1. Color can be used in a variety of ways in graphic novels. Some examples of graphic novels are Babymouse, Squish, and Lunch Lady. They do not use a traditional full-color approach; they have a more limited colour palette. The Golden Compass and The City of Ember graphic novels use darker tones to help project mood and tone. Colour plays an active role in the storytelling.

• What colours are predominant?

• What might the colours represent/symbolize?

• What would happen if different colours were used?

• Does the graphic novel use a full-colour process? Why or why not?

• Are the colours bold, muted, or pastel?

2. Line is a component of the art in a graphic novel, and the direction of a line (horizontal, diagonal, vertical) can imply different things. A diagonal line might indicate movement or loss of balance. A horizontal line could mean rest or peace or calm, while a vertical line could indicate not just height but strength. Readers should be able to determine if the direction of an illustration or a panel or even a page or more is horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. Here are a few questions to consider along with readers:

• Are lines thin or thick? Bold or sketchy?

• How does the artist use line to draw the readers’ eyes in a certain direction?

• How are lines used to frame the panels or toseparate the white space from the text and illustrations?

3. Composition is how the illustration is put together (composed). Size and placement are two critical components of composition, so think about these questions in your exploration

• What is in the centre of the panel? In the top? The bottom? What might the placement of objects signify?

• Are some elements of the illustrations in the various panels larger than others? Why or why not?

4. Frames can be used to contain text and illustration and create panels. Determine if the frames are created by lines or simply become boundaries where the text and illustration end.

• What type(s) of frames are used in the book?

• Do the frames vary throughout the narrative or remain consistent?

• Are there frames within frames to accentuate anything in the story?

• If the frames were removed, how might the story change?

• The art sometimes breaks the borders of the frame. What might the artist be conveying with this technique?

5. Speech balloons contain the text and dialogue of the graphic novel. Does the book separate text from the illustration, or does the text bleed into the illustrations without separation? These other questions are also valuable when talking about text, especially speech balloons:

• Does the text appear in black and white or colour? Are different colours used? If so, why?

• Do the words differ in shape and size? How does the illustrator indicate emotional intensity, humor, etc., using speech balloons, colours, lines, etc.?

• Is there text in addition to speech? How is it set apart from the dialogue? Why is it necessary?

6. White space is important in graphic novels. Events often happen in the white space. This is similar to the action that happens offstage in plays. The gutter is the space between panels. Students should think about some of the following questions about white space and gutters:

• Are the panels roughly the same size and shape? Why or why not? What could a change in shape and size signify?

• Does anything bleed into the white space or gutters? If so, why do you think the author and/or illustrator used the space for this purpose?

• Does more happen in one panel than in another?

• How does the author/illustrator move the reader from one panel to the next? Are there connections provided to the reader?

7. Media and technique/style of illustration functions in graphic novels as it does in any art. Just as the work of Picasso and the cubists differed from the work of Monet and the impressionists, different artists use different approaches in their graphic novel work.

• What media is being used? Are illustrations done with coloured pencil, watercolours, tempera, etc.? Sometimes information about the media can be found on the copyright page of a book.

• What sort of illustrative style is present? Is this cartoon art? Are there elements of other techniques such as pointillism, impressionism, or realism?

• Is it possible to identify the illustrator’s work in other books, series, etc.? What are the critical attributes of the work of various illustrators?