

GRAPHIC NOVELS IN ADVANCED ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS
CLASSROOMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
School of Education.

Chapel Hill
2012

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ABSTRACT

CARY GILLENWATER: Graphic novels in advanced English/language arts classrooms:
A phenomenological case study
(Under the direction of Madeleine Grumet)

This dissertation is a phenomenological case study of two 12th grade English/language arts (ELA) classrooms where teachers used graphic novels with their advanced students. The primary purpose of this case study was to gain insight into the phenomenon of using graphic novels with these students—a research area that is currently limited. Literature from a variety of disciplines was compared and contrasted with observations, interviews, questionnaires, and structured think-aloud activities for this purpose. The following questions guided the study: (1) What are the prevailing attitudes/opinions held by the ELA teachers who use graphic novels and their students about this medium? (2) What interests do the students have that connect to the phenomenon of comic book/graphic novel reading? (3) How do the teachers and the students make meaning from graphic novels?

The findings generally affirmed previous scholarship that the medium of comic books/graphic novels can play a beneficial role in ELA classrooms, encouraging student involvement and ownership of texts and their visual literacy development. The findings also confirmed, however, that teachers must first conceive of literacy as more than just reading and writing phonetic texts if the use of the medium is to be more than just secondary to traditional literacy. The findings also affirmed that a complex interaction of

pedagogy, curriculum, and historical influences inform, affect, and shape this phenomenon and create tensions around the use of this medium, particularly for students.

The study also produced some interesting findings that complicated and even challenged current scholarship about the canon, literacy, and using comic books/graphic novels in the ELA classroom. While it is understood that canonical texts often persist due to social and cultural forces that influence both schooling and our society, there are also less controlling forces influencing the canon, particularly nostalgia. The findings also suggest that excellent traditional literacy abilities can play an important role in understanding and interpreting images; however, instruction in the arts and visual literacy can augment and deepen students' visual literacy. Finally, the findings suggest that scholarship on comic books, particularly how to read them, may be overly complicated and pedantic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have contributed to the journey I have taken as a graduate student. I wish to acknowledge them and extend my deeply felt and sincere gratitude to them.

I would like to thank Chuck Nolan, the principal of Orange Charter School, who allowed me to make time in the day to pursue graduate courses at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Without his flexibility I would not have been able to begin this journey.

I would also like to thank Lynda Stone, Gerald Unks, and James Trier who welcomed me to the Culture, Curriculum, and Change program and helped mentor and navigate me as I pursued my Masters. I consider Lynda, Gerry, and Jim to be true friends.

I am forever indebted to Madeleine Grumet, whom I asked to be my advisor several years ago because I knew she would not allow anything less than the best I could give. Her guidance, patience, and reality checks made me not only a better writer but a better scholar. I would also like to thank the rest of my committee, James Trier, Jeff Greene, Lucila Vargas, and Renee Hobbs, for all their support and guidance along this journey as well.

Finally, I must thank my family who believed in me and were proud of me every step of the way. I am grateful to my parents for instilling in me the values of learning and of dedication. If my mom in particular had not begun to “put her foot down” when I was in fifth grade and made me make school a priority, I would never have come this far. Who would have thought school would become my life? Ultimately, there is one person I can never repay for the sacrifices she made and the suffering she endured as I struggled to become the scholar I am

today: my wife Zoe Gillenwater. Her support, love, confidence, and sometimes a “kick in the pants,” helped me persevere through this journey of graduate school. Soon it will be her turn.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The idea of using a comic book in the classroom, particularly the English/Language Arts (ELA) classroom, is not as far-fetched as it was just a decade or two ago. Back in 1989 I was in eighth grade, and between class bells my friends and I would stand huddled around my locker looking at comic books. We would flip through the pages and speak in almost guarded whispers about the images we were seeing. We knew that if we brought them into the classroom, they would immediately be confiscated—a fact my best friend learned the hard way—so the two minutes between classes was our only option if we were to share in the pleasure they brought each of us. Reflecting back on these early experiences with comic books in school, I realize that having comic books seemed tantamount to having pornography stashed in the locker. In retrospect, the idea that I had to be secretive about my reading choice of comic books seems almost laughable, but in fact it was a serious issue because they simply were not acceptable in school. Currently, it is still an uncommon practice to read comic books and/or graphic novels¹ in the ELA classroom; however, it is not as unheard of as it was when I was in school.

¹ Will Eisner, famed comic book creator of *The Spirit*, is often credited as the coiner of this term because he used it in the 1970s, but it was the news media's use that introduced the term to the general public (Weiner, 2003). Diamond Comics, the leading distributor of comic books, differentiates a graphic novel from a comic book in two ways: first it is longer, and second it tells a standalone story as opposed to the more serialized traditional comic book format. However, the term is also used when consecutive issues of a serialized comic book are collected.

Another distinction that exists between then and now is the internet. Finding a space in ELA classrooms for comic books is potentially more critical now than at any other time in comics' history because in comparison with phonetic texts this medium has more elements in common with reading on the web, both in how they are created and how they are understood (Clarke, 2007; P. Gutiérrez, 2008). It is interesting that one of the earliest modes of communication, images, is the most relevant to the newest mode.

Over the last two decades, scholarship on the medium has come from a number of disciplines, mostly focusing on the conventions of the medium (e.g. Carrier, 2000; Varnum & Gibbons, 2001) and/or the intended and unintended results of the medium (e.g. Barker, 1989; Schmitt, 1992) while other works explore their history and cultural significance (Nyberg, 1998; Wright, 2001). However, there is a growing body of scholarship concerned with the medium and its potential benefit to students' literacy development (e.g. Bakis, 2012; Carter, 2007a, 2007b; Dorrell, Curtis, & Rampal, 1995; Freeman, 1998; Galley, 2004; Leckbee, 2005; McTaggart, 2005; Norton, 2003; Snowball, 2005; Versaci, 2001, 2007; Williams, 2007). Much of this scholarship addresses the potential of the medium to engage students, pointing to its relevancy and to the pleasure derived from these texts. A majority of these scholars ultimately concludes that one of the best justifications for comic books is that they provide a bridge to traditional, phonetic texts for struggling, reluctant, and nonreaders (e.g. Carter, 2007b; Freeman, 1998; Galley, 2004; Leckbee, 2005; McTaggart, 2005; Schwarz, 2002; Snowball, 2005; Versaci, 2001). The use of this medium to cultivate students' traditional literacy, i.e. reading and writing phonetic texts, is commendable and should be studied further; nevertheless, the typical conclusion that it is best suited as a scaffold to traditional

literacy implies that the medium of comic books is secondary or what James “Bucky” Carter, a comic book scholar and teacher educator, calls *minor* in relation to the *major* role of traditional literature (personal communication, 2012).

In order to circumvent this persistent subordination that appreciates comic books merely as a bridge to something else, I have chosen to work specifically with advanced² students and advanced ELA curriculum in this study. This population could be particularly helpful in understanding how comic books and graphic novels can function in the ELA classroom beyond that of bridging them to traditional phonetic texts because these advanced students already have the ability to comprehend and make meaning from traditional texts. There is also very little research on the use of comic books and graphic novels with this population (Carter, 2007a, 2007b; Mitchell & George, 1996). This study will help to expand on this literature.

The research questions that guided this study were created based on literature from a variety of disciplines. They were the foundation for the initial interview protocols for teachers and students (see appendices A & B for interview protocols):

1. What are the prevailing attitudes/opinions held by the English teachers who use graphic novels and their students about the medium of comic books/graphic novels?
 - What contributes to these attitudes/opinions?

² I define advanced for the purposes of this study as students and teachers that engage with what is typically termed in the high school setting as honors and advanced placement ELA curriculum. This definition is congruent with the College Board’s description of the AP English Literature and Composition course as outlined on their website: www.collegeboard.org.

- Do the teachers' attitudes/opinions affect their pedagogical approach?
 - Do the students' attitudes/opinions affect their initial reception of these texts?
 - What is the outcome of the use of these texts on the students' attitudes/opinions about these texts specifically and about the advanced ELA curriculum generally?
2. What interests do the students have that connect to the phenomenon of comic book/graphic novel reading?
- What are the circumstances of their initial encounters with the medium?
 - Do the students become interested in these texts at any specific point of time?
 - How do students compare and contrast their experiences with these texts with those of purely phonetic text?
3. How do the teachers and the students make meaning from graphic novels?
- How does their meaning making contribute to their understanding of literacy and its functions beyond the classroom?

Purpose of the Study

In addition to expanding the literature on the use of comic books and graphic novels, what I term hybrid texts³, with advanced students, this study will examine how hybrid texts exist within the institution of schooling, specifically the advanced English/Language Arts (ELA) classroom. Furthermore, the study will illuminate how hybrid texts are negotiated or analyzed, critiqued, and engaged with, by both the teachers and the students in an accelerated and demanding curriculum that is historically grounded in traditional literacy. It also suggests that hybrid texts might add to students' traditional and visual literacy development and understanding of phonetic, visual, and hybrid texts. The pedagogical approach of the teachers working with these various texts is analyzed to further understand what differences, if any, exist in teaching them compared to traditional texts, as well as what a pedagogy of visual literacy may entail. The main purpose of this study is to gain insight into how the interfacing of pedagogy and curriculum, each influenced by historical forces, inform, affect, and shape the phenomenon of hybrid text use in the advanced ELA classroom as well as how students learn how to make meaning with these texts.

Background of Study

This study stems from my involvement with comic books and graphic novels since my youth and from my career as a middle school language arts teacher. It is further informed by my graduate studies in literacy, as well as a class project I worked on in the School of Journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (subsequently

³ Gunther Kress (2003), a scholar of semiotics and education, calls texts that combine words and images multi-modal. Drawing from this concept of multi-modality, I use the term *hybrid text* in this study when referring to comic books and graphic novels to emphasize that certain multi-modal text such as comic books and graphic novels use words and images concurrently to form a narrative (Carrier, 2000).

referred to in this text as UNCSJ). These experiences were the catalysts for this study and help to situate the perspectives I bring to the use of comic books and graphic novels in education.

A Passion for Comic Books

In 1986 I picked up three comic books at a local convenience store. They were superhero comics: Amazing Spider-man #298, Batman #418, and Uncanny X-Men #224, which featured Wolverine. I was eleven years old and in sixth grade. I immediately fell in love with the medium. Interestingly this purchase inspired me to get a job at a local produce stand that was located adjacent to the 7-11. I would get off the bus on Wednesday afternoons and work at the produce stand for an hour. I earned three dollars—"off the books" due to my age—for my hour of work, which typically consisted of things an eleven year old probably should not have been doing like stocking the giant walk-in freezer and chopping wood! Wednesdays are an important day for comic book readers because Wednesdays are when new comic books arrive in stores, so after work I immediately went to the 7-11 and bought comic books. Fortunately, back in the late 1980s comic books were priced around seventy-five cents with some being a dollar, so I could buy three comic books a week. While I deviated sometimes, my staples were Amazing Spider-man, Batman, and Uncanny X-Men. To this day Spider-man, Batman, and Wolverine, an X-man, are my favorite comic book heroes, and I still read their comics; I am thirty-six. Much of what I currently own are items I have a special attachment to, whether it is because they are excellent reads, have some sentimental attachment, or are valuable. I even have a few comic books from when I began collecting them back in 1986.

When I began reading comic books, my joy stemmed from the battles between the heroes and villains, but as I have matured, I now find the internal conflicts of the heroes and even the villains more compelling. I have also come to realize that their physical battles are often—at least in the best comics—a manifestation of their internal struggles. Spider-man’s battles are an example. I also thoroughly enjoy the visuals in comic books because they connect to my love of movies and of drawing. Even though I drew prior to becoming involved with comic books, I became a better artist after reading them because I would spend hours with my friends trying to duplicate the styles of the artists in the comics. I believe that reading comic books contributed heavily to my ability to draw and ultimately to acquiring jobs in Hollywood, California, as a storyboard artist—again a mixing of my two favorite activities: movies and drawing.

While I enjoyed reading comic books as an eleven year old, my mother was not happy about this new hobby of mine because she felt comic books were a waste of time and money and that reading them was not really reading. Her worry was not unfounded, because in my early adolescence I was a borderline *nonreader* (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007). Typically, nonreaders are considered to be students who do not read, whether for school or recreation (Williams, 2007). Interestingly, Williams (2007) found that many nonreaders do read, but they are reading texts such as comic books, magazines, trading cards, films, and the like—texts that are not generally school sanctioned. In my case, I did read what I had to for school, often the night before and sometimes opting for *Cliff’s Notes* when I was out of time. In short, I was not interested in traditional reading and writing beyond their connection to getting good grades, thus the designation of *borderline nonreader*. It is important to note that many of the students in this study also

enacted their literacy in this same manner, opting for the easiest and most efficient methods of “reading” their school texts to secure a good grade as opposed to engaging with the texts for the sake of pleasure and/or learning. (This issue will be discussed further in chapter 4.)

When I began reading comic books in 1986, I read them only for pleasure. I had come to understand explicitly from my mother and implicitly from school that these texts did not warrant any further engagement. Ironically, I had found a love for reading that was not supported by my mom or my teachers. Fortunately, my father took an interest in my newfound passion for this medium and took me to the comic book store. He also shared his childhood experiences with the medium with me; however, we never sat down and had any kind of discussions about the content of specific comic books I was reading at the time. Conversely, my friends and I did discuss these texts, but we never had any profound discussions, i.e. discussions about the meanings, particularly those not readily evident in the narratives, and instead talked about how cool things were, who could beat up whom, and other surface aspects of the medium. Upon reflection, I believe that my reception of these texts was mostly superficial. Any meanings I took away from them were typically superficial and tended to conform to and reinforce the dominant discourse of the superhero genre, i.e. the assertion of male masculinity and the role of violence in conflict resolution (Eco, 1965, cited in Magnussen & Christiansen, 2000). For example, when I read Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (see figure 1 below) I was captivated by an image of Batman hitting Superman, but the most I had to say about it was that it was “cool.”



Figure 1: Batman punching Superman

***Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, writer and artist Frank Miller ©1986 DC Comics**

After subsequent and more nuanced analytical readings of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, I have come to understand the image of Batman hitting Superman as symbolic of a rejection of oppression and even a triumph of the individual against those who wish to oppress him. This image is compelling because Superman is iconic as a good guy who stands for “truth, justice, and the American way”; however, in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* Superman has been co-opted by the government, and subsequently these values have been perverted into dictates that are used to ensure that those who would challenge America are kept in their place. Interestingly, it is therefore also possible to read the image as disrespectful to authority and even un-American. I now understand these messages as a reflection of my own upbringing in a lower middle class family that tended to vilify the government and others in power while also promoting ideals of individualism and simultaneously community. Ultimately, I believe that if I had been taught that images can be read and that they can carry meanings beyond what is

immediately apparent, I feel I would have been better equipped to interpret and understand this text at a deeper level, i.e. going beyond the text to make meanings informed by my own prior knowledge and sociocultural contexts.

The Superhero Genre. Chapter two of this study provides a historical analysis of the medium, which also includes claims that the medium contributes directly to violent behavior. While this study is not about violence in comic books, it is an important topic that must be addressed at this point if the discussion on their use in the advanced ELA classroom is to be productive.

In superhero comic books and graphic novels violence tends to be the main approach to conflict resolution, and not all uses of violence in these texts are symbolic. Violence when used gratuitously can be problematic, not only for comic books, but for other media as well, as it may be understood as advocating it. There are likely many reasons for the use of gratuitous violence, including appealing to young males who may be struggling with their masculine identity or even adult males who may take pleasure in the violence or feel it is cathartic; either way, it tends to promote an extreme view of masculinity that translates into sales for the industry. It may also be a response to Americans' fascination with conflict and/or for shock value. Nevertheless, there are those comic books and graphic novels that use violence symbolically; therefore, they transcend the trappings of the superhero genre. The image discussed above from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* is one example of such a use, and figure 2 below from *Maus II* provides another example.

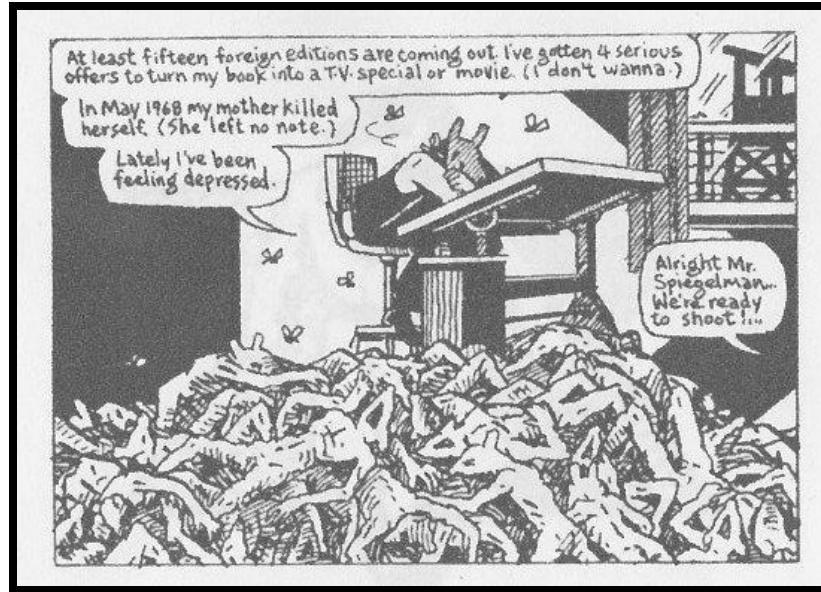


Figure 2: Anthropomorphic Art Spiegelman atop mice bodies

***Maus II*, writer and artist Art Spiegelman ©1986 by Art Spiegelman**

The image above portrays Art Spiegelman, wearing a mouse mask, at his drawing table sitting atop a pile of dead bodies that symbolize his despair about being able to tell his father's story of Auschwitz faithfully (Ewert, 2000).

Of course, violence also appears in phonetic texts that are considered canonical and important to our culture. Some examples include many of Western culture's myths as well as works by Shakespeare. The traditional plot outline of much of our literature is that of conflict leading to resolution. While not all of the conflict is violent, the point is that violence is not uncommon in our literature and our history.

Barthes (1985) posits that the purposes of violence in literature can be myriad, ranging from the "violence of the state," i.e. oppressive/repressive mechanisms, to "violence that concerns individual bodies," and even to positive violence, i.e. "creative passions" and "creative radicalism" (p. 308-309). The *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*

image discussed above is an excellent example of violence as symbolic, particularly in relation to Barthes concept of violence of the state while also simultaneously being concerned with individual bodies. However, before proceeding with a further analysis of this image, the image must be understood in the context of both the time period it was published and its narrative.

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns was originally published as a four issue comic book mini-series in the mid-1980s during the Reagan administration. It was later published as a graphic novel and received status as a piece of graphic literature. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* stands as a critique of both the Reagan administration, with Ronald Reagan portrayed as a robot that has become president for life, and a critique of the cultural milieu of the time, particularly aspects of national security, economic disparity, and the news media. It has also maintained its relevance in light of the recent Bush administration, the current economic crisis, and the prevalence of news media in our daily lives.

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns is about Bruce Wayne struggling with becoming Batman again after being forced into retirement by the government ten years prior along with all the other superheroes, save Superman. Gotham City, his home, has devolved into a state of near chaos with only a semblance of order being maintained by the news media, which airs 24 hours a day *a la* CNN, and Superman, who is now a covert government agent whose name cannot be said by the news media without fear of governmental reprisals. The struggle Bruce Wayne undergoes is a psychological one with his Batman persona, which ultimately triumphs and leads to a rejection of the façade of Bruce Wayne. This rejection acts to complicate the idea of a secret identity, a

common superhero genre element, by suggesting that the man, Bruce Wayne, is in actuality the mask of Batman who is much larger than just one man. This idea is enacted during the course of the narrative as Batman becomes a movement within Gotham City. The return of Batman into this new world where those in power know that Batman is Bruce Wayne also leads to a loss of all the economic, social, and cultural capital that Bruce Wayne had accumulated as well as inherited. In this story, Batman is fully realized as a man of and for the people. With the return of Batman, his old enemies once again become active, leading to several confrontations, all of which end with the enemies dead. In conjunction with these events, Batman also uncovers military dealings with a gang that threatens to take full control of Gotham City. His presence, including his findings in relation to the military and consequently the government, climax in a confrontation between Batman and Superman, resulting in Batman's supposed death from heart failure. Having actually faked his death, Batman is now liberated from all constraints of society and is able to reestablish himself as Gotham's protector. He is effectively reborn/resurrected as a savior. Interestingly, he is portrayed in the final image of the graphic novel as a mentor or even a teacher (see figure 3 below).



Figure 3: Batman as mentor/teacher

***Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, writer and artist Frank Miller ©1986 DC Comics**

From a literary standpoint, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* is replete with symbolism and universal themes that resonate with people at a personal and a societal level, from the death of loved ones and the destruction of the family, (see Appendix C for an example) to concepts foundational to our country's identity such as the individual and the struggle for freedom, as well as, and possibly counter to the latter theme, a rejection of the status quo. In the end, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* transcends the superhero genre, establishing it as a piece of literature and validating it as a part of this study.

As a note, there are also many other examples of literary graphic novels. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, originally published as a twelve issue mini-series

in comic book form, is another example of a superhero graphic novel that has transcended its genre. Additionally, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, and many others are widely regarded as literature and are used in high school and college literature courses. All of the graphic novels mentioned by name contain to lesser and greater degrees portrayals of violence, with *Maus* being arguably the most jarring because of Spiegelman use of children's character archetypes, mice and cats, in its portrayal of life during and after the Holocaust.

Inappropriate Reading Material!

During my first year teaching middle school in 2001, I had a student who refused to read anything in class or at home. He was the very definition of a nonreader. He struggled all year and subsequently failed the sixth grade due to poor grades and a non-passing score on his North Carolina Reading End-of-Grade (EOG) standardized reading test. In my second year, I was the remediation instructor for the school. This same student showed up in my classroom one day, and he had *The Simpsons* comic books with him. The student read them during sustained, silent reading time (SSR) and made modest progress on his practice Reading EOG tests. I was also very pleased to see that he was taking an interest in reading something. Whether he was just reading the images or reading the texts I do not know; however, what mattered to me was that he was engaged with a mode of text.

During an observation of my class later in the year, the students took part in SSR, and this particular student pulled out his comic books and read while the observer took notes. During the post conference, the observer was extremely displeased that this student read comic books during my class. She considered them inappropriate reading

material and negatively documented their use on the appraisal instrument. I attempted to make the case that he was at least reading something, but she refused to hear it, and claimed that reading comic books was simply not appropriate for school. Her disdain for a whole medium raised many questions for me as an educator, particularly about the place traditional literacy occupies in our schools, and by extension society, and the absence of other modes of literacy in the classroom. These questions have remained with me as I have pursued my doctorate in education, and they motivated the class project I completed at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Journalism (UNCSJ) that would become the foundation for the current study.

How Things Change

The class project I conducted at UNCSJ was an exploratory, qualitative study. The purpose of the project was to uncover perspectives that teachers and students brought to comic books and graphic novels, particularly considering their literary merit. I conducted interviews with a language arts teacher and some of her students that produced some interesting findings.

The teacher stated that she had viewed the medium as having no literary merit, a position that upon reflection she attributed to her own primary and secondary schooling, as well as her professional training as a language arts teacher. Nevertheless, she had recently warmed to the idea that the medium could contribute to the ELA classroom due to some events in her personal and professional life. She stopped short, however, of acknowledging it as having literary merit on its own, but instead viewed it as a motivational tool to encourage her reluctant, struggling, and nonreaders to bridge the gap to traditional literature, mirroring the conclusions drawn in much of the scholarship on

the use of comic books and graphic novels in schools (see Freeman, 1998; Galley, 2004; Leckbee, 2005; McTaggart, 2005; Schwarz, 2002; Versaci, 2001). I initially felt that bridging was the best use of the medium as well when I first became interested in it from a scholarly standpoint. I now believe that the scholarship on the subject inadvertently perpetuates the idea that image-oriented media are, at best, subservient to traditional literature. In order to circumvent this line of thinking, I decided in my class project to interview only students who were considered advanced as defined by their involvement with texts in and outside of the classroom, their analytical and evaluative engagement with texts in the classroom, and their teacher's evaluation of their performance in class and on assessments, as well as on their Reading EOG test scores.

I also discovered that the student participants reflected their teacher's view that these texts lacked any substantial merit through the way they discussed them in personal interviews and during a focus group, both of which were held without their teacher present. Their interpretative efforts betrayed a superficiality that was in keeping with how my friends and I discussed these texts in our youth. For example, during the focus group the students talked about *Naruto*, a Manga or Japanese graphic novel, which they all read and socialized around outside of class, typically during lunch at school or online after school. I asked them to describe its basic plot, and they stated that it was about an adolescent male, Naruto, who is feared and shunned by the villagers because he is cursed. Nevertheless, he continually proves to be their savior throughout the series. I then pressed them to go beyond the basic story elements that might be discussed in their language arts class and try to connect *Naruto* with their prior knowledge and personal experiences to create deeper meaning from the narrative. Unfortunately, they were

unable to draw any further interpretations beyond the obvious ones present in the basic plot.

One student participant claimed that graphic novel reading was easy and therefore was not really appropriate for the language arts classroom. Her conclusion may be attributable to an ELA curriculum that is dominated by the need to perform well on standardized tests, resulting in an emphasis on process over substance, where process is knowing and applying the specific literary analysis toolkit in order to perform well (Street, 2006). In middle school, the toolkit tends to focus on skills necessary to understanding the foundational elements of narrative, i.e. plot, characters and characterization, setting, point-of-view, and theme. Therefore, her assertion that it was easy to read devalued the process of reading the comic and also disregarded any substance in it. Whatever the reason, it was evident that she was making a distinction between texts that were school sanctioned and those that were not (Norton, 2003; Williams, 2007; Versaci, 2001).

In reflecting on these particular circumstances and experiences as well as my own passion for the medium of comic books and graphic novels, I had to make a decision about whether to be a participant or a non-participant in this current study. I felt that these factors had the potential to complicate this study by attaching assumptions that may or may not actually be present in the actual classrooms where this medium is being used. In an effort to avoid these assumptions, I chose to work with teachers who significantly surpassed my five years teaching experience within the public school ELA classroom and who also had significant experience using comic books and graphic novels in their classrooms. My thinking was that their veteran status would create a space for me as the

researcher to learn from them as opposed to my being the veteran in the classroom. Finding teachers who fit these requirements was difficult. As I searched, I discovered that mostly new teachers, typically with 1 to 3 years teaching experience, tended to be receptive to the idea of using comic books/graphic novels, but knew little if anything about the medium other than that it was “cool” with students and trendy in their professional journals. While it was great that their newness to the profession brought with it a desire to do interesting and innovative things in the classroom, they consistently asked me to teach them how to utilize the medium of comic books/graphic novels in their classrooms. While I offered to help them, I did not want to include them in the study because the purpose was not to provide and study what arguably could be considered a pedagogical intervention, but instead was to understand the phenomenon of the medium as used in the ELA classroom. Fortunately, I found two teachers that fit my criteria, one through a friend and one who actually found me through an interview I had done for the *Diamond Bookshelf* website, Diamond Comic Distributor’s education arm. The veteran status of the two teachers, 20 years for one and 8 for the other, allowed me to witness instruction that had a history and a confidence behind it that afforded them, to varying degrees, the power to introduce an alternative medium into a traditional literacy space. However, before delving into the current case study, it is critical to understand how comic books have intersected with schooling and scholarship historically, and how this history has affected the current reception of this medium in society, and consequently, in schools and scholarship.

CHAPTER 2: COMICS AND EDUCATION

The history of comic books in America reveals a medium that has been both heralded and derided as a mode of literacy since its inception. During the early 20th century, comics in the form of comic strips began to appear more frequently in newspapers (Dorell, Curtis, & Rampal, 1995). They were enjoyed by adults and children alike and typically followed the conventions of print text in the sense that the narrative was linear (Schmitt, 1992). Nevertheless, they often troubled parents and educators because they were believed to be a waste of time that kept young readers away from more quality reading material (Lent, 1999). As comic strips grew more popular, they began to appear in collected “books” called “comic books” (Dorell et al., 1995), and with the advent of comic books the backlash against them as a form of literacy also began (Freeman, 1998). However, the history of comic books also reveals that at one time they were studied and regarded by some as beneficial to education, a position that has recently found support again (Buhle, 2003; Dorrell et al., 1995). Nevertheless, during the 1950s the public and academy turned against the medium, leaving a legacy of disdain that still haunts the medium today.

Mid Century Views of Comic Books and Literacy

With the arrival of comics and subsequently comic books during the first few decades of the 1900s, the debate began within society and therefore the educational community about the effects and reading value, i.e. literary merit, of comics (Dorrell et al., 1995). Teachers often defined comic book reading as a problem, and the common

complaint raised was that comic books were leading children away from better, i.e. educationally sanctioned or canonical, literature and thus creating a generation of semi-literates (Nyberg, 1998). Despite protests that the medium was not suitable reading material, comic books hit their highest circulation during the 1940s due to the popularity of the first superhero, Superman, and also found their way into classrooms across the country (Dorrell et al., 1995). During this time there was also an influx of research and scholarship promoting their use in the classroom, the result of which yielded scholarly and professional evidence of how comic books could promote literacy (Dorrell et al., 1995). For example, Robert Thorndike (1941), a prominent educational psychologist at Columbia's Teachers College (as cited in Dorrell et al., 1995) argued that comic books were a valuable resource in vocabulary building and in the area of remedial reading. He attributed their value in remedial reading to the images, which helped the reader understand concepts that would have been difficult with a phonetic text. His conclusions would be reconfirmed decades later in research on effective use of images in texts (Carney & Levin, 2002; Levin & Mayer, 1993; Peeck, 1993).

Also, in 1942, DC Publications (later known as DC Comics), the home of such characters as Superman and Batman, began providing comic materials to schools that promoted reading improvement and grammar, and a 1943 issue of *Newsweek* documented that comic books were being used in six thousand schools as supplementary texts across the country (Dorrell et al., 1995). In 1944, Harvey Zorbaugh reported that comics were an accepted element for instruction within schools and that comic books were a vital aspect of American society (as cited in Dorrell et al., 1995). However, his claim about their being a vital aspect of American society was based on the U.S. military's use of

comic books as propaganda within the classroom. Comic books were an excellent vehicle for this propaganda because they were heavily read by the youth and the comic book industry was depicting their heroes fighting in World War II. By 1948, 92% of junior high age students (those that would now be in middle school) were reported to read comic books (DeLara, 1948, as cited in Dorrell et al., 1995).

Nevertheless, despite scholarly research in support of using the medium in schools and active use of comic books by teachers, in the early 1940s school librarians initiated a crusade to keep comic books out of schools (Dorrell et al., 1995). They saw comic books as a “menace” and spoke about them as if they were a disease, stating, for example, that “a severe case of comics often leaves a serious aftermath of disinterest and disability in reading” (Hunter, 1949, as cited in Dorrell et al., 1995, p. 231). Ironically, the claims of disinterest and disability in phonetic reading are the argument offered in support of including comic books in classrooms today (e.g. Freeman, 1998; Galley, 2004; Leckbee, 2005; McTaggart, 2005; Schwarz, 2002; Versaci, 2001).

Counter to pro-comic book research, there also existed research that found that comics were to some degree detrimental to literacy development. For example, in 1952 a survey was conducted, and it was reported to the public that comic books did not help to improve educational attainment, but that reading standard literature did show an increase in literacy (Dorrell et al., 1995). Dorell et al. (1995) note that it has become clear that this conclusion was mainly predicated on inference as opposed to any scientific evidence.

Despite much of the research conducted during and post-World War II that supported comic book use in the literacy classroom, during the late 1940s and early 1950s, there again was a growing body of claims made that comic books destroyed

reading comprehension and imagination, and therefore children should be reading more acceptable materials (Dorrell, et al., 1995). Beyond a growing fear that comic books were harming literacy abilities, a new and more troubling claim was also made: comic books caused violent behavior (Nyberg, 1998; Schmitt, 1992; Wright, 2001). For example, in 1940 the *Chicago Daily News* ran an article entitled “A National Disgrace” wherein comic books were argued to be instigators of violence and deviance that made children impatient with what were called “quieter stories” (Nyberg, 1998, p. 4).

By the mid-1950s, due to the efforts of Dr. Frederick Wertham, Senior Psychiatrist to New York City Hospitals, and other concerned citizens, the comic book industry was completely discredited and nearly destroyed (Nyberg, 1998). In his 1953 book *Seduction of the Innocent*, Wertham argued that because comic books focused on images rather than words, they disrupted “proper reading habits” (p. 126). Consequently, he determined that the reading of comic books was an inadequate experience that not only contributed nothing to a child's education, but was also potentially damaging to it. Wertham also concluded that comic books could be held accountable for criminal elements of society such as the growth in juvenile delinquency— a conclusion that in later years has not only been refuted, but completely invalidated on grounds that his methods and therefore his conclusions were unsound because they were based on the fact that many of the delinquents in his study read comic books (Nyberg, 1998). This correlation with delinquency is undermined when it is realized that at the time of his study over 90% of children read comic books; however, this fact also made Wertham’s conclusions even more alarming to adults (Wright, 2001). Unfortunately for the comic book industry and kids across the country, Wertham had managed with his work and his

book to convince a great many parents, teachers, and politicians that comic book reading was detrimental to society. *Seduction of the Innocent* resulted in hearings of the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, which led to the establishment of the Comics Code Authority (CCA) in 1954.

The CCA was a regulatory body charged with making sure that comic books did not contain any deleterious or objectionable content (Nyberg, 1998). This task was accomplished by establishing guidelines that were primarily concerned with sex, violence, and language. All comics that passed the authority's scrutiny received their stamp of approval denoting that they were safe for juvenile consumption. The ones that did not pass scrutiny and therefore did not receive the stamp could still be sold, but saw their audiences dwindle to nearly nonexistent because parents no longer allowed their kids to possess them. EC Comics, publisher of the very popular crime and horror comics, which were specifically cited as causing juvenile delinquency by Wertham, did not receive the stamp, and consequently the company went out of business.

Wright (2001) argues that the debates over comic books, particularly in the years following World War II, were actually about cultural power, not about their value as literacy or their supposed potential to incite violence. Wright's claim is exemplified by Leverett Gleason, pioneer of crime comics in the 1940s, who in the early 1950s wrote a letter to the *New York Times* that accused critics of comic books of being cultural elitists who were determined to set up an "intellectual dictatorship" (p. 102) over the reading habits of the American people (Wright, 2001). Kois and Brown (2008) argue that children's culture is not taken seriously until it is perceived as a bad thing, and they

contend that the fight against comic books was actually a fight over the notion that kids are capable of having their own desires, opinions, and points of view.

Wright (2003) further posits that the problem with comic books was not the threat of violence, but the associations that violence had with poverty. Comic books during this period were often associated with the poor because they were a cheaply made and mass produced medium, which correlated to cheap and inappropriate reading material. This is a deterministic view of reading, which suggests that the particular ways people read, including what they choose to read, is determined by their social positions (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994). Comic books were equated with slums and broken homes and seen as contributing to the degradation of American youth (Wright, 2003). For instance, in 1947 *The New Republic* claimed that those residing in poorer households were most likely to be regular readers of comic books as opposed to those in wealthier households (as cited in Wright, 2003). The implication of this report was that comic books appealed to the unsophisticated and poorly educated. The fear was that comic book reading would result in a group of people incapable of reading ordinary text and would ultimately ruin American culture.

Furthermore, Groensteen (1988, in Magnussen & Christiansen, 2000) posits that prejudice is levied against comic books because they contain images and text that work together to convey a narrative, therefore blurring the distinctions between each. During the 1950s, this distinction was believed to be transgressive because it challenged the supremacy of phonetic literacy (Varnum & Gibbons, 2001). Furthermore, Carrier (2000) contends that the real issue was that the essential boundaries, i.e. traditional literacy as controlled by authority, had been undermined. Traditional literacy was, and often still is,

viewed as natural due to having been the “gold” standard for so long; therefore, this challenging of the boundaries was felt to be dangerous (Gee, 1996).

The attacks on the medium in the 1950s and the prevailing attitude against comic books put an end, for a while, to research on the benefits of comic books and teachers’ use of them in the classroom. However, during the 1960s society became more and more disillusioned with the establishment (Nyberg, 1998), and comic books once again found a readership, this time among adults. During the early 1960s, underground comix⁴ began to appear sporadically, and by the late 1960s, they had gained a strong counterculture readership (Sabin, 1996). Underground comix were influenced by EC Comics, publishers of the crime and horror comics that had been the impetus for the backlash against the medium in the 1950s. Underground comix portrayed drug use, sexuality, violence, and other socially relevant content that were forbidden under the Comics Code Authority (Sabin, 1996). They were a clear rejection of the code and the mainstream values the code tried to impose. While these comic books were praised as being socially relevant and politically progressive, they were also criticized for their explicitness, particularly their sexual explicitness and portrayals of sexual violence such as rape. These issues notwithstanding, as the enforcement of the Comics Code relaxed in the 1970s to bring it in line with the contemporary standards of American society, these underground comix began to find a more mainstream audience, and though many still remained very graphic, explicit, and subcultural, some titles began to explore progressive political ideas such as feminism and the environment (Sabin, 1996).

⁴ The spelling “comix” was used to differentiate these comic books from mainstream comics and the “x” also denoted x-rated content (Sabin, 1996).

Also during the late 1960s and 1970s, mainstream superhero comics began to explore the grittier side of society. One of the most famous examples is *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #85-86 published by DC Comics, which dealt with Green Arrow's ward Speedy's heroin addiction. Also, Marvel published a story arch in *Amazing Spider-man* #96-98 that dealt with a character's cocaine addiction. Interestingly, the *Amazing Spider-man* story arch is infamously dubbed "Not Approved by the Comics Code Authority." As comic books began to reflect the darker aspects of society and dealt with problems that were more socially relevant, the Comics Code Authority began to lose its significance, and in 1989, the Comics Code was again revamped, resulting in a move away from specific guidelines in favor of principles in various categories. The 1980s became a turning point for comic books, leading to a current renaissance both at the academic level and in the broader society.

Comic Books as Literacy in the New Millennium

The term graphic novel began to appear in the popular press during the mid-1980s, supposedly to denote the literary merit of certain comic books; however, there is debate about whether the term was actually used as a marketing ploy to legitimize comic books (Wolf, 2011). This issue aside, three critically acclaimed graphic novels, Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, have their origins during this time period and are still heavily read and highly influential not only among comic book readers but also within education. Interestingly, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* were each originally published as a four issue and a twelve issue mini-series, respectively. The fact that each was originally a comic book and then a graphic novel blurs the line between

each of these forms of text and further calls into question any distinctions these names may lend. Ultimately, it is not the name of the form that is important, but the quality of the work itself, and there are many comic books that are not considered graphic novels but that are considered quality works. This fact notwithstanding, each of these texts has received scholarly attention: *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (e.g. Blackmore, 2004; Morris & Morris, 2005, Tipton, 2008), *Watchmen* (e.g. Hughes, 2006; White & Irwin, 2009; Van Ness, 2010), and *Maus* (e.g. Ewert, 2000; Rothberg & Spiegelman, 1994; Young, 1998). Additionally, *Maus* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, and in 2005 *Time* magazine labeled *Watchmen* one of the top 100 novels since 1923 (Grossman & Lacayo, 2005).

Currently, comic books, which were once viewed as a menace to reading by librarians, are now trumpeted by them as an excellent way to get children interested in literature (Bucher & Manning, 2004; Leckbee, 2005). In 2004, the *New York Times* heralded graphic novels as possibly the next new level of literacy (Thompson, 2007). This conclusion is understandable due to the medium's permeation of main stream culture through blockbuster films and television shows that are made from the endless array of characters and stories the medium has to offer (The BG News, bgnews.com, retrieved February 18th, 2012).

Another major turning point for the medium occurred with Scott McCloud's 1993 work *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, which utilized comic book conventions not only to trace the origins of the medium, but to also reveal the complexities of the medium both visually and narratively. In the text, McCloud examined the power of visuals to not only make meaning, but to manipulate meaning. He also pushed readers to

deconstruct their own assumptions not just about comic books, but about the world in general by focusing on the concept of multiple perspectives. McCloud's graphic text challenged the notion that comics are a "low brow" or minor form of art and re-conceptualized them in new and relevant ways that re-situated them as a medium worthy of study and merit. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* is now considered to be the seminal text on the medium because of McCloud's depth of analysis and his calling into question long held assumptions of the medium.

All this attention has again sparked the interest of the academy, and in the last few years much scholarship has been devoted to graphic novels. Comic books have been found, yet again, to aid in literacy skills acquisition (Galley, 2004), and they are also being used to motivate so-called "non-readers" or reluctant readers (McTaggart, 2005; Snowball, 2005; Versaci, 2001) and to remediate students that have issues with reading, particularly visualization (Freeman, 1998; Leckbee, 2005). There have been a number of scholarly articles in top tier journals of professional associations such as the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) that discuss comic books as a mode of literacy (Freeman, 1998), and there have also been a number of studies suggesting that comic books be brought into the school curricula (e.g. Bakis, 2012; Carter, 2007a, 2007 b; Versaci, 2001, 2007).

Knowing how to comprehend and make meanings from textual and visual integration is becoming increasingly critical in an age of information saturation by the media, particularly the web (P. Gutiérrez; 2008; Leu, 2006). Peter Gutiérrez (2008) argues that the techniques used to navigate comics are transferable to reading on the web, a proposition that is echoed in the web design community by Andy Clark (2007) a well-

respected web designer who argues that graphic novels are very similar to principles of text and image synergy (Sipe, 1998) that are used to develop web pages. While very little work exists on this idea currently, and what does exist is being done by the web community, it is very interesting that one of the oldest mediums for communication, comics, may speak more directly to the newest one, the web, than the mode that is currently valued above all others, phonetic text.

It is evident that comic books have experienced a renaissance within literacy education, but will the medium finally find a permanent place in both the classroom and the academy? History suggests not, and this may be the case when a closer examination of the medium, particularly in the academy, is taken. In 2011, several popular press articles appeared discussing the use of comics at the university level. Though positive in their assessment of the medium as a mode of literacy and for learning, the language implies something a bit different: an infatuation that may not be long lived. For example, on the *Sign On San Diego* news site, Peter Rowe (2011) reported:

At UCSD's (University of California, San Diego) Geisel Library, former librarian Susan Jurist is credited with beginning that school's collection [of graphic novels] about a decade ago, even though she's not wild about comics. "But it's part of the culture, you know?" said Jurist, who retired in 2009. "I don't think we, as academics and artists, should be fighting the culture."

Of course, if comics again lose popularity with "the culture," understood to be the mass or dominant culture, then her comments imply that they will also lose their status within education as well. The article continues:

Still, as teaching methods go, this one hasn't won straight As. "The fact that we're giving comic books to first-year

students,” Losh [a professor of UCSD] noted, “some of the comments we’ve gotten from people, they really think it’s the end of the world.”

While it is clear from the article that UCSD values the medium for scholarly reasons and has stocked its library with the medium, there still appears to be apprehension. Articles often mention that the medium is not just about superheroes or that the medium has moved away from superheroes (Rowe, 2011; Whiteley, 2011). The implication of this declaration is that there is a need to distance the medium from its supposedly more childish fare in order to maintain its legitimacy. However, most superhero-centered comic books and graphic novels counter this perception. The fact that most comic books are not childish is validated by a need in the industry to begin to appeal to kids again; for example, in 2003, Marvel Comics launched a line of superhero titles intended for younger readers and even small children under the imprint *Marvel Adventures*. Furthermore, comic books find their roots in the superhero/hero genre, and this distancing could result in a decontextualization of the medium from its historical and cultural origins. Interestingly, this decontextualization could be the medium’s ticket into the realm of high or major literature as it has for many once “pop” phonetic works such as those by Shakespeare (Lentricchia & McLaughlin, 1995). What is more likely to occur is that some graphic novels will become canonized, a state that *Maus* appears to have already achieved and *Watchmen* to a degree as well, while much of the superhero-oriented material, which is the majority of the work that currently exists, will be rejected. This rejection is not unanticipated, because just like most novels that exist, there are plenty of mediocre comic books and graphic novels as well.

Another issue plaguing the medium is the default position of comic book scholars that the medium is best suited to scaffolding reluctant, struggling, and non-readers to traditional literature. This conclusion contributes, albeit inadvertently, to undermining the medium's potential literary merit, thus limiting the role it can have in the literacy classroom (e.g. Freeman, 1998; McTaggart, 2005; Snowball, 2005; Versaci, 2001).

Another point that may affect the above mentioned direction the medium may take within education is the current contention around the use of the term *graphic novel*. Julia Wolfe (2011) discusses this issue in her web article "Death to the Graphic Novel," in which she quotes Art Spiegelman, the author of *Maus*, stating, "The graphic novel is really a stupid name...I've been saddled as one of the fathers of the graphic novel, and I am still demanding a blood test" (thelinknewspaper.ca). Wolfe also states that people who refer to comic books as graphic novels "know nothing about comics and seem to treat this ignorance as a point of pride. They label the mass of comics as 'low art' and other, better marketed pieces, as high-class." Her claim is important, if accurate, because it suggests that graphic novels that find a broader audience may not do so because of their literary merit but because they were more hyped/promoted in the media. Pat Grant, a cartoonist and zinemaker, echoes Wolfe's sentiment when he stated in a web article for the Sydney Morning Herald, "It's [the term graphic novel] just pretentious. It's a way of separating the jokes from the literary stuff" (Stegner, 2011).

This analysis of the history of the comic book from its inception to the present reveals a medium that is plagued by its past, and may be damned by its present trendiness, as such comments as Terra Feast's, the curator of education for the Boise Art Museum, exemplifies when she stated, "Comics and graphic novels are so timely right

now” (Whiteley, 2011). In the end, the historical information detailed in this chapter is critical to understanding the broader cultural and historical context in which this study, and these students and teachers, are affected by and exist within.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The following study is a phenomenological case study comprised of two cases where hybrid texts, specifically graphic novels, were used in advanced English/language arts (ELA) classrooms. These two cases are compared and contrasted with each other, as well as with literature from a diverse array of disciplines, including education, literature theory, arts education, cultural studies, and media literacy. What follows is a rationale for the study and for the methods utilized, a discussion of the methodology, and finally an overview of the analysis process.

Rationale for Methods

Karen Gutiérrez (2004) argues that “rigorous qualitative studies should be the cornerstone of educational policy” because “they provide important insights gained from textured descriptions of developmental processes and microanalysis of learning activity and may expose the inherent inequity of educational policies and practices” (p. 109). The reason for utilizing qualitative research methods in this study, specifically *interpretive case study* method that attempts to “illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions” (Merriam, 1998, p. 108), stems from a variety of factors. Case studies have been employed in understanding educational practice for over forty years; thus, the method has a significant track record in the field of education. Merriam (1998) posits that case study researchers are primarily interested in “insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” of a phenomenon (p. 98); consequently, qualitative

methodology promotes a deep understanding because it allows for multiple perspectives to be voiced, making the data complex and nuanced (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Study Procedures

Overview

Case 1 consisted of two rounds of data collection, collected on site. First-round data collection took place in August 2010 at the beginning of the school year. The classroom studied was a 12th grade Advanced Placement (AP) English classroom in a working-class rural high school in Kentucky. Methods included in-depth semi-structured interview guides (see appendices A & B) with the 12th grade AP English teacher and seven of his students, six non-participant observations of an AP English unit involving the graphic novel *Daredevil: Born Again* by Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli using an observation guide (see appendix D for sample), and a structured think-aloud activity that took place during the student interviews involving an excerpt from the graphic novel *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (see appendix C) (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007; Kruger & Casey, 2000; Stake, 1995). Second-round data collection took place in November 2010 and consisted of follow-up interview questions (see appendix E) with the 12th grade AP English teacher and the seven student participants, four non-participant observations of an additional AP English unit involving the graphic novel *Superman for All Seasons* by Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale using the same observation guide from round 1, and an additional structured think-aloud activity that took place during the student interviews that involved comparing and contrasting a CNN.com webpage to a different excerpt from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (see appendix F).

Case 2 consisted of one round of data collection that took place in May 2011 at the end of the school year. Case 2 data was collected from a questionnaire that was sent by email to a 12th grade English teacher and seven of her students in an affluent suburban high school in Massachusetts. The questionnaires were devised from the Case 1 interview guides and Case 1 follow-up interview questions (see appendix E). These were returned to me by email for analysis.

Researcher's Role

My role as the researcher was essentially non-participatory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008); however, as I became more familiar to the teacher and students, the teacher began to include me in the classroom discussion. Much of what I commented on was about college life and academics, but occasionally I was asked about comics. Despite fielding some questions during my time in the AP classroom, I maintained a non-participatory role based on the potential that my knowledge of and passion for the medium could potentially affect the data. My concern was that if I became involved, particularly pedagogically, I would lose perspective on the phenomenon I was studying.

Research Sites

Of the two research sites in the study, the site for Case 1 was the only site I was able to visit. During my two visits, I produced a first-hand impression of the community, the school, and the classroom. The first visit was a seven day stint in August 2010 at the beginning of the school year to study the teacher's first unit involving the graphic novel *Daredevil: Born Again*. The second visit was a four day stint in November 2010 during the second trimester to study a subsequent unit involving the graphic novel *Superman for all Seasons*. I was not able to be present at the Case 2 site; therefore, I had to rely on

descriptions of the site from the teacher who participated, as well as research on the web about the school and the community.

The Case 1 school is located in a rural Kentucky town. The population of the town is under 7,000. Data on the racial make-up of the town states that over 96% of the town's population is white; consequently, the school is also predominantly white.

The school is an older, one-story, sprawling structure with metal and concrete features. It is located just a few miles from the downtown area. The high school is the only high school in the entire county, and many of the students' parents and the AP teacher had previously attended the school as students.

Every morning that I was at the school, I stood in the commons area/main lobby as the students arrived and observed how courteous, respectful, and calm the students were. On several mornings I was also able to speak with the principal of the school, the assistant principal, and the resource officer. Each one confirmed that they had very few instances of altercations, either verbal and/or physical. The teacher participant also confirmed this fact.

During both visits, I stayed in the town for several days at a time, which allowed me to get to know the community and my participants a bit better. The community is spread across a vast area, and while there is a modicum of affluence present, much of it is depressed. The average income of the county is in the upper \$20,000s. The main hub of activity is the local Wal-Mart. The town also has a public library with a collection of graphic novels, but they are haphazardly split between the juvenile and adult sections, with many of the superhero texts being in the youth section whether they are appropriate there or not. For example, Alan Moore and David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta*, about a

terrorist trying to expose governmental corruption and mass murder, was in the youth section. As for the town, there is no local comic shop, and the Wal-Mart does not carry any form of comic book and/or graphic novel either. The nearest comic shops are one hour away, effectively preventing the students and the teacher from being able to frequent them. The importance of the lack of access to the comic book medium is that the student participants were completely removed from any outlet to purchase them; therefore, very few of them had had any exposure with the medium. Those who did have exposure borrowed comic books from older siblings. Their teacher, who has collected comics since his youth, mail orders them.

The walls of the AP teacher's classroom were covered in posters, pictures, etc. While some of the items on the wall are what you might find in a typical classroom, i.e. motivational posters, as well as posters and pictures promoting traditional literary texts and posters that outline various grammatical and literary techniques, the room was dominated by posters of superheroes, not canned education-oriented posters, but posters that a person would pick up at a comic book shop or mail order. There were also two distinct areas of the room flanking the teacher's desk that were comprised of hundreds of pictures of the teacher with his students throughout the years. The overall combination of items on the walls, in conjunction with the numerous class sets of texts, including class sets of graphic novels the teacher had purchased through a grant, produced an atmosphere that suggested students were going to be experiencing something a bit different with this teacher. However, when it came to the arrangement of the desks, they were all in rows, resembling a traditional classroom set-up conducive to a more teacher-centered

pedagogical approach. Nevertheless, the teacher maintained a relatively discursive climate in the classroom.

Most of the student participants in Case 1 were interviewed in the media center. Interestingly, the media center had a few displays on the wall that reflected comics. For example, there was an NEA (National Education Association) poster showing a *Zits* comic strip. There was also a sign for a math tutor that had the tutor depicted as Superman proclaiming, “They call me Superman, I’m here to tutor you!” The media center also had several graphic novels, but the media center specialist said they were rarely checked out.

The Case 2 high school is located in a suburban area of Massachusetts. The school is a modern-looking building with large expanses of windows and a symmetrical layout. The school serves three towns that are affluent, with income levels averaging around the mid \$90,000s. The student body is also majority white (93%) and is reflective of the district population, which is 94.4% white.

The Case 2 teacher participant Ms. Veronica described her room as a space conducive to small group discussion, where the desks are in whatever position is needed to accommodate the texts and/or activities the class is engaged with. She states, “[The desks are] NEVER in rows.” (All caps used by her for emphasis.) The Graphic Novel course she teaches is part of a system of electives that 12th graders are allowed to choose from for their English IV requirement. These electives range from the Graphic Novel course to a poetry course, a global literature course, a gothic tradition course, and also include a traditional English IV course.

Study Participants

I had planned to have the teacher I worked with during my class project in the School of Journalism be the primary teacher participant in this study. Unfortunately, in the time between the project and approval of this research she had moved to Texas. Nevertheless, I visited the school to speak with the literacy coordinator, whom I had met during my class project and who was very interested in graphic novels, to ascertain if there were other teachers I could work with. This meeting occurred in late spring of 2010. She informed me that the principal of the school was no longer open to alternative literacy approaches because of the school's recent performance on the End of Grade tests. This news left me with no participants at a school where I had worked to establish a connection. I decided to contact colleagues who researched comic books and graphic novels via the listserv Comixscholars and the ning Making Curriculum Pop. I received some replies to my inquiry for names of potential participants; however, when I contacted these teachers they tended to be new teachers with 1 to 3 years' experience teaching and wanted me to come to their school to train them to use graphic novels in their classrooms. While I was open to the idea of coming to the school to train these teachers, I did not want them to participate in the study because they did not fit the parameters I had designated for my teacher participants. I was searching for a veteran teacher who had used comic books and/or graphic novels for many years with advanced ELA students. A teacher participant that fit these parameters connected directly with research questions 1 and 3. Mr. Ryan, the Case 1 teacher participant, fulfilled these parameters because he had taught advanced ELA students for 20 years and had used this medium on and off for 15 of those years in his 12th grade AP English class. Mr. Ryan has also been the English

Department Chair for the high school for 15 years. As the chair of the department, he has been able to encourage the use of graphic novels by other teachers, but has only had one teacher actually use a graphic novel, *Maus*, in his entire tenure at the high school.

Mr. Ryan was located through purposive sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) but by informal means. I was able to find him because he had taught one of my friends who, upon finding out about my research, remembered that her high school English teacher, Mr. Ryan, sometimes used graphic novels in his AP English class. The task of locating a teacher that fit the parameters I had designated was much more difficult than I had anticipated; therefore, I had to use informal means to locate one. While I feel there are likely teachers in NC that use graphic novels in their classrooms, my limited network did not put me in contact with any of them.

After two rounds of data collection at the Case 1 site, it was decided that I should find another teacher who used graphic novels with advanced students to help deepen and strengthen my data. After the difficulties I had had locating one teacher, I was concerned with trying to find another one. Again luck intervened when the Case 2 teacher participant Ms. Veronica located me through email due to an article I had published in *Afterimage* and an interview with me on *Diamond Bookshelf*. This method could be considered “reverse purposive sampling.” She also fit the parameters of the study because she was a veteran teacher of 8 years and had created a graphic novel course at her high school for 12th grade English students; the class is mainly populated by honors-level students. However, there was a distinction between Mr. Ryan and Ms. Veronica: Mr. Ryan has been an avid comic reader and collector since his youth, while Ms. Veronica was not introduced or even interested in the medium until she took a literacy

class involving them a few years ago during her graduate studies for her Masters. The result of this difference was that Mr. Ryan had a stronger knowledge base of the characters, the writers, the artist, and even the industry than Ms. Veronica, and he also had, arguably, a deeper passion for the medium. This difference did not appear to affect how the medium was treated in the classroom; however, Case 1 students often commented that Mr. Ryan's passion for the medium helped him to be able to teach with it effectively—a claim that was not substantiated by data in Case 2.

The Student Participants in both Case 1 and Case 2 were the students of the teacher participants during the 2010-2011 school year; therefore, they were found through convenience sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The circumstance of being the teacher participants' students connected directly with research questions 1 through 3. No student was excluded from the study for any reason, and participation was completely voluntary. For Case 1, all eighteen students who were in the AP English class were potential participants; however, only seven chose to officially participate. Upon returning assent forms, the student participants numbered six males and one female. Reading comic books was not a necessary parameter for the students, and of the Case 1 students, only one actively read them because his older brother had several. Unfortunately, this same student was not present in the AP English class for the second round of data collection due to poor performance the prior trimester. Case 2 student participants were students of the teacher participant; however, they were doing an internship during the end of the school year so they were no longer in the teacher participant's class. Nevertheless, they had spent 1.5 semesters in her class prior to being in the study. Of her 130 students, only seven chose to participate: three females, three

males, and one unknown gender. Of these seven student participants, four had read comic books and/or graphic novels prior to The Graphic Novel course, and of these four, two were female. The reason I mention the gender of these students is that comic books are often considered male centric reading material, but there is a growing female readership.

All participants in the study are identified by pseudonyms of their own choosing. Interestingly, several of the pseudonyms reflected a popular culture slant. Some examples from Case 1:

- Michael Scott (from *The Office* television show)
- Leroy Jenkins (an internet sensation from *World of Warcraft*)
- Thor Plath (a combination of the Marvel Comics character Thor and Sylvia Plath, making this one an interesting combination of popular culture and high culture)
- Tyrone Biggums (from the short-lived but extremely popular *Chappelle's Show*)
- Wade Wilson (from the Marvel Comic series *Deadpool*).

Case 2 examples:

- Veronica (teacher participant pseudonym from the *Archie* comic books)
- Admiral Ackbar (from *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*)
- Tyler Durden (from *Fight Club*, the pulp novel and film)
- Seth Peterson (an actor)
- Graphicnovelreader (self-explanatory)

In having the participants pick their own pseudonyms it was believed that the participants would *buy into* and subsequently have a stake in the research (Stake, 1995).

Graphic Novels in the Study

As discussed above during the Case 1 data collection, I utilized excerpts from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (see Appendices C & F). This text was picked for its literary merit, which was discussed in chapter 1, as well as its status in the world of comic books. It also provided a modicum of continuity between the first graphic novel used by Mr. Ryan, *Daredevil: Born Again*, because it was also written by Frank Miller. I believed that the familiarity with the author might help the students feel more comfortable with analyzing this text.

Mr. Ryan chose *Daredevil: Born Again* for his class to read during the unit on romanticism and symbolism. He chose this text because the main character, Matt Murdoch, aka Daredevil, is trapped in a spiraling loss of everything he holds dear because of the betrayal of a former lover, Karen Page. Additionally, this graphic novel is replete with religious symbolism (see Appendix I for examples).

Born Again was originally published as serialized issues of the *Daredevil* comic book. Comic book characters at the major comic book publishers (Marvel in the case of Daredevil) are controlled by what is referred to as a “character bible,” which dictates the fundamental characteristics of a character, such as characterization and even the look of the character. Due to the character bible, even though Daredevil can lose everything and even appear to be non-heroic in this particular story arch, he must ultimately be returned to his former heroic state prior to the end of the story arch. During one class that I

observed, Mr. Ryan told the class that this type of storytelling produces the “illusion of change.”

During one observation, the class engaged in a discussion of literary merit. Mr. Ryan discussed the idea of formula fiction versus literary fiction. He explained that formula fiction is genre driven, and *Born Again* does ultimately descend into the superhero genre because of the need to return the character to status quo by the end of the story. *Born Again* achieves this through a genre cliché of a large scale battle between Daredevil and Captain America against a super villain named Nuke. Mr. Ryan felt that *Daredevil: Born Again* lacked literary merit; nevertheless, I counter that its themes of decline and fall of an individual humanize the character of Matt Murdoch/Daredevil and provide an “every man” quality to him. Even his subsequent vindication suggests themes of hope and redemption. These themes are persistent throughout canonized literature as well; such examples include *The Odyssey* and *The Scarlett Letter*.

The second graphic novel used by Mr. Ryan was *Superman for all Seasons*. This text was used during the unit on heroism for obvious reasons. However, the graphic novel had a great deal more to offer than just the simple fact that Superman is a hero. One of the more compelling aspects of this text, aspects that were discussed during round 2 observations of the AP English class, is that it grounds Superman by reducing the character to his human qualities. He is portrayed first and foremost as a small-town boy who has gone to the big city, leaving the comforts and loves of home behind for the big city of Metropolis. While this may seem clichéd, the narrative masterfully revisits the small town life he once knew in a recursive manner demarcated by the seasons of the year. The graphic novel’s portrayal of Superman as human, yet still somehow a

transcendent being, worked very well as a foil to Beowulf. During my observations I noted that Mr. Ryan discussed this dynamic between Superman and Beowulf with the students, noting that Beowulf, while considered a hero, is effectively a hero for hire because he seeks fame and riches for his heroic deeds. Mr. Ryan further pointed out that Beowulf is actually more aligned, though not completely, with Superman's nemesis Lex Luthor who attempts to appear heroic but is actually motivated by greed and power.

In Case 2, The Graphic Novel course taught by Ms. Veronica had nine core texts as well as several supplementary texts. The core texts consisted of seven graphic novels, which were *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, *A Life Force* by Will Eisner, *A Contract with God* by Will Eisner, *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang, and *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore, all of which are considered exemplary works. There were also two core texts on the medium, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* by Scott McCloud and *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* by Will Eisner.

In-depth Interviews and Questionnaires

I met with the Case 1 teacher participant Mr. Ryan for semi-structured in-depth interviews twice over the course of my data collection. The first interview took place prior to the start of the 2010-2011 school year, and the final follow-up interview took place at the end of the data collection for Case 1 in mid-November 2010. Both of the interviews took place in his classroom and lasted over an hour. The first interview had to be continued by email due to time running out before he had to go to a meeting. I have also followed up through email as needed for clarification and for updates. These interviews were audiotaped so that I could ask questions and allow the interview to be

more of a dialogue, allowing additional questions to arise as needed (Stake, 1995). I also maintained some notations in the form of memos as necessary (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The initial interviews were transcribed and used in conjunction with the memos, the structured think-aloud activities, and the observations during analysis.

The Case 1 student participants were interviewed at the beginning of the school year during their first unit in their AP English class and then later in mid-November during another unit that also used a graphic novel. All student participants were interviewed individually in various places around the school building, with the media center being the most common place. Interviews took place before and after school to minimize the student losing instructional time in the classroom. Each student participant was interviewed twice: one initial interview and then a follow-up. The interviews ranged in time between 30 minutes to 1 hour. These interviews were also audiotaped so that I could ask questions and have a conversation without worry of having to maintain detailed notes, which could be intimidating to the students (Stake, 1995). Memos were also taken during the interviews as necessary (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). These interviews were also transcribed and used in conjunction with the memos, the structured think-aloud activities, and the observations during analysis. Case 2 data collection consisted of questionnaires that were distributed to the teacher and student participants through email; therefore, there was no need for audio-taping.

Non-Participant Observation

Lofland et al. (2006) argue that interviews and observations are interrelated; therefore, they will allow a deeper understanding of participants' views of a particular topic or experience. During the Case 1 data collections, I conducted non-participant

observations of the teacher participant Mr. Ryan and his students as they interacted with each other during two units that involved graphic novels. I performed a total of 10 observations over two separate visits to the Case 1 site, and they ranged in time from 60 to 90 minutes. The observations were used to orient me to the classroom, as well as to begin to ascertain Mr. Ryan's primary perspectives on literacy, the curriculum he teaches, and his pedagogical methods. They were also useful in augmenting information and understanding gained through interviews of both Mr. Ryan and his students. The observations of student participants were focused on the interactions the students had within the classroom, primarily with the teacher and the texts they were studying, but also with the other students. I used the information gathered from these observations to construct additional questions for interviews that helped me to verify, modify, or reject my previous understandings. An observation guide (see appendix D for sample) was used to help organize the information collected in the classroom. It was understood that the observation guide was just a guide; therefore, it did not dictate what I was observing (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I also used field notes to log my observations and memos (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). My observations of Case 1 were very helpful because they focused my attention on the happenings in the classroom and helped give a backdrop to the interviews. When data drawn from observations is discussed I state that it came from observations.

Structured Think-Aloud Activities

I used two structured think-aloud activities during data collection with the AP English classroom teacher and his students. Each of the structured think-aloud activities was embedded into the interview guides. Smith (2006) states that think-alouds, "or

verbalizations of a person's thoughts while undertaking a cognitive activity” (p. 765), help model the thought processes as a person reads. The think-aloud method may draw out whatever strategies the reader is using, such as connecting the text with prior knowledge and experience, determining the significance of aspects of the text, and/or drawing inferences and interpretations about the text’s meaning. During round 1, the participants’ were asked to analyze an excerpt from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (see appendix C) so that I could gain insight into how they approached reading these texts, as well as how they perceived them, comprehended them, and made meaning with them. An additional purpose of this exercise was to help provide an understanding about students’ visual literacy abilities or lack thereof, and how these abilities may complement or interfere with traditional literacy. As the participants read the excerpt, they verbalized what they were doing cognitively to the best of their abilities, as well as asked questions as desired (Someran, Barnard, & Sandberg, 1994). Their verbalizations were audiotaped so that I would not distract them from the task at hand with writing their verbalizations. After the think-aloud portion was finished, I followed it up with a few questions about the excerpt to ensure I gained the information I needed for the study.

The second structured think-aloud activity was a comparison between a page from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and a screen capture of a CNN.com webpage (see appendix F). The participants were asked to draw comparisons and contrasts between the two texts. The second think-aloud activity was devised to elucidate claims that reading comic books and reading on the web share commonalities (Clarke, 2007; P. Gutiérrez, 2008).

Analysis

Utilizing Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method coupled with Corbin and Strauss's (2008) coding process of open, axial, and selective coding, the interview data collected was not only compared with literature and research from multiple disciplines, but also against the data collected from the observations and the structured think-alouds. Additionally, both Case 1 and Case 2 were compared with each other.

The initial open coding of the Case 1, round 1 data decontextualized the data and allowed for initial, tentative understandings and interpretations of the phenomenon being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The round 1 data was then subsequently axial coded, allowing for the data to be reconceptualized, which further strengthened the connections between merging categories of data. Analyses of Case 1, round 1 data lead to further questions that were subsequently coded through the same analysis model that informed Case 2 data collection. The process of open and axial coding also helped to identify the dimensions of the phenomenon, as well as its consequences and relationships with other phenomena, specifically traditional literacy (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). After three iterations of coding, four primary themes and several secondary themes emerged that began to elucidate the phenomenon further. The primary themes are:

- Normative reading
- ELA pedagogy, curriculum, and evaluation
- Literacies and the ELA classroom, including visual literacy, hybrid literacy, and 21st century literacies

- Meaning making in the ELA classroom

It is critical to note that these primary themes are not completely independent of one another, but often times functioned simultaneously. Their designation as *primary* is based on their prevalence in the data. There were also secondary themes that emerged and connected to the primary themes. These secondary themes were testing, engagement, experience/exposure, interest, pleasure, popular culture, and visualization/imagination. The primary themes frame the discussion that follows.

The multiple interviews and questionnaires from teachers and students in conjunction with the literature, observations, and the structured think-aloud activities allowed for triangulation of the data by providing multiple means by which to validate and lend credibility to this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

CHAPTER 4: NORMATIVE READINGS

The history of comic books and their involvement in and around schooling discussed in chapter 2 addressed an important point –those who make decisions about children, i.e. parents, teachers, librarians, administrators, politicians, etc. also dictate what is appropriate for children to read/view and what is not appropriate. Of course, youth can and do reject the dictates of adults and pursue their own interests (Hall, 1980); however, they may be doing so to the detriment of their schooling career (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Compton Lilly, 2006; Moss, 2000).

As an ELA educator, I have taught a spectrum of students and been in ELA classes supervising student teachers with their own range of students. There were students who actively rebelled against their literacy development for various and some likely valid reasons. There were also those who embraced it, maybe because they saw themselves reflected in the texts that they were required to read (Gee, 1996; Hall, 1980). There were also those who had for various reasons lost sight of the enjoyment they once derived from their literacy learning. The latter were still academically successful, but at some point their focus had shifted from learning from texts to earning grades from texts. This mode of learning is problematic because they are superficially reading texts and looking for answers instead of actively engaging with the texts and achieving deep comprehension, i.e. going beyond the texts to make meanings that are informed by their own prior knowledge and sociocultural contexts (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; Snow & Sweet, 2003). Students in both case studies recognized that through schooling they had

and were still being forced to comply with the dictates of ELA curriculum that they no longer found to be compelling. As Leroy Jenkins, a Case 1 student, sarcastically commented during an interview:

It seems like my previous teachers focused solely on reading comprehension. I mean, quite frankly, or at least I would hope—most of the students know how to read by now.

The type of reading comprehension that Leroy is referring to is not deep comprehension as indicated by his statement about already knowing how to read.

During the interviews as well as during classroom observations, students in Case 1 confirmed Gallagher's (2009) argument that schooling kills students' love of reading when they stated that they no longer enjoyed reading and did not read recreationally because they viewed it as a chore. For example, during the first observation on the first day of the AP English class Mr. Ryan asked, "Who likes to read recreationally?" 6 out of his 18 students (1/3) raised their hands. Nevertheless, the majority of them were still very successful students in school. Thomas Hinkey, a student in Case 1 who was also the salutatorian of his graduating class provided an excellent example of this issue when he stated during an interview:

English classes are always novels or short stories or poems or something that's acceptable in a learning environment, which is annoying, because I get tired of reading all these things that are socially acceptable or classroom acceptable, when graphic novels are a style that's out there and just as many people like these.

It is evident that Thomas Hinkey was displeased about the choices that had been made for him throughout his schooling career. It appears that his main complaint was the

repetition of the material covered, raising the concern, which I will briefly discuss here but will discuss further below, of process over substance (Street, 2006). Thomas Hinkey implies in his complaint, that the reason novels, short stories, and poems are annoying is because they are not discussed as meaningful texts in their own right, but as a task to be completed (Gallagher, 2009). Another important aspect of Thomas Hinkey's complaint is that he explicitly recognized that there are texts that are "socially acceptable" or "classroom acceptable," effectively drawing no distinction between *socially* and *classroom*. At one point during the first interview Thomas Hinkey referred to the curriculum as "the code," which I argue implies control as opposed to learning. As salutatorian, Thomas Hinkey was obviously a successful student, at least as determined by his GPA, but instead of trumpeting his accomplishment, it appeared he was disillusioned. Some additional examples from other students' interviews also reflect the issues addressed herein:

Over the years, we've been programmed to read piles of text with few visual aids. – Seth Peterson, student (Case 2)

I'm just accustomed to reading text because that's all you're ever told or taught to read. So instinctively I go for the text just because I'm more comfortable with it. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1)

These students' statements suggest that the "code," i.e. curriculum, has "programmed" them to "instinctively" choose phonetic texts.

This study also revealed that there are other less ideological but just as important reasons that contribute to this persistent belief, such as teachers' past experiences and love for traditional texts and teachers' own formal education from elementary school up

through teacher training. Guillory (1995) argues that the canon is not pre-determined by some secret group that dictates what students should read, but is instead a result of several factors, one being what those involved in schooling read when they were in school. While his argument still favors a form of social and cultural maintenance because the teachers become complicit in the persistence of certain texts over others, this study found that canonical texts are not only a product of social and cultural traditions but are also a product of personal nostalgia as well. This argument notwithstanding, teachers' beliefs are passed down to their students either covertly or overtly as the following example demonstrates:

I'm almost positive that I've even heard English teachers themselves say that comics are like a kiddish-type thing to read. So, I'd say probably stereotypes have been reinforced, become stronger by...you know when you hear a teacher say something like that...teachers not looking into it, just kind of—it is that way, you know. Not checking into them. So, being closed minded. – Thor Plath, student (Case 1, interview)

Thor Plath, through reflection on his literacy upbringing when juxtaposed with his current AP English class, concludes that:

I've gotten the impression that comic books are highly unimportant. And that's startling to me now that I've actually started to read Daredevil. I'm like, you know, how could that be unimportant? But I have been heavily under the impression that they're just not important to literature.

Thor Plath's recognition that comic books have been deemed "unimportant" in the context of his schooling is congruent with the literature that argues that phonetic texts are

promoted as superior to other modes of text despite the value other modes of text can bring to the classroom (Gee, 1996; Norton, 2003; Versaci, 2001; Williams, 2007).

Gee (1996) argues that parents also play a critical role in their children's literacy development because literacy development begins in the home prior to school. Gee posits that home is the student's primary discourse, with school being the secondary discourse. When the primary and secondary discourses are aligned, then the possibility of problems is minimized and the discourses' sociocultural origins become decontextualized and ultimately naturalized (Gee, 1996). The traditional view of literacy tends to be decontextualized and therefore cloaks literacy's connection to power, social identity, and ideologies in service of privileging certain types of people. Nevertheless, this connection can be exposed and even disrupted when events occur counter to those expected. Interestingly, in this study there was a divide among parents over the use of graphic novels in the ELA classroom. Some parents were not happy with the use of the medium, at least initially, while other parents were fine with it and even interested in it.

Some parents dissuade their students from enrolling in 'The Graphic Novel' course for fear of how colleges might perceive it (as not rigorous enough or that it's a blow off course) based on stereotypes and a general lack of understanding of the medium. – Ms. Veronica, teacher (Case 2, questionnaire)

I told my dad and he didn't understand at all. He was just like, "Comic books in an AP class? What's that all about?" I tried to tell him but he's more of a [muffled] sort of person; he didn't really understand what was going on, but I'm sure he will at the end when I'm able to tell him the entire story and how much I liked it. – Thomas Hinkey, student (Case 1, interview)

My parents weren't too keen on the idea at first. I switched from Advanced Placement English to Honors Graphic Novel and they weren't exactly thrilled. They eventually warmed up to the idea after seeing they weren't just two page comic books. – Graphicnovelreader, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

Graphicnovelreader's choice to take The Graphic Novel course is an excellent example of a student exerting her own will on her course choice and choosing a course that was counter to her parent's desires, which were aligned with ideas of what advanced students are supposed to do to be academically successful. Her actions exemplify the ability to counter the norms of schooling, specifically those norms about what counts as literature and what does not. Her choice made an implicit statement about what literature she felt was worth studying at this point in her schooling career.

An interesting distinction that exists between the two cases is that in Case 1, the students did not have a choice whether to read comic books or not, but in Case 2 the students actively chose to take The Graphic Novel course. This distinction raises a question: Did the involuntary circumstance of Case 1 make it more acceptable to the parents? Leroy Jenkins commented during his first interview that he was sure his mother trusted the teacher's decision even if she did not agree with it. Her comment suggests that she just accepts what the teacher does.

However, there were some parents that found the use of graphic novels interesting, even appropriate, and supported it, as exemplified by the following comments:

It didn't bother them at all. They knew it was AP, and that we were going to be exposed to a lot of different stuff. They all thought it was a good idea, both of them. They

were like, “Hey, that’s kind of cool.” – Michael Scott, student (Case 1, interview)

My dad saw me reading it yesterday and was just like, “Okay, that’s cool.” And he asked what the title was, and he wasn’t really...like he just considered it another homework assignment really. – Thomas Hinkey, student (Case 1, interview)

My dad thought it was pretty cool. He didn’t question or, “how foolish to show this to AP students supposed to be preparing for college,” but he thought it was pretty interesting and stuff. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1, interview)

The constructedness of traditional literacy as the most valuable and relevant mode of literacy for students was called into question simply because the parents had different and contradicting reactions to the use of the medium in the ELA classroom.

Parents’ views on reading graphic novels in the ELA classroom notwithstanding, the students in the study consistently spoke about how they enjoyed reading the graphic novels. This enjoyment was often in contrast to how most of them felt about reading traditional texts. Brooke, Case 1 student, discusses how graphic novels may help students again enjoy reading:

It’s important for people to read, even though a lot of people do not enjoy it. So if a kid finds it enjoyable to read a graphic novel, why not let them read it? Don’t bring them down, let them just read it. – Brooke, student (Case 1, interview)

Brooke continues:

Some kids, since they don't like to read, if you hand them a picture—not a picture book, like a graphic novel, something with pictures, something a little bit more entertaining, exciting, something with characters they've watched movies over, they've seen before, they get more into it and they enjoy it a lot more.

Interestingly, Brooke, a student who professes not enjoying reading, agrees with much of the current scholarship on using comic books that concludes that this medium is a good way to bridge students to traditional literature. Also, it seems she feels that there is something missing in the ELA classroom that if present would ignite a desire to read. It is evident to Brooke that what are missing are texts that appeal to students who are already immersed in a visual world and who have prior knowledge and experiences with images. Graphic novels are a medium that fulfills Brooke's requirements.

During the first round of data collection, Brooke began to enjoy reading this medium, as her first interview indicates:

Daredevil: Born Again was kind of hard to get into, but once I did get into it, I like it now...I actually like reading it now. – Brooke, student (Case 1)

Additionally, several other students who were not comic book readers before taking these classes developed a budding interest in them beyond the classroom. For example:

Although I have never read graphic novels in the past, I have recently begun to take a larger interest in them after enrolling myself in a Graphic Novel course at my school. I have developed more of an interest in them. – Lessley Murlow, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

After I read my first graphic novel in The Graphic Novel class, I became interested in the medium. I plan on reading quite a few this summer. – Graphicnovelreader, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

I'm not a big reader to begin with. I'll read every now and then if I have to or if I'm just feeling it, but I'm usually not...I enjoyed reading a graphic novel in class a lot. I would, honestly read another one. If there was a subject, like you said *Halo*, or something like that that I could get into, I honestly think I would, because I just had never known before but now that I do it's interesting, something different. – Thomas Hinkey, student (Case 1, interview)

Prior to my second visit to the school for round two data collection, Thomas Hinkey had purchased another graphic novel, *HALO*, which is set in the world of the video game *HALO*. Hinkey had told me that he was a “massive” video game fan on a couple of occasions, so this graphic novel was an excellent merging of his established interest, video games, and his newfound interest in graphic novels. Furthermore, several students in the study discussed interests in visual media, including video games, which suggest that the medium appeals to the students because of its connections to their personal lives beyond the classroom. Nevertheless, Peeck (1993) argues that just because images appeal to students, it does not mean they will be understood or even considered beyond their decorative value unless they have a purpose and are engaged on an analytical level.

Putting Peeck's (1993) argument aside for a moment, Compton-Lilly (2006) posits that when students are not allowed to or are unable to find relevance and take ownership of texts, then texts become obstacles that must be overcome to be successful. Therefore, it is evident that relevance is important because it acts as a motivator for students. Interestingly, in Case 1 the students were required to read graphic novels as

part of their AP English class; however, despite being required, the interviews and observations suggest that these texts were welcomed by the students because they were a change of pace and were something more in line with their own interests outside the classroom. Ownership of texts is critical, because when students own the texts they become invested in them beyond just trying to make sense of it for the teacher and for a grade. Unfortunately, Compton-Lilly (2006) argues that students tend to be in an environment where they do not own the texts but see them as something to be studied and then tested on; therefore, they must find another motivator other than the text in order to be successful in the classroom. In these circumstances, such things as grades become the primary focus. Compton-Lilly's claim is illustrated by the following comment:

Do what the teacher says, give the information taught back to the teacher in the ways the teacher asks for it and show learning in forms predetermined and delineated in a rubric, so that the teacher has proof learning occurred. Student gets the grade; teacher keeps his or her job. There is data to prove everyone is doing what they are expected to do. – Ms. Veronica, teacher (Case 2, questionnaire)

Students are also savvy to this reality as exemplified by Michael Scott's, Case 1 student, comments during an interview:

I think in today's day and age, it's a lot of test score-driven stuff, so you see reading rates drop, and automatically you want to intervene and kind of bring those up, and you kind of push everything else that's not as important off to the side.

Mr. Ryan, Case 1 teacher, counters during his interview:

Yes, there are state standards, yes, there are national standards, but I think that I can get to those through whatever I do. To me it doesn't matter if it's Shakespeare

or if it's *The Great Gatsby* or if it's *Daredevil: Born Again* or it's a Jodi Piccoult novel, you can get to them somehow. You just find what works.

Nevertheless, he concedes that his curriculum is...

Primarily traditional, because, you know, I can't teach twenty graphic novels. I can't do that...to outsiders that would look a little strange if 90 percent of my curriculum were based on graphic novels. I do have to teach toward—I hate that phrase, “teach toward the AP test”—I don't think I really do that. I think I teach them toward understanding how literature works and it happens to coordinate with the AP test. And I give them practice essays and practice multiple choice through the year but I would never say that my whole point is—probably the College Board will want to come shut me down, but I never think it's all about that AP test. I never think that...AP has a fairly prescribed curriculum; however, I will use comic books to enhance something I'm doing with a traditional novel.

It could be easy to claim that Mr. Ryan is actually constrained/controlled by the AP English curriculum and subsequently the AP exam. It is evident that these circumstances do dictate to some degree what he must teach, however, it does not dictate how he must teach it. Two realities, not necessarily incongruent, are functioning within this classroom. The first is that the students are in the class for the AP curriculum and likely for the AP credit that can be applied to college. The second is not all of his students will be interested in graphic novels. Mr. Ryan recognizes these two realities and makes his pedagogical decisions based on them. There are years when he does not use graphic novels, but every time he does use them they are used in conjunction with the novels required by the AP curriculum. He calls this use “enhancing the curriculum.”

The issue of testing aside for the moment, the more important issue to pursue is the issue of students, particularly advanced students, finding something else other than literacy to motivate them to be successful in school, because it suggests that the curriculum is potentially failing these students, not in their grades, but in their education (Compton-Lilly, 2006). Several students in the study acknowledged that there are norms to schooling that ensure that you are successful as long as you follow them. Ms.

Veronica, Case 2 teacher, discusses these norms further in her questionnaire:

In my experience, the norms students refer to are those that help them figure out how to achieve, not necessarily learn or enjoy the learning process. Teachers' norms might vary slightly, but overall traditional methods of teaching enable students to form attitudes and behaviors that help them get through school, which is very different from actually learning skills or becoming more knowledgeable. Test-taking skills are dramatically different than the authentic learning process of trial and error. Failure is not encouraged nor rewarded—a norm that dissuades authentic learning. Achievement and mastery of content and skill is rewarded by grades, so kids figure out how to achieve and master long enough to score well on a test. Very few students combine achievement and genuine learning. The other code I notice is that students assume teachers have all the answers and to do well in school a student must figure out the teacher and give that teacher the answer he or she is looking for.

Ms. Veronica continues:

Experience has also taught me that students sometimes become resentful about the dramatic change in the status quo or conditioned learning patterns, occasionally resisting with anger and disdain. These are students who hope to continue their success at mastering the established habits of pseudo-literacy.

Ms. Veronica's comments about resentment to change are compelling because they speak to the argument that an English curriculum based on traditional modes of literacy has become naturalized to these students as the proper way of performing literacy (Gee, 1996). Mr. Ryan's, Case 1 teacher, pragmatic viewpoint on why students choose to take AP English corresponds to Ms. Veronica's statements:

AP kids do not sign up for AP Literature and Composition because they love English. They sign up for AP Literature and Composition because they want AP on their transcript and most of them wouldn't mind having the AP test to get them credit in college, but very few of those kids sign up for AP Literature and Composition because they love English. They sign up for it because they're good students, they're smart kids. That's why they sign up for it. It's not because they have a particular passion for English.

The result of external rewards motivating students is that traditional literacy becomes fetishized as a personal benefit and the key to social and economic advancement, i.e. social and economic capital (Lankshear & Knobel, 2010). This fetishization helps perpetuate a canon of texts that act as supposedly stable maintainers of societal norms simply because they have persisted (Street, 2006). Guillory (1995) posits that the literature canon is not determined by some conspiratorial secret committee, but it is instead determined by social institutions such as school and by rules and regulations such as curriculum, which are decided, promoted, and perpetuated by those in authority. He argues that one purpose of the canon in schooling is about learning to read and write, i.e. literacy, not about the text. He further contends that another purpose is the preservation of models of proper grammar, which are perceived as better than the current speech used more generally. Each of these purposes performs the function of cultural preservation

through language, particularly if it is conceded that culture is enacted, reflected, and contained in language. Interestingly, Guillory (1995) notes that this looking back for models of correct grammar is complicated and even called into question because of the extreme changes the English language has undergone over the centuries, hence the difficulty of reading Shakespeare. This problem results in our models being relatively closer temporally, suggesting that even the most deliberate attempts to preserve our culture through proper ways of speaking and writing must eventually be abandoned in favor of newer modes. This argument is also transferable to the canon itself, because it has also evolved as times have changed. Nevertheless, Guillory (1995) contends that in school, the vast and diverse world of literature becomes reduced down to few texts that are used primarily as models of literacy.

Guillory's (1995) argument can also be mapped onto popular culture versus canonized texts because popular culture represents the present while the canon represents the past. The fundamental problem, as discussed in chapter 2, is that popular culture associated with the masses also bears a designation as "low brow" and therefore becomes situated in a low class mode of literacy that threatens the stability of the dominant culture (Gee, 1996).

Williams (2007) argues that Americans have perpetually been in a literacy crisis, despite findings to the contrary. Gee (1996) argues that discussion of a literacy crisis is a displacement of the actual causes of the issue. For example, he cites a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) study in 1986 that pointed not to a literacy issue, but to a schooling issue. In short, as the tasks became more school-like, fewer students could do them, with failure being worst among the most disadvantaged students,

because it is school-based literacy that carries within it the primary discourse of middle class mainstream values. Williams (2007) concludes that the real reason for concern has nothing to do with a perceived dumbing down of curriculum or the fragmentation of our culture, but instead is middle class anxiety about their own status and privilege being removed from them as schooling became more inclusive. It is this fear that shapes education practices and policy, which subsequently inform the practice of teaching (Gee, 1996; Williams, 2007).

CHAPTER 5: ELA CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY, AND EVALUATION

Bernstein (1971) described the process of social control as society selecting, distributing, transmitting, and evaluating educational knowledge. He noted that curricula are what are transmitted, pedagogy is how curricula are transmitted, and evaluations determine whether or not curricula are successfully received through pedagogy.

Bernstein's stance on the role each of these elements plays in schooling is founded on a strong Marxist position that a primary purpose of education in a capitalist society is that of indoctrination into a social and cultural milieu that promotes competition, financial gain, and individualism, among other qualities, as natural, consistent, and even moral. It is the belief that these ideas are natural that is the focus of the indoctrination. This argument has merit, particularly when one considers that some believe a primary purpose of education in our society is to maintain cultural continuity, e.g. E. D. Hirsch (1985).

Nevertheless, Duncan and Smith (2009) argue that teachers are trained to privilege phonetic texts as the only culturally legitimate form of literature. Therefore, what appears to be happening is that the texts read are instead chosen because of the past experiences that those in charge of schooling have had with them (Guillory, 1995).

These texts that have persisted over time become the canon, which though conceived of as a maintainer/preserver of cultural continuity is itself also flexible and fluid.

In the Bernstein (1971) scheme, pedagogy is implied to be a form of imposition, a monolithic method per se, but in actuality it tends to be more fluid. For example:

I love teaching Shakespeare, and I love teaching *The Great Gatsby* and I love teaching *A Streetcar Named Desire*,

which is probably not quite traditional but I love teaching it. I love all that stuff. But I think sometimes it's a tough sell to kids...If you continually start the school year with the Puritans and *The Crucible*, you're not going to reach every kid. It doesn't matter how great *The Crucible* is if the kids aren't paying attention to it. You might as well be pissing in the wind; you're not achieving anything. – Mr. Ryan, teacher (Case 1)

Nevertheless, whether pedagogy is student centered, democratic, or backed by any other progressive education idea/l, the pedagogical approach is typically still decided by the teacher. This examination of curricula and pedagogy suggests that they are not stable forces in schooling, but that they must instead be maintained (Hall, 1980). One method of maintenance is evaluation through standardized testing. It is on this point that Bernstein's (1971) claims become more accurate. Ms. Veronica, Case 2 teacher, found these issues with curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation to be valid when she and her colleagues began revitalizing their 12th grade ELA courses:

Two years ago my colleagues and I transformed our English/Language Arts curriculum from traditional World Literature to an elective program in order to better engage students. Prior to this transformation and despite the fact that the Massachusetts Department of Education Curriculum Frameworks contains media literacy objectives, the reality of the World Literature class was a perpetuation of canonized works that, as it states in the Guiding Principles section of the document, "are part of a literary tradition going back thousands of years."

ELA Curriculum

Bernstein (1971) argued that when curricula are transmitted in a strict frame, then schooling is more about acquiring or gaining knowledge than about constructing or making it, which can produce apathetic students who are passive to the messages they

receive from texts (Compton-Lilly, 2006). The canon is employed to provide this strict frame, but because it is not an entity removed from people, it has evolved over time to encompass a diversity of authors (Guillory, 1995). The evolution of the canon also provides the opportunity for a diversity of types of texts; nevertheless, the canon is still a powerful force for traditional literacy socialization as exemplified by the following experience of Rocco Versaci when he was teaching high school English. When Versaci (2001) asked his class, “What is literature?” many of the students’ responses suggested that it was something that was decided by others. He notes that the students sensed that certain works were more worthy of serious attention than others. They were talking about the canon. Furthermore, the way that they expressed the definition of a canon troubled him, because it indicated a sense of removal from the processes of evaluation that helped establish this canon. In their view, others make decisions about literary quality. Luce-Kapler (2007) argues that when students view literature in this way, they resent it because it is a chore and lacks relevance to their daily lives. The following comments during interviews support this argument:

I’ve really enjoyed reading this because a lot of the time you’re just reading textbooks and all kinds of other literature and then you just kind of feel the grind. – Michael Scott, student (Case 1, interview)

Mr. Ryan comes out with the Daredevil book. I was pretty excited when he showed it to us. It was something new, for sure. It seems like a chore almost, reading some of the novels, because it’s the core content that they have you read every year after year. It seemed like something new and refreshing. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1, interview)

We read *Pride and Prejudice*, and personally I thought it was awful. It was the most uninteresting book I've ever read. I've been turned off to Jane Austen. I will not read her literature again. There wasn't any action to it really. Jane Austen—she used a lot of dialogue to move her story along, and I don't know, there just—seemed like everybody was standing still just talking the whole book. There were almost 300 pages, so I really wanted to stop. And I didn't even read the last few chapters of it, so...that's how bad it was. Not a lot of people liked it, I don't think. Really a negative reaction to it. I really wanted to get out of that and read like Daredevil, Superman, Batman, stuff like that. – Michael Scott, student (Case 1, interview)

The above comment by Michael Scott suggests that there may be a preference of reading material by males that is not reflected in the ELA curriculum (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolla, 2003; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). However, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) did a study to determine why males tended to perform worse than females in the literacy classroom, and they found that reading was often rejected by males not because it is considered feminine, but because it is thought of as “schoolish.” The males tended to reject school texts because they did not find them connected to their literacy lives outside of the school. The females were not studied by Smith and Wilhelm; therefore, while it was known that the females were doing better in their literacy classes, the reasons for their success were not explored. Interestingly, in my research I found little or no gender differences in student responses to *Pride and Prejudice*. During observations and interviews both male and female students expressed a strong dislike of the text because they felt it was boring. Conversely, during an observation a female student declared that she enjoyed *Superman for all Seasons* so much that she reread it the night before. During observations I noted that Mr. Ryan, Case 1 teacher, made it a point that one of the

purposes for reading *Daredevil: Born Again* was to critique the comic book for its portrayal of women, particularly the character of Karen Page, who acted as the “damsel in distress.” *Born Again* was also coupled with texts such as *The Hours* and *A Sorrowful Woman* that called into question the traditional conceptions of female. Using these texts as springboards, discussions ensued during observations about gender roles/gender norming, ideas of gender identification, and stereotyping of females as weak and needing men to save them. Mr. Ryan also offered critiques on Harlequin romance novels and the popular *Twilight* saga by Stephanie Meyer.

The issue of a feminized ELA curriculum notwithstanding, Kress (2003) argues that, “The school, as an institution founded on the mode of writing and on the medium of the book, has its valuations deriving from a former era” (p. 165). Guillory (1995) argues that canon formation is a means of objectifying reading by removing it from its sociocultural and historical contexts. Literacy training, as opposed to learning, provides the models for us to acquire proper grammar and proper ways of behaving; therefore, he concludes literature’s primary task is to perform a social function. This argument is exemplified by Thomas Hinkey’s, Case 1 student, observation that “classroom acceptable” texts are also “socially acceptable.” Guillory also argues that canon formation in schools was and still is about acquisition of literacy as a skill to be used but not necessarily enjoyed. James “Bucky” Carter, a comic book scholar and teacher educator, argues that it is important from an educative standpoint to follow best practices that present a balanced literature pallet for students: canonical texts as well as other texts, even popular culture texts such as comic books and graphic novels that utilize other modes of literacy (personal communication, 2012).

Popular Culture. When students engage with popular culture texts, such as comic books and graphic novels outside of school, they find this non-required reading pleasurable (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Botzakis, 2006; Luce-Kapler, 2007). One benefit of popular culture texts is that they tend to be either exclusively imagistic or predominantly imagistic. Pauwels (2008) argues that images are more familiar and prevalent in our students' experience and so are a more readily accepted and comfortable means of receiving new information and practicing skills. Students in the study confirm Pauwels' claim:

If I had a choice between reading or watching a movie or playing a video game, I'd pick movies and video games over anything. That's just the way I like to be entertained. I even like to learn that way. Like if we watch documentaries I can get just as much if not more out of that than a PowerPoint, and it's not as boring to me. I'm more of a visual-based learner, I think. – Thomas Hinkey, student (Case 1, interview)

Image-based media is best for me because it is often complemented by text or auditory information. I learn a lot from the Discovery and Science Channels because they can show diagrams and videos while explaining what goes on. Image-based media is often more dynamic than word-based media, which makes it easier and more entertaining to absorb. – Seth Peterson, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

Thomas Hinkey and Seth Peterson recognize that they not only prefer image based media for recreational purposes, but that this mode is also preferred for learning purposes. Their comments suggest an astute awareness about how they would like to be taught, and it also points to their lives beyond the school. Furthermore, it is critical to recognize that these students are advanced students (for example, Thomas Hinkey was the salutatorian) and that they are completely capable of learning with and about traditional literature.

Nevertheless, comments by many of the participants, including these above, make it very evident that these students are bored with traditional modes of learning and literacy and feel that school should offer more.

Interestingly, some students in the study made reference to media from their childhood. For example:

We can relate to them better, I guess. We kind of grew up with Superman and Spiderman and Daredevil, like all the Marvel and DC heroes, and it's kind of like easy for us to like get into those more than *Beowulf*. Comic books are kind of geared toward a teenage audience, and they're like perfect for our age group. – Tyron Biggums, student (Case 1, interview)

The students' references to media from their childhood are compelling because they suggest nostalgia for media-based past experiences. As discussed briefly in chapter 1, this nostalgia finds a parallel in the idea of continuity with the canon. In a way, canonization of texts is a form of nostalgia for the past works of our culture. Canonization is an attempt to hold onto the past just as these students' nostalgia for childhood media is a way to maintain continuity between their formative years and their present, suggesting a need to maintain their personal social and cultural selves—a personal canon if you will.

Nielsen (in Alvermann, et al., 2006) argues that the more diverse and discrepant the choices of literacy provided to students, the more likely they are to become critically engaged readers. Ms. Veronica, Case 2 teacher, recognizes this assertion when she argued in her questionnaire:

Graphic novels would very likely engage those students who were apathetic about reading partially because of an uninspiring curriculum and also stimulate avid readers who might appreciate a change from the routine dose of classic texts.

Furthermore, Norton (2003) argues that fun or pleasurable reading gives children a sense of control over the reading process, which results in the students taking ownership of the texts. Ownership is gained through the pleasure found by reading the texts because pleasure promotes a deeper engagement with the text, what Reed, Schallert, Beth, and Woodruff (2004) call *involvement*. According to Reed et al. (2004), engagement is a process that is motivated, strategic, and activity oriented, such as looking for answers; whereas involvement is a particular form of engagement in which the reader is totally absorbed in the process of reading. Involvement leads to learning and deeper comprehension of the texts beyond just rote memorization of aspects of the text that can be gained from a superficial reading (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; Reed et al., 2004). Ms. Veronica noted in her questionnaire that...

Students feel more ownership over this medium because it, they believe, is for them and aimed specifically at them as the primary audience in contrast to canonical texts which are perceived by students to have been written for older adults or teenagers of previous generations. It is my perception that students do not feel as though they are the primary audience for many traditional texts, but rather they are imposed on them by administrators and teachers without their input or consent.

Ultimately, it is a teacher's pedagogy that acts as the vehicle to bring other modes/types of texts into the ELA classroom; consequently, it is the pedagogy that can either perpetuate or challenge the status quo (Ellsworth, 1997).

ELA Pedagogy

Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) argue that the fundamental purpose of English teachers is to preserve our common language and cultural heritage. One of the more influential books on this matter is Leavis and Thompson's *The Training of Critical Awareness*, published in 1933 (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994). Leavis and Thompson (1933, as cited in Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994) argued that English teachers played a central role in the preservation of the English language and therefore culture. Teachers were to go on the offensive to accomplish this preservation, as it was a war against popular media as well as the world outside the classroom. Leavis and Thompson's decree was based on a fear that our cultural heritage could be lost if students became consumed by popular media. Their fears were not unfounded, because the early 1930s marked an explosion of new media forms, including comic books. This fear of popular media consuming youth and subsequently ruining their literacy development and ultimately our society still persists today (Gee, 1996; Williams, 2007). A prime example of this concern is E. D. Hirsch Jr.'s 1987 book *Cultural Literacy*. He argues that cultural literacy, which is akin to traditional literacy but adds a dimension of conformity to a national identity, is critical to maintaining national unity. Hirsch's (1987) argument may have merit, but the fundamental issue with this argument is in the simple yet powerful question: Whose culture are we supposed to know? Looking at the preponderance of Western authors in the canon, it appears that it is Eurocentric culture that should be taught in schools (Gee, 1996; Kellner, 2002).

From a pedagogical perspective, the idea of cultural preservation is justified by the position that the teaching of canonized texts creates a continuity that reaches across

generations (Guillory, 1995). This continuity is seen as a powerful force for recognition of the human condition and allows for the possibility of unity and understanding across generations, albeit primarily Eurocentric. This continuity was demonstrated by Mr. Ryan on several occasions during my observations of his class. For example, he connected the poem *The Seafarer*, an Old English poem, to the boredom teens feel in school and the need to get away.

Kellner and Share (2005) argue that pedagogy is not a neutral mode of transmission, but is instead replete with struggles between complex relations of knowledge and power. The struggle is not one-sided, and it is in the struggle that change can occur. Nevertheless, Norton (2003) found that when student teachers were asked about using non-traditional modes of literacy, they expressed a fear of loss of control over the curriculum and the students and were therefore apprehensive. However, Greene (1995) argues that exposure and positive experiences are powerful and can alter teachers' perceptions and change their pedagogical approach. This effect is exemplified in Ms. Veronica's, Case 2 teacher, comments in her questionnaire:

The Graphic Novel course grew out of my graduate school experience where I was first introduced to graphic novels. I had never read a comic book and immediately became defensive when I saw the list of titles on the syllabus; however, after a lengthy discussion during class about the nature of art and what qualifies as good literature, I was a little more open to giving these "picture books" a chance. Needless to say, as I progressed through the course, my mindset about these texts changed dramatically, and by the end of the course, I was completely convinced of the legitimacy of the graphic novel as literature worthy of attention.

Ms. Veronica further addresses the direct impact on her pedagogy:

My classroom is also far more democratic than in previous years teaching traditional literature in traditional ways, and I attribute this to images being more open to interpretation, therefore more open to discussion and competing ideas. Students spend far more time debating and working toward consensus and meaning-making collaboratively.

Ms. Veronica's use of the phrase "more open" implies that words are of course open to interpretation; however, the more important point she implicitly makes is that words are less open to interpretation than images. Semiotics argues that symbols, which include both words and images, are representations and therefore are encoded with meanings that must then be interpreted to produce understanding (Pierce, 1958; Saussure, 1960/1906-1911). Semiotics suggests that words and images are equally open to interpretation: i.e. that neither is more open to interpretation than the other. However, the issue at least for this study is not so much about creating interpretations as it is about the issue within schools of controlling interpretations. Words typically follow conventions of the language and have denotations that attempt to fix the meaning of them (Hall, 1980). Furthermore, Ellsworth (1997) argues that traditional pedagogy works to eliminate the spaces between the reader and the text that are opened up by the ambiguity of symbolic words. Interpretive space is eliminated through a pedagogical approach that is teacher centered, fixing and maintaining the meanings of not just words but also texts, providing a continuity of interpretation that is critical for social and cultural control or consistency. Ms. Veronica does not view her pedagogical approach as traditional and therefore is able to conclude that images are more open to interpretation because her approach creates

space for this possibility. This conclusion notwithstanding, the status of images relative to interpretation is explored further in chapter 7.

While the ELA curriculum and ELA teachers' pedagogy can impede use of popular culture texts, specifically comic books and graphic novels, teachers are, to greater and lesser degrees, in control of these aspects, and therefore they are subject to revision by teachers who wish to have a balanced approach to their ELA classroom. Unfortunately, an aspect that is not under teacher control is that of state mandated standardized testing, and this component of the ELA classroom functions to arrest the choices teachers make within their classrooms. Mr. Ryan's following statement during an interview exemplifies this conflict:

You can use [comic books] to teach literary technique. You can use them to teach any of that stuff. You can use them to teach storytelling. You can use them to teach anything. That's what I use them for. However, you couldn't use them in AP classes as "this is a work of literature that you can use on your free response essay on the AP test."

ELA Evaluation

Literacy curriculum is narrowing as people's exposure and knowledge of media and popular culture is expanding (Buckingham, 2003; Dressmann, O'Brien, Rogers, Ivey, Wilder, Alvermann, Moje, & Leander; 2006). The national movement to standardized testing exemplifies this narrowing of curriculum. One consequence is that within ELA classrooms, literacies that deal with images, whether still or moving, are noticeably absent despite the fact that some variation of image analysis, evaluation, and/or production exists in every state's curriculum (Kellner & Share, 2005). For example, Ms.

Veronica, Case 2 teacher, noted on her questionnaire that the Massachusetts's State Curriculum contains two media literacy learning strands; however, these strands are not tested on the state assessments, which implies they are a lesser priority and subsequently are not typically taught. Considine (2002) voices the sentiment of Ms. Veronica and other teachers in the current American education climate of standards and accountability when he repeats the mantra, "If it's not on the test, I'm not teaching it" (p.13). During interviews, I told students that there are literacy objectives in their curriculum that are specific to visual and other modes of literacy. They responded:

I don't know if it's like this in other states either—but for here, they seem to stress so much of your English purely on writing ability. And I mean, I highly think that's important. I mean, communication through literature is very important. But I mean since fourth grade, doing portfolios until now, they've just been pounding and pounding the idea of reading, reading, reading stuff and then writing stories non-stop. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1, interview)

I've had English classes where it's just extremely boring, and you go through and you read other textbooks, do what you're supposed to, have a test over it, answer some practice questions, prepare for the test...I mean, it just gets so boring. Nobody really wants to do it, we don't really get in depth with the story, we don't understand the concepts you're supposed to. – Thomas Hinkey, student (Case 1, interview)

Well, I'm not entirely sure what it consists of, but I mean you hear it after year, they're like, and "We've got to follow the core content. We have to do what the state's telling us to do." I mean, I know sophomore year, every single class read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Every single class read *Moby Dick*. Last year, every single class read *Huckleberry Finn*. Every single class read *Death of a Salesman*. I don't know if every single...we did in our AP English class. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1, interview)

In the rare instances when these texts are the focus of the class, then the ELA classroom must be transformed in order to allow for these texts to have primacy over the traditional texts. Mr. Ryan's comments during his second interview address this fact when he discusses that the ELA class would have to be turned into an elective:

I think you could teach a class on graphic novels, easy, and I would hate to call it that, but you would have to call it that. But even if you did that, you would have to demonstrate that this elected course supports the teaching of the standards. So, everything goes back to the standard—this is all standard based.

Though Mr. Ryan does not know the Case 2 teacher Ms. Veronica, what he describes is exactly what she and her colleagues had to do in order to have a class that used only graphic novels. She explains in her questionnaire:

In order to convince the school's administration that these texts could foster student learning, I constructed a rationale to show how students could learn in a traditional fashion and would not be merely drawing cartoons and discussing which superhero they liked best. I asserted that students would be practicing writing regularly, developing reading skills and strategies, listening, speaking, researching and consistently engaging in sophisticated inquiry and critical analysis just as they would in any other English course. I also relied heavily on evidence from the American Library Association and the statistics they provided about the value of graphic novels to engage teen readers and the legitimacy of the medium. As a result, I managed to convince the school committee of the value of using graphic novels with seniors, and since the members of the committee seemed more concerned with students' practical communication skill than their knowledge of canonical literature they were less concerned about the materials I planned to employ as a means to that end.

The findings suggest that alternative texts such as graphic novels must conform to the strictures of the traditional ELA curriculum because of testing constraints. Nevertheless, despite these texts supplementary and elective status (Case 1 and Case 2 respectively), the teachers, by simply utilizing these texts pedagogically and treating them as equals to traditional literature, have called into question the superiority of traditional literacy for their students and colleagues and have created a space for other modes of literacy in their classrooms. The following chapter explores the possibilities for the ELA classroom when the definition of literacy is expanded to include other modes of literacy, specifically visual and hybrid literacies, as well as discussion of what visual literacy pedagogy would entail.

CHAPTER 6: LITERACIES AND THE ELA CLASSROOM

A review of the literature on literacy reveals a struggle to define what literacy entails for students, especially when their contexts outside of school are included in the discussion (e.g. Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Alvermann, et al., 2006; Aufderheide, 1993; Buckingham, 2003; Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Kress, 2003; Pauwels, 2008; Moss, 2000; Street, 2006; Willinsky, 1990). Nevertheless, the concept of literacy from a schooling standpoint seems to remain constant, as revealed in both teachers' responses to the question "What is literacy?"

Mr. Ryan states in his first interview:

I think it's how your reading ability has enhanced your writing and how your writing ability has enhanced your reading over the course of your education until this point. How one has played into the other, how your reading has impacted your writing and your writing has impacted your reading over the course of your development. So I guess your literacy is your reading and your writing ability, how they work hand in hand, which I guess ultimately becomes your fluency with language.

Ms. Veronica succinctly writes in her questionnaire:

The ability to read and compose texts.

Even though the teachers define literacy from a schooling standpoint nearly identically, neither of them subscribes to that definition completely. They do not teach that literacy is just a process, i.e. reading and writing, but that literacy is about critically engaging with texts, connecting with them on a personal level, reading deeply, and making meanings

with them (Bleich, 1978; Grumet, 1985; Iser, 1978; Street, 2006). These teachers' perspective on literacy encompasses not only traditional literacy, but also other modes as well. Their perspective on literacy is validated when Iser's (1978) concept of intertextuality of different types of phonetic texts is expanded to encompass other modes of texts, specifically visual.

Traditional Literacy

The benefits of traditional literacy, i.e. reading and writing phonetic text, are obvious and undeniable. If a person is literate in the traditional sense, he or she is able to access a great deal of information because much of the knowledge that has been collected has been written down. This knowledge is not confined to official, sanctioned, canonized, etc. texts, but also resides in texts considered popular, aberrant, sub-cultural, taboo, etc. Access to the latter texts can be difficult to varying degrees, but they do exist and can be accessed if one is literate in the traditional sense. As discussed above and in chapters 1 and 2 of this study, the medium of the comic book tends to fall into the latter category, typically under popular culture, partially based on the fact that while it contains phonetic text, its primary mode of communication is the image. Therefore, the hybridity of these texts suggests that both traditional literacy skills and visual literacy skills are required to make meaning from it. This medium presents a dilemma for the ELA classroom because it harkens back to the elementary years when picture books were used.

Sipe (1998) argues that in picture books the illustrations add an extra layer of meaning to the texts. Furthermore, Sipe notes that educators in both preschool and the early elementary years embrace the use of images in an effort to develop children's vocabulary and their understanding of words. Nevertheless, during the early elementary

school years students are “graduated” from looking at images to reading words. This graduation is generally considered a benchmark of literacy development, but there are at least two consequences:

- 1) Students come to believe that words are superior to images, since words take the place of communicating meaning that images once held.
- 2) Students come to associate images in books, particularly books that have a disproportionate amount of images, as childish.

Sipe’s (1998) argument notwithstanding, comic books are not picture books. The images in comic books do not parallel the phonetic texts, but instead are the main method of communicating the narrative with the phonetic text providing dialogue and some expository aspects as needed (Carrier, 2000). Will Eisner (1985/2008) argues that the image is the primary mode of communication in a comic book. Nevertheless, the second conclusion above is strengthened by teachers and other adults, just as in Thor Plath’s, a Case 1 student, memory of hearing teachers calling comic books “kiddish.” During interviews, the students in the study recalled their experiences using picture books in elementary school and this transition away from images to words, while also making the case for disassociating graphic novels from those picture books of their early years.

When you’re little like all you can do is read images in picture books or what not. Gets an idea going. I remember being little, I couldn’t even read Dr. Seuss books, like *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*, like relying on the pictures, and I got the general grasp of the story that the cat shows up, messes everything up, and leaves before the mom gets back. And *Daredevil: Born Again* or *The Dark Knight Returns* or any other graphic novel, I feel like the pictures, while obviously not as childish as a Dr. Seuss tale, I think the pictures can be used to show a lot about, especially in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, the emotions. Like

when it shows the flashback, you can just see the terror in his eyes, and the hecticness of the scene. In Daredevil, particularly the symbols, as has been hit upon heavily in the classroom, I think the pictures play a huge role in being able to obtain the knowledge from the story, being able to obtain the information that the author wants you to know. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1, interview)

As a student it's less stressful, kind of having the pictures there almost, but it helps you relate to the story a little bit more. Kind of like when you're a kid, it helps you understand it a little bit better. I think that's one way I kind of analyze it. – Michael Scott, student (Case 1, interview)

Michael Scott's comments are verified in literature reviewed by Peeck (1993). He concludes from his synthesis of several studies on the use of images with phonetic texts that "a picture may help to activate prior knowledge or provide a schema for organizing incoming textual material and may also have an attention-directing and controlling effect as the learner proceeds through the text" (Peeck, 1993, p. 230). Nevertheless, as discussed in depth in chapter 4, Williams (2007) argues that within the literacy classroom the goal seems to be to wean students from popular media and on to a more socially and culturally appropriate mode of literacy, i.e. traditional. Ms. Veronica, Case 2 teacher, supports William's assertion when she notes in her questionnaire:

The literature curriculum has not substantially changed since its inception, and most teachers believe that basic literacy is the most important literacy to establish before emphasizing other, newer, or visual literacies. I actually agree, though I believe that since the rise of the Internet, visual literacy skills have become necessary and we should make room for teaching students the new literacies and competencies they'll need to function in this new communications format.

Interestingly, students appear to have trouble understanding exactly what literacy entails as Mr. Ryan, Case 1 teacher, noted in an interview.

We have our kids write about their literacy. “How do you see how your literacy has developed over the course of your twelve years of school?” We have to ask that question every year and kids are like, “What do you mean?”

I speculate that even though the students do recognize the apparent differences between media, they do not conceive of literacy as media specific processes. This could be attributable to Kress’s (2003) concept of multimodality, which suggests that no text has aspects that are exclusive to its type, further suggesting that the distinction between texts may only be surface appearance. Furthermore, Kress’s conception of multimodal texts is congruent with Iser’s (1978) concept of intertextuality.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is the idea that all texts share common elements such as conventions, genres, structures, production elements, and rhetorical devices (Iser, 1978; Pailliotet, Semali, Rodenberg, Giles, & Macaul, 2000; Scholes, 1989). For example, graphic novels use many of the same literary devices that novels do because each one at its core is a narrative (Carter, 2007a; W. Eisner, 1985/2008; Frey & Fischer, 2008). The intertextuality of graphic novels and phonetic novels was also recognized by the students in the study:

There are a lot of literary elements in graphic novels. There’s a lot that you can grasp from it, a lot that you can learn from them. – Tyron Biggums, student (Case 1, interview)

Teachers are just not aware of what graphic novels have to offer and how they contain the same elements that you'd find in normal novels. They're no different than a regular novel. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1, interview)

I don't think there is any difference other than the visual art, other than the seeing it instead of it having to be explained, which when you're explained, you'll see it. – Thor Plath, student (Case 1, interview)

There are probably more similarities than differences between them, actually—they're both read instead of watched, they both tell a wide variety of stories—the single defining difference seems to be the use of images. – Abed, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

The similarities between a novel and graphic novel were made very apparent in the first structured think-aloud activity using *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (see appendix C) with Case 1 students. They were able to point out and discuss literary elements, primarily symbolism, as conveyed through the images and the juxtaposition of the written text with these images. Some examples from the structured think-aloud:

Throughout the whole couple pages here, it gets closer and closer up on the pearls. First the whole necklace, then just half of it, then really it almost zooms in on them, and it shows how they're separated. And I think that's an undoing or an untying kind of thing. It may be a part in his life where something comes undone. Where his parents die, so his family unit is kind of broken, so it's kind of like that string of pearls. And it's broken; he's the only one. I don't think he has a relative but I don't remember. – Michael Scott, student (Case 1)

When the bat, for Batman, crashes out of the window, it's kind of like symbolizing freedom in a way. Maybe not the freedom that he wants, but it is freedom, because I believe

that birds in general, unless they're caged, symbolize freedom. – Thor Plath, student (Case 1)

As the students above stated, the main difference is that these elements are conveyed primarily through images in graphic novels.

Recognizing the intertextuality of texts is critical, because it suggests that literacy in one medium may complement literacy in others (Pailliotet et al., 2000). Leroy Jenkins, Case 1 student, demonstrates this possibility in the following excerpt from his interview when he draws a connection between the symbolism of rain in a graphic novel and the symbolism of rain in Martin Scorsese's film *Shutter Island*:

The visual literary elements, like in *Daredevil: Born Again*, there's a scene where he's kind of—he's on the lawn, and it's raining, and I didn't figure it out at the time, but eventually I figured out, or Mr. Ryan explained, that the rain was supposed to symbolize like cleansing—a personal cleansing, and watching *Shutter Island*, like there's this big hurricane and fog that comes in, and like before I'm just like, 'Oh, that was just there so he couldn't leave the island,' like I thought it was just an excuse for them to explain the part where he couldn't leave the island, but I eventually realized like, the rain is representing the cleansing of his mind. I remember, whenever I saw the *Shutter Island* thing I immediately snapped back to when we read *Born Again*. Like, I made that connection.

His example suggests that there are commonalities between different media that allow for abilities learned in one, as he had learned from Mr. Ryan, to be transferable to another.

Other examples of these texts' intertextuality appeared during the Case 1 observations.

Mr. Ryan connected the character Beowulf to current times using Superman and Lex Luthor. He argued that Beowulf seeks fame, glory, and recognition like Lex Luthor, while Superman teaches us humility. Mr. Ryan also made several references during the

classroom observations to popular music, television shows, movies, and even commercials to expand and/or to reiterate concepts he was teaching. Additionally, during board work he used Ray Bradbury's "Why Superman? Why Today?" and had students write responses connecting both *Beowulf* and *Superman for All Seasons* to this text. Despite the fact that his students could not use comic books on their AP exam, he was nevertheless providing them an opportunity to write in a manner that was congruent with the AP exam.

[Mr. Ryan] uses a lot of the literary elements that are in comic books and kind of discusses them in the same manner that he would if we were reading like another story such as *Beowulf* or just any other book that you typically read in English IV class. From *Superman for all Seasons*, it's kind of like—I guess I never really realized like the typical sort of like hero. I guess like a lot of the attributes that one would have, I didn't realize they were so obvious in a lot of works, but after reading *Superman*, he kind of taught us what the modern day version of a hero is. – Tyron Biggums, student (Case1, interview)

The intertextuality of these texts and the complementary pedagogical approach also held during Case 2:

Clearly, the difference between the two is that a graphic novel has images and a traditional novel does not. Beyond that, I don't think there necessarily has to be any sort of difference in terms of themes or subject matter, besides those artificially imposed by the people who read them. – Abed, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

Ms. Veronica treats them fairly the same, because in reality, they are fairly similar. Though one speaks through pictures, and the other screams through words, the message is all the same... We perform in depth analysis of content, and look for hidden meanings in symbolic imagery much

like we would look for hidden meaning in metaphors or words. – Lessley Murlow, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

Ms. Veronica also argued in her questionnaire:

Teaching genre and aspects of content are the same between graphic novels and novels. Teaching all aspects of literacy can be done with graphic novels the same as print texts.

In spite of the above comments, even though there may exist many commonalities between graphic novels and traditional texts, there are also differences that require formal training in visual literacy in order to comprehend some of the imagery beyond that of the superficial (Elliot Eisner, 1978; Pauwels, 2008). Ms. Veronica, Case 2 teacher, noted in her questionnaire:

The way to read visuals differs, so instruction must also include some initial reading training in order to promote meaningful comprehension. Since using graphic novels, I have had to incorporate more visual literacy instruction.

Ms. Veronica's comments above are congruent with Peeck's (1993) position that visual literacy should be taught alongside reading comprehension. However, instruction must be more than just "pay attention to the pictures": it must entail doing something with the images, having a purpose when reading them, and reflecting on the interpretations (Carney & Levin, 2002; Peeck, 1993). Peeck (1993) argues that when instruction in visual literacy asks students to engage the images at a deeper, more meaningful level, then it increases the picture's effectiveness as a text. Furthermore, Peeck argues that effective visual literacy instruction in conjunction with traditional literacy instruction can help students know a great deal more about the phonetic text and the phonetic text can aid

in interpreting the pictures, just as in hybrid texts. Michael Scott, Case 1 student, supports Peeck's assertions when he noted in an interview:

In graphic novels, the pictures and the panels, they kind of add something that you're able to infer and take something from the meaning of the pictures. So, that's one added skill that you don't get with a novel.

Interestingly, during this study the assertions discussed above were supported, but they were also challenged. While it was evident that students who had had visual literacy instruction in their art classes were able to speak more specifically about aspects, specifically techniques, used in the graphic novels, the students who did not have this instruction were also able to understand and make profound meanings using the images. Their traditional literacy was very useful to them when reading images, reaffirming Kress's and Iser's assertions about multimodalities and intertextuality. The students' abilities to read visuals attest to their advanced traditional literacy abilities, while also suggesting they are prime candidates for visual literacy instruction.

Kress (1997) argues that the written word is only one of the many semiotic modes a child encounters; another mode is that of the image, and Elliot Eisner (1978) notes that images are the mode that we encounter before that of language. Even after we encounter and use language, Elliot Eisner argues that our conceptions of reality are not limited to linguistic understanding, but encompass visuals as well. Their arguments implicate a need for more than just traditional literacy; they are advocating for visual literacy. The question remains, what is visual literacy and what would visual literacy pedagogy entail?

Visual Literacy

The students were asked to define visual literacy as they understood it during the interviews and on the questionnaires. The following examples are indicative of their responses:

To be visually literate is to be able to look at a picture, or a scene, or an icon and be able to understand, one, what it represents and two, what it is intended to mean. – Lessley Murlow, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

Visually literate? Maybe getting the story out of the images, or maybe it's more about the relationship between the images and you know, or visual, or maybe it's not anything to do with graphic novels and it means creating a visual image with literature. – Thor Plath, student (Case 1, interview)

It is important to point out that Lessley Murlow had received formal education about what visual literacy entailed because data collection with Case 2 students took place at the end of the year and Ms. Veronica had taught them how to be visually literate. Thor Plath, however, had not yet discussed this concept at the time of his first interview. Nevertheless, as discussed above, similarities in their understanding of this mode of literacy exist, even if Thor Plath is less sure of his definition.

More formally, major organizations in the field of visual literacy conceptualize visual literacy as the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from images; however, Luc Pauwels (2008), a visual literacy theorist and educator, argues that this definition is insufficient. He extends it to entail learning how to look more consciously or critically at representations of reality, learning to understand the various modes of visual representations and their areas of application, being able to place images in the

broader context of production and consumption, and becoming aware of the social and cultural coloring in visual representations, as well as being able to produce images or at least understand how they are produced or constructed. This conception of visual literacy is very close to critical media literacy, which is a synthesis of critical pedagogy and media literacy (Semali, 2003). In critical media literacy, a critical pedagogical approach delves deeper into the sociocultural and historical origins and contexts of texts by extending the analysis of a text beyond itself to encompass sociocultural and historical contexts in which the text, the reader, and even the producer exist (C. Luke, 1999; Semali, 2003). Critical media literacy opens up texts to broader and even competing interpretations by recognizing that people bring prior knowledge to bear on media texts within those sociocultural and historical contexts (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999). This conception aligns with current research on reading comprehension of phonetic texts that finds that deep comprehension, i.e. going beyond the text to make meanings, is best executed when the reader connects the text to his or her prior knowledge and sociocultural contexts (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; Snow & Sweet, 2003).

There were several questions during the interviews and on the questionnaires that demonstrated the role critical media literacy can play in students' lives. The students were asked to evaluate the role of visual literacy in various situations: school, while watching TV/movies, in understanding other cultures, at an art museum, while interacting with others, and when encountering advertisements. Their answers revealed several interesting aspects about both their visual literacy and their media literacy abilities. Answers to the school-related questions tended to yield comments about being able to understand accompanying images, and some referenced visual literacy being important to

art class. Additionally, every student discussed the universality of images when the question about other cultures arose. When discussing interacting with others, the concept of reading body language was mentioned several times. Finally, when discussing advertising, students commented on being aware that they were being manipulated/enticed by advertisements to purchase things. Their answers suggest that they have picked up methods for understanding their world beyond just those of traditional literacy either on their own or through formal training, particularly art class.

Nevertheless, Pauwels (2008) argues, echoing Elliot Eisner (1978), that without formal instruction in visual literacy, students are effectively visually illiterate. Conversely, the students' comments in the study suggest that they are not visually illiterate; however, the teachers each discussed the issues they have experienced with students when those students encountered images in hybrid texts without having been formally taught visual literacy. Mr. Ryan, Case 1 teacher, stated in an interview:

I had kids last year who absolutely could not; they just struggled to read *Daredevil Born Again*. One girl was distracted by all the color. She said, "There's just so much color,"...some kids were distracted by the pictures. They didn't know where to focus and when they tried to focus on the one panel, their attention was being drawn by another one, and they just didn't know how to focus on one panel at a time or that it was okay to move from one panel to another. They just didn't know how to do that.

Ms. Veronica, Case 2 teacher, further emphasized in her questionnaire how important visual literacy is to understanding the medium of comic books when she wrote:

Training is necessary to understand form and the medium in which a story is told. If you do not understand how comics work, the ways in which the format is utilized and/or extended, then readers will miss the overall

intention, purpose, and meaning of a graphic narrative.
Form is related to content. You can't teach one without
knowledge of the other.

Ms. Veronica's comments are supported by research on the effective use of images within the context of literacy development (Carney & Levin, 2002; Frey & Fischer, 2008; Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003; Levin & Mayer, 1993; Peeck, 1993). In 1993, Peeck did an extensive review of research on images in phonetic texts in an effort to understand how to increase their effectiveness in learning. Peeck found that an issue plaguing effective use of images in the classroom was the assumption that they were easy to understand because images could be taken at face value. This conclusion is echoed by Pauwels (2008) when he argues that teachers assume students have the capacity to make meaning from images because they are engaged with them on a continuous basis. Peeck (1993) called for instruction in visual literacy that was purposeful, i.e. instruction that required specific things of the viewer beyond just looking at the picture. In 2002, following Peeck's lead, Carney and Levin updated the research base on effective use of images and also updated Peeck's conclusions. Drawing initially on Fang's (1996) work on the use of images in texts, Carney and Levin (2002) reported that while there were some negative effects of using images, particularly when instruction is not suitable to helping students, the majority of research on using images found that they contributed positively to children's literacy development by motivating students, promoting creativity, serving as mental scaffolds, and fostering aesthetic appreciation. They found that for images to have a positive effect, however, they needed to have a purpose. Supporting this research, Versaci (2001) found that purposefully using graphic novels

helped to develop his students' prior knowledge and literacy abilities, which increased their much needed analytical and critical thinking skills. In this study, Ms. Veronica, Case 2 teacher, not only instructed her students in visual literacy as they read hybrid texts, but also had her students complete a comic book project in which they created their own comic from script to images. She commented that creating a comic was extremely helpful in helping the students understand the complexity of the medium.

Toward a visual literacy pedagogy. Snow and Sweet (2003) argue that formal instruction plays a critical role in traditional literacy, and to a lesser degree, the case is also the same for visual literacy (E. Eisner, 1978; Pauwels, 2008) because instruction in visual literacy can strengthen students' understanding and ability to make meaning with images by providing a deeper understanding of techniques used in image creation. In keeping with this idea, Peeck (1993) recommends that visual literacy should be taught in the context of reading comprehension because of the potential images have of promoting reading comprehension, particularly the ability to aid in visualization by activating prior knowledge or providing a scheme for organizing what is read. Unfortunately, while several students in the study referenced their personally developed ability to read and understand images, and some mentioned that art classes had helped them, the majority noted that their previous ELA teachers rarely, if ever, taught them how to engage and make meaning from images. For example:

No, I have never been formally taught visual literacy, but I think my early introduction to comics is what helped me to be able to read images. – Tyler Durden, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

Tyler's comment is important because it answers one of the central questions in this dissertation: can hybrid texts, specifically comic books, help teach visual literacy?

The teachers in this study approached teaching visual literacy in similar ways; they each transferred techniques used in reading and understanding phonetic texts to the visual aspects of the graphic novels they used. They also augmented these techniques with those specific to understanding images. Unfortunately, I was only able to observe Mr. Ryan, Case 1 teacher, actually enact his pedagogical approach. It is his approach that I will now examine.

After handing out *Daredevil: Born Again* to his class, Mr. Ryan immediately began to discuss how to read it. He told the class that you read it the same as a book, left to right, unless there are arrows indicating what path your eyes should follow. Peeck (1993) warns against simply stating "look at the pictures" because students will simply glance at them and not focus attention on them in order to understand and make meaning from them. Nevertheless, Mr. Ryan effectively said just that when he handed out the texts. Mr. Ryan did discuss the phonetic elements of the comic book rendered in captions and speech balloons and their relationship to dialogue in a traditional text, and he also emphasized that only a portion of the narrative will be in these elements, and that the majority of the narrative and therefore their understanding of it would be found in the images individually as well as sequentially. He then gave them a handout about effective paneling (see figure 4 below).

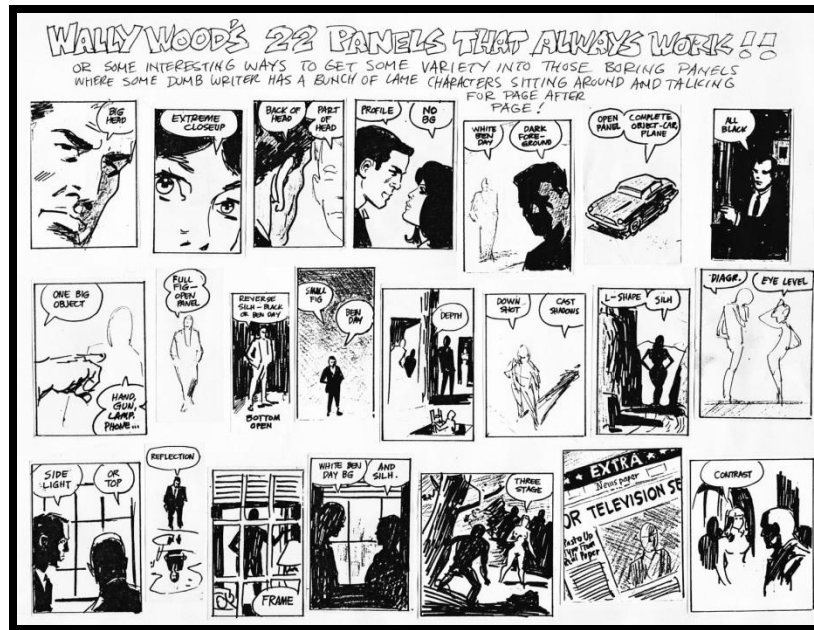


Figure 4: Wally Wood's 22 panels that always work

In an interview, Mr. Ryan explained that his attempt to connect the reading of a graphic novel to reading a phonetic was a response to how scholarship on comic books has attempted to mystify the reading of them and has made the reading of them overly complicated. I agree with Mr. Ryan's assertion, and it also coincides with the finding that traditional literacy can be used to read, understand, and make meaning from images. Nevertheless, despite his instruction, and in keeping with Peeck's (1995) argument, a student told him the following day that he was lost and had "read the wrong boxes." This issue is understandable because even though the narrative typically progresses visually from left to right, it does not always maintain this consistency (W. Eisner, 1985/2008; McCloud, 1993). Furthermore, the images on the page being present simultaneously can confound inexperienced readers of these texts because they become overwhelmed and distracted (Carrier, 2000). These issues notwithstanding, the problem may actually stem from the students' vast experience with phonetic texts and little to no experience with

hybrid texts, which is also complicated by a preference of words over images that they have learned via schooling (Sipe, 1998). During his first interview Mr. Ryan alluded to this issue when he mentioned that he had encountered this problem of not understanding how to read a comic in the past. He had determined that the students were not reading the images, but were instead glancing at them or even ignoring them. During my observation of a subsequent class, he stressed that students must “divorce themselves from the idea that I read it because I read the words.” As the unit progressed, Mr. Ryan began to instruct the class on symbolism and its presence in *Born Again*. He stated to the class, “We must be conversant in symbolism.” Though he did not state it explicitly to the class, he seemed to be implying that in order to understand and interpret the text of *Born Again*, the students needed to understand how symbolism was enacted and functioned within the text, and in order to do this the students needed to overcome their superficial understanding of the images and begin to read them, hence the example of instruction in visual literacy witnessed during an observation that follows.

One of the more compelling discussions that occurred in the class was around the character of Ben Urich, a reporter who had uncovered information on the criminal, the Kingpin, and the stress and anxiety of the character as he began to suffer threats on his life. The following discussion references figure 5 below, as well as other parts of *Born Again* not pictured here.



Figure 5: Ben Urich's fear represented by color and art style

Daredevil: Born Again, writer Frank Miller & artist David Mazzucchelli ©1986 Marvel Comics

In this panel the emotion of the character is not so much evident in the phonetic elements of the texts as they are in the visual elements. Mr. Ryan discussed the artist's rendering of the character here as less detailed than earlier in the graphic novel; this rendering is also evident in comparison to the other characters in the panel. The stylistic choice to make him less detailed serves two functions. The first, mentioned by Mr. Ryan, is that it makes him seem small and weak. The second, though not mentioned by Mr. Ryan, is that a less detailed rendering of a character makes it easier for the reader to identify with that character (McCloud, 1993). Ewert (2000) makes this point in reference to *Maus* when Spiegelman decided after many variations on the mice characters to go with a less detailed rendering. Mr. Ryan also noted the use of the color red to depict fear and anxiety. None of the students had picked up on these features prior to this discussion.

I only have a modicum of information about the methods used to teach visual literacy in Case 2. Ms. Veronica wrote in her questionnaire:

I add a focus on visual literacy—both deciphering and analyzing of images and composing using visual, or graphic, images. The combination or blending of visual and traditional literacy is a large part of the course.

Much of what was taught is deduced from the statements of students in Ms. Veronica's class. For example:

To be visually literate is to be able to examine an image and to understand what it is communicating. It's a lot more than simply looking at a picture, in the same way that reading is a lot more than simply looking at words or even knowing what they say—being visually literate involves using images as a means of communication. – Abed, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

Ms. Veronica's approach appears to have favored a more critical stance than Mr. Ryan's to the images in the texts. Her approach to the images in comparison to Mr. Ryan's could be at least partially attributed to her use of two texts on the subject of visuals in comic books: *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* by Scott McCloud and *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* by Will Eisner, each of which discusses in detail aspects such as use of paneling, color, style, layout, composition, etc. Additionally, she worked with students to create their own comics. I believe that each teacher's approach offers the potential to learn visual literacy; however, Ms. Veronica's may be closer to the idea of visual literacy as put forth by Pauwels (2008) and as enacted by Jon Callow (2003; 2008), a teacher educator and lecturer in literacy education.

Jon Callow (2003) provides effective guidelines for what visual literacy pedagogy might require. He states that teachers must first provide students with a *metalanguage* so they can develop a "more sophisticated and critical understanding" about how visual texts are created (readingonline.org, no page #). He argues that teachers must scaffold students to a better understanding of visual literacy and that an important part of this scaffolding is modeling the construction of visual texts. Callow (2003) argues that Kress and van

Leewen's (1996) concept of "visual grammar" is a prototype for this metalanguage (no page #). He argues that their model considers social, cultural, and contextual aspects of texts, including audience and purpose. Kress and van Leewen (1996, as cited in Callow, 2003) propose that images simultaneously "represent actions, objects, and settings; create interactive or interpersonal meanings between the viewer and what is viewed by the use of features such as color, angles, shot distance, and type of media employed [the latter component considers the conventions unique to the medium as well]"; and "present layout choices that indicate the value or emphasis on particular elements within an image, such as...the attention getting aspects of a particular object or piece of text." Callow (2003) also argues that the explicit knowledge of students about phonetic texts must also be extended to visual texts, for which students already demonstrate an intuitive or implicit understanding. In 2008, Callow extended visual literacy instruction to also encompass students' affective and personal interpretations of texts. He also outlined a framework for assessing students' visual literacy called the "Show Me Framework" that included making visual literacy "part of an authentic learning experience" by "using authentic texts" (p. 619). He further posited that teachers should "value the affective, compositional, and critical dimensions of visual texts, as the interplay between the visual and written elements as well as "including student-made visual responses" (p. 619). Ms. Veronica's having the students make their own comics is an excellent example of this type of visual literacy pedagogy. While there may be additional aspects not covered by Callow (2003; 2008) that can further strengthen a visual literacy pedagogy, I believe that his model is an excellent starting point for teachers who wish to teach this mode of literacy.

When the teachers in the study formally taught visual literacy skills through the graphic novels, their students' ability to read images seemed to be improved, as deduced by the first structured think-aloud activity with *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (see appendix C) in comparison with their classroom discussions about *Daredevil: Born Again*, as well as the students' in Case 2 questionnaire responses. The following comments support these conclusions:

I am better at understanding images; I need his [Mr. Ryan's] help though. I might be able to do better in this book [*The Dark Knight Returns* during the structured think-aloud activity], but like in *Daredevil*, if it wasn't for him explaining the images, I don't really think I would have caught on as fast. Like my paper was specifically over just the religious symbolism, not any other type, so I mean, the fact that I was able to pull out enough points to write an entire paper about just the religious symbolism in one comic book, which kind of showed me that there's a lot in there. – Thomas Hinkey, student (Case 1, interview)

I have come to learn that just glancing at an image doesn't tell you the full story behind it. Images have many components that must be analyzed to fully understand what is happening. – Graphicnovelreader, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

I do believe I'm able to understand images better. This is due mostly to our discussions in class and especially Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, which I had read before but not fully comprehended. For example, while reading a chapter of a Manga the other day, I found myself reflecting back on McCloud's explanation of different panel-to-panel transitions in graphic works, and how Manga frequently moves its focus from one aspect of a scene to another, with no action in between. McCloud discusses how this relates to the Asian cultural focus on the journey as opposed to the destination, and while reading the Manga I was able to think about how this detail contributed to the mood—and

the message—of the scene. – Abed, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

In his second interview Leroy Jenkins, Case 1 student, explicitly describes the change that occurred for him between the first graphic novel the class read, *Daredevil: Born Again*, and the second one several weeks later, *Superman for all Seasons*:

I think definitely better, because starting to read *Superman for all Seasons* yesterday and finishing it, I noticed it was picking up a lot more details in the pictures than I was in *Daredevil: Born Again*. So I guess the pictures, like—there's one where after Superman leaves Metropolis, it just shows the scene, and it shows one of the Lex Luthor guys helping a little kid, and you think, "Well, they replaced Superman." But you can see in the background, like there are these billboards being replaced, like Superman billboards are being replaced with Lex Luthor billboards and stuff. It's kind of subtle, because I'm not looking in the far back corner of the picture, but I mean—it kind of goes on like they've completely taken over the city basically. And they don't actually come out and say it anytime, like, "Lex Luthor has become the new Superman," or "He's taking over Metropolis." If you're not paying attention to the images, you are going to miss that completely, and I think they tell just as much of the story as the text does.

Thor Plath, Case 1 student, also discussed during his second interview applying his newfound visual literacy skills to the world outside of the classroom, suggesting that this instruction also aids in media literacy development:

Well, just getting anything out of the image, you know. I mean, before seeing a billboard or whatever, I would just take the text or what they said, you know. I've never really—the image didn't really apply, or at least I didn't think so. But, yeah, I've definitely learned, you know, there's more to read than just the text.

The students in Case 1 were able to perform sophisticated image readings during the structured think-aloud activity by transferring the skills the teacher modeled and taught in the classroom to the new text. The following examples reference the first structured think-aloud using *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (see appendix C). (Further examples are provided in chapter 7.)

The beads of his mother's pearl necklace continuously get further apart throughout. They get closer up and further apart, so that's interesting. I'm pretty sure there's a connection there with something. If I had to guess, the necklace was on her neck, and as it came closer to breaking off, he got tenser and tenser. I'm pretty sure after it broke, or it didn't necessarily break, it just went to the ground maybe, and shows them together and then it shows them separating and there's only three. If I had to guess I would say that's the father, the son and the mother, who are now completely separate instead of connected like they were back here, because they're dead and he's by himself here in the middle. If I had to guess. But that makes a lot of sense to me. I don't know. It seems very easy to connect and actually makes a lot more sense now that I think about it. Because I probably wouldn't have considered the actual, emotional. They're broken; they're falling apart because everything is getting worse as he's thinking about it. The news has kept getting bad, it keeps getting bad. He's calling someone. He's calling someone, then there's good news, and then the beads kind of come back together. That almost might be his sanity. That's one way to think about it. It could symbolize both, because they are always multiple things, whether the author even wants to include the same meaning there can always be multiple ones depending on the reader's point of view. – Thomas Hinkey, student (Case 1)

A bat flies in through the window right next to Bruce Wayne and that signifies the return of the bat. It's very, very direct symbolism but yeah. I'll admit, I didn't read the earlier Batman comics but in *The Dark Knight* movie [which does not resemble *Batman: The Dark Knight*

Returns] the bat, that's his fear as a child. Is it like that in the comic books? – Wade Wilson, student (Case 1)

In the end, hybrid texts are an excellent medium for bolstering students' visual literacy because these texts utilize students' already established traditional literacy skills while simultaneously cultivating their fledgling visual literacy skills. I term the execution of these two modes of literacy simultaneously hybrid literacy.

Hybrid Literacy

Carrier (2000) argues that in comic books each element, the phonetic and the visual, are dependent on each other to have meaning. He demonstrated this idea through the use of paraphrasing. He argued that a comic can be paraphrased with words, thus suggesting the possibility that the images are merely incidental; however, he contended that in paraphrasing comics, the visual dynamics of the panels are lost and as a result so is the impact of the narrative. In keeping with Carrier's (2000) claim, Thomas Hinkey's, Case 1 student, comments during an interview illustrate the important role of pictures in comic books:

I didn't think there was anything to the images really beforehand. I just thought there were words, and the pictures were just to keep you entertained. I didn't really understand that the pictures had just as much meaning as the text, and I didn't understand the text would go that in-depth, and...like the symbolism in *Daredevil* was just enormous. And I was not expecting that at all.

For Carrier (2000), neither the images nor text is completely or consistently dominant over the other. There is no dichotomy between them because the words can take on properties of the images and vice-a-versa. Wade Wilson, Case 1 student, demonstrated

this idea during the second structured think aloud with *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*

(see appendix F):

I don't really focus on the text all that much. I look more at the black silhouette with the red cape trying to obviously, with all his might, trying to save these 20 million people. And basically this image is text.

McCloud (1993) argued that words and pictures in comic books can function in many ways, but they tend to function interdependently to convey ideas that neither can sufficiently convey alone. For example, in a comic book or graphic novel, neither the dialogue nor captions, that is, the phonetic text, make sense without the image (Varnum & Gibbons, 2001). Students made several comments on the relationship between the words and images in comic books that confirm the claims made about the interdependence of the phonetic and image elements in comics:

Images help back up the text and give you a better explanation of what's going on or what the text is supposed to say or what the text is really supposed to mean to you. They kind of go hand in hand. You can't just have the pictures. You could, but if you just had the pictures you would be left up to your own about what's really going on. And you also couldn't just have the text by itself because it's so vague you need more to back it up. They both go hand in hand and need to be together so you fully understand the comic, because without one you don't even understand what's going on. – Brooke, student (Case 1, interview)

The pictures and words tell the story together. If you simply read the words and did not look at the pictures (or vise-a-versa) you may be able to understand the story but not at the same level as reading and understanding both. – Graphicnovelreader, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

I have read several graphic novels for class and I found that the images helped me to understand the text by showing actions, rather than explaining them. The text and images work well in tandem for comprehension. – Scott Petersen, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

In the above comment, Scott Petersen is making a distinction between being able to literally view the actions of the narrative and having to completely imagine them in his head. It might be assumed that the text showing the images for the reader interferes with the reader's comprehension because the reader is not cognitively visualizing the text; however, research on the use of visuals suggest that they may actually augment and strengthen a reader's comprehension and even his or her imaginative capacities if the images are used for a purpose beyond that of decoration (Carney and Levin, 2002; Levin & Mayer, 1993; Peeck, 1993). Furthermore, according to McCloud (1993), we as the readers utilize our imaginations to fill in the action between the panels, therefore bringing "closure" to the sequences in comic books (see figure 6 below).



Figure 6: Reader murdering the character

Examples of this closure can also be found in the first structured think-aloud activity with

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns (see appendix C):

I think I was just imagining what might happen at that time, like what the robber was going to do and what the guy and what they were saying, that kind of thing. Because there are no captions in this. – Michael Scott, student (Case 1)

It's interesting how the visual art affects the storyline. It's almost like, I got into it at one point and I swear it was almost like watching a movie. I guess the mixture of the text and the visual. Well, that's what you have in a movie – Thor Plath, student (Case 1)

I just kind of played it out like it would be a movie in my head, sort of. – Tyron Biggums, student (Case 1)

It is interesting to note that for these students, and several others in both Case 1 and 2, closure took the form of a mental movie. Will Eisner (1985/2008) argues that comic panels do not correspond to cinematic frames, but they do tend to create a cinematic effect because of their sequential nature, therefore offering insight into why the above students imagined the comic as a movie. It is important to note that these mental movies are the students' enactment of visualization or imagination.

Kintsch and Kintsch (2005) argue that the goal of reading instruction is often to learn from a text by constructing a situational model, i.e. a mental model of situations in a text, to be used at a later time in the text or beyond it. Cognitive psychological research concludes that “pictures are remembered far better, and far longer, than their verbal counterparts”; furthermore, “when pictures are incorporated into text material, memory for that material can be substantially improved” (Levin & Mayer, 1993, p. 96). This

discussion of imagination will be continued in chapter 7 in conjunction with meaning making.

Graphic novels are an excellent medium for strengthening the visual literacy abilities of students while also reinforcing traditional literacy. Because these texts require both traditional and visual literacy abilities nearly simultaneously, what I term hybrid literacy, comic books and graphic novels may be more relevant and critical to understanding and interpreting texts such as electronic texts or Web based texts. Ms. Veronica, Case 2 teacher, came to this conclusion after her first year of teaching The Graphic Novel course:

Ironically, after having taught the graphic novels course the first year with a purely “literary” approach, I learned that the very nature of the comics medium, the technicalities of its form and how it shapes content, is its value in terms of teaching important literacy skills to 21st century students. Not only could I meet the curriculum standards for teaching students traditional literacy, I was able to use the comic’s medium to teach students 21st century skills.

21st Century Literacies

Peter Gutiérrez (2008) defines 21st century literacies as the ability to analyze and synthesize multiple modes of simultaneous information. These multiple modes of information are often drawn from electronic sources, specifically the web but not exclusively. Following this definition, hybrid literacy is actually 21st century literacies when transferred to electronic texts. It is this transferability that makes the nearly century-old medium of comic books incredibly relevant to digital media because these texts require readers to get information from simultaneous sources of information: the art in each panel, the sequencing of the panels, the spaces between the panels, which

McCloud (1993) calls gutters, the printed text in speech balloons that are the dialogue of the narrative, the captions which often serve as exposition or as character's thoughts, and the art that represents sound effects such as "WAM!" (Carrier, 2000). Leroy Jenkins, Case 1 student, demonstrates the value graphic novels have for 21st century literacies in his discussion of reading on the Web during his second interview:

I do a lot of reading on message boards, forums, and different websites of stuff I'm interested in. And I read some, like Kentucky basketball is the big thing, so I do a little reading on news outlets online for that...Reading any magazine or reading any website, even watching TV—I mean, if you're watching the news, they've always got a picture next to the guy accompanying the story they're talking about and stuff like that. I mean, I actually think graphic novels are much better for understanding like the media literary stuff. That's just my opinion, I guess. A lot of the literary elements that are in these long novels are not going to be in these stories that are about getting the point across. And the pictures that accompany the stories, I think, the skills that are gained from graphic novels definitely assist in understanding why they're there and helping to interpret them in general.

Peter Gutiérrez's (2008) idea that the techniques used to navigate comics are transferable to reading on the Web is echoed in the web design community by Andy Clark (2007), a well-respected web designer, who argues that graphic novels are very similar to principles of text and image synergy (Luce-Kapler, 2007; Sipe, 1998) that are used to develop webpages. Furthermore, research has begun to link the ability to read, understand, and critically interpret these texts, particularly the graphic novel, to the ability to read, understand, and critically interpret Web-based media (Dressman et al., 2006). The following interview excerpts come from the second structured think-aloud done by Case 1 students during the second round of data collection. They were asked to

compare and contrast a screen shot of CNN.com and a page from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (see appendix F).

I can see kind of the same idea [connection between reading graphic novels and the Web] with like the different pictures—how it's kind of veered off, like with this, you have each different article, that sort of thing...so that helps you move from one thing to another like this. [I ask – is it kind of like paneling?] Paneling, yeah. I kind of start at the top and work my way down, left or right and everything, and you go from a successive panel, building on what you see in the last one, and with this, you kind of go from the panel of the oil well and then to 'Future Rocket Scientists' and then there's an ad about a phone or something here. So, I mean, you kind of...go side to side. - Michael Scott, student (Case 1)

The fact that the images are bigger than everything else just like these, made me—like they drew my attention to them first before I actually read the words surrounded by them. For example, I see this person, but like if they catch my attention, they look like some superhero, not superhero, but some rocket person way back in the day, just trying to fit in like that. I've never seen it, so just based on that, I would be like—my curiosity would be spiked to read, because I don't understand it. But these pictures I understand, so I'm probably not going to read. – Thomas Hinkey, student (Case 1)

The CNN piece also uses like some of the same bold colors as *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, like they use a lot of the same colors—but it seems like they mainly rely on text more than the picture. They're kind of organized the same, like boxed and not real messy and it's kind of—the pictures are laid out in an organized way. It's not just like thrown together. With all text, it's less like interesting, and you actually have to read the titles and stuff, and you can't just like look at the picture and be like, 'Oh, this is going to be about an oil spill. That's something I really want to know about.' And then click on it, and you've got to like read the title and read into the text before you actually figure out what it's going to be about. – Brooke, student (Case 1)

The printed word in my opinion, like—it fits with the picture, but at the same time, but it's kind of like a separate thing, really. Like in the CNN site, it seems like the pictures are used to just catch your attention so you'll read it. Like that's kind of...the picture's more of an influence on this, and to me...It just seems like the text is more important in this. Because if you want to understand what the picture's about, you have to read it. Because the picture's not exactly what the story's about. – Thomas Hinkey, student (Case 1)

However, Thomas Hinkey continues...

Our homepage at home is like MSNBC or whatever. So like every time I open the computer there's always a big picture or two, and I'll actually probably read the headlines underneath—just because the pictures strike my curiosity. I know if I open a webpage and I just saw a bunch of words, I'd just go on to what I was going to do to begin with. Like I wouldn't even stop.

Interestingly, when Mr. Ryan did the structured think aloud with the CNN webpage he noted:

I think when I look at a website; I'm probably looking at words first because I want to know what I'm getting ready to read about. I mean, when I read a newspaper I don't look at the pictures first, I look at the headlines first, and I read webpages like I read newspapers.

I speculate that the difference of looking at the text first could denote a generational difference in how older people versus younger people read informational sources, a possibility Mr. Ryan alludes to when he states:

I think that the website looks like kind of a supped-up version of a newspaper. Bigger pictures. Mostly bigger pictures, smaller amounts of text, and then when you want

more text, you click on a particular article and go to it. Students are melding together pictures and words and what they see on the internet, that's what they see. They're used to dealing in images more, probably more than we [he and I] are to a certain extent.

Several of the student participants mentioned during the interviews and structured think-aloud activity that the images on the CNN.com site seemed to be only useful in getting a person's attention. Carney and Levin (2002) would label such a use of images as "decorative," which they find has little to no benefit to the learner (p. 8). However, the students' conclusion that the pictures were merely decorative is not completely accurate. Generally the images, for example the offshore oil rig used in the CNN.com excerpt, are what Carney and Levin (2002) term "representational" because they depict or overlap part or all of the text to make the text more concrete. They further argue that representational pictures have been found to aid in recall of the text. In the case of the oil rig, all of the students instantly associated what was a stock photo of an oil rig with the 2010 BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico. No one mentioned wanting to read the article, but every student alluded to knowing something about the situation. CNN.com's use of the oil rig photo demonstrates the power of images to represent a concept (Hall, 1997). Thor Plath's, Case 1 student, comment during his second interview about CNN.com exemplified this power:

CNN.com, if nothing else, [the images] kind of make a statement. I mean, you know, it gives me a general idea about what this article is about before I even read it. If I'm just glancing over it, seeing that image—it just draws me to it, or just because the image gives me a general idea of what it may mean; so, as I'm glancing over at it, it may be something I'm interested in. Maybe something I want to read. – Thor Plath, student (Case 1)

Interestingly, one of the images, the boy in the space helmet, was not concrete or representational, and it was this image that seemed to capture the students' attention and hold it more so than the other images. Several students discussed wanting to read the article because of the picture of the boy.

In keeping with the students' assertion that the images were used only to get a person's attention, the students also noted that the words were the most important part of the webpage, as opposed to the comic book excerpt where the images conveyed most of the meaning. Michael Scott's, Case 1 student, comment during his second interview exemplified this point:

CNN.com's primary mode of communication, I think it's the headlines. They're always putting some of them bold or big letters to kind of jump out at you to get you to read.

However, when the students in Case 1 were asked if they would read the webpage if it were just text on the screen they unanimously said they would not. Therefore, despite the fact that the images are secondary to the text on a webpage, it seems apparent that for involvement they are primary. It is important to note that the phonetic text on a webpage is treated as an image, what Kress (2003) calls a graphic block, by the web designer for layout purposes. This also parallels how artists of a comic book or graphic novel treat the printed word in order for their drawings to accommodate the printed text that can take the form of speech and thought balloons, captions, and sound effects (Carrier, 2000). In comic books and graphic novels, there is no either-or dichotomy between text and images

because words can take on properties of images and images can take on properties of words (Varnum & Gibbons, 2001).

Snow and Sweet (2003) argue that electronic texts pose a particular challenge to reading comprehension because they are typically non-linear, i.e. textual elements do not follow the traditional prose construction where words lead to sentences then to paragraphs that then constitute a narrative. Luce-Kapler (2007) also discusses this issue in her research on digital literacy practices, stating that it is one of the challenges that literacy educators will face. Therefore, ELA teachers need to consider how comprehension of these texts both differs and is similar to traditional linear texts.

Comic books and graphic novels may aid in the comprehension of electronic texts because parallels exist between a webpage and a comic book at both the design level and the communicative level (Clarke, 2007; P. Gutiérrez, 2008; Kress, 2003). Luce-Kapler (2007) argues that considering these factors, standards-based education relying heavily on agreed-upon traditional texts appears terribly narrow and limiting and ultimately inapplicable to developing skills students need for navigating technology-rich and media-saturated environments. Ms. Veronica's statement in her questionnaire sums up the connections between the two media, comic books and the Web, and the importance of hybrid literacy development for students:

The static nature of the medium allows for more reader control and manipulation akin to Web reading. Readers can control the pace of reading, viewing, re-reading, and pausing while reading comics, similar to the ways one clicks and browses online. With the rise of technologies like the iPad, reading will most likely transform to include more visual symbols embedded within traditional print text providing a sense of depth utilized at readers' discretion. Such technology enables readers to be more involved with

the rate and form of information they choose to access. As teachers, we cannot ignore the effects of students' exposure to new technology and media. It is our responsibility to thoroughly assess the way our students learn, communicate, and understand what they see or read.

It is very evident that the ELA classroom has the potential to help students develop and refine more than just their traditional literacy skills when the conception of literacy is expanded to include other modes, particularly visual and hybrid literacies. Once the conception of literacy is expanded to include other modes, then the ELA classroom can become a space for interesting and rich discussions about the meanings of these texts.

CHAPTER 7: MEANING MAKING IN THE ELA CLASSROOM

Snow and Sweet (2003) define reading comprehension as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning” from texts (p. 1). They further argue that for this process to be meaningful beyond that of just superficially understanding the text, the reader must connect the text to his or her sociocultural contexts. Kintsch and Kintsch (2005) argue that when readers are able to make these connections, then their understanding is deepened beyond the text in meaningful ways, and students move from rote understanding to inference making, i.e. meaning making. Ultimately, the interaction of reader and text determines whether reading comprehension remains at the superficial level or moves beyond that to become meaningful (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; Snow & Sweet, 2003). Unfortunately, for some students in this study, reading comprehension remained suspended at the superficial level for nearly the entirety of their schooling career. The following comment exemplifies this issue:

It seems like my previous teachers focused solely on reading comprehension. I mean, quite frankly, or at least I would hope—most of the students know how to read by now. I personally think as far as trying to dive deep and pick up like the elements and the emotions and stuff that they’re trying to show, I think, quite frankly—I personally think that should be started on a lot earlier. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1, interview)

Meaning making can take two distinct forms in the literacy classroom. A student can read a text by decoding the words through assigning denotative meanings to them, which then string together to produce an intended, or dominant, decoding of the text,

which typically reflects what the student thinks the teacher wants to hear (Hall, 1980). Pedagogically, this form of meaning making or interpreting is focused on the formal elements of the text; therefore, meanings can be found in the text. This mode is reliant on external input from an authority, in this case a teacher; to not only teach these meanings but to ensure that the readers' interpretations match the text. This type of meaning making, it is argued, negates the experiences and prior knowledge that some students bring from outside the classroom because the pedagogical approach tends to emphasize the dominant cultural codes of our society, which may not coincide with students who do not conform to those codes (Compton-Lilly, 2006; Gee, 1996). Furthermore, this method of meaning making is focused on literacy as application of specific skills used to decode meanings that are imbedded or already present within the text. This method was also occasionally present during observations and interviews in the Case 1 classroom where the teacher and the students would defer to the text. Leroy Jenkins, Case 1 student, commented during an interview about his past experiences with making meanings from texts:

I kind of develop my own, at least subconsciously, my own ideas and stuff, but I do find myself trying to think, "What's the author trying to show in the image?"

However, despite the occasional appearance of a formalized approach in Mr. Ryan's class, Leroy Jenkins explains:

I don't really think as much what Mr. Ryan wants us to look for, because I don't know if it's that I always assume he must have the same view as the author or not, but I really do not find myself doing that quite as much. Last year I had a teacher who I was trying to think, "What does she want me to say? What does she want me to...?" With

Mr. Ryan, he's definitely—I mean, we're reading graphic novels, so he definitely is a lot more open minded than past teachers I've had. So, I don't feel quite as obligated to try to agree with him because I know if you disagree with him, it's not a big deal.

Nevertheless, when meaning making is reliant on an external authority, it produces passive readers, as Ms. Veronica, Case 2 teacher, experienced, that do not engage in the text in any meaningful way other than to find answers. In this mode of reading, which Grumet (1985) terms *sliding*, students accept, not actually make, meaning from a text. Fortunately, it is possible to change sliding to involvement with the texts when teachers not only welcome but also help create spaces in the curriculum and their pedagogical approach for the texts to be resymbolized, i.e. discussed in a way that incorporates and validates students' experiences and understandings (Bleich, 1978; Grumet, 1985; Iser, 1978). This alternative approach to meaning making recognizes that texts are not decontextualized objects to be deciphered, but are subjective, encoded, symbolic systems that are understood and interpreted within specific sociocultural contexts (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Hall, 1980; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Snow & Sweet, 2003; Street, 2006). In this mode, typically identified as Reader Response Theory, meaning making is a convergence of the text, the reader, and the sociocultural context in which it is occurring (Lynn, 1998; Rosenblatt, 1995). From a pedagogical perspective, this mode is reliant on a dialogic approach to teaching where this convergence produces tension and communication between the text, readers, and teacher that result in shared meanings of the texts. Reader Response Theory was also present in

the Case 1 classroom; however, Ms. Veronica, Case 2 teacher, stated that it was the primary mode in her classroom.

A reader is ultimately influenced by his or her own experiences and prior knowledge when interpreting a text; therefore, different readers may find different meanings in the same text, which texts seem to encourage, but oftentimes teachers seem to discourage (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Iser, 1978). The following comments exemplify this point:

Well, with this one, Superman, he comes from kind of a small town-background—well, I live on a farm, so I kind of know what maybe he kind of went through and kind of what he relates to in that. This isn't really a big town or anything, so everybody knows everybody like in "Superman." – Michael Scott, student (Case 1, interview)

Superman for all Seasons starts off with Superman in high school, so that's obviously something that's easy to relate to. I mean, obviously teenagers do not have to face problems like having superpowers or anything like that. But, I mean, just the idea of entering adulthood and trying to adapt...I mean, the little part about entering adulthood in the opening, and even the entire book of *Superman for All Seasons*. I mean, it's kind of similar to like entering adulthood ideas in books like *Catcher in the Rye*, or I guess to an extent, *To Kill a Mockingbird* maybe. I mean those are the kind of ideas and was easy for me personally to relate to. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1, interview)

Like an image without text, like with these [referencing a sequence in *The Dark Returns*], you can see the emotional face and you can read what their thoughts might be. Me, I kind of put myself in that position. What would I be thinking if something like this happened or if I was this character? What would I be thinking? So like in these pictures, the young Bruce Wayne, you can see the fear in his eyes and I just kind of imagined how really shocked I would be. I'd be fairly scared too, but just really the shock

of it, I think that's how I read some of these pictures. –
Michael Scott, student (Case 1, interview)

Abed, Case 2 student summed up the point made herein when he wrote:

A reader's understanding of anything is influenced by his
or her personal experience, whether the thing he or she is
“reading” be an image, a traditional novel, or a film.

Many commonalities exist between making meaning from phonetic texts and texts that contain images (Kress, 2003; Iser, 1978; Peeck, 1993), and these commonalities allow for the development of hybrid literacy skills. An important commonality that tends to get overlooked because phonetic texts have become decontextualized from the objects they represent is that words are images (Arnheim, 1969; Hall, 1980). Ms. Veronica, case 2 teacher, acknowledged this fact when she wrote:

Readers of images evaluate the various lines, space, artistic style, or sequence of images within an image etc...to understand and conclude about what all of these elements mean. We do the same thing when we look at words—letters are lines and space and we decipher these and what sounds and meanings (through combinations) they represent.

Kress (2003) argues that when literacy is conceived of as more than just language, there is a theoretical shift from linguistics to semiotics. Both written text and images are sign systems that effect interpretation, and as we read media that incorporate both, we must shift between these sign systems to make meaning. Meanings are realized in this shifting between these sign systems. This process, which Sipe (1998) calls “transmediation,” is a complex process of meaning making that requires imagination (p. 97). Comics are a unique kind of language or system of signification (Magnussen &

Christiansen, 2000; Varnum & Gibbons, 2001). In graphic novels, a sign or a symbolic message is both narrative and visual (Varnum & Gibbons, 2001). Deriving meaning from such hybrid texts as graphic novels is a complicated process that relies on being able to decode both language and images (Carrier, 2000). Graphic novel readers simultaneously utilize analysis and synthesis to decode the words and the illustrations (Leckbee, 2005), which includes many different kinds of verbal information through visual imagery such as onomatopoeia, thoughts, and dialogue (Carrier, 2000), as well as complicated representations of facial expressions, body language, and body positioning, which are already difficult to decode in real life, in addition to the symbolic encoding of certain images (Buhle, 2003). All of this decoding is accomplished while also having to create the events between the panels (McCloud, 1993). This complex negotiation of text and images allows for a flexibility and multiplicity of meanings (McAllister et al., 2001).

Furthermore, Kress (2003) argues that when words appear in conjunction with images, the words supply only part of the meaning of the text, unlike in traditional literature, and the part it supplies is not necessarily an equal one. Sipe (1998) argues that, “The text-picture relationship is not so much a matter of balance of power as it is the way in which the text and pictures transact with each other, and transform each other” (p. 98). Will Eisner (1985/2008) contends that the image takes primacy over the word because it is the image that modifies and defines the meanings of the words. Brooke’s, Case 1 student, comments during an interview exemplified these points:

If this comic did not have the pictures, I would visualize everything totally different. Like I wouldn’t see it the same way because I would see it from my perspective and not from the author’s perspective. But with the comic because it does give you the pictures, so I realize what the author

meant for the pictures, or what the author meant for the text to reveal and show. You have a little bit of interpretation but you don't have as much interpretation as if you read just a novel, because the novel gives you nothing except a detailed description and with the graphic novel you can actually, you know, look at the picture and interpret it in your own way and think a little bit differently because a lot of people think outside the box since the graphic novel will just give you a small picture, they can think about what's going on a little bit further on in the picture because they don't show you the full image. They'll just show you like a little snippet it seems like.

However, Brooke's comments also alluded to an issue that was present during several interviews: these texts being easier to understand.

This issue of the ease of popular culture texts should give pause because if these texts are easy for the advanced students, then they may not be providing the challenge that these students need to excel. Furthermore, these texts' apparent easiness could promote a superficial engagement with these texts, therefore perpetuating the superficial and passive readings many of these students have already grown accustomed to with traditional texts. Mr. Ryan, Case 1 teacher, discussed this issue during his second interview from the perspective that the assumptions students make about the easiness of the text can impede their deeper understanding of it.

That's also the way kids will read something. They'll like just take it at very quick face value and whatever hits them first. They won't think about the context.

Mr. Ryan's statements above are supported by Peeck (1993) who argues that a picture's meaning can seemingly be grasped very quickly; however, this quick understanding may

actually be an “illusion of full understanding,” therefore leaving the reader without a full comprehension of the text (p. 228).

Mr. Ryan is cognizant of the potential for the students to engage texts, whether traditional or not, at a superficial level. When I observed his classes, Mr. Ryan continuously taught and reinforced the concept of “close reading” with each text they were studying, as well as creating meaningful questions. Additionally, he had exercises to allow for practice and reinforcement of these concepts. For close reading, he had students annotate their texts with Post-it notes, and for constructing questions he used a 1–3 leveled system. Level 1 questions are knowledge questions or questions where the answers are readily available and usually apparent in the text, making them difficult to refute and consequently not creating discussion. Level 2 questions are textually implicit questions where the answers are found by “reading between the lines”—or images in this case. Answers to these questions may be varied because students may or may not understand or read things the same way, which may create space for discussion. Finally, level 3 questions go beyond the text. With these questions there are no answers readily available. Instead, these questions are meant to provoke discussion, not be definitively answered.

The issue of easiness notwithstanding, Brooke, Case 1 student, acknowledged during an interview that in a graphic novel the images are incomplete, allowing for the reader to imagine outside the box or panel. It is interesting to note that even though several students stated that having the images made the text easier to understand, they also thought that the images were more open to interpretations. I argue that this seeming contradiction occurred because the students understood comprehension to be of the

variety that they have always had to do in their ELA classes, i.e. understand the surface meanings of the text, and that they also recognized that the images had deeper meanings as well. Brooke described what Varnum and Gibbons (2001) call disjunctions in the images, and they argue that these disjunctions affect the meanings made by the reader because they require the reader to draw upon prior knowledge, experiences, and sociocultural contexts as he or she attempts to fully apprehend the totality of the image. What is available to the reader in the images becomes integrated with his or her prior knowledge, and the prior knowledge is then rearranged and produces a transformation of his or her knowledge, leading to new meanings. This process also coincides with meaning making in phonetic texts (Iser, 1978). As a reader engages with a text, there is often a lack of fit between him or her and the text, partly due to the intentionality on the author's part and also partly due to the fact that the piece was written over an extended period of time, which leads to inconsistencies in the texts. Iser (1978) termed these inconsistencies "blanks" or gaps. These gaps can be attributed to the connotations that are encoded into the text and allow for a variety of connotations to be decoded as well. As a reader works through the texts, these blanks are filled in with mental images that help connect aspects of the texts together. These mental images are a result of visualization, which is critical to reading comprehension (Snow & Sweet, 2003). Iser (1978) argues that the mental images we produce as we read are a peculiar hybrid: at one moment imagistic and at another linguistic. These images form a sequence that constantly reveals contradictions due to inconsistencies generated as the reader proceeds through the text. These contradictions are created because these mental images are only representations or signs of the referent. Iser (1978) formulates this process as a

dialectical relationship between the 1st degree image, i.e. the original image based on socio-cultural norms or the symbolization, and the 2nd degree images, which are the result of the reader's symbolization of the original understandings being challenged and therefore resymbolized (Grumet, 1985). Iser (1978) contends that this tension produces a change to the initial response and opens the text up to multiple meanings. The meanings that are derived from the text, just like the images, are either completely or partially rejected or assimilated as a reader continues to read. The ones that persist are then integrated with the reader's prior knowledge and experiences (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005).

A similar method of comprehension exists when reading comic books because the panels in a comic book are sequential and therefore take on characteristics of language (Will Eisner, 1985/2008). Neal Cohn (2007) has taken this idea further, arguing that structured sequential images primarily found in our culture in comics are a visual language. Arnheim (1969) and Will Eisner (1985/2008) note that the cognitive processes involved in viewing a word and an image are analogous, and Cohn's (2007) theory of visual language provides validity to Will Eisner's (1985/2008) claim when he demonstrates the viewing of words in sequence, i.e. sentences. For Will Eisner, the rendering of the elements of a comic, i.e. the panels, figures, etc., the arrangement of the images, and the images association with other images in sequence constitutes the "grammar" of the comic narrative (p. 40), which connects to Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996, as cited in Callow 2003) concept of visual grammar. In comics, the panels are separated by spaces called "gutters," which are analogous to Iser's (1978) blanks because they require the reader to fill in the missing images in order to progress the narrative. Furthermore, these gutters can be an active part of the image when they are used to

produce negative spaces or to control the pacing of the text (Carrier, 2000). The idea of gutters controlling pacing is exemplified in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (see Appendix C). Furthermore, McCloud (1993) argues that even if the two images seem completely unrelated, it is inevitable that a connection will be conceived so as to move the narrative along (see figure 6 above). This process is analogous to people reading words, which are symbols or signs, because they decode the messages in them individually and in combination with each other while also creating, affirming, and rejecting their own interpretations along the way (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Iser, 1978). Ms. Veronica, Case 2 teacher, further speaks to this process of meaning making, when she wrote:

Part of interpreting images has to do with one's prior associations with other images seen and experiences in general as that comes to bear on the meaning of what one sees. Like print text, sometimes readers have to review the image many times to understand the context and meaning of lines and space, also color, shading, etc.

This example from the first structured think aloud activity using *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* demonstrates this process (see appendix C):

I'm reading the captions and looking at the pictures, not simultaneously, but sort of simultaneously—like as I read the caption, I'm also looking at the picture and watching the emotion on the characters and then when it goes to just pictures, I mean, I'm just looking at them and saying, "This is the retelling of Batman in slow motion." And then I'm watching—like looking at the artwork and seeing how it goes along with what's being said. — Mr. Ryan, teacher (Case 1)

Interestingly, while Mr. Ryan is an experienced comic book reader, Thomas Hinkey, one of his students, who read his first comic book in this class, was also able to articulate this process during the structured think-aloud portion of the first interview:

They're working together but they're different. For example, when it comes to this, he's having the flashback; he's trying to hold it back. He's got that tense look he's trying to hold it back really hard, and then the TV. That the TV's picking on him. "The children were last seen with two young men," so that's not a good thing. So, they're bad. But they're working together because he's having this bad flashback and this television that's spitting out bad things is not helping at all. So they're working together but they're two completely different things.

McCloud (1993) calls this continual process of connecting separate images as we read comics "closure" (p. 63). This closure not only applies to the spaces between panels, or gutters, but also to the images in the panels and the narrative as a whole. Will Eisner (1985/2008) claims that filling in the gutters is an example of the enactment of imagination. Being able to delve further into the images is also an enactment of imagination (Kress, 2003). For example, Michael Scott, Case 1 student, alludes to the idea of completing an image when he states during his first interview:

I imagine further into the picture, like what's on the sides of the picture, what's around this picture. So if you were standing in Matt Murdoch's shoes right now, what else would you see around you, and kind of what the environment would be like. Expand on the illustrations and kind of let your imagination go with it, so you can kind of create this space yourself as like in a regular novel. You'd create this space but you'd also go further with it just with the aid of the illustration.

In the above example, Michael was able to take the image provided and using his imaginative capacities, visualize further into the image to mentally expand it.

Visualization and Imagination

The argument for moving away from images during the formative literacy development years of elementary school is that print helps abstract the concepts within the text and allows the child to rely less on perception, or his/her initial sensory understanding, and more on his or her imagination (Arnheim, 1969; Sipe, 1998). This transition, however, can create problems for students when their prior knowledge and experiences do not provide a basis with which to visualize these abstracted concepts in phonetic texts (Snow & Sweet, 2003). For example, Elliot Eisner (1978) found that reading teachers, particularly in later grades, assume that their students understand concepts such as space, direction, dimension, time, and sequence, when in actuality they often lack the ability to visualize such abstract concepts, particularly if the students lack perceptual knowledge in the form of prior knowledge and experiences of such events. This problem can result in a reader missing information or misunderstanding something described. The result is that the reader's mental images, i.e. visualizations, are either partially or completely incorrect, causing cognitive dissonance between the reader and the text (Arnheim, 1969; Iser, 1978). Peeck (1993) argues that a similar result can occur when viewers of images also lack prior knowledge and experiences. While this study is focused on advanced readers, it is pertinent to note that Peeck argues that this issue can have a negative impact on struggling readers also. Peeck argues that in either scenario, excellent reader or struggling reader, the images must have a purpose and that instruction must be specific and purposeful as well. Thor Plath, Case 1 student, discussed during his

first interview a particular situation that arose when he was reading a novel and missed some details that ultimately effected his conception of the main character:

People may argue that you should have your own idea of what something looks like. However, for example, I read the *Twilight* novels and I read all four books, and through all four books I pictured, because I guess I missed a detail, I pictured Bella as someone completely different as who she was. I pictured her as blonde and much more of a damsel in distress than what she really was, just because of the way I had pictured her early in the book and kept that image all the way through the novels. However, I haven't really seemed to have that problem ever reading a comic. If I pick up a comic and read it and then read anything else about it or a movie about it or anything, then it's more, I had it right. I didn't really make any mistakes.

Peeck's (1993) and Carney and Levin's (2002) findings that pictures can aid in understanding of a phonetic text also hold when that text is a hybrid text where each element, phonetic and visual, must be apprehended nearly simultaneously to completely comprehend and make meaning from the text (Carrier, 2000; McCloud, 1993; Thompson, 2007; Will Eisner, 1985/2008). Thompson (2007) posits that in comic books and graphic novels, the images in the text model visualization by way of working interdependently with the text to offer symbolic examples of what mental images should resemble when reading a phonetic work.

Kress (2003) notes that when we encounter an image, it consists of several elements, such as lines, colors, contrasts, layouts, contradictions, iconic imagery, symbolism, and the like. As a viewer, we must not only perceive the elements used in the work, we must also organize these images cognitively to make meaning from them (Arnheim, 1969). Therefore, Kress (2003) argues that images are reliant on a variation of

imagination that organizes images that are weakly structured cognitively in an effort to make new meanings out of them.

Furthermore, Kress (2003) argues that imagination is also utilized to determine the reading path a person will take with an image-based text, i.e. to establish the relations between elements in the representation.

With color—you have to look at contrast. Like for example, if something's glow in the dark and something's more lit up, like more of a lighter color, even if it's not in the center—your eyes are drawn more directly to that, and that's kind of what a lot of times the author [artist being called author] of the picture wants you to look at. In my opinion anyway. And at the same time, though, contrast with the darkness, you have to look at like if somebody's standing in the frame, and they're off in the distance, but they're like white, and most of the surroundings are gray or black, you're going to notice the white figure first. And you're going to try to understand why they're there, and why they're significant, and maybe you'll see it will come up later. But like if the surroundings are black, but you just notice that person off in the distance first. – Thomas Hinkey, student (Case 1, interview)

As Thomas Hinkey noted, the reading paths in images are encouraged by the artist's choice of color, shading, size, placement, or shape of the images, or any combination thereof, and based on these design choices, people's gazes go to particular points in the image first—often the biggest, the most central, or the most vivid (Kress, 2003). The readers' eyes then move around the image correspondingly. The following comments provide further examples of the role elements of the visual play in creating reading paths:

I start from the edges of the picture, and work my way to the center taking note of everything, the color the shading the darkness, and the design. Everything holds a meaning I have learned that even the edges of lines can interpret

different meanings. – Admiral Akbar, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

The first thing to do, of course, is to examine everything happening in the image, and to make sure I know what it's saying on the most basic level. (Batman is punching The Joker, Scott is watching as Ramona leaves, etc.) Then, I ask "why." "Why would the artist choose to arrange the image in such a way?" "Why is there so much empty space in this panel?" "Why does he show Evey's face and not Finch's [reference to *V for Vendetta*]?" "Why is this character drawn in a different style from the background?" If I can try to answer these questions, the deeper meaning of the image may begin to reveal itself. – Abed, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

I think about the associations that come to mind, I also read it in context of its placement next to other images or text etc... I evaluate the associations prompted by color or lack thereof. I also consider style which I associate with the range of styles with which I am already familiar. Basically, I use metaphor to understand parts of images, the image itself, especially ones unfamiliar. – Ms. Veronica, teacher (Case 2, questionnaire)

These comments demonstrate that when a person is interpreting an image, he or she is often simultaneously processing the various aspects of it. Kress (2003) posits that this simultaneity is not possible with text because the conventions of grammar and structure, i.e. words to sentences to paragraphs, etc. prescribe linearity to the text. However, Barthes (1985) would disagree with this assertion because what he terms the "symbolic field" of a text introduces "elements of intemporality, substitution, and reversibility" (p. 75). Nevertheless, the very fact that the phonetic text is bound, to a degree, by rules of grammar, as well as the reality that words first have denotations and secondarily

connotations, which are less agreed upon, does problematize the ability of the reader to move backwards and around the text without creating cognitive dissonance.

Interestingly, in the case of hybrid texts, both visual and phonetic elements are present simultaneously, creating a dynamic where the phonetic elements compel and encourage the reader to move forward through the text, while at the same time the visual elements require the reader to stop and contemplate (McCloud, 1993). Nevertheless, the students in the study believed that at a fundamental level there was no distinction in the role imagination plays in making meaning from either a phonetic text or an image based one. These students' comments exemplify this position:

I don't really think that there's a lot of difference in the understanding because with a novel, with the description you're able to use your imagination more so; you're able to imagine the setting, imagine these characters, put yourself in that kind of position and go with the story that a way. And with a graphic novel, you have some kind idea of the setting with the illustration and you can kind of imagine yourself in that matter. Like if you were to watch a movie or something you could go, "Imagine if I were doing this," or "what if I was that character?" That sort of thing. That's how I think of it. – Michael Scott, student (Case 1, interview)

The difference is in the method. In terms of a graphic novel, we use static images, body language, facial expression, iconic imagery and archetypes to visually portray a story. In a novel, stories are spun around words, which are intended not to visually show a picture, but instead to paint a scene within the readers mind. In one case, the image is there for you to analyze and create a story. In the other, the words are there for you to interpret, and in turn you construct your own imagery. – Lessley Murlow, student (Case 2, questionnaire)

Meaning Made

In the end I believe that the Case 1 students' comments during the first structured think-aloud of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (see appendix C) best demonstrate how students come to comprehend and make meanings with hybrid texts. Specifically, these examples make evident the role that their hybrid literacy skills, which for these students are a confluence of their already established traditional literacy skills and their burgeoning visual literacy skills, in conjunction with their imaginative capacities, play in their comprehension and meaning making with this hybrid text. I have divided these examples into the themes that consistently appeared during the think-aloud activity to emphasize the variety and levels of meaning making present during the activity. It is important to note that while each theme is labeled "literary convention" to emphasize that the students are discussing traditional literary concepts learned in their AP English class while reading a hybrid text, this labeling does not imply that these concepts are limited to traditional literature as is evidenced by their execution in this hybrid text primarily through the images.

Literary convention – flashback:

A movie comes on that spurs a flashback. And it doesn't go through the whole description of, "This is what happened," like describing the whole thing. It shows his thoughts, like it comes to mind, "It's just a movie. That's all it is. No harm in watching a movie." And then it says, instantly it goes back into the flashback and starts to show it through the visuals. So I thought it was very interesting how when it goes to the flashback it has no text. It's just simply the visuals. I think it kind of adds to the dreamy feel that you would have going to past memory or something, and it kind of creates that mood a little better. I think it does a better job of describing the scene than if it was to be written out in text, because sometimes they go for

the abstract and the emotions, almost like a poetry style of writing for flashbacks sometimes, and it kind of—like you can see in the illustrations, you can visually see the fear in his eyes in the pictures, rather than having to go through, I call them snapshots in writing, whenever they try to build up an image in your mind, it can just go straight through it. As I mentioned, particularly on this slide you can see the fear in eyes; you don't have to read through something describing it. You can see here he's just frightened beyond reason. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1)

Then he says, “You remember that night.” This indicates to me it might be some sort of a flashback. “You remember that night.” That's all it says in that frame. The next frame is that flashback. Without a lot of these frames in between, I don't think you could take as much from it because there are the limited captions. He says, “You remember that night,” and then it tells the story of that night through the pictures. If they weren't there, I probably wouldn't make that connection between his flashback and that sort of thing. Then it goes to the news, so there would kind of be some confusion for me if those pictures weren't there. So it's just like his flashback. It's really elaborating on the text. Like, “you remember that night,” and it goes into the whole flashback and how he makes the connection between watching *Zorro* on TV and to watching *Zorro* that night his parents got killed. – Michael Scott, student (Case 1)

Literary convention – conflict:

He's watching *Zorro*. A superhero watching another renegade superhero. He's got a lot of emotion going on; wonder what that's about. Okay, so he's having flashbacks from his childhood, I think. From the night his parents were murdered, when they were ambushed, jumped. Really like this picture, how it gets close up to the trigger, how it kind of shows the tension, how he's almost about to pull it. I think that's really cool. Not a lot of variety in the frames. I think that's really interesting compared to like *Daredevil*. A lot of struggle going on. His parents are trying to save him, keep him out of the way. – Michael Scott, student (Case 1)

They're [images and words] kind of working separately toward the end here where he's kind of arguing with himself here, I think. Yet at that the beginning it's just a TV talking and it's hard to analyze what that tells him, except for when he gets mad and he's thinking to himself, "You remember that night." That's really different from the end here where he's arguing with himself. It's effective because the pictures help to tell the story more than the text really, because even when there is text there's not a lot. It's just like the TV talking, then him talking to himself. There's not a lot of text but the pictures kind of show his emotions, like his anger right there. – Tyron Biggums, student (Case 1)

The text was coming from the TV pretty obviously, and it even kind of pointed out where it was coming from too [refers to speech balloons tail]. The text that kept coming from the TV, and that was basically the only text, it seemed to keep feeding to his struggle or his grunts as it was going. As more was said he seemed to struggle even more and more, and it seemed it pretty obvious between the text of the TV saying, "Blah blah blah, this crime, that," and Batman, you know, gotta be Batman. – Thor Plath, student (Case 1)

Literary convention – symbolism:

I think a lot of, it's just pure aesthetics, the color, the shapes, positioning of character, the contrast. The perspective, I think that's a big thing, like how close, how far you are from the main object in the picture, the person. Like with a lot of the frames here, you have close ups on the face and it really shows to the emotion on the face, so I think that you really begin to understand what he's going through because of that visual image. And just the way, I want to aesthetics, the way the colors go together, what kind of mood you can infer from that. Like these, they have limited color. There are just a few colors and it's really dark, so you get that dark idea. – Michael Scott, student (Case 1)

In the end when the bat comes in it's more of like a dark mood because he's angry with himself and angry at the world, so the bat kind of represents that darkness...Color. Usually darker colors symbolize a darker mood. There's not a lot of background image, which shows you they're just trying to focus on the character itself. Like how it's a dark background. – Tyron Biggums, student (Case 1)

The beads continuously get further apart throughout. They get closer up and further apart, so that's interesting. I'm pretty sure there's a connection there with something. If I had to guess, the necklace was on her neck, and as it came closer to breaking off, he got tenser and tenser. I'm pretty sure after it broke, or it didn't necessarily break, it just went to the ground maybe, and shows them together and then it shows them separating and there's only three. If I had to guess I would say that's the father, the son and the mother, who are now completely separate instead of connected like they were back here, because they're dead and he's by himself here in the middle. If I had to guess. But that makes a lot of sense to me. I don't know. It seems very easy to connect and actually makes a lot more sense now that I think about it. Because I probably wouldn't have considered the actual, emotional. They're broken; they're falling apart because everything is getting worse as he's thinking about it. The news has kept getting bad, it keeps getting bad. He's calling someone. He's calling someone, then there's good news, and then the beads kind of come back together. That almost might be his sanity. That's one way to think about it. It could symbolize both, because they are always multiple things, whether the author even wants to include the same meaning there can always be multiple ones depending on the reader's point of view. – Thomas Hinkey, student (Case 1)

Obviously the necklace. You see the scene where it almost cuts down like on the flashback, like the amount of images kind of seems crunched together to where the necklace is being pulled off of her, and I guess it's supposed to be showing like fall to the ground in those images reoccur later in his mind. So the necklace may be an important symbol in the book later on, I don't know, but it's obviously an important symbol in his mind. This is a pearl

necklace. Maybe it's supposed to represent the pure, the goodness of his mother, because this happened when he was a child, maybe this pureness being broken and literally taken away from him. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1)

Literary convention – Rebirth & Heroism:

It seems like maybe he thinks he needs to be Batman again, like the time has come, he needs to go back to doing what he used to do, because this town or city or whatever needs him, because there's all these bad things going on. Because where he says, "You cannot escape me" or whatever, maybe he's talking about his Batman-self. The pictures were very descriptive. – Brooke, student (Case 1)

In this flashback, in one picture that's describing the flashback you see a bat flying. I'm assuming this is the flashback where his parents died. And you see the bat's shadow across the moon in the sky, and I guess that's supposed to be symbolizing that this is what gave birth to the Batman, like this scenario. And then when it comes back here, the bat comes back—obviously not the same bat—but just the symbol of the bat comes back, crashing through Bruce's window. I guess crashing back into his life, like it's time again to be Batman. I thought it was interesting, that symbol, going through the flashbacks, like when I first saw the picture of the bat's shadow on the moon I didn't think anything of it. I'm like, "It's Batman. They're just some spooky looking picture." And you go two pages over and you see almost the same picture in this one, but you see the bat's coming back to his life. And I guess it does show how important the visuals can be in a comic. Because you've got to pay attention to every detail. It kind of shows that the visuals play a relatively large role in the storytelling, and I guess especially in the symbolism. – Leroy Jenkins, student (Case 1)

I like the way the bat just busts through the window. I guess that symbolizes the change he's going through at the time, at this moment, where Batman just floods back into him, the idea, and the role. It just kind of crashes back into

him and they kind of merge again. – Michael Scott, student
(Case 1)

It is important to also note that during this time the students were primed to look for symbolism. They had learned to recognize symbolic imagery in *Daredevil: Born Again* through teacher led discussions and modeling with the text during their class and were then able to transfer and expand upon this knowledge with the *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* excerpt. As the researcher and as an ELA educator, it was fascinating to witness how the students were able to seamlessly integrate information from the phonetic and the visuals elements to comprehend and make meaning from this text.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUDING REMARKS

The primary purpose of this phenomenological case study was to gain insight into the phenomenon of using hybrid texts, specifically graphic novels, in the advanced ELA classroom. Two distinct cases composed this study: a 12th grade AP English class in rural Kentucky and a 12th grade English elective class called *The Graphic Novel* in a Massachusetts suburb. Literature, observations, interviews, questionnaires, and structured think-aloud activities were compared and contrasted for purposes of better understanding this phenomenon, as well as to provide triangulation and to lend credibility and validity to the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Using the research questions as the foundation for the study, an examination and analysis of pedagogy, curriculum, and historical influences were studied to determine how these factors informed, affected, and shaped the phenomenon of hybrid text use in the advanced ELA classroom, as well as to understand the effects of visual literacy instruction on how students learn to make meanings with these texts in comparison to traditional phonetic texts. Overall I believe this study was successful at helping further understanding of these texts and the phenomenon of using them in the advanced ELA classroom. The study also expands on the broader literature on the subject of comic books in education.

One of my concerns when I began this study was that I would only be confirming findings in the literature I reviewed as well as my own enthusiasm for the medium. While there were many findings in this study that did validate previous research,

conceptual work, and my own understanding of the medium, there were also several insights gained by doing the study that helped to complicate some of the issues that tend to frame the argument for their use in the ELA classroom and the influence of curriculum, pedagogy, and historical forces that prevent it. The study also raised interesting questions about different modes of literacies necessary for understanding and interpreting images.

Exploding the Monolith

During the course of the study, I came to recognize canonization as less monolithic than it tends to be when discussed in education circles. The canon is often promoted as a coherent, consistent, and persistent force imposed on students, hence the use of the article *the*; however, as I read scholarship from literature studies, it became evident that while canonized texts do dominate the ELA curriculum, these texts are always subject to change and are only as powerful as those who reinforce the idea of them as superior examples of literature, i.e. educators. The reality is that there is not *the canon*, but only canonized texts, and we are currently witnessing the canonization of some graphic novels, *Maus* and *Watchmen*. Nevertheless, there is still a real and persistent issue that canonized texts often, though not always, reflect certain more dominant cultural aspects while excluding alternative voices and modes of texts. This issue creates problems for introducing alternative texts, whether phonetic, imagistic, or a combination of the two, into the ELA classroom. While this is a problem for ELA classrooms at all grades and levels, this problem has been shown in this study to be a particularly salient one for advanced students who have become bored with traditional literature and have in some cases begun to reject it.

The reality of canonized texts comes down to tradition because tradition is a way of maintaining continuity between generations. The idea of tradition is about shared experiences that inform who we are culturally, socially, and historically, which is also true for canonized texts. This understanding led me to reflect on my own views about the comic books I read. While I still read and enjoy these texts, I also differentiate between the common comic book, i.e. the ones that are read and then traded back to the store or sold on eBay because they really do not warrant keeping, and those that are worth keeping or even re-reading. The latter category is a small percentage of the comics I read. Upon reflecting on this fact, I now understand I maintain my own personal canon! Through this study I have also come to understand that I read comic books in part because of nostalgia for my childhood, and I have come to understand that the perpetuation of certain phonetic texts is actually nostalgia for books read in a person's past as well. In my discussions with ELA teachers, including those outside of the study, this nostalgia is evident in the way they discuss favorite works of traditional literature from their youth, many of which were introduced to them in school.

Literacy as Fluid

It is fascinating to me that there is still a debate among scholars or even among teachers about what literacy entails and what modes of literacy should be taught in the ELA classroom. I have come to understand that one of the biggest issues in this debate is trying to define what different modes of literacy entail. Before beginning this study, I also held a belief that there were distinct modes of literacy that had unique components that set them apart from traditional literacy. While this study does confirm that other modes of literacy do have some aspects that are specific and must be taught in order to

better understand them, it also confirms that strong traditional literacy can go a long way to helping students understand and interpret other modes of texts. The reality of literacy is that it is fluid, and for the most part, concepts and skills in one mode are directly translatable to different modes because texts are intertextual (Iser, 1978). This understanding is exactly what proponents of other modes of literacy in the classroom have fundamentally been arguing, but have in some respects obfuscated in pursuit of promoting alternative modes of literacy. Furthermore, an acknowledgment that traditional literacy is exceptionally valuable to other modes and provides an excellent foundation for developing other modes is absent. This conclusion does not undermine this study because the actual issue is not traditional literacy or other modes of literacy but about the tendency to compartmentalize modes of literacy.

For example, I found that students who had art classes had a better sense of how to understand and interpret images, and Ms. Veronica found that teaching her students art concepts helped in developing visual literacy. This fact is not compelling in and of itself; however, the study also revealed that students who did not have any art training were also able to understand and interpret images in graphic novels as effectively as those who had art preparation. The main difference between these students was that students who had received formal art/visual literacy instruction had language for the concepts and conventions used to create the images (Peeck, 1993). While it does seem that training in art/visual literacy does augment and expand students' understandings and interpretations of images, a lack of it does not seem to undermine students' because they are able to rely on traditional literacy. Ultimately, visual literacy and traditional literacy flow into each

other, and the students in this study understood this fact when they did not understand the question about literacy that they were required to write about in school.

Over Thinking the Mark

The actual practice of teaching with comic books and/or graphic novels reveals the scholarship is sometimes over thought. An excellent example of this problem is literature on how to read a comic book/graphic novel. In reality, reading a comic book/graphic novel is in many respects identical to reading a traditional text. The main difference is the obvious one: comic books and graphic novels contain images in place of words. Mr. Ryan's, teacher in Case 1, following comment during his follow-up interview serves to exemplify this issue:

I've got a couple of Lane books that a former assistant principal gave me on using graphic novels in the classroom, and I thought they were completely useless because they seem to be written by people who didn't know what they were reading or what they were talking about. They were acting as though—they were all written about using them as things to help students with special needs or lower ability levels, which is fine. But I think they can be done—you can do more with that and they just kind of kept talking about how to read a comic book and I was like, "How to read a comic book??" You read a comic book. You pick it up, and you read it. From left to right. Basically the same thing that you and I've been talking about...Absolutely useless. Somebody has, you know, has jumped on something there to make some money or whatever.

Ryan maintains here that preparation for understanding and interpreting a comic book can be accomplished through traditional literacy. However, texts such as Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* are valuable in deepening a person's foundational understanding of the medium of comic books and in establishing that these

texts are the ones that expand a person's literacy repertoire, which is exactly what the current literature curriculum needs. The issue of focusing on how to read a comic may be a remnant of our propensity in schooling to focus on the literal reading of a text before moving to comprehension and interpretation. This issue may also contribute to the persistence of this medium being used primarily with struggling and non-readers.

In closing I wish to share one last bit of data that made an impression on me. After data collection was complete at the Case 1 site, I emailed the students and teachers to ask if they had any further thoughts or wanted to ask me any questions. Most emailed me back and said thank you for letting them be in the study and they wished me good luck, but they did not have anything else to add or ask. However, Thor Plath provided this rhetorical response in his email:

Is a school's purpose not to expand education? How can this be achieved without broadening a student's exposure to literature?

Thor Plath's questions speak volumes to the place that traditional literacy still holds in schooling and consequently the marginalization and neglect of other modes of texts and literacies.

Appendix A: Teacher Participant Initial Interview Protocol, Case 1

Opening:

Hello _____, I want to first let you know that I appreciate your agreeing to do this interview. The interview will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour. First, I would like you to tell me a little bit about yourself:

1. Have long have you been teaching?
2. What training did you receive to become a teacher?
3. Can you tell me about any experiences that influenced you to be a teacher?
4. Please describe your teaching experience thus far.
5. When did you start reading comic books?
6. What got you interested in them?
7. Do you still read them currently?
8. Can you compare and contrast your experiences with comic books when you were young with your experiences now?

Introductory:

1. How do you perceive yourself as an educator?
2. Discuss your position on traditional literature.
3. How do you define literacy?

Transition:

1. Would you describe your class as being focused primarily on print/traditional literacy, visual literacy, or both?

Please explain.
2. Please explain your conception of visual literacy.

3. What attracted you to using comic books/graphic novels in your classroom?
4. Are there or have there been any impediments in the curriculum to using comic books and/or graphic novels?

If “yes”, please describe.

If “no”, please describe any type of support you have received in regards to using these texts.

5. Are there or have there been any impediments from colleagues and/or administration to using comic books and/or graphic novels?

If “yes”, please describe.

If “no”, please describe any type of support you have received in regards to using these texts.

Key:

1. Do you think it is possible to “read” a picture/image?
If so, can you describe how to do this?
2. Do you think reading graphic novels can contribute to being visually literate?
If “yes”, please explain.
If “no”, please explain.
3. Do you think reading graphic novels might contribute to being print literate?
If “yes”, please explain.
If “no”, please explain.
4. Describe your students’ receptiveness to the using comic books/graphic novels in your AP classroom.

5. [possible] Does the students' AP status affect their interaction with the texts in any way you have noticed? Explain.
6. Can you describe the difference in a student who has or currently reads comic books/graphic novels and a student who has/does not when they read them in your classroom?
7. Can being print literate help in comprehending comic books/graphic novels?
8. Can it hinder comprehension?

Ending:

1. Would you choose a graphic novel for the class to read instead of a traditional novel if either option would achieve your curricular objectives?

If "yes": Please explain choice.

If "no": Please explain choice.
2. If someone told you that graphic novels are inappropriate texts for your English classroom, what would your response be to that person?

Thank you, I will be in touch with you soon to follow up on any ideas that develop from this initial interview.

Appendix B: Student Participant Initial Interview Protocol, Case 1

Opening:

Hello _____, I want to first let you know that I appreciate your agreeing to do this interview. The interview will take about 30minute to 1 hour. First, I would like you to tell me a little bit about yourself:

1. Are there a lot of books, some books, or very little books in the place where you live?
2. What types of books are available to you in your home?
3. Have you in the past or are you in the present reading comic books and/or graphic novels?

If “yes”, please elaborate.

If “no”, please explain why you do not.

Introductory section:

1. Describe what the phrase “graphic novel” means to you.
2. Is there a difference to you between a novel and a graphic novel?
If so, what is the difference?
3. Do you think these differences are important?
If “yes”, in what way?
If “no”, why not?
4. Are there any similarities between these two texts? Please explain either way.
5. Do you prefer word-based media or image-based media in your life outside of school? Please explain.

Transition:

1. What are you currently reading?
2. Tell me one thing about the story/plot. (plot question)
3. Tell me a couple of things about the main character. (characterization question)
4. Who is telling the story? What point of view is it told from? (point of view question)
5. What about the story has made an impression on you personally? (theme question)

Please elaborate.

6. Describe your favorite scene thus far. (Visualization)

Key:

1. What do your parents think about your reading comic books/graphic novels?
2. Have you ever read a graphic novel as part of a class?

If “no”, what do you think is the reason for not doing so?

If “yes”, can you tell me if the images aided or hindered your understanding of the text? Please explain.
3. *We are going to do a Structured Read Aloud activity. Here is an excerpt from a graphic novel – **provide page** – as you read it, please say aloud how you are reading it and what you are doing to understand it. Also, please state aloud any difficulties you may be having with understanding it. I have some specific questions for you once you finish*
 - 1) Where did you focus first?
 - 2) In which direction did you read it?

- 3) Did you read the text first or analyze the images first?
 - 4) Did you fill in the spaces between the panels? If so, please describe by providing an example.
 - 5) What information about the story is being conveyed in the printed text?
 - 6) What information about the story is being conveyed in the images?
 - 7) Is the information in one different from the information in the other?
 - 8) Describe to me your ideas about the images in the texts. Do they contribute to or hinder your understanding of it?
 - 9) In your own words, describe the story conveyed in this excerpt.
 - 10) Can you infer this excerpt's relationship to the rest of the text?
 - 11) How did you figure out the relationship between the words and pictures in a graphic novel?
4. What do you think the phrase "to be visually literate" means?
 5. Do you think it is possible to "read" a picture/image?
If so, can you describe how to do this?
 6. Have you ever been taught how to be visually literate?
 7. How would being able to "read" images be helpful:
 - a. In school?
 - b. While watching TV and/or movies?
 - c. Understanding other cultures?
 - d. At an art museum?
 - e. When interacting with others?
 - f. When encountering advertising?

Ending:

1. Pretend you are the AP English teacher; would you choose a graphic novel for the class to read?

If “yes”, please explain.

If “no”, please explain.
2. If someone told you that graphic novels are not “real reading” what would you say to that person?

Thank you, I will be in touch with you soon to follow up on any ideas that develop from this initial interview.

Appendix C: Structured Think-Aloud #1 –*Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*



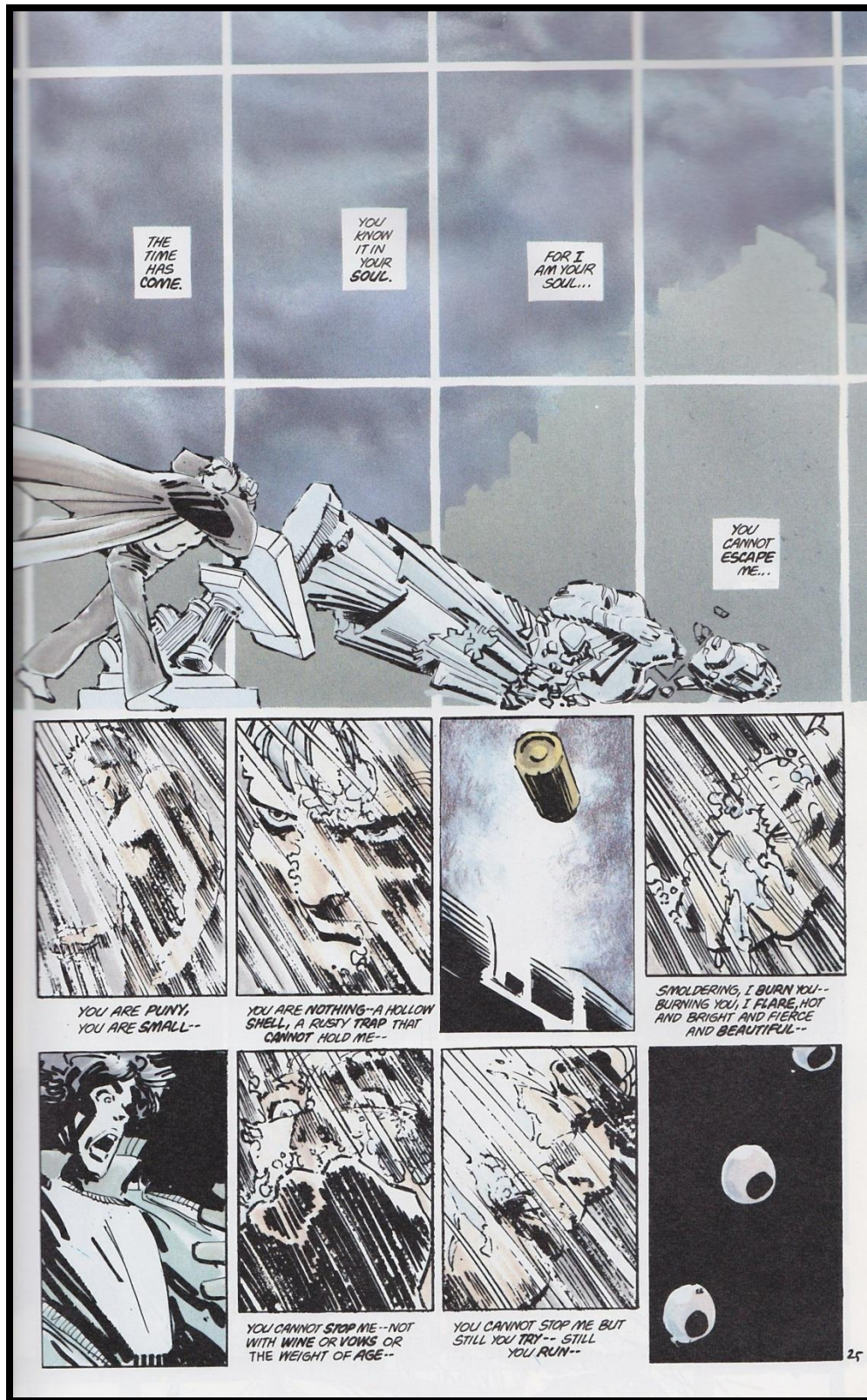
Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, writer and artist Frank Miller ©1986 DC Comics



Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, writer and artist Frank Miller ©1986 DC Comics



Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, writer and artist Frank Miller ©1986 DC Comics



Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, writer and artist Frank Miller ©1986 DC Comics



Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, writer and artist Frank Miller ©1986 DC Comics



Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, writer and artist Frank Miller ©1986 DC Comics

Appendix D: Sample Observation Guide

Who: _____ When: _____ Where: _____

[illegible]

Codes:

*D = discussion; L = lecture; I = individual work; G = group work; P = projects

**S T = Student with Teacher; SG = small group; WG = whole group; SS = Student with student (not group work)

***R = Emphasis on reading; W = Emphasis on writing; I = Emphasis on images/visual

***TP = Teacher prompted; TX = Text prompted; SP = Student prompted

Appendix E: Sample Follow-Up Interview Protocols, Case 1

Further Questions – (Teacher, Case 1)

1. Have any parents through the years, or even this year, approached you either in person or by phone or email to discuss the use of comic books in your AP class?
[Elaborate]
2. What similarities seem to exist between how you teach traditional literature and how you teach graphic novels?
3. Any differences?
4. Do you think that it takes a strong foundational/background knowledge of this medium to be able to effectively teach with it?
5. Are comic books/graphic novels appropriate for an AP English class? Why?
6. Do you see them having any value in a regular English classroom or even in a remedial one? If so, what value?
7. When you were in high school, did a teacher ever break from the norm and use any type of image based media in your English classes?
 - a. If so, please elaborate.
 - b. If not, why not?
8. Have you seen students reading other comic books/graphic novels since introducing them to this medium? This can be this year or in previous years.
9. When you encounter an image, what do you do to understand it?
10. All 50 states have some form of media literacy objectives in their curriculum, however, currently the literacy/literature curriculum that is taught in schools is heavily reliant on reading and writing print to the exclusion of other forms of literacy. Do you agree with this statement? If so, why? If not, why not?
11. Which do you believe is more open to interpretation – images or words?
 - a. *[Follow-up, if appropriate]* Do you think an image having the possibility for multiple interpretations affects a teacher's decision to use them? If so, explain. If not, explain.
 - b. *[Possible different follow-up – Is it easier to control the meanings of words or the meanings of images?]*

12. Do the graphic novels seem to appeal to the young women in your class?

Follow-up Questions from Observations & Student Interviews

1. How would you describe your pedagogical approach?
2. What/who influenced this approach?
3. Have any of your colleagues, past administrators, parents and/or students ever critiqued your use of comic books in class?
4. Both you and some of my interviewees have mentioned that some teachers seem to be there to collect a paycheck. What are the ramifications of this on learning?
5. Several times students I interviewed mentioned that there is a “code” or “norms” to teachers and schooling. What are your thoughts on their observations?
 - a. What are these codes/norms they mention?
6. What role does testing play in dictating what can and cannot be used in school?
7. Why do you disagree with the term “graphic novel?”
8. What does a close reading of a traditional work of literature entail?
9. What does a close reading of a comic book/graphic novel entail?
10. Often times when I interviewed students, they would repeat back to me interpretations of images that they learned in class, what are your thoughts on this phenomenon?
11. Can you further explain the difference between formula fiction and literary fiction?
 - a. How does a person make a distinction?
 - b. Can a work be both?
 - i. Example?
 - c. Are there any comic books/graphic novels you consider to be literary fiction?
 - d. If so, why? If not, why not?
 - e. Is the label formula fiction a negative one?

12. Some students seemed to be struggling to gather deeper meanings from texts, including Daredevil; they tended to stay in the concrete/literal zone. What do you think is contributing to their difficulty?
 - a. Is it school related?
 13. How many students wrote their papers on Daredevil?
 - a. How many of those were males?
 - b. How were those papers?
 14. I noticed that you have shifted away from a focus/emphasis on images in the graphic novel *Superman For All Seasons*, why is this?
-

Follow-up Questions from Interview

1. You mentioned that the pictures and even the colors in comic books have sometimes been a distraction to your students. Why do you think this was the case?
 - a. What did you do to alleviate this issue?
2. You mentioned that you sometimes get a sense that using comic books will not work during certain years, can you elaborate on this sense? Maybe provide an example?
3. You made a distinction between a traditional comic book, ex. *Daredevil: Born Again* & *X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills*, and *Maus*. What is the difference?
4. Last interview, I asked you, “Have there or are there any impediments in the curriculum to using this medium?” You basically said that there were not, but initially you seemed to want to say that there may be. So, I guess I would like to have you answer this question again.
5. How did comic books help you expand your vocabulary?
6. You mentioned that sometimes your AP students’ intelligence gets in their way of something fairly simple—like putting together what’s going on a comic book page. Can you elaborate?
7. Why do you think students who have not been exposed to comic books are “skittish” at least initially?

Structured Think-Aloud Activities

*We are going to do a Structured Read Aloud activity. Here is an excerpt from a graphic novel – **provide page** – as you read it, please say aloud how you are reading it and what you are doing to understand it. Also, please state aloud any difficulties you may be having with understanding it. I have some specific questions for you once you finish*

- 1) Where did you focus first?
 - 2) In which direction did you read it?
 - 3) Did you read the text first or analyze the images first?
 - 4) Did you fill in the spaces between the panels? If so, please describe by providing an example.
 - 5) What information about the story is being conveyed in the printed text?
 - 6) What information about the story is being conveyed in the images?
 - 7) Is the information in one different from the information in the other?
 - 8) Describe to me your ideas about the images in the texts. Do they contribute to or hinder your understanding of it?
 - 9) In your own words, describe the story conveyed in this excerpt.
 - 10) Can you infer this excerpt's relationship to the rest of the text?
 - 11) How did you figure out the relationship between the words and pictures in a graphic novel?
-
2. *Please look at the following two excerpts, one is from Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, the other is a screen capture from CNN.com.*
 3. What is the primary mode of communication in the Dark Knight excerpt?
 4. What is the primary mode of communication in the CNN.com excerpt?
 5. Are there any similarities in how you approached reading the excerpts? Any differences?

6. Do you notice any similarities in the layout of these two texts? Any differences?
 7. What if the CNN.com webpage was all printed text, would you be likely to read it? If so, explain. If not, explain.
 8. Do you find novels or graphic novels more relevant to what are called 21st Century Literacy skills, i.e. reading on the web, understanding media, producing texts, etc.?
 9. Do you feel that your students have learned these skills in their formal schooling? Please elaborate
-

Additional Questions

1. What questions would you have asked?
2. What questions would you like to ask me?
3. May I have copies of the papers by the students I interviewed that were written on Daredevil?
4. Do you have any last things you would like to add about graphic novels in the classroom?

Further questions - (Student, Case 1)

1. When your parents found out you were reading another graphic novel what was their reaction?
2. What about you?
3. Do any similarities seem to exist between how your teacher teaches traditional literature and how he teaches graphic novels?
4. Any differences?
5. What interests do you have that might make using graphic novels in the classroom seem appealing?
6. After this week you will have used a graphic novel twice during your time in Mr. Ryan's classroom, what are your thoughts on this type of text in an AP English classroom?
7. Have your perceptions/beliefs about these texts changed at all?
 - a. If they have changed why do you think that is?
8. Have you become more interested in this type of text since reading them in your class? If so, do you remember when this happened?
9. Have you read/pursued any more graphic novels or comic books outside of class for personal/leisure reading?
10. Do you feel you are able to understand messages conveyed in images better, worse, or the same as before Mr. Ryan's graphic novel lesson?
 - a. Provide an example.
11. When you encounter an image, what do you do to help understand it?
12. All 50 states have some form of media literacy objectives in their curriculum, however, currently the literacy/literature curriculum that is taught in schools is heavily reliant on reading and writing print to the exclusion of other forms of literacy. Do you agree with this statement? If so, why? If not, why not?
13. Which do you believe is more open for interpretation – images or words?
14. Do you think an image having the possibility for multiple interpretations affects a teacher's decision to use them? If so, explain. If not, explain.

15. Throughout the last trimester, much of the literature you read was traditional novels, short stories, etc. Did you find yourself wanting to read another graphic novel or read/watch some other mode of text in general? If so why? If not, explain.
-

Follow up questions

1. You mentioned several times liking to see the movie or an image of the character to help better know what they look like. Is this connected to your interest in fashion?
-

Structured Read-Aloud Activity

Please look at the following two excerpts, one is from Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, the other is a screen capture from CNN.com.

1. What is the primary mode of communication in the Dark Knight excerpt?
2. What is the primary mode of communication in the CNN.com excerpt?
3. Are there any similarities in how you approached reading the excerpts? Any differences?
4. Do you notice any similarities in the layout of these two texts? Any differences?
5. What if the CNN.com webpage was all printed text, would you be likely to read it? If so, explain. If not, explain.
6. Do you find novels or graphic novels more relevant to what are called 21st Century Literacy skills, i.e. reading on the web, understanding media, producing texts, etc.?
 - a. Do you feel you have learned these skills in your formal schooling?

If not, have you learned them somewhere else? Where?

Further questions - Leroy Jenkins (Student, Case 1)

1. When your parents found out you were reading another graphic novel what was their reaction?
2. Do any similarities seem to exist between how your teacher teaches traditional literature and how he teaches graphic novels?
3. Any differences?
4. What interests do you have that might align with using graphic novels in the classroom?
5. After this week you will have used a graphic novel twice during your time in Mr. Ryan's classroom, what are your thoughts on this type of text in an AP English classroom?
6. Has your perceptions/beliefs about these texts changed at all?
 - a. If they have changed why do you think that is?
7. Have you read/pursued any more graphic novels or comic books outside of class for personal/leisure reading?
8. Have you become more interested in this type of text since reading them in your class? If so, do you remember when this happened?
9. Do you feel you are able to understand messages conveyed in images better, worse, or the same as before Mr. Ryan's graphic novel lesson?
 - a. Provide an example.
10. When you encounter an image, what do you do to help understand it?
11. Currently the literacy/literature curriculum in schools is heavily reliant on reading and writing print, what are your thoughts on this? [Clarify if necessary – Outdated? Outmoded?]
12. Which do you believe is more open for interpretation – images or words?
13. Do you think an image having the possibility for multiple interpretations affects a teacher's decision to use them? If so, explain. If not, explain.
14. Throughout the last trimester, much of the literature you read was traditional novels, short stories, etc. Did you find yourself wanting to read another graphic

novel or read/watch some other mode of text in general? If so why? If not, explain.

Follow up questions

1. You mentioned enjoying reading stuff on the web. Is there any relationship between a comic book/graphic novel and a webpage?
 2. You mentioned that people may see the pictures in a comic book/graphic novel and write it off as childish. Why do you think that people equate pictures with children?
 3. Also, the implication is that people equate words with adults – why is that?
 4. Do you find that interpreting a text is more about trying to discover what the author wants you to or coming up with your own ideas as the reader?
 5. You mentioned this idea of a core content you read year after year. What is this core content? Is there a purpose to reading it year after year?
-

Structured Read-Aloud Activity

Please look at the following two excerpts, one is from Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, the other is a screen capture from CNN.com.

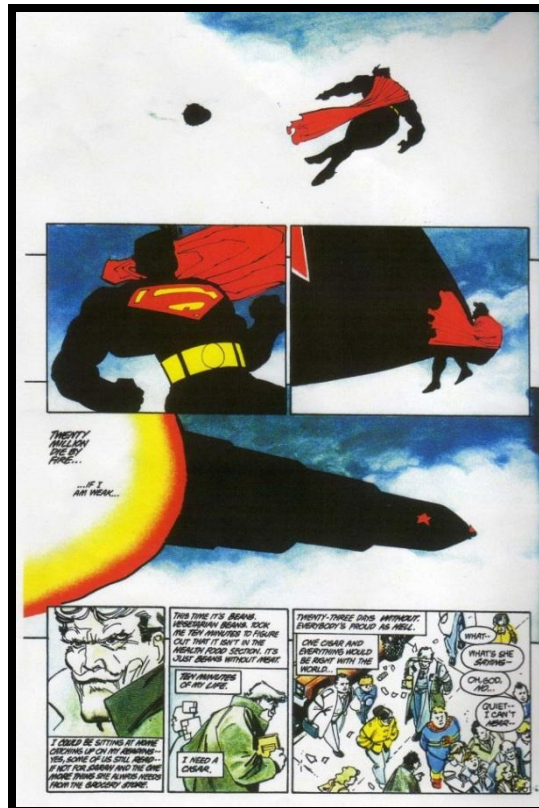
1. What information is being conveyed in the Dark Knight excerpt?
2. What information is being conveyed in the CNN.com excerpt?
3. Are there any similarities in how you approached reading the excerpts? Any differences?
4. What initially stood out in each?
5. Are there any similarities between the two excerpts?
6. Are there any differences?
7. What, if anything, do you notice about the layout of these two texts?
8. About the use of color?
9. About the use of contrasts?
10. How does each use the printed word?

11. How does each use images?
12. What if the CNN.com webpage was all printed text, would you be likely to read it? If so, explain. If not, explain.
13. Do you find novels or graphic novels more relevant to what are called 21st Century Literacy skills, i.e. reading on the web, understanding media, producing texts, etc.

Appendix F: Structured Think-Aloud #2 – CNN.com & *Dark Knight Returns*



CNN.com © Turner Broadcasting System, Inc



Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, writer and artist Frank Miller ©1986 DC Comics

Appendix G: Teacher Participant Questionnaire, Case 2

Please indicate a name you would like to be known by in the study. This name is your pseudonym or a fictitious name used to conceal your identity. Do not choose a pseudonym that may be linked to you in any way such as a nickname, a username, etc.

Pseudonym: _____

Opening:

1. Have long have you been teaching?
2. What training did you receive to become a teacher?
3. Can you tell me about any experiences that influenced you to be a teacher?
4. Please describe your teaching experience thus far.
5. What is your professional opinion of comic books/graphic novels?
6. Do you read comic books/graphic novels?

Introductory:

1. How do you perceive yourself as an educator?
2. Discuss your position on traditional literature.
3. How do you define literacy?
4. How do you define “visual literacy?”
5. How would you describe your pedagogical approach?
6. What/who influenced this approach?

Transition:

1. Please describe the course you teach called The Graphic Novel.
2. What prompted the creation of The Graphic Novel course?

3. Please describe how this course fits into the mandated English curriculum.
4. What has been the response to The Graphic Novel class by students?
5. What has been the response to The Graphic Novel class by other teachers?
6. What has been the response to The Graphic Novel class by parents?
7. What has been the response to The Graphic Novel class by administrators?
8. Were you interested in comic books/graphic novels prior to teaching this course?

Key:

1. Would you describe your course as being focused primarily on traditional literacy techniques, visual literacy, or both? Please elaborate.
2. Do you think it is possible to “read” a picture/image? If so, can you describe how to do this?

When you encounter an image, what do you do to understand it?
3. Which do you believe is more open to interpretation – images or words? Please elaborate.
4. Do you think reading graphic novels can contribute to being visually literate?
 - a. If “yes”, please explain.
 - b. If “no”, please explain.
5. Do you think reading graphic novels might contribute to being print literate?
 - a. If “yes”, please explain.
 - b. If “no”, please explain.
6. Are there any recognizable differences in performance of students who are comic book readers prior to coming to your class and those who were not?

7. Can being print literate help in comprehending comic books/graphic novels?
8. Can being print literate hinder comprehension?
9. What similarities seem to exist between how you teach traditional literature and how you teach graphic novels?
10. Any differences?
11. Do you think that it takes a strong foundational/background knowledge of comic books/graphic novels to be able to effectively teach with them?
12. Has your pedagogical approach changed in any way in order to teach The Graphic Novel class? If so, please elaborate.

Ending:

1. When you were in high school, did a teacher ever break from the norm and use any type of image based media in your English class? Please elaborate.
2. Have you seen students reading other comic books/graphic novels since introducing them to this medium? (This can be this year or in previous years.)
3. If someone told you that graphic novels are inappropriate texts for your English classroom, what would your response be to that person?
4. All 50 states have some form of media literacy objectives in their curriculum, however, currently the literacy/literature curriculum that is taught in schools is heavily reliant on reading and writing print to the exclusion of other forms of literacy. Do you agree with this statement?
 - a. If so, why?
 - b. If not, why not?
5. Several times students I interviewed mentioned that there is a “code” or “norms” to teachers and schooling. What are your thoughts on their observations?

6. What are these codes/norms they mention?
7. What role does testing play in dictating what can and cannot be used in school?
8. What questions would you have asked?
9. What questions would you like to ask me?
10. Do you have any last things you would like to add about comic books/graphic novels in the classroom?

Thank you

Appendix H: Student Participant Questionnaire, Case 2

Please indicate a name you would like to be known by in the study. This name is your pseudonym or a fictitious name used to conceal your identity. Do not choose a pseudonym that may be linked to you in any way such as a nickname, a username, etc.

Pseudonym: _____

Opening:

1. Are there a lot of books, some books, or very little books in the place where you live?
2. What types of books are available to you in your home?
3. Have you in the past or are you in the present reading comic books and/or graphic novels?
 - a. If “yes”, please elaborate.
 - b. If “no”, please explain why you do not.

Introductory section:

1. Describe what the phrase “graphic novel” means to you.
2. Is there a difference to you between a novel and a graphic novel?
 - a. If so, what is the difference?
3. Do you think these differences are important?
 - a. If “yes”, in what way?
 - b. If “no”, why not?
4. Are there any similarities between these two texts? Please explain either way.
5. Do you prefer word-based media or image-based media in your life outside of school? Please explain.

Transition:

1. What are you currently reading either for class or for recreation?
2. Tell me one thing about the story/plot.
3. Tell me a couple of things about the main character.
4. Who is telling the story? What point of view is it told from?

5. What about the story has made an impression on you personally? Please elaborate.
6. Describe your favorite part of the story.

Key:

1. What do your parents think about your reading comic books/graphic novels?
2. Have you ever read a graphic novel as part of a class?
 - a. If “no”, what do you think is the reason for not doing so?
 - b. If “yes”, can you tell me if the images aided or hindered your understanding of the text? Please explain.
3. What do you think the phrase “to be visually literate” means?
4. Do you think it is possible to “read” a picture/image?
5. If so, can you describe how to do this?
6. Have you ever been taught how to be visually literate?
7. How would being able to “read” images be helpful:
 - a. In school?
 - b. While watching TV and/or movies?
 - c. Understanding other cultures?
 - d. At an art museum?
 - e. When interacting with others?
 - f. When encountering advertising?
8. Do any similarities seem to exist between how your teacher teaches traditional literature and how she teaches graphic novels?
9. Do any differences seem to exist?
10. What interests do you have that might make using graphic novels in the classroom seem appealing?
11. Have you become more interested in comic books/graphic novels since reading them in your class? If so, do you remember when this happened?
12. Have you read/pursued any more graphic novels or comic books outside of class for personal/leisure reading?

13. Do you feel you are able to understand messages conveyed in images better, worse, or the same as before The Graphic Novel class?
 - a. Provide an example.
14. When you encounter an image, what do you do to help understand it?
15. Do you think an image having the possibility for multiple interpretations affects a teacher's decision to use them?
 - a. If so, explain.
 - b. If not, explain.

Ending:

1. Pretend you are an English teacher; would you choose a graphic novel for the class to read?
 - a. If "yes", please explain.
 - b. If "no", please explain.
2. If someone told you that graphic novels are not "real reading" what would you say to that person?

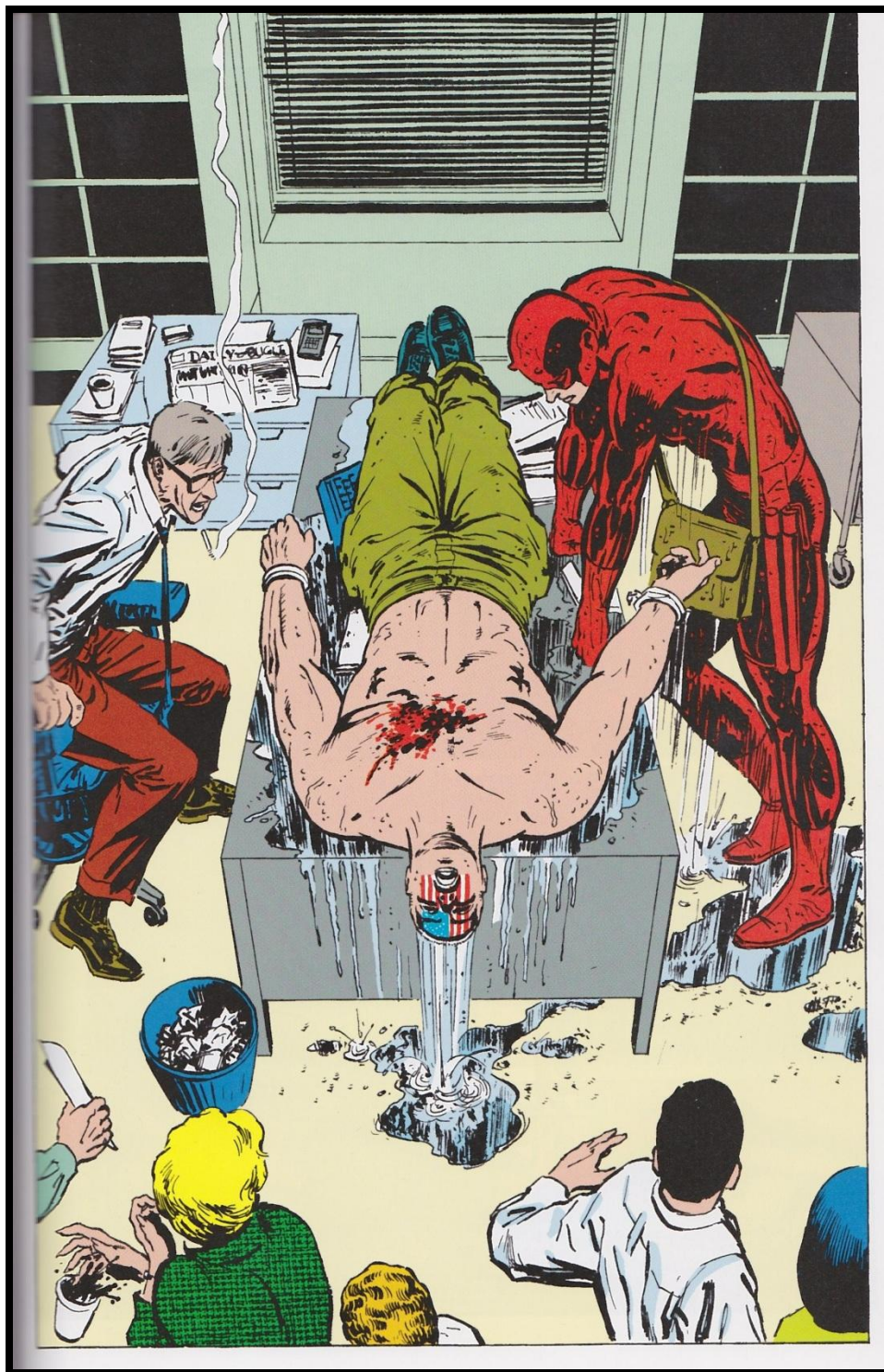
Thank you

Appendix I: *Daredevil: Born Again* religious symbolism examples



Daredevil: Born Again, writer Frank Miller & artist David Mazzucchelli ©1986 Marvel Comics

Figure



Daredevil: Born Again, writer Frank Miller & artist David Mazzucchelli ©1986 Marvel Comics

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