student comics may help students accomplish this task of reflection. This assignment could also be done by utilizing a virtual tour (Chapin, 2015).
Creating comics about their museum experience can be a fun and informative way to maximize this experience and inspire reflection. The assignment below has students selecting (or encapsulating) different things they learn from a museum to create a comic. Of course, this will vary by museum. I have been to a number of museums as a child and adult. Growing up in New York City, I frequently visited the Museum of Natural History. I have also been to the Smithsonian. Both of these can be overwhelming. As a social studies methods instructor, I take my students to the Maryland Society Historical Museum in Baltimore Maryland, which is a little less overwhelming. This museum chronicles Maryland’s history. I have created the assignment below with this museum in mind. Educators will most likely need to tailor this activity to a specific museum. I give my students a cheat sheet with this assignment. This assignment can help students create order (through sequence) from a wide array of facts and information.

Museum Education Assignment

Directions: Answer the questions below.

1. Select five different events from the museum. You can select one event from each century (1600s, 1700s, 1800s, 1900s, and the 2000s) or you can just select five events without regard to when they occurred (e.g., two events in the 1700s, two in the 1800s, and one in the 1900s).

2. Write a brief one-sentence summary of the event and why you think it is important. These events should have some continuity. So, maybe they all deal with slavery in Maryland, or with riots and disturbances that have occurred in different centuries in Baltimore.

3. Draw each event and utilize the features of the comic medium.
   (a) Think here of what scenes to encapsulate, as well as emotions and gestures characters you draw, and take note of the background.
   (b) Think also of sequencing and how the scenes are related to each other.

4. Post your comic to the discussion board on Joule (my university’s LMS). Critically comment on how one of your classmate effectively utilized one of the features from the cheat sheet.
By the time I implemented this assignment, I kind of had an idea of what I was doing. One of my students depicted various riots and mob activity that had taken place in Baltimore over the last three centuries. Here, the art style helped to convey the message. The art is frantic and helps to convey a sense of confusion that characterizes this type of event (Fig. 4.3). Another student’s comic (Fig. 4.4) featured a brilliant use of strategic color. Her comic, which was all in black and white, had a red line in the fourth frame which runs through the city of Baltimore. My student was trying to show how the practice of redlining had hurt the development of Baltimore. I thought both of these examples demonstrate how the comics medium can help students reflect on and make sense of their museum experience in new creative ways.

Description of Figures

Figure 4.1: My students created a game board, and each person in the Common School Movement had a different path to take. I thought this formulation truly showed a nonlinear take on some of the complexities of the Common School Movement.

Figure 4.2: This is an example of a student-created comic for the local history assignment. In this example, the student drew a sequence of events which helped to depict some events associated with the site, which was a historical mansion. The student also surrounded this sequence by larger historical events and themes which could have impacted the events shown as well.

Figure 4.3: This is an example of a student-created comic for the museum comic assignment. Here, the art style helped to convey the message. The art is frantic and helps to convey a sense of confusion that characterizes this type of event.
Figure 4.4: This is another example of the museum comic. Here the student used color in an intriguing way to convey the idea of “red lining.” She drew an imposing red line through her depiction of Baltimore.
Fig. 4.4  Student example of museum comic #2

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