Little Nemo's Big New Dreams

CCSS-aligned Lesson Plan & Teacher's Guide

Little Nemo's Big New Dreams

THE TOON EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH TEAM:

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Lydia Nguyen is a cartoonist and illustrator attending the Center for Cartoon Studies in White River Junction Vermont, where she also teaches children how to draw comics. She holds a degree in history from Fordham University and her short form comics have appeared in several anthologies.

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

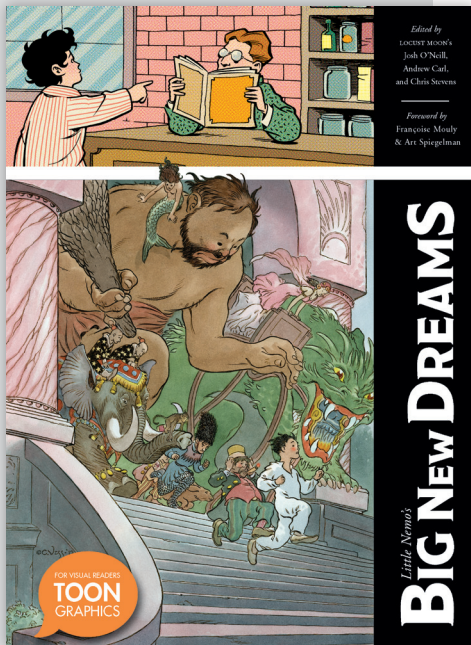Look carefully at the artwork: it offers a subtext that at first is sensed only on a subliminal level by the reader and encourages rereading. It creates a sense of continuity for the action, and it can tell you about the art, architecture, and clothing of a specific time period. It may present the atmosphere, 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

Peter and Maria Hoey, page 19

Yuko Shimizu, page 15

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. Quenstions 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 usng 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.
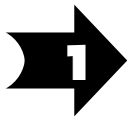
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY. Writing (W).4-5.7
Students conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
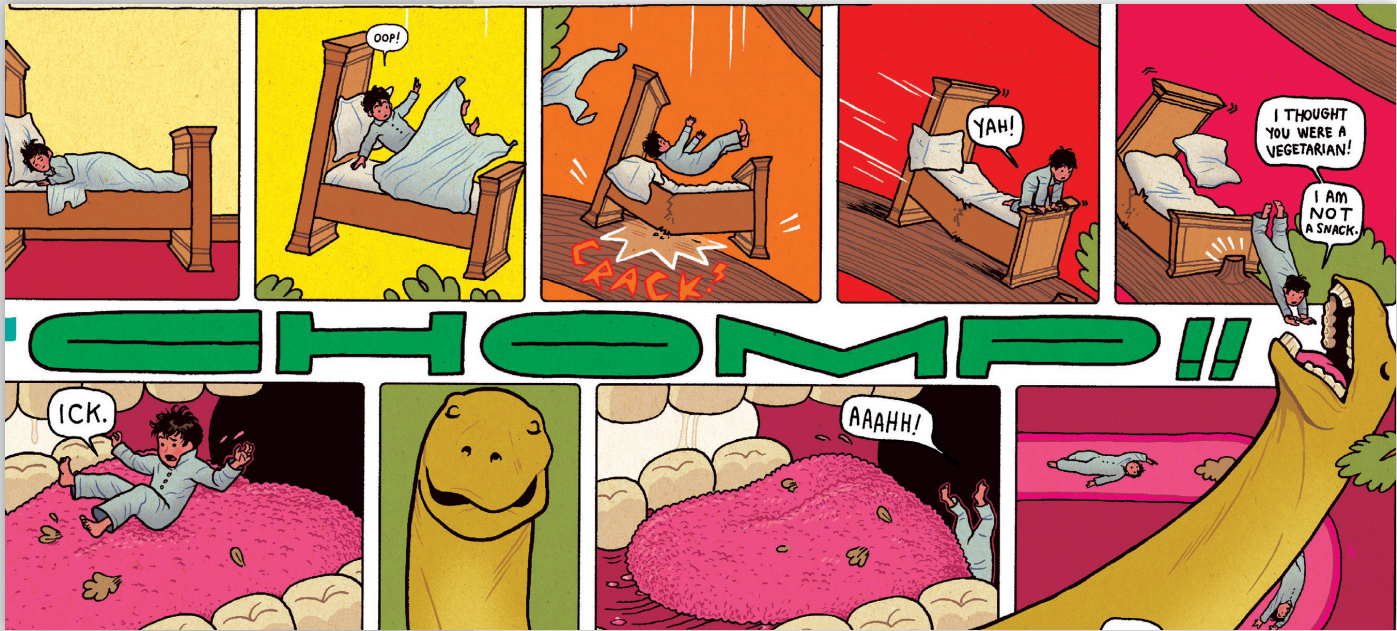
Martin Wicks and Joe Quinones, page 51

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

◆ "Nemo" is the Latin word for "nobody," as cartoonist Cole Closser references in his comic (page 35). Why do you think McCay chose to name his character "Nemo"? How is that reflected in the way Nemo is characterized by the authors in this anthology?

In naming his character "Nemo", McCay makes Nemo into a passive everyman with whom the reader can identify. In this anthology, each cartoonist has a different interpretation of Nemo's character. Because he is an everyman, the authors have room to experiment with and interpret his character in a variety of ways. Still, in most of the strips, Nemo remains a passive character who finds himself in various fantastical situations and must adapt. Other characters are shown to be more active, like Flip in Jeremy Bastian's comic on page 37.

Winsor McCay, page 11

3

Carla Speed McNeil, page 23

J.G. Jones, page 63

Paolo Rivera, page 21

◆   At the end of each Little Nemo in Slumberland comic, Nemo always wakes up in his bed, commenting briefly on the adventure that happened while he was asleep. How have some authors in Little Nemo's Big New Dreams used the expectation of this recurrence to their advantage?

In some of these stories, the authors have undermined the reader's expectations by doing something else in that last panel, such as on page 19, where Nemo wakes up in a washing machine, or on page 21, where the panel mimics what we expect. These instances suggest that everything that happened might have been real. This catches the reader off guard and can be used for humorous effect or can cause the reader to re-examine the adventure.

◆   Flip and Nemo are often featured together, both in the original *Little Nemo in Slumberland* strips and in the comics in this anthology. Yet in the original comic facing the introduction page of Little Nemo's Big New Dreams, Nemo says Flip is his worst enemy as he begs the mermaids not to hurt him. Are Flip and Nemo friends or enemies?

Flip and Nemo are both friends and enemies. While Flip can save Nemo, as he does in Marc Hempel's comic on page 61, he also endangers Nemo frequently with his recklessness, like on page 37 and page 59. Flip serves as an adventurous foil to Nemo's more passive character and is often the one to instigate the action in the comic. Despite Flip's tendency to cause trouble for Nemo, the two are able to spend time together and talk pleasantly, as on page 63. Their words and interactions show a sense of comradery and goodwill to one another.

◆   The main cast of Little Nemo in Slumberland is largely male, save for Nemo's mother and the Princess. This reflects the male-dominated early 1900s society that McCay lived in. In contrast, how are women present in this anthology? What are some examples of how contributors have introduced or examined female characters in Slumberland?

In his comic on page 29, Craig Thompson references antiquated societal attitudes towards women when the Princess tell Nemo that he idealizes her. She asserts that his perception of her is fueled by his fantasies, which cannot last. This blunt observation subverts the traditional narrative of princesses, and results in a level of awareness that ultimately shatters Nemo's dream. Other cartoonists, such as David Mack (page 33) and Bishakh Kumar Som (page 49), choose to make their leading character female, or to make the subject of the visit to Slumberland something seen as typically feminine (Andrea Tsurumi, page 55). James Harvey (page 31) reimagines the princess as a fast talking, active and direct character who pursues Nemo's friendship aggressively.
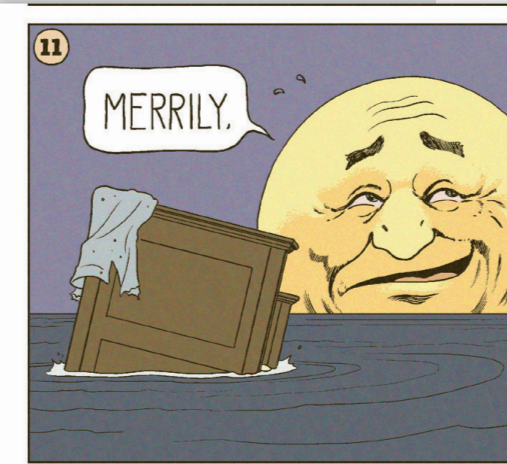
Paolo Rivera, page 21

Time

◆ Both in dreams and in comics, time can pass in the blink of an eye. How do comics like Paolo Rivera's strip on page 29 convey the passage of time? How does the cartoonist tell the reader how much time has passed between panels without using words?

Paolo Rivera uses visual cues in each panel to tell us what's happened from one panel to the next. Even though he skips years of action in between some panels, he's always careful to have a visual reference to the last panel in the following one. Details like the length of Nemo's hair and beard also help us infer how long Nemo has been at sea and how long it's been since we saw him in the panel preceding the one we're looking at. In comics, the action isn't continuous. No matter how soon one panels follows another, the reader constantly has to infer what has happened in between. Using visual cues, a cartoonist can take the reader on an infinitely long journey or an incredibly short one, all in a single page.

◆ Both Cole Closser (page 35) and Marc Hempel (page 61) make reference to the hundred-odd years that have passed since the debut of the original Little Nemo in Slumberland strips in the New York Herald. Cole Closser looks at what's happened to Slumberland after all this time, while Marc Hempel chooses to look at what's happened in the real world. While the tone that each comic strikes is wildly different, what are the similarities in these two comics?
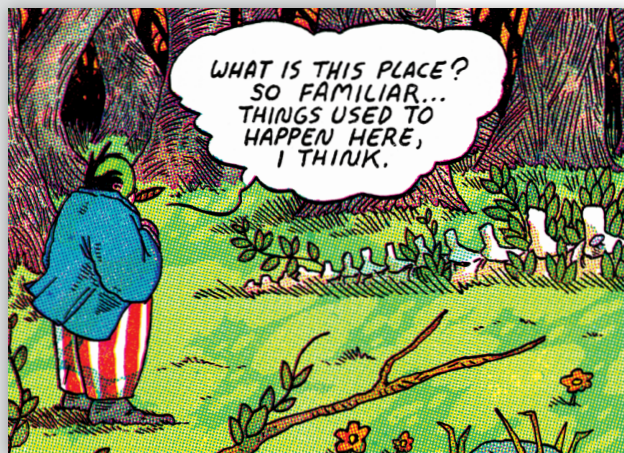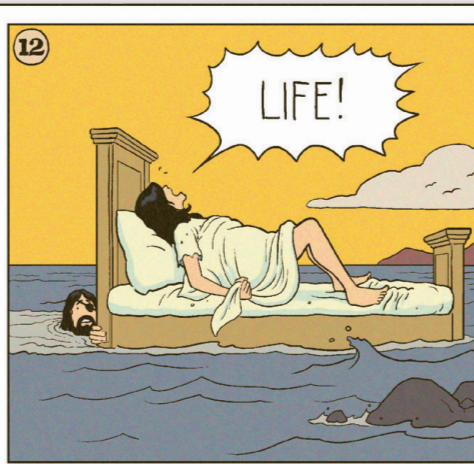
Both comics suggest that the world no longer has a place for these characters in the future. In Closser's comic, Flip comments on how everything familiar to him is gone. In Hempel's comic, Nemo's father tells him there's no time for his old way of life and he has to learn to adapt, whether he likes it or not. Both of the main characters have difficulty accepting the new world they find themselves in, and it takes something familiar from their old world to wake both of them. In order to wake up, Nemo needs Flip to come break open his head to wake up, and Flip needs to recognize something familiar to him.

Cole Closser, page 35
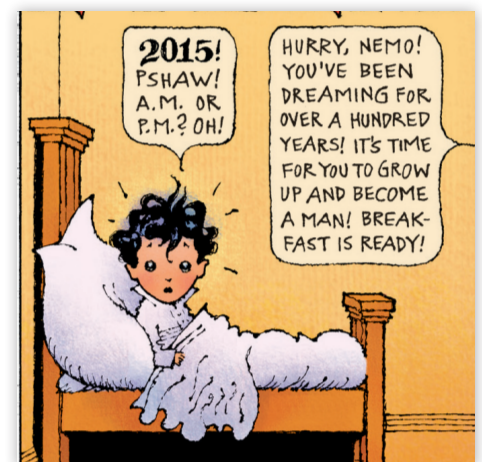
Marc Hempel, page 61

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 mulitmedia 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).

Page Layout and Composition

◆   Winsor McCay was working at a time when the American comic strip was still a fairly new medium. Whenever he laid out a page, he had to consider not only how to fit his story within the page, but also how to make it legible to an audience that wasn't very familiar with comics yet. His bold compositions helped lead the eye, as did his numbered captioning system. Cartoonists today still have to think about how to draw a comic so that the reader will read it the way they intended, and they have many different visual tools to help them. How did some of the cartoonists in this book choose to lead the reader's eye while experimenting with format?

Peter & Maria Hoey (page 19) choose to guide the reader by putting two "waking world" scenes on either end of the page and clearly dividing them with a circular arrangement of panels meant to be read from the outer circle inwards. Cole Closser (page 35), uses the skeleton on the page to lead the reader's eye through the panels in a natural order without having to refer to the numbering system. David Plunkert (page 45) uses a similar technique with the limbs of his giant figure, which snake through the page and guide the reader as he wishes. R. Sikoryak (page 57) simply has Freud and Nemo walk in the direction the panels should be read in. Bishakh Kumar Som (page49) turns all the speech bubbles on the page into a long chain leading from beginning to end.

◆   Color played an important part in the original Nemo strips. The New York Herald, which ran the original Little Nemo strips, used a then-advanced method of color printing known as the Ben-Day dots printing process, and McCay carefully annotated each page of Little Nemo with the color scheme the printer was supposed to use. Color is also important in the Little Nemo strips in this book, although the coloring technique is different from artist to artist. What are some strips that use color to enhance the narrative? What are some strips that use color to enhance the composition?

Cliff Chiang's comic (page 25) is an example of color being used for a narrative purpose. Nemo and friends are completely

Hans Rickheit, page 59
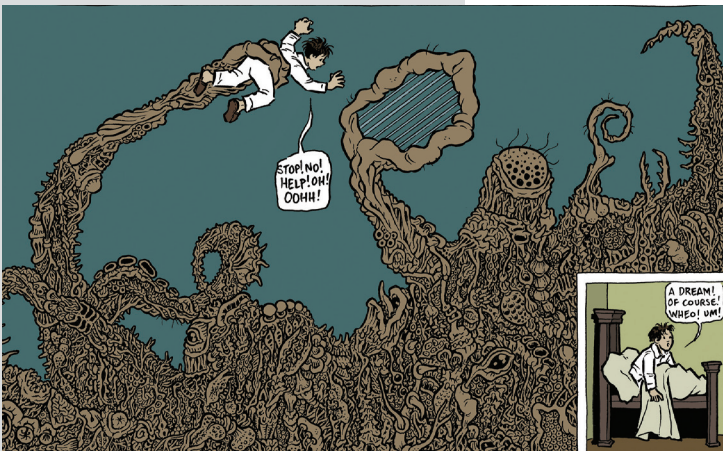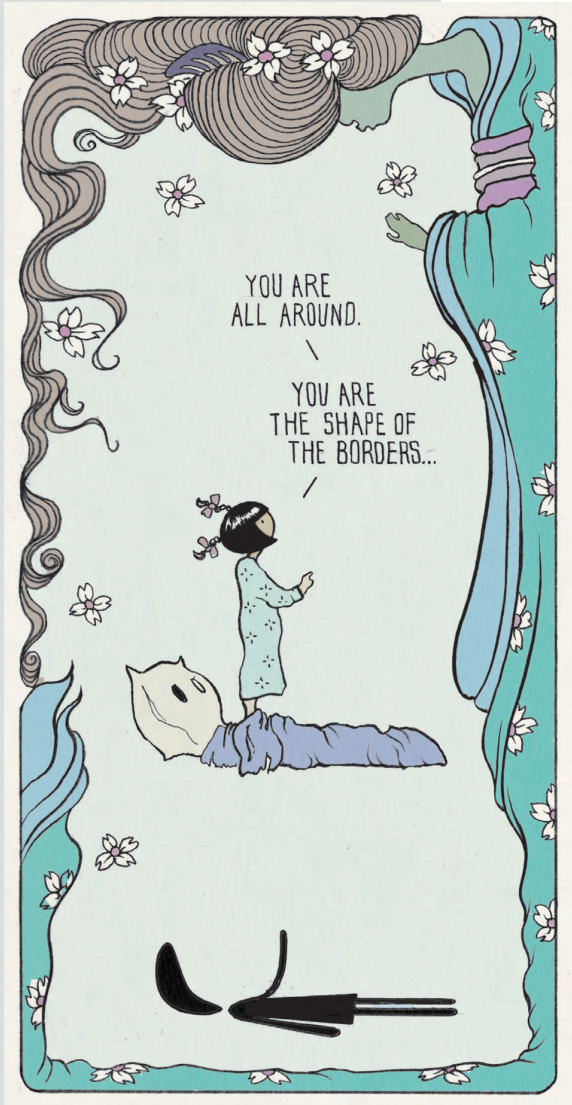
Said Mack, page 33

washed out in blue tones until they are in the same panel as their creator, Winsor McCay. This emphasizes their role as McCay's creations and draws a visual line between the world of McCay's comic and the world that he inhabited as a creator. Hans Rickheit (page 59) uses color to set an ominous mood, drawing from a muted and darker palette than many of the other comics in the anthology. Color is used to enhance the composition in James Harvey's comic on page 31, where the princess's world is predominantly a muted blue, except her red hair, which makes her stand out and seem more magical. The blue also contrasts with the red of Nemo's world, which takes up the opposing page. This is reflected in the colors of the outfits of the clowns in the margins, the red one standing at the first day panel, the blue one standing at the last night panel.

◆   On page 33 David Mack uses the page composition as part of the story. How does making Kabuki's mother into the panel borders change the message of the comic? Why not just use ordinary panels and have Kabuki and her mother talk to each other inside of them?

By making Kabuki's mother into the panel borders, David Mack is choosing to make Kabuki's mother's words address the reader as well as Kabuki. By changing the reader's perception about the structure of the comic, he makes Kabuki's mother's words directly affect the reader without directly addressing the reader. This layout also speaks to Kabuki's relationship with her mother. Her mother's hair and dress create the a border that envelops the small girl, reinforcing the idea of Kabuki as a small girl encompassed by her mother's protection.

Space

◆   In dreams, we can change our size and shape. In *Little Nemo's Big New Dreams,* Carla Speed McNeil (page 23) and Nik Poliwko (page 43) both take advantage of this. How do they use size in their comics to convey mood?

Carla Speed McNeil turns Nemo's cat into a giant to make something normally cute and harmless seem frightening and threatening. Nik Poliwko chooses to do the opposite, shrinking Nemo himself to make him seem more helpless.

◆   When we're awake, the ways we decorate our houses with or the places where we spend our time can say a lot about us, but in a dream, the landscape can be more fantastical and can reveal much more about a character's psyche. Bishakh Kumar Som uses this to his advantage on page 49 with Anjali's dreamscape. What can you tell about Anjali from the space he surrounds her with?

From Anjali's surroundings, you can infer that she is a precise and meticulous person. The angles of the building are intricate. You can tell that the dream is stressful because, despite the geometric

Bishakh Kumar Som , page 49

look of the building, it also looks confusing and chaotic. The number of people trapped in glass rooms tells you that Anjali may be feeling isolated or have trouble connecting to others. Ask students what other traits they might attribute to Anjali from looking at the dream building she explores.
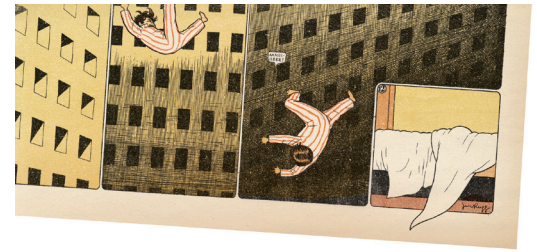
◆ "The fourth wall" is a term which refers to the metaphorical wall between the reader or viewer of a book and the action going on within the book. Artists J.G. Jones (page 63-65) and Jim Rugg (page 66) choose to break the fourth wall in their comics. How do their characters break the fourth wall? How do they interact with the space in their comic, and why is it unusual to see?

Jim Rugg, page 66

J.G. Jones has Flip and Nemo add and destroy gutters, or the white spaces between the panels, in the pages of his comic. The gutters are a space on the page that characters don't typically interact with and it is assumed that they are not "aware" that they exist within the construct of a single page. When Flip and Nemo alter the space that is usually supposed to be invisible to them, they inform us that they are aware of the fact they are in a comic. Jim Rugg chooses to have Nemo break the fourth wall more passively, simply by falling off the bottom of the "page" into blank white space that is meant to represent the real world. Normally, no matter how far Nemo falls, the distance would be represented panel-to-panel, never leaving the confines of the panel borders or page.

◆ In dreams, we can go from one place to another with very little logical explanation. In his comic on page 43, Nik Poliwko takes advantage of that. How does he use space to make the reader feel as disoriented as Nemo when the setting suddenly shifts?

By taking us from an enclosed space where we read the silhouette of a face as the sky to an open space where we, the readers, can see what's really happening, Poliwko creates the same sense of surprise and disorientation that Nemo feels when he discovers he is trapped in a bottle.

Nik Poliwko, page 43

Inferential Thinking

R. Sikoryak, page 57

Slumberland

◆   McCay had a very specific vision of Slumberland, and so do each of the cartoonists in this anthology. In your opinion, what factors might affect how a cartoonist chooses to portray Slumberland?

◆   Based on the comics in Little Nemo's Big New Dreams, is Slumberland a place you would want to visit? Make your argument using specific examples from the comics in the book.

Dreams and Reality

◆   R. Sikoryak (page 57) has Freud visit Nemo to discuss the nature of dreams. Freud has become a somewhat controversial figure in the field of psychology, and very few psychiatric residents training at universities today are trained in psychoanalysis. Still, his work and legacy have given him a permanent attachment to the idea of dreams in popular culture. What do you think dreams can tell you about a person? Do you agree with Freud about the meanings for symbols that he explains to Nemo?


Zander Cannon, page 27

◆ In *Little Jin in Slumberland* (p. 27), the protagonist is a boy around the same age as Nemo, but from a very different time period and cultural context. How much do you think our real-life surroundings affect our dreams? What might Little Nemo's slumberland have looked like if Nemo was a modern-day child? What if McCay lived in another country, or was a different ethnicity, how do you think the tone of the comic would change?
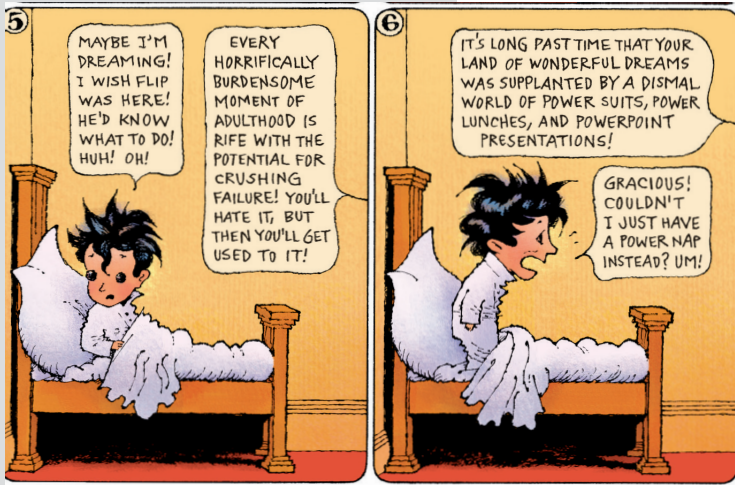
◆ On page 61, Marc Hempel satirizes Nemo's childlike fantasies by having the character wake up to learn that he's been sleeping for one hundred years and now has to become an adult. Do you think Marc agrees with Nemo's father's lecturing? Why or why not?

While Hempel is poking fun at Nemo's eternal youth, he is also commenting on his father's negative outlook. Flip calls the new fears filling Nemo's head a "distorted worldview" and fixes Nemo very promptly by breaking his head open and letting all the negativity spill out. Flip also comments that the fix he has in mind is painful, suggesting that while Nemo's father's phobias are harmful to Nemo, letting go of these phobias is also difficult. In the end, neither Nemo's world of dreams or his father's version of reality is seen as truly real.

Marc Hempel, page 61
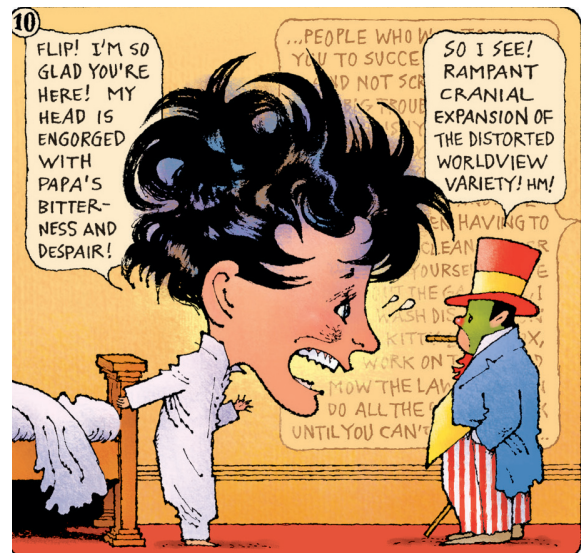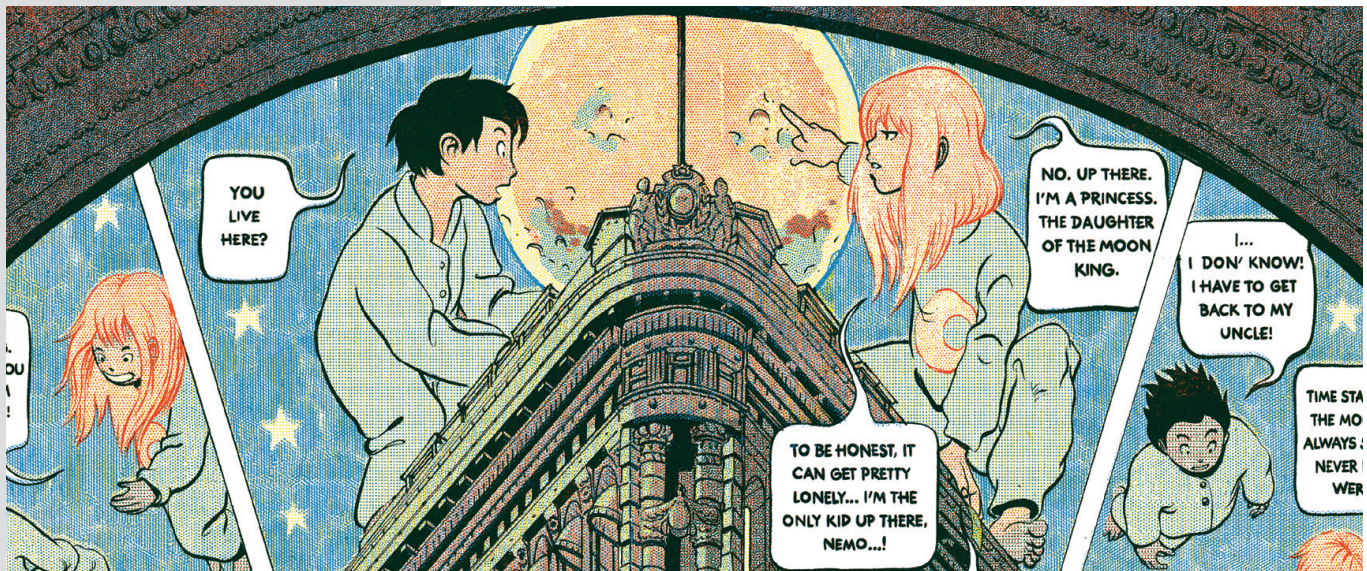
James Harvey, page 31

4 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 knowledgfe 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.

◆   Throughout this lesson plan, we have discussed the nature of dreams, and the elements that make up Nemo's Slumberland. Have students write a depiction or draw a map of their Slumberland and give a short explanation to the class. Encourage students to make a comic of themselves visiting their Slumberland afterwards. When making their Slumberland, ask students to consider the external aspects of their lives, as well as their own desires, dreams, and tastes.

◆   Winsor McCay loved to perform, and often drew and even animated characters on stage for audiences as a vaudeville act. Ask students to create a skit about their own trip to Slumberland.

◆   Winsor McCay was a successful cartoonist during a time when successful cartoonists were considered to be major celebrities. As a research project, have students look into other famous American cartoonists of the late 1800s and early 1900s, such as George McManus, Frederick Burr Opper, George Herriman, Richard F. Outcault, or Bud Fisher. Have them do a short presentation or essay on their work and lives, and make sure to ask what the students
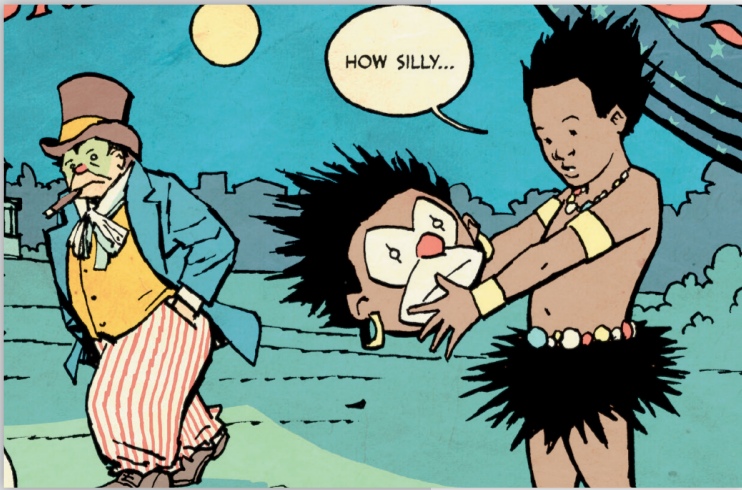
Cliff Chiang, p.25

find interesting or confusing about their comics. For extra credit, ask the students to draw a comic based on that cartoonist's work, as the cartoonists in Little Nemo's Big New Dreams did.

◆ Each cartoonist who contributed to *Little Nemo's Big New Dreams* has a different take on Nemo that reflects both their perspective on the source material and the nature of their own work. Ask students to write a short piece explaining which comic stood out the most to them and why. Be sure that they consider the theme and main ideas of their chosen comic, as well as the indivual artistic choices that enforce those ideas.

◆ Discuss: In the foreword of this book, the racist element to McCay's comics is addressed by mentioning the character of the Imp (page 7). Cartoonist Cliff Chiang tackles the issue of racism in his comic (page 25) by having the Imp take off his face to reveal it was a mask. How is the artist changing the traditional role of the Imp, and what is he trying to say? Discuss the historical implications of the Imp, and ask students if they feel that this comic successfully addresses this problem. Do they feel that Little Nemo has less merit because of its racist elements, or is the fact that it's a product of its time something which excuses it?

◆ Much of McCay's work dealt with dreams. Another newspaper strip McCay ran was called Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend. It had no recurring characters, but rather, followed a different person through a bizarre dream brought on by a late night snack in every strip. Show students some of the Rarebit Fiend strips McCay drew. Have students draw a comic about a strange dream they've had, starring either themselves or a fictional person. Encourage them to do as McCay did and play with the format of the comic to reflect the strangeness of the dream. If possible, bring in snacks for this activity and explain to students what rarebit is.

James Yang, p.25