

**Title:** Drawing on Experience: World building as activism in autobiographical comics created by youth

**Conference topic question:** How do reading and writing function as forms of activism or empathy? What is the role of empathy in cultivating discourse and communication?

**Key words:** graphic memoir, autobiographical comics, youth engagement, youth activism, comics, world building, multimodality

**Abstract (245 words):**

"We increasingly live among, read, and construct visually rich and intoxicating texts and by doing so, we engage in recursive relationships with words, images, words as images, and the intersections of all of those variations" Graff, J. M. (2013).

This paper, presented in visual-textual form, draws on an autobiographical comics workshop I hosted with an after-school club for youth. In the monthly workshop, we explored student-initiated themes through the media of visual-textual storytelling, both through the exploration of existing graphic memoirs and those created by the youth participants.

In this paper, I focus on the role world-building plays in activism amongst the youth and in relationship to the aesthetics of social justice. Through the creation of life-narratives in visual-textual form not only are key constructions such as identity and worldview expressed in the storytelling, they are literally drawn into the text. As comics activist Kate Evans states about her own work in graphic memoir, "The narrative centres around me because it's limited to my direct experience..." (Evans, K., 2018). In "limiting" visual narratives to the lived experiences of young people, a unique ownership over the storytelling and sense of self-as-protagonist emerges in both the narrative and visual representations. This paper presents world building in comics by youth as a means to communicate worldview and lived experiences—and asks how the form itself has the potential to act as both a means of and for activism.

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