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Comics in the Classroom: A Pedagogical Exploration of College English Teachers Using Graphic Novels

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COMICS IN THE CLASSROOM: A PEDAGOGICAL EXPLORATION OF COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHERS USING GRAPHIC NOVELS

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Title: Comics in the Classroom: A Pedagogical Exploration of College English Teachers Using Graphic Novels

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This pedagogical study explored the usage of graphic novels among three, college English instructors at various institutions in the state of Pennsylvania. All three participants were faculty members of their respective institutions and were interviewed, had their classes observed by the researcher, and had content analysis conducted on all original documents produced and distributed by the instructor.

The pedagogical study, which was a modified cross-case analysis, looked to explore (1) how the instructors literally taught their English courses using graphic novels and (2) how their past experiences and perceptions of the medium of graphic novels affected their textual choices and subsequent pedagogies.

Analysis of the data showed that the participants in the study taught using graphic novels in a way that emphasized the literal reading of multimodal texts and analyzing said texts through a thematic lens. Additionally, the data also showed that while all of the participants personally found graphic novels to be academically valuable, they cited issues of student apprehension towards the reading of the texts and issues of access to certain graphic novels being problematic to the implementation of graphic novels in a college English course. Additionally, the assignments they required of students to complete reflected which particular element of graphic novels they found valuable in a college English class.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

For close to 100 years, comics have been a significant part of America's cultural and media landscape. From political cartoons, to newspaper "funnies," to comic books, and finally graphic novels, the narrative form of "sequential art" (Eisner, 1985) has evolved as a story-telling vehicle. While comics were first derided for their sophomoric content, they have since become powerful forms of storytelling incorporating a multimodality (New London Group, 1996; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2003) that has pedagogical implications for both traditional and visual literacies. As such, this medium is quickly becoming a significant part of academia.

The first essay in Stephen Tabachnick's edited collection *Teaching The Graphic Novel* (2009a) is titled "Defining Comics in the Classroom; or, The Pros and Cons of Unfixability" (Hatfield, 2009). Hatfield states, "Academic comics study, not exactly a new but certainly a newly self-conscious field, has been particularly notable for this sort of anxious throat-clearing about how to define its object" (p. 19). Hatfield's analysis of the definition of comics in academic contexts raises the issue of how the diverse nature of the comics medium should be defined and whether it should be different or not. Hatfield's analysis is visited later on in this chapter in the key terms section, but the dilemma that Hatfield asserts when it comes to defining comics can actually be taken a step further.

Possibly more nebulous is how comics are best used in classrooms. There are articles, collected volumes, and books on this topic which will be addressed in chapter two of this dissertation, but comics as a learning tool in classrooms is still a relatively new phenomenon in academia. The questions for graphic novels and comics being used

in college English classrooms ranged from what should be/is appropriate to be read to how to literally use graphic novels and/or comic books. So much of English teachers' experiences with teaching has revolved around traditional texts that exploring alternatives to that established practice has become, understandably, an unknown territory that only some teachers have ventured to explore.

Using graphic novels and comic books in the English classroom represents a shift from traditional texts that are monomodal (prose, poetry, plays, etc.) to texts that are multimodal. This dissertation explored academic territories that have not been the focus of much previous investigation. The literature on graphic novel and comic book usage is limited, and, as Tabachnick (2009b) states, "the possibilities for such courses and for graphic novel interventions in traditional literature courses are infinite. We are still at the beginning of this exciting pedagogical development" (p. 7). Tabachnick sees the usage of graphic novels and comic books in English classes as still being a relatively new phenomenon despite the wider influence of comic books on modern culture. Also, his edited volume was published 16 years after McCloud's seminal work *Understanding Comics* (1993) and 24 years after Eisner's seminal work *Comics & Sequential Art: Principles & Practice of the World's Most Popular Art Form* (1985). Both of those texts look to expand the public and academic perception of comic literature beyond superheroes and Sunday Funnies. Nevertheless, even after 25 years of scholars, creators, and educators arguing for the significance and pedagogical value of comic literature, Tabachnick (2009b) still finds it necessary to state that the usage of graphic novels and comic books in educational settings is "the beginning of [an] exciting pedagogical development."

And this is where this dissertation looked to add to the academic discussion. This dissertation aims to help explore "this exciting pedagogical development" of graphic novels and comic books in the English classroom and what those usages mean for literacy, pedagogical, and comic studies.

As a former high school English teacher, I can attest to the difficulty of incorporating comics into the traditional curriculum of American high schools. My experience with using graphic novels in high school classrooms was limited to a pilot study done with The National Writing Project in 2010. This study was presented at the Northeastern Pennsylvania Writing Project: *Writings on the Wall* conference (Romagnoli, 2010). That very limited study was reflective of a high school teacher who had to make to time to use graphic novels due to curricular obligations and standardized testing.

What the study did do was open my eyes to the possibility of the medium as a pedagogical tool in college classrooms. However, those possibilities needed to be explored further. The focus of this study was to explore how the medium of graphic novels and comic books have been used in academic contexts, specifically the college English classroom.

Statement of the Problem

It becomes apparent when reading the current literature on graphic novels and their usage in academic settings that there is a great deal of dissonance in the styles of the texts being utilized and the content of the graphic novels being employed. Articles concerning this topic cite various literacies and claim that graphic novels and comic books are a hybrid of traditional literacies (The New London Group, 1996) and visual

literacy (Kress and & Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2003) making the texts multimodal (Ajayi, 2008, 2009, Kress, 2003). Graphic novels and comic books being characterized as multimodal is a relatively new trend, but in that characterization are certain conflicting issues.

Multimodality implies a combination of varying forms of communication working in tandem to relay a given message. With graphic novels and comic books, the problem becomes identifying which literacies teachers are privileging when they use the medium in their classroom. This is a problem going forward for both literacy studies and comic studies as not being aware of the literacies that are being accessed by teachers who employ graphic novels in their classrooms can create confusion when analyzing a certain text. This needs to be resolved in order to better understand graphic novel usage in the classroom.

Exploring which literacies are privileged brings to light another problem with the study of graphic novels and comic books in classrooms: how the texts are literally used. Studies such as Chun's (2008), Ajayi's (2008, 2009), and Bitz's (2004) address this issue of how to literally use comics in academic settings, but there are few such studies. Some articles, such as Harris-Fain's (2009), only theorize how beneficial using a graphic novel in a classroom *could* be. In Harris-Fain's article, the researcher cites the benefits of utilizing Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight* (1986) and Alan Moore and David Gibbons' *Watchmen* (1986). However, Harris-Fain doesn't report on tested pedagogical practices for how they can be literally employed. Would students read-a-loud in class? Keep journals on it? Create alternate endings? Suggestions are given, but Harris-Fain's article

is typical for literature on this subject in academia where few or no pedagogical strategies are given and discussion remains theoretical.

Pagnucci's (2004) book on narrative asserts that narratives of all kinds are valid and in fact valuable for academia. Pagnucci states, "..a narrative teacher would be open to all sorts of stories, romantic novels, comic books, and sports stories. All stories are useful" (p. 47). This valuing of unique texts is a running theme throughout Pagnucci's work. His section on "The Unacknowledged Hierarchy of Genre" (p. 20-22) reflects an ideology that values narratives no matter what medium they are. As such, Pagnucci's work on narratives represents a call to action for all academics to expand the possibilities of genre beyond current boundaries.

Finally, teachers sometimes encounter resistance that is societal, curricular, or policy-driven when employing graphic novels in the classroom. The perceived sophomoric stereotype of comic books coupled with the adult content of some graphic novels and comic books may limit a teacher's ability to employ these texts in the classroom. As such, teacher's choices on which texts to use in their classrooms often reflects not only the lesson or unit that is being covered in class but also pressures from society, administrations, and other professionals. While there is not an abundance of research on this, there is a trend that acknowledges this inherent fear among educators about using graphic novels. The trend becomes apparent when reading the limited literature on graphic novels in academia. Most of the texts that are used are what Wolk (2007) would identify as "art comics" as opposed to "superhero comics" or strips from a Sunday paper. The repetition of texts that circulate through academic journals provides a narrow window into why certain texts are chosen. For example, *Maus* (Spiegelman,

2003) is used ad nauseum in classrooms because of its powerful content and socio-historical significance, and there is no disputing its importance as a graphic novel. What becomes unclear is why popular graphic novels and comics about characters such as Batman, Spider-Man, Charlie Brown, and others are not given greater attention. Therefore, the research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are the different ways college English teachers in this study employ graphic novels in their classrooms?
2. What affordances and/or constraints do college English teachers in this study see in both the medium of graphic novels as an academic text and their own application of the medium? In other words, how academically valuable do the college English teachers in this study find comics?

The research questions were designed to address the practice of using graphic novels and comic books in academic contexts. Specifically, why do teachers use comic books as a legitimate and academic genre, and what is their rationale for using them? Within the research questions was an exploration of how graphic novels and comics were utilized by English teachers and why said educators saw graphic novels and comic books as pedagogically sound, academically sound, and socio-culturally sound in educational contexts.

Purposes of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how college English teachers employed graphic novels in their classrooms and how that employment of this medium reflected the teachers' valuing of the medium and the literacies that were accessed. By studying how

and what literacies were predominantly accessed in college classrooms, the pedagogical implications of graphic novel/comic book usage were better presented. Studies have been done regarding how graphic novels have been employed before, but those studies generally focused on the content/context of a singular graphic novel or comic book (Chun, 2009; Leibold, 2007; Webb & Guisand, 2007). Also, many of the studies on comic literature are still in the mode of struggling to gain respect for the genre in academic and cultural contexts. The literature that is aimed at furthering understanding of sequential art's characteristics (Eisner, 1985; McCloud, 1992) have become seminal. Additionally, literature in diverse fields of study including history books (Jones, 2004; Wright, 2003), edited collections of theory and application in academic contexts (Tabachnick, 2009a; Carter, 2007a), and theories on how comics can be used with ESL students (Cary, 2004; Romagnoli, 2012) have explored the socio-cultural and educational value of graphic novels and comic books. The goal of this dissertation was to add to the body of existing theoretical and pedagogical constructs that would hopefully legitimize comics as a consistently utilized academic genre.

The way graphic novels were used and how that usage reflected literacies that were privileged in classrooms needed to be explored. Further exploration needed to occur if graphic novels and comic books are to further establish themselves as viable and thought-provoking media for English teachers to utilize. In short, the purpose of these case studies was to examine how graphic novels/comics were actually/literally being used in college English classrooms and what those implications meant for literacy, pedagogical, and comic studies moving forward.

A Brief Overview of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

The discourse on graphic novels and comic books in academic contexts can be really seen as one about the advancement and privileging of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), and visual literacy needs to be a centerpiece of the discussion. The New London Group asserts that evolving social, cultural, and media landscapes require literacies that are both non-traditional and more representative of the world as students view it through their own eyes and experiences. The New London Group introduced the term "multiliteracies" in 1996. This coincided with the beginning of computers playing a vital role in communication, business, and lifestyles. As Jacobs (2007) notes in his article on comic books and their visual components, much of the discussion regarding multimodality and multiliteracies has been very positive and encouraging as these discussions relate to more modern forms of media. However, Jacobs hoped that his article would, "help us to push the conversation about multimodal texts and literacy beyond the usual focus on the Internet, film, and television so that we can also embrace the complex multimodal literacies involved in reading comics" (Jacobs, 2007, p. 201). Jacobs' call for more focus and specialization on comics as a significant multimodal medium is part of what this dissertation aimed to meet. Examining and exploring how teachers utilize graphic novels and/or comic books in their classrooms helped add to this ongoing academic discussion regarding comic studies. It also addressed multimodal issues and how multiliteracies were literally being employed in educational settings.

Jacobs, as well as The New London Group, are not alone in their calls for action. Romanelli (2009) looked at how readers of graphic novels and comic books practiced "outsider literacy." She argues that more research needs to be conducted in order to truly

understand the culture and the practices of "outsider literacy" (p. 293). It's also quite interesting that Romanelli's dissertation on the reading practices of graphic novel and comic book readers is grounded in a literacy that openly promotes otherness. Romanelli claims more research is necessary to further understanding of a literacy that purposefully differentiates itself from traditional literacy. Stainbrook (2003) also calls for further research into the field of comic studies, but his call for action reflects his dissertation's focus in that the application of how a comic is read/interpreted needs to be applied to readers of comics. Romanelli's dissertation does just that in her analysis of "outsider literacy," but Stainbrook also argues that there are educational implications for comics studies that need to be explored (p. 180).

Kress' look toward future studies is actually the subject of his final chapter in *Literacy in the New Media Age* (2003). As the world naturally changes, Kress says the ways in which knowledge is shared, attained, and communicated has to evolve with the natural progression of time. Kress never specifically mentions comics or graphic novels, but his theories on multimodality and evolving forms of literacies are key to not only this study but studies of media that might otherwise be considered alternative. For Kress, the key in looking towards the future is not to replace or abandon old ways of communicating, knowing, or learning. Instead, openness to change and acceptance of what is possible is vital to supporting the natural evolution of literacy. Graphic novels are one new way to learn about and view the world through their unique combination of visuals and text.

Kress' books (Kress, 1997, Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) privilege visual literacy in the evolution of literacies in general. Even though the relevance of

visual literacy has been argued for since the early 1970s (Fransecky & Debes, 1972), Kress does not see visual literacy as a singular concept alienated from text. Instead, Kress sees visual literacy as being part of a person's multiliteracies. Not surprisingly, Kress was a member of The New London Group which spearheaded the discussion of multiliteracies. Since graphic novels and comics are multimodal in nature, Kress' assertion that visual literacy is only part of an overall literacy influenced the theoretical framework of this study.

As this dissertation was designed around exploring which literacies were privileged in classrooms that utilized graphic novels, it became necessary to establish what "traditional literacy" meant for this study. The tenants of traditional literacy are supported by NCTE in its book *Standards for the English Language Arts* (2009) which outlines what English/Language Arts standards should be for learners. Since NCTE is primarily a public school entity, its assertions as to what constitutes literacy and which texts should be used to attain said literacy are a legitimate standard based on the nature of public schooling in the United States. Westby (2010) referred to "traditional literacy" as the, "reading and writing of printed texts" (p. 65). These standards and NCTE's aforementioned book on standards will be addressed in depth at the beginning of this dissertation's second chapter.

The New London Group (1996) also addresses what traditional literacy is in order to expand on how multiliteracies can be beneficial to students in evolving media and socio-cultural landscapes according to the New London Group. Traditional literacy reflects a practice where the written word is privileged and where the study of the written

word is supported by literature that has been utilized over many years, thereby establishing a precedent.

By focusing on the differences between traditional literacy and multiliteracies, mulimodality (New London Group, 1996; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) also becomes significant. Graphic novels and comics are amalgams of visual and textual elements making them mutlimodal texts which are characterized by their multiple modes of communication (textual, visual, audio, etc.). The degree to which those elements compliment each other is up to debate as Stainbrook (2003) and Jacobs (2007) showed in their works regarding the nature of comics and comics' textuality. Nevertheless, multimodality and its effects on students and their literacy practices reflects how students' lives outside of the classroom affect the way they read and interact with texts in the classroom.

What all of this means for graphic novels and comic books in academic contexts is still nebulous as much of the literature written on graphic novel usage in classrooms is scattered and sporadic. Additionally, the seminal works on comics in academic contexts (Eisner, 1985; McCloud, 1993; McCloud 2000) are focused on the medium itself and how its components work to form narratives. While these are excellent examples of multimodality and its inner workings, the usage of comics in classrooms does not have what might be considered a “seminal” work. Comic usage in the classroom is usually reserved for edited volumes (Carter, 2007a; Tabachnick, 2009a). Frey & Fisher (2004; 2007) have conducted noteworthy studies that present classrooms where graphic novels have been employed effectively and with interesting results. The literature review in

chapter two will delve further into how graphic novels and comic books have been used in classrooms.

The framework of this study was designed to establish and utilize traditional literacy, multiliteracy, and visual literacy. That establishment and utilization was used as the basis for exploring which literacies teachers privileged in their classrooms while using graphic novels. Establishing the multimodal nature of the graphic novel was important, especially when exploring classrooms that used the medium. Multimodal texts are exceptions to the tradition of using monomodal texts (books, poems, plays, etc.) in a classroom.

Methodological Approaches

This was a pedagogical study utilizing a modified cross-case analysis (Stake, 1995) conducted in three college classrooms with a focus on how graphic novels and/or comics books were used by the teacher(s). The length of each case study was dependent upon the teacher's unit and how the graphic novel or comic was used in the classroom.

The data sources for each modified case study included interviews (Kvale, 1996; Spradley, 1979) non-participatory observations (Stake, 1995), and content analysis (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995). The focus of the data collection was on how the instructor(s) were using the graphic novel and/or comic in his/her classroom. Data from the case studies was analyzed and presented to provide what Geertz (1973) described as "thick description." Though Geertz cites Ryle (1968) as having coined the term and set the groundwork for the term in ethnographic studies, Geertz expanded upon the idea of

gathering data from multiple sources in order to present the data from a given study in as thorough a way as possible.

Since this study sought to gain a better understanding of how college English teachers utilized graphic novels in their classrooms, these were case studies with an emphasis on interviews of the teachers utilizing the graphic novels, classroom observations of college classes in which graphic novels are taught, and textual analysis of documents (interview transcripts, assignments, syllabi, etc.) provided by the teacher. For this dissertation, it was logical to implement a modified version of an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) as the data was used to add to the fields of literacy studies and comic studies. An instrumental case study, characterized by the selection of the case to be studied not being pre-determined or pre-chosen, allowed the focus of data collection to be on how teachers used graphic novels in the given case studies. No case study was generalizable as specific contexts were limited to their own environments, but instrumental case studies allowed the researcher to choose contexts that best addressed the research questions of a given study. However, this dissertation was also a cross-case analysis of three college classrooms with the data being analyzed and presented using "thick description (Geertz, 1973). Thick description allowed for diverse data sources to be reported and analyzed in a fashion that focused on how the participants structured their classes and the roles of the graphic novel(s) within them.

Part of the "thick description" was in the interviews conducted with the teachers. Of primary influence was Spradley's (1979) work on ethnographic interviewing and Kvale's (1996) structure and process of interviewing. In understanding (as much as possible) what cultures perceive and practice when involved in a discourse, the better the

data gained. Even though this was not an ethnographic study, every classroom has a distinct culture. Incorporating Kvale's process and structure of a qualitative interview with Spradley's emphasis on the cultural underpinnings that interviews are undeniably connected to enriched the interview data of this study.

Another vital component of any class is the text that is provided by the teacher. The graphic novels the students and teachers worked with were also texts, but the focus of this study was on how teachers utilized these graphic novels. Therefore, content analysis was used to examine the texts provided by the teacher including syllabi, assignments, and any other "handouts" students received. In addition, the transcripts from interviews with the participants and the notes from classroom observations were analyzed as texts for the content analyses. As Krippendorf (2004) notes, the context in which this content was analyzed was vital to the data collected in content analysis and for the case study in general. Stake (1995) emphasizes the importance of observations in qualitative case studies (p. 60) making content analysis important to this study. Combining what was observed in this pedagogical study with the artifacts that the cases produced provided a more encompassing analysis of what was occurring in the cases.

Presentation of the data collected was dependent on the collective nature of the case studies (Stake, 1995) with focus on analyses of interviews (Spradley, 1979; Kvale, 1996), and content analyses of teacher's classroom documents and classroom observations (Krippendorf, 2004). Stake (1995) uses "triangulation" to present data. This term gets broadened to "crystallization" by Ellingson (2009). However, I preferred the use of "Thick Description" (Geertz, 1973) which is more about capturing the full experience than trying to generate a comprehensive trend from the data collected.

Key Terms

Graphic Novels and Comic Books

The limited amount of academic literature on comic studies makes defining the medium difficult. In Tabachnik's edited book *Teaching the Graphic Novel* (2009a), the premiere chapter by Hatfield (2009) addresses this challenge of defining graphic novels and comics in an academic landscape:

> Comics *shouldn't* be easy to define, as they are an interdisciplinary, indeed antidisciplinary, phenomenon, nudging us usefully out of accustomed habits of thought and into productive gray areas where various disciplines—such as literature, art, semiotics, and mass communications—overlap and inform one another. (p. 23)

The problem with defining the medium is that comics are still new to academic audiences, and the varying and diverse styles that the medium is subject to makes defining them difficult. Stainbrook (2003) explores how the relationship between the words and images of a graphic novel or comic change its message depending on both the reader and the creator(s). Eisner (1985) defined comic literature as "sequential art" where images narrate a story along with the words. McCloud's first book *Understanding Comics* (1993) gives a similar idea of what comics literally are, but his work reflected a more multimodal nature where the images and words worked together to form meaning.

However, a difference between graphic novels and comic books has been established in recent years. Graphic novels are now typically characterized by their length and their content. In terms of content, graphic novels usually have more serious content

than comic books. Additionally, graphic novels are much longer than comic books because they're designed to be full-length stories reminiscent of traditional novels in terms of length. The length of a graphic novel is determined either by the necessity of the creator(s) to finish a story or by the number of collected issues in a volume as many graphic novels are a collection of individual comic books. This leads to the definition of graphic novels and comic books for this dissertation:

> Graphic Novel – A comic style narrative, fictional or non fictional, that is either a collection of individual comic book issues or an extended, original work
>
> Comic Book – A singular comic style narrative that is either a stand-a-lone story or part of a serialized story

Traditional Literacy

In NCTE's *Standards for the English Language Arts* (2009), the organization's standards for literacy are presented with an emphasis on traditional literature: "In particular, students need to read literature, including classic, contemporary, and popular narratives, poems, songs, and plays" (p. 11). This statement of which texts are valuable and of academic worth relates to The New London Group's (1996) view on what traditional literacy is and entails, and what they call "literacy pedagody:"

> Literacy pedagogy has traditionally meant teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language. Literacy pedagogy, in other words, has been a carefully restricted project -- restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language (New London Group, 1996, p. 60-61).

The New London Group defines traditional literacy in terms of the way its taught, or as they phrase it, "literacy pedagogy." NCTE's assertion as to what literacy is, which is cited above, presents a very traditional way of viewing literacy. However, Westby (2010) presents a clear and concise way of defining what traditional literacy is: "The term *literacy* traditionally has referred to reading and writing of printed text" (p. 65). This dissertation recognized Westby's short, yet appropriately concise, definition of what "traditional literacy" is. The details of what *traditional literacy* is considered to be, in regards to texts that are read, was recognized in NCTE's book on standards; that book is discussed in detail in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

Multiliteracies

The New London Group (1996) wanted to evolve the concept of literacy given the changing nature of media. At that time, computers became much more prevalent in society with the burgeoning of home computers and the beginning of the internet. This created an atmosphere where the concept of literacy, as it had been regarded up to that point, needed to evolve. With people needing to become more adept at navigating the multiple forms of communication they were bombarded with on a daily basis, it made sense to rethink the concept of literacy as a whole. As a term, "multiliteracies" does not replace traditional literacy; instead it looks to add differing and varying methods to interpret and synthesize modes of communication outside of the traditional print literacy students have primarily been taught. Multiliteracies aims to expand the scope of literacy in general. However, The New London Group defines multiliteraices in terms of its pedagogy:

> What we might term “mere literacy” remains centered on language only, and usually on a singular national form of language at that, which is conceived as a stable system based on rules such as mastering sound-letter correspondence…A pedagogy of multiliteracies, by contrast, focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone. These differ according to culture and context, and have specific cognitive, cultural, and social effects (p. 64).

Since The New London Group defines multiliteracies in terms of its pedagogy, a definition for the actual concept, as opposed to its pedagogy, needs to be established. Danzak (2011) defined "multiliteracies" the following way:

> The term *multiliteracies* (New London Group, 1996) refers to a shift in the conception of literacy and literacy pedagogy from that of a page-bound practice restricted to an official/standard (i.e., monolingual and monocultural) language to a critical and dynamic understanding of literacy as a multiplicity of discourses. This broad conceptualization of literacy highlights diversity, both of texts and of the individuals who create and interact with them. (p. 189)

As the term had originally been defined through its pedagogical implementation, Danzak's interpretation of The New London Group's serves as the definition for *multiliteracies* in this dissertation. However, the paradigm of *multiliteracies,* as a part of this dissertation's theoretical framework, was still derived from The New London Group's seminal work (1996).

Visual Literacy

Graphic novels and comic books are a predominantly visual medium making a reader’s visual literacy skills important for their use. Fransecky and Debes (1972) saw a

student who used visual literacy as a student who "…can translate from the visual language to the verbal and vice versa. He has a basic understanding of the grammar of visual language and some realization that it parallels verbal language" (p. 7). This definition is blatant in its separation of the verbal and visual making it a historical precedent from which to build upon. The view of visual literacy this dissertation will use is more akin to the concept of multiliteracies, however, where multiple methods of interpreting diverse texts are read together in order to comprehend meaning. Therefore, Kress' (2003) assertion of what visual literacy is and how it fits into a pedagogy of multiliteracies was applied to this dissertation:

> To use both modes, image and writing, together, as is ever more frequently the case with the new technologies, is to be involved in the *use* of the resources of visual composition (layout), in the *use of the visual mode of image*, in the *use of the mode of writing*, and all in ways which both draw on the existing knowledges and resources and yet are also quite new. (p. 24, italics in original)

This is not a definition in the traditional sense. Rather, it is an approach to studying various literacies where one mode does not relegate the other. Instead, as the definition of multiliteracies asserts, both print and visual literacies work in tandem.

Significance of the Study

Knowledge

Examining how teachers utilized graphic novels can contribute to not only the field of comic studies but also the fields of literacy and pedagogy. Whereas much of the literature suggests how graphic novels *could* be used or how graphic novels were used as

secondary texts (not primary texts), this study seeks to add to the literature on how graphic novels are used as primary texts. As such, this dissertation is significant in its focus on how the utilization of graphic novels by college English teachers privileged certain literacies (traditional, visual, multiple, or otherwise) and how that privileging reflected the participants' views on the medium. It is known that graphic novels were used and the fact that they're multimodal. What hasn't been as prevalent iss how their usage in classrooms reflected teachers' perceptions of the medium and subsequent literacies that were accessed in the classroom.

Practical Problems

Many teachers want to use graphic novels in their classrooms, but they are limited by not knowing the best pedagogical practices and benefits of those practices. This study clarified some of the pedagogical unknowns in teaching with comics. By focusing on the literacies that teachers access in their lessons with graphic novels, the affordances and/or constraints of utilizing a graphic novel or comic in a college English class were presented in three case studies.

Action

The social issues surrounding graphic novel usage are really rooted in the socio-cultural perception of the medium as being exclusively designed for children. This mentality has faded in recent years with many non-fictional graphic novels establishing academic legitimacy including *Maus* (Spiegelman, 2003), *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2007), and *Palestine* (Sacco, 2002). A side question for this study became identifying which graphic novels were used in classrooms. By identifying which graphic novels were used, it made a case for better understanding how the socio-cultural perceptions of comic literature

affected teachers' choices of comic texts. Exploring this question shed light on whether there was a perceived "preferred" style of graphic novel usage in classrooms and how that style reflected the socio-cultural perceptions outlined above.

Summary of Chapter One

This dissertation explored the complex relationship between teacher usages of graphic novels and/or comic books in English classrooms, how teachers viewed the legitimacy of the medium in academic contexts, and which literacies were accessed during the utilization of graphic novels. Since graphic novels and comic books are multimodal, literacy privileging depended on how classes were structured, how the instructor(s) viewed his/her own usage, and what the products of that usage were (assignments). Therefore, a cross-case analysis of three case studies, which were designed to gather varying types of data to provide a comprehensive discourse, were employed for this research.

The benefits of this dissertation were in its emphasis on teacher usage and exploration of subsequent literacy privileging. The focus on the instructor was designed to get to the deeper reasoning behind using graphic novels and/or comic books in classrooms and what those usages meant for teachers and their classroom goals. Since the literature on usage of graphic novels and comic books in classrooms was scarce, the roots of this scarcity was addressed in the reflections of the teachers who used graphic novels and comic books (interviews), how comic books were literally used (classroom observations), and what the products of that usage were (content analysis). This study not only had implications for literacy studies, but also comic studies and pedagogical studies.

Specifically, this study contributed to the ever-evolving and growing literature on the academic usage of graphic novels and comic books in classrooms. Schmitt (1992) was correct and indeed prophetic when he said, "Comic books are indeed an 'attack' on traditional values, one which contains within its seemingly inconsequential and frivolous facade, the deconstructive seeds of a revolution in perception, likely to leave no stone of traditional educative practice unturned" (p. 154). These “stones,” as Schmitt called them, are beginning to be unturned, and this study focused on *how* those “stones” were literally being unturned and what the repercussions of that unturning meant for literacy, pedagogical, and comic studies.

At the same time, this study was limited in its scope. Part of this was due to the limited usage of graphic novels in English classrooms. The implementation and study of graphic novels and comic books was severely limited due to "the relative newness of the formatstill fallout from Frederic Wertham's infamous 1954 text (now widely debunked), *Seducation of the Innocent*[or]Perhaps it is the word-picture association itself that is disturbing" (Carter, 2007b, p. 20). The study was also exploratory in nature reflecting not only a constructivist positionality (Vygotsky, 1978) on the part of the researcher but also a realization that the usage of graphic novels in academic contexts is diverse and affected by various dynamics including social, political, educational, and literary constructs.

Comic literature, being a multimodal literacy medium, is in opposition to what The New London Group (1996) called “literacy pedagogy” (p. 60) where the focus of literacy is on “…learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language” (p. 60). Since teaching graphic novels and comic books is in opposition to established and practiced pedagogies, the teaching of graphic narratives or

“sequential art” (Eisner, 1985) is pedagogically exotic. Finding participants (teachers) who willingly participated in challenging established pedagogical practices proved to be difficult.

Overview of the Dissertation Chapters

The remainder of this dissertation is split into six chapters. Chapter Two explores the existing literature on multiliteracies and comic studies with emphasis on how The New London Group’s theory of multiliteracies is applied to the study of multimodal texts, specifically graphic novels and comic books.

Chapter Three provides the methodology for this study. Specifically, a modified version of Stake’s (1995) case study methodology is outlined as are the data sources which included interviewing, observation, and artifact/content analysis. Chapter Three also addresses ethical and trustworthiness issues of the study.

Chapter Four presents data collected throughout the study. Specifically, this chapter answers the first research question of the dissertation. How teachers literally used the graphic novels in their classes is presented in this chapter with an emphasis on how the participants pedagogical practices exhibited certain commonalities as well as unique differences.

Chapter Five continues the presentation of data with a focus on the study's second research question: mainly, how did the participants' views on graphic novels affect and inform their pedagogy. Additionally, the nature of the participants' assessments are studied in the context of how those assessments reflected the participants' valuing of the medium and the literacies that were discussed.

Chapter Six discusses the themes emerging from the cross-case analysis, which leads to summary conclusions and implications of the research questions of the study. Additionally, the study's implications for future research in both literacy and comic studies are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Focusing on the usage of graphic novels among college teachers first required exploring how the medium of graphic novels has become more legitimized in academic contexts and how visual literacy related to both students' abilities to interact with such a text and the expectations of teachers who employed multimodal texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2003) in their classrooms. The theory of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), which addresses the need for the concept of literacy to evolve as media evolves, became the cornerstone of this study's theoretical framework. Even though this dissertation explores how college professors' expectations of graphic novel usage in their classes varied, multiliteracies was vital to that exploration and analysis. In particular, the role of visual literacy within the realm of multiliteracies was also significant.

While multiliteracies aim "to broaden this understanding of literacy and literacy teaching and learning to include a multiplicity of discourses," (New London Group, 1996), visual literacy focuses on the ability of the reader of a given text to interpret and synthesize meaning through pictorial (drawn, photographed, or otherwise) elements. As graphic novels and comic books are multimodal (Jacobs, 2007) with both textual and visual elements, exploring the characteristics of visual literacy was vital to the background of this study.

Finally, the exploration of how graphic novels have become more legitimized in academia and how visual literacy and multimodality have played a part in that legitimization was a significant area of scholarship to consider. Graphic novels and comic

books, having transcended the roots of Sunday Funnies and child-oriented storytelling and have become complicated and powerful forms of storytelling with their own multimodality usage of text and image (Stainbrook, 2003) and literacy, Romanelli (2009) called "outsider literacy."

Theoretical Framework

The visual and written style of comics is unique, requiring the construction of a framework for this study to draw on a combination of literacies with varying characteristics and a generalized support for the inclusion of graphic novels in academic studies. The theoretical framework for this study addressed the following areas:

- Literacy: What does it mean traditionally?
- Multimodality: An evolution in texts
- Visual Literacy: A connection to multiliteracies
- The Connection: Multiliteracies and graphic texts
- Graphic novel usage: How the medium has been used

As will be thoroughly discussed below, graphic novel usage in college English classrooms has been explored in the past, but those studies were limited in significant ways. Some studies relegated the graphic novel to a supporting role, some were theoretical studies on the possibilities of a particular genre of graphic novel, some studies promoted graphic narrative as a tool for creation, and some studies linked the reading of graphic novels to alternative literacies. Additionally, some studies were reflective of high school classrooms. While there are clear pedagogical and academic differences between

college and high school classrooms, the studies from high school contexts were still vital to this literature review.

As this study looked at how literacies were accessed in college classrooms that utilized graphic novels, this framework addressed the very nature of literacy and its evolution in a changing media landscape. The New London Group's (1996) study on multiliteracies asserts a theory that changing media (especially media that is technologically significant) requires new ways in which to understand and synthesize meaning. However, The New London Group's theory does not aim to eliminate or relegate traditional literacies in the course of addressing the rising and new literacies.

Literacy: What Does it Mean Traditionally?

Any level of education, from elementary through graduate school, stresses the need for literacy, how important it is, and how it can be achieved. While the definition of literacy has matured beyond simply being able to read and write (New London Group, 1996; Ntiri, 2009), those traditional skills still hold a strong place in how literacy is perceived and studied.

Even though it is difficult to pinpoint what "traditional" literacy skills are, the ability to effectively read and write would be a good place to begin. Moats (2000) asserts that, "Few would deny that teaching children to read, write, spell, listen and speak is among the foremost responsibilities of educators" (p. 3). That much seems obvious. Moats asks what types of texts should be utilized for learning literacy, a fundamental question directly tied to this study. Additionally, Westby (2010) succinctly defines "traditional literacy" the following way: "The term *literacy* traditionally has referred to

reading and writing of printed text" (p. 65). The idea of literacy referring strictly to written word is important as it presents a culture of schooling where alternative types of media (movies, television, graphic novels, etc.) are almost entirely ignored.

The National Council of Teachers of English's (NCTE) *Standards for the English Language Arts* (2009) outlines what their English/Langue Arts standards are for learners. In their section titled “A Broad Range of Texts,” the following is asserted:

> Language learning depends on the exploration and careful study of a wide array of texts. In particular, students need to read literature, including classic, contemporary, and popular narratives, poems, songs, and plays. Exploring literary worlds gives students a new perspective on their own experience and enables them to discover how literature can capture the richness and complexity of human life.
>
> Broad reading also includes informational and academic texts, such as textbooks, lab manuals, papers, and reference materials; student-produced texts, including peer writing, journals, and student newspapers and literary magazines; technological resources, such as computer software, computer networks, databases, CD-ROMs, and laser disks; mass media and other visual texts, including films, selected television programs, magazines, and newspapers; socially significant oral and written texts, such as speeches, radio and television broadcasts, political documents, editorials, and advertisements; and everyday texts, such as letters, bulletin board notices, memos, and signs (2009, p. 11).

This extensive citation is purposefully left uninterrupted or abbreviated. It is essential to read and experience the wording of the United States’ premiere English pedagogical

organization and its view on what texts are worthy of both literary merit and pedagogical application. It is possible to interpret the first part about “contemporary, and popular narratives” as applying to graphic novels or other media, but the focus here for NCTE is on traditional texts. The NCTE standards go on to say, “In particular, we recommend a focus in English language arts education on four purposes of language use: for obtaining and communicating information, for literary response and expression, for learning and reflection, and for problem solving and application” (p. 12).

The New London Group (1996) sees the traditional views on literacy in a unique way:

> Literacy pedagogy has traditionally meant teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language. Literacy pedagogy, in other words, has been a carefully restricted project -- restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language (p. 60-61).

While this seminal article's scope goes beyond the question of what constitutes literacy and into the socio-cultural implications of such a question, the New London Group's definition remains vitally important to both how traditional literacy has been perceived for many years and how multiliteracies (along with multimodality which will be discussed shortly) has become important in a world where media never remains static.

The New London Group's view on traditional literacy is not meant for educators to simply dismiss its value though. Instead, their discussion of traditional literacy is intended to inspire thought and reflection on the part of the educator. Part of that reflection is centered on the monomodality of traditional literacy: "What we might term

'mere literacy' remains centered on language only, and usually on a singular national form of language at that, which is conceived as a stable system based on rules such as mastering sound-letter correspondence" (p. 64). The New London Group argues that written language alone is not enough to teach literacy in a world that continues to create new methods of communication.

In an evolving media landscape, the best method for accruing literacies is up for debate. Multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) increasingly play an important role in contemporary education. Multimodal texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), which possess varying dimensions of expression, are unique tools teachers can use to teach literacy. Comic books and graphic novels enable varying dimensions of interpretation for students of unique learning styles because comic books and graphic novels are multimodal.

Multimodality: An Evolution in Texts

While Kress (2003) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) are solid works in the study of evolving literacies, The New London Group (1996) was a starting point for examining why multimodality is so vital to the study and application of graphic novels in college classrooms. Specifically, for the New London Group multiliteriacies was, "a word we chose to describe two important arguments we might have with the emerging cultural, institutional, and global order: the multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity" (p. 63). That "multiplicity of communications channels and media" is where Kress and van Leeuwen expand on the importance of multimodality in education.

Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) examined how different forms of media (text, audio, image, etc.) can be combined to create a multimodal discourse. As opposed to monomodality, which relies on one dimension of expression, multimodal texts create multiple dimensions in which a text (which is anything that can be interpreted) can be read (p. 1). By reading a text through varying and diverse literacy lenses, meaning-making becomes multi-faceted and accesses a reader's natural and varying ways of interpreting and synthesizing communications of any kind whether they be textual, visual, audio, tactile-kinesthetic, or any other common form.

As media changes, skills to interpret those changes in media are necessary. Kress continues his interpretation of texts as evolving and breaking away from the traditional monomodality they're typically known for being. Kress (2003) analyzed how literacy needs to change because of the types of texts we, as readers, are exposed to. In addition to expanding the term “text” to mean anything we interpret as an audience including music, television, movies, etc., Kress cites “multimodality” as a major factor for new literacies. Ajayi (2008) shares this same view of texts saying, "By text, I mean different genres such as reports, newspapers, pictures, songs, manuals, textbooks, narratives, procedures, legal documents, spoken or written words, and the different text types associated with electronic media" (p. 209). For example, trying to describe how a movie scene makes one reflect on an event in his/her life is difficult to do in words because the source material that instigated those feelings/emotions is mostly visual and not entirely verbal. However, readers/writers are traditionally expected to relay nearly all responses (at least academically) through writing:

> The materiality of the different modes—sound for speech, light for image, body for dance—means that not everything can be realised in every mode with equal facility, and that we cannot transport mode-specific theories from one mode to another without producing severe distortions (Kress, 2003, p. 107).

This literacy dissonance is why new ways of analyzing diverse texts are becoming more and more essential in a changing world. Looking at Kress' text as a major work has benefits as it brings to light the conflict inherent in using alternative texts in traditional settings. In seeing literacy as a multi-faceted and extra-lingual phenomenon that is socially constructed, resolving such dissonance becomes the focus of the pedagogy and subsequent analysis of its components. Kress focuses on examples of students' works to make his points; this makes sense as Kress is looking at how to navigate literacy in a changing world where students are extremely active.

Jacobs' (2007) ethnographic piece on the multimodality of comics has set a precedent for the recognition of graphic novels/comics as being multimodal texts. Jacobs not only analyzed graphic novels' multimodality through traditional research and critical analyses of previous studies, he also accessed his prior experiences with comic books as motivation for him to pursue reading opportunities.

One of Jacobs' main arguments relates to the multitude of skills that are required to read a comic and/or graphic novel. The multiple modes of interpretation that comics provide support future reading in other forms of text. For Jacobs, "the literate practices learned in reading comics not only provide pleasure for the reader, but they also provide transfer value to other forms of literacy, both multimodal (such as the Internet, film, or television) and print" (Jacobs, 2007, p. 188). It is important to note that nearly all other

forms of literacy, except for traditional print, have visual components, but unless a traditional prose book is advertised as illustrated, the only visual element a reader is likely to encounter is the picture on the cover of the book. Readers are constantly exposed to visuals during their daily interactions with texts outside of the English classroom, and the texts read in an English class rarely reflect the typical media students encounter.

Jacobs goes on to detail his experience as a young boy in a general store deciding which comics to buy with his allowance simply by looking at the cover of a comic called *Nova*. He goes on to cite the image on the cover (Jacobs, 2007, p. 195-196), the intertextuality of the cover (p. 196), and the implied narrative of the cover (p. 197). The analysis of how the comic's cover convinced a young boy to buy the comic is worthy of being analyzed due to its relation to both multimodality and multiliteracies. Jacobs was able to infer a general story simply by looking at the cover of the comic; Jacobs calls this an "implied narrative" (p. 197). The main point is that the images told a story which the young boy understood. The inner pages of comics are even better at doing this because the union of words and images are specifically designed in a sequence: what Eisner (1985) termed "sequential art." As another researcher put it, "verbal language and visual imagery are complementary and provide what the other lacks" (Gillenwater, 2009, p. 33).

Through multimodality arises the necessity for different and unique literacies that need to be explored further. The New London Group explains that multimodality is a natural aspect of communication: "In a profound sense, all meaning-making is multimodal. All written text is also visually designed" (New London Group, p. 81). Going forward with this dissertation, the concept of texts of any kind being influenced by

all modes of communication is vital. Graphic novels and comic books are predominantly visual, but they are also grounded in visual elements.

Multimodality is taking different modes of communication and incorporating, however needs be, into a given message or narrative. According to The New London Group, all communication, no matter the medium, is subject to multimodality.

Visual Literacy: A Connection to Multiliteracies

Visual literacy, as a theory, is nothing new (Fransecky & Debes, 1972). According to Fransecky and Debes (1972), a student who has visual literacy possesses the following:

> He can translate from the visual language to the verbal and vice versa. He has a basic understanding of the grammar of visual language and some realization that it parallels verbal language. He is familiar with and somewhat skilled in the use and tools of visual communication. And, finally, of course, he is developing a critical sensibility toward visual communication (p. 7).

Metros (2008) defines visual literacy "as the ability to decode and interpret (make meaning from) visual messages and also be able to encode and compose meaningful visual communications" (p. 103). These two definitions are, despite a gap of 36 years, quite similar. In particular, there is an emphasis on communication and being able to understand and interpret visuals and their messages.

Where communication is concerned, visual literacy uses images to communicate a cohesive message. Kress (2003) makes the point that differences in literacies are important to recognize, but they should not be treated as singular entities or islands of

thought. Instead, visual literacy works with other literacies to create an overall understanding of messages being communicated. Gunther Kress was a member of The New London Group (1996) whose multiliteracies theory has already been discussed. Kress' views of visual literacy being a part of a person's overall literacy is naturally in line with The New London Group's theory of people possessing multiliteracies in a changing media landscape. Therefore, isolating one literacy from another can become counter-productive:

> It may be that when we speak in popular, everyday contexts, these metaphoric uses, extending infinitely -- visual literacy, gestural literacy, musical literacy, media literacy, computer-, cultural-, emotional-, sexual-, internet- and so on and so on -- are fine, though I have my doubts even then. (Kress, 2003, p. 23).

Despite Kress' assertion regarding literacies and their relationships with each other, much of the existing literature on graphic novel and comic book usage in classrooms is framed around the theory that visual literacy is essential to students' understandings of graphic texts (Ajayi, 2008, 2009, Jacobs, 2007; Romanelli, 2009; Schwartz, 2002; Stainbrook, 2003; Versaci, 2010). Therefore, it becomes important to address visual literacy in this review of the literature. It must be remembered, though, that the theoretical framework for this dissertation takes The New London Group's and Kress' views on literacies (that they are interconnected) as the basis for the study's design and analysis of the data. This distinction of literacies being interconnected is important because it represents a continuing evolution of literacies as opposed to finite and/or limited interpretations of what a literacy is. For example, Romanelli (2009) asserts that readers of graphic novels possess "outside literacy." However, that "outsider literacy" does not *replace* visual,

print, or any other literacy while reading a graphic novel or comic book. As the New London Group and Kress state, that "outsider literacy" works with the readers' other literacies.

The importance of visuals in literature for children's literacy development was extensively explored by Kress (1997) prior to his focused works on multimodality. In his earlier study, Kress took the drawings of children before they had learned how to write and found that, "…it is equally important to point out that these representations [children's drawings] are not arbitrary: the logic of their makers' meanings is coded in their form" (p. 31). A connection Kress found that children make is between the visual representations of objects, ideas, and concepts that will eventually become written. In other words, children develop their future written literacy sometimes through their abstract, visual representations of things. Children may just draw what appear to be random lines going up and down the page, but the child may say, "I just drew buildings." In that drawing, an elemental understanding of buildings being vertical and straight is reflected; there is an understanding of the child's interpretation of the word "building" in the visual depiction.

Granted, this study focused on the teachers using the graphic novels and comic books, but the connection between language and visuals was established in Kress' work (1997). Even in the introduction to his study on children's drawings, Kress states, "The world, now, is no longer a world in which written language is dominant" (p. 5). The importance of the relationship between language and pictures is also emphasized in Kress' later works (2001, 2003) and provide examples of how individual literacies (visual, spoken, written, traditional, etc.) are part of a person's overall multiliteracies.

An image is made up of many parts, but the parts are almost always referred to as a single image. According to Sinatra (1986), people interpret and synthesize images holistically; that is, they combine all the components of the image and interpret it is a whole image (p. 97). Even earlier, Vygotsky (1978) addressed the holistic nature of images in *Mind in Society* when discussing the importance of children's play in the creation of vital cognitive connections. Vygotsky stated that, "A two-year-old usually limits his description to separate objects within the picture. Older children describe actions and indicate the complex relationships among separate object within the picture" (p. 32). The important aspect of Vygotsky's analysis of how children interpret images is partially in the importance of recognizing both the parts and the totality of a given image.

There are implications here for graphic novel reading. If students observe an image as a sum of parts, then the dialogue and thought balloons of a comic panel are included in the student's interpretation of the image. Navigating the relationships between image and written text can then become a productive exercise for a student.

Visual images also add a different dynamic that most traditional texts naturally do not posses. Not taking visual images at face value becomes a part of the comprehension: "Visual images do not exist in a vacuum, and looking at them for 'what they are' neglects the ways in which they are produced and interpreted through particular social practices" (Rose, 2001, p. 37). The "vacuum" that Rose mentions is important in regards to visual literacy. While emphasis is placed on the images and/or pictures, the relationships the images/pictures have with the written text is equally important.

Flynt and Brozo (2010) focus on the importance of promoting visual literacy in classrooms due to the influence of visual media surrounding students. In addition, the

assertion that visual literacy needs to be privileged in classrooms immediately is stressed. The visual literacy that Flynt and Brozo reference here represents a pedagogy designed around the inclusion of technology and the internet. Specifically, the social nature of online networking as being beneficial to developing literacies is asserted. In terms of giving examples of what visual literacy can be interpreted as, this article provides further support for alternative literacies in classrooms. Nothing concerning graphic novels or comics is mentioned, but the internet/computers are sometimes grouped together with comics, television, and movies to support an all-encompassing literacy which is sometimes called "media literacy."

Keeping with the trend of extending visual literacy's scope is Seglem and Witte's (2009) piece on how to visually read certain types of images. The researchers in this study make a case for the importance of visual literacy in education and provide detailed examples of how to use diverse media. These media include tattoos, collages, paintings, persuasive narratives, and graphic novels. Specifically, the graphic novels are used in their study as a way to visualize the abstract concepts of poetry through the creation of poetry comics stating, "Layering complex literary analysis skills with visual representations allows students to practice visualizing the texts that they read" (p. 223). This is yet another example of an article designed to promote the awareness of visual literacy in education. The study's focus is on public schools, but the diverse media that are covered provides the ability to use the term *visual literacy* in referring to their work.

Whereas words have specific definitions, images are more open to interpretation. According to Seels (1994), "…the way we search for patterns differs with visual language. With verbal languages, one searches for rules, with visual language one

searches for relationships of a temporal, spatial, or salient nature" (p. 102). It is important to note here the "relationship" aspect of visual literacy again which Jacobs (2007) asserted existed in his analysis of selecting a comic book based strictly on its cover. That relationship can be anything a reader needs it to be: visuals can be a tangible representation of an abstract thought, emotion, or concept. For example, it may be easier to show happiness than to actually define it even though there is an established definition. Being able to identify emotions or other abstract concepts through images also encourages students to access their own experiences or cultural backgrounds to apply meaning to a text.

There is also a relationship between the reader/viewer and the image. Long (2008) shows the relationships between readers and the images they perceive. The study is actually historically based using depression era images to elicit emotional responses from viewers. This study has implications for visual literacy because students "…begin to develop multitextual relationships with the people in the photographs and supplemental texts as they imagine themselves inside the unfolding historical events" (p. 505). This idea of a text and/or reading experience being multimodal adds new dimensions of comprehension for a reader. Instead of simply reading about the Great Depression, students are encouraged to create an emotional connection through the images which in turn supplement any texts that might be read.

When learning from traditional, printed materials, the path of thinking is typically linear. With images, the interpretation of the image is multidimensional with varying modes of meaning. Color, shape, style, and even the image as a whole affect interpretation and subsequently information (Fredette, 1994). Fredette's commentary on

visuals focuses primarily on traditional photographs. In the context of this review regarding graphic novels, Fredette's recognition of an image's qualities beyond simple pictographic content promotes the promise of graphic novels as a study-worthy text. The multimodality of both the images and the words working together encourages unique and individualized methods of interpretation and comprehension.

The Connection: Multiliteracies and Graphic Texts

The multimodality of comic books and/or graphic novels allows students to interpret information from different perspectives. Typically, students can read the text of a comic book which is supported by traditional approaches to literacy. Additionally, images also support interpretation of a text by providing context clues (Cary, 2004) and clarifying misinterpretations of a text. The multimodality of comic books and the literacies of that multimodality have been explored by various researchers.

Schmitt (1992) is an early example of the push to garner acceptance for comics in academia, but this work is also an early examination of the relationship between texts and images. Its publication date of 1992 better reflects the arguments he makes which have in recent years become necessary for any researcher to sight in his/her work on graphic novels in academia or education, and Schmitt asserts an early opinion of comics possessing multimodality. Of particular interest is Schmitt's assertion (in 1992) that comics will have a bigger influence on literacy and education than educators think they will. Additionally, his differentiation of literacies (print and visual) was prophetic. In terms of differentiating comic literacies, this article serves as an early precedent. Schmitt presents his point rather succinctly:

> Two separate techniques must be employed by youngsters; two separate literacies. Unfortunately for Wertham and others who wish to maintain the primacy of reading the print-block text, comic reading actively deconstructs traditional ways of reading, creating a different literacy in which pictorial and word texts continually exchange emphasis, effectively eradicating the primacy of either (p. 157).

This is not the initial work of comics being recognized as a multimodal literacy, but it is an early work that can be utilized to trace the history of visual literacy and comic books.

McCloud's (1993) book on how comics literally work both as a literacy and as a text has become a seminal piece in the area of comic studies. His entire book focuses on how the form works as both a visual (pictures) and as a traditional (words) hybrid in which each cannot exist without the other. Instead of interpreting comics as a combination of visuals and texts, McCloud asserts that comics (or graphic novels) are actually a complicated new method of storytelling that relies on *the relationship between* words and images to convey a singular thought or idea. McCloud even attempts to dispel the perception of comics as being only a supplemental text to be used to introduce readers to classics. McCloud says, "TRADITIONAL THINKING HAS LONG HELD THAT TRULY **GREAT** WORKS OF ART AND LITERATURE ARE ONLY POSSIBLE WHEN THE TWO ARE KEPT AT ARM'S LENGTH" (Caps and bold in original, p. 140). There is a fusion of literacies present here: traditional/print/prose and visual.

Stainbrook's (2003) dissertation looked at the relationship and connection between words and images in comic books and graphic novels. Specifically, the roles of text and images (and how those opposing forms of communication work in tandem) are

deconstructed through analysis of multiple comics from varying genres, artists, writers, and styles. Stainbrook found that “Images, it turns out, can be cognitively linked via a number of connective principles we have generally ascribed to language” (p. 174). Also, “This study discovered that the text is manifested through graphic images…” (p. 173). Essentially, comic literature is an amalgam of text and images that either work in tandem in comic literature. Either way, text and images affect one another and feed off one another in the comic medium. This is concordant with the New London Groups assertions of how literacies interact with one another.

All of Stainbrook’s data is from analysis of comics and graphic novels. The extensive analysis of comics’ cohesion between text and image results in an asserted theory based on the syntactical nature of both text and images including “Syntactic cohesion,” “Non-syntactic grammatical cohesion,” and “Conceptual Cohesion” (p. 118). Depending on the creators of a given comic and the comic’s style and/or genre, the story progresses predominantly through storytelling of the text, a mixture of text and image, or a predominance of imagery. This multimodal nature of the comic may require a special kind of literacy which Romanelli (2009) described as "outsider literacy:"

> Thus in America, comics and graphic novels are culturally and academically situated outside the expected course of study for students and acceptable reading material for educated adults, occupying places of suspicion and scorn, if not outright disregard, in literacy practices. As such, graphic novels and comics represent a different kind of literacy--outsider literacy--something (until recently) mostly associated with adolescence and cult followings (p. 15).

Romanelli (2009) conducted a study with nine adults from varying backgrounds and had them participate in a think-aloud protocol while reading graphic novels and interviews about their experiences with the medium.

What makes Romanelli's study vital to this review is its emphasis on establishing the types of literacies that are necessary for reading a graphic novel. As such, it simultaneously provides ways of suggesting which literacies educators are accessing when they have students engage with graphic novels in their classrooms. Romanelli's separation and support for the diverse nature of literacies that constitute holistic readings and understandings of graphic novels is quite specific and detailed. Romanelli's "Action-Coding Catergoies for Think-aloud Protocols" (p. 171) outlines how readers literally read graphic texts, and her subsequent analyses of participants' usage of those strategies during their "think-alouds" supports those protocols. Romanelli found that readers accessed their own background knowledge when reading and commenting on the narratives and the aesthetics of the graphic novels.

Both dissertations, Stainbrook (2003) and Romanelli (2009), stress the importance of literacies that are necessary for understanding and comprehending content from graphic texts: Stainbrook provides an analysis of the ways in which text and visuals interact in the comic medium, and Romanelli asserts a style of literacy unique to readers who are able to navigate the unique combination of visuals and texts that comics possess.

The strength of visual literacy is evident in its ability to transcend languages through imagery. Unlike language, images and pictures are relatable purely through visual content, not interpreted symbols (McCloud, 1993, p. 49). Therefore, students' experiences can be empowered through relation to a given image. Ajayi (2008)

conducted a study in a California high school with an ESL class of students who were predominantly Hispanic. Ajayi says his study's purpose was, "to explore how language learners in high schools use visual representations and the social conditions of their lives to construct meanings that reflect their lived experiences" (p. 208). Ajayi had the students read an article from the *Los Angeles Times* about immigration, and then had them discuss the piece and respond to it through art. Specifically, Ajayi had the students create their own comic strips and/or political cartoons to share their personal experiences. "What the students produced here is an example of the multimodal approach to meaning making" (p. 221). Students shared meaning through their personal experiences via their art; the text was partially written, partially visual. Even though this article focuses on the artistic interpretations of definitions from ESL students, the article offers insight into multiliteracies. Having students share comprehension via comic strips bypasses many of the grammatical and technical aspects of sharing ideas through language.

Graphic novels and comic books are a unique blend of traditional/print and visual literacy (Stainbrook, 2003), so, "In an increasingly visual culture, literacy educators can profit from the use of graphic novels in the classroom, especially for young adults" (Schwartz, 2002, p. 262). What makes comic books and/or graphic novels unique is their artistic dimension. In adding a visual element to the text, "visual clues increase the amount of comprehensible input and consequently boost reading comprehension" (Cary, 2004).

Mouly (2011) discusses the benefits of comics or graphic novels for young children citing visual literacy as a lens through which to examine and highlight the benefits of reading such a text. Specifically, Mouly looks at graphic novels as being

valuable tools for developing picture-word recognition and creating connections between concepts children are learning and their lives. She also cites being an active participant in reading a comic because, "cartoon language (like poetry) is a medium that can summarize complex emotions, but also needs to be understood and interpreted by the reader" (p. 14). Visual literacy becomes a recurring theme when researching graphic novels and how they can be used as a tool for literacy and exploring complex themes. Picture-word recognition seems to be a concept that is visited over and over again especially with literature that focuses on elementary aged children. In comparing comics to children's picture books, Mouly connects the literacies that very small children grow up with, and I see it as disconcerting to see children grow up with and love one style of storytelling only to be told at a later date that the type of literature they grew up with (the picture book) is only for children. It would be like using a spoon for 10 years of your life and then being told at age 11 that only children use spoons; it would be a shock to the proverbial system.

While this dissertation specifically focused on graphic novels and comic books, it is important to realize that visual literacy is not limited to graphic literature and/or graphic narratives. Griffin (2008) uses examples from television, religious paintings, and advertisements to propose a direct link between being visually competent and possessing/applying media literacy. Creating such a link emphasizes the importance of visual literacy as a necessary tool for an evolving and changing media landscape echoing Kress' (2003) and The New London Group's (1996) assertions concerning the evolution of multiliteracies with changing texts. Even though comics/graphic novels are never specifically mentioned, Griffin's article gives reasons for why visual competence and

visual literacy are necessary and important skills to possess as readers of texts (both visual and traditional) in an evolving world.

Some researchers have already experimented with graphic novels as a primary text (Boatright, 2010; Harris, 2007) and have yielded some interesting results which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. By exploring graphic novels being used as a primary text, the integration of literacies (or lack thereof) can be better explored as the focus of an entire unit is on the graphic novel or comic book being used. When graphic novels or comic books are used as a supplementary text, like Leibold (2007) did by pairing an issue of *X-Men* with *Dante's Inferno*, the emphasis on the visual text is on its uniqueness as a companion text. Leibold asserts that by using the *X-Men* comic book as a supplement to *Datne's Inferno*, a more thorough understanding of specific themes may occur. However, Leibold uses *Inferno* as the primary text because that is the text the unit is built around. The difference then between primary and supplemental texts for this dissertation was a distinction in which text a certain teacher used as the dominant one. In other words there was a distinction between which text was always privileged in referencing. All of the participants in this study utilized their graphic novels as primary texts.

A significant amount of the research already conducted about graphic novels and comics in educational settings has focused on using them as cultural discussion points. Due to the artistic nature of graphic novels, many researchers have utilized the visual components to promote critical thinking and analysis by students. The connections that are made in equating a concept with both a word and a picture creates different modes of retention for a student learning a language to pull from when reading (Cary, 2004).

However, even though there is a strong assertion that images help with retention, the context of the images is equally important.

Primary & Secondary Texts

Utilizing the style of graphic narrative is becoming more prominent as evidenced by many studies (Bitz, 2004; Ajayi, 2008, 2009; Smetana, Odelson, Burns, & Grisham, 2009). Smetana (2009) conducted a study with deaf students where they read graphic novels and created outlines for their own stories. In citing the multimodality of the medium (especially as it pertains to pictures) the students, who had struggled with prose, reacted to the graphic novels in a positive way producing work that, according to Smetana, exceeded their work that was based on prose readings. Additionally, the study gave a concrete example of a lesson with an actual lesson plan included in the paper. The fact that a lesson plan was included with this study is quite rare for studies on comic literature in academia. Very little of the literature on comic studies explicitly describes how the texts are literally used in a classroom, which is what this dissertation was designed to explore. Literature circles are one of the methods used, and that is an original idea for graphic novels. While literature circles are a staple of many public schools' English programs, they have been traditionally reserved for "literature" and not for graphic novels. Also, the visual nature of comics and graphic novels makes for an interesting choice when working with students who have hearing disabilities. In choosing graphic literature as a means of expression, sounds can become visual through onomatopoeia and pictorial representations of sound.

Graphic novels fit right in with the rise of "multiliteracies." When used in an educational setting, graphic novels "can enrich the students' experiences as a new way of imparting information, serving as transitions into more print-intensive works, enticing reluctant readers into prose books and, in some cases, offering literary experiences that linger in the mind long after the book is finished" (Gallo & Weiner, 2004, p. 115). While Gallo and Weiner make excellent points about the benefits of graphic novels in educational settings, it needs to be vehemently noted that they still connect the benefits to traditional literacy, or as they put it, "…serving as transitions into more print-intensive works…" (p. 115). Too often, this is the fate of graphic novels in educational contexts: destined to be relegated to the "minor leagues" of literature and literacy. The benefits of multiliteracies are too clear and present to have graphic novels/comics be so relegated. Utilizing multimodal texts such as graphic novels can help students access their diverse literacies and apply their unique multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983).

The connection between graphic novels/comic books and multiliteracies is rooted in the multimodality of the medium. The New London Group asserted that all media is multimodal in nature making multiliteracies important when communicating through any medium. For graphic novels and comic books, the connection is even more vital because sequential art blatantly incorporates two distinct modes of communication: textual and visual.

Graphic Novel Usage: How The Medium Has Been Used

Even though there is now a growing respect for graphic novels as a legitimate and powerful medium, their comic book roots have not always experienced the same acclaim.

As early as the 1950s, comic books were attacked for their supposed salacious content and inappropriate violence (Wright, 2003). The assault on comics reached its zenith when Fredric Wertham wrote *Seduction of the Innocent* (1953, 2004). The book criticized the comic book industry for publishing what he considered to be indecent material. His accusations finally made their way to the United States Senate where the comic book industry was required to institute a self-imposed code. This code held strong until the mid-1980s (Wright, 2003).

While it is the opinion of this researcher that some of Wertham's accusations held merit, his attack and subsequent censoring of the comic book publishers did more to hinder the medium than help it. However, it must also be made clear that many of the comic books Wertham and other critics targeted were of the horror and crime genres and not the superhero or humor genres with which most people associate with comic books.

Only towards the end of the twentieth century have scholars started making genuine cases for graphic novels and comic books being considered legitimate literature (Dardess, 1995; Eisner, 1985, McCloud, 1993, Schmitt, 1992), and much of the research on the legitimization of graphic novels focuses on the medium itself and not necessarily its effects on students.

Despite the advancements of graphic novels in the field of literacy, much of the existing research on integrating graphic novels into a classroom to improve literacy enlists graphic novels in a supporting role similar to the debate on literature. As far back as 1944 (Sones), comic books were viewed as sophomoric and unworthy of serious consideration due to their content and target audience of children. Sones went as far as to assert that comics could be used "as a starting point to lead to the discovery of finer

literary, language, or art forms" (Sones, 1944, p. 238). This mentality of treating graphic literature as texts strictly designed for students to sew their literary wild oats is consistent with Leonard (1975), Rollin (1970), and even some more contemporary studies which focus on the pairing of a graphic novel or comic book with a traditional literary work (Carter, 2007d; Leibold, 2007; Webb & Guisand, 2007). What is of paramount importance here is Sone's use of "finer literacy" to imply that comics were a "less fine" literacy. What the definition of that "finer literacy" is remains unclear. Since 1944, the respect for comic books has grown significantly making this article simply a portal to historical perspectives on comic books in the field of education. It is useful to understand that this was a very popular opinion concerning comic books for the better part of the twentieth century. That view still shapes many teachers' attitudes toward comics today. Additionally, the role of comics as a supplementary text or as a text to promote traditional literacy is addressed here (Sones, 1944).

Sones' assertion that comic books could be used as transitional texts is not very different from Gallo and Weiner's (2004) statement on the benefits of graphic novel usage, "…serving as transitions into more print-intensive works…" (p. 115). Unfortunately, Gallo and Weiner make an assertion that reflects a mentality that is (at the time of their publication) 60 years old.

The role of graphic novels in promoting literacy is still in flux, but the respect that graphic novels now have is much improved. In regards to literacy specifically, there is not an abundance of literature for graphic novel and comic book usage in classrooms. However, what does exist are examples of students reading graphic novels of a serious and/or historical nature (Harris, 2007; Chun, 2009) or the promotion of some graphic

novels as a form of progressive literature (Behler, 2006; Schwartz & Rubinstein-Ávila, 2006; Schwartz, 2010).

Harris (2007) shares the experience of using *Persepolis* as a culturally relevant text, making it a point to use *Persepolis* as a supporting text in conjunction with a young adult novel. *Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi, is the author's account of her experiences growing up in Iran during the late 1970s. While the technical usage of the graphic novel reflects the traditional relegation of graphic novels and comics to a supporting role, the cultural impact that Harris suggests *Persepolis* may have is powerful. Reading *Persepolis* "can give students valuable insights into the destructiveness of stereotypes and prejudices" (p. 38). Harris' assertions concerning graphic novels are limited, at least in this study, to *Persepolis*. Despite that limited scope, the potential for graphic novels to act as culturally rich texts is very apparent.

What needs to be stressed here is the lack of literature in comic studies, or academic studies on the use of comic literature, describing *how* the instructors used the texts. Harris (2007) says that *Persepolis* was used as a supporting text, but the logistics of how the teacher used the text is never given. This absence is what this dissertation sought to explore and uncover. This next section cites studies that have studied how graphic novels, but the literature on this is minimal and many of the studies look at graphic novels in supporting, rather than primary, roles.

Graphic Novel: Supporting Text or Primary Text?

If graphic novels are to make an impact in a classroom of any level, perhaps the entire culture of English teaching needs to be challenged, though it must be said that

English teachers have absolutely had an effect on students by using traditional text. This dissertation is not meant to undermine of discredit past practices. Rather, it is seeking to expand the potential texts a teacher may use. Perhaps there needs to be a consideration of different pedagogical approaches given the support of multiliteracies as a legitimate theory (The New London Group, 1996).

Frey and Fisher (2004; 2007) have written about the use of graphic novels in the classroom. Specifically, they have focused on graphic novels' uses in urban communities and their usage as a primary text. Frey and Fisher's study makes a point of privileging graphic novels in a classroom. Part of the study details how a high school teacher in an under-privileged area used a graphic novel to teach themes and concepts that other more affluent schools were having their students study. The teacher, Ms. Scott, chose Will Eisner's *New York: Life in the Big City* (2006) due to its serious content and the graphic novel's depiction of poverty in a major city. When asking for a student's comments regarding a picture-only story of a woman who uses water from a fire hydrant to mix her baby's formula, the student replied, "'I guess it's in her eyes…I think she's sad – I would be sad if that was my life'" (Frey & Fisher, 2007, p. 31). For students to be able to deconstruct an image and produce a personalized reaction based on the context of a given text demonstrates fine critical thinking skills. It is also of paramount significance here to note that the graphic novel, which was the impetus for the student's comment, is used as a medium to explore themes; the graphic novel is not used as the focus of the conversation but rather the catalyst. Additionally, the student is bringing her own cultural context to the analysis of the piece essentially focusing her cultural lens on what she finds to be the most telling and significant theme of the piece.

Frey and Fisher also make the case that the traditional classroom novel can be a graphic novel or any other text that is not in the traditional canon (Frey & Fisher, 2007, p. 36). As evidenced from the young girl's comments earlier, "given the diversity of needs among adolescents in any secondary classroom, it is unlikely that one novel will meet the needs of all learners" (p. 35). This comment is true of classical novels, but it is also true of graphic novels; there is no text that can fully address the diversity of any given classroom. However, graphic novels do have two modes of interpretation which work in tandem, textual and artistic, for a student to synthesize.

The earlier study by Frey and Fisher (2004) looks at the effect of graphic novels and popular media on students in under-privileged areas. This study makes a case for using graphic novels with English language learners. Despite the uniqueness of this study's focus, it has to be made clear that Fisher and Frey used the same segment from Will Eisner's *New York: Life in the Big City* in both of the studies discussed in this review. A young student of Jamaican heritage wrote an essay about leaving Jamaica and coming to America in response to the Will Eisner graphic novel. Another student from Thailand wrote a similar essay in response to the Will Eisner text. Composition teachers yearn for students of any ability level to write essays/pieces that access and utilize reflection; in this study students who were labeled as "ELL" wrote complex pieces and displayed an ability to critically analyze a text, compartmentalize it, and interpret it through an individualized, cultural lens (Frey & Fisher, 2004, p. 20). This idea speaks to the great value of graphic novels as a primary teaching tool.

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (2003) is constantly cited as a premiere graphic novel to be read in classrooms due to its powerful content and nearly universal, critical praise.

Maus, which tells the story of a holocaust survivor, utilizes animals as the main characters with the focus being on the Jewish people represented by mice and the German Nazis represented as cats. Christina Chun (2009) addresses the use of *Maus* in the classroom as a means of teaching critical literacy. Additionally, Chun asserts that Graphic novels might also encourage an independent impetus to read among all demographics possibly contributing to the closing of the achievement gap (Chun, 2009, p. 145). However, Chun brings an excellent point forward in citing the multiliteracies that graphic novels would bring to diverse learners. Chun says that, "Because meaning making has become increasingly multimodal, our definition of literacy needs to encompass not only the textual, but also the visual, the spatial, and the aural" (p. 145). Admittedly, *Maus* is an excellent text to use in any classroom due to its powerful content, and Chun suggests scaffolding this text on top of already covered historical and/or primary texts from the period that address the holocaust. Through analysis of both *Maus* and other texts, connections, discrepancies, and critical analyses of both texts and contexts could occur (p. 147-148). The privileging of *Maus* by Chun represents an example of how using a graphic novel as a primary text helps students engage with themes or lessons that might otherwise be supported by traditional prose texts.

Another well respected graphic novel is *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi which, as was stated before in this chapter, tells the story of a young Iranian girl in the Islamic Revolution and her family's struggles. Harris (2007) looked at this graphic novel as a way to help students learn history through the unique experiences of an individual who was/is a primary source. Her article proposes a theorized unit of study for reading *Persepolis* as an alternative to a young adult novel. *Persepolis* is chosen because "for a number of

students, the predominantly pictorial format allows them to enter into difficult subject matter more readily than they might otherwise" (p. 39). Despite this progressive approach to reading a graphic novel, Harris still makes it abundantly clear that *Persepolis* should be read in conjunction with a young adult novel. She even gives varying suggestions (Harris, 2007, p. 42-45). This begs the question of why *Persepolis* could not be the sole text studied. Of course, integrating other texts into a unit is often a crucial element of effective teaching, but Harris is suggesting students read two primary texts in the same unit. In this article, the graphic novel *Persepolis* is at first praised as a worthy text for students to study and then relegated to the position of supporting text (Harris, 2007).

Harris and Chun are not alone in their associating of graphic novels with supplemental material. Dan Leibold (2007) was discussed earlier in regards to graphic novels and comic books being used a supplementary texts. However, from a literacy perspective, his combining of an *X-Men* comic book and Dante's *Inferno* yielded interesting ideas. The major difference between Leibold's ideas and the concepts presented by Harris and Chun is his use of a superhero comic. The vast majority of research done with graphic novels in education focuses on non-superhero texts. This may be due to the content in superhero comics being popularly perceived as inappropriate due to perceptions of gratuitous violence. As Schwartz (2010) states, "First, anything new often faces resistance, especially if it is part of popular culture. Finding classroom-appropriate works is also a concern. Not all graphic novels are appropriate, and even some of the best contain profanity and sexual and violent content" (p. 63). Some superhero comic books are problematic, but Leibold presents a well structured use for a superhero comic book. Additionally, Leibold outlines specific classroom strategies to use

in accordance with a primary text. Most of the strategies have students making connections between the ancient text, the *X-Men* text, and modern elements (p. 109-111). These could presumably promote critical thinking as students are asked to not only create connections between two texts, but also culture, society, and other dimensions of life.

Advocacy of graphic novels as literature does not have to be rooted in the replacement of traditional texts, but rather as an addition to the existing curriculum (Carter, 2007a; Frey & Fisher, 2007; Leibold, 2007). This is a progressive stance to take especially in an era of strict curriculums. While this trend of using the graphic novel as a supplemental text is at least open-minded, there is still an inherent relegation of graphic novels present; graphic novels are used to help students understand the more important concepts and themes of traditional literature rather than graphic novels being the focus themselves. Despite this concern, there are some examples where that pairing of graphic novels and traditional literature appears to be effective (Carter, 2007a; Leibold, 2007).

One of Carter's studies was discussed earlier in this chapter, but another example of this trend is Carter's (2007c) pairing of *The Amazing "True" Story of A Teenage Single Mom* (Arnoldi, 1998) and *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1986). Again, the reasoning behind pairing two such spectrally opposing titles is to help expand the students' interpretations of the traditional text: "Often considered a stale American relic, *The Scarlet Letter* gains fresh relevance when coupled with Arnoldi's graphic novel autobiography" (Carter, 2007c, p. 62). Both Carter and Leibold use the graphic novel/comic book as a means of helping students understand a traditional text. In both cases, their discussion of the texts leads one to argue that they see the graphic novel as the supplemental text rather than as a primary text.

One study does apply a graphic novel as a primary text, though. Schraffenberger (2007) proposes replacing the traditional *Beowulf* with its graphic novel adaptation. Doing so, according to Schraffenberger, would "accomplish the dual task of teaching literature and that of promoting and fostering critical thinking and learning through visual literacy" (p. 80). This serves as another example of a teacher utilizing a graphic novel as a primary text. The one noteworthy distinction here is that Schraffenberger is not replacing *Beowulf*, but rather the media in which the story is told. Therefore, this is strictly a privileging of graphic novels' aesthetics unlike Chun (2009) and Leibold (2007) who used diverse comic stories: namely *Maus* and *X-Men*.

Traditionally, university English curriculums are dominated by what many scholars might consider the “Western Canon” (Bloom, 1994). While that mentality has become less pronounced in recent years, the precedent for using comics in the classroom is only quite recent. There is some literature from the 1970s addressing the inclusion of comics in the English classroom at the college level, but they were (at the times of their publications) used as a gateway to more traditional texts. Leonard (1975) provides an early pedagogical map which teachers have followed for years. Leonard had his college students create comic book versions of literary classics from the traditional canon and then had the class vote on which one was the best for the class to read as a whole. The pedagogy of creating comics by taking old source material is somewhat common at the present time, and this article provides an early precedent. Additionally, Rollin (1970) claims that if superhero comics are used in traditional literature classes, "they [students] can begin to perceive significant esthetic and intellectual parallels between the popular and the classic, then their heightened awareness of the unity and the relevance of all art

will help to make their study of literature easier, more enjoyable, and more pointed" (p. 434). The ends are quite clear for both of these scholars: the comics are used to introduce students to the classics.

Rocco Versaci (2010) shares how using graphic novels in his first year composition class at a community college was an effective and promising experience. He states that his reason for initially using graphic novels was to find literature that would appeal to discerning students. In using graphic novels, "it became clear that my students were unaware that comics could and did address mature subject matter" (Versaci, 2010, p. 62). Versaci also made the now common assertion in studies of graphic novels that, "Aside from engagement, comic books also help to develop much needed analytical and critical thinking skills" (p. 64). This study serves as an excellent example of a teacher using graphic novels at the university level. It also needs to be stressed that Versaci only used what might be considered mature and/or sophisticated graphic novels as opposed to the more sophomoric or superhero texts that are commonly associated with graphic novels and comics. Versaci includes a list of titles he suggests for students to read (p. 65) which include two of the more common graphic novels used: Spiegelman's *Maus* (2003) and Sacco's *Palestine* (2002).

It is quite apparent when reading the published literature on graphic novels and education that superheroes are either discredited or completely ignored. This has been touched upon earlier in this review of literature, but it does warrant mentioning that some scholars are beginning to see value in the superhero genre (Romagnoli & Pagnucci, 2013). Besides, it is close to impossible to engage in a discourse about graphic novels and comic books without at least mentioning superhero literature. Harris-Fain (2009)

proposed a way to incorporate two superhero graphic novels, *Watchmen* (Moore & Gibbons, 1986) and *The Dark Knight Returns* (Miller, 1986), into a college English class. Much of the language is that of "could" and "might" implying that the researcher is quite passionate about these texts and their potentials but that these ideas have never been classroom tested. However, Harris-Fain's assertion that superhero texts are very "intertextual" (p. 149) yields some interesting possibilities relating to their use in the classroom. Specifically, "spending some time on the intertextual nature of these graphic novels could lead into a discussion of them as postmodern artifacts" (p. 149).

The discussion of studies of graphic novels and comic books that have been outlined above show a variety of uses from being supplemental texts of traditional literature (Carter, 2007a; Leibold, 2007; Webb, 2007), texts that have significant cultural implications (Chun, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2004; 2007; Harris, 2007), and texts that challenge the status-quo (Harris-Fain, 2009; Versaci, 2010).

Summary of Chapter Two

The sources cited earlier in this chapter have outlined how traditional literacy, multiliteracies, visual literacy, and multimodality all contribute to studying graphic novels both as a tool for teaching. Of particular importance to this study was The New London Group's (1996) assertion of "multiliteracies" and how they are continuing to affect both students and teachers as media continues to evolve. Also, The New London Group's characterization of "traditional literacy" helped provide a solid context with which to contextualize multimodal literacy studies. Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) and Kress (2003) also contributed heavily to this study's framework in the establishing of

multimodality. Multimodality is becoming more of an academic staple as technology continues to evolve and further infiltrate lives on both a personal and academic level. Nevertheless, multimodality is vital to studying graphic novels/comics and their educational implications.

Much of the works on graphic novels are not rooted in classroom application and are more theoretical in nature. It is inescapable to associate the debate of what is literature from how said texts help promote literacy, so some of the preceding studies bleed into the research of how graphic novels affect literacy. That is appropriate though because all of these studies work together to produce a larger and more intricate view of the existing literature on graphic novels in an academic setting.

Even with research continuing to build in support of graphic novel use, the number of resources is still surprisingly sparse. While the majority of the studies analyze the multimodality of graphic novels (Schwartz & Rubinstein-Ávila, 2006; Jacobs, 2007; Webb and Guisand, 2007; Ajayi, 2009; Chun, 2009), their contexts vary widely. Some aim to help in the reading of literature (Webb & Guisand, 2007), some look to expand the horizons of students' reading of graphic novels to include Japanese Manga (Schwartz & Rubinstein-Ávila, 2006), and others examine the effects of graphic novels on comprehension (Chun, 2009). Despite the variances and spectral differences of these resources, they all support the inclusion of graphic novels as legitimate vehicles to promote and enhance literacy.

The theoretical framework for this study was influenced by The New London Group (1996), Kress (2003) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) with emphasis on how multiliteracies is a valid theory for how to interpret and synthesize texts as they naturally

evolve through the advent of technologies and changing socio-cultural perceptions. Where graphic novels and comic books are concerned, multiliteracies also recognize multimodality as a means of communication that requires the accessing of different ways of interpreting information; in other words, graphic novels require diverse and multiple literacies to synthesize information.

Since this study focused on college teachers' usages of graphic novels and/or comic books in their classrooms and how those usages reflected the teachers valuing of and views on graphic novels, using multiliteracies as the framework constructed a lens through which the affordances and/or constraints of a multimodal medium were observed and subsequently analyzed.

The proceeding study explored the issues raised during the literature review including how teachers' usage of graphic novels were literally employed, how that employment reflected the teachers' views on and valuing of the medium, and what implications those privileging of literacies while using graphic novels had for literacy studies, pedagogical studies, and the field of comic studies.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

As a study designed to explore the usage of graphic novels and/or comic books in English classrooms and the subsequent literacies that are privileged through such usage, the focus of this dissertation was on the teaching of graphic texts in the classrooms studied. Specifically, the research questions put an emphasis on the teacher and his/her class structure as it pertained to the study of graphic novels:

1. What are the different ways college English teachers in this study employ graphic novels in their classrooms?
2. What affordances and/or constraints do college English teachers in this study see in both the medium of graphic novels as an academic text and their own application of the medium? In other words, how academically valuable do the college English teachers in this study find comics?

Having the research questions and subsequent methodology focused on the teacher was deliberate. Whereas students are asked to read certain texts, teachers are responsible for the selection of those texts, the structuring of the lessons around them, and the assessments that signify competency in understanding. Therefore, in order to explore the usage of graphic novels in English classrooms and the subsequent privileging of literacies present in those classrooms, the teacher was the focus of this study.

Every classroom is unique, and the ways literacies are constructed and valued in specific classrooms are as varied and diverse as the teachers and students who make up these classes. As The New London Group (1996) says, "Every classroom will inevitably reconfigure the relationships of local and global differences that are now so critical" (p.

72). The New London Group's theory of multiliteracies was the theoretical framework for this study, and its emphasis on literacies being interconnected and ever evolving promotes a classroom where change and openness need to be constant. As a medium that embodies those ideals, graphic novels and comic books are an excellent type of text to analyze the potential for mulitliteracies in college English classes. Not only are the texts multimodal (Kress 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; New London Group, 1996) giving them a uniqueness of experience which Romanelli (2009) calls "outsider literacy," but they have become more present in classrooms necessitating an exploration of the medium, its usage by teachers, and the subsequent literacies that are privileged through its usage.

Reason for a Qualitative Study

This study was qualitative in nature as it sought an "understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). The larger question of this study addressed how graphic novels were used and how that usage reflected teachers' views on the medium and which literacies were accessed. Classrooms are societies in their own rights, and their problems can have ramifications that extend beyond their physical and socio-cultural boundaries.

The research questions for this study were designed to gain as full an understanding as possible of a teacher's graphic novel usage, and the focus on this study was on the pedagogical practices of the participants. Both research questions required answers that had experiential elements to them, so a qualitative study was necessary in order to further understand why graphic novels were used the way they were in particular

contexts. As Stake (1995) points out, "qualitative researchers have pressed for understanding the complex interrelationships among all that exists" (p. 37). The experiences of the teachers who used graphic novels were of prime concern in this study, and the valuing of experiences is what Stake considers to be of importance in any qualitative research. Spradley (1978) and Kvale (1996) echo the importance of experiences in qualitative research specifically regarding interviewing which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

Aside from the experiences of the teacher in the classroom, the content that the teacher(s) used was also of value in the study. Content analysis was used for analyzing classroom observation notes, documents provided by the instructor, and transcriptions of interviews between the researcher and the instructor of the class. Krippendorf (2004) even states that, "Qualitative approaches to content analysis have their roots in literary theory, the social sciences and critical scholarship" (p. 17).

Pedagogical Exploration: Utilizing a Modified Case Study

A modified case study, as influenced by Stake (1995), was employed in this dissertation. While Yin (2002) effectively exhibits a strong reasoning and model for a case study, Stake's structure of a case study better matched the dimensions of this study as developed through the research questions. Specifically, what Stake calls an "instrumental case study" (p. 3) was employed.

Stake sees an instrumental case study as one where the "Case study here is instrumental to accomplishing something other than understanding this particular teacher, and we may call our inquiry *instrumental case study*" (p. 3, emphasis in original). Since

this study looked at three individual college English classrooms, the study became what Stake calls a "cross-site analysis" (p. 25) or "cross-case analysis" (p. 36). For the purposes of this dissertation, the term "cross-case analysis" was used. The study of the usage of graphic novels in college English classrooms benefited from a modified cross-case analysis as understanding connections among the unique contexts and characteristics of each case study became essential for final analysis of how the medium was used in differing contexts.

This study employed a modified version of Stake's "cross-case analysis," though. Whereas Stake emphasizes creating individual case studies for each case, the analysis of the cases in comparison to one another for this dissertation was done throughout the data presentation and analysis. The focus of this study was on pedagogical uses of graphic novels and in order to emphasize this point, the cases were discussed jointly to draw out the pedagogical implications of each case.

Bassey (1999) also makes a case for utilizing case studies in educational research. Specifically, Bassey makes the assertion that case studies in educational contexts are valuable to the research of new educational policies and pedagogical practices. However, he also states that case studies are inherently open to interpretation, and it is the duty of the researcher to provide what Bassey himself calls "'fuzzy' generalizations" (p. 3). Hadfield (2000) compared Bassey's "'fuzzy' generalizations" to Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) saying, "it (Bassey's 'fuzzy' generalizations) combines elements of Yin's (1994) idea of replication of logic with Stake's (1995) 'petites general-knowledge produced by case studies" (Hadfield, 2000, p. 364).

As this dissertation explored the pedagogical practices of college English teachers, the modified case study in the style of Stake (1995) reflects Bassey's acknowledgement of the importance of case studies in educational contexts. And though this dissertation utilizes Geertz's (1973) "thick description" as the method of data presentation, Bassey's "'fuzzy' generalizations" provide insight into the very nature of educational case studies. All educational research is valuable no matter the limitations because, "It is not an admission of frailty in the way the research was conducted. It is a firm reminder that there are many variables which determine whether learning takes place" (Bassey, 1999, p. 52). Educational case studies are, according to Bassey, limited by multiple factors including geographic location, demographics, curriculum, and nearly any other socio-cultural element of life. And though these factors limit the scope of educational case studies, they do not affect their value when considered within the larger discourse of educational/academic research.

The variation in data sources for this research also required a modified case study methodology that focused on the pedagogical choices of the participants. Exploring graphic novel usage and the subsequent accessing of literacies needed to take into account experiences on the part of the teacher employing the medium (interviews/content analysis), the way in which the class was designed and implemented (observations), and the expectations of the teacher and assessment of those expectations (content analysis).

Researcher Positionality

This dissertation was purposefully designed to be an exploration of how graphic novels were used in different contexts within an English department and how those

usages indexed literacy privileging. As such, this study was exploratory in nature with no active participation on the part of the researcher. Since the research questions for this study were reflective of an interpretation of events as opposed to critically analyzing the said events, I adopted a constructivist positionality. As constructivist groundbreakers Berger and Luckman (1967) asserted, knowledge is socially constructed and subject to the individual experiences of given social situations. Classrooms are socially constructed environments making a constructivist positionality reflective of the exploratory nature of this study's research questions.

Constructivism "holds that all knowledge claims and their evaluation take place within a conceptual framework through which the world is described and explained" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 31). The "conceptual framework" of this study was founded on the theoretical framework of multimodal literacy and the contexts in which the study occurred. This dissertation did not aim to critically instigate change on the part of college English teachers, nor did it look to transform the researcher through participation. Exploration and description of teachers' usages of a given medium was what this dissertation aimed to accomplish.

The Study Sites

The context of this study was predicated on the research questions. Specifically, since the practices of college English teachers were studied, professionals in that field needed to be interviewed and observed to help explore the pedagogical implications of graphic novel and comic book usage in classrooms.

The lack of educators utilizing the specialized medium of graphic novels needed to be taken into account when planning the study's context. Therefore, finding local classrooms that utilized graphic novels was key to the implementation of this study. The environments for this study were college classrooms. For logistical reasons, the site range was limited to Pennsylvania so that the researcher could draw on his own knowledge of Pennsylvania teaching settings. Specifically, three different college types in Pennsylvania were the settings for this dissertation: a community college, a private university, and a public university. Each participant was employed at a different university, and the type of university differed from participant to participant.

Participants

The participants for this dissertation were three college English teachers, who were faculty members of their respective institutions. The participants taught undergraduate classes, and all of the classes observed were core classes (required by all students on campus to take) for their respective universities. The teachers also utilized a graphic novel as one of his/her primary texts in a given unit or extended lesson. There were no gender, age-related, cultural, social, or religious requirements related to the participants in this study. Though there are extensive participant profiles at the beginning of Chapter Four in this dissertation, a short description of each participant follows.

Dr. Nelson taught an introductory literature course as an adjunct faculty member at a community college in western Pennsylvania. Having been an avid reader of comic books since he was a child, his choice of texts reflected the passion he had for the medium growing up. Dr. Nelson used Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* (1986)

and Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's *The Killing Joke* (1988). Both texts were of the superhero genre, and Dr. Nelson's classes focused on the socio-cultural implications of heroism and villainy.

Dr. Simpson also taught an introductory literature course, but she was employed as a tenure track assistant professor at a public, four year university in southern Pennsylvania. Dr. Simpson considered herself a "skeptic" of comic books and graphic novels until she attended a NCTE conference session on graphic novels. Unlike Dr. Nelson, Dr. Simpson's professional and personal tastes were more reflective of what Wolk (2007) called "art comics." The graphic novel she used was *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore and David Lloyd (2008). Dr. Simpson included this text in her unit on dystopian stories.

Ms. Madison taught a freshman seminar course as an adjunct faculty member at a private, four year university in eastern Pennsylvania. This freshman seminar course was required of all incoming freshman to the university, and the content of the course was left to the instructor of record; Ms. Madison chose to devote the entire course to the reading and analysis of graphic novels. Ms. Madison, like Dr. Nelson, grew up with comic books as a child and expanded her tastes in the medium during her high school years. Ms. Madison used multiple graphic novels in her course which she made photocopies of for the students to read. In order to keep the number of observations of each participant consistent, I only observed two of Ms. Madison’s classes. During those two observations, she used photocopied sections of *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun* (2010) by Geoffrey Canada and Jamar Nicholas, *The Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb* (2009), and various World War II political cartoons by Dr. Seuss.

Research Design

This dissertation was a modified version of Stake's cross-case analysis (1995) of three college English classrooms that utilized graphic novels or comics as primary texts. The design of this case study also reflected Bassey's (1999) emphasis of case study implementation in educational contexts. The research questions for this study looked to explore the usage of the texts by teachers and to explore the literacies they accessed through that usage. Since each classroom was a unique environment with its own culture, procedures, and expectations, individual case studies of the three venues helped to represent those courses. As case studies include "multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61), multiple methods of data collection were employed in this dissertation.

Methods of Data Collection

Interviews

As a means of learning about experiences, interviews provide interactions between two or more people. While Spradley's work with interviews deals primarily with ethnographies, the emphasis on naturalistic and candid styles of interviewing were important for this study. Additionally, the cultural context of an interview is also stressed by Spradley. As Spradley is an ethnographer, this naturally makes sense. However, this dissertation was not an ethnography; it was a modified case study exploring literacy and pedagogical practices. Nevertheless, the culture of the classroom was important and contributed to the teacher's interactions with students and with the researcher making Spradley's assertions regarding interviewing and cultural context relevant to the

interviewing process.

Kvale (1996) defines interviews this way: “One form of research interview -- a semistructured life world interview -- will be treated in this book. It is defined as *an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respects to interpreting the meaning of the descried phenomena*." (p. 5-6, italics in original). Kvale’s work on interviewing is broader in its focus of qualitative research than Spradley’s making Kvale’s structuring of the interviews the model for this dissertation.

The interviews in this study were to learn about the experiences of the participants as they pertained to graphic novels, comic books, the participants’ choices of texts, and their usages in their classes. Two interviews were conducted with each teacher in each of the case studies: one before classroom observations and one after. The first interview explored the following issues:

- Teacher’s history with graphic novels and/or comic books before classroom utilization
- History with graphic novel usage in the classroom
- Reasoning behind selection of particular graphic novel for classroom use
- Perceived challenges of implementation and planned assignments/activities planned for unit

The first interview was designed with what Kvale calls “introducing questions” (p. 133) which can lead to what he calls “probing questions” (p. 133) designed to elaborate on certain experiences that may help address the research questions of this study. The second interview occurred after classroom observations were completed and addressed the following issues:

- Reflection on the utilization of the graphic novel(s) used during the study
- What the teacher wanted students to "get out of" the graphic novel and what the instructor feels the students did "get out of" the graphic novel
- Challenges in the implementation of the graphic novel (personal, administrative, parental, etc.)
- Any Resistance encountered (student, administrative, parental, etc.)
- Views on the acceptability of the medium in classrooms in general
- Views on the value of the medium

The second interview was designed to continue the discourse of the participant's usage of graphic novels. This was similar to what Kvale calls "Follow-Up Questions" and "Probing Questions" (p. 133). Even though Kvale's "Types of Interview Questions" (p. 133) are sequenced in such a way that introducing, follow-up, and probing questions occurred within the time-frame of a single interview, the logic behind conducting two interviews with the participants in this study was to provide more time to explore how teacher's expectations of graphic novel usage matched their eventual reflections on the process and events of that usage (see Appendices B and C for Interview Protocols).

Classroom Observations

Marshall and Rossman (2011) note that "Combined with observation (looking, hearing, smelling, or touching), interviews allow the researcher to understand the meanings that everyday activities hold for people" (p. 145). Therefore, non-participatory observations were a crucial data source for this pedagogical study. As Marshall and Rossman assert, the interviews and the observations for this case study complimented each other with the interviews exploring the teachers' personal views and experiences

with graphic novels and the observations exploring the actual implementation of the medium.

A vital component of Stake's (1995) case study methodology involves observations which, "work the researcher toward greater understanding of the case" (p. 60). The research questions of this dissertation were explored by non-participatory observation or limited interaction on my part with the participants or their environments. Creswell (1998) addresses this very issue of participants' roles in qualitative studies saying, "This role can range from that of a complete participant (going native) to that of a complete observer" (p. 125). This study was not ethnographic in nature, and it was designed to research graphic novel usage and subsequent literacies privileging on the part of the teacher. Therefore, "going native," as Creswell states, was not a goal of this study.

Observations were an integral part of the data collected, thought, as "data have meanings directly recognized by the observer" (Stake, 1995, p. 60). As an observer, I was in what Stake calls "a quiet nook to write up the observation while it is still fresh" (p. 62). While Stake is referring to a style of observation that may include participation, my non-participatory observations in this study were as inconspicuous as possible in order to observe the classroom environment as it interacted with the graphic novel, the teacher, and the additional artifacts provided by the teacher for the particular unit.

Content Analysis of Artifacts

Even though content analysis refers to what will be done with the data after it has been collected, collected documents from the case studies were also collected as data for this study. In addition to the interviews with the teachers and the observations of their classes, what Stake (1995) calls "Document Review" (p. 68) was part of the case studies

and eventual cross-case analysis. For Stake, the benefits of document review support observations and interviewing: "Gathering data by studying documents follows the same line of thinking as observing or interviewing" (p. 68). Additionally, Stake cites a benefit of this data source as being one that "substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly" (p. 68). All of documents collected were provided by the participants for the students to use and/or assignments for students to complete in regards to the graphic novel unit being studied.

Finally, any sort of observation notes or interview transcriptions became artifacts themselves for the study. In that case, they were subject to analysis just like any other document that was collected during the studies. Creswell (1998) asserts that "An analysis of other artifacts--those not encoded in text--might also be fruitful for a qualitative study" (p. 161). All of artifacts collected during the case studies were documents created by the participants. The only exception to this was Ms. Madison's photocopies of graphic novels as she provided photocopied sections of the graphic novels to her students. Aside from the legality of such a practice, which will be discussed in Chapter Five, I considered these photocopied sections of graphic novels to be the students' texts from which they read and not an original document/assignment provided by Ms. Madison.

Summary of Procedures

The length of each case study was determined by the instructor’s actual unit plan. However, the same procedure applied to each case study no matter the length of the unit plan in which the teacher utilized the graphic novel or comic book.

1. Each teacher was interviewed before actual classroom observations. The details of that interview included past experiences with graphic novels as a professional educator and as a casual reader, expectations of graphic novel or comic book use in the classroom, and any perceived challenges to implementing his/her lesson plan using graphic novels and/or comic books. There were two total interviews with each participant.

2. Classroom observations were then conducted. These were non-participatory in nature with the researcher taking notes during class. The number of classes observed depended on both the logistics of the researcher to attend the participants' classes and the length of a given participants' unit. In addition, original documents created by the participants were collected at these times.

3. The participants were interviewed after the classroom observations. This interview was designed to be a follow-up to the initial interview. The focus of this interview was on reflecting on the process, perceived resistance to the implementation from students or administration/faculty, and what the teacher felt the students “got out of the comic book lesson.”

Data Analysis

Stake (1995) sees case studies being analyzed through what is termed triangulation, and this was expanded in Ellingson's theory of "crystallization" (2008).

However, the data from this dissertation was presented in what Geertz described as "thick description" (1973).

Geertz's assertions concerning "thick description," which Geertz states was originally coined by philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1968), provides a way to present qualitative data in a way that reflects the very nature of the research itself. For Geertz the ethnographer, who is himself a researcher of culture, is faced with the following:

> a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render.

Making sense of all the data sources in this dissertation reflected Geertz's description of what it means to be an ethnographer. The data sources were all interconnected, but they needed to be sifted through in a way that simultaneously presented commonalities among participants yet still kept the uniqueness of each participant's case.

While triangulation is a valid way of analyzing data, it has inherent issues that even Stake addresses. Stake (1995) refers to triangulation as "Δ" (p. 107) and says, "The problem of Δ is complex because so many qualitative researchers subscribe a little bit or a lot to an epistemology called 'constructivism'" (p. 108). Thick description doesn't attempt to come to ultimate conclusions. Instead, it is a method of data analysis, description, and presentation that honors the convoluted nature of individual cases and provides a means to share the findings.

While Geertz (1973) is the originator of the term "thick description" as it relates to qualitative studies, Ponterotto (2006) stated that defining it was difficult to do as the term was inherently confusing. As such, Ponterotto took it upon himself to provide a

working definition of the term, taking into account various scholars' interpretations and syntheses of the term since its inception:

> Thick description refers to the researcher's task of both describing and interpreting observed social action (or behavior) within its particular context. The context can be within a smaller unit (such as a couple, a family, a work environment) or within a larger unit (such as one's village, a community, or general culture). Thick description accurately describes social actions and assigned purpose and intentionality to these actions, by way of the researcher's understanding and clear description of the context under which the social actions took place. (p. 543)

Ponterotto's definition of the term is informed by Geertz's original article and the idea of presenting "observed social action" in a way that maintains the uniqueness of the data collected while providing a respectful and ultimately informative analysis of said data. This dissertation, being a cross-case analysis of three college English teachers and utilizing multiple data sources, was best presented using "thick description."

Interviews

Kvale's (1996) analysis strategies include "Meaning Structuring Through Narratives" (p. 199) and "Meaning Interpretation" (p. 201) for the interviews. Additionally, Reissman's (2002) "Narrative Analysis" (p. 696) informed the analysis of narratives provided by the interviews with the participants. Reissman places the value of narratives provided through interviews as being "not only relevant for the study of life disruptions; the methods are equally appropriate for research concerning social movements, political change, and macro-level phenomena" (p. 696).

Since much of the data attained from the interviewees was presented in stories or narratives, a method for making sense of the narratives within the context of the research questions was necessary, and Reissman stresses the necessity of the researcher to sift through narratives because "Stories in research interviews are rarely so clearly bounded" (p. 698). However, Reissman's emphasis on sifting through the narratives was essential to the interviews conducted with this study.

As the interview questions were designed to gather personal experiences with graphic novels and comic books in their classrooms as well as their personal lives, "the discernment of a narrative segment for analysis--the representations and boundaries chosen--is strongly influenced by the investigator's evolving understandings, disciplinary preferences, and research questions" (p. 701).

Classroom Observations

Stake's (1995) method of observation includes establishing a focus prior to actual observations of classrooms (p. 78-81). Since this study focused on graphic novel usage and literacy privileging, the focus of the observations were what the teacher was doing (pedagogically) with the graphic novels. Keeping this focus during observations helped limit ambient data from the collection process. Since notes were taken during my observations, the notes themselves served as the primary observation data. Additionally, the context of the case studies was a significant factor in the analysis of the data for this dissertation. Since the data for observations came from my handwritten notes, they were analyzed from the observations and treated as documents; they were ultimately subjected to content analysis. In relation to Stake's emphasis on establishing focus before actual

observation, the importance of the context was emphasized during the analysis of classroom observations as "Without explication of the context, the steps that a content analyst takes may not be comprehensible to careful readers, and the results to which they lead may not be validatable by other means" (Krippendorf, 2004, p. 34).

Content Analysis

As was stated earlier in this chapter, content analysis for this dissertation included documents and artifacts. That data was shared according to Stake's "Naturalistic Generalizations" (1995, p. 85) which "…are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that a person feels as if it happened to themselves" (p. 85). This is being included under content analysis because the classroom observation notes and interview transcripts were part of the content analysis of this cross-case analysis. By presenting, as closely as possible, the classroom environment of the case studies, the usage of the graphic novels and subsequent literacy privileging of those contexts was better understood. Stake proposes a dichotomous view of how to organize and analyze data saying, "Most case study reports present both coded data and direct interpretation but one or the other usually bears the conceptual load" (p. 29). As this study was constructivist in nature and sought to explore how a specific medium was being used in specified contexts, the content analysis and data sharing was partly "direct interpretation."

Trustworthiness and Ethics of the Study

The trustworthiness of this study was established not only in the theoretical and methodological grounding of the study, but also through the ethical considerations. As

Marshall and Rossman (2011) note, "the potential trustworthiness and goodness of a study should be judged not only by how competently it is designedbut also by how ethically engaged the researcher is likely to be during the study's conduct" (p. 44). This connection between trustworthiness and ethics is a cornerstone of qualitative research given the intimacy of qualitative research. By exploring and studying the experiences of participants and utilizing those emotions, opinions, and views, the trustworthiness of the study is undoubtedly linked to the way those participants are treated before, during, and after data collection. In other words, the trustworthiness of this study is linked to the ethical treatment of the participants.

Human Subjects Protection

Making assurance for the ethical treatment of participants was supported by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board (IRB) which tries to ensure that any study conducted by its students or faculty is ethically sound and respectful. And while the IRB for this dissertation provided institutional support, "It is the researchers themselves who provides the bulwark of protection" (Stake, 2010, p. 206). It was my duty to see and recognize any danger that may be occurring to the participant of the study. Should I have become aware of this factor, I would have ceased any further studying of a participant who exhibited distress or who declared a wish to not participate anymore. By adhering to this guideline, the ethical aspects of qualitative research were upheld while simultaneously maintaining the trustworthiness of the study. At the same time, a study like this one, which looked at teachers' own established pedagogy, posed little risk to the participants. None of the participants chose to discontinue his/her participation during the study.

Ellingson (2009) echoes the connection between trustworthiness and ethics stating, "every time you make a claim as you crystallize, you do just that -- you *make a claim* on the trust of your participants, on the reader's time and attention, and on the collective body of knowledge in your own and related disciplines" (p. 40). The trustworthiness of this study was supported not only by the literature in which the theories this study utilized were found, but it was also supported by aiming for the respectful treatment of the participants that provided the data for this study. Without fully respecting the participants in the study, both the ethics and the trustworthiness of the study would have been compromised.

All participants signed appropriate consent forms for this study (Appendix P). These forms were approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania IRB. Copies of the consent form are in the appendix of this dissertation (Appendix D). All participants' names in this study were pseudonyms to protect identities.

Member Checking

Part of Stake's (1995) "triangulation" involves "member checking" (p. 115) where "the actor [participant] is requested to examine rough drafts of writing where the actions or words of the actor are featured, sometimes when first written up but usually when no further data will be collected from him or her" (p. 115). Stake's usage of member checking is done to insure that what is being reported and finally analyzed by the researcher is accurate, and member checking is common across many of the sociological sciences (Schwandt, 2001, p. 155).

Member checking was an important aspect of this study's trustworthiness as a bulk of the data was from interviews with and observations of teachers who utilized

graphic novels in their classrooms. The member checking occurred after all of the data has been collected involved participants being sent highlighted drafts of both the data reporting and analysis that pertained to his/her particular data. Highlighting was done to facilitate the process of member checking for both the participant and the researcher. Participants then reported back to the researcher with any corrections or clarifications that needed to be made based on the participants' perspective. These concerns were then addressed as much as possible.

Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodology for this dissertation. The research questions of this study necessitated a qualitative approach to data gathering and analysis as the goal of this study was to explore how graphic novels and comic books were used in college English classrooms.

Specifically, two interviews with college English teachers who used graphic novels in their English classes was conducted; one interview occurred before classroom observations, and one occurred after those observations. The observations for this study were non-participatory in nature as to observe how the class and teacher interacted with the graphic novel. Finally, original documents created by the participants from the graphic novel units were collected and/or recorded. By collecting documents, the usages of the graphic novels were better explored as what the instructor said (interviews) did (observations) and expected (artifacts) were ascertained.

The collected data was then analyzed using "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) as it allowed for a sharing of the data which reflected its inherent and natural

interconnectedness with the participants, the contexts, and the researcher's observations and analyses. The data collected is presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

The data presentation was organized to first share what the participants in this study literally did in their college English classrooms (Research Question 1) and then to analyze how what the participants did in their classrooms was influenced by both their personal experiences with graphic novels and their views on the legitimacy of the medium (Research Question 2).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PARTICIPANTS' USAGES OF GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THEIR CLASSES

This chapter begins with an overview of the dissertation's scope and focus in order to maintain the context of the study. The findings of this study, as they relate to the first research question, are then presented. Data that pertains to research question two are presented in Chapter Five. The participants are presented in the order they were interviewed/observed.

This chapter begins by presenting participant profiles which focus on the teachers' personal and professional histories with graphic novels/comic books, and then providing participant-specific case-studies. In order to present the data in an organized fashion, it became important to keep discussions of these practices within their own contexts, but certain commonalities among the participants are discussed in this chapter. Chapter Five addresses the second research question of this dissertation which focuses on the participants' thoughts on graphic novels in academic contexts, their reflections on their usages, and the contextualization of their assessments as it pertains to their valuing and privileging of graphic novels.

Overview of the Study and Participants

Graphic novels and comic books remain on the periphery of acceptability in academic contexts. Despite this trend, we need "multiliteracies" (New London Group, 1996) to function in the 21st century. Comics, a combination of diverse modes of communication (visual and textual) can be used to teach multiliteracy. These "multiliteracies" have evolved along with media changes and advances in the technology.

As the socio-cultural landscape is becoming increasingly multimodal, the literacies of the people who interact with that media also become multimodal. New literacies require multimodal skills (Kress, 2003).

Graphic novels are inherently mutlimodal (McCloud, 1992) since they use both text and image to relay a message. Thus using graphic novels as a teaching tool presents an opportunity to explore how a multimodal medium can be used in academic settings.

The present study was conducted during 2012 and 2013. Data from three separate cases were collected: the cases were three different English teachers at three different higher education institutions in Pennsylvania. This dissertation sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the different ways college English teachers in this study employ graphic novels in their classrooms?
2. What affordances and/or constraints do college English teachers in this study see in both the medium of graphic novels as an academic text and their own application of the medium? In other words, how academically valuable do the college English teachers in this study find comics?

The participants in this study were English teachers who utilized at least one graphic novel as a primary text in one of their English courses. Prior to their participation in this study, all three participants had used graphic novels/comic books in their pedagogy and therefore had experience using the medium in educational contexts. All of the participants in the study were interviewed twice (once prior to classroom observations and once after classroom observations) where their experiences with graphic novels, their descriptions of their pedagogies using graphic novels, and their expectations teaching the

particular graphic novel being used were shared. Non-participatory observations of the participants' classes were conducted; I took notes while observing but did not make audio or video recordings. Except for Ms. Madison, whose entire class was devoted to the medium of graphic novels, all of the classes in which the participants utilized a graphic novel were observed. Additionally, any original artifacts created by the participants for the graphic novel units which were given to students in their classes were collected and used as data.

Individual case studies (Stake, 1995), were produced from the data that was collected. What follows are backgrounds on the participants with particular emphasis on their histories, both personal and professional, with graphic novels and comic books.

Dr. Nelson: Growing up with Comics

Dr. Nelson taught an introduction to literature course at a satellite campus of a community college in western Pennsylvania and was an adjunct faculty member. The class, "Introduction to Literature," was a core course which all students were required to take. Dr. Nelson had taught at the school for a few years prior to the period of this study, and he had just completed his own doctoral work at a neighboring university. The graphic novels Dr. Nelson used in the courses I observed were *The Killing Joke* (1988) by Alan Moore and Brian Bolland and *Watchmen* (1986) by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons.

The Killing Joke is a self-contained Batman graphic novel which presents an origin story of Batman’s nemesis, the Joker, and a deconstruction of Batman’s relationship with his arch-nemesis. The story is also known for its graphic depiction of Commissioner Gordon’s daughter, Barbara Gordon, being paralyzed at the hands of the

Joker. *Watchmen* is one of the most popular graphic novels ever created and presents a dystopian alternate reality where superheroes exist and the world is on the brink of nuclear war. With a dense narrative that relies as much on Brian Bolland's art as it does on Alan Moore's text, the graphic novel is multi-layered and non-sequential at points. It has since been made into a major motion picture of the same name. Both texts are of the superhero genre and are written by Alan Moore whose stories concerning superhero mythology are non-traditional in that they question the concepts of heroism and the place of superheroes in society at both the contextual and metatextual level.

Dr. Nelson's experiences with comic books and graphic novels dated back to his childhood, and he credited much of his passion for the medium to that early exposure. Of particular interest was his first memory regarding comic books which took place in an educational setting. Citing a childhood reading disorder, Dr. Nelson worked closely with a reading specialist who utilized a *G.I. Joe* comic book to help him read: "She brought in *GI Joe*. She brought in *GI Joe #1*, and I wasn't allowed to get to the next page until I had read every word aloud" (personal communication, October 17, 2012). This event in the early 1980s introduced Dr. Nelson to the comic book medium, and the teacher allowed him to keep the comic book when he was finished reading it. Dr. Nelson still has that exact comic book which he read with the reading specialist, and he said he greatly values it as part of his personal collection.

From that point on, Dr. Nelson became an avid reader of comic books with a particular fondness for DC Comics' characters and stories. His interest in comic books at a young age clearly had an impact on his pedagogical choices as an educator, and is likely what led him to teach graphic novels in multiple educational settings.

His pedagogical experiences with graphic novels included an introductory English course for international students at a four-year university. Dr. Nelson's theory was that the students could use comic books which had the words removed so that vocabulary and grammatical structure could be practiced. This lesson with comic books did not develop the way he thought it would, and he reflected on that lesson saying, "The idea of visual literacy is that at that time, now we're talking Spring 2006, is that visual literacy is contextual to a certain society or culture meaning their idea of a house is different, looks different, than our idea of a house" (personal communication, October 17, 2012). According to Dr. Nelson, the issue that arose with this lesson was the international students' inexperience with comic styles of storytelling and the images that the comic used. In other words, Dr. Nelson attributed the failure of this lesson to a cultural dissonance where the medium he valued and grew up with did not have a similar value to his students.

The inherent socio-cultural influence on visual literacy was also present in his co-teaching experience in an advanced composition course where the cultural significance of media was explored. Again, Dr. Nelson had students read various comic books; in this case he had students read *G.I. Joe* and had students discuss how the concept of "patriotism" had changed during the course of the twentieth century using various issues of the *G.I. Joe* comic book series. Additionally, Dr. Nelson co-taught a class that was designed specifically around the study of comic books and led a discussion on the mythology of superheroes.

Dr. Nelson's previous experiences with incorporating graphic novels and comic books into his pedagogy were different and were used in diverse classes. His

implementation of graphic novels in academic contexts was primarily of a thematic nature. Instead of focusing on the mechanics of literally "reading" graphic novels, he said his focus was primarily on how the narratives in comic books, especially the superhero genre, reflected society. Except for his introductory English course, which had many international students who were still working diligently on improving their vocabulary and grammar skills, Dr. Nelson's use of graphic novels and comic books seemed to privilege the texts at a socio-cultural level.

As an instructor at a community college teaching an introductory literature course, Dr. Nelson said his design of the course was structured thematically. Specifically, he used a theme of society and society's influence on the actions of people throughout the course. Dr. Nelson utilized the superhero genre in his pedagogy. As was mentioned earlier, Dr. Nelson had the students read Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's *The Killing Joke* and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's *Watchmen*. He said his reasoning for including these titles was to analyze how societal views impact and define notions of heroism and villainy. In addition, Dr. Nelson showed scenes from films such as *Batman* (Guber & Burton, 1989) and *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) which supported the class discussions. During the first interview, Dr. Nelson explained his reasoning for showing portions of feature films:

> In this class, we're using movies as a supplemental to the graphic novel. We're using that to open up this whole idea of the morality code of heroes and superheroes: in other words, the code of conduct. Heroes have a certain way of acting and the villains have a certain way of acting, and they sort of have this wonderful dance of action versus reaction. (personal communication, October 17, 2012)

The inclusion of films into Dr. Nelson's pedagogy reflected a teaching philosophy that used varying media to study sociological and literary concepts. Dr. Nelson designed his class so that graphic novels were integrated into the course instead of a class where isolated experiences with visual media were utilized for entertainment purposes. It appeared that Dr. Nelson was attempting to utilize multimodal media (graphic novels and films) to aid in the discussion of the theme of his class (how society contributes to the construction of "good" and "evil").

The two classes I observed were from an introductory literature course that had a popular anthology as its primary text. The classroom was quite small with long tables that students sat at, a white board at the front of the room, a screen accompanied with a ceiling projector that displayed a computer screen, and a television on a rolling stand. Students sat in seats, and the class was primarily of a lecture and discussion style.

Dr. Simpson: Discovering comics as an adult

Dr. Simpson taught a course titled "Introduction to Literature" at a public, four-year university in southern Pennsylvania. As an Assistant Professor at the university, Dr. Simpson has a Ph.D. in English Education, and much of her professional work relates to pedagogy and young adult literature, including graphic novels. The graphic novel Dr. Simpson used in her introductory literature course was *V For Vendetta* (2008) by Alan Moore and David Lloyd. Given Dr. Simpson's personal interests when it came to graphic novels, this choice of graphic novel was interesting. She said her personal interests tended to gravitate toward what Wolk (2007) called "art comics" such as *V For Vendetta* which pushes the superhero genre to its limits. The story follows a masked vigilante

known only as “V” in a dystopian future London. “V” makes it his mission to bring down a corrupt government and recruits a young woman named Evey Hammond to help him complete his missions.

While Dr. Simpson said the graphic novel did not cater to her personal interests, she said it fit wonderfully into her class’ theme of “Dystopian Realities” and she had students read *V For Vendetta* alongside novels such as *1984* (1949) by George Orwell and *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) by Ray Bradbury.

Unlike Dr. Nelson, Dr. Simpson’s experiences with graphic novels and comic books were quite limited. In fact, Dr. Simpson had little to no experience with the medium outside of her professional career. She stated that, “I don't have a lot of experience with comic books,” and, “I kind of considered myself a skeptic. I didn't expect to get out of these texts what I now value about these texts” (personal communication, October 23, 2012). It was during her time in graduate school that she became exposed to graphic novels' potential as literary texts and attended a session at a NCTE conference which was highlighted by a presentation on *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006) and *Blankets* (Thompson, 2003). It was at this conference session that Dr. Simpson remembered contemplating the potential of graphic novels in the classroom and brainstorming their implementation in her pedagogy:

> I just immediately recognized how valuable they could be in a secondary classroom or at a college level. The content surprised me. The depth of the content surprised me in the texts, and then I just sort of experimented with them in classes that I was teaching to see how students would respond. That's kind of

where my interest to move forward with research in that area started. (personal communication, October 23, 2012)

Dr. Simpson's interest in the medium during graduate school culminated in her dissertation which focused on graphic novels.

Since Dr. Simpson's interest in graphic novels and comic books started during her graduate school years, her experiences with graphic texts were also reflective of that later exposure. Unlike Dr. Nelson, whose life was shaped by his experiences with comic books from a young age, the texts that Dr. Simpson cited as being some of her favorites were representative of what Wolk (2007) characterized as "art comics:" *Blankets* (2003) and *Habibi* (2011) by Craig Thompson, *Maus* (2003) by Art Spiegelman, *Persepolis* (2007) by Marjane Satrapi, *American Born Chinese* (2006) by Gene Luan Yang, *Watchmen* (1986) by Alan Moore and David Gibbons, and *Fun Home* (2006) by Alison Bechdel. Dr. Simpson asserted that her self-identifying trait of "skeptic" helped in that, "I think because I was a skeptic I understand that position now, and I'm better able to present texts like these to people who may have the same level of skepticism" (personal communication, October 23, 2012).

In regards to pedagogically utilizing graphic novels and comic books, Dr. Simpson said she had minimal experience in high school settings and considerable experience in college settings. Much of her experience with pedagogy and teaching texts is informed by her years as a high school English teacher. For high school, Dr. Simpson worked with another teacher and provided students with single issue comic books which she characterized as, "those ten cent kind of comic books" for silent reading periods. Dr. Simpson said students who used comic books for their silent reading periods often

reported being confused interacting with the comic books. According to Dr. Simpson, some students were literally turning the comic books sideways trying to get a starting point. This experience presented Dr. Simpson with some of the challenges in integrating graphic novels into an English classroom at any level. From her viewpoint, much of the difficulty in implementing units with graphic novels entails gauging how much experience students have had with the medium and scaffolding appropriately to address potential confusion. Dr. Simpson's first lesson with graphic novels in her introduction to literature course explained to students the technicalities of interacting with graphic texts, and this introductory lesson was indicative of Dr. Simpson's pedagogy which scaffolded literacy skills before approaching a particular text and analyzing its themes and/or other literary tropes.

Dr. Simpson said her experiences with utilizing graphic novels in college settings were more successful than her high school teaching venture. Much of her pedagogy was about engaging the text as a unique medium. Specifically, Dr. Simpson placed emphasis helping students focus on reading images and developing a discourse with the visual elements of graphic literature. The college course she had used graphic novels in was an English Education course titled "Teaching Adolescent Literature," and was designed to inform aspiring English teachers about the texts they and their students might encounter in their future classrooms. Including graphic novels in a course for adolescent literature shows that Dr. Simpson wanted to expose her English Education students to a medium that they might encounter as aspiring English teachers.

The other course Dr. Simpson used graphic novels in was titled "Graphics and Gaming" where half of the class was devoted to analyses of graphic novels and the other

half was devoted to analyses of video games. Video games were another area of Dr. Simpson's pedagogical expertise. In her classes, including the course I observed, Dr. Simpson has students complete assignments in the form of a Role Playing Game (RPG) video game where students gained “XP” (experience points) in order to advance to the next stage/level (passing an assignment). The graphic novel usage in her “Graphics and Gaming” class was more akin to a literary survey course as opposed to her “Teaching Adolescent Literature” course where pre-service teachers were exposed to diverse texts.

I observed three consecutive classes that Dr. Simpson taught. "Introduction to Literature" was a core class at this four year university. Dr. Simpson taught the class in an auditorium-like classroom with stadium seating to accommodate more than 40 students who took the class. Dr. Simpson was situated at the front of the room for all of the classes, and the classroom was equipped with a computer, a projector connected to the computer with a screen, and a chalkboard.

Ms. Madison: Exhibiting a passion for graphic novels

Ms. Madison taught a "Freshman Seminar" course at a private, four year university in eastern Pennsylvania as an adjunct. She had recently completed her Masters in English at the same university, and was currently exploring options for doctoral studies. Ms. Madison taught a course titled “Freshman Seminar.” The course was a core class which was taught by English teachers. While the class is about adapting to college life and college-level studies, the professors are given free reign as to what they want to have students read or interact with. I observed Ms. Madison teach portions of two graphic novels: *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun* (2010) by Geoffrey Canada and Jamar Nicholas, and *The*

Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb (Crumb, 2009). *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun* is an autobiographical account of growing up in Harlem in the 1970s. *The Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb* is an illustrated version of the first book of *The Bible*. The artist for this second book was famous for illustrating underground comic books during the 1960s and 1970s which included crude descriptions of sexual acts, violence, and drug use. These underground comic books were also characterized by their phonetic spelling of “comix” and "synthesized political satire, drug humor, pornography, psychadelia, graphic experiementation, and indiosyncratic visions of life into an art form that shot straight to the imagination of millions of young Americans" (Jones, 2004, p. 301).

The beginning of the first class I observed also featured various political cartoons that were found by students using newspapers and online news sites as well as a short collection of Dr. Seuss’ 1940s political cartoons which were given to the students by Ms. Madison. Since the 2012 American Presidential election had just occurred a few days prior to my observing Ms. Madison’s class, most of the political cartoons collected by the students were commentaries on the election and the candidates.

Ms. Madison herself was introduced to comic books as a young girl, and the titles she read as a child were indicative of a child who grew up in the early 1990s. Among the titles she read were Superman, Batman, "and all those weird things." She also read *Ren and Stimpy* which was a Marvel comic book series based on the Nickelodeon cartoon series of the same name, and *Sonic The Hedgehog* based off the video game. Ms. Madison jokingly said in response to listing the titles she grew up with that, "I'm still holding on to my youth" (personal communication, November 7, 2012). What made Ms. Madison's experiences with graphic novels/comic books particularly interesting was that

unlike Dr. Nelson (whose entire life had been influenced by the medium) and Dr. Simpson (who only discovered the medium during her graduate school years), Ms. Madison reported that she grew up with comic books, left them during her adolescence, and then returned to them in her teens.

She said her reason for losing interest in the medium was, "I started reading them really young, but then as I kind of started to grow up, maybe 13 or 14, I realized that maybe I shouldn't be reading comics anymore" (personal communication, November 7, 2012). Ms. Madison's lack of interest in the medium during her adolescent years was indicative of both her age and the era in which she was an adolescent. Ms. Madison was “13 or 14” in the late 1990s, many years before graphic novels were beginning to gain traction in academia. Graphic novels also weren’t as popular among middle school students at this time, so Ms. Madison’s departure from reading comic books during this time is indicative of the era in which she grew up.

Ms. Madison's rediscovery of the medium occurred in high school when she read *Maus* (2003) by Art Spiegelman: "it kind of blew my mind. And then I started to realize that oh my god. Comics can have deeper meaning than Batman zooms in, gets the bad guy, all is right in Gotham City" (personal communication, November 7, 2012). Even without prompting Ms. Madison with a question, she made a distinction between superhero comic books and what Wolk (2007) called "art comics." Her experiences with graphic novels continued into her undergraduate years where she was introduced to other graphic novels including *Fun Home* (2006) by Alison Bechdel, *I Love Led Zeppelin* (2006) by Ellen Forney, and *Sandman* (1991) by Neil Gaiman.

As a teacher, Ms. Madison had limited experiences with graphic novels. While this “Freshman Seminar” was Ms. Madison's first chance to teach a class completely devoted to graphic novels, she said she did have experience incorporating various graphic novels into her English 100 and 101 classes. As an example, Ms. Madison shared that her students in her English 101 class, a type of first-year composition course, wrote their own "literacy autobiography." Ms. Madison used portions of Alison Bechdel's works which presented Bechdel's influences as a writer/artist. Additionally, for an English 100 course, she had students read Lynda Barry's *What It Is* (2008) and specifically focused on the questions, as Ms. Madison described them, "that plague any artist, she says are 'Is it good?' or 'Does it suck?'" (personal communication, November 7, 2012).

Perhaps most interesting about her usage of graphic novels was her Masters thesis, titled *Book Ends,* which was a complete graphic novel. Ms. Madison wrote and illustrated an entire graphic novel and is currently in the process of having the text professionally published.

Before discussing how Ms. Madison used graphic novels in her "Freshman Seminar" class, it is vital to note that all of the portions of her texts were photocopied from originals. This came up during the first interview when Ms. Madison was citing numerous graphic novels that she had students read. As an avid reader of graphic novels myself, I know how expensive the texts can be, and I was silently calculating the cost in my head as she listed the graphic novels she used. I asked her if she made the students buy all these texts. She responded, “They absolutely do not. I scan excerpts for them” (personal communication, November 7, 2012). Additionally, the students only read excerpts from certain graphic novels, never the entire text. While Ms. Madison admitted

to being worried about copyright infringement, she defended her photocopying of portions of texts saying, “I like to give them this kind of wide overview so they can see the point of this class is to dispel the myth of graphic novels as, you know, childish or juvenile” (personal communication, November 7, 2012). This issue of photocopying and access to graphic novels is explored further in Chapter Five of this study.

I observed Ms. Madison teach two consecutive classes. Her classroom was similar to a conference room with long rectangular tables that were arranged by Ms. Madison and the students to represent a conference table. There was a white board, a computer right in front of the white board, and the computer connected to a projector which projected onto a pull-down screen. Students sat around the make-shift conference table, and Ms. Madison sat at the “head” of this table.

Data Presentation

Research Question 1: What are the different ways English teachers employ graphic novels in their classrooms?

The primary question of this dissertation was directed at the usage of graphic novels in educational contexts. How did college English teachers use graphic novels and comic books in their classes? By using graphic novels in a particular manner, how is the inherent multimodality of the medium privileged and analyzed during a given unit? The participants in this study utilized graphic novels in two predominant fashions: focusing on the unique characteristics of the medium (i.e. visual narrative, sequential art, picture-word recognition, etc.) and incorporating a given text’s content within a thematized unit or thematized course.

Focusing on the Multimodality of Graphic Novels

All three participants commented during their interviews that they hold graphic novels in high esteem and consider the medium as relevant to English studies as any other established mode of expression and/or communication. Two of the three participants devoted a significant amount of classroom time to the teaching of how a graphic novel is structured and how it is read. They appeared to have done this due in part to the potential confusion the inclusion of a visual text could create. As was discussed in chapter two, graphic novels and comic books are naturally multimodal in that they incorporate various modes of communication including images and text. Learning to navigate that relationship between image and written word is, what Romanelli (2009) termed, learning an "outsider literacy." For the participants in this study, instructing students how to literally read the texts was important, but they focused on this teaching of reading a graphic novel to different degrees.

Dr. Nelson: Providing Students with Independent Reading

Dr. Nelson's pedagogical style with graphic narratives was thematically grounded. Dr. Nelson made the graphic novels the focus of discussion during his classes. While Dr. Nelson had students read Chapter Three of Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics* (1993) for homework in order to better understand how to read comics, what Will Eisner calls "sequential art" (1985), he did not devote a portion of class dedicated to having students literally learn how to read graphic novels. Some of the students in Dr. Nelson's class had taken a class with him prior to this observation, and he

said that they were aware of how to read graphic novels from that class. Nevertheless, he did not dedicate a lesson to the reading of graphic novels. This could perhaps be due to Dr. Nelson's attitude towards implementing the texts in that he, "Treated it like a piece of canonical literature. That's what I did. Used the comic books to teach the same kind of things you would encounter in any short story or model for an introduction to literature class" (personal communication, October 17, 2012). His heavy involvement with the medium at a young age probably also contributed to his attitude when utilizing the medium in academic contexts. His comfort with the medium resulted in not specifically teaching the mechanics of reading a graphic novel.

Dr. Nelson did provide photocopied packets of Chapter Three of McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) as a reading for class in conjunction with *Watchmen* and *The Killing Joke*. Therefore, even though he never explicitly taught a class regarding the reading of graphic novels and/or multimodal texts in general, Dr. Nelson appeared to believe he had adequately addressed the possibility of students not knowing how to read the graphic novels by providing a text that taught them how to read them.

Dr. Simpson: "Reading Graphically"

Dr. Simpson had an especially interesting perception of why the reading of graphic novels needed to be taught. She said this was because, "…you can't just put something in front of them (students) that has pretty pictures and assume that they're going to like it…" Dr. Simpson's assumption appears to be that most students do not naturally know how to read graphic texts which would indicate that students were accessing their multiliteracies. Dr. Simpson added, "…if they're not taught how to read

the text carefully, then a lot of them demonstrate a lot of confusion when they sit down to read the text" (personal communication, October 23, 2012).

Dr. Simpson's first class was designed to be an introduction to reading graphic texts and developing an ability to comprehend story and mood strictly through visual narrative. At the beginning of the class, Dr. Simpson stated the objective of the class as, "Today we're talking about reading graphically." This lesson was reflective of Seglem and Witte's (2009) assertion regarding visual literacy in that Dr. Simpson appeared to be "Layering complex literary analysis skills with visual representations" the way Seglem and Witte say teachers should (p. 223). There was an emphasis in this first class on having students recognize and utilize their natural, visual literacy skills. She first had students free-write and reflect on what their perceptions of comic books were, on who read comic books, and on whether they could be used for serious discussion in a collegiate English class. Dr. Simpson also showed a picture of a character from the cartoon series *The Simpsons* named "Comic Book Guy." This character was depicted in the television show as being slovenly, overweight, over-protective of comic books, owning a comic book shop, and being socially awkward. The students instantly recognized who the character was and agreed that this was the stereotypical image of comic book readers. Dr. Simpson then made the point that this was not who the typical comic book reader was: "This is the stereotype we're breaking away from," she said. The fact that Dr. Simpson introduced her graphic novel unit in this way reflected the popular mentality toward the medium. Despite the growth the medium has experienced in academic contexts over the past decade, there is a constant return to the stereotypes it has been associated with since the latter half of the 1970s.

Dr. Simpson then summarized what she called the "Principles" of images according to Molly Bang's book *Picture This, How Pictures Work* (2000). Since the students did not have this book, Dr. Simpson handed out a half-sheet of paper that outlined what Molly Bang's "Principles" of imagery were. She then gave a short lecture about how students needed to train themselves to read *both* the images and words of a graphic novel. The bulk of her lesson was presenting a portion of Molly Bang's book which constructs an image of the fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood" using only shapes (triangles, circles, rectangles, etc.). Using the projector and computer, Dr. Simpson sequenced Bang's building of the picture piece by piece and discussed how different shapes and locations within an image can produce different reactions on the part of the reader. An example of this is when the character of Little Red Riding Hood is shown as a small, red dot in the middle of a forest made up of large, black triangles; Dr. Simpson said making the character small among large surroundings presents a setting and mood of isolation and dread.

Finally, Dr. Simpson presented a few panels from Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics* (1993) which showcased how readers create their own meaning between the panels in a graphic novel: since there is no image or text between panels in a comic book or graphic novel, readers are able to apply their unique interpretation of events. The concept of readers "reading between the panels" was explored further by the students via a handout that Dr. Simpson had students complete in class (Appendix F). Dr. Simpson said this whole class was designed to prepare students to read the first half of *V For Vendetta*.

Of the three participants, Dr. Simpson's lessons were the most geared toward the literal act of reading a graphic novel and deconstructing and analyzing the visuals of a text. However, both Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison discussed the need to provide background on the mechanics of the medium.

Ms. Madison: Combining Lessons and Readings to Teach the Reading of Graphic Texts

I did not observe the classes that were devoted to the teaching of reading of graphic novels because I was only able to observe classes in the middle of a course designed around the reading of graphic novels. Ms. Madison said she had covered the mechanics of reading a graphic novel at the beginning of the semester. She wrote in the section of her syllabus titled, "Course Description & Objectives" that, "By the end of this course, students will have a working knowledge of visual literacy and rhetoric as well as a deep familiarity with the representative works of the genre." In order to prepare students to complete those course objectives, Ms. Madison heavily utilized McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993).

Ms. Madison focused much of her teaching on having students analyze images in a sequential nature. In other words, Ms. Madison was particularly interested in having students understand the overall narrative of a text through the images and how they connected. Ms. Madison's syllabus also had students read every chapter of McCloud's book during the month of September, and she covered one chapter of the book every class period during that month.

Ms. Madison also said she wanted students to understand, as she stated it, "the amplification of meaning through the simplification of images" which is a direct quote

from McCloud's *Understanding Comics*. Romanelli (2009) addressed this concept saying it, "is the effect achieved by reducing an image to its most basic elements, which is the essence of cartooning" (p. 65). Even Ms. Madison's assignment, which will be covered in depth in the next chapter, had students conduct a "McCloudian Analysis" (Appendix G) on a text of the students' choosing. Part of her assignment prompt stated, "Perhaps you'll want to discuss the amplification of meaning through the simplification of the image" (Appendix G). The importance of this is what Ms. Madison covered in order to prepare her students to read graphic novels and to analyze them. Additionally, Ms. Madison also reminded students while discussing *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun* about “reading between the panels.” This was the same technique as Dr. Simpson who began her unit about reading graphically. Ms. Madison was particularly insistent on covering the idea of “amplification of meaning through the simplification of images” While discussing R. Crumb’s *The Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb* as much of their discussion during that the covering of that text was related to the art style. The specifics of that discussion are presented later on in this chapter.

Participants' Approaches to Teaching the Reading of Graphic Novels

All of the participants were aware of having to address the literal reading of graphic novels. Of particular interest, however, was the extent to which Dr. Simpson went. Since Dr. Simpson was an admitted "skeptic" before her graduate school years in regards to graphic novels, her class structure was indicative of her own learning process with the medium just as Ms. Madison's and Dr. Nelson's classes were indicative of their experiences with the medium. Since Ms. Madison and Dr. Nelson grew up with graphic

novels as children, they were more familiar with the medium and its mechanics, and that familiarity may have contributed to their class structure and the teaching of reading a graphic novel. The same could be said for Dr. Simpson, whose first exposure to graphic novels/comic books was in her graduate school years. Moreso than Ms. Madison and Dr. Nelson, Dr. Simpson was quite methodical and deliberate in her lesson on "reading graphically."

The common thread among all of the participants in terms of teaching students how to read graphic novels was the recognition of that teaching. In other words, all three participants were vocal about believing they had to cover how to read graphic novels with their students, even if it was a lesson utilizing a PowerPoint or perusing a chapter from Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993). The extent to which the participants went to cover this material was the important factor to consider when analyzing their individual pedagogies.

Each of the participants in this study said they believed they needed to scaffold the analysis of graphic novels with a review of how to read the texts. Dr. Simpson had an entire lesson on how to read comics focusing on Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1992) and Molly Bang's *Picture This, How Pictures Work* (2000). Ms. Madison also covered the concept in a course lesson also using Scott McCloud's text. Brian had students read a photocopied chapter of Scott McCloud's work outside of class. All three participants used McCloud's *Understanding Comics* to prime their students for interacting with graphic texts, and even this dissertation cited Scott McCloud's *Understand Comics* as one of the seminal works in visual literacy, comic studies, and multimodality.

Teaching Thematically

The lessons and readings on how to literally read graphic novels and comic books were primers for the analyses of the texts. After covering the characteristics and mechanics of the medium and having students become aware not only of their own visual literacy, but also the multimodality of the comic book medium, all three participants' courses became surveys of texts which informed a particular theme.

For Dr. Simpson, the theme was "Other Worlds: Dystopia, Unreality, Virtuality and You." More specifically, Dr. Simpson's syllabus stated the following:

> The primary focuswill be the examination and analysis of contemporary issues raised by the texts of study, including: **American consumerism, our relationship with technology and the mass media, dystopia, privacy and censorship in the 21st century, fantasy role-playing games and virtuality, real and synthetic landscapes, and more**. (Bold in original)

The portion of the class I observed was about dystopian futures, and Dr. Simpson had students read Alan Moore and Dave Lloyd's *V For Vendetta* which portrays a dystopian vision of London and how a vigilante takes it upon himself to combat the government.

Dr. Nelson's unit involving graphic novels was an examination of the concepts of “heroes” and “villains” in society. More specifically, this lesson was on how society contributes to the formation of these socio-cultural constructs. Dr. Nelson used Alan Moore and Brian Bolland’s *The Killing Joke* for the first class and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ *Watchmen* for the second.

Ms. Madison's classes were a bit more focused on the analyses of the texts as singular units as opposed to linking them to overarching themes. Her first class had students analyzing World War II political cartoons drawn by Dr. Seuss as well as political cartoons they had found on their own for homework. Students also read a section of the graphic novel *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun* by Geoffrey Canada and Jamar Nicholas while focusing on what Ms. Madison described as "representation of black identity" in the graphic novel. For her first class, Ms. Madison focused on society and how those particular texts (political cartoons and *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*) informed her class' discussions on society. Her second class was an examination of "comix" (underground comic books which were not sanctioned by the Comic Code Authority) through R. Crumb's *The Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb*. Since this graphic novel is an illustrated interpretation of a religious text, Ms. Madison structured the class' discussions around religion and how the images in the graphic novel may have been more than simply images and could possibly be interpreted as a commentary on the artist's personal perception of the validity of the religious text.

All three participants' classes were organized to address course themes. What follows are descriptions of how these teachers conducted their classes in regards to exploring themes.

Dr. Nelson: Exploring "Good" and "Evil" with Superhero Graphic Novels

During the two classes I observed, Dr. Nelson utilized *The Killing Joke* in the first class, and *Watchmen* in the second class. Both classes began with questions that Dr. Nelson provided and served as the frame for discussions throughout the classes.

For his class with *The Killing Joke*, Dr. Nelson's question was "How does society affect us?" Dr. Nelson led a discussion and examination of *The Killing Joke* with Dr. Nelson focusing on issues of wealth and poverty. Specifically, Dr. Nelson had the class look at the characters of Bruce Wayne, a rich socialite who is also the superhero Batman, and the Joker, who is portrayed as a poor and struggling comedian who gets into trouble with a Mafia-like gang. Dr. Nelson's lecture during class was discursive, and Dr. Nelson encouraged the students in the class to share their experiences with the popular characters. Students gave input which Dr. Nelson had students link to panels/dialogue from the graphic novel, and that was essentially how Dr. Nelson used graphic novels. Interestingly, the panels that were linked to students' discussions of the themes were chosen by Dr. Nelson himself and shown on a screen using a projector and computer set-up. While students cited panels from the graphic novel that they felt were important to the discussion, Dr. Nelson chose the majority of panels to analyze. This was the case for his second class and the discussion of *Watchmen*. The graphic novels became the artifacts upon which socio-cultural issues were referenced in a class-wide forum.

In addition to displaying sections of *The Killing Joke* on the screen, Dr. Nelson also presented a PowerPoint on three topics: "Superhero Code of Conduct," "Superheroes," and "Super Villains." To supplement the students' reading of *The Killing Joke*, Dr. Nelson also showed scenes from Tim Burton's 1989 film *Batman* and Christopher Nolan's 2008 film *The Dark Knight*. Both films presented stories about the Joker, and the short portions of the films served as more examples of how the relationship between Batman and the Joker were socio-culturally constructed. It appeared that the reasoning for showing clips from the film was to have students further analyze the

constructs of “good” and “evil” and how those constructs were presented in varying media. As Dr. Nelson himself stated, “…we're using movies as a supplemental to the graphic novel in which we're using that to open up this whole idea of the morality code of heroes and, you know, superheroes” (personal communication, October 17, 2012).

Dr. Nelson’s assignment for this unit on *The Killing Joke* and the concept of morality (Appendix O) reinforced what he was attempting to convey in his usage of the graphic novel and the films. His assignment asks students to move, “beyond the plot of the Joker versus Batman…” and to analyze how, “…this idea of being morally resolute applied to each of us.” This assignment does not necessarily take the multimodal nature of the media Dr. Nelson chose to use into account. While there is a strong focus on the thematic elements of the texts, there is little that specifically relates to referencing the visuals or multimodal elements of graphic novels. Despite using graphic novels, a visual medium, the questions on this assignment appear to privilege traditional literacy skills as opposed to multiliteracies or even visual literacy. This is due to the question’s focus: the actions of characters within a given story. Dr. Nelson does have students take visual media into account when answering the prompt, but the nature of the assignment does not appear to reflect the inherent multimodality of the media he had his students read.

This all related back to Dr. Nelson’s discussion of the graphic novel and its themes of society and the impact of society on people. One of Dr. Nelson’s main points in *The Killing Joke* was that the Joker’s sanity, which is almost always called into question when discussing superhero mythology, is not completely lost. Instead, Moore and Bolland’s narrative depicts a man whose view of society has changed so completely that his actions are no longer socially acceptable. It’s an interesting notion, but Dr.

Nelson's use of *The Killing Joke* reflected a usage of graphic novels that didn't primarily focus on the mechanics of the medium and instead represented a usage of graphic novels that automatically privileged them as a valuable medium to utilize. In other words, there was no attempt at trying to convince students of their value or even implying that graphic novels and/or comic books were still vying for legitimacy in the fields of education and literature. Dr. Nelson treated the medium as simply the next text in his syllabus.

This consideration of the graphic novel as being inherently worthy of study was echoed in Dr. Nelson's own explanation during the second interview of how he used the medium of graphic novels in his classroom: "Treated it like a piece of canonical literature. That's what I did. Used the comic books to teach the same kind of things you would encounter in any short story or model for an introduction to literature class" (personal communication, October 29, 2012). All of the participants in this study exhibited a level of respect for the medium, but Dr. Nelson's implementation of the medium was noteworthy in its seamless integration from the texts that were studied prior to the classes observed. That seamless transition is also reflected in Dr. Nelson not taking class time to cover how to read graphic novels but instead assigned students to read a photocopied chapter from McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993). To put the transition into perspective, the students had just finished reading the short story *A Rose for Emily* (1930, 2008) by William Faulkner where an elderly woman continues to live and sleep with the body of her deceased husband long after his death. The theme for that lesson, as Dr. Nelson explained it, was also about the public perception of people which tied into his lesson for *The Killing Joke* and how the Joker's actions are perceived as being evil by society.

The second class of Dr. Nelson's I observed was similar to his first class, but the text discussed was *Watchmen*. This class occurred one week after the first class I observed. Students had expressed confusion about the graphic novel at the beginning of class, and Dr. Nelson said, "Let me complicate this for you." He wrote, "Who Watches the Watchmen?" on the board; the phrase is a running trope throughout the dystopian graphic novel and serves as the work's signature theme. This phrase served as a catalyst for discussion in the class. It was the frame for the class with the question being answered at the very end of the session. The confusion that students exhibited is also important here, and it is discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Dr. Nelson and his students deconstructed *Watchmen* by breaking down each character in the graphic novel and analyzing his/her actions in the story. Sections from the graphic novel were discussed at length. After each character was analyzed by both Dr. Nelson and the students through a class discussion, a portion of the film about the character was shown. This was the general structure of the class. For Dr. Nelson, the films were a supplement to the graphic novel. The culminating event of this second class was Dr. Nelson's readdressing of the question, "Who Watches the Watchmen?" Dr. Nelson finally presented an answer to the question which was, "No one."

Mirroring what he did with the first class and the graphic novel *The Killing Joke*, the question for the class was linked back to society and how the construct of society affects and ultimately influences the actions of people, even in a fictional graphic novel. During the second interview with Dr. Nelson, I brought up his choice of graphic novels again, and he reiterated why those particular graphic novels were chosen:

> So, I'm looking at, sort of like the main underlying theme throughout the semester is looking at this idea of society, you know, and anything that deals with society, so it's very broad, and you can apply pretty much anything to it. The reason why I chose the *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight*, or *The Killing Joke* was because they deal heavily with this, you know, certain perception of society. (personal communication, October 29, 2012)

The focus on themes stayed consistent throughout the classes that I observed Dr. Nelson teach in his Introduction to Literature class.

Dr. Nelson's classes were heavily discussion-based, as were all of the participants' classes in this dissertation. The integration of the graphic novels into the discussions during the classes was done primarily through the referencing of page numbers and panels, and in the case of the first class with *The Killing Joke*, panels were displayed on a screen using an overhead projector. This helped Dr. Nelson discuss how the images of a given panel/page informed a given theme. An example of this was when he displayed the first page of *The Killing Joke* which depicts rain drops falling in a puddle making multiple ripples in the water. Dr. Nelson led a discussion with the students asking them what symbolism or theme they thought those ripples represented given the entire context of the graphic novel. Dr. Nelson then shared that in regards to superhero mythology, the ripples of characters are of paramount importance because it mirrors reality in that no person's actions are insular or isolated; all the actions of people ripple into one another.

This style of pedagogy, where discussions would take place about a given panel or page in the graphic novel with a recognition of the image contributing to the overall message, was Dr. Nelson's predominant style, and it also reflected The New London

Group's "pedagogy of multiliteracies" (1996) where students and teachers alike recognized and privileged the diverse literacies each person possesses: in the case of Dr. Nelson's class, visual literacy and traditional literacy. Dr. Nelson utilized multiple media sources (graphic novels, motion pictures, computers and projectors, and the traditional board at the front of the classroom) to discuss and analyze themes.

Dr. Simpson: Using Visuals to Inform Discussions of Themes

The first class with a thematic focus was a discussion of the first half of *V For Vendetta*. Unlike her previous class, which focused on students accessing their abilities to interpret images holistically and contextualize them in their discussions of texts, this second class was more akin to a traditional literary discussion. Part of Dr. Simpson's class' protocol was having students write what she termed "responses" to texts they were required to read; Dr. Simpson went around and checked for completion of this assignment. In the meantime, students filled out a gridded worksheet (Appendices H1-H2) which had students recall events from the graphic novel. These comprehension questions became the review for the class before thematic issues were addressed. As will be discussed further in the description of Dr. Simpson's case, her concern with using graphic novels was getting students acclimated to reading and interacting with graphic novels. This review of comprehension, while sometimes necessary in literature courses to refresh memories and prime discussion, may have been a result of Dr. Simpson's concerns when it came to students having to read the text.

Dr. Simpson's focus, in terms of the class discussing the graphic novel, was centered on the moral ambiguity of the character "V" who takes it upon himself to

terrorize a corrupt government. In order to generate class discussion, Dr. Simpson had the class pick a title of one of the first four chapters of the graphic novel (the four chapters they were required to read) and discuss, “how the events of the chapter inform the title." All of the chapter titles begin with the letter “V,” further enhancing a trope which encompasses much of the book’s imagery and themes. Dr. Simpson then picked two students to share what they had found. For the most part, students expressed an understanding that the chapter titles were designed to be either ironic in nature or foreboding. For example, in the chapter titled “Virtuous Victory,” “V” kills a corrupt Bishop by forcing him to eat a poisoned communion wafer. Dr. Simpson probed the class by asking, “Does the Bishop deserve to die?” Much of the class was very stoic regarding that incident in the story with many of them agreeing with each other that the Bishop’s actions (sexually assaulting underage girls) warranted a brutal and symbolic death at the hands of “V.” This seemed to be what Dr. Simpson’s point was in the class, though: the reader needed to constantly question him/herself as the story progressed so as to reaffirm his/her moral compass.

The major pedagogical method during all of this was class discussion, and it must be stressed that the class was structured very much like a traditional literary survey course. Since the class was an introductory literature course, this made sense. However, the key difference here was that Dr. Simpson did make a point of having students analyze images from the graphic novel. Of particular interest was the shadowing of the character “V,” and a sequence where “V” infiltrates a broadcast station in order to play a propaganda tape over all of the televisions in Britain.

Having students open their own copies of the graphic novel as she discussed certain panels, Dr. Simpson told students to analyze the images of the character Evey Hammond at the beginning of the story. Dr. Simpson made the point that some of the panels showed only Evey Hammond's eyes which Dr. Simpson inferred are the same as Evey Hammond saying, "What have I gotten myself into?" Additionally, Dr. Simpson asked why "V" is mostly in shadows at the beginning. She agreed with the students' interpretations that the shadows, "Give a feeling of evil." This again led back to Dr. Simpson's focus throughout the class of "V's" moral ambiguity and how that affected the class' interpretation of his actions.

As Dr. Simpson was discussing the visual and textual elements of the graphic novel, Dr. Simpson said, "There's a lot going on here. It's not linear like a novel." This was in reference to the actual layout of the book. Even during discussions of thematic issues, Dr. Simpson returned to the structure and layout of the graphic novel as a medium; this was important. Dr. Simpson appeared to want students to recognize the form of the medium being integral to understanding its themes; interpreting and referencing the visual elements of the story were essential to understanding the overall themes.

The final activity in the class built upon the concept of interpreting the visuals of the story coupled with the text. Dr. Simpson had students analyze a scene where "V" is infiltrating a broadcast station and killing guards in the process. While these visual scenes are occurring, background noise is being presented in word balloons. In the word balloons is the dialogue from propaganda sitcoms that the government is broadcasting to the people, and those sitcoms include laugh tracks. Dr. Simpson asked students how this

was significant, and the students commented that the actions of "V" were matching the sitcoms. Dr. Simpson pointed out the irony of the laugh tracks while "V" was killing people and said, "It definitely narrates his actions." Again, Dr. Simpson helped the class recognize the visual and textual elements of the story working in tandem, and Dr. Simpson led discussions in class which highlighted this literary relationship.

The recognition she taught of the visuals of the story paralleling the textual elements was reflective of McCloud's (1993) commentary on comic art that the visuals are capable or narrating action and foiling the text. As such, Dr. Simpson displayed a pedagogy that privileged both the textual and visual elements of the text by asking questions that pertained specifically to the visual narrative as well as the textual narrative. As Kress (2003) made the point that in multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), literacies are not individualized in that they don't exist separately of all other literacies. Instead, they are interconnected and inform each other. By leading a discussion that addressed both the visual and textual elements of the graphic novel's narrative, Dr. Simpson displayed a pedagogy that seemed to recognize and was designed to access students' multiliteracies.

Dr. Simpson's second thematic class was similar in structure to the previous one with students working on writing responses at the beginning of class and theme discussions regarding the book being led by the teacher. Students first researched who Guy Fawkes was (the mask of "V" is a stylized version of Guy Fawkes' face) and had a discussion about how Fawkes' attempt to blow up Parliament informed the actions of "V" in the story. This became the crux of the class' discussion and continued themes that were

brought up in the previous class: specifically, the reader's emotions and reactions to a vigilante causing terror and whether or not that vigilante has a right to do that.

Most of the thematic discussions were related to the overall narrative of the story and not the relationship between the visual narrative and the textuality of particular scenes. However, at the end of the class, Dr. Simpson pinpointed a section of the text for its visual elements. This scene was where the character Evey Hammond is abducted by "V" in order to make her come to terms with allying herself with the vigilante. Dr. Simpson asked, "How do the images contribute to the emotions of the passages?" Students gave examples from the text including Evey Hammond standing naked in a rainstorm after being tortured by "V." Dr. Simpson contributed to the discussion saying, "How do the images set up the notions of surprise? Awakening? Awareness? Does she look anything like the Evey we saw before? She looks monstrous, almost." While most of the final class with graphic novels was finishing up general discussions of the text, the unique, visual characteristics of graphic novels were emphasized at the end of the class.

Dr. Simpson ended the unit on *V For Vendetta* by showing students a scene from the film version. However, the class ended abruptly with no discussion occurring after the showing of the scene. The use of film was similar to Dr. Nelson's use of the Batman films while discussing his graphic novels, but Dr. Nelson's use of film was much more extensive than Dr. Simpson's. Both used the film versions of the graphic novels as supplemental texts.

Ms. Madison: Reading Into the Images

As Dr. Nelson and Dr. Simpson had done with their classes, the beginning of the first class I observed was discussing assignments and the syllabus for scheduling and

assignment purposes. An assignment was handed out to the students which was to be due at a later date. The assignment was called a "McCloudian Analysis" (Appendix G) in reference to Scott McCloud and his book *Understanding Comics*. Ms. Madison went over the assignment which was an analysis of a section of a graphic novel which they would be reading in the coming weeks. Part of Ms. Madison's explanation of the assignment included her discussing "the amplification of meaning through the simplification of images." According to Ms. Madison, this is a tenet of Scott McCloud's work and what the students could be focusing on when they analyze graphic texts. This mirrored Dr. Simpson's explanation of how shapes represent deeper meanings and emotions by using portions of Molly Bang's book *Picture This, How Pictures Work* (2000) and highlighting the section where a scene of "Little Red Riding Hood" is built using only shapes.

The class then shifted to discussing political cartoons. A handout was provided to the students which covered general characteristics of political cartoons and a short Dr. Seuss biography (Appendices I1-I2). Additionally, a few Dr. Seuss political cartoons from World War II were included at the end of the packet. Much of this part of the class was Ms. Madison reading from the packet and giving students examples of how political cartoons used symbols to represent complex ideas. For example, Ms. Madison displayed a political cartoon of President Obama and Governor Mitt Romney using the "swing states" of the United States as spots for the game Twister. According to Ms. Madison, the cartoon could be interpreted as the candidates perceiving the election to be a game and the states being simply part of a larger game.

After a few more examples of current political cartoons, Ms. Madison shifted the attention of the class to the Dr. Seuss political cartoons at the end of the packet and

focused on one in particular called “Second Creation” (Appendix J) where a Nazi general is melting people down and reforming the molten people into little pieces “hailing Hitler.” Ms. Madison asked for interpretations of the cartoon, and one student commented that it was Hitler playing God. Ms. Madison agreed with the students and said, “There’s a little bit of persuasion in there. I don’t want to get melted down.” According to Ms. Madison, the cartoon used symbolism, juxtaposition, and irony of its title to present the viewer with a horrid perception of what the Nazis were doing to its people, and the world in general, during the 1930s and early 1940s. Additionally, the fact that the artist was Dr. Seuss gave the students a bit of a shock as nearly everyone was familiar with his children’s storybooks as opposed to his work as a political cartoonist.

Students had been required to find a political cartoon from the internet or a newspaper for homework, so Ms. Madison put the students in groups of four in order to discuss the cartoons they picked out and to select a cartoon from the group to share with the rest of the class. The groups then shared their selected political cartoons, and the class had a short discussion on each cartoon.

This class ended with a class discussion on *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun* (2010). For the major texts that were read in the class, Ms. Madison gave moderator duties to one of her students, so a student led the discussion on this text. Of particular interest was a question raised by a student concerning the color of the gutters (spaces between the panels of a comic book page) being black instead of white. Ms. Madison took this opportunity to remind students of what McCloud (1993) says about reading between the panels: that it is up to the reader to decide what happens between the panels. While Ms. Madison addressed the fact that gutters are traditionally white because of the paper that comics

were and are printed on, she asked the class to analyze the black gutters in the context of the graphic novel which follows a young, African-American boy living in Harlem in the 1970s. At this point, Ms. Madison took over the class discussion and presented the students with some interpretations of the black gutters. First, according to Ms. Madison, the black gutters might symbolize “Black consciousness," referring to race. Additionally, she made a point that, “Not all comic books are 'white,'” again referring to race. Since this question came up, Ms. Madison told the students at the end of class to think about this: “Why do you think the representation of black identity appears less in comic books than white identity?” Finally, students were reminded to read the portion of R. Crumb’s *The Illustrated Book of Genesis* (Crumb, 2009) she had provided for the next class.

The second class continued on the heels of the discussion that ended the previous class, mainly a discussion on race in comic books. Ms. Madison again reiterated her question of why the representation of black identity was less frequent in comics than representations of white identity. She discussed with the students the race of superheroes and asked students to think of any African-American superheroes. Some students could think of names, but the list was very short. Ms. Madison’s point here was to highlight the mono-cultural history of comic literature.

Ms. Madison then discussed the Comics Code Authority which was accompanied by a handout (Appendices K1-K2) which explained the history of why the Comics Code Authority existed. This was all in preparation for discussing R. Crumb’s *The Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb* as he was a pioneer in comic books that existed outside the mainstream and therefore was creatively opposed to the Comics Code Authority. The nature of “comix” was then discussed with Ms. Madison referring to her handout

(Appendices K1-K2). It seems that every class, or at least every unit, was accompanied with a handout that Ms. Madison created; these became the students' notes during the class, and all of her talking points came from these handouts.

As was done in the previous class, a student was in charge of discussion for the portion of *The Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb* they read. The student provided a handout for the class which was essentially a biography of R. Crumb. After presenting the biographical information on R. Crumb, a discussion on how Crumb's art was metatextual occurred. Specifically, students equated Crumb's rough artistic style with what they perceived to be his belief in the subject matter. In other words, the students said the rough quality of Crumb's artwork might mean that he didn't believe in *The Book of Genesis*. Ms. Madison instructed the students to turn to the artist's introduction which addressed this issue. According to Crumb, he changed nothing from *The Bible* when he drew the illustrations, so everything he drew were interpretations of what was written. Since this text is an interpretation of another work, the visuals were important for Ms. Madison to focus on when she discussed the work with her students. The value of the imagery was stressed in this lesson, especially in how it informed the text.

The class discussion stayed dedicated to the visuals of the story as opposed to the narrative and addressed the aesthetics of the nudity in the story. According to Ms. Madison, the fact that the students even noticed the nudity was indicative of their socio-cultural perspectives. Finally, students questioned why the scenes in the city of Sodom and Gomorrah were visually darker than other scenes in the text. Ms. Madison reviewed the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and how the ancient city was ridden with sin and then reworked the question highlighting the mood of the story at the time. Ms. Madison had

the students work through the story and take the visuals into account when discussing the narrative, and she got her students to develop a theory regarding the visual representation of sin in the text: the scenes are darker because there is more sin occurring.

Throughout the discussions during class, Ms. Madison asked questions that reflected a privileging of graphic novels' multimodality. *The Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb* was particularly revealing in that regard as the way the students perceived the images, the illustrations becoming darker the farther into Sodom and Gomorrah the characters went, encouraged students to access their multiliteracies. Even when the students were discussing the color of the gutters in *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*, the theme of the story was discussed through an analysis of the comic literature's physical structure.

Ms. Madison took the final minutes of class that to introduce "graphic poetry" to her students in advance of them reading it over the next few days for class. Students wrote in their "Idea Books," which Ms. Madison explained in our interview was "…essentially a journal, but I don't call it a journal because there are like stigmas that go with the word "'Journal.'" Ms. Madison's prompt was, "What do you think society would rather read? The original poetry or the graphic interpretations?" Class ended after the students wrote in their "Idea Books."

Summary of Chapter Four

The first question this dissertation was designed to address was how collegiate English instructors utilized graphic novels in their pedagogies. Specifically, what did English teachers literally do with graphic novels and comic books? The preceding pages of this chapter have addressed that question, and two predominant trends emerged from

the data: the college English teachers in this study used graphic novels as a means to access and use students' multiliteracies (textual, visual, etc.) and as a means to discuss themes with an emphasis on how the visual nature of the medium helps contribute to the overall understanding of a given theme.

The multimodality of graphic novels was stressed and taught by all three participants, only in varying degrees of coverage. Dr. Simpson devoted an entire class of her "Introduction to Literature Course" to multimodality. Ms. Madison covered the mechanics of the graphic novel in a class prior to my observations. Dr. Nelson had students read a chapter from McCloud's book, *Understanding Comics* (1993) for homework. Despite the variance, all three participants cited that students being taught how to read multimodal texts was important to students' understandings and analyses of the texts. The participants' concerns regarding students being able to read graphic novels will be covered in the next chapter, but the trend remained that all three participants found teaching, what Dr. Simpson termed in her class, "reading graphically," important.

Another aspect of the participants' pedagogies in regards to scaffolding their analyses of graphic texts with lessons on how to read graphic texts was the use of McCloud's book *Understanding Comics* (1993). This volume has been mentioned several times throughout this dissertation including the literature review, the methodology chapter, and this chapter's data analysis. While all three participants chose diverse graphic novels, they all utilized McCloud's seminal work. This could be interpreted as being indicative of the quality of McCloud's work as an academic text, but it is also important to highlight the commonality of the participants' lessons and objectives. Three different English instructors from diverse backgrounds, universities, and classes all grounded their

instruction of how to read a graphic novel on Scott McCloud's theory of how text and image interact with one another in the comic medium. Teaching students about multimodality, or the relationship between the written word and image, was significant for these participants when teaching with a graphic novel.

The thematized lessons of these instructors' classes all naturally varied given the different classes and diverse texts used. What became apparent when looking at the data was the linking of the themes analyzed/discussed to both the overall narrative of the stories and the individualized modes of communication that the graphic novels employed. In other words, the participants recognized, and in some cases privileged, the images in the graphic novels as being vital to the class discussions and analyses. This may come across as obvious since this dissertation was focused on highlighting the medium of graphic novels which are inherently visual, but the recognition on the part of the teacher participants that graphic novels require a different type of literacy to read and understand was paramount.

The data presented here, as it related to the participants thematizing their graphic novel lessons, provided insight into how what The New London Group termed "multiliteracies" (1996) works in collegiate English classrooms. The examples are, of course, limited in their generalizability to the participants in this study, but the strength of this qualitative study was not in attempting to generalize the pedagogies of collegiate English teachers who used graphic novels. Instead, this dissertation looked to explore how these teachers and their unique experiences, both professionally and personally, shaped their pedagogies when using graphic novels.

This chapter has presented how three collegiate English teachers taught graphic novels in their classroom. The second question this dissertation looked to address, what teachers found to be valuable about using graphic novels in the English classroom and how those values affected their pedagogical choices, is covered in the next chapter of this dissertation.

CHAPTER FIVE

PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS ON GRAPHIC NOVELS AS ACADEMIC TEXTS

The previous chapter presented how the participants in this study, college-level English teachers who utilized a graphic novel in their pedagogies, literally used the medium of graphic novels in their classes. For all three participants, there was a practice of scaffolding literacies, particularly visual literacy (Kress, 2003). In order for students to be able to interact with and analyze graphic texts, the teachers believed students first needed to be taught, what Dr. Simpson termed, to "read graphically." While all three participants addressed this issue in varying degrees, teaching students how to read graphic novels appeared to be essential to the successful integration of the texts in their classrooms. In this chapter, the participants are presented in the order they were interviewed/observed.

All three participants then had students read their texts through a thematic lens. Each participant's thematic focus was different, but the practice of having students base their analyses of the graphic texts on an overarching discussion point remained consistent. Again, the literal pedagogies of the participants varied, and theses differences in teaching styles were presented in the previous chapter.

The ways the participants literally used graphic novels in their college level, English classrooms was only part of this study's scope. It also remains to be seen how those teaching styles were informed by their expectations for the course, how they viewed the medium of graphic novels personally and professionally, and what challenges the medium of graphic novels/comic books face in the world of academia.

This dissertation looked to examine the usage of graphic novels in academic contexts beyond the actual classroom and to take the participants' histories, opinions, and expertise into account. Therefore, the research questions for this dissertation are re-presented here:

1. What are the different ways college English teachers in this study employ graphic novels in their classrooms?
2. What affordances and/or constraints do college English teachers in this study see in both the medium of graphic novels as an academic text and their own application of the medium? In other words, how academically valuable do the college English teachers in this study find comics?

This chapter will build upon the previous chapter's presentation of the participants' pedagogical styles when utilizing graphic novels in their classrooms and examine how their preferences, concerns, and challenges of implementing the medium informed their choices as college English teachers and as scholars.

Presentation of the Data

Research Question 2: What affordances and/or constraints do college teachers in this study see in both the medium of graphic novels as an academic text and their own application of the medium? In other words, how academically valuable do teachers find comics?

The fact that some college English teachers utilized graphic novels in their classes is reflective of the increased respect the medium has gained over the last decade. This dissertation has already highlighted how some college English teachers actually use

graphic novels, but the reasoning behind their use is equally important. Additionally, the participants' ideas as to what the benefits and deficits of using graphic novels gives insight into how the multimodality of the medium influenced educational decisions ranging from choice of text to assessing students' analyses of the texts. The findings of this study, as they relate to the second research question, are presented here. The findings informed the participants' perceptions on the legitimacy of the medium in academic contexts, their students' apprehensions toward graphic novels, and how issues of access to graphic novels affected their pedagogies.

Legitimacy of the Medium

It was raised in Chapter Two that the legitimacy of the graphic novel/comic book medium is in a constant state of gaining academic acceptance. From a socio-cultural perspective, the medium has experienced a growth in popularity as greater quantities of movies and games are based on, or influenced by, stories that originated in the medium of "sequential art" (Eisner, 1985). All of the participants in this dissertation exhibited a respect for graphic novels in academic contexts, and that should come as no surprise. It was difficult at the beginning stages of this dissertation to find college English teachers who used graphic novels in their classroom, so when suitable participants were found, it was likely that they would be "fans" of the medium.

While they all held a level of respect for the medium in academic contexts, all three participants had different reasons for those admirations and exhibited that respect in varying ways. Dr. Nelson said he respected the medium immensely and felt that its legitimacy was still growing. Dr. Simpson found legitimacy primarily in the medium's

inherent multimodality. Finally, Ms. Madison said she appreciated the varying subject matter that the medium had addressed over the years.

Dr. Nelson: Comics Still Seeking Legitimacy

During the follow-up interview after observing Dr. Nelson's classes, he stated what he wanted his students to get out of the texts he picked for his classes to read. Dr. Nelson had used *The Killing Joke* (1988) by Alan Moore and Brian Bolland and *Watchmen* (1986) by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons which are both superhero texts. He said, "Well, there were two things I was trying to do. One, was try to expand, or expand their, oh, not knowledge, but give them a chance to try comic books: try graphic novels. To expose them to that genre of literature" (personal communication, October 29, 2012). Dr. Nelson's choice of texts was interesting here as both Dr. Simpson and Ms. Madison had stayed away from the superhero genre. Dr. Simpson's graphic text, *V For Vendetta* (2008), also written by Alan Moore, was more reminiscent of superhero tropes, but the idea of not using superhero narratives in their graphic novel units was apparent. Dr. Nelson exhibited a mentality towards the usage of graphic novels that reflected his personal views on the medium's having greater academic acceptance.

As was outlined in the participant's profile at the beginning of Chapter Four, Dr. Nelson's history with graphic novels and comic books was extensive, and his academic usage of the medium was rife with instances of both pedagogical success and failure. To Dr. Nelson, gaining legitimacy for the medium of graphic novels is an ongoing process. Whereas Ms. Madison and Dr. Simpson saw the legitimacy of the medium having garnered a level of academic acceptance at this point in time, Dr. Nelson characterized

the acceptance of the medium as ongoing. When asked about the acceptance of the medium in academics, he said, "There's a shift. Right now we're in the middle of a shift. Twelve years ago, nuh uh. No" (personal communication, October 29, 2012).

Dr. Nelson had started using graphic novels in the early 2000s, so his personal perception of this "shift," as he called it, corresponded to his academic experiences with the medium. He stated that in reference to the use of graphic novels and comic books years ago, "There were very few people [using graphic novels], and they would talk about, they would whisper about them" (personal communication, October 29, 2012). As a follow-up question to this, I brought up the fact that he used superhero graphic novels as opposed to graphic novels that are usually more associated with academic contexts such as *Maus* by Spiegelman (2003) or *Persepolis* by Satrapi (2007). Dr. Nelson's personal history with comic books was heavily tied to the superhero genre, so his usage of superhero graphic novels is understandable. However, he did make a distinction between superhero graphic novels and more traditional, academically-accepted titles: "I think they're less accepted [superhero graphic novels], and one of the excuses I've heard people say is that it's convoluted." Even when he wrote his Masters thesis on a graphic novel in 2002, Dr. Nelson said, "I had to heavily justify why comics because at the time, comics were not perceived as being read/readable" (personal communication, October 29, 2012).

Finally, Dr. Nelson's view of comics as being a legitimate medium for academic study began earlier than the other participants in this study and encountered administrative resistance. At the request of the participant, specific stories will not be shared, but Dr. Nelson characterized the resistance he encountered from educational

administrations as "Huge." Despite this, Dr. Nelson steadily incorporated graphic novels and comic books into his pedagogy for over ten years (at the time this dissertation was being written, 2012-2013). His views on the legitimacy of the medium were clearly rooted in his experiences with this medium, as were all of the participants. The major difference with Dr. Nelson was that his view on the legitimacy of the medium never ceased at any point in his personal or professional life whereas Dr. Simpson shared that she never read comics or graphic novels until graduate school, and Ms. Madison stopped reading them when she was an adolescent. Nevertheless, Dr. Nelson's views on the legitimacy of the medium in academic contexts were reflected in his usage of superhero graphic novels in his introductory literature course. For Dr. Nelson, the medium was of equal caliber to the texts that would be traditionally read in a literature course: "Treated it like a piece of canonical literature. That's what I did. Used the comic books to teach the same kind of things you would encounter in any short story or model for an introduction to literature class" (personal communication, October 29, 2012).

Dr. Simpson: Finding the Legitimacy of Graphic Novels Through Multimodality

As was eluded to earlier, Dr. Simpson was, as she called herself, a “skeptic” of graphic novels/comic books in academic contexts. Dr. Simpson’s participant profile in Chapter Four outlined her personal and professional experiences with graphic novels in detail, but overall, her experiences with the medium were quite limited with her first exposure to the medium, personally or professionally, occurring in her graduate school years. Her usage of graphic novels in her introductory literature course showed that she

had developed a pedagogy where students were first taught how to “read graphically” and then analyzed graphic texts through a thematic lens.

Dr. Simpson’s views on the legitimacy of the graphic novel medium in academic contexts was more reflective of her exposure to the medium later in life. An NCTE conference is where she said, “I just immediately recognized how valuable they could be in a secondary classroom, at a college level” (personal communication, October 23, 2012). The uniqueness of the medium’s multimodality was where Sara saw much of the value, but she also saw value in the content of some of the graphic novels she was originally exposed to including Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese* (2006) and Craig Thompson’s *Blankets* (2003), both of which are what are critic Douglas Wolk (2007) would consider “art comics.” For Dr. Simpson, “The content surprised me. The depth of the content surprised me in the texts, and then I just sort of experimented with them in classes that I was teaching to see how students would respond” (personal communication, October 23, 2012).

However, the aesthetics of the medium were of premiere value to Dr. Simpson as a scholar and as a teacher. In sharing what she felt were the strengths of the medium in academic contexts, she described what a graphic novel was to her:

> What a graphic novel to me is, you know, both working together, word and image working together in a way where one relies on the next. One can't function without the other. In fact, I think, as I'm sure you know, lots of times the narrative opposes the image, so if you're not looking at both, then you're not getting the whole story. (personal communication, October 23, 2012)

Multimodality and how it pertains to graphic narratives was reviewed in Chapter Two of this dissertation, and Dr. Simpson's analysis of graphic novels supports what Kress was asserting when he said that, "…not everything can be realised in every mode with equal facility…" (2003, p. 107). In other words, Dr. Simpson saw the value of the medium being its ability to effectively present unique narratives in both textual and visual forms. This explains a lot when looking back at Dr. Simpson's classes when she scaffolded her analysis of *V For Vendetta* with portions of McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) and Bang's *Picture This, How Pictures Work* (2000), both of which deconstruct how images can be read and interpreted.

Even during the follow-up interview, Dr. Simpson reiterated what her goals were for the students when they read *V For Vendetta*:

> I really want them to be able to think critically about how to read images and word alongside each other. I think they're very inundated in their society with images, and that's a lot of the information that they receive. So, aside from that, I wanted them to begin weighing the values that are raised in the text itself. (personal communication, November 6, 2012)

The intersection of students being able to "think critically about how to read images" and "weighing the values that are raised in the text itself" were seen in her handouts to students to work on during the course of the class discussions (Appendices F1-F4, and M1-M2). Part of Dr. Simpson's pedagogy involved classroom discussions with students that were interspersed with guided writing in the form of worksheets. Many of her questions on these sheets asked for recalling information from the text such as, "Look at all of the chapter names in each section. What do they have in common?" or "What is

'Norsefire?'" (Appendix H). However, there were also questions that specifically asked students to analyze images in the context of the story including, "Examine the panels on p. 14. What is the effect of the placement of these images? What about color, facial expressions, etc.? What story do the images tell?" (Appendix H). This was where Dr. Simpson saw the value of the graphic novel in academic contexts: the images in a graphic novel presented unique narratives that encouraged students to use not only their traditional literacies (Westby, 2010), but also their visual literacies (Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996). The connection between text and image made for more modes of interpretation, and Dr. Simpson found this to be refreshing for students to encounter as, " just because it's a text embedded with pictures does not mean that it's going to be simple" (personal communication, November 6, 2012).

Ms. Madison: Valuing the Diversity of Genres

When reading *Maus*, "I started to realize that, oh my God, comics can have deeper meaning than Batman zooms in, gets the bad guy, all is right in Gotham City" (Ms. Madison, personal communication, November 7, 2012). Ms. Madison was referring to a high school class when she discussed how Spiegelman's *Maus* (2003) changed her perceptions of graphic novels. As was presented in Ms. Madison's participant profile at the beginning of Chapter Four, she grew up with comic books in her house because her father used to read them in the early 1990s when she was growing up. The distinction that Ms. Madison makes between *Maus* and the Batman story she used as an example of traditional comic book literature was interesting. Part of Ms. Madison's view on the legitimacy of the graphic novel medium in academic contexts was in its various subject

matters and themes. This could have contributed to Ms. Madison's photocopying of numerous texts for her students throughout the semester as she wanted to expose her students to as many genres as possible.

In regards to Ms. Madison's copying of the texts for her students, she said her reasoning for exposing students to as much material as possible was rooted in her desire to address the sophomoric perceptions of the medium. The students did not buy copies of the texts they read; speaking strictly from an economic point of view, this may have been just as the amount of material that Ms. Madison covered in her class would make for an expensive class. What the photocopying does not account for are the legal issues inherent with such a practice. Further discussion of Ms. Madison's photocopying of texts is presented in the section of this chapter titled "Access to Graphic Texts." However, Ms. Madison stood by her decision for this saying, "I like to give them this kind of wide overview so they can see the point of this is to dispel the myth of graphic novels as, you know, childish or juvenile" (personal communication, November 7, 2012). Battling cultural stereotypes became a cornerstone of Ms. Madison's graphic novel pedagogy, and she had students reflect on their own comic reading as well.

When discussing which titles Ms. Madison had used in her class before I observed her, she addressed the nature of the texts that she copied for students to read:

> There's a lot [graphic texts]. And I'm not having them read just because they're on a Freshman level everything, right? Because I wanted them to give them, a lot of their background on comics is Batman and Superman. Not like that's, there's nothing wrong with that, right? And we start there, but I want them to see that sometimes it can be more complex than maybe simple plotlines. And I'm not

> saying that they're all just simple plotlines, you know. (personal communication, November 7, 2012)

There seemed to be a consistent evaluating and reevaluating of the texts Ms. Madison used in her class in an attempt to diversify the content of the graphic novels she used and also to address the inherent stereotypes associated with graphic literature. This insistence to address graphic literature's stereotypes was also present in Dr. Simpson's pedagogy when she had students reflect on the image of “Comic Book Guy,” the humorous cartoon character from *The Simpsons* who is characterized as obsessed with comic books and socially awkward.

Ms. Madison respected the medium and the benefits of its multimodality when discussing themes, society, culture, religion, and many other paradigms typical of a literary survey course. What became apparent was her energy; that energy was as devoted to legitimizing the medium as it was to studying it with her students.

Students' Apprehensions Towards Graphic Novels

The first participant in this study was Dr. Nelson. While interviewing him before the first observation of his class, I inquired what challenges he foresaw in implementing the graphic novels in his classes. He told me, "Getting the students to read it," (personal communication, October 17, 2012) a comment he accompanied with a chuckle. Much of the literature that was reviewed in Chapter Two presented what benefits graphic novels could have for students and teachers alike, and many of those studies cited the multimodality of the medium being a major part of its power as a text.

As the participants in this study began sharing what they felt were some of their biggest concerns about utilizing a graphic novel in their English classes, the deficits of that usage became a bit clearer. This dissertation was designed to share how the participants used graphic novels and how their views on both the medium and its implementation in academic contexts affected that usage. Part of those views included reflections on the issues inherent with using graphic novels in college English classrooms. This section presents those concerns and addresses an important part of the second question of this dissertation, specifically, what the constraints of graphic novel usages are.

Dr. Nelson: Getting Students to Read Graphic Novels

Part of Dr. Nelson's pedagogy when it came to implementing graphic novels in his class was integrating them with clips from movies based on the graphic novels being read. He cited the usage of film clips being "supplemental" to the graphic novels: "In this class, we're using movies as a supplemental to the graphic novel in which we're using that to open up this whole idea of the morality code of heroes and, you know, superheroes" (personal communication, October 17, 2012). Since Dr. Nelson's graphic novels were of the superhero genre, finding film material wasn't very difficult as superhero films have become commonplace in popular culture. Linking the analysis of the graphic novels to the films also aligns with theories of "multiliteracies" (New London Group, 1996) and Kress' commentaries on how visuals contribute to communication (2003). Dr. Nelson's pedagogy was also scaffolded in such a way that the discussions on the texts that were read in class were followed by the clips from the films.

However, right after Dr. Nelson shared that his biggest challenge in implementing a graphic novel was, "Getting the students to read it," he elaborated on his use of film in class to supplement the graphic novel reading. Specifically, Dr. Nelson cited the use of film in class as being "motivational," or, "So, that's why I'm using the movies to sort of like a way to motivate them to say, 'Wow. This is very cool'" (personal communication, October 17, 2012).

Dr. Nelson then elaborated on why getting students to read the graphic novels was his biggest challenge in implementing the texts. At the root of this challenge was some students not being able to read the multimodal texts. This relates back to Dr. Simpson's pedagogy and her scaffolding of her lesson to teach students how to "read graphically" before analyzing *V For Vendetta*, and Dr. Nelson said it was difficult getting them to read the texts, "If they don't know how to read them. That's where I use Scott McCloud" (personal communication, October 17, 2012). Dr. Nelson gave the students photocopies of Chapter Three of Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* as part of their reading for that week.

This trend was also seen in Dr. Simpson's challenges as a teacher of graphic novels, and her commentary on this will be covered in the next section. The follow-up interview with Dr. Nelson featured comments that were more reflective of his teaching practices and views on graphic novels as academic texts, but he did reiterate his concern when it came to getting students to read the graphic novels. Upon asking him if he'd change anything about his class/graphic novels usage based on his most recent classes, he was reflective on the students' reading of the texts:

> It depends. I'll see what the feedback is from the students. Getting the students to read, remember they're not English majors. These are students that are highly intimidated by having to read more than 5 pages for class, ok. I think using them [graphic novels] that way, using visual narratives was a way of changing that up to get them to read a novel worth of text for one class. (personal communication, October 29, 2012)

However, as one instance from my observations highlighted, that may have not been the case. While observing Dr. Nelson's classes, students exhibited confusion regarding the graphic novel *Watchmen* before Dr. Nelson had entered the classroom for his second class. Some of the students even revealed to each other that they had read only the first chapter out of twelve for class; those students all cited the book as being confusing. Interestingly, Dr. Nelson himself had said many academics claim the superhero genre is too "convoluted" to be taken seriously as a text to be studied. Dr. Nelson was correct when he said that his biggest challenge would be getting the students to read the graphic novel assigned, at least with *Watchmen*. His first assigned graphic novel, *The Killing Joke*, was only 96 pages long whereas *Watchmen* was 416 pages. The lengths of the books need to be taken into account, but the casual commentary by the students before Dr. Nelson entered the room informed Dr. Nelson's challenges to implementing the graphic novels in his class much more than the number of pages the graphic novel had.

Dr. Simpson: Getting Students to Read Images and Her Admission Regarding The Class Being Observed

Dr. Simpson described her students' reactions to the graphic novels she'd previously utilized in her classes as "nervous" because, "nobody has everput them in front

of them, especially a professor to say, 'Ok, we're gonna read this together and think about it in the same way that we think about traditional novels that you're required to read'" (personal communication, October 23, 2012). As a former, self-described "skeptic" of graphic novels, Dr. Simpson's description of how students reacted to her assigning graphic novels for reading and analyzing was understandable. Furthermore, Dr. Simpson asserted that, "one thing I discovered was that students come to these texts with their own prejudice. They [students] think you're putting it in front of them because they're not smart enough to understand something else or it has all of this sort of juvenile attachments to it" (personal communication, October 23, 2012). This all led to what she said was her biggest challenge in implementing *V For Vendetta* in her introductory literature course.

While Dr. Simpson's challenge was similar to Dr. Nelson's, who said that getting the students to read the graphic novel(s) assigned was the biggest challenge, Dr. Simpson was more concerned with the students' abilities to interpret multimodal texts:

> I think the challenge is just getting students to see their value sometimes, and also sometimes it's helping them to see beyond the image. Sometimes it's helping them to actually look at the image. I know when I work with English majors they just read the words. They don't pay attention to the pictures, so often times what I feel like I'm doing is kind of complicating their reading process by asking them to slow down and pay attention to what's happening in the image and how what happens in the image works alongside the narrative. Or it creates the narrative of the text. So, I seem to spend a lot of time talking about that in particular. I think because of the students that I typically have, they're very trained to analyze word.

> They're not trained to think about image. (personal communication, October 23, 2012)

These challenges reflected both Dr. Simpson's previous usages of graphic novels in academic contexts and her scaffolded pedagogy during the observed classes. During her research for her own dissertation, which also looked at graphic novels in academic contexts, Dr. Simpson stated that many of the students in a high school class she observed, "didn't know how to read them. They didn't know where to put their eye on the pageSo, they were doing things like moving it around trying to figure out where to start and where to end" (personal communication, October 23, 2012). This also occurred at the college level with her own classes. Specifically, in a class called "Teaching Adolescent Literacy," she said she needed to teach students, "how to do a close reading of text. They don't know how to do a close reading of visual text. So, we kind of talk about, again, the skills that you need in order to read images effectively" (personal communication, October 23, 2102). Dr. Simpson called this a "Comics Close Reading."

Most importantly, these experiences clearly influenced the style of her pedagogy and content of her classes. The challenges Dr. Simpson voiced during the interviews were not exactly the same as Dr. Nelson's, but there was still a recognition by her of students being initially apprehensive about reading a graphic text. For Dr. Nelson, the concern was generally about students reading the texts at any level whereas Dr. Simpson was specifically concerned for how students would engage with images. Either way, both participants expressed a concern for their students being able to complete assigned readings of graphic novels.

There was also an interesting event while observing Dr. Simpson's classes that needs to be shared in relation to student apprehension while working with *V For Vendetta* in class. Most of Dr. Simpson's class was lecture-based with activities interspersed, and her style of teaching was presented in the previous chapter. During the first class I observed, Dr. Simpson seemed to have difficulty engaging the students in conversation. She would ask questions and wait for long periods of time for a student to answer or, at the very least, return a question. I observed Dr. Simpson give, what appeared to be, nervous smiles and laughter as a way to offset a visible discomfort she was having while discussing the graphic novel with the class. At one point during the first class, she looked to me sitting in the back of her classroom taking notes and shrugged her shoulders and gave a nervous smile. While there is no way to guarantee that my interpretation of this action was exact, I interpreted that as an apology on her part for the dynamics of her class. In other words, she seemed to be sorry that her class was, as she seemed to be indicating, not adequately participating.

That incident was during the first observation, so when I arrived for the second observation, I met with Dr. Simpson in her office to discuss what I'd be seeing in class that day. The first thing she said to me was, "I'm sorry for the last class. Usually they're not so quiet" (personal communication, November 6, 2012). I complimented her on her teaching and thanked her for allowing me to observe her class as a response, but the comment does has very strong implications for using graphic novels in English classes.

Dr. Simpson had stated in the first interview that she found value in using graphic novels, and this mirrored what was found in this study's literature review. However, what appeared to be a tepid reception on the part of the students to Dr. Simpson's choice of text

may indicate that the passion Dr. Simpson had for graphic novels was not shared by her students.

During the second interview with Dr. Simpson, I asked her if she thought using the graphic novel in her course helped students reach her goals for the unit. Her response addressed the reception the students had to the text:

> I believe so. You know, we had like a rough class last time you observed, but I think they're making the connections. They're just, at least that day, weren't voicing them that much I mean, the questions I'm asking, I hope, are making them think, and I think that a lot of what they're doing, I hope a lot of what they're doing, is just kind of trying to work it out. (Laughs) They might not have the answer yet, but they're thinking about it, and to me that's what matters. (personal communication, November 6, 2012)

She continued to address the matter when I continued asking her what she felt the students got out of the graphic novel and the lesson:

> I think they got out of it that reading a graphic novel is not as easy as they thought it would be. That just because it's a text embedded with pictures does not mean that it's going to be simple. I think they felt that when they were reading. I think they understood that texts like comics and graphic novels don't deal with what they might perceive to be childish stories. I think some of them are surprised. (personal communication, November 6, 2012)

Finally, and perhaps most telling since this was the final interview after Dr. Simpson had taught all of the classes, Dr. Simpson said, in regards to her students, that "A lot of them said it was more difficult to read a text like this than a traditional novel. So, I always find

that interesting" (personal communication, November 6, 2012). Even after Dr. Simpson had spent a great deal of class time and energy covering how to read a graphic novel and reviewing the themes of *V For Vendetta*, there was still a level of apprehension on the part of the students.

Ms. Madison: Encountering Challenging Themes

Dr. Nelson and Dr. Simpson both expressed a concern whether their students would read, or have enough confidence in their own visual literacies to read, the graphic novels assigned to them. Ms. Madison's entire class was structured around reading graphic novels, so her concerns reflected the students' consistent exposure to reading graphic texts. Therefore, Ms. Madison's self-professed challenges were indicative of how students would respond to content rather than the aesthetics of a particular text. Ms. Madison said, "I think the challenge is more with *The Book of Genesis*" (personal communication, November 7, 2012). She was referring to R. Crumb's illustrated interpretation of the first book of the Bible. Ms. Madison's concerns were interesting because as she described the texts herself, "…how does a comics artist, who has been portrayed as racy and controversial do a Biblical text?" (personal communication, November 7, 2012).

Another challenge Ms. Madison voiced had to do with *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun* (Canada & Nichols, 2010), a graphic novel about an African-American boy growing up in Harlem. Specifically, Ms. Madison had concerns about the text because it addressed issues such as, "race and social hierarchy," which Ms. Madison found problematic given that she had a class of college freshmen: "Freshmen, in my experience, there are things

they don't like to talk about: it's religion, it's gender roles, and it's racial issues" (personal communication, November 7, 2012). It's interesting that Ms. Madison chose two texts that represented discourses which addressed those issues, but the class itself (Freshman Seminar) was devoted to acclimating incoming students to both collegiate life and collegiate-level academics. Those issues were bound to arise in the students' classes at some point, so the challenge those texts presented to both the students and the teacher were understandable.

These challenges that Ms. Madison cited emphasized the thematic elements of the texts being read as opposed to the actual aesthetics of the medium. In other words, Ms. Madison saw her challenges as getting the students to engage with the themes that might arise in a reading of the graphic novels as opposed to the actual task of reading the graphic novel. This could be due to the fact that Ms. Madison's students had had two months (at that point when her classes were observed by me) of practice reading graphic novels. In order to keep the number of observations of each participant consistent, I observed two of her classes. Despite not being in Ms. Madison's classes when she was covering how to read and interact with graphic texts, she told me she had done that earlier in the semester, and there was evidence that Ms. Madison spent time reviewing that as her assignments to students asked them to conduct a "McCloudian Analysis," (Appendix G) referring to McCloud's book *Understanding Comics* (1993).

Another important factor to consider while discussing Ms. Madison's concerns for her class was the actual texts the students read. Both Dr. Nelson and Dr. Simpson had students read complete graphic novels, start to finish. Ms. Madison, on the other hand, had students read photocopied excerpts. While photocopied pages and actual, published

pages would have identical images and text (except for the lack of color, which is an important factor to consider as well), the students in Ms. Madison's classes were not asked to read the complete texts. Ms. Madison reflected on that in her first interview. One of the questions about past pedagogical experiences was to discuss which challenges she had faced in implementing graphic novels before. Ms. Madison answered the question, but it referred to her current class. Also, her response addressed the number of texts she had students read:

> I think the only challenge I have in this, right now, is cutting the material down. You know, because when I envisioned this, you know, I was like, "I'm going to teach everything," you know? Because that was my one shot to do it all, and I cut it down a lot, but I need to cut it down again. That's my one challenge. (personal communication, November 7, 2012)

The challenge became more directed at Ms. Madison's pedagogical choices as a teacher of English than whether or not students would read the texts.

Finally, Ms. Madison did hint at her students having a bit of apprehension when the semester started in regards to reading the graphic novels assigned: "They've been kind of, they haven't had a lot of background in them. Well, some students do. There are like two in the class who devour every comic" (personal communication, November 7, 2012). Upon asking her whether or not students were resistant to reading them, she said, "The only one that they were kind of not so into was Adrian Tomine who does these short stories. His most popular one is called 'Short Comings,' and I don't think they enjoyed it too much because he never has an ending." She later explained that the students didn't like his graphic novel because, "…he makes your eye go all around the page and it's not

‘Z’ formation type stuff” (personal communication, November 7, 2012). This supported what Dr. Nelson and Dr. Simpson had said students had problems with when reading graphic texts: knowing where to put their eyes on the page. "Z" formation refers to a comic book that is read straight across, left to right. Similar to the way a traditional prose novel is read, "Z" formation comic books present the narrative of the comic book in very organized and sequential panels.

Ms. Madison's assertion that students preferred "Z" formation in graphic novels informed Dr. Simpson's concerns when she was teaching students to "read graphically," and Dr. Nelson's reflection on students not reading assigned graphic novels when they don't necessarily know how to read them. All three participants also used McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1992) in one way or another to help students understand how to engage with a graphic text. The challenges the participants shared in their interviews all related to students' reading of and processing of graphic texts. And while the characteristics of those challenges were unique to each of the participants, all the participants commented on the general challenge of getting students to interact with, analyze, and deconstruct visual texts was present.

Access to Graphic Novels

Issues of access arose throughout the data collection of this dissertation. Specifically, the participants shared experiences and concerns about students being able to obtain graphic novels. Like the students’ apprehensions that were presented in the previous section, this portion of data reflects how the use of graphic novels can be inhibited depending on a teacher’s pedagogical direction and choice of texts. This section

addresses another constraint when using graphic novels in academic contexts, at least within the scope of this study.

Dr. Nelson: The Superhero Genre and a Proposed Anthology of Comics

Dr. Nelson had concerns about the access to graphic texts for both students and teachers. He stated, "that's the major problem right now that I'm findingin order to teach a comic book literature course, you need to have some kind of anthology." Unfortunately for Dr. Nelson, "There is none. And two, could you imagine the size of that book and the cost?" (personal communication, October 17, 2012). Graphic novels are notorious for being pricey as the cost of printing in color and in large formats necessitates more expensive production. However, Dr. Nelson's problem is particularly interesting in that of the three participants, Dr. Nelson was the only one who used superhero graphic novels. That distinction is important when discussing issues of graphic novels' access in academic contexts as superhero graphic novels are, as Dr. Nelson openly admitted, "convoluted." Dr. Nelson's professional goal was to teach a comic book mythology course using an anthology of a particular publisher's characters and texts. Specifically, Dr. Nelson said, "if I was going to teach, it would probably be DC," referring to DC Comics which includes characters such as Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman. He seemed to want an anthology that presented superhero narratives in chronological order of publication so as to study how perceptions of "good" and "evil" change as society changes.

Graphic novels which are common in academic contexts such as *Maus* (Spiegelman, 2003), *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2007), and *Pride of Baghdad* (Vaughan, 2008)

are moderately priced due to their abundant use in academic settings. These graphic novels would also fall into the realm of what Wolk (2007) called "art comics" as opposed to superhero comics, which Dr. Nelson used in his classes. To refresh the texts from Dr. Nelson's classes, he used *The Killing Joke* (1988) by Alan Moore and Brian Bolland and *Watchmen* (1986) by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. His rationale for using these texts also highlighted the inherent issues of accessibility in regards to graphic novels:

> The reason why I chose the *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight*, or *The Killing Joke*, was because they deal heavily with this, you know, certain perception of society. That's why I chose those as opposed to choosing anything else. The other thing is that those graphic novels can still be ordered; they're easily accessible. Some of the other stuff I might have used is not. (personal communication, October 29, 2012)

Even during his planning of the course, Dr. Nelson contemplated how his students would be able to get the texts. As per Dr. Nelson's admission, access to superhero graphic novels were, in his experiences, problematic. However, the genre of superheroes was not the only genre subject to issues of accessibility, as the study data revealed.

Dr. Simpson: Reflections on Past Issues of Access to Graphic Novels

Unlike Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison, Dr. Simpson did not experience as many issues of accessibility during the class I observed. This could be due in part to the fact that Dr. Simpson only used one graphic novel while Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison used multiple titles. Additionally, Dr. Simpson chose a rather popular graphic novel to study, *V For Vendetta* (Moore & Lloyd, 2008), which is abundantly available.

Dr. Simpson's background is in English Education, so much of her pedagogy is informed by her experiences in a high school including utilizing graphic novels in an English class. Dr. Simpson requested that certain portions of her interview pertaining to issues of accessibility not be put into this dissertation, and this dissertation respected those requests. It needs to be stressed here that Dr. Simpson did experience issues of accessibility similar to Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison, but Dr. Simpson requested that the specifics of those incidents not be shared. What can be shared is that while Dr. Simpson conducted a study with high school students, she said, “I think getting access to the resources to begin with was difficult in a high school setting” (personal communication, November 6, 2012). This dissertation’s focus was on college teachers and their pedagogies, but the history of the teachers and how they developed those pedagogies was equally important as evidenced by the participant profiles at the beginning of Chapter Four which briefly outlined the participants’ histories with graphic texts. Dr. Simpson found that in the high school level getting actual, physical texts for the students to read was a genuine concern when considering whether or not to use a particular graphic novel. These concerns were distinctly different from the issues of questionable content and high school classes that were addressed in Chapter Two of this dissertation; even aside from the traditional limitations of the medium due to the popular perception of graphic novels containing inappropriate material for high school contexts, implementing graphic novels into a high school setting also required access to the texts that are generally acceptable. The point here is that even beyond the content of graphic novels which, in some cases, are questionable, potential utilization of the medium necessitates being able to actually

get physical copies of the text. These are two major obstacles to consider when implementing a graphic novel.

Again, while Dr. Simpson's personal experiences of having difficulty gaining access to texts pertained to high school contexts, the fact that both Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison photocopied texts for their college classes highlights the inherent issues of access when implementing graphic novels in any academic setting. The major difference between high school and college issues of access is the very nature of acquiring books to read for a given class. Simply put, high school books are bought by the school district for the students to read, and college students are responsible for purchasing their own books for class. This presents an interesting dichotomy in the very nature of accessibility. For high schools, even if a graphic novel is acceptable for teenagers to read in a school setting, the access is limited to a school district's funds and which texts a high school English department, as a whole, wants to purchase. With college, the access is limited by the printing and availability of certain titles. Dr. Nelson's earlier comments on not being able to use certain graphic novels due to their lack of availability reflected this.

The participants in these case studies either experienced issues of access in the class that was observed or shared instances where issues of access arose during the development of their unique pedagogies. Either way, issues of access to graphic novels and comic books were apparent across all three cases.

Ms. Madison: Photocopying and Copyright

The issues of access that Ms. Madison experienced throughout the teaching of her Freshman Seminar course were different than Dr. Nelson's accessibility to superhero

texts. Most of Ms. Madison's texts were "art comics" (Wolk, 2007) which are more readily available because of their use in academic settings. What made Ms. Madison's issue of access unique was her struggle over the question of how much material to photocopy from the graphic novels she wanted students read. Ms. Madison did not share with me the quantity of pages she was photocopying from each graphic novel, but she did worry about the cost and accessibility of these materials. She often had to cut out materials or limit her use out of concerns for copyright. Because cost and accessibility were of paramount importance to her, these factors had an ongoing impact on her pedagogy. It was not clear in my observations the full range of decisions Ms. Madison had to make to resolve these challenges or even that they could all be resolved. But this was not the focus of my study. For the purposes of this study, what was clear was that access and cost are major issues for teachers who want to utilize graphic novels in their classes.

During the interview, Ms. Madison started listing which texts she had considered using in her class before I came to observe her for this study. By the month of November, Ms. Madison said that her class had read excerpts from *Persepolis*, Brian Fies' *Mom's Cancer* (2006), Forney's *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michaelangelo, and Me: A Graphic Memoir* (2012), an unspecified graphic novel by Neil Gaiman, and *Maus* (Spiegelman, 2003). Upon asking whether or not the students bought all these, Ms. Madison replied, "They absolutely do not. I scan the excerpts in for them." These excerpts came from her personal collection:

> And I pick the excerpt, and then, this is what usually happens: they're usually interested in it and then I have to lend my book out to half the class. So, if I were

to redo this course again, I think I would take more time on certain ones. (personal communication, November 7, 2012)

I asked Ms. Madison whether she was concerned about copyright laws and her practice of photocopying texts and she said, "Absolutely." She was worried about the possible legal ramifications of this "in the long run."

Ms. Madison's reasoning behind giving students a multitude of excerpts instead of focusing on a smaller number of complete texts was, "I like to give them this kind of wide overview so they can see the point of this class is to dispel the myth of graphic novels as, you know, childish or juvenile" (personal communication, November 7, 2012). Her class was a Freshman Seminar where English faculty introduced freshmen to college and studied topics; Ms. Madison's topic was graphic novels. She felt giving the students so many texts was necessary and said, "I want to give them this wide array, but I think I'd cut down on it next time." Toward the end of the first interview, Ms. Madison reiterated her intention to cut down on the material she would have students read saying, "For legality purposes, number one, and for the sheer fact that I think we can go deeper into some of these things" (personal communication, November 7, 2012).

Photocopying texts for classroom use is nothing new, but the photocopying of graphic texts does bring up important issues of access to some graphic texts. Dr. Nelson even admitted to photocopying portions of Chapter Three of McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) for his students in order to help them read graphic texts, so even within the context of this study, there is a trend that emerged in regards to teachers photocopying graphic texts. Ms. Madison simply took the practice of photocopying and made it the status quo for her class. As a teacher-scholar, I am aware of the legality of photocopying

texts for classroom use. However, the issues of accessibility present a challenge for teachers who want to use graphic novels in their classrooms, and for two of the participants in this study (Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison), photocopying texts was a viable solution to that challenge. Nevertheless, their practices do highlight a challenge in utilizing graphic novels in a class.

Finally, Ms. Madison shared even more reasoning behind the photocopying of texts. She said she had looked into providing the texts she wanted her students to read via an anthology, similar to what Dr. Nelson had voiced about the issues of access:

> And it's really kind of disheartening because over the summer I was thinking well maybe I could throw this anthology together, right, and go through a legitimate process. Well, number one, it would be so large, you know? It would be, between all of the stuff we're covering, and I was like, "We're never going to be able to do this." And I talked to Beacon a little bit about it, and somebody else too, but I forget, about developing something, and they basically shot it down right away. That's really unfortunate though because some of these titles are so important I think. And then, it's like, well how do I work them into the classroom? (personal communication, November 7, 2012)

Once again, this related to Dr. Nelson's concerns regarding an anthology when he said, "There is none." Dr. Nelson even added that it would also be a difficult volume to publish because, "could you imagine the size of that book and the cost?" Both Ms. Madison and Dr. Nelson shared that issues of access to particular texts affected their pedagogies and textual decisions when preparing classes.

Participants' Assignments for Students

While the participants' assignments were addressed in an abbreviated fashion in the previous chapter as assignments did inform the question of how teachers used graphic novels in their classrooms, the very nature of assignments helped shed light on what the participants found valuable about the medium. By focusing on how the participants phrased their assignment questions and what they asked their students to consider, what the participants valued in graphic novels as academic texts was addressed as well as which literacy or literacies they were having students access.

When analyzing the assignment styles of the participants, it became apparent as to what the participants were academically valuing when they employed the graphic novels in their classrooms. All of the participants exhibited passion and excitement in regards to using graphic novels, but what they wanted their students to get out of that usage became clearer when looking at their assignments. It was already discussed that Dr. Simpson was more inclined to discuss the aesthetics of the medium as her classes were heavily geared toward what she termed, "reading graphically" while Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison presented their classes with more opportunities to study and deconstruct thematic elements from the narratives as opposed to explicitly focusing on the multimodality of the text and images working in tandem.

This is not to say that Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison did not formulate questions and lead discussions that highlighted the multimodality of the medium. All three participants produced discussions in class and provided assignments both in and out of classes that reinforced connections between a narrative's text and the images associated with that text which McCloud (1993) says is the strength of comic books and graphic

novels. In short, the assignments that participants required of students highlighted the multimodal nature of graphic novels/comic books, but the extent to which the participants highlighted the multimodality in their assessments varied.

Dr. Nelson: Studying Themes Using Graphic Texts

When asked about what types of assignments he gave to his students to assess their analyses and readings of graphic texts, Dr. Nelson stated that his assignments were, "hands on." He elaborated on this saying that in traditional literature classes, "they read the textbook, we go over some things, a couple chapters, and then, what I do is, because the book has a very practical, very, you know, you look at a paragraph and have to pick out the topic sentence" (personal communication, October 17, 2012). Dr. Nelson characterized traditional literary classes as having a uniform and established style of assessment. He then continued to describe his assignment, as it related to graphic novels:

> What I do is I throw a couple of comic books at them and have them do it in an abstract way which is they have to visuallyI've noticed that there's been studies that talk about this is that the way our younger generations are being, they're learning language, they're becoming more visually literate than they are to actually literate, that they're losing the ability to read text: large amounts of text. (personal communication, October 17, 2012)

Dr. Nelson described his assignment as being conscious of a trend which he noticed was/is occurring. The trend, as Dr. Nelson described it, is "younger generations arebecoming more visually literate than they are to actually literate." The New London Group's theory of "multiliteracies" (1996) asserted that people have multiple literacies

which work in tandem with one another in order to process and synthesize multiple forms of media. In that sense, Dr. Nelson's personal analysis of students possessing varying types of literacies reflects The New London Group's theory. What then became interesting to analyze was the assignment that Dr. Nelson gave to his students to complete.

Of the two texts, only *The Killing Joke* (Moore & Bolland, 1988) had a written, collected assignment. This assignment asked students to respond to a prompt which revolved around Batman and the Joker's ongoing confrontations. In addition, Dr. Nelson asked students to consider multiple sources including *The Killing Joke* (the graphic novel the class read), *Batman Begins* (Roven & Nolan, 2005) (a motion picture about Batman), and *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) (another motion picture about Batman which the students watched portions of in class). Dr. Nelson's assignment stated, "**For your second paper, please respond to the prompt below. This paper will be graded on how well you make your point and how much support you provide to defend your point**" (Appendix O, Bold in Original). This assignment required students to write a least a page and a half. The actual question asked students to respond to the following quote from the film *The Dark Knight*: (Note: this quote is taken directly from Dr. Nelson's essay prompt and not the actual film)

> You just couldn't [let] me go. Could you? This is what happens when an unstoppable force meets and immovable object. You truly are incorruptible, aren't you? You won't kill me out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness. And I won't kill you because you are just too much fun. I think you and I are destined to do this forever. (Appendix O)

The prompt then went on to ask students to consider whether or not Batman should kill the Joker, going against his moral and ethical code as a hero; this concept was the cornerstone of Dr. Nelson's lesson. He asked students in the prompt, "Should we always be like Batman who is always firm and unwavering in his values and rules?Be sure to cite examples." (Appendix O). The question became socio-cultural, ethical, and reflective in nature with students being asked to consider the notions of heroism, villainy, justice, and limits. Dr. Nelson even stated in his first interview that they were looking at Batman's, "Moral Limits. So, we're looking at this from like a societal, you know, frame point…" (personal communication, October 17, 2012). The question also required students to access multimodal media (Kress, 2003) in its requirements for completion.

However, unlike Ms. Madison's prompt, which asked students to utilize McCloud's (1993) theoretical lens when analyzing the images in a given comic book/graphic novel, Dr. Nelson had students analyze various texts to explore moral, ethical, and "societal" issues. Ms. Madison's prompt was much more precise in its requirements and had students explicitly analyze panels and images. Moreso than Dr. Nelson's prompt, Ms. Madison's was focused on the analysis of the medium as opposed to the themes in it. Her classroom discussion did address thematic issues as evidenced by the description of her class in Chapter Four, but students' independent essays were crafted to have students focus on the aesthetics of the medium. Dr. Nelson's prompts were more thematic in nature, and the graphic novels used in the class became the vehicles through which thematic issues were analyzed. There were instances where Dr. Nelson would ask students to consider aesthetic elements of a graphic text, such as when he asked students to analyze the image of raindrops at the beginning of *The Killing Joke*

during class discussion (this is covered in Chapter Four). However, the bulk of Dr. Nelson's assessments asked students to reflect on the ethical and moral dilemmas which characters in the superhero genre experienced and how those dilemmas reflected the socio-cultural construct of a hero.

Dr. Simpson: Privileging Multimodality

Dr. Simpson described her class as being, "pretty discussion based," and from the observations that I did of her class, that was the case. As was discussed in Chapter Four, Dr. Simpson would introduce a topic, present questions for students to respond to in a free-write fashion, have the students share with their peers for a few minutes, and then open it up into a class-wide discussion. She characterized this style of pedagogy as being common for all of her classes, and her approach to assessing responses/analyses of the graphic novel being read, *V for Vendetta*, was allowing various response styles:

> for *V for Vendetta*, they're required to write a response for each half that we're going to talk about. They can respond in a variety of ways; in fact, they can do art as a response. They can write a paper as a response. They can do, they can create their own graphic if they want. They have a lot of different choices for how they can respond to the text. They can make a connection between the themes in the text and something that's happening in our current events or whatever. So, or they can write a traditional paper and analysis (personal communication, October 23, 2012)

Of the three participants, Dr. Simpson was the only teacher who gave her students the option to respond to the graphic novel in the form of art. All three participants were

aware of the multimodality of graphic novels when assigning work, but only Dr. Simpson presented students with multimodal options. This could be informed by Kress (2003) when he said, " that we cannot transport mode-specific theories from one mode to another without producing severe distortions" (p. 107). In other words, Dr. Simpson's allowance for students to respond to visual text through art could result in students being better able to present reactions and ideas that were possibly triggered by a visual text. However, I never saw any students complete a response using art.

This trend of privileging the multimodal nature of graphic novels in her assessment questions was seen in Dr. Simpson's various class discussion handouts. One particularly blatant example was when she titled the questions on her "Questions for Discussion: *V for Vendetta*, Part II" handout (Appendices M1-M2) "**Review for Comprehension**," "**Think Critically**," and "**Think Multimodally**." The comprehension and Critical thinking questions were quite traditional and reflected the literary issues that *V for Vendetta* present. However, Dr. Simpson's Multimodal question was as follows: "How do the images in both the graphic novel and the film contribute to the emotion of these passages? How does the music additionally affect your response?" The film that Dr. Simpson was referring to was the film version of *V for Vendetta* (McTeigue, 2005) and the particulars of her usage of the film were presented in Chapter Four of this dissertation. Nevertheless, Dr. Simpson's questions for students required reflecting not only on the socio-cultural and literary issues of the graphic novel but also how the medium itself helped present and develop the issues and themes of the particular text.

Additionally, the questions that Dr. Simpson provided daily as guides for discussion had discussion points which incorporated and privileged the multimodality of

the comic medium. By asking students specific questions about particular panels, Dr. Simpson had students think critically not only about the text holistically but also how its visuals aided in relaying the message of a given scene. An example of this was on her handout to students titled "***V for Vendetta***: Class Discussion: Part I." Two of the questions referred specifically to imagery:

> Examine the panels on p. 14. What is the effect of the placement of these images? What about color, facial expressions, etc? What story do the images tell? (Appendices H1-H2)

Another question asked students to consider the significance of the mask the character "V" wears:

> What does this mask represent? Why would Lloyd [artist] suggest we should "celebrate" Fawkes' attempt? How does *V for Vendetta* "celebrate" vigilantism? (Appendices H1-H2)

Both questions referred to analyzing and deconstructing the visuals of a given text. While it is definitely possible to analyze a character wearing a mask in a monomodal text, Dr. Simpson's handout (Appendices H1-H2) provides an image of V's mask directly next to this question. This style of questioning was consistent throughout class discussions and in the handouts Dr. Simpson provided. Other questions that privileged the multimodality of graphic novels included, "Pay particular attention to the images that float on the television screen behind him. What do these image images reveal? How do they end V's message?" (Appendix L) and, "How are 'V's' movements cleverly narrated through the words and the images" (Appendix L). All of these questions were discussion points that Dr. Simpson instructed students to address throughout the class periods.

Interestingly, though Dr. Simpson's daily handouts to students contained questions of a multimodal nature, the section of her syllabus pertaining to the study of *V For Vendetta* does not address the multimodal nature of the text. Instead, it states that there will be, "Evidence of preparation and lively engagement in small/large group discussion of *V For Vendetta*." However, I observed in the classes very little "lively engagement" among the students. In fact, the student engagement with the text and with each other appeared to be quite muted. This phenomenon was covered in the last section on student apprehension. What was important here was Dr. Simpson's language in her syllabus regarding her assignments and how that differed from the language in the syllabus.

This could be due to Dr. Simpson simply looking to complete her syllabus before the class had started, and the extent to which she outlined her in-class assignments with multimodal questions seems to suggest that her objectives for the unit were clearly aimed at having students engage with multimodal texts. Additionally, one of her objectives for the course states that students will be able, "to synthesize, integrate, and evaluate literature from a variety of genres, including fiction, poetry, non-fiction, graphic fiction, and the multimedia." Even from the start of her class, Dr. Simpson appeared to be establishing a class where non-traditional texts were used and analyzed.

Ms. Madison: Accessing Multiliteracies

The assignments that Ms. Madison used with her students during the "Freshman Seminar" course were designed, as Ms. Madison herself attested, to lead Freshmen students into college level work. Therefore, there were no traditional tests because, “I

don't test just because that's my policy…and as a Freshman, I think maybe that's something they build up to" (personal communication, November 7, 2012). Ms. Madison's assignments were rooted in reflections on the texts read and in the students analyzing the readings using what she called a "McCloudian Analysis."

For the purpose of reflection, Ms. Madison had students continually keep a discourse with what she dubbed an, "Idea Book" instead of a journal: "It's essentially a journal, but I don't call it a journal because there are stigmas that go with the word 'Journal.' People think, 'Dear Diary,' you know?" (personal communication, November 7, 2012). She stated that these were usually done near the end of every class period. During my observations of Ms. Madison's class, I saw the "Idea Book" used once at the end of the second class. The students were doing a guided free-write on whether they thought someone would rather read poetry in its original form or in a graphic format. This was in preparation for the next class when students were to have read traditional poetry that was reimagined in a comic book style.

What Ms. Madison did have students do that was not shared during the interviews was take on the role of moderator during class discussions of texts. During both classes I observed, two different students led the discussions on *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun* (Canada & Nicholas, 2010) and R. Crumb's *The Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb* (2009). Both students researched the book and the author(s) and prepared a list of discussion points/questions for the class. This appeared to be a common pedagogy and assignment on the part of Ms. Madison and her class, but she never expressly stated that every student led such a discussion. However, it seemed that every student had, or was scheduled to, conduct such a discussion.

Finally, Ms. Madison handed out to the students a prompt that was to be due two weeks later. This was titled, "Mini-Assignment #3: McCloudian Analysis" (Appendix G). The directions for the assignment were as follows:

> For your third and final Mini-Assignment, I want you to perform a "McCloudian" analysis of a panel (or set of panels) from one of the graphic texts we've read this semester. In other words, write in detail about how your panel, or panels, exemplify at least one technique or idea from McCloud's *Understand Comics* and how exactly that technique plays an important role in creating meaning within the text. (Appendix G)

This assignment reflected a privileging of the multimodality of a graphic novel. Not only are students being asked to analyze a text, they are using a theoretical lens through which to conduct the analysis. The specificity of the instructions were coupled with examples later on in the prompt which outlined different approaches to completing this analysis including, "how gutters and panel-to-panel transitions create meaning and flow (Chapter Three), and "the various ways in which words and pictures can be combined to create meaning (Chapter Six)" (Appendix G). The particular theoretical lens that Ms. Madison asked her students to utilize while analyzing their texts highlighted the relationship that text and images have in "sequential art" (Eisner, 1985). Romanelli (2009) summed up McCloud's theory on the relationship between word and image in her dissertation:

> McCloud's analysis of word and image interplay explores Eisner's notion that this kind of word/art fusion is meant to be read as a single, visual entity. Thus, when one aspect of word-image combination dominates an element of the story such as plot, then the other is free to explore different aspects of narrative. In other words,

> verbal text is not always anchored to plot considerations nor is image married to illustration. (p. 79)

Ms. Madison's students were asked to consider this relationship in their analyses of the graphic texts they had read in class indicating Ms. Madison's consideration and privileging of the multimodality of graphic novels/comic books in her pedagogy.

In privileging and explicitly asking questions pertaining to the visual elements of a given graphic novel, Ms. Madison was practicing a "pedagogy of multiliteracies" (New London Group, 1996) because other modes of interpretation (visual) were being honored outside of traditional literacy, mainly textual analysis (Westby, 2010).

Summary of Chapter Five

This chapter has presented data that addressed the second question of this dissertation. Specifically, what did the participants' view as the affordances and constraints of using graphic novels in a college English classroom, and how did those affordances and constraints inform their pedagogies? All of the participants shared that their personal and professional experiences with graphic novels influenced the way they viewed the medium as an academically valuable text and as a resource that contributed to students' discussions of themes in their classes.

The three participants shared that they found graphic novels to be legitimate and academically valuable texts to study in their classes. However, as was stated before, this was not surprising given that the participants had already found personal value in comic books and graphic novels both personally and professionally. What became important when analyzing the data was where the participants found that value. Dr. Nelson found

great personal value in comic books and graphic novels, but felt that the medium still had a ways to go in order to be fully embraced by academia; his experiences with administrative resistance when using the medium may have contributed to this perception. Ms. Madison embraced the varying genres the medium offered, and the diversity of texts that she had students read was evident of that. Dr. Simpson found value primarily in the multimodality of graphic novels, and her extensive scaffolding of teaching students, "reading graphically" before analyzing their assigned graphic novel supported this.

All three participants also shared that their students exhibited episodes of apprehension when presented with graphic novels in the classroom. The extents to which the participants experienced student apprehension varied from case to case, but it was a common trend across all of the cases. What the three participants found to be the reason for this apprehension was students not fully understanding how to read graphic novels. As a result, all three participants utilized McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) to teach students how to read comic books and graphic novels. Once again, Dr. Simpson termed these lessons concerning the teaching of reading of graphic texts, "reading graphically."

Issues of access also rose during data collection and analysis highlighted by the participants' experiences with choosing graphic novels for their classes to read. Most notable was Ms. Madison, who photocopied all texts that the students analyzed as she wanted to provide students with a diversity of genres. Dr. Nelson stated that he chose the graphic novels his class read partially because they were still in print, and Dr. Simpson

stated that in her previous experiences with graphic novels in high school contexts, getting copies of the graphic novels for students to read was a cause for concern.

Finally, the participants' assignments of their students' work with graphic novels reflected a privileging of the multimodality of graphic novels. This was consistent across all of the cases, but the extent to which the assessments highlighted that privileging of the multimodality varied. Specifically, Dr. Simpson's assignments were most representative of taking the visual literacies of her class' students into account. This is not to say that Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison did not do this, but the majority of their assignments were rooted in the thematic analyses of the texts as opposed to the aesthetics or mechanics of the graphic novels.

This chapter has presented data that addressed the second research question of this dissertation which looked to further explore how teachers who used graphic novels in their college English classes regarded the medium and its academic value. The final chapter provides a summary of the study with an emphasis on a review of the research questions and their findings, implications for scholars and fields of study, and possible future research that could be conducted based on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND FURTHER STUDY

This dissertation sought to gain a better understanding of how three college English instructors utilized graphic novels in their English classes and how their views on graphic novels, both personal and professional, informed the pedagogies they employed. This study focused on two research questions:

1. What are the different ways college English teachers in this study employ graphic novels in their classrooms?
2. What affordances and/or constraints do college English teachers in this study see in both the medium of graphic novels as an academic text and their own application of the medium? In other words, how academically valuable do the college English teachers in this study find comics?

This study looked at three cases using a modified cross-case analysis (Stake, 1995). Each case included interviewing the college English teachers, observing classes in which they employed graphic novels, and collecting documents that the instructors created and used with their classes. The data from this study were presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation with Chapter Four focusing on describing how the participants used graphic novels and describing the teachers' pedagogies and Chapter Five focusing on discussing views on graphic novels and how those views informed their selection of texts and subsequent pedagogies. The study's main findings are discussed in this chapter with an emphasis on the commonalities among the participants.

The Importance of This Study

How college English teachers used graphic novels in their classes and the reasons for that usage were the primary aims of this study. Since much of the literature on comic and literacy studies celebrated the potential for the medium in academic context, this study was important in its distinction to highlight the pedagogies teachers employed while using graphic novels in their classes as opposed to exploring possibilities of usage. Coupled with the exploration of teacher usage was delving into why teachers used graphic novels in their classes and why they valued them.

A unique aspect of this study was the relationship between the two research questions. The data from this study showed there was a connection between the two questions as the passion the participants had for graphic novels and comic books informed their teaching of them. As will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, that connection made for some surprising data.

This study is important because it begins to present how teachers literally use graphic novels and comic books as academic texts in classroom settings, and the study also provides significant questions for comic studies going forward. Specific implications of this study are explored later in this chapter, but findings of this study suggest that utilizing graphic novels in English classes is more about teaching the literacy skills necessary to analyze graphic texts and less about the exoticism of reading a medium that has been relegated to the sidelines of academia. The participants shared that they valued the medium for different reasons, which were discussed in depth in Chapter Five, and those varying reasons resulted in differences of pedagogy, assignment design, and expectations for the classes. For teachers who look to use graphic novels, or other types

of multimodal texts, this study presents a starting point for exploring how teachers use graphic novels in their classes.

The Surprising Element of This Study

The literature review of this study was rife with examples of scholars discussing the importance of comic studies to students' literacies and why using graphic novels in an English class could help with analyses and discussions of particular themes. What few of those studies did was present how teachers used those texts and why they utilized those texts in the fashion they did.

The texts the participants chose to use was quite rooted in the instructors' personal affections for the medium, and that is significant when discussing why this study is important. Tsang (2004) had explored how teachers' "personal practical knowledge" (p. 163) and their interactive decisions came from their personal and educational histories, and the participants' textual choices in this study reflect a similar phenomenon. The passion the participants had for comic books and graphic novels was the original impetus for them to utilize the medium in their classes, and the personal experiences the participants had with graphic novels affected the way they taught them to their students and which texts they picked. This is important to recognize when interpreting the data because the findings seemed to suggest that the choosing of graphic novels for study was primarily about the teachers and their passions for the medium as opposed to choosing the medium strictly for achieving pedagogical goals.

This is not to say that the participants didn't have valid and strong reasons for picking the texts they did, but the class time spent on learning how to read the texts and

the subsequent issues of student apprehension towards the reading of the texts seems to suggest a disconnect between what the literature in the field of comic studies claims (that students can potentially become more engaged with a multimodal medium) and this study's findings. There were instances where students had great and engaging conversations with the participants as evidenced by Ms. Madison's students discussing the visual representation of "sin" in R. Crumb's *The Illustrated Book of Genesis* and Dr. Nelson having students share their personal experiences with the popular superhero Batman, but in the totality of this study's scope, the passion for the texts appeared to come predominantly from the participants.

I see this as an important finding of this study, and it's really a finding that sheds light on the very nature of being a teacher who strives to introduce new materials and new texts to students. This is not a question of whether or not the particular texts the participants in this study chose were of academic value but rather a recognition that the passion the participants had for graphic novels and comic literature was not always shared by the students despite what an abundance of the literature on the subject said. All three participants said in their interviews that getting students to read and/or engage with graphic novels was a challenge at one point of another, and as a teacher myself, I understand the frustration of encouraging students at any level of schooling to read a text for homework. However, the texts were graphic novels, and the literature on the subject presented another picture of utilizing graphic novels. That picture was more promising in its goal of engaging students with one scholar in particular claiming, "for a number of students, the predominantly pictorial format allows them to enter into difficult subject matter more readily than they might otherwise" (Harris, 2007, p. 39). Being an avid

reader of graphic novels and literature on comic studies, I don't disagree with this. The key to this is that I am an "avid reader of graphic novels," and have developed an appreciation for comic books and graphic novels over years of readership.

Even the incident with Dr. Simpson apologizing to me for her students not being more engaged with *V For Vendetta*, which was discussed in detail in Chapter Five, was telling. It seemed to be that her frustration stemmed as much from the students not valuing the text the same way she did as it did from students just not engaging with the teacher that particular day of class. Students not being engaged with the teacher is a typical phenomenon, and again, as a teacher myself, I understand that frustration. However, the fact that the lack of engagement occurred on a day where Dr. Simpson was discussing a particular text she had a lot of personal investment in seemed to amplify that frustration.

Going into this study, I wanted to explore how teachers used graphic novels in their classrooms and how that usage reflected their valuing of the medium. This study has done that in regards to three college English teachers in the state of Pennsylvania. What this study didn't originally seek, but found during the collection of data, was a telling commonality among the three participants of student apprehension towards the reading of the texts. Nevertheless, this finding is important to the overall discussion of this study's significance.

Summary Conclusions and Implications for Research Question 1

Question 1: What are the different ways English teachers employ graphic novels in their classrooms?

Participants in this study exhibited two distinct ways of teaching a graphic novel in a college English class:

- Focusing on the multimodality of the medium and subsequently scaffolding the teaching of techniques for reading a graphic novel
- Focusing on the themes of a particular graphic novel with a connection to the class/unit's overarching theme

All three participants in this study used both of these pedagogies during class observations. Additionally, these pedagogies were discussed in their comments during interviews and reflected in their course materials. The degrees to which the participants demonstrated these two pedagogies varied.

Summary Conclusions for Question 1

There seemed to be a strong link between the personal experiences with comic books of the participants and how much they focused on the teaching of how to read a graphic novel. Specifically, Dr. Simpson demonstrated an extensive lesson on how to, what she termed, "read[ing] graphically," and her experiences with graphic novels were quite limited. In fact, she shared that her first exposure to graphic novels was during her graduate school years at an NCTE conference. However, Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison both grew up with comic books as a part of their lives. Dr. Nelson especially reveled in the superhero genre while Ms. Madison had casually picked through her father's comic book collection as a young girl and read titles such as *X-Men* and *Ren & Stimpy*. As a result, Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison had much more exposure to comic books than Dr. Simpson had.

Based on this study's data, the link between focusing on how to read graphic novels and the personal experiences of the participants with "sequential art" (Eisner, 1985) was strong. Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison did not go over the reading of graphic novels as comprehensively as Dr. Simpson, though all three participants did cover the mechanics of how to read a graphic novel. This was evident in Dr. Nelson's copying of a chapter from McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) and assigning it for homework, and it was also evident in one of Ms. Madison's assignments which asked students to conduct a "McCloudian Analysis" (Appendix G) of a text. Ms. Madison had also reminded her students during the classes which I observed that the students were responsible for interpreting what happened "between the panels." McCloud (1993) comments on this issue in *Understanding Comics*.

As for utilizing the graphic novels in lessons that were thematically focused, all three participants had clear themes and theme sets through which to analyze the multimodal narratives of the texts. Dr. Simpson's theme of dystopian futures was explored through *V for Vendetta* which told of a post-apocalyptic Great Britain where a vigilante takes it upon himself to challenge a corrupt government. This analysis of dystopian futures was reflected in the class conversations, the interviews with Dr. Simpson, and her in-class assignments which served as discussion points. Of particular interest were Dr. Simpson's categories of questions on one of her question sheets (Appendices M1-M2) where she purposely had students explore the themes of the book primarily through the visuals of the text. She appeared to do this in order to privilege the multimodality of graphic novels and continued the discussion of themes brought up in the text.

Dr. Nelson's class was primarily focused on the themes of the texts, and those themes were rooted in superhero mythology. The two texts he used, *The Killing Joke* (Moore & Bolland, 1988) and *Watchmen* (Moore & Gibbons, 1986), were both written by Alan Moore and represented a shift in the typical narratives associated with the superhero genre. Dr. Nelson built his class' thematic analysis of the texts around the pressure that society places on identity and linked that idea to both the previous texts the students had read in the class and the identity struggles the characters in the graphic novels exhibited. Dr. Nelson, during the interview sessions, even described this focus:

> So, I'm looking at, sort of like the main underlying theme throughout the semester is looking at this idea of society, you know, and anything that deals with society, so it's very broad, and you can apply pretty much anything to it. The reason why I chose the *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight*, or *The Killing Joke* was because they deal heavily with this, you know, certain perception of society. (personal communication, October 17, 2012)

The assignment he gave the students to complete also had students analyze how the identity of a superhero was established through his/her actions and his/her morals. For that particular assignment, Dr. Nelson had students analyze Batman's moral code which was addressed in *The Killing Joke*.

Ms. Madison's class was not devoted to the exploration and discussion of a specific theme like Dr. Simpson and Dr. Nelson's classes. Instead, the themes changed from class to class because of the variety of genres that Ms. Madison employed. Ms. Madison was able to accomplish having her students read a broad diversity of texts by photocopying portions of the texts and having students read them. Nevertheless, each

class had a different thematic focus due to the changing texts. For the two classes I observed, Ms. Madison had students analyze political cartoons they had found for homework, discuss the idea of "black identity" in graphic novels through the graphic novel *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*, and deconstruct how the art in R. Crumb's *The Illustrated Book of Genesis* may have informed the artist's own religious views. All of these themes related to Ms. Madison's commentary on what freshmen (her class was made up entirely of freshmen) did not like to discuss: "…it's religion, it's gender roles, and it's racial issues" (Ms. Madison). Her class was also highlighted by the fact that one student moderated the conversations for each class and provided the other students with handouts discussing the authors/artists and the text itself. Additionally, Ms. Madison had students reflect on questions in what she called the student's "Idea Book." Having students discuss a different theme every class resulted in students having to keep track of their ideas in this makeshift journal, and Ms. Madison had students write in it twice at the end of both classes I observed; the topics for these "Idea Book" entries were to discuss "black identity" in comics and whether students thought that people would rather read poetry in its original form in a multimodal text such as a comic strip/book.

Despite the variance in the participants' attentions to and focuses on the multimodality of graphic novels and how that mutlimodality was accessed, all three participants presented pedagogies that reflected what both Kress (2003) and the New London Group (1996) saw as being a valuable component of multimodal texts: the concept of literacies not being islands of thought or synthesis but rather interconnected interpretations of modes working together to create and synthesize a given message. The participants' pedagogies presented varying degrees of intensity in regards to the coverage

of interpreting multimodality in their classes, but they all recognized and addressed it nonetheless. Even during the classes in which the themes of graphic novels were discussed as opposed to the multimodal characteristics of graphic novels, a recognition of that unique multimodality was privileged in both the class discussions and assessments.

Implications for Question 1

This study found that all participants believe it was necessary to scaffold their students' analyses of graphic novels through thematic lenses with the teaching of how to read a graphic novel/comic book. Again, the degree to which each participant did this varied, but the practice was present across all three of the cases in this study. What this means for the fields of literacy and pedagogical studies is discussed here.

The implications for literacy and pedagogical studies inform one another. The findings that addressed the first research question support the building of literacies across varying modes of communication. According to Ajayi (2008), recognizing and utilizing the different forms of media students and teachers are exposed to is important to improving students literacies. As the participants in this study focused on teaching their students about the visual aspects of graphic novels, they accessed the students' visual literacies (Kress, 2003).

The teaching of visual literacy skills and the eventual contextualization of those learned skills is important going forward for educators who want to incorporate graphic novels into their English classes. All of the participants expressed concern for their students knowing how to read graphic novels, especially the images and how they related to the textual narrative of a graphic novel. The teaching of how to read images and

multimodal texts is important when using graphic novels in English classes as a primary text because even though students are bombarded with visuals in their everyday lives through television, internet, and mobile devices, the ability to interpret and analyze those images in relation to an academic discussion of themes is not a natural ability most students have. Dr. Simpson even stated in her first interview that she couldn't put a graphic novel in front of a student and expect that student to inherently know how to read the text or get excited about reading a graphic text in school. For teachers who look to use graphic texts in their classes, the data from this dissertation suggests that teaching visual literacy skills such as Bang's (2000) "Principles of Images" or McCloud's (1993) "reading between the panels" helps contribute to students' literacy skill sets.

None of the participants neglected to cover how to read graphic novels. Dr. Nelson was the only participant to not actively teach his students how to read graphic novels in a class as he assigned a photocopied chapter from McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) for homework, but that chapter by McCloud (Chapter Three) is about interpreting images. So while Dr. Nelson didn't have a class on how to read graphic novels, he provided background information for the students on how to do so and even stated in the interviews that getting students to read graphic novels was difficult if they didn't know how to read graphic texts. Interestingly, some of the students in Dr. Nelson's class had expressed confusion while reading *Watchmen* (Moore & Gibbons, 1986) before he came into the classroom to start his class, and this was the only open discussion I heard among students during data collection that focused on confusion while reading a graphic novel assigned to them.

Looking back at what Dr. Nelson had assigned his students in regards to learning how to read visual texts, he gave a photocopied chapter of McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) to his students as a homework assignment. Seeing as both Dr. Simpson and Ms. Madison had spent class time going over "reading graphically," and that none of the students in the classes I observed expressed confusion about the texts they were required to read, the data from this study seems to suggest that spending class time going over how to read graphic novels is a more effective pedagogical choice than giving a text to read as homework.

Simply put, teaching students how to read graphic novels privileges the multimodality of the genre and exhibits an understanding of how students' literacies need to be simultaneously accessed and taught through exposure to a predominantly visual medium. For literacy studies, this means that while students may possess "multiliteracies" as proposed by the New London Group (1996), that doesn't mean students are necessarily able to access them without explicitly designed exposure and subsequent contextualization. Additionally, for pedagogical studies, students may be able to analyze traditional texts and other visual media such as television shows and motion pictures, but the graphic novel presents a unique combination of literacies (visual and traditional) that may be best served by discussing the literacies individually and then bringing them together in an analysis of a multimodal text. Exposing students to the aesthetics and mechanics of graphic novels first and then having them discuss themes appears to be, based on the findings of this study, a beneficial way to use graphic novels in the college English classroom. Granted, Dr. Nelson did skip discussing the specifics of how to read graphic novels in his class, but the confusion the students expressed while

reading *Watchmen* informs the importance of teaching students how to read graphic novels.

Summary Conclusions and Implications for Research Question 2

Question 2: What affordances and/or constraints do college English teachers in this study see in both the medium of graphic novels as an academic text and their own application of the medium? In other words, how academically valuable do teachers in this study find comics?

Exploring how college English instructors used graphic novels in their classes was only part of this dissertation's scope. In addition to the pedagogies of the participants, their commentaries on how graphic novels are academically valuable were vital for contextualizing the participants' teaching practices and for gaining an understanding of some of the challenges inherent in utilizing a graphic novel in a college English class. The participants all had unique and individualized views on graphic novels and comic books in academic contexts, but certain commonalities emerged during data collection and analysis:

- All three participants found graphic novels and comic books to be academically valuable and legitimate for study
- The participants shared moments of students exhibiting apprehension toward reading graphic novels in their classes
- Issues of access to graphic novels for students was a concern when using them in a class

- The assignments the participants gave their students to complete reflected what the teachers found valuable in the medium.

The academic value of graphic novels, according to the participants in this study, was affected by their personal experiences with the medium and also the problems that arose throughout their usage of graphic novels. It should also be noted that many of the participants' comments on the value of graphic novels in academic contexts reflected both the classes observed by me as part of the case studies for this dissertation and also the past experiences of the participants' teaching with graphic novels and comic books.

Summary Conclusions for Question 2

The three participants all held graphic novels in high esteem when it came to their potential as texts to be studied and analyzed in academic contexts. This came as no surprise, though, since the participants were selected for their interest in graphic novels. In fact, the recruitment of participants for this study proved to be a difficult task. Originally, this dissertation was intended to be a cross-case analysis of high school and college English classes that utilized graphic novels, but finding high school English teachers who used graphic novels was very difficult. Even after limiting the scope of this dissertation to college level English teachers, finding participants who used graphic novels in their English classes was not particularly easy. Ultimately, this meant that the participants in this dissertation would, most likely, hold graphic novels and comic books in high regard as they found them valuable enough to use in their classes. That was the trend for this dissertation, and again, that was expected. What became important in regards to the participants' valuing of graphic novels in academic contexts was what

aspect(s) of the medium they valued and how those values were reflected in their teaching.

Ms. Madison found value in the variety of genres graphic novels had, and that was evident in her photocopying portions of diverse texts for her students. This practice of photocopying was also indicative of issues of access for graphic novels in classrooms, but the photocopying reflected what Ms. Madison had found to be important in her implementation of graphic novels. Her sharing of how she had grown up with graphic novels, left them because she felt she outgrew them, and then returned to them after reading Spiegelman's *Maus* (2003) was really a commentary on what she found valuable in the medium and ultimately how she saw the medium as legitimate in academic contexts.

Dr. Nelson saw graphic novels and comic books as being valuable, but he also commented on what he thought was the state of graphic novels gaining universal acceptance and legitimacy in academia. Specifically, Dr. Nelson personally saw graphic novels as valuable but felt that the medium was in what he called a "shift" from being academically ostracized to being academically accepted. This shift, according to Dr. Nelson, was occurring at the point this dissertation's data was being collected (2012-2013). Also, Dr. Nelson's choice of texts, which were of the superhero genre, reflected his passion for the medium and may have also contributed to his commentary regarding the acceptance of graphic novels in academics. The other participants in this study utilized what art critic Wolk called, "art comics" (2007), and their views on the acceptability of the medium were more favorable than Dr. Nelson's. This is not to say that superhero graphic novels are not academically valuable. Rather, it is to highlight the

choice of genre being both reflective of the participant's personal views on the acceptability of graphic novels/comic books and also indicative of how the favoring of one genre may clash with more traditional academic values. This also became evident when Dr. Nelson shared his experiences with administrative resistance to his attempting to implement graphic novels in previous classes he had taught.

Dr. Simpson was the only participant who had not grown up with comic books or graphic novels, and her valuing of the medium in academic contexts seemed reflective of that. Specifically, Dr. Simpson said she saw the value of graphic novels in their multimodality and how the written word worked with text. A privileging of the multimodality of graphic novels was evident in her classes and in her interviews. Additionally, Dr. Simpson's initial exposure to graphic novels as a graduate student at an NCTE conference informed her valuing of the medium primarily through its multimodality. As NCTE is a conference of fellow English educators, the initial exposure to graphic novels she experienced there would, most likely, have been "art comics," and her personal preferences of graphic novels reflected that. Some of her favorite graphic novels included Thompson's *Blankets* (2003) and Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2007). Nevertheless, having her students explore and expose themselves to the multimodality of the graphic novel became the cornerstone of her usage of graphic novels.

While most of the data from the participants in this study reflected the benefits of using graphic novels in college English classes, the participants did share some very interesting deficits they saw to using graphic novels. Specifically, and most interesting for this discussion, was the apprehension among students toward the reading of graphic novels. As was shared in Chapter Two of this dissertation, much of the academic

literature on graphic novels praises the medium for its ability to engage students through its visuals. The participants in this study all shared that they had concerns regarding their students reading the graphic novels they assigned. Dr. Nelson and Dr. Simpson were particularly open about this dilemma. For them, the concern rested mainly on the students not reading the texts because they were not used to graphic novels and their structures. This dissertation already addressed that the participants did make it a point to teach their students how to read graphic novels, but these concerns remained nevertheless. Ms. Madison had experienced this as well, but her entire class was devoted to graphic novels. She cited one instance, which was presented in the section titled "Students' Apprehensions Towards Graphic Novels" of Chapter Five. Throughout the class Ms. Madison taught, students openly resisted reading a particular text: Adrian Tomine's "Short Comings." Since Dr. Nelson and Dr. Simpson only used graphic novels for a short part of their classes (Dr. Nelson for two classes and Dr. Simpson for three classes), the effects of this apprehension among students were much more poignant. However, all three participants expressed that they were comfortable in the way they covered the reading of graphic novels with their students.

Another major deficit to using graphic novels in college English classes arose during the interviews when all three participants shared that issues of access to particular graphic novels affected their usage of the medium. Ms. Madison had made photocopies of portions of the texts her students read in the class in order to expose them to as many genres as possible in order to, as Ms. Madison put it, "dispel the myth of graphic novels as, you know, childish or juvenile." However, those photocopies were only of portions of the texts, and Ms. Madison admitted to being concerned about the legal ramifications of

such a practice. Nevertheless, she did comment that if she taught the class again, she would limit the number of texts the students read in class and focus on a few complete titles as opposed to portions of multiple titles, effectively eliminating the practice of photocopying portions of the texts for her students.

Dr. Simpson and Dr. Nelson also experienced issues when it came to access to graphic novels. Dr. Nelson stated that he chose *The Killing Joke* (Moore & Bolland, 1988) and *Watchmen* (Moore & Gibbons, 1986) partially because those titles were currently in print and readily available to students. In that way, the availability of the texts affected the lessons Dr. Nelson could have taught. Dr. Simpson had also experienced instances of access with graphic novels, but those instances were during her time conducting a study in a high school where students were taught with graphic novels. Specifically, Dr. Simpson shared that getting the texts for the students in the class was a concern for the teacher. Additionally, though Dr. Simpson requested that some specifics of her issues of access not be shared in this dissertation, it is permissible to state that Dr. Simpson experienced issues of access when attempting to implement the medium in public school contexts.

The assignments the participants used in their classes were also reflective of what they valued in graphic novels/comic books as academically valuable texts. Dr. Simpson and Ms. Madison exhibited a privileging of the multimodality of the comic medium through their assessments. For Dr. Simpson, her lessons generally focused on the ways in which the images and text informed one another in graphic novels, and even some of her classroom questions categorized the discussion in class into thematic questions and questions focused on imagery of a particular panel. Ms. Madison also focused her

assessments on the multimodality of the comic medium when she had students complete a “McCloudian Analysis” (Appendix G) referring to McCloud's book *Understanding Comics* (1993). Specifically, Ms. Madison asked students to analyze and deconstruct a particular panel or sequence of panels of their choosing. Emphasis was placed on “reading between the panels” where the reader was expected to formulate his/her own interpretation of events within the context of the multimodal narrative.

Dr. Nelson’s assignment was more focused on the themes of his unit and sociological implications of the graphic novels they read. Dr. Nelson’s major assessment while utilizing graphic novels in his class asked students to analyze the relationship between the superhero Batman and the villain the Joker while keeping in mind the ways in which society affected both of them (Appendix O). While this analysis was in reference to the graphic novels read in his class, the assessment privileged the thematic analysis of the text more so than the multimodal nature of the medium.

The affordances and constraints of using graphic novels and/or comic books in the college English classroom were informed by the findings of this study. Among the participants of this study, which represented a community college, a private university, and a public university, graphic novels/comic books were beneficial to the analysis of themes through its multimodality as the participants stated that the diversity of modes allowed for rich discussions of themes and structure. However, the constraints of the medium as an academic text were also evident in the data as the participants shared instances of student apprehension to reading the texts, and the burgeoning respect of the medium in academic contexts limited access to particular texts. Finally, the assessments the participants administered while using graphic novels in their classes was reflective of

the privileging of the both the multimodality of graphic novels and their potential for discussing themes.

Implications for Question 2

As the second research question looked to explore how graphic novels were characterized and perceived by the teachers who used them, the data collected from this study, which informed the second research question, have implications for literacy studies and pedagogical studies.

In regards to literacy studies, the participants' assessments were particularly telling in that they reflected what was important to their own class' study of the texts. Dr. Nelson's assignment reflected a thematic analysis of the texts while Dr. Simpson and Ms. Madison's reflected an emphasis on how graphic novels' multimodality could be utilized in exploring the text thematically. For literacy studies, the participants' assignments reflect the New London Group's "multiliteracies" (1996) with the assignments having students access and incorporate varying modes (textual and visual) into their analyses of texts. Though Dr. Nelson's assignment was more rooted in traditional thematic analyses of texts when he asked students to discuss the influences society had on the actions of a hero, there was still an emphasis on having the students cite and utilize the graphic novel they had read in class, namely *The Killing Joke* (Moore & Bolland, 1988).

The concerns the participants had with their students reading the graphic novels also has implications for literacy studies. All three participants were concerned about their students reading the texts, and all three participants acknowledged the importance of teaching students how to read the texts. Once again, this informs the theory of

"multiliteracies" (New London Group, 1996) and it also reflects Kress' analysis of literacy (2003) where literacies are interconnected. With the participants in this study both acknowledging the importance of teaching their students how to access varying literacies and presenting lessons that addressed the inherent multimodality of graphic novels, they provided an example of how graphic novels have implications for literacy studies. Specifically, even though the New London Group and Kress both make a case for students possessing varying literacies that work in tandem, if an instructors is going to utilize a multimodal text in his/her college English class, it is the responsibility of the teacher to actively acknowledge the multimodality of a given text and shape his/her lesson around multimodality. The participants in this study did so, but they did so to different degrees with Dr. Simpson and Ms. Madison providing assessments that directly asked their students to consider both the visual and textual elements of the graphic novels. Dr. Nelson, on the other hand, placed more emphasis on thematic discussions and used graphic novels as the primary texts to discuss those themes.

For pedagogical studies, the findings from the second research question provide many implications when it comes to using graphic novels in an English class. Most important is the issue of access to specific texts. While the buying of books and the decisions made by teachers in regards to what books to use in a class is an important decision in any classroom at any level, the participants in this study presented a significant obstacle for teachers who may wish to use graphic novels: gaining access to certain texts. While this may not be a problem for popular texts such as Spiegelman's *Maus* (2003) or Satrapi's *Persopolis* (2007) since they're both extremely popular in academic contexts, Dr. Nelson's admission that his class was affected by the texts he had

to use may present problems for teachers who wish to explore certain themes. Ms. Madison's photocopying of the text she had students read also provided troubling implications for this very complicated issue. Both Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison stated that they were limited in what graphic texts they could have their students read due to an absence of a comic anthology. The reasons for this, as shared by Dr. Nelson and Ms. Madison, was the competition among publishers and the price such a proposed volume would cost. Finally, Dr. Simpson even stated that her experiences in the high school setting, but not in the college classes I observed, presented challenges in getting physical copies of graphic novels for students to read. Nevertheless, the issue of access to graphic novels is a major implication to consider for potential teachers who might wish to use a graphic novel in their class.

All of the participants had a passion for the medium as evidenced by their personal experiences with graphic novels. Since graphic novels are such a specialized and burgeoning medium in education, this passion became an important facet of the pedagogies of the participants. This is not to say that a teacher who didn't have extensive, personal experiences with graphic novels and/or comic books could not use them in his/her classroom: far from it. Dr. Simpson's later exposure to the medium in her life is evidence of finding value in graphic novels and/or comic books despite having nearly no experience with the medium during childhood and adolescence. Instead, this passion may be related to the persistence the participants exhibited when discussing the issues and constraints associated with using graphic novels in their English courses. Graphic novels possess certain deficits which can impede usage in a classroom including limited access to the texts desired, spending instructional time covering the reading of the texts, and

students exhibiting apprehension towards a potentially new text. These constraints do not make the inclusion of graphic novels in a college English class inconvenient. Rather, the participants exhibited a passion for the medium which aided in addressing these pedagogical and literacy issues. In short, teachers who wish to use graphic novels in their classrooms need to be aware of the constraints which arose during the data collection and data analysis of this dissertation. And while this dissertation's scope is limited with three college English teachers sharing their experiences and pedagogies, the trends discussed here were present across all three cases. Therefore, it is possible these constraints could be present in future classes which utilize a graphic novel as a primary text.

Study Limitations

The limitations in this study were reflective of the state of graphic novels in academic settings. Part of the difficulty in beginning this study was finding participants. Even the study's original goal, which was to look at how high school English teachers and college English teachers used graphic novels, needed to be adjusted as finding participants at the high school level became problematic. There being only three participants limits the reach of this study's findings, but the fact that finding participants was difficult was really indicative of the place of graphic novels in academic contexts.

Another limitation of this study was the focus on only one voice in the classrooms explored: that of the teacher's. Part of this was due to the nature of the IRB that was approved by Indiana University of Pennsylvania and honored by the institutions that the participants were instructors at. However, student voices are important when looking at

how classrooms operate and what decisions an instructor makes in regards to pedagogy and textual choice.

Additionally, the time spent in each classroom was also a limitation. However, this limitation was a result of the instructors' schedules, syllabi, and maintaining consistent analysis of the three participants' classrooms. As was mentioned earlier, Ms. Madison was the only participant who had an entire class devoted to the reading and studying of graphic novels. While observing more of her classes would have been beneficial to the study of graphic novels in academic contexts, the other participants only spent 2-3 class periods on graphic novels (Dr. Nelson spent two class periods on graphic novels and Dr. Simpson spent three class periods). Maintaining an even number of observations and interviews was important since this study was a modified cross-case analysis (Stake, 1995).

Despite these limitations, this study did explore how graphic novels were used by the college English teachers in this study. Going forward, the limitations listed here also provide promising future research in the fields of pedagogy, genre theory, and comic studies.

Future Research

This dissertation was a modified cross-case analysis (Stake, 1995) which also reflected Bassey's (1999) favoring of case studies to explore educational practices. The study focused on three teachers from different universities who used at least one graphic novel as a primary text in their classes. The cases included were developed and analyzed from classroom observations, interviews, and content analysis of the documents provided by the teachers. In that way, the scope of this dissertation was limited in that it truly

focused on only three college English teachers. Different educational contexts, such as public high schools, were not part of the study. This limitation provides a potential avenue for further study. Additionally, this dissertation did not seek a particular genre of graphic novel which college teachers used. This choice of genre among the participants raised some interesting questions which may benefit from future research.

Studying High School Graphic Novel Usage and Student Apprehension

As was mentioned above, the scope of this dissertation was limited to the three participants who were from three different universities. This study is therefore limited in its scope. I have an extensive background in English Education as I taught high school English for three years. During those years, I had always wanted to use a graphic novel in my classes. Due to logistical and curricular limitations, I was never able to do so, and the original conception of this dissertation was to conduct a cross-case analysis of high school and college English classrooms that used graphic novels.

It was already presented in this dissertation that the reason for not having a high school teacher as one of the participants was the difficulty in finding a high school teacher who did so. Not many districts would allow the teaching of graphic novels as the emphasis on standardized tests makes fitting graphic novels in a curriculum difficult. After discussing this trend with my dissertation advisor, it was decided that the dissertation's scope would be changed to only the collegiate level.

While I agreed to this, there is still a lingering question of how high school teachers would use graphic novels in their English classes. Even Dr. Simpson, who also

had a background in English Education, stated that she experienced limitations when interacting with high school students and graphic novels.

Further research is necessary to explore how the data presented in this dissertation would inform and be informed by graphic novels in a high school English classroom. With the methodological approach this dissertation has provided, I would like to continue my research in this field and find high school English teachers who use graphic novels. By exploring how graphic novels are used by English teachers in high schools, the affordances and constraints of using graphic novels in high school contexts, and in English classrooms in general, would be greatly expanded.

Studying Graphic Novel Genre Choices

Another finding from the data was the variation in genre choice among the participants and why they chose the texts they did. Both Dr. Simpson and Ms. Madison had picked titles that would belong in what art critic Douglas Wolk characterized as, “art comics” (2007). These comics are outside of the stereotype of traditional comic book content including superheroes, syndicated comic strips from newspapers, and generally what might be considered sophomoric. Nevertheless, the roots of comic art is in these genres, and Dr. Nelson’s choices of texts, superhero graphic novels, reflected that world of typical, United States comic book content.

What makes this finding important for further research is the struggle that Dr. Nelson shared during the interviews. For Dr. Nelson, the battle for utilizing graphic novels in educational settings was much more apparent than for Ms. Madison and Dr. Simpson. Admittedly, this may be due to the fact that Dr. Nelson's reflections and

experiences were from when he attempted to use graphic novels in classrooms during the early 2000s, much earlier than Dr. Simpson and Ms. Madison. Dr. Nelson himself even stated that he felt the acceptance of graphic novels had grown since the early 2000s.

Nevertheless, this finding brings another interesting dynamic into both comic and pedagogical studies: the choice of genre and how that choice is influenced by social and administrative pressures. This dissertation has addressed this to a point during the interviews when the participants were asked about which comics they chose and why they chose them for their classes. The answers the participants gave were presented in Chapter Five of this dissertation, and issues of access to graphic novels for students was the commonality across all three participants. Looking at genre would be an excellent continuation of this study, though.

Romagnoli and Pagnucci (2013) touched upon the acceptance of the superhero genre asserting that academia privileges graphic novels that don't necessarily represent the most popular content of the medium: namely superheroes. That text focused on the superhero genre, but did not look at classroom use. Therefore, a study that sought to explore why English teachers, at either the college or high school level, used certain titles of graphic novels would greatly expand the field of comic studies and how graphic novels inform pedagogical studies in English classrooms.

Student Apprehension Towards Graphic Novels in an English Class

As was stated earlier, the most surprising finding from this study was the student apprehension that the participants experienced while using graphic novels in their English classes. This is surprising because a significant portion of the preliminary research done

for this dissertation yielded articles and literature that celebrated the benefits of using graphic novels in a classroom setting. Two particularly telling pieces on this were Harris (2007) and Versaci (2010). Harris (2007) had stated that, "for a number of students, the predominantly pictorial format allows them [students] to enter into difficult subject matter more readily than they might otherwise" (p. 39). And Versaci (2010), who used graphic novels in a community college class, said, "Aside from engagement, comic books also help to develop much needed analytical and critical thinking skills" (p. 64). While these two pieces are only a sampling of how academia perceived the benefits of graphic novels, the data from this dissertation suggest that a reexamination of the benefits of graphic novels in English classes, in regards to student engagement, is warranted.

A continuation of this study could be adding another dynamic and interviewing students about their preferences as college students in terms of what texts they would prefer to read. This study's scope was focused on the teachers and how they use the texts. It became apparent while collecting the data that the students were not as enthused about the choice of texts as their teachers were. A study that sought to gain a better understanding of how students react to teachers' textual choices could be beneficial to students and teachers alike.

Conclusion

As a teacher-scholar who has been influenced by the literature of his youth, I feel that this dissertation has been an exploration as to how I could use graphic novels in a classroom with an emphasis on the actual logistics of that potential usage. Ever since I started teaching high school students in 2007, I wanted to use graphic novels because I

personally found value in their ability to present narratives through both images and text. However, at the time, me educational environment limited my ability to teach with comics. Dr. Nelson and Dr. Simpson's experiences with graphic novels in high school contexts appeared to mirror my experience. The original incarnation of this dissertation also included a high school dynamic, but that approach had to be altered due to a seeming lack of high school teachers using graphic novels.

This dissertation has positively affected me both personally and professionally. Personally, there is a certain validation in my interests as a teacher-scholar in regards to graphic novels in the English classroom. The participants in this study provided insight into both the affordances and constraints of graphic novels, and that insight has allowed me to reflect on my own teaching and scholarship moving forward. Professionally, this dissertation has also created the groundwork for further research into graphic novels in the classroom. As the previous section of this final chapter has outlined, the potential for further research is promising, and I look forward to continuing my research in this area and contributing to the fields of literacy, pedagogy, and comic studies.

The validation spoken of before is really of paramount importance to me when reflecting on this study. The participants in this study used graphic novels partially because of their passion for the medium, but they also used graphic novels because they saw a value in them that went beyond their personal interests. Within the multimodality of the texts, the participants had their students analyze how society helps shape its fictional heroes, what a fictional dystopian future says about the present, and how the images presented by an artist provide insights into his/her own views on humanity. These are important and vital lessons the participants in this study had their students partake in,

and their decisions to use graphic novels in their classes speaks volumes for both the evolution of literacy and the burgeoning respect for texts outside of the traditional mainstream.

Eisner (1985), in his seminal work on graphic literature, summed up the position of graphic novels in educational contexts quite succinctly:

> For reasons having much to do with usage and subject matter Sequential Art has been generally ignored as a form worthy of scholarly discussion. While each of the major integral elements, such as design, drawing, caricature and writing, have separately found academic consideration, this unique combination has received a very minor place (if any) in either the literary or art curriculum. (p. 5)

This dissertation has sought to dispel this academic trend, and even though Eisner wrote about academia's position on comic books and graphic novels almost thirty years ago, the data collected in this dissertation presents a growth in the medium becoming acceptable but not fully embraced.

Any teacher who looks to use graphic novels in his/her class becomes, in essence, a pioneer in advancing literacy studies because of this. While there are some constraints associated with using graphic novels in educational contexts, the benefits of teaching multimodality seem clear, and this study has provided cases from teachers from diverse institutions that exist as examples of how the medium can be beneficially used in college English classes. For teacher-scholars like myself, who look to multimodal texts as possibilities for developing education units and lessons, this study is an advancement of exploring literacies, how they change, and how our teaching can reflect the constant evolution of literacy studies.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Protocols

The interviews for this dissertation are designed to gather information on the individual teacher's experiences with graphic novels and comic books, both personal and pedagogical. All participants in this study were interviewed twice: once before classroom observations and once after the completion of classroom observations. The questions for each interview sessions reflects that sequencing with the first interview focusing on experiences and expectations and the second interview focusing on reflection and encountering any issues with the medium and/or class.

What follows are the base questions for the interviews employed in this study.

Appendix B

Interview 1 Questionnaire

1. What are your personal experiences with graphic novels and comic books?

2. What are/were some of the titles, if any, that you read for personal enjoyment?

3. How were you introduced to graphic novels and comic books?

4. From a professional/pedagogical perspective, what are your experiences with graphic novels and comic books?

5. If you have used graphic novels and/or comic books in you classrooms, how have you used them?

    5.a What titles, if any, have you employed in your classroom?

    5.b How have students reacted to the use of graphic novels and comic books?

    5.c What assignments and/or activities did you administers with the text?

    5.d Where, in your class schedule, did you incorporate the text into your class?

    5.e What challenges, if any, did you encounter in using a graphic text?

6. If you haven't used graphic novels of comic books in your classroom before, how do you think you'd incorporate them?

7. In regards to this study, what graphic text(s) will you be using with your class, and do you plan to use the text(s) in your class?

8. What challenges, if any, do you foresee in using this text(s) in your class?

Appendix C

Interview 2 Questionnaire

1. Describe how you used the graphic novel and/or comic book in your class.

2. What did you want your class to get out of using that particular text in your class?

    2.a Do you feel using the graphic text helped your students in achieving the educational goals and/or outcomes of the unit?

3. What do you think the students did get out of using that particular text?

4. What were some of the challenges in implementing a graphic novel in your class?

5. What resistance did you encounter?

    5.a If you encountered resistance, from whom/what?

    5.b How did you address said resistance?

6. What are your views on the acceptability of the medium in education in general?

    6.a How do you see the value of the medium evolving in the coming years?

7. What are your views on graphic novels and/or comic books in general?

Appendix D

Non-Participatory Observation Protocols

The non-participatory observations for this dissertation reflect Stake's (1995) view on how researchers should conduct observations while conducting a case study. Specifically, the researcher is to have as little contact with the participants and their environments as possible. For that reason, the researcher is to find an unoccupied section of the classroom, preferable toward the back, that does not impede on any of the class' usual activities.

The researcher is also to look for and record the following information:

1. Record questions that the teacher asks students in regards to graphic novels.

2. Record any and all content the teacher puts/writes on a blackboard or a whiteboard. This can include notes, discussion questions, visuals that support a given lecture, etc.

3. Any Power Points or presentations that use visuals should also be described as best as possible. This also includes any films or visual media the teacher utilizes.

4. Make note of the classroom's organization and aesthetics.

5. The objectives for the class you're observing is to be recorded. Additionally, the subject of all of the instructor's lectures and discussions should be recorded. Quotes, when applicable to the discussing of graphic novels and/or comic books and their usage, should be recorded.

6. While the IRB for this dissertation does not include quoting and/or directly observing students and their interactions with the graphic novels, general reactions to the instructor's questions regarding graphic novels and comic books can be recorded.

When the class ends, the researcher will simply leave the class. Follow-up interview and questions with the participants (instructors of the classes observed) will be conducted at a later date.

Appendix E

Content Analysis of Documents Protocols

The content analysis of documents for this study takes into account the original documents produced by the participants for their students to use in the course. The only exception to this is if a participant provides copies of the texts they were assigned to read (such as Ms. Madison and Dr. Nelson did for this study). Additionally, transcripts from the interviews and observation notes will be analyzed the same way any of the documents are.

1. The researcher will collect any documents the participant (instructor) gives to students. The documents can include syllabi, essay prompts, assignment/activity sheets, notes, or any other document that provides information to the students regarding graphic novels and comic books in the instructor's class.

2. Upon completion of collecting the documents, each document will be read by the researcher at least twice. This includes all interview transcripts and classroom observation notes.

3. After reading the document, the researcher will look for aspects of each document that pertain to visuals, questions about visuals, questions about graphic novels and/or comic books, and generally any part of the document that addresses literacy.

4. The data taken from the documents will be analyzed and coded as it relates to the other data from the case. In other words, how do the documents inform or contribute to the case that was studied?

5. Document analysis will be used to supplement analysis of the participants' graphic novel and/or comic book usage with citations occurring as necessary.

Appendix F

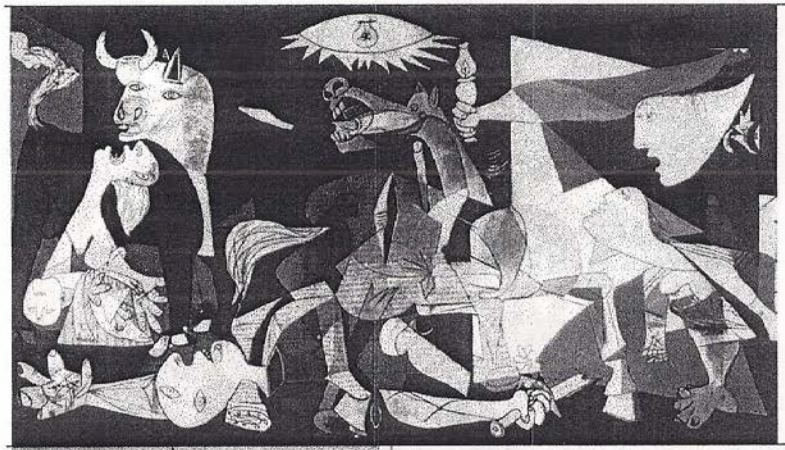
Dr. Simpson's "Reading Graphically" (Next 4 Pages)

How Pictures Work
By Molly Bang

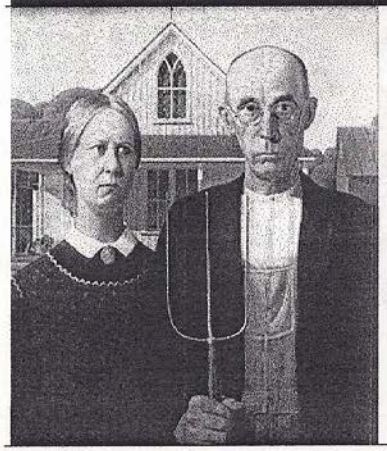
How do Shapes/Colors tell the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* in Molly Bang's work?

Little Red Riding Hood

What story do the shapes/images tell in these paintings?

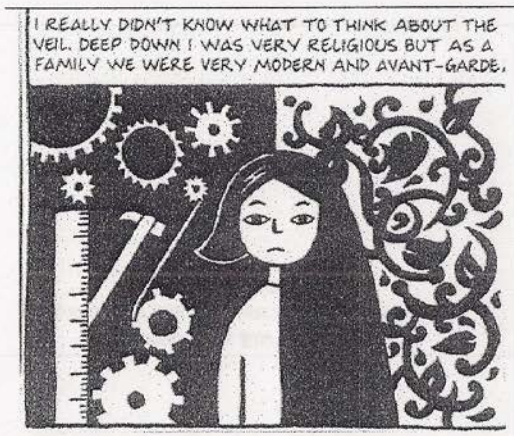


La Guernica by Pablo Picasso



American Gothic by Grant Wood

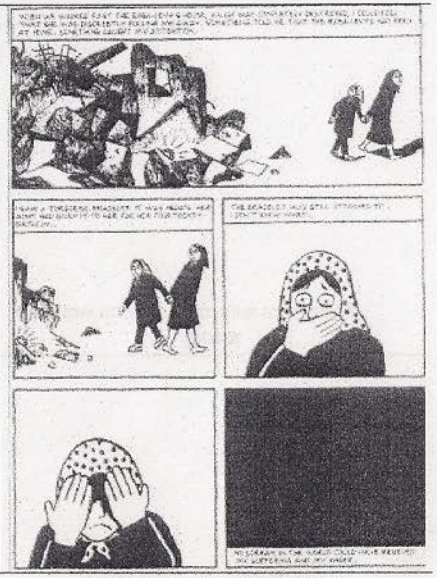
	**Multimodal Interpretation:** Linguistic Meaning (words and language) Visual Meaning (pictures and images) Auditory Meaning (sounds) Spatial Meaning (placement/size of images) Gestural Meaning (body language/facial expressions)	What do you see in these panels?
	**Reading Between the Panels** Scott McCloud, author of Understanding Comics writes: "I may have drawn an *axe* being *raised* in this example, but I'm not the one who let it *drop* or decided how *hard* the blow or *who* screamed or *why*. *That*, dear reader, was *your special crime*, each of you committing it in your own *style*. All of you *participated* in the murder. All of *you held the axe* and *chose your spot*. To kill a man between panels is to condemn him to a thousands deaths" (Understanding Comics 68-69).	How do you interpret the events in these two panels?
American Born Chinese How do the images contribute to the feeling of isolation in these panels?	***Manga Romeo and Juliet*** How is motion/action implied through image?	***Maus*** How do lines contribute to meaning?



From *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi

What do images, words, and icons tell us about Marjane's conflict with her self-identity?

What does the empty, black panel communicate to readers?



From *Blankets* by Craig Thompson

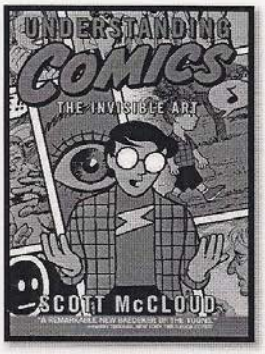
How do both images represent Craig's state of mind?

Appendix G

Ms. Madison's "McCloudian Analysis" Assignment Prompt

Mini-Assignment #3: McCloudian Analysis

For your third and final Mini-Assignment, I want you to perform a "McCloudian" analysis of a panel (or set of panels) from one of the graphic texts we've read this semester. In other words, write *in detail* about how your panel, or panels, exemplify at least one technique or idea from McCloud's *Understanding Comics* and how exactly that technique plays an important role in creating meaning within the text.



Throughout the entire semester, as a class, we've essentially been performing this type of analysis. Now, it's your turn to draw on McCloud's theories and specifically apply it to one of the texts we've read.

Perhaps you'll want to discuss the amplification of meaning through the simplification of the image (Chapter 2) or how gutters and panel-to-panel transitions create meaning and flow (Chapter 3). Maybe you'll analyze how lines, symbols, and images can evoke emotions through a synesthetic process (Chapter 5) or the various ways in which words and pictures can be combined to create meaning (Chapter 6). Or perhaps you're a color-addict and you're dying to examine the role of color in your chosen comic.

Remember, you're not limited to only one theory of McCloud's. Feel free to utilize more than one theory (since many graphic panels incorporate several techniques all-at-once). Regardless of what theories you choose, just remember that a well-thought and composed analysis will not only identify the specific techniques being utilized within the panel(s), but it will also discuss *how* those techniques create meaning in the overall work.

Your completed Mini-Assignment must be at least a full 1½ to 2 pages. Please double space your essay and adhere to the MLA documentation guidelines provided on your syllabus. Be sure to cite page numbers (or scan/photocopy the actual images and attach them) from the graphic work as well as cite the specific information you'll be utilizing from *Understanding Comics*.

Due Date: Friday, November 16th – hard copy due in-class

Appendix H

Dr. Simpson's "*V for Vendetta* Class Discussion Sheet" (Next 2 Pages)

V For Vendetta
Class Discussion, Part I

History: "Remember, Remember the Fifth of November, the gunpowder treason and plot. I know of no reason why the gunpowder treason should ever be forgot." (p. 14)	Who is Guy Fawkes? What is the Gunpowder Treason? (use your "Feed" to look it up!)	Examine the panels on p. 14. What is the effect of the placement of these images? What about color, facial expressions, etc? What story do the images tell?
	David Lloyd, illustrator, wrote to Moore, the author regarding "V": "Why don't we portray "V" as a resurrected Guy Fawkes, complete with one of those papier-mâché masks, in a cape and a conical hat? He'd look really bizarre and it would give Guy Fawkes the image he's deserved all these years. **We shouldn't burn the chap every Nov. 5th but celebrate his attempt to blow up Parliament!"** Moore commented that, due to Lloyd's idea, "All of the various fragments in my head suddenly fell into place, united behind the single image of a Guy Fawkes mask." (Quoted from Wikipedia)	What does this mask represent? Why would Lloyd suggest we should "celebrate" Fawkes' attempt? How does *V for Vendetta* "celebrate" vigilantism?

Review the Following Characters: Who are they? The Leader: The Voice of Fate: Lilliman: Delia: Mr. Almond:	What is "V's" Vendetta? Who does he punish in Book 1 and why?	
Review the Following Places: What are they? The Finger/Fingermen: The Nose: The Eye: The Ear: The Mouth: Fate: Larkhill: Room V:		What is "Norsefire"? What does Norsefire believe? What does their slogan mean? ***Hint:** are you making any connections to *1984*?
Did you notice? Look at all of the chapter names in each section. What do they have in common? **For next time**: As you read forward, pay attention to all of the references to "V"	Choose one of the chapters in "Book 1: Europe After the Reign," **look carefully at the chapter title, and write about how this title connects to the events in the chapter:**	

Appendix I

Ms. Madison's "Political Cartoons" Handout (Next 2 Pages)

Political Cartoons: An Introduction

Political cartoons (also known as editorial cartoons) are defined as illustrations or comic strips containing a political or social message that usually relates to current events or personalities.

Cartoonists use specific devises to get their message across:

Symbols (simple pictures that are understood to stand in for ideas or groups). Examples: Dove/Peace, Donkey/Democratic Party

Caricatures (drawing of a person that exaggerates his characteristics for comic effect). Examples: Big ears, extra long nose

Stereotypes (generalization, usually exaggerated or oversimplified and often offensive, that is used to describe or distinguish a group). Examples: Dishonest lawyers, Italian gangsters

Analogies (comparisons—this thing is like the other thing). Examples: a situation is compared to a well known event, book, myth

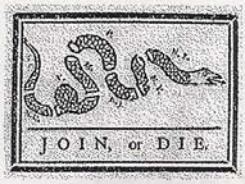
Juxtaposition (positioning people or things side by side). Example: putting a politician next to a $ sign

Irony (use of words to convey a meaning that is the opposite of its literal meaning, an outcome of events contrary to what was expected). Example: when someone says it is "beautiful" when they mean ugly or "as clear as mud"

Captioning and labels (used for clarity and emphasis). Example: words at the bottom or top of cartoon to further its message

According to Charles Press, author of *Political Cartooning*, in order for a political cartoon to be effective it must have the following four qualities:

- Artistic quality—but the artistry must not get in the way of the message
- Genuine sentiment—but it should not feel phony
- Fresh, uncomplicated imagery—should be striking, forceful, and amusing
- Lasting importance—the subject of the cartoon should be important so the cartoon can be understood by future readers



Political (or editorial) cartooning began in America with Benjamin Franklin's "Join or Die." The image was created to emphasize the importance of colonial unity and reflected the well known superstition about snakes coming back to life after being cut in half.

In the 18th and 19th Centuries political cartoons were commonly independent of other writing and were used to get messages across to those who could not read. Thomas Nast, considered to be the father of political cartoons, made a name for himself with his famous cartoons of William "Boss" Tweed and the Tammany Hall scandal.

Today, political cartoons can be found in newspapers, magazines, on opinion and cartoon pages— practically everywhere you look. Political cartoons have, according to the 2007 documentary *The Political Dr. Seuss*, "taken their place on the page and screen as valid outlets for expressing political thought, championing activism and affecting social change through creative use of visual art."

Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel)

Theodor Seuss Geisel was born in Springfield, Massachusetts on March 2, 1904. He was the second child of a successful German-American family. His family ran a successful brewery until Prohibition closed it down and his father then worked for the city's public park system. He had, by all accounts, a relatively happy childhood, attending the local Lutheran Church and selling war bonds for the Boy Scouts during WWI. He was the brunt of instances of anti-German bullying (especially during WWI) which impacted his work greatly.

After he graduated from the local high school, he attended Dartmouth College, graduating in 1925. He spent a great deal of his time writing for the college's humor magazine. While the editor of the magazine he was caught in his room drinking bootleg gin (it was prohibition after all!) and was banned from further involvement in the magazine. In order to continue writing for the magazine, he needed an alias, and he used his middle name. It was then that "Seuss" was created. He added the "Dr." part later in his writing career.

Thinking that he might want to become a literature professor, he left to study at Oxford. While there he spent more time traveling and doodling then studying and decided the academic life was not for him. While there he met his first wife, Helen Palmer and he decided to try to make a living as an artist. He moved to New York with Helen and started writing (and illustrating) for *Judge* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. One of the cartoons he created included Flit (a popular insecticide) which caught the eye of Standard Oil who hired him to write (and draw) advertisements for them. This led to a long career as an advertising artist for several companies. This salary also gave him the opportunity to travel and write.

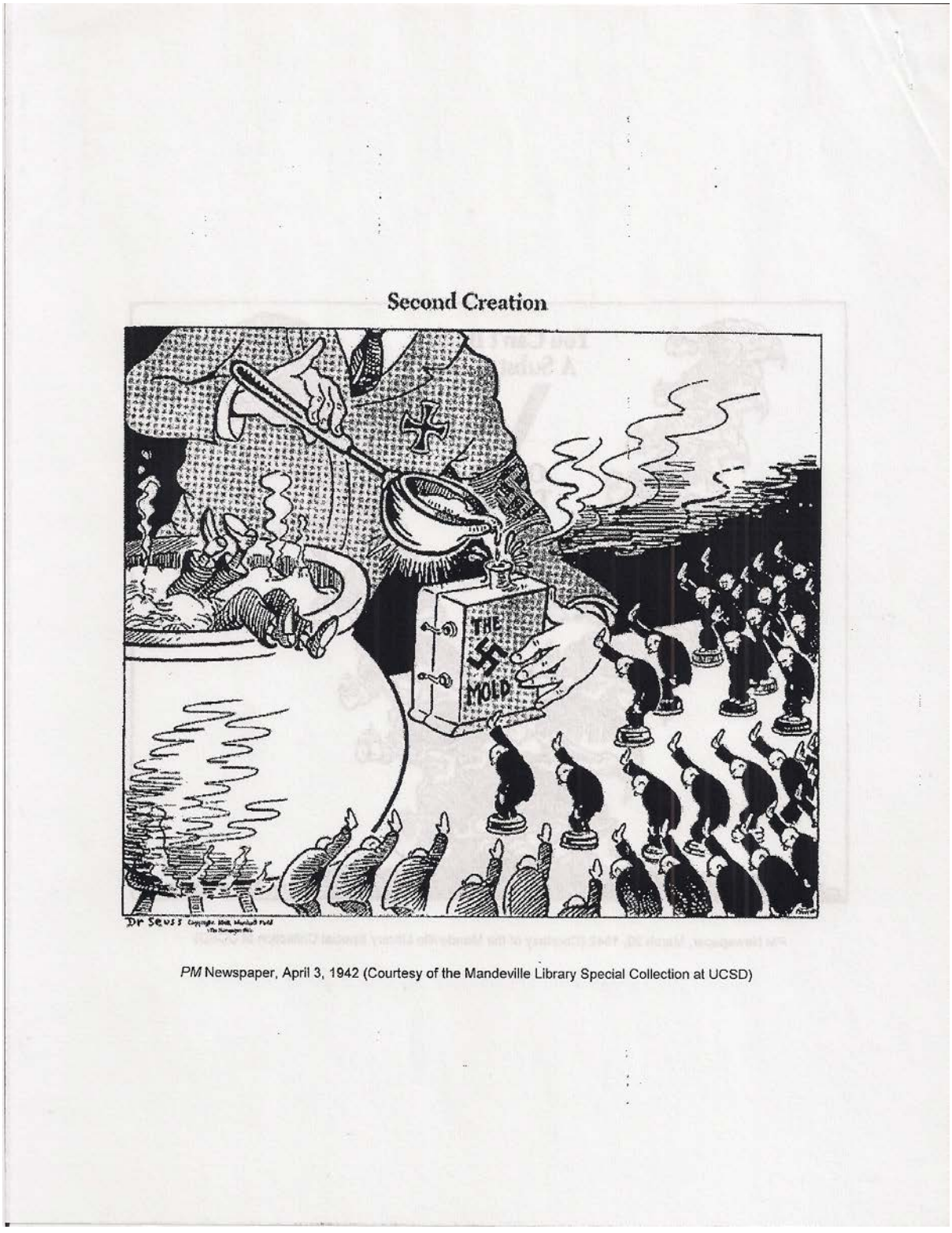
In the late 30s, Geisel began writing children's books. The first published was *And to Think I Saw it on Mulberry Street* (Geisel said the book was rejected 27 times) and he continued to write children's books until it looked as if war loomed for America. Geisel found he could no longer write books for children, he needed to make America aware of the dangers from abroad (fascism and the Axis powers) and at home (isolationism and prejudice).

From 1941 to 1943 Geisel created more than 400 political cartoons for *PM* Newspaper in New York—tackling such subjects as racial discrimination, the dangers of isolationism, social injustice and anti-Semitism, political machinations, the war effort, and political leadership. In 1943 he joined the Army and worked for the Information and Education Division where he created the character Private Snafu-who taught by negative example. He also wrote "Your job in Germany," a propaganda film about peace in Germany and "Design for Death," a movie study of Japanese culture.

After the war, Geisel returned to writing children's books and produced some of his most famous and beloved titles—*The Cat in the Hat, Horton Hears a Who!, The Grinch Stole Christmas* and many others. His books continued to teach important lessons and touch on important social issues. He lived in La Jolla, California after the war with his second wife and died on September 24, 1991.

Appendix J

Ms. Madison's Copy of Dr. Seuss' Political Cartoon "Second Creation"



PM Newspaper, April 3, 1942 (Courtesy of the Mandeville Library Special Collection at UCSD)

Appendix K

Ms. Madison's "Comics Code Authority and 'Comix'" Handout (Next 2 Pages)

Comics Code Authority and the Creation of ComiX

Last class, we briefly touched on how black identity occurs less than white identity in graphic novels, and how one dominant view may be privileged over another in the comics industry. Yes, brown characters undoubtedly exist in comics (for instance, Marvel's Black Panther and DC's Black lightning and Green Lantern's John Stewart), but they're unfortunately not as common and well-known as their white counterparts.

Yet, this oppressive hierarchy of identity within comics isn't a new fade. In fact, much of it stems from no other than the CCA, or Comics Code Authority – a group created by the Comics Magazine Association of America in 1954 to "self-regulate" the content of U.S. comics due to fears that they were corrupting the youth and highly influencing juvenile delinquency. The CCA forced comic distributors to obtain a CCA approval seal (on the front of their comics) in order to sell their books to the public.

Spearheaded by civil and religious groups as well as the government, the CCA censored all material that they deemed "immoral" from comics, which was quite a bit at that time. Like the 1930 Hollywood Production Code (a.k.a. the Hays Code), the CCA's code of "ethics" banned things like:

- Sexual perversion
- Ridicule of clergy
- Violence
- Gore
- Horror
- Profanity
- Suggestive nudity
- White slavery (but black slavery was OK)

Ultimately, the CCA had its own hidden agenda, which undoubtedly valued some identities and viewpoints over others. For instance, in 1956, the CCA attempted to censor a science-fiction story called "Judgment Day" in which one black astronaut travels to another planet only to discover that this foreign locale, where robots reside, is guilty of the same segregation – division among the functionally identical orange and blue races. Now, this censorship never occurred but only due to the fact that the editor, William Gaines, fought tirelessly to ensure its success.

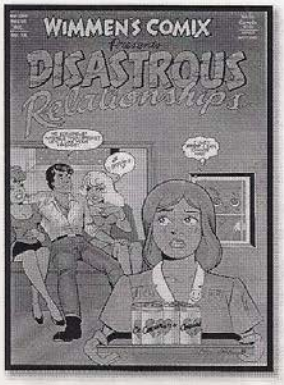
- **Comix as a Form of Resistance**

In response to the CCA's unfair and strict regulations, a comic book revolution occurred in the form of comix during the 1960s. Usually self-published, these countercultural creations refused to believe that there was a limit to what could/could not be discussed in comics. Instead, they set out to represent various, alternative stories and focused on subjects dear to the counterculture at the time like recreational drug use, politics, rock music, free love, and gender equality. Essentially, the "X" in the term referred to the "X-rated" contents of the publications.

Strongest from 1968-1975, the underground comix scene found success in self-distribution or through alternative venues such as head shops and publications like *Playboy* and *MAD* magazine. There were numerous cartoonists working in the comix genre like Gilbert Shelton (*Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers*) and Art Spiegelman (*Breakdowns*), yet the most famous individual from this period is no other than R. Crumb.

Hailed as one of the prime originators of the medium, Crumb has stated that the appeal of comix was, indeed, their lack of censorship, "People forget that that was what it was all about. That was why we did it. We didn't have anybody standing over us saying 'No, you can't draw this' or 'You can't show that'. We could do whatever we wanted." With that sentiment in mind, Crumb went on to self-publish *Fritz the Cat* and *Zap Comix,* which eventually began to feature other alternative cartoonists at the time. In addition, Crumb also illustrated various vinyl record covers for artists like Janis Joplin, The Grateful Dead, and many blues musicians.

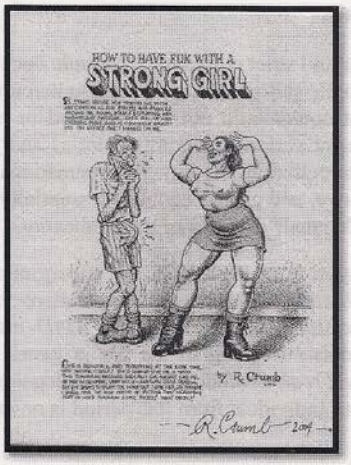
However, Crumb has been criticized for his extremely sexist and possibly-pornographic representations of people, especially women, and has been and is still considered one of America's most controversial cartoonists.



In response to these sometimes blatantly-misogynistic works, female cartoonists such as Lynda Barry and Aline Kominsky-Crumb, among many others, began to create their own women-center comix. Eventually, these creations took form in an anthology entitled *Wimmen's Comix* which focused on concerns such as sexual and gender politics as well as feminist and queer issues. This was also the first ever comic strip to feature an "out" lesbian.

Yet, as all revolutionary things, comix by the mid-70s was becoming less avant-garde and increasingly more stereotypical. As Spiegelman puts it, "What had seemed like a revolution simply deflated into a lifestyle. Underground comics were stereotyped as dealing only with Sex, Dope and Cheap Thrills. They got stuffed back into the closet, along with bong pipes and love beads."

Regardless of its eventual disintegration into predictable stereotypes, the comix revolution undeniably influenced artists to extend beyond mainstream borders, fearlessly representing all identities and viewpoints – for better or worse.



Appendix L

Dr. Simpson's "V for Vendetta Class Discussion Handout" (Next 2 Pages)

Review "Video" (pp. 107-112) Here "V" breaks into the Broadcasting Tower. For what purpose?	Pay attention to how words and images are used here. What's happening in the TV show? What kind of propaganda is promoted by the show?	How are "V's" movements cleverly narrated through the words and images?
In "A Vocational Viewpoint," (pp. 112-117) "V" addresses the nation. What is his message?		Pay particular attention to the images that float on the television screen behind him. What do these images reveal? How do they enhance V's message?
Who is to Blame for the state of the world?	Listen to "V's" speech in the movie: How is this message similar/different from that in the graphic novel? What common sentiment do they both share? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKvvOFIHs4k	

What is "V's" Story?	**What does Delia's Diary Reveal?**	**Is "V" a hero or a villain? Why?**
What is Evey's Story?		**Why does "V" take an interest in Evey?**
Carefully Review Chapter Five (Chapter V!) Which opposing ideologies do each of these "Versions" present?	**What does the "Leader" believe? Why?**	**What does "V" believe? Why?** **(What do *you* believe?)**

Appendix M

Dr. Simpson's "V for Vendetta Class Discussions, Part II" Handout (Next 2 Pages)

Questions for Discussion: *V for Vendetta*, Part II

Evey's "rebirth" marks a significant transformation both for Evey and for us as readers.

Review for Comprehension:
What happens in the chapters "Valerie," "The Verdict," and "Values"? (pp. 154-172).

Think Critically:
What is "V" trying to teach Evey in these panels? Do you agree with his message? Is it true for us today?

Is "V" a villain for imprisoning and torturing Evey, or was this a necessary "evil" to achieve a meaningful outcome? What do you think?

Later, on p. 250-251, when Evey lifts "V's" mask, who does she see? Why is this significant? What might this symbolize?

Think Multimodally:
How do the images in both the graphic novel and the film contribute to the emotion of these passages? How does the music additionally affect your response?

Anarchy, Chaos and Freedom

On pp. 195-196, V says, "Anarchy means 'Without Leaders' not 'Without Order." What is the difference between the two?

On pp. 222-223, V says, "Anarchy wears two faces, both creator and destroyer." What does he mean by this? How is this true of V? Are his aims noble? Why/why not?

Interpretation:
Why do you believe author Alan Moore wrote this book? What did he hope to achieve? What did he want his readers to know or think about?

Final Question: Is V a hero or a villain? Choose one and defend your choice.

Appendix N

Dr. Simpson's "Principles of Images According to Molly Bang" Handout

In her book, *Picture This, How Pictures Work* (2000), Molly Bang theorizes that the size, shape, color, and position of an image have the ability to create a variety of emotional responses in readers. Among the many principles Bang lists to demonstrate this point follow:

- Smooth, flat, horizontal shapes give a sense of stability
- Vertical shapes are more exciting and more active
- Diagonal shapes imply motion or tension
- We feel more scared looking at pointed shapes
- We feel more secure and comforted looking at rounded shapes or curves
- Open space on a page can imply isolation or time
- The larger an object, the stronger it feels
- The center of the page is the most effective "center of attention"
- The bottom half of a picture feels heavier, sadder, or more constrained
- The top half of a picture is a place of freedom, happiness, and spirituality (Bang 42-72)

Appendix O

Dr. Nelson's "*The Killing Joke* Essay Prompt"

ENG 255: Introduction to Literature
Graphic Novels
The Killing Joke, *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*

For your second paper, please respond to the prompt below. This paper will be graded on how well you make your point and how much support you provide to defend your point.

In the final confrontation between the Joker and Batman, the Joker states:

> "You just couldn't let me go. Could you? This is what happens when an unstoppable force meets and immovable object. You truly are incorruptible, aren't you? You won't kill me out of some misplaced sense of self-righteousness. And I won't kill you because you are just too much fun. I think you and I are destined to do this forever."

The Joker is referencing to the never-ending plot of Batman vs. Joker. Batman has one rule – all life is precious. He will not kill no matter how far he is pushed. Because of this rule, Batman is unable to truly stop the Joker and his reign of violence. Is this the right choice for Batman? Why should Batman uphold his value of preserving all life, including the Joker's? Or should he make an exception to prevent more bad things from occurring? Will Batman still be a hero if he kills the Joker?

Moving beyond the plot of the Joker versus Batman, this idea of being morally resolute applies to each of us. As our society becomes more diverse, we continually see that our moral values are being tested and critiqued daily. Should we always be like the Batman who is always firm and unwavering in is values and rules? Is this even possible? What are the implications of being as resolute as Batman when it comes to negotiating your values as opposed to the values of the new culture? Be sure to cite examples

1.5 page minimum. This is due next class for a grade.

Appendix P

Informed Consent Forms (Next 3 Pages)

Exploring Graphic Novels as Primary Texts: A Cross-case Analysis of College English Classrooms

You are invited to participate in this research study conducted by Alex Romagnoli, a doctoral candidate attending Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate in this study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher. You are eligible because you are an English professor who utilizes graphic novels and/or comic books in your class.

The purpose of this study is to explore how graphic novels and comic books are used in college-level English classrooms. Focus will be on how the instructor uses the graphic text and how that usage reflects literacies that are accessed in the classroom. There will be two interviews, which will ask for approximately 30 minutes each. The first interview will occur before classroom observations, and the second interview will occur after classroom observations. The first interview will focus on past experiences with graphic novels and comic books, both personal and professional, and how the medium is used in your classroom. The second interview will focus on reflecting on the use of the graphic novel or comic book and discussing issues of access regarding graphic novels and comic books. This study will also include, non-participatory classroom observation of classes involving the use of a graphic novel or comic book, and collecting teacher-provided materials. These materials may include a syllabus, assignment sheet, or any other activity. No work from students will be collected and/or analyzed.

There are no known or foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research. However, discussing and reflecting upon graphic novel and comic book usage in your classroom may help with improving your own usage of the medium. The information gained from your participation will add to the growing number of studies on graphic novel and comic book usage in classrooms.

Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You are free to decide not to participate in this study, or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship (if any) with the researcher or the researcher's institution (IUP). You are free, for example, to stop an interview at any point or to ask the class observer to stop taking notes or leave the classroom at any point. Your decision to withdraw will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to participate, all information will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms so that your personal information will remain protected. Please be advised that the information obtained through the study may be published in scholarly journal or presented at scholarly conferences, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are will to participate in this study, please sign the statement on the final page of this packet, and return it to the researcher. You will be given an additional unsigned

version of these forms to take with you for your record. If you choose not to participate, please notify the researcher of your withdrawal at the address below:

Contact Information for Alex Romagnoli:
English Department
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA 15705
hmjr@iup.edu
724-357-4788

Contact Information for Dr. Pagnucci:
English Department
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA 15705
pagnucci@iup.edu
724-357-2262

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects: (724) 357-7730

Informed Consent Form

Exploring Graphic Novels as Primary Texts: A Cross-case Analysis of College English Classrooms

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT):

Signature:

Date:

Phone number, e-mail or location where you can be reached:

Best days and times to reach you:

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

Date:

Researcher's signature:

The project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for The Protection of Human Subjects: (724) 357-7730.