It All Starts With a Click

A Toolkit to Create Non-fiction Comics

Introduction

This toolkit is a product form the culinative work that the 'BATOGHATO: HIMALAYAN LIVES & LANDSCAPES, AND THE ROADS THAT CHANGE THEM'

The project is a communication initiative focused on a research-based graphic novel that delves into the politics of road construction in rural Nepal. It aims to catalyze discussions on development, democracy, and civil society while introducing graphic storytelling to a wider audience. Through visual narratives, the novel portrays the perspectives of various stakeholders involved in road construction, challenging common narratives about its consequences. The project involves translation, illustration, and collaboration with publishers to ensure accessibility and natural dialogue. Led by Stacy Leigh Pigg and a team of artists and researchers, 'Batoghato' is based on the work of the research group 'Infrastructures of Democracy.'

Who are we?

Stacy L Pigg is an anthropologist turned graphic novelist. She is a professor at Simon Fraser University, Canada with over 30 years of research ties to Nepal. She uses storytelling as a way to explore the meanings of development-led

Promina, an illustrator, comics artist and researcher in the field of visual arts, is currently focusing on her own projects while farming somewhere in Nepal. She is the co-founder of Virangana Comics Collective

Social Science Baha, founded in 2002, aims to advance social science research in Nepal. Initially focusing on establishing a social science library, it expanded to offer programs like the Immersion Course on Contemporary Social Issues. By 2007, it registered formally, broadening activities to include lectures, workshops, conferences, and publishing. The SSB Library boasts a collection of over 35,000 publications. It hosts lectures by renowned scholars, conferences like the Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya, and publishes various materials. SSB conducts collaborative and contract research, including labor and migration studies through its Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility (CESLAM).

Purpose of this toolkit

Our non-fiction comic toolkit serves to inspire and assist creative minds in diving into the world of non-fiction comics.

Creation Guidance
Provides tips on what to keep in mind when researching, writing and drawing tailored to non-fiction storytelling for aspiring comic creators.

Advocacy Tools
Empower activists and journalists with storytelling strategies, distribution methods and ethical considerations.

Collaboration
Fosters collaboration among creators.

Research Assistance Tool
Offer resources for scholars studying the impact of non-fiction comics on communication and education.

Educational Support
Educators can use this as a template and guides to integrate non-fiction comics as part of teaching and learning various subjects in a creative way.

In summary, our toolkit serves as a comprehensive resource for creating, teaching and studying non-fiction comics, amplifying their potential for education, advocacy, and storytelling.
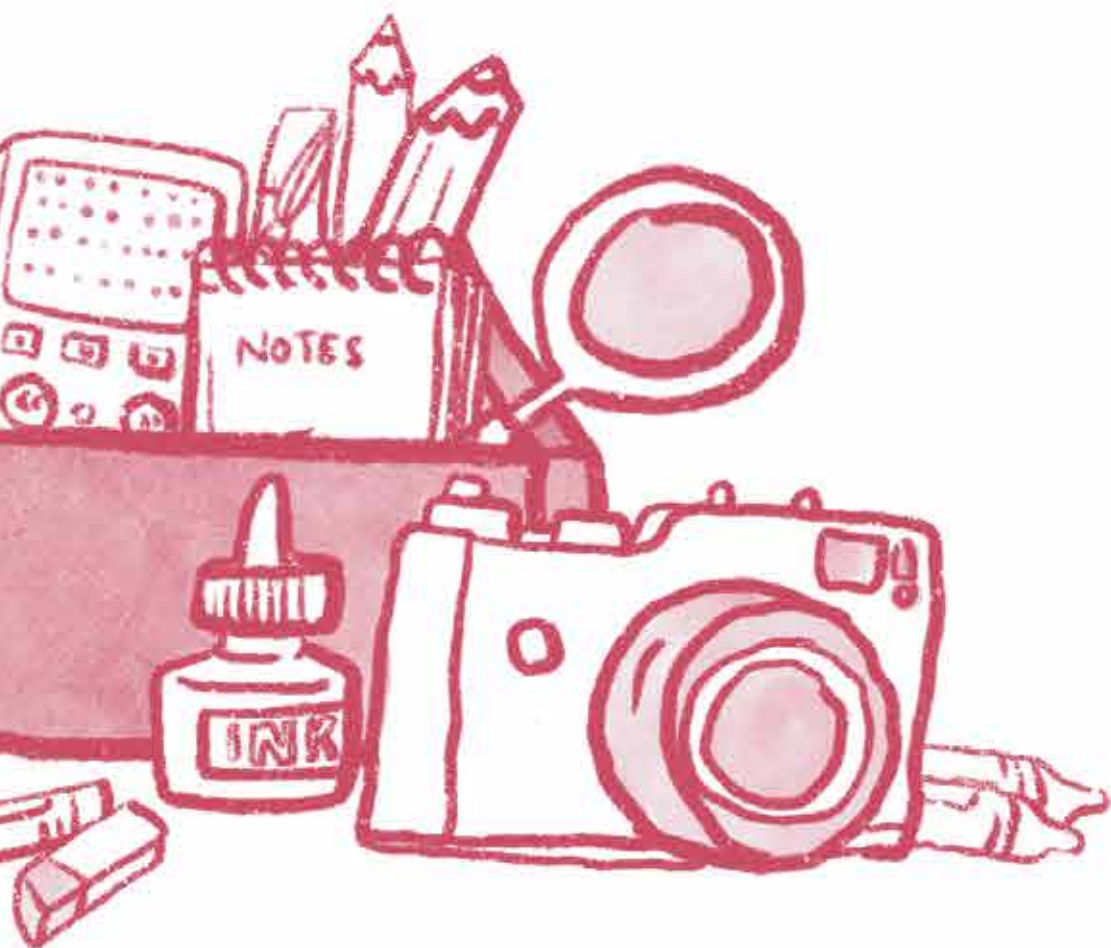
What are non-fiction comics?

Non-fiction comics, also known as graphic non-fiction or graphic journalism, are a genre of comic books or graphic novels and comics that depict real-life events, people, places and ideas. Unlike fiction comics which tell fictional stories, non-fiction comics are based on factual information and aim to inform, educate or advocate for a particular viewpoint. They often combine visual elements such as illustrations, panels and speech bubbles with text to convey information in an engaging and accessible format.

Why non-fiction comics?

Non-fiction comics are valuable because they're accessible, engaging, and memorable. They make complex topics understandable, capture attention with visual storytelling, and enhance retention. They also offer a creative way to explore diverse subjects, break down barriers to learning, and have a significant cultural impact by raising awareness and amplifying voices.

These make for intersting reading and are great tool in classrooms with students as well.

Genres, themes and types

Non-fiction comics span over a diverse array of disciplines and multitude of subjects, employing visual storytelling and factual content/narratives to effectively convey and consume information.

These include genres like mental health, journalism, autobiographies, memoirs, education, sciences, history, environment, politics, geographies, anthropology, medicine, mathematics and more indicating the versatility of non-fiction comics . This medium excels in making information and narratives more accessible across a wide range of subjects.

Non-fiction comics come in various shapes and sizes - anthology, zine, single issue, digital comics, digital first, limited/mini series, webcomic or variant cover, floppies, annual, maxi-series, one-shot, ashcan and collected editions (digest, omnibus, trade paperback, hardcover (HC), original graphic novel (ogn) and graphic novel)

Getting started

Creating a nonfiction comic involves a combining narratives, sequential imaging and factual accuracy. The following steps will help you to start laying the groundwork for a non-fiction comic and publishing:

Start by choosing a topic :
Select a subject that is interesting to you. It could be a historical event, a biography, a scientific discovery, a research paper, an arguement or critique of a paper or article, a personal experience or something you may have witnessed that you might find worth telling.

Define your intent in creating a comic:
Clearly articulate the message or theme you want to convey through your non-fiction comic. Whether it's shedding light on a historical event, defining a research point, creating dialogue, exploring cultural nuances, or addressing social issues, having a defined message will guide your storytelling.

Research and document thoroughly:
Gather information from reliable sources. This may include books, articles, documentaries, interviews, and or even your own memory. Ensure that the information is accurate and up-to-date. Document and archive not just textually but also for visual references through photographs, audio, doodles, video and so forth. Additionally, before you delve in do do some market research. Are there works similar to what you are proposing? Can you do something new or differently?

Figure out your narrative structure:
Decide on the structure of your comic, what chronological order it might follow, use flashbacks, or focus on specific themes? What will your narrative point of view be? Plan the pacing and layout of your pages to maintain a smooth flow.

Keep in mind while researching and writing to think visually as well!

Script writing:
Write a script that combines your research findings, message, and character development. Outline the dialogue, captions, sound effects, transitions and pace, and panel descriptions. Clearly indicate the visual elements for each panel (if you can), including characters' expressions, actions, and background details. The script serves as a backbone guiding you in writing and illustrating. Avoid using all your research, and prioritise what is best suited to tell your story.

It is more practical writing the script before the artwork begins.

Character Development:
Identify key figures to your narrative, document them, draw them doodle photograph them. Whether real individuals or symbolic figures, these characters add depth and relatability to your comic.
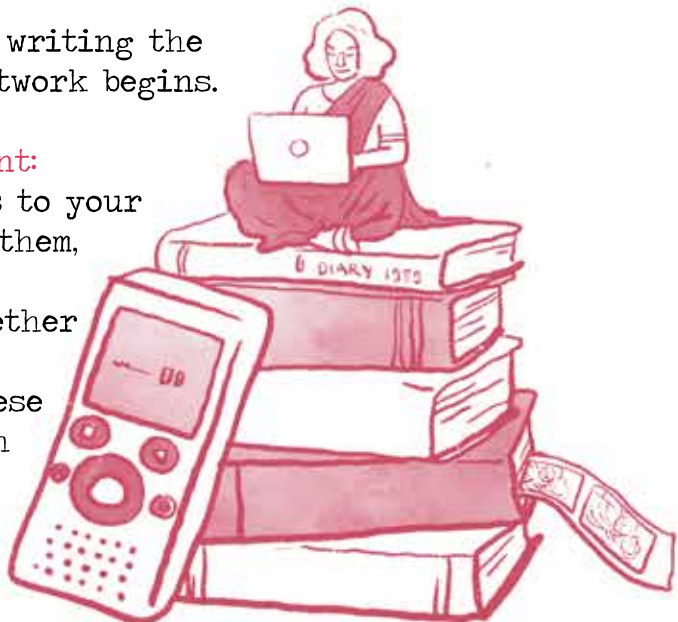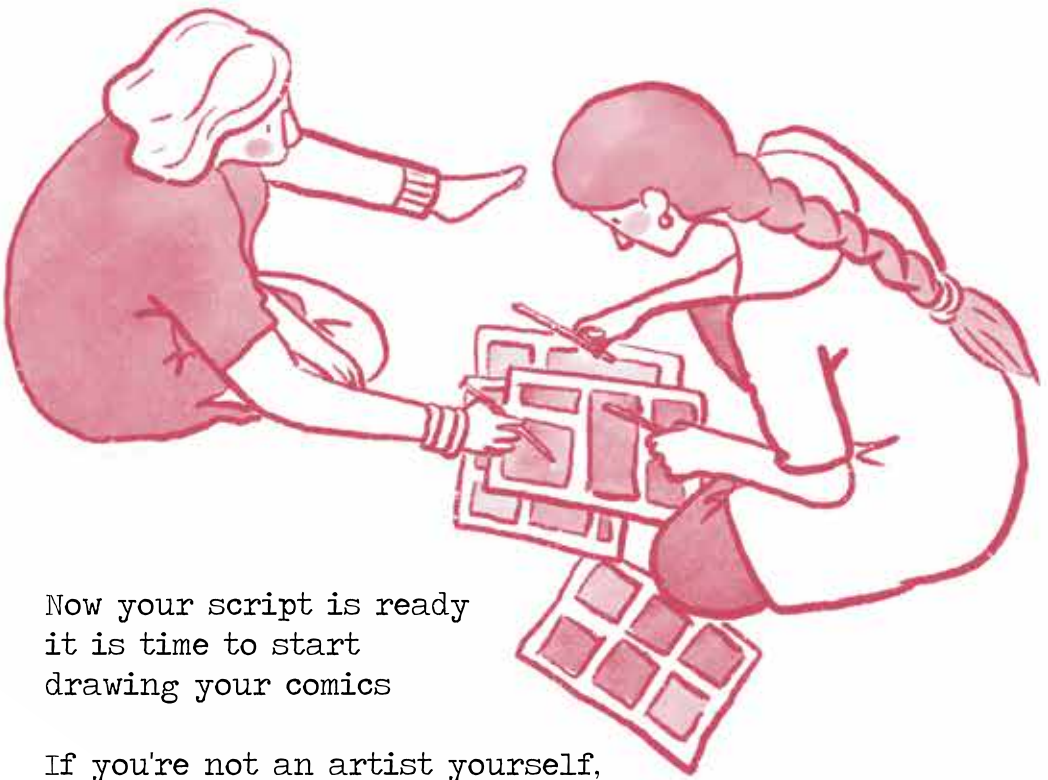
Now your script is ready
it is time to start
drawing your comics

If you're not an artist yourself,
don't be shy to collaborate with
a skilled artist. Provide them with the script and
discuss the visual style, tone, and overall aesthetic
you envision for the comic.

Thumbnails and storyboarding:
Plan the visual sequence of your comic through a
series of thumbnails and storyboarding. Create rough
sketches, outlining the layout and flow of each page,
ensuring a logical progression and transition of
events or ideas.

Incorporate visual elements:
Incorporate visuals that complement the narrative.
Include accurate representations of characters,
settings, and historical details. Utilize visual
metaphors, symbolism, and other artistic elements to
enhance the storytelling. It does not mean that you
need to limit your creativity on it.

Character design:
Like character development, you illustrate your character, create character sketches in different poses and perspectives. It does not necessarily need to be rendered realistically, it can encompass any number of styles, and can add to the text.

Balancing Text and Images:
Find the right balance between text and images. Avoid overwhelming the reader with too much information in one panel. Ensure that the visuals enhance the narrative and provide additional context.

Visual Style:
Determine the visual style that best suits your narrative. Consider the tone of your story and the emotions you want to evoke, then collaborate with your illustrator to bring these elements to life through the artwork.

Editing and Fact-Checking:

Review the comic script and visuals for accuracy and flow.

Feedback and Revisions:

Seek feedback from others, like friends or professional peers, along with those unfamiliar with the topic or your potential/target reader pool. Use their input to make revisions and improvements to both the script and visuals.

Lettering and Formatting/Layouting:

Choose a readable font for lettering. Place captions and dialogue balloons strategically to guide the reader's progression through the comic. Ensure that the layout is consistent and enhances the overall aesthetic.

Don't forget to mention, credit and thank the everyone who helped you on your journey!

ALMOST FINISHED

●●●

Getting Published

Publish and Share:

Once you are satisfied with the comic, consider publishing and sharing your nonfiction comic through platforms such as webcomics, self-publishing, or traditional publishing avenues.

Pick your format - single issue, graphic novel, digest, omnibus, zine, webcomic, anthology or other.

Approaching a publisher (esp for books or anthologies):

Some writers approach publishers in advance, some do it after the work is done. Here is a tip on one of the best ways to do so.

1. provide a brief or abstract of the comic, and/or each chapter.
2. add character sketches and studies
3. add at least 2 to 4 sample pages or an illustrated chapter (if it is a whole book).
4. Add a brief cover letter introducing yourself and your creative and/or research partners, as well as a short intro to your work.
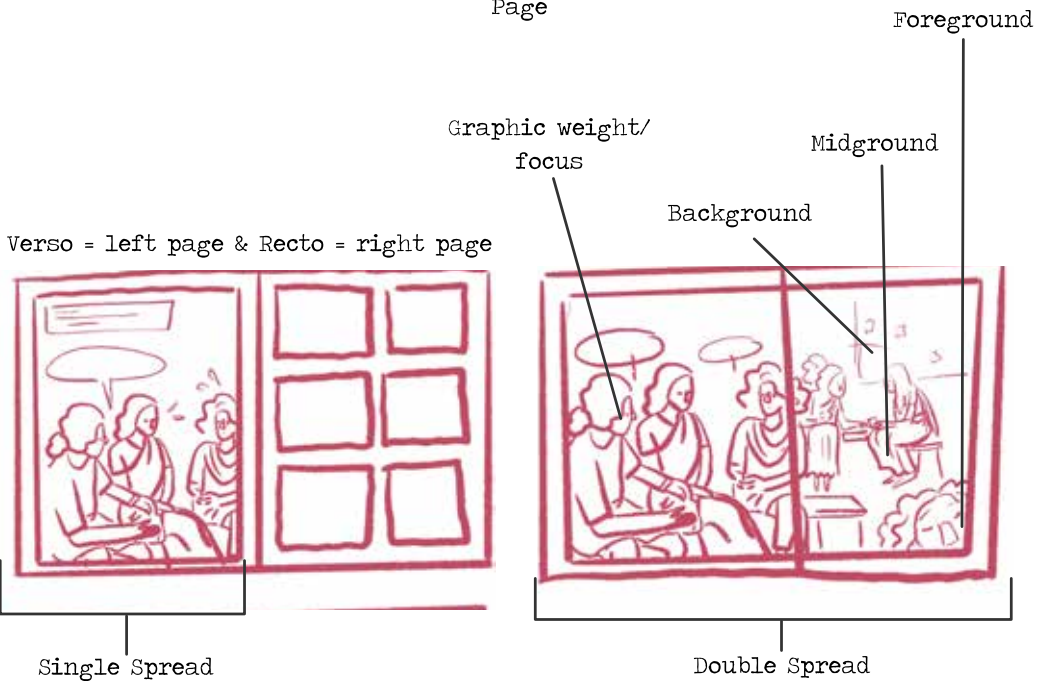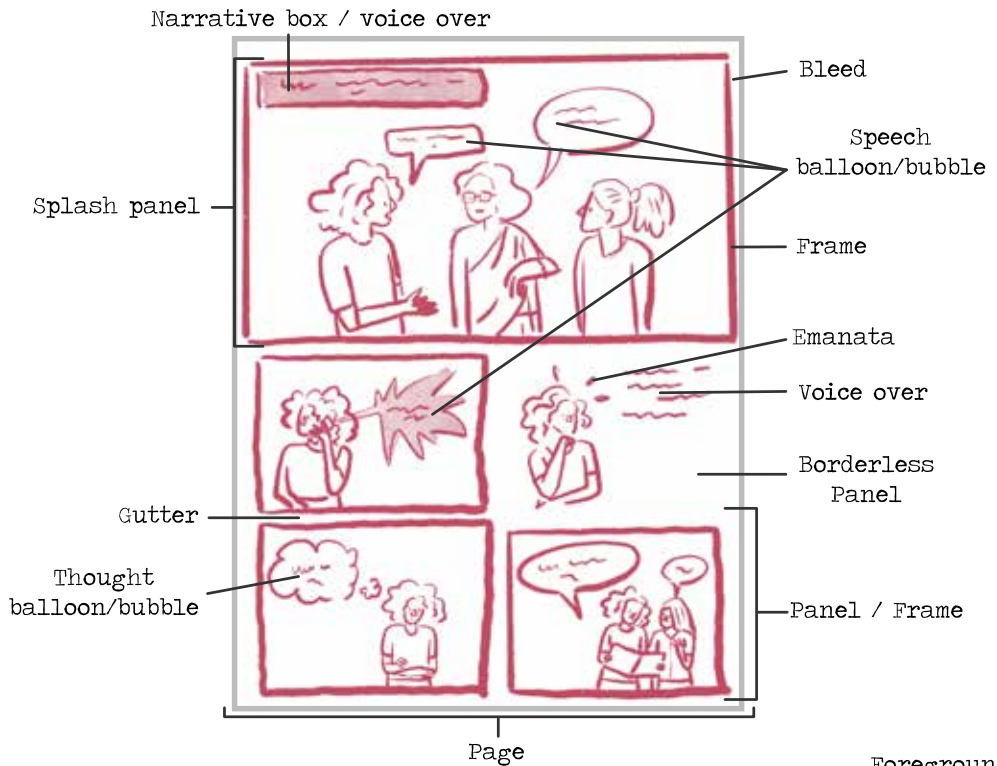
It is good and ethical practice to share credits if it is writer and artist team.

Remember, the key to a successful nonfiction comic is a harmonious blend of accurate information, compelling storytelling, and visually engaging artwork..

Page anatomy & terminology

Narrative box / voice over

Bleed

Speech balloon/bubble

Splash panel

Frame

Emanata

Voice over

Borderless Panel

Gutter

Thought balloon/bubble

Panel / Frame

Page

Foreground

Graphic weight/ focus

Midground

Background

Verso = left page & Recto = right page

Single Spread

Double Spread

Try these for practice

Here's a straightforward exercise to create a comic,
beginning with just three panels. Grab basic tools
like pen and paper, or explore creative mediums such
as digital or collage.
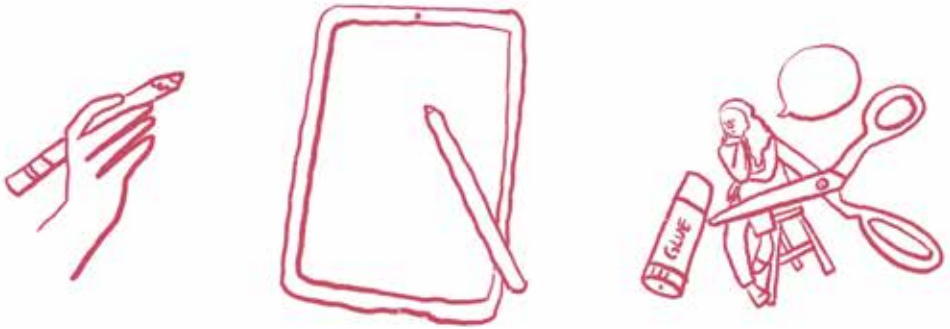
1. Choose a word that captures the essence of your
story.
2. Sketch some doodles inspired by that word.
3. Select the most impactful image from your doodles.
4. Envision a scene that encapsulates that chosen
moment.
5. Illustrate that scene using your preferred
materials.
6. Once complete, consider what transpired before the
depicted scene and create a panel to the left.
7. Reflect on what follows that initial scene; craft a
panel to the right.

Congratulations! You now have a three-panel comic.

Feel free to extend the story or practice with
additional panels. This storytelling starter draws
inspiration from the techniques of Lynda Barry and
Ivan Brunetti.

सोशलसाइन्सबहाः
SOCIAL SCIENCE BAHA

VIRANGANA
COMICS