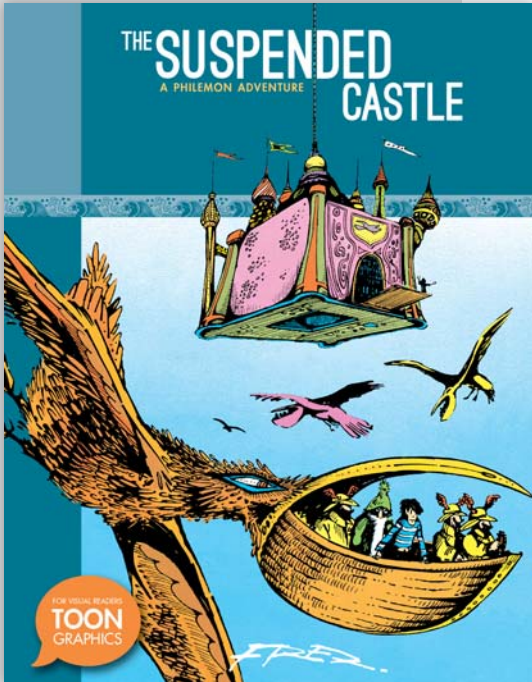




# The Suspended Castle

CCSS-aligned Lesson Plan & Teacher's Guide

## TOON GRAPHICS FOR VISUAL READERS



**The Suspended Castle:**  
A Philemon Adventure  
by Fred  
A TOON Graphic  
ISBN: 978-1-935179-86-3

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THE TOON EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH TEAM:

**Richard Kutner** is a translator of both prose and graphic literature with a thirty-three year background in education. He holds degrees from both New York University and Yale, and was the 2014 recipient of a Hemingway Grant for his work with TOON.

**Genevieve Bormes** holds a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design and is an illustrator based in New York City.

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

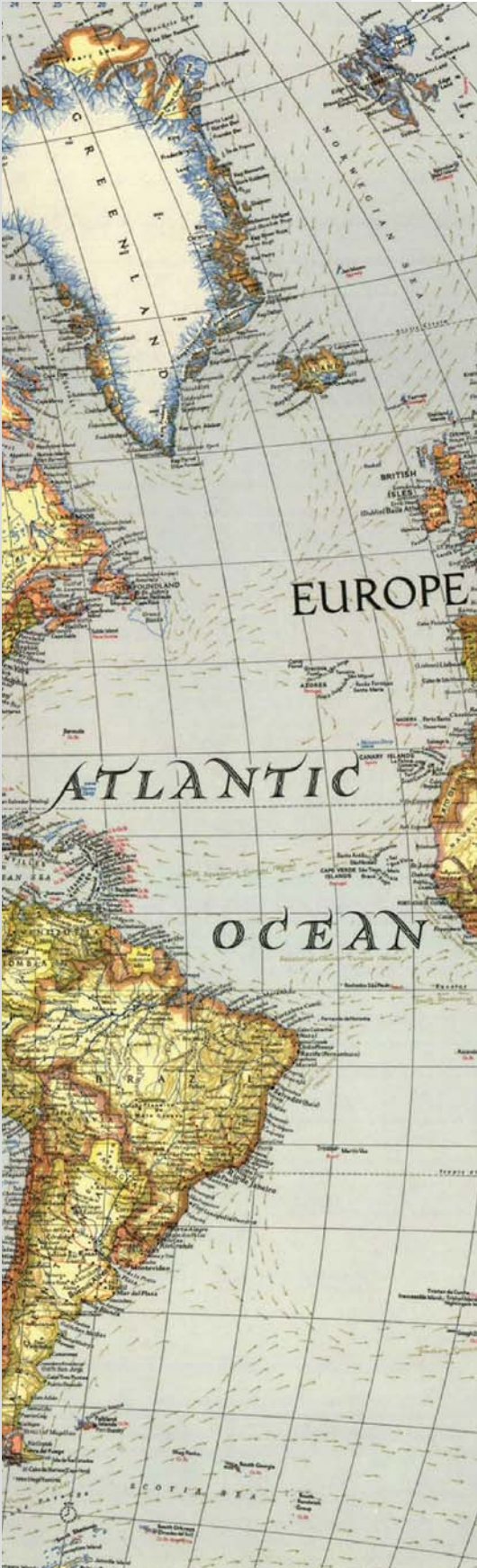
Look carefully at the artwork: it offers a subtext that at first is sensed only on a subliminal level by the reader and encourages rereading. It creates a sense of continuity for the action, and it

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.





# 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.

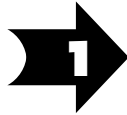
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.1  
Students write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

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.4.3  
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).

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

## Characters



- ◆ Bartholomew was stuck on the “A” of the Atlantic Ocean for forty years and wanted desperately to get back to the “real” world. (See *Cast Away on the Letter A* and *The Wild Piano*.) Now that he’s back he’s feeling glum. Why?

Bartholomew is bored. He feels homesick for the “A” and finds life in the “normal” world disappointing. He misses his castle, his “A” clothing, his centaur, and all the strange things he had gotten used to, like the bottle trees and the two suns.

- ◆ How would you describe the character of the king (pages 17-21)? Why do you think his moods change so quickly?

The king is welcoming and good-humored at first. When Bartholomew asks him if he’s sure they’re on the dot on the “i”, he becomes belligerent (first panel page 18). Then he reveals his pride, followed by a silly, poetic description of what would happen if there were no owl-lighthouse. He even starts to dance. After that, he’s back to being angry. On page 20, he remarks about how clueless Philemon and Bartholomew are. In the end, he helps them to use the luminous pathway. (Why do you think he says “luminous pathway” instead of simply saying “ray of light”?) He is pompous, temperamental, affected, and unpredictable, and he feels superior to other people. Perhaps Fred is satirizing royalty or people in power in general.



◆ Contrast the characters of the captain of the whale-galley and the captain of the Suspended Castle. How are they different? Do they speak differently?

The captain of the whale galley appears to be vain, smug, and egotistical. He brushes off his uniform after being caught underneath the gate and straightens his hat (page 31). He threatens and shouts at Philemon and Bartholomew (page 27). The captain of the Suspended Castle is concerned about the welfare of his fishermen (second panel, page 47) and goes down with his “ship” (panels 3 and 4). He speaks calmly (no boldface exclamations) and acts nobly. He even looks noble (see below).



◆ How does Philemon show kindness to Bartholomew?

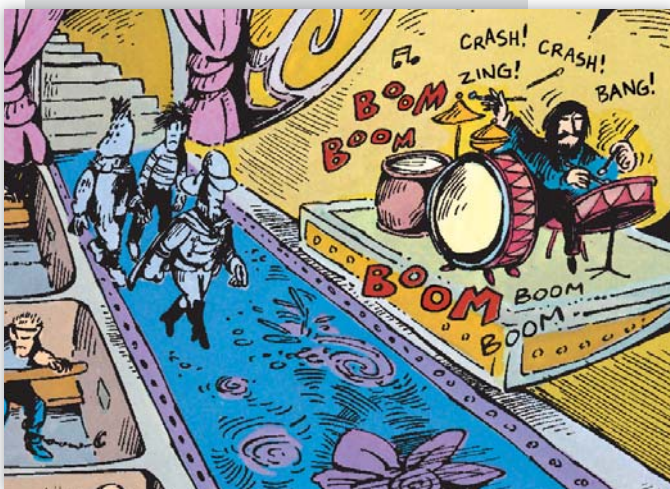
Philemon is worried about Bartholomew (page 12, panel 3) and asks him why he’s unhappy. He suggests to Bartholomew that there might be a way to go back to the “A.” He’s concerned that Bartholomew forgot his hat (last panel, page 15), which is how he himself gets back to the “A.” He rescues Bartholomew when he’s about to fall off the “luminous pathway.” Bartholomew returns the kindness on page 41 when he asks Philemon if he’s okay (next-to-last panel). He’s also worried that he might never see him again (page 40, panel 4).

◆ In the second Philemon adventure, *The Wild Piano*, Philemon gains courage. How do we see this in *The Suspended Castle*?

It’s Philemon’s idea to return to the “A.” He doesn’t hesitate to suggest it to Bartholomew. Philemon doesn’t appear to be afraid to walk on the “luminous pathway” (pages 21-22). On page 41, Philemon seizes the prison guard and tells Bartholomew to take his keys.

◆ Why is there a man playing the drums and cymbal in the big panel with the rowers on page 28?

Often on galleys, a man banged a drum to keep the rowers rowing at a steady, fast pace. Fred may be making fun of this idea--or maybe it’s logical in this illogical world.



## Words and Metaphors

◆ Fred loves to create two-word nouns using words that usually have little to do with each other: an owl-lighthouse, a whale-galley, and pelican-whalers. Why do you think he does this? What does the first word of each name have to do with the second?

The juxtaposition of unrelated words is part of the humor and absurdity of Fred’s parallel universe. Notice that in all three examples, one of the words is an animal.

An owl can see well in the dark, so it is a good animal to make into a lighthouse. It has large corneas and pupils, and since its eyes are on the front of its face, it can see in three dimensions with both eyes at the same time.

A galley is a large boat, so comparing it to a whale seems logical.



A pelican is a large water bird. Since it is a predator, it is a good choice of an animal to use for hunting, and, in this book, its large throat pouch, usually used to catch its prey, is roomy enough to hold the captain and crew.

## Time

◆ On page 13, Bartholomew says, “Forty years is a long time—a very long time.” The king, on page 17, says, “I haven’t had a visitor for at least 327 years ... That’s a long time.” On page 43, the fisherman says, “A long time ago—a very long time ago ... 2,327 years ago to be precise ...” How do you think Fred thinks about time? What is a long time for you?



For Bartholomew, a man from the “real” world, forty years is a long time. For the king and the fisherman, who live in the world of the “A,” time is as unreal as everything else (although real for them). When Philemon is on the “A,” only a very short time has passed in the “real” world. Time is relative depending on your frame of reference. Maybe Fred was familiar with the work of Einstein!

Notice that he used 327 and 2,327.

◆ Have you noticed that time seems to pass quickly when you’re on vacation but slowly when you’re doing something less pleasant (like taking a math test)? Do you think this is what’s really happening? Do you think time really exists, or is it something we have constructed to help us understand reality and be able to live our daily lives?



Lead a discussion about this. Talk about different divisions of time—seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks (why seven days in a week?), months (based on the moon), years, decades, centuries, millennia. Is a millennium a long time (see previous question)? It’s only as long as the lives of ten people living to be 100 years old.

◆ We measure our year as the amount of time it takes the earth to revolve around the sun. How do you think the year is measured on the “A,” where there are two suns? Maybe this is why the clock explodes in *Cast Away on the Letter A*.

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



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. Throughout the Philemon series, 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? Tell them that, later on, when they study a branch of science called physics, many things they learn will contradict their everyday beliefs.

For most of us in a Western industrial society, our reality includes a home, food, clothing, and education. For most of the world's children, reality means none of these things. Children should think about this.



## Inferential Thinking

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.6

Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8

Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

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.RI.4-5.4

Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text (here, art and comics vocabulary).

- ◆ The cutting of the rope holding up the Suspended Castle is a joyous event, releasing its inhabitants from their curse. However, the castle ends up falling into the sea and sinking, putting the fishermen in danger. What do you think of this? Are Philemon and Bartholomew saviors or not?

Fred may be trying to show us that things don't always turn out the way we plan. We need to be equipped emotionally to expect the unexpected and deal with it. Even the cutting of the rope proves to be more complicated than anyone thought. Life is a mixture of good and bad, and even a happy event can have problems attached to it. Besides, in Fred's world, it's normal for logic to be turned on its head.



# 3

## 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

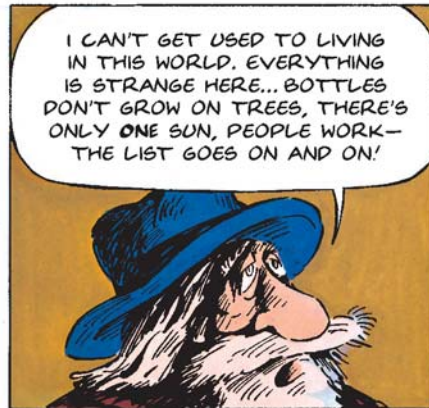
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5  
Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, stanzas, etc. fits together to provide the overall structure of a story.

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).

## Colors

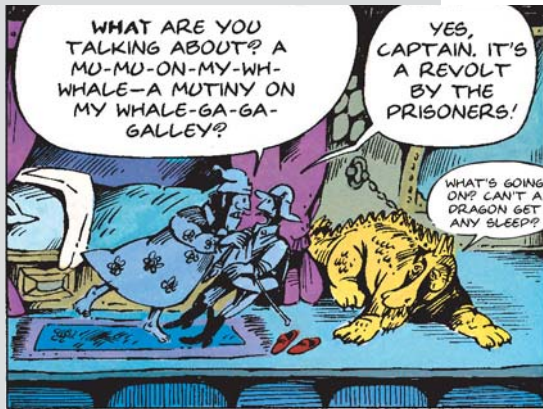
◆ *Cast Away on the Letter A* and *The Wild Piano* begin with a bright yellow sky and cheerful colors. Look at the first five pages of *The Suspended Castle*. Why do you think the artist chose to use dark, gloomy colors?

The dark, gloomy colors probably reflect Bartholomew's state of mind. He is unhappy with his life back in the "real" world, and it is this unhappiness that sparks the return to the world of the "A". The color palette begins to change in the sixth panel on p. 16, as Bartholomew is on his way to the world of the "A".



◆ In this book, there are pages that are mostly blue, purple, pink, or yellow. Why might this be? Do different colors give you different feelings or create different moods? How are the "real world" colors different from the colors in the world of the "A"?

Since the "A" is another world, it has another, less "realistic" color scheme to separate it from the "real" world. These colors may reflect the mood of the situation. Dark purple is often associated with sinister things in this book—night, the uniform of the man who watches over the rowers, the prison guard's uniform in the *Suspended Castle*. The bright, cheerful, yellow sky on pages 34-37 and 44-47 give a promise of freedom, as the characters fight to save themselves from the pelican-whalers or cut the



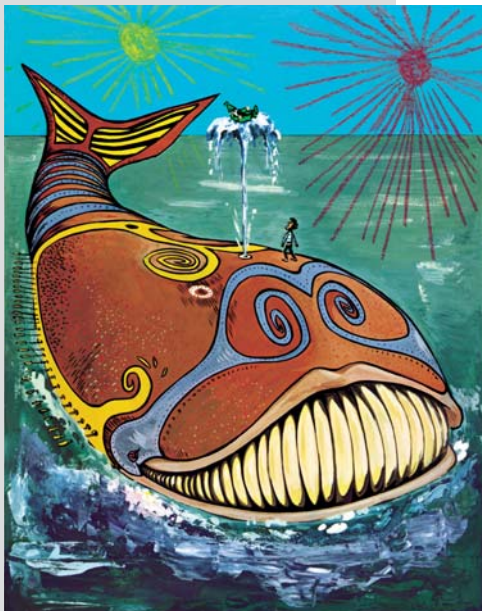
rope holding up the Suspended Castle. The acid blue of the sea (pages 32-38) makes it seem malevolent. Each important character has his own color clothing (Philemon: blue, white, and black; Bartholomew: burgundy and black at first, then green; the captain of the whale galley: red; the fishermen: orange; the prison guard: purple). These colors may give indications of the characters' personalities or roles in the story. Discuss this with children and see what they think.

◆ What do you think of the captain's pink pajamas with blue flowers (fifth panel on page 30)?

The captain's dainty pajamas don't match his tough attitude or bright red uniform. The contrast is funny. Maybe it's meant to show the captain's softer side, as when he accepts the workers' demands.

## Page layout, Frames, Composition, and Lettering

◆ Look at the full-page picture of the whale-galley on page 24 and the one of the Suspended Castle on page 38. Why do you think the artist put in big pictures at these points of the story?



Full-page pictures and two-page spreads slow down the reading process and make us stop to reflect on what is happening. The whale-galley is a shocking sight, and we need time to think about what might happen and how we feel about it. We also get the opportunity to imagine what Philemon is feeling. The Suspended Castle picture also shows us a remarkable sight, and the dramatic juxtaposition of colors (pink, yellow, teal) add to the strangeness. We also get a scary view of the pelican-whaler with its nasty harpoon. The dark shadows on the underside of the pelican-whaler make it seem even more ominous. Slowing down the reading here helps us to think about the drama and the danger of the situation. Notice also how the long third panel on page 29 slows down the reading, giving us a moment of rest as the sun sets on the horizon.

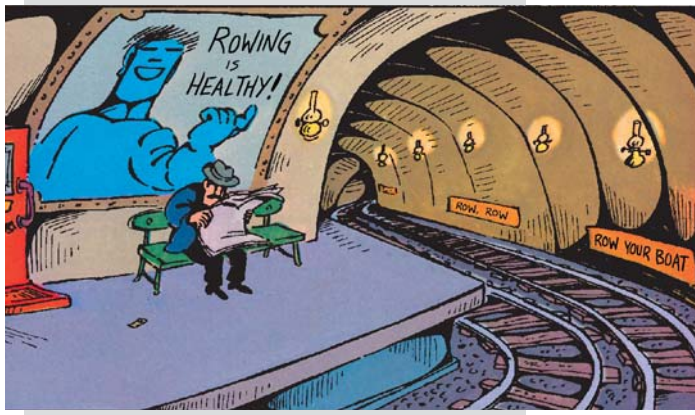
◆ Notice the frameless word "SUDDENLY," written in dramatic purple against black, on p. 30, and how the word "ALERT!" crosses the next two frames. Why might the artist have made these choices?

The word "SUDDENLY" is not confined in a frame. Things that happen suddenly, without warning, do not occur in a way we can hold onto or contain. The word "ALERT!" crossing the frame line enhances the drama and suddenness of the moment, and makes the alert message break directly into the captain's cabin with no interruption.

◆ Notice the curved artwork for the subway inside the whale (p. 26-





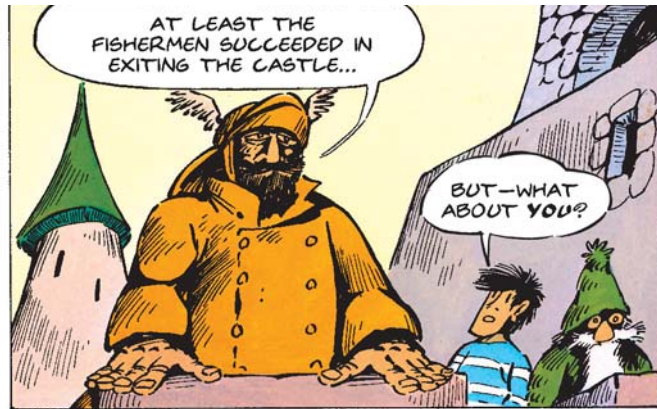


27). Any idea why the artist presented the subway this way?

Fred was French. The Paris subway has curved stations and tunnels, unlike the New York subway. The curves also reflect the structure of the whale, which is curvy both inside and out. Even the big word “ROW” is curved in the last panel of p. 26. Notice the tree and the cows in this panel.

◆ The captain of the Suspended Castle is viewed from below in the second panel on page 47. Why might this be so?

Viewing him from below accentuates his size, heroism, and nobility. It makes us “look up” to him. Also look at how big he is compared to Philemon and Bartholomew. Notice his resolute stance and big, powerful hands.



◆ Look at the fifth panel on page 41. Why does the author have us look down on Philemon and Bartholomew in their prison cell?

Looking down on them makes them appear small, helpless, and vulnerable. They seem far away from anyone or anything that could help them. The “CLINK! CLANK!” adds to the foreboding feeling of this image.



◆ Notice the curved walls and heavy stones of the prison cell on pages 40-43. How do they make you feel?

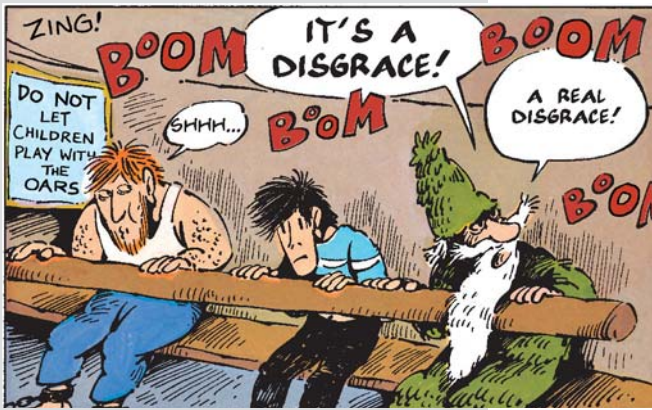
The curved walls and heavy stones create a claustrophobic feeling. If Fred had made a square or rectangular cell, readers would not experience the same emotion.

◆ What is your favorite frame of this book? Why?

Students should justify their choice with specific ideas or feelings that are evoked.

◆ How does the size of the writing in the speech balloons affect your understanding of what is being said and how it is being said?

Words written in a large font, especially if it is a colorful one, show strong emotion or urgency and give us clues as to how the characters feel and how to read what they are saying with the proper expression and intensity. Notice the fourth panel on page 28, when Bartholomew says, “It’s a disgrace!” in large writing, then says “A real disgrace!” in smaller print. The first time is a bold statement; the second is a bit more timid, indicating perhaps that he’s not as courageous as he thought or that he has realized



that it is not a good idea to speak out in his situation. Look also at the third panel on page 22, when Bartholomew (whom you can't see) calls out "Philemon!" in large, pink letters. He's in a dangerous situation and needs help immediately. The lettering shows this. Also take a look at the second and third frames on page 42, the way the prison guard's words are expressed. You can sense his emotion from the size and/or color of his words. Have children find other examples throughout the book and ask them what they think the print size and color are expressing. Colored letters are even more expressive than ones written in boldface.



## 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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.5

Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.



◆ How would the story have ended if Philemon and Bartholomew had not been able to cut the rope holding up the Suspended Castle? Write a new ending based on this situation.

◆ For discussion: Satire is using humor, exaggeration, or ridicule to criticize people's foolishness or vices, especially in contemporary politics and institutions. For a long time, French workers have made demands for shorter working hours, better working conditions, and longer vacations. In this book, Fred satirizes this by inverting the situation: He has the workers demand to work on Sundays rather than just Monday through Saturday. This makes sense in a world where logic is inverted. Compare this to the satirization of the justice system in *The Wild Piano*, where Philemon's lawyer, although not present at his crime, is a witness against him, and the judge accuses Philemon of assault and battery when he smashes his own finger with his gavel. Relate this to *Alice in Wonderland*, when, during the Knave of Heart's trial, the Queen of Hearts says that the sentence should come before the verdict. Does our real justice system sometimes invert reality?

More satire is coming up in *The Impossible Voyage*.

◆ Choose one of the characters that Philemon meets on his journey (the whale-galley captain, the captain of the Suspended Castle, the prison guard, one of the rowers, the king, etc.). Write a story about his life and adventures. Try to match the storytelling style of *The Suspended Castle*. Draw your own illustration(s).

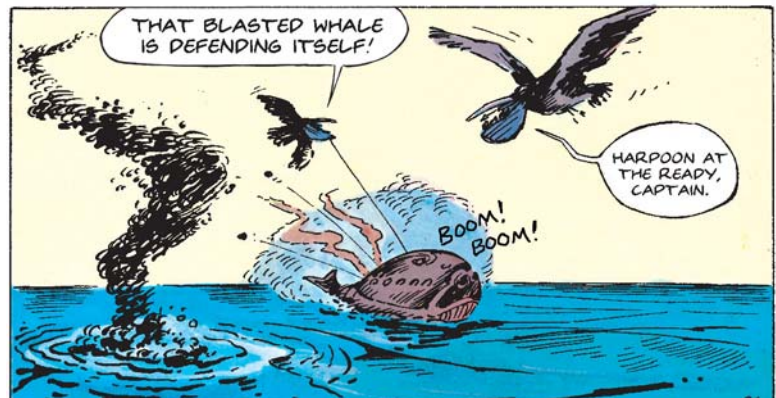


◆ Writing Project: choose any of the questions from the Verbal or Visual Expression sections. Write a short piece explaining your answer clearly, using reasons and evidence from the text.

◆ Readers' Theater: read and act out 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 references section (pages 50-53) 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.

◆ Whaling was an important part of the American economy for many years. Research how whaling was done and how people used different parts of the whale. Report your findings to the class.



◆ Many cities around the world have subways: New York, Washington, Kolkata (Calcutta), Moscow, Paris, Tokyo, to name a few. Research some of these subways in small groups and report on them to your classmates. When were they made? How many miles long are they? How many stations and routes do they have? What do they look like inside and out? What do the subway stations look like? What can we learn about the people of these cities from their subways?

◆ Invent a character and create your own eight-panel adventure to another world. Pay attention to dialogue, color, panel size and shape, writing size, and composition to express your ideas. You may use more panels if you like.