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## Art teacher draws her way to comic MA

236-page thesis a first of its kind, SFU says

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**When it comes to prioritizing doing schoolwork over poring through comic books, a North Vancouver teacher has skillfully demonstrated it's a choice one doesn't necessarily have to make.**

Carson Graham Secondary visual arts teacher Meghan Parker recently drew her way to a master's degree from Simon Fraser University after submitting a 236-page thesis in comic-book form.

She says her eureka moment arrived over the course of her master's degree in education when she realized she'd rather be showing readers the power of art, and arts education, than writing about it.

"Why is it that I'm typing about art instead of making art about art?" she tells the North Shore News. "We're talking about the importance of living artfully, and why the arts are important, and so it just



North Vancouver resident and visual arts teacher Meghan Parker shows off the 236-page comic book thesis she recently defended, earning her a master's degree in education from Simon Fraser University. PHOTO MIKE WAKEFIELD

seemed like the form made a lot of sense."

Parker's thesis is an autobiographical comic that explores her personal reflections and experiences as a

relatively new teacher in the public school system.

Her long-term project makes her the first person in Canada to submit a thesis of an autobiographical nature in

comic form, according to SFU.

"I'd never made a comic before this and I began researching and realizing its potential for storytelling and reflection and for research and

for all sorts of things," Parker, who has taught at Carson for four years, explains. "It then became my medium and I did the rest of my whole master's degree responding ... in a

comic form."

Under direction from Lynn Fels, an associate professor at SFU who had students in her class respond with a weekly reflection assignment, Parker would eventually start submitting her assignments using her own images with quotes or bits of texts embedded from the course material. Over time it dawned on Parker, with encouragement from Fels and another instructor, that she should turn her comic reflections into a full-fledged thesis project.

"I always knew that graphic novels presented amazing artwork, but it wasn't something I sought out necessarily. In my master's and my research, I kind of came to find and understand there's a whole movement right now going on of people making really smart and powerful and meaningful comics," she says.

While the thesis deals with a number of topics in comic form – an educator in the midst of developing her artistic self, developing one's teaching methodology, and more – one of the main parts explores how arts education is important.

By essentially making art in the form of a comic in order to explore the importance of art more broadly, the thesis

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# Comic form shows diversity of learning

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attempts to show how there's a broad spectrum of ways to learn, Parker explains.

"We have all sorts of different, diverse types of learners that communicate their knowledge in all sorts of different ways, and to be open to letting them figure out what their voices, or their artistic voice, or what their form might be, I

think is really powerful," she says.

The entire thesis, including the text of the main body, is written and drawn by hand, she explains.

Since defending her thesis, Parker has been awarded the 2017 Arts Researchers Teachers Graduate Research Award, according to a release from SFU.

Doing her thesis in comic

form allowed Parker to further explore ideas that are not always easily expressed in words, she says, adding that creating art in general can give students and people of all ages an opportunity to do this.

"I think I see the learners like me in my classroom that don't always fit the conventional mould of academia and I hope they could find a place there too," she says.