



# Foreword

"I actually enjoyed the graphic-novel format, ...before I would always think 'Pffft! I don't need graphic novels! They're for dumb people who are too lazy to read and just want to look at pictures!' Boy, was I wrong! I really did like it, and it was just as interesting and informational as it would be in a regular book form. Actually, probably more interesting!"

Danielle, *Writing-Reading Notebook* entry, 1/14

I've been exploring the ways my students can use drawing as a thinking/writing tool for more than ten years, often working with Roger Essley in my eighth-grade classroom. My students have shown us how drawing helps them understand the writing of others, craft their own ideas into writing, and unravel complicated reading tasks. Through their pictures they think deeply and show others that thinking.

Danielle is a motivated, sophisticated, successful eighth grader, who has seen the value of using drawing as a reading and writing tool, yet when I introduced her class to graphic novels, she raised the same questions that I've often struggled with as a teacher. Why do many of us in education dismiss drawing as an unsophisticated tool better left behind at third grade? Why have we *taught* our students that understanding comes only from, and with, words? Of course we want our students to read and write for meaning, but why do we limit the ways they get there?

With this book Roger offers convincing evidence that we must address—and foster—our learners' natural visual learning skills. We hear from scientists, physicists, mathematicians, sociologists, historians, authors, and from our own literacy research, how drawing has always been an essential thinking tool that helps learners simplify and understand complicated issues. Examples of students' and teachers' visual work at all grade levels offers exciting and inspiring evidence that echoes what my students show me: we can encourage diversity by teaching kids that drawing is a sophisticated tool for understanding and representing our thinking, a natural and needed companion with words.

In the closing pages of this book a girl confesses hiding her drawings in school because "I worried I needed them because I lacked the intellectual heft to figure things out based on the text alone." That top student, now using drawing to unravel complicated cases with a federal judge, reminded me of Danielle. I am struck by the clear and prolific evidence presented for integrating visual tools in our curriculum, to help all our students grow their intellectual heft. And Danielle reminds me of how critical connecting words and pictures is for learners in our increasingly visual culture.

Danielle was intellectually stimulated by the complexity of the graphic novel format and, as another excerpt from her journal entry reveals, she discovered it was actually "enjoyable to read because . . . important facts were punctuated with a drawing. . . . If you missed something you could get that information from the picture. And it was just so relaxing, to turn a page and not be bombarded with six inches of very small print."

I hope you will see, through all the evidence presented in this book, how critical visual tools are to the growth and enjoyment of all of our students.

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Author of *Inside the Writer's-Reader's Notebook*, *100 Quickwrites*,  
*Vision and Voice*, and *Seeking Diversity*