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Visual Literacy

RI.8.7, RL.8.7, RST.8.7

Vocabulary

ingenious
hurtling
navigable
photorecon-
naissance
strait
trajectory

Images and sound can often give you insights about what you're reading that words alone cannot. Illustrations help you picture settings and characters more vividly and convey some information better than words alone. Seeing a play performed on a stage is a different experience than reading it silently. When you read nonfiction, illustrations, photographs, maps, diagrams, charts, and graphs give information on a topic that enhances your understanding of the text.

Guided Practice

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Messenger's Mission

by Edward Seaton

In 2011, space scientists were anxiously awaiting an event scheduled to take place on March 18. The NASA spacecraft *Messenger* was coming to the end of its seven-year voyage to Mercury, the closest planet to the sun. On that date, *Messenger* would fire its main thruster for 14 minutes. The maneuver would slow the craft by 1,929 miles per hour, taking it out of orbit around the sun to be the first human-made object to orbit Mercury. It was expected to remain in Mercury orbit for about a year, taking photographs and performing experiments.

Why did it take seven years for *Messenger* to reach Mercury, when spacecraft can reach more distant Mars in a matter of months? It was simply a matter of money—and less simply, an ingenious feat of engineering and computer science. Scientists could have plotted a direct course to Mercury, but that would have required more fuel and a bigger rocket. It would have required even more fuel to slow *Messenger* down enough to orbit around Mercury, instead of crashing into the planet or shooting past it. Instead, they plotted a roundabout course that used gravity assists from Earth, Venus, and Mercury itself to change its velocity.



Run an Internet search on the *Messenger* mission. See what other presentations of the facts you can find and compare and contrast them with the article.



ingenious
clever

Graphic Literature

Graphic literature is a category of stories that are told by combining text with a sequence of illustrations. It grew from the storytelling tradition of comic books, which date back to the 1920s. However, graphic novels often use a design structure, style, and color pattern that set them apart from comics of the familiar *Batman* or *Spider-Man* type. They typically tell a complete story, as compared with comic-books that may include serials or disconnected stories involving the same characters. Graphic novels deal with more mature themes than most comics. They are also bound more like paperback books.

Graphic literature may be adapted or original. You can find graphic versions of favorites like *Tom Sawyer* and *Frankenstein*, as well as stories that have never appeared as prose texts. Myths and legends are also popular subjects.

Some graphic novels and stories are written and illustrated by the same person. For others, an author scripts the story and gives directions for the illustrations to be drawn and colored by an artist. These directions will include the pattern of illustrations on each page. They may range from bare suggestions to detailed descriptions. The author may prepare a **storyboard**, a rough layout of each graphic story that shows the illustrations the author has in mind. This is similar to the way it's done in the movies when a director translates a screenwriter's script into visual images. In fact, it's useful to think of a graphic novel as a screenplay in stills. Like a screenwriter, a graphic novelist should not *tell* what his characters can *say*, and he should not use words when an image will convey the information as well or better.

Each separate picture in graphic literature is called a **panel**. A block of text used to relate the narrative is called a **caption**. The dialogue that a character speaks or thinks is enclosed in a **balloon**.

Guided Practice

Read the story and the following graphic presentation. Then answer the questions.

from **The Labors of Hercules**

a myth of ancient Greece

A jealous goddess! So begins my tale. For though this is a story of the hero Hercules, it was the goddess Hera, queen of Mount Olympus, who was the cause of it all. Hercules was admired for his great strength. However, although his mother was Alcmene, a mortal woman, his father was Zeus, king of the gods and Hera's husband. Maybe it was Zeus who was the cause of the trouble.

Whoever was to blame, Hera had hated Hercules since before he was born. Often, she had sought to end his life, but other gods had protected him. At last she thought of another way to destroy him. She made him lose his mind. In his madness, he killed his own wife and children. When he came to his senses, he was devastated by what he



had done. He went to the Oracle of Apollo and asked the god if there was anything he might do to atone for his terrible crime. Apollo told him that as punishment he must serve his cousin Eurysthus, King of Mycenae, for 12 years as a common slave.

Now, Eurysthus was a cruel man and held Hercules in contempt. He told Hercules that to serve his time, he must complete ten tasks, or Labors. If Eurysthus had his way, Hercules would not live to complete even one. For his first labor, Hercules was to bring him the skin of a lion. Yet, not just any lion! This one had terrorized the countryside near the city of Nemea, devouring any human encountered.

Hercules set off on his seemingly impossible task. On his way, he stopped for the night at the house of a poor laborer named Molorchus. When he told Molorchus of his task, his host said, "Let me sacrifice an animal to Zeus to pray for a safe lion hunt."

"No," said Hercules, "wait 30 days. If I return with the lion's skin, we shall sacrifice to Zeus together. If I die in the attempt, then make your sacrifice instead to me as a hero."

This Molorchus agreed to, and Hercules went on his way. When he came to the hills, he found the lion easy to track. However, the great beast's skin was so thick that his arrows and his club were useless against it. He followed the lion to its den, blocked the entrance with a great stone, and wrestled the lion until it was dead.

Hercules returned to Mycenae wearing the lion's skin as a robe. King Eurysthus, who had thought he would never see Hercules again, now became tremblingly afraid of him. He commanded the hero never to enter the city again and told him that from now on he would receive his orders through a messenger. What's more, he had a large jar made and buried halfway in the earth, in which he could hide from Hercules when he felt he needed to.

Eurysthus's messenger came to Hercules and told him that his next task would be to slay the Hydra, a giant, venomous water snake. What he didn't tell Hercules was that the Hydra had nine heads, and that one was immortal and could not be destroyed. Furthermore, even if someone were to cut off one of its mortal heads, two heads would grow in its place.



Research and prepare a PowerPoint display on the Labors of Hercules. How did they expand from 10 to 12? Can you find any modern stories that are based on this famous theme?

THE LABORS OF HERCULES

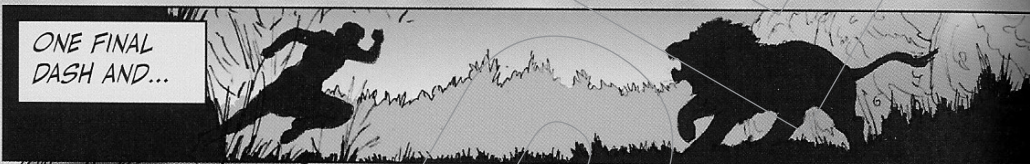
HERCULES HAD FOLLOWED THE GREAT LION FOR MONTHS...



...AT LAST, THE BEAST WAS CORNERED.



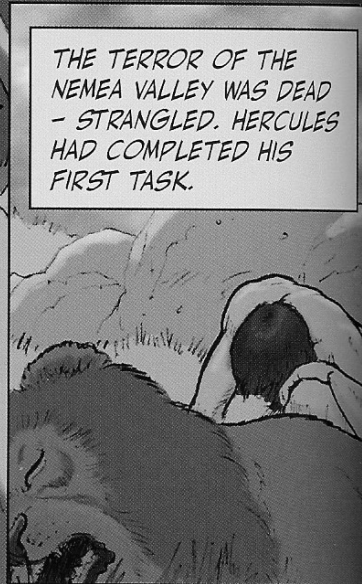
ONE FINAL DASH AND...



HERCULES' CLUB AND ARROWS HAD BEEN USELESS AGAINST THE LION'S THICK MANE. HE WOULD HAVE TO KILL IT WITH HIS BARE HANDS!



THE TERROR OF THE NEMEA VALLEY WAS DEAD - STRANGLER. HERCULES HAD COMPLETED HIS FIRST TASK.



WHY HAD HERCULES KILLED THE LION? IN A FIT OF MADNESS BROUGHT ON BY HIS STEPMOTHER, THE GODDESS HERA, HERCULES HAD KILLED HIS OWN WIFE AND CHILDREN. TO PUNISH HIM, THE GODS HAD FORCED HERCULES TO SERVE HIS COUSIN, EURYSTHEUS, THE KING OF MYCENAE, AND PERFORM TEN HEROIC TASKS, OR LABORS. HERCULES WAS NOW BACK IN MYCENAE TO BE GIVEN HIS SECOND TASK.

AT THE COURT OF KING EURYSTHEUS...

WAKE UP, SIRE.

WHAA?

ARGH! THE NEMEAN LION HAS COME TO EAT ME!



THE NEMEAN LION IS DEAD...

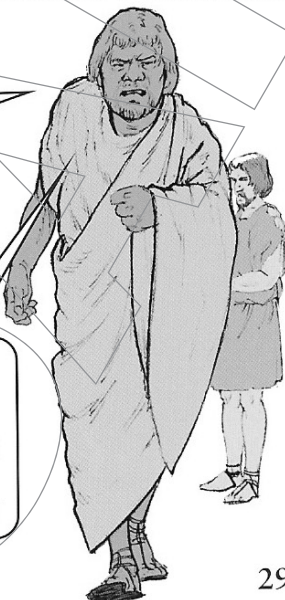


...HERE IS ITS SKIN.

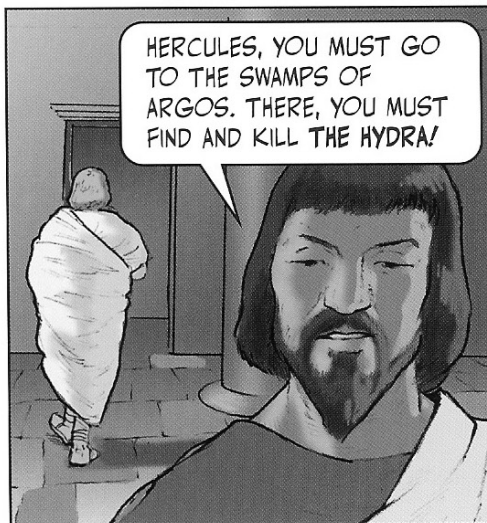
ER, WELL DONE, HERCULES. YOU KEEP IT. SOMEONE WILL GIVE YOU YOUR NEXT TASK. I HAVE TO GO.

THE MAN'S A MENACE! IN THE FUTURE, DON'T LET HIM NEAR THE PALACE! WHO KNOWS WHAT DAMAGE HE COULD DO?

I NEVER LIKED HIM WHEN WE WERE CHILDREN! WHY COULDN'T HERCULES AND THE LION HAVE KILLED EACH OTHER!



HERCULES, YOU MUST GO TO THE SWAMPS OF ARGOS. THERE, YOU MUST FIND AND KILL THE HYDRA!



Analyze how the events of the plot are treated differently in the graphic and prose versions. Why did the graphic author and illustrator choose to tell the story as they did?



When a story is developed through pictures, a lot of details that are *told* in a prose narration can be *shown* in illustrations. Here is a sample answer:

The graphic version begins in the middle of the story. The exposition about Hera, Eurystheus, and the labors is told in one panel at the top of the second page. This begins the story with an “action” scene. The graphic author and illustrator skip the detail about Molochus, which isn’t necessary to the plot and would be boring to show in pictures. They also show by Eurystheus’s expression that he is afraid of Hercules, so they don’t have to explain it.

Analyze the five panels on page 156. How does the illustrator vary the angle, size, and focus of the panels to tell the story?



Can you see how a graphic novel is like “a screenplay in stills”? The author and illustrator have varied the “shots” on this page like a movie director would. Here is a sample answer:

The first panel shows a close view of Hercules’s eyes glaring at the lion. The second panel is a twin of the first, showing the lion glaring back at Hercules. These are set side by side. Then you see a narrow panel that shows Hercules rushing toward the lion in silhouette. That shows you that the fight is about to begin. The biggest panel, the one with the most detail, shows Hercules wrestling the lion—the main thing that happens in this part of the story. The last panel shows the outcome, the end of the episode. It’s drawn as if it were part of the main panel.

Test Yourself

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Across the Top of the World

by Clarice Campbell

Global warming may be the cause of a lot of problems over the next century, but in one respect it is fulfilling a 500-year-old dream. It is turning the once-mythical Northwest Passage into a fact.

The “Northwest Passage” is a sea route between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the North American Arctic. Ever since geographers realized the land Columbus had discovered was not Asia but a continent unknown to Europeans, sailors had been seeking a way around it. They could risk their lives by going around stormy Cape Horn or threading the slightly less risky Strait of Magellan. The Spanish guarded that route jealously in the 1500s. If you were a trader from another nation, you needed to find another way or be prepared to fight.

That’s why explorers sought a northern sea route to Asia. There had to be a “northwest passage” that would take them to the Pacific without going the long way around. There “had to be,” only because traders wanted there to be. Arctic ice extended so far south, even in summer, that no one was able to prove that a Northwest Passage existed. The English explorer Martin Frobisher tried to find it in 1576, but he got no farther than the southern end of Baffin Island. A decade later, the English captain John Davis made three attempts to find the passage. His voyages made a profit through fur trading and fishing, but when he tried to sail north around Baffin Island he found the sea filled with huge icebergs and covered by fog. By late August it was winter in those latitudes, and Davis returned to England.

At least he and his men got home safely. Others who sought the passage were not so fortunate. The most famous was Sir John Franklin and his ill-fated expedition of 1845–1848. He made it through the strait north of Baffin Island, but his ships became frozen in the ice near King William Island, and he and all his men were lost. Artifacts from the Franklin expedition are still turning up in the Canadian Arctic.

Robert McClure finally proved that there was a Northwest Passage in 1854. However, he had to make his way in from the west by dogsled. The passage was finally navigated from Atlantic to Pacific in 1906, by the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen. It was a historic feat, but a hollow one. The voyage had taken three years. The variation each year in whether the passage was blocked by ice made the route impractical. And just a few years later the Panama Canal opened, making the dangerous passage irrelevant.



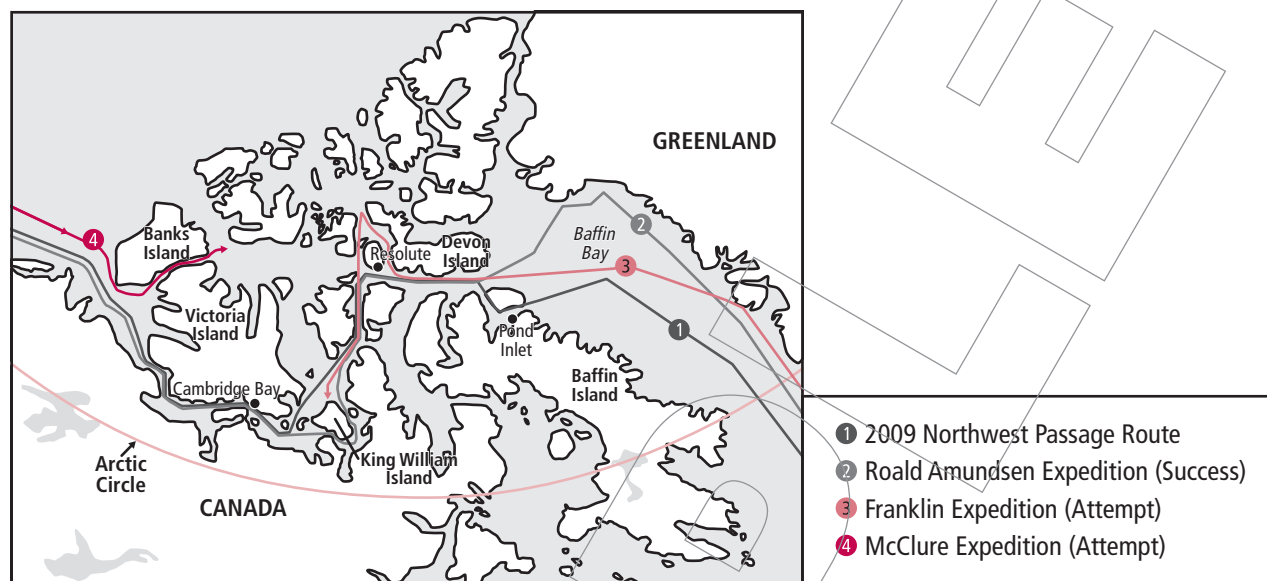
strait
*narrow body of
water between
two land masses*



Until 2009. That year, shrinkage of the Arctic ice because of global warming had left the Northwest Passage navigable by large cargo ships during the summer months. Now a new question has arisen. Is the passage part of Canada, as the Canadians claim? Or, is it an international strait, as other nations would have it? Neither side hopes it will take as long to resolve the issue as it did to open the passage.



navigable
able for ships to
travel through



- 1** Which fact in the article is emphasized by the illustration on page 161? Analyze how the illustration gives information that is not necessarily evident in the text.

- 2** Why was Baffin Island a barrier to explorers searching for the Northwest Passage? Analyze how the map on page 162 helps you answer the question.

3 Ships going through the strait north of Baffin Island passed between it and ____.

- A** Greenland
- B** Banks Island
- C** Devon Island
- D** King William Island

4 The article mentions a controversy between Canada and other nations over whether the Northwest Passage is in Canadian or international waters. What conclusions can you draw about this dispute from looking at the map?

5 Evaluate how this topic might be better presented and easier to understand in a different medium.

