

## **Graphic novels in the classroom – Wayne Mills**

### **DITES, VITES AND SWALOOPS**

Wayne Mills introduced a fascinated audience to the arcane world of comic book language and visual effects at the July SLANZA mini conference.

Comics and graphic novels are not just random doodlings by artists who have not 'grown up'. They contain a rich visual language that has been studied and described and can be used from level 2 in the Visual language strand of the English Curriculum.

Wayne began his session by showing us a classic illustration from a 1938 Superman comic. From there we saw how artists use in their work, signs, symbols and special effects to create actions, movement, and mood, that move the story line forward and create sophisticated visual effects. We looked at how backgrounds are created using Dites to show polished mirrors and glass. Vites, on the other hand show a polished floor or ice. And swalloops? They are the lines that show a golf swing or aeroplane propellers whirling.

Comic book language is rich in onomatopoeia. Rat-a-tat-tat will indicate gunshots, Kaboom, for explosions and all those innocent keyboard symbols, which when put together, show the rudest swear words possible. \$#@^&\*!!

Next time you get a chance, borrow or buy a range of comics and look to see how the artists have conveyed the tone of voice of the characters. If the print is large and bold the person will be shouting or angry. Study the speech bubbles and see how they differ if the character is whispering, thinking or relaying their voice. Find out how feelings of despair, fear and surprise are created.

The strange vocabulary comes from the United States, and if you want to find out more, read 'Understanding comics' By Scott McCloud. ISBN 0-87816-243-7. A PhD thesis no less! If you get really hooked, visit Gotham Comics in Onehunga, Auckland.

Jeannie Wright  
National Library Napier