

# GRAPHIC NOVEL

**Summaries and Activities**

for

DISCOVERING OUR PAST:  
ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

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# SUMMARIES & ACTIVITIES

## ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

The following pages contain additional information about each graphic novel. Page references refer to the textbook. You will find background information, a brief summary of each graphic novel, and two activities to help you guide your students' understanding of each graphic novel. The first activity is designed to help the student utilize the story presented to complete the assigned task. The second activity is more broadly focused, allowing students to make connections between the graphic novel and the larger historical context of the period.

### CHAPTER 1, PAGES 118–151

## FIRE AND ERROR

### SUMMARY

The textbook discusses theories regarding the survival of early humans and the development of civilizations. Without written records, we can only speculate about what life was like for early humans. Artifacts and geological findings are clues that give information about where people lived, their tools, and daily life. Archaeologists have found evidence of large cities, wealth, religion, and government organization. Before these great civilizations developed, however, early humans were learning how to survive and improve their lives.

Early humans spent most of their time adapting to the environment and using nature to provide food, clothing, shelter, and tools. This graphic novel takes a humorous approach toward the development of early humans. It speculates how some discoveries may have been by chance, leading to larger discoveries and improved ways of living.

### ACTIVITIES

**1** This novel depicts a man learning about weapons, tools, and fire. With these things he is able to obtain warmth, food, and clothing. Have students speculate what he might do next with this new knowledge. Now that he has some basic necessities, what other things might he try to develop to make life more comfortable or secure? What do they think would be the first thing he should work on? Ask students what it would have been like to live at that time. What would they miss most about their life today? What would be a benefit of living during that time?

**2** The chapter explains that early humans slowly changed from being nomads to settled villagers. As people began to farm and domesticate animals, they

remained in one area. Some began to specialize in different trades, and small villages slowly grew. Over time, villages traded with other villages, bringing communities closer together. Ask students to create a graphic organizer comparing and contrasting the life of nomads to settled villagers. Which way of life do they think is better and why?

## CHAPTER 2, PAGES 152–195

# FLOATING ALONG THE NILE

## SUMMARY

This story illustrates the transmission of culture between Egypt and Kush. While it is a fact that the Nile River flows north, for the purposes of this graphic novel, we are imagining that the river flows south to Kush. Egypt conquered the early Kushites after a 50-year war in the 1400s B.C. After this conflict, the two civilizations coexisted and flourished for many years. Kush would later rise in prominence and conquer the Egyptians in 728 B.C.

Though historians traditionally believe that the civilization of Kush borrowed and adapted many Egyptian customs, it is understood that trade and interaction flowed to and from both civilizations. Kush received many goods from Egypt, and they exported cattle, gold, and ivory to Egypt. During this time, Kushites learned to work with copper and bronze, which eventually helped them defeat a weakened Egypt.

The Kushites also learned from the Assyrians, who invaded Egypt years later. Though the Kushites lost control of Egypt to the Assyrians, they maintained their own empire and continued to prosper through trade. The transfer of knowledge occurred with the Assyrians as it did with Egypt. Kush learned about ironworks from the Assyrians, which improved their farming techniques and military power.

## ACTIVITIES

**1** This novel explains that after the Kushites were conquered, they developed a powerful economy from trading with Egypt. Using the many skills passed to them by the Egyptians, they became the conquerors. The textbook continues the story of the Kushites. After reviewing the text, have students create three or four graphic panels for the novel that show some of the events that followed the Kushite victory over Egypt.

**2** The textbook explains that a pharaoh ruled for his lifetime and then the power passed to one of his sons. The United States has a very different government. The president is in office for a specified number of years and shares power with the other branches of the government. Have students create a graphic organizer listing the pros and cons of each type of government. Have students share their organizers with the class. In a class discussion, ask students which type of government they think is best and why.

## CHAPTER 3, PAGES 196–227

# THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

## SUMMARY

According to Jewish beliefs, the original Ten Commandments were kept in a box called the Ark of the Covenant. From time to time, they were moved from one place of worship to another. After King David captured Jerusalem, he wanted to build a permanent home for the Ark there. He hoped to unite the Israelites by having the Ark and the king's home in the same place. King David planned to build the temple on Mount Moriah because of its connection with Abraham. According to the Hebrew Bible, it was here that Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac to prove his love for God. The First Temple, the Second Temple, and Herod's temple were all built on Mount Moriah, or Temple Mount.

In this graphic novel, a family is gathered to celebrate Hanukkah. To make sure his grandchildren understand the reasons for the holiday, the grandfather questions them about what Hanukkah commemorates. In response, his grandchildren recount the Jewish struggle against the Syrians, the retaking of the temple, and the miracle of the oil. Then the grandfather and his grandchildren discuss how the family celebrates Hanukkah and the reasons for these practices.

## ACTIVITIES

**1** Explain that Hanukkah does not always occur on the same dates in December. Have small groups of students research how the Jewish, or Hebrew, calendar year is organized to learn why this change occurs. You may also want them to research what year it is on the current calendar. As a class, discuss what students learned about this method of tracking time.

**2** Have students scan their textbooks for information about the temple in Jerusalem. Tell them to list the following: who built or rebuilt the temple, what happened to it, and approximately when the event occurred. Finally, they should also describe what remains of the temple today. After the class finishes this task, ask the following questions: Was the temple in Jerusalem important to Jews? Why or why not? Are its remains important to them? Why or why not?

## CHAPTER 4, PAGES 234–271

# MUCH ADO ABOUT ZERO

## SUMMARY

The concept of nothingness did not originate in ancient India. Mathematicians in ancient India did create the first symbol for zero, which they represented with a small dot. What seems like a simple idea today made a profound impact in science and mathematics.

Besides developing the symbol for zero, early Indian mathematicians also created the symbols for the numbers we use today. In addition, they were among the first to use algebra. They also invented algorithms. Early Indians developed

ideas about the universe and theorized that it is made up of tiny particles called atoms. In medicine, they created tools and performed operations.

In this graphic novel, a student enters a school science fair, and as her project, she creates a symbol to represent zero. Though others laugh at first, she soon receives the adoration of many people for her discovery.

## ACTIVITIES

**1** The author of this graphic novel imagines that the symbol for nothingness was created by a young student. In the story, people laugh when they see the symbol until they realize the value of the invention. Discuss with the class their feelings about the novel. Ask: Why did the people laugh? What was the girl's reaction? How do the students feel about these events? Many times in history, scientists and inventors have been ridiculed for their discoveries or inventions. Ask students why they think this happens. Then have students name some people in history who made profound discoveries but were ridiculed at first.

**2** It is hard to imagine not having the symbol for zero. Many concepts and inventions were discovered long ago that today are considered basic “everyday” knowledge. For instance, the concept that the earth revolves around the sun is widely accepted as fact today, but when the idea was first presented, it was rejected. Ask students to think of an item used everyday, such as tape, microwaves, cell phones, or paper plates. Have students do independent research on their chosen topic to learn its origin, inventor, and how it was first used. Students should answer questions such as: Has its original use changed over time? Did it lead to the development of other inventions? Was it immediately accepted or did the inventor have to struggle to get acceptance? Have students present their findings in a two-page essay.

## CHAPTER 5, PAGES 272–307

### A LESSON LEARNED

#### SUMMARY

Confucius taught that people must practice filial piety if they want to be morally good. Filial piety does not mean that children must always agree with their parents. It also does not mean that children must do whatever their parents tell them to do without question. Rather filial piety is showing respect to parents and older relatives. Confucius thought that the practice of filial piety helped people consider the needs of others instead of just thinking about themselves. Confucius believed that how people acted within the family influenced society and government.

In this graphic novel Confucius teaches his views on filial piety. A young boy listens very closely to what Confucius is saying. His words remind the boy of an incident in which he was disrespectful to his parents. Then adults in the audience point out to him how he has misbehaved. Regretting his earlier behavior, the boy runs home and apologizes to his parents. The last three frames also show several of Confucius's sayings.

## ACTIVITIES

- 1 After students read the graphic novel, ask the following questions: What reminded the boy of the time he and his parents went shopping for clothes? In your opinion, did the boy realize that he had not been respectful to his parents, or did he need the adults in the crowd to tell him? What are the reasons for your opinion? Next have students draw several frames that change the shopping incident into one in which the boy shows filial piety. The boy does not have to like the robe that his parents chose, but he does need to show them respect.
- 2 Tell students to read about Confucianism and Legalism in their textbook. Next describe a situation in which the boy from the story did something that hurt people in his community, such as steal rice. As a class, discuss how a government influenced by Confucian teachings and one following Legalist guidelines might deal with this action. Then ask the following questions: Why would the governments treat the same offense so differently? Which system of government would you prefer to have? Why?

## CHAPTER 6, PAGES 308–325

### THE MAYAN BALLGAME

#### SUMMARY

Many Mesoamerican cultures played a variation of the ball game called *pok-a-tok*. The Mayan version of the ball game was rooted in their religion. While historians know some information about the game, the exact rules are not entirely clear. For example, it is unclear what would happen to the losing team. Some historians believe they were all executed, while others argue that only the coach of the losing team was killed in ritual sacrifice. Some historians believe that the winning team was executed, as it was considered an honor and a privilege to be sacrificed to the gods.

Have your students visit the website [www.ballgame.org](http://www.ballgame.org). This resource provides further background about the game, including rules, uniforms, and equipment. The site also contains pictures of artifacts, as well as interactive simulations of the ball game.

#### ACTIVITIES

- 1 After reading the graphic novel, tell students that while waiting for Zinna to feel better, the students on the field trip were able to see more of the Mayan civilization. Refer students to the first panel of the graphic novel where the teacher describes the Mayan as “artists, astronomers, warriors, and statesmen.” Ask students to illustrate two or three panels of what they think the students might see that would represent these traits.
- 2 Refer students to the panel in the novel where the priest hurls the ball into the court to signify the start of the game. Ask students why they think the priest would be responsible for starting the ball game. What significance did the ball game have to the Mayans? What role did religion have in the Mayan culture?

## CHAPTER 7, PAGES 332–371

# PELOPONNESIAN STRANGERS!

### SUMMARY

Sparta was not always a military state. Its military lifestyle developed around 700 B.C. after Sparta conquered Messenia. Messenia was located in the southwestern part of the Peloponnesus. It contained rich agricultural lands. Sparta turned the people of Messenia into slaves, or helots, who worked the land for Sparta. The helots had to give half of their agricultural produce to Sparta. These slaves greatly outnumbered the Spartans, and the helots revolted more than once against them. To keep control over the helots, Sparta became a military state.

The development of Athens was quite different, and geography influenced it. Mountain ranges protected its territory. Unlike Sparta, Athens had a long coastline, which invited its development as a sea power. The lack of sufficient rich farmland gave Athenians a reason to use the seas. The city included a hill with its own water supply. The Athenians fortified the hill, providing the city with an excellent means of defense.

In this graphic novel, Draco of Sparta and Cylon of Athens discuss their differing outlooks on life. For Draco, physical strength and military skills are most important. He does not respect anyone who is weak. On the other hand, Cylon prizes physical beauty, art, music, and literature. The two men also compare their childhoods. Draco remembers military training and Cylon his toys, reading, and education. At the end, the men agree that they are both Greeks, which is what is most important.

### ACTIVITIES

**1** Ask half the students to write a summary of what they have learned about the Spartans by reading “Peloponnesian Strangers!” Have the remaining students do the same for the Athenians. Next have volunteers share their summaries with the class. Then ask the following questions: What were some ways in which the Spartans and Athenians were different? In your opinion, why did the illustrator name this graphic novel “Peloponnesian Strangers!”? Why does Cylon think that Draco’s last statement is very Athenian?

**2** Organize students into pairs and ask them to read in their textbooks about daily life in Sparta and Athens. Tell pairs to use graphic organizers to compare and contrast the lives of women and girls in these cities. Using the graphic novel as a model, have each pair write a short conversation in which a Spartan woman and an Athenian woman compare and contrast their lives. Ask volunteers to share their dialogues with the class.

## CHAPTER 8, PAGES 372–415

### SOPHOCLES PRESENTS: *OEDIPUS REX*

#### SUMMARY

Greek plays generally involve heroes and gods. The stories deal with issues such as the nature of good and evil and what roles the gods played in life. The Greek play *Oedipus Rex*, written by Sophocles, is a traditional Greek tragedy with a hero trying to overcome difficulties and failing in the end. Many consider it Sophocles' greatest work.

Writers such as Euripides depict the life and issues of common people. Plots with real-life situations were often meant to challenge traditional thinking of the day. Other writers, such as Aristophanes, wrote comedies that made fun of politicians and scholars. His works include many jokes, similar to modern comedy.

Early Greek plays had only one actor who would describe events and relay a story through speeches and song. As theater developed, more actors, backdrops, and costumes were added. These early advances helped create the entertainment we enjoy in movies and television today.

This graphic novel focuses on how the play *Oedipus Rex* might be produced. The novel is a comedic view of the actors and directors in ancient Greece. It presents such “special features” as director and cast interviews and a behind-the-scenes look at the night of the premiere. The graphics maintain the look associated with ancient Greece but in a modern context.

#### ACTIVITIES

**1** This novel is set in ancient Greece, however, it uses many images and terms that are found only in the present day. Ask students to identify what images or terms do not belong in ancient Greece. Ask students if this mix of past and present makes the novel difficult to read or more interesting and easier to follow. Why? Ask students to identify stories in books, movies, or television shows that have a similar mix.

**2** During this time in Greek theater, many forms of drama were developed that are still used today. The textbook mentions the two main types of Greek drama—tragedy and comedy. Have students create a diagram with the two types listed at the top as headings. Under each heading, write the definition and list movies, television shows, and books that are examples of each type. Ask: Under what heading would the graphic novel fall?

## CHAPTER 9, PAGES 456–495

### THE ERUPTION OF MT. VESUVIUS

#### SUMMARY

The Roman Empire had many rulers. Some rulers were destructive and harsh, others promoted peace and prosperity for the people. During the late A.D. 70s, a general named Titus became emperor. Though he died after ruling for only

26 months, he was one of Rome's most popular emperors. Titus continued the work of his late father, Vespasian, who promoted building and development throughout the empire. Titus sent large sums of money to the provinces for road and fortress construction. He also funded major projects, such as the famous Colosseum, originally started by his father.

Two natural disasters occurred during Titus's reign. One was a three-day fire that destroyed most of Rome. The second was the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius that destroyed the town of Pompeii and nearby communities. Both times, Titus sent relief funds, authorized housing construction, and created a commission of senators to provide assistance as needed.

Pompeii became part of the Roman Empire around 200 B.C. It was a busy and prosperous town located near the Bay of Naples. In A.D. 79 Mt. Vesuvius erupted and buried the town in volcanic ash. In the 1500s, the ruins of Pompeii were discovered. After many years of carefully digging through the hardened ash, archaeologists uncovered buildings, pottery, artwork, and even holes shaped like human bodies. These findings provide insight into ancient Rome and give a glimpse of what people experienced as the volcano erupted. This graphic novel tells the story of one citizen during the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius.

## ACTIVITIES

**1** When Mt. Vesuvius erupted, thousands were killed, and many lost everything. This novel depicts the moment of eruption and the panic and chaos that followed. Have students continue this graphic novel, either in writing or by drawing, describing events that might have occurred after the eruption. Have students consider these questions: How did Titus get help to those in need? What did the survivors do when it was over? Students could also speculate about what happened to the child in the story.

**2** In an empire, the emperor generally inherits the throne, as Titus did, or takes control by force. In the United States, citizens vote for the president. The textbook introduces many Roman emperors. Choose several and put each name in a box. Organize students into three groups and have each group pick a name. In a mock election campaign in which each man is running for the office of emperor, each group will try to persuade the class to vote for their candidate. To prepare for the campaign, have the groups do additional research to learn more about their candidate's background, strengths, and accomplishments. Then have the groups create a multimedia presentation to present their candidate to the class. Afterwards, have the class vote on which candidate they like best.

## CHAPTER 10, PAGES 456–495

### AUGGIE AURELIUS'S WIDE EMPIRE OF SPORTS

#### SUMMARY

The first known Roman gladiator contests took place in 264 B.C. Three pairs of gladiators fought at the event. Games could last for one day or up to 100 days.

In A.D. 107, Emperor Trajan had five thousand pairs of gladiators participate in a contest.

There were many types of gladiators. Some are described below:

- Armed with a net, a gladiator known as a retiarius tried to catch a fully armed gladiator. If he caught his opponent, he killed him with a trident, a three-pronged spear.
- A samnite was a gladiator equipped with a short sword, plumed helmet, and large rectangular shield.
- An armed essedarius was a gladiator that fought from a chariot.

There were many rituals associated with gladiator contests. In the beginning, for example, all the gladiators marched through the amphitheater. They would turn to the presenter of the games and say, “We who are about to die salute you.” A trumpet signaled the beginning of the games. When a gladiator was obviously defeated, he raised his forefinger, asking for mercy. A wave of handkerchiefs from spectators meant that he lived. If the spectators gave a thumbs-down, he died.

The author of this graphic novel imagines that television existed in Roman times. Auggie Aurelius, the moderator of the sports program, is interviewing Herculeus Bruticus, a famous gladiator. They discuss Herculeus’ childhood, highlights in his career, and his plans for the future.

## ACTIVITIES

**1** Before students read “Auggie Aurelius’s Wide Empire of Sports,” explain that this graphic novel is a parody. A parody imitates the characteristics of a piece of literature or a situation in a way that makes the resulting story funny. Point out that students can better enjoy the humor in “Auggie Aurelius’s Wide Empire of Sports” if they understand what is being compared. Then ask students to research and identify the following people and things: Colossus of Rhodes, titan, Hercules, and Nero. In addition, point out that many male Roman names end in *-us*. Next, have students read the graphic novel. Then ask the following questions: How can you tell that this graphic novel is taking place on a television sports program? Why is the title of the show a play on words? How is Auggie’s interview with Herculeus similar to those conducted with athletes today? How do some of the statements during the interview demonstrate that this graphic novel is a parody? To conclude, have volunteers comment on whether they think this novel succeeds as a parody.

**2** Tell students to read about Roman science and engineering, the Colosseum, and ancient Roman sports in their textbooks. Also be sure to share the introductory background information for this graphic novel with the class, if you have not already done so. Then ask the following questions: What kinds of events are taking place between Herculeus and other athletes in this story? Why might people in Roman times have thought the Colosseum was an amazing structure? Why might the saying “All roads lead to Rome” support Herculeus’ belief that fighting at the Colosseum shows that he is at the top of his career? Next, brainstorm with students the type of information that would appear on a poster advertising upcoming events at the Colosseum. Then have pairs of students create such a poster. Encour-

age students to research visuals. Finally, allow time for pairs to share their posters with the class.

## CHAPTER 11, PAGES 510–545

### THE VISION

#### SUMMARY

Constantine was born into a Roman military family and raised in the court of Diocletian in the eastern Roman Empire. When he was very young, his father, Constantius, became a deputy emperor and was sent to the western Roman Empire. In A.D. 305 the two Roman co-emperors abdicated, and Constantius became co-emperor in the west for a short time. When rule passed to other individuals, Constantine joined his father, and they fought a campaign in Britain. At his father's death in A.D. 306, the army proclaimed Constantine emperor, but not everyone accepted this claim. A series of civil wars followed as individuals tried to become emperor. In A.D. 312 Constantine invaded Italy. At the Milvian Bridge near Rome, he battled his brother-in-law Maxentius for the position of emperor of the Roman Empire in the west.

In this graphic novel, an outnumbered Constantine prepares to fight Maxentius. Suddenly Constantine sees a vision in the sky that tells him he will conquer under the sign of Christ. Constantine tells his men to paint the letters XP, the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek, on their shields. During the battle, Constantine forces Maxentius's army back toward the Tiber River and gains control of Milvian Bridge. Maxentius is killed, and his men flee across the Tiber on an improvised bridge. It collapses and most of his soldiers drown. Constantine then goes on to Rome and is declared Roman emperor. In A.D. 313 he issues the Edict of Milan, which grants religious freedom to all people in the Roman Empire, including Christians.

#### ACTIVITIES

**1** Ask students to explain the title of the graphic novel. Next draw a timeline on the board and label it "From the Vision to Freedom of Religion for Christians." As students name the steps in this process, write them on the timeline. Then ask the following questions: What did Constantine believe about his vision? Why did he think this? Approximately how long after his vision did Constantine grant freedom of religion to Christians?

**2** Tell students to read in their textbooks about Roman treatment of Christians and the Roman adoption of Christianity. Next organize the class into small groups, and ask them to discuss how Christians might have felt about the Edict of Milan. Groups should consider questions such as the following:

- Did Christians trust the emperor's new policy? Why or why not?
- How might the new policy affect their lives?
- How might Christians feel about the government's past actions?

Then have groups present the results of their discussions and be prepared to explain why they reached their conclusions.