TEACHING READING "OUTSIDE THE BOX":

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL IN THE SECONDARY CLASSROOM

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Andrea Vecchione

Drew University

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ABSTRACT

Teaching Reading "Outside the Box":
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Doctors of Letters Dissertation by

Andrea Vecchione

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Teaching Reading "Outside the Box": The Graphic Novel in the Secondary

Classroom presents the history and evolution of the graphic novel and explains how the

various features of a graphic novel innately strengthen the critical reading, writing and

thinking skills of its readers, especially that of struggling and remedial students. This

dissertation studies the benefits of incorporating the graphic novel in the secondary

classroom to promote engagement, as well as to fulfill the requirements set out by the

Common Core State Standards. Recent reading comprehension strategies and exercises

are explored and connected to the reading that is required of graphic novels. Case studies

on how graphic novels were used in the classroom to strengthen reading comprehension

were examined, and multiple interviews were conducted to further research the presence,

strategies and challenges of using a graphic novel in the classroom, as well as to evaluate

the level of engagement and acceptance by the student reader and teacher.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to the woman who taught me what real challenges and real strength looks like: "My mother is a never ending song in my heart of comfort, happiness and being. I may sometimes forget the words but I always remember the time" (Graycie Harman).

I dedicate my dissertation to my family and friends who supported and encouraged my absence for three years, especially Ariana Grace and Stella Jo. I especially dedicate this dissertation to my father, who was once overheard saying that he hopes I will never lose my "fire": This project is proof that day will never come. I dedicate my dissertation to my students, whose curious eyes and questions encouraged me to complete this project with pride. I dedicate my dissertation to my committee, Dr. Sloane Drayson-Knigge and Professor Mary Brancaccio who have patiently and eagerly offered their time, encouragement and expertise.

I dedicate my dissertation to my husband, who has washed too many dishes and folded too many clothes. Your work ethic, your talent, your success has inspired me throughout this process and, surely, will continue to inspire me daily. I hope we always continue to chase cars.

Mostly, I dedicate my dissertation to my gem, Juliana. Having you by my side has driven me daily. I have loved you for a thousand years. And I'll love you for a thousand more.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For the last nine years I have been fortunate enough to teach hundreds of students and learn about their needs as learners and young adults. With each passing school year I have recognized that my students' needs continue to change. I spend endless hours researching new teaching strategies and current trends in education in an attempt to prepare for the upcoming school year and continue to create a list of engaging activities and lesson plans, yet I am amazed when I return to my classroom in September to realize just how different my students are as learners than I was when I was in their student seats nearly fifteen years ago. My constant struggle to quickly adapt to their needs signifies the commitment that I promised to maintain throughout my career as a high school English teacher. I feel I must always grow as an educator to properly attend to their individual needs as students and create lessons and activities that are not only engaging but that also model the fast-paced and visually rich world that they live in.

Over the past decade, Americans have evolved technically. We live a very different lifestyle than was lived just ten years ago. As human beings, we are constantly tuned in. Cell phones with unlimited internet access allow carriers to constantly stay connected. Information can be achieved with a simple click of a button. The world's news is always available and immediately updated. Photographs and images flash across multiple social media websites to document what users are doing at that exact moment. These photographs and images rarely contain captions longer than a mere sentence or two. We are expected to quickly connect these photographs and images to their short

captions to create our own interpretation of the story at hand. Our news is often delivered graphically, visually and very quickly.

We are no longer mere spectators of the media's news. We now have a voice, which can be heard through the various social media sites, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or any online blog. We can now contribute to the stories that are developing as we read about them or view them on our computers or television screens. As workers, unlimited access to internet mail requires us to respond immediately, and although most of us may value the interpersonal means of communication, such as telephone conversation and face-to-face meetings, new technological tools have simply created a new, more efficient method of delivery—a delivery that is fast, focused and visually powerful.

Our students' personal lives are fueled by the graphics they encounter. They are constantly tuned in and connected. They also obtain their information graphically, visually and quickly. They desire close connections with technological tools. They use their cell phones and computers to respond to the world around them. Although the Common Core Standards are updated every five years, most high school classrooms still value traditional educational methods of delivery and are only beginning to explore the idea of using technological aids and more graphic texts in the classroom instead of using them solely as recreational or companion texts. Literature that has been read and studied for years is still the primary focus in most high school Language Arts classes instead of more contemporary forms of literature. The Common Core State Standards are designed to serve as a guideline for districts around the state. They have been created by a team of educators and researchers with the sole purpose of effectively preparing students for their

future by giving them an enriched education. The Common Core State Standards mandate that students continue to be exposed to more of the canonical texts, such as Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and many of William Shakespeare's plays. They also mandate that students read and analyze these texts to establish a meaningful academic relationship with literature by studying the theme, character and plot development, figurative language and style of each traditional text. The Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of analyzing an author's style and diction. The goals of The Common Core State Standards recognize the connection between reading and writing. All New Jersey high school students are expected to collaborate and converse with their peers about a number of subjects, including topics about or provoked by literature.

As educators, we find ourselves struggling to bridge the works of the past to our students of the present. Although I understand the benefits of exposing students to the reading of traditional texts, it is still necessary to use all current technological resources as educational tools to efficiently teach the fundamentals of English. Since our students are accustomed to obtaining information quickly, since they are accustomed to easily contributing their opinions, since they live a more interactive life full of communication, our classrooms must offer traditional academic information to them in ways that hold their attention and require their insight.

Furthermore, The New Jersey Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of analyzing visuals images and visualizing texts. The graphic novel is specifically referenced as a valuable tool to help readers strengthen their reading

comprehension and critical thinking skills. In the Appendix of the New Jersey Common Core State Standards, graphic novels are mentioned as texts of "high complexity" that require "graphics whose interpretation is essential to understanding the text" because such graphics "provide an independent source of information within a text" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers). It is my premise that teaching graphic novels in high school Language Arts classes can greatly improve the educational experience for both the student and the teacher. The use of the graphic novel as both a reading and writing tool can make a student's classroom experience more interactive and interesting and a teacher's educational instruction more appealing and relatable. Teachers should consider using the graphic novel specifically to increase their students' critical reading, writing and thinking skills. While reading graphic novels, students innately practice the most current reading comprehension-strengthening strategies because of its unique format and arrangement.

Graphic novels are created to provide their audience with a more personal and memorable reading experience. They require readers to become involved in the act of reading the frames, pages and text. Graphic novels allow readers to become a part of the creation of the story. Instead of being a mere spectator, the graphic novel artist and reader establish a relationship by developing each frame of the graphic novel together. Because of this, the graphic novel's presence in high school curricula will provide high school readers a unique type of reading that better suits their interactive needs and lifestyles while requiring the critical reading and thinking skills that the Common Core State Standards require. Graphic novels are effective tools for analyzing visual images and their relationship with the text around them.

Fortunately, the graphic novel has already emerged as a new and exciting genre of literature, though the actual definition of the graphic novel is still often debated. Many scholars believe that the genre contains too many vastly different elements to grant the graphic novel a single definition. The graphic novel contains text and visuals, and can be written as nonfiction or fantasy. Although the definition of the graphic novel is still debated and certainly complex, all graphic novels combine text and images to produce a unique form of literature. Will Eisner and Scott McCloud[1] specifically discuss the difficulties of defining the graphic novel. In order to truly define a graphic novel, McCloud first defines what the graphic novel is *not* in his book, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. According to popular belief, the graphic novel is *not* a mere comic book filled with "crude, poorly drawn, semiliterate, cheap, disposable kiddie fare" (3). It took years for the graphic novel to gain the public acceptance it now experiences.

McCloud draws and places himself in an infinity of drawn stars, "a proper definition, if we could find one, might give lie to the stereotypes and show that the potential of comics is limitless and exciting" (*Understanding Comics* 3). As McCloud continues to define the different aspects of the graphic novel, he provides visual companions to his definition. These visual scenes are exaggerated, making his argument more solid and understandable. McCloud visually shows us the potential of comics as

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[1] Will Eisner and Scott McCloud are both American cartoonists and writers who have published multiple texts introducing, defining, explaining, and assessing both old and new graphic novels in an attempt to make the genre more familiar to new readers and writers. Their work has provided the genre with the exposure that it needed to gain mainstream acceptance. Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels*, and *Reinventing Comics: How Imagination and Technology are Revolutionizing an Art Form*; and Will Eisner's *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative: Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* are major contributors to the development of the graphic novel genre.

being as limitless and exciting as the infinity of stars he now places himself within and is clearly passionate about explaining how valuable the genre of the graphic novel is.

McCloud explains the comic medium as "a vessel which can hold any number of ideas and images" so defining a graphic novel as a mere comic would not give it the proper justice that it deserves (*Understanding Comics* 6). Scott McCloud starts with a term provided by Will Eisner. Eisner uses the term "sequential art" to define the graphic novel. McCloud finds that because "art" is too broad of a word, he needs to add the word "visual" to the definition. To truly understand the comedy behind the difficulties in providing a proper definition, Scott McCloud's cartoon version of himself is now standing in front of a live audience, arguing with the definition to the animated crowd. The newly composed term, "Sequential visual art" is still too broad (*Understanding Comics* 6-7). It too closely resembles the definition of animation and film. Although the graphic novel is quite similar to animation and film in that it also contains sequential images, it does not contain the same type of movement and so its definition needs to therefore be revised yet again. To make his definition a little more specific, McCloud adds the word, "juxtaposed" before "sequential visual art" (8). He quickly adds, subtracts and changes a few words before he finishes his definition of the graphic novel. According to McCloud, the graphic novel is "juxtaposed pictorial and other images (such as words) in deliberate sequence" (9). Although these stylistic tools enable a reader to read the text quickly, they still analyze the visual text as well, thus strengthening their critical reading and thinking skills. McCloud still seems unhappy with this final definition but believes that it is close enough.

The problem with McCloud's definition is that it does not specify the importance of each layer in each frame of a graphic novel. Within a single frame, or moment in a graphic novel, there are multiple elements that each contribute to the comprehension of the story. In order to truly understand the complexities of the graphic novel, one must have the experience of reading a graphic novel. Throughout its history, the graphic narrative has been successfully developed for a variety of purposes dating back as early as the ancient Egyptian tomb paintings, which were completed in the form of hieroglyphics and images.

Elaine Martin, a critic from the University of Alabama, recounts Danny Fingeroth's historical explanation of the graphic novel in the article, "Graphic Novels or Novel Graphics? The Evolution of an Iconoclastic Genre":

> The paintings in ancient Egyptian tombs record events through a combination of sequential drawings and hieroglyphic lettering. . . . A monumental example of sequential art from the Roman period is Trajan's Column, completed in AD 113. Its spiraling carvings tell the story of the emperor Trajan's victory in the Dacian Wars. . . . Similar narrative friezes are found on ancient Greek and Roman temples, as well as early Church buildings. Sequential art can also be seen in medieval tapestries, the most famous of which is the Bayeux Tapestry, recording the Norman invasion of Britain in 1066. (Martin)

McCloud describes the aforementioned Bayeux Tapestry of 1066 and adds that the graphic narrative dates back to 1519 when Cortes discovers a "pre-Columbian picture manuscript" (10) and explains that although the graphic art that the Ancient Egyptians created is read in a "zig-zag" as opposed to the traditional left-to-right reading that we practice, the Ancient Egyptian art still tells multiple nonfictional stories (*Understanding Comics* 12-13).

Since then, the graphic novel has taken on different versions of itself. Published in 1713, William Hogarth created "A Harlot's Progression" and "A Rake's Progress," which were paintings displayed in sequence to tell a story. Similarly, Rodolphe Töpffer created "light satiric picture stories, starting in the mid-1800s" which featured "the first interdependent combination of words and pictures seen in Europe" (*Understanding Comics* 17). By the early 1900s, artists were starting to tell their stories through comic strips and a genre was officially born.

By 1910, a new form of literature was made available. Christopher Lanier, a cartoonist, animator, and writer explains this new form of literature, called "The Woodcut Novel," which earned its name from the texture an artist uses to create the images within their frames of their story, in his article "The Woodcut Novel." The Woodcut Novel was started by the Belgian artist, Frans Masereel, and consisted of "a sequence of images" instead of traditional text on a page (Lanier 15). The Woodcut Novel gained tremendous attention and popularity throughout the world. Lanier writes, "The wordlessness of the form abetted its content, allowing the books to traverse the nationalist boundaries of language and even the boundaries of literacy" (15). Because of the Woodcut Novel's wordless form, readers of various levels and abilities were able to read the text. The visuals the Woodcut Novel also introduced and aided in visual reading comprehension regardless of language or ability. Soon comic narratives became longer in length and popular among a more diverse audience.

James Bucky Carter, an Assistant Professor of English Education at the University of Texas, and author of "Going Graphic" writes, "Comic books, which grew out of the newspaper comic strips that gained popularity in the 1880s and 1890s, have

existed in the United States since the 1920s" (1). In fact, according to Rebecca Zurier, a

Schragies Fellow at Syracuse University and author of "Classy Comics,"

> Most accounts trace the invention of the modern comic strip to the Sunday
> humor sections, which were developed as ammunition in the circulation
> wars waged in the 1890s by the American newspaper tycoons Joseph
> Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. Entertaining characters,
> reappearing each Sunday, ensured that loyal readers would buy the paper
> week after week, providing a steady audience for advertisers. (98)

These Sunday comics were created to approach a new audience of readers and

even attracted people who lacked the ability and/or language to read the newspaper.

Soon after, these Sunday comics were printed and bound into soft-cover comic books that

contained a super hero, a super power, and a likeable plot. Bradford W. Wright, author

of *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* explains that

"comic books first emerged as a distinct entertainment medium in the 1930s. They

communicate through a unique combination of text and sequential illustration that works

within its own aesthetic vocabulary" (xi). The comic book emerged as a separate entity

to the comic strip and developed a loyal audience.

Much like the graphic novels of today, many comic books of the past were

created to address current issues in the world. American comics specifically created

"caricature[s] of Depression-era America, sometimes absurd, always simplistic, yet often

revealing" (Wright 22). Superheroes typically fought the political controversy over the

Depression (27) and New Deal (22) and although "comic books rarely, if ever questioned

the integrity of the federal government or national leaders, local politics [were] a different

matter" (Wright 24). Because these graphic stories were understood by many members

of society, they held the power to tell the stories of the world, both good and bad, to a

large number of people. Remembering that these graphic stories use minimal text, the

images themselves create a particular plot, powerful conflict, mood and purpose, which will be interpreted by the reader. These images alone tell a comprehensive story.

In the forties, the comic book industry was highly influenced by the occurrence of World War II. Not only did the Superhero "fight the battle of American soldiers," but as Wright explains,

> publishers also sought to boost their image by linking their products to patriotism and the war effort. Superman urged readers to give to the American Red Cross. Batman and Robin asked boys and girls to 'keep the American eagle flying' by purchasing war bonds and stamps. Captain America and his sidekick Bucky showed readers how to collect paper and scrap metal. Publishers throughout the industry printed an open letter from Treasure Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr. asking boys and girls to buy saving stamps. (34)

The comic books of the forties became a political voice with an agenda. Comic books were also shipped to soldiers for entertainment and in an effort to keep them motivated and enthusiastic about being America's heroes (Wright 31). Readers of all backgrounds and ages were exploring graphic literature and were learning from its content.

These political issues are also addressed in contemporary graphic novels. Many graphic novels have been created to address the event and aftermath of the world's most tragic and memorable events, including the Holocaust, the 1960's rebellion, the bombing of Hiroshima, and 9/11. Political issues were not the only subject to be addressed through the comic books. Examining comic books from the forties to the graphic novels of the present day can also provide insight into gender and racial issues, class differences, and memoirs of triumph and defeat.

The trend in graphic storytelling is the use of the graphic novel to relay tragic stories and personal tales of triumph. Art Spiegelman, an accomplished graphic artist

known for the advancements that he has made in the graphic novel world, has written about the event and tragedy of 9/11 in his graphic novel, *In the Shadow of No Towers* in an attempt to share his point of view of what happened during such a crisis. This is not the first time Spiegelman chose a graphic novel to tell a personal story of trauma. Years preceding *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Spiegelman wanted to document the horrific experience endured by his father during the Holocaust in his most famous work, *Maus*. *Maus* received much criticism and praise[2]. In 1992 Spiegelman's *Maus* was awarded a Pulitzer Prize, which helped to legitimize and bring serious attention to the graphic novel. Spiegelman' graphic novel is an excellent example of the stylistic techniques an author uses to create a reading that is interactive. It inspired future graphic artists. Spiegelman's audience reads *Maus* and discovers both Spiegelman's relationship with his father and the graphic tale of his father surviving the concentration camp. He breaks the traditional frame of the narrative by having his narrator, his mouse-self, speak directly to the audience at times, thus provoking engagement. He offers personal graphic expressions, which offer his readers an inside connection to how he is truly feeling and what he is truly thinking.

Regardless of its content, the graphic novel contains a number of fundamental elements that intrigue its readers. These fundamental elements enable a reader to become an active participant in the reading. This connectivity promotes engagement and strengthens comprehension. Much like film, the graphic novel connects with its readers on a visual level. Unlike film, however, the graphic novel requires the reader to

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[2] Speculation regarding the placement of *Maus* began upon publication. Since the story's characters are allegorical, many critics believed this graphic novel should be considered fiction. But because *Maus* tells the tale of Spiegelman's father surviving the Holocaust, many critics believed it should be considered a nonfiction piece.

actively read and analyze each frame of the story, specifically each frame's text and pictures. While watching films, the audience has a tendency to passively allow the camera to transport them into a different world, hearing the sounds of the scenes and seeing only what the camera shows. Comics require the audience to participate more in building comprehension of the story (Eisner 71). While reading a graphic novel, the audience is expected to move through the frames on their own instead of having a camera take them on the journey. They are expected to aid in the development of the story instead of being a mere spectator to it. The audience is required to imagine the sounds that they hear on the page, and they are even expected to imagine the action that they don't see or hear in each frame. They are no longer a spectator of the story. The graphic novel reader is part of the creation team. The story that they are experiencing is therefore more memorable and valuable to them.

Although the graphic novel is told in a series of frames that model a traditional time line, a truly talented graphic novel artist can create a story that transports the reader through a number of settings, stories, and flashbacks. In the creation of comics, a graphic artist is "not working with real time or motion, so he is not restricted in any way by the reality of his images" like a filmmaker is (Eisner 72). Will Eisner adds, "The comics storyteller is free to invent and distort reality by using caricatures and devised machinery which in reality, could not possible work" (73).

Will Eisner discusses the relationship of comics and film in his book, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative: Principles and Practices from Legendary Cartoonist*:

> There is [one] substantial and underlying difference [between film and comics]. Both deal with words and images. Film buttresses these with sound and the illusion of real motion. Comics must allude to all of this from a platform of static panels. Film employs photography and a

sophisticated technology to transmit realistic images. Again, comics is limited to print. Film purports to provide a real experience, while comics narrates it. These singularities, of course, affect the approaches of the filmmaker and the cartoonist. (71)

McCloud is one of many critics who discuss the tricks and techniques that a graphic artist uses to connect his reader to their work in his books. In *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels,* McCloud specifically explains the literary journey readers experience while reading a graphic novel. The author determines what is important to focus on and connect with. The reader just moves along the page based on where the author leads him (*Making Comics* 3). Based on the size and location of each frame within a page, the reader is subliminally led to read the graphic novel in a very precise pattern. McCloud stresses that a graphic artist makes a "constant stream of choices regarding imagery, pacing, dialogue, composition, gesture and a ton of other options," such as choosing how to frame each scene and how to create movement within each frame and throughout the story (9-10). These choices influence the order in which frames are read and determine which frames are more significant. Certain frame forms create specific reactions and others do not (*Making Comics* 5). Different characters' points of view or their moments of disorientation are also shown graphically within each frame or page and will allow the reader to experience the same emotions as the characters involved in them (*Making Comics* 229). The graphic artist must determine how to crop each frame, specifically focusing on the point of view, balance and tilt of the frame, which affect the importance of the images in it (*Making Comics* 19).

The frames in which a story is told can also dictate the reading of the story. McCloud writes, "Wordless panels can provoke a sense of direct experience and

immediacy which is sometimes best left alone" (134). Larger frames will entice a reader more strongly than smaller frames. Longer frames will be read vertically. Images without boarders will promote a deeper, longer examination. The arrangement of the words and objects within each frame tell a separate story, which contributes to the arrangement of the frames, or panels, within a page. The layout of each page contributes to the meaning of the story.

Another way in which an author creates such a strong connection between his characters and his readers is through character design. Facial expressions, body language and the relationship of their words and actions specifically contribute to who a reader perceives is the protagonist and who the reader perceives is an antagonist (*Making Comics* 4). The reader no longer has a choice in recognizing and deciding which character[s] in the story are significant or secondary, good or bad. Their visual presence is understood. They are easily recognizable. Their facial expressions will contribute to the tone of the text accompanying them.   McCloud says, "But, your choices [as a graphic artist] narrow when you want your comics to provide a specific reaction in readers. That's when certain methods might do the job for you and others won't" (*Making Comics* 5).

These techniques create a visual world in which the reader becomes emotionally and mentally involved in the text. Most reluctant readers are unsure and insecure in their capabilities as readers. These visual clues allow them the certainty they need to comprehend the text and visuals they encounter. It assures them that their comprehension is correct, and enables them to analyze the literature, while looking for a deeper interpretation that the Common Core State Standards suggests can be uncovered.

McCloud believes that one of the best ways in which a graphic artist can have his work connect to his reader is to create characters that "come to life" (3). McCloud believes that there are many ways in which a graphic artist can achieve powerful characterization in his graphic novel. A character in a graphic novel must have a strong personality. McCloud suggests having the characters "write themselves" by creating a background story or inner life for each character (64). He believes that graphic artists should create characters with strong personalities, strong facial expressions and descriptive body language (*Making Comics* 62). These characteristics should be uniform and recognizable throughout the story and, they should be relatable to the reader (78) because even though human beings like variation, "consistency is important for keeping readers in your spell" as a graphic artist (*Making Comics* 78-79). This can be done by creating a unique character trait for each of the story's characters, which can act as a visual reminder for the reader throughout the story (*Making Comics* 71).   This particular style was mastered by Spiegleman in the aforementioned graphic novel, *Maus*.

A character's actions, expressions, and reactions aid in the meaning-making of the graphic novel. McCloud explains, "Symbolic expressions are closer to the written word in the sense that their meaning is fixed regardless of how they're rendered—just as a word means the same thing regardless of handwriting or font choice" (97). In this case, the reader will analyze the character's facial expressions or reactions to determine the appropriate mood established within the frame. Even the posture of the characters creates a sense of emotion, ranking, or significance[3] (*Making Comics* 102-107). McCloud says,

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[3] Scott McCloud thoroughly presents the importance of body language when creating characters in a graphic novel. The stance a character has in a panel can further dictate the emotion that he is expressing. Body language is different than facial expressions. See appendix for examples from Scott McCloud's *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels*.

"It takes time to learn how to portray [body language] in comics, but when done well, body language can fill a page with life, energy and personality from top to bottom" (102).

It is also important for the word bubbles within each frame to showcase the action of the characters or images within it. McCloud writes, "Readers aren't looking directly at your characters' faces as they read their words" (99). Naturally, the reader follows a standard left-to-right, up-to-down reading of a graphic novel (*Making Comics* 32). McCloud declares that "words are a powerful ally in storytelling" (30). The graphic artist's choice of words to accompany such images is also significant. The way in which they present these words into each frame will dictate emotion, significance, and tone to the reader (*Making Comics* 10). Bold, oversized lettering can create a sense of urgency and strong emotion (*Making Comics* 144). McCloud explains, "Some cartoonists use dramatic variations of size and shape to portray vocal inflection on a word-to-word basis" (144). It is also through such lettering that sound effects are suggested (*Making Comics* 129). By reading bold or oversized letters, the reader inflects the words that the creator wanted to emphasize. It establishes the mood and atmosphere of the graphic novel.

Finally, and most importantly, Scott McCloud explains how to create a more interactive graphic novel by breaking what he calls, "the fourth wall" (48). Each frame is made up of four lines that border the action in the scene of each frame. If a character, object, or action spills outside of these four walls, it breaks the barrier between the literary scene and the reader's real life. McCloud writes, "But also because they're no longer fully contained by the panel border [they] can, well...'bleed' into our world" (163). This creates a more interactive reading of the text[4]. When the fourth wall is broken, the

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[4] Much like film, the graphic novel creates a fictional world in which their audience is welcomed and encouraged to enter. If any frame is broken, the reader is reminded that what they are reading is

reader feels more connected or a part of the graphic novel's world. They feel as though the barrier between real life and their cartoon world is blurred.

All of these techniques get the reader to engage in the story that they are reading (McCloud 53). In *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, McCloud introduces the graphic term "gutter" to further explain how reading a graphic novel is an interactive experience, one in which the reader is responsible for incorporating his/her own perspective on the details of the story. To explain this new concept, he shows two frames[5]. One has a monster of a man chasing his subject: a helpless, scared man; the second frame shows the scene of a calm nighttime skyline containing only the graphic word, EEYAA!!" McCloud explains, "See that space between the panels? That's what comics aficionados have named 'the gutter.' And despite its unceremonious title, the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics" (66). There is a story between the two frames that only the reader can infer. McCloud says, "Here in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and *transforms* them into a single idea" (66). This act of determining what action/actions take place within the gutter of the two frames is an activity that the graphic artist created for the reader to fulfill. As in any great medium, literature or film, it is the moments that the reader or viewer is required to actively determine the outcome of a situation, or the conclusion of a story, that promote a deep sense of connection between the reader or viewer of the piece. McCloud writes, "Participation is a powerful force in any medium"

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fictional. It is a reminder that they have entered the fictional world. Much like in film, it is unconventional to break this fourth wall so when and if it is done, it should be done correctly and with the intention of adding effect.

[5] See appendix for Scott McCloud's example of the power of the gutter and the way in which the audience interprets the action in between the frames of the two pictures.

(69). The graphic novel requires more active participation than that of the other visual media, such as television and film. Even though many films are now also creating gutters between scene transitions, the graphic novel always requires the reader to develop his/her own interpretation within and between each frame. This participation creates a more intense and active engagement for the readers. It is one of the many ways in which a graphic artist can get his readers to invest in the reading material.

Like most educators, my tools to strengthen reading comprehension and critical reading, writing, and thinking skills were once limited to using traditional texts. My first encounter with the graphic novel was in a graduate level class at Drew University, instructed by Dr. Sloane Drayson-Knigge. Before the course, "Beyond Words: The Graphic Novel and Representations of the Holocaust," my understanding of the graphic novel was limited, like most uneducated readers of the genre. I was familiar with comic art and pictorial methods of storytelling, but never knew the reaction or experience that the graphic novel could provide. Immediately, as I engaged with graphic novels and texts, I was intrigued. The graphic novels' stories were interesting and well-constructed. The characters within the graphic novel were likeable and well developed. The stories were easy to read and evoked immediate response and reaction. Our classroom discussions were energetic, passionate and plentiful. I knew that this new material needed to be incorporated in my English classes. I knew that if given the experience, my students, particularly in my English classes that schooled reluctant readers, would appreciate the shorter sentence structure, the visual companions, and the critical analysis within each frame. One of the struggles of incorporating graphic novels in high school curricula is that it is still quite an unfamiliar genre to most educators. Is it possible that

teachers already feel the pressures of completing the required work listed in their class curriculum, as it applies to preparing students for the new testing requirements mandated by the state? Will introducing a new genre to their schedule seem daunting? Will teachers feel too inexperienced or untrained to effectively teach reading through graphic novels? Perhaps they will find it especially difficult to find appropriate graphic novels that can be used effectively in their curricula? Another challenge that most educators believe they face while teaching graphic novels is that their students will not be familiar with its format. Will the idea of teaching students how to read graphic novels seem too time-consuming to educators who are already experiencing a strict schedule of material?

Paula Griffith, a teacher and librarian at The University of Houston, responds to some about these common concerns of teaching graphic novels in her article, "Graphic Novels in Secondary Classroom and School Libraries." She writes, "graphic novels provide new learning opportunities for adolescents in both middle school and high school. Many adolescents are already aware of this format, even though the reading of these books requires different skills than novels with prose only" (Griffith). It is not that these students need to be taught the proper way to read a graphic novel. A well-written graphic novel is arranged in a way that is natural to follow, thus promoting the reluctant reader to deeper comprehension. Even if the format is unfamiliar to the student, it can be easily taught. Reluctant or remedial readers will then be able to analyze the many elements of the graphic novel that promote critical reading and thinking. Griffith also states that, "The field of digital illiteracies is revealing a whole new world of literacy that needs further exploration" (Griffith). As educators, we need to address the new skills that our students are required to know. Griffith writes, "Their mission is for students 'to

become full participants in an emergent media landscape and raise understanding about what it means to be literate in a globally interconnected, multicultural world" (Griffith). In a society in which we expect our students to remain current and educated in the graphic world that we live in, the graphic novel is an excellent tool to blend older forms of storytelling with more current graphic trends. The graphic novel enables a student to bear witness to yet another mode of delivery, thus offering another unique point of view on a particular subject.

Because students can naturally follow the graphic sequence in graphic novels, they may respond to their reading in a more engaged and effective manner than when a teacher uses traditional texts. Jeremy Short, a Texas Tech University professor and graphic novel author, and Terrie Reeves, a teacher at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, wrote "The Graphic Novel: A 'Cool' Format for Communicating to Generation Y." They begin their article with a quote by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, authors of *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*, a book about modern culture: "Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication" (414). In my classroom, I struggle to persuade my students to engage with the classical texts we are reading. Some of my students never read a word of the books assigned. Some of my students struggle to understand the printed words on a page. Some of my students complete and understand the reading but are unable to offer any personal insight or show interest. Later, I show them film versions of the texts. During the film version of such movies, I find my students immediately interested in offering their opinion about characterization, setting, dialogue, and the way in which the story was recreated. Perhaps

it is because they are more visual beings, the material is less time consuming, and they seem more invested in visual learning.

While studying a text visually, even the most disinterested student may become engaged and active. This may be one reason why multiple forms of literature are encouraged in the classroom under the Common Core. Short and Reeves believe that because the graphic novel contains a "format [that] allows for the integration of rich metaphor and expression of concepts that are difficult to convey or that otherwise might not maintain the reader's interest through text alone," incorporating the graphic novel into a school's curricula "is in line with the ideas inherent in media richness theory that suggest individuals will have enhanced recall when visual elements are integrated into communication" (Short & Reeves 3). Laura Hudson, Senior Editor at the Comic Foundry, quotes the director of the Institute for Comics studies, Peter Coogan: "We're a visual culture now, not a typographical culture. Comics teach visual literacy" (Hudson). She continues:

> Literacy isn't simply being able to understand the written word, but being able to extract meaning from the printed page. There's a kind of visual literacy that is innate. There's a lot that kids are able to understand and an enormous amount of complexity that can be used. It's like poetry: deceptively simple, and levels and levels of meaning can be brought out. (Hudson)

Short and Reeves continue to explain the difficulties that educators face in "reaching YGeners[6]" who "are criticized for their short attention spans that may be a function of an environment where constant stimulation is the norm" (5). Our students have short attention spans that may inhibit them from enjoying the longer, more

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[6] "The generation of students born between 1982 and approximately 2003, often dubbed Generation Y, is almost as large as the Baby Boom generation, with 75 to 76 million YGeners, compared to 79 and 80 million Boomers" (Short & Reeves 5).

traditional texts of the past. They are used to communicating visually. The graphic novel would be an excellent way to have our students experience reading in a way in which they are more comfortable. Through their research, Short and Reeves found that:

> Print media [such as textbooks] are useful for 'the ingraining of lineal, sequential habits' and to foster perceptual habits that compartmentalize and separate information into linear patterns. If a text is to be understood, the reader must understand the abstract symbolism represented by the letters and words and be able to accurately assimilate information. Graphic depictions are useful in their ability to aid in translation of symbolic materials by presenting the material in a format alternative to text alone. Assuming that the reader understands the printed text, text materials may be learned and/or retained if the user is able to successfully "cool" the medium and allocate concepts easily and accurately into specialized segments. In contrast to text alone, proponents of the graphic novel format have noted that this format allows for the concept of "imaginative interactivity." (14)

The graphic novel requires a reading that will strengthen literacy skills and comprehension, and because reading and writing coexist, the graphic novel can also aid in developing and strengthening a student's writing skills. Randy Wallace, Cathy Pearman, Cindy Hail, and Beth Hurst, Missouri State University faculty members and authors of the article, "Writing for Comprehension," discuss their frustrations that reading and writing have been separated in the school systems for so long. They believe that in order to truly increase both reading and writing skills, they need to be approached together. Furthermore, through their research they have found that approaching both reading and writing skills "increased both content learning and overall student achievement" (Wallace et al.). Strengthening a student's reading and writing skills will aid in their overall learning experience.

It is also no surprise that when a student writes, he is participating in an activity that will benefit him in multiple other ways. Writing allows a student to be heard. The

art of writing requires students to think and create independently. Their writing creation is something that students can own and be proud of, thus increasing their sense of self awareness and confidence. Students like to write. They do it all of the time through various social media websites and blogs. Writing through the graphic novel allows students to not only write, but to visually tell the stories the way words cannot. This process will require them to create visual connections to their plots. Writing a graphic novel will also require students to think about creating a story that has smooth movements and transitions between frames.

Graphic author and artist, Mark Crilley offers strategies to use the graphic novel in the classroom to promote writing activities. One strategy that he suggests is to provide students with visuals and wordless books, which will allow them to create a story based on the images they see within each frame. Another suggestion is to provide the students with a title that presents the characters, conflict, and resolution and allow them to fill in the blanks of the story. For example, "How I Lost (And Found) My Dad's Camera at the Zoo" (Crilley). Whatever the title may be, the student's experience in creating a graphic novel should be simple enough that they can enjoy the process of writing and creating and not have to worry about everything in between. He believes in incorporating the graphic novel into the classroom because "Graphic novels are the perfect meeting place of words and pictures and as such offer an excellent way of getting visually-oriented students to read" (Crilley). Crilley concludes his thoughts by sharing that creating comics in the classroom should specifically include, "dialogue [in the form of word balloons], sound effects, at least one wordless panel and at least three different facial

expressions in the story" (Crilley). These incorporated elements require students to think critically about all elements of their creation, thus engaging them.

As an undergraduate, I was taught to teach with enthusiasm and to creativity and actively engage my students. Within a few years, engagement was a term that was assumed. Instead, teachers were expected to step back and allow students to become more active participants in the classroom experience. Student-run lessons, large group discussions and group work were expected in lesson planning and activities. As the state's Core Curriculum Content Standards changed, so did the focus of education. Teachers are now creating Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) and they will be evaluated on the percentage of students who accomplish growth while enrolled in their classes. As an English teacher, I am expected to strengthen my students' reading, writing and critical thinking skills. My students are expected to understand new vocabulary in context. They are expected to synthesize sources while writing an essay. They are expected to read closely and critically. In addition to convincing my students of the worth of strengthening these skills, my greatest obstacle is that not all of my sophomore students are thinking, reading and writing at grade level. It is my responsibility to seek out, learn and implement new and creative ways to engage my students. This requires time and training. In most instances, teachers cannot wait for a workshop to be properly trained in new skills. They are forced to learn how to teach new material themselves and simply do not have the time to learn new methods, such as the use of the graphic novel in their classroom.

The use of the graphic novel in academic classrooms is not necessarily a new concept, but it remains a rare one. As a teacher in the Hanover Park High School district

for nearly ten years, I have noticed the importance of teaching reading for comprehension. Hanover Park High School's English department hosts many workshops about critical and close reading and provides teachers with strategies to increase comprehension in their classrooms, regardless of their subject area. Chapter 2 presents the most popular and effective reading comprehension strategies and exercises often practiced. These reading comprehension strategies have proven successful in improving the reading comprehension skills of struggling readers. Chapter 2 will also demonstrate how these skills are naturally enhanced while reading graphic novels. In my experience, there are few workshops on using graphics or graphic novels in the classroom. In fact, graphic novels were not even mentioned during our district's faculty and department meetings as a method for strengthening critical reading, writing and thinking skills. If graphic novels can be used as an additional tool to strengthen critical reading, writing and thinking skills, then why aren't more educators using them?

In most school districts, grade and class curricula is written and approved before the start of the school year. My experience suggests that using a graphic novel in the classroom requires both paper work for official approval and lots of advocacy. My administrators heard the term "graphic novel" and quickly linked it with its ancestor, the comic book. Perhaps because many administrators aren't exposed to the newer graphic novels, they are reluctant to trust that they are appropriate for students to read.

But despite these challenges, insisting on incorporating the graphic novel in high school curricula is a task worth tackling. Those who read a graphic novel cannot help but recognize the positive impact it would have on students' educational experiences. Many graphic novels can be taught in elementary school, middle school, high school and even

college. Graphic novels can be used to strengthen critical reading, writing and thinking skills, or they can be used as a tool in other subject areas, such as history or psychology. Graphic novels can be effectively used in remedial and ESL classes and Advanced Placement courses. Graphic novels are taught in graduate level classes. In order for educators and administers to experiment with graphic novels in their classrooms, specifically with remedial or reluctant readers, they need to be introduced to the ways in which graphic novels are being used in the classroom; they need to study the benefits and challenges faced by educators who exposed their students to graphic novels.

In the studies conducted by Smetana & Grisham, Hines & Dellinger, Pantaleo, and Connors referenced in Chapter Two, lessons explaining how to read a graphic novel and what to look for in a graphic novel need to be taught before students can interact with the text independently. Even though the students were unfamiliar with the format, they often engaged with the text, often rereading it, visualizing gutter gaps and identifying moments of literary devices.

Another challenge later presented is finding graphic novels that are appropriate for grade and reading levels. Perhaps as more graphic novels are taught in the classroom, graphic novel artist and writers will begin to write stories appropriate for classroom anthologies or with the intent that they be used as a companion text. In order to bring more graphic novels into the classroom, teachers need to discover graphic novels that are appropriate for their curriculum.

Though class curriculum is developed and established, many teachers find it difficult to complete recommended reading without introducing companion texts throughout the school year. As discovered, finding appropriate material is already

challenging. Trying to find material that also relates to classical literary works will be especially taxing. It would be especially rewarding to develop a unit in which our students' reading skills are monitored before, during and after instruction. We need to test our students' critical reading, writing and thinking skills before we implement new strategies and monitor their growth throughout the process. It would be beneficial to monitor our students' initial and natural reaction to the graphic novel and test their comprehension before instruction alters their response.

Remedial and reluctant readers often label themselves as incapable and therefore often feel intimidated by the texts they study in class. If students think they cannot read, they will not read. It is essential that our students read more, especially struggling readers. If they are not successful reading traditional texts, then we may need to incorporate alternative material. Given the proper training and material, students may benefit from the use of the graphic novel in the classroom. In the studies presented, students' readings of graphic novels were commonly described as engaging. Although they were challenged, most students were willing to participate in large group readings, discussions and personal writing responses. In many instances, students also became more eager to contribute to classroom analysis and discussion while reading graphic novels. Students recognized author's choices and intention by commenting on the importance and changes in color, perspective and panel arrangement.

It is my premise that the graphic novel will greatly benefit high school students, specifically reluctant readers and writers. I believe that if exposed to the graphic novel, students who struggle with reading will naturally use the reading comprehension skills and strategies outlined in Chapter 2 while reading. The manner in which graphic novels

are used in the classroom is highlighted in the case studies presented in Chapter 2 and through the presentations of teacher interviews in Chapter 4. The results, specifically the students' reactions to reading the graphic novel, along with the challenges faced while teaching graphic novels, are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. In addition to providing evidence of the positive incorporation of the graphic novel in the classroom, it is my hope that this dissertation will make more teachers aware of the ways the graphic novel can strengthen their students' critical reading, writing and thinking skills. Providing our students with a variety of genres, such graphic novels, will also make reading more pleasurable. My purpose as an educator is to provide my students with such experiences. It is my obligation to expose my students to the most current trends in education and to use any and all resources to aid in their growth as learners. Using the graphic novel in the classroom is one answer to the question of how to engage all students in reading, writing and critical thinking.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For years, versions of the graphic novel were created for an array of audiences. Some graphic novels tell heroic tales of courage and triumph. Other graphic novels comically follow the anecdotes of their characters. Some graphic novels are modern rewrites of classical literature. Regardless of content, most graphic novels, like most other forms of literature, have been created to tell a story with a clear purpose. Graphic novels entertain and reach readers of all ages and backgrounds and should now be used in classrooms as a tool for educators to strengthen the critical reading, writing and thinking skills of their students, specifically struggling or remedial readers.

In Bradford W. Wright's *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*, he follows the history of comic books and their influence and place in American culture. Wright says that comics are among the most "recognizable" of genres, and yet they are still the most misunderstood (xiii). Even with their "lengthy history…they remain inscrutable to most adults, including scholars. The average thirteen-year-old displays more knowledge about the topic than the average professor of history, even a professor of culture" (xiii).

Although the first forms of graphic novels dated well before the thirties, shorter comic strips printed in newspapers were especially popular. Even though not all comics produced in newspapers were necessarily funny, they were traditionally referred to as the "funnies" because they often told humorous tales. Wright explains that series such as "*The Yellow Kid*, *Katzenjammer Kids*, and *Mutt and Jeff* satirized the foibles of domestic

life, social relations, and ethnicity in the tradition of vaudeville routines" (Wright 2).

Newspapers especially experimented with action-filled stories like *Dick Tracy*, *Flash*

Gordon, and *The Phantom*.

     Superman especially proved himself to be quite appealing to the American public.

Because many Americans were left with feelings of defeat after the Great Depression,

superheroes like Superman's Clark Kent were encouraging because they came from the

common, every day man of society. With each new edition of *Superman*, the content

better reflected the current stories of society. Wright specifically recalls the tale of

Superman taking on the government during a war abroad:

> He then ends the fraudulent Latin American war by informing the
> belligerents that they have been manipulated by greedy American
> industrialists. Echoing the Nye Committee's conclusion that 'merchants
> of death' had conspired to involve the United States in the Great War,
> Superman warns that moneyed self-interest remained a menace to the
> national welfare. (Wright 11)

     Americans applauded the everyday man taking the matter of the government's

corruption into their own hands. Superman's description became "champion of the

oppressed...devoted to helping those in need!" (Wright 11-12). Many other Superman

stories "explore the conflict between corporate greed and the public welfare" (Wright 11-

12). In *Superman* comics, the underdog, which typically represented the common man,

always prevailed. In reality, the *Superman* comics series served as escapist literature

during a time when ordinary Americans were working hard to survive. The series

certainly served as inspiration for further superheroes who wore a costume, had a secret

identity and the power to make a difference against evil. Even through the forties and

fifties, major business corporations and local politics were disguised as evil-doers in

comic books. Specifically, any stories of the *Green Lantern* were based around the

superhero fighting against business corporations in favor of the common man. In one

Green Lantern "adventure," the superhero saves a "working man" who has been "abused"

by a businessman:

> The worker appeals to the legal authorities and the corporate-owned press,
> but they refuse to believe that 'one of the most successful businessmen in
> the country' could have committed such crimes. One radio executive,
> though sympathetic, refuses to air the charges against the tycoon because
> he fears being sued for libel. The Green Lantern listens and acts. His
> benevolent intervention finally brings the elusive corporate criminal to
> justice. (Wright 23)

Captain Hero, a superhero particularly popular during World War II, helped

"unite" the country of America "against foreign aggression" (Wright 31). Not only were

Americans responsible for supporting the comic books that fought against the enemy, but

"*The New York Times* reported that one of every four magazines shipped to troops

overseas was a comic book" (Wright 31). Soldiers especially found their pictured panels

a convenient and quick way to enjoy a story without intense concentration.

World War II influenced changes in the comic book world, in both illustrations

and publications. Most men were being called to serve in the war, among them, leading

graphic artists. Wright points out that "those who remained or returned to the home front

after military service benefited from the higher pay rates brought on by the wartime labor

shortage" (Wright 33). The remaining males and some female graphic artists knew that

their audience was changing. They felt they should begin to write stories that would

appeal to children and their parents. A new committee was organized, consisting of

"professional men and women who have made a life work of child psychology,

education, and welfare' to serve on the board…[which] included English professors,

child-study experts, Boy Scout leaders, and even retired boxers Jack Dempsey and Gene

Tunney" (Wright 33-34). The purpose of this advisory committee seemed to have

"emerged in part from DC's sense of social responsibility" to become more

"wholesome," sending American families patriotic messages of pride and "patriotism"

(Wright 33-34):

> Publishers sought to boost their image by linking their products to
> patriotism and the war effort. Superman urged readers to give to the
> American Red Cross. Batman and Robin asked boys and girls to 'keep the
> American eagle flying' by purchasing war bonds and stamps. Captain
> America and his sidekick Bucky showed readers how to collect paper and
> scrap metal. Publishers throughout the industry printed an open letter
> from Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr. asking boys and girls to
> buy saving stamps. (Wright 34)

At this time in our history, even the government supported the growth of the

comic book industry for advertisements and propaganda. Wright says, "Franklin D.

Roosevelt well understood the power of modern media to influence public attitudes" (34).

Comic books were a way to encourage Americans to support the war. This message was

especially made to children and those who did not support the war. Wright explains,

"The comic book war effort, much like the real one, left no room for ambiguity or debate

on most issues. Direct, emotional and naïve, comic books contributed to the widespread

popular impression, which still persists today, that World War II was truly a "good war"

(Wright 44). It is important to note that comics were also created to tell the tale of other

perspectives and other wars, including World War II and the Cold War. Jack Kirby

created *Captain America*, a superhero whose "origins were consciously political" in an

attempt to "wage a metaphorical war against Nazi oppression, anticipating the real

American war that they believed was inevitable" (Wright 36).

By the fifties, nearly half of the U.S. population was reading comic books. This

offered an unbeatable opportunity to advertise the latest fashion and fads. Comic books

included ads for "Keds sneakers, baseball gloves, Daisy rifles, female hair-care and

weight-loss products, hospital insurance, and correspondence courses in radio

technology" (Wright 57). Comics were used as another medium of advertisement, in

hopes that readers would purchase the same items they have seen in their favorite comic

books.

Soon after, comic books expanded their subjects. Because the audience and

interest of the comic book world was changing, the "superhero titles dropped" and prior

graphic artists began selling provocative pictures and storylines of "women with short

skirts, long slender legs and exaggerated breasts," which "beckon[ed] randy young males

with sexually suggestive and sadomasochistic images" such as "women in bondage and

women placing men in bondage, dominating men with ships, or trampling men with high

heels that played to common male fetishes" (Wright 73). The tone of such comics "took

on powerful racist and imperialist—as well as sexual and sadomasochistic—overtones"

(Wright 73). Described as being a "guilty pleasure" of sorts, these violent and sexual

comics still educated audiences about the consequences of living dangerous lives (Wright

73-74). Just as superhero wrong-doers always met a justifiable fate, readers were

reminded that unhealthy and impure lifestyles led to nasty consequences. Could it be that

many educators remember these images and topics and are therefore reluctant to explore

the use of graphic novels in the classroom?

For the younger crowd in the forties, comical characters containing humorous

"teenage humor" were introduced (Wright 72). *Archie*, for example, "featured (a) cast

(that) drew from familiar high-school character types: freckle-faced Archie himself,

billed alternatively as 'America's favorite teenager' and 'America's typical teenager"

contained stories of about "middle-class adolescent concerns—dates, cars, school, and

parents" (Wright 72). *Archie* was widely accepted. Not only did he participate in the typical American adolescent experience, but he did so in a respectful way: never cursing, fighting, or engaging in drugs or alcohol and always "obey[ing] his parents" and exhibiting "only the vaguest hint of his libido" (73). The stories Archie comics published also used Archie's friends, Betty and Veronica, to attract a young female audience while containing stories that were appropriate to society's standards. In the sixties, the focus of comics even stretched to representing outcasts in society. Most superheroes, as explained in Wright's *Comic Book Nation*, are socially awkward and often "question [their] existence" (224). It was also at this time that comics were regarded as highly artistic. Popular American artists, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Stan Lee, experimented with cartoon art by encouraging audiences to analyze comics, such as *Marvel* comics, as a form of "popular culture" (Wright 224).

By the sixties, comic books were more widely accepted and in the late seventies, the *New York Times Magazine* wrote an article describing "comics of recent years" as "mature" and "no longer a crude medium of childhood fantasies" but instead "feature[ing] more sophisticated themes and images, which readers of various ages could appreciate on different levels" (Wright 233). In addition to focusing on issues of war, starting in the seventies, comics addressed issues of "civil rights, feminism, and environmentalism" (Wright 233). During the early seventies specifically, *Captain America* comics addressed the Watergate scandal as it "unraveled to the public" (245).

By the eighties and nineties, direct-market distribution allowed artists to experiment with more violent and graphic material without worrying about adhering to rules and codes. Critics worried about the effects these explicit images would have on

children and although some publishers rated and labeled their comic books, the new

"mature" material only further enhanced sales (278).

The comic book industry found itself facing a dilemma during the tragedy of 9/11.

Not knowing how to address a disaster of such magnitude, post-September 11th comic

books carefully told the tales of America's true heroes, "the firefighters, rescue workers,

police, and armed forces" through the stories of the superheroes, often showing them

during the aftermath of the tragedy, cleaning up the pain *with* the American public,

instead of for them (Wright 287-289):

> The mass medium so appropriate for propaganda and star-spangled saber
> rattling in the 1940s now survived among a subculture raised on cynicism,
> irony, and moral relativism. September 11 forced comic book makers to
> step back and reevaluate the place of their industry in American culture.
> Some found it difficult for a time to find anything relevant to say with
> super-power heroes in tights. (Wright 288)

A post-September 11th issue of *Spiderman*, published in December 2001, was

completely "encased in a solid black cover" (Wright 289). Similar to an issue created

after Pearl Harbor, Spiderman and many other superheroes reunite on the last page,

standing behind the "real" heroes, the first responders of September 11th (Wright 287).

Onlookers question Superman, asking their beloved hero "how (he can) let this happen"

(Wright 287). He responds, "We could not be here before it happened. We could not

stop it. But we are here now" (Wright 287).

Throughout history, comic heroes and graphic novels have been created both for

public enjoyment and to address current social issues. The future of the comic book

industry appeared on television, or in the form of the graphic novel, defined by Will

Eisner in the seventies as "sequential art" (Wright 291). These graphic novels were

"more sophisticated, lengthier, and pricier than traditional comic books" and "have run

the gamut of genres from superheroes and detectives to autobiographies and realistic character studies" (Wright 291).

As graphic artists found ways to change the design of comics, readers also found additional ways to use its new format. It is true that comics have had a long history of attracting a variety of readers because they presented and informed their readers about the current events in society in a format that was understandable and even visually engaging. The newer forms of comics, the graphic novels, also proved to be exceptionally educational. Because of their "sophisticated" format and storyline, readers are able to analyze the graphic novel's visual elements and how they correspond with its written plot (Wright 291). Robert C. Harvey, author of *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History* writes, "Comic books can tell their stories all at once with no repetition, can exploit varying panel sizes and shapes to embellish stories with special narrative-enhancing effects, can manipulate time over longer periods to create mood, and can do it all in color" (Harvey 24). Readers find political, social, and personal stories relatable and particularly easy to understand when they are presented visually. Graphic artists continue to manipulate their frames to visually interact with the text on the page. The stylistic choices of a graphic artist, such as the panel format and arrangement, the choices in font and graphics, contribute to an interactive reading of the text. According to Scott McCloud, author of *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art, Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels,* and *Reinventing Comics: How Imagination and Technology are Revolutionizing an Art Form,* "comics requires us to make a constant stream of choices regarding imagery, pacing, dialogue, composition, gesture and a ton of other options" (*Making Comics* 9). Each specific choice and detail

contributes to the overall understanding of the text. This not only creates a more enjoyable reading experience, but it encourages the reader to actively engage in the text. McCloud writes, "participation is a powerful force in any medium" (*Understanding Comics* 69). Graphic novels require our students to actively engage in their reading of the text, therefore they become more invested in their reading, which may result in strengthening their critical reading, writing and thinking skills. This type of active engagement and participation will especially benefit students who have struggled with reading from early in their educational careers.

From the time when some young students were placed around different reading tables based on reading abilities, it happened. Reading quickly became a sport, one in which students were recognized as being either proficient or struggling. Students' strengths and weaknesses, students' ability levels, are apparent to their teachers and fellow students. Advanced readers gain confidence and continue to volunteer, even as they get older and the reading becomes more challenging. Many remedial readers become self-conscious and either silence their reading voices or focus on the speed at which they are reading, instead of practicing and strengthening their comprehension.

Although the act of reading leisurely may start in early childhood for many children, the art of learning how to read may start as early as first grade. Typically, elementary school teachers instruct students on the proper way to comprehend the material they are reading. This instruction should continue through elementary school and middle school, becoming particularly developed in a student's high school English and reading classes. In addition, students should be surrounded by an environment that fosters an appreciation for the art of reading. Reading should be encouraged at home. If

proper reading skills and habits are not developed by the student, he/she is left feeling unprepared and unaware to properly read at his/her grade level. Unfortunately many students advance to middle and high school with lower-than-average reading comprehension and compromised critical thinking skills. Middle and high school teachers expect students to already have received the proper training on how to read, write, and think critically and efficiently. Many high school students do not have the contextual foundations or vocabulary development expected of their grade level. When high school students do not fully comprehend their reading material, they find themselves uncomfortable during classroom readings and unwilling to participate in many reading activities and assignments. Many students become frustrated with the act of reading and lose passion for participation, which can result in them being labeled as remedial or uninterested readers.

In elementary school, students enjoy testing their creativity by writing short stories, playing vocabulary games and participating in spelling bees. As middle school students, they begin competing with friends for the highest score in the most popular video game. They begin text messaging and abbreviating words. They speak in the slang that they often hear on their favorite television shows. As high school students, they spend a majority of their time on major social media websites. They are constantly tuned in, exploring, and responding to the current issues that they are exposed to over the Internet. The information that they receive is given to them mostly visually, through action-shot photography and video. Cellular phone applications revolve around students publicizing personal pictures with a caption description. They have shorter attention spans because of the way they are communicating, and because they are not reading

recreationally, they are generally intimidated and uninterested in reading in the classroom and reading leisurely on their own time.

Kelly Gallagher, teacher, secondary literacy education specialist, and author of the book *Deeper Reading* states, "If we simply assign writing instead of teaching students how to write, we'll get poor writing. If we simply assign reading instead of teaching students how to read, we'll get poor reading" (7). Because a student's critical reading, writing, and thinking skills can be greatly developed by the techniques a teacher uses, teachers need to incorporate the most recent research to strengthen their students' critical reading and thinking skills. These techniques may positively enhance students' experiences with literature. In addition to exposing students to current and engaging literature, teachers should practice techniques that aid students' development and deepen comprehension. This focus to create an environment that both promotes a love for reading and practices the skills required to foster deep reading must start in the elementary schools, but must continue throughout a student's travels through middle school and high school.

Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, a secondary language arts teacher and Assistant Professor at the University of Maine, writes in *You Gotta Be The Book*, a case study of proficient and remedial students in his language arts classes. In his work he questions the differences between proficient and remedial readers and explores the activities proficient and interested readers inherently complete as they read literature. He then applies strategies to promote these activities to more remedial and reluctant readers. Reading capabilities are typically recognizable and often classified. If the end result is to strengthen remedial readers' comprehension and capabilities, a valuable technique is to study the tendencies

of proficient readers. Wilhelm questions the methods used in many Language Arts classrooms that restrict remedial readers from improving their skills. Immersed in *You Gotta Be the Book* are strategies teachers can use to strengthen critical reading, writing and thinking skills. Wilhelm writes, "you see, those kids knew what it meant to be labeled a 'remedial reader.' With every move and comment they made, they damned the very label, the class they were in, and their whole history of reading education in school" (Wilhelm 2). In addition to proficient readers containing the skills needed for deep reading, they also contained the confidence. Unskilled readers grow uncomfortable with the art of reading and if not properly addressed, will begin to recognize their remediation, believe their labels, and often stop trying to learn how to improve their reading experience.

Like many students, the readers in Wilhelm's classroom understood their levels and abilities. The proficient readers willingly interacted with the text and were actively engaged during classroom discussions, while the remedial readers remained silent, unwilling, and unengaged throughout the process. Not only were these remedial students facing challenges comprehending the material, but they also recognized their weaknesses and grew embarrassed, self-conscious, and uncomfortable in their classrooms. This thought is painful for Wilhelm to realize, as it is for most teachers of reading. Reading should be an activity that many students actively participate in and enjoy. Wihelm writes, "My best friendships involve books; some friendships are because of books" (4). These strong relationships encouraged Wilhelm to read more. The first step to improve a student's reading comprehension is to have him/her read more literature. If we want our students to read more literature, we must offer them reading experiences that allow them

to practice reading in a comfortable and safe manner. Because graphic novels aren't traditionally taught in schools, most students, regardless of their reading abilities, will be experiencing the text for the first time. Wilhelm writes, "part of encouraging adolescents to read is knowing a variety of material and encouraging kids to read different genres and authors to learn the scope of what is available and the field of their own taste" (34). Students must read books that are of high interest to them, such as graphic novels.

Wilhelm believes that teachers should also use texts that are not necessarily a part of the "literary canon" (33). Wilhelm believes that "a literary text is any text that provides a particular reader with a deeply engaging aesthetic experience" (33). Although there are great benefits to requiring our students to read "the classics," if our goal is to have them appreciate the activity of reading, we must also incorporate books that have been written for them, as a new generation of students who are visually intrigued.

Educators are reminded of the importance of incorporating a wide variety of resources as teaching aids. Once students master the skills of actual comprehension, educators can better expose their students to a worthwhile experience with more traditional texts. If students are exposed to a variety of genres—fiction, nonfiction, fantasy, mystery, young adult literature, sports writing, the graphic novel, they are more likely to find a type of literature that they are comfortable with, interested in, and become engaged in reading, encouraging them to read more and enabling them to better practice comprehension while reading. On the other hand, when our students encounter texts of low interest, or challenging texts, they are less likely to remain engaged with the reading, becoming frustrated every time they lose focus or comprehension.

Students cannot practice reading and begin to enjoy the activity of reading or truly understand the benefits of reading if they aren't reading enough. Carol Jago, teacher and author of *With Rigor for All*, believes that "most English departments inadvertently downplay the influence voices have had upon the American character when they teach only the classics" (137-138). Students should also be exposed to different points of view to more fully understand the time period, background and language of the classical text they are studying. The teacher may quickly realize the many opportunities to teach character education through the graphic novel's unique perspective, by focusing on how the graphic novel's perspective may be different than the historical accounts studied in social studies classes or during reading of traditional texts. Fortunately, a number graphic novels have been written from a minority point of view, which will also expose our students to unique perspectives that may appeal to students with weaker reading attention spans and comprehension. Specifically, since the graphic novel contains a format that differs from the format of a traditional text, teaching the graphic novel in the classroom will attract our students' attention and quickly convince them that this reading experience will be unlike any other one they have encountered. This will especially benefit our struggling readers who feel that they have already been labeled as remedial readers. Because the genre is so versatile, graphic novels are often viewed as appropriate companion texts to the classics, while also being considered high-interest texts for our student readers. Wilhelm specifically lists the graphic novel as one of his examples of "vital genres of literature": "there are vital genres of literature known as Children's and Young Adult literature that speak directly to the concerns of these age groups, attempting to connect directly with their 'current state of being' (Wilhelm 34). There are comic

books, mysteries and horror stories, historical fiction, fantasies, stories of death and

dying" (Wilhelm 34).

Once an engaging literary text is chosen, exercises can be used in a classroom to

create both a positive and productive learning experience. Teachers Stephanie Harvey

and Harvey Daniels also studied "proficient adult readers" and the skills these proficient

readers "developed over years of experience with reading and texts" in their book

Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action (21). According to

Harvey and Daniels, proficient readers, "monitor [their] comprehension and make

adjustments" while reading to better understand the text especially if and when the text

gets challenging (21). Proficient adult readers "ask questions," "infer and visualize

meaning," and "determine importance" of the material they are studying (Harvey and

Daniels 21). Proficient readers experience the text in an active way that remedial readers

do not. Without practicing these strategies, students aren't reading for comprehension.

Remedial readers need to learn how to determine which passages are significant because

they contain symbolism, foreshadowing or essential characterization. From the start of

the text, students should ask questions about characterization and plot development and

visualize the setting and significant events as they are introduced.

Students who read the text of graphic novels also benefit from experiencing the

visual images the graphic artist created to accompany the text. For remedial students, this

is a way to introduce and develop visualization techniques. The new format of a graphic

novel changes the method in which a struggling reader experiences the act of reading.

Eisner explains,

> The reading process in comics is an extension of text. In text alone the
> process of reading involves word-to-image conversion. Comics

accelerates that by providing the image. When properly executed, it goes beyond conversion and speed and becomes a seamless whole. In every sense, this misnamed form of reading is entitled to be regarded as literature because the images are employed as a language. (Eisner xvii)

The graphic artist visually emphasizes certain images, signifying their importance over other images in the text. These visuals serve not only as clues but also force readers to slow their reading pace and examine the images as textual references for greater understanding. These visuals offer various opportunities for students to question the facial expressions, color scheme, drawing techniques and dialogue used throughout a graphic novel. These elements of deeper comprehension are not found "in between the lines" of a graphic novel. Since they are visually apparent during our students' reading, our remedial students will develop stronger critical reading and thinking skills and a greater tolerance for reading.

In order to properly prepare students for such an effective reading experience, teachers need to provide them a proper introduction to stimulate high interest in their students prior to their reading. Teachers should remind their students that reading requires active visualizing and questioning. Students should be reminded that it's natural to be confused sometimes while reading. Gallagher states, "The difference between a good reader and a poor reader is that a good reader will tolerate being a bit confused for a while, trusting that the confusion will eventually clear…Poor readers have less tolerance for getting lost" (65). It is important for teachers to remind their students that "it is normal for all readers to be occasionally 'off channel' while reading" (Gallagher 52).

Jago agrees that it is essential for us to "forewarn" our students about the difficulties they may experience while reading a complex text (27). According to Jago,

the length and format of the text[1], the vocabulary an author chooses, and the dealings with unfamiliar settings, time periods and character names all contribute to the misunderstanding of our students' reading (27-29). By pointing out that our students are not expected to understand every word in the story, we give permission to reluctant and struggling readers to feel more comfortable when encountering a word that is unknown. This will address their fears of reading aloud in class, an activity practiced in many elementary and middle school reading classes, and occasionally in some high school reading classes. Working through the pronunciation and meaning of the word using context clues will generate a deeper connection and appreciation for the text. As stated previously, she also agrees that being "forewarned" is being "forearmed": "Suddenly [reluctant readers will realize] that [there] isn't anything was wrong with them" if they didn't initially understand the text (Jago 26-27). Knowing that a text is going to be challenging before they actually encountering the challenge will better equip our students, reminding them not to be intimidated if they do not understand every page. Teachers should emphasize that students should begin the reading focused and prepared to understand as much of it as they can. They should not give up during their reading because comprehension will come. Students should be provided with techniques to address their struggles. For example, teachers can offer open-ended questions for students to think about during reading. These questions should address the complexities of the literature, which can serve as comprehension questions that will guide the reader throughout the story and help alleviate their struggles during a complex read through, thus creating a sense of relief, understanding and enjoyment.

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[1] Format of the text includes syntax.

Jago also believes that as educators, we need to clarify that learning, specifically reading in some instances, is not always fun. By honestly telling our students that some academic tasks and reading texts require hard work, we can help them recognize that working hard for their comprehension can help bring them great accomplishment, and a different type of "fun" (Jago 27). Jago writes, "The goal is learning…The 'fun' comes later when students realize how much this extraordinary character[2] has taught them about themselves" (27).

If our students actively decipher the plot, learn to identify with the characters, recognize the significance of the reading, they will experience how satisfying learning can be. One of the reasons why they don't see the fun in reading is because many of them lack the skills to properly read at their age level. Gallagher writes, "According to Helping Middle and High School Readers," a publication of the Educational Research Service, a nonprofit foundation, "three types of prior knowledge are considered especially important for students as they read content-area texts: (1) knowledge about the topic (2) knowledge about the structure and organization of the text, and (3) knowledge about vocabulary" (27). Since background knowledge is essential to deep comprehension, if our students do not have the background knowledge needed, the teacher must provide it prior to assigning reading. They should have a general idea of the text's topic and format. They should also be reading material that is near their reading level, which contains challenging vocabulary that they can figure out with context clues and help from their teacher. Strengthening vocabulary skills is especially manageable

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[2] Carol Jago uses the Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment* to illustrate her belief that although the activity of reading a "629-page novel" is not exactly what students enjoy doing, working through the struggle to understand its content and character will be the true "fun" reward (27).

when reading a graphic novel because in addition to the textual context clues, the images of the graphic novel also enhance the meaning of the text when background knowledge isn't present.

Not only are reluctant readers missing out on the activity of reading and exploring fictional and nonfictional worlds authors create for them, but they are also no longer strengthening the critical thinking skills that deep reading triggers. They worry about their reading speed instead of their comprehension. They do not visualize the characters or setting. They do not recognize the use of figurative language, themes and symbols. They cannot expand on the author's intent. They struggle to pronounce unfamiliar words and either look them up or ignore them instead of focusing on context clues to determine their meaning. Students are not interacting with the text.

Literacy, as defined by Wilhelm,

…is both the willingness and the ability to evoke, conceive of, express, receive, reflect on, share, evaluate, and negotiate meanings, in various forms that meanings may take…Literacy is not limited to proficiency with written and oral language, but extends to the making of meaning with other sign systems: art, music, drama, physical movement. (152)

Since literacy is "both a private and public phenomenon" and since "as a private act, it helps the reader in the process of self-discovery and definition," it is worthwhile for our teachers to spend the time promoting collaboration and reflection during the reading process (Wilhelm 152). Wilhelm also reminds us that such personal growth can manifest "into the social world" (152). He writes, "literacy is a window into the social world, where it empowers and emancipates the reader, helping us to become social by understanding other perspectives and to develop a personal sense of agency in the world" (Wilhelm 152).

To truly enhance literacy, a teacher should recognize the multiple layers of comprehension and especially note the importance of their students' creating relationships with their texts by collaborating with their fellow readers before and during the reading activity, and reflecting on their experience of reading after completion. This collaboration and reflection offers students many opportunities to understand one another and therefore better understand the text. Gallagher agrees that "collaboration plays a key role in elevating reading comprehension," bringing "new insight" into our readings (105). Gallagher includes a breakdown from the work of Edgar Dale, author of *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching*, which states that once we're done reading, we remember

> 10 percent of what we read
> 20 percent of we hear
> 30 percent of what we see
> 50 percent of what we both see and hear
> 70 percent of what we talk about with others. (17)

From this breakdown it is clear that if teachers want their students to retain information from their reading, they must encourage collaboration and allow their students to discuss different perspectives of the reading. If we only remember ten percent of what we're actually reading, the activity of reading cannot be valued as a sole tool for retention, but instead a sophisticated foundation for discussion, focusing especially on the global meanings of the text. Harvey and Daniels remind us that much of our students' daily activities are social activities. They look forward to friendly competition during physical education classes. They are enthusiastic during lunch recess. They are vocal and energetic during passing time from class period to class period. Classroom reading should not be any different. They write, "Small group activity brings energy, richness, multiple viewpoints and diverse talents to work" (Harvey and Daniels 65). Harvey and

Daniels believe that inquiry circles[3] are the best way to promote active reading and

thorough collaboration. Harvey and Daniels note that these inquiry circles should be

limited to a small number of student participants to ensure participation and easily

monitor accountability (275).

> Harvey and Daniels explain inquiry circles as follows:
>
> What do these small-group inquiries look like? Think of literature
> circles—but instead of choosing a single book to read, kids select a topic
> or a question to explore. Picture teachers teaching comprehension
> strategies and kids making connections, asking questions, synthesizing the
> information. Envision teachers modeling social skills and kids planning
> interviews, asking follow-up questions, and making decision about what to
> investigate. Imagine teacher demonstrating research techniques and kids
> meeting together to pursue answers to their questions and take action.
> (13)

We know that our students have the ability to love literature because when most

children were younger, they had the same love for literature that Wilhelm and most

teachers search for in their classrooms. As infants and toddlers, children will remain

silently engaged as their parents/guardians recite the words to their favorite children's

illustrated book. They ask questions and actively participate with the movement in the

story, sometimes even animating what it is that is being read to them. For younger

children, "reading was an adventure that was unique every time" (Wilhelm 6). What

happens, then, that changes our young children's love for literature? And perhaps more

importantly, how do we engage more reluctant readers to appreciate and practice reading

after more intriguing and engaging texts are chosen? Wilhelm writes,

> If we take the theoretical stance that reading is, in fact, producing and
> creating meaning, then the way reading is traditionally practiced in
> schools must be rethought. If reading is creating texts in response to texts,
> something new must start happening in our classrooms. This something

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[3] The term "inquiry circle" is also known as inquiry groups, study groups, learning circles, question circles, idea circles, or group investigations (Harvey and Daniels 72-73).

must take response beyond boilerplate questions and 'correct' answers (10).

Typically, in an English classroom, a method called "bottom-up" or "parts to whole" is used as the common method of teaching reading. In this popular approach, teachers evaluate a student's ability to understand the "letter-to-sound correspondences[4]" (Wilhelm 12). Students are evaluated on their ability to recognize groups of letters as words and their understanding of the sounds these letters make together as words. Later, during most middle and high school reading activities, students are asked to read a selected passage or whole text and respond to the comprehension questions that follow as evidence that they have read and as a way for their teachers to evaluate their students' level of comprehension. The students' assessment depends on how well they answer the questions assigned to the reading. "Lack of involvement suggests why [reluctant readers] have negative attitudes toward reading," says Wilhelm (90). Most students view reading as a "passive" activity of merely "receiving someone else's meaning" when in fact, it should be the opposite (Wilhelm 13).

Many students do not recognize the benefit (or fun) in reading literature because many of them do not read for comprehension. Harvey and Daniels call this type of reading without actual retention, "word calling" (27). Harvey and Daniels specifically define comprehension as more than just about "spitting out facts and filling in blanks. Comprehension is about *understanding*. And reading is not merely about word calling. Reading is about thinking" (27). Too often we ask students basic reading

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[4] "Leading experts call this 'bottom-up' approach the longest and greatest influence on reading instruction, and the one that is usually reflected in basal readers and reading programs. This view regards reading as a data-driven process, and is rather mechanical in that it emphasizes the mastery of specific subskills and skills, moving from small units such as letters to bigger units such as words, phrases, and sentences" (Wilhelm 13).

comprehension questions that do not require them to engage with the text. Too frequently, students can easily answer these literal questions, without understanding the text conceptually.

Reading should encourage our students to have personal opinions and observations that will be shared with peers. Without personal opinions and observations, our students will sense that their "work feels more like an assignment than an invitation, and they are just 'filling in the blanks'—doing what amounts to jumbo, multiday worksheets" (Harvey and Daniels 68). Wilhelm found that "less proficient readers do not naturally and spontaneously experience literature as participants" (89). They are not as involved in examining the story for meaning, contributing to its message, and relating to its overall theme. It is clear that this "lack of involvement" is a major contributor in explaining a student's disinterest in reading (Wilhelm 90).

Harvey and Daniels stress the importance of the student acquiring more "responsibility" while reading, by "pos[ing] their own questions and conduct[ing] inquiries to build their knowledge (66). It is no wonder that many students become uninterested in reading when the *only* thing that they are asked to do is to recall the factual answers from with their text after their reading. Because of this common practice, students realize that *they* are less likely to be asked to comment on, discuss, or respond to their reading and are not thinking of the questions that this text is asking them to question and discuss. Harvey and Daniels write "in order to develop readers, we must encourage and foster the creative attitudes and activities of engaged readers" (11). This is when actual comprehension takes place.

This type of active engagement is required while reading graphic novels. The four major elements involved in the narrative of a graphic novel are the narrative breakdown, which is the division of a story into panel units; composition, which is the arrangements of words and images within the frames; layout, the arrangement of frames on a page; and style, which is the technique used when an artist draws his/her story (Harvey 9). In addition to specifically analyzing the various elements within even a page of a graphic novel, the mere format of the graphic novel also promotes a deeper, more engaging level of comprehension. McCloud believes that "words and pictures have great powers to tell stories when creators fully exploit them both" (*Understanding Comics* 152). Although some graphic novels may be written with frames that do not contain words or pictures, McCloud believes that the best comics use images and text "like partners in a dance and each one takes turns leading" (*Understanding Comics* 156). As long as there is balance within the graphic novel, both words and images will work together to create meaningful reading.

Within a graphic novel, many visual decisions are made by the graphic artist and actively followed by the reader. Each frame or panel contains words and images that create time, pace, mood and action within its borders. Traditionally, the frame is in the shape of a box or rectangle, but at times it is shaped "irregularly [to] echo the actions depicted in them" (Harvey 33). These frames can be considered mini-stories or stories within stories, sometimes requiring readers to interpret the many elements within each frame. On a basic level, a reader actively follows the format of the frames. On a deeper level, readers recognize the relationship between and within the frames and how each frame shape contributes to the overall meaning of the story. The graphic novel's natural

timeline does not necessarily unfold chronologically. In fact, it often breaks chronology with the inclusion of flashbacks, through the use of patterns to recreate continuity, or in the case of bleeding[5]. Harvey writes about the progression of panels on pages:

> The entire progression of panels is carefully timed to withhold as long as possible the information the page at last divulges. Suspense builds as both word and picture contrive to advance the action without telling us what we most want to know. And in the last panel, we need all the resources of the graphic novel to confirm our suspicions. (Harvey 111)

Within each frame of a graphic novel, many actions can take place, thus creating intervals of time. Depending on use of artistic techniques, a single panel can represent mere moment or an extended period of time. McCloud believes that "pictures and intervals between them create the illusion of time through closure" (*Understanding Comics* 95). Panels can depict the past, present, or even future of the story (*Understanding Comics* 104). Mostly, it is through the action of the images within the frame that dictate the time within the scene. Sometimes artists use action lines, or "streaking effects" to exaggerate motion, therefore referencing time. Eisner writes, "In comics the reader is expected to understand things like implied time, space, motion, sound and emotions. In order to understand this, a reader must not only draw on visceral reactions but make use of an accumulation of experience as well as reasoning" (Eisner 49). Readers will recognize the images, action and mood within each frame and analyze their importance in the overall story.

Traditionally, graphic artists will use a left-to-right formatting of frames, much like conventional reading. Graphic artists will also "tailor the last panel on the right-hand page to act as a tease for the next page" (*Reinventing Comics* 221). The reader breaks the

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[5] Bleeding refers to the term when actions within a frame break the outline of the frame and bleed into the rest of the page.

flow of quick reading only when the graphic artist changes the pace of frames with a vertical layout through either the absence of frames or by the action of breaking the fourth wall. These breaks cause "just enough split-second confusion to yank readers out of the world of the story" (*Making Comics* 33). Readers slow their pace and analyze each unique frame or the absence of frames that caused the break in the flow of their reading, and inadvertently question the format of the frames, as well as the content within them. These natural breaks in reading allow students to monitor their comprehension, ask questions about their reading, and infer and visualize material in the way Harvey and Daniels explain as essential.

A break in the steady flow of storytelling in a graphic novel will create a sense of surprise for the reader. Surprising the reader of a graphic novel is not easy. The sequence, images and text need to be perfectly orchestrated. The result is similar to being surprised in other media, like film. But unlike film, reading requires the audience to actively engage with the characters in the text. If a character is frightened, so too will we be (Eisner 52). If done correctly, the effect creates an amazingly engaging experience for the reader. David Carrier, author of *The Aesthetics of Comics* writes, "much of the craft of comics involves making such transitions happen quickly enough that they do not appear static and boring, but without such large gaps as to make the action seem jumpy" (Carrier 53). It is only through such manipulation that a graphic artist can create a reading experience that seems effortless to the reader, while in fact requiring more active analysis along the way. Harvey writes, "only in the comics can the field of vision be so manipulated: the size and arrangement of images control our perception of the events depicted, contributing dramatically to the narrative effects produced" (Harvey 162).

Since only noteworthy plot events cause the break of frames, readers will recognize their importance and are also more likely to remember them while reading the rest of the story and when contributing to classroom discussions.

Instead of being tested, students should discuss the text before, during and after their reading experience. They should ask questions and predict endings. They must grow to like or hate a character. They must interact with the text and hold opinions. This type of reading is much more engaging and valuable than the traditional approaches to reading we favor in the classroom. Harvey and Daniels write,

> By instead focusing our instruction and support on the construction of meaning, the classroom can become a place where students not only produce and share meanings, but a place where they share ways of reading and being with text, becoming aware of the process of their own strategies and those others. (Harvey and Daniels 11)

In addition to asking questions, Gallager believes that challenging texts[6] require a certain level of collaboration in order to accurately reflect, understand, and appreciate the complex literature. According to Gallagher's "Model for Teaching Difficult Text," the most basic form of reading simply involves "focusing the reader [by] framing the text" (12). During this stage of reading, the material is merely presented so the overall concept of the story is understood. It is only through a student's interaction with the text, perhaps even their rereading of a text, that they become willing and able to "collaborate" and create "metaphorical" and "reflective" responses. The deeper forms of readings involve thinking critically about the text and creating personal reactions to it. Deep reading also allows a student to identify and understand the "metaphorical" meaning of the text, the message in between the lines (Gallagher 7). Many students do not infer when they read

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[6] See Kelly Gallagher's "Model for Teaching Challenging Texts" in Appendix.

or actively try to solve the puzzle of the plot, or identify with the characters, or predict the conclusion.

Deep reading, reading that requires the reader to collaborate and think metaphorically and reflectively about the text, happens more naturally while reading a graphic novel. Eisner discusses the importance of deep reading and keeping a reader engaged with the text in his book *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist*. He writes,

> A major element in the reader-storyteller contract is the struggle to maintain reader interest. The devices used in the telling bind the reader to the storytelling. For the storyteller this is a matter of control. Once the reader's attention is seized it cannot be allowed to escape. The key to reader control is relevance to his interest and understanding. (Eisner 50)

Because graphic novels maintain an inescapable amount of interest, readers are more likely to understand the text, think critically about it, and analyze it on a deeper level. Major analysis happens within each frame of a graphic novel. Typically, a graphic novel's frames contain a border, narration, word balloons and some visual objects and/or people. The artist's technique contributes to the story's tone. Harvey writes, "An artist's style can be identified by describing the way he draws certain objects (shoes, hands, lips) or how he uses a brush or pen (thin lines, thick lines; sketchy or labored or detailed)" (Harvey 152). A detail as simple as the frame's border may be bold or thin, decorated or deleted. In fact, line design typically controls the tone of the story in a graphic novel. The width, texture, and direction of a simple line all contribute to the portrayal of an emotion and therefore contribute to the tone of the story. McCloud writes, "by direction alone, a line may go from passive and timeless—to proud and strong—to dynamic and changing—by its shape, it can be unwelcoming and severe—or warm and gentle—or rational and conservative. By its character it may seem savage and deadly—or weak and

unstable—or honest and direct" (*Understanding Comics* 125). Arguably the most important element in a graphic novel, the frame is responsible for dividing the story into visually significant moments of the story. Although each frame will contain its own specific tone, together the stylistic choices a graphic artist makes while drawing each frame will provide insight into the whole tone and mood of a story. Students are forced to not only recognize these choices but what they may represent metaphorically.

Gallagher writes, "We live in a world of metaphor, and those who can appreciate it are richer for it. I want my students to experience this richness" (125). He continues,

> Bringing metaphorical thinking into the teaching of literature provides two
> benefits: (1) students are more readily able to reach deeper levels of
> comprehension when they understand metaphor in challenging text…and
> (2) repeated practice recognizing and analyzing metaphor enables
> students to generate their own metaphorical connections to the text and the
> to the world, thus sharpening their higher-level thinking skills. (Gallagher
> 125)

Students should not be finished reading once the sentence is punctuated. Students should read and draw conclusions, thinking specifically about how this work has shaped society or even themselves. Jago points out that it was only when her students realized that "they were actually going to have to 'do' something to make the text comprehensible, their frustrations with reading decreased" (51). Reading, in this sense, is a mystery in which all readers become active participants in solving the meaning of the text.

This type of inquiry, discussion and reflection engages the reader and therefore creates a personal and worthwhile relationship between the student and the text. Wilhelm writes, "Instead of looking at reading as receiving the meaning in texts, reader-oriented theories regard reading as the creation, in concert with texts, of personally significant experiences and meanings" (16). When our students are actively engaged in the activity

of reading, they finish a passage and end their reading with personal feelings and reactions to the text. Proficient readers realize that the reason why they have grown to love or hate a character is because of the characterization created by the author. Deeper comprehension comes from them exploring and discussing the diction chosen, the tone created, the outcome experienced. This is where personal preference plays a critical role in reading conversations. Reading should actively take place in our minds and through communication with one another. Teachers should not only review a reading's plot summary, but they should ask their students about their personal interactions with the text. Students should be asked about what they think, hear, feel as they are reading and share such answers with their classmates. Teachers should also ask students to complete the author's thoughts by asking additional questions and seeking additional answers even past the printed page. This way, "many students will preconceive the reading act in a way that empower[s] them" because it gives them "a sense of their own agency as meaning-makers" (Wilhelm 85). According to Wilhelm, the "top-down" approach, or the phonics approach, is perceived by children as being a "symptomatic…way schools drain away the juicy joys of reading and set out obstacles between children and becoming literate" (16). Jago believes that "teachers need to go beyond encouraging responses from student readers and push them to understand exactly what the author has done with words and sentences, syntax, and diction that elicited such a response in them as readers" (56).

Such analysis of the text, of the words and sentences, syntax, and diction happens on multiple levels within a graphic novel even though the narration within each frame of a graphic novel is typically kept short. The graphic artist is expected to choose the font

style, size and even color of the narration throughout the graphic novel's story. Any

change in font, size or color will also be treated as a significant change and will signal a

momentous change in tone. Because the narration stylistically relates to the visuals

within each frame, readers are more likely to comprehend not only the storyline, but also

the mood of the graphic novel. These elements serve as helpful features in the overall

understanding of the text.

Additionally, the graphic artist provides word balloons that serve as dialogue

within each frame. The choice in font, size and color is also significant within a word

balloon. More importantly, word balloons may serve as interior monologue, a unique

way for the readers to hear interior thoughts or truth within a story. Word balloons are

used to convey sound and thought (*Understanding Comics* 134). At times they clarify

what the images and narration within each frame simply suggest. Eisner writes, "The

comics' medium does not have sound, music or motion, so this requires readers to

participate in the acting out of the story. The dialogue, therefore, becomes a critical

element" and yet another way for the reader to better interact with the text (Eisner 57).

Carrier writes, "According to Descartes, we cannot know another person's mind directly;

we can only infer thoughts from their outward expression in words and gesture" (Carrier

20). He recalls a "French semiotic commentator's" definition of the word balloon,

"neither purely verbal nor just pictorial, but both one and other at once, bridge the

word/image gap" (Carrier 28). Carrier writes, "When we read the contents of balloons,

our first concern may be with the meaning of the words they contain. But since comics

are also a visual art, we are concerned as well with the strictly visual qualities of balloon"

(Carrier 30). The shape of the word balloon will contribute to the mood of the frame

(*Making Comics* 142). Carrier explains that word balloons can be "graceful" or "chunky" (Carrier 44). Artists can make a reader character seem inferior, superior, suffocated or lonely by the placement and number of word balloons. Carrier writes,

> We readily compare and contrast the balloon with the depicted objects surrounding it, observing how its shape does or does not fit into the composition. Thus the balloon is not just a neutral container but another element in the visual field. Indeed, even identifying balloons as containers already is to hint at some ways of identifying their expressive significance. (Carrier 44)

The emphasis on specific words within the word balloon will aid urgency and signal importance to the reader (*Making Comics* 144). Carrier writes, "We contrast elegantly shaped and awkward-looking balloons and are aware of the visual qualities of the chosen type, which we read in the ways we read handwriting for signs of someone's character" (Carrier 30). McCloud calls oversized wording in word balloons, "dramatic variations" and believes that differences of "size and shape" are used to "portray vocal inflection on a word-to-word basis" (*Making Comics* 144). Eisner writes, "The style of lettering and emulation of accents are the clues enabling the reader to read it with the emotional nuances the comics storyteller intended" (Eisner 61). Word balloons may be left empty for effect, or may contain visuals to show the pictures the character is imagining (Carrier 31). Since two elements can be read within each frame, the text and the visuals, word balloons may also serve as another way for the graphic artist to slow down the action of reading. A word balloon may come in between two action frames, requiring the reader to stop and read the text. Similarly, sound effects add an element of urgency and connectivity to the text. Often large in font and unavoidable, the reader is forced to imagine the sound within the frame and understand its importance to the plot of the story. Harvey writes,

> The graphic novel may have other characteristics as well, but speech
> balloons and narrative breakdown seem to be vital ingredients:
> concurrence of speech and action, and timing. Without these traits, the
> graphic novel will simply be something else—another kind of graphic
> story, surely, but not of the same order as the comics. (Harvey 109)

The companions to these words are the images within each frame. Each frame can have a number of visuals in various forms ranging from places, to people, to objects. McCloud calls these visuals, "icons" (*Understanding Comics* 27). Different than symbols, the word icon is "used to represent a person, place, thing or idea" (*Understanding Comics* 27). Unlike many symbols, the icons used within each frame can contain a number of meanings, each "fluid and variable according to appearance" (*Understanding Comics* 28). The way in which a character is drawn will specifically serve as ways of presenting and controlling characterization. According to McCloud, it is through the way a character is drawn that the audience determines the level of "human connection" felt (*Making Comics* 4).   Eisner explains,

> An "image" is the memory or idea of an object or experience recorded by
> a narrator either mechanically (photography) or by hand (drawing). In
> comics, images are generally impressionistic. Usually, they are rendered
> with economy in order to facilitate their usefulness as a language.
> Because experience precedes analysis, the intellectual digestive process is
> accelerated by the imagery provided by comics. (Eisner 9)

Since images are so impressionistic, graphic artists pay specific attention to the eyes, expressions and body language of the characters. McCloud explains the tradition of drawing characters with skillful proportions and symmetry to better represent humanistic qualities. In some instances, however, exaggerated caricature is used, which is "essentially aggressive in its distortions" (Carrier 6). McCloud explains "the level of abstraction varies" in the drawings of cartoon characters, meaning that if a graphic artist wishes to create strong characterization, exaggerated caricatures are drawn

(*Understanding Comics* 28-29). Even a character's clothes are also "symbolic" and will

further establish characterization for the reader (Eisner 16). Dark clothing can symbolize

evil. Light clothing can symbolize purity. Characters' social status is established by the

clothing they wear. Uniforms can easily reveal a character's profession and, if the

characters are drawn with their uniforms on, the reader can assume their profession is

important to the development of the story. Remembering that it is our experiences that

aid in our understanding of visuals, the specific details drawn to such images will

contribute to our analysis of them. These specific details create lasting impressions for

the reader, which are essential to the understanding of a story. More importantly, these

build quick, subtle aspects of character that are non-verbal.

Readers should relate to the characters, recognize characterization and predict

character actions. They should sympathize with the characters' feelings and try to

understand their problems. Similarly, readers should picture the setting of the story and

travel within the fictional space with the main characters. Wilhelm writes, "Quite often,

the readers would become a presence in the story world, and begin to move around in that

world or manipulate it in some way" (56). Readers can achieve this by "project[ing]

themselves and their real-world knowledge into the story world. They would also

mentally create visual pictures of settings, situations, characters, and their physical

features and gestures. The readers on these dimensions evoked a complete story world,

and at this point of the virtual world of the story had intense and comprehensive reality

for them" (Wilhelm 56).

Graphic artists can manipulate how connected the reader feels towards each

character in the story for instance, which characters readers relate to, appreciate or

despise. McCloud writes this "ability of cartoons to focus our attention on an idea is an important part of their special power, both in comics and in drawing generally" (*Understanding Comics* 31). The more general the character drawing, the more relatable it becomes to the reader. Readers can pull from their memories their own version of that representation, even though they may not share the same background as the author. Readers can use these detailed visual representations as tools to delve into the details about character and setting without having to rely on their understanding of vocabulary or their grasp of syntax.

This is why graphic artists must be particular and detailed while drawing characters and their expressions and details of body language. Since graphic novels do not have the luxury of narrating a back story the way traditional texts can, artists must share the characters' background information, driving force, innermost details with the reader visually. McCloud believes that "body language can fill a page with life, energy and personality from top to bottom" (*Making Comics* 102). Specifically, according to McCloud, a characters' posture alone can influence how the reader hears the words on the page (*Making Comics* 106). Eisner writes, "Remember, this is a graphic medium and the reader absorbs mood and other abstracts through artwork. Style art not only connects the reader with the artist but it sets ambiance and has language value" (Eisner 149).

Even a story's setting can be portrayed as either significant or insignificant based on the detail with which it is drawn. It could be blurry or focused. It could be dominant or simply a background. McCloud explains, "If an artist wants to portray the beauty and complexity of the physical world, realism of some sort is going to play a part" (*Understanding Comics* 41). At times artists will create more fantastic backgrounds in

their frames, encouraging the reader to "mask themselves in a character and safely enter a sensually stimulating world" (*Understanding Comics* 43). When a background is repeated across a number of consecutive frames, "details and repeated elements just fade from view and are ignored" (*Making Comics* 34). In this case the reader is more likely to focus on the material in the forefront of the frame, recognizing its importance. Either way, "backgrounds can be another valuable tool for indicating invisible ideas…particularly the world of emotions" (*Understanding Comics* 132). The graphic artist arranges the frames to suggest which frames the reader should actively notice, and which frames contain a setting that the reader should not notice or analyze because it is no longer important to the understanding of the text.

The characters' relationship to the setting is also quite important. Their placement within each frame often controls their power and importance within each scene. Images and words placed in the center of the frame will hold more importance that those surrounding (*Making Comics* 24). Minor objects included in a frame may become a visual hint of foreshadowing (*Making Comics* 29). The backgrounds may specifically reference the inner feelings of a character. Weak readers sometimes overlook such symbolism and characterization. McCloud believes that "when a story hinges more on characterization than cold plot, there may not be a lot to show externally—but the landscape of the characters' minds can be quite a sight" (*Understanding Comics* 132). For example, if a character is feeling confused or dazed, not only will their expressions and body language change, but the background within the frame may also reflect those emotions (*Understanding Comics* 132). McCloud writes, "because readers want and expect that sense of place, a clever storyteller can choose to

delay the establishing shot to increase suspense—or to mirror the thoughts of a character who's temporarily unaware of his or her surroundings" (*Making Comics* 23). These serve as visual cues to internal characterization, which is often another storytelling element overlooked by remedial readers when reading traditional texts.

Even the color within each frame serves as a "storytelling role" in a graphic novel. Just as colors may symbolically represent various emotions, so do the ways in which color progresses throughout a story. Readers specifically recognize vast differences in color within a page, which serves as yet another hint about tone, mood and plot. While some graphic novels are printed in black and white, the benefit of using color is its symbolism because many cultures identify certain colors with certain emotions.

Wilhelm writes that his readers "became consciously concerned with what could be termed 'a narrative world,'" when they were "consciously recognizing not only details but the openness of the text—what is not told, of what is left out for the reader—and considering the significance of such openness" (74). The details of the text that are not literally written, but instead implied in the graphic novel is found in the gutter, or blank space in between each frame of the graphic novel. Although this space holds no images or text, it contains unseen action because time passes between the two frames. It is in the gutter that the reader actively determines the time that takes place between the two frames, as well as the action that is visually missing. It is also through the examination of the gutter that "the audience is a willing and conscious collaborator and closure is the agent of change, time and motion" (*Understanding Comics* 65). Perhaps the gutter is the most powerful way in which a reader actively engages with a text in a graphic novel. Seasoned readers are able to recognize elements of foreshadowing, develop questions

while reading and predict future actions in the story. The gutter, the small space within

each frame of a graphic novel, requires readers to recognize, question, and predict

quickly and easily, thus permitting them to become active participants in the development

of the plot. It is within the space between two frames, in the gutter, that the reader takes

the information suggested by the graphic artist and completes the story, thus participating

in the creation of the story to some degree.

Wilhelm shares with his students:

Authors leave the reader many gaps…which they expect the reader to fill
in. Sometimes these gaps are details, like what people are wearing or
might be thinking, but sometimes, they can be whole scenes, or years'
worth of time which we have to create in our minds in some way
consistent with the cues from the story. (107)

Graphic novel readers are required to interpret what happens in between the two

frames, much like the deep reading required of traditional literature. They are forced to

use their imaginations to create conclusions to these missing storylines. Creating

personal interpretations and predictions in the gutter of a graphic novel or during the

sections of traditional texts that are not thoroughly explained will generate a deeper

connection between the reader and the text. Even though the graphic novel is highly

graphic and visual, visualization is forced during a reading of a graphic novel. Every

reader's perspective of what happens in these so-called gutters will vary promoting

valuable discussions in the classroom based on varied backgrounds and personal

experiences. Wilhelm writes, "Perspective-taking, as pointed out by Enciso (1990), is a

highly complex social-cognitive process that entails considering what someone else

might be seeing, thinking or feeling" (59). The sharing of these perspectives and

interpretations "is critical to the development of more sensitive and powerful readings

that lead to greater understanding of self and other" (Wilhelm 59).

Activities such as creating an artistic interpretation of the gutter, will not only encourage our students to better relate to their reading material, but it will also allow them the opportunity to offer their own interpretation of the text. This will promote a deeper connection to their reading and allow them to make valuable contributions to class discussions. These exercises encourage the reader to actively participate in reading by entering the story world, creating a relationship with the characters, and developing a visual understanding of the setting and storyline. Wilhelm writes,

> As they started to read, students would 'enter' or 'get into' the story world by comprehending literal meanings, taking an interest in the story action, and deciding to continue with the reading. They would begin to make predictions and form expectations as they recognized the 'the rules' and 'the game' set up by the text. The reader entering the story world also began to create rudimentary mental images, often stereotypes from televisions or films. (51)

When students play an active role in developing a visual companion for their reading, it excites them. Wilhelm records, "Once these students were given the support to create a concrete visualization of a story, then they often became excited about reading that particular piece, and became capable of empathizing, connecting and reflecting upon the literary experience" (65). Wilhelm believes that creating "mental images of the story" and "noticing cues for visualizing a 'secondary world'" allows readers to "immediately relate to a particular character and create the setting through the eyes of the character" (62). It becomes an exciting experience for a student to become one with the characters and book in general. Wilhelm explains, "Once these students were given the support to create a concrete visualization of a story, then they often became excited about reading that particular piece, and became capable of empathizing, connecting, and reflecting instances throughout the school year" (65). They become the "meaning-

makers" allowing them to not only understand their reading, but enabling them to contribute to discussions evolving around literary messages (Wilhelm 85).

Wilhelm believes that students need to take the time to engage with a text to truly characterize elements of deeper reading, such as stereotypes. According to him, readers need to "create rudimentary mental images" which seem to take the place of "stereotypes from television or films" (51). A student's experience with a graphic novel will not only allow him/her to easily follow along with the visuals presented, but will also encourage visual analysis in a search for characterization. In Wilhelm's experience of his students' deeper reading,

> Readers become a presence in the story world, and begin to move around
> in that world or manipulate it in some way. In this way they would project
> themselves and their real-world knowledge into the story world. They
> would also mentally create visual pictures of setting, situations, characters,
> and their physical features and gestures. The readers on these dimensions
> evoked a complete story world, and at this point the virtual world of the
> story had intense and comprehensive reality for them. (56)

Wilhelm adds that visualization "encourages students to access and apply their prior knowledge as they read, increases comprehension, and improves the ability to predict, infer, and remember what has been read" (117). Visualizing the text not only encourages the student to see the images that the author intends, but it also allows the reader to "actively look for patterns that evolve through a reading and consider matters of coherence and how separate elements fit together to indicate meaning" (Wilhelm 75). Visualization requires our students to imagine and determine what is not written in the text. Visual associations with the text have proven to be a powerful way to enhance comprehension. Jago writes,

> I also describe to students how within a very few paragraphs I must re-
> create the story's setting in my head. If I read that snow is swirling about
> a man's legs as he crosses an empty airfield, I picture that image. Reading

on, the image develops. Is it day or night? Is there a moon? Re-creating
the story's setting is essential because it will be the backdrop for
everything that follows. Readers don't need to remind themselves
continually of the setting any more than we need to remind ourselves as
we sit in the classroom that the school is located in Santa Monica,
California. But we do need to see the fictional world with our mind's eye.
(Jago 143)

Wilhelm writes, "Having entered the story and been engaged by it, these readers

immediately began to anticipate action and make predictions" thus becoming an active

participant in the reading (56). Students who struggle with visualization will benefit from

reading the graphic novel's text and seeing its companion pictures. In the case of a

graphic novel, the story "comes from the text and is embellished by the art" (Eisner 23).

The art can be analyzed for deeper meaning, as well as its connection to the text. Harvey

writes, "when words and pictures blend in mutual dependence to tell a story and thereby

convey a meaning that neither the verbal nor the visual can achieve alone without the

other, then the storyteller is using to the fullest the resources the medium offers him"

(Carrier 4). These images serve as visual aids for remedial readers who have trouble

visualizing text independently.

Images are especially powerful to analyze. Carrier writes that while drawing a

graphic novel, "the artist's aim is to enable the spectator to form some hypothesis about

what is depicted" (Carrier14). A mere picture can evoke emotions and questions. While

meeting a character for the first time, the reader unconsciously questions who the

character is and analyzes the visuals to better understand the "past, present, and future of

the character presented" (Carrier 14). Carrier writes, "If that process is successful, the

spectator's hypothesis matches the artist's intention, and that viewer sees illusionistically

represented what the artist desired to depict" (Carrier 14). The reader can connect more

easily with the visual and therefore is more likely to recognize and relate to the graphic artist's intent.

Wilhelm stresses the importance of "actively look[ing] for patterns that evolved through a reading and consider[ing] matters of coherence and how separate elements fit together to indicate meanings" (75). This type of analysis is especially important during the examination of a graphic novel. Artists of a graphic novel create patterns of images, colors and line textures. These elements "[build] up meaning by adding together an accumulation of various details considered to be significant that were presented at different places in the text" (Wilhelm 75). Asking students to recognize and remember them requires a deep level of retention and analysis and reflection and these are skills that struggling readers need to practice. McCloud calls the act of setting up of a frame and scene, an "establishing shot" (*Making Comics* 160). Much like film, graphic novels use long shots to set the scene of the story. Similarly, close-ups are used to focus audience attention. Traditionally, objects of significance are centered within the frame. If an image is off-centered, the reader is free to "wander" the scene and feel the world "surround" him/her (*Making Comics* 160-165). Establishing the shot before introducing the text allows readers to better understand the environment in which the character lives, as well as identify his/her significance within the setting or scene. Harvey discusses the seamlessness in which a graphic novel can repeat actions, "forcing us" to "witness again and again" the "same events" the characters experience in the setting (Harvey 116). When patterns occur in a graphic novel, the reader recognizes and questions their importance, which serves as foreshadowing in the narrative.

Whether the questioning is something that is done verbally, non-verbally, or as written responses, Harvey and Daniels stress, "questioning is the strategy that propels learners on" (23). Readers should "wonder about the content, concepts, outcomes and genre" (Harvey and Daniels 23). Readers of the graphic novel can be encouraged to wonder about the format, line strokes, color choices and arrangement of the frames, in addition to questioning the written word in the text. They should "question the author, the ideas and the information" and "read to discover answers and gain information" (Harvey and Daniels 23). These questions should promote "further research and investigation to gain information and acquire knowledge" (Harvey and Daniels 23). Since the graphic artist's techniques reveal the personality of the artist, the reader has a unique opportunity to question what the artist's creation reveals about his/her attitudes or perspective. Each aspect of the reading of a graphic novel deepens comprehension and builds literacy.

In addition to building effective anticipation for a reading and creating worthwhile assignments as guided activities during readings, teachers should encourage students to reflect on their reading and the impact it has on them "before, during, and after their reading" (Harvey and Daniels 20-22). This is how literacy is developed. Harvey and Daniels write, "Real understanding takes root when learners merge their thinking with the content and react to the information" (31). Jago suggests an effective way of reflection. As a form of assessment, instead of a reading check, she requires students to remember details from the text that some struggling readers may have missed or forgotten so she asks her students to "visualize the most powerful image they remembered from last night's reading" (64).

Gallagher reminds us that "when students tell [us] that they do not understand the reading, what they are really telling [us] is that there are *parts* of the reading they do not understand (67). It is also important for us to remind our students that they need to make note of which parts of the text they found challenging. Harvey and Daniels agree that students should "monitor" their "comprehension" and "keep track of [their] thinking in a variety of ways" noticing the areas of the text that remain approachable and the areas that lose their interest and understanding (22). This forces the reader to stop periodically and examine the text by asking questions to perceive meaning. It has been proven effective to encourage students to break down reading into smaller, controlled sections. This will organize their reading and encourage them to digest the text multiple times. Readers are encouraged to "become aware of their thinking as they read" and to "listen to their inner voice and follow the ongoing inner conversation" they should be having while reading (Harvey & Daniels 22). Discussing the material also contributes to a better understanding of the text and encourages readers to "stop, think, and react to information" (22) as they read. Both reluctant and struggling readers may only understand small sections of the text at a time, or may miss important clues of foreshadowing and become confused by the plot and disengaged in their reading.

Wilhelm stresses the importance of allowing students time to "stop at various points in their reading" to evaluate their reading (8). This activity encourages a student to "report their thoughts, feelings, imaginings" (Wilhelm 8). This activity is particularly difficult when students are reading challenging texts that contain rich vocabulary and sentences filled with imagery. Gallagher explains the importance of breaking down a reading selection to improve reading retention. Harvey and Daniels also state that

proficient adult readers will "summarize and synthesize ideas" as they are reading. In order to do this, readers will need to "paraphrase information" and "use the parts [of the text] to see the whole" idea (Harvey and Daniels 24). Since the graphic novel is broken down into separated frames, it neatly sections off passages of the story to help our remedial students focus. These predetermined sections or frames create organized breaking points for struggling readers who cannot digest vast amounts of the text at once. When a student becomes "lost" in the written word of the text, he/she can rely on the visual story for clarity, and vice versa.

Working with a text this closely usually requires multiple readings. Gallagher stresses the benefits of students rereading a passage for better clarity. He writes, "Individually and collaboratively, they make meaning from the text, revisiting it a number of times to deepen their understanding" (24). According to Gallagher, it is rare for students to experience deep comprehension during a first-draft reading[7]. Gallagher writes, "Reading a complex book requires the reader to revisit it if a deeper appreciation is to be developed" (80). Understanding that it is already difficult for reluctant readers to become motivated enough to read a passage or complete text once, asking or requiring reluctant readers to participate in multiple readings of a passage or text is unlikely. Jago believes that "teachers need to take time in class to show students how to examine a text in minute detail: word by word, sentence by sentence" (54). Much like analyzing poetry, challenging texts may require multiple reads. A first-draft reading will probably allow the reader to experience the text on a superficial level. Gallagher believes that "Students need to return to the text to help them overcome their initial confusion, to work through

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[7] Gallagher refers to the "initial reading" of a text as a "first-draft" reading (53).

the unfamiliarity of the work, to move beyond the literal, and to free up cognitive space for higher-level thinking" (80). During a first reading, students may have a basic understanding of the plot. Students may experience a more multi-layered understanding of the text during a second reading, such as tone, diction and purpose. Multiple experiences with the text will promote critical thinking about theme and motive, enabling a student to become personally invested in the material through personal reflections. By re-reading a graphic novel, a student examines a particular section of the story multiple times, perhaps without even realizing it. Each time, the reader focuses on a different element: sentence structure, choice of font, color used and/or visual companions. Each aspect requires the reader to reread without the process becoming tedious because during each reading, the reader focuses his/her attention on a different aspect of the text.

Eisner writes, "Readers grow impatient with long text passages because they have become used to acquiring stories, ideas and information quickly and with little effort" (xvii). Often readers appreciate receiving information in condensed format. Adult readers are reading shorter online articles and in the classrooms, our students traditionally prefer shorter stories to novels. Rereading a graphic novel is more convenient because it is short. McCloud points out that "readers like change and variety," which is another way why the graphic novel attracts a wide audience. Carrier writes, "Reading novels, by contrast, my sense of the whole attention is directed at a long text, no single page of which I can attend to entirely all at once. When I flip backward and forward…seeking to find a scene I recall with especial pleasure, I unavoidably reread other passages I had remembered only vaguely" (62).

Educators should recognize the importance of creating an educational experience similar to the new lifestyles, this visual literacy, our current students live so that our students can better respond to education. In elementary school, students enjoy testing their creativity by writing short stories, playing vocabulary games and participating in spelling bees. As middle school students, they begin competing with friends for the highest score in the most popular video game. They begin text messaging and abbreviating words. They speak in the slang that they often hear on their favorite television shows. As high school students, they spend a majority of their time on major social media websites. They are constantly tuned in, exploring, and responding to the current issues that they are exposed to over the Internet.   The information that they receive is given to them mostly visually, through action-shot photography and video. Cellular phone applications revolve around students publicizing personal pictures with a caption description. Perhaps we may recognize our students' exhibiting signs of shorter attention spans because of the way they are communicating, and because they are not reading recreationally. Perhaps our students are generally intimidated and uninterested in reading in the classroom and reading leisurely on their own time. Eisner writes, "printed text lost its monopoly to another communication technology, film. Aided by electronic transmission, it became the major competitor for readership" (Eisner xvi). Our students' personal lives involve much interaction with technology, therefore graphics and visuals are more of a common way for receiving information. Eisner writes, "With its limited demand on a viewer's cognitive skills, film makes the time-consuming burden of learning to decode and digest words seem obsolete" (Eisner xvi).

Practicing reading is not only important to develop reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, but it is through reading that "students develop intellectually" (Jago 7). According to Jago, students must "delve" into stories (7). She stresses the importance of students completing close reading activities. Jago writes, "Teachers need to take time in class to show students how to examine a text in minute detail: word by word, sentence by sentence" (Jago 54). This type of reading may require students to examine a text multiple times. Gallagher insists that students understand that reading is a "process" and must be "revisited" many times for true understanding (24). This repeated exploration will begin to happen more "automatically [once] their reading abilities mature" limiting the times a student will need to reread for deep comprehension (24).

Gallagher shares the philosophy of Sheridan Blau, a professor of English literature and author of *The Literature Workshop*, who believes that the three questions we should ask our reading students are, "1. What does it say? 2. What does it mean? 3. What does it matter?" (86). According to Blau, these three questions are the only essential questions that matter while our students are reading and should be answered in chronological order for better comprehension. The first question, "What does it say?" can and should be answered during first reading and should focus on the actual language of the author. This first question is used more as a "foundation" for the second question, "What does it mean?" During the level of this question, students will then begin to examine why certain diction was chosen, notice foreshadowing, ask questions of the language used, and predict the future development of the text. Using these two questions, students are more likely to find significant passages and differentiate them from insignificant moments in the text.

It is not until the last question, "What does it matter?" that our students are able to "think deeply about the issues that will affect their lives" (Gallagher 89). In addition to appreciating the plot of a story, it is important for our reading students "to think beyond the story" and recognize the motive of storytelling as well as the influence literature has on society (Gallagher 90). Gallagher writes,

> Though the world has changed drastically since many of these works were written, there is much about the human condition that has remained unchanged, and recognizing these universals enables students to carefully consider their place in society (90).

Just as our students recognize busy work as opposed to work that is substantial, our students want to make valuable use of their reading time. If our students are able to connect with the text and recognize the lessons that it teaches them or society in general, they are more likely to appreciate literature and the reading experience. Most classics contain universal and timeless themes that can both intrigue our students and generate discussions about their effects on society.

Jeffrey Wilhelm references Edgar Dale, author of *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching*, in *You Gotta BE the Book*. The second most effective method of retention involves merging both what we see and what we hear, either during whole class read alouds or while listening to audio books. Since the graphic novel contains shorter sentences, less proficient readers are able to take their time reading the material without becoming self-conscious about their timing. Perhaps then, students will be less reluctant to participate during in-class readings because the literature isn't overwhelming or intimidating.

Using the graphic novel, either as a primary source of study or as a companion reading to a more traditional text is another way for us, as educators, to guarantee a

classroom that approaches and addresses all types of learners by telling all types of stories. In his chapter titled, "Reading is Seeing," Wilhelm shares his experience of using the graphic novel in his class to promote reading comprehension. When given the option to read a graphic novel, Wilhelm recalls there being "a stampede for these books" (123). During visualization exercises, Wilhelm believes that "the visualization activities seemed to enhance their memories of the stories they had read (133). He recalls realizing "that the response of engaged readers is intensely visual, empathic, and emotional" (Wilhelm 144). Specifically he writes,

> By focusing in class on the importance of these evocative responses, that is, entering the story world, visualizing people and places, and taking up relationships to characters, less engaged readers were given strategies for experiencing texts and were helped to rethink reading. As a result, many were helped to become more enthusiastic readers. These less engaged readers' use of insufficient or impoverished strategies were then used as a springboard to richer and more reflective response. (Wilhelm 144)

Harvey and Daniels write, "Information comes in all shapes and sizes" (81).

Many graphic novels are appealing to the classroom because they tell a story that has never been told before, in a way that has never been told before. The graphic novel is a new and exciting form of literature that teaches beyond the written word, and requires a deep level of visual analysis. Jago recalls a quote from Robert Scholes, author of *Protocols of Reading*, "Reading is not just a matter of standing safely outside texts, where their power cannot reach us. It is a matter of entering, of passing through the looking glass and seeing ourselves on the other side" (69). Harvey and Daniels remind us, "Nothing prompts a question quicker than an image of spewing volcano. Nothing spurs an inference faster than a hungry Komodo dragon stalking a wild pig" (82). If we want our students to experience the art of reading, we must include the graphic novel in our curricula.

More recently, educators familiar with the benefits of incorporating graphic novels in the classroom have published their experiences of using graphic novels to promote critical reading, writing, and thinking skills among students in early education and high school reading classes.

Authors Linda Smetana of California State University in, Hayward and Dana L. Grisham of National University in San Diego in "Revitalizing Tier 2 Intervention with Graphic Novel," share the findings of an effort to incorporate the graphic novel in an urban school's Tier 2 Response to Intervention program, a program that that focuses on strengthening the reading skills of below-average elementary school students. The five fifth-grade students in this study do not qualify for remedial classes but exhibit a very limited vocabulary and feelings of discomfort while reading. According to Smetana and Grisham, these young readers already label themselves as incapable readers, which as Wilhelm discusses, hinders their experiences and skills. Because they feel as though they are not good at reading, they read less and receive less practice than the average and advanced readers in their grade. This program sought to establish a comfortable and inviting environment, the kind of environment that Gallagher describes as being one that fosters a love for reading, specifically one in which these students can experiment with literature, become comfortable working through their difficulties, and return to the traditional classroom to interactively read with their fellow classmates.

As recommended by Wilhelm, Jago, and Harvey and Daniels, the graphic novels chosen for this study were chosen carefully and were of high interest. Originally, they too were met with the usual reluctance in this Tier 2 intervention program. With time, students exhibited signs of engagement, interest and relationship with the material. The

format of the graphic novel was introduced, and once it was understood by the students, "thirty-minute intervention periods" were planned and executed to "incorporate(d) strategies for decoding, sight word acquisition, fluency, vocabulary, and/or comprehension" (6). These periods of instruction "included direct instruction, guided reading and independent practice" (6). Within two weeks of the study, discussion with the students proved to be interesting.

During Phase 3 of the study, students participated in literature circles introduced earlier, which proved to be successful since the students were able to participate in a full class' worth of "deeper" discussion. Strategies were reviewed in the beginning of the lesson, and students then read individually or with a partner (7). During this process, "decoding of multisyllabic words was embedded into the oral reading of the graphic novel" (7). As predicted earlier in the chapter, reluctant and remedial readers were more willing to participate in reading out loud during classroom discussions while reading a graphic novel, largely because the graphic novel contains shorter sentences and is therefore less intimidating. As explained in the article, "phrase reading was authentic as the students read the speech and think bubbles with expression and sight words were read as they arose in the text. Comprehension was developed though interaction with content. Students completed retellings, examined character actions in light of the elements of the story, and made and confirmed or rejected predictions" (7). This type of interaction demonstrated by the students' enthusiasm and predictions suggest that deeper comprehension is possible and could result in a more exciting classroom experience.

Smetana and Grisham found that "the gutters on the pages also provided natural stopping points for discussion, fluency was developed 'just in time' as the students read

and reread more" (7). These natural stopping points also encouraged the type of reexamination Gallagher suggests we encourage in students. They allowed the readers to stop, think and react to the text, while often rereading passages in class discussions to further understanding of the text.

The study documented significant "positive changes in students' literacy behaviors" (8). It was reported that within "the first two weeks the students were reading more; they were decoding words and sharing a bit of what they had read" and they "spoke of the 'cool' different books that they got to read" (8). Further into the study, it was "noted" that the students in the Tier 2 intervention program were returning to their larger classrooms and sharing the stories of the graphic novels they were reading (8). They shared their graphic novels with their peers and their families. These students were excited with their new texts and showed true signs of engagement. It is implied that these students were establishing a stronger relationship with their graphic novels than traditional texts because they were successful in reading and understanding them. It was even observed that during lunch recess, "students brought graphic novels to the eating area and read them and formed their own lunchtime literature group that included others from the general education classroom" (9). While discussing the literature, "their faces were animated and their bodies were moving, mimicking the characters in the story" (9). Furthermore, they were "becoming experts on the visual arts and mentored their general education peers" by discussing graphic novel terms such as "bubble, gutter, frame, thinking bubble, mood, contrast, shadow, light, darkness and intentions" (9).

The collected data showed an increase in more than just motivation and engagement. Their data was collected and studied every two weeks (9). At the start of

the study, students in the Tier 2 intervention program were "reading between 75 and 83 words per minute as measured on the DIBELS passages" and "their reading was hesitant, lacking prosody and expression" (8). Students who score "below the 50th percentile should be making a gain of between .7 and .8 in the number of words per minute each week" (8). It was reported that, "in a period of two weeks, the gains, as measured by number of words read in a minute, doubled" (9).

In addition, students were more likely to take risks. They began to trust their reading skills and were therefore more willing and eager to read more. The participants in the study "spoke [not] of character motives and behaviors" but recognized motives of the authors (9). It is important for students, especially elementary students, to recognize that all reading material is written for a reason. Understanding the author's intent is an example of sophisticated comprehension.

The benefits of incorporating graphic novels have been studied in middle schools. Specifically, Susan Hines a fifth grade teacher at Mountain View Elementary School in North Carolina, and Katy Dellinger, seventh grade teacher at Lincolnton Middle School in Lincoln County, North Carolina, investigated the effects of the graphic novel on struggling middle school readers in their study "The Impact of Reading Graphic Novels on Student Motivation & Comprehension." Susan Hines worked with a fifth-grade group consisting of three boys and two girls. Katy Dellinger worked with three boys and two girls from seventh grade. Hines and Dellinger find that most middle school students "either love reading or absolutely despise it" and like many other English and Reading teachers, they are always looking for new and innovative ways of encouraging reading (2). Like Smetana and Grisham, Hines and Dellinger believe that many of their students

are unmotivated to read and do not complete related homework assignments resulting in a low school grade. This low grade certainly deepens students' disdain for reading. It is also particularly difficult for the teacher to "find material on the student's instructional reading level that is appropriate for interest at their age level" (2). It was not until their graduate course that Hines and Dellinger were introduced to the possibilities provided by incorporating the graphic novels in their classrooms. In an attempt to increase both "student motivation" and their "students' comprehension," they conducted a research project examining the benefits of using the graphic novel in both of their schools (2).

Hines, an elementary school teacher, worked with this small fifth grade group containing "three boys and two girls" who are already a part of a reading and writing resource setting, called "Language!" (4). This program runs forty-five minutes a day and is in addition to the forty-five minutes of "additional instruction" provided by "an instructional specialist" who focuses on "comprehension strategies with other students who are struggling readers, but not identified as EC[8]" (4). Her students' interests and ability in reading vary but all of them have been a part of the EC program for more than two years.

Dellinger teaches a seventh-grade class and conducted her study among a group of "three boys and two girls" (5). These five students receive "reading and writing instruction each day a week for 60 minutes each" (5). Dellinger's students' abilities and interest levels also range. Her study involves a student who has a "504 plan because of his Autism" and a general education student who is reading at a seventh-grade level and

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[8] According to the North Carolina State Board of Education and Department of Public Education, "The mission of the Exceptional Children Division is to ensure that students with disabilities develop intellectually, physically, emotionally, and vocationally through the provision of an appropriate individualized education program in the least restrictive environment" (http://ec.ncpublicschools.gov/).

"enjoys readings in his free time" but "happens to fall in the Inclusion Language Arts classroom" (5). The rest of the participants are a part of the "Language Arts Resource class" (5).

Their study lasted four weeks and involved meeting with their participants for forty-five minutes each day. During class time, students were led in group discussions about a graphic novel through "Literature Reading Circle(s)" (6). The first week was devoted to introducing their students to this new format of reading, and discussing the procedures of the study, as well as understanding the students' feelings towards reading. The students also participated in a "pre-comprehension" multiple choice test (6). During the second and third week of the study, "anecdotal notes" were recorded as students "discussed what they were reading and their thoughts about the graphic novel" (7). The graphic novels[9] were read each day. During the second and third week of "Literature Circles," students "took over roles to lead discussions as [they] took turns reading" and discussion revolved around "main ideas of the chapters, time progression and what happened to the characters during time progression, illustrations and how they supported the text, text-to-self connections, and predictions" (7). During this time, students also "entered responses to the reading on the blog" (7).

During week four, reading logs were checked and discussed. Students were asked about their experiences with the graphic novel. Again, "anecdotal notes" were recorded by the teachers and discussions similar to those conducted during the second and third week were completed (7). Post-surveys and "post-comprehension selections on their instructional reading level" were conducted (7). The graphic novels used in the study

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[9] Students were asked to choose a graphic novel from the collection provided by the teacher. Students chose the following titles: *Nancy Drew*, *Lunch Lady*, *Bone*, *Owly*, *Rose*.

were chosen after the data was collected from the students' week one test. Students were asked to choose a graphic novel from the "wide selection" acquired from classroom and school libraries, as well as from teachers' personal collections. It is important to note that Hines and Dellinger offered their students the opportunity of choice, an element stressed by Wilhelm, Jago, and Harvey and Daniels.

Most of the students in their study were reading at or below their grade level. Their pre-comprehension test was given in a "multiple-choice format with questions regarding plot, characters, setting" used to better assist Hines and Dellinger "[to] determine what [their] students know about the elements of both fiction and nonfiction" (13). The same post-test was given. Results were encouraging; "all of the students' scores increased in their comprehension skills[10]" by "at least 10%" (13 & 19).

The teachers were especially pleased with the number of entries students completed in their reading logs. During week one, one out of ten students completed only one writing entry and five out of ten students completed two writing entries, for a total of six out of ten student responses. During week two, all students completed a writing entry (10/10): four of whom wrote once, three of whom wrote twice, and three out of ten wrote three entries. The results stayed nearly consistent for the next two weeks. By the end of the study, eight out of ten students wrote five or more entries in four weeks, two of which wrote ten entries a piece[11]. Similarly, although optional, all of the students wrote on the class blog[12]. Students were no longer reluctant to write about literature. In fact, "9 out of 10 of [their] participants increased their attitudes towards

[10] See Appendix for Hines and Dellinger's Pretest and Posttest Scores.
[11] See Appendix for Hines and Dellinger's Completion of Reading Logs Chart: Table 4.
[12] See Appendix for Hines and Dellinger's Table 3A and 3B.

reading" and only "one student had decreased his/her attitude toward reading[13]" (19). It was noted that "over time, more of the students saw graphic novels as something they 'could not take their hands off of'" (20). As explained by Jago, this type of authentic enjoyment certainly contributed to the students' increase in comprehension. Over time, students become more comfortable with interacting with and responding to the text. Their increased level of learning also promoted their engagement with literature. They found themselves capable and therefore willing to continue to engage with their texts.

In her article "Grade 7 Students Reading Graphic Novels: 'You Need to Do a Lot of Thinking," Sylvia Pantaleo, Associate Professor at the University of Victoria in British Columbia writes about her "multifaceted, classroom-based research project." Her study followed the development of twenty-five seventh-grade students' knowledge of "illustrative elements" and literature and "their understanding, interpretation and analysis of picture books and graphic novels" (113). These twenty-five seventh-grade students, sixteen girls and nine boys, participated in the reading of four graphic novels[14] and contributed to sophisticated conversations regarding the texts, which improved the "students' understanding of how information can be designed and how representations structure our perception and interpretation" (114). The research took place in a "predominately upper-middle class area" in western British Columbia (117).   At the conclusion of the study, nearly half [15]of the participants identified the study's graphic novel *Amulet* as their favorite book. The purpose of the study was to convince teachers to "embrace a sociocultural theory of learning" and to have teachers recognize "how the

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[13] It was noted that this particular student was "struggling" with "environmental issues" at home during the course of the study.

[14] *The Arrival*, *Babymouse*: *Queen of the World*, *Amulet Book One: The Stonekeeper*, *Coraline*

[15] 12 out of 25 students.

nature of classroom communities, such as the prevalent discourses, affects the learning of individual students" (115). Whereas traditional texts can be labeled masculine or feminine, graphic novels have been "shown to appeal to both genders, and to students from diverse backgrounds and cultures" (116). This is particularly important to note since most teachers of English and Reading classes struggle to find material suitable for all of their students.

Pantaleo asserts that "graphic novels are for readers of all ability levels and ages" and that the "benefits of including graphic novels in the curricula focuses on how the visual nature of these multimodal texts enhances comprehension" as well as "vocabulary development" and engagement (116). Students reading a graphic novel are able to study the literature by conducting quick rereads of both the textual and visual material. Readers of the graphic novel are able to complete "double reading" and can easily "follow several narratives at a time" (116). Pantaleo points out that "close study of eye-movements in reading comics indicates that the eye moves between words and pictures rapidly, so that neither the word nor the picture text remains linear in a left-to-right pattern" (116).

Because the reader's understanding must "sustain the narrative across the spaces between the panels," true comprehension while reading graphic novels requires the readers to study the material and determine what is happening in between the frames, in the space called the gutter (116). It was believed that the incorporation of the graphic novel in this seventh grade class would "assist students with visualization; promote language and literacy development, including vocabulary development; develop critical thinking and comprehension skills" and teach the students about "literary techniques,

terms and elements" while providing an "opportunity for media literacy education," an area of interest in our students' lives (116).

Many students in the study were familiar with the term graphic novel, but never actually read one. The study took place for eleven weeks at the beginning of the school year in Mrs. K's classroom, so information regarding the participants' academic backgrounds was not yet known. Once the students were briefed about quality writing responses and taught techniques on interpreting and analyzing a graphic novel, the students read a series of practice picture books on their own, wrote a written response and contributed to a large group discussion. Throughout the study, the students participated in a number of the analytical activities encouraged by Wilhelm, Jago, and Harvey and Daniels. They addressed the importance of recognizing the artist's choice in a graphic novel, such as narrative balloons, font size and color, sound effects image color and technique; and, "with respect to point of view, [they] discussed how authors and illustrators position readers or manipulate readers' orientation in relation to the telling of the narrative and/or to the viewing of an image" (119). The students also participated in a number of surveys and created original storyboards as a concluding activity. Pantaleo specifically uses the students' responses to their reading of *Amulet* as a way of communicating their engagement and understanding during the study. These responses were written prior to large-group discussion. She writes, "Overwhelmingly, the students' comments focused on art elements and/or graphic novel compositional conventions" (121). Students were successful in using new vocabulary or terminology when discussing the graphic novel.

Specifically, students wrote analytically about color, perspective [depth and distance], point of view, panel orientation, and their experience in reading graphic novels. Pantaleo writes, "Overall, the data showed that the students understood and appreciated the complexity of graphic novels as a format of literature" and that "additional pedagogy about graphic novel conventions and art elements would have provided the students with opportunities to deepen their understanding of how the synergy of multiple semiotic resources in graphic novels engages the brain in a rigorous workout" (127). Throughout the study, the students' responses proved that they are willing and eager to engage with graphic novels, even though it does require rereads and sophisticated analytical skills.

Graphic novels have also been studied in high school classrooms to examine the benefits of using visual media to enhance critical reading, writing and thinking skills. In the article "Weaving multimodal meaning in a graphic novel reading group," Sean P. Connors, Assistant Professor of English Education in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Aransas followed six high school students as they interacted with four graphic novels [16] on a voluntary basis to study "the semiotic resources" derived from graphic novels (34). The study was conducted in the American Midwest at Hamilton High School, "an affluent suburban school" (35). The participants, four males and two females, are identified as "proficient readers" and were recruited through a written invitation by their English teachers. These participants expressed varied interests in literary genres (35). Many of them found reading traditional texts "time-consuming" but "enjoyed conversing with others about books" (35). Three of the

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[16] *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, *Night Fisher*, *Pride of Baghdad*, *Laika*

six participants had prior exposure to the graphic novel, two had some experience, and one participant had very limited experience reading a graphic novel.

At the start of the study, all participants answered "31 questions designed to yield information about attitudes toward reading, their reading preferences, their experiences reading prose fiction, both at home and in school, and their experiences reading comic strips, comic books, manga, and graphic novels" (36-37). They were also a part of a number of large group discussions, containing topics similar to the questions listed in the interest survey. The objective of the study is to uncover what "semiotic resources" high school students draw on as they read graphic novels, and in what ways "they work with those resources" (38).

Students were specifically asked to focus on characterization. Facial expressions not always described in other forms of literature are especially important in graphic novels because "the human mind is predisposed to imbue every aspect of an image with meaning" (39). It is noted that facial expressions are the easiest and best way in which readers relate to the characters in the story and "infer information about [characters'] motivations" (40-41). Students in this study were able to identify with the characters, as well as recognize the connection of the characters to the setting and action of the story.

As mentioned earlier, Gallagher believes that the recognition of patterns in literature requires deep comprehension. Participants in this study were polled on their interpretation of panel arrangement and color choices used throughout the graphic novel. Students were able to recognize that "characters situated at the opposite ends of a panel might be construed as separated by emotional distance. Likewise, variations in the size of the panel a cartoonist used to frame an image were regarded as potential meaning-

making resources (42). The students in the study were able to recognize the visual and symbolic contributions to the plot and their significance to the story. Also, although "acutely aware" of it, color is one of the many ways a graphic artist "communicates information pertaining to emotion" (41). Participants in the study identified color as a way "to 'feel' tactile sensations they attributed to characters in a narrative" (41). They felt that certain colors represented certain moods and "meanings" (41). Connors writes, "They acknowledged socially and culturally agreed upon meanings associated with different colors, so that they interpreted black as signaling impending doom, blue as conveying feelings of sorrow, and white as representing purity or wholesomeness" (41). Students were able to use their prior knowledge and connect it with the visuals of the graphic novel to create a deeper meaning of the text.

Connors writes, "Though references to it were neither explicit nor as frequent as were references to visual design of the graphic novels they read, the participants made use of an available linguistic design" (43). They were able to textually recognize "symbolism and verbal irony" which allowed them "to fill gaps in a narrative and construct meanings that extended beyond the referents to which the words in a panel immediately pointed" (43). Overall, Connors feels that the data shows that participants in the study were "active as readers" and "moved between a text's visual design and linguistic design, synthesizing the meaning each conveyed to interpret a scene" with confidence and "ease" (43). With limited prior exposure to the genre, the participants were able to identify with the characters, interpret panel organization and stylistic choices made by the graphic artist on both literally and symbolically.

The number of studies examining the use of the graphic novel in the classroom is limited. Recognizing that many of the found studies were conducted by teachers who have had prior experience with graphic novels, further research was needed to accurately understand the benefits of incorporating graphic novels in our curricula. Would the collected data prove differently if the teachers had limited prior knowledge and experience with graphic novels? Would the attitudes of the students differ if the teachers were less invested in the use of the genre in their classrooms? How would the results differ if a larger group of teachers and students were studied? How successful would a students' experience reading a graphic novel be if their teacher had limited training in teaching the genre? Are reading comprehension strategies innately used while reading graphic novels? It was through these questions that my research project was founded. In order to determine if the latest reading comprehension strategies are present during the reading of graphic novels, a larger number of teachers and students needed to be studied. Chapter 3 describes both the preliminary survey conducted, as well as the interviews recorded regarding the use of graphic novels in the classroom.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

My review of literature regarding how graphic novels impact struggling and remedial readers raised many questions. In an attempt to better understand why the graphic novel is a genre not better explored in the classroom, I created a study[1] to further examine the practice and attitudes of using graphic novels in the classroom. Originally, my idea of finding and interviewing teachers who used graphic novels in their classrooms seemed like a difficult task. In my ten years of teaching, I had rarely heard a teacher mention using the genre in the classroom. Therefore, I created a preliminary survey and distributed it to teachers in my district to determine which teachers were using or had used graphic novels in their teaching. The preliminary survey also determined which teachers would be interested in learning more about the genre and how they thought about using graphic novels in their classrooms, if given the opportunity. This preliminary survey was created with respect for the demands of a teacher's workload and simply required them to check the appropriate lines that applied to them. The second stage of my research involved scheduling interviews with volunteer teachers who had taught or were teaching the graphic novel. It was through these interviews that I hoped to open a conversation about their experiences in teaching the graphic novel.

The participants of the preliminary survey consisted of teachers who are employed in the Hanover Park Regional High School district in East Hanover, New

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[1] See Appendix for preliminary survey and interview questions used in the study.

Jersey. With a combined enrollment of nearly sixteen hundred students, Hanover Park

High School and Whippany Park High School teaches students from East Hanover,

Florham Park, and Whippany. Hanover Park High School has an approximate enrollment

of eight hundred and seventy East Hanover and Florham Park students in grades nine

through twelve. There are two hundred and eleven students in the senior class. The East

Hanover/Florham Park/Whippany area is "predominantly residential in character" but the

area is also known to "include a number of major corporations and research laboratories

as well as many retail businesses" (www.hanoverpark.org). According to the Profile of

General Population and Housing Characteristics from the United States Census Bureau,

the town is made up of 85.11% White residents, .83% Black or African American

residents, .08% Native American residents, 11.92% Asian residents, .94% from other

races, 1.11% from two or more races. A little over five percent of residents are Hispanic

or Latino. According to the Hanover Park High School website, Hanover Park High

School was named *New Jersey Monthly's* Top 1000 Schools in the Nation and *New

Jersey Monthly's* Top 100 Schools. Hanover Park High School was also recognized

nationally and statewide in the *Washington Post* of among America's Most Challenging

Schools and was the first New Jersey school district to receive the title of National

School District of Character by New Jersey Alliance for Social, Emotional, and Character

Development and Character Education Partnership. There are approximately seventy

teachers employed at Hanover Park High School.

My preliminary survey consisted of five statements that asked teachers in English,

world language, world history, science, computer and culinary arts to participate. It was

assumed that these departments could find graphic novels to support their curriculum.

This preliminary survey asked participating teachers to identify their subject area and to check off all statements that applied. The statements read:

1. I have NOT used a graphic novel in my teaching career.
2. I am not clear about what a graphic novel is.
3. I would be interested in using a graphic novel in my classroom, if properly trained on how to incorporate it into my curriculum.
4. I have used a graphic novel in my teaching career.
5. I would be willing to speak with you about my experience teaching a graphic novel.

It also specified that they understood that by filling the preliminary survey out, no specific information about them or their classes, would be published and that their responses would be strictly anecdotal. Participants also had the opportunity to include a name and signature if they were willing to be interviewed about their experiences teaching the graphic novel.

It was my hope in conducting this survey that I would not only determine which teachers were using graphic novels in their classrooms but also how many teachers were unclear about what a graphic novel is. In addition, I wanted to know how many teachers would be willing to learn more about graphic novels to use them in their classrooms to teach reading comprehension. The preliminary survey was distributed via school mailboxes and collected similarly or by me personally.

The optional preliminary surveys took approximately a month to distribute, collect and review. Once those preliminary surveys were collected, teachers who marked that they had taught the graphic novel in the past were contacted and interviews were scheduled. These interviews took approximately three months to complete. The results from these surveys were encouraging; conversations with colleagues specifically

provided many details about teaching our current student readers, revealing insights into their abilities and habits.

Sixty-five percent of teachers polled participated in the preliminary survey. Out of the forty-one surveys that I sent out, I received twenty-seven surveys back. Eleven surveys were distributed to the history department, ten surveys to the English department, nine to the science department, eight to the world language department, three to the culinary arts department, three to the computer teachers, and one survey to the school librarian, a former English teacher. Seven of the surveys were completed anonymously, without a record of either the teacher's name or his/her subject area.

Out of the eleven surveys distributed to the history department, one of the surveys identified the respondent as a history teacher. Out of the ten surveys distributed to the English department, ten teachers identified themselves as English teachers. Out of the nine surveys distributed to the science department, five of the surveys were returned and identified with a science subject area. Out of the eight surveys that were distributed to the world language department, one of the surveys identified as a world language teacher. All three of the surveys distributed to the culinary arts department came back. Two of the three surveys came from the computer teachers and the school librarian returned her survey.

Twenty-one out of twenty seven teachers (77%) responded that they had not used a graphic novel in their teaching career. Out of those twenty-one teachers, five teach biology, one teaches history, one teaches world language, three teach culinary arts, four teach English and seven were anonymous. Based on these results, it seems graphic novels are not being widely taught in my district in subject areas. The English

department survey revealed six teachers who had taught the graphic novel. As suspected, the majority of graphic novels were being taught in English classes even though there are plenty of opportunities for graphic novels in other subject areas. Based on these results, English teachers in Hanover Park seem more familiar with the genre and therefore more likely to experiment with using them in their classrooms.

Out of these twenty-one teachers, eight teachers (38%) responded that they were not clear about what a graphic novel is, none of whom were English teachers. Two teachers, one from the computer department and the other anonymous, did not respond that they have not used a graphic novel in their teaching career but also responded that they were not clear about what a graphic novel is. Fifty-seven percent of teachers who said they have not used a graphic novel in their teaching career also said that they would be interested in using a graphic novel in their classroom, if properly trained on how to incorporate it into their curriculum.

With regard to this query, one of the teachers, a science teacher, wrote, "I don't know of any [graphic novels] in my subject area." Graphic novels have been created to address genetics, DNA, calculus, the Periodic Table, chemistry, and evolution. In fact, *Education Week* published a blog listing the top fifteen graphic novels for the Science classroom in 2012[2]. Similarly, one of the culinary arts teachers wrote, "I would like to talk about writing a graphic cookbook." This idea was a mere thought for this culinary

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[2] The Stuff of Life: A Graphic Guide to Genetics and DNA, by Mark Schultz, illustrated by Zander Cannon and Kevin Cannon (Hill & Wang, 2009).
   The Manga Guide to Calculus, by Hiroyuki Kojima, Shin Togami, and Becom Co (No Starch Press, 2009).
   Wonderful Life with the Elements: The Periodic Table Personified, by Bunpei Yorifuji (No Starch Press, 2012).
   Evolution: The Story of Life on Earth, by Jay Hosler, illustrated by Kevin Cannon and Zander Cannon (Hill & Wang, 2011).
   The Cartoon Guide to Chemistry, by Larry Gonick and Craig Criddle (Collins Reference, 2005).

arts teacher until she both participated in the survey and happened to find a graphic novel recipe in her monthly subscription to the *Rachel Ray* magazine. After a quick discussion, she decided to experiment with using the graphic recipe story in her classroom and then participated in an interview once her classes were finished with the project.

It is important to note that out of the sixteen teachers who said they have not used a graphic novel in their classroom and did not check off that they were unclear of what a graphic novel is, twelve of them said they would be interested in using a graphic novel in their classroom, if properly trained on how to incorporate it into their curriculum. Only four of the sixteen teachers who are clear about what a graphic novel is were not interested in using one their classroom.

Seventy-five percent of teachers who knew what a graphic novel is recognized the opportunity to use graphic novels in their classroom. All seven of the teachers who were not clear about what a graphic novel is, were also not interested in using a graphic novel in their classroom.

Only five out of twenty-seven teachers surveyed responded that they have taught a graphic novel in their classroom: four English teachers and the school librarian who taught graphic novels in her English and theater arts classes. These five teachers also responded that they would be willing to speak with me about their experience in teaching the graphic novel in the classroom. Only one of them also checked off that he or she would be interested in using graphic novels in their classroom, if properly trained on how to incorporate them into the curriculum. Three out of five teachers who have seen the benefit to using graphic novels in the classroom expressed that they had prior training on how to properly use them in their classroom.

The distribution of these preliminary surveys ignited conversation. Three English teachers hand-delivered their responses to me, specifically asking more about my project and my beliefs about how the graphic novel could aid in strengthening reading comprehension, writing and critical thinking skills. Two teachers from other departments, a history and world language teacher, also personally delivered their surveys and asked about graphic novels published in their subject areas. As mentioned earlier, a culinary arts teacher specifically mentioned she was considering using after participating in the survey. It was clear that further research might determine how exactly teachers were using graphic novels and whether their experiences mirrored earlier studies.

Once the preliminary survey was distributed and collected, a longer interview was arranged with the teachers with experiences with graphic novels in their classrooms. Willing teachers contacted through my preliminary survey, as well as willing teachers from outside of my district who were personally contacted via email, participated in an interview that further discussed their use of the graphic novel. The majority of these recorded interviews were conducted in person, with a few participants requiring other means of communication, such as telephone and Internet interviews. Each interview subject was asked to describe his/her district and teaching experience. They were asked to share the number of years teaching, the primary subject taught, the specific classes in which they use the graphic novel, how many graphic novels they teach each year, their reasons for using graphic novels, their experiences in teaching the graphic novel, the difficulties they face teaching the graphic novel, and the students' responses reading graphic novels.

These five teachers gathered from my preliminary survey were too small of a survey group to perform my research. I emailed teachers outside of my district asking if they, or any of their colleagues, teach or have taught graphic novels in their classroom. Through this process, I found a total of nine additional teachers who teach, or have taught, graphic novels in their classroom and who were willing to discuss their experiences with me. The teachers ranged from early childhood to high school teachers. Their names have been changed for the purpose of my study. The names of their district have also been left out, but the depictions of their districts have been included. Their responses were recorded and noted. Beyond their answers to my survey, our interviews sparked worthy anecdotal conversations, which I have included.

The purpose of these interviews is multileveled. First, I wanted to shed light on who is teaching graphic novels. Are graphic novels being taught in the classrooms of more experienced teachers or by teachers who are newly educated and trained? Graphic novels can be read and studied in a number of different classrooms. Are mostly English teachers using graphic novels, or are teachers of other subjects experimenting with the use of graphic novels in their classrooms?

Secondly, why were these teachers using graphic novels in their classrooms? Are they being asked, encouraged or required by their districts, or are they choosing on their own to teach the graphic novel? If asked, encouraged or required by the district, were these teachers trained on how to effectively use the graphic novel in their classroom to strengthen critical reading, writing, and thinking skills? If they chose to teach the graphic novel, what prompted their experimentation with the genre?

More importantly, I wanted to learn how graphic novels are used in the classroom. Are most graphic novels being taught as a supplemental reading to a required text on the curriculum, or are graphic novels only being taught in short excerpts? Are students mostly completing their readings at home or in school? How are these reading assignments received compared to traditional texts? What challenges do teachers experience while teaching graphic novels? Are these challenges similar or different from the challenges they face during their teaching of traditional texts? Essentially, initial reports indicated an exhibited increase of engagement from students while reading graphic novels. What does this engagement look like exactly, and how does it compare to the engagement exhibited while reading traditional texts?

Similarly, many reports indicated that students exhibit signs of short attention spans, disinterest in reading, unwillingness to discuss readings and refusal to participate during in-class readings. Some suggested students find the language in the literature they are reading difficult to approach. In addition to further exploring these statements, what approaches can we as educators take to change our students' experiences with literature?

Finally, and most importantly, reading comprehension strategies and exercises explained in Chapter Two are reported to be very effective in improving the reading comprehension skills of struggling readers. Experts suggest that many of these strategies are naturally practiced while reading graphic novels. In interviews, teachers were specifically asked whether their students ask questions, visualize content, identify global issues, complete multiple rereads, recognize the importance and development of significant characters, grasp details of setting, identify the significant actions of the text

and what these actions may foreshadow, and complete the "stop-think-react" reading strategy while reading both graphic novels and traditional texts.

Fifteen teachers of graphic novels were interviewed. Of these fifteen teachers, nine of the teachers were employed in a high school and six were employed in an elementary and middle school. Of the fifteen teachers, fourteen teachers teach either reading, writing or English and taught graphic novels before participating in my preliminary survey. Only one of the teachers who participated in my Teachers of Graphic Novel Survey was a culinary arts teacher who was inspired to use an excerpt of a graphic novel after participating in my preliminary survey. I had many objectives when conducting the interviews. I wanted to shed light on how teachers encourage practice in the most current reading comprehension strengthening strategies while reading graphic novels, such as questioning the text, visualizing the material, identifying global issues, completing multiple readings, recognizing the importance and development of significant characters, details, and actions while reading, as well as the stopping, thinking and reacting to the text while reading. I wondered if these strategies are not practiced as strongly or as often while reading traditional texts. Would those who are disinterested in reading traditional texts be more eager while reading visual media? Are graphic novels a solution to teachers who are searching for new approaches to engage struggling readers? In addition to researching these questions, several questions arose while interviewing teachers of graphic novels. Were these teachers required to teach graphic novels or did they choose to teach graphic novels in their classrooms? How exactly were these teachers teaching graphic novels and were they properly trained to teach visual media? How would English, reading and writing teachers define engagement while reading, and

did they report that their students seem any more engaged while reading graphic novels?

What suggestions do English, reading and writing teachers have for how educators can

better approach disinterested or struggling readers?

This project was formed by accident. Initially, I wanted to conduct a case study

of my own students as a form of action research. My original plan involved using a

required summer reading text, *A Raisin in the Sun*, to test my students' comprehension

prior to instruction. These results would have been measured against their

comprehension of a companion graphic novel, *Incognegro*. The action research project

involved comparing their understanding of both texts with little guidance from the

teacher. Instead, the students participating would have practiced the latest reading

comprehension skills and strategies recommended by the experts introduced in Chapter

Two of this dissertation. The study would have been conducted in three of my lower-

leveled English classes and was estimated to take approximately three weeks to complete.

My proposal was met with many obstacles. My district, although initially

interested, was particularly concerned with the amount of instructional time lost in the

classroom. Because of new standardized testing schedule, instructional time is already

compromised. My district was also reluctant to allow a new graphic novel in the

classroom. Also, because it involved studying human subjects, I was not easily granted

permission by the university. It became clear after speaking with my advisor, Mary

Brancaccio, that more accurate answers to my above-mentioned questions may be found

by speaking to multiple teachers, who are not researchers, but instead educators who have

experience with graphic novels in their classrooms. Their reflections and responses not

only proved to be valuable, but also encompassed a larger number of teachers and

students than one case study could.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF DATA

The number of teachers who responded that they have experimented with graphic

novels and were curious about how to better use graphic novels in their classroom was

higher than I anticipated. It was through the following interviews that I studied the ways

in which graphic novels were successfully used, as well as the challenges these teachers

faced while teaching reading using both traditional and visual media.

The seven elementary and middle school teachers interviewed ranged from

kindergarten to eighth grade teachers. Five elementary school teachers met with me after

school one day in Ms. C's third grade classroom. I set up my recorder and placed an

interview in front of each of their tiny chair settings. Their district is described as a

lower-middle class district with diverse students who are primarily Caucasian, closely

followed by large numbers of Hispanic, Polish, Indian and Asian students.   Ms. A is a

kindergarten teacher who has taught in her district for fifteen years. Ms. B is a third

grade teacher who has been teaching for six years. Ms. C is also a third grade teacher

who has been teaching for ten years. Ms. D is a fourth grade teacher who has been

teaching for two years. Mr. E is a fifth grade teacher who has been teaching for four

years. Regardless of their students' ages and grade assignments, these elementary school

teachers teach mini-lessons, which "usually incorporate a picture book" daily for "most

of the entire year" (Ms. C). These books vary from "five" to "twenty" pages, and are

referred back to throughout the unit for "various reasons" (Ms. B). Reading in their

classrooms takes place not only during their assigned reading time, but also during their

social studies and science block, and sometimes during "math and Italian time" (Ms. A). Ms. C explained that the new math books have stories attached to the chapters, which include math problems in narrative form for the students to read and solve. Students complete their reading both during class time and for homework.

Most of the reading completed in their classrooms is narrative, both nonfiction and fiction. The only time students read passages and answer reading comprehension questions is when they are preparing for standardized tests. Because this is not traditionally the type of reading they are used to, students respond to these reading comprehension sections "with fear, just like us [teachers]" (Ms. C). Along with "positive reinforcement," Ms. C specifically points out the benefits of using visual media to strengthen her students' comprehension skills for such standardized tests, even if it means that students feel unfamiliar with traditional literature once they begin test review. She says, "Otherwise we'd *only* be doing 'read this essay and answer these questions' in *all* of our English blocks and that's unfair for that to be how they're taught." All the teachers present at the survey agreed that although they are required to teach using visual media, they choose to teach visual media because it's "better" (Ms. D) because "just like the older grades there's such a wide range of reading levels so that teaching on a more basic level using tools that all students could understand allows them to use [the text] on their own level as well" (Ms. C).

Graphic novels, or visual media, are used as core texts in their classrooms to teach skills or themes for the units required in their curriculum. Students learn as early as Kindergarten, using "phonics" as "building blocks" (Ms. A). Ms. A explains how she incorporates pictures to teach words. She said she uses a "sight word with a picture, then

a sight word with a word, then a sight word with a picture and a word underneath." Ms. A specifically notes, "now that students don't come with such varied [personal] experiences, visual media models are needed to create their own mind-movies." In her experience, it's no longer a natural occurrence for students to react to the settings of the texts with prior knowledge. Graphic novels are able to take them to those places as a reference. She says, "I find I have to show them places that kids used to just come knowing" (Ms. A). Mr. E, the fourth grade teacher, agrees and uses graphics on a more mature level by introducing students to texts without visuals and having them create the visuals "based on what they see in the text."

Graphic novels, or visual media, are also used as supplemental readings to planned, themed units. Ms. D explains "a lot of times we use short excerpts but usually from a book that they've already been exposed to as a whole story but use specific pages to teach a specific skill. So if [they're] writing" she'll refer to a specific page and say "notice the strong dialogue in it…now mirror it in your writing sample." Graphic novels, or visual media, are read during class time and as homework, as long as it's on their level, but most of the time reading is guided.

The most intriguing part of our discussion came once I asked how students in elementary and middle school respond to reading in general. Ms. A says, "Enthusiastically…It's a big deal." Ms. D says, "Even in fourth grade they still really love it." All of the teachers agreed, except for Ms. B. Ms. B clarified that students in her third grade class exhibit mixed feelings about reading and "that's where the graphic novel comes in, in the beginning of the third grade there's some of them that are at that bridge of second and third grade reading." Because the graphic novels listed in their curriculum

explore interesting and diverse subjects for all students, male or female, they are more likely to embrace these reading assignments. Also, Mr. E points out that students who are just learning to read and aren't "really sure who they are as a reader are able to take the time to explore what [genre] do they like" using graphic novels.

Because their students enjoy reading, all of the teachers agreed that their students are more likely to complete their homework. Only a small minority of students do not complete their homework, either a result of a demanding schedule, or because of misunderstanding of the material (Ms. D). Parental involvement also plays an important factor in the number of students who successfully complete their homework. Ms. D explains, "Most of the students do their homework all of the time, mostly because of their parents." Overall, according to their experiences, students seem eager to read visual media and are not reluctant to embrace the visual format but treat their visual readings as stepping stones to reading more traditional texts. This type of engaged reading is evident as students share their findings and ask questions of the text to one another and to their teacher. Ms. A says when her students are engaged there is "a lot more noise" in her classroom. This type of engagement is found while reading both visual media and traditional texts. Ms. C elaborates by explaining that because traditional texts "look" like the type of reading their older siblings and parents are doing, her students feel that it is more sophisticated reading. She feels that students in her third grade who are eager to read traditional texts are not yet ready to truly comprehend the text but instead want to read it because it's "longer" and "does not contain pictures" (Ms. C).

Their practice of balanced literacy also seems to be a major factor in why reading is better embraced in the lower grade levels. Balanced reading, the idea that students will

read independently or in groups, at their own reading level, to not only enjoy the art of reading, but also to appreciate the specific goal the teacher assigns during that reading, allows for a more engaging and effective reading experience. For example, students will be given twenty minutes to read a passage and identify examples of characterization. It doesn't matter if the students complete the entire passage or only complete only a couple of pages of the passage. As long as they find examples of characterization, they are successful in their reading exercise.

These elementary school teachers agree that the varied reading levels in their classrooms are the most difficult challenge faced while teaching. They felt as educators, they need to enforce reading as a method to learn more about life and one's self. Students therefore need more options and a community of people who love books, like their teachers, their librarian, their parents and their siblings.

When asked if students are distracted by the various features on a given page in a graphic novel, Ms. D says, "They enjoy taking the time looking at, getting through that page because they stop and look at the pictures. It's what we've taught them to do, to use those clues in the picture to help their comprehension." Although these teachers took Early Literacy courses, they feel they were never trained on how to properly teaching reading, especially visual media or graphic novels. They believe they were largely self-taught either by seeking material on their own or by attending literacy workshops.

Throughout our discussion, there was clearly a disconnect in attitude regarding reading witnessed in the elementary school classes compared to the level of engagement while reading in the high school classes. When asked why they think students are eager to read in their classes and not when they get to high school, they responded that choice is

a major factor and that "a lot of the fun is taken out of it" in the higher grades (Ms. A).

Ms. A explains the importance of encouragement. Reading is "the basis of what we're

doing and you can learn so much from entering this realm [of the text]" as opposed to the

attitude traditionally experienced in more structured readings in high school, the "this is

what we're doing, answer the questions" (Ms. A). She asks, "Where is that fun?" Ms. B

adds, "We spend so much time getting them to read on their level. What is their level?

As long as they're reading and understanding the concepts, it doesn't matter what level

we label them."

While reading visual media or graphic novels, these elementary school teachers

believe that students naturally complete the "stop-think-react" strategy, are able to

visualize the content of their material, are able to complete multiple readings of the text,

and are able to recognize the importance and development of significant characters,

settings and actions. These elementary school teachers also believe that their students ask

questions while reading, but this important reading exercise must be modeled before they

expect their students to practice it. They believe that their students are not able to

recognize global issues, which they referred to as "text to world" issues, until they reach

at least third grade (Ms. A).

Table 1 illustrates the elementary school teachers' responses to their students'

experiences while reading:

Table 1

Elementary School Teachers' Responses

	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Shorter Attention Span	5			
Uninterested in Reading			5	
Engagement		5		
Classroom Discussion		5		
Unapproachable Language			5	
At-Home Readings		5		
Struggle During Read Alouds		5		

Overall, the elementary school teachers agreed that their students exhibit a generally positive attitude regarding education, learning, and reading. Their students are eager to learn and please their teacher. They enjoy challenging themselves and are generally not embarrassed to take educational risks, such as discussing classroom topics, answering questions and sharing their responses. Their theory is that this attitude continues into middle school and starts to decrease once a student approaches high school. This theory became an added discussion topic when I interviewed the two middle school teachers, both of whom agreed with that assertion.

Ms. F, is an eighth grade teacher who has been teaching for eighteen years. She teaches at upper-class middle school where more than half of the student population is white. Her middle school classroom is faced with "very large variations" of learning

styles, landing most students in her class at "two ends of the spectrum." Another middle school teacher of twenty-one years, Ms. G, teaches literacy at a school that she describes as "a socioeconomically advantaged district" with students who are "trained to be interested in reading." For the last three years, she has used a graphic short story called "Hurdles" because she wanted to try teaching something different in her classroom. She finds that graphic novels "differentiate instruction for visual learners" and that "students seem to be able to analyze the format more deeply than traditional reading materials like short stories or chapters in novels because the format is so different" (Ms. G).

These two middle school teachers find that their students are generally eager to learn and read, and that this interest increases with new teaching tools, such as graphic novels. They believe that students start to exhibit reluctance and resistance once they approach high school for a number of reasons. In middle school, their students' parents are still a part of the educational equation. These parents review their children's homework and maintain communication with their children's teachers throughout the school year. Once a student approaches high school, they become more independent learners and are slightly more responsible for the outcome of their own education. Also, once a student approaches high school, his/her schedule and priorities seem to change. After-school activities and sports become more demanding, often meeting four to five times a week for two to four hours a day. A student becomes more social, meeting and maintaining friends from an array of groups. Similarly, because most high school schedules require an eight-period school day, their academic demands change, which may leave them feeling overwhelmed and requires making adjustments. As middle school teachers, both Ms. F and Ms. G recognize the stressors of standardized tests, but

they believe that the demands high school teachers experience result in less differentiated learning in a high school classroom, and less time dedicated to inviting new teaching approaches, such as using graphic novels as supplemental readings or primary texts.

Ms. F does not currently teach graphic novels, but has taught "a great number of them in the past." When asked why she no longer incorporates graphic novels in her classroom, she responded, "Why is that? PARCC preparation."

PARCC, or The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers is "a consortium of states working together to develop a set of assessments that measure whether students are on track to be successful in college and their careers" (http://parcconline.org). Because PARCC is new, many districts feel the stressors of teaching the format and content to better prepare their students for the test. Many teachers experienced a narrowing of their curriculum because of PARCC. Ms. F was especially frustrated that PARCC preparation has prevented her from using graphic novels in the classroom. She especially believes they should be used in middle school, where "visual media is so important" (Ms. F). In the past, Ms. F has taught graphic novels most frequently in her reading/literature-based courses, but has also taught a number of graphic novels and visual media in her reading study skills class and in her writing/public speaking class. In her experience, she believes that she has used graphic novels over twenty times, but mostly worked with *Anne Frank: The Anne Frank House Authorized Graphic Biography*, and the *Maus* books.

Ms. F was never asked or required to teach graphic novels. She chose to teach graphic novels because she wanted to try teaching something different and felt like she had the background knowledge to effectively incorporate graphic novels in her

classroom. She believes that graphic novels provide their readers with the "required choice piece" that allows them to be as "fairly well accepted" in a way that "more traditional texts" cannot allow (Ms. F). Ms. F has used graphic novels as supplemental readings to the required text on her curriculum, as well as an independent text and as a learning unit around the text. Her most effective unit, she believes, was using *Maus* to supplement the novel, *Night*. She recalls that *Maus* almost always "then became the core piece of study" (Ms. F). She asks that her students read graphic novels during class time and for homework.

Ms. F expands on how her students respond to graphic novels. She believes that students seem eager to read visual media and that although they "initially release or dismiss" graphic novels because of the "look of them," once they are "trained" they become more "serious" about their reading (Ms. F). She recalls, they "generally have a naive acceptance for graphic novels, but then respect them" (Ms. F). She strongly believes that her students are more likely to complete their reading assignment when it is in the form of visual media.

Because students are traditionally unfamiliar with the visual format, a number of them seem more "open-minded and excited" to read something so different. "Depending on the kid," students seem generally "excited about the unfamiliar yet accessible" format of the graphic novel (Ms. F). She says, "even my avid readers find them appealing" (Ms. F). The only difference in attitude she notices is when she teaches graphic novels in honors classes. Sometimes, she notes, they are initially met with "arrogance," but for the most part feels that her students react "in a positive way" because graphic novels seem "different" (Ms. F).

Ms. F, the teacher with the most experience teaching graphic novels in the classroom, believes that her students exhibit all of the latest reading comprehension strategies believed to strengthen critical reading, writing and thinking skills. She believes that students complete the "stop-think-react" reading strategy "easily" while reading graphic novels, "not only about its literary content, but also about its form" (Ms. F). She found that with time, her students "scrutinized the picture" and were "attentive conservationists" whose responses were "plentiful" because they were "more confident" while reading graphic novels (Ms. F). She explains, "even if they didn't finish the material, they could have focused on the small piece that we were studying to contribute to the conversation" (Ms. F). She also believes that students "have more room" to ask questions while reading graphic novels, are able to visualize the content of their readings, are able complete multiple readings of the text "entirely," are able to recognize the importance and development of significant characters, the setting, and significant actions of the text and what these actions foreshadow. Being able to recognize these literary aspects is very "confidence building" (Ms. F).

Ms. F believes that most of these strategies are not present while reading traditional texts. She says, although we "want" and "expect" students to "stop-think-react" while reading traditional text, most students at her grade and reading level do not. Although most students are capable of completing multiple readings of the texts, they are not "willing" to because of the length and time involved (Ms. F). She believes that her students are able to effectively ask questions while reading traditional texts and able to identify the significant actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow.

When asked if the students in her class are generally interested or disinterested in reading in general, she responded that they are "generally interested in pleasing the teacher while reading in class" more so than high school students who have "bigger stuff at stake with more distractions in their lives" (Ms. F). She believes that there is more "energy" devoted to academics in middle school, which is why the graphic novel should be continued in middle school grades (Ms. F).

Ms. F believes that in order to effectively teach graphic novels, students need to first be "guided and trained on what needs to be done in class." She was taught how to read a graphic novel through her own research, which she explored after taking a graduate course at Drew University. Ms. F believes much like students can read poetry, students can read graphic novels, but learning how to teach graphic novels is essential when including them in the classroom because "even though students are bombarded with such visual media," she asks, "do they really know what they're looking at" when they're studying graphic novels? Being more exposed to the genre will increase their comfort level, as well as reading skills. She believes that there is not enough time in the school year to properly teach the graphic novel, especially because of the new demands placed on the teacher regarding standardized tests, but also believes that graphic novels need to be taught in the classroom, even if they're in the form of electives, "like a journalism or poetry class" (Ms. F).

When engaged, Ms. F's students are "willing to participate, wanting to be heard" and "seeking validation" from the teacher (Ms. F). She feels that students exhibit these signs of engagement while reading graphic novels, but not always while reading traditional texts. Because there are "tons of kids" with "different reading levels" in her

reading classes, it is difficult to engage her students at the same level while reading traditional texts as she can while reading graphic novels (Ms. F).   She believes that educators "need to be honest about who can and can't read" and instead of "humiliating their levels" start teaching "analysis" through tools like graphic novels.

In Ms. G's classroom, graphic novels are used as supplemental reads to required texts on her curriculum. She only uses excerpts of graphic novels or visual media and her students primarily read graphic novels during class time. In her experience students seem eager to read visual media as they "respond enthusiastically to the format" (Ms.G). Ms. G believes that her students are more likely to complete their reading assignment when it is in the form of visual media. Because Ms. G has been trained on how to read and teach graphic novels, she does not find that there are any difficulties in including graphic novels into her classroom. In fact, she explains that her "reluctant readers find novelty in the medium and so they are apt to read it with enthusiasm" (Ms. G). Her students ask questions while reading graphic novels and are able to visualize the content of their readings. They are able to complete multiple readings of graphic novels and identify the importance and details of the setting and the global issues presented in graphic novels. While reading traditional texts, Ms. G finds that her students also exhibit signs of deep reading comprehension. Her students are able to ask questions, visualize the content of their reading, identify global issues, and identify the significant actions of foreshadowing and the significance of characters while reading traditional texts, but that discussions involving the graphic novel are plentiful and that students who choose to continue reading graphic novels independently "always want to show it to (her) and talk to (her) about it" (Ms.G). This demonstrates, she explains, an example of the specific behavior

exhibited while her students are engaged in reading. She says, "Students do not want to stop when independent reading time is over. They will read instead of doing other tasks. They will talk to each other and the teacher about the text and consistently bring reading material to class" (Ms. G).

Table 2 illustrates the middle school teachers' responses to their students' experiences while reading:

Table 2

Middle School Teachers' Responses

	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Shorter Attention Span		1	1	
Uninterested in Reading			2	
Engagement		2		
Classroom Discussion		2		
Unapproachable Language			1	1
At-Home Readings		2		
Struggle During Read Alouds		1	1	

The following high school teachers are mostly employed at Hanover Park High School or our sister school, Whippany Park High School. The one teacher from an outside district, Mr. H is thirty years old and has been teaching world and American literature, as well as an introduction to literature course in an urban district with a lower socioeconomical population for six years. Eighty percent of his students are minorities and approximately twenty percent are white. In addition to exploring the perimeters of

the study during the interviews with these high school teachers, teachers were also asked to discuss the level of student interest and attitude regarding education and reading, in a continued search for reasons why there is a decrease in interest and attitude once a student reaches high school.

Mr. H teaches two graphic novels, *The Alchemist*, in his world literature class and the *Romeo and Juliet, The Graphic Novel: Original Text* in his introduction to literature course. Mr. H has taught graphic novels for four years and although he was never trained on how to properly teach visual media[1] he still chooses to include it in his curriculum to try a different approach to teaching traditional texts and reading strategies. He uses the graphic novel as a supplemental read to the required texts on the curriculum and finds that graphic novels are "mostly effective for students with IEPs or lower leveled students who are not over-inundated with other work" (Mr. H).

Although Mr. H recognizes that although "it really depends on the class he's teaching each year," he finds that most students are eager to read visual media. In fact, he believes that they are more likely to complete their reading assignments when they are in the form of visual media, even though his students are traditionally unfamiliar with the format of the graphic novel. Most notably, Mr. H finds that "depending on the class" most students experience initial difficulty in "piecing together the two formats" and are often confused "when dialogue is missing, like in the gutter." He finds that his students sometimes become distracted by the various features on a given page in a graphic novel, sometimes "spending a considerable amount of time examining the artwork" (Mr. H).

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[1] At the time of our conversation, Mr. H was "highly considering" enrolling in a summer course at Montclair State University, which focuses on the many ways to teach graphic novels in the classroom.

Mr. H believes that his students are "slightly more" interested in reading graphic novels than they are traditional texts. He recalls that they "often finish their graphic novels, even if it is longer" and that they are more willing to "answer questions and participate in key point discussions of the story" (Mr. H). Mr. H believes that students "stop-think-react" while reading graphic novels, that they ask questions, are able to visualize the content, are able to recognize the importance and details of the setting and significant characters, are able to complete multiple readings of the text, and are able to identify significant actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow while reading graphic novels. In contrast, while reading traditional literature, Mr. H believes that of the reading strategies listed, his students are only able to ask questions, recognize the importance and development of significant characters and the setting, and are able to visualize the content of their readings. Because his students are traditionally disinterested in traditional books, he believes that it is essential to teach using tools like graphic novels and that teachers "should make time for them" in their curriculum (Mr. H). His students are traditionally intimidated while reading because they are "left to use their own devices," which involve reading tools they may not have learned or yet mastered (Mr. H). While reading graphic novels, his students naturally "annotate the text" and "reread key passages" not because they have learned these strategies but because it is their innate "job" as graphic novel readers (Mr. H). These behaviors, he believes, are only found while teaching graphic novels, and not while teaching traditional texts. Mr. H believes that the skills come more "naturally" while reading graphic novels, which is why his students are more likely to accept such jobs as their "responsibility as a reader."

Mr. H finds that the most difficult challenge in teaching reading is that his students "lose focus and concentration." He stresses the importance of instilling a love for reading at the lower grades, while teaching proper reading habits such as "working *with* the text" (Mr. H).

Mr. I is a sixty-two year old teacher of thirty four years at Hanover Park High School, a "relatively affluent" district whose students are "eighty-five percent white, and fifteen percent Asian, Hispanic, and Black" (Mr. I). He specifically teaches medium- to low-track college preparatory classes and "frequently" chooses to include graphic novels "depending on the group and dominant ability" for "students who are reading challenged and who need images to act as a catalyst in reading comprehension" (Mr. I). Mr. I believes that tools, such as graphic novels, "jump start" the process of reading by the students "being fed a stream of images." He finds that his "academically challenged readers generally find the images [in graphic novels] appealing" (Mr. I). When teaching graphic novels, Mr. I uses it as a primary read and creates a learning unit around it. He believes that students seem eager to read visual media but sometimes seem "reluctant to use inferential skills" while reading visually, often "taking each frame too literally" because they are often unfamiliar with the format of graphic novels (Mr. I). While reading graphic novels, Mr. I believes that his students complete the "stop-think-react" strategy, are able to ask questions while reading, are able to visualize the content of their readings, as well as the importance and development of significant characters and importance and details of the setting, and are able to identify the significant actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow. He believes that only some of his students are able to identify global issues and complete multiple rereads of the text while reading

graphic novels. While reading traditional texts, Mr. I believes that his students are able to complete the "stop-think-react" strategy, are able to visualize the content of their readings, and are able to recognize the importance and development of significant characters, details of the setting, and the significance of the actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow.

Mr. I finds that his students are generally disinterested in reading and that this level of disinterest is "becoming increasingly worse" because of the "myriad of computer/online sources available." He finds that even "AP level students will circumvent the task [of reading] and look for ways to substitute the whole text for a truncated version" and that too often students become easily distracted because of their "addiction" to social media and other functions of the cell phone (Mr. I). He believes that these distractions are apparent "no matter what the material" (Mr. I). Mr. I explains that most of his students "do not read," feeling as if reading "is not imperative" and that they can "catch up with their reading assignments later in the unit, but don't" (Mr. I).

Mr. I expressed frustration with the lack of personal connection students experience while reading. Lack of variety in the high school curriculum often diminishes a student's engagement with the text. He believes that schools need to offer students with choices that are more "indigenous" to their "personal likes," especially for the students who "abhor reading" (Mr. I). He specifically says he is often concerned "by the number of students who cannot read aloud with confidence and clarity" (Mr. I). Also, he believes school districts should "relegate their reading to career based" literature (Mr. I). Another frustration Mr. I discusses is the "shackles" English and Reading teachers experience "by

far too many standardized tests" which "deflate any real effort to ameliorate reading as something academic and pleasurable" (Mr. I).

Ms. J, also a teacher in the district, has been teaching for fourteen years and has chosen to teach three graphic novels, one each school year for the last three years, in her AP Language and Composition class because she wanted to try teaching something different. She explains, "As a result of professional development reading, [she] found information on the value of visual literacy through the graphic novel and used *Maus* and *Night* in a unit on politics as a means of engaging students in a range of literacy forms" (Ms. J). In her experience, she has used graphic novels as both a supplemental read to a required text on the curriculum, as well as the primary text with a learning unit created around it. She has included, in her teaching career, only excerpts and short graphic novels or visual media and has required her students to read graphic novels during class time and for homework.

In her experience, "most" of her students seem eager to read visual media and "some" of her students seem reluctant to read such a new format. She believes that "many" of her students find "articulating and interpreting" graphics "challenging at first but gradually become more fluent" (Ms. J). She finds that the major difficulties in teaching graphic novels are that students are generally unfamiliar with the format and that there is not enough time in the school year to properly teach the graphic novel. Ms. J believes that her students complete all of the latest reading comprehension strategies while reading both graphic novels and traditional texts; that they are able to "stop-think-react" while reading visually, able to ask questions, able visualize the content of their reading, able to identify global issues, able to complete multiple readings, able to

recognize the importance and development of significant characters and details of setting, and able to identify the significant actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow.

Ms. J finds that fifty percent of the students in her classes are "avid readers" and the "remaining fifty are disinterested in reading…sadly." She measures their level of engagement mostly by their level of focus and finds that "many read more slowly for comprehension" (Ms. J). Although some of her students "sometimes" find the visuals in graphic novels "distracting" Ms. J believes that her students generally exhibit such levels of engagement while reading graphic novels more so than when they're reading traditional texts. In typical print texts she says students "skip over" the text because of their "limited attention span" and lack of ability to "read for comprehension" but while reading visually, they "pay more attention to the graphics" when provided thus better analyzing the text (Mr. J). Ms. J believes "even the AP students are hesitant" to discuss their readings with the class during class time (Ms. J). She believes that as educators, we need to teach more close reading strategies, especially in the elementary and middle schools.

Ms. K, a fifty-four year old English teacher of nineteen years teaches approximately one graphic novel a year for the last five years typically in her lower-leveled English class. She chose to teach graphic novels not only because she wanted to try to teach something different, but also because she believes graphic novels "bring the words [of a text] to life" for her students and "allows them to see more clearly what's going on with the words" in a text specifically when the "subject content is difficult"

(Ms. K). Ms. K felt that because her students were struggling with reading, she "had to try to teach something new to reach them in a different way."

Mostly used as a supplemental read to a required text on her curriculum, Ms. K uses both excerpts and short graphic novels such as *Romeo and Juliet, The Graphic Novel: Original Text*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *Beowulf: The Graphic Novel* to "capture the main ideas" of these "sometimes complex texts" (Ms. K).   Her students mostly read these graphic novels during class time. Ms. K, an avid, well-read teacher, is often nominated to lead in the writing and revising of the school's Summer Reading Program, which at one point listed a choice of approximately ten books for students to choose two to read. After experiencing such positive reactions in including graphic novels in her classroom, she spoke in agreement with the School Media Specialist and added two graphic novels, *Persepolis* and *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, to the Senior Summer Reading list as a "good alternative for students who did not like traditional novels" (Ms. K). The first year it was included, ten percent of the senior students chose to read either *Persepolis* or *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, mostly reporting back that their reading experience was enjoyable because it was a quick read. A few of them described themselves as comic book aficionados appreciating the specific choice option for them.

Ms. K believes that her students seem eager while reading visual media and that they "seem to like [graphic novels] a little bit better" than traditional texts. She does not believe that her students are more likely to complete reading assignments when it is in the form of visual media, because although it "depends on the individual student" generally "any kind of homework is viewed as a negative" in her low-leveled class (Ms. K).

Although Ms. K has not been trained to teach graphic novels, she does not believe that the unfamiliar format of the graphic novel creates difficulties in including it in her classroom. In fact, she believes that her students "naturally" read graphic novels and the new form of literacy is "not difficult at all for them" (Ms. K). Her biggest concern, however, is the "gaps" graphic novels contain (Ms. K). She believes that the visual versions of the required curriculum classics "leave out a lot of content" often "Americanizing Shakespeare's language" for example. If students only read the graphic novel version of these texts, they are "missing out on the *language*" (Ms. K). Ms. K's students are not intimidated or distracted by the format "because of bombardment of technology today this is right up their alley." In fact, Ms. K found that her students "were excited to read [graphic novels] because they are shorter and easier to understand" and because most of her students had never read a graphic novel before, the graphic novel became "a novelty, which cannot be overused" in fear that it will become "ineffective" (Ms. K). Ms. K also points out that some of her students may not take graphic novels as seriously as they should at first, because they don't realize "how many books are written in graphic style and are serious literature."

Ms. K believes her students completed all of the reading comprehension strategies, except recognizing global issues, while reading graphic novels. Her students specifically stopped, thought about and reacted to their reading of graphic novels, often "asking questions" in the moment of reading (Ms. K). They completed multiple readings of the text, often at the request of the teacher, and are able to recognize the importance and development of significant characters, importance and details of the setting, and

identify the significant actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow "because it's so visual" (Ms. K).

While reading traditional texts, Ms. K's students are able to ask questions and recognize the importance and development of significant characters. Ms. K feels that her students do not "stop-think-react," and are not able to visualize the content of their readings, which include recognizing the importance and details of the setting and/or actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow while reading traditional texts "as well as they can with graphic novels" (Ms. K). She does believe that her students exhibit greater reading practices when modeled and prompted by the teacher, but rarely without guidance. Her students regard "reading as a chore," which is often "met with groans and not cheers" (Ms. K). But while engaged in reading, her students follow her study guide, ask questions, question plot development and details, and often stop her and ask her to restate/go over passages. Ms. K believes that her students exhibit these signs of engagement while reading graphic novels, moreso than while reading traditional texts, because too often her students find that traditional texts are "longer and therefore more difficult to follow" (Ms. K). Since they have been "brought up with visual cues all around them," and with answers to their questions being so "immediate," they enjoy graphic novels, because they too "get to the point much faster" (Ms. K).

Ms. K's biggest difficulty met while teaching reading is that her students "can't read on their own" because they often find "vocabulary is difficult" and they therefore spend too much time trying to "decode" the words rather than comprehending the text. She finds that her students express "no enthusiasm about reading" unless they do it together (Ms. K). So often students want guidance while reading and although we need

to break them away from guiding them while reading, she asks "is there enough time?" (Ms. K).

Ms. K believes that by providing more options for our students, using high interest novels for independent reading, for example, will increase their love for reading and will therefore increase their comprehension. She believes that districts need to "stop with the classics and start with the high interest [novels]" (Ms. K). She wonders why districts cannot understand that students "need to read novels that reflect their own lives" even if they are books that are "banned" or contain "content which is objectable" (Ms. K). Too often districts provide "white-washed versions of what's appropriate and keep reverting back to classics even though there are clearly no connections experienced with such texts" (Ms. K). Ms. K believes that reading starts with developing a love for reading which "can only be achieved when you give [students] something they want to read. This will promote them to read another book and will indirectly enhance their reading skills" (Ms. K).

Ms. L, thirty-one years old, taught three graphic novels a school year, *Maus I & Maus II, Persepolis*, and a methods of acting graphic novel in her English and theater arts classes for eight years at her prior district before she became a librarian at Hanover Park High School. Her district was a small city district whose students were low- to lower-middle class and mostly immigrants.   There were some wealthy families in the district, "but they chose to send their students to private schools" (Ms. L). An AP language teacher from this district had returned from an AP Summit and was "kind of amazed with all of the graphics that the AP added to the list and felt like it was something [the English department] should look into" (Ms. L). Soon after, her English department "made a

universal decision" to include graphic novels in their classes to provide their students with "exposure to a different form" of literacy (Ms. L). Ms. L believes the graphic novel is "a new way to reach the students who may not have felt connected to traditional texts, while also motivating the more avid readers to a more visual aspect of interpretation."

Ms. L used graphic novels as both a supplemental read to a required text on the curriculum, as well as a primary read in which she created a learning unit around it. Her students read graphic novels during class time and for homework. She found that her students, especially her low-leveled students, "felt things were more accessible to them and were more willing to participate in something they were actually able to finish" (Ms. L). She also recalls how interesting it was using graphic novels in her Honors classes, witnessing her students "having to learn how to deal with the new format" (Ms. L). Because they were not sure they "how to approach it" it was particularly "interesting to see the different levels of readers rebalance" because they "didn't know what to do with this new thing" (Ms. L). They were "often worried they were doing it wrong" but met the format with "equal seriousness of their traditional texts (Ms. L). She believes that her students were more likely to complete their reading assignment when it was in the form of visual media because of the "perceived time it would take them to do it" (Ms. L).

Ms. L felt that because most of her students were unfamiliar with how to read the new format, she had to spend some time in the beginning of the unit to teach graphic novels. She did not find that this unfamiliar format was particularly intimidating or distracting and found that her prior knowledge of comic book reading helped in her teaching graphic novels. This unfamiliar format actually served as a positive in teaching

graphic novels, she believes, because it "definitely increased their level of questioning" and "participating" while reading (Ms. L).

Ms. L recalls having very few students in her classes that would classify themselves as "leisure readers." Her students were generally disinterested in reading, often unfocused while reading. While engaged in reading, her students remained quiet during independent reading and were not easily distracted, and "expressed specific body language, like a pencil in the hand or leaning into discussion instead of leaning out, and asking questions while reading" (Ms. L). She believes that her students expressed higher levels of engagement while reading graphic novels than traditional texts. Because most of her students were reading behind grade level, she feels that schools need to better approach the needs of each specific student when it comes to reading. Ms. L jokes, "I'm a librarian now, I know there's a book for everybody!"

Mr. M, an English teacher of fourteen years has taught one graphic novel a school year in his lower-leveled Senior English class at the prior district he worked at, both because he was required to and chose to teach a graphic novel. Because it was a required read, it was taught as a primary text and a learning unit was created around it. His students read the graphic novel during class time, as well as for homework. In his experience, students seemed eager to read visual media and eventually treated their readings of graphic novels much like their readings of traditional texts. Originally, students regarded reading graphic novels as "going backwards" because it was "not like the normal" texts they were used to reading (Mr. M). They felt there were "reading silly comics" but "once they understood the content and that it was just a different presentation of a serious story they better appreciated the genre" (Mr. M).

Mr. M finds that his students were traditionally unfamiliar with the format of a graphic novel but not intimated or distracted by the images on a given page. He feels that there is time to teach graphic novels and did not find a major difference in enthusiasm while teaching graphic novels as opposed to traditional texts.

While reading graphic novels, Mr. M believes that students "easily" stop, think, and react to the plot of a graphic novel "more so than while reading traditional texts," are able to ask questions and visualize the content of their readings, are able to complete multiple readings of the text, and are able to recognize the importance and development of characters and details of the settings, as well as identify the significant actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow. He does not believe that his students were able to recognize global issues while reading graphic novels.

While reading traditional texts, Mr. M believes that students are also able to ask questions and visualize the content of their reading, but "only sometimes." They are able to complete multiple readings of the text and recognize the importance and development of significant characters, and details of the setting while reading, as well as identify significant actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow. In order to increase reading comprehension, as well as a love for reading, Mr. M believes that we need to "motivate" our students to read more by "creating more opportunities of choice." He finds that his students are generally "lacking motivation" and are "disinterested in reading" because we "don't promote reading for pleasure anymore" (Mr. M). If interested in reading, Mr. M believes that his classroom would have more lively discussions and that his students would "ask more questions instead of merely responding

to my posed question." He experienced such levels of engagement while reading graphic novels, but "only sometimes while reading traditional texts" (Mr. M).

Ms. N, a thirty-two year old teacher, has been teaching in district for ten years. She primarily teaches Junior AP courses, but has also been assigned a Junior British Literature class this year. She teaches visual literacy only in her AP classes, once a unit for the last three years, which first includes a short lesson using Scott McCloud's "Show, Don't Tell" chapter from his book *Understanding Comics*, which explains how "visual images make their meaning through both words and pictures" and nicely demonstrates "the interplay that exists between the two" (Ms. N). She uses visual literacy as supplemental readings during class time "because it's a component of the AP exam" and prepares her students for the exam using any visual she can, which includes "cartoons, paintings, comics, graphs, and photos" (Ms. N). She adds that she also chooses to teach visual literacy because she does think it is "interesting" the way [various graphic] writers make meaning and the way meaning is made, *period*, and to examine how image and language can contribute with one another" (Ms. N). She points out that "reading images teaches kids close reading skills" because students "are able to notice things in images that they're not confident enough to notice in written language" (Ms. N).

Her AP students first seem excited to read graphic novels because "it looks interesting" but in order to effectively read visual literacy, they need to "first train their eyes how to move: left to right, up to down" because this is no longer a skill they use (Ms. N). Ms. N believes her students are more interested in reading visually, but "of course there is always going to be an issue that some kids in class don't like the format" (Ms. N). Although her students are unfamiliar with the format, she does not find that they

are intimidated or distracted by it and believes this is because "we are a culture of images" (Ms. N). Her students are generally eager to read visual literacy and although visual literacy doesn't necessarily "have more merit" over traditional literature, sometimes as readers, "we just like something different sometimes" (Ms. N). As teachers, regardless of levels, it's important for us to "do different things for the sake of doing different things. All texts are different" and we need to teach our students to "see different texts, as well as deconstruct texts of all different sorts" (Ms. N).

In her experience, her students are able to visualize the content of their readings and recognize the importance and development of significant characters, as well as the importance and details of the setting, and are able to identify the significant actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow. Overall, she believes that "kids aren't great at stopping and thinking and reacting and they aren't confident enough to think" and often "give up before reacting" to the text (Ms. N). Similarly, she finds that students aren't good at asking questions and getting answers from the text and that they can't easily "visualize readings, which means they can't globalize meanings" (Ms. N). Because Ms. N believes that students rarely complete multiple readings of texts, they are "generally more interested in reading shorter texts, like graphic novels, where they are more likely to reexamine the visual over and over again for deeper meaning" (Ms. N).

Ms. N believes that when her students are engaged in reading, they are often "asking questions and paraphrasing what they've seen. They are thinking about personal questions and relationships with the text" (Ms. N). In order for our students to become more engaged in reading, we need to "hold students accountable" and find material that fosters "genuine interest" which will "draw our readings into close reading" (Ms. N).

This is difficult because "most of our students don't want to read because they already lack the confidence to read" and the material that we're teaching "doesn't interest them" because they "don't feel a relationship" to the text (Ms. N). She finds that it's easier to teach close reading with film rather than literature and that the "graphic novel is hopeful in that sense" (Ms. N).

Ms. O is a sixty-three year old Family and Consumer Science teacher of thirteen years in district. Once Ms. O completed the preliminary survey regarding the use of graphic novels in the classroom, she was inspired to incorporate a graphic recipe from a *Rachel Ray* magazine in her Home Economics classroom on how to make the "Ultimate Scrambled Eggs." She used this graphic recipe in three of her Foods classes of "approximately seventy-five kids" because she thought that it was a "novel thing to see a recipe written in graphics" (Ms. O). Ms. O shares that her students "aren't good at reading recipes and following directions in traditional format" so she wanted to see if there was a difference while reading a "graphic recipe story" (Ms. O).

While reading the graphic recipe story, Ms. O had her students start the reading in class and finish it for homework, identifying the names of numerous chefs referenced throughout, as well as listing these chefs' opinions of how to make "the ultimate scrambled egg." Her students were then asked to create a traditional recipe listing the ingredients and explaining how to conduct the recipe. Ms. O says "all of the students did really well in writing the traditional format from the graphic novel" and what she found was "they didn't need to look at the recipe once they were making the scrambled eggs because they seemed to remember what to do and in what order to do it." She says that

this was "truly a *wow* moment because it just doesn't happen with traditional recipes" (Ms. O).

Overall, Ms. O believes her students were eager to read the visual media because it was "so totally different than what you would normally see in (her) classroom" (Ms. O). And although there "are always reluctant students" when it comes to reading, "majority of the students were more engaged and more likely to complete the assignment because it was in the form of visual media" (Ms. O). Ms. O found that her students were comfortable reading graphically because they were already accustomed to graphics in their everyday life and that they were "not at all intimidated or distracted" by the format (Ms. O). She finds that although she wants to incorporate more graphic novels in her classroom "because of this positive experience," it seems difficult to find the appropriate material to do so (Ms. O). Ms. O witnessed a higher level of engagement and participation while using the graphic recipe story and that her students "had to stop, think, and react while reading the graphic recipe story because the activity called for it" (Ms. O). She also believes that the students were able to visualize the content of the reading, complete multiple readings of the text, were able to recognize the importance and development of the characters, and overall, were "able to get what they needed from the text: amount of ingredients, the utensils, the amount of time for cooking the ingredients" (Ms. O). While reading traditional recipes, only some of the students "stop-think-react" to the text and are "generally not really reading or digesting the steps" at all, often "disconnecting the ingredients from the top of the page to the directions on the bottom of the page" (Ms. O).

Ms. O has witnessed "more kids reading before or during class," but it's "leisure reading" and so she believes that in order for us to promote reading, and therefore strengthen reading comprehension skills, we need to "incorporate different formats" to "help the reluctant readers" (Ms. O). It was from her experience of using the graphic recipe story that "proved to (her)" that if students are disinterested in reading, if given a different format, whether it's the graphic recipe or anything else, then that would help some of them" (Ms. O).

Table 3 illustrates the high school teachers' responses to their students' experiences while reading:

Table 3

High School Teachers' Responses

	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Shorter Attention Span		5	1	
Uninterested in Reading		4	2	
Engagement		2	6	
Classroom Discussion	2	2	2	
Unapproachable Language		2	4	
At-Home Readings		1	2	2
Struggle During Read Alouds		5	1	

Because Ms. O only experimented with a graphic recipe story once and because her students do not complete traditional readings in her electives, her results were not included in the general data report. The three tables show shorter attention spans at both

the elementary and high school levels. There is a slight decrease in engagement from when a student is in elementary school to when he/she approaches high school. Regardless of their grade, students seem to frequently struggle with read alouds and occasionally find the language that they are reading unapproachable, but are still interested in contributing to classroom discussion. According to the data collected, students are more likely to complete at-home reading assignments in the earlier grades.

Although six teachers interviewed believe that their students are unfamiliar with the format of the graphic novel, none of them believe that this new format intimidates their students and only one of them believes that their students become distracted by the various features of a graphic novel. This one teacher also explained that this type of distraction is a positive reaction, often leading to students spending more time to examine the features. Seven teachers believe that their students are interested in reading, all of whom were elementary or middle school teachers. These teachers reported using more graphic novels in their classrooms than the high school teachers interviewed. None of the high school teachers believe that their students foster a love for reading. There is clearly a disconnect in students' level of appreciation for education and reading once they reach high school. Twelve out of fourteen teachers believe that their students express levels of engagement while reading graphic novels, as opposed to the seven teachers who believe that their students express these same levels of engagement while reading traditional texts.

From the fourteen teachers who were interviewed and included, eight of them received some proper training on how to include graphic novels in their classroom. Of these eight teachers, five were elementary school teachers, two were middle school

teachers, and one was a high school teacher. All eight teachers experienced great results when teaching visual literacy and felt that their students naturally exhibited the latest reading comprehension exercises while using graphic novels in their classrooms.

A major focus of this study was whether students innately practice the latest exercises suggested to strengthen their reading comprehension and critical reading, writing and thinking skills. Twelve teachers believe that their students "stop-think-react" while reading graphic novels, thirteen teachers feel that their students are able to appropriately ask questions while reading graphic novels, thirteen teachers find their students are able to complete multiple readings of the text, thirteen teachers believe that their students are able to recognize the importance and development of significant characters, and thirteen teachers feel that their students are able recognize the significant actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow. All fourteen teachers believe that their students are able to visualize the content of their reading and all fourteen teachers believe their students are able to recognize the details and importance of the setting. Only seven teachers reported that their students are capable of understanding global issues, a concept that seems to be complex for students who are average or lower-leveled readers. These numbers are promising. The majority of the teachers reported that their students are able and willing to stop, think and react to the text, often rereading the material to offer personal insights about the development of the plot. Since they are able to recognize the significance of characters, setting and actions of the story, they are more likely able to contribute to classroom discussion. Those discussions about literature can promote a deeper understanding of the text.

Fewer teachers reported productive discussions while reading traditional texts. Seven out of fourteen teachers believe their students "stop-think-react" while reading traditional texts as opposed to the twelve teachers who believe students complete this while reading graphic novels. Ten teachers believe that their students are able to ask questions while reading traditionally as opposed to the thirteen teachers who believe their students are able to ask questions while reading graphic novels. Seven teachers believe their students complete multiple readings of traditional texts as opposed to the thirteen teachers who find their students are able to complete multiple readings of graphic novels. Twelve teachers believe their students are able to recognize the importance and development of significant characters while reading traditional texts as opposed to the thirteen teachers who believe that their students are able to complete this skill while reading visually. Nine teachers believe that their students are able to visualize the content of their readings while reading traditional texts in contrast to all fourteen teachers believing that their students are able to visualize the content of their reading during their readings of graphic novels. Ten teachers feel their students can identify the importance and details of the setting during their reading of traditional texts as opposed to all fourteen teachers who believe their students are able to complete this skill during their reading of a graphic novel. Eleven teachers feel their students are able to recognize the significance actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow during their readings of traditional texts. Thirteen teachers feel that their students are able to do this graphically. Three teachers believe their students are capable of understanding global issues as opposed to the seven teachers who feel their students can complete this skill using graphic novels.

In all of these instances, students exhibit stronger reading comprehension skills while reading graphic novels, at times without any teaching or prompting or prompting of these skills by the teacher. While reading graphic novels, students are strengthening critical reading, writing, and thinking skills while maintaining intrigue and increasing their engagement.

Of the fourteen teachers, only five were required and/or asked to teach the graphic novel, all of whom were elementary school teachers. These five elementary school teachers also stated that they choose to teach graphic novels, along with one middle school teacher and all eight high school teachers who used graphic novels in their classrooms.   In order to get more graphic novels taught in classrooms, we need to first educate teachers about what graphic novels are. Then, teachers must be trained on how to use graphic novels in their classroom if the objective is to use graphic novels to strengthen critical reading, writing and thinking skills.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

At the start of this project, my primary purpose was to expose the benefits of incorporating graphic novels in classrooms. It was during my first reading of a graphic novel that I knew it would be widely accepted by my students. I figured that if I could recognize the graphic novel as a genre that is exciting but still appreciate that it requires much attention and analysis, then my students, who seem to be visually connected to multimedia modes of entertainment, will certainly appreciate the graphic novel as a new way to value reading and literature. I felt that because the graphic novel's format was so unique, my students, especially my lower-leveled students, would find the visual frames engaging and the textual setup approachable. Because I was trained on how to properly read a graphic novel, I noticed that the various elements within a page would require the type of critical thinking skills and reading analysis that we are trying to strengthen in our classrooms.

As explained earlier in my Dissertation, the graphic narrative is a genre that has been around for centuries. Various graphic novels have been written to narrate fictional stories and nonfictional accounts in history. Graphic artists use a number of techniques to engage their readers in participating in the development of a story, instead of passively reading it. Innately, readers of graphic novels perform a number of reading strategies, which have been proven to be successful in the development of critical reading, writing, and thinking skills. Since the graphic novel is told in a natural timeline, its multiple frames and shorter sentence structures require readers to stop, think and react to text.

Objects within each frame serve as visuals, which aid in the development and understanding of characters, setting and actions. Personal interpretations of these visuals generate questions and promote discussions. These discussions are beneficial in the classroom.

I researched the newest reading comprehension strategies that have been proven effective and saw a great correlation. While reading graphic novels, I felt that students innately practice these strategies without such strategies being modeled for them. I never set out to replace classic literature with the graphic novel, but felt that by incorporating a new and engaging genre, our students would become more responsive to the art of reading. I felt that by using the correct graphic novels in the classroom as companion texts to the required traditional literature, students of all reading levels would be better able to come together, delve into the text, and contribute to the unit's discussions and activities.

My initial goal was to measure the level at which my students understood a required reading from their grade-appropriate curriculum and measure it against the level at which they understood a thematically similar graphic novel. A unit plan, which required mostly student-centered activities and a pre- and a post- test, was created by me but turned down by my district. My plan to initially test my students' comprehension of their summer reading text would have given me an accurate understanding of their reading capabilities without my assistance. A graphic novel would have been taught using the most recent suggested reading comprehension strategies. Their level of understanding was going to be evaluated a second time and compared to their initial comprehension. Projects like this are essential in the understanding of how well graphic

novels can aid in the strengthening of our students' critical reading, writing and thinking skills. It is my hope that this dissertation encourages other educators to experiment with using graphic novels in their classroom because few projects of its kind exist. I believe the reluctance over using graphic novels in the classroom can be attributed to a number of things. There are many new demands placed on district administrators and teachers. Few districts feel comfortable conducting a study using minors. Instructional time is valuable and conducting a study when their teachers, administrators, and districts are being evaluated annually seems risky. Few administrators know the term, graphic novel, let alone the concept. Student Growth Objective (SGOs) must be set at the start of each school year. Teachers are evaluated based on how much growth their students experience. With the new demands of SGOs and preparing for the PARCC test, conducting a three-week study seemed time-consuming. Instead, I found projects with similar goals from around the country and studied their results. These projects raised more questions than answers.

I wondered who in my district was using graphic novels and if any teachers experimented with graphic novels outside of the English or reading classroom. I wondered how these teachers were exposed to the graphic novel and in what ways they were using them in their classrooms. I wondered what difficulties teachers faced while teaching graphic novels. And I wondered how well graphic novels were being received and if teachers found them to be a valuable tool in engaging their students and strengthening their critical reading, writing, and thinking skills, and whether these results differed depending on the level of reader. I knew that if I could interview a number of teachers, my research would greatly expand past a mere classroom, and instead include

experiences of hundreds of students as these teachers remember them. I was especially interested in discussing the use of graphic novels in the classroom of teachers whose goals were not to conduct a study. Their comments and reactions were purely from memory, often generalized, with no goal other than to answer my questions. This provided authentic conversations not only about graphic novels, but about reading and academics in general. An emerging focus included in my study was following a student's level of engagement from elementary school into high school and trying to understand why most students initially experience a love for education and passion for reading but lose that lost in high school.

One difference is parental involvement experienced in the lower grades verses high school and another is the difference in priorities a high school student faces as opposed to an elementary school student. However, I found that most teachers agreed that one of the major contributions to such a problem is the difference in the teaching of reading and writing in the school grades. In elementary and middle school, students are focusing on enriching certain skills of reading. In high school, students become disengaged, merely answering reading comprehension questions about the content of the text. By reading graphic novels, students can practice stopping, thinking and reacting to the text and become more active readers by noticing and analyzing the visual aspects within a frame. They can question the graphic artist's choices of style and arrangement and how these choices affect the plot, theme and outcome of the story.

When students become disengaged with reading, they may fall behind in their comprehension skills when they reach high school. Many teachers interviewed expressed frustration with finding ways to approach the various levels of readers in their classroom

at a given time. They found that their students were less intimidated when reading graphic novels because they were able to study a single frame at a time. Because each frame contained a shorter sentence structure, their students were more likely, willing and capable of approaching and analyzing the text within each frame.

Finally, a number of teachers attribute the decrease in academic interest among the grades to a lack of personal connection and choice experienced in high school. Offering options such as graphic novels in classrooms will provide students with alternative opportunities to read, one that better suits their visual, interactive tendencies. As many teachers pointed out, because so few graphic novels are taught in the classroom, it maintains its appeal as a novelty to our students, one that cannot and should not be overused. It is important, then, that if only a few graphic novels are taught in the classroom, that right ones are chosen. This reminds us of the importance of a media specialist within a district. It would be beneficial for school librarians to offer a list of appropriate and worthwhile graphic novels by grades and subjects.

I was especially pleased with the number of teachers who expressed interest in learning more about graphic novels and how they can be used in the classroom. The graphic novel is still an unfamiliar genre to most teachers, but I believe that if introduced to such texts, more teachers would experiment with using whole graphic novels, or excerpts from graphic novels, as supplemental reading in their classrooms. If teachers were properly trained on how to effectively teach graphic novels, students would practice reading in other subject areas and therefore strengthening their critical reading, writing, and thinking skills in a unique and nontraditional way, or more importantly, while building content knowledge.

Most educators are intrigued with new approaches to teaching concrete skills, like reading comprehension, regardless of their background and subject area. Awareness continues to be an important tool in promoting the use of graphic novels in the classroom. I believe that teachers would attend workshops focusing on the use of graphic novels in the classroom and would incorporate more graphic novels in the classroom, if such workshops were provided by the district and/or local colleges and universities. It is beneficial for teachers to be trained not only on how to use graphic novels in the classroom, but also on how to effectively strengthen reading comprehension while using graphic novels.

If graphic novels are currently being used in the classroom, their inclusion seems to be more of a result of the teacher's desire to include them. The graphic novel should also be introduced to teachers in subjects other than English and reading. It would be especially beneficial to start using graphic novels outside of these classrooms. Students would respond well to the use of visual literacy in other subject areas which would further increase their critical reading, writing and thinking skills. Studies need to be conducted to measure the level of comprehension using graphic novels in other subject areas, compared to the level of comprehension students experience while reading traditional texts. Graphics may be especially helpful in science, math, history, and world language classes. I believe that if these teachers knew about graphic novels available to their subject area, they would chose to experiment with them in their classrooms.

All of the teachers interviewed chose to teach the graphic novel, even if they were also required to teach it. There seems to be no direct correlation with the age of a teacher or their years of experience as whom is teaching the graphic novel. If a teacher has been

exposed to graphic novels, he/she seems to believe in them enough to use them in the classrooms. The teachers who reported a background in studying graphic novels also reported more positive findings within their classrooms. Although a teacher does not necessarily need to be properly trained on how to teach graphic novels, it is important that they learn of the many teaching or teachable moments found within a story, page and frame of a graphic novel. The methods that teachers use with graphic novels vary. Twelve out of fourteen teachers use graphic novels as supplemental readings to required texts on the curriculum and eleven out of fourteen teachers use graphic novels as primary texts. Two teachers used only excerpts of graphic novels. The manner in which teachers use graphic novels in the classroom may correlate with the results they experienced while using them. Teachers who use only excerpts of graphic novels cannot expect their students to recognize global issues in the text, for example[1]. Teachers who are spending an entire unit studying a graphic novel may ultimately experience different results than those who are just using excerpts from a graphic novel.

Graphic novels are being read at home and in the classroom. Eleven out of fourteen teachers require their students to read graphic novels during class and nine also require their students to read graphic novels for homework. Regardless of when graphic novels are being read, thirteen out of fourteen teachers believe that their students seem eager to read visual media, and only two of them believe that their students are reluctant to read the new format. In fact, nine teachers believe that their students are more likely to complete their reading assignments if they are in the form of visual media. None of the teachers felt that their students were less likely to complete their reading if it was in the

---

[1] The use of editorial cartoons could be an exception to this point.

form of visual media. Incorporating graphic novels in the classroom is imperative, especially since so many of the teachers interviewed recognize the importance of incorporating various genres to promote reading to their students.

Graphic novels can be used as a primary or companion text, or excerpts of graphic novels can be explored separately within a unit. Although I referenced how this may have altered my data, the graphic novel's versatility is another appealing factor. A future area of study should involve looking more closely at the outcome of teachers who were trained on how to properly incorporate the graphic novel in their classroom compared to those who have not received training. Additionally, it would be interesting to see if teaching graphic novels as primary or companion texts alters the students' and teachers' reaction to them and experiences with them.

In my study, regardless of the manner in which it is used, all interviewed teachers believed that their students were more likely to complete their reading assignments when in the form of visual literacy because their students exhibited greater signs of engagement while reading graphic novels. This is especially exciting considering none of the high school teachers believe their students are interested in reading. Students were reported as often being curious and eager to read such a new genre, even if they were unfamiliar with the format. Even the advanced readers reported from the AP and Honors teachers who originally seemed reluctant to read "comics" eventually understood the benefits of its complexities.

My experience in the classroom is similar to the accounts I found in my research. Many of my students reach my sophomore English class with critical reading, writing and thinking skills at or below their expected level. Many of them are uninterested in reading

and writing. Often, without trying, my students declare they cannot complete assignments and that they do not understand the material because they are not capable of reading. Often my students simply do not want read. Few students admit to reading recreationally. Many students are often intimidated by texts and are especially reluctant to read out loud. My students often recognize whether or not they are skilled readers. I believe that some of their reluctance comes from their insecurities as readers. They become nervous when they don't understand the text and become disengaged in the material. The graphic novel provides them with a new and exciting opportunity to read, connect and comprehend.

When I bring excerpts of graphic novels into my classroom, my students seem eager to learn how to read the new format. Classroom conversation becomes driven by my students' reactions to the graphic novel and the author's choice of text and images. My students quickly recognize the importance of artistic approaches. They acknowledge the relationship they see between the words and the images. They are eager to discuss the characters and setting within each frame while recognizing the relationship of the frames within a page and/or chapter. Now more of my students, regardless of their reading backgrounds or levels, are able to contribute to a meaningful conversation while better connecting to the material.

As an English teacher, I experience the most willingness and eagerness in my classes when I design my lessons and class discussions to better reflect my students' personal interests. If our goal as educators is to have our students read at their expected level in order to think deeply and critically about literature and life, then we must change our approaches to teaching literature so that they better respond to our students' lives.

This can be done while strengthening our students' critical reading, writing and thinking skills. Even if many students are unfamiliar with its format, the inclusion of the graphic novel in the classroom will enhance engagement and initiate the analytical conversations and connections we strive for from our students.

Because of these conversations and results, I plan to champion the use of graphic novels in a range of classrooms to promote critical reading, writing and thinking skills. The start of this research project has already opened up conversations about new methods of teaching literacy, especially with the use of graphic novels. Since the start of my dissertation, my school library has expanded its collection of graphic novels. The science teacher who was unaware of graphic novels in his subject area was given a list of titles to be used in his classroom. As a result of the one culinary arts teacher who used a graphic novel as a different approach for her students' reading of a recipe, another teacher in her department asked to meet with me about teaching how to read the format of a graphic novel to her and her students as an introductory lesson in her sewing class. Once her students become familiar with the format, she plans on having them read several superhero comic strips, study the fashion of the superheroes, and create a personal superhero cape and comic strip.

I was also observed using the graphic novel in my sophomore English class and received the highest rankings in all four areas of evaluation. The observed lesson followed my teaching of how to read a graphic novel, and included four stations of visual literacy examples. At each station, students were required to use the close reading skills learned. These skills were then applied during the opening excerpt of *Of Mice and Men*. Students were expected to recognize the diction, setting, icons and dialogue, as well as

the motive of the excerpt. They then created a comic strip of more than three frames which included their interpretation of close reading. During this mini-unit, students exhibited signs of curiosity and engagement. They also showcased deep levels of comprehension during their close reading of the traditional text, which was illustrated in their comic strip creations.
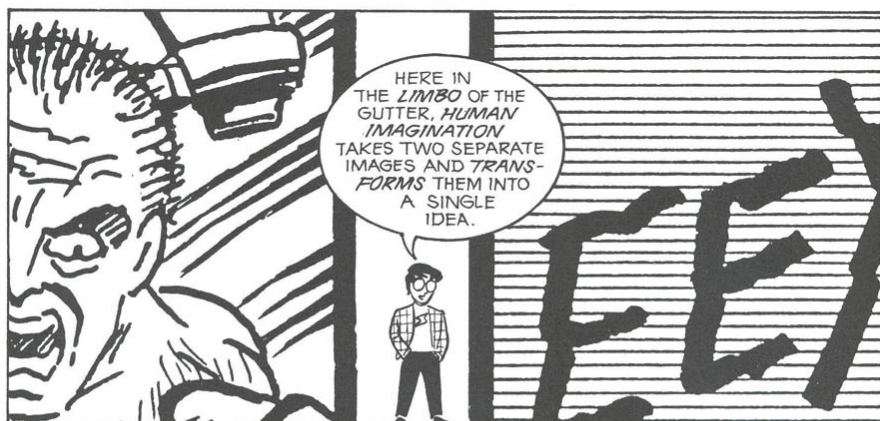
I believe that if teachers are provided a list of graphic novels for use in their subject areas, as well given some techniques on how to properly teach the format, they will be more likely to incorporate graphic novels into their curriculum. More lessons need to be created, implemented and shared using the graphic novel in the classroom. Sharing conversations about how this genre is successfully used in the classroom to strengthen remedial or struggling readers will allow for the graphic novel to be better accepted by districts. Furthermore, the graphic novel should not be restricted to English classrooms. Because many high school classes combine students of various backgrounds and abilities, the graphic novel can be used as a tool for the teacher to bridge gaps that often occur between remedial and advanced students. Students reading graphic novels in multiple subject areas will not only also find these subjects more engaging and relatable, but they will continue to strengthen their literacy skills.

APPENDIX A

SCOTT MCCLOUD'S PRESENTATION OF BODY LANGUAGE AND THE
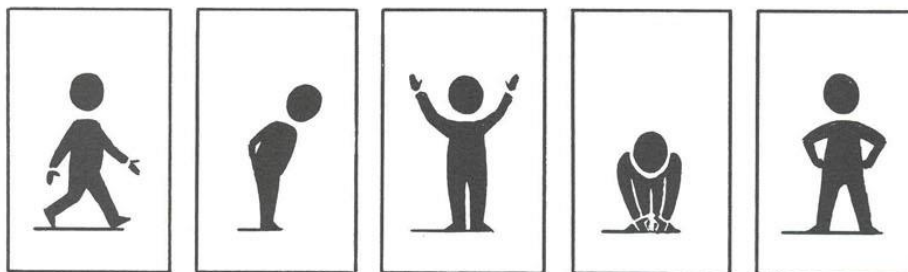
GUTTER

153

NOTHING IS *SEEN* BETWEEN THE TWO PANELS, BUT *EXPERIENCE* TELLS YOU SOMETHING *MUST* BE THERE!
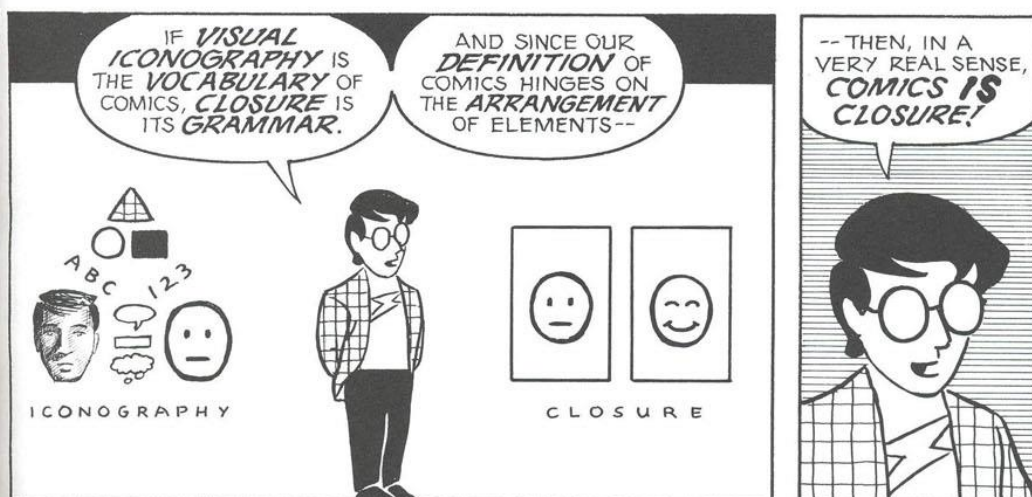
Peek-A-Boo!

Peek-A-Boo!

COMICS PANELS *FRACTURE* BOTH *TIME* AND *SPACE*, OFFERING A *JAGGED, STACCATO RHYTHM* OF *UNCONNECTED MOMENTS.*

BUT CLOSURE ALLOWS US TO *CONNECT* THESE MOMENTS AND *MENTALLY CONSTRUCT* A *CONTINUOUS, UNIFIED REALITY.*

IF *VISUAL ICONOGRAPHY* IS THE *VOCABULARY* OF COMICS, *CLOSURE* IS ITS *GRAMMAR.*

AND SINCE OUR *DEFINITION* OF COMICS HINGES ON THE *ARRANGEMENT* OF ELEMENTS--

-- THEN, IN A VERY REAL SENSE, *COMICS IS CLOSURE!*

A B C 1 2 3

ICONOGRAPHY

CLOSURE

67

APPENDIX C

KELLY GALLAGHER'S MODEL FOR TEACHING CHALLENGING TEXTS

Figure 2.1

Model for Teaching Challenging Texts
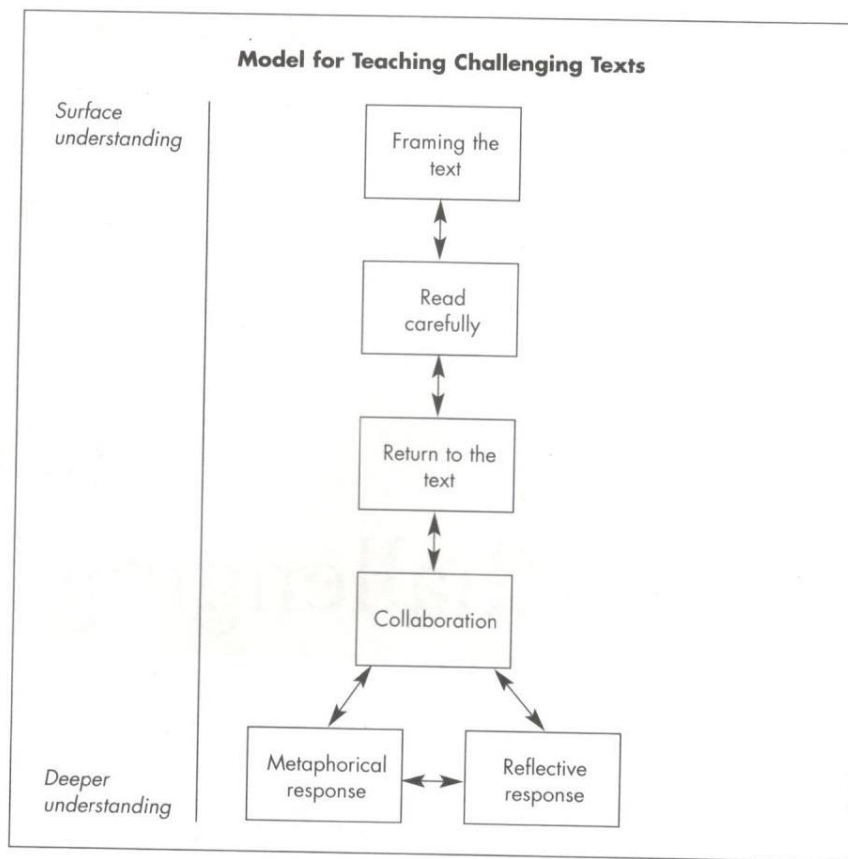
HINES AND DELLINGER'S DATA

Table 2A

5th grade	Pre-Survey (3/7/2011)			Post-Survey (3/31/2011)		
	Recreational:	Academic:	Full Scale:	Recreational:	Academic:	Full Scale:
Molly	28	22	50	35	27	62
Kyle	27	22	49	20	21	41
John	30	23	53	28	27	55
Zeb	15	14	29	16	19	35
Holly	21	18	39	26	28	54

Table 2B

7th grade	Pre-Survey (3/7/2011)			Post-Survey (3/31/2011)		
	Recreational:	Academic:	Full Scale:	Recreational:	Academic:	Full Scale:
Emory	32	26	58	33	27	60
Tiffany	18	22	40	24	20	44
Austin	26	22	48	28	24	52

Table 4

Student:	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Total
Molly (5th)	0	2	1	2	5
Kyle (5th)	0	1	1	1	3
Zeb (5th)	1	1	1	1	4
Holly (5th)	2	3	3	2	10
John (5th)	2	3	2	2	9
Emory (7th)	0	1	1	3	5
Eduardo (7th)	2	2	2	2	8
Austin (7th)	2	1	1	2	6
Tiffany (7th)	0	2	1	2	5
Sierra (7th)	2	3	4	1	10

Student:	# of Entries posted:	# of Responses posted:
Emory	1	3
Tiffany	2	5
Sierra	2	4
Austin	3	6
Eduardo	1	2

Table 3B

Student:	# of Entries posted:	# of Responses posted:
Molly	4	0
Zeb	3	1
John	5	2
Kyle	3	0
Holly	4	1

APPENDIX E

PRELIMINARY SURVEY AND INTERVIEW MATERIALS

Department Chair Email
Andrea Vecchione
avecchione@drew.edu

Dear Department Chair:

I am in the process of completing my dissertation, Teaching Reading "Outside the Box": The Graphic Novel in the Secondary Classroom and am interested in interviewing teachers who have used graphic novels in their classrooms. I hope to discover who is using graphic novels in their classroom, in what ways graphic novels are being used and received, and in what ways (if any) students' experiences of reading graphic novels may differ from their reading of more traditional texts.

In order to conduct my research, I have created a Preliminary Survey to find teachers who have taught graphic novels in their classrooms, teachers who are unclear about what graphic novels are, and teachers who would be interested in further participating in my research. The survey consists of five statements. Participants will be asked to check off all the statements that apply. The process should take less than five minutes to complete. I have copied enough surveys for your department and was hoping that you would distribute these surveys to the teachers in your department.

If the teachers in your department are interested in participating, please ask them to fill out the Preliminary Survey and send it back to me via school mailbox:

Andrea Vecchione
avecchione@drew.edu

Consent Form
Andrea Vecchione
avecchione@drew.edu

The following interview I will conduct will be used in my dissertation, Teaching Reading "Outside the Box": The Graphic Novel in the Secondary Classroom. I am studying the responses of teachers who have used graphic novels in their classrooms, the ways in which graphic novels are being used and received by both teachers and students, and the ways (if any) students' experiences of reading graphic novels differs from their reading of more traditional texts.

The following seventeen-question survey, should take approximately an hour of your time. I will read each question and your responses and any generated discussion between us will be noted and recorded and used in the final chapter of my dissertation. Your name will be changed and your identity will be kept confidential.

This is a voluntary survey. Please know that you can discontinue your participation at any time and there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to you. By filling out the following information, you agree to the above-mentioned description of your participation in the interview and are providing consent for your responses to be published in the final chapter of the dissertation titled, Teaching Reading 'Outside the Box': The Graphic Novel in the Secondary Classroom.

Participant's Full Name (Printed):

Participant's Signature:

Preliminary Survey
Andrea Vecchione
avecchione@drew.edu

Can you please take a moment and complete the following questions?

Please know that by simply checking off a few boxes below, you are greatly contributing to my project and it is much appreciated:

I am in the process of completing my dissertation titled, Teaching Reading "Outside the Box": The Graphic Novel in the Secondary Classroom and am interested in interviewing teachers who have used the graphic novel in their classrooms.

Subject Currently Teaching:

Please Check ALL that Apply:

_____ I have NOT used a graphic novel in my teaching career.

_____ I am not clear about what a graphic novel is.

_____ I would be interested in using a graphic novel in my classroom, if properly trained on how to incorporate it into my curriculum.

_____ I have used a graphic novel in my teaching career.

_____ I would be willing to speak with you about my experience teaching a graphic novel. I understand that no specifics of myself, or my classes, will be published and that my responses are strictly anecdotal.

Please include your name if you are willing to be interviewed about your experience teaching the graphic novel:

Name:

Signature: _____

Thank you,
Andrea Vecchione
avecchione@drew.edu

Teachers of Graphic Novel Survey
Andrea Vecchione
avecchione@drew.edu

Date:

Name:
Age:
Email:
Cell Number:

District:
Primary Subject (s) Taught:

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. How many graphic novels do you teach each school year?

3. In what subject(s)/class do you find that you teach the most graphic novels in?

4. For how many years have you taught the graphic novel?

5. Why is it that you include the graphic novel in your classroom?
Check all that apply:
_____ I am asked to teach the graphic novel.
_____ I am required to teach the graphic novel.
_____ I choose to teach the graphic novel.
_____ I wanted to try teaching something different.
_____ I have been teaching with graphic novels for years.

6. Please expand on the previous question in narrative form:
Why is it that you include the graphic novel in your curriculum?

7. How do you teach the graphic novel?
Check all that apply:
_____ I use the graphic novel as a supplemental read to required text on the
curriculum.
_____ I use the graphic novel alone and create a learning unit around the text.
_____ I use only excerpts or short graphic novels or visual media.
_____ I ask my students to read the graphic novel during class time.
_____ I ask my students to read the graphic novel for homework.

8. In your experience, how do students respond to the graphic novel? Check all that apply:

_____ Students seem eager to read visual media.

_____ Students seem reluctant to read such a new format.

_____ Students seem to treat their reading of graphic novels much like their readings of traditional texts.

_____ Students are more likely to complete their reading assignment when it is in the form of visual media.

_____ Students are less likely to complete their reading assignment when it is in the form of visual media.

_____ Students seem not to treat the graphic novel any different than traditional texts.

9. What difficulties, if any, do you find in teaching the graphic novel?
Check all that apply:

_____ Students are traditionally unfamiliar with the format.

_____ Students are intimidated by the unfamiliar format.

_____ Students are distracted by the various features on a given page in a graphic novel.

_____ I was never properly trained on how to teach visual media.

_____ There is not enough time in the school year to properly teach the graphic novel.

Other:

10. In your experience, are students more or less interested in reading the graphic novel than they are traditional literature? How was their increased or decreased level of interest exhibited?

11. Students complete the following reading strategies while reading graphic novels.
Check all that apply:

_____ Students complete the "stop-think-react" while reading the graphic novel.

_____ Students ask questions while reading the graphic novel.

_____ Students are able to visualize the content of their readings.

_____ Students are able to identify global issues while reading the graphic novel.

_____ Students are able to complete multiple readings of the text.

_____ Students are able to recognize the importance and development of significant characters.

_____ Students are able to identify the importance and details of the setting.

_____ Students are able to identify the significant actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow.

Students complete the following reading strategies while reading traditional texts. Check all that apply:

_____ Students complete the "stop-think-react" while reading the graphic novel.
_____ Students ask questions while reading the graphic novel.
_____ Students are able to visualize the content of their readings.
_____ Students are able to identify global issues while reading the graphic novel.
_____ Students are able to complete multiple readings of the text.
_____ Students are able to recognize the importance and development of significant characters.
_____ Students are able to identify the importance and details of the setting.
_____ Students are able to identify the significant actions of the text and what these actions may foreshadow.

12. Are the students in your class generally interested or disinterested in reading? Please explain:

13. If engaged while reading, what specific behaviors do your students exhibit?

    Do you find that your students exhibit these behaviors while reading graphic novels?

    Do you find that your students exhibit these behaviors while reading traditional texts?

14. What difficulties do you find in teaching reading in general?

15. In what ways do you think education can better approach students who are disinterested or struggling readers?

16. Please describe the district that you are teaching in:

17. Please circle the response that best describes your experience of each of the following statements:

Students exhibit signs of a short attention span.

Always   *Frequently*   *Occasionally*   *Never*

Students are uninterested in reading.

Always   *Frequently*   *Occasionally*   *Never*

Students find reading engaging.

Always   *Frequently*   *Occasionally*   *Never*

Students struggle with reading aloud in class.

Always   *Frequently*   *Occasionally*   *Never*

Students are able and willing to discuss their readings with the class.

Always   *Frequently*   *Occasionally*   *Never*

Students complete at-home reading assignments.

Always   *Frequently*   *Occasionally*   *Never*

Students find the language in the literature they are reading unapproachable.

Always   *Frequently*   *Occasionally*   *Never*

_____

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VITA

<u>Full Name</u>: Andrea Vecchione

<u>Place and date of birth</u>: Hackensack, New Jersey, April 25, 1983

<u>Parents' Names</u>: Michael and Joanne Vecchione

<u>Educational Institutions</u>:

School	Place	Degree	Date
Secondary: Becton Regional High School	Carlstadt, NJ	High School Diploma	June 2001
Collegiate: Montclair State University	Montclair, NJ	B.A.	May 2005
Graduate: Marygrove College	Detroit, MI	M.Ed.	
Drew University Caspersen School of Graduate Studies	Madison, NJ	D.Litt.	May 2015