



The Wild Piano

CCSS-aligned Lesson Plan & Teacher's Guide

TOON GRAPHICS FOR VISUAL READERS

TOON Graphics are comics and visual narratives that bring the text to life in a way that captures young readers' imaginations and makes them want to read on—and read more.

The very economy of comic books necessitates the use of a reader's imaginative powers. In comics, the images often imply rather than tell outright. Readers must learn to make connections between events to complete the narrative, helping them build their ability to visualize and to make "mental maps." A comic book also gives readers a great deal of visual context that can be used to investigate the thinking behind the characters' choices.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE ARTIST'S CHOICES

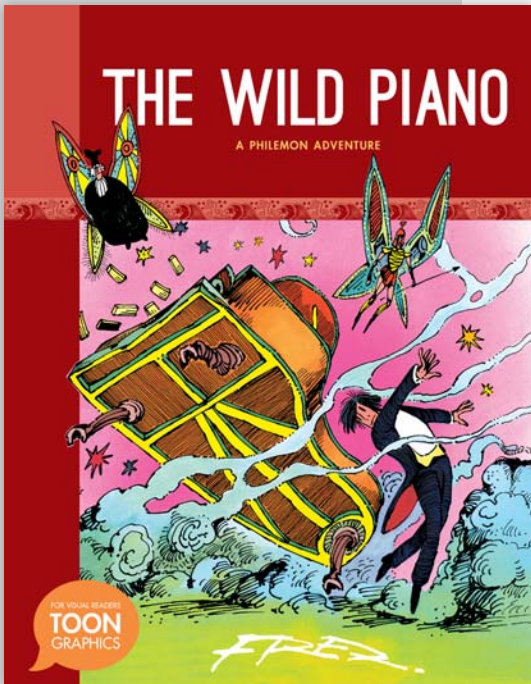
Look carefully at the artwork: it offers a subtext that at first is sensed only on a subliminal level by the reader and encourages rereading. It creates a sense of continuity for the action, and it

can tell you about the art, architecture, and clothing of a specific time period. It may present the atmosphere, landscape, and flora and fauna of another time or of another part of the world.

Facial expressions and body language reveal subtle aspects of characters' personalities beyond what can be expressed by words.

READ AND REREAD!

Readers can compare comic book artists' styles and evaluate how different authors get their point across in different ways. In investigating the author's choices, a young reader begins to gain a sense of how all literary and art forms can be used to convey the author's central ideas. The world of TOON Books, TOON Graphics, and of comic book art is rich and varied. Making meaning out of reading with the aid of visuals may be the best way to become a lifelong reader, one who knows how to read for pleasure and for information—a reader who *LOVES* to read.



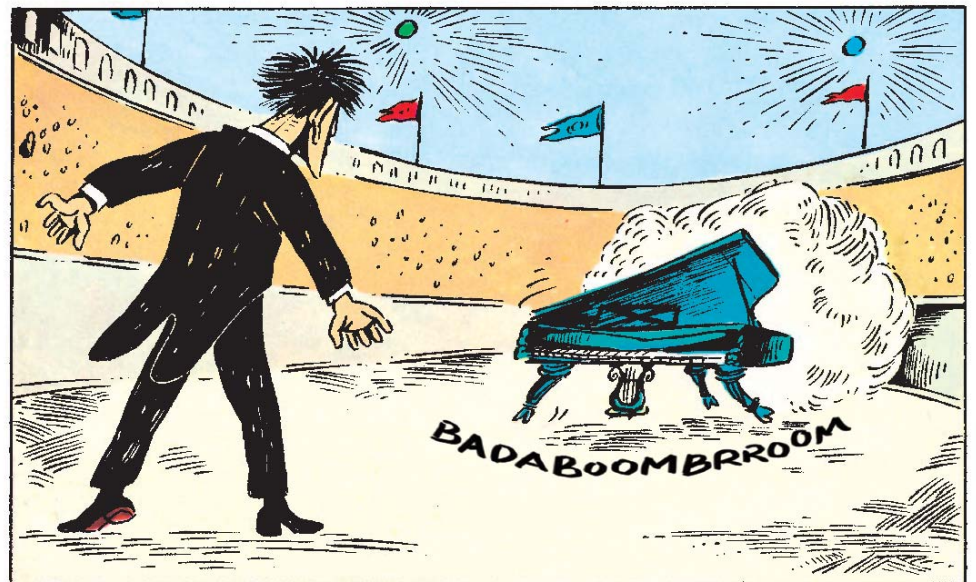
The Wild Piano:
A Philemon Adventure
by Fred
A TOON Graphic
ISBN: 978-1-935179-83-2

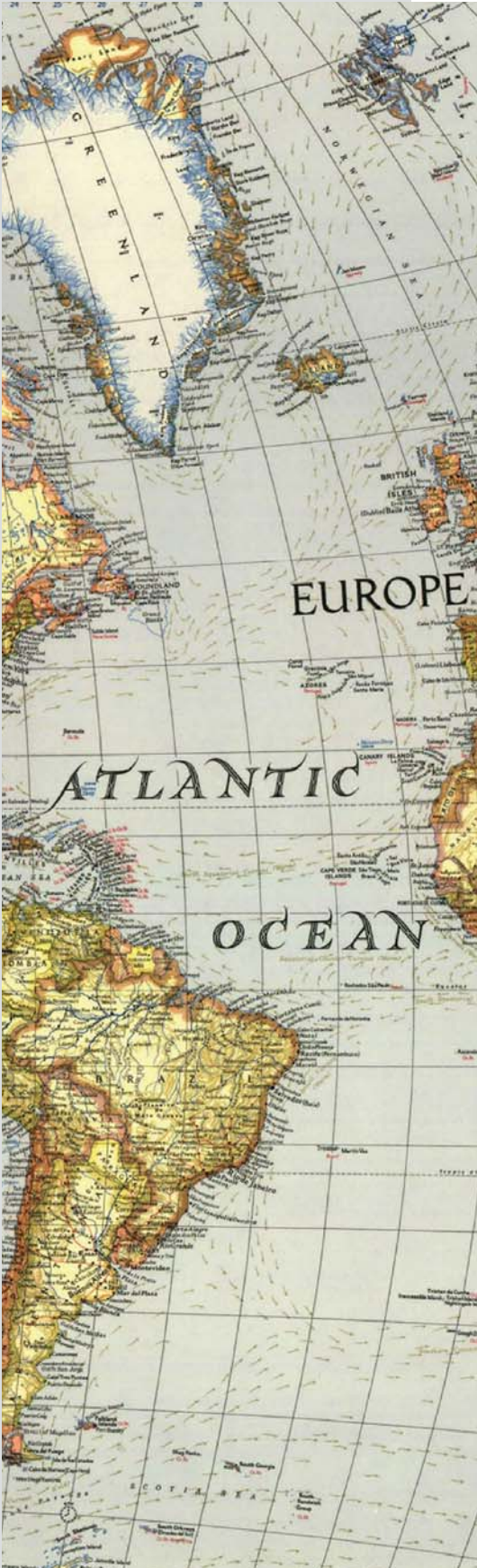
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THE TOON EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH TEAM:

Hsin Yu Chao, an illustrator and comic artist in her native Taiwan, is currently pursuing a master's degree in Arts Administration at Teachers College, Columbia University. Chao has worked for numerous galleries as well as for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Sasha Steinberg, who holds a BA in Comparative Literature from Vassar College and an MFA in Cartooning from the Center for Cartoon Studies, was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to study political art in Russia.





LITERACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In addition to providing students with the tools to master verbal literacy, each TOON Graphic offers a unique focus on visual learning. The 21st Century has seen a shift where literacy has been redefined to include visual literacy. Our unique lesson plans and teacher's guides help instructors and students alike develop the vocabulary and framework necessary to discuss visual expressions, structure, and meaning in the classroom.

For schools that follow the ELA Common Core, TOON Graphics lesson plans offer examples of how to best utilize our books to satisfy a full range of state standards. The Common Core's learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade, and were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live. Though this book can be used in any grade, we focused this lesson plan on state standards for grades 4 and 5. Questions included in this guide fulfill the following standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Reading: Literature (RL).4-5.1-10
Students build skills in reading and comprehending literature independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Reading: Informational Text (RI).4-5.4, 9
Students determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text. Students integrate information from several texts in order to speak knowledgeably on a subject.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Speaking and Listening (SL).4-5.1
Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

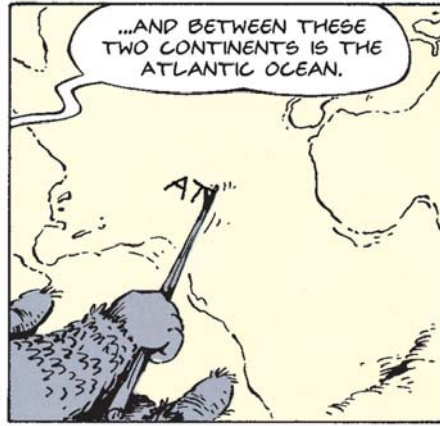
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Speaking and Listening (SL).4-5.2
Students summarize a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Speaking and Listening (SL).4-5.4
Students report on a topic or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes.

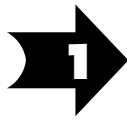
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.1
Students write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.2
Students write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.7
Students conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.



- Black = potential questions for course plans
- Gray = feedback for teachers.



Verbal Expression

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1
Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3
Describe in depth a character, setting or event in a story, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1
Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text, including how the characters in a story or drama respond to challenges; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3
Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

**The standards listed on the right are fulfilled by every question in this section. Additional standards may be listed in the gray sidebar on the left for particular units listed below.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.6
Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.

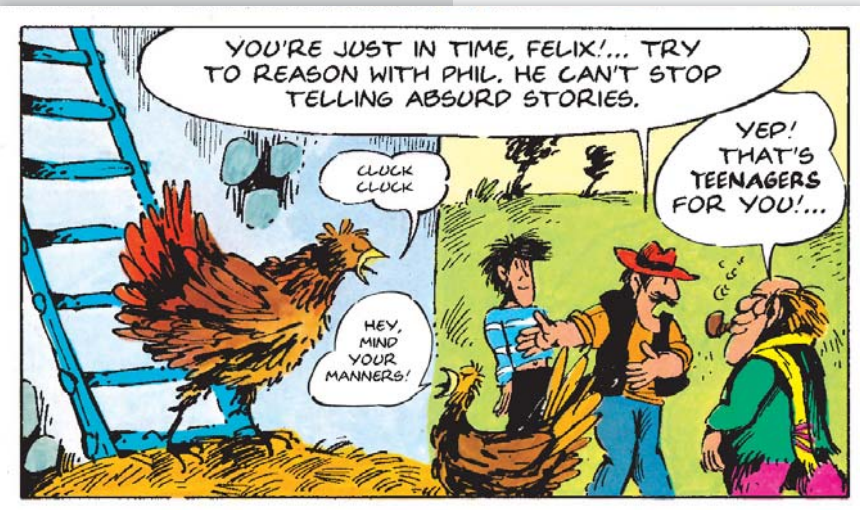
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6
Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

Characters

- ◆ How do the four central male characters (Philemon, Hector, Bartholomew, Uncle Felix) differ? What do their speech patterns tell you about their personalities?

Philemon often seems to be trying to make sense of the world. He tries to sort out the facts ("That's strange. He never spoke about you" - page 12) and explain his point of view ("But I went there, Uncle Felix. That's where I met Bartholomew" - page 13), despite being constantly interrupted.

Uncle Felix, a source of those interruptions, seems jolly at first ("Ha ha ha! Trips and all kinds of stuff...hee hee!" - page 12) but he quickly changes when the subject of the islands is raised. After, Felix becomes a bit withholding. He never fully answers Philemon's questions (page 13), and sends him into danger with very little warning or explanation (page 15). Philemon's father, Hector, by contrast, is the most straightforward. His dialogue is constantly grumpy, and we have the distinct impression that he is always screaming. When we meet Bartholomew at the end of the book, he seems dazed and confused ("mmhmm...What's going on?" - page 33). Students may be interested in comparing this characterization with his confident persona in the previous book (*Cast Away on the Letter A: A Philemon Adventure* ISBN: 978-1-935179-63-4).



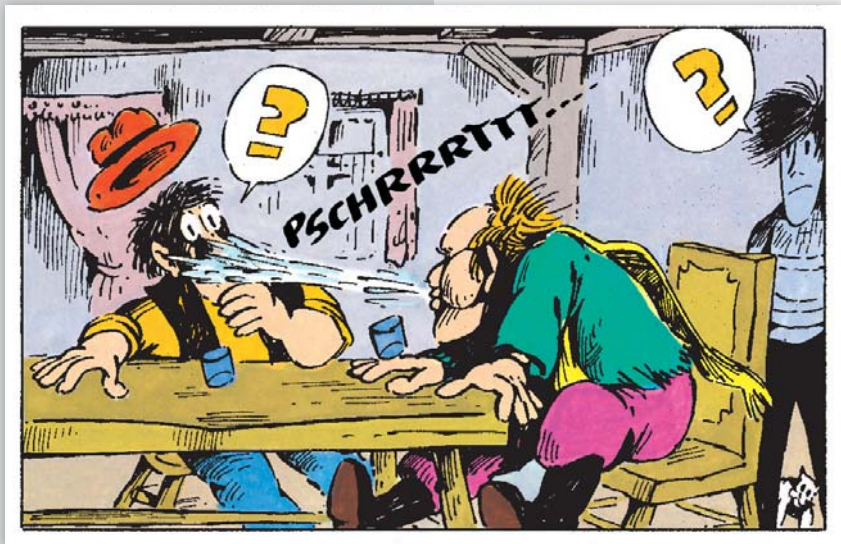
◆ At the beginning of the adventure (page 11), Philemon is eager to return down the well to the mysterious islands. Why?

Philemon feels obligated to return because he was not able to take Bartholomew back with him to the farm. Bartholomew was the reason he went down the well to begin with (after he received a message in a bottle in *Cast Away on the Letter A*). Ask students how they would feel in Philemon's position. Why do they think Philemon hasn't tried going back down the well to rescue him? On page 14, it almost seems like he was too scared to go back by himself. Once he feels like he has support

from his uncle, his bravery increases ("let's go!" page 14)

◆ On pages 12-13, we meet Uncle Felix for the first time. What do you think of his character? How is he similar to his brother Hector (Philemon's father)? How is he different?

The two brothers are depicted with similar bodies and facial features, but their personalities are very different. Felix is good-humored and talkative, whereas Hector is deeply impatient and angry. On pages 12-13, however, the two share one noticeable trait, which is that they both keep silencing Philemon (although the reasons are different). Students familiar with the first book may be surprised to meet Felix, because there was no previous mention of him. Remind them that the comic was originally published in serialized form in the magazine *Pilote*, so it's unlikely that the story was planned in advance. Ask students to put themselves in the position of the writer. Why would they have added a character like Felix? How is he necessary to the plot?



◆ Why doesn't Felix want Philemon to talk about the island of the "A" (pages 12-13)?

Felix doesn't want Philemon to talk about the island in front of Hector. We don't learn the exact reason for the secrecy. Ask students to draw some possible conclusions. Is it, for example, because Hector is very skeptical, and Felix knows that he will not believe them (which is exactly what does happen)? Is it because Felix has an entire secret life that he doesn't want his brother to know about ("I'm something of a magician" page 14)? And so on...

◆ Find all the moments when Philemon has misunderstandings with the characters he meets on his adventure. What do these moments have in common? If you were in Philemon's position, how would you respond?

Students should pay special attention to the interactions with the water hiker (pages 17-19), the courtroom of the "N" (pages 24-25),



and the organizers of the “concert” (pages 29-32). In each of these cases, Philemon struggles to make sense of a world that doesn’t follow traditional rules of logic. In some cases, words that make sense to Philemon have a different (or no) meaning to others (such as “drown,” page 17).

◆ On page 33, when Philemon finds Bartholomew, the latter is asleep in a strange bedroom (inside a labyrinth). Why is he asleep? How did he get there?

At the end of the first book, we find out that what seemed like days on the island was only a few hours on the farm. How long do you think Philemon was on the farm in between adventures? How long was Bartholomew lost in the labyrinth? Remember that Bartholomew has no way to keep track of the passage of time. In his state of endless confusion, sleep may be the only way to assert some order and to break up the monotony.

◆ How does Philemon change over the course of the book?

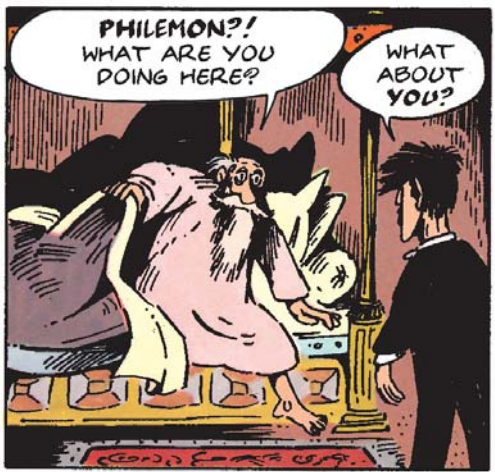
Philemon becomes increasingly confident over the course of the book. We’ve discussed (above) his hesitation at the beginning of the book to venture back to the islands. Once he is transported there, we see this hesitation manifested as fear. In his first two interactions, he latches onto



others and asks them to help him (pages 17 & 20). Once he’s placed on trial, he begins to independently stand up for himself (“let me EXPLAIN!” page 24). Up until this point, he’s still trying to make sense of everything, or rather, apply rules of logic and sense to a world that simply does not follow them. On page 30, facing the wild piano, he finally exclaims that it all “makes no sense. It’s crazy!” After he admits this, he actually is much better off. He somewhat randomly defeats the wild piano (page 32), randomly finds Bartholomew (page 33), and randomly leads them home (“we can always try...” page 37). It isn’t just his outfit that is different by the end. He seems to have gained a great deal of confidence and clarity. That being said, he still occasionally tries to apply logic where it doesn’t belong (“I know the way out once we get there” page 34).

◆ Find all the animals in the story. How are animals represented? How do they interact with the central characters? How do they interact with the narrative of the story?

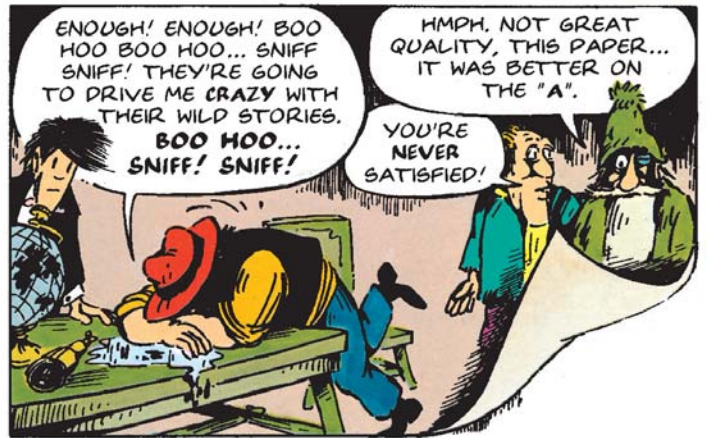
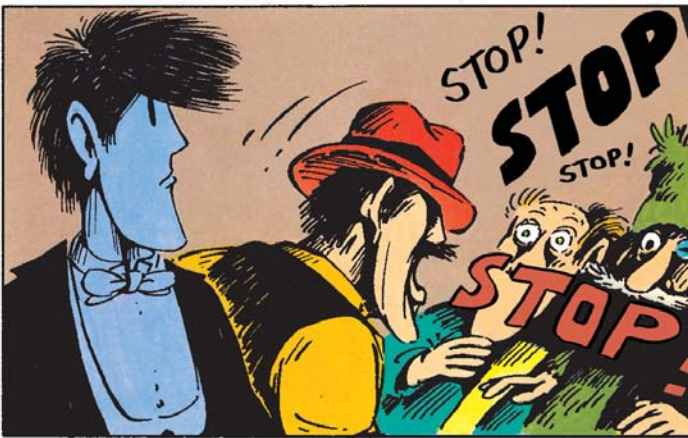
Aside from Anatole (Philemon’s pet donkey), the most notable animals in the story are: the chickens on Hector’s farm (page 11), the white cat



inside the house (pages 12-14), and the zebra jail (pages 27-28). All of the animals are given both animal sound effects and written verbal dialogue, although it is unclear whether the humans can hear them talking or not. Philemon definitely acts as if Anatole can talk to him (pages 28 & 39), but is this just the fantasy of a young man and his favorite pet? In many cases, the animal world seems to be a kind of parallel to the central characters. On page 11, the chickens are fighting with each other (“mind your manners!”) just like Philemon and his father. On page 14, the white cat takes on the annoyed tone of Hector, after he leaves (“They’re making me dizzy!”).

- ◆ The book ends with Philemon and Bartholomew returning to Uncle Felix’s house. Hector screams and cries when they try to tell him about their adventure. Why does he respond in this way?

Hector is overwhelmed by the “impossible” stories that the people around him continue to share. He is outnumbered by characters who challenge his reality. Ask students how they feel about Hector. Do they feel sympathy for him? Do they think he is being selfish and stubborn? Do they think he is good comic relief? Do they think he’s meant to be the classic comedic “straight man” (the person in a comedy group who is intentionally not funny in order to make the humor of the other characters more hilarious and absurd)?



Words and Metaphors

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

- ◆ What does it mean for something to be “real” or to “exist”? Explain what you usually mean when you say that something “really exists.”

Some feel that “real” describes things that you can see with your own eyes. But in our “real world,” most people believe in concepts that cannot be “seen” (justice, logic, religion). Many of these are very important and have a large impact on how our society and psychologies are structured. In this story, Hector denies that the world of the islands (which he hears about constantly from his son and brother) can be real. Why is he so certain? Perhaps because the world of the islands directly contradicts foundational beliefs about the world that he knows (logic, science, geography, etc.). Ask students what they would do if they came face to face with something that contradicted their beliefs about reality. How would they respond?

- ◆ Take a look at the trial scene from pages 23-27. How does the tone



of speech change during this scene? Look especially at the “scroll” on page 25. How would you describe the kind of language used in this document and how does it make you feel?

The trial scene directly confronts the “official language” of our world and parodies it by robbing it of traditional meaning and purpose. In the world of the islands, words like “assault and battery,” “act of rebellion,” “witness,” “defense,” etc. carry the same importance, but not the same meaning. In this case, they are simply tools of punishment, that can be applied loosely by those with power. In the case of the scroll, the author uses a very serious tone to lay out an utterly absurd and impossible history. Like many “absurdist” writers, Fred (the author) likely has negative feelings about systems of power (like the “law” or “history”) and wishes to lampoon them with silliness. Can you think of other books or films that do this (*Monty Python*, *Christopher Guest films*, *Lemony Snicket*, *Alice in Wonderland*, etc.)?

Logic and Absurdism



- ◆ List all the ways that Philemon can travel between the farm and the islands (that we know of so far). How are these places connected? What do these methods of transport have in common (if anything)?

Philemon travels to and from the islands using: the well, the spyglass and globe, and finally the wardrobe in Uncle Felix’s house. The main thing that these have in common is that they are relatively ordinary and commonplace things in our world. What are some other ordinary objects that you could imagine being secret portals to another world/dimension? Some teachers may want students to expand this into a written or oral presentation..

- ◆ What is the “logic” (if any) of the mysterious world of the letter-

islands? List all the elements that depart from our own reality and try to identify what they have in common.

Although there are many departures from reality in the world of the islands, some of the most important include: the two suns (page 17), walking on water (page 17), people with wings (page 22), and a piano with bull's legs (page 31). One of the themes of this world is adaptation. Ask students to identify all the cases in which humans, plants, and animals seem to have changed to better suit their environment (see pages 17 and 25 specifically).

- ◆ How do the people who live on the islands see the world, as compared to Philemon? Do they have different expectations (or senses of what its “normal,” “safe,” “okay”)? Why do you think that might be?

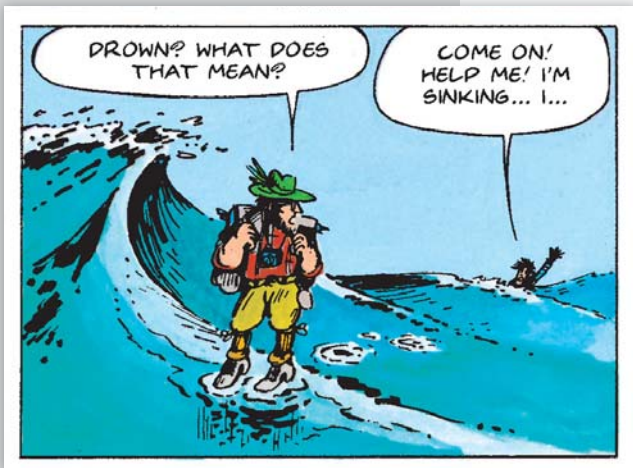
Have students take a look at pages 17-19 for an excellent example. Note that the hiker doesn't understand what “drown” means (page 17) and he can't understand why Philemon is frightened of the storm (page 19). Because they have different past experiences (the hiker has always seen water as a kind of safe flat surface), their world views are very different. This is paralleled in the interaction between Philemon and his father (page 13). What seems impossible to one may seem completely probable to another, simply based on experience. Ask students if they have encountered this phenomenon in their lives.

- ◆ Who defines the laws of “right” and “wrong” on the letter N? Who defines those laws in our own reality?

Although we learn that certain laws were decreed from above (page 25), this happened long ago. The world of the islands (especially the letter “N”) is indeed very rule-bound (and with some very strange rules at that!), but there does not seem to be a single group of people enforcing these rules. Instead, it is the people themselves who police each other, recite the rules, and keep things in their place. Ask students if they have ever experienced this in their own lives...in school, in society, etc. In our reality, who decides what's “right” and “wrong” and where do those ideas come from?

- ◆ What is the role of the “absurd” in this book? What does that word mean to you? What do you think it means in art and literature? Can you think of other stories, films, or comics that are “absurd”?

In literary theory, absurdism describes a story about many many meaningless actions or events, meant as a critique of the very ideas of “good,” “bad,” “right,” “wrong,” “real,” or even “the truth.” Most absurdist pieces depict relatable central characters that are struggling to make sense of a philosophically absurd surrounding (Kafka, *Alice in Wonderland*, Nikolai Gogol, etc.). *The Philemon Adventures* are great examples of absurdist literature, and students may recognize similar themes at work in contemporary works such as *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, *Family Guy*, *30 Rock*, and even *The Matrix*, or in the prose of Haruki Murakami, Kurt Vonnegut, and Christopher Moore.



CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4-5.9
Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics and patterns of events in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.



Visual Expression

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7
Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.5
Explain major differences between poems, drama, prose, etc. Refer to the structural elements when writing or speaking about a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.4
Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text. (Here, art and comics vocabulary)

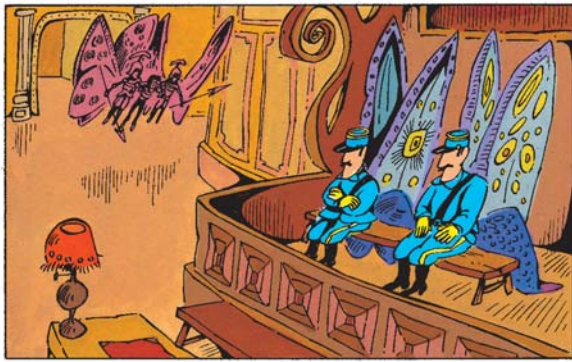
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7
Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5
Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, stanzas, etc. fits together to provide the overall structure of a story.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4
Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text. (Here, art and comics vocabulary)

**The standards listed on the right are fulfilled by every question in this section. Additional standards may be listed in the gray sidebar on the left for particular units listed below.*

Colors



◆ Make a list of the dominant colors on each page spread. You will notice that the colors transition consistently as the book progresses. Why do you think the author/artist did this? Do the colors match the atmosphere of the story and environment?

Pages 11-14 are mostly in balanced in color (and are more “realistic” narratively). Pages 15-20 are purple and dark blue, pages 21—23 introduce brown and orange colors, pages 24-27 are extremely brown, and finally, after a brief transition back to blue, pages 30-36 are quite yellow (transitioning in the final moments to lavender before returning to “the real world”). Ask students to think about our cultural or personal associations with certain colors. Is there a connection between color and emotion? Some students may note that brown is often considered an “ugly” color, which lends the trial scene an immediate unpleasant atmosphere.

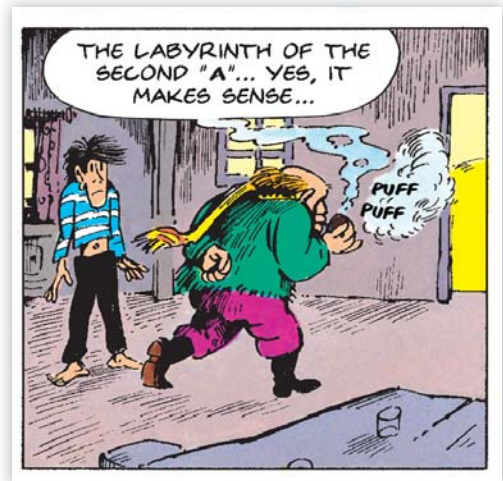
Panels, Word Balloons, and Lettering

◆ Look at the different types of panels used in the book. Find all the examples of panels (and especially panel borders) that depart from the standard format (thin black lined box). Why did the author choose a different design in these instances?



Students can find non-traditional borders on pages 14 (borderless), 16 (through a telescope), 21, 23, & 26 (borderless), 27 (a giant sound effect), 28, 29 & 37 (borderless), and 38 (pulling up the corner—see the question on this below). Each of these instances underscores a crucial transition (often the passage of time, or the movement between different realities). Visually, different-looking panels break up the story, and give readers a “interlude” from the intensity of the adventure.

- ◆ Look at the various kinds of word balloons in this book. Note that there are many different shapes, sizes, textures, etc. How do these different shapes and styles make you feel? How do they fit into the story? What do they tell you?



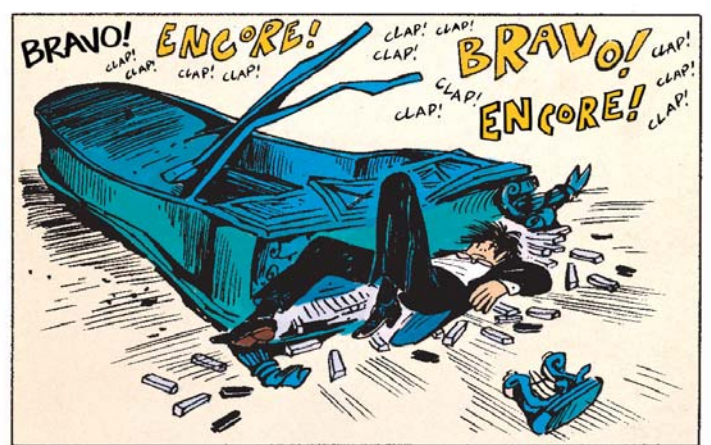
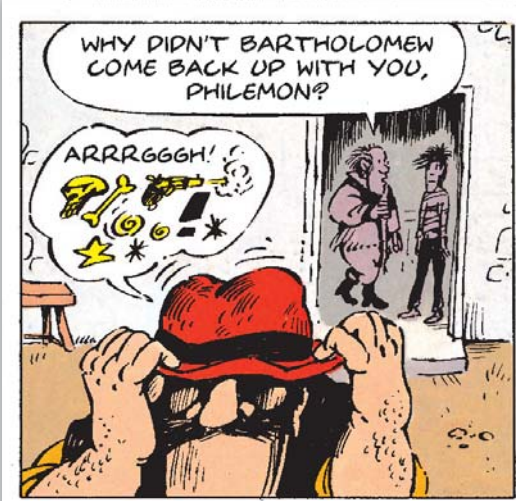
The best examples of this are on pages 11-14, where Uncle Felix's pipe smoke becomes the tail of his word balloon and on page 21 where the balloon disappears behind the rope of the hot air balloon. In addition to being rather playful, these designs help to integrate the text with the images (in a very literal way!).

- ◆ Find some different examples of the visual expressions enclosed in the word balloons, like cursing or explanatory images. Why do you think the artist chose to present language with pictures instead of words in those instances. In what ways do the pictures resonate with the illustrations?

Most of the cursing happens when Hector is speaking (pages 11-13). Students may also note the musical notes that appear when a character is singing (pages 18, 25). Ask students how these symbols make them feel. Are they more or less clear than what could be said in words? Do the symbols encourage the readers to use their imagination in a different way?

- ◆ Look at the sound effects. Note that they vary in both size and texture. Is there any particular one you like the best? Why? Note that some sound effects are included in the word balloons, and some are imposed over the image. Do you think the characters actually say these as words? Or are they were included for some other reason? If so, why?

Students may note that some of the sound effects represent spoken words ("Bravo" - page 32, "stop" - page 38) while others represent sounds ("pschrrttt" - page 12). These sound effects, together with the expressive question marks and stars, etc. (indicating pain or surprise), add large colorful signs that communicate to the reader that something important is happening.





CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text, including how the characters in a story or drama respond to challenges; summarize the text.



◆ On page 15, the dialogue lettering gets very small when Philemon shrinks in size. How does this help to clarify the scene?

In the case of pages 15-16, the letters shrinking into nothingness help to illustrate Philemon's physical transition (and his disappearance from the "real world.")

◆ Some cartoonists refer to expressive symbols or lines that emanate from a character's head as "emanata." What are some examples of "emanata" in this book, and how do you interpret them.

The best examples of this are on pages 23 (Philemon's back), 27 (Philemon's head), 35 (Bartholomew's eye), and 37 (Philemon's head). In these cases, the stars, circles, and asterisks indicate physical pain and emotional shock/confusion. Other good examples of emanata in the book include: bouncing lines (page 22), slurping lines (page 26), door slam lines (pages 36). Emanata are often used to try to communicate things that are difficult to communicate in a drawing (movement, emotion, texture).

Characters

◆ Compare the faces of Hector and Uncle Felix (who are brothers). Can you find ways in which the artist highlights their relation? Look at their costumes. What do their costumes communicate about their characters?

Students may note that Felix and Hector have almost identical bodies and posture, similar face shapes, but slightly different features (and different hair). The real difference, however, lies in the way their hair and costumes are colored. Hector is shown in very "natural" colors (the same colors used on the farm itself—orange, red, blue, black). Felix, by contrast, is in very saturated and surreal colors reminiscent of the island world (the same green appears in the color of the ocean and the same violet appears in the color of the hot air balloon). These color choices mark Felix as unique and other-worldly.

◆ What does Philemon's costuming (and the way it changes throughout the book) communicate about the character?

Philemon's costume is very boyish and provincial. Students should note that he never wears shoes! On page 29, he is dressed in a tuxedo (with shoes) before his concert. Although this functions as a way of making fun of suits (presenting it as part of an inhumane torture, and having everyone on the farm laugh at it), it also marks Philemon's transition to being more of a leader. Dressed in more adult clothes, Philemon saves the day at the end of the book—finding Bartholomew and bringing him home.



- ◆ Find all the “authority” figures in the book and describe their physical appearance. What do you think the author is trying to communicate with the costumes, colors, and design?

The best example of this are the costumed judge (pages 25-27) and the “Grand Judge” on the scroll (page 26). The latter appears to be some kind of prisoner wearing a clown wig. The former—with his wings, wig, hat, cloak, personal harpist, and giant train—is the epitome of excess. By costuming “authority” as a superficial buffoon, Fred pokes fun at systems of power. Ask students to identify “authorities” in their own lives. Could such characters be drawn and costumed in a way that would make their power seem ridiculous?



Setting

- ◆ On page Philemon is imprisoned inside a “zebra jail.” What do you make of the zebra jail? How does it fit within the logic of the island? What further information does it give about the environment?

The idea of a zebra jail is a whimsical joke about a zebra’s appearance (the black stripes resemble both bars and a prison uniform). It also underscores the linkage between the world of the islands and the world of paper, art, and comics. In an illustration, a zebra really is hollow, because the white does not have to be painted. Just like the letters on a map that become literal islands, the zebra jail may lead some readers to see the world of the islands as a kind of metaphor for the artistic imagination.

- ◆ At the end of the adventure, Philemon finds himself in a labyrinthine hallway full of doors. How does this scene make you feel? How does it fit in within the overall environment.

If the world of the islands is a metaphor for the artistic imagination, then the hallways beneath them represent the vast archive of creative possibility. Getting lost in the halls might be like struggling with writer’s block—overwhelmed with the endless possibilities.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text; summarize the text.

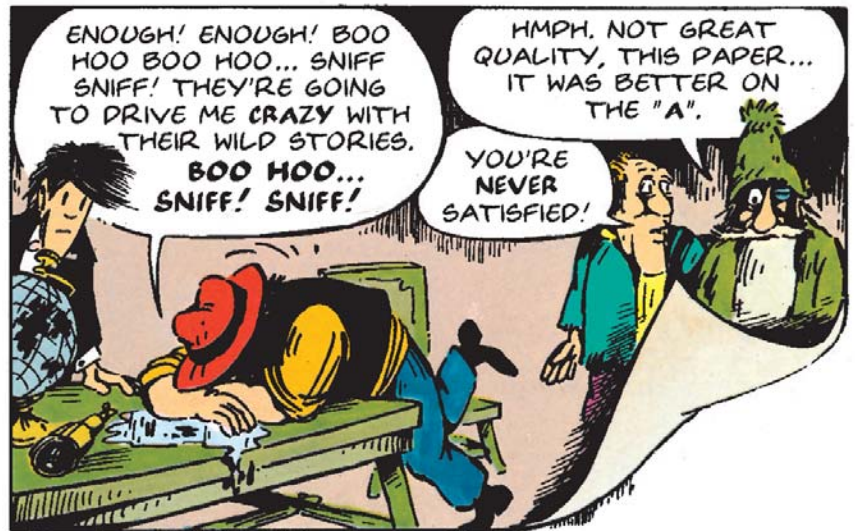
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2
Determine a theme of a story from details in the text, including how the characters in a story or drama respond to challenges; summarize the text.



◆ This book contains several different collages using old drawings and photographs. Find all instances of these. How do you interpret these moments? What further information do they give about the environment?

The best examples of these are on pages 25 and 35. In both cases, Fred adds absurd dialogue to a very serious illustration, completely changing the meaning. This accomplishes at least two important things: first, it makes fun of “traditional” or “educational” texts that might feature such historical illustrations (a classic absurdist parody of authority) and second, it stands as a testament to the comics imagination, which

uses the interplay between image and text to inscribe new meanings, challenge first impressions, and craft a dynamic story.



◆ On the final page of the story, Bartholomew comments on the paper of the book itself. How does this make you feel? Why do you think the author chose to do this?

In literary theory, scholars refer to something called “metafiction,” which occurs when a work of literature calls attention to the fact that it is an artifact—a book, a piece of fiction. Instances of metafiction can be traced as far back as *The Odyssey*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and *Don Quixote*. Metafiction raises questions about the relationship between fiction and reality, and therefore perfectly complements the themes of *The Philemon Adventures*.

3

Further Research

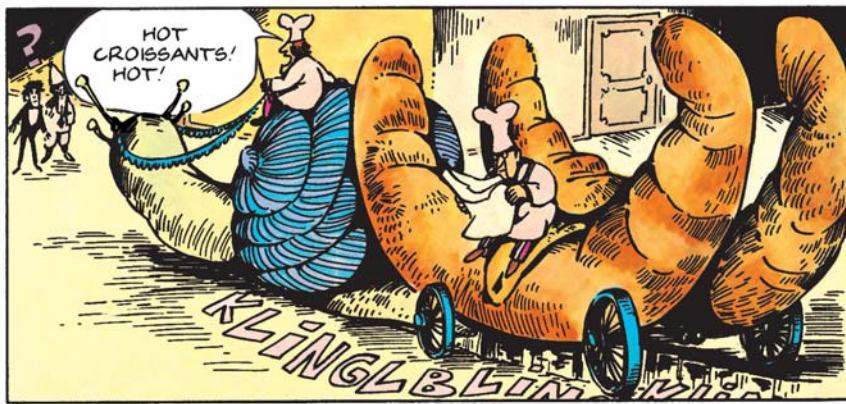
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4-5.9
Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.1
Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.2
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4-5.7
Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.



◆ Choose one of the characters that Philemon meets on his journey (the hiker, the balloonist, the judge, the zebra jail, the giant, the croissant delivery-man, etc.). Write a story about their life and adventures. Try to match the storytelling style of *The Wild Piano*.

◆ Writing Project: choose any of the questions from the Verbal or Visual Expression sections. Write a short piece explaining your answer clearly, using reasons and evidence from the text.

◆ Readers' Theater: read various scenes aloud in class. Pay attention to their inflection. If possible, try out multiple roles and be sure that you adjust your performance accordingly. Try to incorporate visual information from the images into your performance. Have fun!

◆ Choose one of the entries in the index (pages 40-45) and expand on it with your own research project. Do you think that the author, Fred, is intentionally referencing these external works in the story? Why or why not? Why do authors often reference other works, or borrow ideas from other writers and artists? Does it enrich your reading experience to research these references? Explain why in a written report.

