



# UNDERSTANDING 'PHALLAINA' – B1

## I. About this lesson

**Activity title:** Understanding 'Phallaina' by Marietta Ren

**Level:** B1

**Recommended Age:** 15+ (metaphorical and introspective story)

**Subject:** English as a foreign language

**Timing:** 50 minutes

**Resources:** One mobile device per student, worksheet.

**Learning objectives:**

- a. Improving independent reading skills
- b. Reviewing vocabulary about personality and character

**Material needed:** One mobile device per student to install the free Phallaina app to read the graphic novel (available on [Google Play](#) and the [App Store](#)).



## II. Lesson scenario

### 1. Instruction for the teacher

#### Preparation to do before the lesson

Two weeks before the lesson, ask your students to download the free app Phallaina. It is accessible and available on [Google Play](#) and the [App Store](#).

You can share this story pitch with them to help them dive into reading:

#### About this graphic novel:

Phallaina tells the story of Audrey, a young woman who suffers from hallucinatory attacks during which she sees whales. Chloe, a researcher in neurology, tests her and finds that she possesses what she calls 'a physeter', a strange element in her brain that allows its wearers to remain in apnea for a long time. Audrey decides to participate in Chloe's experiments to discover if this physeter is linked to her seizures, and she realises that she might be part of an ancient species linking humans and whales...

Phallaina is a horizontal scrolling strip digital graphic novel to read on mobile devices. There are also background music and sound effects to enrich the reading experience. It was first presented as a 115 meter long fresco you could walk by in Angouleme, the comics capital of France.

Ask your students to read the whole graphic novel: remind them not to stop at each word or scene they do not understand but try to progress through the story as it might help them understand them better. The approximate reading time should be



between an hour and a half to two hours. Some students might be confused with the moving image elements, so advise them not to scroll too fast.

Encourage your students to do the following as they read:

- Take screenshots of moments you found interesting,
- Take screenshots of the things you did not understand,
- Write down vocabulary or sentences they do not understand.

## Introduction

Start the lesson with a short “Check IN” by telling students:

- a. Today, we will study ‘Phallaina’ by Marietta Ren.
- b. For the preparation, I asked you to read the graphic novel, take screenshots, and write down what you did not understand.
- c. Here is the plan for today’s lesson:
  - First, we will complete a true/false exercise about the graphic novel in small groups, which we will correct together.
  - Then, we still study vocabulary to describe someone’s personality and character and complete one exercise about it, which we will correct.
  - Finally, we will discuss what you understood from the story and what you may have found difficult to understand.

## Step 1: True or False exercise (10 min)

- a. Put students in pairs and ask them to complete the true or false exercise.
- b. Then, ask students what they answered and why.
- c. Finally, provide the correct answers and give the context listed below to your students. Make sure to explain any points, in terms of vocabulary or story,



that they would not understand. If you plan to do another lesson on Phallaina, you can ask your students to read specific moments of the story again so they understand it better.

### Answers to exercise 1:

1. True, that's the basis of the story!
2. False; he is in a relationship with Chloe.
3. False: the physeter as the element of a brain is an invention to write this story. In our world, the Physeter is a category of whale species.
4. False: Audrey takes part in scientific studies as a subject, but she is a translator.
5. False: Chloe's father fought the theory of whale people.
6. False: She often doubts herself, and she struggles to keep up with her translating jobs, the latest of which come from one of her friends.
7. True: Although there are moments when the scientists disagree, they are friendly to Audrey and to the others characters as well.

### Step 2: Vocabulary about personality (30 minutes)

- a. Go over the list of vocabulary with your students, and make sure they all understand it. Ask them if they know other words to describe someone's personality or if there are any words (even if they are not on the list) that they do not understand.
- b. Then, put your students in pairs and ask them to complete the exercise. Correct it with the class and make sure the most important words are well understood. When correcting, ask your students to read the comic panels aloud and 'play' the different characters.



- c. Finally, ask your students to complete exercise 3 independently or in pairs. When correcting, focus on the proper use of vocabulary rather than on proper spelling in the rest of the sentence.
- d. If there are a lot of mistakes in your students' sentences, you can ask them to correct them for the next class as homework.

### Answers to exercise 2:

- Panel 1: wise, cheerful
- Panel 2: hopeful, honest
- Panel 3: crazy, confused

### Step 3: Open up the discussion (10 minutes)

- a. Open up the discussion by asking students what they think about the graphic novel. Have they ever read motion comics? What did they feel about having sound effects while reading?
- b. In addition, you can ask your students if there are any points of the story that they did not understand. See if the rest of the class can explain the story: if your students generally do not understand the story, especially the end, it might be good to ask them to read again and spend another class to finish studying the story.
- c. If you plan to organise other classes on Phallaina, ask your students to make sure they have read the whole story for the next class. You could also ask them to focus on specific parts that you would like to work on next. Leave at least one week between the 2 classes to give time for your students to read.



## 2. Worksheet for the student

### INTRODUCTION: PRESENTATION OF PHALLAINA

**Title:** Phallaina

**Type of comic:** Graphic novel and motion comic

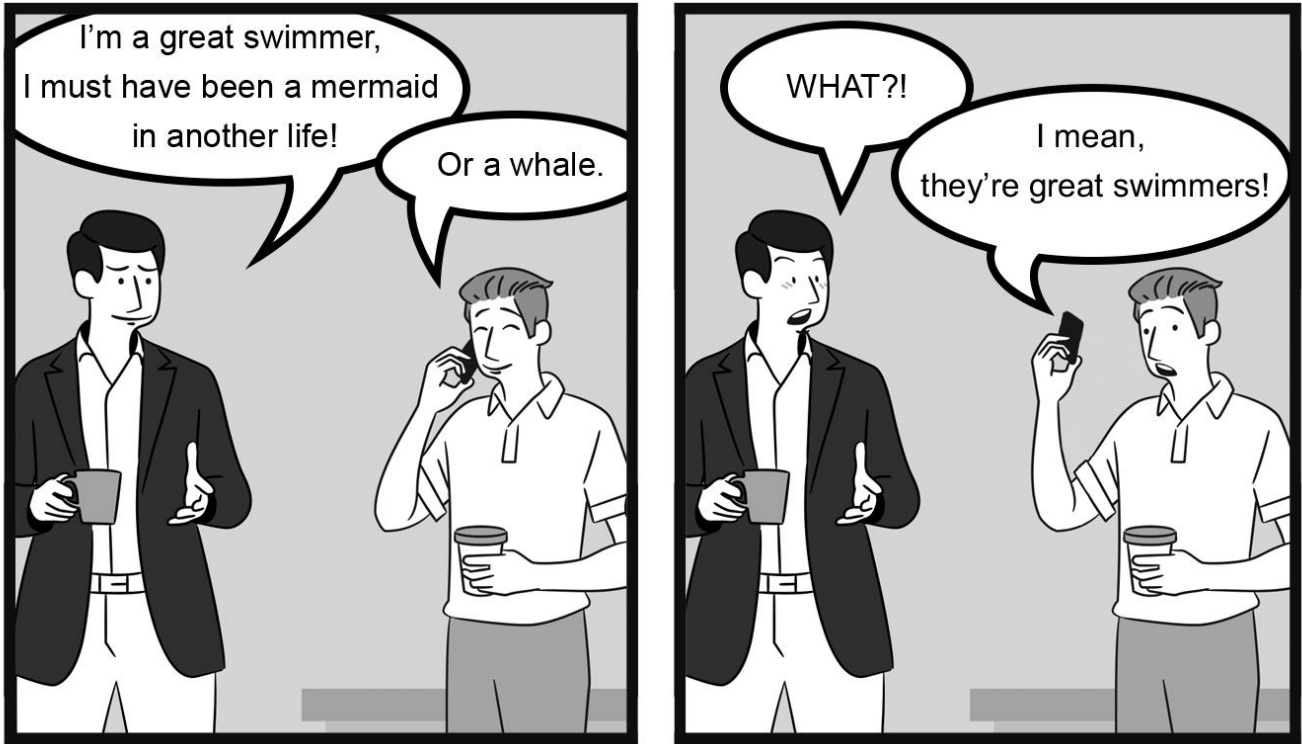
**Authors:** Marietta Ren is a French illustrator who has worked in the comics and animation industries. You can see examples of her work at:

<https://mariettaren.com/abouta-propos/>

**Summary:** Phallaina tells the story of Audrey, a young woman who suffers from hallucinatory attacks during which she sees whales. Chloe, a researcher in neurology, tests her and finds that she possesses what she calls 'a physeter', a strange element in her brain that allows its wearers to hold their breath underwater for a long time. Audrey decides to participate in Chloe's experiments to discover if this physeter is linked to her seizures, and she realises that she might be part of an ancient species linking humans and whales...

**Link to the comic:** Download for free on [Google Play](#) or the [App Store](#).

## STEP 1: UNDERSTANDING THE STORY



**EXERCISE 1: Write 'TRUE' or 'FALSE' to indicate whether the following statements are true or false.**

1. Audrey can hold her breath for much longer than ordinary people.

True or False? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Ulysse is in love with Audrey.

True or False? \_\_\_\_\_

3. The physeter is a natural part of the human brain present among some people.

True or False? \_\_\_\_\_



4. Audrey is a scientist.

True or False? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Audrey's father was one of the leading scientists fighting against the theory that whale people existed.

True or False? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Audrey is a confident woman who has a successful career.

True or False? \_\_\_\_\_

7. The scientist team working with Audrey are friendly to her.

True or False? \_\_\_\_\_





## STEP 2: VOCABULARY ABOUT PERSONALITY

Word	Definition	Example
Anxious	Not relaxed	I run slowly, I'm anxious about our athletics class this afternoon.
Brave	Showing no fear in front of dangerous or difficult situations	Firefighters are brave. They put their lives at risk to save others.
Brilliant	Very intelligent	She is a brilliant woman! Can you believe she's been to space?
Cheerful	Happy and positive	Manu's fiancé is very kind and cheerful. He smiles all the time.
Confused	Unable to think clearly or to understand something	Elena is confused because she doesn't know if she wants to become an astronaut or a baker.
Crazy	Mad, or not mentally sound, or out of the ordinary	Having so much work to do makes me crazy!
Delighted	Very pleased	Maria's grandparents are delighted to see her, as they haven't in a long time.
Easygoing	Usually relaxed and calm, not worried or upset	Marta's landlord is easygoing. She let her paint the walls red!
Honest	Sincere and telling the truth	Everybody lies once in a while, no one is 100% honest.



Hopeful	Feeling positive about a future event or situation	The CEO was hopeful to see his employees close the deal with their clients.
Lively	Full of energy and interest, energetic	These children are very lively! They keep running from the garden to the house.
Nervous	Feeling frightened or worried about something	John is very nervous about his job interview tomorrow. He keeps repeating his answers.
Patient	Able to remain calm when waiting for a long time or when dealing with problems or difficult people	George is very patient with his grandchildren.
Peaceful	Quiet and calm, not agitated	Sitting by the lake makes me feel peaceful.
Reliable	Can be trusted or believed	Evan is not reliable! He keeps saying that he will come with us, but we never see him.
Scared	Feeling afraid when you think something bad and/or unpleasant is going to happen to you.	Max is scared of spiders. You should see him running away when he sees one!
Shy	Not confident, especially about meeting or talking to new people	Edward was too shy to ask Jill to dance with him, but he really wanted to.

Wise	Having knowledge or experience, showing good judgement	My piano teacher is wise but he knows so much it's sometimes difficult to understand everything he says!
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**EXERCISE 2: Write the word best describing the personality or mood of each character in the panels below.**

**1) Panel 1**



The grandmother is \_\_\_\_\_.

The granddaughter is \_\_\_\_\_.

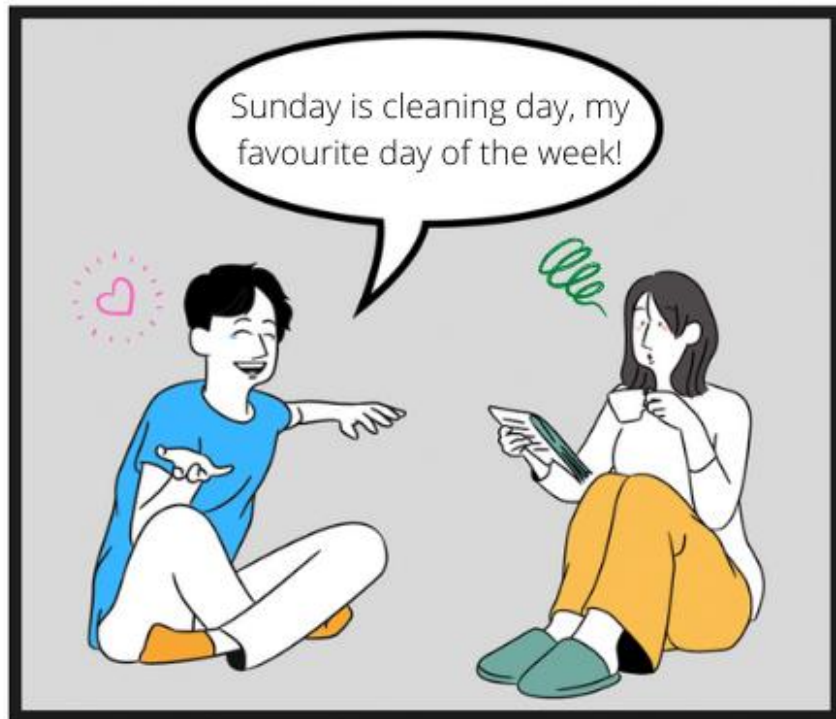
## 2) Panel 2



The grandmother is \_\_\_\_\_.

The granddaughter is \_\_\_\_\_.

### 3) Panel 3



The man is \_\_\_\_\_.

The woman is \_\_\_\_\_.

### EXERCISE 3: Writing exercise

Write 5 sentences about the characters' personalities in Phallaina. You can describe scenes that take place in the comic to do so.

**Example:** Audrey is anxious around her friends: she has been avoiding them and prefers to spend time taking part in the experiments.



### III. Modification and differentiation ideas

- a. You could spend another 2 other classes studying the whole graphic novel in detail and making sure students understand it thoroughly. Activities could be related to presenting the different characters, giving explanations, or debating the book's themes.
  
- b. Reading and exploring Phallaina could be an interesting cross-curricular project to complete with an Ancient Greek or Arts teacher to explore all the mythology-inspired references and graphic choices (which are briefly described in the following article: <https://pipedreamcomics.co.uk/digital-comics-round-up-dark-pulsar-and-phallaina/>).