

Fall 2011

Reading the Word and the World through Graphic  
Novels: A Graphic Portrayal of Young Adult Literacy  
Development in a Ninth Grade English Literature  
Classroom

Sandra Jane Greene

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd>

---

**Recommended Citation**

Greene, Sandra Jane, "Reading the Word and the World through Graphic Novels: A Graphic Portrayal of Young Adult Literacy Development in a Ninth Grade English Literature Classroom" (2011). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 562.

<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/562>

This dissertation (open access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies, Jack N. Averitt College of at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu).

READING THE WORD AND THE WORLD THROUGH GRAPHIC NOVELS:  
A GRAPHIC PORTRAYAL OF YOUNG ADULT LITERACY DEVELOPMENT  
IN A  
NINTH GRADE ENGLISH LITERATURE CLASSROOM

by

SANDRA JANE DAVIS GREENE

(Under the Direction of Elizabeth Carr Edwards)

ABSTRACT

This study presents a view of reading instruction based on investigating motivation and engagement related to adolescent literacy practices through graphic novels. A case study utilizing the graphic novels grounded in the theoretical approach of critical literacy demonstrated increases in motivation toward reading from a more critical social lens.

Participants in this case study were chosen from a set of ninth grade literature classes in a rural high school. The students were placed as a result of the random selection of heterogeneously mixed student abilities providing a rich mix of perspectives and motivational levels among the students. Allowing students to view character experiences in graphic novels through both graphic and traditional text opened

possibilities for opportunities in improving reading comprehension by increasing motivation and engagement. A change from traditional viewpoints that focus on mastery of skills to a critical view about text has the potential to allow adolescent students to question, to challenge, and to seek the unknown which in turn motivates this same learner to read.

The primary findings include: (1) a positive connection between student attitudes toward reading and their engagement with text; (2) the reaction of students to elements of popular culture that included graphic novels created a bridge to traditional literature and improved student relationships with reading standard text; (3) challenging students to view text whether from a traditional standpoint or through the medium of sequential comic art supported the students' ability to redefine reading from critical perspectives; (4) critical readings of traditional text and graphic novels gave voice to the students as direct agents of their own learning particularly as it related to real-world social issues; and (5) student motivation toward independent and academic reading was improved by teacher passion and commitment to the understanding and connection of text and graphics to the literature formats. Further study is recommended in the areas of the impact of the teacher on student motivation. Additional study is recommended related to the use of popular culture to enhance learning and motivation.

**INDEX WORDS:** Case study, Critical literacy, Social justice, Reading, Graphic novels, Comics, Comic books in education, Motivation, Motivation and engagement, Adolescent, Adolescent literacy, Middle school, Reading instruction, High school reading instruction

READING THE WORD AND THE WORLD THROUGH GRAPHIC NOVELS:  
A GRAPHIC PORTRAYAL OF YOUNG ADULT LITERACY DEVELOPMENT  
IN A  
NINTH GRADE ENGLISH LITERATURE CLASSROOM

by

SANDRA JANE DAVIS GREENE

B.S., Georgia Southern College, 1978

M.Ed., Georgia Southern University, 2005

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2011

© 2011

SANDRA JANE DAVIS GREENE

All Rights Reserved

READING THE WORD AND THE WORLD THROUGH GRAPHIC NOVELS:  
A GRAPHIC PORTRAYAL OF YOUNG ADULT LITERACY DEVELOPMENT  
IN A  
NINTH GRADE ENGLISH LITERATURE CLASSROOM

by

SANDRA JANE DAVIS GREENE

Major Professor:  
Committee:

Elizabeth Carr Edwards  
Stergios G. Botzakis  
Ming Fang He  
Michael Moore  
John A. Weaver

Electronic Version Approved:  
December 2011

## DEDICATION

To my fabulous husband, George

You endured the many hours of reading, writing, and discussion.

You are my joy, my partner, and my friend!

I love you forever!

To my son, Tim

Your struggle with learning has inspired me to become more as an educator.

You are a pioneer in showing me what literacy and reading truly means!

I love you forever!

To my friend, Lisa

You have been my travelling companion through this adventure in learning.

You are my true friend!

I love you forever!

To Mom and Dad,

You have watched over me through all of this.

You saw me in truth.

I love you forever!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study could not have been completed without the support and assistance of many people. To my committee chair, Dr. Elizabeth Carr Edwards, I give my sincerest thanks for her understanding and her encouragement during this time. Her efforts complemented my questions and challenged my thinking in working out what was illustrated in my mind and eventually found on paper.

To my committee members, you are a diverse group of men and women whose comments, questions, and probes into my work helped me to find my point of view and my voice. Your expertise and strength brought insights and challenges along the way encouraging me to open my own mind to alternative possibilities. To Dr. Ming Fe He, Dr. John Weaver, Dr. Michael Moore, and Dr. Stergios Botzakis, I offer you my thanks for all you have done.



To my husband, George, your love and compassion in understanding this woman I have become boggles the mind of most people we meet. I, however, am so thankful to



have found you and to be your eternal companion. I could never have accomplished this without your input, your thoughts, your understanding, or your love. I thank you for your support in the woman I have become.

To my friend, Lisa, we have accomplished much together. Your companionship on our travels and your thoughts as we discussed the ideas and the concepts so misunderstood by everyone else are pearls I will cherish always. I offer you my thanks and my friendship.

To Mr. Grayson, your willingness and energy in this project are unmatched! I thank you for accepting this challenge and using what you know and what you want to know to drive yourself to even better teaching. Your ability to connect with your students and your love for them speaks volumes through your passion and your joy. I offer you my sincerest thanks for all you have done.

Finally, to Mr. Grayson's third period class, it is difficult to express how much I appreciate the work put into this study without thanking you all for the trust you have given me in asking the questions and allowing me to hear the answers from you that at times are so hard to hear. I thank you for your passion, your honesty, and your joy of life. No part of this study could have happened without anyone of you. I love you all!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
LIST OF TABLES.....	12
LIST OF FIGURES.....	13
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	23
Context of the Study .....	25
Purpose .....	34
Research Questions .....	36
Autobiographical Roots.....	37
Struggles in Context .....	38
History of Comics.....	46
Experience and the Power of the Critical Picture.....	52
Summary of Study.....	54
2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	56
Making Sense of Language .....	57
New Thought in Defining Adolescent Literacy .....	65
What is Literacy in a Digital World? .....	70
Remembering Critical Literacy .....	74
The Choice of Comics and Graphic Novels in Learning.....	80
The Opposing View of Comics .....	91
Adolescent Motivation and Engagement in an Age of Multiple Literacies .....	94
Curriculum and the Challenge of Critical Literacy .....	98
Reading the Word and the World through Graphic Novels .....	102
Summary of Literature.....	105
3 METHODOLOGY.....	109
Theoretical Framework .....	109
Design.....	113
Researcher Perspective .....	115

Setting of the Study .....	118
Participants .....	120
Role of the Researcher.....	122
Instructional Program .....	123
Data Collection .....	125
Data Analysis.....	130
Graphic Novels and the Connection to Critical Literacy .....	132
Challenges of the Study.....	138
Significance of the Study.....	141
Summary of Methodology.....	143
4 DATA ANALYSIS.....	145
Observations .....	152
Observation 1.....	152
Observation 2.....	164
Observation 3.....	176
Observation 4.....	182
Observation 5.....	185
Observation 6.....	190
Observation 7.....	197
Observation 8.....	200
Observation 9.....	208
Observation 10.....	214
Observation 11.....	216
Observation 12.....	224
Observation 13.....	231
Observation 14.....	235
Focus Group Interviews .....	238
Focus Group 1 .....	238
Focus Group 2 .....	246
Focus Group 3 .....	252
Final Participating Teacher Interview .....	256
Essay Responses .....	258

Survey Results .....	260
Test Scores.....	264
5 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	268
Finding 1: Student Attitudes about Reading .....	270
Finding 2: Popular Culture—What are They Talking About? .....	287
Finding 3: Reading, Motivation, and Adolescent Readers .....	296
Finding 4: The Integration of Graphic Novels .....	309
Finding 5: The Graphic Novel and Critical Literacy.....	322
Finding 6: Critical Understanding of Social Issues .....	332
Finding 7: Critical Reading and Student Voice.....	339
Finding 8: The Commitment of the Teacher .....	353
Finding 9: Graphic Novels and Traditional Literature .....	365
Implications for Curriculum Studies and Recommendations.....	372
REFERENCES .....	387
APPENDICES	
A Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey.....	401
B Student Interview Questions.....	404
C High School Permission .....	406
D The Guilford Press .....	407
E Henry Holt and Company .....	408
F Pixton Comics .....	409
G SparkNotes .....	410

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: August 2010 Guide to Interpreting Scores .....	261
Table 4.2: January 2011 Guide to Interpreting Scores .....	261
Table 4.3: Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey Questions .....	262
Table 4.4: 8 <sup>TH</sup> Grade CRCT Scores .....	265
Table 4.5: 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade Literature End of Course Test (EOCT) Scores .....	266

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Greene, Drawing 1 .....	24
Figure 1.2: Greene, Drawing 2 .....	24
Figure 1.3: Greene, Drawing 3 .....	27
Figure 1.4: Greene, Drawing 4 .....	27
Figure 1.5: Greene, Drawing 5 .....	32
Figure 1.6: Greene, Drawing 6 .....	33
Figure 1.7: Greene, Drawing 7 .....	39
Figure 1.8: Greene, Drawing 8 .....	39
Figure 1.9: Greene, Drawing 9 .....	40
Figure 1.10: Greene, Drawing 10 .....	40
Figure 1.11: Greene, Drawing 11 .....	41
Figure 1.12: Greene, Drawing 12 .....	41
Figure 1.13: Greene, Drawing 13 .....	43
Figure 1.14: Greene, Drawing 14 .....	44
Figure 1.15: Greene, Drawing 15 .....	44
Figure 1.16: Greene, Drawing 16 .....	45
Figure 1.17: Greene, Drawing 17 .....	45
Figure 1.18: Greene, Drawing 18 .....	46
Figure 1.19: Greene, Drawing 19 .....	46
Figure 4.1: Grayson, 2010, Observation 1 .....	152
Figure 4.2: Grayson, Travis, Morgan, Carl, Jake, Brad, 2010, Observation 1 .....	153
Figure 4.3: Grayson, 2010, Observation 1 .....	153
Figure 4.4: Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 1 .....	154
Figure 4.5: Grayson, 2010, Observation 1 .....	154
Figure 4.6: Grayson, Sophia, Brad, 2010, Observation 1 .....	155
Figure 4.7: Grayson, 2010, Observation 1 .....	155
Figure 4.8: Carl, Mark, Travis, 2010, Observation 1 .....	156
Figure 4.9: Grayson, Travis, Mark, Sophia, Jake, Brad, 2010, Observation 1 .....	156
Figure 4.10: Grayson, Sophia, Jake, Mark, 2010, Observation 1 .....	157
Figure 4.11: Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 1 .....	157

Figure 4.12: Grayson, Mark, Carl, Brad, 2010, Observation 1 .....	158
Figure 4.13: Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 1 .....	158
Figure 4.14: Grayson, 2010, Observation 1 .....	160
Figure 4.15: Grayson, Morgan, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Observation 1 .....	161
Figure 4.16: Grayson, 2010, Observation 1 .....	162
Figure 4.17: Grayson, Morgan, 2010, Observation 1 .....	162
Figure 4.18: Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 1 .....	163
Figure 4.19: Grayson, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Observation 1 .....	163
Figure 4.20: Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 1 .....	164
Figure 4.21: Grayson, 2010, Observation 2 .....	165
Figure 4.22: Jake, Mark, Kirk, Travis, 2010, Observation 2 .....	166
Figure 4.23: Grayson, 2010, Observation 2 .....	166
Figure 4.24: Grayson, Jake, Travis, Sophia, 2010, Observation 2 .....	167
Figure 4.25: Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 2 .....	168
Figure 4.26: Grayson, Jake, Morgan, 2010, Observation 2 .....	169
Figure 4.27: Grayson, Sophia, James, 2010, Observation 2 .....	169
Figure 4.28: Grayson, John, 2010, Observation 2 .....	170
Figure 4.29: Grayson, James, Brad, Mark, Morgan, 2010, Observation 2 .....	170
Figure 4.30: Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 2 .....	171
Figure 4.31: Grayson, Sophia, Sean, 2010, Observation 2 .....	171
Figure 4.32: Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 2 .....	172
Figure 4.33: Sophia, Mark, Faith, 2010, Observation 2 .....	173
Figure 4.34: Mark, Sophia, Travis, 2010, Observation 2 .....	173
Figure 4.35: Travis, Sean, Morgan, Mark, Mary, 2010, Observation 2 .....	174
Figure 4.36: Greene, Drawing 20 .....	174
Figure 4.37: Travis, Jake, Sean, Sophia, Mark, Mary, John, 2010, Observation 2 .....	175
Figure 4.38: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 2 .....	175
Figure 4.39: Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 3 .....	177
Figure 4.40: Grayson, Jake, Mark, 2010, Observation 3 .....	178
Figure 4.41: Grayson, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Observation 3 .....	178
Figure 4.42: Grayson, Robin, 2010, Observation 3 .....	179
Figure 4.43: Grayson, Sophia, Mary, 2010, Observation 3 .....	180

Figure 4.44: Grayson, Brad, 2010, Observation 3 .....	180
Figure 4.45: Travis, Morgan, Sophia, Mark, Mary, 2010, Observation 3 .....	181
Figure 4.46: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 3 .....	182
Figure 4.47: Grayson, Morgan, 2010, Observation 4 .....	183
Figure 4.48: Grayson, Mark, Mary, 2010, Observation 4.....	184
Figure 4.49: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 4 .....	185
Figure 4.50: Grayson, 2010, Observation 5 .....	186
Figure 4.51: Grayson, 2010, Observation 5 .....	186
Figure 4.52: Greene, Drawing 21 .....	188
Figure 4.53: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 5 .....	189
Figure 4.54: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 5 .....	190
Figure 4.55: Grayson, Mark, Robin, Mary, 2010, Observation 6.....	191
Figure 4.56: Grayson, Mark, Morgan, Mary, 2010, Observation 6.....	191
Figure 4.57: Grayson, Mark, Morgan, 2010, Observation 6.....	192
Figure 4.58: Grayson, Amy, Morgan, Travis, Mark, 2010, Observation 6 .....	192
Figure 4.59: Greene, Drawing 22 .....	193
Figure 4.60: Greene, Drawing 23 .....	195
Figure 4.61: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 6.....	197
Figure 4.62: Grayson, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Observation 7 .....	198
Figure 4.63: Grayson, Jake, Sophia, Morgan, Mark, 2010, Observation 7 .....	199
Figure 4.64: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 7 .....	200
Figure 4.65: Grayson, 2010, Observation 8.....	201
Figure 4.66: Greene, Drawing 24 .....	201
Figure 4.67: Mark, 2010, Observation 8.....	202
Figure 4.68: Grayson, 2010, Observation 8.....	202
Figure 4.69: Sean, Jake, Sophia, Robin, 2010, Observation 8.....	203
Figure 4.70: Grayson, Travis, Jake, Morgan, James, Brad, John, 2010, Observation 8.....	203
Figure 4.71: Grayson, 2010, Observation 8.....	204
Figure 4.72: Grayson, Brad, Sophia, Cathy, Robin, 2010, Observation 8.....	205
Figure 4.73: Grayson, Jake, Mark, 2010, Observation 8 .....	205
Figure 4.74: Amy, Morgan, Sophia, Jake, 2010, Observation 8.....	206
Figure 4.75: Grayson, Sean, Jake, Carl, Mark, 2010, Observation 8 .....	206



Figure 4.76: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 8 .....	207
Figure 4.77: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 8 .....	208
Figure 4.78: Grayson, Sophia, John, James, Robin, Jake, 2010, Observation 9.....	210
Figure 4.79: Grayson, Sophia, James, Morgan, Jake, 2010, Observation 9 .....	210
Figure 4.80: Grayson, Jake, James, Sean, Sophia, 2010, Observation 9 .....	211
Figure 4.81: Grayson, Sophia, Robin, Sean, 2010, Observation 9 .....	211
Figure 4.82: Grayson, Jake, Morgan, Sean, James, John, 2010, Observation 9 .....	212
Figure 4.83: Grayson, Jake, Sophia, Morgan, James, Sean, John, 2010, Observation 9 .....	212
Figure 4.84: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 9 .....	213
Figure 4.85: Grayson, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Observation 10.....	214
Figure 4.86: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 10 .....	216
Figure 4.87: Grayson, Mark, Morgan, 2010, Observation 11.....	217
Figure 4.88: Mary, Evan, Sophia, Robin, 2010, Observation 11 .....	217
Figure 4.89: Mark, John, Evan, Morgan, Mary, Jake, 2010, Observation 11.....	218
Figure 4.90: Grayson, Jake, Sean, Sophia, Mark, John, 2010, Observation 11.....	218
Figure 4.91: Grayson, Mark, Jake, John, 2010, Observation 11 .....	219
Figure 4.92: Grayson, Jake, 2010, Observation 11 .....	219
Figure 4.93: Grayson, Jake, 2010, Observation 11 .....	220
Figure 4.94: Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 11 .....	220
Figure 4.95: Grayson, Sophia, Travis, Jake, Robin, 2010, Observation 11 .....	221
Figure 4.96: Grayson, 2010, Observation 11 .....	221
Figure 4.97: Grayson, 2010, Observation 11 .....	222
Figure 4.98: Grayson, 2010, Observation 11 .....	222
Figure 4.99: Grayson, Mark, Jake, 2010, Observation 11 .....	223
Figure 4.100: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 11 .....	224
Figure 4.101: Grayson, Faith, Jake, Carl, 2010, Observation 12.....	225
Figure 4.102: Mark, Travis, 2010, Observation 12.....	225
Figure 4.103: John, Mary, 2010, Observation 12 .....	226
Figure 4.104: Grayson, Mark, Morgan, Faith, 2010, Observation 12 .....	226
Figure 4.105: Faith, John, Cathy, Robin, 2010, Observation 12 .....	227
Figure 4.106: Grayson, Faith, Morgan, Amy, 2010, Observation 12 .....	227
Figure 4.107: Travis, Mark, 2010, Observation 12.....	228

Figure 4.108: Grayson, Faith, John, Cathy, Robin, 2010, Observation 12.....	229
Figure 4.109: Grayson, Faith, Mark, Mary, 2010, Observation 12 .....	229
Figure 4.110: Grayson, Cathy, 2010, Observation 12 .....	230
Figure 4.111: Grayson, Morgan, 2010, Observation 12 .....	230
Figure 4.112: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 12 .....	231
Figure 4.113: Grayson, Mark, Jake, James, Morgan, Robin, 2011, Observation 13.....	232
Figure 4.114: Jake, Kirk, James, Cathy, 2011, Observation 13.....	232
Figure 4.115: Travis, John, Kirk, Sophia, Cathy, 2011, Observation 13.....	233
Figure 4.116: John, Morgan, Robin, Travis, Mark, 2011, Observation 13.....	233
Figure 4.117: Morgan, John, Jake, 2011, Observation 13 .....	234
Figure 4.118: Morgan, Cathy, Jared, Jake, 2011, Observation 13.....	234
Figure 4.119: Greene, 2011, Reflection to Observation 13 .....	235
Figure 4.120: Travis, Jake, Morgan, Sophia, Mark, Mary, 2011, Observation 14 .....	236
Figure 4.121: Morgan, Mary, John, 2011, Observation 14.....	236
Figure 4.122: Jake, Travis, Sophia, Brad, Mark, 2011, Observation 14.....	237
Figure 4.123: Greene, 2011, Reflection to Observation 14 .....	237
Figure 4.124: Cathy, Evan, Susan, 2010, Focus Group1 .....	240
Figure 4.125: Faith, James, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	240
Figure 4.126: Morgan, James, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	241
Figure 4.127: Cathy, Jared, Morgan, Evan, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	241
Figure 4.128: Susan, Morgan, Cathy, Evan, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	242
Figure 4.129: Morgan, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	242
Figure 4.130: Cathy, Faith, Morgan, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	243
Figure 4.131: Evan, Jared, Morgan, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	243
Figure 4.132: Faith, Travis, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	244
Figure 4.133: Morgan, Evan, Susan, James, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	244
Figure 4.134: Jared, Evan, Morgan, Cathy, Travis, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	245
Figure 4.135: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Focus Group 1 .....	245
Figure 4.136: John, Alice, Sean, Karen, Jake, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	246
Figure 4.137: John, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	247
Figure 4.138: Alice, Sophia, John, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	247
Figure 4.139: Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	248

Figure 4.140: Mark, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	248
Figure 4.141: Mark, Sophia, Alice, John, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	249
Figure 4.142: Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	249
Figure 4.143: Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	250
Figure 4.144: John, Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	250
Figure 4.145: John, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	251
Figure 4.146: John, Sophia, Alice, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	251
Figure 4.147: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Focus Group 2.....	252
Figure 4.148: Robin, Brad, Carl, 2011, Focus Group 3.....	253
Figure 4.149: Kirk, Amy, Robin, Brad, Carl, Mary, 2011, Focus Group 3.....	253
Figure 4.150: Mark, Robin, Kirk, 2011, Focus Group 3 .....	254
Figure 4.151: Brad, Mary, Robin, 2011, Focus Group 3 .....	254
Figure 4.152: Amy, Robin, Carl, 2011, Focus Group 3.....	255
Figure 4.153: Mary, Robin, Kirk, 2011, Focus Group 3 .....	255
Figure 4.154: Greene, Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview .....	256
Figure 4.155: Greene, Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview .....	257
Figure 4.156: Greene, Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview .....	257
Figure 4.156: Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview.....	258
Figure 5.1: Faith, Morgan, Cathy, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	272
Figure 5.2: Evan, Morgan, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	273
Figure 5.3: Travis, Faith, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	273
Figure 5.4: John, Alice, Sean, Karen, Mark, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	274
Figure 5.5: John, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	275
Figure 5.6: Grayson, Susan, Amy, Mark, Evan, 2010, Observation 6 .....	278
Figure 5.7: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 7 .....	279
Figure 5.8: John, Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	280
Figure 5.9: Greene, Sophia, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	281
Figure 5.10: Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	281
Figure 5.11: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 7 .....	282
Figure 5.12: Tyler, Jake, Sophia, Mark, Morgan, John, 2010, Observation 2.....	283
Figure 5.13: Grayson, 2010, Observation 9.....	284
Figure 5.14: Carl, Mary, Mark, 2010, Observation 9 .....	284

Figure 5.15: Grayson, 2010, Observation 9 .....	285
Figure 5.16: Mark, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	286
Figure 5.17: Mark, Sophia, John, Alice, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	286
Figure 5.18: Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	287
Figure 5.19: Grayson, Jake, Mary, 2010, Observation 2 .....	288
Figure 5.20: Grayson, 2010, Observation 2.....	289
Figure 5.21: Jake, Mark, John, Travis, 2010, Observation 2.....	289
Figure 5.22: Grayson, 2010, Observation 2.....	290
Figure 5.23: Grayson, 2010, Observation 6.....	295
Figure 5.24: Greene, Drawing 25 .....	295
Figure 5.25: Greene, Travis, Jake, Morgan, Sophia, Mark, Mary, 2011, Observation 14 .....	297
Figure 5.26: Jared, Evan, Cathy, Morgan, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	298
Figure 5.27: Susan, Morgan, Cathy, Evan, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	298
Figure 5.28: Morgan, Evan, Cathy, James, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1.....	300
Figure 5.29: Evan, Jared, Taylor, Cathy, Travis, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	300
Figure 5.30: Grayson, 2010, Observation 1 .....	302
Figure 5.31: Grayson, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Observation 7.....	304
Figure 5.32: Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 7.....	304
Figure 5.33: Grayson, 2010, Observation 10.....	307
Figure 5.34: Mark, Jake, Sophia, Travis, Mary, Carl, 2011, Observation 14.....	309
Figure 5.35: Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 2 .....	311
Figure 5.36: Grayson, Sophia, Faith, 2010, Observation 2.....	312
Figure 5.37: Grayson, Jake, Morgan, 2010, Observation 2 .....	314
Figure 5.38: Grayson, Sophia, James, 2010, Observation 2.....	314
Figure 5.39: Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 2.....	315
Figure 5.40: Mark, Sophia, Faith, 2010, Observation 2 .....	315
Figure 5.41: Mark, Sophia, Travis, 2010, Observation 1 .....	316
Figure 5.42: Grayson, Robin, 2010, Observation 3 .....	317
Figure 5.43: Grayson, 2010, Observation 8.....	318
Figure 5.44: Sophia, Morgan, Jake, Jared, 2010, Observation 8 .....	318
Figure 5.45: Grayson, Travis, Jake, Morgan, James, John, Brad, 2010, Observation 8.....	319
Figure 5.46: Grayson, Jake, Faith, 2010, Observation 12.....	320

Figure 5.47: Grayson, Mark, Travis, 2010, Observation 12 .....	320
Figure 5.48: Grayson, Faith, Jake, Travis, Robin, 2010, Observation 12.....	321
Figure 5.49: Grayson, Morgan, Cathy, Jared, Jake, 2011, Observation 13 .....	322
Figure 5.50: Grayson, 2010, Observation 8.....	323
Figure 5.51: Jake, Sophia, James, Morgan, John, 2010, Observation 8 .....	324
Figure 5.52: Grayson, Mark, Sophia, Jake, 2010, Observation 8.....	324
Figure 5.53: Grayson, Mark, Jake, Sophia, John, 2010, Observation 8 .....	325
Figure 5.54: Morgan, Susan, Evan, James, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1.....	325
Figure 5.55: Grayson, 2010, Observation 9.....	326
Figure 5.56: Grayson, 2010, Observation 9.....	327
Figure 5.57: Grayson, 2010, Observation 9.....	327
Figure 5.58: Grayson, Jake, 2010, Observation 9.....	328
Figure 5.59: Grayson, Mary, 2010, Observation 9 .....	328
Figure 5.60: Grayson, Mary, Sophia, 2010, Observation 8 .....	329
Figure 5.61: Grayson, Mary, Sophia, John, 2010, Observation 8.....	330
Figure 5.62: Grayson, Karen, 2010, Observation 8 .....	330
Figure 5.63: Evan, Morgan, Cathy, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	333
Figure 5.64: Robin, Jared, Carl, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	333
Figure 5.65: Greene, Cathy, Evan, Morgan, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	336
Figure 5.66: Greene, Robin, Brad, Carl, 2011, Focus Group 3 .....	337
Figure 5.67: Greene, Amy, Robin, Carl, 2011, Focus Group 3.....	337
Figure 5.68: Greene, John, Kirk, Sophia, Morgan, Cathy, 2011, Observation 14.....	338
Figure 5.69: Greene, Robin, Travis, Mark, 2011, Observation 14 .....	338
Figure 5.70: Grayson, Greene, 2010, Planning Session 3 .....	341
Figure 5.71: Grayson, Jake, 2010, Observation 11 .....	343
Figure 5.72: Grayson, Jake, 2010, Observation 11 .....	343
Figure 5.73: Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 11 .....	344
Figure 5.74: Greene, 2010, Observation 11 .....	345
Figure 5.75: Grayson, Mark, Jake, 2010, Observation 11 .....	345
Figure 5.76: Grayson, Sophia, Travis, Jake, Robin, 2011, Observation 11.....	346
Figure 5.77: Mark, Travis, 2010, Observation 12.....	347
Figure 5.78: Grayson, Jake, Faith, Travis, Sophia, 2010, Observation 12 .....	347

Figure 5.79: Grayson, Jake, Mark, Morgan, 2010, Observation 12 .....	348
Figure 5.80: Grayson, Cathy, 2010, Observation 12 .....	348
Figure 5.81: Morgan, Cathy, Jared, Jake, 2011, Observation 13.....	349
Figure 5.82: Morgan, Mary, John, 2011, Observation 14.....	351
Figure 5.83: Jake, Travis, Faith, Sophia, Brad, Mark, 2011, Observation 14 .....	351
Figure 5.84: Susan, Morgan, Cathy, Evan, Jared, James, 2010, Focus Group 1 .....	356
Figure 5.85: Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	357
Figure 5.86: Alice, Sophia, John, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	358
Figure 5.87: Sophia, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	359
Figure 5.88: Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 3 .....	360
Figure 5.89: Grayson, Jake, Mark, 2010, Observation 3 .....	361
Figure 5.90: Grayson, Mark, Sophia, 2010, Observation 3 .....	361
Figure 5.91: John, Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	362
Figure 5.92: John, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	363
Figure 5.93: John, Sophia, Alice, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	363
Figure 5.94: Greene, Grayson, 2010, Planning Session 2 .....	366
Figure 5.95: Grayson, 2010, Planning Session 2.....	367
Figure 5.96: Grayson, 2010, Observation 2.....	368
Figure 5.97: Morgan, Evan, Cathy, James, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1.....	368
Figure 5.98: John, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	369
Figure 5.99: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 1 .....	369
Figure 5.100: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 2 .....	370
Figure 5.101: Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 3 .....	370
Figure 5.102: Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview.....	371
Figure 5.103: John, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	377
Figure 5.104: Alice, Sophia, John, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	377
Figure 5.105: Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	378
Figure 5.106: John, Jake, Alice, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	378
Figure 5.107: John, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	379
Figure 5.108: Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2.....	380
Figure 5.109: Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	381
Figure 5.110: John, Sophia, Cathy, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2 .....	382

Figure 5.111: Cathy, Robin, Kirk, 2011, Focus Group 3 .....	383
Figure 5.112: Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview.....	383
Figure 5.113: Greene, Mark, 2011, Observation 14 .....	385
Figure 5.114: Greene, 2011, Reflections .....	385
Figure 5.115: Greene, 2011, Reflections .....	386

## CHAPTER ONE

Artie: “It’s an important book. People who don’t usually read such stories will be interested.” Vladek: “Yes. I don’t read Ever such comics, and even I am interested” (Spiegelman, 1986, p. 135).

The field of adolescent literacy has been limited by curricular approaches that demand reducing learning to a set of skills, allowing the definition of quality education and achievement to resemble a production line of standards and testing. Adolescents have faced expectations related to significant increases in content reading and demands on comprehension with little or no support related to specific reading instruction. More and more reading is devoted to rote meaning and literal comprehension. There is little question that adolescents have been placed on the back burner or ignored when consideration is made toward quality reading instruction. The idea that there needs to be improvement made in reading instruction is not new. Over and over again we have heard the declarations of politicians that American school children are not competing in the international arena because of low levels of achievement. Allington (2002) suggests that “media reports on what high school or college students don’t know have been an almost annual event for the better part of the past century” (p. 3). Much of this leads to legislation and rhetoric designed to control and manipulate educational systems that create frameworks for reading instruction that decrease motivation and limit critical thinking opportunities for the adolescent reader while increasing behavioral issues of boredom, confrontation, rebellion, and loss of control.



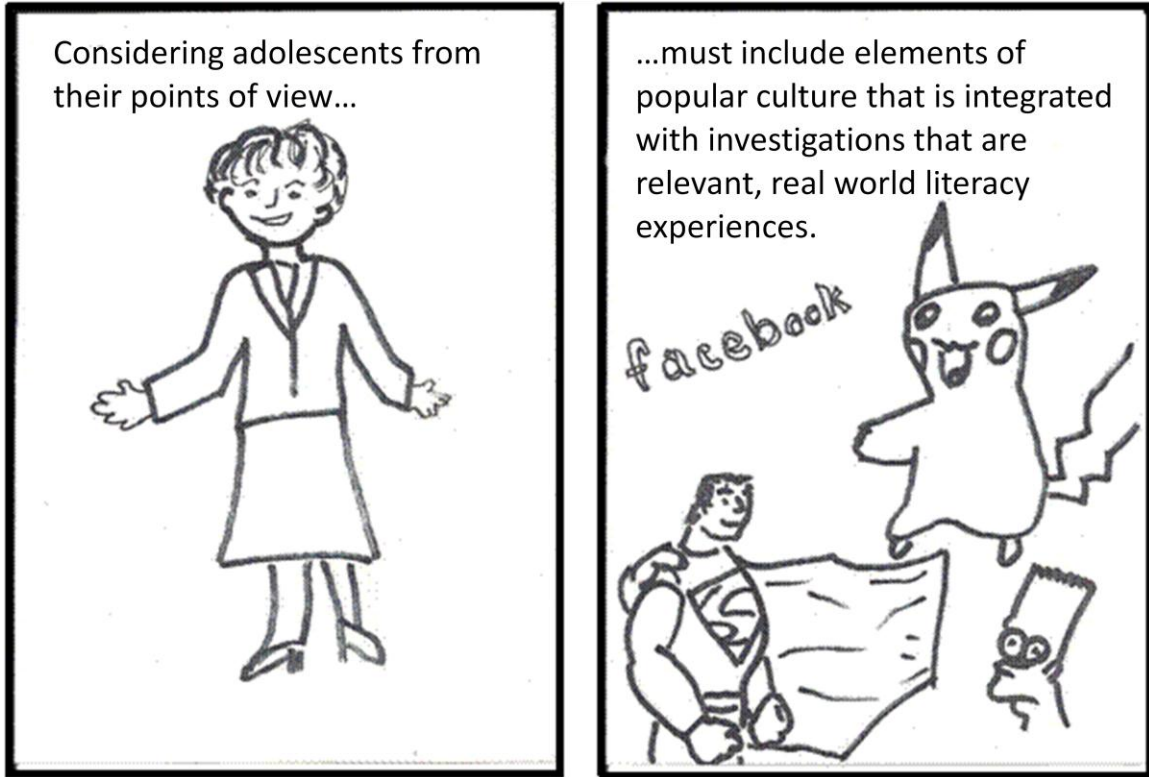


Figure 1.1

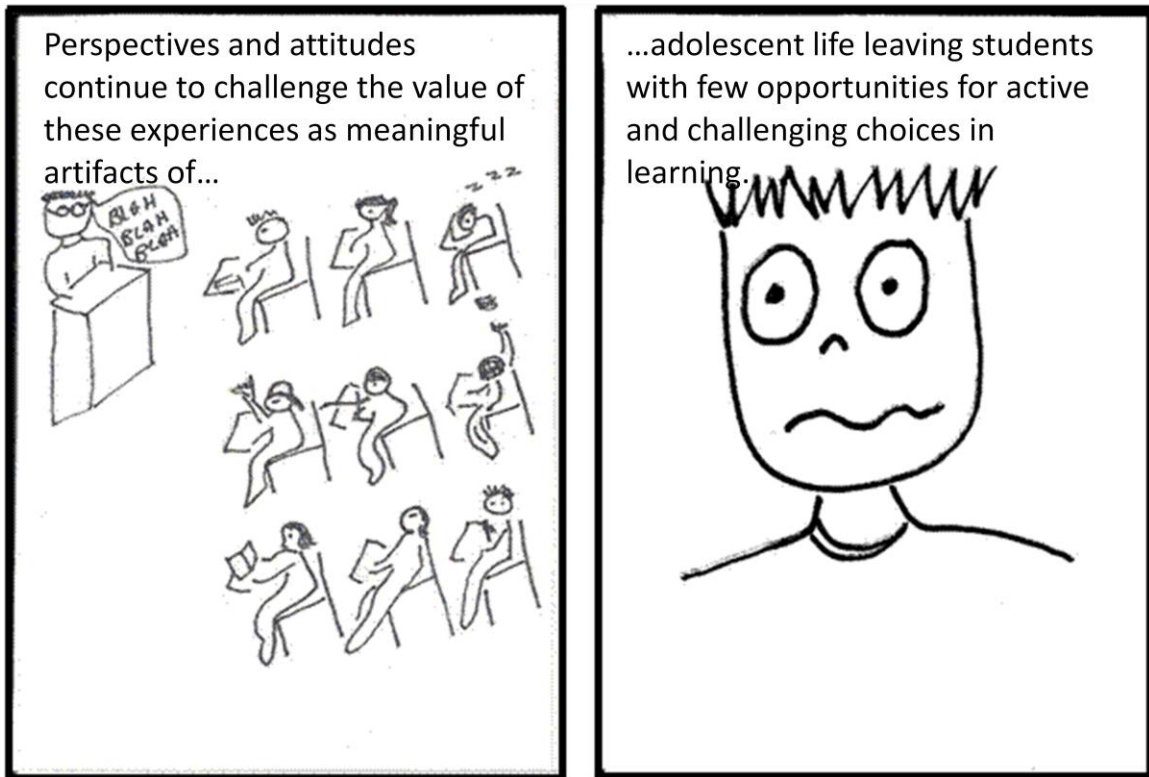


Figure 1.2

This study has endeavored to view reading instruction through a more critical lens and support adolescent literacy and motivation by including the use of graphic novels. Considering this medium in adolescent reading instruction provided a differing viewpoint when relating reading to social and community issues of critical literacy. Maxine Greene (1988) suggests “that there may be an integral relationship between reaching out to learn and the search that involves a pursuit of freedom” (p. 124). The specific medium of graphic novels utilizes visual and textual cues to invoke meaning and provoke thought thus sparking that reach to learn. However, graphic novels and comic books have long been relegated to the closet, hidden under the desk, and given the distinction of frivolous material unworthy of inclusion in the classroom among claims in the past by Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) that comics promoted delinquent behavior. Traditional mindsets that place comics and graphic novels in the realm of trivial and meaningless miss the opportunity to utilize the power of visual storytelling or narrative graphics as another tool toward adolescent literacy that supports the need for relevance often made through popular culture.

### **Context of the Study**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has created a sense of heightened accountability and data-driven instruction. It has also created a classroom focused on standards, limited choice related to those standards, and a structure that does not foster learning or creativity (Allington, 2002; Goodman, 2004; Shannon, 2004, 2007). One of the strategic decisions of NCLB was the formation of the National Reading Panel in 2000. The reading panel was constructed to evaluate scientific evidence and make recommendations regarding reading instruction for American schools. These

recommendations have formed the basis for decision making at the national, state and local levels controlling and determining instruction. One of the problems with the findings from the National Reading Panel was the prevailing idea that reading is a fixed process and can only be achieved through specific and direct phonics instruction in the early grades with an approach that appears to present a one-size-fits-all standard. There is very little emphasis given to the adolescent reader from this panel leaving this age group with the assumption that what must work for one age group must also work for another. Researchers in adolescent literacy suggest otherwise and declare the need for further work specifically related to adolescent literacy that is provided through a social context and critical understanding.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was given the charge by Congress to “convene a national panel to assess the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read” (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2001, p. 1). The members focused on the areas, or pillars, of Alphabets, Fluency, Comprehension, Teachers Education, Reading Instruction, and Computer Technology. Each of these pillars of reading was assessed through a review of research literature that focused clearly on “qualitative analysis to provide the best possible information about an instructional reading approach or program” (NICHD, 2001, p. 5). The body of research related to the adolescent reader indicates a variety of both quantitative and qualitative findings. Given the National Reading Panel’s limitations on research to include only quantitative, clinically reproducible studies, it openly admits the narrow and limited conclusions for this age reader.

What is wrong with utilizing this approach? Can teaching strategies and student responses be reproduced outside of a clinical setting, and if so, is it what constitutes appropriate learning or appropriate teaching for that matter? One-size-fits-all approaches restrict the thinking processes of the students and assume all children are developmentally the same.

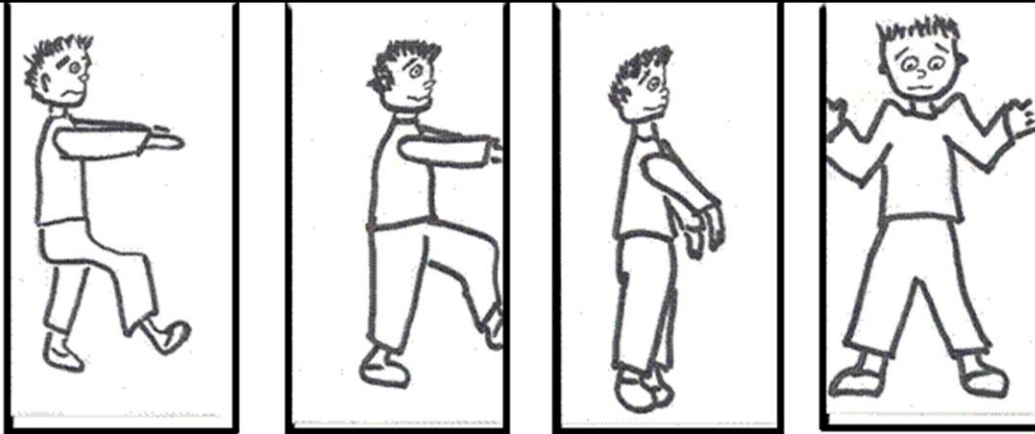


Figure 1.3

Teachers may be provided a scripted manual of what to do, when to do it, and what not to do. In essence, this deskills the teacher and drops them to a level of “encyclopedic robots, with little or no understanding...



...of why they [are] doing what they [are] doing. The experimental methods might satisfy the cultural rituals of the research community but would produce little of value, and much probable harm to the professional life of the teacher” (Nuthall, 2005, p. 900).



Figure 1.4

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that:

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. (p. 13)

In stressing these aspects of research, there is a conflict between what is considered true and reliable when dealing with social constructs. However, there is a balance to be secured within this research tension that raises the cry for more qualitative work related to this social experience.

Creative teachers continue to be provided oversimplified competency-based approaches and resemble a more technically oriented training in teaching students. Current programs designed to move adults quickly from the business world into teaching positions provide less understanding of adolescent student learning and learning styles and more of a technical approach expected to prepare students for the world of work. Very little concern is directed toward approaches that foster critical understandings that allow students to question and explore interpretive encounters with literature that lead to an explanation of the challenges and oppressions in students' lives and cultures. Close examination, questions and confrontation with issues and struggles of peoples "who articulated such struggles is to come in touch with people attune to deep currents in the culture, currents of feeling and thinking not yet visible on the surfaces of life" (Greene, 1978, p. 38). As a result, students and teachers become indoctrinated into a mundane world focused on irrelevancies and basics with little connectedness to themselves and their own places in society. Warily, teachers find themselves as "clerks" within

classrooms with little “time, nor energy, nor inclination to urge their students to critical reflection; they, themselves, have suppressed the questions and avoided backward looks” (p. 38) which closes the doors and windows of imagination and critical comprehension and buries teachers in paperwork and politically based educational standards.

We currently categorize those readers who appear to have difficulty with comprehension and reading as “struggling.” Education has a long history of attempting to categorize and label students into manageable groups intended to present and teach material in orderly packages with desired outcomes and specific goal-setting tied to structured curriculum and focused learning. Mary Doll (2000) suggests that “one cannot have one’s imagination released when one is boxed in and tied down by defining rules” (p. 165). Within this framework students’ responses to reading are influenced by “(a) her perception of her abilities as a reader, (b) how she wants to be seen as a reader, and (c) her desire to comprehend and learn from text” (Hall, 2006, p.425). Each of these areas lends credence to the thought that reading is more than just a process in the acquisition of skills and presents the position of reading as a social experience and necessary in applying relevance and choice related to students’ lives in their literacy experiences. The idea that our imaginations are limited to spare time experiences and the trivial pursuit of enjoyment must be reconsidered in thinking about how we view popular culture and the effect it has on our students whether we understand it or not.

Teachers of adolescents often find themselves making assumptions about control in the classroom and in choices of reading material. Alexander Nehamas (1985) speaks of the perspectives of Nietzsche when he suggests that “everything one does is equally crucial to who one is” (p. 7). Assumptions are made by administrators, teachers, and

often parents as well that require a certain standard of behavior, a certain format of instruction, mastery of a specific skill set which are all very organized into a curriculum focused on outcomes and misleading definitions of achievement. These assumptions tend to ignore research based insights into how children and adolescents learn and codify resulting expectations into rules of learning and mastery.

Concerns with discipline tend to overshadow curriculum planning that enhances the discovery of diverse questions, beliefs, and values that support student identity. Bean (1998) recognizes that:

Attitude toward reading influences frequency of reading, and frequency of reading assists comprehension. Despite being faced with serious social issues related to racism, citizenship, and a host of other concerns, the many powerful young adult novels related to these issues are absent from conversations about school reading. (p. 158)

The field of adolescent reading has recognized the need to bring critical literacy to the table, however, road-blocks to the discussion often interfere with the addition of problem-based young adult novels because “issues of power and status often get shoved aside in the curriculum precisely because they generate controversy” (p. 159). The identity of an adolescent learner is measured by the social structures to which she believes she belongs or would like to belong. These structures are restricted even more to the frameworks and boundaries of traditional curriculum and definitions of who achieves and who struggles. The controversies of power, race, culture, religion, and prejudice are necessary to provoke learning, and challenge thoughts, values, and beliefs all of which are important to adolescent learning and break the boundaries set by those traditional frameworks.

Critical literacy requires a view of text beyond the words that question those words as they relate to the world. Adolescents are faced with significant social issues that affect their day to day lives. Searle (1993) posits that “the teaching of reading and writing in schools, as opposed to the teaching of literacy in schools, has only rarely been concerned with the development of a critical consciousness among children” (p. 172). Dealing with text from a critical perspective that is “based on the premise that the social negotiations of the rules of proper behavior, laws, and social institutions are not conducted among equals because social, economic, and political circumstances have given certain groups license to assert undue influence over the outcomes” (Shannon, 1995, pp. 62-63) stretch the viewpoints of standard curriculum and require insight into power struggles and inequalities. Apple (1993) recognizes that:

Texts are really messages to and about the future. As part of a curriculum, they participate in no less than the organized knowledge system of society. They participate in creating what a society has recognized as legitimate and truthful. They help set the canons of truthfulness and, as such, also help recreate a major reference point for what knowledge, culture, belief and morality really are. (p. 198)

The bureaucratic desire to reduce reading to a set of skills rather than view it from a conceptual standpoint that opens language to a means of understanding the world rather than passing a test forces students to then view their world from a stagnant, packaged point of view.

Paulo Freire (1970) in his work with the Brazilian people sees text as a reflection of social inequities that must be questioned and that “to surmount the situation of



oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (p. 47). Mastery of skills is not the issue in a critical pedagogy that includes social awareness and a dialogue with text.

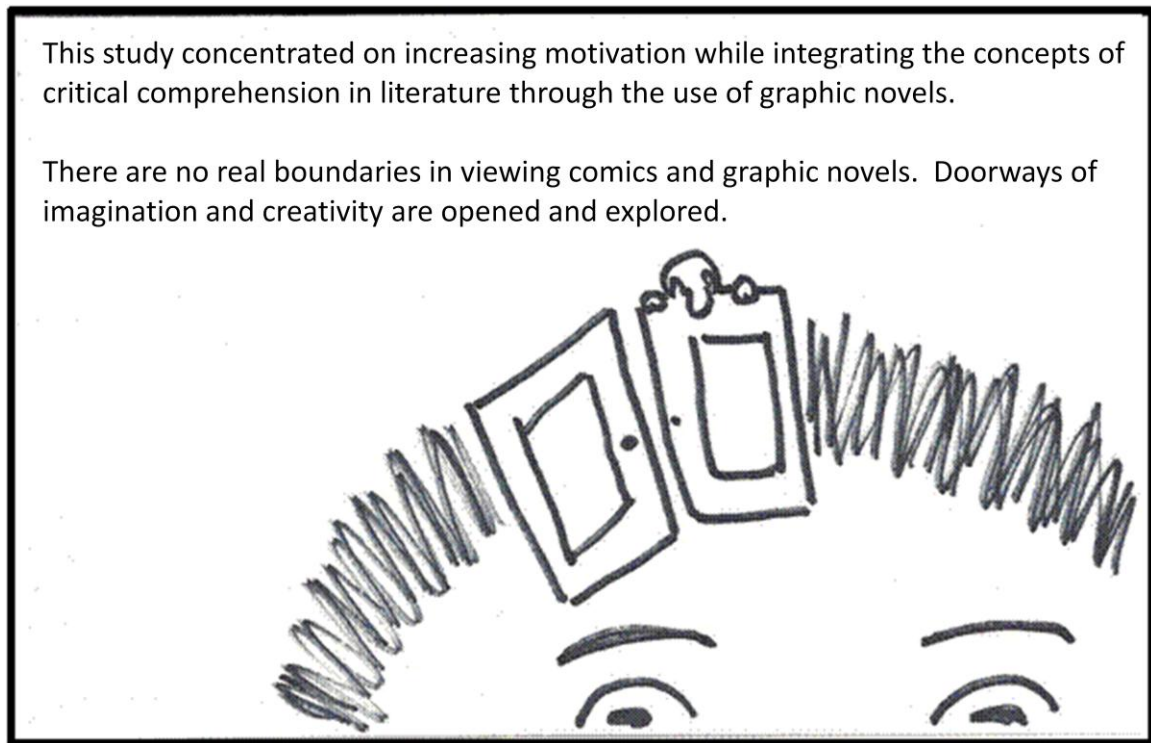


Figure 1.5

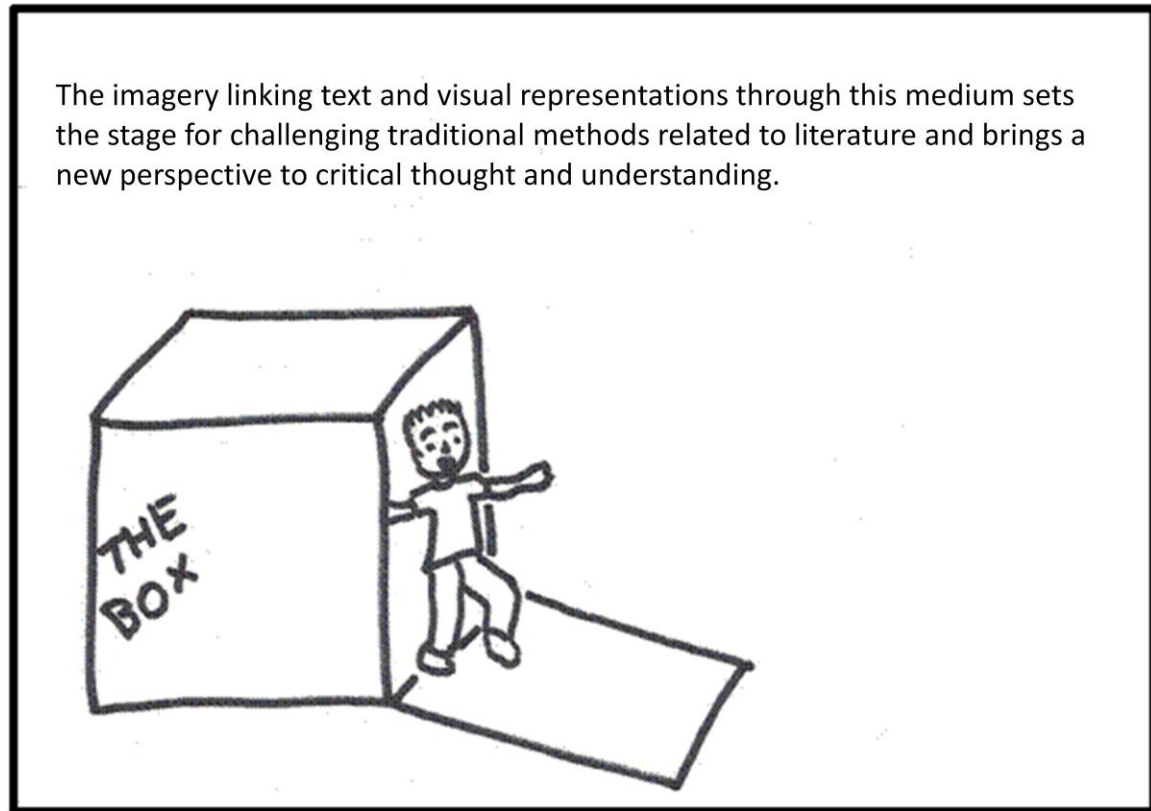


Figure 1.6

Greene (1995) challenges us to remember that “imagination may be our primary means of forming an understanding of what goes on under the heading of ‘reality’; imagination may be responsible for the very texture of our experience” (p. 140). Allowing our realities to be questioned through the art of graphic novels, the images that evoke meaning and understanding, and the narrative that blends the story with our imaginations, our experiences, and the expansion of ideas creates a natural position for evaluating adolescent learning from a point of view found in popular culture. This effectively blends visual and textual cues and breaks the boundaries of former labels and categories in education.

Comprehensive investigations into social conditions that make meaning from text and draw the reader into conversations and dialogue that pierces stereotypes and

questions what is considered “normal” must go beyond the limitations of standards and programs for students. Fear, misunderstanding, values and beliefs often interfere with the curricular structures within schools. Giroux (1993) suggests:

It is crucial for educators to link a politics of literacy and difference to a theory of social welfare and cultural democracy. At the very least, this means that educators must work to insert the idea of difference into the curriculum as part of an attempt to rearticulate the ideas of justice and equality. (p. 375)

Opening a new conversation that includes alternative texts such as comics and graphic novels forces a crack in the traditions of the old and allows for the introduction of a viewpoint that examines the world and people within their culture from a differing perspective.

### **Purpose**

Standards, essential questions, testing, and accountability are all measured in skill levels of achievement. Each level is meticulously outlined in what is expected. Pacing guides and curriculum maps order the teaching and stipulate what should be learned when and in some programs how learning is to be achieved as well. Shippen, Houchins, Calhoon, Furlow and Sartor (2006) suggest that this model has been adopted by many schools and “is based on the premise that there is a single systematic process that will help schools improve achievement for all students” (p. 322). Certainly, one would expect to find measurable results and unquestioned data to support academic achievement plans, but how does this current line of thinking fit with what motivates and fosters continued growth in reading content for adolescent readers?

The purpose of this study was to investigate adolescents' motivation and engagement of literacy practices when graphic novels and comic books are used to inquire into social and community issues of critical literacy. Traditional notions of reading instruction commonly view text from the point of view of print versus non-print material. These notions rarely integrate visual depictions in significant teaching and learning situations designed to increase reading comprehension and motivation in adolescent readers.

This study took the non-standard approach to reading instruction by combining the use of graphic novels with strategies related to comprehension and critical understandings. The use of a case study approach allowed the researcher to observe and participate in teaching and learning situations utilizing critical literacy from the point of view of a graphic novel and comic format. This teaching style activates the social and historical impact of graphic novels thus contributing to the students' deeper understanding of the material and provided an increased level of motivation and insight.

Rich examples of visual narrative that open imaginative doorways of critical review allow adolescent students to utilize such thought in an effort to "question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps the very life [they] are living at that moment" (Rich, 2001, p. 21). Whether one considers graphic novels and comics as art or not, they are conceived in the imagination and often grow freely into dynamic representations of ideas. Maxine Greene (1995) challenges us that "we must seek more shocks of awareness as the time goes on, more explorations, more adventures into meaning, more active and uneasy participation in the human community's unending quest" (p. 151). That being said, examples of graphic depictions and visual storytelling

present material in ways that lead to thoughtful pondering and discussion and support the contexts of discussion related to the social, moral, and political contexts of critical literacy. Stories produced through and in conjunction with sequential art pull the imagination into new realities in which to consider and often challenge personal roles and belief systems related to social frameworks and boundaries. Teachers and students must demonstrate the courage to recognize that. Doll (2000) writes:

The story, if it is a real story, takes us into a vertical dimension of ourselves where perhaps we have not journeyed before. It is alien, often terrifying; different, often embarrassing; strange, often unbelievable. Story provides a place to react violently or sublimely, for it touches another word. To journey to another storied world necessarily involves letting preformed ego habits die a bit in the head...the venture—like good teaching—is dangerous. (p. 29)

Given the limitless boundaries of comics and graphic novels, the journey is both dangerous and exciting.

### **Research Questions**

An inquiry utilizing graphic novels and settled in the framework of critical literacy suggests the following research questions:

1. What impact do graphic novels and comic books structured around traditional literature have on motivation?
2. How does the integration of graphic novels support the engagement and motivation of adolescent readers?
3. Where does the graphic novel and comic book fit in the theoretical basis of critical literacy?

### **Autobiographical Roots**

I did not grow up with comics under my bed. I enjoyed reading them from the Sunday papers and had my favorites in *Blondie*, *Beetle Bailey*, and *Brenda Starr*. We were allowed one or two *Archie* comics when travelling on vacation, but for me, my love was in text and books. In my world, the concept of reading has always gone beyond a collection of sounds and symbols representative of language and represents a more conceptual sense of the world through text. Reading provides windows to worlds, places, and people I have never met; it provides opportunity for considering points of view I have never felt; and it paints beautiful pictures in the imagination through the music of language. For me, reading is a long, but welcome journey.

However, perhaps it is my age, but I have found a fascination in the adventures of *Batman* particularly, an interest in the stylized stories of Manga, and in the memoirs and historical stories from *Maus*, *Persepolis* and others that have generated a new definition and meaning of reading that views text, graphics, and comprehension from a more challenging position. We find our journey as a learner impeded at times by the mundane but as Greene (2001) articulates:

[The] reflective and diverse encounters with works of art may well release and energize us...They cannot but open new perspectives on the natural and human worlds around us. We are made conscious, sometimes abruptly, of alternative modes of being alive, of relating to others, of becoming what we are not yet. (p. 99)

If reading comes from a more conceptual understanding, then Eisner's (2008) idea that reading is a "perceptual activity" that includes "the reading of pictures, maps, circuit

diagrams, [and] musical notes” (p. 2) requires a change in the strict frameworks that govern reading instruction in schools today. Comics and other forms of visual representation must find their place in the perceptual and conceptual understandings of what it means to read along with text rich opportunities for growth and learning.

There are those whose journey with text does not come easily nor with the understanding that worlds will be open, knowledge will pour in, or an escape can be made to fictional lands and places outside the stresses and disappointments of day-to-day life for some. Difficulties in adolescent reading stem from a progressive detachment from traditional skills based reading instruction and the type of reading that supports and values the world in which students live. This disconnect from artifacts of popular culture such as technology based reading, texting, blogging, social networking or entertainment magazines, contemporary writers, and comics that include single story line graphic novels often finds the adolescent reader in a quandary over their place in society and the position of those activities and artifacts in which they find the most meaning.

### **Struggles in Context**

While my particular struggles did not involve the ability to read or comprehend, I found myself in situations with my family that did affect what was read. My mother and father were married in the mid-1950s and became the parents of four daughters. They married in their thirties and were older than most of the parents of my peers. I believe their coming from an age that remembered the Great Depression, the war years, and victory gardens gave them perspectives that were unknown and at times scoffed by the parents of many of my peers.

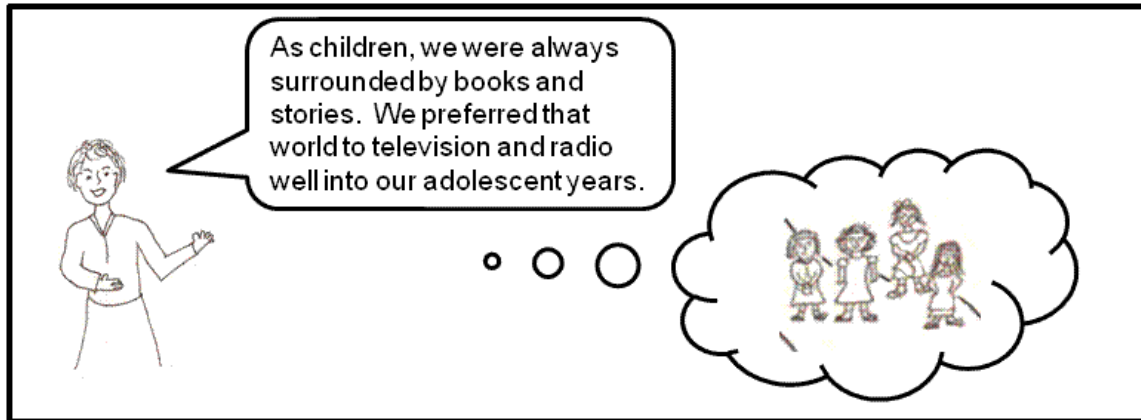


Figure 1.7

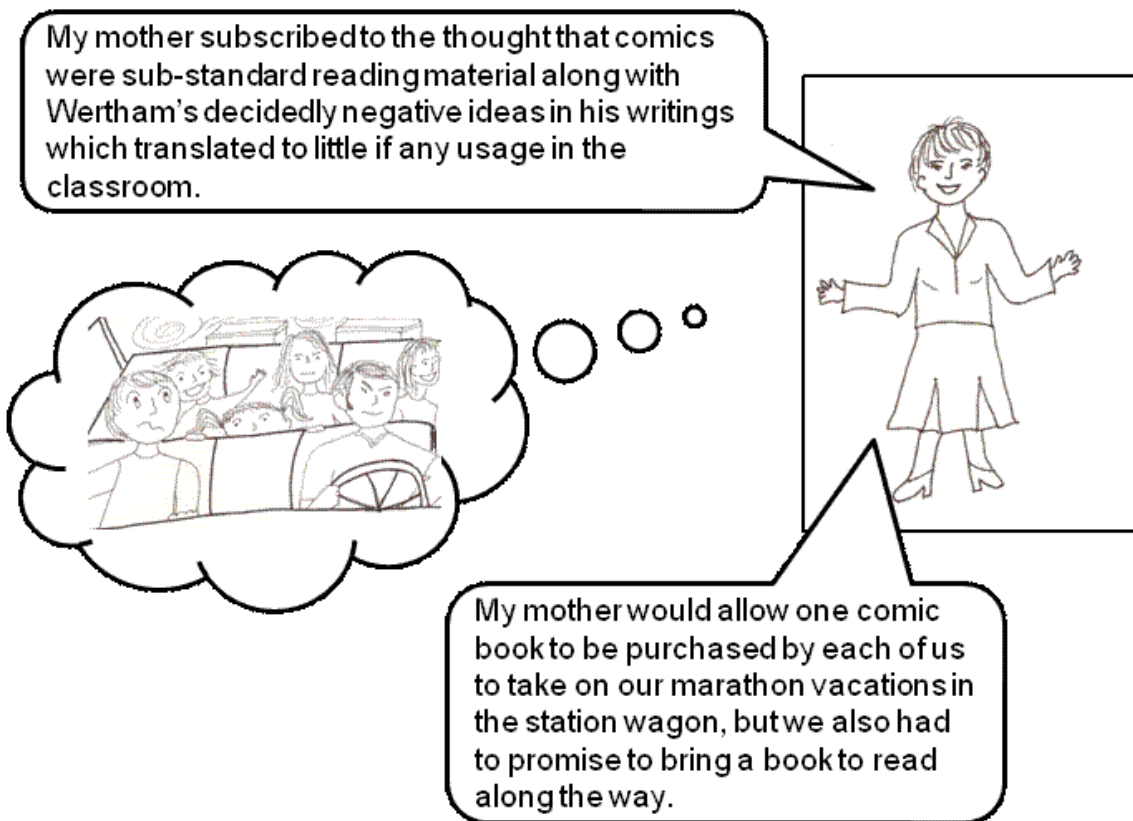


Figure 1.8

My second sister was born two years after my oldest sister. I do not know when I noticed her as different from the rest of us –or if I ever really did acknowledge that difference. To me, she was just moody and had trouble figuring things out.



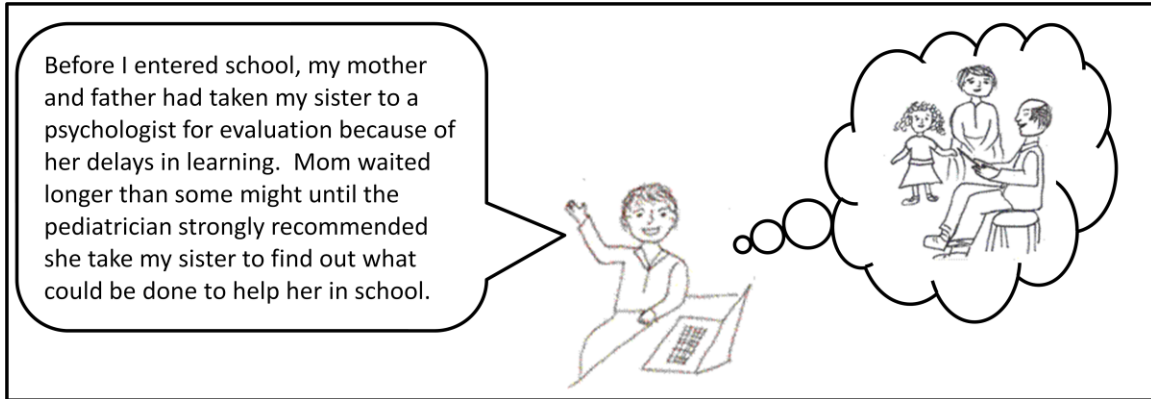


Figure 1.9

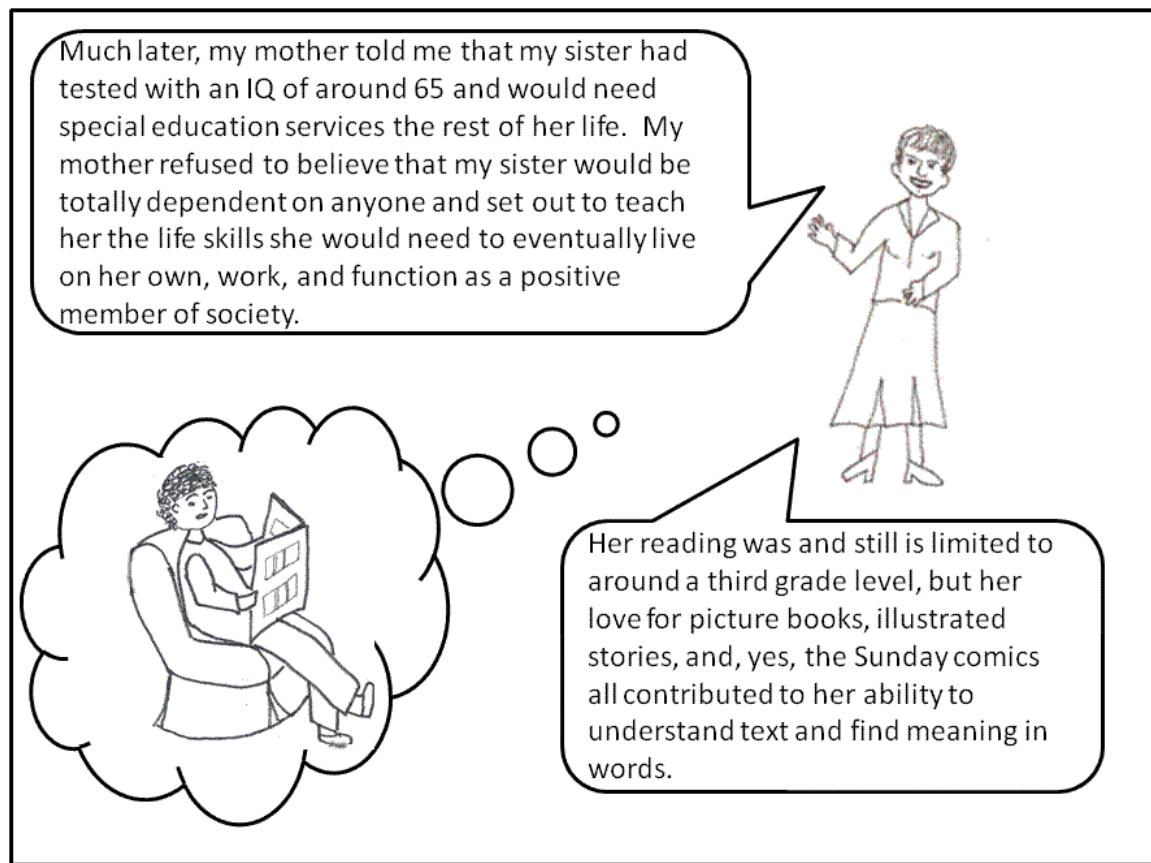


Figure 1.10

My father was a high school graduate that had immediately gone into the army upon graduation. He had never wished to go to college as far as I knew and rarely read books except westerns by Louis L'Amour. He loved those books.

He was a self-made carpenter and scanned the newspaper for plans for shelving, bookcases, and tables. Once he found what he was looking for, he would write for the plans and start working on his projects deciphering the complicated instructions and manuals as he received them.

Figure 1.11

My dad supported my mother in her efforts to provide us with a reading environment, but I still never saw him reading just for pure enjoyment in the same way as she did.



When I asked Mom why Dad did not read as many books as we did, she would tell me that he just did not like to read what he did not want to read. This challenged my thinking in what it means to struggle and be a reluctant reader.

Figure 1.12

In teacher preparation programs including my own, we are taught that our students all have different learning styles, and we must develop plans that differentiate for instruction that responds to the specific needs of the students. Yet, so often in schools and classrooms we find deliberate packaged textbooks and programs that claim success in achievement if fidelity is kept to the structure of the program. Claims occur especially around adoption years that attempt to convince school systems that a particular program or curriculum package will support all students with specific direct instruction techniques

that allow little time for creativity outside of the designed framework. What is troubling is the on-going problem with decreased motivation through the adolescent years with increased pressures on more structured learning. As was the case with my father and my sister, each carried their own needs and interests as learners that were met only outside of the school setting.

Adolescent learners today must adhere to a specific skill set per grade level that is determined by standards set forth by the state. While these standards are intentionally broad, many school systems attempt to hyper-focus instruction in the standards by teachers with the specific intention to score well on the end of year test and thus raise achievement levels. Given this narrowing of the curriculum, students are left without time for creative thought and are given minimal and superficial time toward understanding topics. Many are frustrated with little or no opportunities to view learning and discovery from a variety of critical and cultural perspectives that include the use of comics and graphics novels. The medium of comics and graphic novels supports strategies unique to reading comprehension as well as supports specific visual and textual cues designed to increase understanding.

Today, I work in a setting of middle school students but frequently find myself talking with teachers about those they consider struggling. There is a pattern of limited materials, little use of technology, and practice and drill that decreased motivation and increases behavior issues within those classrooms. These students have continued to move through classes that do not challenge or investigate alternative forms of learning such as visual representation as a means of increasing reading comprehension. Visual representation calls for the use of image and text in a binding fashion that cannot be

treated as separate disciplines since in “the skillful employment of words and images lies the expressive potential of the medium” (Eisner, 2008, p. 7) perhaps offering an alternative method of learning. Conventional definitions of “struggling,” “retarded,” “able,” and even “gifted” tend to shift and become less appropriate when less traditional and more innovative forms of teaching and learning become a process of problem-solving rather than a static measure of ability or intelligence.

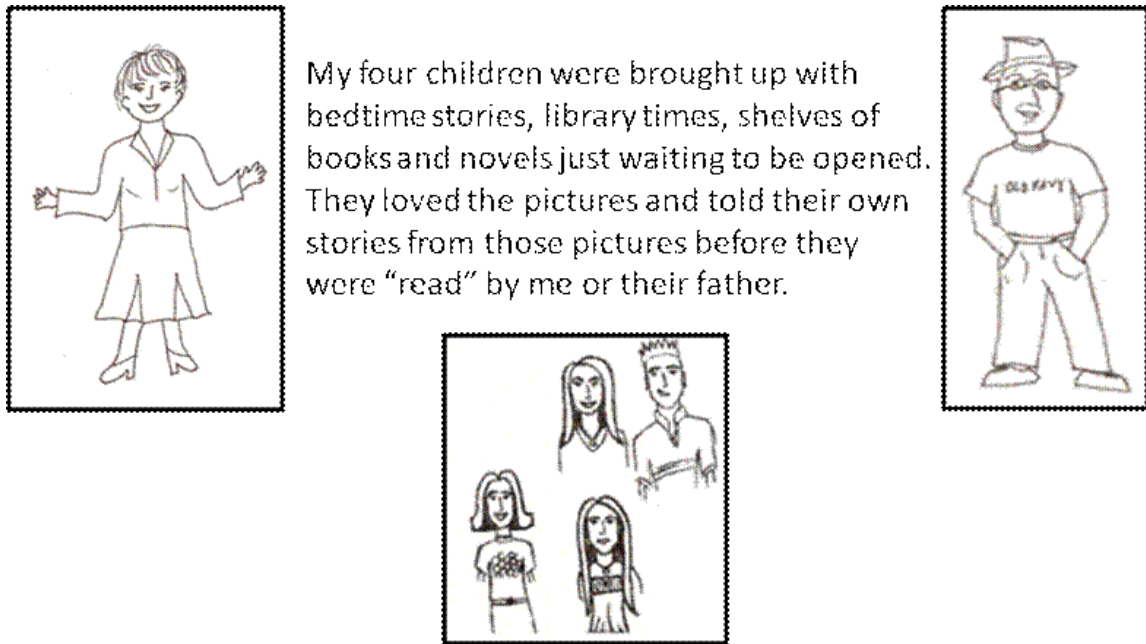


Figure 1.13

As they arrived at elementary school each was immediately required to read certain books at certain reading levels at certain times with no real regard for personal interests or ideas that were loved by my children. Their love of reading was imposed upon by a program designed to increase independent reading and improve interest and motivation. For my children it provided just the opposite and carried very devastating effects on their definitions of learning that have continued in their adult lives.

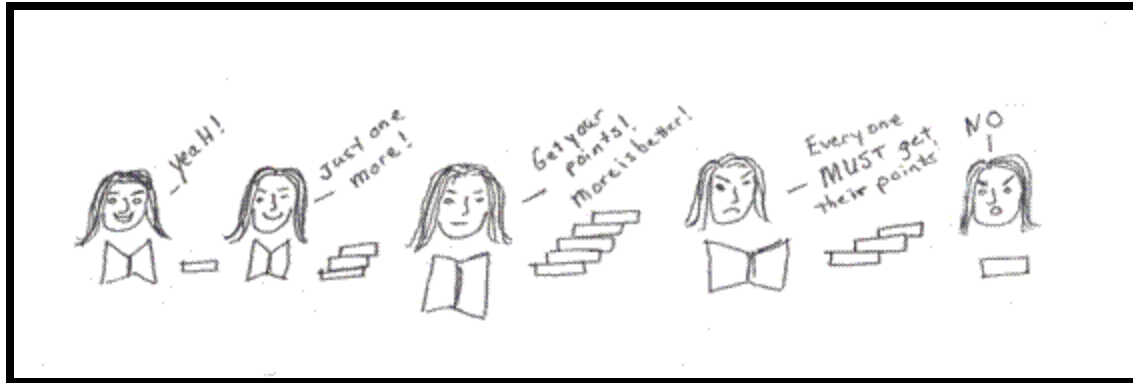


Figure 1.14



My son challenged traditional reading practice and confounded the expectations of his parents and teachers alike. Letters and words were difficult for him. He had trouble with phonemic awareness and meaning for print. This boy wanted to learn from a different point of view, but his efforts to do that did not meet with the standards of behavior or prescribed skill sets for mastery learning in the classroom.



Figure 1.15

He wanted his teachers to be happy with him, but no one would listen to what he was trying to tell them about how he saw the world and his place in it. He was punished and isolated for not complying. He was considered a behavior problem and tested to determine “learning disabilities”. None were found but the behavior labels continued throughout his schooling.

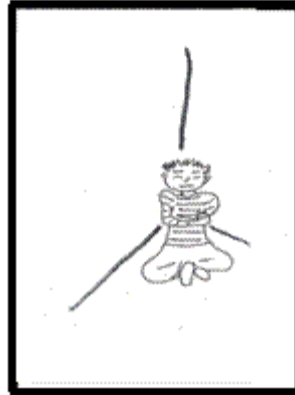


Figure 1.16

We had bug collections and bug boxes and identified each from scientific manuals and encyclopedias. My son kept a journal of what he found and where he found it. I helped him keep a box of words to use when he needed them. He was always allowed to ask me or his sister about a word when he was writing or when he was reading.

I taught my son to read by going outside, by drawing pictures, and by making connections between what he thought, saw, and read. We sat together under trees and read books about trees, insects, and plant life.

We learned about history by going to Indian mounds, museums, and historical sites. I bought the pamphlets from the gift shops and helped my kids make pamphlets of their own about what they had learned, what they had seen, and what they had read. We sat and talked with park rangers and museum representatives to ask about artifacts and anthropology, historical figures, and the people who lived in these places.

Figure 1.17

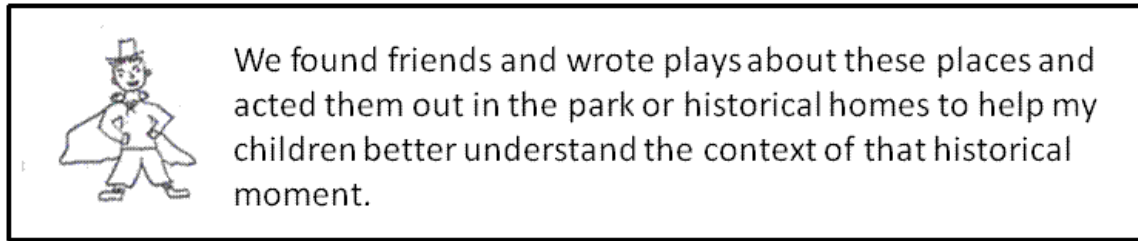


Figure 1.18

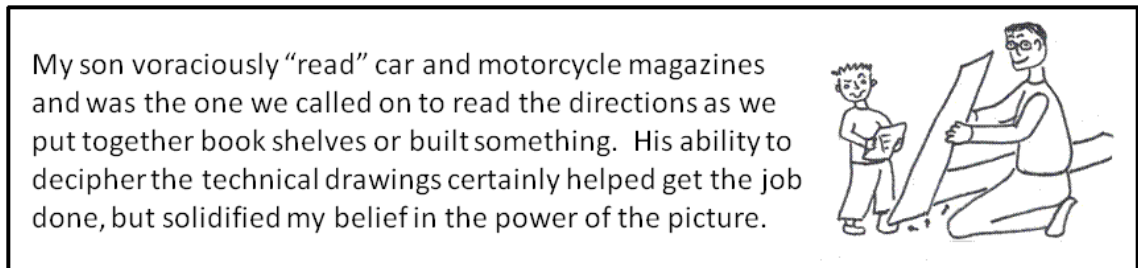


Figure 1.19

### History of Comics

The American comic book and lately the graphic novel have struggled to be accepted as teaching and learning tools to support reading and reading comprehension in the adolescent learner. Wright (2003) notes that “few enduring expressions of American popular culture are so instantly recognizable and still so poorly understood as comic books” (p. xiii). Recognizing a long-standing history of negative reactions from adults in general, religious groups, and political organizations, the comic has survived as a visual and textual narrative and acknowledged for its entertainment value in the industry as well as daring to enter the world of literature with powerful theoretical social constructs, themes, and points of view.

Historically, the comic is an invention of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but the true origins date back to the days of Greece and Rome through visual stories told in art and found on walls, urns, and sculpture of the history and mythology of the day. Certainly pictures have carried great weight in helping ancient peoples understand their world through cave drawings in France that outline great battles and hunting parties to mythological events of

Roman gods and goddesses on urns and artwork that convey a definitive beginning, middle, and end of a story. I have a set of tables that my grandmother obtained in Okinawa just after World War II that has wood carvings to dramatize the story of a Chinese leader and subsequent battle in early Chinese history. While I am not particularly conscious of Chinese history, this artifact of the Chinese culture illustrated through the carvings on the table tell a story that resonates the history of that ancient time and is focused on the ability of those seeing it in being able to understand the story.

There is a comprehensible difference in managing text and relating to visual images for “unlike words, even those fixed in a written text, visual images have an almost infinite capacity for verbal extension, because viewers must become their own narrators, changing the images into some form of internalized verbal expression” (Brilliant, 1984, p. 16). The use of visual narratives and sequential art in the form of comics and graphic novels brings a new or at least differing perspective on reading that blends the motivational interest of popular culture and the combination of text and graphics together in order to view the concept of reading from an alternative point of view with adolescent readers and supports the use of common and specific sensory tools to enhance comprehension of a variety of media.

The long-standing history of American comics as mindless, “trash icons” that according to Sabin (1996) “have been perceived as intrinsically commercial, mass-produced for a lowest-common-denominator audience, and therefore automatically outside notions of artistic credibility” (p. 8) or legitimate forms of contemporary literature has prevailed in the context of generalized educational practice. Originally published late in the nineteenth century as funny pages that included political cartoons,



illustrated stories, and an original cartoon series called *Hogan's Alley* were all intended to appeal to the lower classes. These early comics and funnies were earthy and unsophisticated and intended to appeal to the growing immigrant classes flooding the populations of New York and other metropolitan cities. The stories were “a parodic look at itself [the immigrant working class], rendered in the vernacular of caricature and nonsense language. The mockery in comics was familial—intimate, knowing, affectionate, and merciless” (Hajdu, 2008, p. 11). However, even in these early days of comics the critics of a more sophisticated palate suggested the comics to be offensive and symptomatic of what was going wrong in contemporary society. In 1906, Ralph Bergengren wrote in *Atlantic Monthly* of the “humor prepared and printed for the extremely dull” and that “respect for property, respect for parents, for law, for decency, for truth, for beauty, for kindness, for dignity, or for honor, are killed, without mercy” (Heer and Worchester, 2004, p. 10-11). Such was the change seen by the more refined of society in this preference for the comics of the lower and immigrant classes that threatened the more Anglo-Saxon values of the day and focused increasing attention on the growing strength of those classes.

Comics survived those early years and took the place of the early “dime” novels. Their appeal and popularity extended to the nonreaders of the immigrant and poor populations while condemnation by critics of the day cried of the degradation of the traditional ideals, literature and definitions of culture and socially acceptable refined practice. Those critics, however, chose to apply the standards of art and literature generally recognized as of the higher classes to a form intentionally created for the lower classes and focused their criticism as if this would lead to the ruination of society in its

influence. Yet, throughout the early 1900's and the Depression years, comics grew in popularity and evolved from earlier neighborhood and street versions to detective stories and heroes appealing to "the adolescent boys and working-class men who were also core readers of the comics pages" (Hajdu, 2008, p. 17). The appeal of these comics to the male reader included exaggerated and extreme stories of male heroes and super sleuths that struck the imaginations of men and boys that validated "a working-class ideal of skilled craftsmanship in the service of manhood" (p. 17). Many of those same readers in that day spent hours at kitchen tables attempting to recreate the artwork and developed skill in the medium that contributed to the careers of comic artists such as Will Eisner who eventually created *The Spirit* after many years of creating comics for other studios and eventually his own. Because of the lack of work and changes in education reforms during the Depression years, many adolescents remained in high school and as a result spent more time with their peers. Changing adolescent attitudes of "personal independence and a generational consciousness struck some alarmed adults as evidence of diminishing respect for authority and declining traditional values" (Wright, 2003, p. 27). Thus began a new level of criticism for comics while comic book publishers closely drew their story lines directly at the child and adolescent market.

Creativity and passion in those early comics lead to growths in the industry as well as opened more controversy related to story lines deemed inappropriate for young children and adolescents bemoaning the limited value and impediments of comics to the future of society. The condemnation of critics of that day were concerned with the contamination of the arts and the detrimental effects of mass culture on their children and went to great lengths to wash the comics of stories of violence, alcohol or drugs, and

sexual innuendo. School groups, PTAs, private religious schools, the Girl Scouts, and other conservative organizations instituted a plan to ban comic books that made its way in to city halls and state legislatures. Conflicting viewpoints between those in academia and politics with special emphasis placed on crime comics and horror eventually lead to legislation in several states that disallowed the sale of comics with these themes to minors “that might incite minors to violence or immorality” (Hajdu, 2008, p. 192). Even the rise of the hero comic in forms such as *Superman*, *Captain America*, and *Batman* which found favor in readership, continued to endure claims of a degradation of literature and of society that continued to test the comic industry and its growing readership.

The 1950’s brought with it an age of censorship that focused hard on comics that had been allowed by comic-book makers to “grow ever more gruesome and lurid, and the blood overflowing the pages drew the decency hounds back to their trail” (p. 201). In 1952 a special committee established by the House of Representatives under the chairmanship of E.C. Gathings of Arkansas conducted hearings on the subject of offensive publications that included comic books. These hearings did not produce any legislation but did provide the charge that comic books lead to crime with adolescents without citing any data supporting the claim. In 1954, Fredric Wertham’s book, *Seduction of the Innocent*, brought additional “scientific” claims of the degradation of youth through comic book reading. Sections of his book were published in the *Ladies’ Home Journal* and newspapers across the country. His work, however, was not scientific and did not support the claims he made in his book. Wertham chose to publish his study in *Ladies’ Home Journal* instead of a peer reviewed journal and drove his conclusions without substantive support from other social scientists in the field to the thought that all

comics were harmful to children and not just the crime, romance, and horror genres. Even the superheroes suffered during this time causing artists to tone down storylines and control questionable and controversial depictions and graphics that concerned the critics and congressional hearings on the subject.

The outcome of this time in comic history produced the Comics Code developed by the newly formed Comics Magazine Association of America and outlined the limitations on published comics. However, the comic book industry has adapted to such criticism and evolved to more creative and imaginative heights similar to before the Code days. Even through the restrictions of the Comic Code, comic publishers began to produce storylines of “reluctant superheroes who struggled with the confusion and ambivalent consequences of their own power... [that helped] keep comic books relevant and profitable in the age of television and rock-and-roll” (Wright, 2003, p. 180). The generational concerns of adults over the wild behavior and lack of control of its children were redirected away from the comic in the 1960’s after revolutionary changes in music, art, dance, and literature with names of Elvis, the Beatles, the twist, alternative comics in Mad Magazine, and new superheroes in Spider Man among others.

This history of comics illustrates the bias that persists today over the value of comics as an educational medium. Teachers and media specialists continue to view comics as substandard or useful only from a special project point of view. However, struggling readers and those less motivated may find power and success in reading comics. The misunderstanding that the reader is only looking at the pictures or the text used in comics as mostly slang, colloquialisms, or sub-standard English demonstrates the pervasive mindset that comics have no place in literature. This mindset misses the

important and necessary requirement of comics in employing text and images requiring the reader to utilize both visual and verbal interpretive skills thereby supporting and enhancing reading comprehension. The rich history of comics including the early days of creativity without boundaries, funnies for the masses, and continuing on to the inception and controls of the Comics Code has led to a minimizing of their effectiveness in the classroom. Wright (2003) comments that “in these times it is as essential as ever to offer young people a wide choice for self-expression within a culture of empathy, compassion, and imagination” (p. 285). Recent years have employed new digital technologies in producing comics and sent comic characters into the world of movies and the more sophisticated graphic novel. According to McTaggart (2008):

Comics are on the cutting edge of pop culture; they react swiftly to social and cultural changes and address them in a timely fashion. The comic-book industry keeps its finger on the pulse of what is happening in the world, what kids view as ‘cool,’ and they respond to it with lightning speed. The industry’s reward is more sales; society’s reward is more student readers. (p. 29)

Despite its controversial history comics have remained a part of American social culture, have developed extensive, complex and complicated storylines, and have contributed to motivation and reading in children and adolescents (Booth & Lundy, 2007; Thompson, 2008).

### **Experience and the Power of the Critical Picture**

The categories and labels found in schools and placed on children such as my son and my sister leads to a level of misrepresentation and “reduction of our capacity to see the three-dimensional, contradictory, complex, dynamic, in-motion, on-a-voyage human

beings before us” (Ayers, 2006, p. 94). The experiences of my own family as they continue today challenge the notions of packaged programs that are intent on leaving no child behind because of the standardized philosophy of skills acquisition. While this notion follows a political agenda that seemingly presents a rosy picture of the view that all children can receive an equal education, the facts dispel these myths but are convoluted in rhetoric and bureaucratic irrelevance to the issues.

McQuillan (1998) makes the statement that “it does little good to teach children to read if, when they leave school, they hate reading” (p. 64). The dynamics of a literature-rich classroom with materials from a variety of genres including digital media, comics, graphic novels, and other artifacts of popular culture provide greater opportunities to view the world through a lens that does not stop at skills. Such would be a lens that investigates greater meaning and relevance through critical and higher order thinking that pursues a better social, political, and moral understanding of the world rather than just one perspective that hyper-focus on one class, race, or viewpoint with little or no meaning to the student.

As a researcher, I want to listen to those voices that seek meaning through critical review of the social context in which we live. The use of artifacts of popular culture and media that opens up the possibilities of picture and graphic cues to enhance textual meaning give new thought to the ability of adolescents labeled through traditional educational frameworks to find significance in what they are reading. Language through the use of graphic novels and comic books serves to provide a different medium for these students in their attempts to critically determine relevance in what they are being asked to read and the world around them. The problem with attaching the definition of reading to a

static process is that it excludes those who rebel against that definition and prefer to view reading in a more social context of learning. Reconsideration must be made in the traditional definitions of reading that work within the social aspects of that process by utilizing graphic novels, comics, and other art in adolescent reading instruction. Graphic novels have the important asset of being a facet of popular culture that demonstrates a continuing story at complex levels while also utilizing complicated vocabulary and intricate literary elements. Perhaps, I can offer another option to the problem of motivating readers and helping to break the traditional frameworks of adolescent reading instruction by introducing just one new facet within the context of popular culture that appeals to the relevance of those students who have not found the answers they seek in standard instruction.

### **Summary of Study**

It would appear with the upsurge of new thought related to adolescent literacy that there is no need to begin inquiry into the area of comics and their use in the classroom. However, the needs of adolescent learners to find identity in their world coupled with a direct connection to popular culture and alternative media continues to push at the walls of traditional reading instruction and challenge singular approaches that limit relevancy in reading. The use of visual learning “plays an integral part in understanding...and [the recognition that] visually literate learners are able to make connections, determine importance, synthesize information, evaluate, and critique” (Frey & Fisher, 2008, p. 1). The visual aspects of learning support critical discussions intended to view the world through a lens that seeks understanding beyond text.

This study seeks to view and listen to the voices of adolescent learners involved in the process of actively utilizing a combination of graphic representation through graphic novels and comic text along with traditional text and passages. These students come from a background saturated in religion, strong family relations, and extensive cultural history that has limits in divergent thinking. This study provides adolescents the opportunity to explore texts and meaning through a more relevant framework of critical literacy, extend their personal lens beyond the boundaries of the county in which they live, and gain meaning and connection to the diverse world around them. The methodological framework utilizes a case study approach such that observations, journals, and discussions are recorded and reflected upon in a manner intended to evoke critical conversations about what is read and the participant's connection to the text, graphics and the world. The narratives collected have "the inherent potential to effect social change, beginning with the individual and expanding into the greater community" (Phillion, He, and Connelly, 2005, p. 292). So often the voices of adolescent student are quashed in the rush toward achievement, standards, and meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). It is my hope that this study will open the dialogue such that adolescents begin to connect with the word as only one means toward understanding their world and also recognize the value of viewing reading as a source of cultural understanding and social consciousness.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

“Every thicket, every piece of undergrowth, every clearing is carefully examined because behind each bush, in every hole we might find something that would put us at least on the right track” (Muth, 2008, p. 44).

The nature of adolescent reading often found in research tends to focus on reading acquisition and struggling readers while most of these readers view literacy through a differing perspective that includes a variety of media beyond most traditional instruction and expectations. This disconnect between traditional schooling and the types of reading found meaningful to this age reader causes great concern when paired against decreases in spontaneous activities related to reading by this age learner. An examination of the current practices and expectations in school reading and literature curriculums that target middle and high school learners necessitates the discussion and warrants an investigation into what motivates adolescent readers and supports comprehension and understanding. The purpose of this study is designed to investigate the issues of critical literacy related to the social context of reading and the educational frameworks that enhance and interfere with learning associated with adolescent literacy. I will review the works of those in the field who have explored the nature of adolescent critical literacy utilizing traditional and innovative concepts associated with popular culture, arts, and literature. The review will concentrate in the following areas:

1. A review of contemporary reading instruction over the past fifty years including a research and political context.

2. The framework of adolescent literacy and the research related to issues of media, popular culture, and motivation as they relate to adolescent learning.

3. A review of adolescent literacy as a social construct within the theoretical framework of critical literacy.

4. A review of American comics and graphic novels as support for comprehension and reading.

5. The theoretical relationship between comics and graphic novels and a look into motivation and engagement for adolescent readers.

### **Making Sense of Language**

The area of adolescent literacy has found itself in a quagmire of frameworks, standards of instruction, expectations, standards, and concepts of student learning. This age of accountability and high stakes testing places the adolescent in the same category of emergent readers in that poor skills acquisition means poor phonics instruction therefore requiring the addition of more practice with sounds and phonics in order to build greater reading skills. Yet, minimal support has been made regarding increased phonics instruction in the middle and high school years. The requirements of the federal government under the No Child Left Behind Act “ultimately promises citizens that uniform implementation of scientific core reading programs will prepare all young Americans to obtain the high-skill, high-wage jobs that are waiting for them in the global economy” (Shannon, 2007, p. ix). As a result, current reading instruction has been broken down to basic skills that are easily measured and quantified according to state assessments and measures of adequate yearly progress. However, in an age of outsourcing and technology, the new high school graduates are finding globally

competitive jobs under these types of reading programs to be a dismal hope at best. Reviewing the recent past involving reading instruction may provide a clue of our current circumstances in dealing with adolescent literacy and reading instruction.

The trail of instructional practices in reading have “swung from a whole word methodology to phonics to direct instruction to whole language, with various stops along the way” (Stahl, 2006, p. 45) and has left teachers dazed and confused with what is considered appropriate and effective. The Scott, Foresman basal readers of the 1960’s that gave us the nostalgic *Dick, Jane, and Sally* stories were supported by teacher narrated stories that focused on particular sight words. Decoding skills were not presented until a certain number of sight words were mastered and varied according to the particular book in the series utilizing a meaning emphasis, whole-word approach. Sometime around the mid-1970’s after the publication of the book *Why Johnny Can’t Read* (Flesch, 1955) a change in focus began in reading instruction that led to the introduction and need for greater instruction in decoding of words.

The 1970’s and early 1980’s were influenced greatly by the business sector in seeking out scientifically based programs of reading instruction and that “by following the directions and using the commercial materials, they [teachers] were teaching reading because the directions, scripts, and procedures embodied the science of reading instruction and they led to students scoring highly on standardized reading tests” (Shannon, 2007, p. 39). This new compelling direction in reading instruction was reinforced by the rationalization of the time that “if it were not true that the directions and materials taught students to read, then the state would not compel students and teachers to use rationalized systems or standardized tests, business would not claim scientific

authority for the materials, and reading experts would not endorse them directly or indirectly through professional organizations or teacher education programs” (p. 39). Reading instruction became focused on specific skills and was separated from actual text in its presentation. Time spent actually reading was reduced while worksheets and drilled practice constituted much of the bulk of time devoted to reading instruction. Worksheets became so prevalent that “in a typical lesson there was not only a phonics skill taught, but another phonics skill reviewed, a comprehension skill taught or reviewed, and another worksheet to review the story” (Stahl, 2006, p. 47). Decoding skills were improved in students such that a set of readers was built with excellent word calling skills, but comprehension skills were lacking. Greater cognitive skills were introduced with more extensive teaching of reading strategies and practice exercises intended to improve comprehension changed the face of basal readers in the late 1980’s and into the 1990’s setting up another shift in reading instruction to the whole language approach originally introduced in 1991.

Whole language instruction is defined by Pressley (2006) as “an approach to literacy education that emphasizes natural development of literacy competence and immersion in real literature and daily writing is favored over explicit teaching of basic reading skills” (p. 15). Phonics instruction is delivered only if needed in the context of reading and writing, but not as the main focus of the instruction. The emphasis of whole language considers word decoding with meaning cues much more critical in the development of word acquisition in readers. Benefits in motivation and comprehension were noted under the whole language approach (Pressley, 2006; Stahl, 2006); however, whole language learners were more likely than skills-based students to rely on context

cues and pictures rather than letter-sound understandings in word recognition of difficult words setting up political controversy within the reading research world and the federal government as to what constituted quality reading instruction and achievement. The political push toward more effective reading programs and standardized instruction neglected to recognize the role of the effective reading teacher. Such a teacher must “understand how reading develops, in all of its manifestations [and] involves a deeper understanding of the development of automatic word recognition, comprehension, motivation and appreciation with a skill in weaving these various goals into a coherent program” (Stahl, 2006, p. 68). Research into reading instruction and comprehension must move toward a more balanced approach of reading instruction regardless of mandates from state and federal bureaucrats and politicians.

Despite this, school-based reading instruction has followed closely the recommendations of the National Reading Panel due to political, financial, and accountability mandates determined by annual yearly progress. The panel determined acceptable research to be objective and verifiable by experiment. Allington (2002) makes it clear that “the methodological standards adopted by the Panel did not arise from the research literature on reading, but rather were imposed upon it...and that unfortunately, only a small fraction of the total reading research literature met the Panel’s standards for use in the topic analyses” (p. 51). Qualitative research that did not meet the standards of the Panel was not considered and which challenges the definition of what is considered “scientific” research related to reading instruction.

The recommendations of the National Reading Panel (NRP) have directed reading instruction at all levels from kindergarten through adult literacy. These recommendations

have led school districts to interpret the information from this report as best and only practice regarding reading instruction. For instance, one of the points of debate involves the NPR statement that “systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade and for children having difficulty learning to read” (NRP, 2006, p. 9). However, it goes on to say that “[o]lder children receiving phonics instruction were better able to decode and spell words and to read text orally, but their comprehension of text was not significantly improved” (NRP, 2006, p. 9). Stahl (2006) supports these statements by positing that “children who lack any of all of these concepts [functions, conventions, form of print, and awareness of phonemes] have difficulty in learning to read, a difficulty that is magnified as they progress through the grades” (p. 51). Comments such as these have limited the ability of teachers to create flexible programs that respond to the specific needs of their students.

The report from the National Reading Panel has placed significant pressure on school systems to adopt commercial reading programs that focus on explicit direct instruction of phonics that are constructed in such a way that reading instruction is limited to specific frameworks, pacing guides, and scripted tasks. What seems to be missing from this approach is the idea that children need to “make sense of language” as it relates to how the language system itself is constructed (McQuillan, 1998, p. 19). Traditional teacher-centered instruction limits students’ ability to question and clarify what is read and does not recognize that “students need to engage in thinking about and discussing the way knowledge is created, shared, and evaluated” without placing significant limitations on what is read and the purposes of such (Anderson, Wang, and Gaffney, 2006, p.278). Skills-based instruction as a sole reading program limits and

inhibits the natural desire for learning and especially begins to magnify the negative issues related to motivation as students move to the middle and upper grades.

Whole class instruction through these direct instruction packages often assumes a “one size fits all” approach and appears to be the recommended “best practice” for reading acquisition and achievement even beyond the primary grades despite research related to a more student-focused approach. In an attempt to address this issue the National Reading Panel makes the statement that “teachers may be able to use a particular program in the classroom but may find that it suits some students better than others... Teachers should be able to assess the needs of the individual students and tailor instruction to meet specific needs.” (NRP, 2006, p. 11) If we look at the standardization of teaching that takes skills and individualizes them to the extent that the curriculum itself requires little interaction between the students, that all answers are either right or wrong, and follow particular rules, then we have set up a pattern early in the elementary years that limits critical thinking and puts defined limits on learning. Shannon (2007) adds the perspective that:

NCLB alienates students from their learning. Designed to raise test scores, core reading programs do not permit students to pursue their questions about the world. As entertaining as some of the lessons might be, the essence of the core program is to direct students’ attention to the skills to be tested and the practice of those skills within controlled environments...Skills are taught separately, practices in texts that are constructed only for that task, and then tested in isolation first, to ensure identical elements between the skill as taught and tested. (p. 208)

Typical middle and secondary school classrooms are given approximately 50 minutes of instruction intended to serve a selected group of students. Often students are tracked or grouped according to perceived abilities and given a set of tasks expected to be practiced until mastery. Difficulties for struggling students, males, and students of African American descent in typical classroom settings find themselves in low-ability groups designed to teach phonics and remediate with redundant worksheets and drills with little or no actual reading. Unfortunately, ability grouping and tracking appear a primary form of scheduling in middle and high school settings.

Classroom expectations are limited by the perceptions of teachers assigned to work with students based on the designations given to classrooms as “gifted,” “honors,” “regular,” “co-teach,” or “resource.” These classroom designations and the materials offered those students assigned through the formalized curriculum act as “tools of control by framing certain knowledge as legitimate and by restricting the way knowledge is taught, presented, or discussed” (O’Brien, Stewart, and Moje, 1995, p.448). However, changing viewpoints that open the door to offering a more diverse student population, increased opportunities for discussion and questioning, encourages traditional and non-traditional text, and teachers “who recognize that students become better readers by reading, not merely practicing reading skills [will] increase students’ opportunity for developing a positive attitude toward reading, improving fluency, improving vocabulary, and improving comprehension” (Beers, 2003, p. 38). Challenging traditional viewpoints and frameworks allow for middle and high school classrooms to consider text and reading from a more conceptual standpoint and recognize the connections between what is read and what is lived.



The report of the National Reading Panel as commissioned by the United States Congress is admittedly limited by research that fit true experimental or quasi-experimental models. This limitation provided the support for their argument for skills-based reading instruction and emphasized that the “complicated processing that sophisticated readers employ when they read challenging texts” (Pressley, 2006, p. 420) brought forth very few studies with definitive data. Given the purpose of this panel was to provide compelling evidence in reading instruction, the balance of their decisions were related to early and emergent literacy; however, the implications for adolescent literacy were carried forward from the stance of elementary literacy providing minimal credible evidence for middle and high school readers. The limitations in the amount of what the panel considered credible evidence directly suggests to the field of adolescent literacy that there is a significant need in the body of literature supporting quality qualitative research and the scope of its application to the general adolescent population. This study is expected to add to that body of knowledge and bring an additional perspective to research in adolescent literacy and learning.

### **New Thought in Defining Adolescent Literacy**

The general body of research related to the adolescent reader indicates a variety of both quantitative and qualitative findings intended to view adolescent literacy from a variety of lenses. Yet, the National Reading Panel’s limitations on research to include only quantitative, clinically reproducible studies, openly admits the narrow and limited conclusions for the adolescent reader. Today’s schools focus on skill-building and practice; however, “children who learn to read successfully do so because, for them, learning to read is a cultural and not primarily an instructed process” (Gee, 2004, p. 13).

Reading instruction from a traditional approach posits that reading is a process and ignores the cultural connection of popular culture, video games, media, and technology. Former controls by administrators in directing curriculum in the school “has been augmented with both more direct and more invasive bureaucratic controls of mandatory time of instruction, directed standards for each grade level, yearly testing, and the technical controls of commercially prepared, scripted lessons in core reading programs” (Shannon, 2007, p. x-xi). This suggests a narrowing of student thought, limiting the ability of students to question, and reducing motivation such that “engagement in reading instruction actually reduce[s] the possibilities of their [students’] intellectual and social development and freedom” (p. x-xi). The use of texts more familiar to students and that offer greater student choice in reading that are not limited to print-based sources may provide a new viewpoint in education that is currently lacking.

The explosion of knowledge and cross-curricular requirements for students does not match the necessary supports needed regarding explicit reading instruction (Jetton & Alexander, 2004, p. 15). The realities of a technology savvy set of highly integrated students with skills brought the classroom that do not fit the notions of traditional literacy and writing create conflict and a disconnect between adolescent desires for relevance in their lives and the standards established within classrooms and school systems.

Lankshear and Knobel (2006) suggested that “people read and write differently out of different social practices, and these different ways with words are part of different ways of being persons and different ways and facets of doing life” (p. 13). In this digital age of websites, video games, text messaging, and web browsing language and literacy has taken on greater meaning than the study of literature from recent and distant a past

that assumes acquisition of a set of skills that leads to assumed abilities to comprehend complex material. However, the reality in educational practice today particularly in the middle and high school settings present a “traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, [and] could never develop a critical consciousness” (Freire, 1974, p. 33) causing greater and greater divides between real life experience and disconnected skills practice.

Derrida (1988) would require us to consider the question “that to the word communication corresponds a concept that is unique, univocal, rigorously controllable, and transmittable: in a word, communicable?” (p. 1). How can it be that reading’s purpose is strictly for communication? Communication of what? Plot line, facts, comedy, or humor? Perhaps, but as he adds “a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription” (p.9) leading to the recognition that reading must be understood from the context of the writer and the reader. I tend to think that while all of the purposes especially used for reading in a school setting include those mentioned above; the primary reason for reading goes well beyond a passive accumulation of facts or short-term accumulation of stories.

If we reconsider the purpose of reading and admit the power in communication, we must also consider the purpose of language in supporting a sustained culture. Recognizing the artifacts of language in the form of poetry, literature, and art suggests a new identity when considering purposes for reading in a social context. Too many in political and educational circles tend to focus strictly on the idea of reading as communication and limit the “primary function of human language [as] two closely

related functions [that] support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions” (Gee, 2005, p. 1) Acknowledging the close relationships between language and culture forces the untidy suggestion that media and popular culture must find a place in the discussion as artifacts of language and societal framework. Oftentimes classroom teachers ignore the forms of communication that integrate adolescents with their world and suggesting those forms are somehow less valuable. Even so, time is spent in that same classroom playing with media presentations, Internet research projects, and word processing programs that set students immediately at a disadvantage according to social standing and availability of technology which serves to widen the chasm between adolescent motivation and learning.

Maxine Greene (2001) understood that “education signifies an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, and moving. It signifies the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reaching out for meanings, a learning to learn” (p. 7). Reading from the conceptual sense that allows the reader to seek meaning and learn to learn as well as picture a new point of view. So often any point of view in education is limited to a prescribed script or specific lesson that does not allow for the examination of issues related to what is read limiting the generation of new ideas, thoughts, and passions. When ideas are limited and imagination is stifled, the mundane becomes the norm and creative minds and thoughts are considered odd and unnecessary. Society today tends to burden the creative mind with commonplace and routine tasks that focus on consumerism and self-serving opportunities that numb the schools and reduce the arts to the unessential. This tendency reinforces dull, rote memorization, and literal comprehension that does not stretch the imagination nor increase the levels of critical thinking.

Rich (2001) suggests that “this devaluation of language, this flattening of images, results in a massive inarticulation, even among the educated” (p. 149). While consumers still visit museums, theatres, and libraries, those same consumers tend to expect shallow stories that titillate the senses into mindless expressions of superficial emotion. Devaluing creativity and reducing the arts to the ordinary will “always argue a still defective education if the moral character can assert itself only through the sacrifice of what is natural; and a political constitution will still be very imperfect if it is able to produce unity only by suppressing variety” (Schiller, 2004, p. 32). The joy in education is in the learning, and reading to learn is fundamental even to our youngest readers. Educators must consider the possibility that adolescents also are willing to read to learn if given the opportunity to read meaningful text not just prescribed ones.

The interest of adolescents in this age of technology goes beyond traditional texts and utilizes digital mediums and storylines originating in video games, comic books, and movies. These students have been raised in an age of superior special effects, graphic interpretations, and abbreviated writing through a variety of measures related to popular culture-most of which has been maligned in traditional school settings. Gee (2004) saw that “children cannot feel they belong at school when their valuable home-based practices are ignored, denigrated, and unused. They cannot feel like they belong when the real game is acquiring academic varieties of language, and they are given no help with this, as they watch other children get high assessments at school for what they have learned not at school but at home” (p. 37). Much of what is presented to adolescents in the media is targeted at capturing their attention through visual connections to text.

Advertisers, television programs, movies, Internet gaming sites, and video games

utilize the very real impact of graphics that deliver simultaneous information while text by itself only delivers in a linear fashion. This combination of input speeds up the process of understanding and comprehension utilizing the text and graphics together to recognize relationships and connections between the known and the learned. Images are stored in long-term memory creating a knowledge base for the words used to recall things already seen and experienced (Burmark, 2008). The heavy load of content and highly conceptual information found in the middle and high school years create volumes of text that are difficult to comprehend and, even more importantly, create little connection between the student and real world, societal issues. While many students have the advantage of computer and Internet availability at home there are substantial issues of poverty, social class, and racial segregation that continue to tip the balance of equity in education leaving those with very little playing the game of “catch-up or give-up” most of their educational career especially when labeled within the school system with learning disabilities or discipline issues.

Maxine Greene (2001) defines education as “a process of enabling persons to become different, to enter the multiple provinces of meaning that create perspectives on the works...and look through the lenses of various ways of knowing, seeing, and feeling in a conscious endeavor to impose different orders upon experience” (p. 5). This definition is in conflict with the current trend of standards-based education in that skills-based, test driven curriculum does not allow for variations in those “lenses” spoken of by Greene. Teachers and students involved in adolescent literacy must recognize the connection between the act of learning to read and the process of reading to learn. According to Jetton and Alexander (2004) “as students begin to unravel the mysteries of

languages, they are simultaneously building their knowledge base. Similarly, as students pursue knowledge in reading or other academic domains, they are building a deeper and richer understanding of language” (p. 19). The demands of increased text and content-driven material with limited real-life connections through middle and high school deeply affect the issues of motivation, subject knowledge, and deep understanding of strategies related to comprehension in this age learner.

### **What is Literacy in a Digital World?**

One of the challenges of reading is in the comprehension of it. Derrida (1988) notes that “the crucial role, usually underestimated, that imagination plays in human life, and the equally crucial role that shared products of the imagination play in human social life” (p. 96) are related to the intentions of reading and the illocution or unspoken intent of the author. Adolescent learning must include the component of oneness with the world around them that seeks an understanding of his or her place in the world. They are seeking connections with real-life experiences and looking for purpose and identity. Such realities create disconnect between content driven instruction and motivation which interferes with students’ ability to “reflect about themselves and about the world they are in and with, it makes them discover that the world is also theirs, that their work is of helping the world to be a better place” (Freire, 1974, p. 76). Critical review and critical consciousness must be present in adolescent experiences with reading and writing that allow a focus on personal realities and reflection.

Because of the increased demands in school-based literacies, there is “predictable and consistent declining interest in reading that accompanies entrance to the middle and secondary grades” (Bean, 1998, p.150). In light of this teachers “face a daunting

challenge when they attempt to use reading as a primary means of stimulating higher level learning and thinking among their students about important topics within the various disciplines” (Underwood & Pearson, 2004, p. 135). The effects of those students who struggle with reading in the early grades are only compounded in the middle grades and high school when faced with these challenges. Recognition of the characteristics of adolescent students and their relationship with the multiple literacies involved in current technologies, social networks, Internet exchanges, graphic novels, *Manga*, and video games present opportunities for innovative and in-depth study into how adolescents learn and develop in reading. Opening the doors to our imaginations as teachers and learners allows for a “broader knowledge and reflection [that] may help us to change [traditional] habits or to initiate the search for new ones” (Noddings, 2006, p. 79). Maintaining traditional habits ignores the needs of a vibrant community of adolescents hungry for connection and understanding in their lives.

Cultural and political contexts have influenced and at times driven the textbook industry and propelled the notion of what should be taught and to whom. Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) suggest that a review of critical media literacy is in order and posit that “[critical media literacy] has to do with providing individuals access to understanding how the print and no-print texts that are part of everyday life help to construct their knowledge of the world and the various social, economic, and political positions they occupy within it” (p. 1). What are brought to the table of discussion are traditional notions of literacy and its implementation in the schools.

Viewing literacy from a critical perspective requires the definition of literacy to move beyond traditional decoding or encoding of words. Text illustrates a “means for



understanding one's own history and culture" which allows for the ability to contemplate the connections between one's life and social structure, and "to act on this new knowledge in order to foster equal and just participation in all the decisions that affect and control our lives" (Shannon, 1995, p. 83). Seeing literacy from a social construct allows one to connect individual and societal relationships and question norms and standards that force students to compete for the right to be successful readers and writers. This thinking, however, sets adolescents in a precarious position. Neilsen (1998) recognizes that:

Faced with school literacy practices as they currently exist, students find that their options are limited: that both the literary and the literacy cannon privilege White middle-class values; Eurocentric, male-centered reading material; hierarchically organized and assessment-driven curricula; and in high school, cultural values that reinforce achievement over learning, and control over educational possibilities. (p. 9)

This sets up a framework of privileged cultural literacy driving curricular choices and instruction that diminishes the student's ability to learn about their own context and celebrate differences.

In the scope of current educational systems it makes sense to think "that someone's tradition, someone's construction of what is important to know and how it should be used, is always incorporated into our planned curriculum" (Apple & Beane, 1995, p. 15). This view of literacy severely limits the constructs surrounding what constitutes knowledge and language and sets up power struggles between educators and their students in recognizing what it means to be literate. Slater (2004) redefines high

literacy as “the educational goal of teaching all students to think, read, and write critically” (p. 40). In this sense, new literacies must be considered not only as they relate to the digital world and technology that goes beyond keystrokes and text, but through a viewfinder that acknowledges the social and cultural relationships that support the relevance to popular culture that is found in these new and modified sources of literate experiences.

Noddings (2006) posits that “the experience gained through reading can increase cultural knowledge, activate the imagination, and provide rich material for personal reflection” (p. 78). Relevance to life experiences is extremely important to adolescent learning. Recognizing this view, we must understand that “when people lack attachments, when there is no possibility of coming together in a plurality or a community, when they have not tapped their imaginations, they may think of breaking free, but they will be unlikely to think of breaking through the structures of their world and creating something new” (Greene, 1988, p. 17). A new mindset must be created that accepts the literacies of digital media and technology that are connected so strongly to adolescent lives.

More and more students are seeing little connection with the digital literacies they have grown up with and the print-based texts of school while recognizing the diminished value often found in assignments made with little understanding of the potential in exploring alternative texts and non-print based media. Teachers and administrators must recognize that new and different strategies are necessary for literacy success and that meaning and understanding will take many modes and forms in developing social and strategic understanding (Booth, 2006). Understanding the dynamic and personal nature of technology, media, and popular culture in students who have lived, used it, and

experienced it all their lives requires the nature of adolescent literacy to include these new literacies in reading development as well as consider new paths toward what we define as being literate.

### **Remembering Critical Literacy**

Jacob Bronowski (1978) ponders on the thought that “everyone has to reimagine, and to reimagine for himself...No work of art has been created with such finality that you need to contribute mothering to it. You must recreate the work for yourself” (p. 14). This thought is contradicted in classrooms where teachers of adolescents often find themselves making assumptions about control in the classroom and in choices of reading material. Concerns with discipline tend to overshadow curriculum planning that discovers the diverse questions, beliefs, and values that support student identity. The field of adolescent reading has recognized the need to bring critical literacy to the table, however, controversial novels with complicated themes and at times questionable language and content frequently lead to issues of appropriateness from school authorities’ intent on minimizing those controversies especially related to power, status, gender, and beliefs. These controversies frequently lead to censorship, web-blocking, and fire walls intended to protect while in reality deny students the ability to seek answers to difficult questions in their own settings. Reading socially conscious material “provides vicarious experience [through the stories], but the encounter with the story is a real experience, and imagination can make vital connections to one’s actual life” (Noddings, 2006, p.78). The controversies of power, race, culture, religion, and prejudice are necessary to provoke learning, and challenge thoughts, values, and beliefs all of which are important to adolescent learning.

Critical literacy requires a view of text beyond the words that questions those words as they relate to the world. Adolescents are faced with significant social issues that affect their day to day lives. Dealing with text from a critical perspective that is “based on the premise that the social negotiations of the rules of proper behavior, laws, and social institutions are not conducted among equals because social, economic, and political circumstances have given certain groups license to assert undue influence over the outcomes” (Shannon, 1995, p. 62-63) stretch the viewpoints of standard curriculum and require insight into power struggles and inequalities. Standardized texts, as part of a curriculum, define knowledge as it relates to society often creating what is considered justifiable and legitimate within that society. These texts “help set the canons of truthfulness and, as such, also help recreate a major reference point for what knowledge, culture, belief, and morality really are” (Apple, 1993, p. 198). However, text may also present a critical review of social inequities that questions oppression, recognizes its causes, and develops a transformative action creating new opportunities for righting those inequities (Freire, 1970). When students are given opportunities to challenge and develop critical text then people begin to recognize new birth through control of their own destinies and the power found therein.

Mastery of skills is not the issue in a critical pedagogy that includes social awareness and a dialogue of text. A critical view beyond skills links literacy to social welfare and the idea of cultural democracy which “can insert the idea of difference into the curriculum as part of an attempt to rearticulate the ideas of justice and equality” (Giroux, 1993, p. 375). Yet current and traditional reading instruction limits the development and social consciousness of students by structuring learning opportunities

and channeling social awareness into mini units and unrelated “special” activities (Shannon, 2007).

Freire’s (1987) counterpoint to this reduction in freedom of thought is that literacy must be “a dialectical relationship between human beings and the world, on the one hand, and language and transformative agency, on the other” (p. 7) such that student and teachers in conversation and dialogue become agents for change. Critical dialogue between teachers and students, students and students must lead to greater understanding and questioning of why things are as they are. Integrating pedagogy of critical and cultural literacy into school curriculums allows for a discourse which reflects and evaluates knowledge and consciousness “within the contemporary context of theory in language, literature, and rhetoric” (Berlin, 1993, p. 264). Students then are given an opportunity to view through Freire’s (1987) understanding that “reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world” (p. 35). As such students recognize that words represent experiences, dreams, values, and beliefs of people offering a chance to questions and see through another’s eyes.

J. Hillis Miller (2002) wrote of a time when he resented the fact that a book even had an author. To him “it [book] seemed a collection of words fallen from the sky and into my hands” and that he “saw through the words to what seemed to me beyond them and not dependent on them, even though I could get there in no other way than by reading those words” (p. 14). Reading creates a visual construct of comprehension in the mind—one that allows the reader to see the setting, imagine the characters, and anticipate the actions while becoming consumed by the words. Miller (2001) suggests that “all novels tend to create a virtual reality in the minds of their readers. Houses, rooms, roads, streets,

hills, rivers, and so on get organized in a mental topography that may vary from reader to reader, just as do readers' imaginations of the way the characters look" (p. 43). This virtual reality transforms thought and deepens the connection between the words and the reader creating a point for the imagination to take over and allowing the reader to learn from the reading. The imagination is able to accept and often embrace the idea of "the omniscient narrator [which] gives the reader of novels using that convention the pleasure of being able, in a fiction at least, to enter into the mind and feelings, even, by an imaginative leap, into the body, of other persons" (Miller, 2001, p. 66). The connections of readers to the content and more importantly the concept of what they are reading in that natural processing, questioning and reflection occurs often spontaneously, reinforces the idea that reading is a performative act requiring the opportunity for dialogue, discussion, and contemplation.

Greene (1995) suggests that "because of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities" (p. 3). Advancements in technology and changes in how students interact, communicate, and network with the world have impacted how schools must deal with new literacies while continuing to expect proficiency in traditional modes. These same students have lived with computers, text messaging, blogging, and social networking all of their lives, yet most of the teaching pool has only experienced technology through professional learning, training classes, and experimentation on their own.

Oftentimes these forms of communication and literacy are relegated to secondary positions behind what is considered traditional reading and writing excluding attention to media and digital literacies. Teachers frequently are given little to no training in media

literacy as it is seen in the classroom as a “frill” or extra-curricular activity. This integral part of adolescent lives has become what they believe to be “normal”, and those who are not familiar with these digital connections are in conflict and feel “left behind” building a power struggle between teachers, administrators, parents, and students in a “those who know” and use alternative literacies and those who fear, control, and legislate it. Students utilize these technologies on a daily basis and “need to understand the degree to which media constructions or representations function to create a common, shared culture...and recognize that the meanings of these texts do not actually lie ‘in’ the text, but rather in how audiences construct the meaning of media texts within specific social contexts” (Beach, 2007, p. 5). If we are to develop critical understandings within the social construct of literacy, then educators must understand that “children can never be too young to use their skills-in-acquisition of literacy to confront, criticize, or question, as well as to form their own rational attitudes to issues arising from their own world. In all these areas and contexts of learning and teaching, skills and consciousness go hand in hand” (Searle, 1993, p. 171).

If we expect to recognize the nature of power bases on oppressed and marginalized peoples “we must be prepared to hear questions we might not like; questions that force us to think differently, to listen and hear other voices and opinions, including those of children. We must be willing to see the world in new ways and to honestly ask ourselves sometimes painful questions” (McDaniel, 2006, p. 5). Developing curriculum within the schools that allows for a reading of the world in this way prepares a dialogue of pedagogy that including a rewriting it “of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work... This dynamic movement is central to the literacy process”

(Freire, 1987, p. 35). Asking students to think more deeply and read in the world as an effort to understand the structures that are placed to limit and marginalize people may lead to questions that support civil and social understandings. The goal of critical literacy is to recognize and challenge unequal power relations while creating social understanding and a fuller civic life (Anderson & Irvine, 1993; Giroux, 1993; Freire, 1987).

Current federal and state mandates have narrowed school curriculum to skill-based practices that are produced, weighed, and checked off through assessments intended to measure and define high achievement while limiting time and practice in creativity, questioning and curiosity. Freire (1987) insists that “a critical pedagogy must not repress students’ creativity. Creativity needs to be stimulated, not only at the level of students’ individuality, but also at the level of their individuality in a social context” (p. 57). Gains in one skill over another do not necessarily take away from critical activity; however, standards and mandates that set students and teachers up to a greater separation between skills acquisition and learning.

It is important to understand that “education signifies an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, and moving. It signifies the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reading out for meanings, a learning to learn” (Greene, 2001, p. 7). The challenge facing educators today is in questioning and changing legislation such as NCLB which alienates students from learning and limits students in being able to pursue their question about the world and their place in it (Shannon, 2007). This requires a pedagogy that questions such standards. The hope for a more socially constructed form of learning must support curriculum that accounts for students’ freedom



to recognize difference and acknowledge students' ability to doubt. Giroux (1993) challenges us to recognize that:

[Literacy] focuses attention on the importance of acknowledging meaning is not fixed and that to be literate is to undertake a dialogue with others who speak from different histories, locations, and experiences. Literacy is a discursive practice in which difference becomes crucial for understanding not simply how to read, write, or develop aural skills, but also how to recognize that the identities of others matter as part of a progressive set of politics and practices aimed at the reconstruction of democratic public life (p. 368).

Educational practices in schools must allow students the opportunity for critical practice in questioning and “doubting” the world and the messages and standards that are presented in it. The voices of those marginalized and “othered” into categories of difference will continue to be diminished and shut out of society if schools do not allow for the opportunities and challenges that create controversy and insight into social and critical issues of race, poverty, and gender. The voices of students may emerge beyond skills and beyond mastery and into a study of identity, value, and social worth of the individual as well as members of a greater society.

### **The Choice of Comics and Graphic Novels in Learning**

The resurgence of American comic books has been greatly enhanced by film adaptations. Superman, Batman, the X-Men, and Iron Man have enjoyed acclaim by those who remember these characters from newsprint booklets in childhood and those who now know these characters primarily through film and graphic novels. Scott McCloud (1993) utilizes a comic format in his book *Understanding Comics* and in doing

so provides a definition for this medium. He suggests that comics are “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (p. 9). McTaggart (2008) offers a more simplistic definition that suggests that “today, the term ‘comic book’ describes any format that uses a combination of frames, words, and pictures to convey meaning and tell a story” (p. 31). These definitions open the door to the understanding that comic art goes beyond simply pictures with word bubbles and historical perceptions of a frivolous waste of time.

Understanding the background and composition of visual storytelling that centers on American comic books and the evolution of the graphic novel helps to put into perspective some of the relative factors that make this part of popular culture exist within the new framework of literacy. Although this medium has been around for quite some time and many of us remember stacks of comic books as a source of pleasure in our youth, it fits in the discussion of popular culture and literacy as a connection to developing critical literacy in conjunction with adolescent reading instruction in a contemporary context.

Redefining literacy suggests there are more options for “literacy practices associated with contemporary changes in our institutions and economy that do not necessarily involve using new technologies” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 26). Reading text involves certain language codes that must be understood by the reader. By the same token, reading comics includes a comic language that “combines to constitute a weave of writing and art which has its own syntax, grammar, and conventions, and which can communicate ideas in a totally unique fashion” (Sabin, 1996, p. 8). The graphic novel

acts as an artifact of social culture with themes that posit historical significance and utilize the two mediums of image and text to convey meaning. Bronowski (1978) suggests that “the characteristic feature of all human cultures is that they make artifacts; and this is really what we mean when we say that the human mind is creative” (p. 63). The power of a graphic novel to produce images that express concepts beyond the imagery and place interpretation in the hands of the reader opens new doors to learning and understanding.

Reading in one sense is its own language. Granted the text is based on the language of the author, however, the language of reading includes the spoken as well as the unspoken. It requires interpretation beyond the words and structure of its construction as well as recognizing the differences in interpretation by each reader. According to Miller (2001) “reading right, it may be, is difficult, if not impossible” (p. 70). Understanding text requires the reading of it. That being said, so often what is read is misunderstood, read literally, or the codes embedded into the text do not lead to understanding or logical interpretation. What are the keys that open this up? How is it that text becomes separate from understanding and less connected, less comprehensible?

In the case of comic art according to McCloud (1993):

Pictures are received information. We need no formal education to get the message. The message is instantaneous. Writing is perceived information. It takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language.

When pictures are more abstracted from reality, they require greater levels of perception, more like words. When words are bolder, more direct, they require lower levels of perception and are received faster, more like pictures. (p. 49)

Does this change the common definition of reading then? Who decides when reading must only encompass what is in textual form or whether other medium, art or graphics are included?

Miller (2001) goes on to suggest that “[a] passage must be read to be understood, which means reading it otherwise grasping that one thing stands for another thing, not making the mistake of reading literally. What key of interpretation will confirm that we have read the parable right? As Jesus’ parable of the sower affirms, understanding a parable involves a performative leap that cannot be taught to another. It is not a matter verifiable cognition” (p. 70). Howard Zinn’s graphic interpretation of, *A People’s History of American Empire*, includes the visual representation of this parable by utilizing Art Young’s editorial cartoon of 1922 to demonstrate the benefits of World War I to the industrialists of that era. This demonstrates an interesting juxtaposition between what is clearly presented in the biblical parable as charity for all with no boundary to classes, to the war profits for all when clearly those who profited during that time were those considered most powerful and rich. These interpretations require an understanding of the text or parable as it relates to the graphic as well as the historical significance of its time. Reading this graphic looks beyond the surface of its illustration and seeks greater understanding through knowledge of the parable and its application to the parody demonstrated in the editorial cartoon.

Art Spiegelman’s *The Complete Maus* (1996) is one of the first graphic novels to come to public notice and has created a work that deals with the issues surrounding his father’s experiences during the Holocaust. Adams (1999) adds that “[*Maus*] manages to force its political agenda into the foreground, to maintain its ‘kitsch’ visual devices

without compromising the pertinence of its narrative statement” (p. 73). This memoir/biographical format brings a new medium to non-fiction storylines and graphic portrayals of difficult, cultural, and political themes and circumstances. Spiegelman’s story plays as both a narrative and as a pictorial journal of events surrounding his father’s life during the Nazi occupation in Poland and his subsequent life in the concentration camps.

The telling of Spiegelman’s tale includes portraying the characters as different animals indicating differing ethnicities. For instance, the Jews are depicted as mice while the Germans are cats. The Americans are represented as dogs and the Poles represented as pigs. In one slide, Vladek, Spiegelman’s father, is attempting to visit a friend in another town, but he must walk past a group of Polish children playing in a yard. Vladek has placed a pig mask over his face, yet the children begin to cry out “A Jew! A Jew!” (Spiegelman, 1996, p. 151). The use of the mask allowed Vladek to act the part of a non-Jew. In this scene he chooses not to run away but says “Heil Hitler” and calms the children down by claiming not to be a Jew. While surviving the danger in this scene, Vladek goes on to say “but the experience cost me really a lot of hairs” (p. 151).

Spiegelman graphically illustrates the dilemma of children betraying his father and demonstrates the hopeless struggle during this time of the mouse caught in a trap.

Spiegelman, forces nonfiction into his graphic style and presents material that is difficult and horrible yet captures the reader in an intricate and delicate web of truth. Versaci (2001) comments on Spiegelman’s work as “challenging in every sense of the word, from the complexity of his visual arrangements, to the weight of the subject matter, to his brilliant use (and deconstruction) of an extended animal metaphor by which the

nationalities of the people involved are represented by various animals” (p. 63). The depth of understanding, the visual representation of difficult issues, and the relevance of this style adds another voice to historical texts.

Marjane Satrapi brings another look at graphic depictions in her memoir *Persepolis*. Her perspectives as an Iranian born woman are meant to portray a different view that one only of fanaticism and terrorism. Her point of view as a child brings innocence to a more complicated and misunderstood history that through the combination of her narrative and graphic depictions of her experiences attempts to illustrate a child’s understanding of the changes in Iran in the early 1980’s. One of the purposes of literature must include the acknowledgement that literature and the reading of it:

[It] is one of the quickest ways to become acculturated, to get inside one’s own culture and to belong to it...Reading literature is also one of the quickest ways to get inside a culture other than one’s own, assuming that is possible at all and assuming you happen to want to do it. (Miller, 2002, p. 90)

Given today’s political climate that often misrepresents the Iranian peoples as terrorists and intentionally limits understandings of the history and cultural background of these diverse peoples, Satrapi brings her own perspective that does not hide the fear, violence, or politics of the time and opens up a dialogue with the reader in the sharing of her viewpoint as an Iranian child during this time.

Satrapi begins her story after the 1979 “Islamic Revolution” and powerfully illustrates the confusion behind the changes occurring in her country at that time. The children are presented on the playground after being told to wear a veil in public. Each of the children in the play yard has found a variety of games to play with the veil rather than

wear it. Only two children actually have the veil on properly. One child has another with the veil around her neck as if she is a horse, one is throwing it off because it is too hot, one is playing jump rope with the veil and another is pretending to execute a child “in the name of freedom” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 3). McAllister, Sewell, and Gordon (2006) suggest that “often comics’ portrayals of social issues and representations of particular groups have significant ideological implications” (p. 5). What appears to be accomplished in the development of a graphic novel such as *Persepolis* is as Derrida (1988) suggests that “a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription” (p. 9). The visual interpretation of the author’s ideas is of equal if not greater importance than the text included. The visual is by its own definition a form of text intended to push forward the story and increase the levels of understanding found in the reader. The character, Marji, continues to challenge the religious controls placed on her while attempting to resolve her own beliefs about God, tradition, and behavior. While Satrapi’s memoir is meant to illustrate her memories of the event, the depictions and word balloons of each of the children in the playground emphasize more explicit themes and values surrounding the act of wearing a veil at that time. Her simplistic almost two dimensional style works in direct contrast to the significance of the times and the complicated nature of the changes in the political climate.

Comics utilize a language that requires the reading to decode and recognize when attempting to read them. This coding includes a tension between the text and graphics intended to convey a specific theme, setting, characterizations and more with the use of specific text and focused drawings. This adds another dimension to literacy and reading

in that “any visualization, whether it is made up of pictographs we recognize as drawings, or drawings we’ve come to recognize as letters, must be interpreted, coded, and comprehended by the mind of the one who views it” (Carter, 2008, p. 49). The development of a comic incorporates that use of a picture and its relationship to word and thought balloons that carry the reader through the images. The reader must act in some respects as his own narrator and begin to make the connections between what is seen visually and what is conveyed in the text.

The characters portrayed in comics and graphic novels are everyday people with flaws that create external conflicts with society and internal conflicts within themselves and provide a potential for critical review through themes, presentation, and plot lines openly visual and textual in nature. Adolescent readers have found these and other new characters visually stimulating with graphic appeal and fast paced interesting stories to be highly motivational and intriguing. The film industry has adopted and adored the comic book genre in that “in Hollywood, comics never have been bigger business, lucrative fields of creativity waiting to be mined by the film moguls, directors, merchandisers, and advertisers” (Roberts, 2004, p. 210). *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Men in Black*, *The Fantastic 4*, *Superman*, and *Batman* movies as well as the popularity of the *anime* television cartoons of *Sailor Moon*, *Dragon Ball Z*, *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, and *Naruto* are a multi-million dollar business with no end in sight.

Characters such as *Superman* or *Batman* fight their battles beyond human endurance while still finding time to be the mild mannered reporter, Clark Kent, or the businessman and philanthropist, Bruce Wayne, giving the reader a place to connect with and imagine the possibilities of powers or superhuman strength while following the



internal and extremes of the external struggles for these seemingly everyday characters. These action-oriented story lines are highly engaging while supporting the desire in the reader to read more (McTaggart, 2008). Students, today, have grown up and lived with visual stimulation in most facets of music, popular culture, and gaming. Teachers and educators may misunderstand the component of learning and its level of importance to those students. It may well be that the reason many students no longer read is because there is so much information to process from the Internet, films, television, and other varieties of media. By the same token, recognition must be made from a critical approach that these forms of media are “normal” for these students and “in many ways, the act of reading a comic cuts much more closely to how our students today receive information” (Versaci, 2008, p. 97).

Those who struggle with reading tend to have difficulties with visualizing text, that is in seeing and understanding text in comprehensible terms. Many of these students have grown up with graphics from TV, video games, and graphic software rather than hours of conversation and reading books with family and friends. For these students, the act of reading text is a chore of decoding letters without relative meaning to their lives or their interests. The visual and textual combination of comics and graphic novels supports the need of many of these struggling students in decoding text and satisfies the need to understand and comprehend content material.

The nature of graphic novels employs the performative aspects of reading by engaging the reader beyond the text to include the visual depictions, hyperbole, and even the spaces between the panels to elicit the use of imagination and meaning. Drohan (2009) suggests that:

Knowledge is not a matter of accurately representing our perceptions. Instead, knowledge consists of our ability to act in the world. The value of our mental images comes from the way in which they organize our different perceptions according to their use-value... In other words, we perceive most clearly that which we know how to use. Perception is therefore a function of our actions in the world. (p. 118)

Engagement with text that allows for connections and meaning between the reader and the reader's prior knowledge and scope of understanding increase the levels of comprehension. Derrida (1988) notes that "the crucial role, usually underestimated, that imagination plays in human life, and the equally crucial role that shared products of the imagination play in human social life" (p. 96) are related to the intentions of reading and the illocution or intent of the author.

The graphic novel expands the ideas and frameworks of comics to a longer and more artful version of the comics in that they typically complete a storyline within the book rather than a compilation or anthology of weekly or monthly comics. Graphic novels combine the elements of text and the visual depictions such as films and TV do providing another medium for literacy. The combination and blending of words and pictures in graphic texts allows readers to "see" characters and settings through the illustrations and text. What is important to note is that this blending is required for comprehension in that the comic or graphic novel is not understood without the text or without the graphic. Each depends on the other for understanding and "does not happen in the words, or the pictures, but somewhere in-between, in what is sometimes known as the marriage of text and image" (Versaci, 2001, p. 62). Graphic novels and comics

provide a meaningful, sophisticated, and interesting approach to issues and events that intrigue the reader and provoke critical thought. With this clear understanding and motivational support, it is expected that those students who find the comic book and graphic novel enticing will continue to seek out more books. Thompson (2008) suggests that “research shows that students who read high-interest, self-selected texts for longer periods of time become stronger readers” (p. 11). Comic books and graphic novels must be considered part of that choice.

The success of the superhero and the development of full-story graphic novels creates another dimension in comic books and the curriculum that supports motivation and interest in adolescent reading. Because of their frequent distribution, comics remain “on the cutting edge of pop culture; they react swiftly to social and cultural changes and address them in a timely fashion....The comic-book industry keeps its finger on the pulse of what is happening in the world, what kids view as ‘cool,’ and they respond to it with lightning speed. The industry’s reward is more sales; society’s reward is more student readers” (McTaggart, 2008, p. 29). The superhuman strength and moral values of Superman coupled with the darker, perhaps sadder side of Batman as a human with athletic ability and considerable gadgets designed to rid the city of criminals absorb the attention of adolescent readers and have for some time.

Moving the comics industry to deepening plots and sub-storylines, the natural and interesting step toward the graphic novel has gone beyond the comic book and brought with it “subtle, complex, and often fascinating plots” (Krachen, 2004, p. 95). The fascination with superheroes is surrounded in the fact that “superhero comics are, by their nature, larger than life, and what’s useful and interesting about their characters is that

they provide bold metaphors for discussing ideas or reifying abstractions into narrative fiction” (Wolk, 2007, p. 92). Storylines that force conflict and tension between those characters otherwise impervious to defeat demonstrate fascinating and focused development of plots that entice the reader into continuing supplemental and spin-off storylines. The argument in adolescent reading is not that adolescents should not be reading comics and graphic novels for enjoyment, but that comics place in education is limited at best even with the foundations for exceptional instructional practice found within the panels and balloons of each.

### **The Opposing View of Comics**

The value of comics as material in the classroom forces questions that challenge curriculum and policy based on educational canon that supports elitist, racist, and class related practices and channel knowledge through a pre-determined sieve. Historical perspectives of comic books have placed them as secondary texts that do not belong in traditional classrooms because of their perceived lack of substantive material. This debate began at their inception with critics complaining of their negative impact on education and was “symptomatic of much that was going wrong in the contemporary world” (Heer & Worcester, 2004, p. 1). Concerns were voiced by these critics that questioned the impact on proper grammar and diction, threats to time-honored literary values, and the possibility of “the growing strength of disorderly immigrant cultures in the United States which threatened to overturn Anglo-Saxon supremacy” (p. 1). Another such critic, Sidney Fairfield, wrote in 1895: “Let the reading-matter have the most of the space. The written word is the first and the highest expression of thought, and it ever will be” (p. 5). While their comments are related to early twentieth century thought, one can easily transfer

these criticisms to contemporary classrooms forced to limit instruction to skills-based approaches that focus that same instruction on pre-determined acceptable knowledge diminishing the value of questions, deepening of thought, and greater concerns for critical issues in literacy.

Included in this dim view of comics, the bestselling book, *The Seduction of the Innocent*, published by Fredric Wertham in 1954 made claims that the violence and sex portrayed in comics contributed to the delinquency of children and began as significant censorship of the comics industry in the United States. This enforced censorship limited most comics to superheroes such as Superman and Batman and prompted the institution of a Comics Code to police content and graphics found in comic books. Hatfield (2005) sums up the view of primarily librarians and English teachers and were concerned with “the neutral or valueless carrier [comic books] of themes and ideas better expressed in traditional books” (p. 34). Of even greater concern was that “the pictures are held to be a detriment because they encourage a ‘lazy’ or passive approach to reading. This position assumes that the verbal aspects of the hybrid text are of no consequence to the (presumably semi-literate) readers, who concentrate wholly on the pictures” (p. 34).

While some change in attitude toward comics has occurred with the introduction of more sophisticated storylines, high level graphics, and the highly motivating and interesting Manga comics, clearly a negative view continues to invade classrooms where time must be devoted to instruction specifically designed to meet expectations, standards, and yearly assessments.

Comics, if accepted, have been relegated to special units and entertaining “down-time” material rather than a highly focused educational tool needed to support

motivation, comprehension, and image-word association in adolescents. Beach (2007) challenges the idea that there is a clear and distinct difference in reading print versus non-print text. He suggests that “many media hybrid texts [including current comic and graphic novels] involve complex reading strategies as well as literacies involved in producing media texts” (p. 3). Often when writing, words are used to recall experiences that have been seen, read, acted, or heard. As is often the case when students have been shown a visual cue or picture, writing becomes more elaborate and detailed in its construction. One common practice in classrooms is the use of a comic book version or graphic adaptation of what is termed “classic” literature. Uses such as this that “scaffold the storyline prior to tackling the original’s Elizabethan English...may introduce students to literature which they might not otherwise encounter” (Smetana, Odelson, Burns & Grisham, 2009). This scaffolding as well as the use of visual cues may support the transfer of information in understanding difficult prose and phrasing as well as cues to emotion and intent often assumed when reading traditional text. However, the use of graphic adaptations as a replacement for the reading of traditional text may well offer a valid argument for non-use of this material diminishing the power of the traditional reading. Limiting the use of comic books then as now creates a powerful political statement based on the values, judgments, and beliefs of the current educational/political system and do not speak well for those students who think, read, decode, and comprehend differently from the norms and standards set by those bureaucracies.

The face of graphic interpretations and sequential art in the classroom is changing; however, resistance is still evident in policies that view literacy from one point of view that forces teachers, parents, administrators, and school boards to choose between

straight-forward standards and expectations from political sources. Maxine Greene (2001) emboldens educators with the thought that “we who teach must address ourselves to our students’ freedom, their capacity to see that they can be different, that things can be different” (p. 47). In responding to this a new voice is added to the discussion requiring a critical perspective of those literacies most important to students.

### **Adolescent Motivation and Engagement in an Age of Multiple Literacies**

Motivation is one of those funny words that are frequently defined by emotions and actions that relate more honestly with those writing the definition rather than those acting on it. In many school buildings voices of teachers are heard articulating problems with the motivation levels of students with comments like: “My students just have no motivation;” “They just don’t care about making zeroes;” “It’s not my job to do their work for them;” “We have to stop spoon-feeding kids;” “We have to get them ready for high school;” “We have to stop babying our students.” This time of accountability from administrators at all levels reinforces the sense that teachers are responsible for the actions of students and motivation is something quite out of their control. Therefore the idea remains that teachers can “make” students become motivated.

The field of adolescent literacy has focused at times on how to increase student engagement and motivation to read. Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, Seunariningsingh, Mogge, Headley, Ridgeway, Peck, Hunt and Dunston (2007) consider the definition of motivation as determined by “beliefs, values, needs and goals that individuals have. Thus, the closer that literacy activities and tasks match these values, needs, and goals, the greater the likelihood that students will expend effort and sustain interest in them” (p. 378-379). This definition is flawed because what is often the case is the misunderstanding

between perceptions of achievement and ability. Collopy and Green (1995) posit that “often in schools where students adopt ability goals, students come to believe that success is defined in terms of how they do in comparison to others. Implicit in the comparative definition of success is the belief that some students are smart, some are average, and some are dumb...Students who adopt ability goals are more likely to avoid challenging tasks and to give up in the face of difficulty” (p. 169).

Alderman (2008) views the idea of motivation from three different psychological functions that include: “(a) energizing or activating behavior; (b) directing behavior; and (c) regulating persistence of behavior” (p. 5). These three functions address the fundamental drive to find the answer through natural curiosity and learning, include the dynamic of choice and student voice; and a persistence that allows students to work toward completion of a goal. From this more diverse perspective of motivation educators must view student effort from a deeper point of view. Teaching must include the purpose of supporting learning and of “breaking barriers of expectation, of boredom, of predefinition” (Greene, 1995, p. 14). Motivation is not something that can be given by teachers nor can the desire to learn be forced on students. Motivation and engagement emanate from the learner. Teachers have the power to “cultivate these elements through authentic and creative teaching” (Riggs and Gholar, 2009, p. 6). Inquiry based in imagination, possibilities, and creativity moves the motivational lens to a focus based on multiple literacies that must include the arts, popular culture, and multimedia formats.

Recognizing the diverse nature of student backgrounds, cultural experiences, funds of knowledge, and learning styles, requires literacy then to become something inherently more intricate than answering a writing prompt and responding to



comprehension questions (Berghoff & Borgmann, 2007). Even so, motivation is a complex issue and must also consider the idea of student beliefs about their own ability in the academic arena versus the value of personal effort.

Student perceptions related to effort and ability drives the formation of misconceptions and negative attitudes affecting and influencing achievement. Students who believe that ability is fixed are more prone to learned helplessness as they see effort as having little effect on their ability to complete tasks successfully. They tend to avoid difficult tasks and give up easily when challenged. When ability is believed by students as unchanging, then they also believe their academic failures are due to their own lack of ability. Concerns with grades as compared in a competitive manner with other students can create anxiety and set up a relationship between mistakes and failures as a negative reflection on ability. That being said, carefully constructed collaborative relationships with other students in the classroom can focus students on the effort of completing a task and utilize mistakes generally as part of the learning process and requiring sustained effort. Alderman (2008) makes the statement that “attributions to effort are emphasized because effort is internal, controllable, and usually perceived as unstable” (p. 55). According to Seifert (2004) “students who attribute success and failure to internal, controllable causes are more likely to feel pride, satisfaction, and confidence and have a higher sense of self-esteem” (p. 140). These students will endeavor to produce higher quality work, persevere through failures, and choose more difficult tasks. Self-instruction training further enhances this approach through teaching students to attribute successes and failures to “internal causes of effort and ability” (Alderman, 2008, p. 56). Promoting student behaviors that reinforce internal messages inclusive of study strategies, effort,

and perseverance ultimately lead to success and mastery. These attributions provide specific expectations for success and failure and provide a mechanism for asking questions and seeking clarification without breaks in confidence. Our task as teachers is to “realize that disruptive students can change with positive behavior supports and [teachers] can be effective with students if they adopt positive practices” (Morin, 2001, p. 64). Even more so the challenge for teachers is to help students maintain a healthy balance between believing that they have the ability necessary to learn, and knowing that effort will help them maximize their ability.

Motivation is that desire within us to move beyond where we are and become something more because of it. That drive to find the answer, understand the concept, look at new ideas, ponder a philosophy, or create new pathways is fostered through a level of autonomy and goal-setting that gives all students a voice in their learning. Adolescent learners are a part of a culture dependent on technology, entertained by video games, television, facebook and twitter. Immediate reactive digital games and reality based programs on television occupy much of the free time and attention of students yet is largely considered substandard when applied to learning goals and student achievement. The appeal of artifacts of popular culture such as graphic novels and comics may lie in “action-oriented story lines...[that allow a student] to read the words, see the action, comprehend the meaning, and is motivated to read more”. (Frey and Fisher, (2008), p. 29. What is even more enticing is the idea that the inclusion of this important part of an adolescent’s world into the educational area “could validate who they are and perhaps increase their genuine interest in reading, writing, and discussing their perspectives of the world.” (Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood, 1999, p.9) Bringing the use of graphic novels

into the classroom as a different form of literacy invites the dramatic increase of visual material that predominates much of how students receive information through the digital world. Versaci reminds us that “comic books—more so than any other visual medium—allow teachers to pose questions that help students do two things: understand how images produce meaning, and become engaged in the search for this meaning.” (Versaci, 2008, p. 96) Looking at this from the point of view of motivation and engagement the pleasures derived from popular culture opens up the possibilities of “other readings and productions of popular texts without dismissing the pleasures already formed” (Alvermann, Moon, Hagood, 1999, p. 35 through previous more traditional teaching and learning opportunities.

### **Curriculum and the Challenge of Critical Literacy**

If we are to develop critical understandings within the social construct of critical literacy, then educators must understand that students need ample opportunities to confront, criticize, and question issues in society as well as be able to challenge their own belief systems and form opinions and attitudes based on their own rational decisions. Recognizing the nature of power bases on oppressed and marginalized peoples requires us as educators to “be prepared to hear questions we might not like; questions that force us to think differently, to listen and hear other voices and opinions, including those of children” (McDaniel, 2006, p. 5) and distinguish the voices of those children from the oppressive voices of those in power. Developing curriculum within the schools that allows for a reading of the world in this way prepares a dialogue of pedagogy that includes a rewriting of it and “of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work... This dynamic movement is central to the literacy process” (Freire, 1987, p. 35).

Asking students to think more deeply in an effort to understand why structures are in place that limit and marginalize people leads to questions that support civil and social understandings.

Students' reading from a critical lens includes understanding that "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (Freire, 1987, p. 35). Words represent experiences, dreams, values, and beliefs of people. Students must be given opportunities to ask questions and to see through another's eyes. Adolescents require the use of imagination and creativity in learning yet that very spark has been minimized in favor of a more structured "back to basics" approach that is more easily quantified through pacing guides and standardized testing. However, the decreases in adolescent motivation related to reading and school in general suggests the need for greater challenges beyond rote meaning. Imagination fosters new ideas, concepts and points of view that goes beyond structured cognition and "permits us to give credence to alternative realities" (Greene, 1995, p. 3). Traditional schooling practices allow little time for conversations that spark the imagination and continually question the social actions, belief systems and values of others.

Developing curriculum within the schools that allows for a reading of the world in this way prepares a dialogue of pedagogy that includes a rewriting of it and "of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work... This dynamic movement is central to the literacy process" (Freire, 1987, p. 35). Asking students to think more deeply by reading in the world promotes an effort to understand why structures are in place that limit and marginalize people leads to questions that support civil and social understandings. If we expect to recognize the nature of power bases on oppressed and

marginalized peoples “we must be prepared to hear questions we might not like; questions that force us to think differently, to listen and hear other voices and opinions, including those of children. We must be willing to see the world in new ways and to honestly ask ourselves sometimes painful questions” (McDaniel, 2006, p. 5).

Current federal and state mandates have narrowed school curriculum to skill-based practices that are produced, weighed, and checked off through assessments intended to measure and define high achievement while limiting time and practice in creativity, questioning and curiosity. What is often missed in the literature classroom is the understanding that “a book itself does not explicitly confirm or disallow any of the ways we may read it. It passively abides our readings and misreadings” (Miller, 2001, p. 71). Allowing our realities to be challenged through the art of graphic novels, the images that evoke meaning and understanding, and the narrative that blends the story with our imaginations, our experiences, and the expansion of ideas creates a greater depth of learning and understanding as part of adolescent literacy. Freire (1987) insists that “a critical pedagogy must not repress students’ creativity. Creativity needs to be stimulated, not only at the level of students’ individuality, but also at the level of their individuality in a social context” (p. 57). Gains in one skill over another do not necessarily take away from critical activity; however, standards and mandates set students and teachers up to a greater separation between skills acquisition and learning.

The challenge in dealing with this legislation requires pedagogy to question such standards. Freire (1987) proposes that “instead of reinforcing the purely mechanical repetitions of phrases and lists, educators should simulate students to doubt” (p. 57). The idea of questioning and seeking answers to extract greater meaning and thereby foster a

conceptual approach to reading simply makes sense in applying this to adolescent literacy. Reading for adolescents in the traditional sense does not often activate the innate desire for further learning without meaningful connection to contemporary themes and experiences. The hope for a more socially constructed form of learning includes the reminder from Maxine Greene (2001) that “we who teach these things must address ourselves to our students’ freedom, their capacity to see that they can be different, that things can be different” (p. 47). The courage to question social oppression, previously held beliefs, and traditions only serves to strengthen student confidence in learning and builds upon natural desires for understanding the world in which we all live.

Teaching from a social construct that includes the infusion of critical inspection of literature, art, and poetry challenges us as educators to seek a new discourse that includes meaningful print and non-print material and assigning value through critical review.

Giroux (1993) challenges us to recognize that:

[Literacy] focuses attention on the importance of acknowledging meaning is not fixed and that to be literate is to undertake a dialogue with others who speak from different histories, locations, and experiences. Literacy is a discursive practice in which difference becomes crucial for understanding not simply how to read, write, or develop aural skills, but also how to recognize that the identities of others matter as part of a progressive set of politics and practices aimed at the reconstruction of democratic public life (p. 368).

Educational practices in schools must allow students the opportunity for critical practice in questioning and doubting the world and the messages and standards that are presented in it. The voices of those marginalized and “othered” into categories of difference will

continue to be diminished and shut out of society if schools do not allow for the opportunities and challenges that create controversy and insight into social and critical issues of race, poverty, and gender. The voices of students may emerge beyond skills and beyond mastery and into a study of identity, value, and social worth of the individual as well as members of a greater society. This study utilized the alternative perspective of graphic novels grounded in critical literacy and gave adolescent learners a bridge to view literature from a finer, more critical lens. In truth, examples of graphic depictions and visual storytelling presented material in ways that opened the door to thoughtful pondering and discussion by these students direly needed in today's school curriculum.

### **Reading the Word and the World through Graphic Novels**

Utilizing a graphic novel such as, *Persepolis*, *Maus*, or *American Born Chinese*, in middle or high school classrooms gives opportunity to explore those difficult questions and controversies and bring new personal meaning to the reader related to power and culture. Critical literacy requires a view of text beyond the words that questions those words as they relate to the world. Adolescents are faced with significant social issues that affect their day to day lives. Dealing with text from a critical perspective that is “based on the premise that the social negotiations of the rules of proper behavior, laws, and social institutions are not conducted among equals because social, economic, and political circumstances have given certain groups license to assert undue influence over the outcomes” (Shannon, 1995, p. 62-63) stretch the viewpoints of standard curriculum and require insight into power struggles and inequalities.

Apple (1993) reasons that:

Texts are really messages to and about the future. As part of a curriculum, they participate in no less than the organized knowledge system of society. They participate in creating what a society has recognized as legitimate and truthful. They help set the canons of truthfulness and, as such, also help recreate a major reference point for what knowledge, culture, belief and morality really are. (p. 198)

The ability of the visual representation in graphic novels to create stress or tension and translate that through symbols, pictures, text, and shapes challenges the reader in a unique way in finding meaning. The reader is actively engaged from beginning to end in the act of “negotiating meaning...[urging] the reader to do the work of inference, to negotiate over and over the passage from submissive reading to active interpreting” (Hatfield, 2005, p. xiv). It is expected in a study utilizing graphic novels that comprehension strategies typically employed by students in reading narrative will be utilized but will not necessarily be simplified. On the contrary, in graphic novels text retains equal importance with the images while both require decoding to be understood. Hatfield (2005) suggests that “word and image approach each other: words can be visually inflected, reading as pictures, while pictures can become as abstract and symbolic as words. The written text can function like images, and images like written text” (p. 36). This suggests pedagogy that includes an on-going dialogue between teachers and students in developing strategies for meaning while extending the conversation toward a critical stance that evaluates the cultural, political, and social context affecting the reading.

When students are given opportunities to challenge and respond to critical text and graphic novels then according to Apple (1993) “here people help create their own



texts, ones that signify their emerging power in the control of their own destinies” (p. 207). Mastery of skills is not the issue in a critical pedagogy that includes social awareness and a dialogue of text. It is the reading to question, to challenge, to seek the unknown that drives the need to read more and intimately finds strength in motivating the adolescent learner.

Graphic novels such as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* or Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* bring a social context to images that evoke emotion and force us to look at the world through different eyes. Mitchell (2005) suggests that “we need to ponder that we don’t just evaluate images; images introduce new forms of value in to the world, contesting our criteria, forcing us to change our minds” (p. 92). This study is expected to find significant improvements in comprehension with those students who have difficulty understanding large textual content since the focus of graphic novels is in specific text and significant visual details intended to enhance comprehension.

Graphic novels may increase motivation and interest in independent reading because of the nature of their construction. Utilizing the comic or graphic novels recognizes that “images are not just passive entities that coexist with their human hosts...they change the way we think and see and dream. They refunction our memories and imaginations, bringing new criteria and new desires into the world” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 92). Educators must acknowledge the specific challenges to adolescent literacy and motivation and work to change how we traditionally think about reading and its close connection to an adolescent’s place in the world.

### Summary of Literature

The use of genres such as comic books and graphic novels offers the adolescent learner a “curriculum that is thoughtfully planned to make the most of multiple arts disciplines [and] enables students to develop deep emotive intensity, intentionality as learners, and useful insights into human experience (Berghoff & Borgmann, 2007, p. 22-23). Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* clearly illustrate early on the struggles and self-torture of Bruce Wayne as he walks the streets of Gotham City. The art is dark indicating a man alone while those around him are grotesque and illustrated in shades of nondescript gray. The text is brief and mirrors the art as Wayne states: “I walk the streets of this city I’m learning to hate, the city that’s given up, like the whole world seems to have. I’m a zombie, a flying Dutchman, a dead man, ten years dead...” (F. Miller, 2002, p. 12). The graphic novel is a medium that plays with the idea of humanness and othering which allows for an inventive turn of the tables on the norm in narrative. Comic art and graphic representations combine words and pictures in a unique way that absorbs the imagination of the reader. McCloud (1993) suggests:

When we abstract an image through cartooning, we’re not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential meaning, an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can’t. (p. 30)

Allowing these graphic interpretations to capture our attention and intensify that meaning serves to create a powerful imagery that more closely allows the mind of the reader to associate with those images and more fully align the imagination with the images.

The imagination is opened through questions, desire, and creativity and is not intended necessarily to resolve issues. Maxine Greene (1995) recognized the power of imagination to “awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected” (p. 28). Adolescent learning and critical literacy may be recognized through the implication that comic books and graphic novels have the ability to allow learners to think “metaphorically, using familiar concepts and objects to explain the unfamiliar, attending to equivalencies and differences while seeking a fuller understanding” (Berghoff & Borgmann, 2007, p. 23). While graphic novels have moved closer in their position of acceptance in the classroom, we must recognize their ability to appeal to diverse students and reluctant learners, as well as providing a source of stories, fantastic narrative, informational topics, and historical representations that provide a connection to the multiple literacies through popular culture so prevalent in our students’ lives. Our goal in reading must go beyond words on a page and allow for the reading of “comic portrayals of social issues and representations of particular groups [with] significant ideological implications” (McAllister, Sewell & Gordon, 2006, p. 5) such that students and teachers are going beyond the word and the image. Reading is more than symbols and meanings, and as Freire (1987) suggests “reading always involves critical perception, interpretations, and rewriting of what is read” (p. 36). Perhaps comics offer such a medium for exploration.

Critical reflection at the adolescent level allows for the imagination “to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life [our students] are living at that moment” (Rich, 2001, p. 21). In breaking open the boundaries of literature by utilizing the possibilities of graphic and visual interpretation; we open the mind to a

change in thought. Graphic representations of sequential comic art bring together the power in perception of images with the strength of words and text used similar to poetry for the greatest effect. Words and images are combined to convey the strongest meaning with the simplest of patterns, icons, position, and even space. Mitchell (2005) would have us understand that “images are active players in the game of establishing and changing values. They are capable of introducing new values into the world and thus of threatening old ones” (p. 105). In an age of technology that mandates its world members young and old to access the digital and textual networks with immediate responses and flashy connections, the idea of the traditional novel or stories of old dead white men carries less meaning and certainly less connection to the relative lives of those whose teachers demand absorption of this material. It is with this thought that reading must encompass more than a dry reading of literature and include “those visual displays that challenge and tussle with the boundaries of preconceived/constructed notions of picture space, illusionism, realism and force a re-conceptualization of the graphic space that we call a page” (Adams, 1999, p. 74). Reading requires a connection to its audience—a connection between the author, writer, or artist and that challenges the archaic thought that reading is only defined by one set of skills or choices that limit the intelligence and understanding of those meant to be audience members.

The study of adolescent reading from the point of view of curriculum studies must be willing to open a dialogue that questions even the choices of Batman who finally stages his own death “to bring sense to a world plagued by worse than thieves and murderers” (Miller, F., 2002, p. 159). What questions can be asked that drive a hero to lengths that challenge our students’ understanding of a fictional world as it relates to our

real world. Perhaps the greater question is how we as educators and students ourselves may act to improve and view curriculum beyond the boundaries of public education.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

“For a revolution to succeed, the entire population must support it” (Satrapi, 2003, p. 17).

Challenging adolescents toward a more conceptual approach to reading requires a dialogue that presents people, their stories, and ideas from a variety of points of view. According to Glesne (2006) “learning to listen well to others’ stories and to interpret and retell the accounts is part of the qualitative researcher’s trade” (p. 1). In this chapter I discuss the method used to investigate this study. I begin with a description of the design of the study. Next, I explain my perspective as a researcher in determining the design and methods of this study. I follow with the setting of the study and then include descriptions of the participants. In addition, I describe my role as a researcher and the instructional program explaining the use of graphic novels in this setting. This is continued with the methods intended for data collection and data analysis. Finally, I include the theoretical framework guiding this study as well as the challenges and significance of this study. In conclusion, I offer a summary of this study.

### Theoretical Framework

**Critical literacy.** The nature of reading instruction has followed a skills-based approach for a number of years largely related to governmental legislation that was designed to improve achievement in reading as American children compared to their international counterparts. Of note are the dramatically changing definitions of literacy moving beyond the scope of governmental mandates and economic definitions of how children learn. Limitations in reading instruction especially related to adolescent literacy

prompt a new viewpoint that must include the influences of popular culture in terms of what and why adolescents choose to read. So often, frameworks and curriculum plans are instituted in schools and classrooms that dictate basic educational skills approaches that do not focus on the realities of life. Teachers and administrators must begin to recognize that “it is our duty to create the means to understanding political and historical realities so as to bring about the possibility of change” (Freire, 2007, p. 3). School systems must measure the differences between students in terms of ethnic groups and economic status but implement little in the curriculum that provokes thought related to diversity, multiculturalism, or economic divisions in society, particularly those found close to home in favor of standards and testing mandates.

Curriculum has been manipulated in an effort to produce productive individuals and factory workers even though the very same jobs under which the curriculum is expected to support have typically been outsourced or become technologically assumed. Schools have systematically reduced learning to a business model more reflective of training and “achieves social control at the cost of intelligence, intelligence broadly understood as including problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity” (Pinar, 2004, p. 28). This restrictive environment inhibits student reflection and adds to the possibility of increased discipline problems, challenges in the classroom, and ultimately a new definition for student, learning, thinking, achievement, and school (Anderson, Wang & Gaffney, 2006; Bean, 1998; Beers, 2003; Friere, 1974, 1987; Gee, 2004; Greene, 2001; Nielsen, 1998; O’Brien, Stewart, & Moje, 1995). It may well be that these challenges come from a level of rebellion in adolescents that recognizes the disparities in natural learning versus this contrived and controlled program of skills.

Issues of reading instruction and acquisition that separate skills from conceptual understandings and context may be counterproductive at best. Rosenblatt (2004) makes the statement that “treatment of either reading or writing as a dissociated set of skills (though both require skills) or as primarily the acquisition of codes and conventions (though both involve them) inhibits sensitivity to the organic linkages of verbal signs and their objects” (p. 1388). Her transactional theory of reading and writing began a look at literacy beyond traditional instruction that considered how students interact with text and the connections that are made with text that include social activities that provide a wide range of means of looking at the world. Today, critical literacy presents a new face that gives readers the power “to envision alternate ways of viewing the author’s topic, and [are] able to exert that power when they read from a critical stance” (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, p. 53).

Appropriate adolescent learning must be balanced with dialogue, experience, discussion, and social understanding along with skills support. The difficulty in implementing instruction that focuses on the critical demands of individuals and communities is in the structures currently in place for schools that limit the development and social awareness of students. Cultural differences and social consciousness are significantly reduced or eliminated from reading instruction in an effort to create a curriculum of sameness rather than equality. Paulo Freire (1970) would suggest that this is a way governmental controls oppress and maintain class differences and “they manipulate the people [students] by giving them the impression that they are being helped” (p. 141). This would suggest that the frameworks under which we currently work may serve to diminish the social and cultural relationships that make up a democratic



society. What has been accomplished as part of educational accountability is that “accountability is not about learning, but about controlling what we teach to our children. It is about controlling the curriculum. To achieve this control—which is finally, control of the mind—the public schools are severed from both the social and the subjective. Teachers are reduced to technicians, managing student productivity” (Pinar, 2004, pp. 26-27) and thus minimizing social commitment and attachment to reading and the civil action required because of it.

This inquiry utilizes a theoretical perspective of critical literacy as defined as “an attitude toward texts and discourses that questions the social, political, and economic conditions under which those texts were constructed” (Beck, 2005, p. 392). Reading from this critical stance takes the attitude as posed by Freire (1970) that “knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). Reading must be purposeful and lead to understandings that allow the reader not to be manipulated by what is seen and read. Literacy and being literate goes beyond the standards of reading today and must create a “dialectical relationship between human beings and the world, on the one hand, and language and transformative agency, on the other” (Freire, 1987, p. 7) such that students and teachers join in a conversation as agents for change. Critical dialogue between teachers and students, students and students must lead to greater understanding and questioning of why things are as they are. Adolescents are beginning to recognize their link to the world and desire opportunities to explore those questions, concerns, and observations.

**Design**

The nature of qualitative analysis allows for the ability to produce “a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases” (Patton, 1990, p. 14). The purpose of this study questions the use of alternative texts such as graphic novels and comics and their influence on the powerful nature of motivation with this age learner. The design of this qualitative inquiry is a singular case study. Case study as defined by Merriam (2009) “is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). A bounded system works as its own social system with its own set of rules and interactions. This particular classroom was chosen because of its workable place in the schedule; however, the students were bound by time, teacher expectations, and content. The use of case study in this instance is appropriate when the focus of a bounded system provides rich, detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. In addition, “case study has proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations, evaluating programs, and informing policy” (Merriam, 2009, p. 51) bringing to focus a rich, thick description of the bounded system in question. This class of students gave the researcher an opportunity to observe them interacting with graphic novels and original text while working within a standards based curriculum.

The use of case study allows for the ability of the researcher to observe the interactions between the class as the case and the insertion of graphic representation into the curriculum. It was not assumed that this was the first experience these students had with graphic novels in the classroom experience. In fact, in the early observations, some students noted that they had used graphic panels from graphic novels with past teachers

and some had not. However, none of the students recalled ever using a graphic novel specifically for study in any of their previous classes.

This study made as its focus utilizing graphic novels as a part of the overall curriculum and their possible effect on motivation with these students. The intent was to draw the participants into a framework of interaction with text and non-text material that explored literature that included graphic and visual representation in a graphic novel or comic format. Viewing this case as the class with the specific and intentional integration of comics into the presentation of classic texts evoked a dialogue and discussion between the student and teacher participants as well as the researcher as a participant/observer that created an opportunity that is unique in adolescent learning. The opportunities afforded through a typical case study approach of this type seeks to understand the complicated issues of adolescent literacy through the voices of the students and in effect allowed them to tell the story of literacy in their lives. This case as marked by this particular ninth grade class has been the product of NCLB in that all of their educational careers have been under the influence of this law. Because of this levels of deep attentiveness and comprehension over the course of years since this Act have been affected. The use of a case study design offered the perspective of a classroom setting that suggested a differing view of what may impact reading as a conceptual rather than skills-based act.

Stake (2003) suggests that “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 134). The use of the case study will allow for a better understanding of the dynamics of the class as a group, help to determine relevance in the case of comprehension and graphic text, and allow for alternate conclusions about teaching and learning. The variable of graphic novels as a medium to activate social

context beyond traditional instruction was a central theme in this study. So often in traditional classrooms and in the standards-based context of current instruction, there is little or no value placed on the relevance, diversity, and innovation from student interactions with text as modeled from a social construct. Graphic novels present depictions of gender, social class, poverty, and race utilizing visual and textual cues as well as themes and literary elements common in well-known literature. Utilizing case study as a means to view this rich, natural progression through the stated curriculum served as the means to understanding this facet of student learning as it related to motivation and engagement. It was understood that new questions would be derived from the process of case study as patterns both expected and unexpected emerged through the process.

### **Researcher Perspective**

My own personal history and perspectives have contributed to the choices made in determining the design, implementation and interpretations of this study. I was a former language arts and reading teacher for a middle school in rural north Georgia. Following my direct experience in the classroom, I became the Gifted Coordinator and worked with gifted and talented middle school students in both regular educational and advanced content classes. During the time of this study, my position changed to a leadership role as assistant administrator of a rural middle school while in my final year of doctoral work in curriculum studies with an emphasis in literacy. Due to my training as a reading specialist, I was able to bring to this study an understanding of reading diagnosis and assessment, difficulties with struggling readers, and a wide range of strategies and understandings related to the adolescent reader.

My prior experience with middle school readers has given me the impression that there is more than meets the eye when working with the complexities of the adolescent reader. The demands placed on adolescent reading contain heavy content requirements with little or no instruction directed in those strategies to understand and comprehend that content. Rote and skill related instruction is limited to meeting requirements related to state assessments and concentrates on flat and literal comprehension delivered most often in whole class “read around” or lecture type formats. It is my belief that notions of linear one-dimensional reading instruction for adolescents increases the potential for decreased motivation, desire, and interest in reading in the middle grades. However, adolescent readers are more likely to read when they have access to materials that span their diverse interests as well as reading levels (Ivey, 2000; Lesesne, 2003).

There have been many times over the years when students have come into classes struggling with grade level texts and carried the designation of “struggling reader” in that academic setting. Yet, so many of those same students are found with car or sports magazines, comic books, or high interest low vocabulary demand novels demonstrating very positive reading behaviors. I would also suggest that reading instruction that includes a focus based on multiple literacies including the arts, popular culture, and multimedia formats while recognizing the diverse nature of student backgrounds and learning styles then becomes something much more relevant to adolescent readers. Phelps (1998) suggests that:

Adolescents can and do immerse themselves in literate activities that transcend adult-sanctioned themes, forms, and limits. In addition to popular fiction, an expanded concept of ‘test’ must also include film, CD-ROM, [DVD], the Internet,

popular music, television, magazines and newspapers, and adolescents' own cultural understandings. (p. 2)

Giving students the opportunity to choose reading material from these multiple literacies and then applying those interests to reading levels, leads to increases in skill and a greater motivation in reading, thus validating the students' real-world applications. The lives of students in and out of school "supports the position that the work students view as most important is grounded in their lives outside of school, their popular culture, and in the ways they use literacy to create their social identities." (O'Brien, 1998, p. 28)

A case study approach allows the observer to view student experiences with the curriculum and their teacher in order to document student point of views expressed because of those experiences. Current curricular practices in schools today that support the belief that worksheets and skills practice will produce high student achievement works against students' desires for a more natural learning as well as diminishes the value of encouraging discussion in social justice. Observation and reflection within this framework while specific to this unique classroom has provided greater insight into meaning making alternatives for adolescents that bring greater thought and inspiration into conceptual reading and comprehension utilizing alternative media not commonly existing in today's middle and high school classrooms. In addition, the dynamic personality of the teacher in this classroom has also made a strong impact on the outcomes related to student interest, participation, and learning.

### **Setting of the Study**

This study was conducted during the 2010-2011 school year in Parker High School (pseudonyms are used for the school name, teacher's name, and students' names

throughout this document), a grade 9 through 12 school located in a rural north Georgia community. Data was collected in the classroom of Mr. Grayson, a ninth-grade teacher involved in the study.

**School environment.** Parker High School is the single high school for this mid-size rural, non-agricultural county. The school has been established for a number of years and recently added a new fine arts building for the 2009-2010 school year and a ninth grade academy in the 2008-2009 school year. The ninth grade academy is intended to provide these students with additional support at the beginning of the high school experience. Teachers assigned to the academy only teach within this grade level and are expected to develop consistent positive relationships with students to support the increase in content, develop organizational skills, and foster an environment designed to keep students in school.

The number of students enrolled in the 2009-2010 school year numbered approximately 1187 students. There are no significant sized ethnic minorities with the population being comprised of 93% White, 3% Hispanic, 1% Black, and 3% other ethnicities. Approximately 44% of the student population qualified as economically disadvantaged, 10% were designated as students with disabilities, and approximately 11% were identified as gifted.

In 2010 End of Course (EOCT) testing for 9<sup>th</sup> grade Literature for this school showed a total of 317 students taking the test. Of those students 10% did not meet standards while 50% did meet standards. Another 40% exceeded expected outcomes on the standards according to the records found at the Governor's Office of Student Achievement.

Reading achievement scores for this county as measured by the Criterion Reference Competency Test are administered each year to all grade levels in the State of Georgia. It was reported in 2009-2010 that 93.7% of the student population met or exceeded the state's annual measurable objective regarding the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the state assessments. However, it is important to note that students with disabilities as a subgroup did not meet standards with 71.4% of the population meeting or exceeding standards, the ELL subgroup showed 77.1% meeting standards, the Hispanic ethnic group showed 94.0% meeting standards, and the economically disadvantaged group showed a rate of 91.2% meeting standards. The graduation rate was noted to be 80.9% in 2010. These scores were reported through the Georgia Department of Education, 2010 AYP report.

National measures of reading achievement were reviewed through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) administered each year to random schools in all states and jurisdictions of the United States in pre-K, grades four and grade eight. Most recent scores from the 2007-2008 school year indicate 70% of students tested in eighth grade performed at or above the NAEP Basic level leaving 27% scoring below basic levels and 2% scoring in the advanced level.

**Classroom environment.** The ninth grade students at Parker High School are served in the ninth-grade academy which is a separate wing of the high school. Each content area is departmentalized and in this case the English department is comprised of three teachers. These teachers focus on ninth grade curriculum and content is framed from the Georgia Performance Standards for that grade. This school works on a block



schedule which designates one-hundred minutes for each class period and compacts the traditional year-long coursework into one semester.

What distinguishes Mr. Grayson from other teachers in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy is his significant integration of popular culture into this curriculum. Rap music, celebrity interest writing pieces, graphic novels, comics, TV shows, and movies are all infused into his lessons as teaching and learning tools. Students are often given choice in the type of assessment product in which to demonstrate understanding that includes his or her own interpretation of the literature in one of these formats. Student work in the form of rap poetry, comics, art work, and writing are found displayed all around the room supporting a wide range of authentic assessments from students.

### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990, p. 169) was used to identify the class matching the criteria established by the researcher: (a) a class of students that were willing to accept the integration of graphic novels and comics into the traditional curriculum; (b) a classroom teacher that had experience in utilizing graphic novels into the curriculum; (c) a class of students who were willing and able to offer rich information about themselves as active or passive readers.

**Mr. Grayson.** I met Mr. Grayson through contact with the Assistant Administrator at the high school who suggested he may be a willing participant in a case study such as this. I was immediately impressed by his classroom as it was filled with creative student examples of written work, artwork, and drawings. Contemporary music was playing in the room that was familiar to the age group of fourteen to fifteen year olds. His demeanor was direct and friendly with an eagerness expressed in participating

in this study. He mentioned his desire to motivate and generate interest in his students while keeping his classroom active and productive. This teacher had expressed concerns in dealing with the diverse needs of this student population while still finding growth in student achievement. His teaching philosophy of connecting literature to real and contemporary experience as well as his experience with infusing the curriculum with popular culture fit within the parameters set by the researcher in determining his role as a participant.

**Students.** This case study focused on the class as the case. Mr. Grayson taught four classes of 9<sup>th</sup> grade Literature. One class was chosen at random due to the necessity of the observer to meet the requirements of her current teaching position as well as fitting within the schedule of Mr. Grayson. Because of the primary element of scheduling, the third period class was chosen.

Students had been placed in this class over the summer through the standard scheduling system of Parker High School and the observer had no input into the make-up or students choices for this class. The students in the class selected for the case study were placed there as a result of the random selection of heterogeneously mixed abilities requiring 9<sup>th</sup> grade literature. This would suggest that gifted students who do not choose Honors classes and special education students that do not require resource services may be placed in this class along with other general education students providing a rich mix of abilities, perspectives, and motivational levels among the students thus meeting the criteria set by the researcher in designing this case study.

Members of Mr. Grayson's third period class included a total of 24 students—13 males and 11 females. One of the males had been identified as gifted and talented, five

had been identified as special education students with learning disabilities primarily related to written expression and the remainder of the class make-up was regular education students. One male student chose not to participate in the study but continued in this class setting decreasing the study participants to twenty-three; however, a new student entered early in the semester that did chose to participate. Each of these students were mainly from a rural north Georgia background where common belief structures were strong and tended to be resistant to difference in ideas and in social diversity. As there are no significant ethnic minorities in this school system, the students in this class are primarily white with few if any students of other ethnic classifications. Of note, the one identified gifted male was also African American.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher in this case study was as a participant as observer (Merriam, 2009, p. 124). In this role I was able to observe and interact with the students and the teacher while allowing the teacher participant to direct all teaching activities. In this way my observations and interviews were known to the group and allowed me active participation in classroom discussions, small group activities, and one-on-one targeted skill workshops. It was important in this case study to find balance between my role as a participant and observer and recognize the challenge in combining “participation and observation so as to become capable of understanding the setting as an insider while describing it to and for outsiders” (Merriam, 2009, p. 126).

### **Instructional Program**

Mr. Grayson taught his 9<sup>th</sup> grade literature class from a less traditional stance and incorporated many artifacts of popular culture into his instruction. He utilized teacher and

student directed activities within the curriculum and brought a contemporary real world point of view to his lessons. This high school chose to incorporate a block schedule in which each semester contained material expected in a year long course; therefore each student took the end of course tests as designated by the state of Georgia at the end of the semester. Mr. Grayson's curriculum map included (1) an in depth study of short stories; (2) a contemporary novel from the genre of science fiction; (3) poetry and mythology with an study of Homer's *Odyssey*; (4) Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*; and (5) contemporary fiction and a study of the graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*, by Gene Yang.

In the first week of class, activities were presented and designed to familiarize students with class dynamics, discipline, group etiquette, and group trust. These activities focused on short stories from the literature book that required group building tasks, journaling, discussion workshops, and class rules and etiquette in the classroom. Mr. Grayson incorporated popular culture into much of his traditional content in an attempt to foster motivation and interest with this text. For instance, the short story unit included examples from a variety of authors and in particular Edgar Allen Poe. Excerpts from graphic novels and the television adaptation of Poe's *The Raven* as depicted by characters from *The Simpsons* were integrated into the lesson as "hooks" as well as to enhance comprehension and interpretation of the work.

Following short stories, students were presented with the contemporary novel, *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins and were guided through it with reading guides, read aloud passages, discussion groups specifically related to the novel, and journal entries. The final culminating project included small group work related to the creation

by students of their own graphic novel based on *The Hunger Games*. This particular project began at the beginning of the novel study unit and continued until the end of the semester. Following this novel study, the poetry and mythology unit included a close reading of the Homer's *Odyssey*. Mr. Grayson chose excerpts from graphic adaptations to introduce some of the history preceding the plot in the *Odyssey*. The primary text for the study of Homer's *Odyssey* came from the student literature book for 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

The next unit of study included the reading of Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*. The subsequent reading and discussion of this play included the traditional text as the primary reading along with the graphic novel text from the series of *No Fear Shakespeare* graphic novels for use in supporting comprehension and deeper thinking related to the material. The final activities of the semester included a collection of activities related to the graphic novel by Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese*. Assessment products were chosen by the students that reflect choice in style, content, and presentation. These products range from full written pieces, song lyrics, and comic depictions of scenes, artwork, or sculpture. Forms of these assessments were utilized through the instructional program and throughout the units and illustrated the infusion of a new point of view outside tradition paper and pencil assessments.

The one-hundred minute class was divided into three primary segments each day. Initially, students worked on teacher directed daily oral language exercises and planned mini-lessons designed to focus on targeted language arts skills and grammar. This was followed by literature experiences that included both whole class and small group reading tasks. Focused reading workshops lead by Mr. Grayson occurred frequently and was intended to repair as well as strengthen comprehension strategies. The final thirty to forty

minutes of class was spent in vocabulary instruction, specific writing workshops, and silent reading. Mr. Grayson specifically designed his instruction both to meet the state standards and to increase motivation, interest, and energy in reading traditional text which in turn opened up discussions into a relevant point of view with his students.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection began the second week in August, early in the school year, and ended in January at the end of the semester. This high school chose a block scheduling approach that allows students to complete in one semester what would traditionally take an entire school year to complete. Thus, this study covered the equivalent of content for an entire school year in one semester. During the data gathering period, a total of fourteen classroom observations of approximately one hour and a half, three focus group sessions of approximately twenty to forty minutes each, three planning sessions with Mr. Grayson of approximately thirty minutes to an hour, and one final meeting with Mr. Grayson at the end of the study for approximately one hour. The data sources for this study included (1) observation; (2) structured and unstructured interviews; (3) reading attitudes survey data; (4) student writing responses and essays; (5) test scores current and past; and (5) personal researcher observation journal.

**Observations.** The use of observation in qualitative data collection must include the setting that is observed, activities that take place in that setting, the people who participate in those activities, and the meanings derived from those activities and people in that setting as determined from the point of view of those people (Patton, 1990, p. 202). The significance in observations is derived from the richness of the description. The observational data collected provided significant and thick description of this age learner

through the interactions between the students in the class, between the teacher and students, between students and text, and between students and graphic novels. In this case, the observations were videotaped in order to record the facial expressions, intonation, and body language of the students thus allowing a fuller visual description of the actions and reactions of the students. The videotaping frame was widely set to include primarily the facial expressions, comments and reactions of the students rather than the teacher to record as closely from the student point of view as possible. Each session was also captured by audio recording in the event of technical difficulties with taping as well as to attempt to understand student tone from an auditory level during transcription. These renderings were compared in an attempt to capture these observations and experiences in their own graphic form. The teacher, Mr. Grayson, was videotaped as well with the purpose of noting his instructional strategies and body language when presenting material as well as his reactions to student interactions. However, the greatest focus was on the students. Observational data allowed for an examination of student perspectives when faced with critical issues from the text and graphics from published materials as well as student-generated products and projects.

**Interviews.** According to Patton (1990) “the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind” (p. 278). The use of interviews in this case study attempted to find out from the students and the teacher participants what was not readily observed. By interviewing the participants, I asked questions of the participants that helped them articulate their feelings, thoughts, and understandings that took place in the classroom setting. Each of the interviews was audio recorded to minimize the potential negative effects a videotaped event may have had on the smaller group setting.

The interview data obtained allowed the researcher to enter into a greater understanding of the participants' point of view and in essence brought me into their world.

Interviews were conducted by the researcher in both structured focus group settings and in unstructured discussions as opportunity in the lessons and the class period allowed for clarification of issues, comments, and reactions among the participants.

Questions (Appendix B) for the focus group interviews were determined prior to the meeting and were used as the basis for questioning in each of the focus group meetings.

The formal focus group occurred on three separate occasions. The first occurred after the third observation approximately two weeks into the study. The second occurred after observation eight approximately midway through the semester, and the third occurred following the last observation at the end of the semester. Focus group interviews allow for "group discussions [that] provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences" (Morgan, 1997, p. 10). These interviews provided opportunities for observations of smaller group interactions among the class participants and gave the researcher the ability to target specific issues and questions related to the study. This allowed me the ability to provide greater depth and meaning in describing the effects of visual representation, popular culture, and critical understandings on the engagement of these ninth grade students as active readers. Glesne (2006) suggests that by working through "the process of listening to your respondents, you learn what questions to ask" (p. 81). Student voices emerged throughout this study that began to define their personal connection to issues of social understandings, literacy, efficacy, and student motivation.



**Responses and Survey Data.** Patton (1990) suggests that “document analysis in qualitative inquiry yields excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from personal diaries; and open-ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys” (p. 10). The use of such documents became another source of information that added to the wealth of information gleaned from interview and observation contributing to “the findings, understandings, and insights that emerge from fieldwork” (p. 10). The Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey (Appendix A) was administered to students just prior to the first day of observations and again on the last day of observations in order to generate a before and after understanding of the students general attitudes related to reading. This survey generated responses that related to four areas of (1) recreational reading in print settings; (2) recreational reading in digital settings; (3) academic reading in print settings; and (4) academic reading in digital settings.

The students will be asked to respond to activities and lessons in written format through short answer responses to literature packets as well as written response to writing prompts and literature discussions. These responses and essays became another tool in understanding insights and perspectives of students that was not as easily observable in the open classroom. Oftentimes, writing responses allowed for alternative perspectives that may not have been offered in the interviewing session or open class discussion for a variety of reasons. In reviewing these responses brought new meaning to student viewpoints related to the issues brought forth in the reading and in the discussions. Recognition of this allowed the observer to “provide a research practice through which we can investigate how [the students] construct the world, ourselves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit us and social

science” (Richardson, 2003, p. 500). The responses and survey data provided a personal account of situations and was analyzed and coded to find common themes in comparative data.

The participating teacher was unable to keep up with a personal journal due to his class, coaching, and graduate education responsibilities. In lieu of that, following each observation after the class time, the researcher captured teacher feedback, concerns, and questions as part of the observational data.

The researcher maintained a research observation log that noted interactions with students, my overall perception of the students’ responsiveness to the issues of critical review, the integration of graphic novels and comics into the curriculum, along with challenges and inconsistencies in the process. Glesne (2006) cautions researchers to be prepared “to engage in personal encounters with self and others throughout the research process” (p. 127) and opening up new insights and perspectives that may be revealed throughout the process. The tracking of my own insights through the research process “provided [me] a solid link to the many simultaneous levels of experience that are involved in the process of qualitative research” (Meloy, 1994, p. 60). This log helped to keep me as a researcher able to maintain some level of sanity by noting my reflections, concerns, questions, frustrations.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis challenge of this study was in “identifying segments in the data set that are responsive to [my] research questions” (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). This was accomplished by assigning codes to the pieces of data collected in order to begin to construct categories that set themes, patterns, or findings that relate to the research

questions. In doing so, three phases of data analysis took place through the constant comparative method of data analysis. Phase I included an identification of patterns and themes related to motivation and engagement in reading as well as narratives of my general impressions throughout the case study. Phase II involved my review and re-reading of the data at a highly specific level in order to code and confirm the patterns from Phase I as well as to identify additional patterns as they emerged. Phase III allowed me to cluster the patterns and themes into groups of similarities and organize those groups into meaningful categories. Those patterns that did not fit into those categories and were not supported through triangulation were left out as a potential theme. These phases were repeated throughout the data collection process and allowed for the constant re-reading of previous data and emerging themes and similarities in new data as it was collected. The phase sequence continued until the themes were solidly determined and saturation occurred in the data.

Meetings were held with the teacher participant for the purpose of lesson planning and the articulation of problems and concerns throughout the process. Debriefing sessions occurred following each lesson with time for more formalized discussions at three regularly scheduled planning meetings. During these sessions, the researcher checked with the teacher regarding common themes in the data, interpretations of teacher perceptions, and with difficulties and successes within the process.

Credibility was established through triangulation of the data between the researcher, teacher, and student participants through class observations, student focus groups, teacher planning sessions, student written responses and surveys. In addition, the researcher's reflexive observation log was used to critically question my assumptions and

biases as a researcher as well as review issues related to the theoretical basis of the study and my limitations as a researcher to the study. The collection of data throughout the process of this case study provided rich descriptions that allowed the reader to clearly determine her ability to relate this research to the reader's own context.

The combined set of data provided a basis for understanding the critical review of literacy in these classrooms. Provoking study in critical literacy and listening to the voices of students and teachers involved in the process only serves to contribute to the body of research that is developing related to adolescent literacy. While comic books and graphic novels have proven to enhance reading choice, there is only a small set of understandings about them that competes with public notions of use-less reading that is evoked by comic books. This study attempts to add to the body of knowledge that utilizes comics and graphic novels as a medium to providing a social context in reading and bringing to focus the issues of political, social class, and morality as it relates to understanding and meaning in our world thus stretching the limits of imposed frameworks on adolescents that contribute to packaging students in positions of advantage and disadvantage.

### **Graphic Novels and the Connection to Critical Literacy**

The use of graphic novels in the construct of critical literacy takes the value of both text and visual depictions and allows common themes and social statements to be made related to moral, social, and political issues. This does not suggest that the same conclusions cannot be made from traditional narrative, but I would postulate that the use of graphic novels heightens student awareness and triggers the knowledge base through popular culture and perceived relevance to the students' life and world that can be

difficult through traditional literature. Advancements in technology and changes in how students interact, communicate, and network with the world have impacted how schools must deal with literacy while continuing to expect proficiency in traditional modes.

Critical judgments are made from cultural artifacts such as social networking, MTV, and reality television opening doors to alternative points of view and challenges in traditional schooling practices. These same students have lived with computers, text messaging, blogging, and social networking all of their lives viewing these technological advances and virtual tools from a mindset that sees the use of technology as different from the traditional standpoint of more or less the same. Lankshear and Knobel (2006) suggest that:

The contemporary world is different in important ways from the world we have known...[and] is related to the development of new digital electronic internetnetworked technologies and new ways of doing things and new ways of being that are enabled by these technologies. (p. 34)

Of note the difference in seeing this seems to fall along age lines according to Lankshear and Knobel (2006) suggesting that the point of view of those approximately above age thirty-five sees the contemporary world as basically unchanged in how things economically, culturally, or socially get done and are only now more “technologized” (p. 34). Oftentimes these forms of communication and literacy are relegated to secondary positions behind what is considered traditional reading and writing. Gee (2004) states that “children cannot feel they belong at school when their valuable home-based practices are ignored, denigrated, and unused” (p. 37) as is frequently the case with video gaming, social networking, and text messaging. This integral part of adolescent lives has become

what they believe to be “normal”, and those who are not familiar with these digital connections are in conflict and feel “left behind” building a power struggle between teachers, administrators, parents, and students in a “those who know and use alternative literacies” and “those who fear, control, and legislate it.” Comics and graphic novels have a place as an artifact of popular culture, and may be seen by adolescents from a more open point of view than their teachers. Graphic novels and comics have the ability to unlock the codes of text. In doing so deeper understandings evolve through visual depictions of difficult concepts that more fully relate to the adolescent reality.

Popular culture and digital representations have transformed literacy beyond our ability to keep up and force the view of multiple literacies rather than a linear idea of the past. These literacies are “associated with the massive growth of electronic information and communications technologies and their increasing role and place within or everyday lives” (Lankshear & Knoble, 2006, p. 26). These literacies include those that may not be considered “new” in the chronological sense such as *Manga*, comic books, and the development of graphic novels. Nevertheless, these sources significantly add to the constructs of multiple literacies and serve to fuel further work related to adolescent literacy and a changing mindset related to this field.

One of the cries raised relative to adolescent literacy is the issue stated by Phelps (1998) that “the full range of adolescent literacy is much more complex, dynamic, and sophisticated than what is traditionally encompassed within school-sanctioned literate activity” (p. 1). Adolescent learners search for relevance within their own personal realities and respond to meaning from a social context. Literacy, for adolescents, is therefore a social construct that derives meaning from that interaction. Prentiss (1998)

recognizes that “teaching-learning practices as well as literacy practices are fundamentally social processes. As such, students and teachers mutually influence each others’ literacy practices” (p. 125). With that in mind the use of alternative material that challenges students’ thinking and offers opportunities for a variety of perspectives give voice to the notion that students must be categorized according to their willingness to comply with traditional texts and strategies. The use of graphic novels and comic books moves beyond the barriers of traditional literature and presents varying perspectives on a variety of themes.

According to Mitchell (2005), “a picture, then, is a very peculiar and paradoxical creature, both concrete and abstract, both a specific individual thing and a symbolic form that embraces a totality” (p. xvii). The nature of graphic novels allows the picture to convey both symbolic and concrete images making them more than just a picture and allow viewpoints beyond the norm. The use of graphic novels in the construct of critical literacy takes the value of both text and visual depicts and allows common themes and social statements to be made related to morality, social, and political issues. This does not suggest that the same conclusions cannot be made from traditional narrative, but the use of graphic novels may heighten the awareness and triggers the knowledge base through popular culture.

The graphic novel and comics have come a long way from their historical origins that includes a reconsideration of their place in art and literature. Even so, the emergence of graphic novels such as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, and Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* create a new avenue for study and application in the field of adolescent literacy. Both these graphic novels bring to the discussion a new approach to the integration of critical

literacy into reading instruction and set the stage for innovative research related to adolescent reading comprehension. Critical perspectives in reading according to Shannon (1995) suggest that those perspectives “push the definition of literacy beyond traditional decoding or encoding of words in order to reproduce the meaning of text or society until it becomes a means for understanding one’s own history and culture, to recognize connections between one’s life and the social structure, to believe that change in one’s life, and the lives of others and society are possible as well as desirable, and to act on this new knowledge in order to foster equal and just participation in all the decisions that affect and control our lives” (p. 83). Teachers of adolescents often find themselves making assumptions about control in the classroom and in choices of reading material.

Concerns with discipline tend to overshadow curriculum planning that seeks to discover the diverse questions, beliefs, and values that support student identity. Bean (1998) recognizes that:

Attitudes toward reading influences frequency of reading, and frequency of reading assists comprehension, adolescents’ attitudes toward reading decline at this crucial stage. Despite being faced with serious social issues related to racism, citizenship, and a host of other concerns, the many powerful young adult novels related to these issues are absent from conversations about school reading. (p. 158)

The field of adolescent reading has recognized the need to bring critical literacy to the table, however, road-blocks to the discussion often interfere with the addition of problem-based young adult novels because “issues of power and status often get shoved aside in the curriculum precisely because they generate controversy” (p. 159). Those



controversies frequently lead to censorship, web-blocking, and fire walls intended to protect while in reality deny students the ability to seek answers to difficult questions in their own settings.

Noddings (2006) prompts us to consider that reading socially conscious material “provides vicarious experience [through the stories], but the encounter with the story is a real experience, and imagination can make vital connections to one’s actual life” (p.78). The controversies of power, race, culture, religion, and prejudice are necessary to provoke learning, and challenge thoughts, values, and beliefs all of which are important to adolescent learning.

The use of graphic images generate a dialogue that allows for the discussion, questioning, negotiation, and challenge found in this medium and subsequently offers that same challenge to traditional text through alternative critical points of view with a basis in critical literacy (Gee, 2005). Reading and literacy taken from a more critical and conceptual stance cannot exist outside the social frameworks from which they came. The social constructs of students cannot be ignored and the recognition that marginalized groups including those considered “reluctant” or “struggling” related to reading impact the concerns that literacy has moved beyond the ability to read or write.

There is an abundance of rhetoric that suggests that man is creative and interested in finding out about what he or she does not know. Yet our educational systems are set up to package concepts and materials into controlled segments and call them standards. Graphic novels do not fit into the model of education that determines thought based on published textbooks that have a corner on biased and limited information under the catchy name of “Understanding Literature” or “Exploring the Life Sciences”. Current

schools ban books based on misunderstanding and puritan-like thinking that ill-prepares students for the world and builds a house of cards when it comes to the future of a democratic society. Literature in its forms contributes as a reflective medium of the society in which it developed and “those who are more daring by a breath dare the venture with language. They are the sayers who more sayingly say” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 137). Artifacts of this culture as in the case of comics, appeal to the senses of the young and old while making statements and portraying images that do not gloss over the horrors of injustice, nor fear the viewpoints related to gender, poverty, power, and race. Graphic novels dare to bring meaning to shocking or controversial events that remain misunderstood or superficially touched in most educational settings and have throughout their history continued to provoke the educational norms of the day.

### **Challenges of the Study**

Challenges within this study included the difficulty in generalizing results beyond the classes and teacher within the study. The thoughts and ideas presented as well as the teaching styles utilized by the teacher did have an impact on the responses and understandings reflected by the students. The teacher in this setting had prior experience in utilizing graphic novels in the classroom and had woven many experiences with popular culture into his classroom social setting prior to and including this study. These experiences appealed to the students and contributed to the outcomes related to student learning and comprehension. Even with these influences, comics and graphics have a place within the artifacts of popular culture and fit within the environment generated in this classroom. It was important to pay close attention to the discussions and journal entries of the students related specifically to graphic interpretation while noting those

influences from other areas of popular culture utilized in the classroom as well. Given those limitations, I believe the reflective process through the responses, essays, interviews and surveys the students gave a voice to the complicated issues surrounding adolescent literacy that brought greater understanding to this diverse population.

Motivation and interest in reading has always been a challenge in working with this complicated learner. Recognizing the application of meaningful text and non-text material that supports motivation and interest also supports the opportunity to work through areas of reading struggle and apply strategies to skills acquisition ignored from this point of view.

One challenge in this study was in obtaining permission to use published material from the graphic novels as a part of this study. Permissions were obtained for all published material used in this case study after multiple and lengthy requests; however, permission was not received to use *Nevermore: A graphic adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories* (2008) in any format other than the published book. None of the images from that book were used in this paper. This created a challenge in that copies of the three primary graphic novels used over the course of the case study were purchased by the researcher and allowed for one book for around five students. The students adapted well to this and did not seem concerned with the inability to view a single copy for themselves. Along with this, the website, Pixton.com, required costs per student to access the web tools in creating the class graphic adaptation of *The Hunger Games*. Some technical knowledge was needed in using the web tools; however, customer support personnel for Pixton.com were made aware of the case study and provided additional support and response to questions needed in developing the student prepared book. It

should be noted that most of the questions came from the researcher and the teacher in this study as the students were mostly able to navigate the website without too many problems. In fact, most of the student questions had to do with creating their panels beyond the simple applications and solving problems with merging the individually created panels together in higher level graphics. This particular challenge illustrated some of the lines drawn between age differences in lifelong access to computer applications and those of us over 35 or 40 who may struggle to keep up with the exploding technologies and literacies relative to today's youth.

Another challenge that acted as a variable in this study was the lack of significant ethnic diversity in this group. The background of many of these students was framed deep within white, rural, and deeply religious perspectives that carried their own cultural limitations. The area of critical literacy presented to these students served to add to the chinks in the armor surrounding expected outcomes and restrictive patterns of instruction while broadening the perspectives of these students within a greater social community beyond the boundaries of their rural home. It was particularly important to observe and structure the lessons around appropriate standards while not limiting the discussions to preconceived notions of social behaviors and norms of another culture. The use of traditional and non-traditional literature provided a forum for discussion utilizing the graphics to enhance literal as well as social understanding. These discussions opened a more critical stance through evaluation of the images and text through discussion, writing, and reading. Because of the nature of critical review, some controversial issues became an issue where discussions were in direct conflict with a student's personal or

family belief system; however, parents were given the right to request alternative reading assignments if necessary.

My presence as a participant/observer was a possible limitation because of my experience as a teacher of many of these students in the middle school setting which feeds this high school. Their view of my teaching, former grading practices, interactions within my classroom, and reputation as a teacher leader in the middle school may have impacted their perspectives in dealing with their current classroom. However, Phillion, He, and Connelly (2005) suggest that qualitative researchers “are not detached observers of, but active participants in, the lives of the people with whom they work. As they become immersed in the lives of their participants, they come to care deeply about their concerns and continuously search for effective ways to act on those concerns” (p. 1). While this may have been a drawback because previous student experiences with me and my work expectations, I also saw this as a strength in that I was familiar with a percentage of these students. Because of this there was very little hesitation during the introductory period in getting to know me or in my finding a place within the social network of the classroom.

### **Significance of the Study**

There is so much to be said about the limitations of standards and high-stakes testing that interferes with the learning of students. I walk into classrooms daily where essential questions are posted on whiteboards, standards are regurgitated in rote style while motivation and creativity are woefully diminished and regretfully abandoned in favor of measurable data and mandates of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Educators have neatly packaged students into categories of “gifted”, “struggling”, “bubble” kids

who are working within the dynamics of school literacy and expected achievement or not based on the definitions of what is considered literacy and what is considered achievement. These definitions have created a dim view of learning with what was at one time vibrant and exciting. The inclusion of new forms of technology, popular culture, and video games have changed the face of adolescent literacy yet left educational lesson plans, pacing guides, and AYP behind in the new acquisition of multiple literacies facing adolescents today. Struggling with these issues are teachers who recognize the limitations yet search for ways to crack the framework and seek relevance in literary study for their students. These challenges will not easily go away as political arguments appear to dictate educational practice.

The significance of this study is found in providing teachers with a better understanding of the power of popular culture to enhance learning by bringing relevant and personal connections to students back into the classroom through a more active process utilizing artifacts of popular culture such as graphic novels and comic books. This study allowed the opportunity for the students involved in this case study to view reading from a different perspective. The application of comics and visual narrative allowed the students to expand on reading strategies focused on comprehension and instruction and direct them into a more critical stance creating active and powerful relevance for them. Utilizing writing, interviews, and extensive discussion points gave students the opportunity to work through ideas, challenge points of view, and test their thinking in a safe and trusted environment that tolerated thinking beyond the norm or standard. A case study approach for an extended length of time such as the semester supported the development of trust between the class members, teacher participant, and

researcher. Each brought their own experience, beliefs, and traditions to the social climate in the classroom that tolerated honest and provocative questions and responses.

By allowing students to view character experiences in graphic novels through both graphic and text opened the possibility for additional opportunities for understanding and specific meaning in this environment and offered additional and enhanced strategies for improving reading comprehension. Given that comics and graphic novels are able to present a myriad of ideas in connected panels, significantly “the different ways in which words and pictures can combine in comics is virtually unlimited” (McCloud, 1993, p. 152), allowed for the variety of themes, ideas, and at times controversial subject matter. This support through the graphic connections provided a conduit to new levels of comprehension and understanding that merged the text and the graphics together in contemporary meaningful discussion. The intent of this study was to provide another bit of needed research in the area of adolescent literacy that forced open the box of misunderstanding surrounding this age group and pursued the thought that the act of reading includes conceptual understandings that foster motivation into perceptions related to the students’ place in a social world, thus reading the word and the world.

### **Summary of Methodology**

The accumulation of written journals, discussion, dialogue, reading, and questioning became an approachable means of hearing the stories of these students, revealing their understanding, and unmasking the categories so many of them have been assigned through their educational careers. It was my intent to give all students a voice in this process with the purpose of listening and learning from them, thus opening the doors of imagination and walking through the mire of tradition and routine to a more relevant

and intriguing world through reading. There has always been a percentage of students within a classroom that comply with the expectations of a teacher for a variety of reasons, a smaller percentage of students that must be convinced to accept the challenge, and an even smaller percentage who rebel or resist whatever the expectation even with incentive. This study was intended to seek reasons to motivate beyond compliance and recognize imagination, creativity, thought, and diversity all play a part in reading comprehension but even more so in the desire, motivation, and drive to want to read to learn from a critical stance.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Data Analysis

“Mr. Spiegelman! What are you doing here? Don’t you see what’s going on?”(Spiegelman, 1982, p. 82).

This journey through a case study such as this has lead me as the researcher into areas and themes that attempt to respond to the research questions included here in this study. I looked forward to my observations and interactions with the students in the class to endeavor to hear their voices and look to their insights in understanding how they make meaning from material presented to them. I also am concerned with the lack of real world application and connection to the community in which they live and the complicated relationships in the world around them. Motivation was defined by one of the students as “like you want to do it!” (Robin, 2010, Observation 13). Another student commented on his thoughts about engagement and suggested that “you actually lose time in the [experience]” (Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2). Case study presented itself as the best method in understanding this class, how its members viewed the material presented by their teacher, Mr. Grayson, and then responded to the interactions. These interactions included the variables of literature solely presented in textual form, literature presented in textual form with comprehension support from graphic novels, and literature presented solely in graphic novel images.

It must be understood that Mr. Grayson chose to read all the literature aloud whether it was in textual or graphic format. His presentation was dynamic and exciting to the students at many levels. Students always had copies of the text or graphics in front of them to follow as he read or “acted out” the material. This allows him to actively place

emotion, acceleration, accents of language, and energy into the literature. The students do not have to use the cognitive energy required to interpret the written material as Mr. Grayson has presented a visual and auditory picture of the literature through his reading of it. This allowed the students the chance to start the process of comprehension from a point of deeper insight and fostered a richer and higher degree of discussion.

The purpose of this study was to investigate adolescents' motivation and engagement of literacy practices when graphic novels and comic books were used to inquire into social and community issues of critical literacy. Data collected in this study consisted of video and audio recordings of each observation, a reading attitudes survey administered at the beginning and ending of the data collection period, quantitative information used to determine typical language arts and reading test patterns, End of Course Test data, grade summaries, student essays and short answer written responses, as well as the observation log of the observer. The observations were then transcribed and coded to discover emergent themes. The coded elements were compared to the research questions in an effort to seek relevance related to the issue of graphic novels, motivation and engagement in the learning process. A set of three formal planning sessions occurred that were recorded and transcribed and included in the data set.

This class was chosen primarily because of its time in the schedule. Due to my own position with the middle school, I was asked to choose a time when there would be less impact on my duties. Mr. Grayson was chosen upon recommendation of the administration at the high school as well as his dynamic personality and determination to connect popular culture to most if not all of what he teaches. That being said, he has had five years of teaching experience and most of that teaching has been at this same high

school. He is well known on the campus and has been voted by the student as the “Most Memorable Teacher”. He has accepted opportunities as an actor and played a significant speaking role on a movie based in his home state of Tennessee.

When I arrived in his class, three or four former students of his were in his room “just visiting”. He shoed them out in order to begin his own class. There was a comfortable sense of community already in this room even though school has only been in session for a few days. A variety of past student work was displayed on the walls and bulletin boards. These appeared to be examples of exemplary pieces from previous student projects. These examples included a painting of the characters Romeo and Juliet, a model of the Globe Theatre, comic renditions of some of the short stories read, and student poetry.

There are five computer work stations on the far side of the room with black office-type chairs at each. Mr. Grayson positioned his desk facing the students again on the far side of the room near the single window. The room was surprisingly bright with what feels like natural light even though there was only one window. The fluorescent lighting is harsh but several lamps with incandescent lighting tended to help soften the effect. An air freshener with some very light and gentle scent was unobtrusively in the corner near his desk. Student desks were placed in traditional rows facing the front whiteboard. Mr. Grayson positioned himself for most observations primarily behind a wooden podium at the front center of the room.

Mr. Grayson had already established his rules for the classroom before the arrival of the observer. The rules appeared on his website, in his syllabus, and were thoroughly discussed in the classroom. These included a list of materials, attendance, tardiness,

grading, and what was required to be prepared for class. Mr. Grayson had been very thorough in his expectations and gave the students a clear and concise set of expectations for his classroom. He included a final statement on his teacher web page that was indicative of what type of teacher the students might expect in his classroom. He stated that:

Mr. Grayson: So, Mr. Grayson sounds like he's a mean guy, y'know? Rules and stuff. Hey, they have to be in place. I am probably the easiest teacher to get along with that you will ever have. I am also the coolest you will ever have! All you have to do is honor these requests, work hard, and do your best to make all our class experiences memorable and educational. **WELCOME TO MY CLASS! GO BOLD AND PROUD!** (Grayson, 2010, Observation 1)

This one statement gave the students a hint as to the opportunities for learning available as well as insight into Mr. Grayson's personality.

Mr. Grayson utilized a very straightforward presentation style and was clear with his expectations without being overbearing with the students. Mr. Grayson commonly used a hand signal successfully as an attention-getting technique in an effort to maintain order. This technique was used in every class that I observed, and it can be assumed that he used it in those classes that were not observed. As an organizational technique, he included the use of student "designated drivers" and was quite clear with his students with what was expected. He described this process in the following manner:

Mr. Grayson: If you didn't know, we have designated drivers. They are the people in charge of each row. They are always the people up front. Any classroom that works as well as mine does it because of procedure, management, and repetition.

Straight up they obey the rules and I make it interesting for them. They know what to expect. (Grayson, 2010, Planning Session 1)

There were a few occasions in which Mr. Grayson verbally reprimanded small groups of students or a single student for inappropriate comments or off task behavior. Typically, Mr. Grayson used techniques involving redirecting a student or a group of students by calling the student(s) by name and making a general reference to the off task behavior. There were times where he changed the current open class task or small group task to one more independent which required less opportunity for off task behavior. In general, this class was eager, well behaved, and willing to tackle the tasks for the day under Mr. Grayson's direction. There was a clear definition of leadership from Mr. Grayson in the classroom, yet students were open and for the most part enthusiastic and at times even impatient to move forward in the lessons for the day.

The semester began with a class of twenty-four students. Each of the students was provided a packet prior to the first observation that included informed consent for participation in this study as well as a copy of the Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey (Appendix A). Informed consent was obtained for both teachers involved as well as twenty-three of the twenty-four students. One student refused and did not return the parental request. This student participated throughout the case study in all activities and discussions; however, he was not included in any of the data results. Parker High School had adopted a program of co-teaching several years prior to the case study that allowed for a policy of heterogeneous grouping including a variety of intellectual abilities in one classroom. This high school complies with the federal requirement of placing students in a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) allowing students with disabilities to receive their

education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers. It also stipulates that special education pupils are not removed from regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services, education in regular classes cannot be achieved satisfactorily. [20 United States Code (U.S.C.) Sec. 1412(a)(5)(A).] This particular class had student subsets of four identified special education students; one identified gifted student, and the remaining nineteen recognized as regular education students. Because of the subset of special education students this program called for a certified special education teacher to co-teach with Mr. Grayson. Oftentimes, in settings such as this the regular education teacher will assume the role of content specialist while the special education teacher works significantly with accommodations for the special education students in the classroom. This was true in this classroom as well, except that the special education teacher, Mrs. Dean, worked equally with other students in the class based on that student's individual need. The students did not recognize her as a special education teacher and accepted her role as a teacher in the classroom. However, it is clear that Mr. Grayson was the "lead" teacher and primarily directed all instruction requesting help from Mrs. Dean from time to time. She was supportive and welcomed by the students. She was older and more experienced than Mr. Grayson and had a quiet, helpful personality. Mrs. Dean maintained a supportive attitude and more subordinate role throughout all the observations and worked quietly with students and in helping Mr. Grayson with daily routines. She did not lead or direct whole group instruction at any time during my observations. She did, however, work with some students individually to explain tasks or manage them in small groups. These small groups were heterogeneously mixed for all tasks assigned for a small group setting. No group was set up according to

specific ability allowing for all to contribute their strengths and weaknesses as the tasks were designed. Occasionally, groups were determined based on the need for leadership roles or to help control off-task behavior.

Mr. Grayson rotated the student desks into varying positions depending on the needs of the unit being studied. He frequently alternated between setting up rows for general instruction and whole class discussion, and moved them to small group blocks of five or six desks when assigning small group work. His typical teaching style involved very little true lecture but did involve his reading of all text and quite a bit of whole group discussion. The small group work was required for the reading of the graphic novel and the reading of the novel, *The Hunger Games*, and included the creation of the class project.

In each observation, the students appeared comfortable and demonstrated a casual attitude--almost like they are at home in their living room. Very little evidence of inattentive behavior such as slumping in the chair, feet on other people's desks, fidgeting, or off task side conversation occurred that might indicate a less attentive attitude.

This study followed these students from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester, and it was expected that the curriculum would follow its intended course in preparing students for end of course tests (EOCT) as well as mastery in the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) for ninth grade literature. That being said, it was expected that while the lesson plans would include graphic novels as tools to improve comprehension, there would be some learning units that would not include graphic novels at all. Observations included both variables and data is included that presented a view of both contexts.

**Observations**

**Observation 1.** One of the characteristics of Mr. Grayson’s teaching style was his actual delivery when reading text. In a daily oral language lesson focused on grammatical parts of speech, Mr. Grayson employed his “what I call the Geico caveman speak” (Grayson, 2010, Observation 1). Rather than employing a straightforward lecture format, he adjusted the lesson to “break this down into the most Neanderthal of communication ways to speak” (Grayson, 2010, Observation 1). The students responded with laughter, focus, and outcries to his non-traditional format for discussing the parts of a sentence.

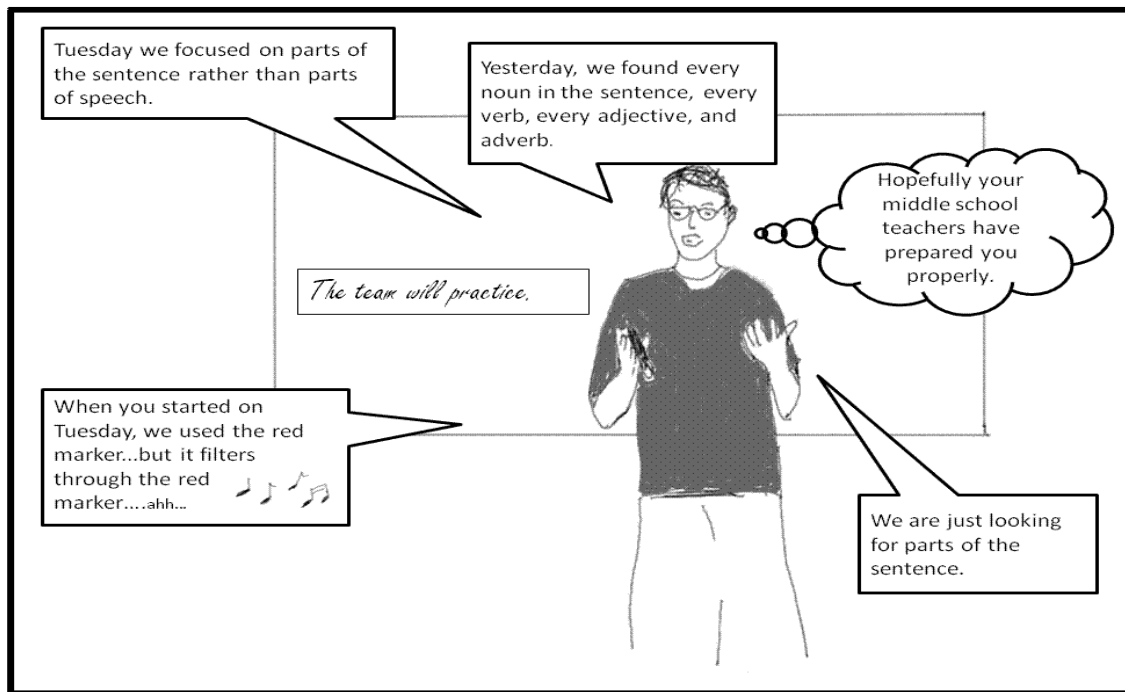


Figure 4.1 Grayson, 2010, Observation 1



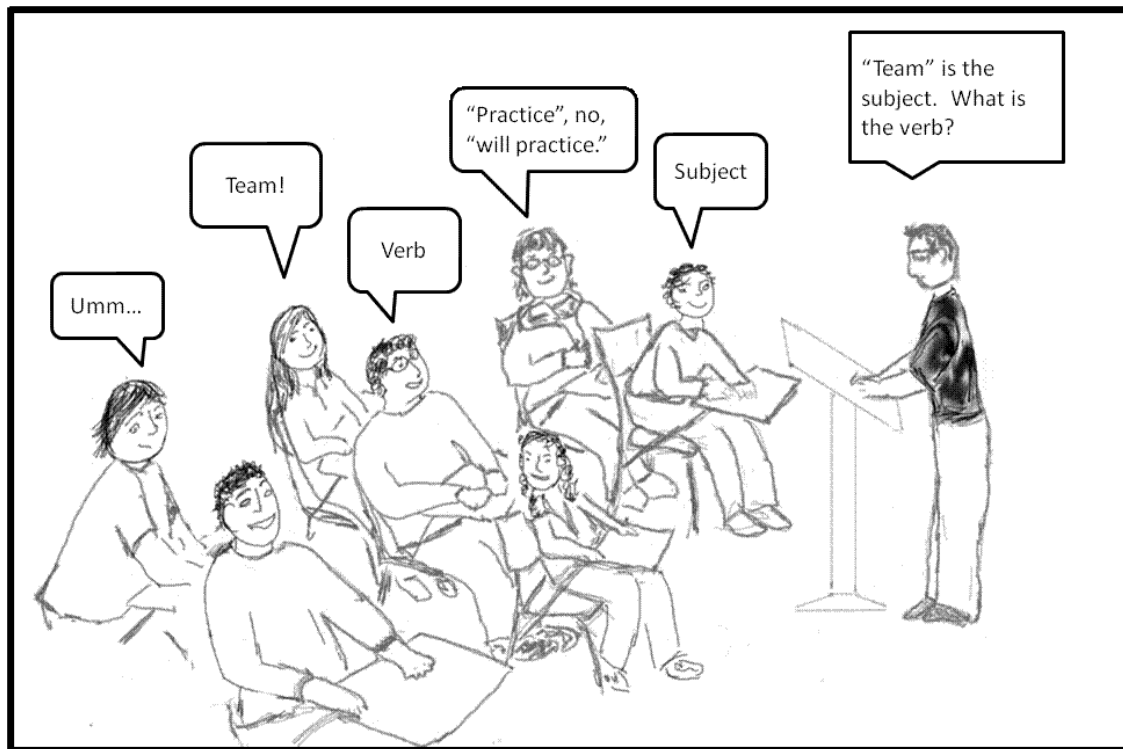


Figure 4.2 Grayson, Travis, Morgan, Carl, Jake, Brad, 2010, Observation 1

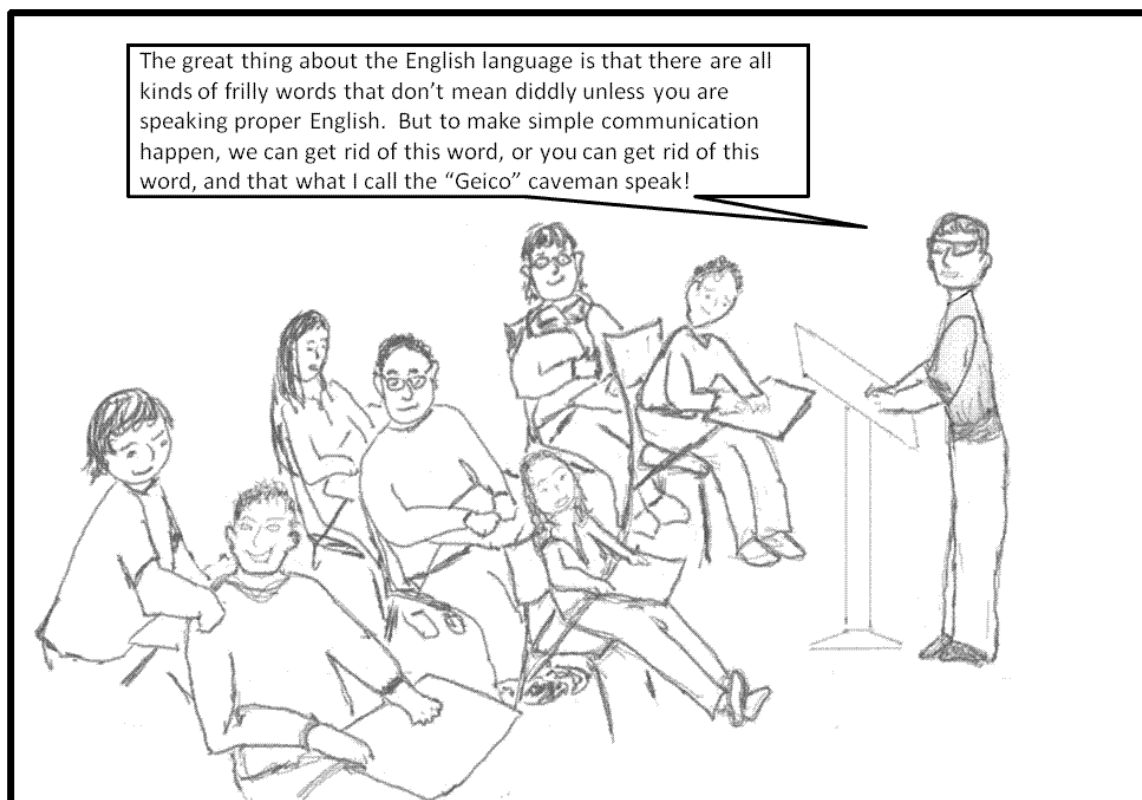


Figure 4.3 Grayson, 2010, Observation 1



Figure 4.4 Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 1

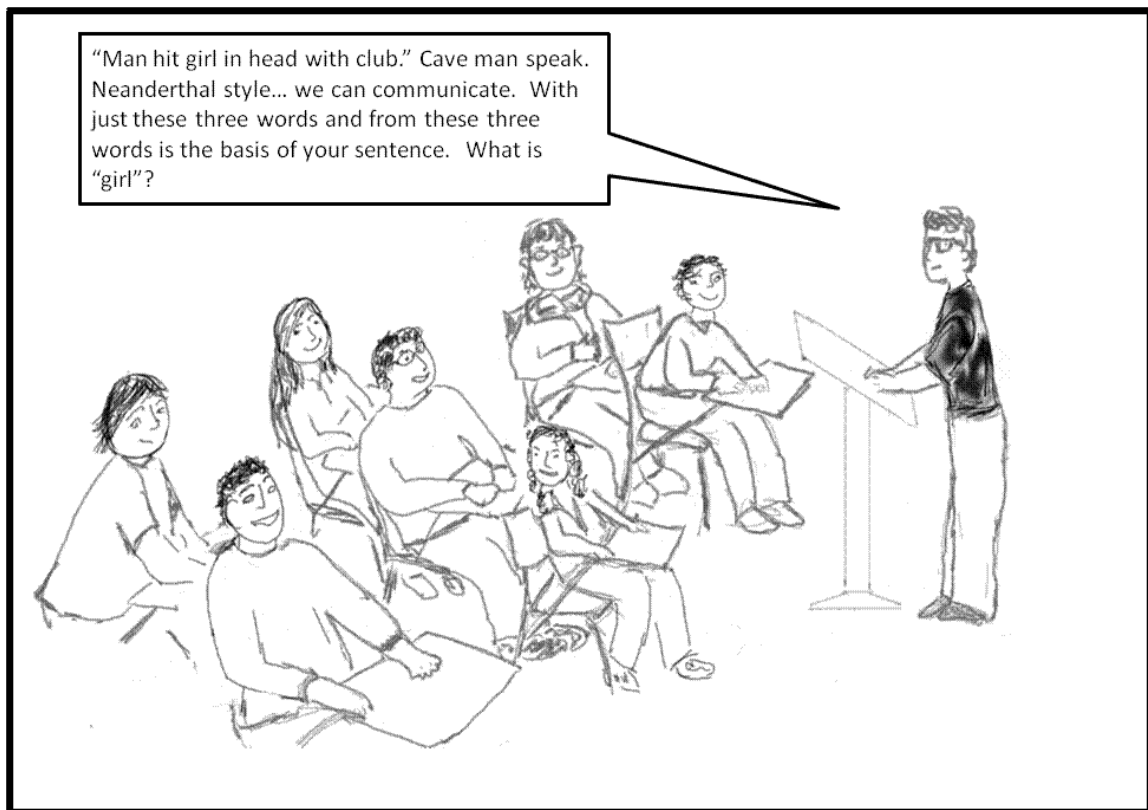


Figure 4.5 Grayson, 2010, Observation

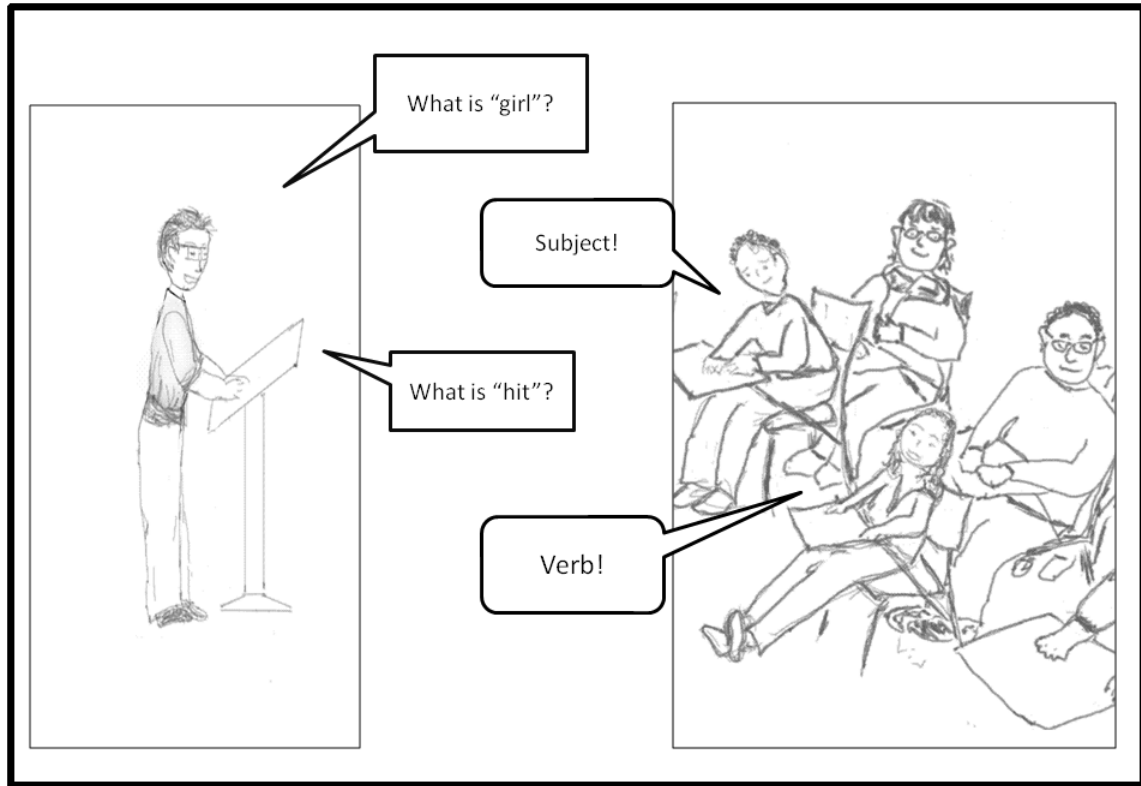


Figure 4.6 Grayson, Sophia, Brad, 2010, Observation 1

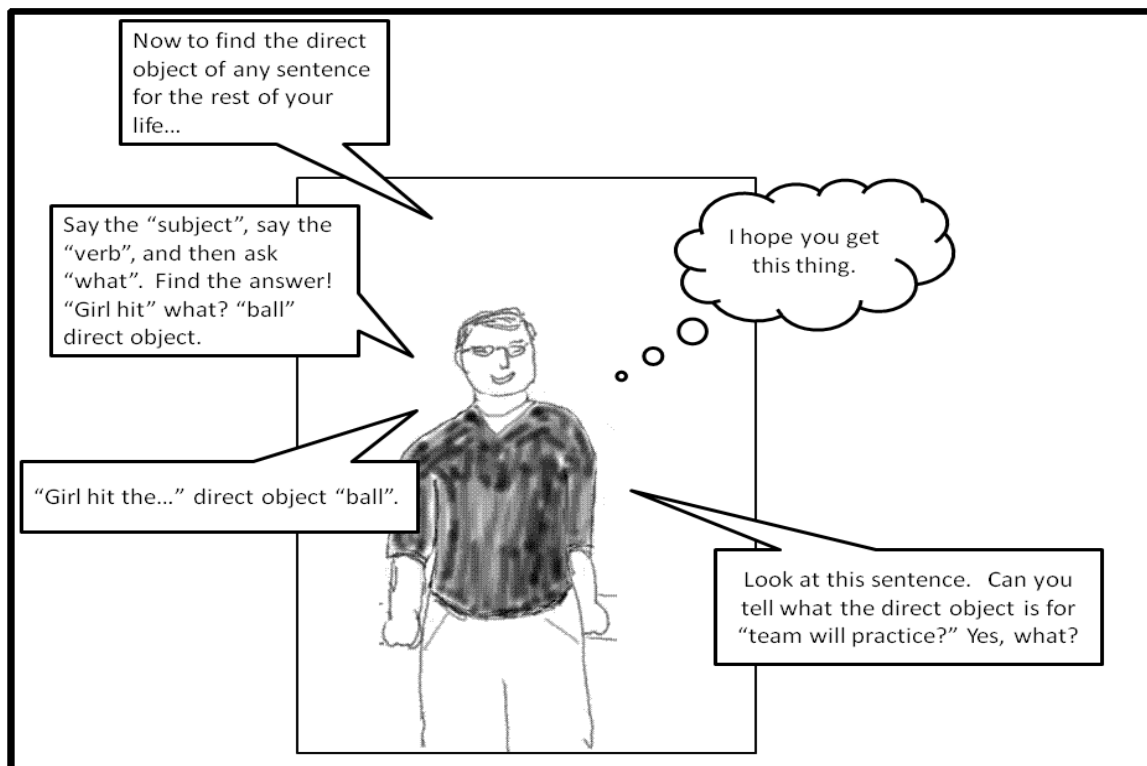


Figure 4.7 Grayson, 2010, Observation 1

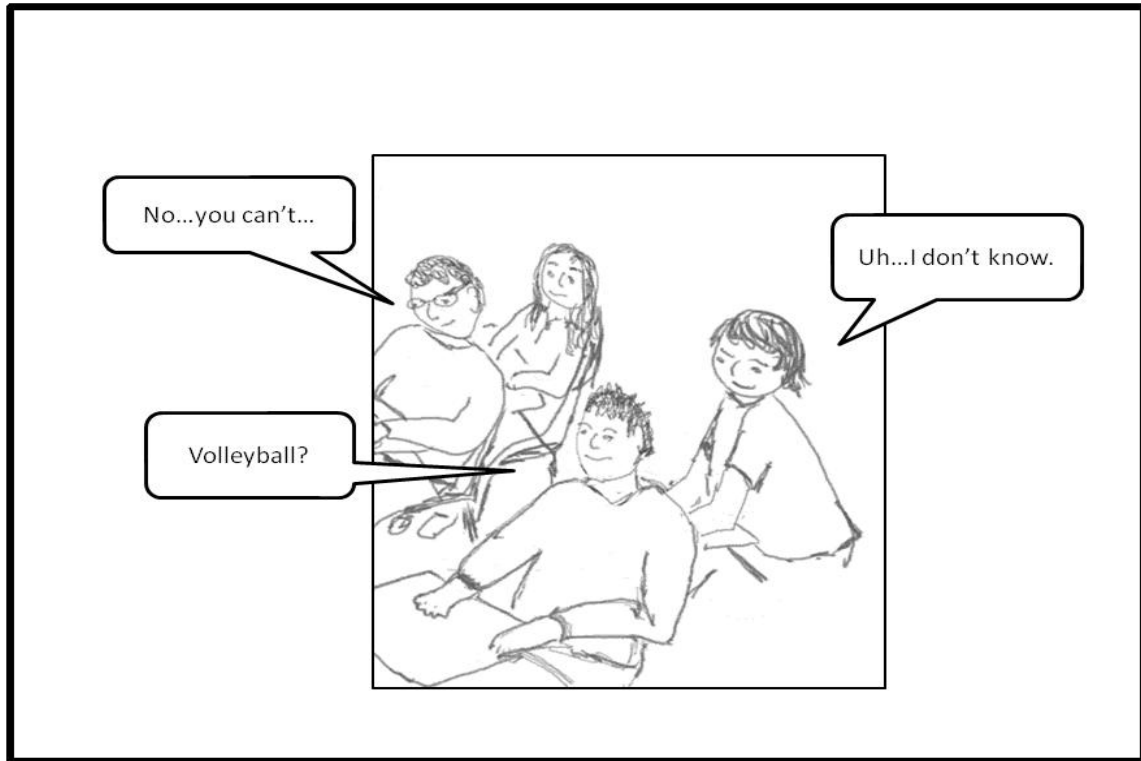


Figure 4.8 Carl, Mark, Travis, 2010, Observation 1

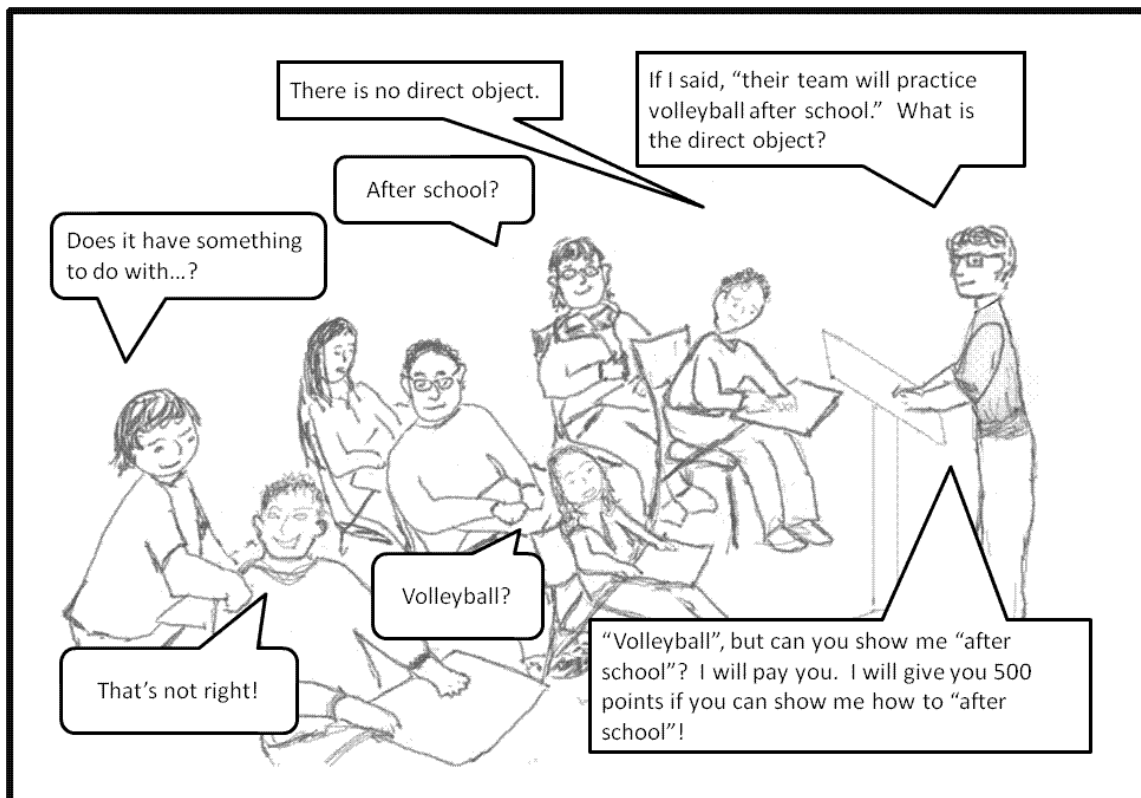


Figure 4.9 Grayson, Travis, Mark, Sophia, Jake, Brad, 2010, Observation1

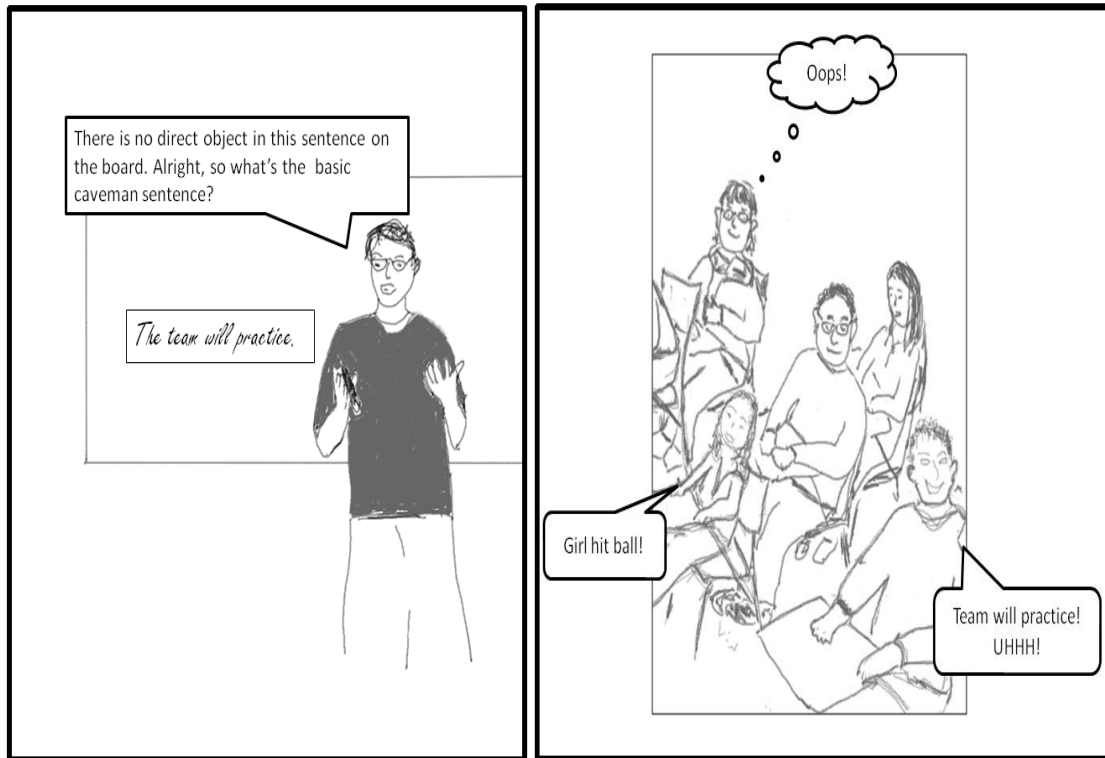


Figure 4.10 Grayson, Sophia, Jake, Mark, 2010, Observation 1

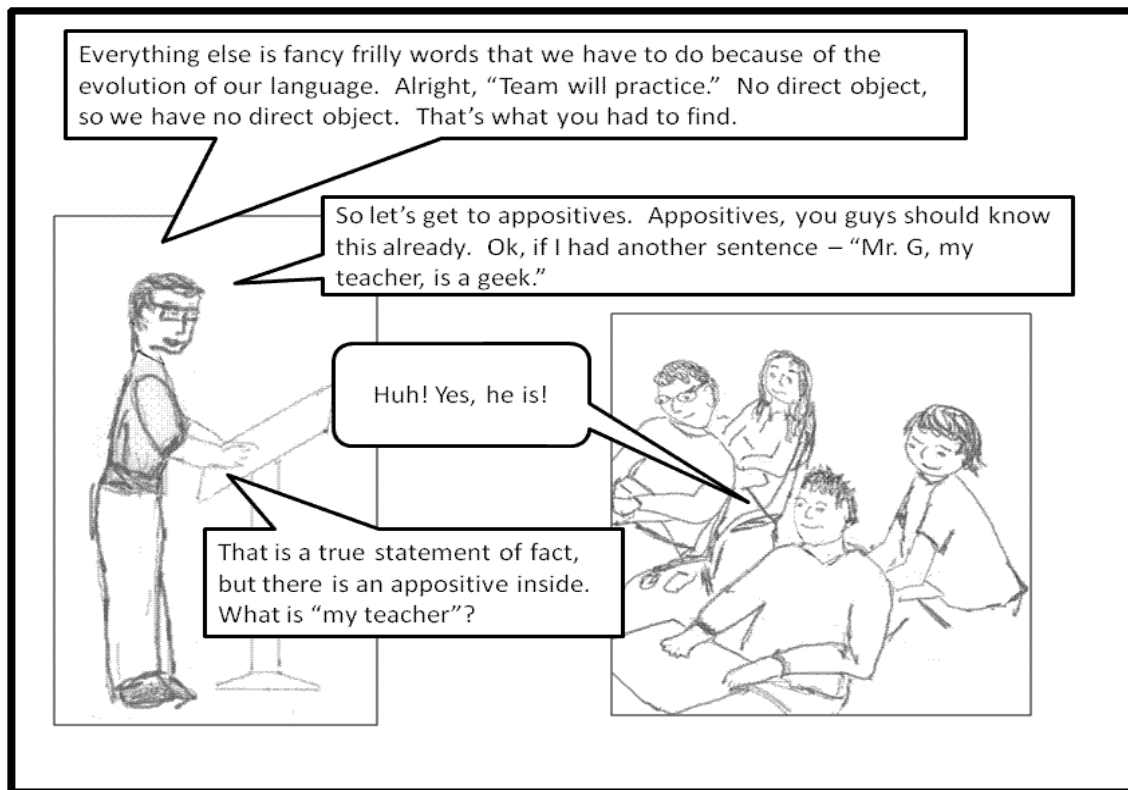


Figure 4.11 Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 1

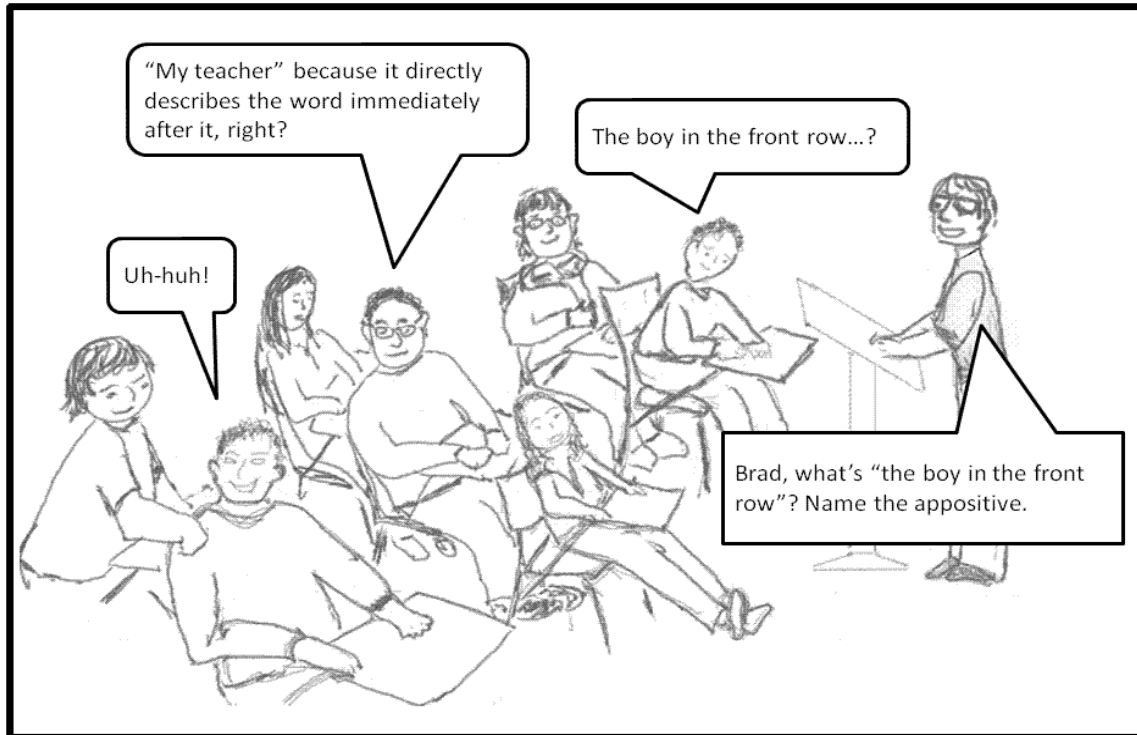


Figure 4.12 Grayson, Mark, Carl, Brad, 2010, Observation 1

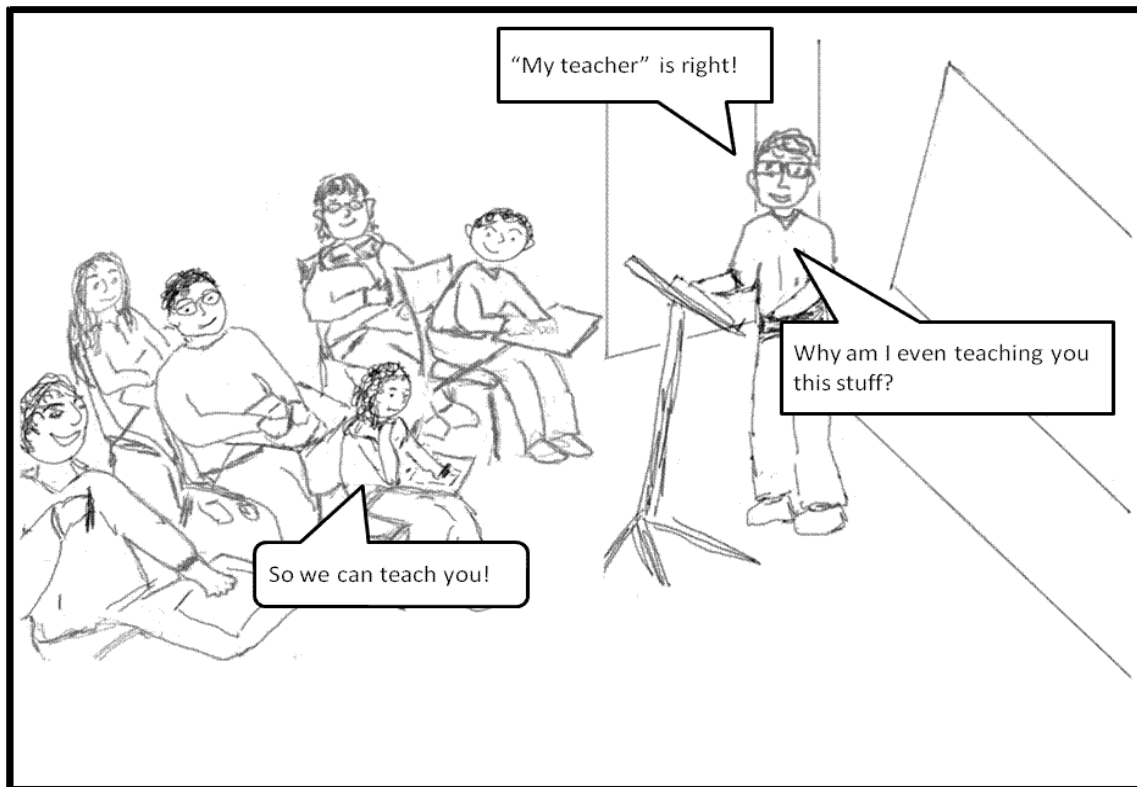


Figure 4.13 Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 1

From this simple connection, Mr. Grayson appeals to the students' sense of humor and sets up a lesson in which the students are actively listening and participating in the discussion. Mr. Grayson's comment of "why am I even teaching you this stuff?" pulled the response from a female student "so we can teach you!" Her comment was genuine and completely met with the class' approval of the lesson from Mr. Grayson. Their involvement and engagement in the lesson was acknowledged and confirmed by both the teacher and the student by this interchange.

Following the grammar lesson, the class focused on reading the text of Richard Connell's *The Most Dangerous Game* from the class literature book. Mr. Grayson had spent some time in the previous day introducing this story and began this observation with the actual reading of text. A common characteristic of Mr. Grayson was his delivery when reading text. His typical pacing was rapid with variations in pitch and volume throughout the reading to build a scene and establish a tone for the story. The students did not seem to mind the fast pace. For instance, in a reading of *The Most Dangerous Game*, Mr. Grayson employed a Russian accent for the character of General Zaroff. The students were absorbed in the detailed and animated reading by Mr. Grayson. His addition of the Russian accent for this character was a fun surprise. Most of the students immediately glanced up smiling at Mr. Grayson when he started the accent and then quickly looked back at the text to follow along.

Throughout the animated reading Mr. Grayson generally acted out each of the characters in the short story creating an environment for total engagement by the students. At one point he acknowledged the students' apparent rapt attention and immersion in the lesson. By articulating what he was seeing, Mr. Grayson was able to

specifically identify to the students' their connection to the material and bring the text to life through this reading. This recognition on Mr. Grayson's part was important to the students' and their sense of teacher attitudes. Motivation and engagement appears fostered by his notice and understanding of their conscious effort to stay focused on his lesson. His animated reading and physical antics seem to be emphasized when the students respond positively to his efforts to help with their comprehension through this method.

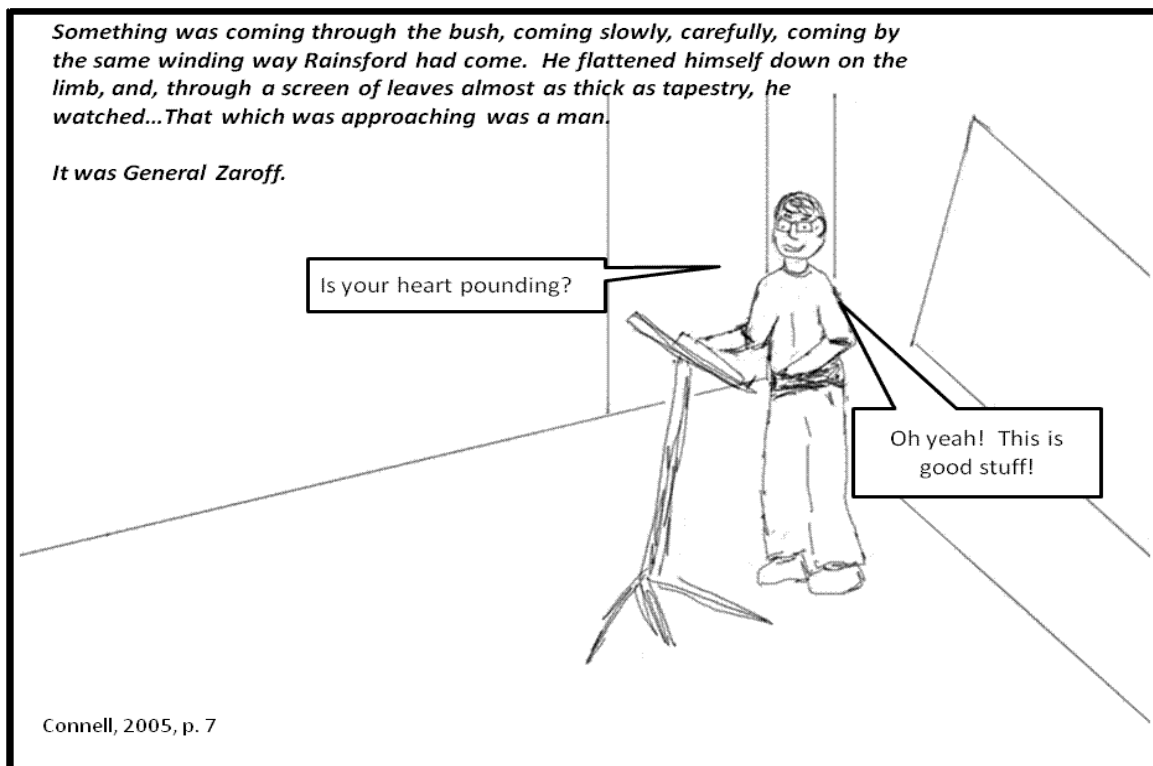


Figure 4.14 Grayson, 2010, Observation 1

Mr. Grayson continued to foster the excitement from the students by creating a visual image of the “trap” to be sprung in the story. This included some of the basic and graphic elements of the character's crude plan to save himself and kill one of the other characters. The natural pace of the story and Mr. Grayson's desire to increase the suspense and thrill of the reading caused him to vary the tone and depth of the words in



his cryptic description of the trap and its deadly consequences. The students appeared mesmerized by the discussion further punctuating the positive effects of this teacher's immersion into the literature and his creative presentation.

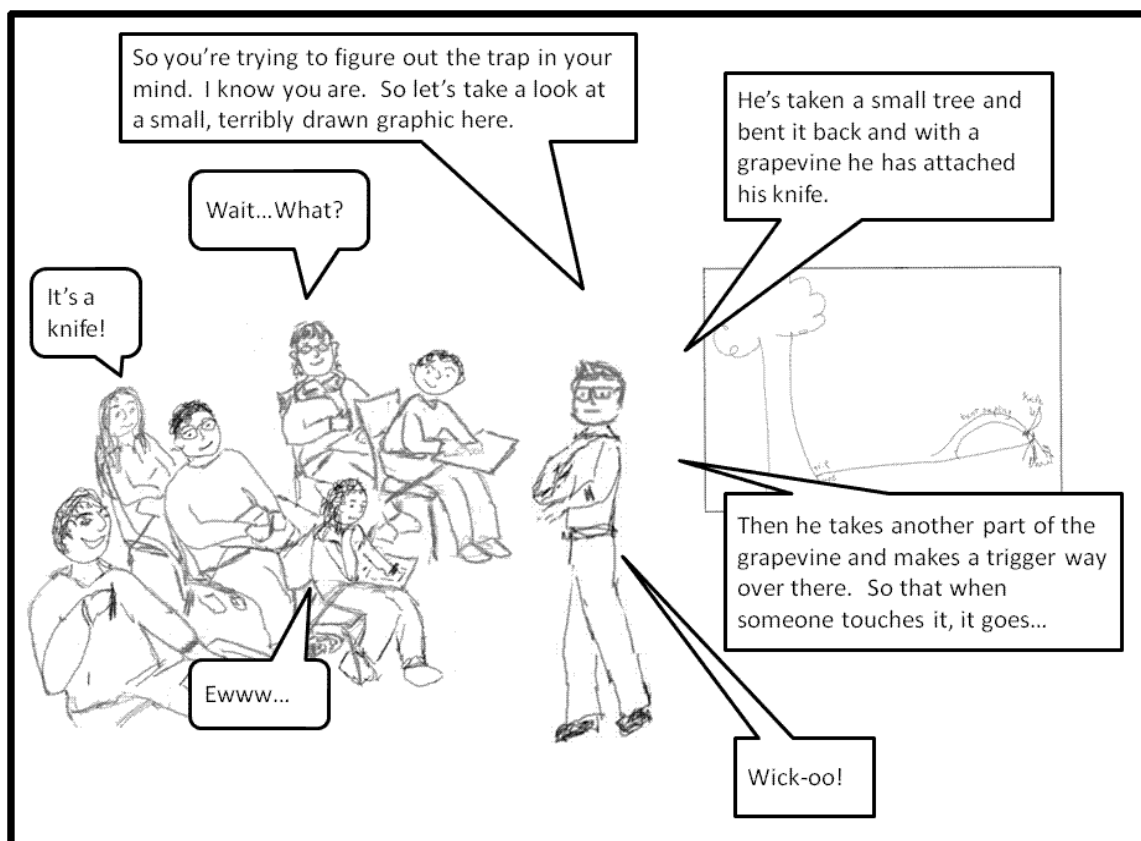


Figure 4.15 Grayson, Morgan, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Observation 1

This short example helped students capitalize on their interest in extremes, focus on helping them see what was happening in the story, and go beyond the words into a more captivating and realistic visual imprint. Mr. Grayson continued to capitalize on the writing of Connell by increasing the suspense of the story through the climax and focused on emphasizing the plot structure and character elements through his active reading style. The students were figuratively brought into the story as participants in the prose.

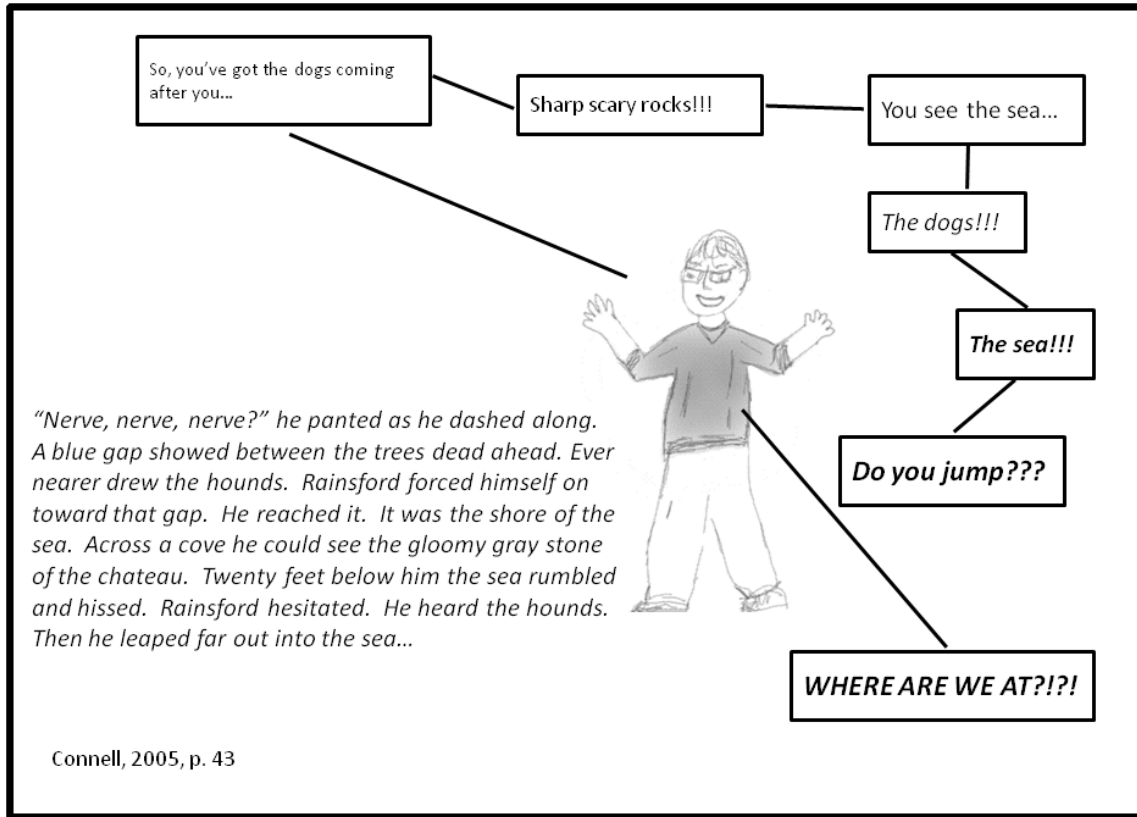


Figure 4.16 Grayson, 2010, Observation 1

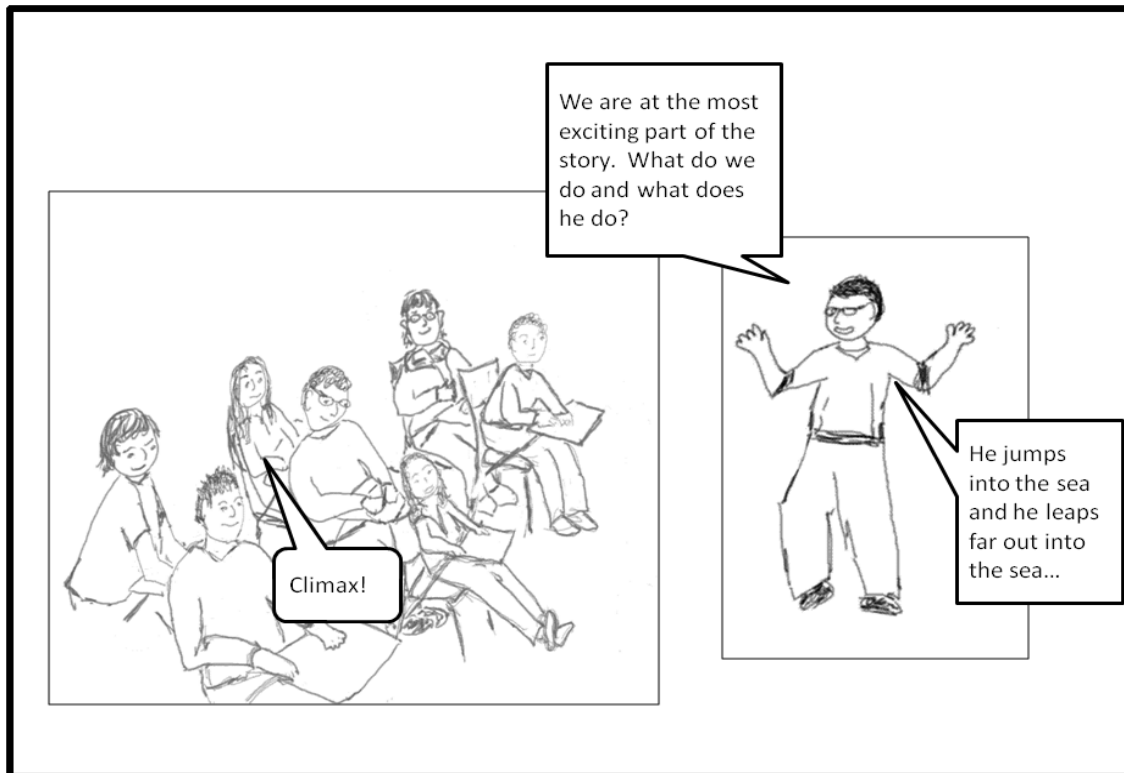


Figure 4.17 Grayson, Morgan, 2010, Observation 1

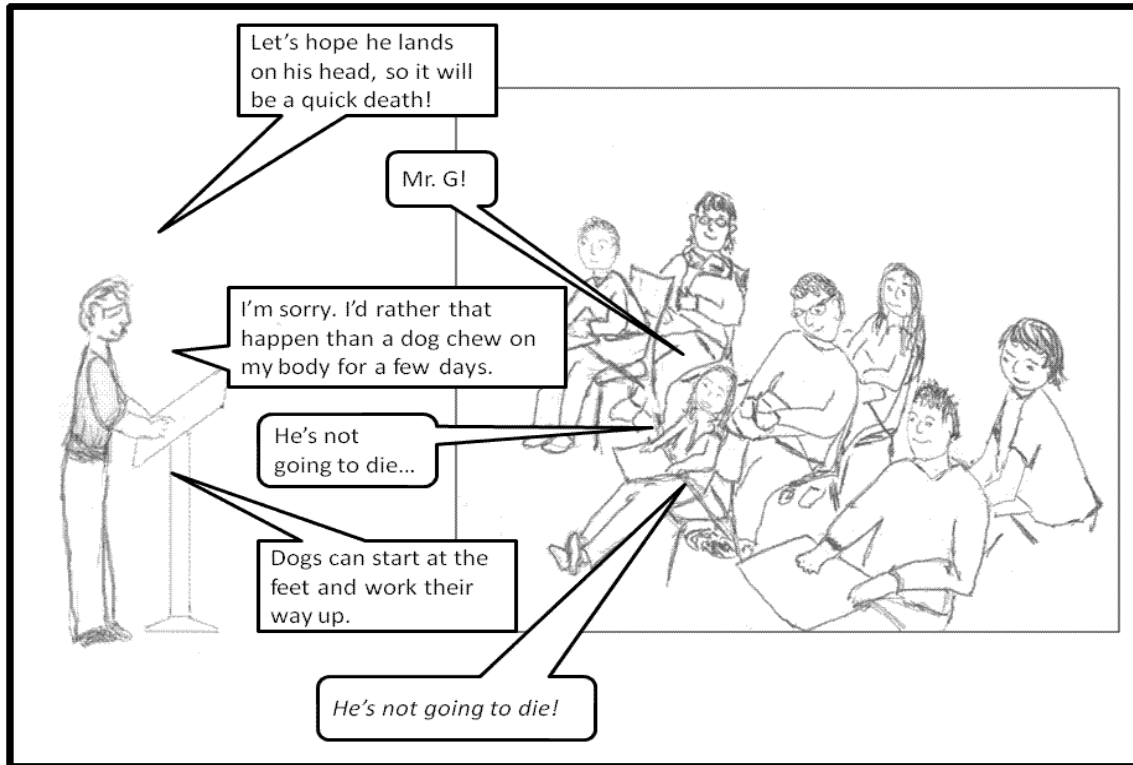


Figure 4.18 Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 1

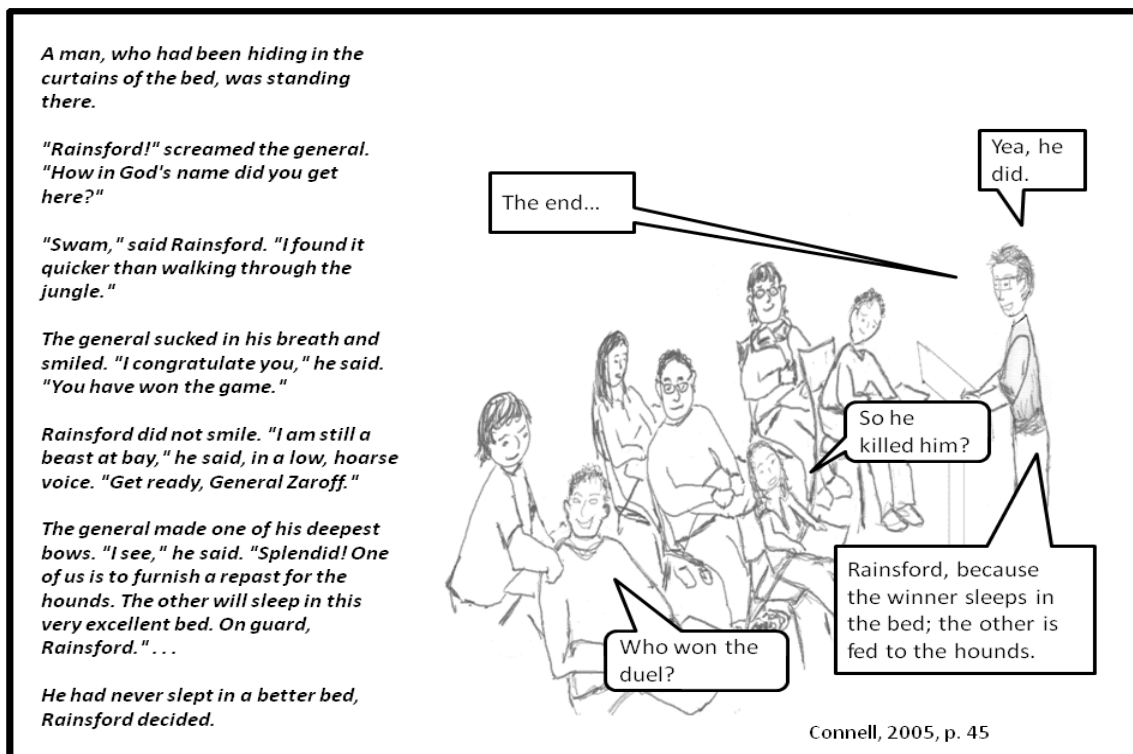


Figure 4.19 Grayson, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Observation 1

Mr. Grayson frequently interrupted the reading for comprehension checks, but he continued the mood or tone of the story generally with each check. These moments came as a surprise to the students because they tended to vocalize to the students not only a better understanding of the text but a better understanding of what Mr. Grayson was thinking because of that text. Clearly, this technique contributed to greater student engagement in the process.

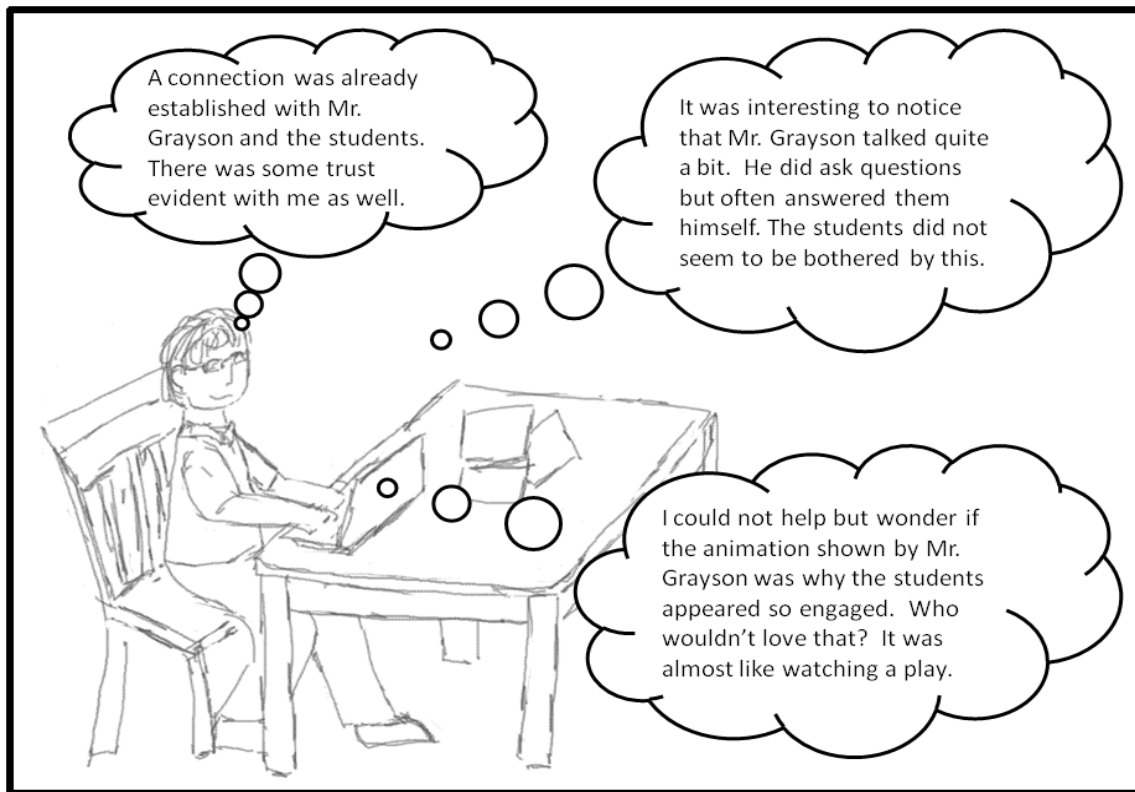


Figure 4.20 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 1

**Observation 2.** This observation consisted of an introduction to the writings of Edgar Allan Poe and his use of literary elements in his writing. Mr. Grayson added a PowerPoint presentation to help reinforce the main points of his lecture. This particular lesson included a packet of activities and notes related to the story. The students received a copy of this packet utilizing Mr. Grayson's "student driver" approach to organization and discipline. This particular lesson was the class' first experience reading literature

through the use of a graphic novel in tandem with the actual text. Mr. Grayson chose to use Poe’s short story *The Tell Tale Heart* from the adaptation taken in *Nevermore: A graphic adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories* (2008). This particular edition utilized graphic adaptations of the original text. The subsequent discussion was intended to begin the process of connect those literary elements found in the text to the visual imagery created in this particular graphic adaptation. It was important to note the student connection to the text as found in the graphic representation was clear and apparent throughout the observation. Mr. Grayson’s knack for applying elements of popular culture helped support this connection.

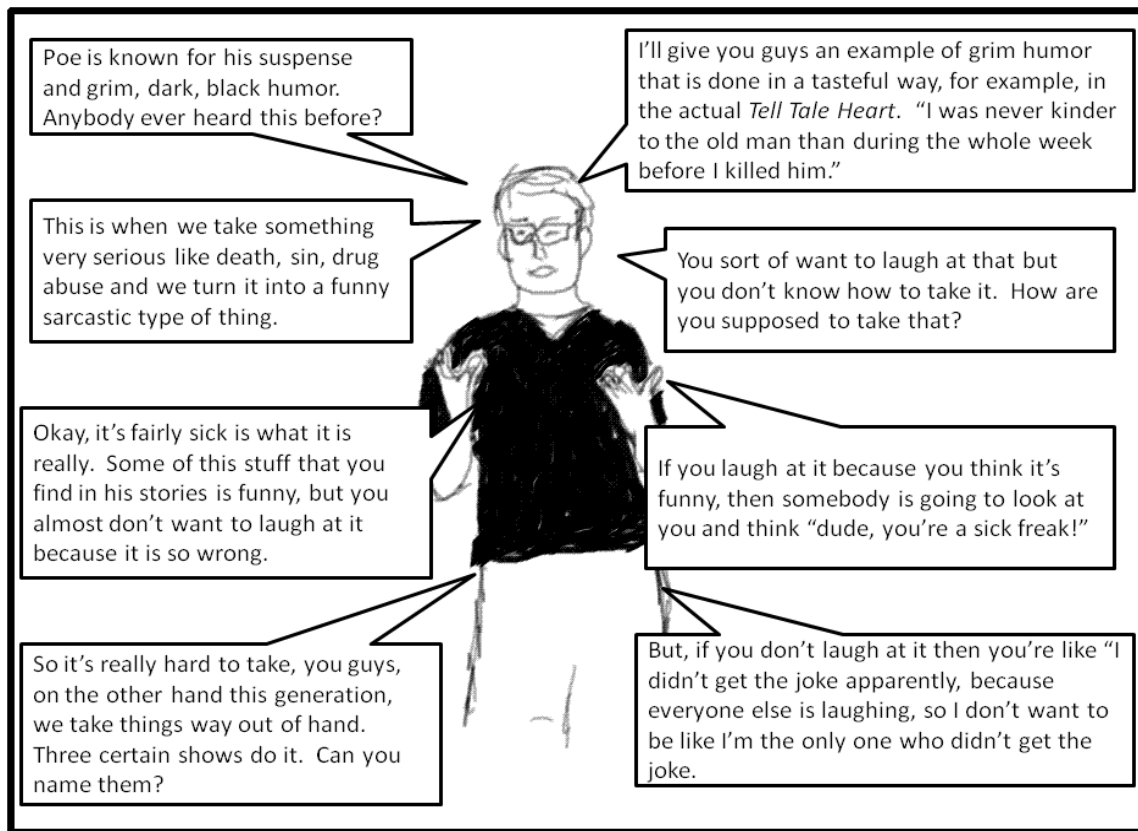


Figure 4.21 Grayson, 2010, Observation 2



Figure 4.22 Jake, Mark, Kirk, Travis, 2010, Observation 2

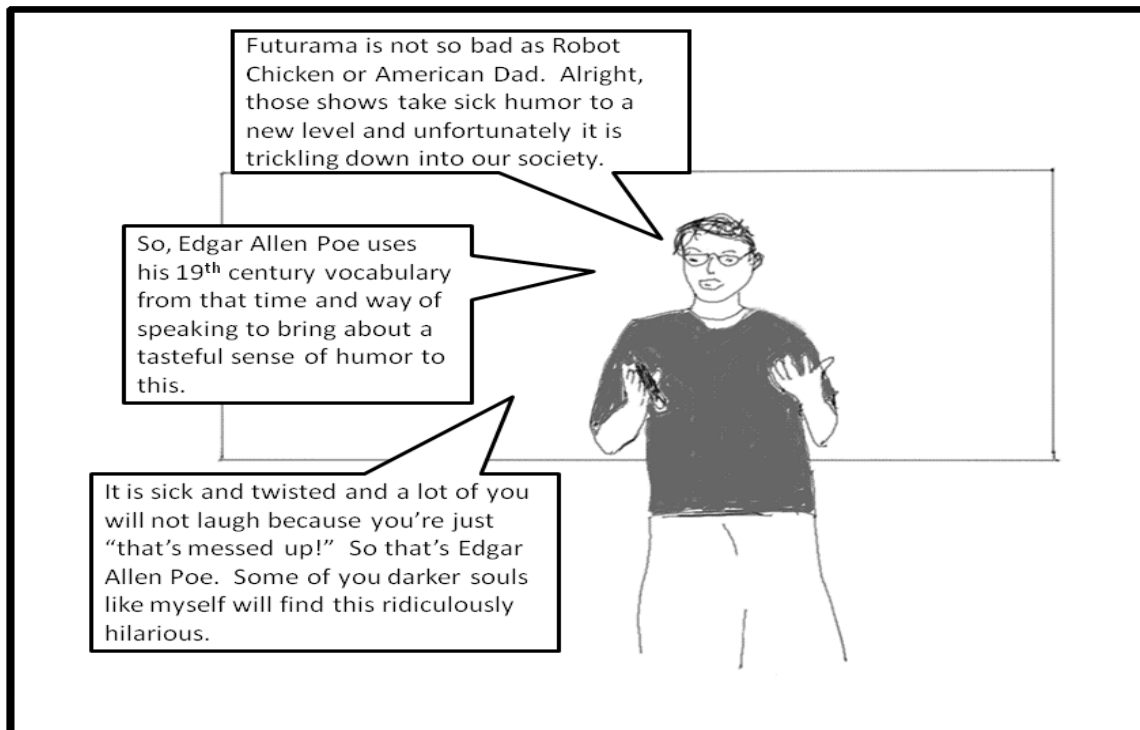


Figure 4.23 Grayson, 2010, Observation 2

The insertion of elements of popular culture familiar to the students bridged the 19<sup>th</sup> century literature of Poe’s time to the more current understandings of the students. Mr. Grayson understood this and made personal connections to the literature so helping the students to see and visualize a greater connection to the text as well as establishing a feeling of anticipation of what was yet to come in the lesson.

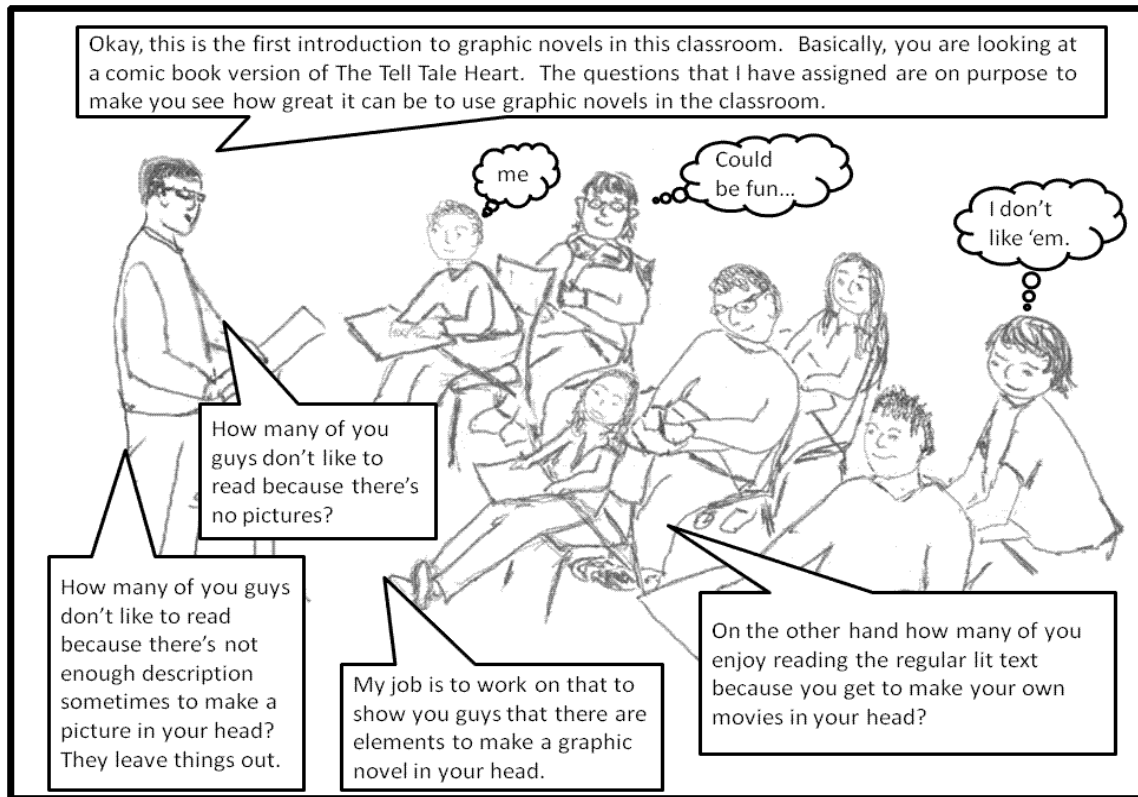


Figure 4.24 Grayson, Jake, Travis, Sophia, 2010, Observation 2

In the planning session held prior to this observation, Mr. Grayson and the observer discussed the necessity of developing introductory lessons in instructing the students in “reading” graphic novels as well as beginning the process of developing an understanding of the relationship between the graphics and the text in making meaning. In this particular case while the text came directly from the original work, the graphics presented a different point of view. For instance, in the graphic adaptation for *The Tell Tale Heart*, the narrator was presented as a woman rather than a male in the original. In

an adaptation like this Mr. Grayson suggested that “graphic novels are able to straight up show us a picture without us actually taking a look at too many details” (Grayson, 2010, Observation 2). Once those differences found in the adaptation were addressed, he introduced the structure of the graphics and the vocabulary of frame, panels, text bubbles, borders, and gutters. With this brief introduction into how to read the comic panels, Mr. Grayson focused the students on the purposes behind the frames and panels.



Figure 4.25 Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 2



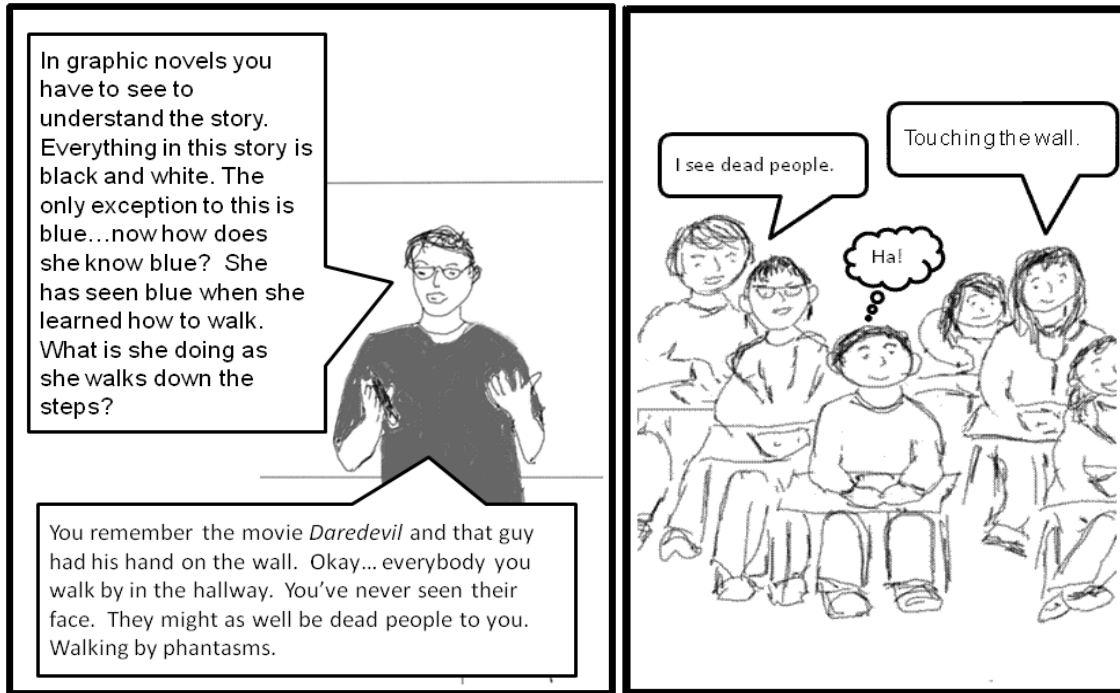


Figure 4.26 Grayson, Jake, Morgan, 2010, Observation 2

Mr. Grayson continues to use the graphic adaptation to help the students see more deeply into the characterization of the narrator and recognize their senses in the reading.



Figure 4.27 Grayson, Sophia, James, 2010, Observation 2



Figure 4.28 Grayson, John, 2010, Observation 2

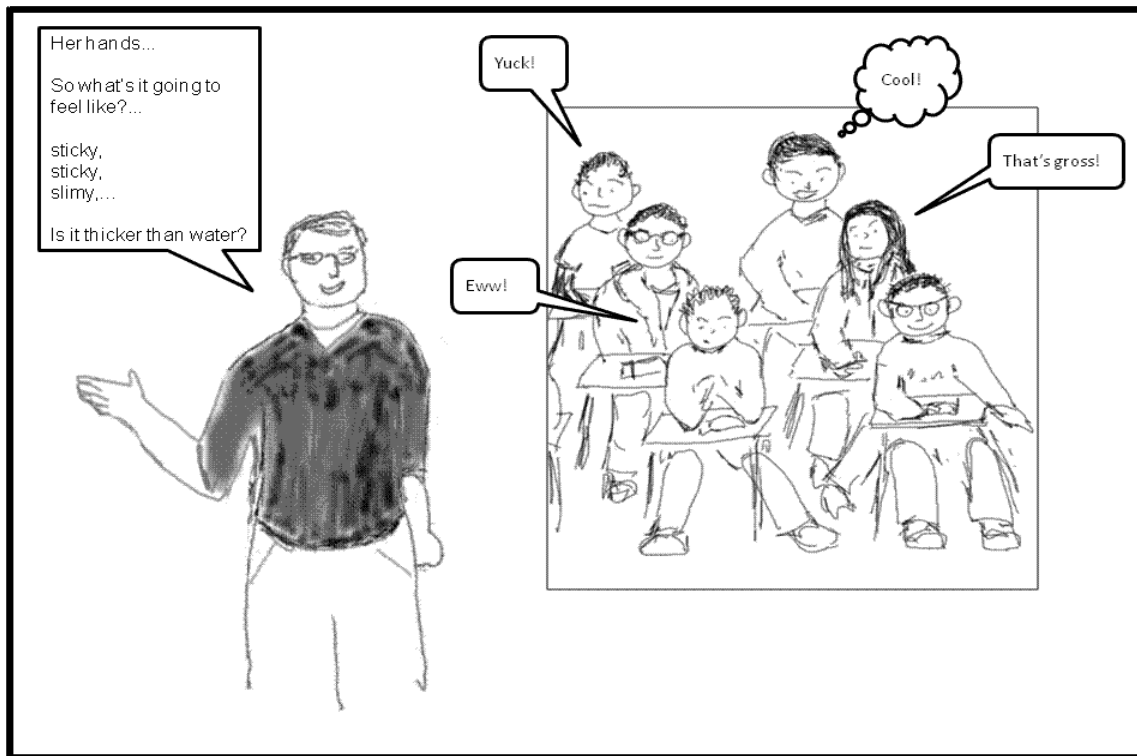


Figure 4.29 Grayson, James, Brad, Mark, Morgan, 2010, Observation 2

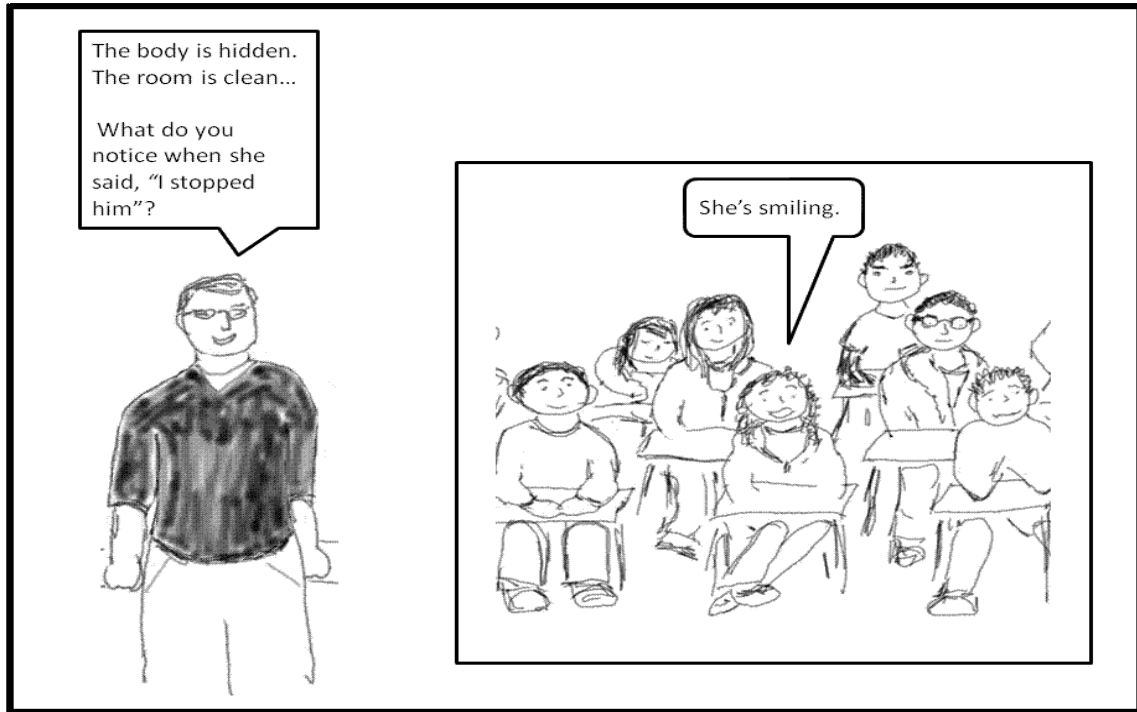


Figure 4.30 Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 2

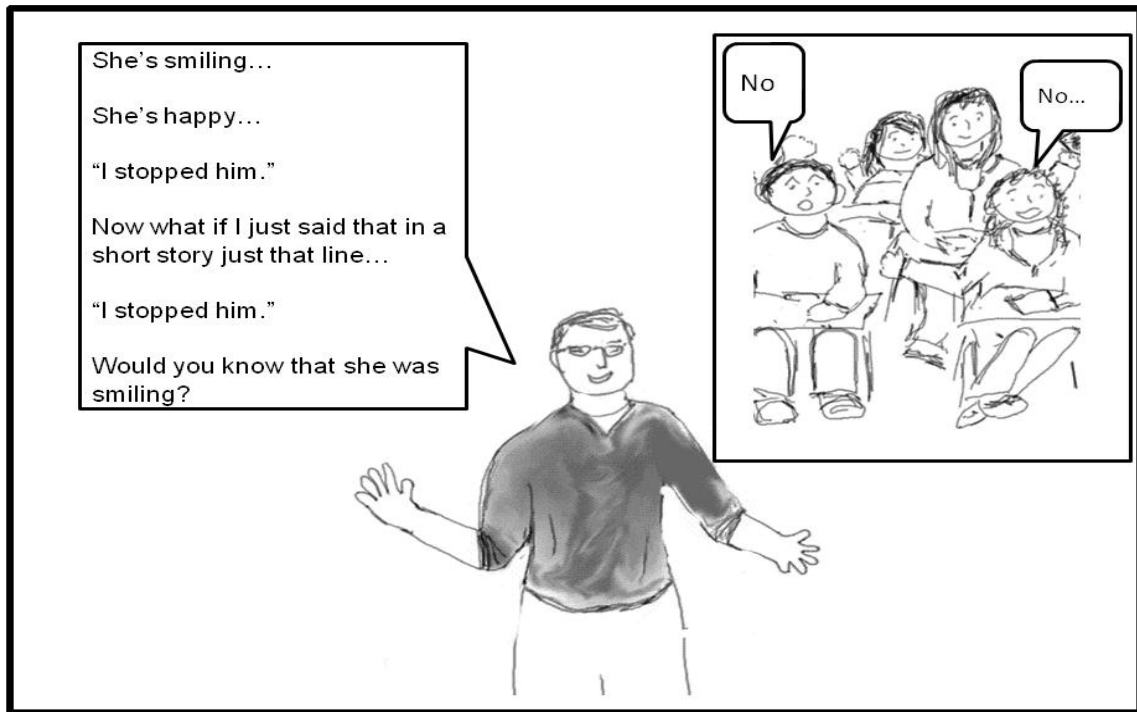


Figure 4.31 Grayson, Sophia, Sean, 2010, Observation 2



Figure 4.32 Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 2

Following the reading of the short story, follow-up questions from a study guide were used to reinforce important ideas and concepts related to comprehension. Several of the questions found in the study guide were directly related to the reading of comic frames and panels. These questions lead to a whole class discussion focused on the imagery found in the earlier reading and attempting to strengthen the students' understanding of how to read the frames. The students continued to see the frame as a superficial visual noting colors and obvious expressions; however, as the discussion progressed they began to view the imagery from a more abstract point of view and to some extent formed opinions and thoughts beyond the obvious. The students appeared eager to respond and often attempted to suggest their answers or ideas while others were speaking. They did appear engaged with the activity and began to respond with greater

thought as they moved through the study guide. Mr. Grayson continued to encourage their responses and listened to their attempts at humor and understanding.

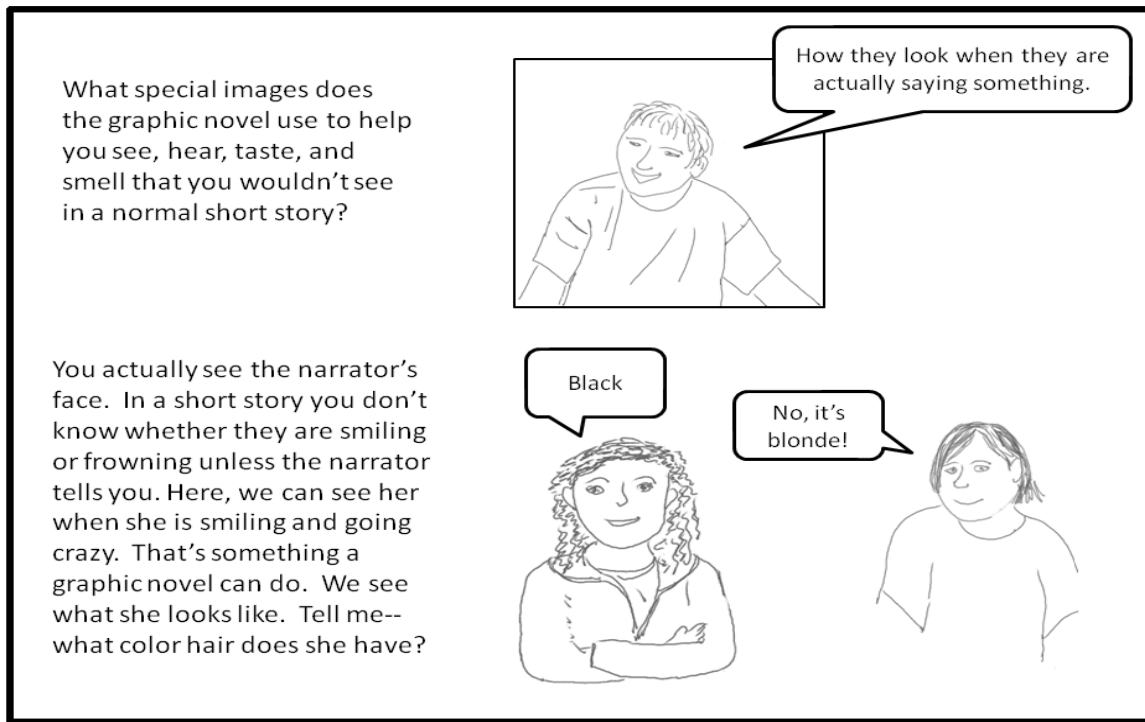


Figure 4.33 Sophia, Mark, Faith, 2010, Observation 2

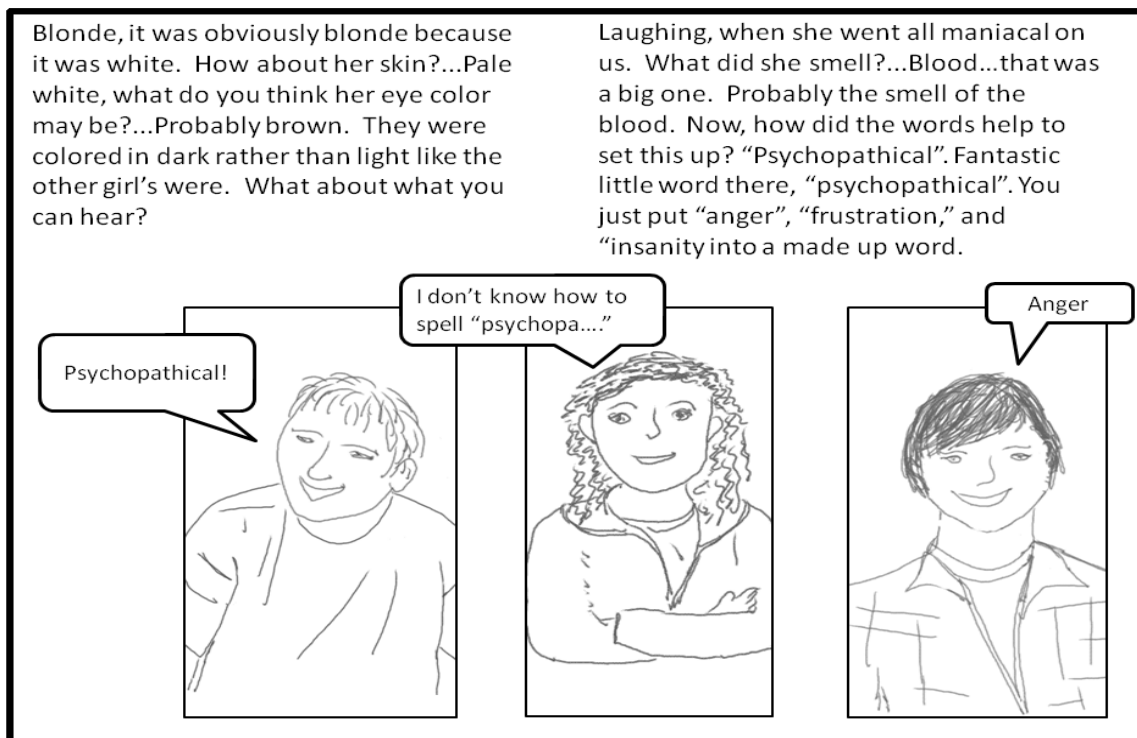


Figure 4.34 Mark, Sophia, Travis, 2010, Observation 2

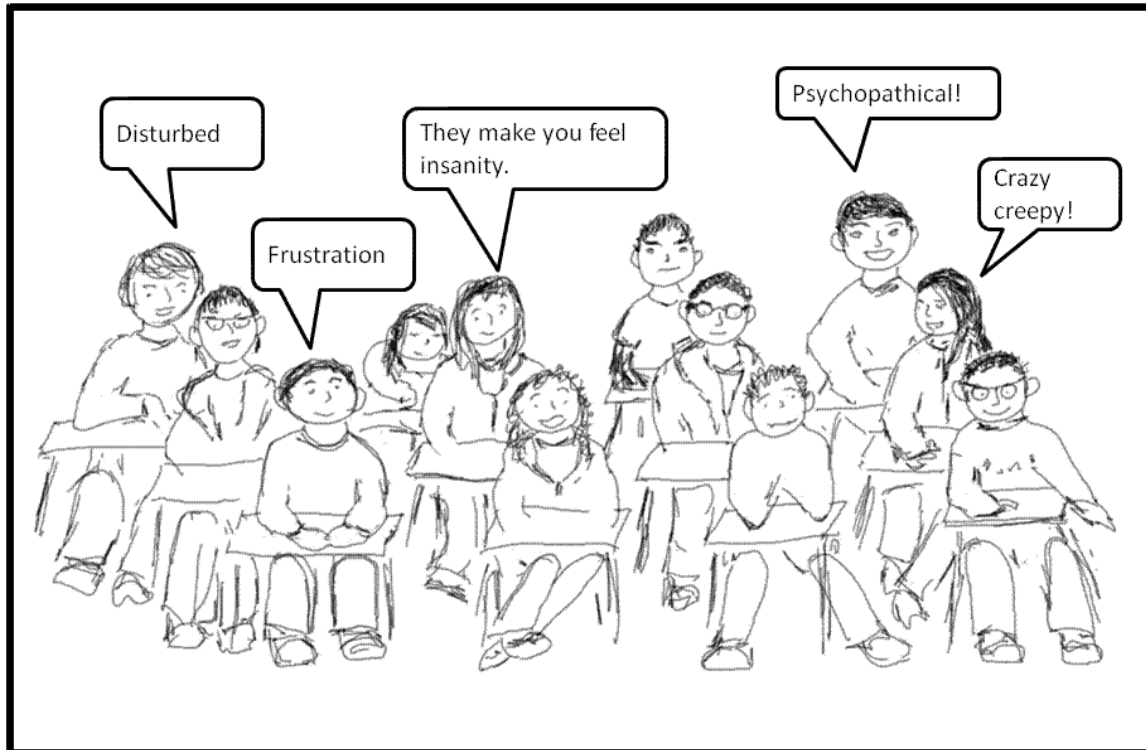


Figure 4.35 Travis, Sean, Morgan, Mark, Mary, 2010, Observation 2

Insanity again—you saw in the face how angry and upset she was. That’s what I was looking for. Crazy creepy is getting close to what I was looking for.

Disturbed fear. She has fear of this man—visible fear. Look at the panels.

Do you see the people around her? The narrator was blind and the author showed you what it was like to be blind in these panels.

Now, the opinion question, and you cannot get this wrong as long as your answer has to do with the story. What did you like or dislike about the graphic novel? Do you think you would understand the story if you just had the pictures, or if you just had the text?

Figure 4.36

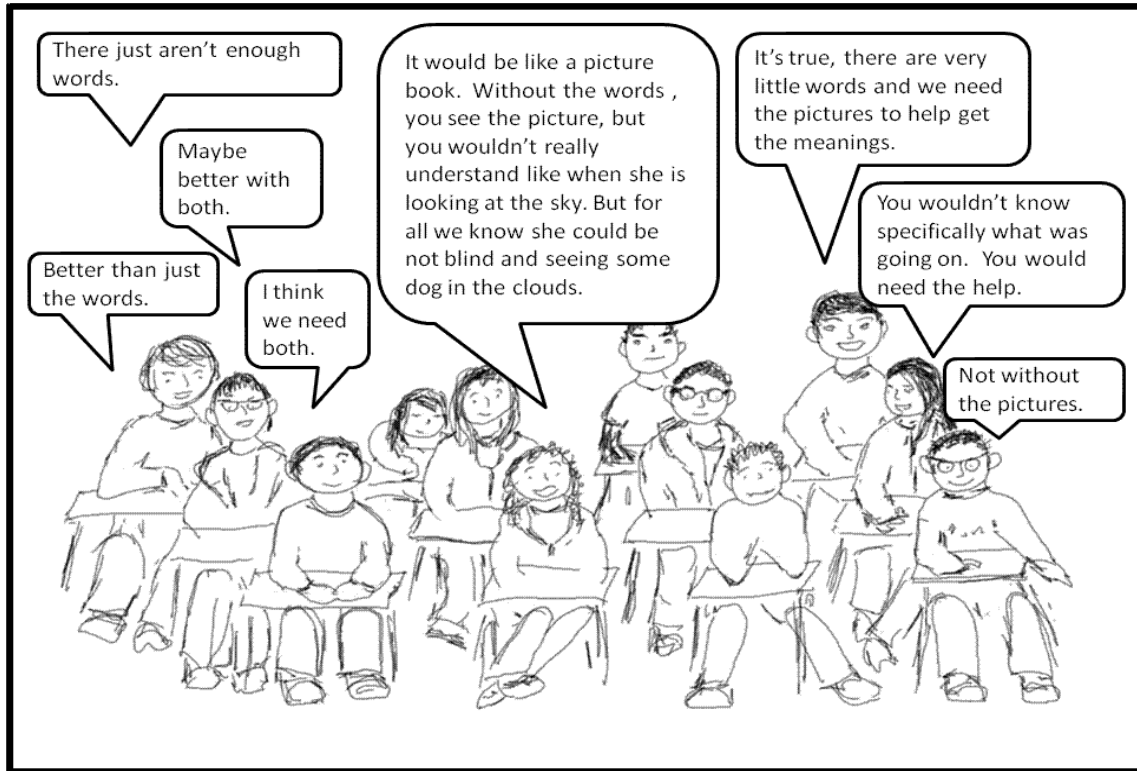


Figure 4.37 Travis, Jake, Sean, Sophia, Mark, Mary, John, 2010, Observation 2

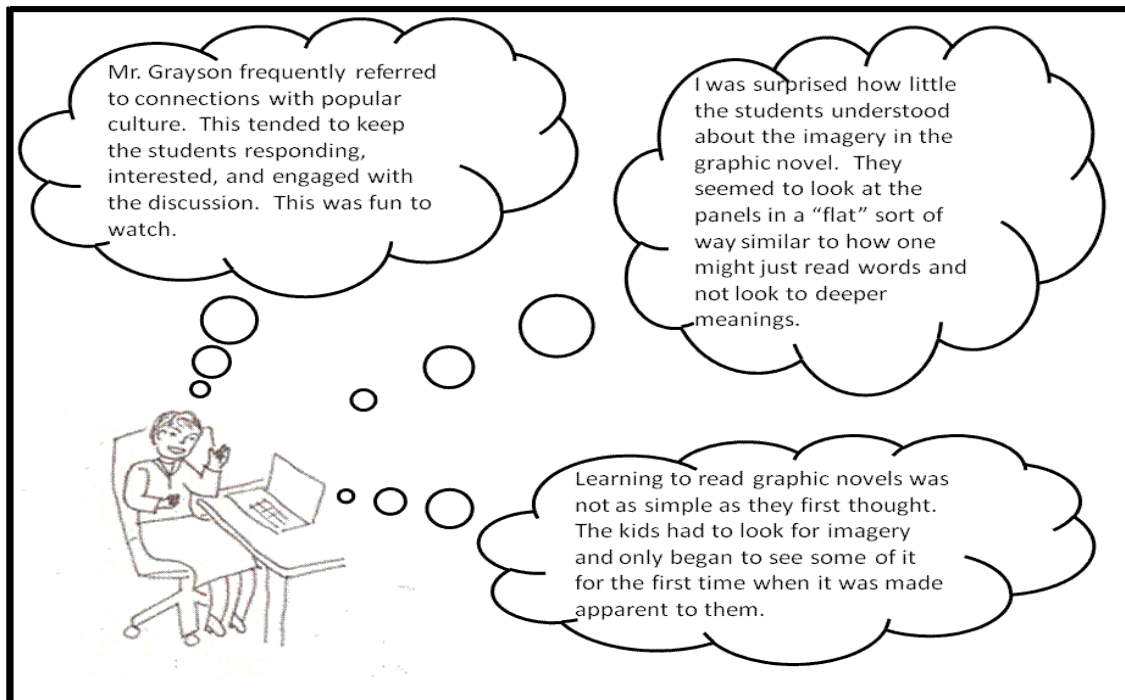


Figure 4.38 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 2

**Observation 3.** This observation continued the study of the works of Edgar Allan Poe and focused specifically on the reading of the poem, *The Raven*. Mr. Grayson again chose to use the graphic adaptation from the graphic novel *Nevermore: A graphic adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories* (2008) in an attempt to enhance comprehension with this poem. Of note, the graphic adaptation utilized the complete text throughout the graphic panels limiting any confusion about what was from the original and what was from the adaptation. It was also important to note that Mr. Grayson has used this particular graphic novel as part of his curriculum for the past few years.

Mr. Grayson attempted to set the stage and prepare a “creepy” mood in the classroom by dimming the lights and adjusting his voice to a quieter and more sinister tone. With this established he instructed the students in the importance of mood, atmosphere, and setting because “you definitely feel a little bit more apprehensive in the dark” (Grayson, Observation 3, 2010). One student put on his hood to listen to Mr. Grayson’s rendering of the text and all others had bowed over their copies in anticipation of this poem. It was interesting to hear Mr. Grayson read aloud. His reading voice was very fast, but the students did not complain or appear to lose interest. His inflection was rapid and varied while setting the dark and even creepy mood of this poem. At one point in the reading he opened the door to let in some light while “tap, tap, tapping at my chamber door. The students were silent throughout the reading except for occasional nervous laughter. Mr. Grayson added to his voice the few actions of rapping on the door, the shelves in the room, and opening and closing the blinds and door to set the scene of suspense and add to the overall “picture” of what was happening in this poem.



At one point his voice carried across into an adjacent classroom. Members of that class began shouting to Mr. Grayson because of what they heard coming through the classroom walls. This seemed to make his antics even more intense in the reading. The students smiled and relaxed even more into the “vibe” set by him. At another point Mr. Grayson cut away from the reading after bringing up the character’s call for his lost and dead Lenoir. He talks of zombies and brings the students in on the tangent.



Figure 4.39 Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 3

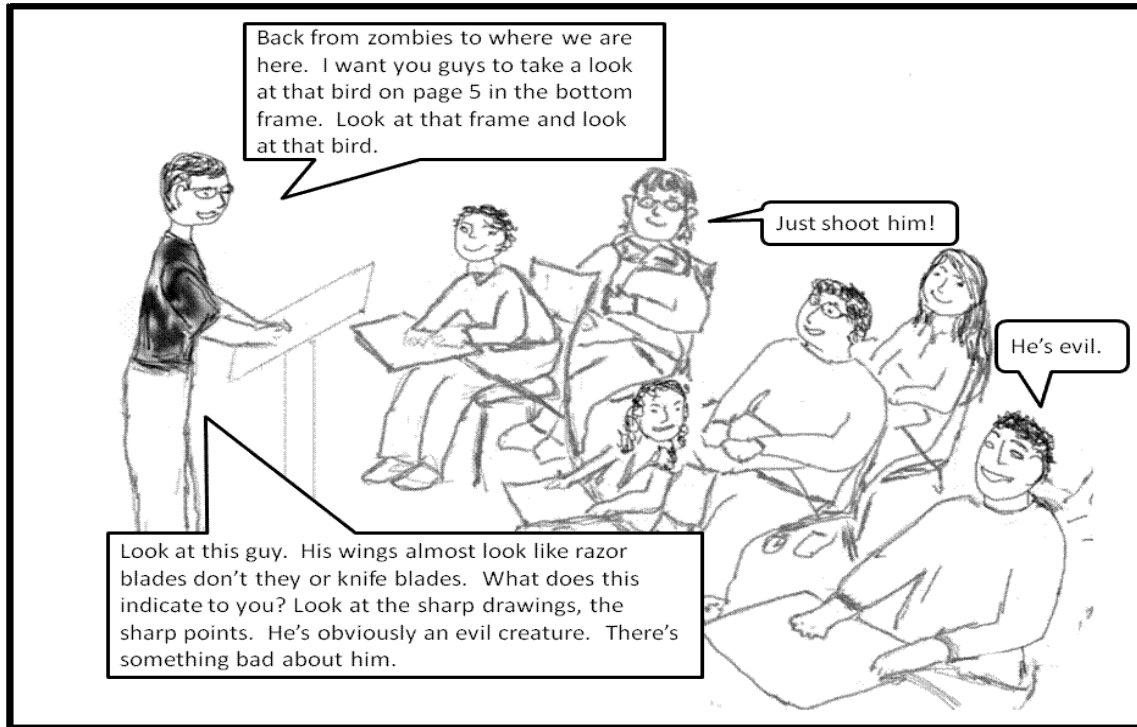


Figure 4.40 Grayson, Jake, Mark, 2010, Observation 3

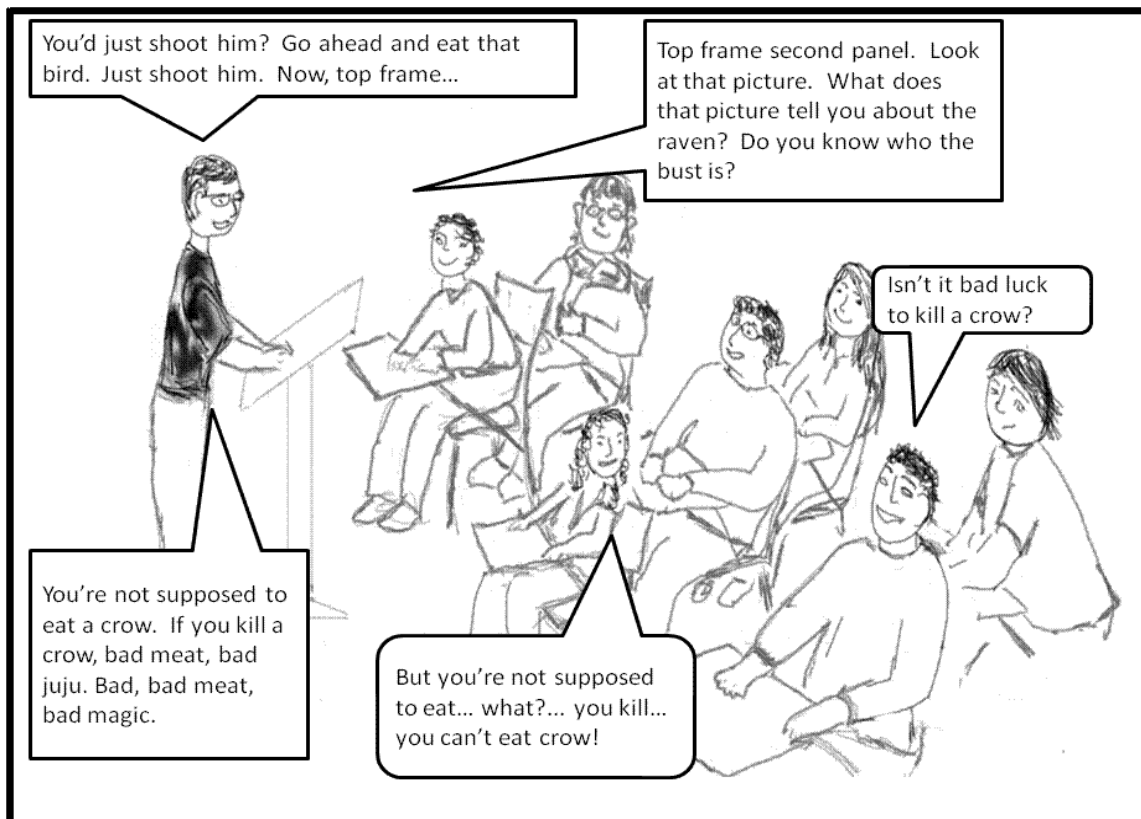


Figure 4.41 Grayson, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Observation 3

Given the intensity of suspense won to this point, this discussion seemed to bring the students to an even greater connection to the text as well as allowed the diversion to provide them some short respite from the intensity and suspense. This tangent led to further student questions and insights into the text.

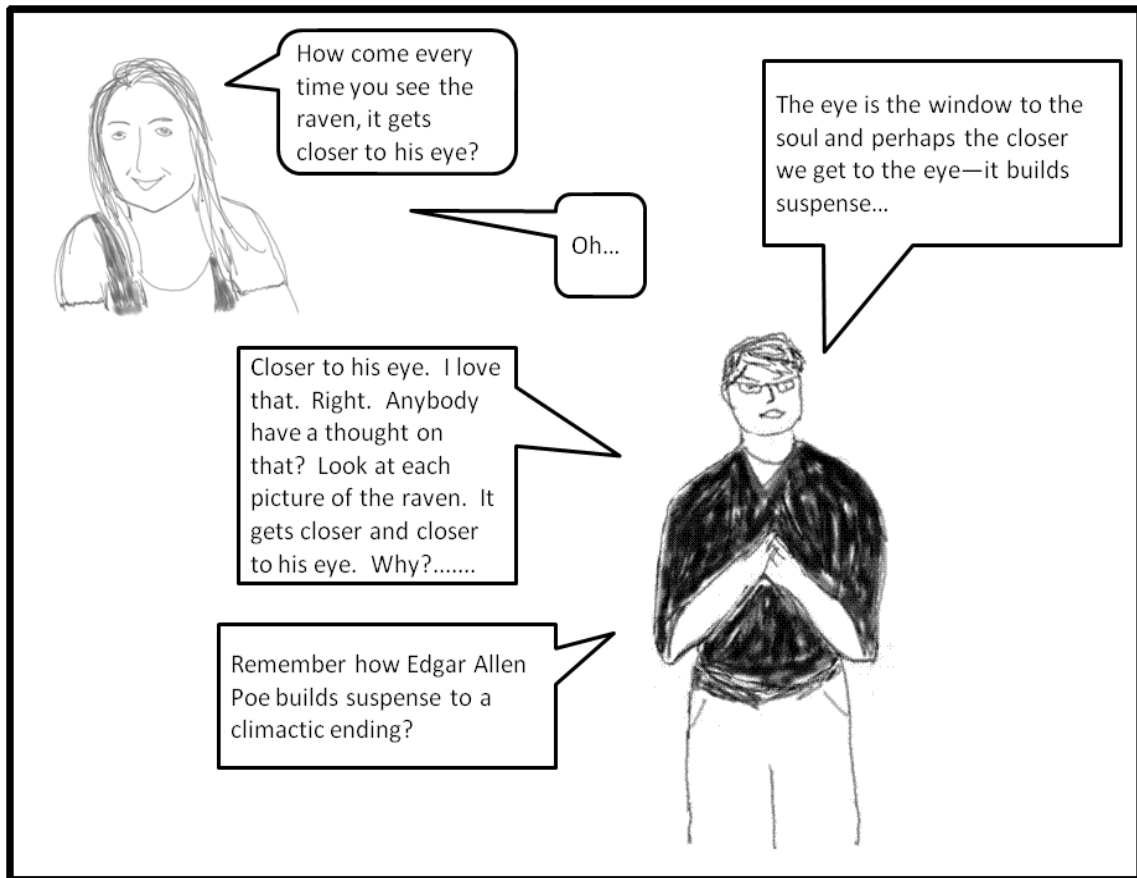


Figure 4.42 Grayson, Robin, 2010, Observation 3

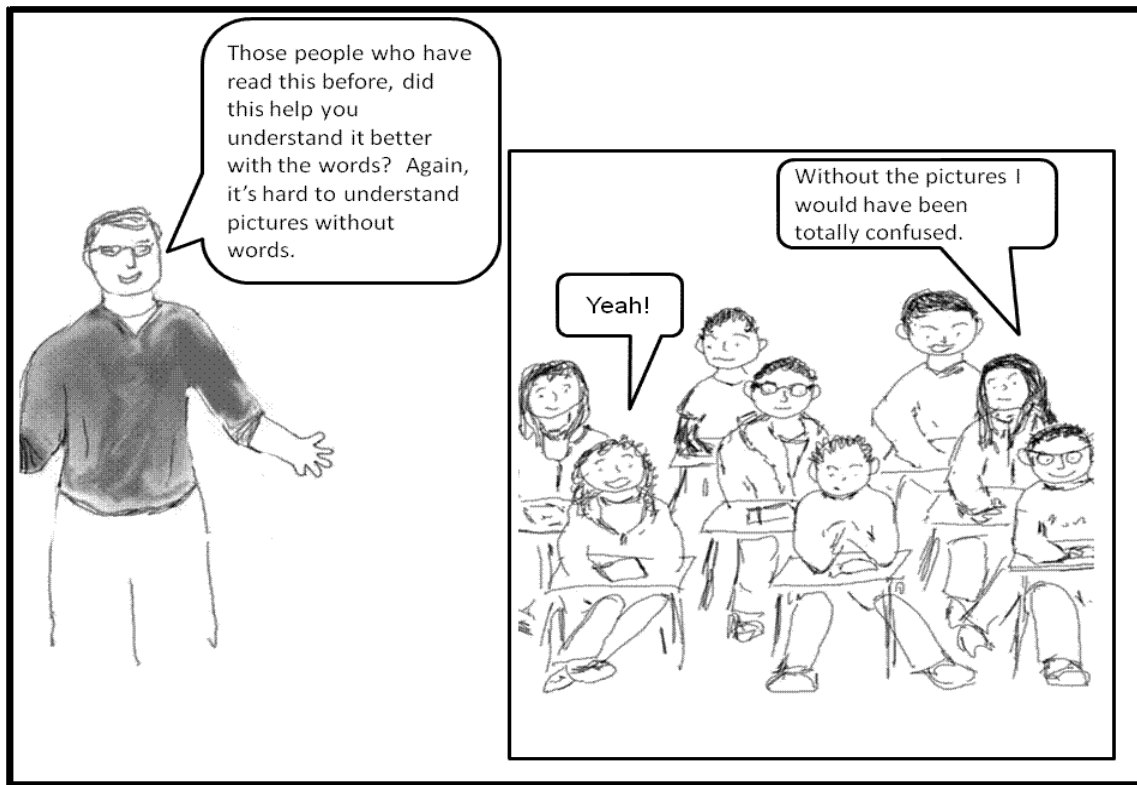


Figure 4.43 Grayson, Sophia, Mary, 2010, Observation 3

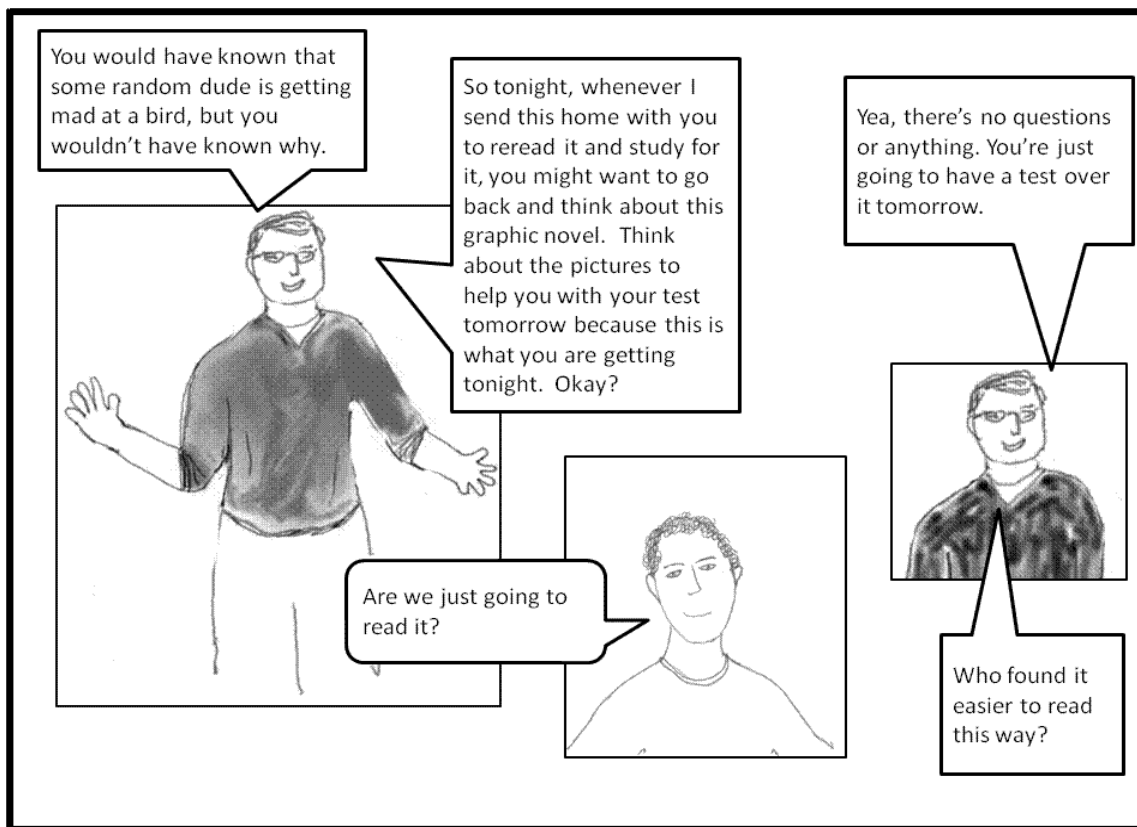


Figure 4.44 Grayson, Brad, 2010, Observation 3

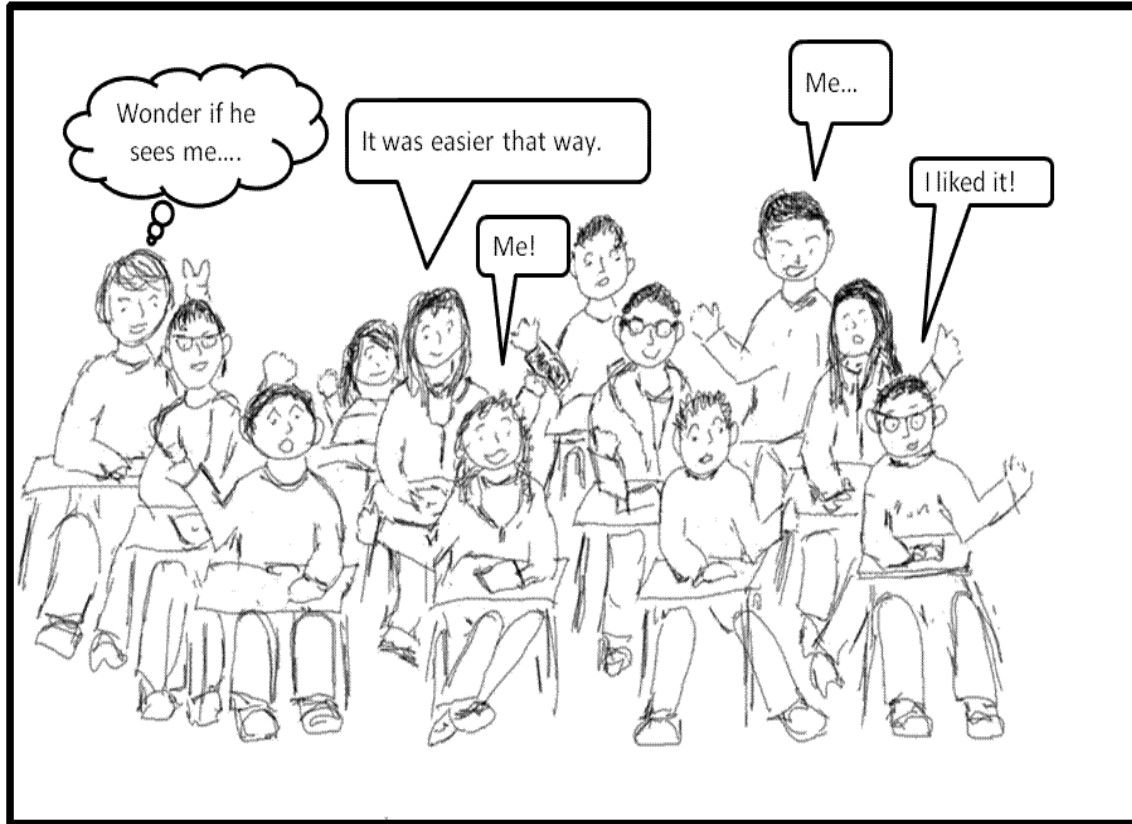


Figure 4.45 Travis, Morgan, Sophia, Mark, Mary, 2010, Observation 3

The graphics generated questions that spurred conversation and appeared to promote comprehension. Mr. Grayson used this to reinforce the concepts related to the literary elements presented earlier. He questioned the students regarding the relevance and support of the graphic adaptation for student comprehension and solicited their thoughts regarding connections between the text and the graphics. This unit only included the graphic adaptation for *The Tell Tale Heart* and *The Raven*, however, the original text was also read for both of those as well as *The Cask of Amontillado*. The original text found in the literature book was assigned as homework for these short stories.

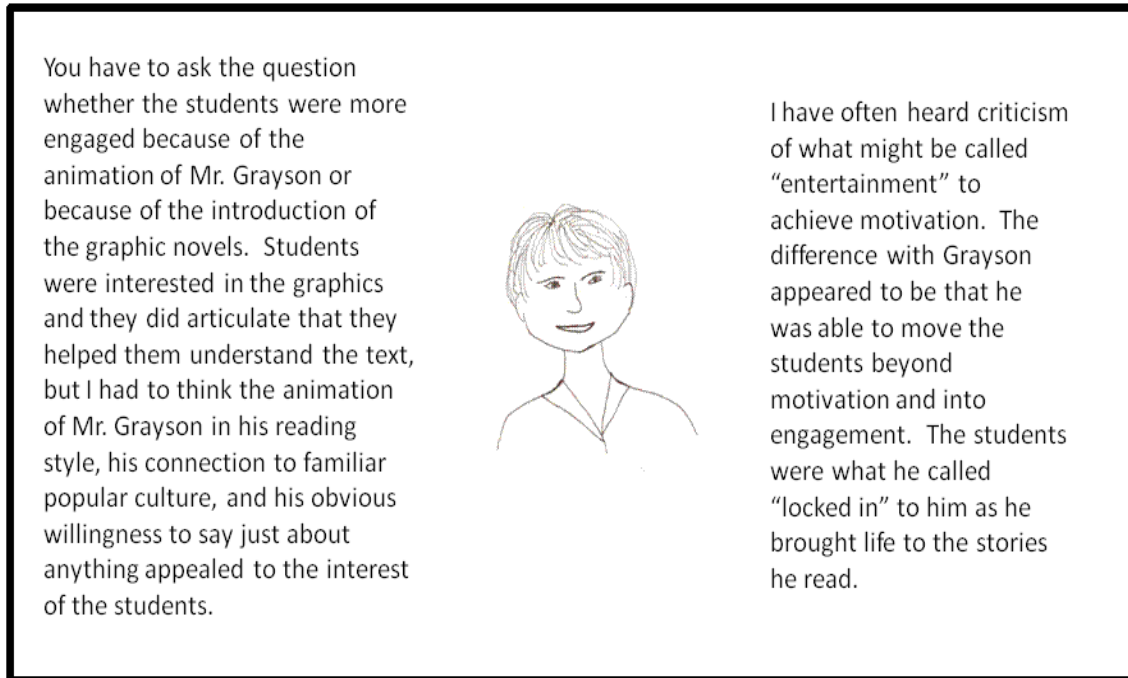


Figure 4.46 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 3

**Observation 4.** This next series of observations focused on the novel *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. The reading of a contemporary novel has been a part of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum for several years. Each English teacher chooses the novel for their particular classroom, and Mr. Grayson had chosen this high interest novel for his class this year. He had taught this novel in the past with a packet of questions and vocabulary to support it. This year he worked with another teacher in developing a different set of activities related to the novel. However, this class only participated in some of the material found in that packet as Mr. Grayson and the observer had determined in the second planning session that the students would develop a graphic novel as a class project. When Mr. Grayson began the unit on *The Hunger Games*, he changed the desks into groupings of five or six. Each of the groupings was given a designation as a “district” simulating the districts found in the novel. Each of the “districts” elected a mayor to act as the “designated driver” for organizational purposes as well as serve as

leaders in small group activities. This particular observation was the first of several opportunities for the students to develop their ideas for the graphic novel in a brainstorming activity. The purpose of this brainstorming activity was to begin to create a favorite scene from the novel and utilize a graphic organizer to illustrate their ideas. Each of the members of the “districts” was allowed to discuss ideas, but each student within the group was required to fill out the organizer individually.

Once the instructions were given, each group began talking about their favorite scene from the book and how they might put it together. The time spent was rich with conversation and discussion. At this point, Mr. Grayson moved from one “district” to another answering questions and discussing ideas with different students. Mr. Grayson asked each group to discuss with the class the ideas that had been placed on the organizer. The purpose of this was to allow the students to show their ideas and receive input from others in the class regarding details and suggestions for clarity.

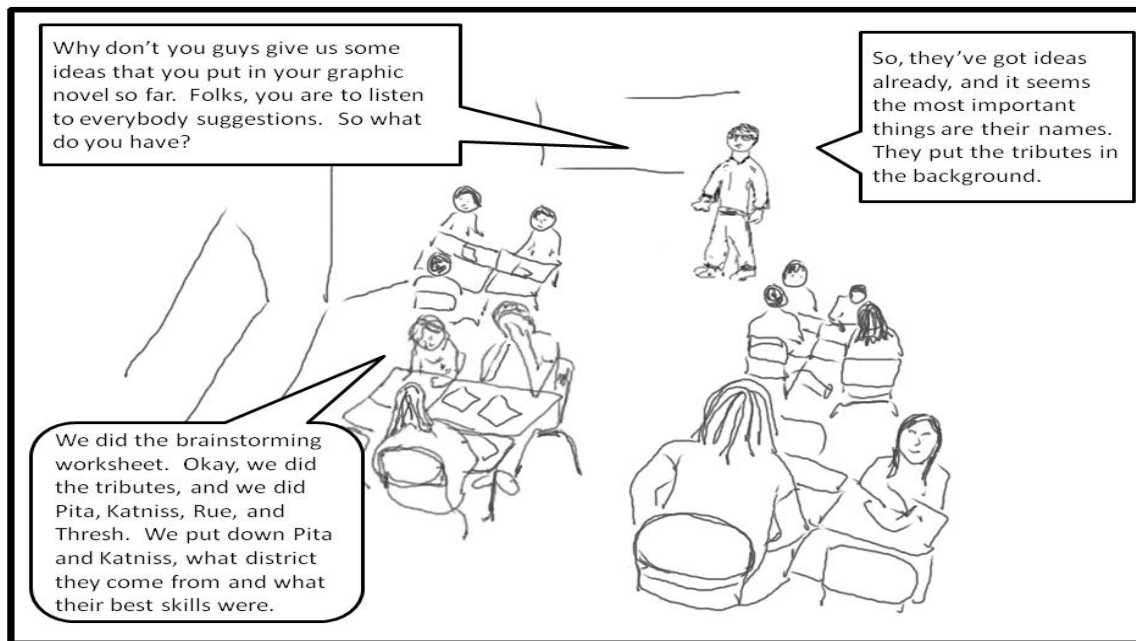


Figure 4.47 Grayson, Morgan, 2010, Observation 4

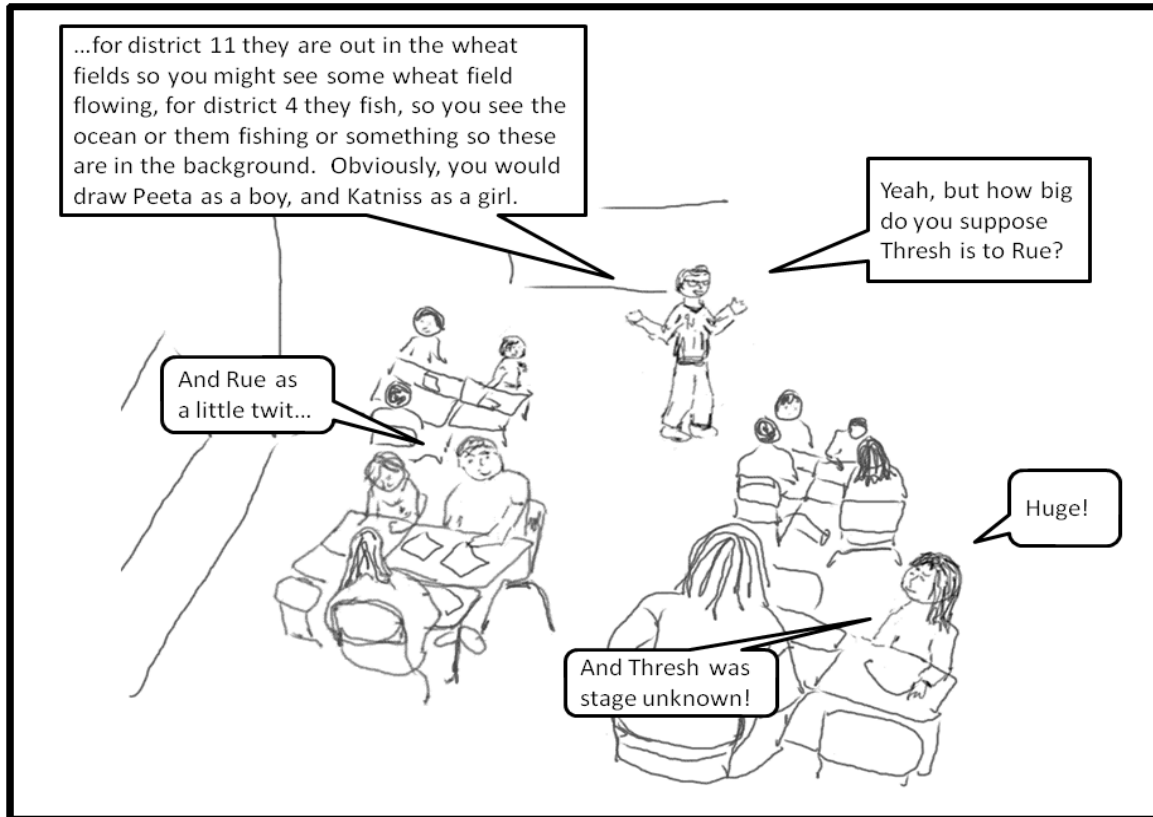


Figure 4.48 Grayson, Mark, Mary, 2010, Observation 4

Of note, there was very little discussion between the groups or across the room as can often happen when students in small groups are left to work for a period of time on their own. The students all appeared absorbed in their thoughts, ideas, and drawings. They were told that in this exercise they did not need to actually draw and could use words if they found that easier to illustrate their ideas in the graphic organizer.



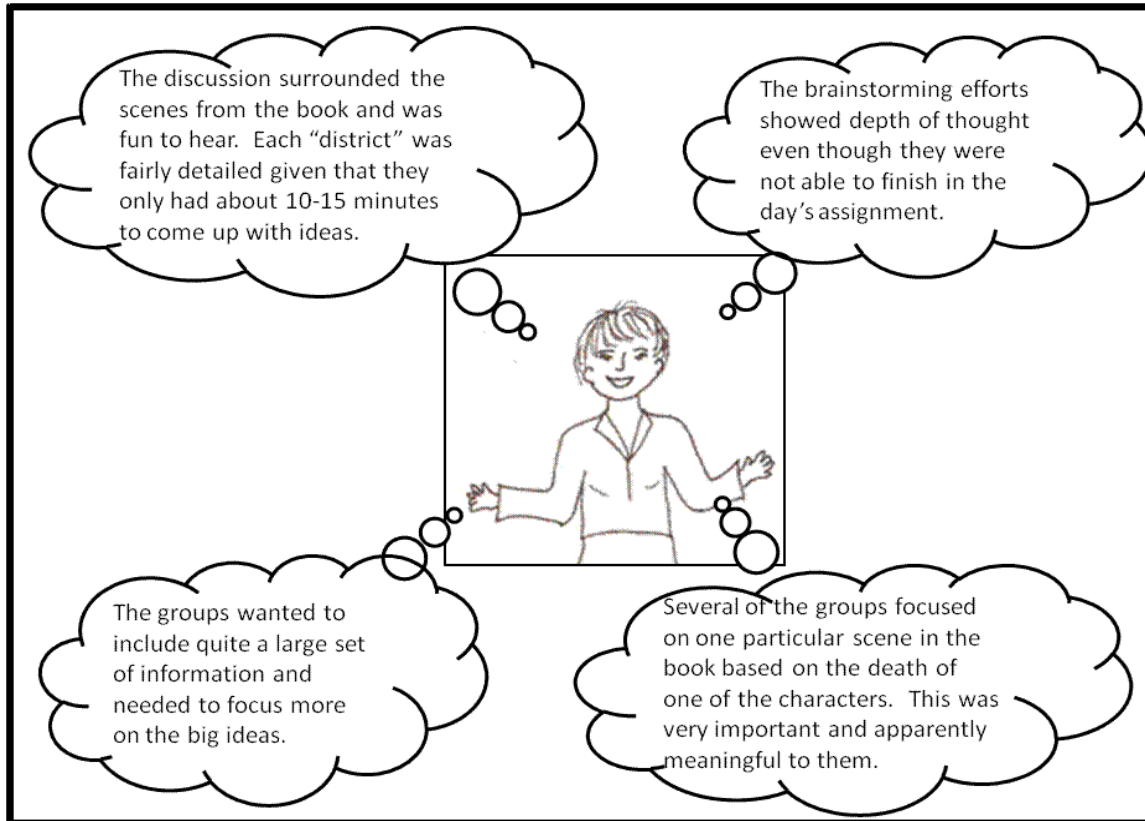


Figure 4.49 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 4

**Observation 5.** This next observation found the students continuing preparation for the graphic novel project. Each group or “district” was focused on choosing their favorite scene from the book and translating their ideas onto their choice of one or two graphic organizers to help with developing an organized storyboard. Of note, each group focused on the task at hand. It was easy to see how interested all of the students were in the novel and many voiced their opinion on which was their favorite scene. Previously, Mr. Grayson had read a passage from the book in which one of the main characters had died. Several of the groups wanted to work on that scene and were discussing what was relevant and needed to organize their storyboard. During the small group discussions a student would occasionally come to Mr. Grayson to ask about a particular scene remembered to determine choices. This self-questioning and verification system used by

many of the students left little question that each had a vested interest in the activity and were motivated to accomplish the goal on their own terms.

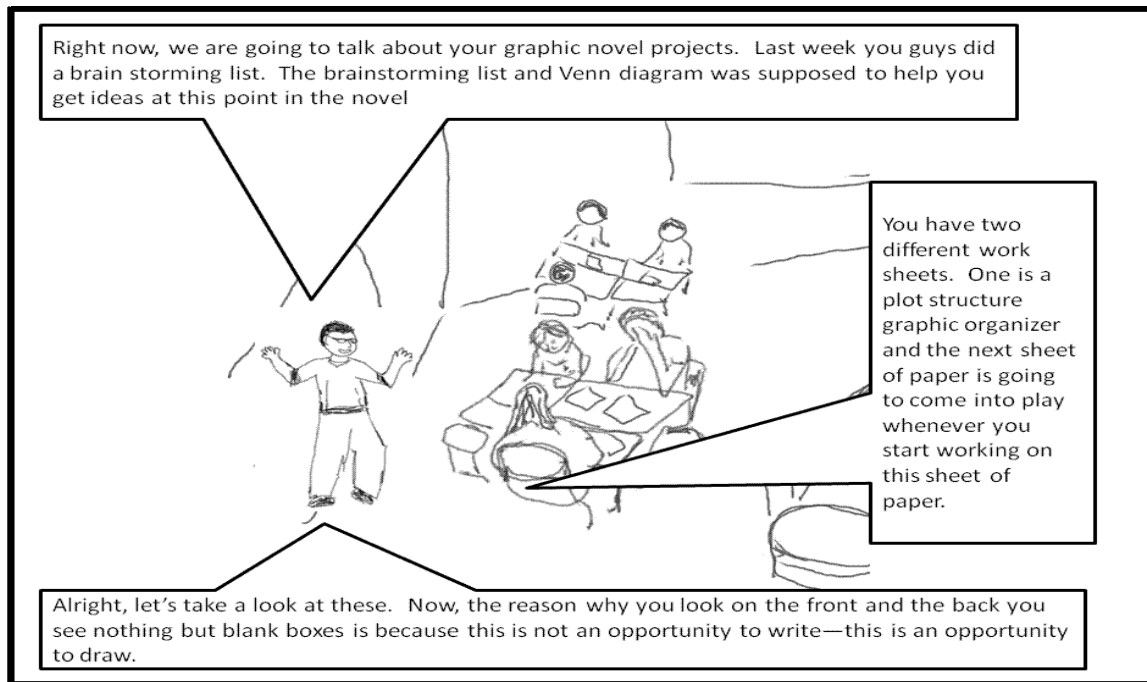


Figure 4.50 Grayson, 2010, Observation 5

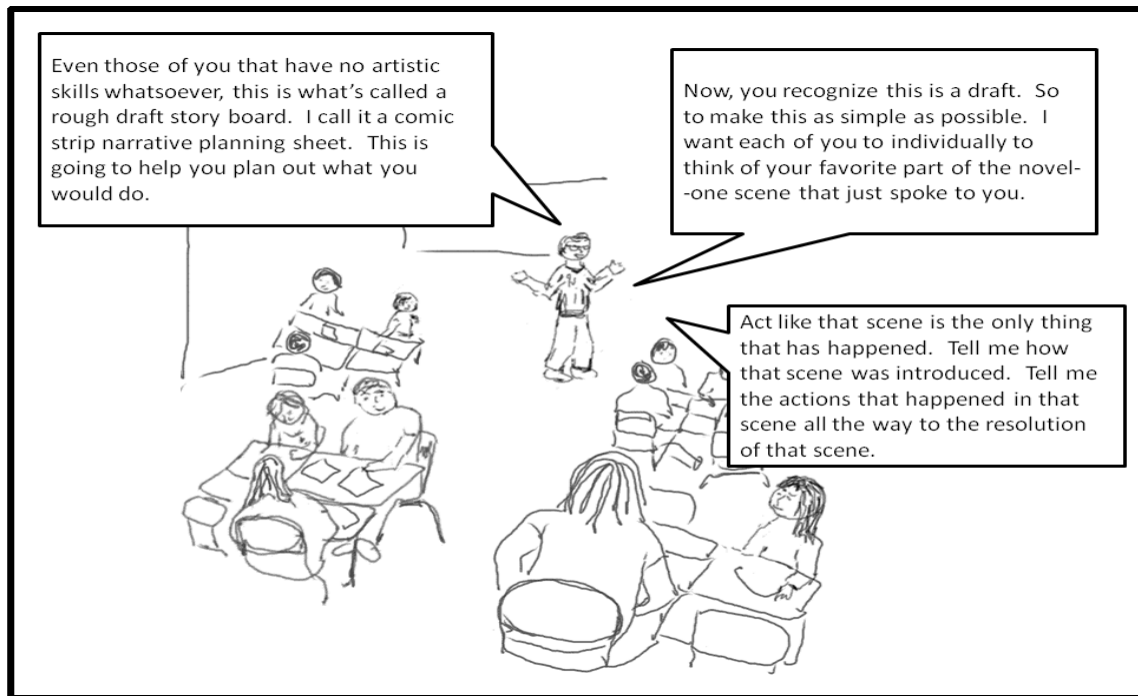


Figure 4.51 Grayson, 2010, Observation 5

At this point in the student planning stages, each student was working on their own individual scene rather than a group scene. This allowed each of them to thoughtfully design and create their own storyboard. The ability to share between the district members enhanced interest and engagement in the project. Continuing to brainstorm and place ideas on the plot diagrams and storyboards contributed to the overall tone and supportive attitude in the class. The ultimate goal for this activity was to create the series of comics through a website designed to work with students in producing comic pages. The students were given the opportunity to work in the computer lab during school hours as well as at home on the Pixton.com website to create their graphic pages.

Pixton.com was chosen as the online source for creating the comic due to its fairly flexible set of characters, backdrops, and tools with which the students were able to adapt easily. The use of this site also eliminated the problem of perceived and actual artistic ability of the students and allowed them be consistent with the characters, sets, and panel design. Given the intended purpose of reinforcing plot structure and characterization as a goal for this novel study, additional comprehension strategies were necessary in developing storyboards for the scenes developed for the class project. Mr. Grayson was impressed by the level of motivation and understanding represented in their group and individual efforts. He stated that:

Our comprehensive project was to create our own graphic novel and send a copy of it to the author that inspired us. [This] was **one of the best teaching tools I could have used in the classroom**. It helped to motivate the students to learn about literature in a new way. We covered everything from plot to

characterization and beyond using Pixton as our medium for comprehension.

(Grayson, 2010, Planning Session 3)

The following example illustrated the ideas for one of the groups of students.

THE HUNGER GAMES





Figure 4.52 Images © 2011 Pixton Comics Inc. Pixton.com

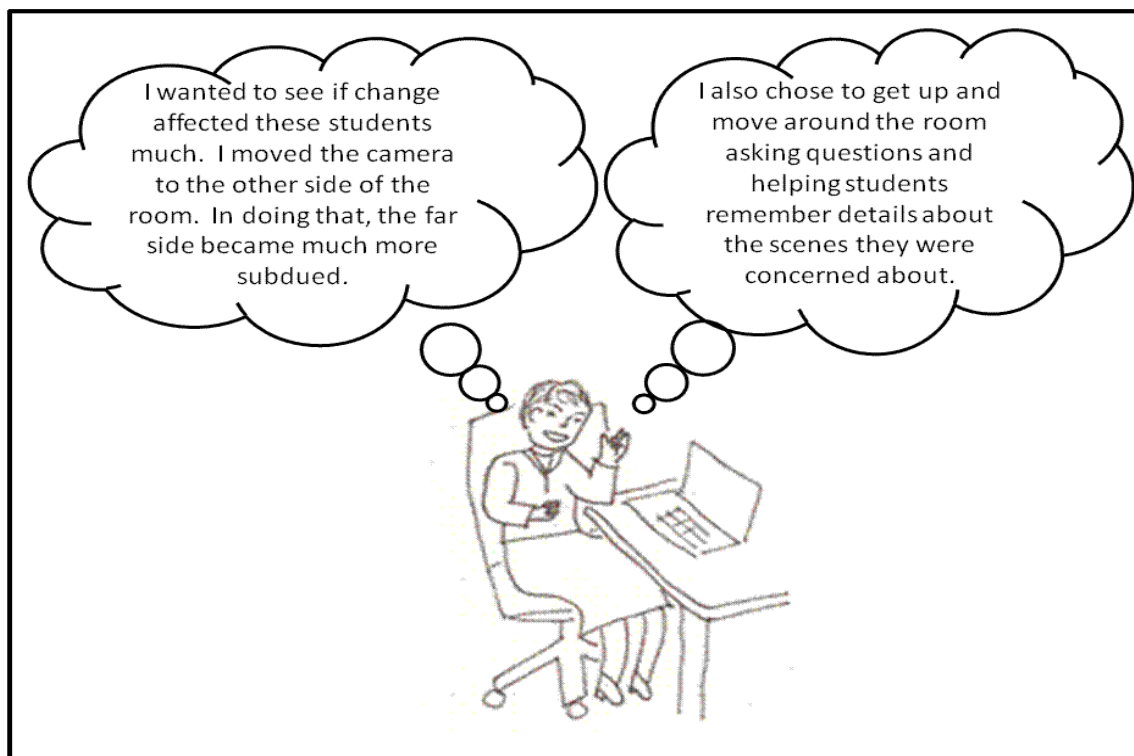


Figure 4.53 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 5

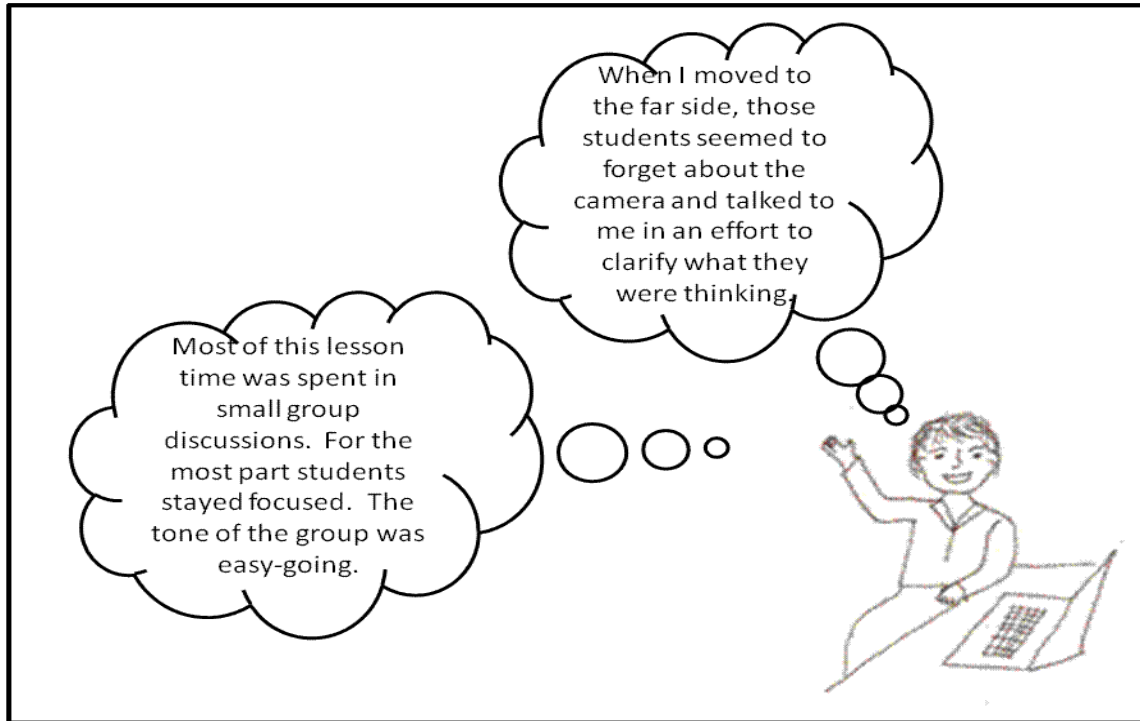


Figure 4.54 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 5

**Observation 6.** The key understanding from this observation came from the collective decisions made regarding which district would take responsibility for the final choices to become part of the graphic adaptation of the novel *The Hunger Games*. Again, the primary discussion came because at least two groups wanted the same scene involving the death of the character, Rue. This was a very touching scene from the book and heightened student engagement with the story.

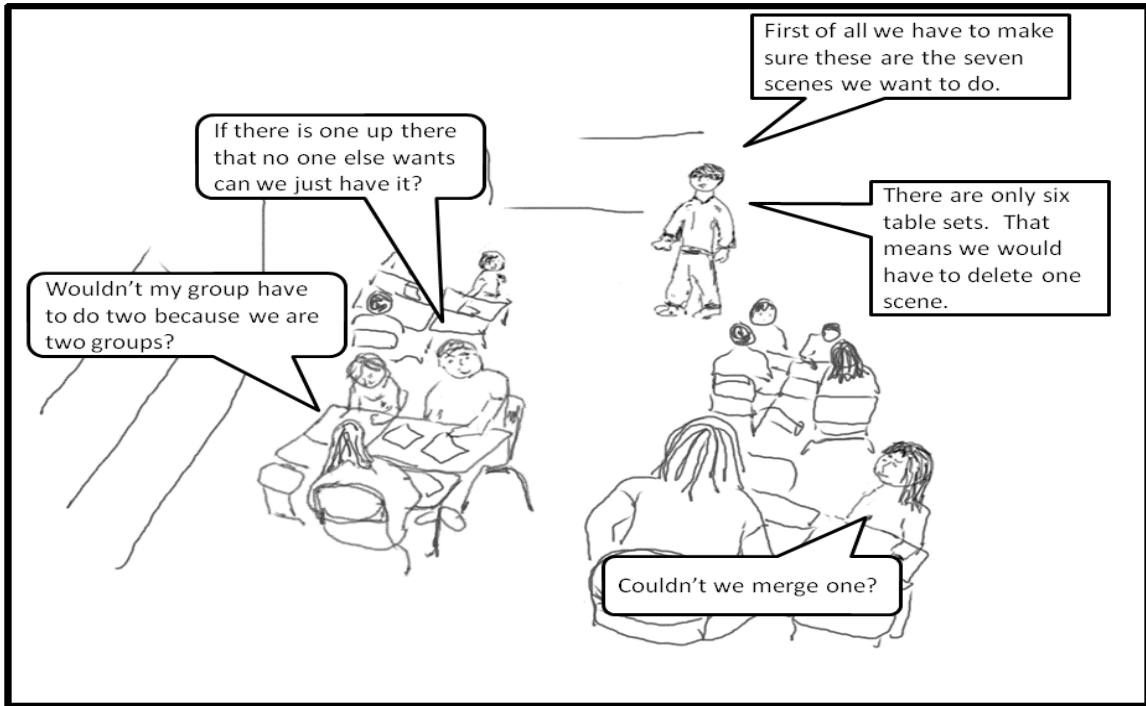


Figure 4.55 Grayson, Mark, Robin, Mary, 2010, Observation 6

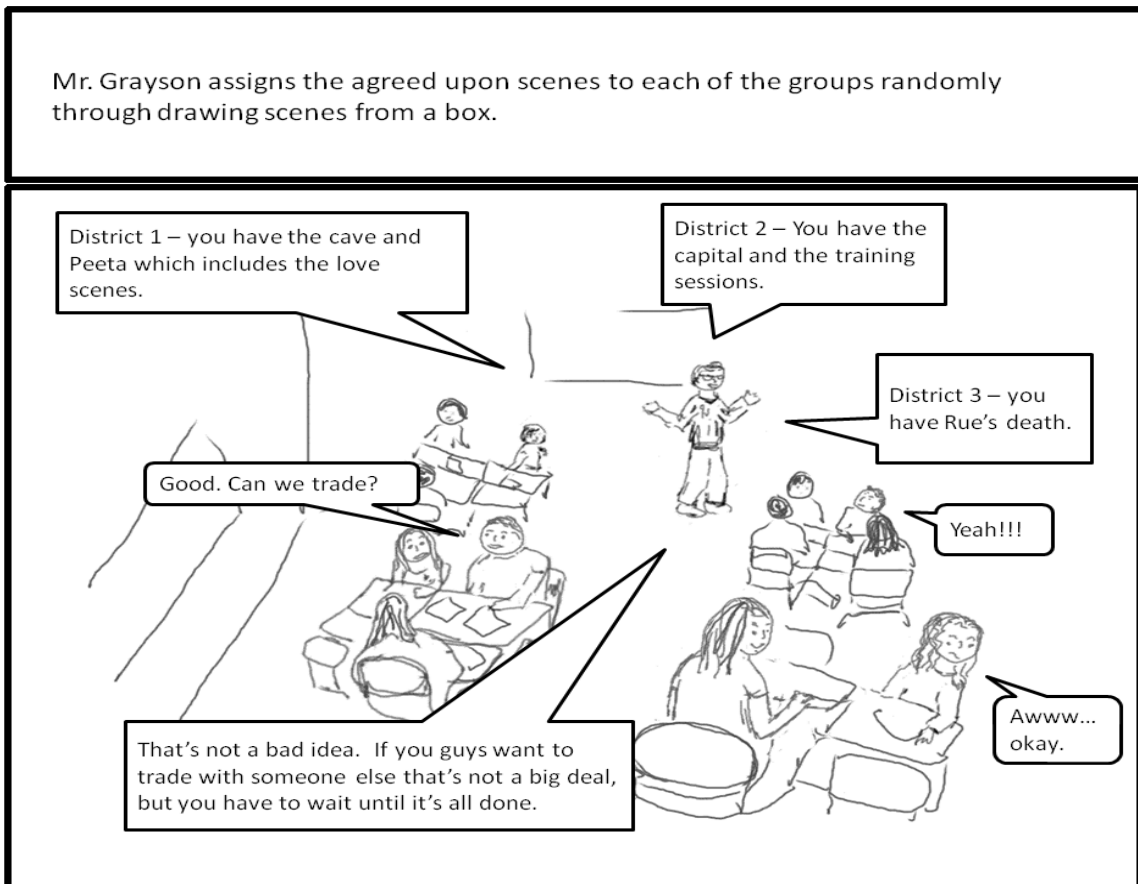


Figure 4.56 Grayson, Mark, Morgan, Mary, 2010, Observation 6

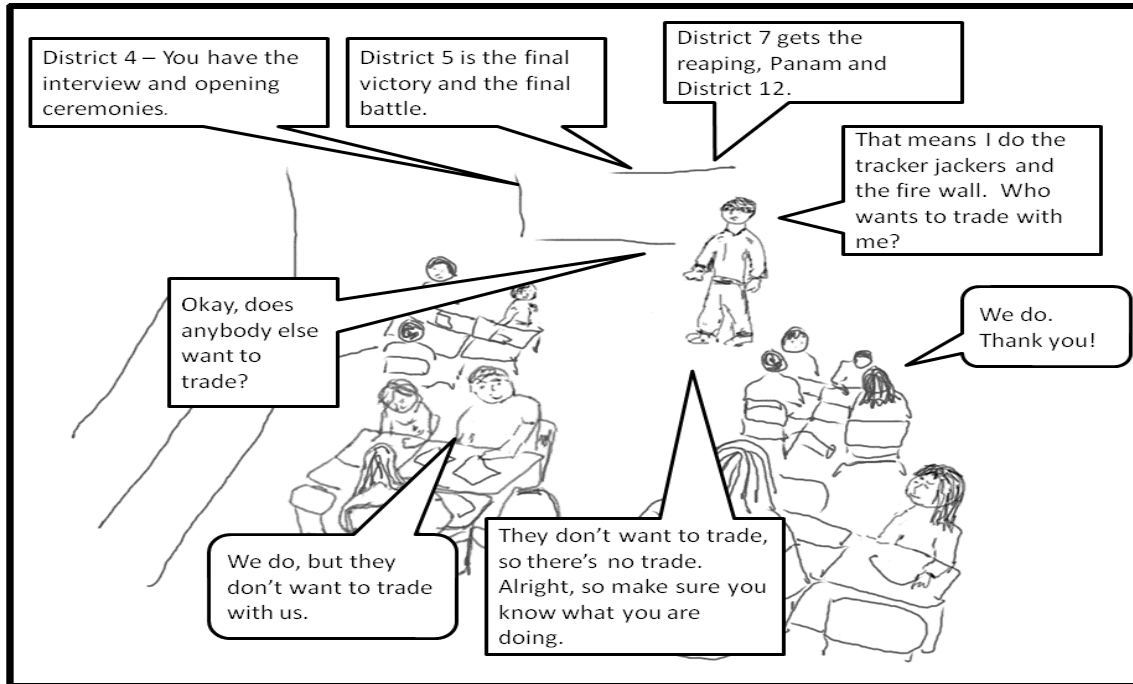


Figure 4.57 Grayson, Mark, Morgan, 2010, Observation 6

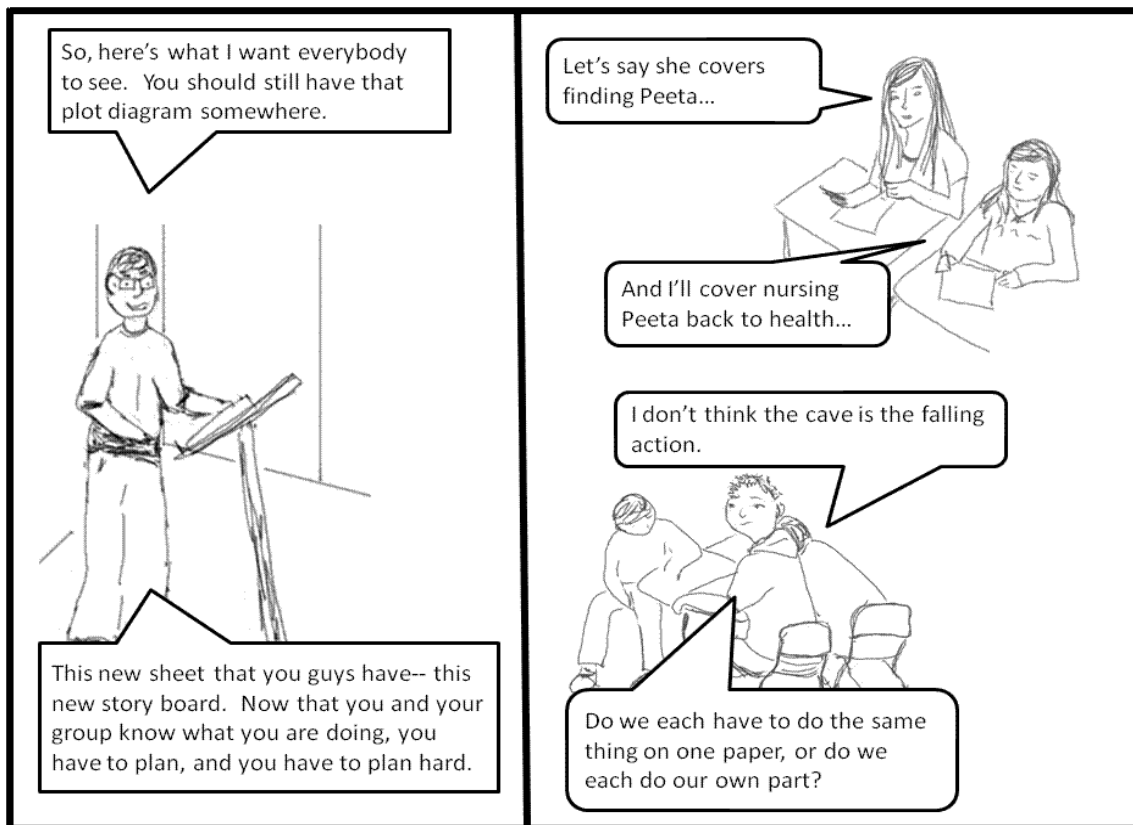


Figure 4.58 Grayson, Amy, Morgan, Travis, Mark, 2010, Observation 6



This particular scene was the one that most affected the students and appeared the most desired. In particular one boy was concerned that his group would not be able to take this scene because of the random decision and attempted to work out an agreement. Allowing student choice in the process served to augment the level of interest in this story and increase the variables in finding activities to motivate students toward increased learning. Groups were then allowed to trade scenes if both sides agreed. Two groups did this and all seemed happy with the choices made. In the end, while all agreed to the ability to trade, the district that was chosen to portray Rue's death did not choose to trade.

Allowing students to be part of the decision-making process supported student engagement in the process and required each of the students to work together to develop the plot elements within their scene choice. While some in each group may have wanted a different scene in the end all had the ability to make a choice. Because of the popularity of this book through its content and Mr. Grayson's animated reading of it even the third choice was a good one to the students.

### The Hunger Games: Rues Death

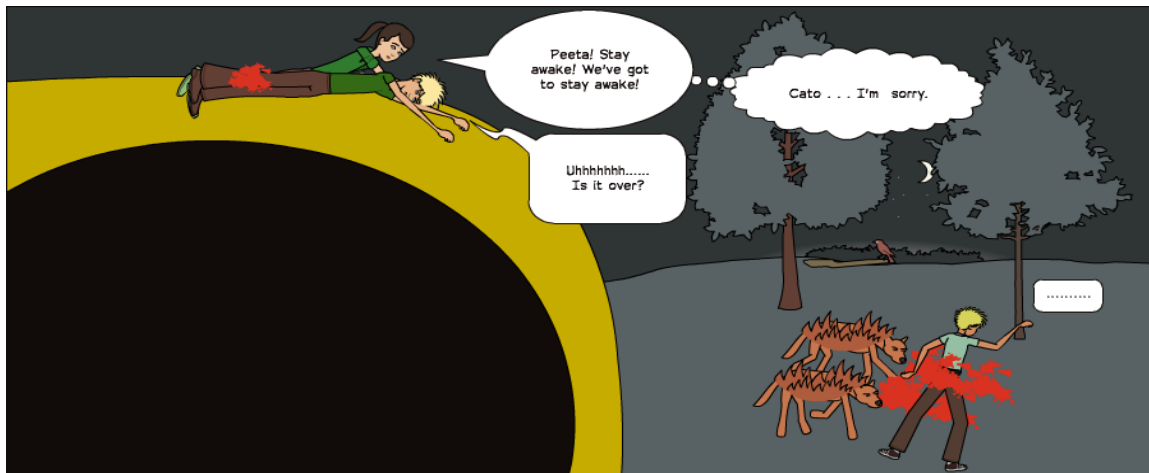




Figure 4.59 Images © 2011 Pixton Comics Inc. Pixon.com

This novel proved to be a favorite in the class and was chosen for its high interest elements. Production of this graphic adaptation required each group to determine what would be accomplished at home through the website as there was limited class time available. The students made choices to illustrate their personal illustrations of the text from the novel and generally remained consistent in connecting the scenes together. Twenty-four pages of creative material were produced by the students in this culminating project. Mr. Grayson took the further step in supporting these students and their efforts by providing each with a color copy of the full document, presenting a copy to the Principal and Assistant Principal, and sending a copy of it to the novel's author, Suzanne Collins. The students' efforts were rewarded and appreciated in the class publication of this work as well as the important offering to the novel's author.

### The Hunger Games: The Victory . . .



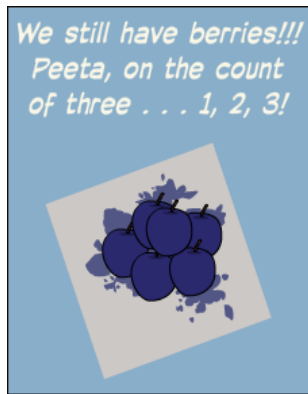
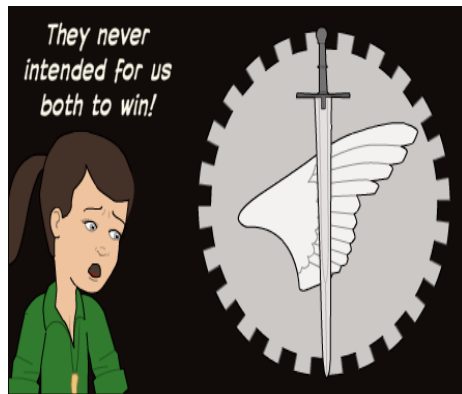


Figure 4.60 Images © 2011 Pixton Comics Inc. Pixon.com

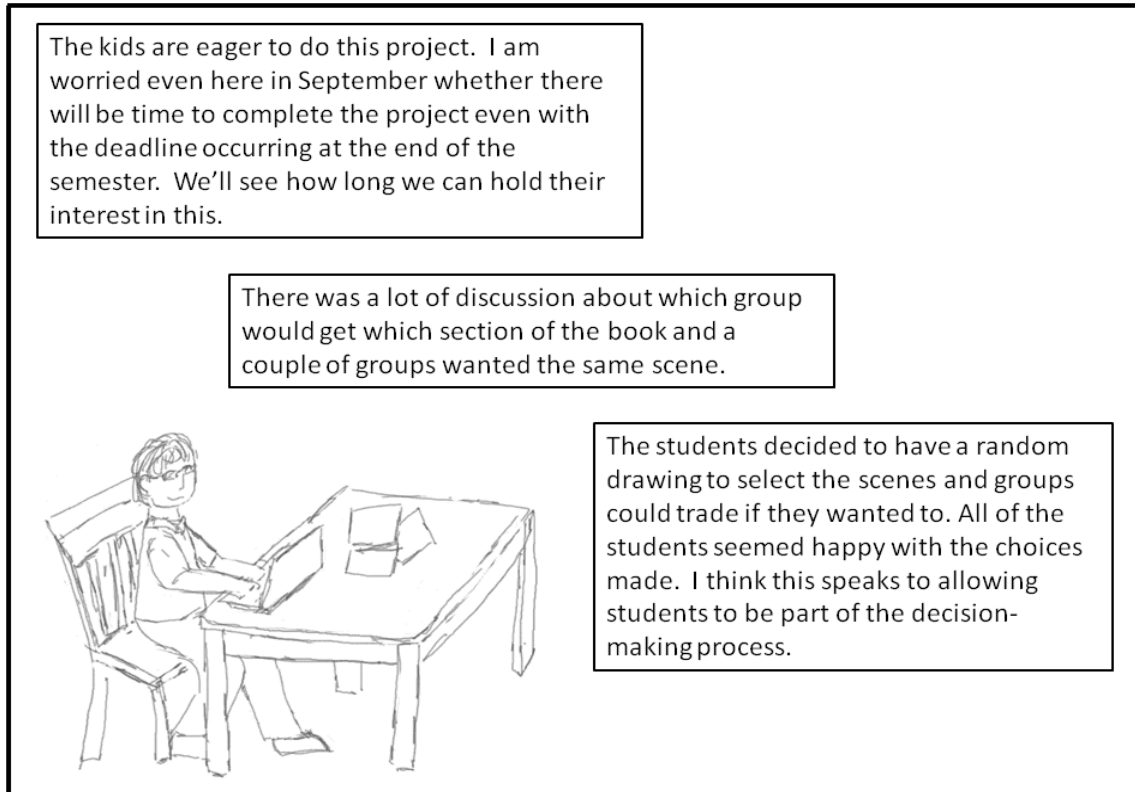


Figure 4.61 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 6

**Observation 7.** This observation concentrated on Mr. Grayson's introduction of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In a previous planning session, Mr. Grayson and the observer determined that the reading of this material needed to come from the original text with graphic passages supporting comprehension where necessary similar to lessons developed in the short story unit earlier in the semester. Throughout this unit, Mr. Grayson read all parts of the play from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade literature book and included his comments and definitions to support student comprehension of the material. This unit on *Romeo and Juliet* included the direct reading of the entire text, supportive graphic passages, and the viewing of two different versions of *Romeo and Juliet* in film. What is also of note must be the consistent insertion of real world concepts into the reading. For instance, in his opening statements, Mr. Grayson emphasized that the content of this play was a tragedy of love. He states: "No matter how bad you want this to end well, we are

going to kill these teenagers. You will beg me to make the characters think clearly. However, instead you [the students] will begin to think more clearly” (Grayson, 2010, Observation 7). Mr. Grayson chose to open the discussion with relevance to loving relationships. He states: “Love does not conquer all. Logical thought, faith, spirituality, love for one another and complete teamwork helps to conquer things” (Grayson, 2010, Observation 7). This immediately led to student interaction, comment, and engagement.

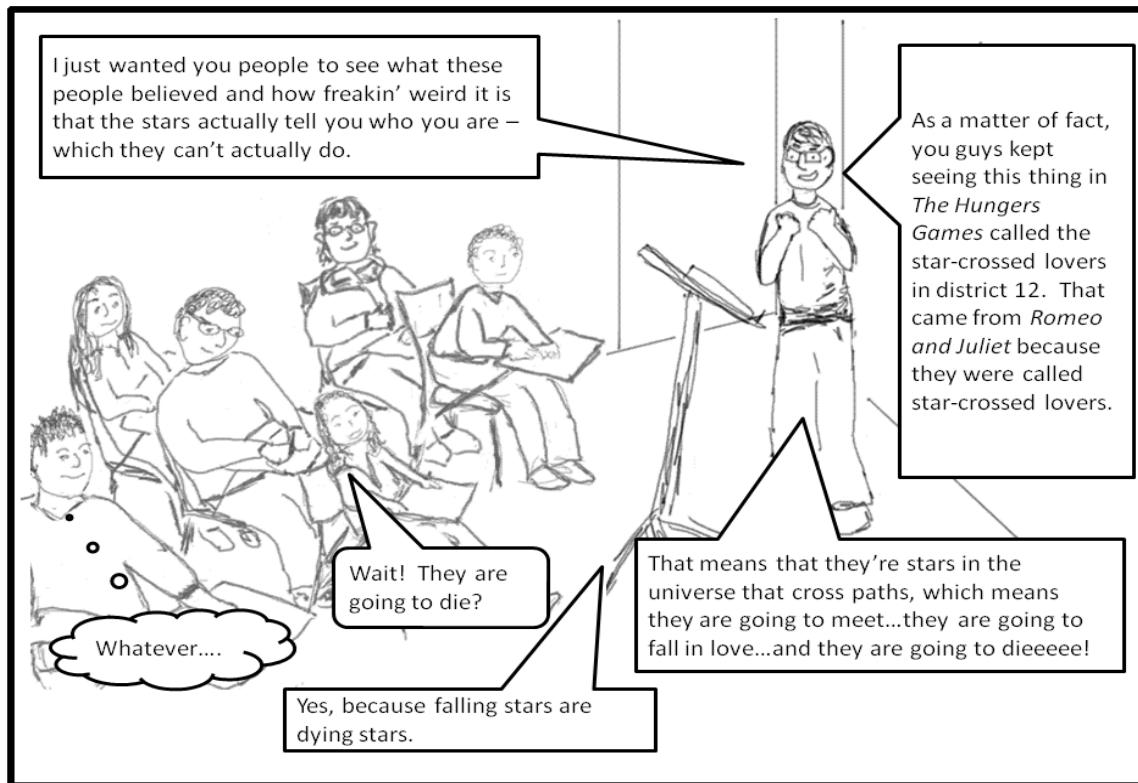


Figure 4.62 Grayson, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Observation 7

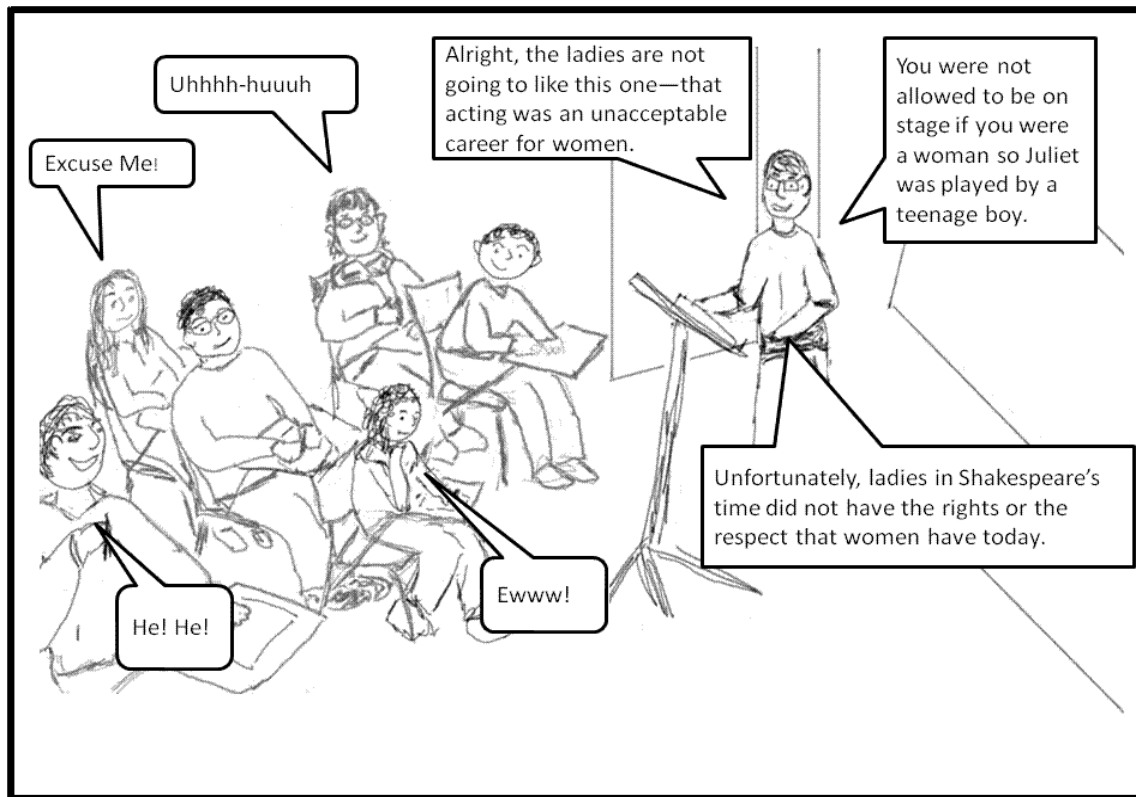


Figure 4.63 Grayson, Jake, Sophia, Morgan, Mark, 2010, Observation 7

Mr. Grayson's delivery again was animated and quick. He dealt with the off-color side of *Romeo and Juliet* without hesitation and remained frank with his discussion and explanation. He read the text from the literature book with great animation and paused at several points in the reading to ask questions with the intent to clarify the text for the students. It should be noted that Mr. Grayson did not believe this text should be read by students because of the student lack of understanding of Shakespeare and his time. Much of the language found in this play was difficult, in Mr. Grayson's opinion, and required from the students a better understanding of the double meanings and vocabulary choices from Shakespeare's day to increase comprehension. Therefore, Mr. Grayson read and acted out much of the play by himself. At one point, he interrupted his reading by commenting on his observation of the students' engagement in the reading. He stated: "are you guys starting to understand this more now? You're all so into this story you're

starting to understand this. It's awesome!" (Grayson, 2010, Observation 7). The students appeared to be sitting on the edge of their seats watching Mr. Grayson throughout the hour as he read the play to them.

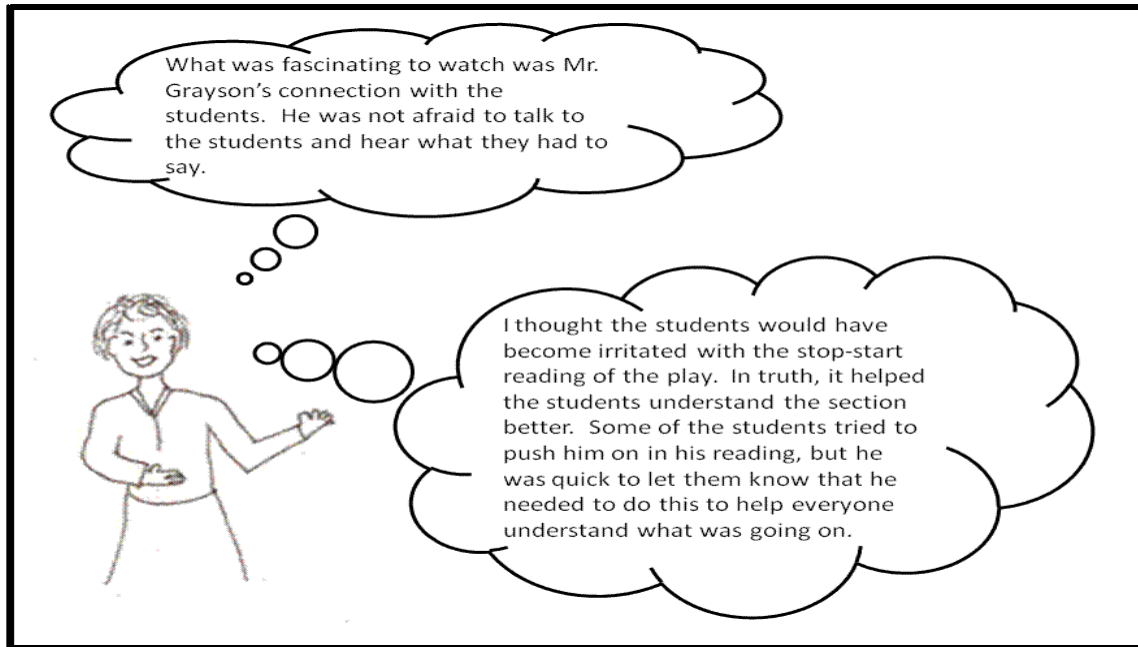


Figure 4.64 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 7

**Observation 8.** This observation included a review of portions of Act I from the graphic novel adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Mr. Grayson was concerned with helping the students comprehend and recognize some of the opening scenes especially when related to the attitudes of the two families. He considered this as key in understanding the problems faced by Romeo and Juliet throughout the play. He also felt that the students needed to be familiar with the expressions and emotions in the graphic novel. A clear understanding of these aspects helped the students identify with the situations in which the characters found themselves and allowed the student to become better able to make connections to the text.



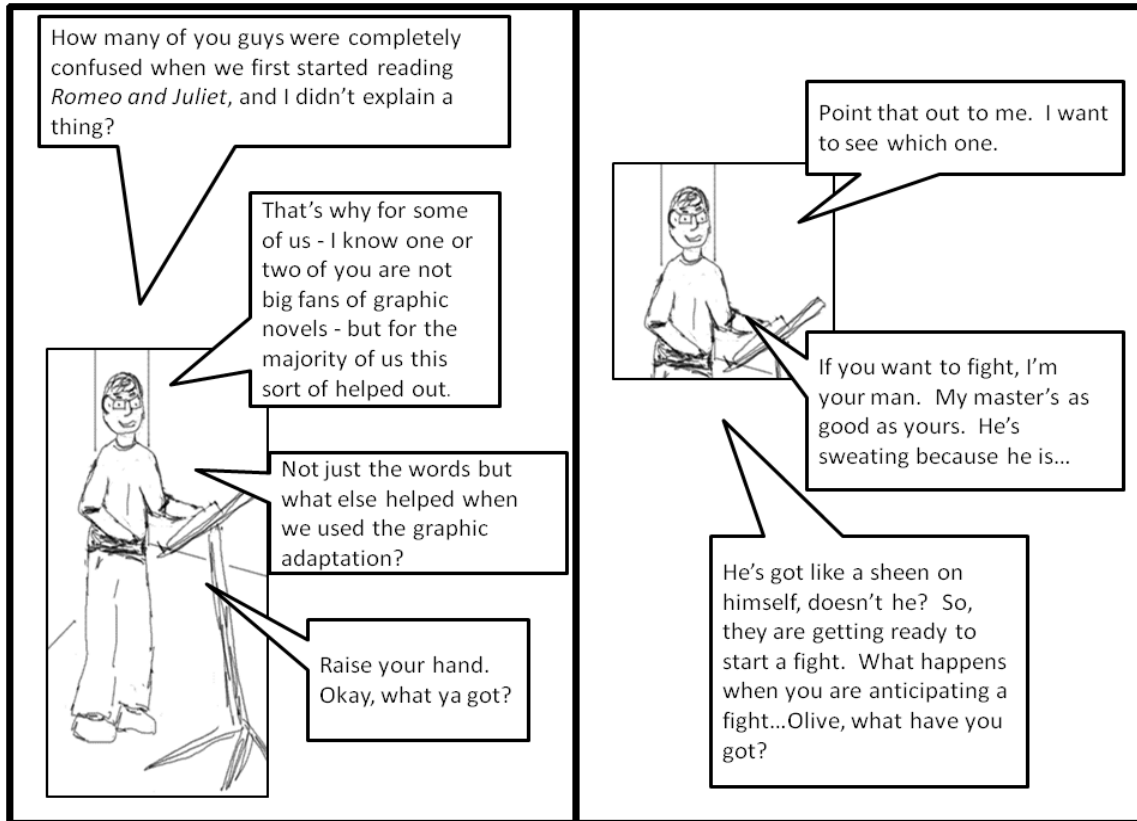


Figure 4.65 Grayson, 2010, Observation 6



Excerpts taken from the book *No Fear Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet* by Matt Wiegle. Copyright ©2008 by Spark Publishing. Reprinted by permission of SparkNotes, LLC.

Figure 4.66

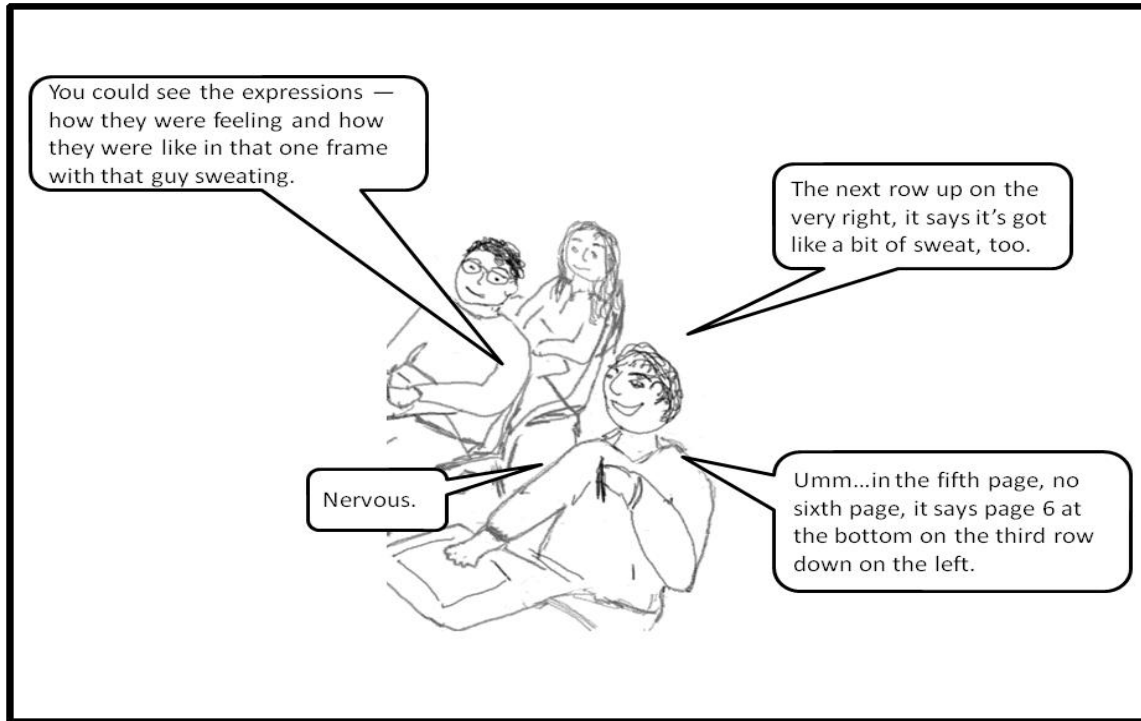


Figure 4.67 Mark, 2010, Observation 8

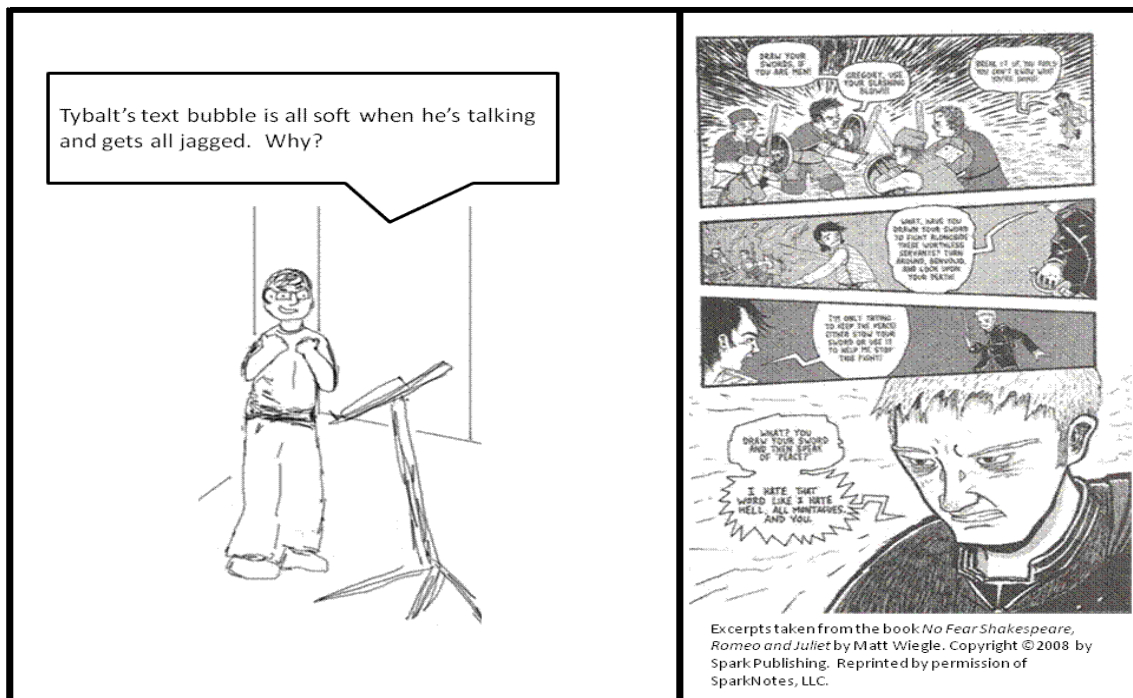


Figure 4.68 Grayson, 2010, Observation 8

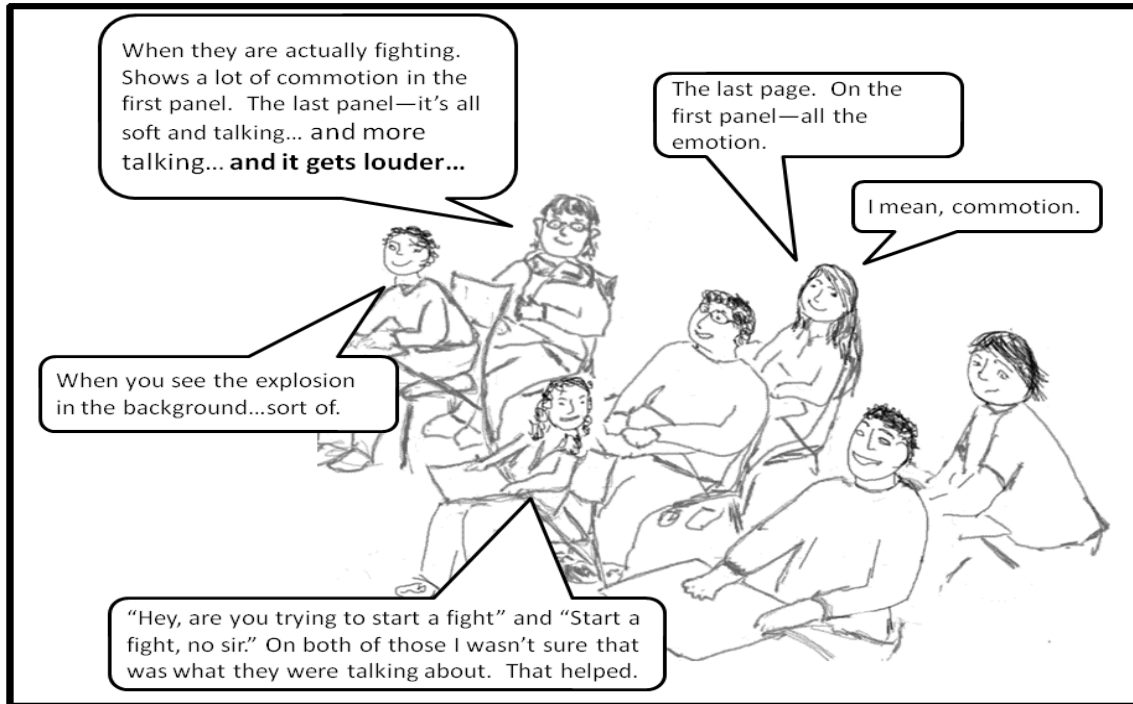


Figure 4.69 Sean, Jake, Sophia, Robin, 2010, Observation 8

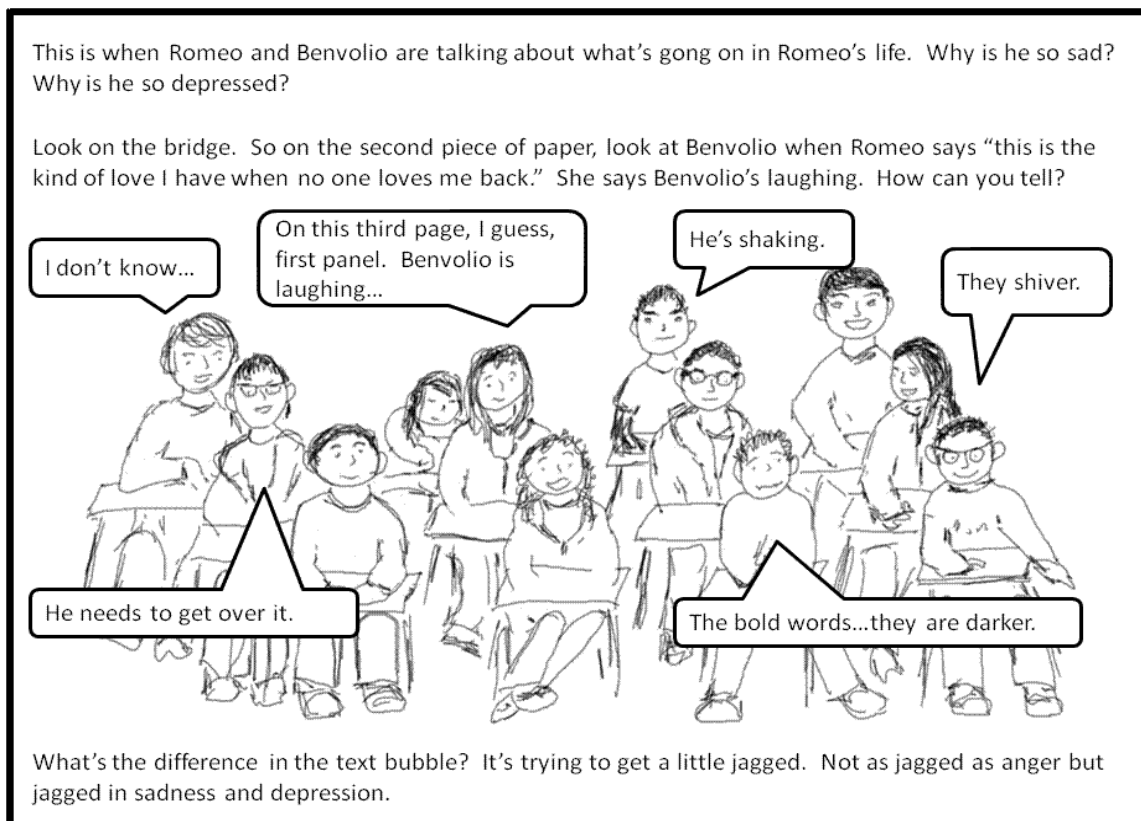
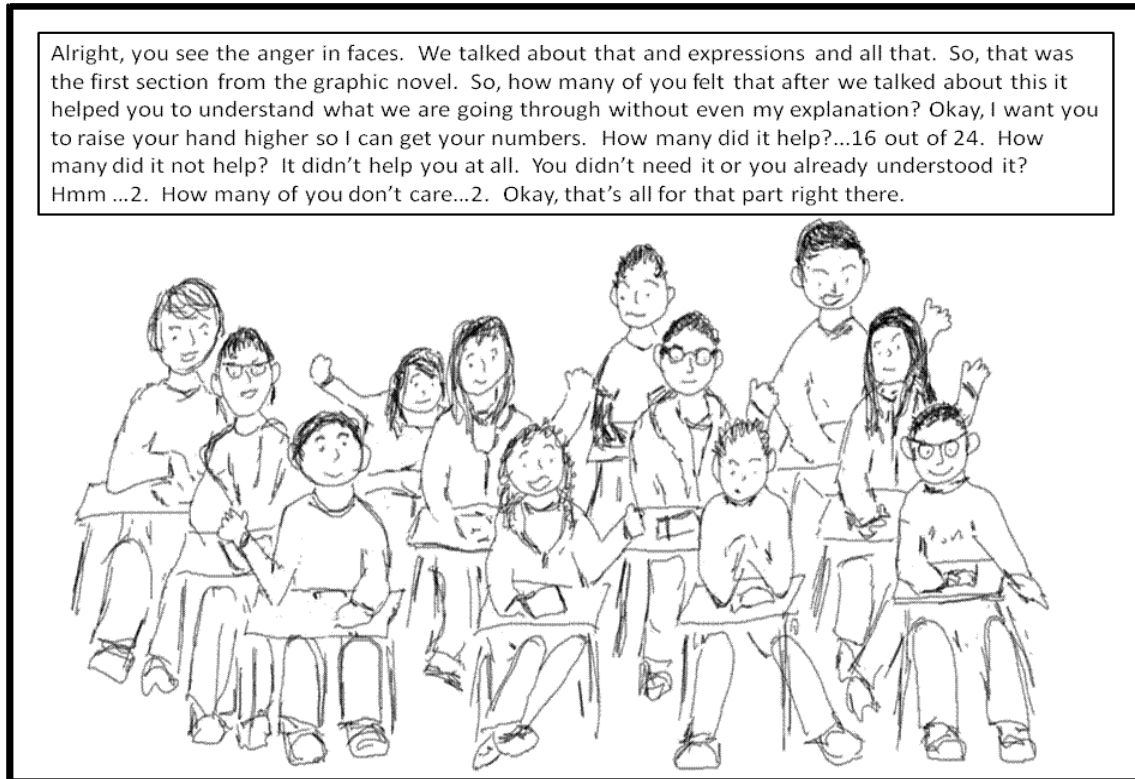


Figure 4.70 Grayson, Travis, Jake, Morgan, James, Brad, John, 2010, Observation 8



4.71 Grayson, 2010, Observation 8

In this section, sixteen students felt the panels were very helpful, two felt they already knew it well enough based on the story itself; and two did not care. Two said they were in between the “don’t care and knew enough” votes. It was helpful to see the students’ reaction to the graphic panels as they voted. It was interesting to note that the discussion seemed somewhat superficial limited initially to descriptions of what was seen rather than interpretation of the imagery. However, the review of the panels did seem to allow the students additional time to think about important passages and use the graphic panels to “see” into the character to some extent.

The final section of graphic panels for discussion was based on what Mr. Grayson calls the “Queen Mab” speech in scene four. The students were more animated through this section. They were interested in the details of each of the panels and articulated their thoughts about what they saw.

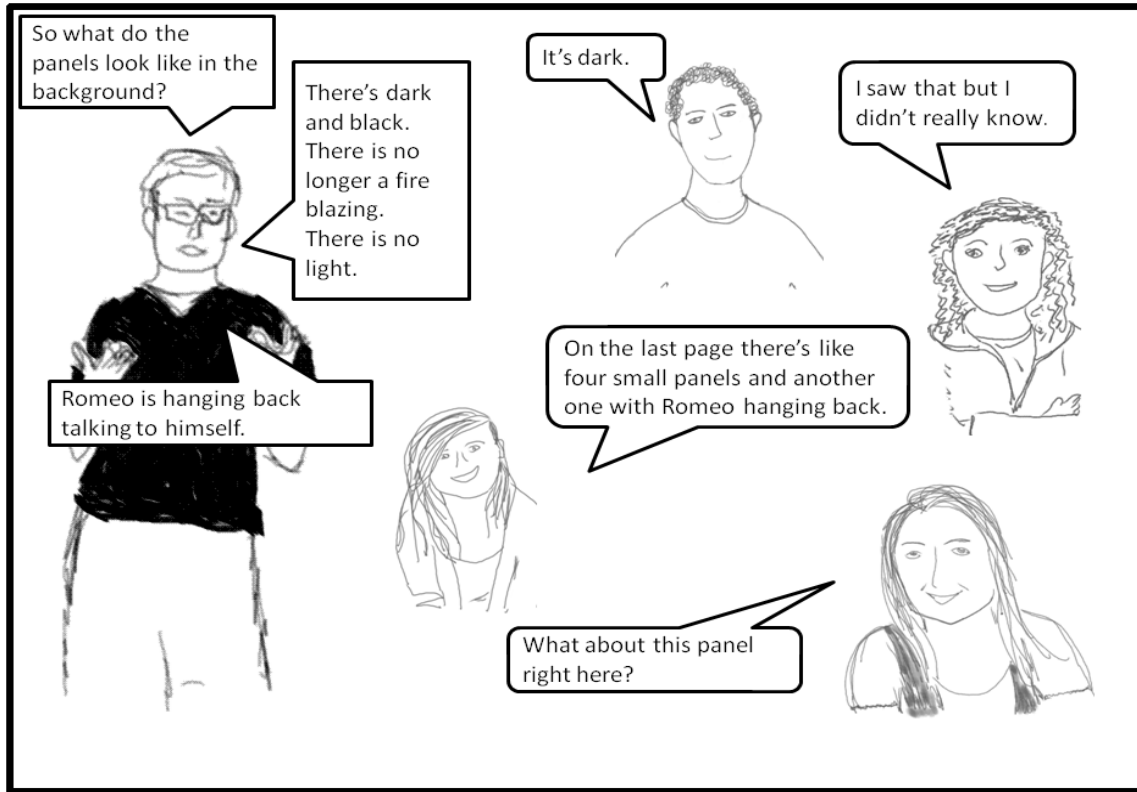


Figure 4.72 Grayson, Brad, Sophia, Cathy, Robin, 2010, Observation 8

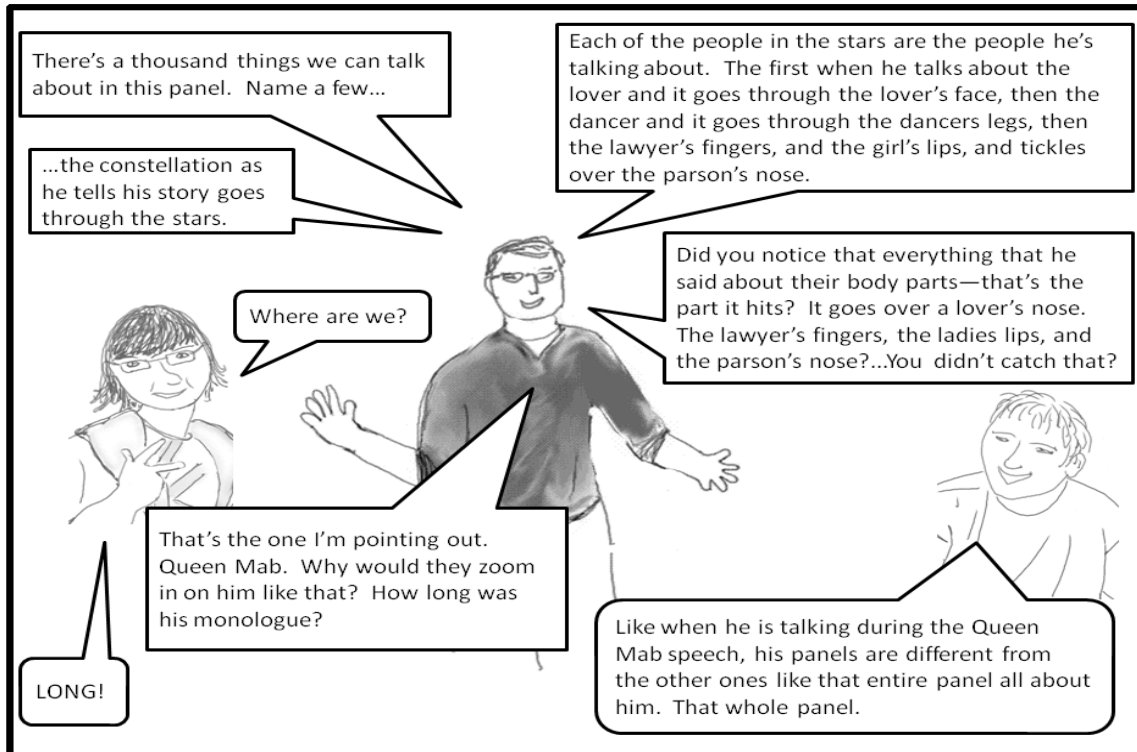


Figure 4.73 Grayson, Jake, Mark, 2010, Observation 8

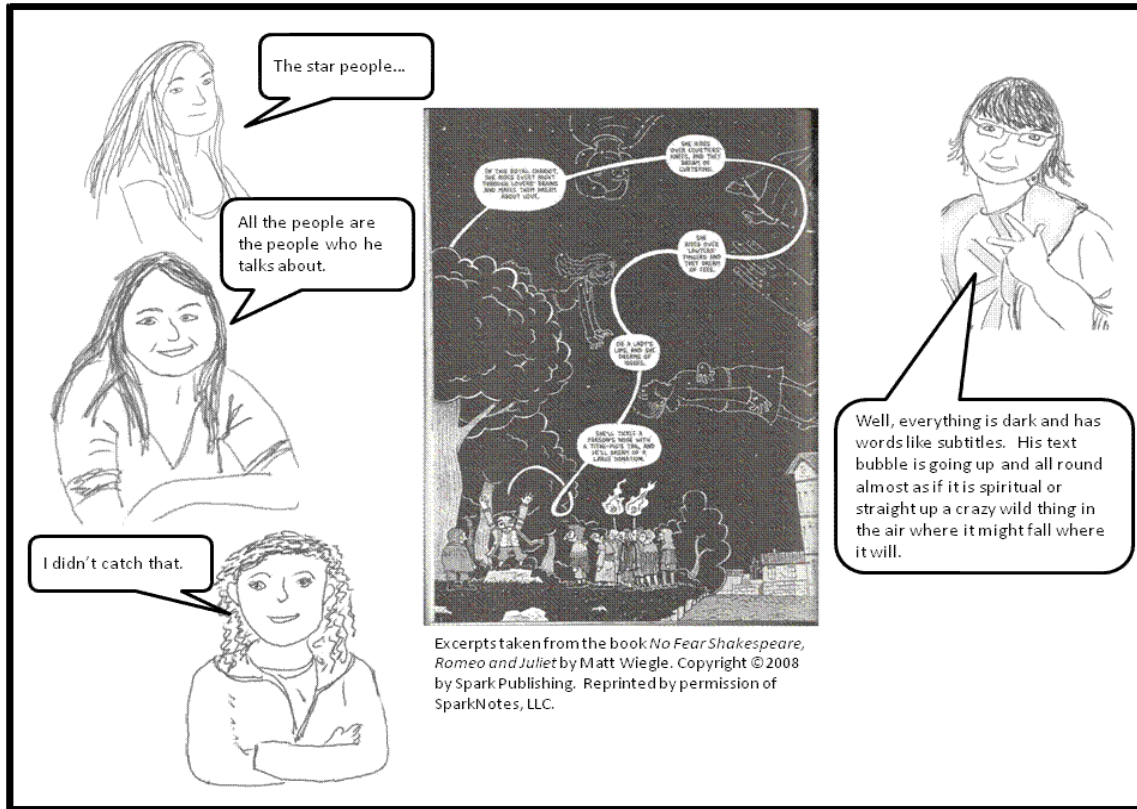


Figure 4.74 Amy, Morgan, Sophia, Jake, 2010, Observation 8

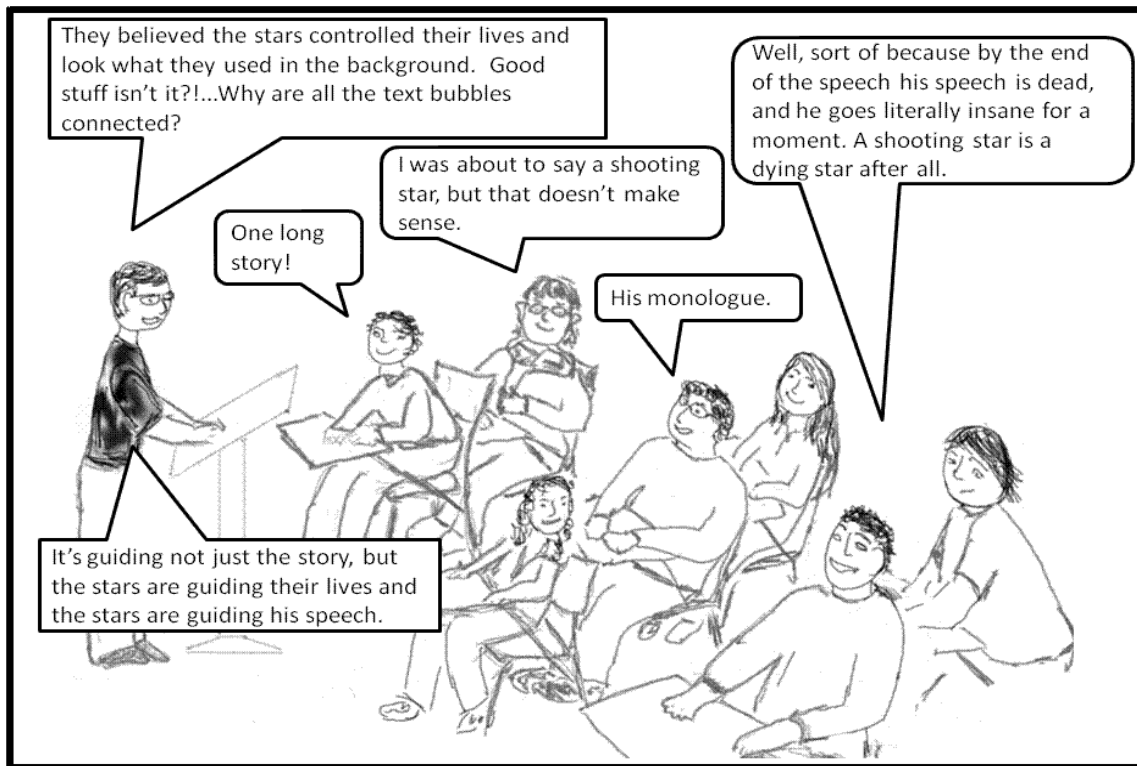


Figure 4.75 Grayson, Sean, Jake, Carl, Mark, 2010, Observation 8

In this discussion of the “Queen Mab” speech, Mr. Grayson found that fifteen students felt they better understood the section because of the graphic novel interpretation; three did not think it helped; and two students did not care one way or the other. It was important to utilize the original text rather than replace it with an “easier” adaptation just because it might appear easier for students to understand. The flow of the words and the language of Shakespeare were important to the students and contributed to their understanding rather than overwhelmed them.

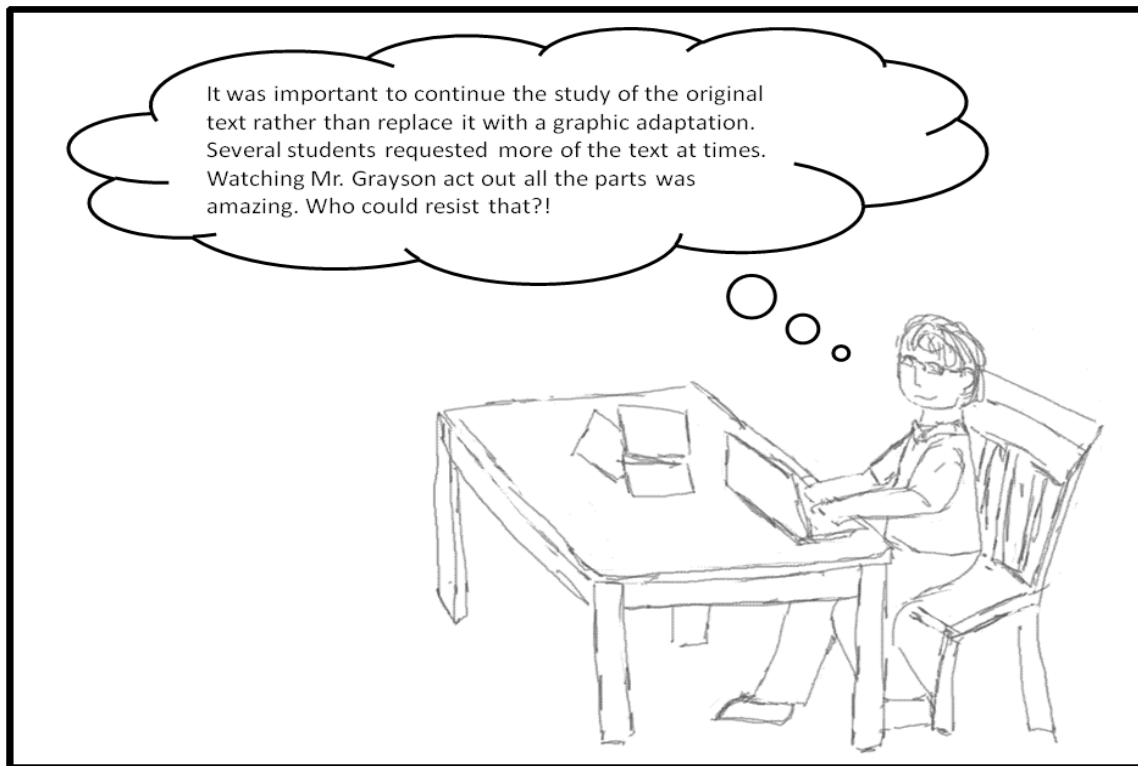


Figure 4.76 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 8

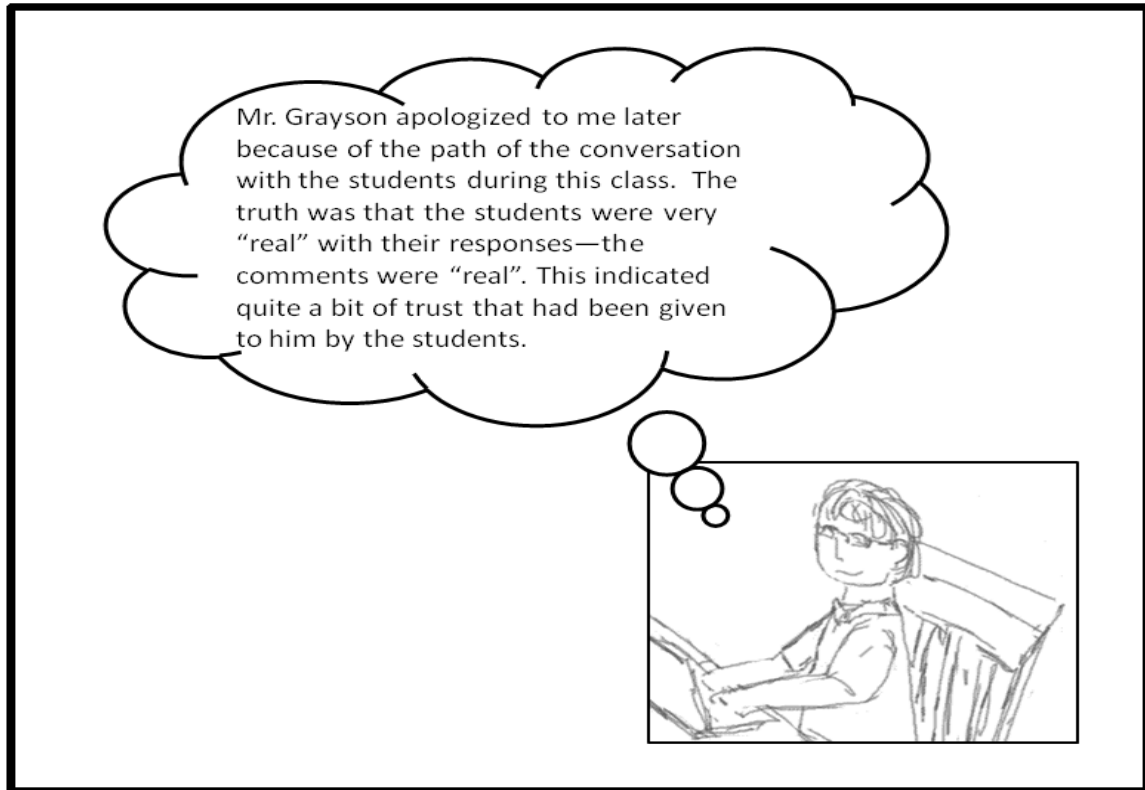


Figure 4.77 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 8

**Observation 9.** This observation was a bit different from the others because the students appeared less connected to the lesson. *Romeo and Juliet* had been a difficult read for them even though Mr. Grayson had consistently read with great animation. He continued to explain the meaning of phrases and frequently stopped for comprehension checks as he read. However, at the beginning of this observation there was a sense of disinterest in the group. During the reading of Act III, Mr. Grayson began discussing the characters of Romeo and Juliet and comparing them to teenagers today. In this scene from the play, Friar Lawrence was scolding Romeo because he “[was] being a spoiled little teenaged brat about this whole thing” (Grayson, 2010, Observation 9). Mr. Grayson began to connect directly with the students and added his comments about the mistakes of youth. He attempted to let the students know that “Romeo is saying what all teenagers say to all of us adults, ‘you don’t know what I’m going through,’ and we do” (Grayson,



2010, Observation 9). As he continues with this line, the students begin to sit up, face forward, and listen carefully to what he has to say. He refers to how adults and parents often know what has been going on with their teenage children because of their own past experiences, and he questions why adolescents don't come and speak to experienced adults choosing instead to talk with other 14 year olds going through similar problems with no experience. In this play one bad decision leads to disaster as often happens, and he suggests that better decisions now make a better life later. Mr. Grayson suggests that the students should always find the good in a bad situation which is somewhat contrary to Romeo's decisions because "if all you do is focus on the negative for the rest of your life, you're going to be miserable" (Grayson, 2010, Observation 9). The use of real world connections to the text was part of what the students felt made Mr. Grayson's class interesting and demonstrates his concern for them as people.

Following this discussion Mr. Grayson began a review of some of the details of the reading utilizing the graphic novel. His focus was on expressions found in the characters and helping the students use the graphic interpretations to understand the text. This was a continued attempt to teach the students the use of the visual metaphors and clues much as a reader might use textual clues to understand text. The students were proactive in the discussion and readily suggested ideas and contributed their own comments to what they were seeing.

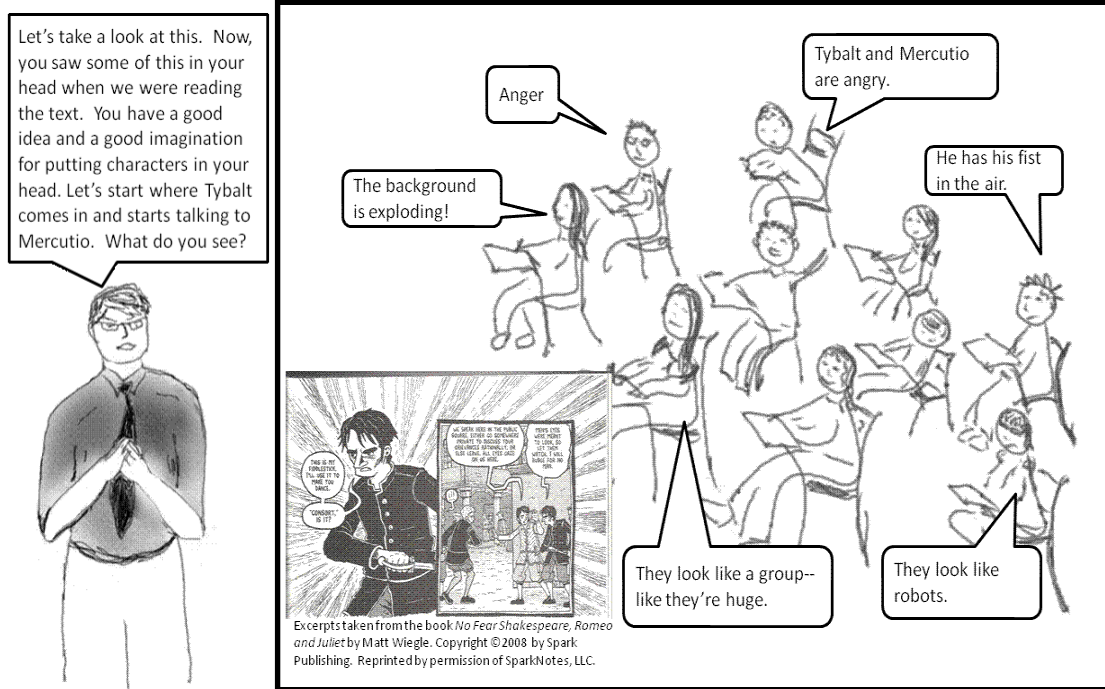


Figure 4.78 Grayson, Sophia, John, James, Robin, Jake, 2010, Observation 9

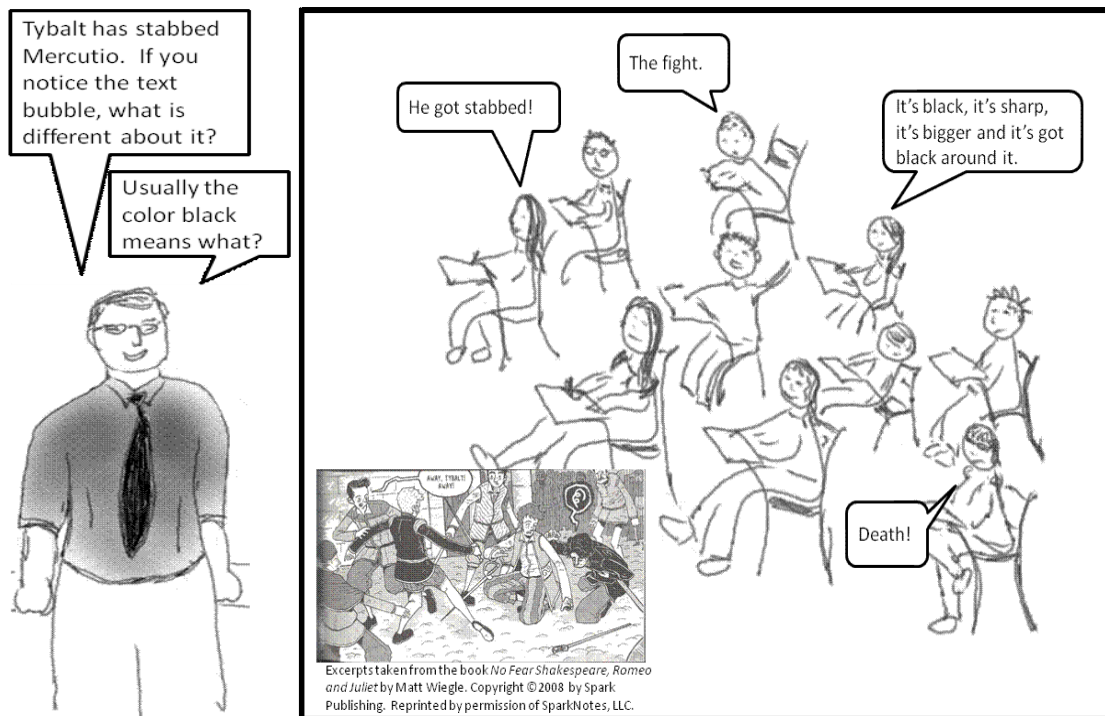


Figure 4.79 Grayson, Sophia, James, Morgan, Jake, 2010, Observation 9

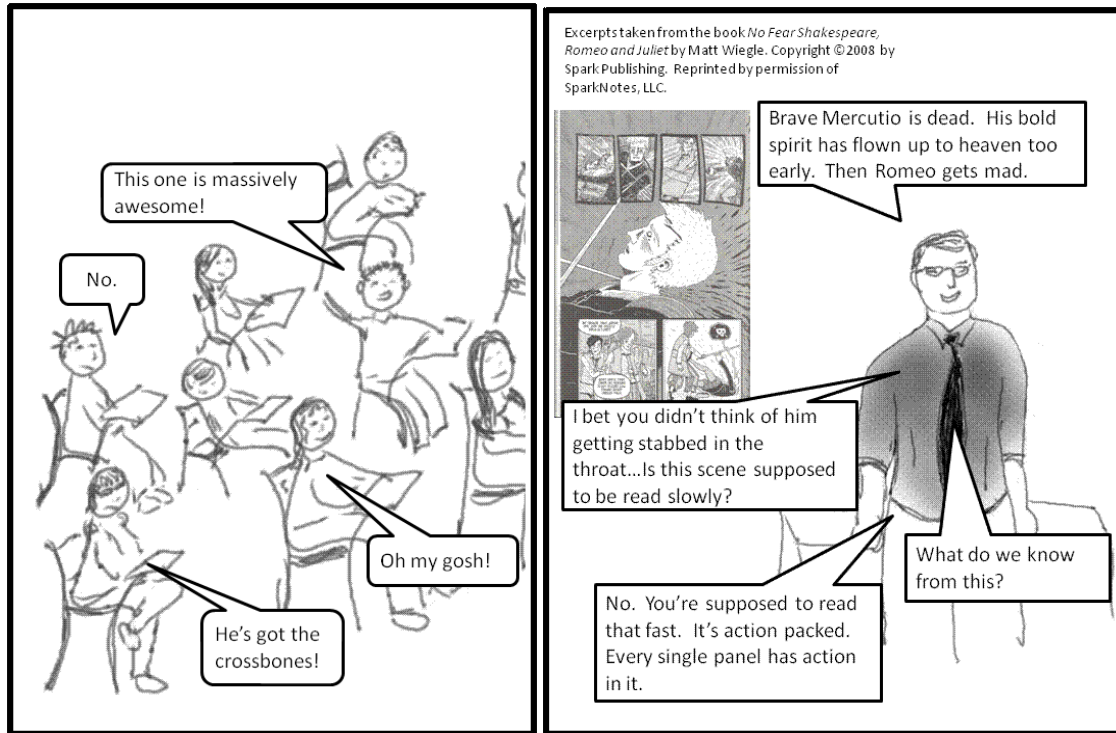


Figure 4.80 Grayson, Jake, James, Sean, Sophia, 2010, Observation 9

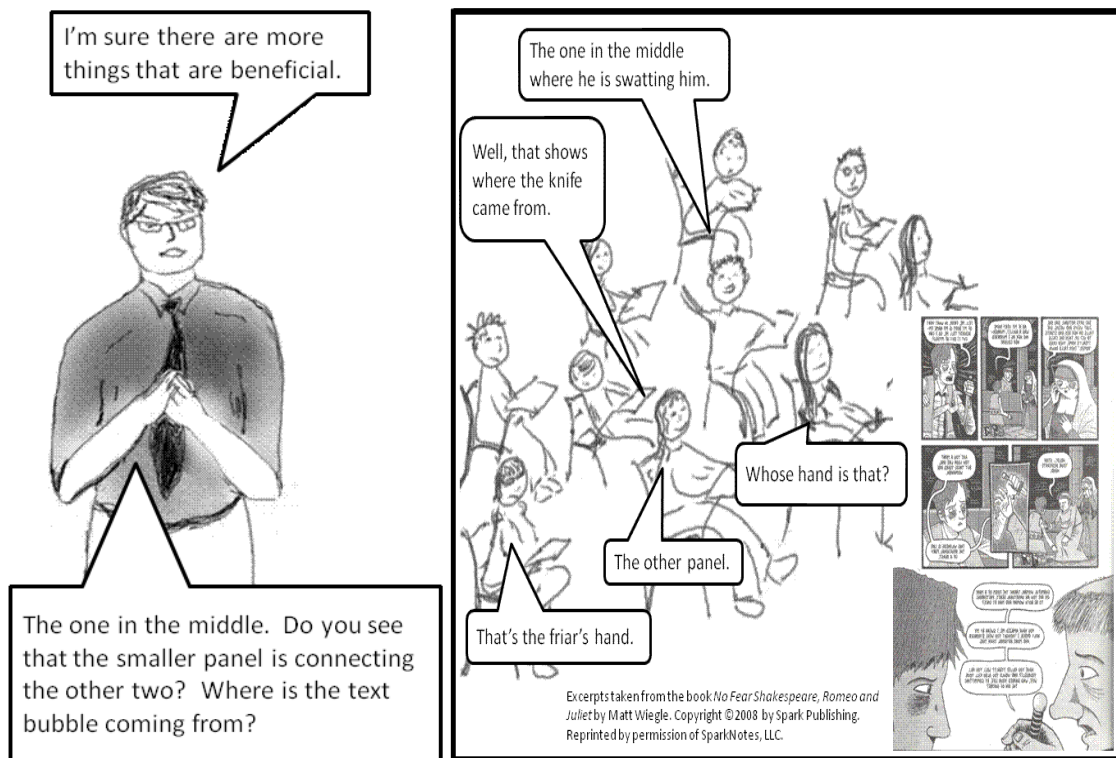


Figure 4.81 Grayson, Sophia, Robin, Sean, 2010, Observation 9

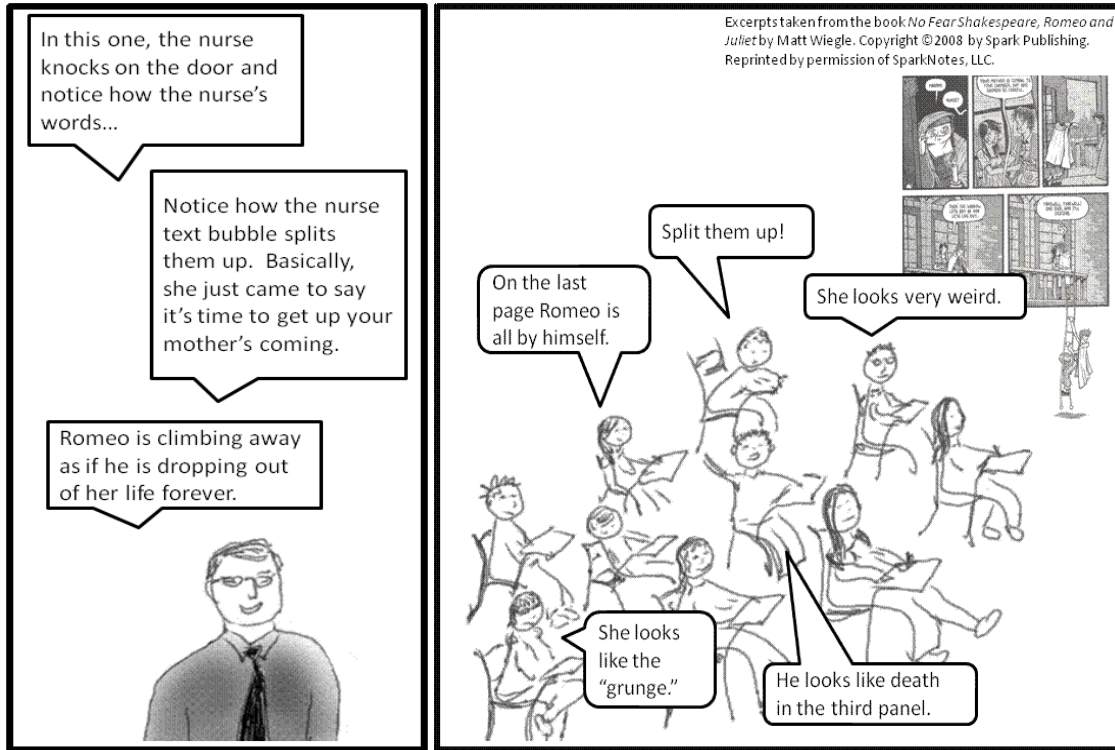


Figure 4.82 Grayson, Jake, Morgan, Sean, James, John, 2010, Observation 9

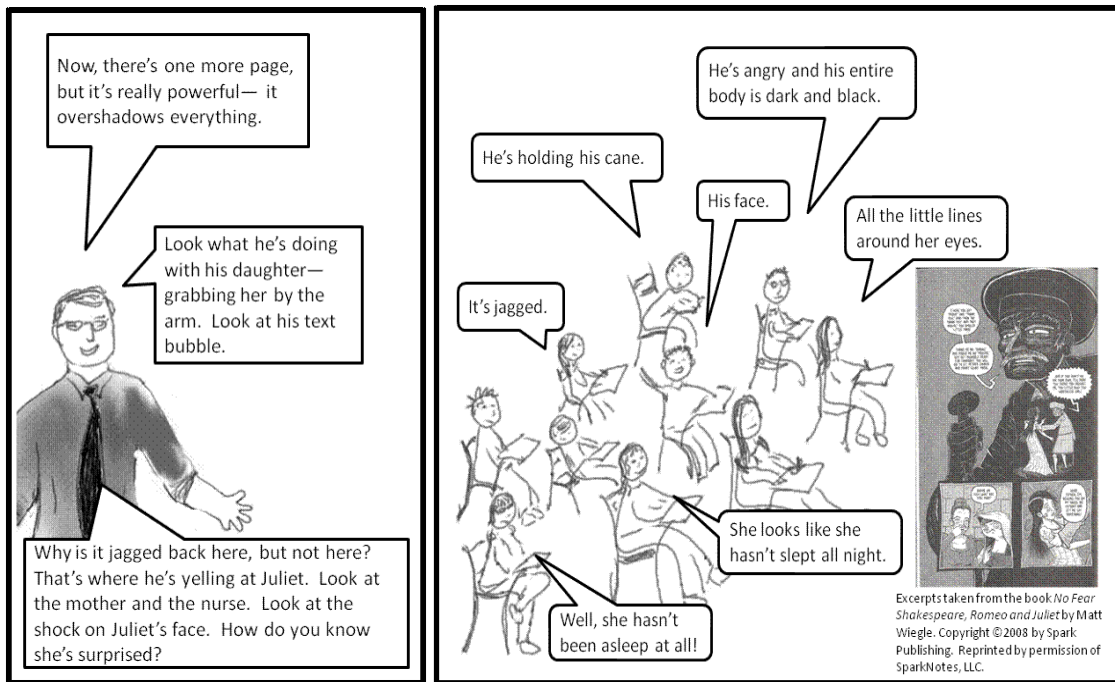


Figure 4.83 Grayson, Jake, Sophia, Morgan, James, Sean, John, 2010, Observation 9

The dynamic personality of Mr. Grayson and the real-world connections made throughout the reading of the text provided ample opportunities for students to contribute to the discussion and look at this play from a more contemporary point of view. The students appreciated his energy in reading the text and commented on the use of the graphic novel to help with understanding some of the passages. Even with this enthusiastic endorsement of comics and graphic novels, the students overwhelmingly preferred the reading of the text as the primary focus for the study of *Romeo and Juliet*. One of the girls commented that “I would have to have someone read it [Romeo and Juliet] to me. I would not be able to read it alone” (Grayson, 2010, Focus Group 3). One male student requested that “I would like more teachers to use comics to relate to regular books” (John, 2010, Focus Group 2). He said that “these comics have been helping me with this” (John, 2010, Focus Group 2). Several other students agreed with his comments.

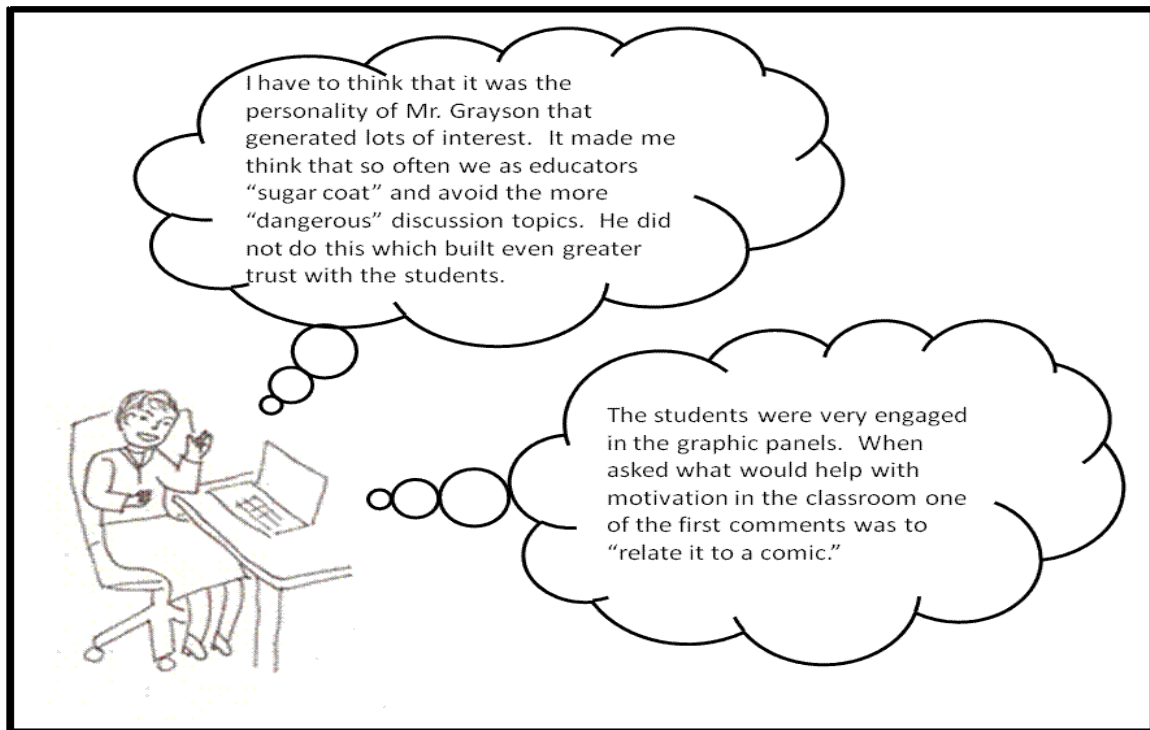


Figure 4.84 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 9

**Observation 10.** This observation brought the reading of *Romeo and Juliet* to a close. Utilizing his established animated style of reading, Mr. Grayson continually interrupted his reading with comments designed to engage the students in thought. One such comment or question required the students to think about the choices Shakespeare made in the plot design of this story. Toward the end of Act V, Mr. Grayson read of the friar’s explanation of what events had occurred to bring Romeo and Juliet to their deaths. This provoked some questioning on the part of the students as they had difficulty putting the friar’s final monologue in their own words after reading the text and requested a review of that text through the use of the graphic novel representation.

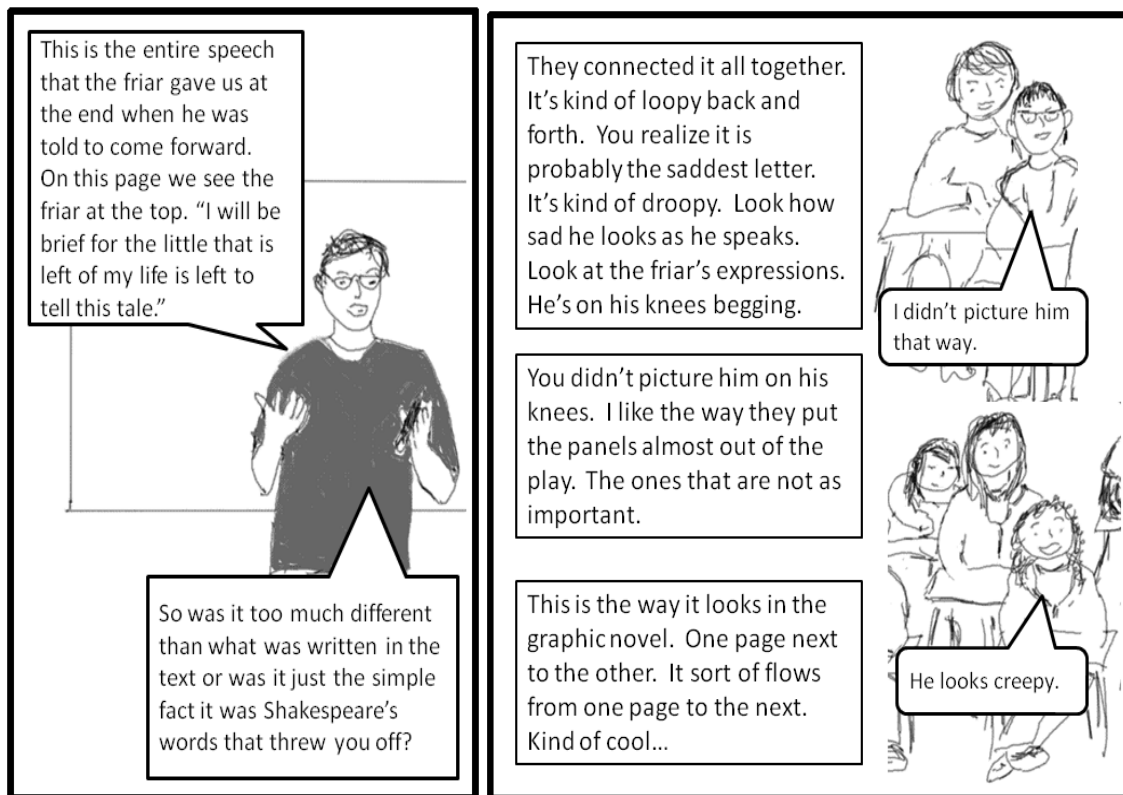


Figure 4.85 Grayson, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Observation 10

Mr. Grayson responded to the students’ confusion with a short review of the text through the graphics allowing them a chance to recognize the friar’s explanation of the

entire play. The students began to “see” his words through the graphics and understand the meaning behind the words better. Twelve students expressed that this technique helped them understand the material better; seven students already knew what was happening; and two students did not care one way or the other about using the graphic novel. After the detailed discussions including instruction regarding the visual cues in the graphic novel passages, the students developed a greater savvy in analyzing the graphic representations after reading the text.

The graphic panels from the No Fear Shakespeare graphic novel version of *Romeo and Juliet* used much of the actual text in graphic form. The students commented on several places where their impressions were different from the graphic version. This different point of view helped to support their understanding in that they were able to see the expressions on the characters’ faces and body stance rather than trying to imagine the correct emotion in a particular scene through the text alone.

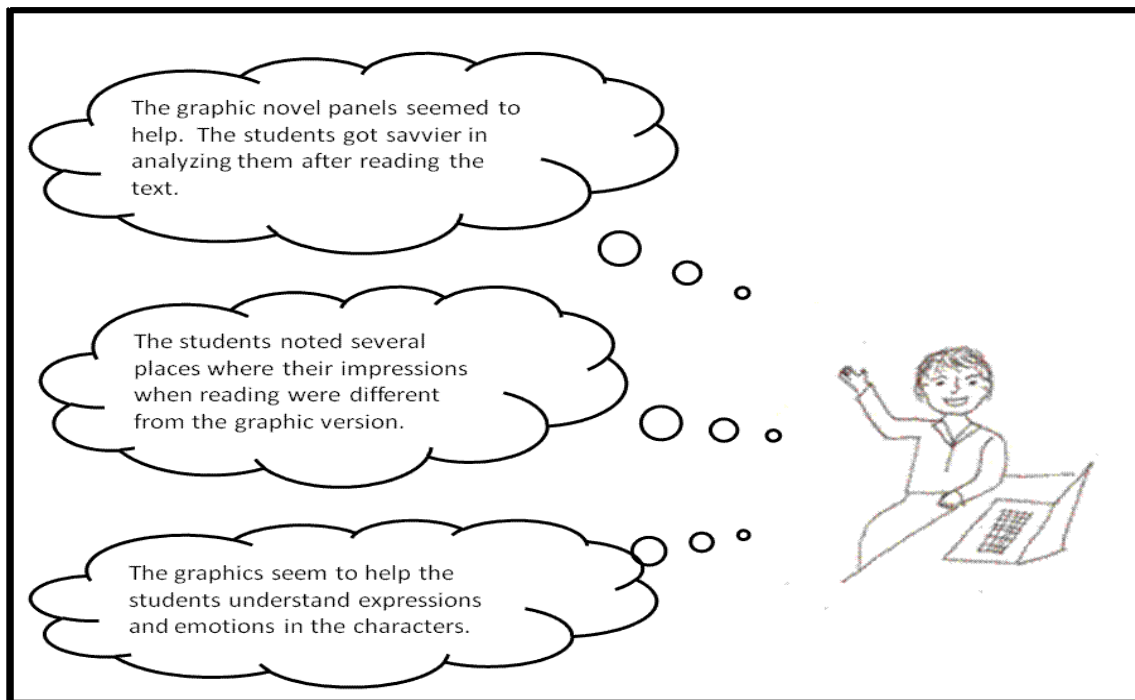


Figure 4.86 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 10

**Observation 11.** This observation focused on pre-reading activities related to the graphic novel *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. This first activity was intended to give the students a chance to understand what it meant to be stereotyped. The observer and Mr. Grayson met in a previous planning session and chose an activity that allowed Mr. Grayson to separate the students by birth month. He made several divisions between the students and gave some of those students candy based on his own favored months. The results generated an interesting discussion and brought forth a bit of contention between those who got candy and those who did not.

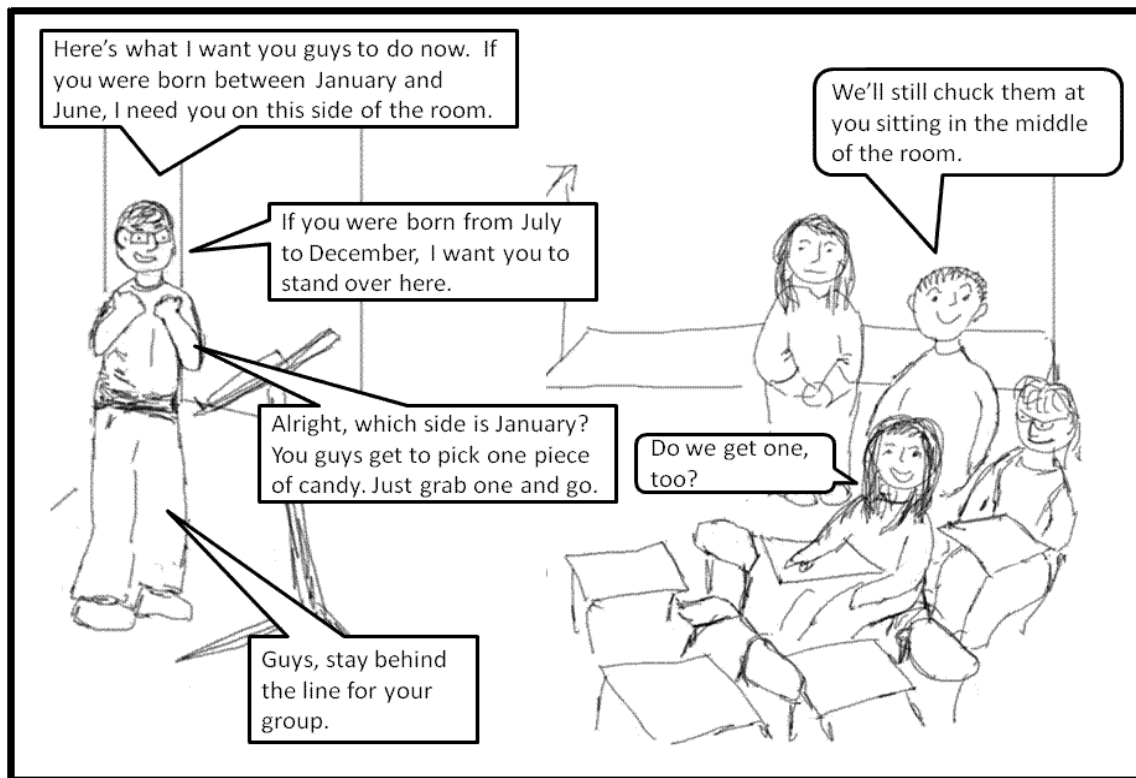


Figure 4.87 Grayson, Mark, Morgan, 2010, Observation 11



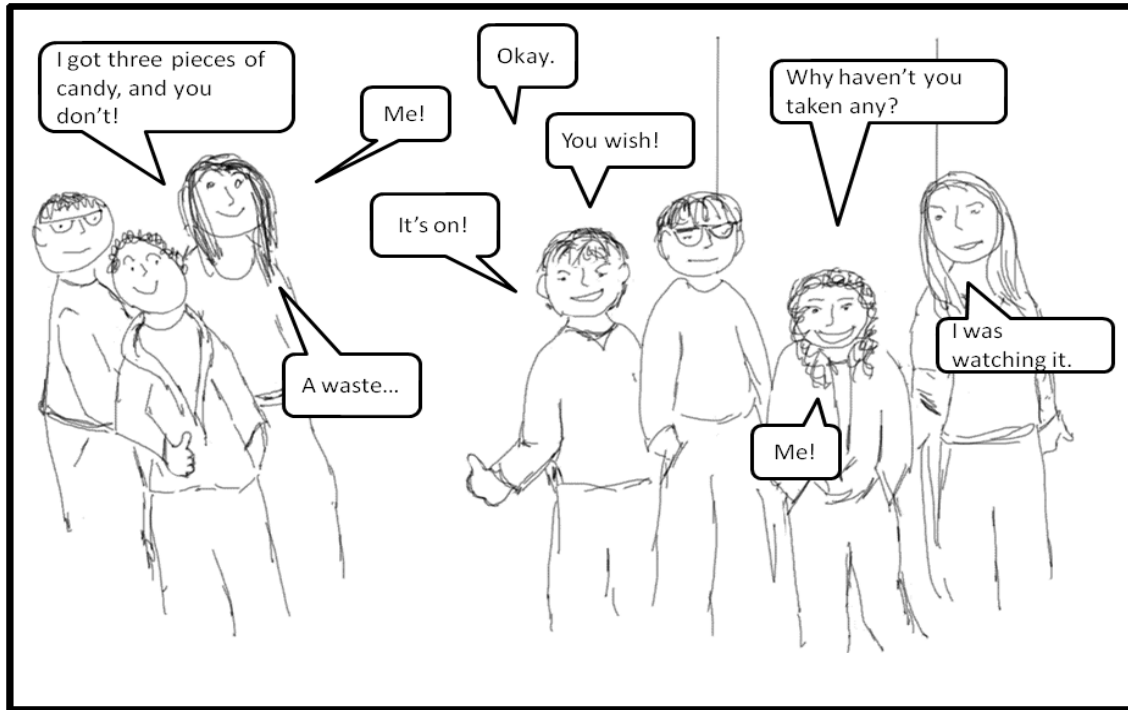


Figure 4.88 Mary, Evan, Sophia, Robin, 2010, Observation 1

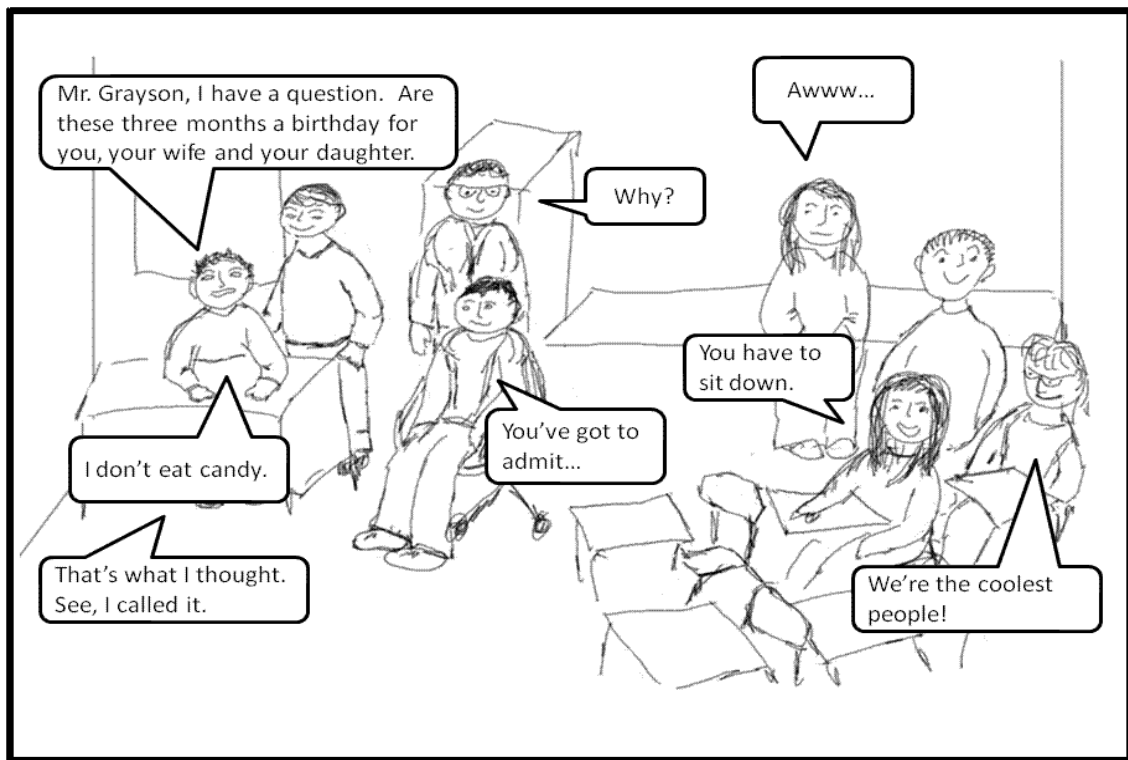


Figure 4.89 Mark, John, Evan, Morgan, Mary, Jake, 2010, Observation 11

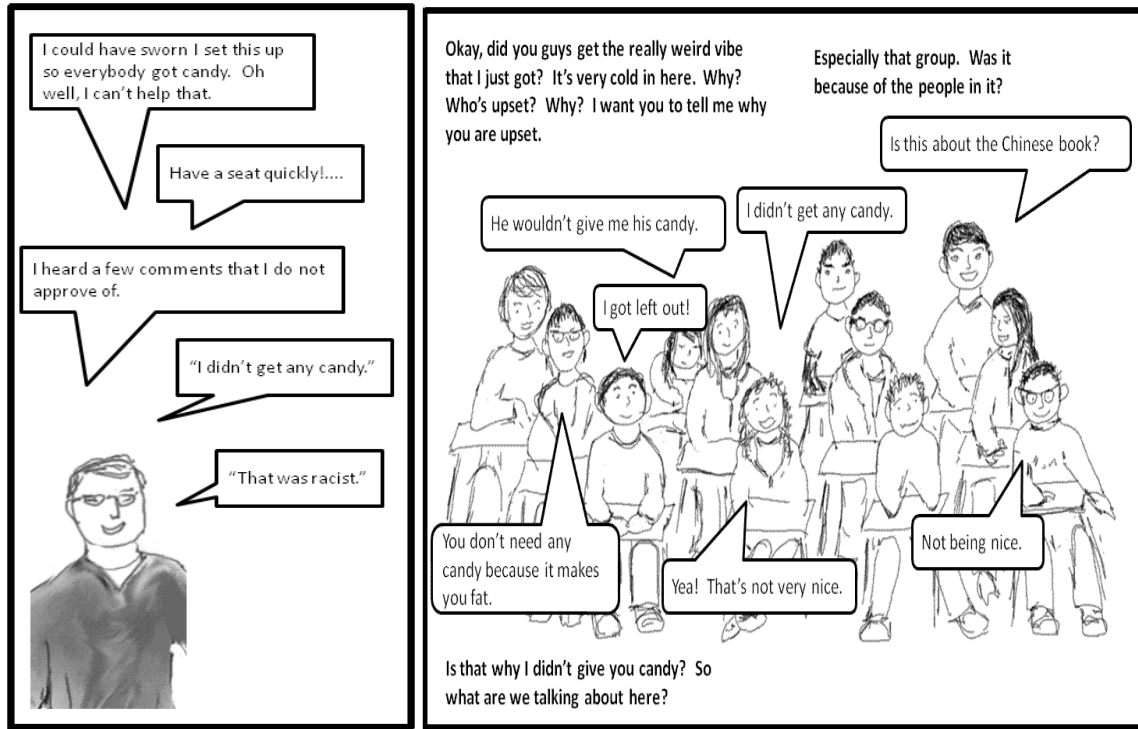


Figure 4.90 Grayson, Jake, Sean, Sophia, Mark, John, 2010, Observation 11

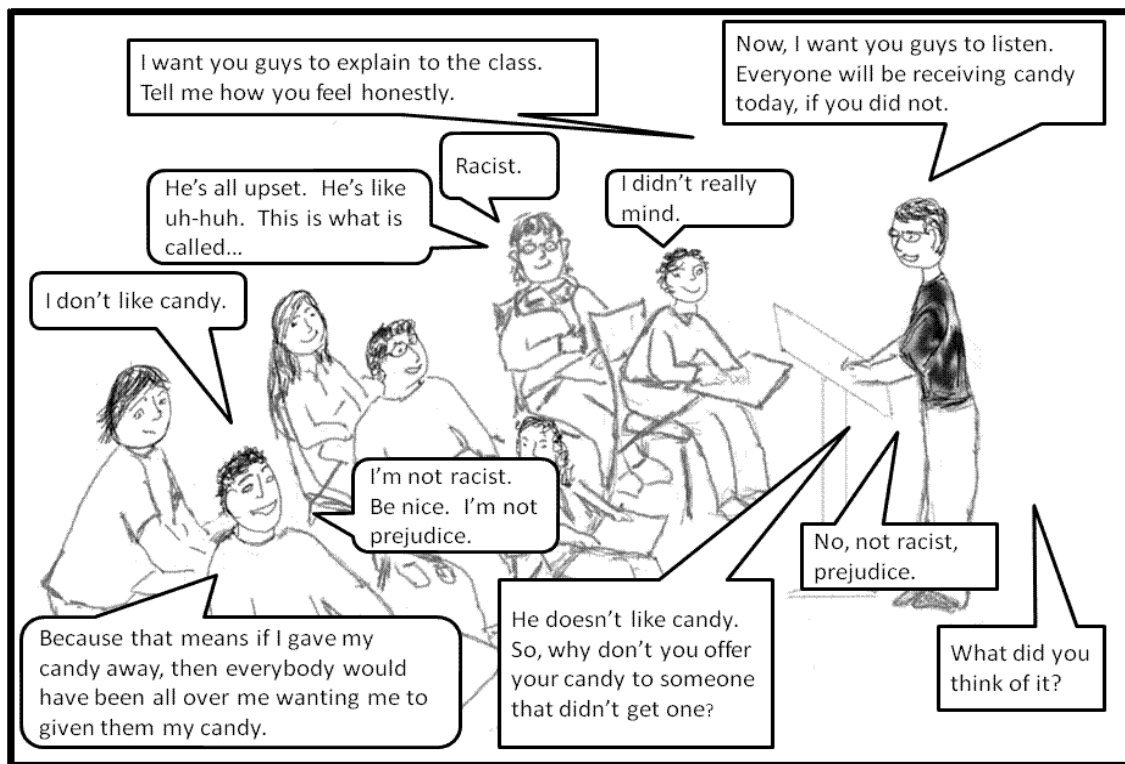


Figure 4.91 Grayson, Mark, Jake, John, 2010, Observation 11

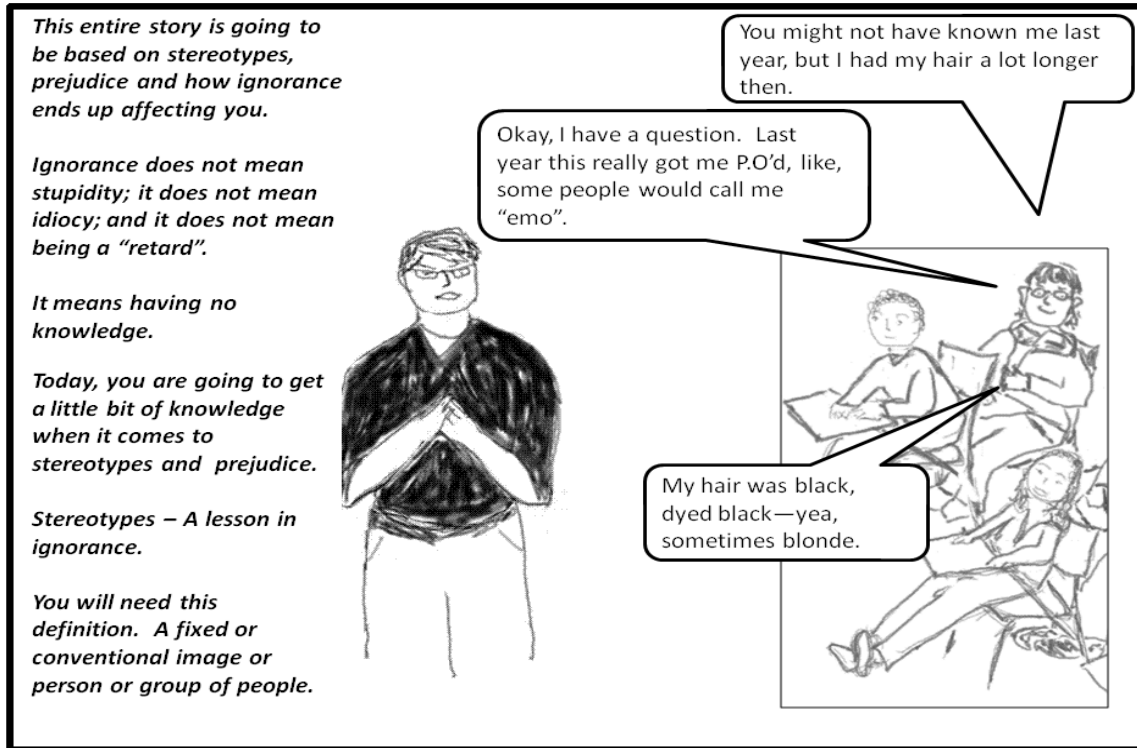


Figure 4.92 Grayson, Jake, 2010, Observation 11

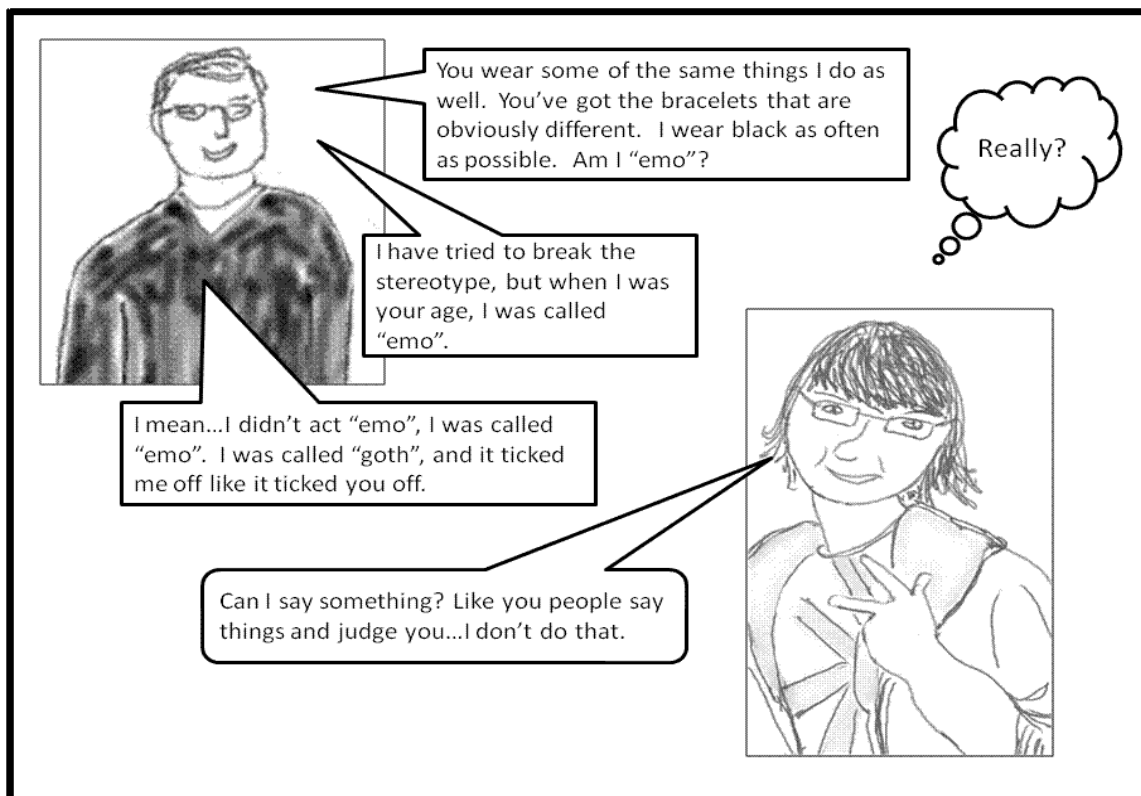


Figure 4.93 Grayson, Jake, 2010, Observation 11

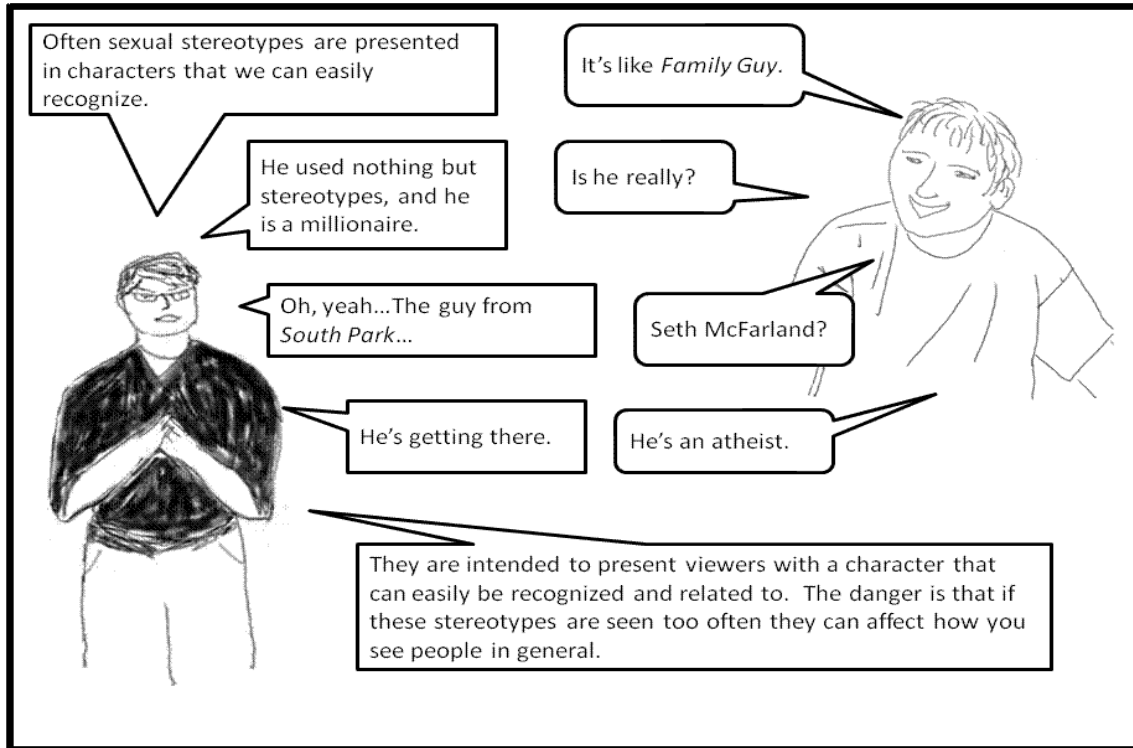


Figure 4.94 Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 11



Figure 4.95 Grayson, Sophia, Travis, Jake, Robin, 2010, Observation 11

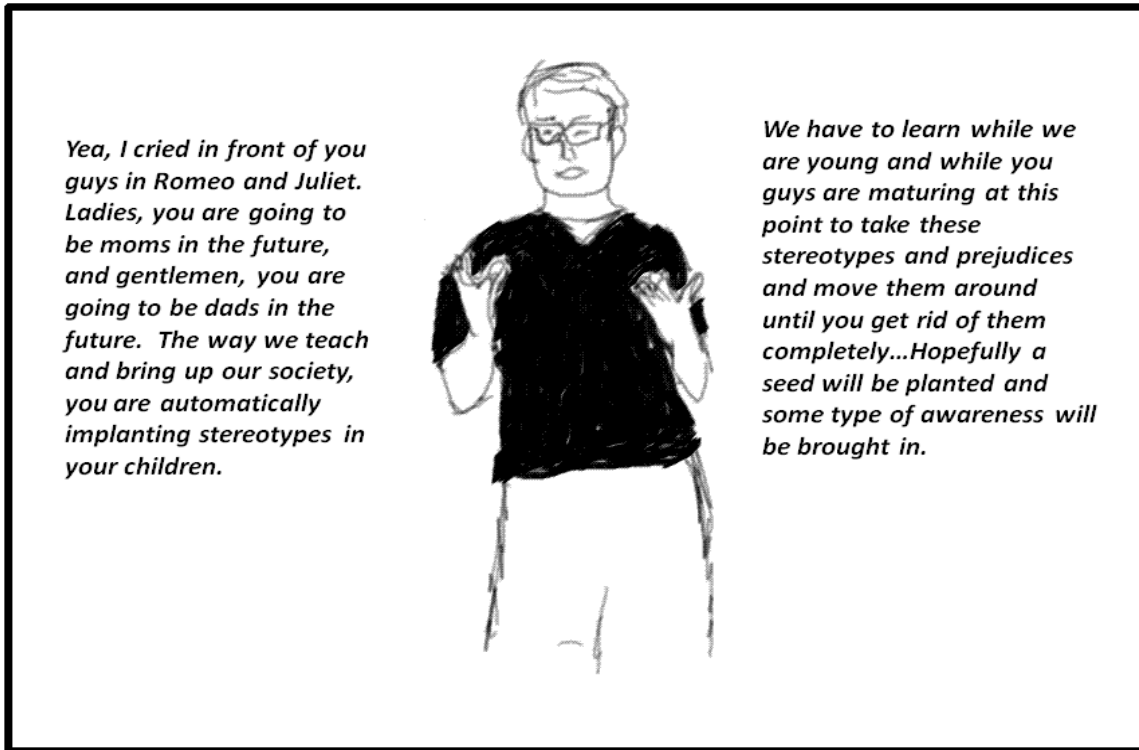


Figure 4.96 Grayson, 2010, Observation 11

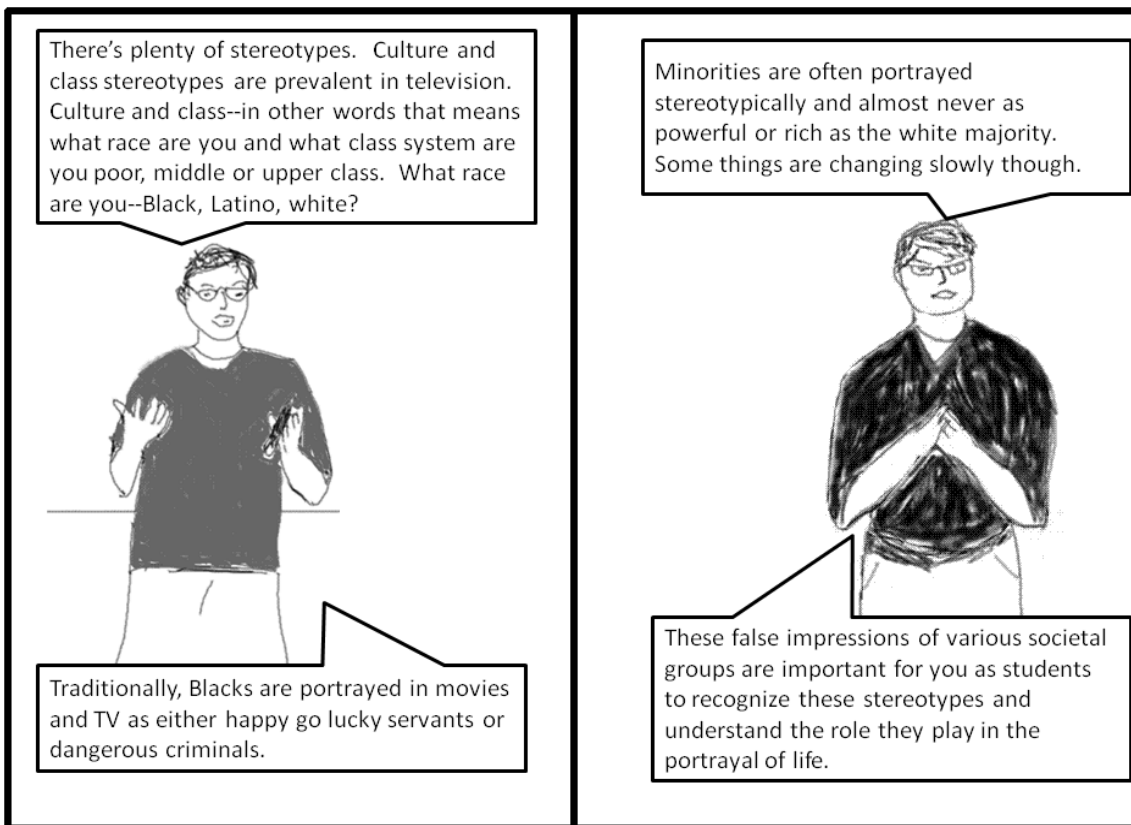


Figure 4.97 Grayson, 2010, Observation 11

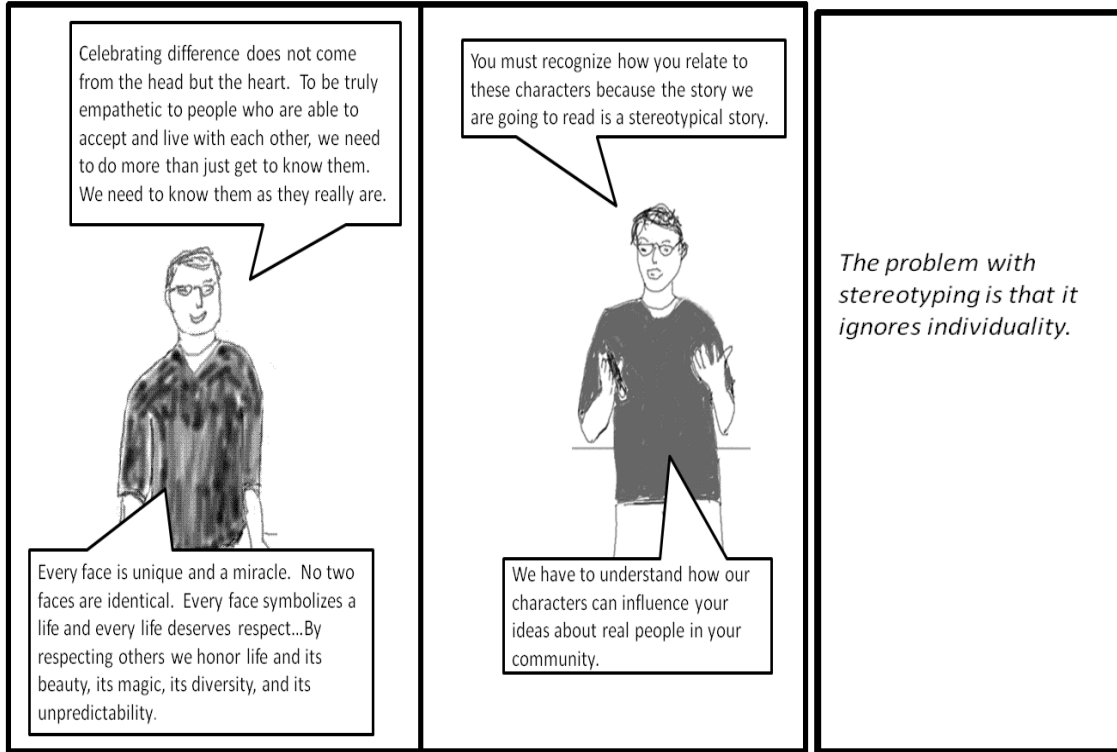


Figure 4.98 Grayson, 2010, Observation 11

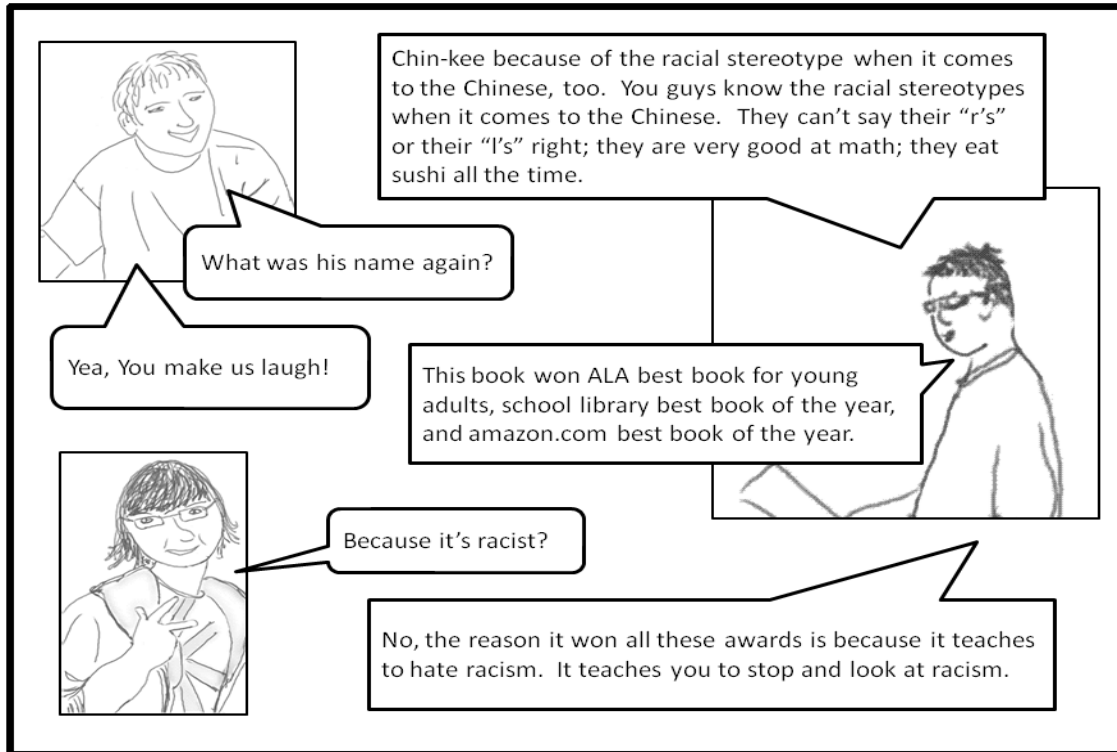


Figure 4.99 Grayson, Mark, Jake, 2010, Observation 11

The choice of the graphic novel *American Born Chinese* fit the criteria of text with a concentration of contemporary social issues prompting discussion among the students. The demographics found in the students' home county are clearly weighted heavily with Caucasians and significantly less with residents of other ethnic or racial backgrounds. The focus of this graphic novel allows a launching point for the discussion of issues related to social relevance and meaning relating literature to the students' identity within the global community.

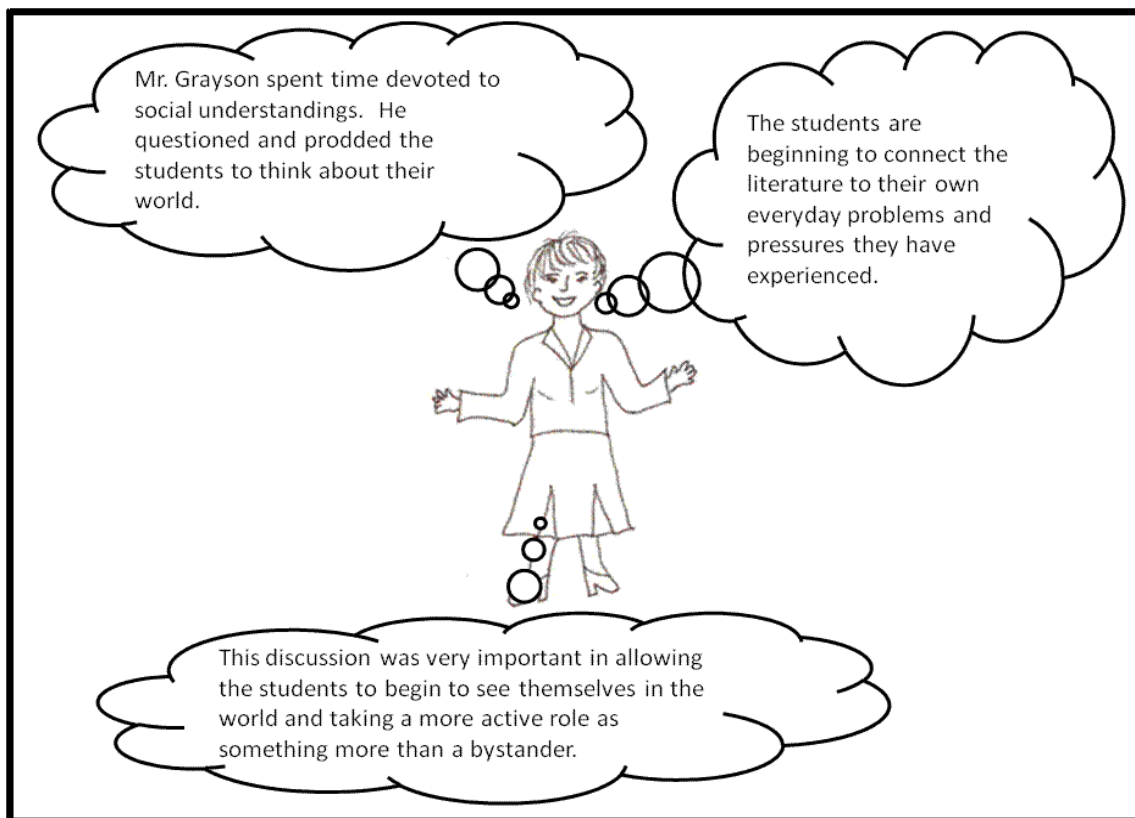


Figure 4.100 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 11

**Observation 12.** This observation occurred just prior to the winter break and followed a set of off days due to inclement weather. The original lesson plan suggested a reading of the material over the course of the week and included a variety of activities,

but because of the set back in available days, Mr. Grayson and the observer decided that the reading of *American Born Chinese* should be finished on this day.

The class had been set up in small groups with the desks facing each other. This allowed the students to gather around the limited available copies of the book and follow along as Mr. Grayson read the novel. Mr. Grayson generally paused following each of the three main sections in the book and focused his comments on the theme of “being yourself and seeing that the monkey king is trying to be something that he is not” (Grayson, 2010, Observation 12).

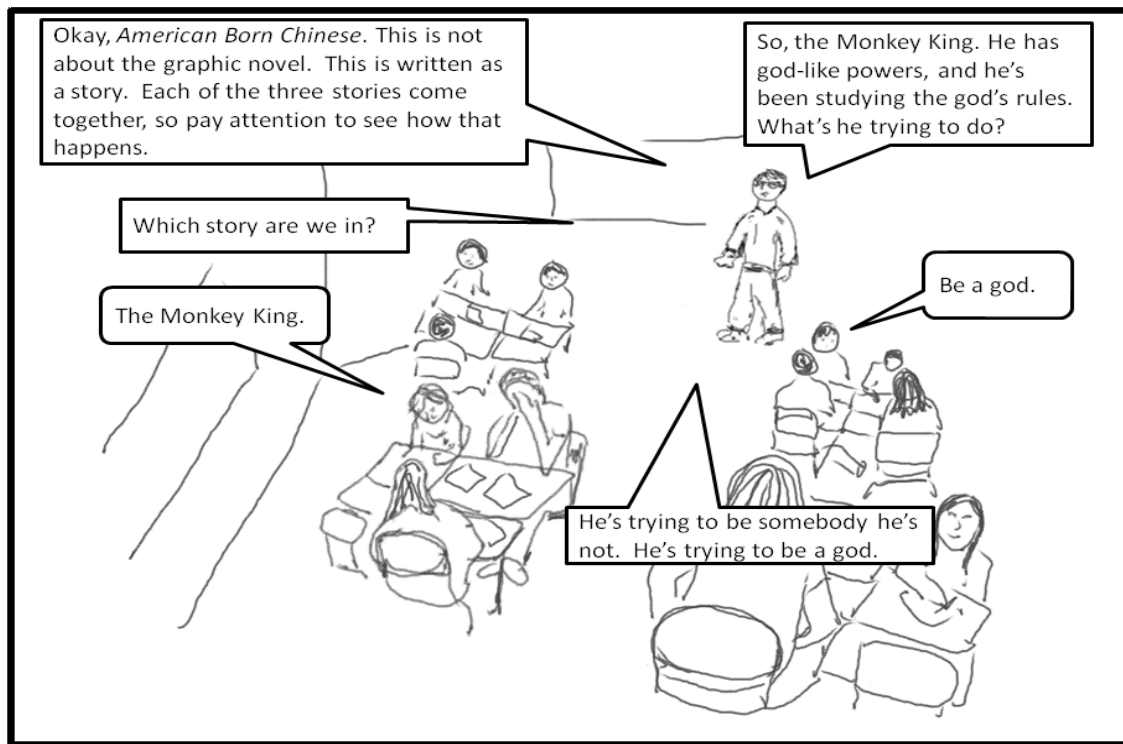



Figure 4.101 Grayson, Faith, Jake, Carl, 2010, Observation 12





Excerpts taken from the book American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang. Copyright © 2006 by Gene Yang. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

*He grabs the dude by his ponytail and starts slashing him about—knocking out all the other gods fighting, throwing him up against the clouds.*

*He left all the gods in a big, bloody pile... Why would he want to get rid of the stink of monkey fur?*

It makes him think that he's a monkey.

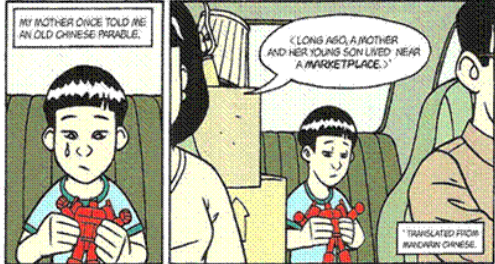
He hates himself.

*I'm a monkey and that's why I can't get into the god's party. I hate the smell now of my fur. What are you guys starting to see in this monkey?*

*He hates himself—low self-esteem. The next story we move into with Jin Wang. What's going on in that panel?...*

Figure 4.102 Mark, Travis, 2010, Observation 12

*If you notice every time they do these little arrows, you'll see a little box in there that says it is translated from Mandarin Chinese.*



So what's up with the bold words? Like, when you read there's a certain bold words.

*There's a certain reason for those bold words. In the story, what happens in every place they are living?*

It changes him.

*It changes him. It affects who he is.*

*In this part, we see a very profound thing to say to a young man.*

*Are you willing to forfeit your soul to become anything you want?*

Excerpts taken from the book American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang. Copyright © 2006 by Gene Yang. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company, LLC.




Figure 4.103 John, Mary, 2010, Observation 12

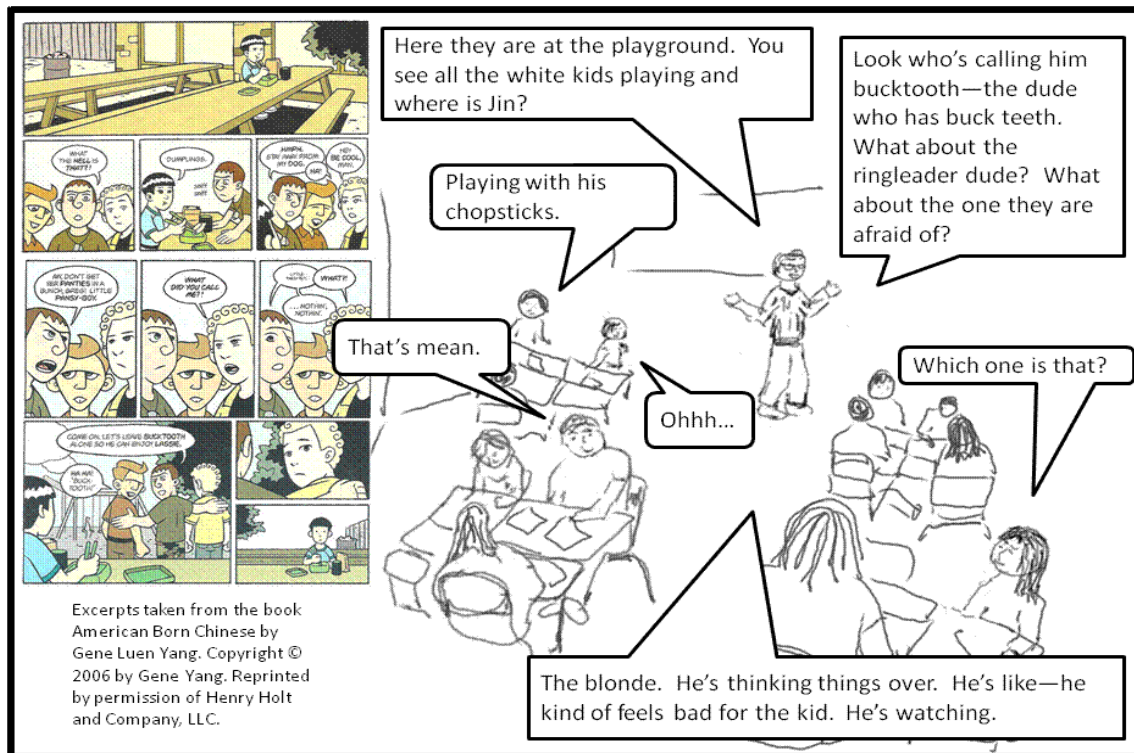


Figure 4.104 Grayson, Mark, Morgan, Faith, 2010, Observation 12

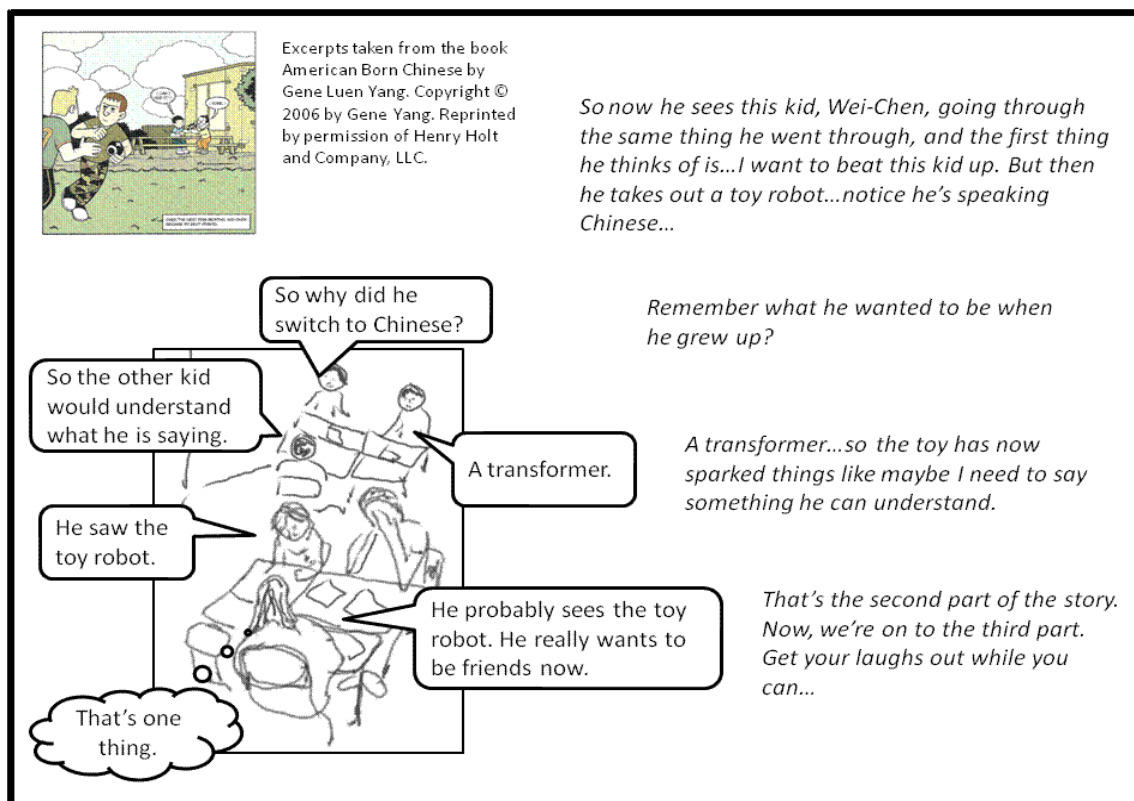


Figure 4.105 Faith, John, Cathy, Robin, 2010, Observation 12

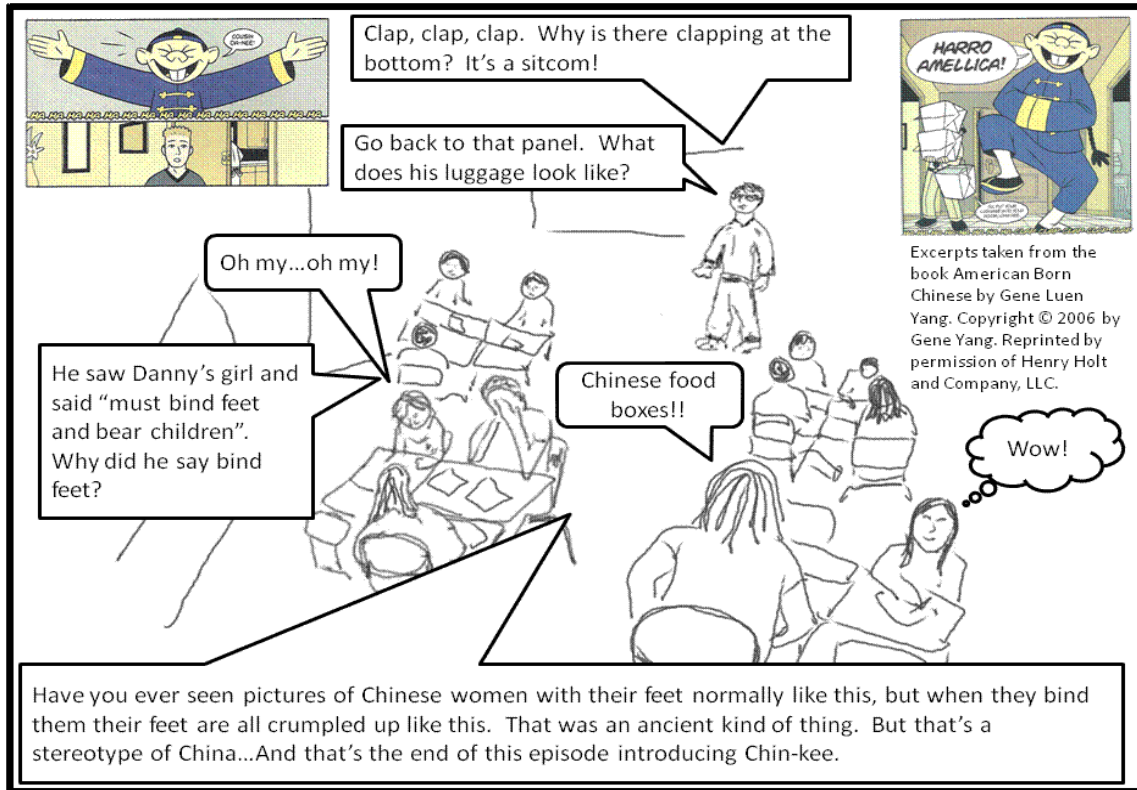


Figure 4.106 Grayson, Faith, Morgan, Amy, 2010, Observation 12

The discussion was encouraged following the reading of each section. The students listened to Mr. Grayson’s active interpretation of the dialogue and description of the engaging graphics especially early in the reading as they became familiar with the characters from each storyline. Because of the loss of days in this week due to weather, it was felt that the book needed to be completed as quickly as possible. What resulted was a shortened amount of time for discussion. However, Mr. Grayson interjected his comments throughout the class period with thought provoking and interesting commentary.



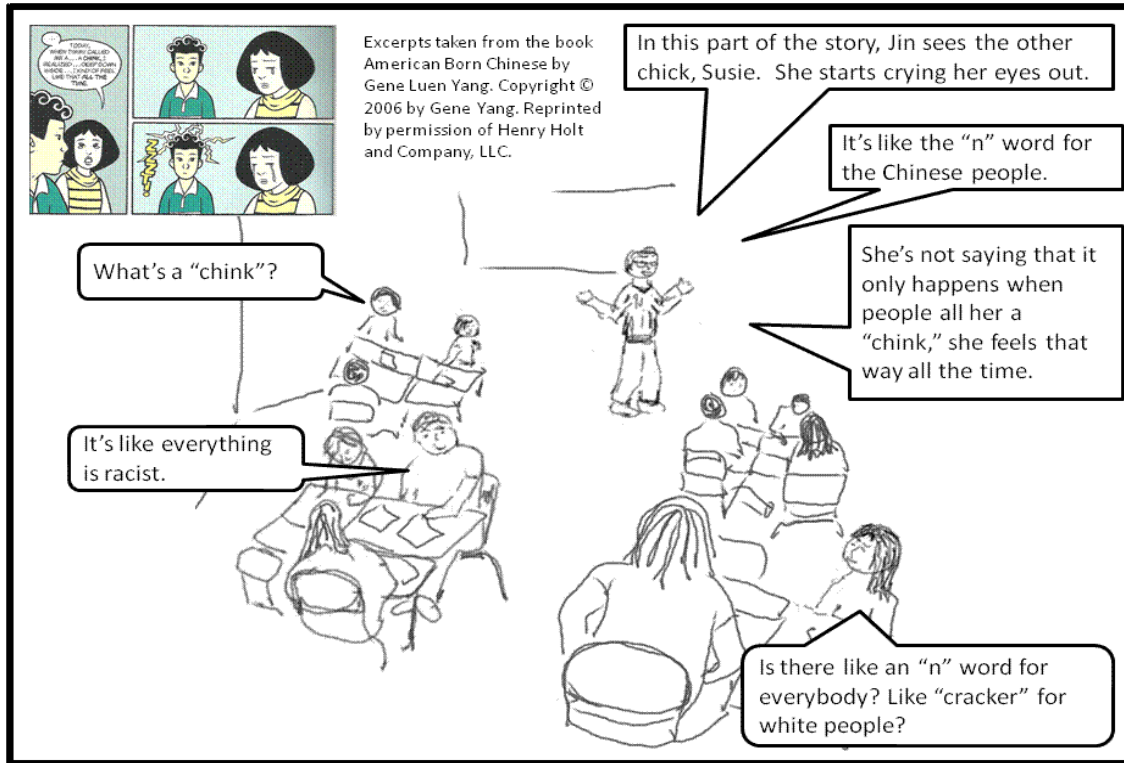


Figure 4.109 Grayson, Faith, Mark, Mary, 2010, Observation 12

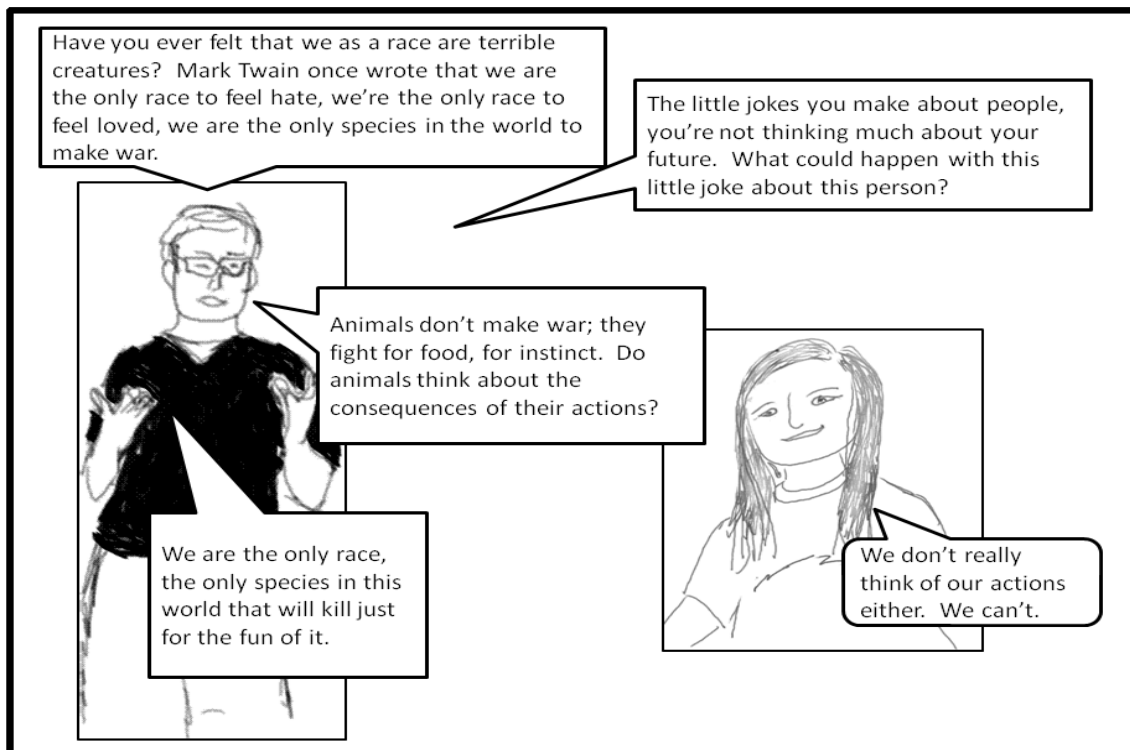


Figure 4.110 Grayson, Cathy, 2010, Observation 12

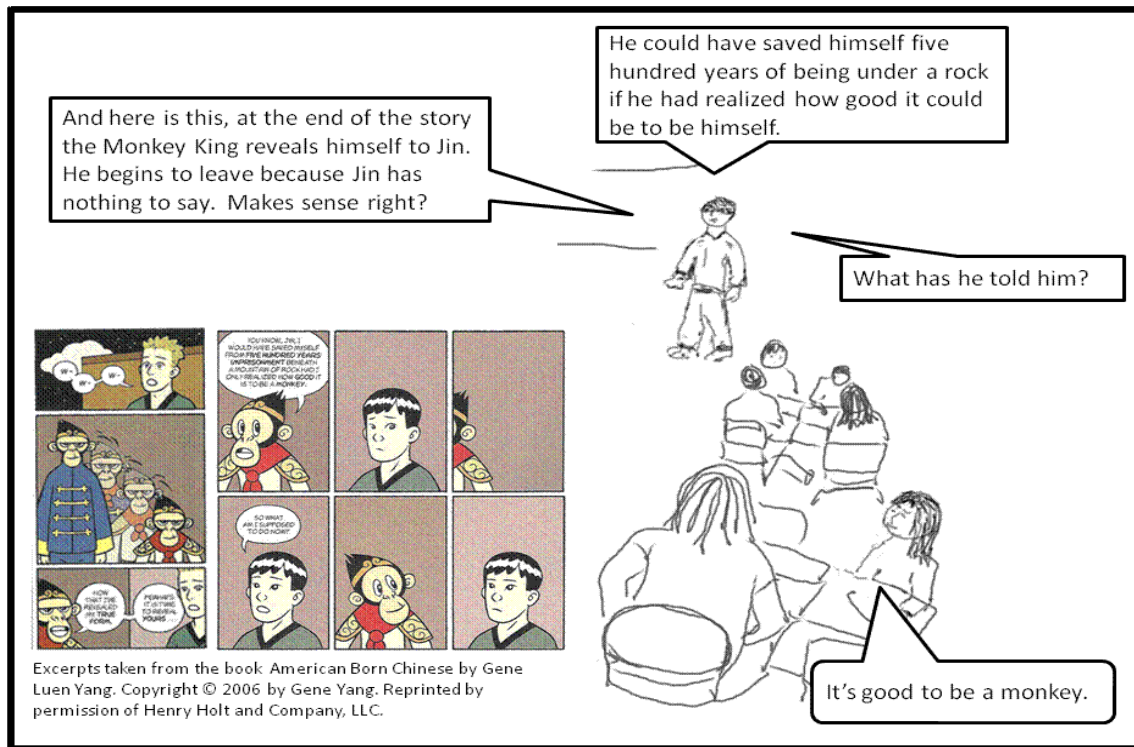


Figure 4.111 Grayson, Morgan, 2010, Observation 12

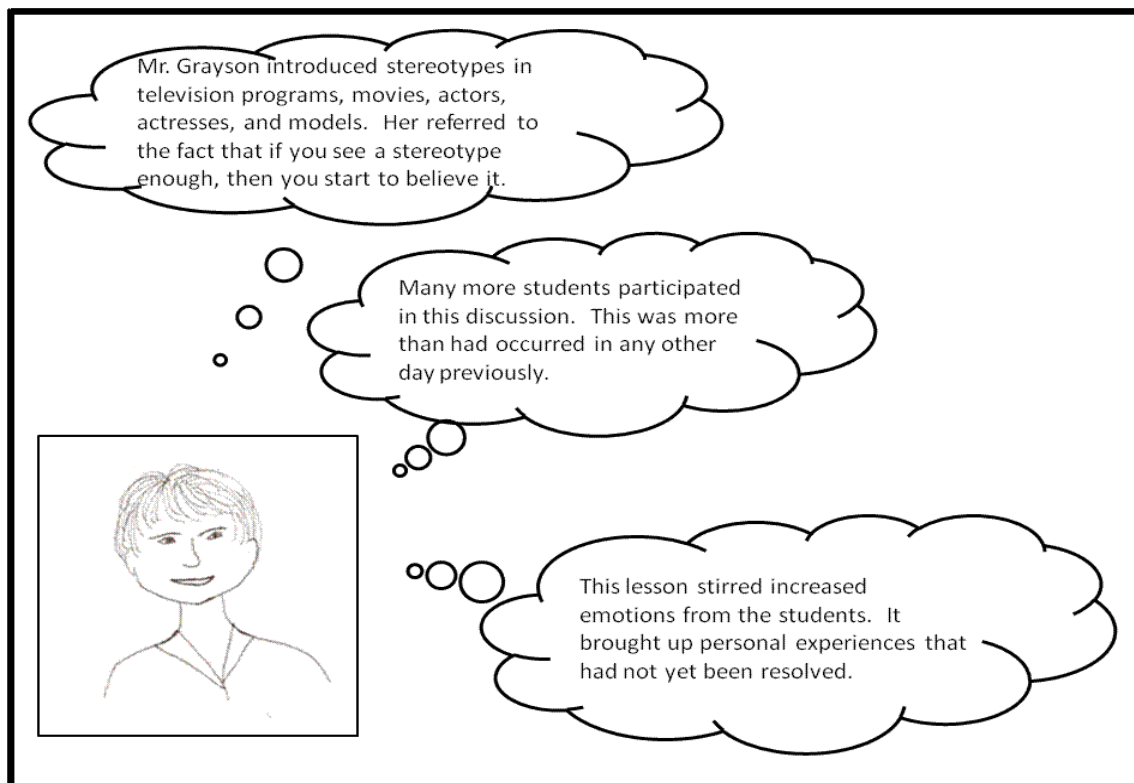


Figure 4.112 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 12

**Observation 13.** The next two observations occurred in response to increasing the semester in this school by three extra days due to inclement weather before the winter break. This allowed the students to complete some of the assignments for *American Born Chinese* including an essay with the following writing prompt: “Describe an experience where you have been stereotyped because of the way you looked, the way you dressed, or the things you have said or believed.” This was also an opportunity for the third and final focus group to be interviewed. The class time was more relaxed than before the holidays. The desks were still placed in small groups and the students were working together on completing an activity packet related to the graphic novel. Also during this time, the final focus group left for their interview. While they were out, Mr. Grayson had some questions of his own for the class.

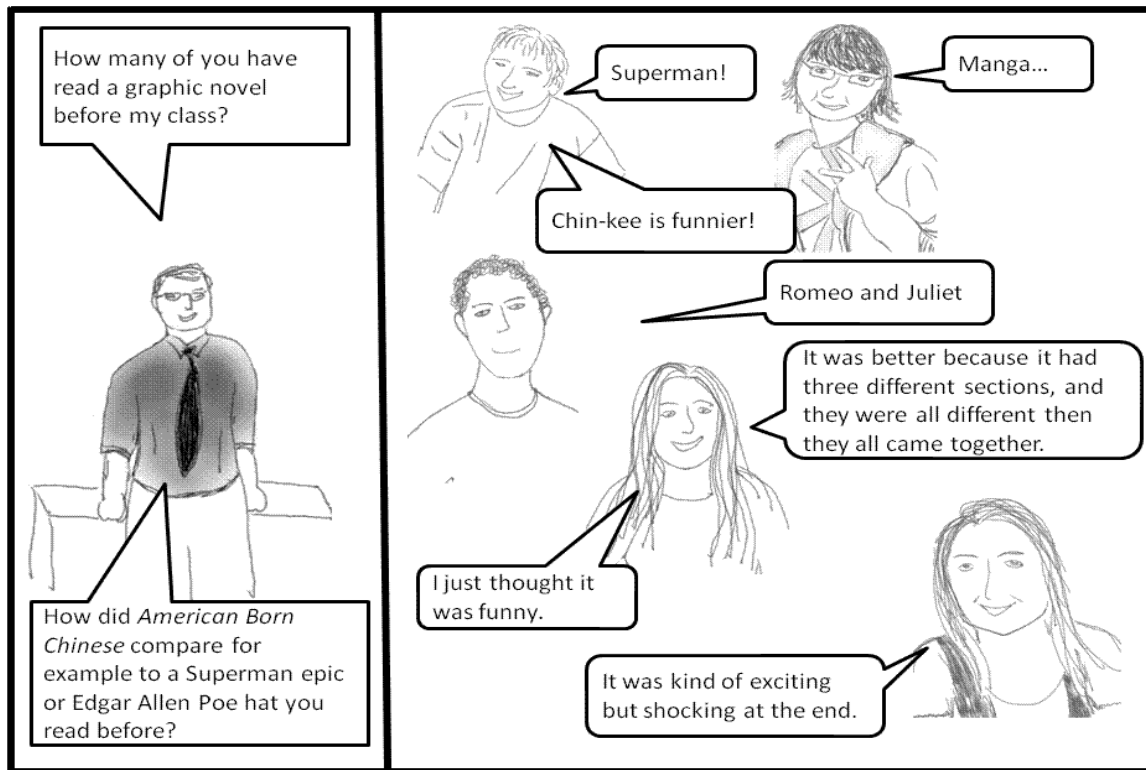


Figure 4.113 Grayson, Mark, Jake, James, Morgan, Robin, 2011, Observation 13

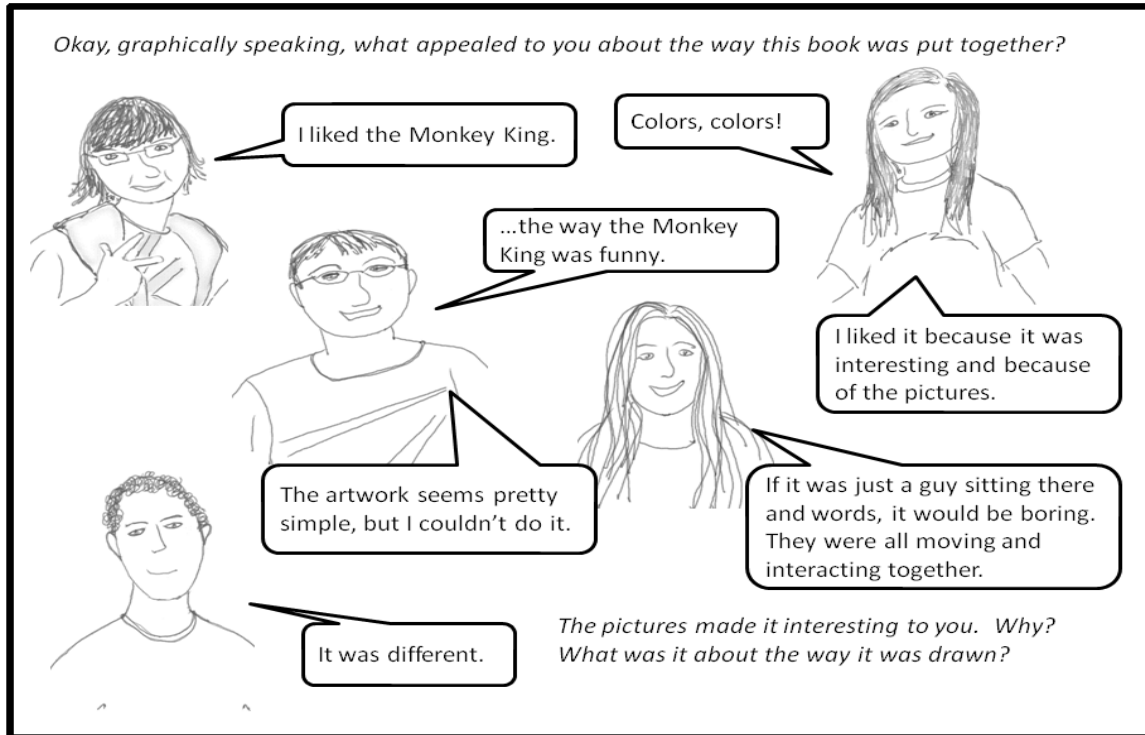


Figure 4.114 Jake, Kirk, James, Morgan, Cathy, 2011, Observation 13

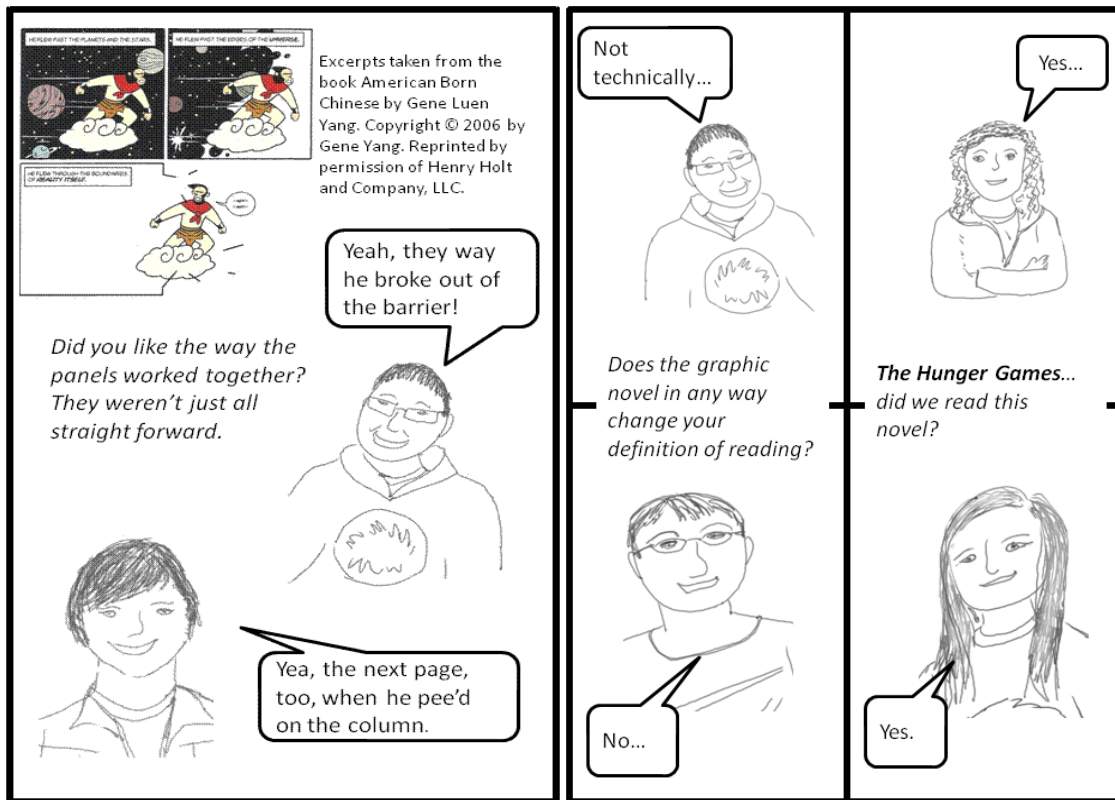


Figure 4.115 Travis, John, Kirk, Sophia, Cathy, 2011, Observation 13



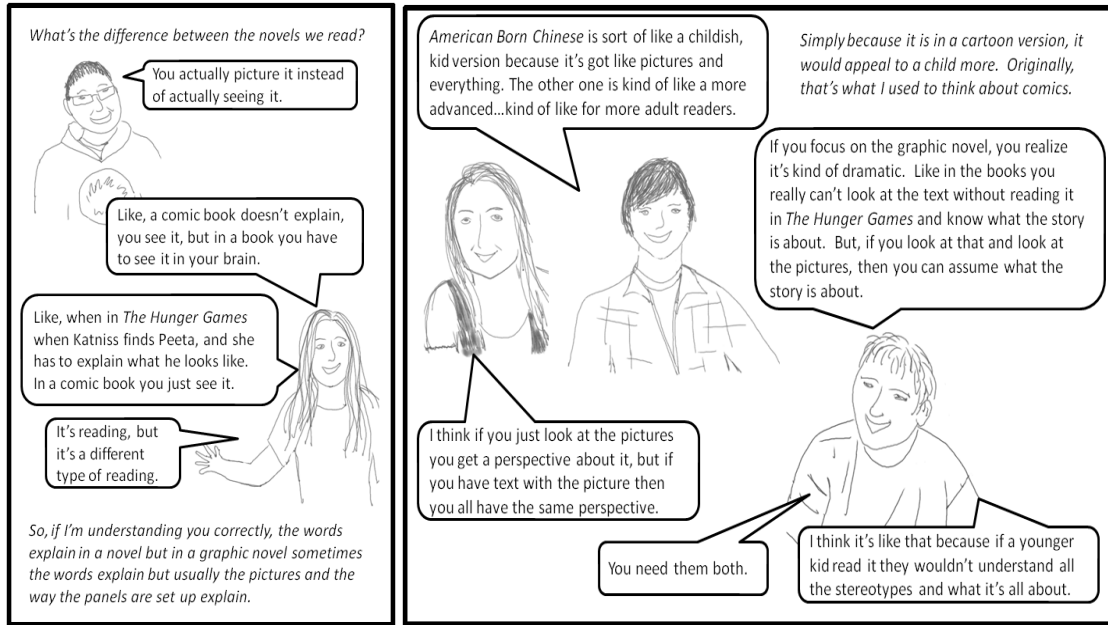


Figure 4.116 John, Morgan, Robin, Travis, Mark, 2011, Observation 13

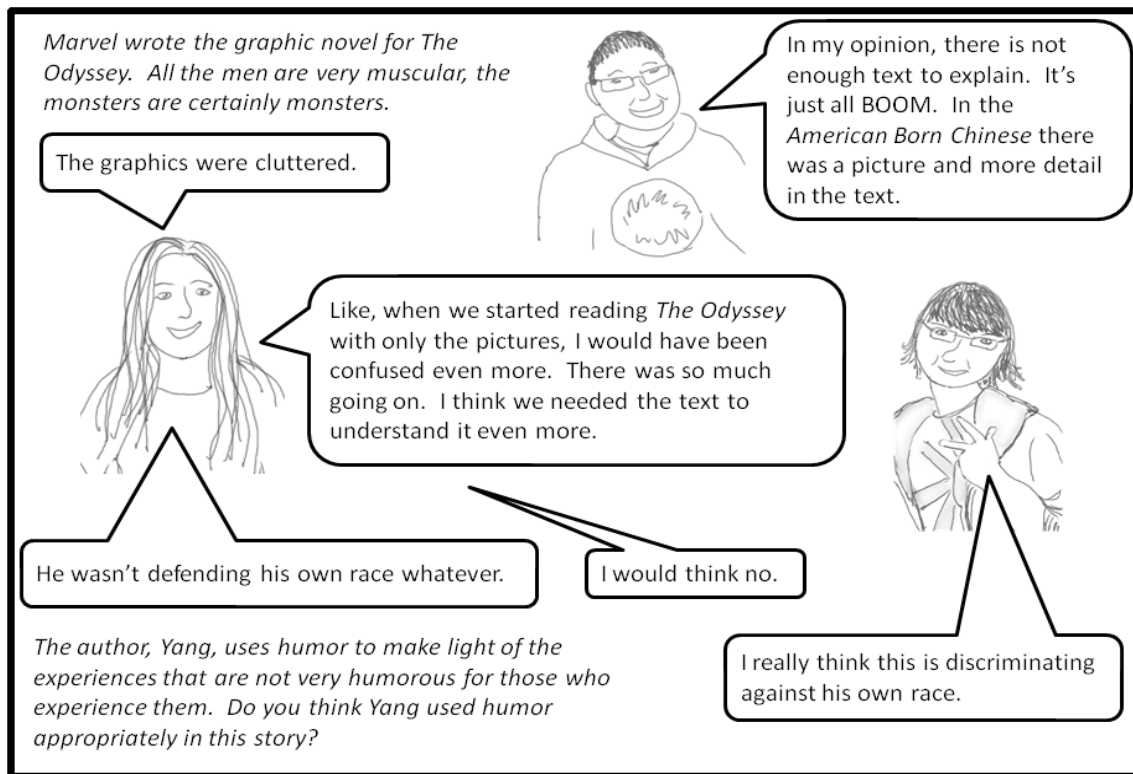


Figure 4.117 Morgan, John, Jake, 2011, Observation 13

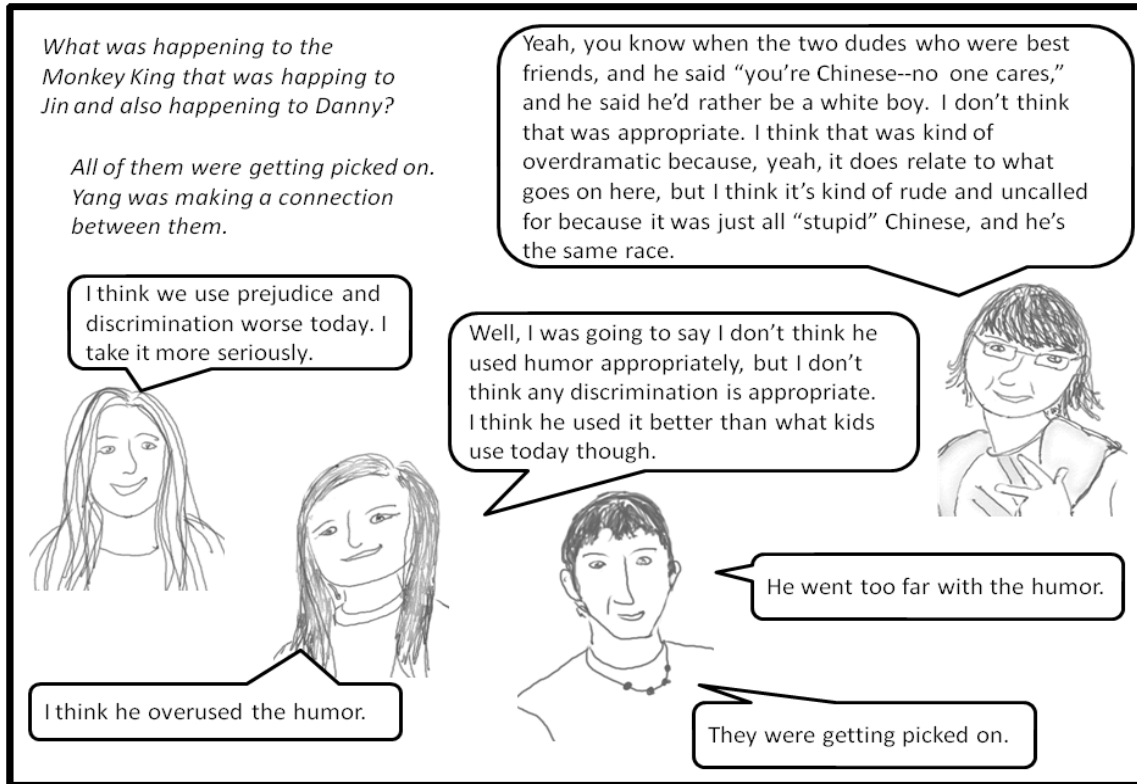


Figure 4.118 Morgan, Cathy, Jared, Jake, 2011, Observation 13

Because of the extension of the semester after the holidays, it was a bit difficult to keep the class focused. However, it did give time to begin a conversation related to some of the issues found in *American Born Chinese*. The dialogue began while the focus group was out, but it continued when those students returned. This was carried into the next observation and continued the investigation into the students' insights into racial stereotyping.

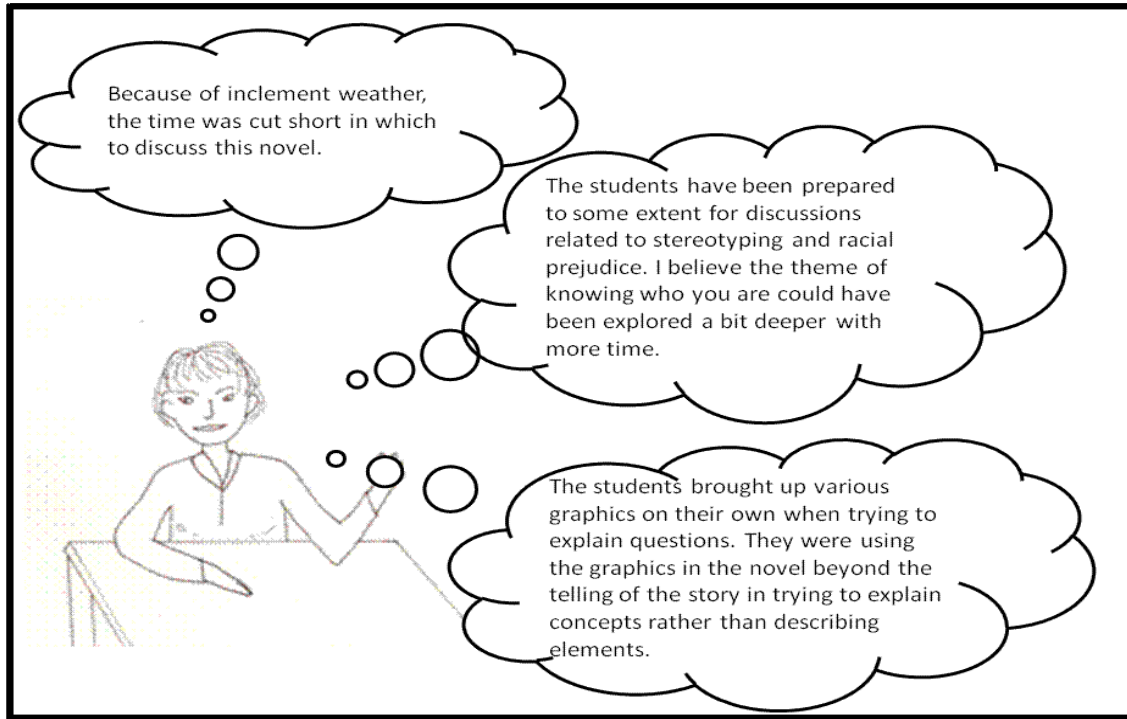


Figure 4.119 Greene, 2011, Reflections to Observation 13

**Observation 14.** This final observation was a combination of final exam and class discussion. The final exam included a packet of short answer questions related to the graphic novel *American Born Chinese*. The class discussion developed over the remaining class time as an attempt to de-brief the students following the case study and understand their point of view following this experience. Several important issues came forward as a result of this discussion.

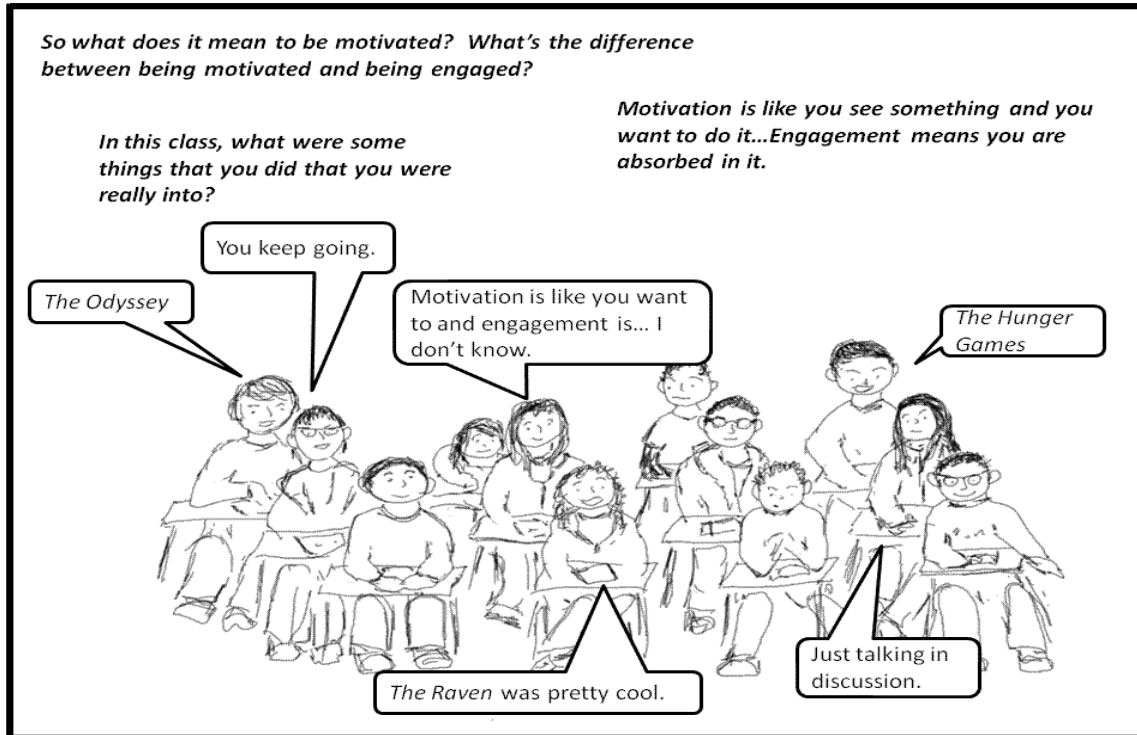


Figure 4.120 Travis, Jake, Morgan, Sophia, Mark, Mary, 2011, Observation 14

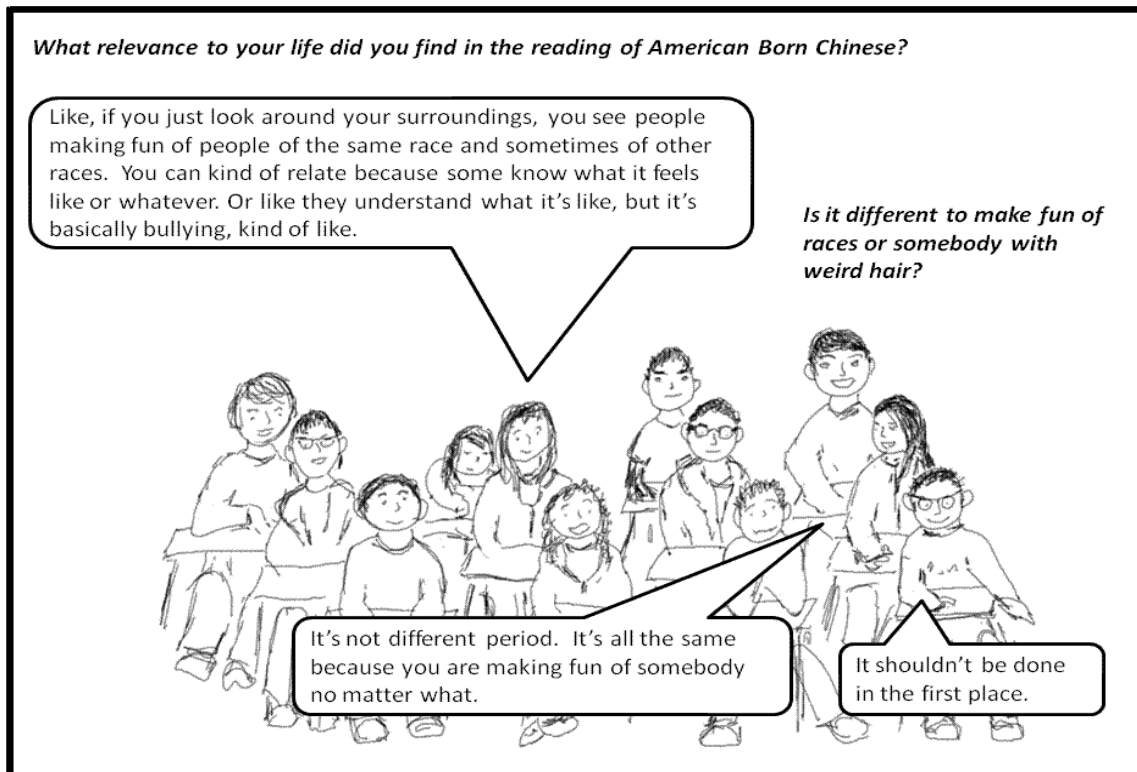


Figure 4.121 Morgan, Mary, John, 2011, Observation 14

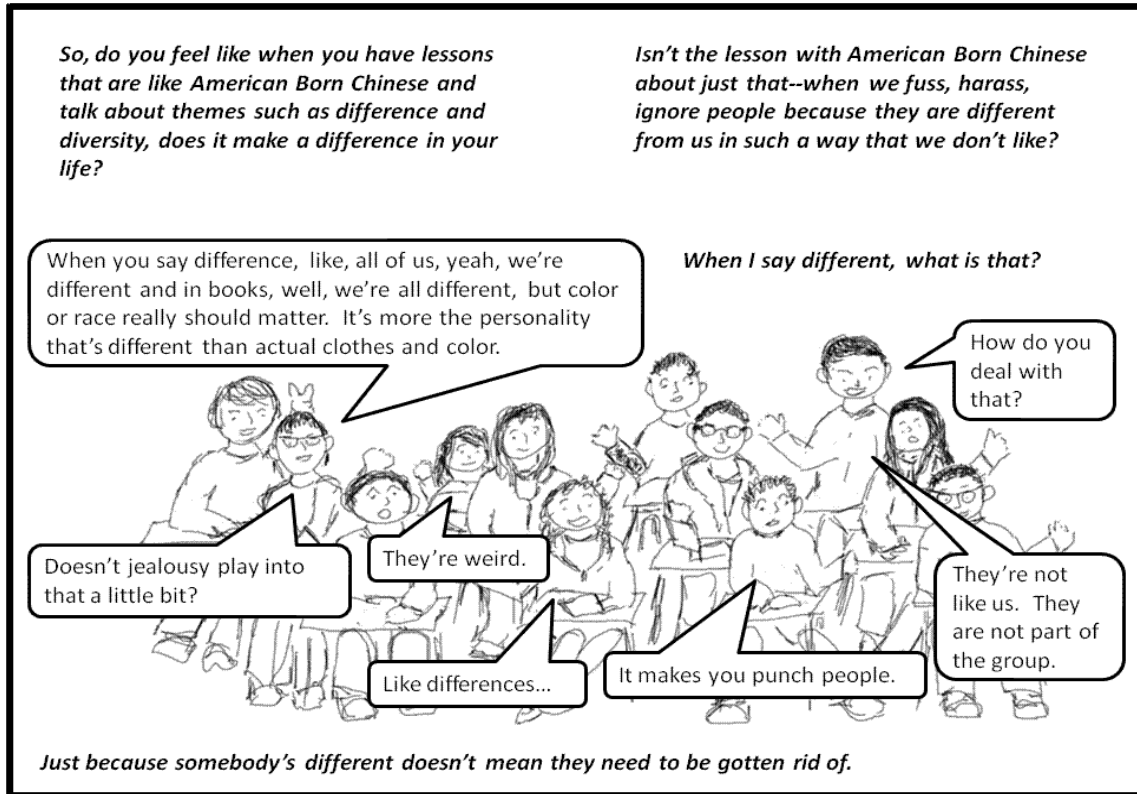


Figure 4.122 Jake, Travis, Sophia, Brad, Mark, 2011, Observation 14

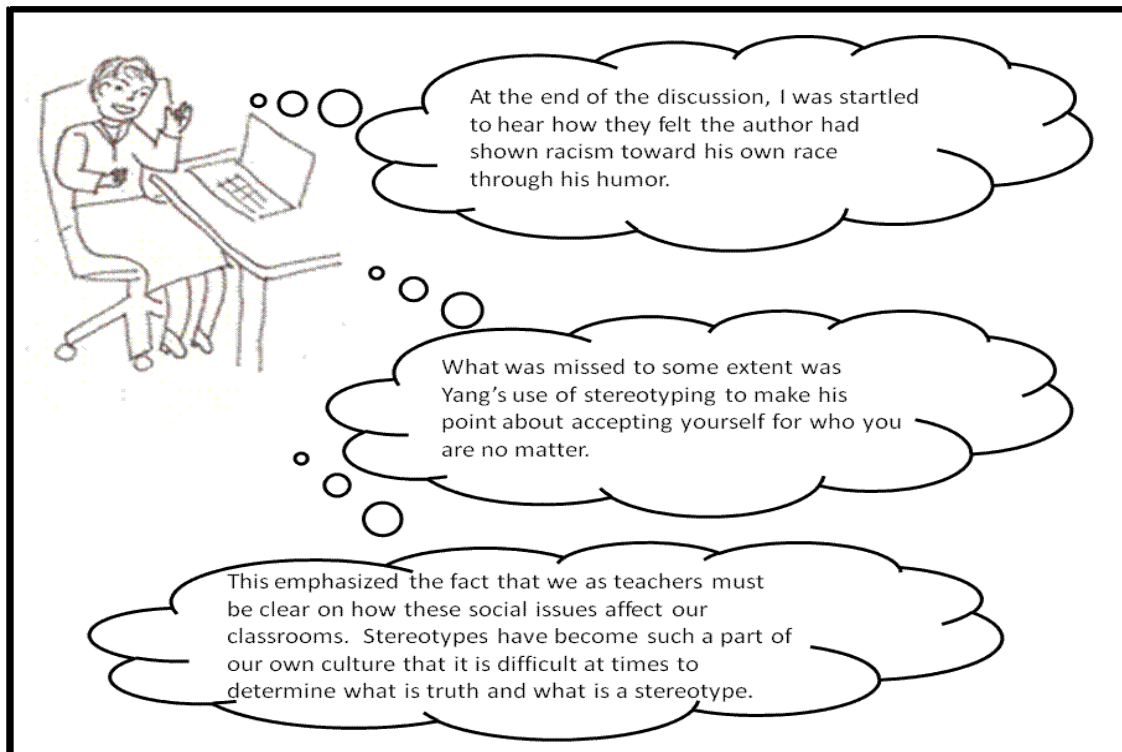


Figure 4.123 Greene, 2011, Reflections to Observation 14

### **Focus Group Interviews**

The focus groups in this study were used to provide supplementary data and allowed the observer to have the opportunity to ask direct questions of the students in a smaller, less restricted setting than might have been perceived in the classroom. Three focus groups were selected at random over the course of the study. Eventually, all of the twenty-four students were involved in one of the focus group sessions scheduled at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. Morgan (1997) suggests that “there is a trade-off—between the naturalness of observations in a field setting and the ability to collect a concentrated set of interactions in a very short span of time via focus groups”. In this case, the expectation of the focus groups was to supplement the rich data from the observations and support the purposes for this study as one means of triangulation of data.

**Focus group 1.** Prior to this session, a classroom had been designated in which to hold the focus group session. It was a typical classroom in the same building as Mr. Grayson’s but found on a different floor. A series of questions were developed prior to the study to help target the discussion on questions designed to support the research questions related to the study. A limited sense of trust was developed within this first focus group which provided a setting that allowed for more honest and straightforward responses. There was some hesitancy to answer within the group members and some probing by the interviewer was required.

The nature of qualitative research requires that at times additional questions must be asked in order to pursue a line of thinking expressed by a student or even to refocus the group back to the target questions as was necessary during these focus group

interviews as well. The members of Focus Group 1 included five girls and three boys. This group occurred very early in the set of observations. Because of their initial hesitancy to respond the students tended to give short one or two word answers. While all of the participating students understood that focus group sessions would happen over the course of the semester, none of the students were particularly interested in being a part of the very first session. One of the students in particular was reluctant to take part in the session but begrudgingly agreed in the end. His attitude seemed to affect the others at first, but they also tended to eventually not be bothered or influenced by his reluctance to respond or be a part of this first interview. In the end, this particular student did participate and responded to some direct questions. It was felt that all the students answered honestly though some were guarded in their responses. All three of the focus group sessions began with a brief outline of the ground rules that included acceptance of individual responses and followed with the previously developed slate of questions.



Figure 4.124 Cathy, Evan, Susan, 2010, Focus Group 1

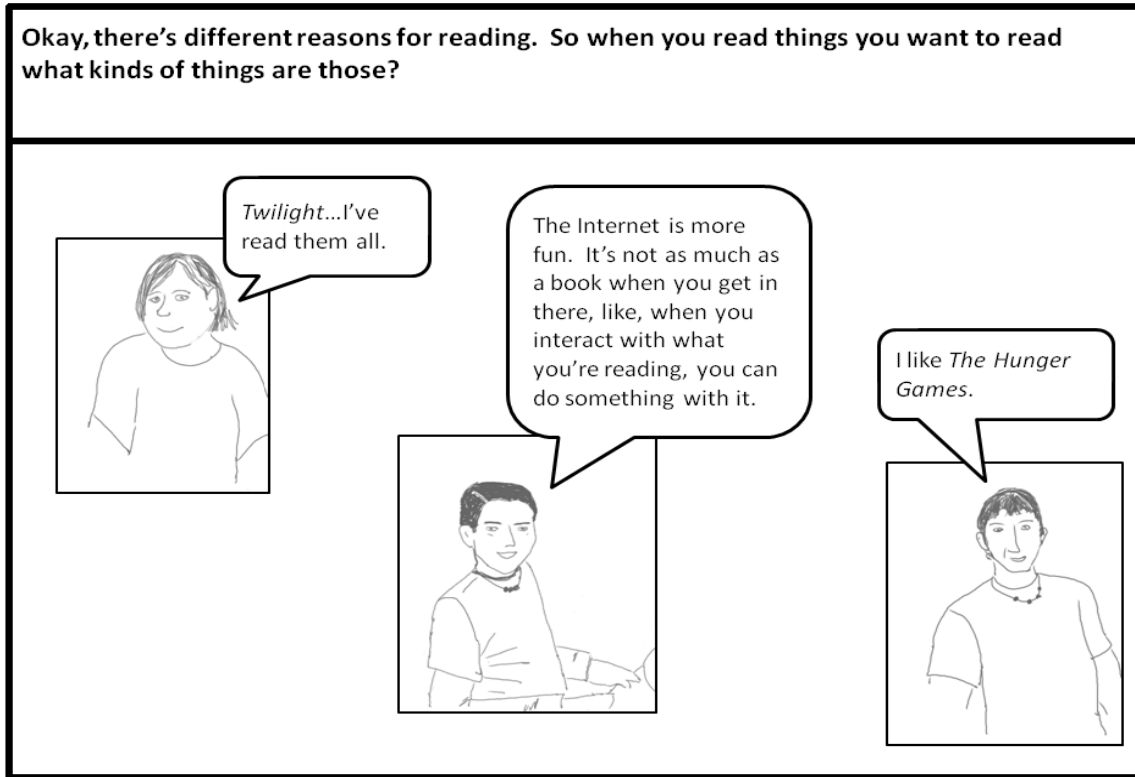


Figure 4.125 Faith, James, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1

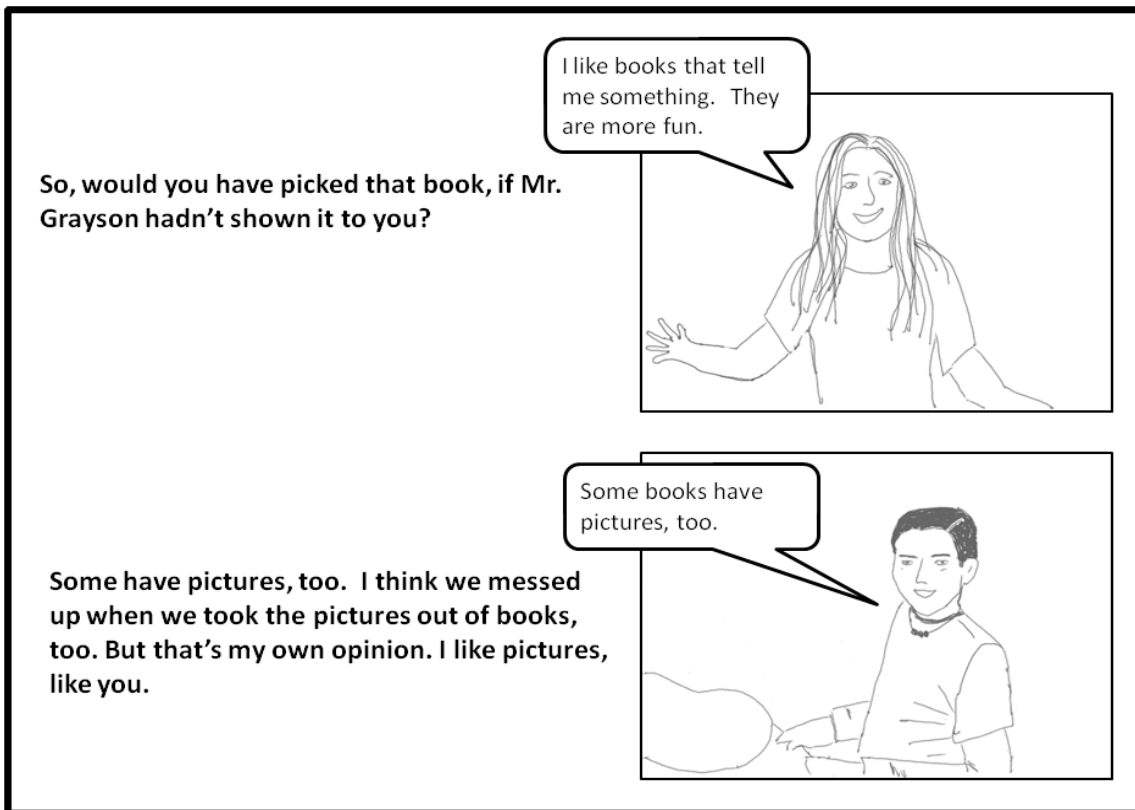


Figure 4.126 Morgan, James, 2010, Focus Group 1



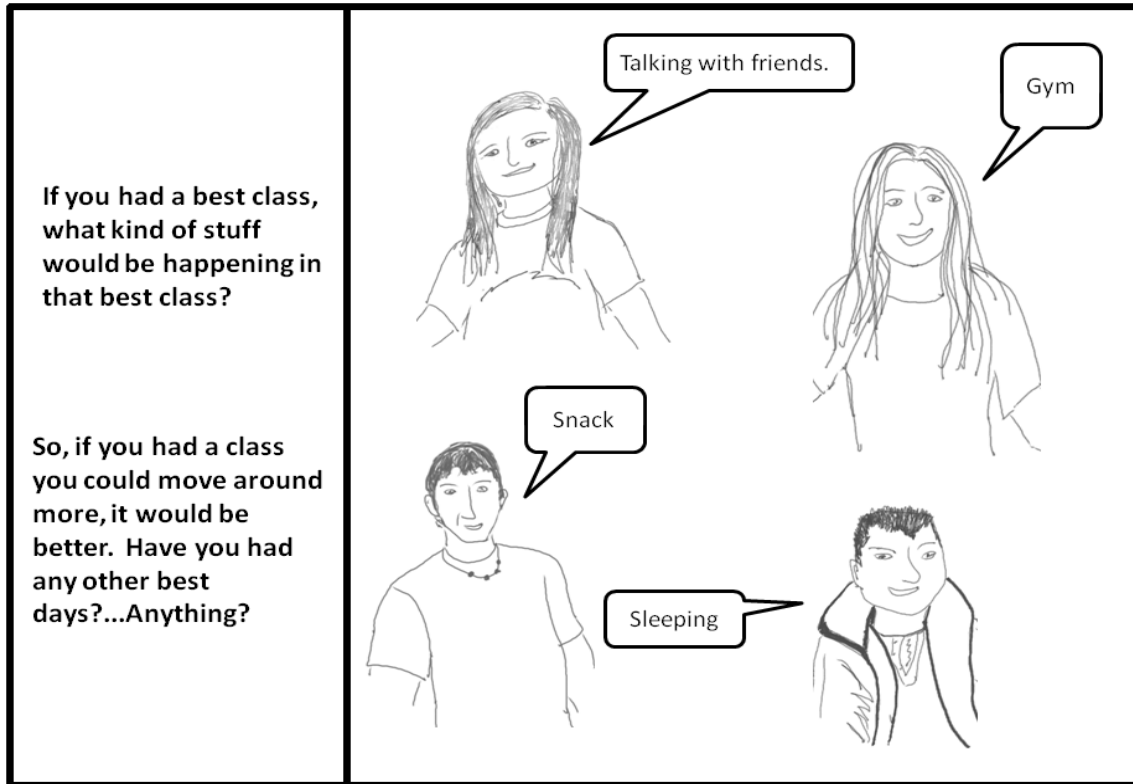


Figure 4.127 Cathy, Jared, Morgan, Evan, 2010, Focus Group 1

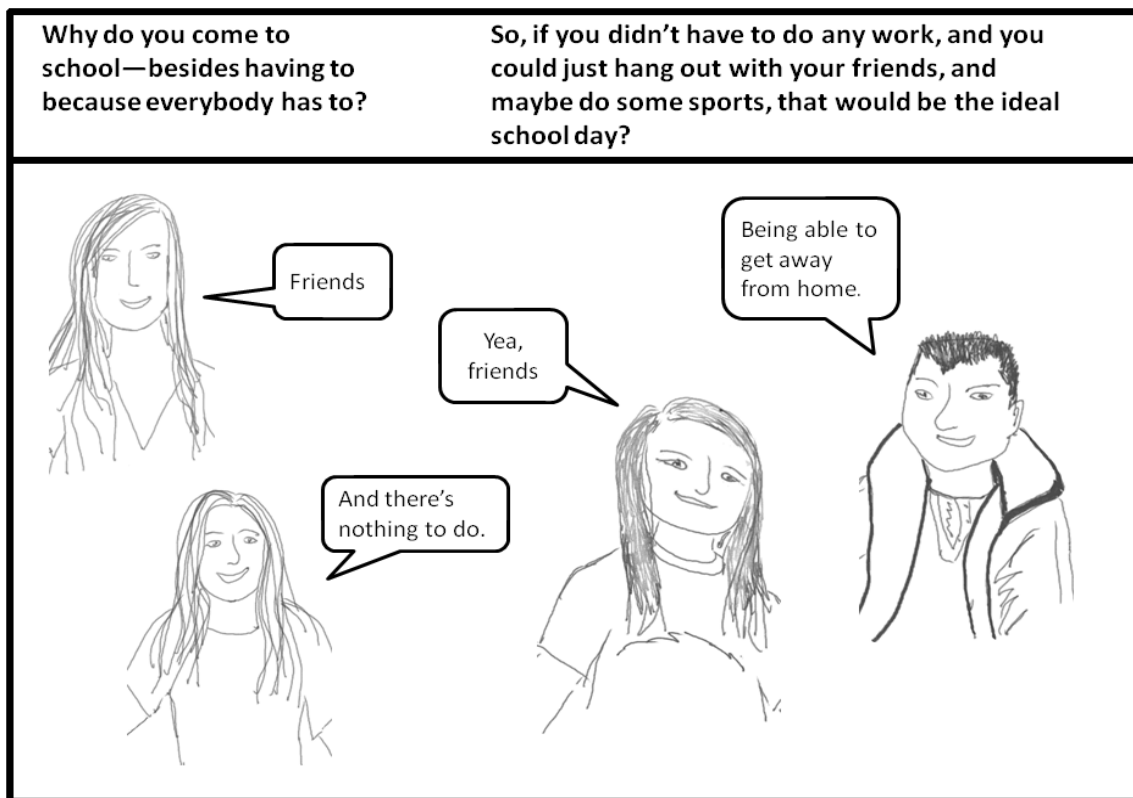


Figure 4.128 Susan, Morgan, Cathy, Evan, 2010, Focus Group 1

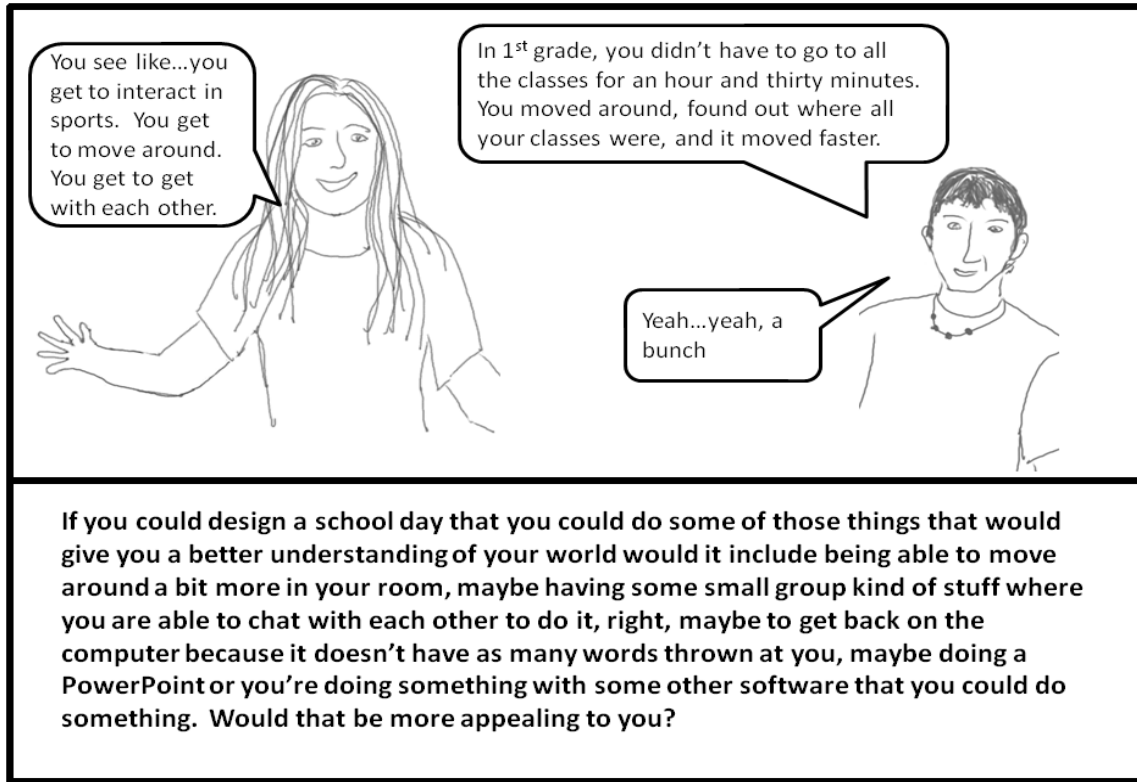


Figure 4.129 Morgan, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1

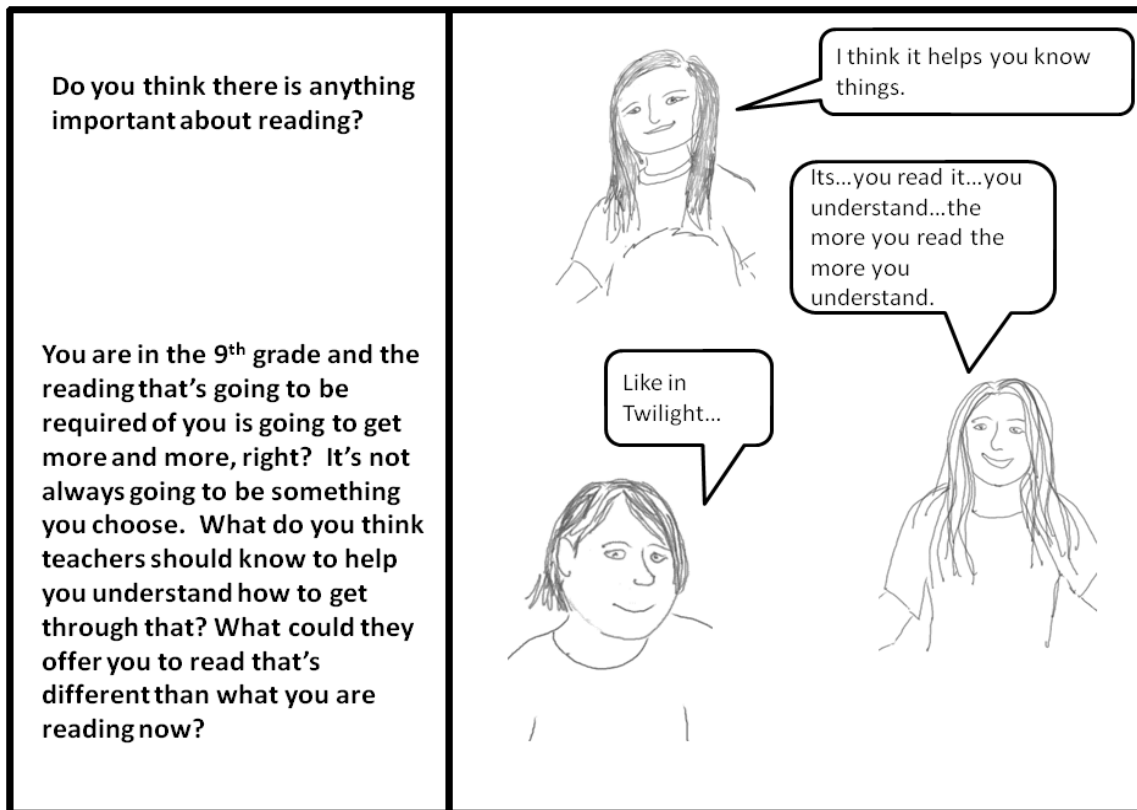


Figure 4.130 Cathy, Faith, Morgan, 2010, Focus Group 1

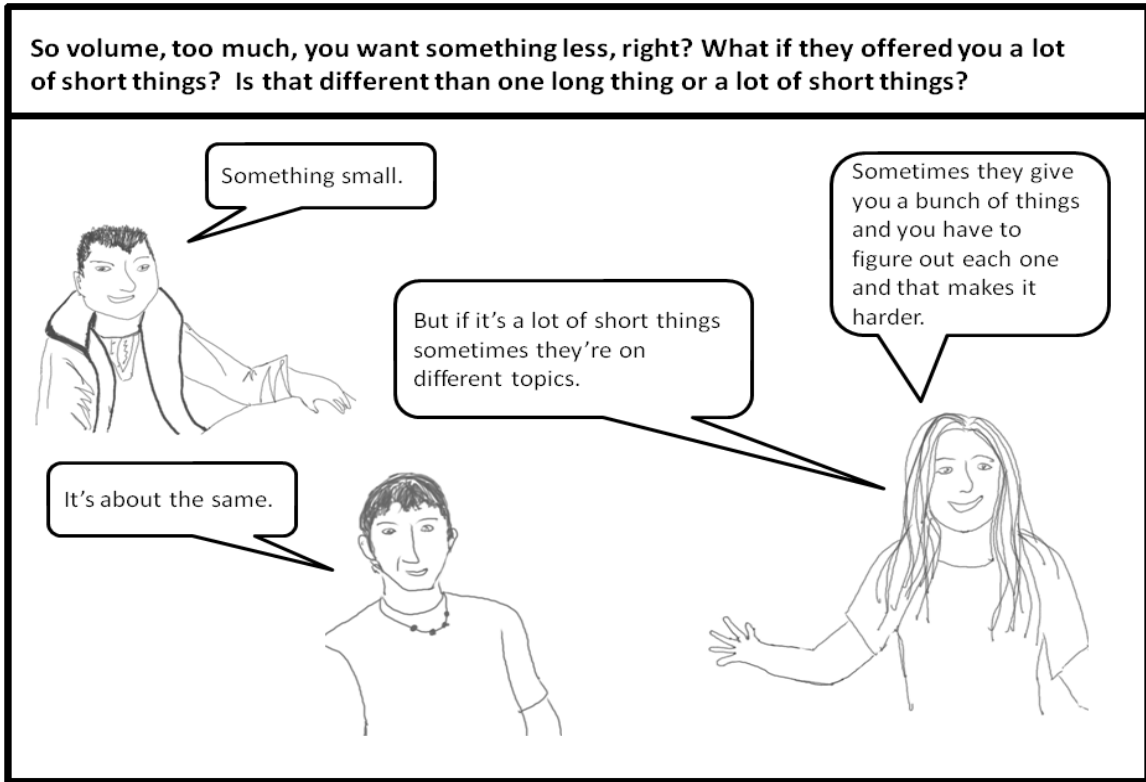


Figure 4.131 Evan, Jared, Morgan, 2010, Focus Group 1

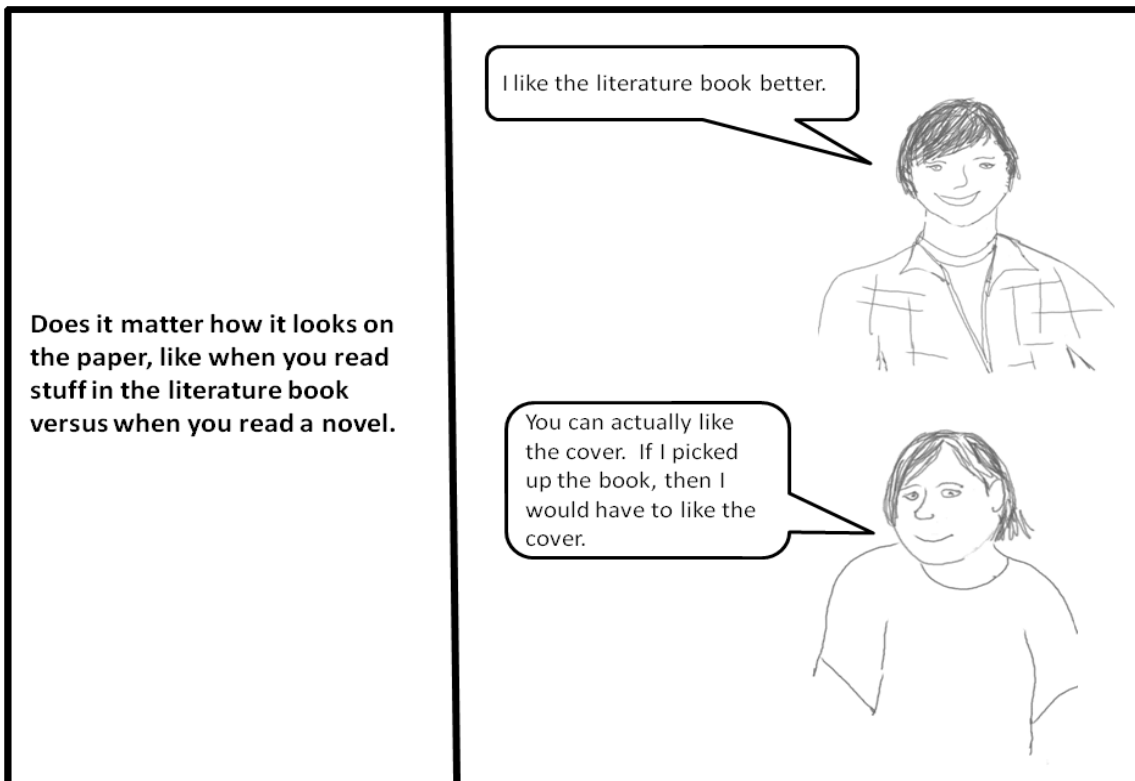


Figure 4.132 Faith, Travis, 2010, Focus Group 1

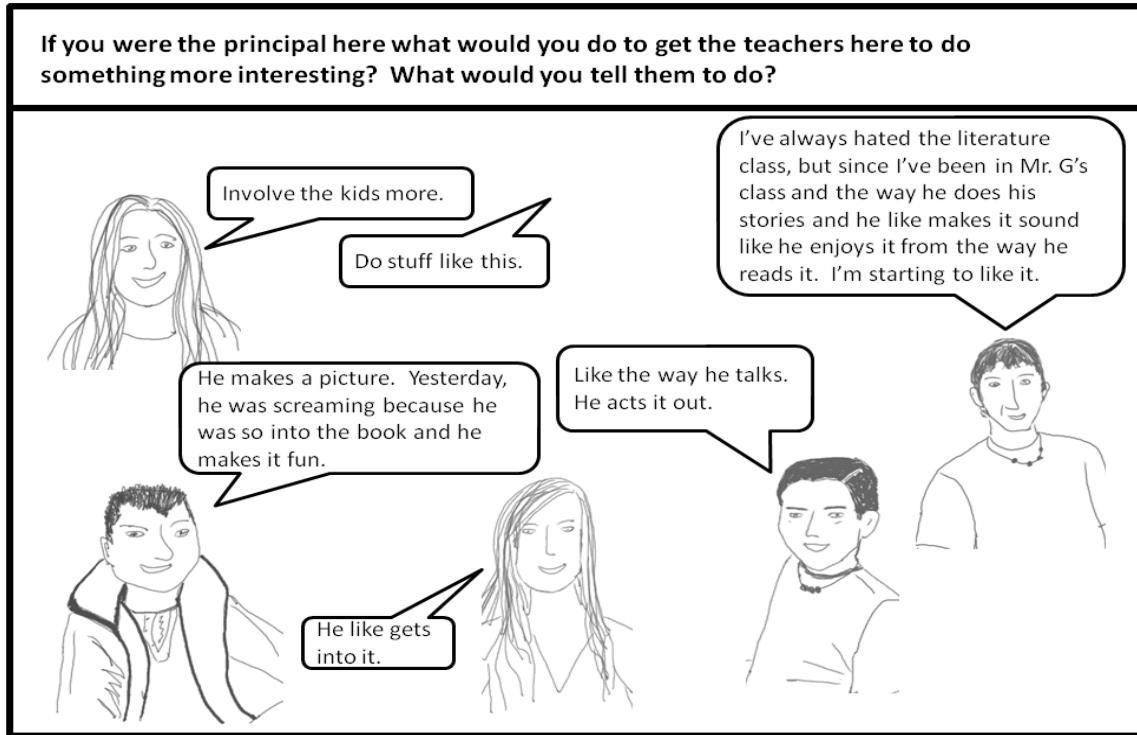


Figure 4.133 Morgan, Evan, Susan, James, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1

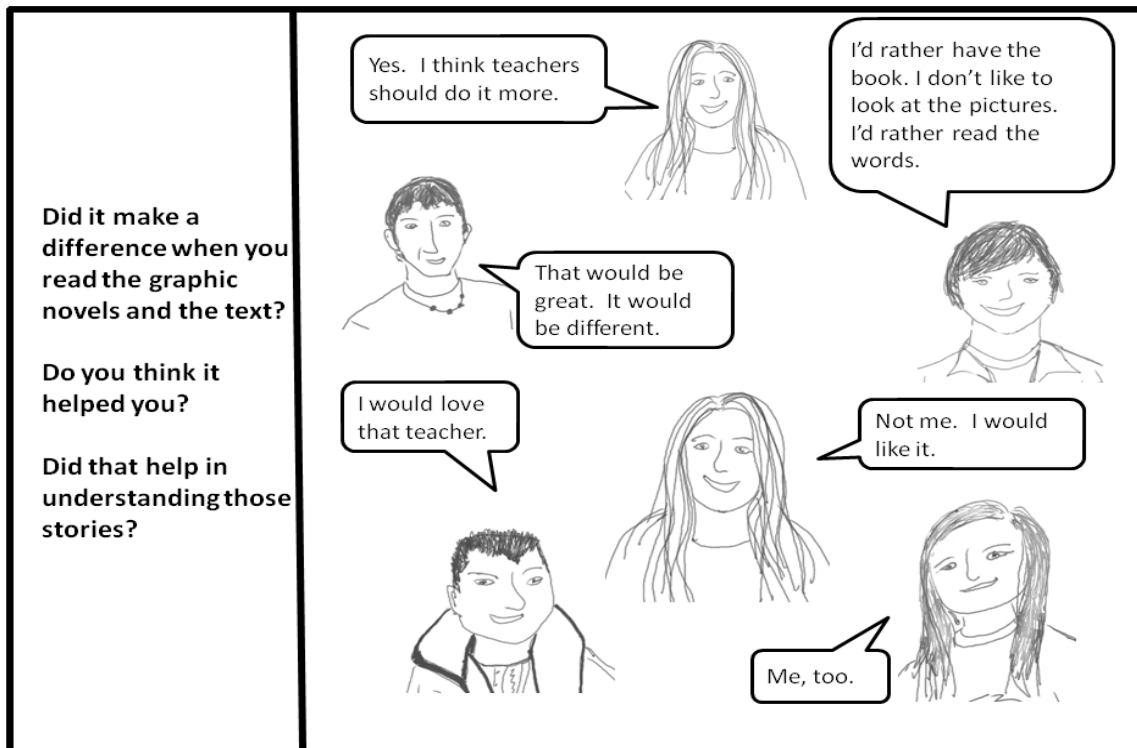


Figure 4.134 Jared, Evan, Morgan, Cathy, Travis, 2010, Focus Group 1

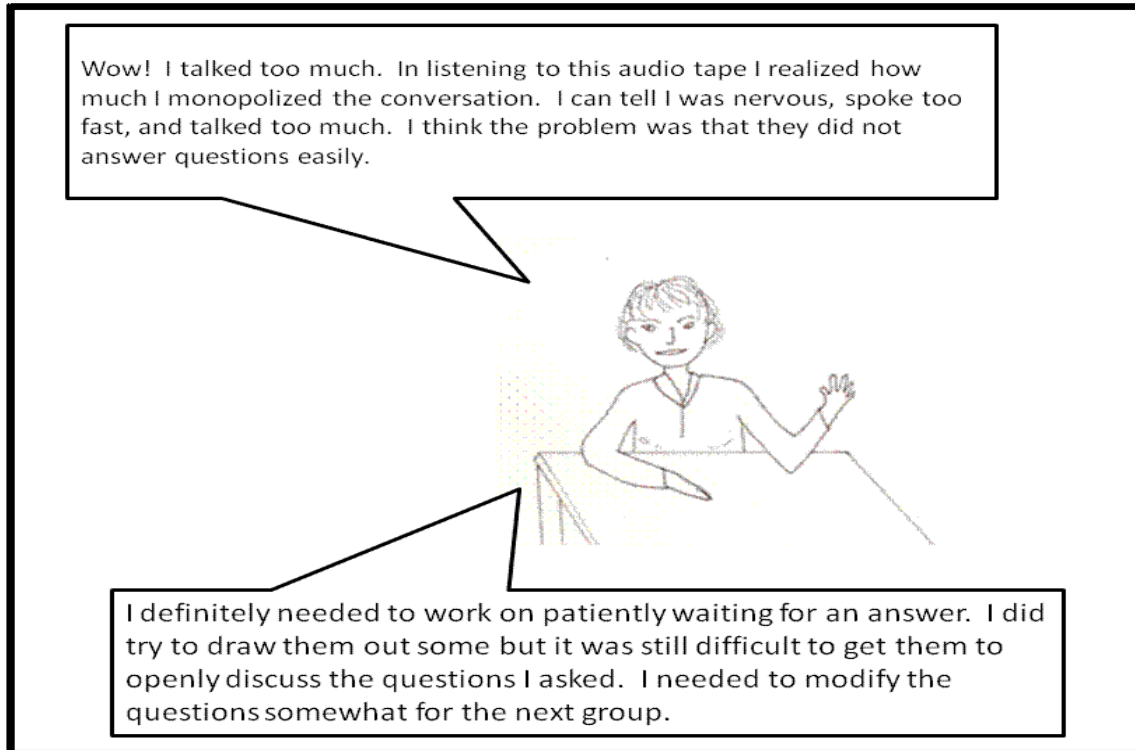


Figure 4.135 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Focus Group 1

**Focus group 2.** This second focus group occurred following the reading of *Romeo and Juliet*. Several observations had occurred and by this point the students appeared to accept the observer and the recording devices as part of the classroom. This particular focus group was quite different from the first in that the students were much more animated and appeared very willing to participate in this discussion. This was apparent in the delight expressed by two male students in particular and the disappointment of several other class members when they were not chosen. Seven students were randomly chosen from those who had not participated in the first focus group. They included three girls and four boys. The same original questions were used to lead the discussion; however, in this group the responses to the original questions lead to several new and different questions primarily of interest to the students allowing the

conversation to drift as well as accelerate at times. This focus group began just as the first with a brief outline of the ground rules followed by the opening questions.

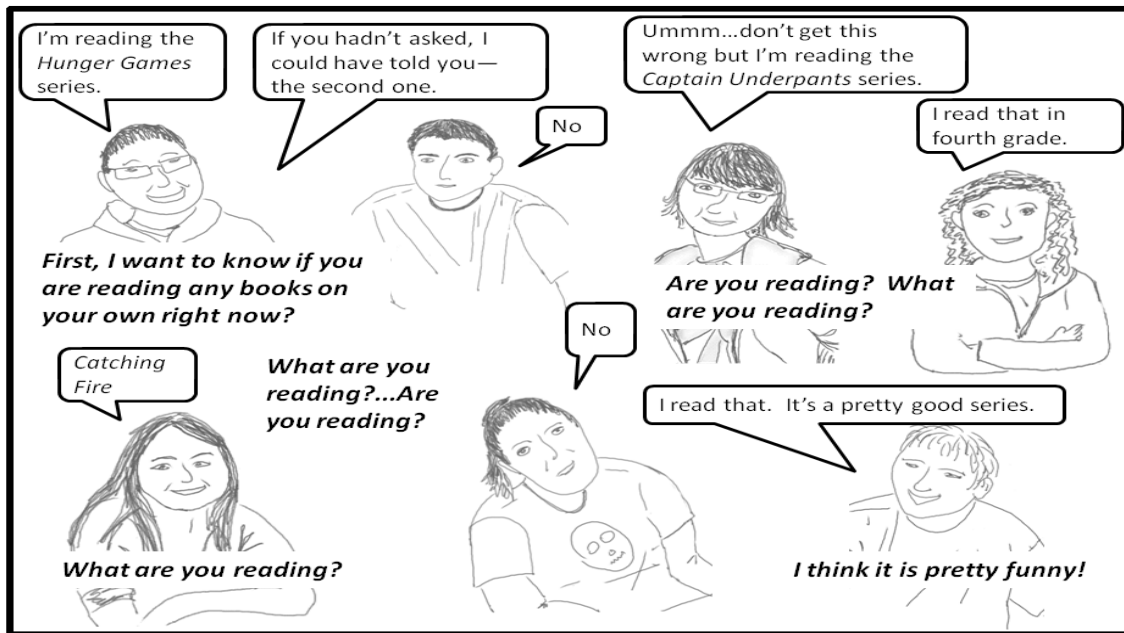


Figure 4.136 John, Alice, Sean, Karen, Jake, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2

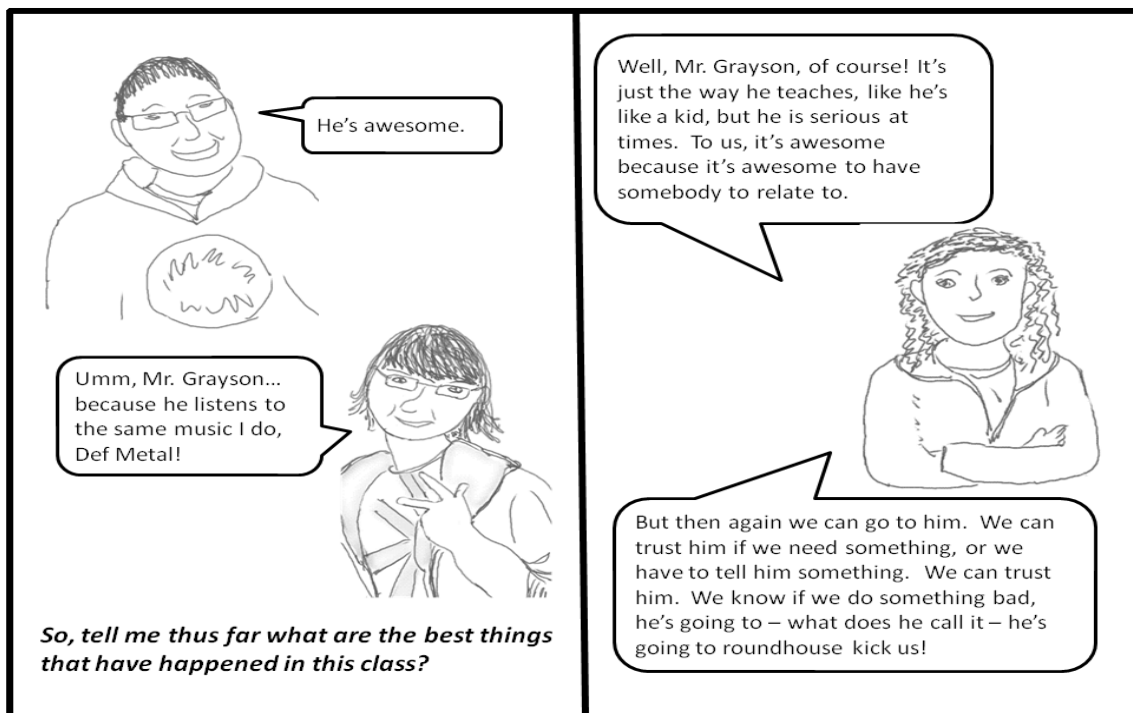


Figure 4.137 John, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2

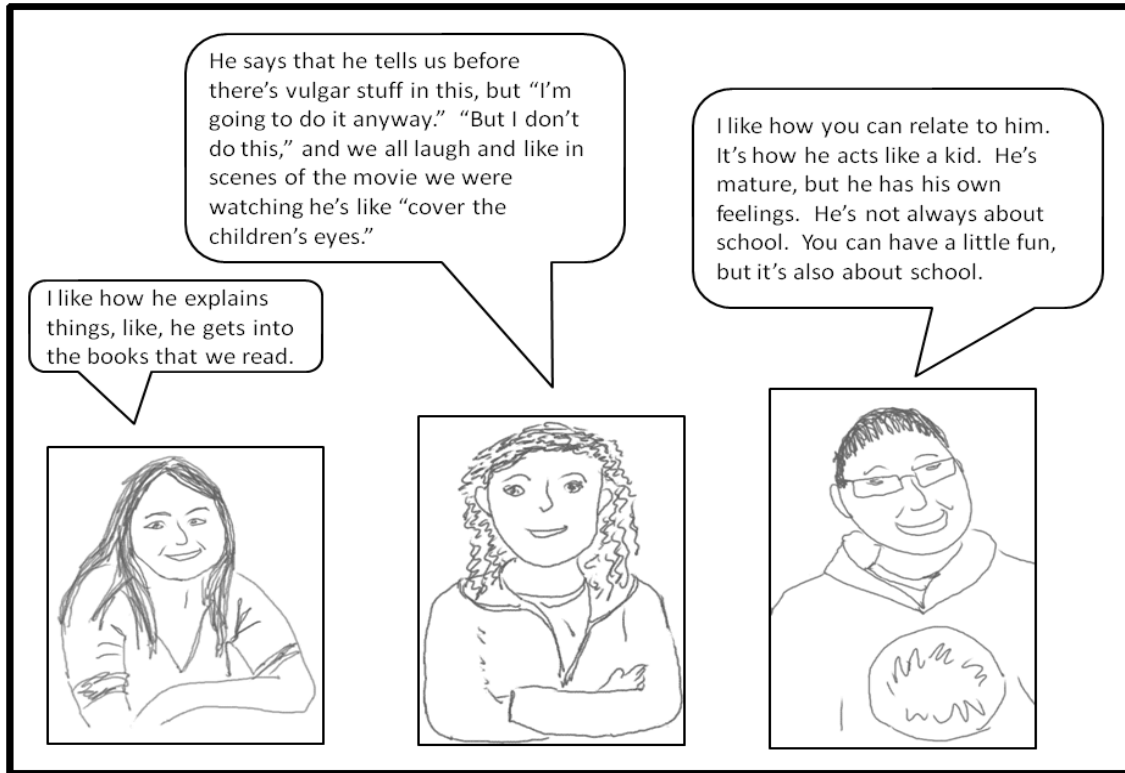


Figure 4.138 Alice, Sophia, John, 2010, Focus Group 2

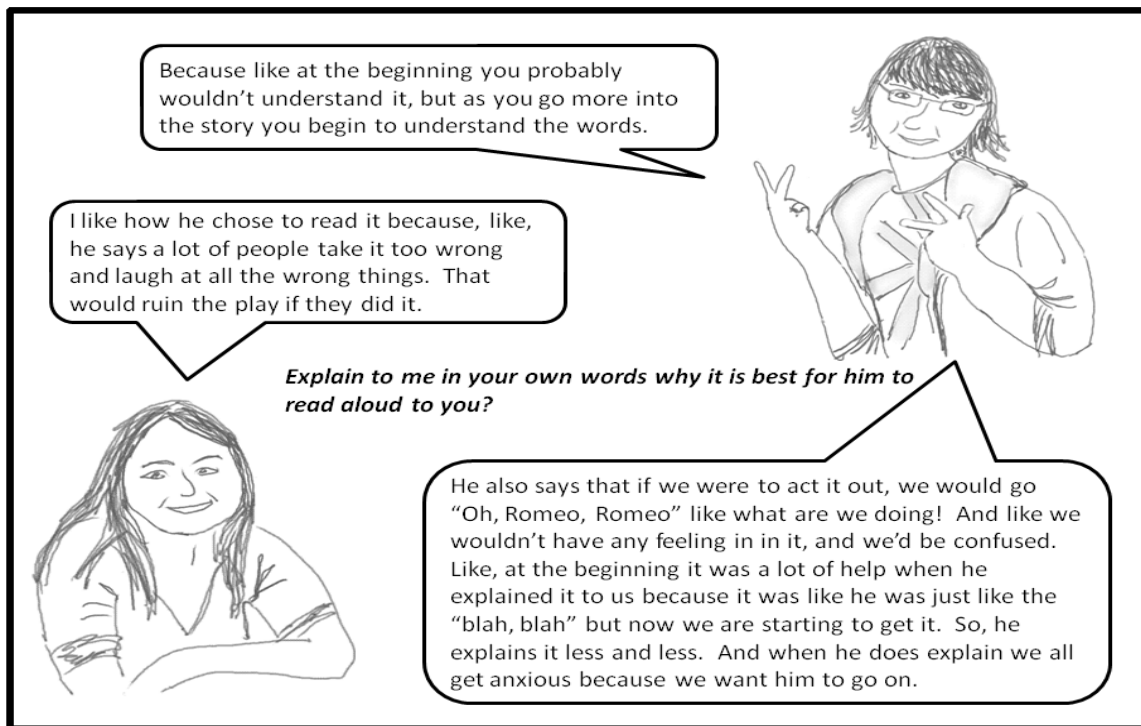


Figure 4.139 Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2

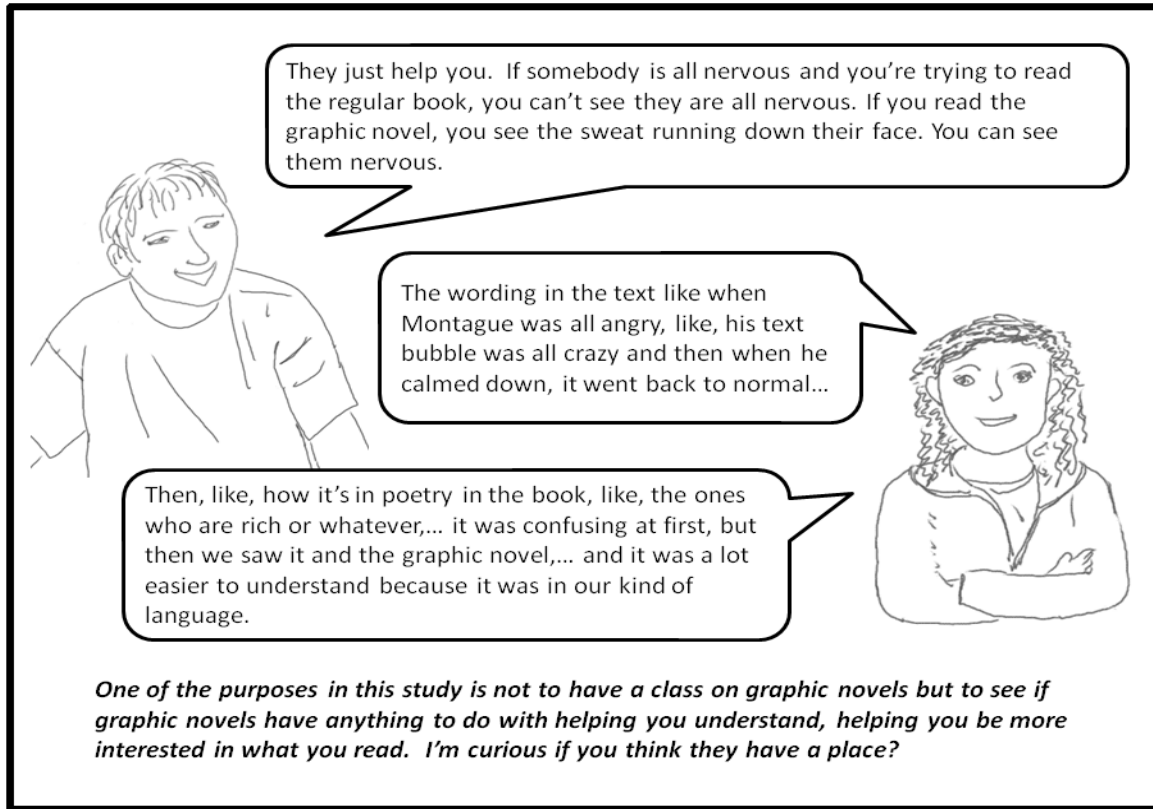


Figure 4.140 Mark, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2

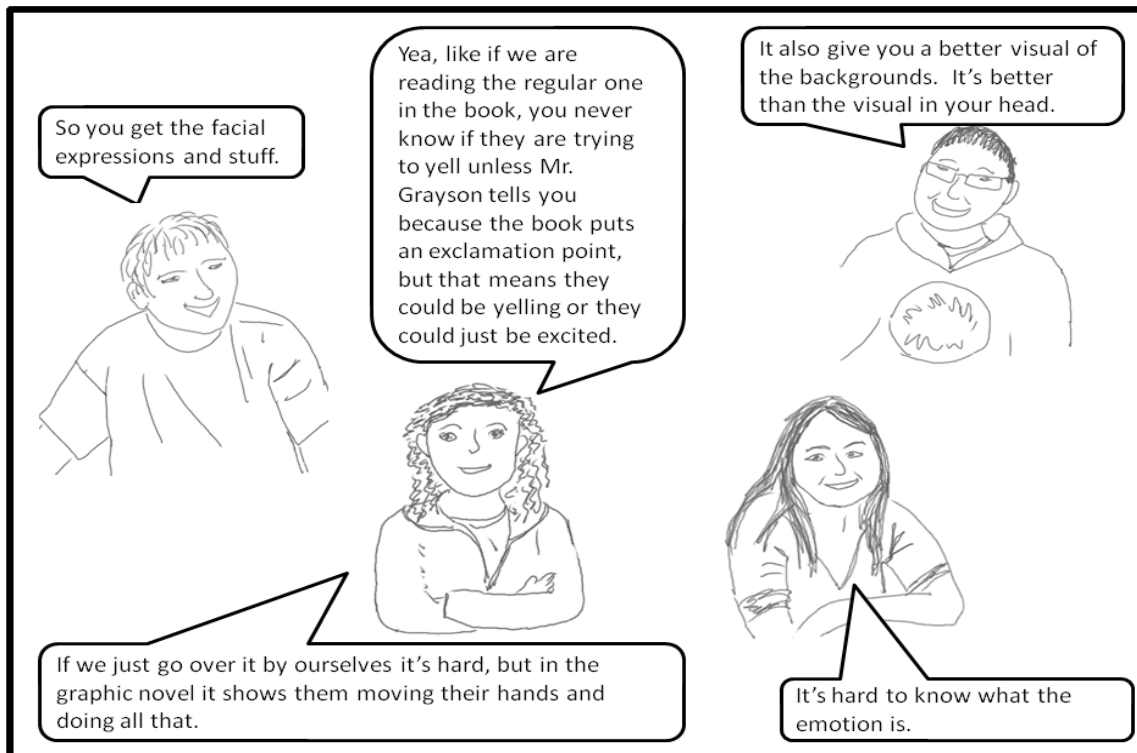


Figure 4.141 Mark, Sophia, Alice, John, 2010, Focus Group 2



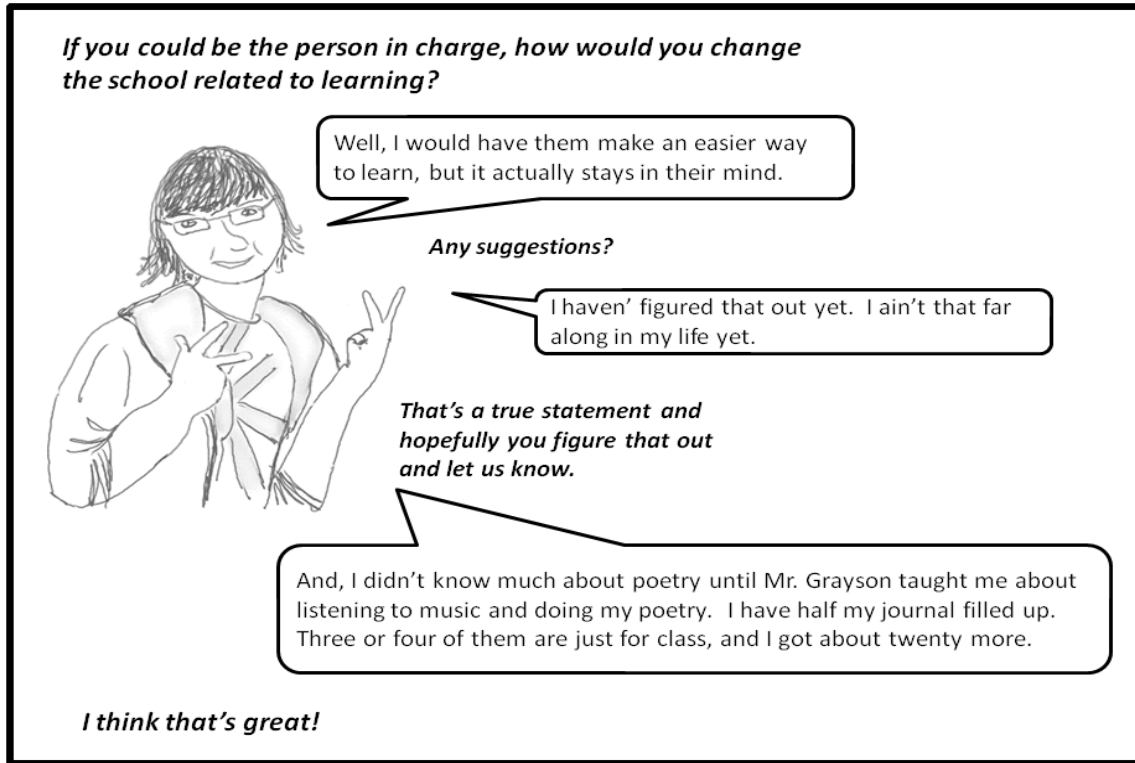


Figure 4.142 Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2

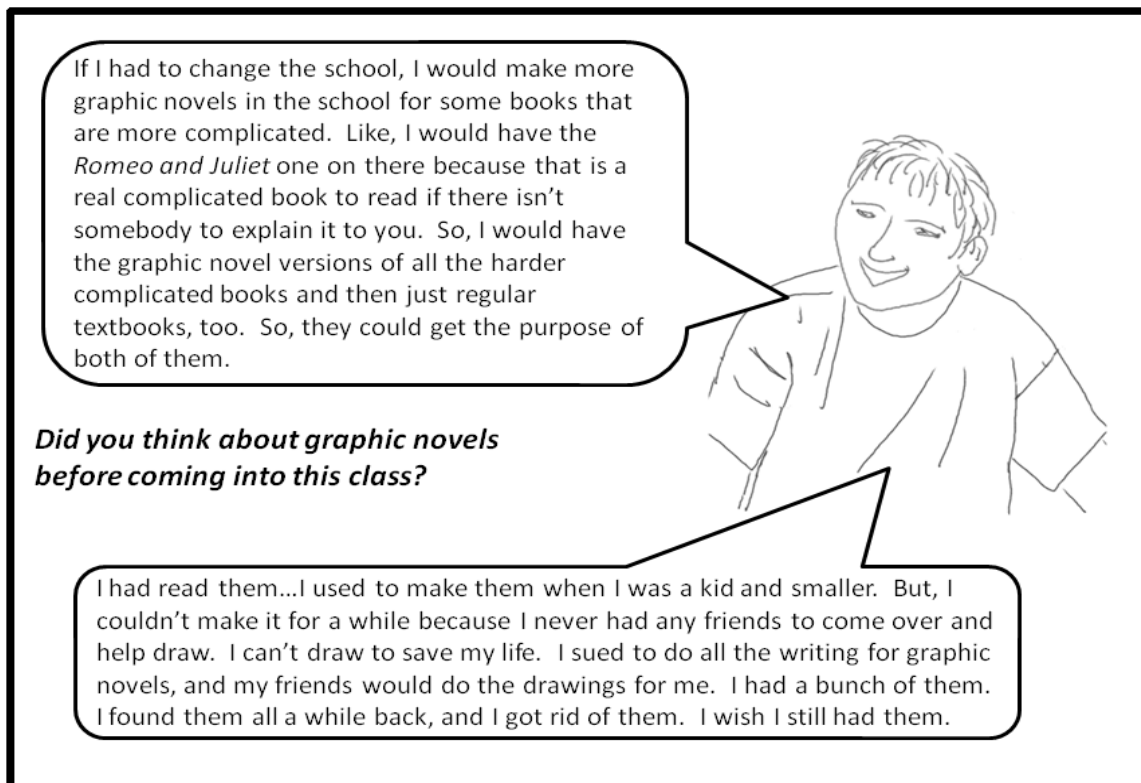


Figure 4.143 Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2

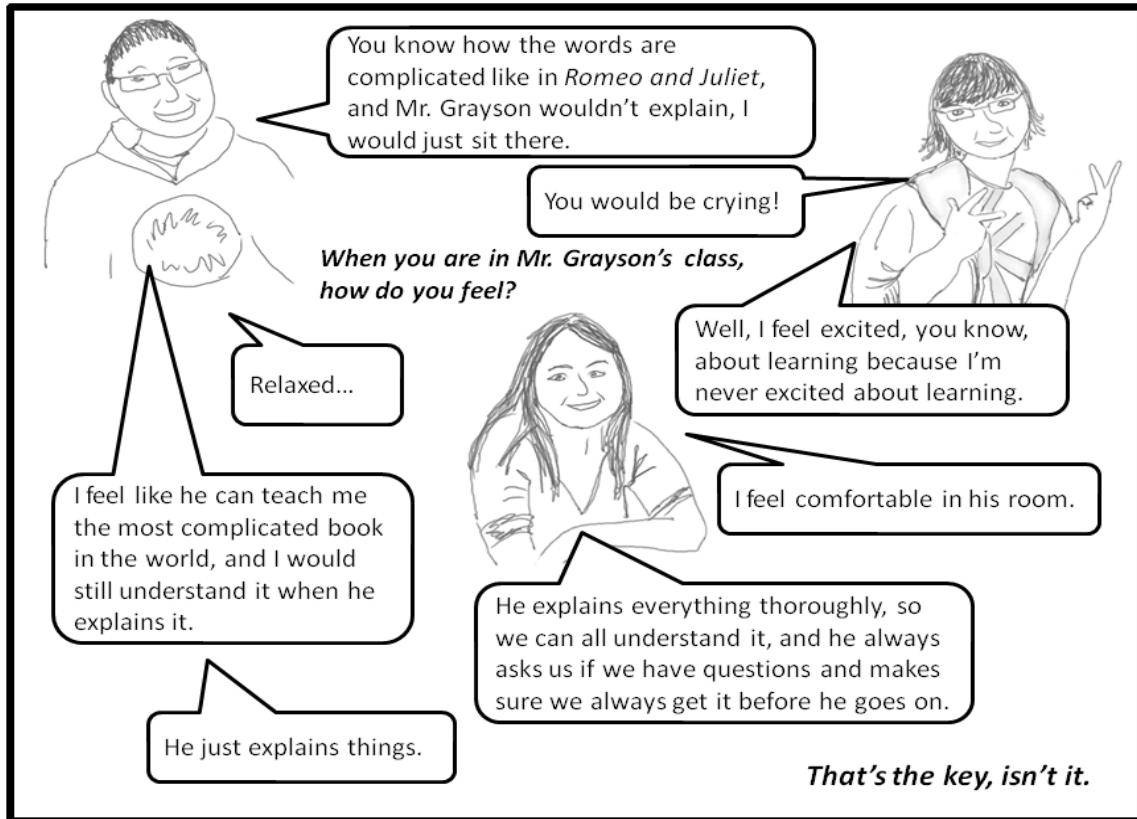


Figure 4.144 John, Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2

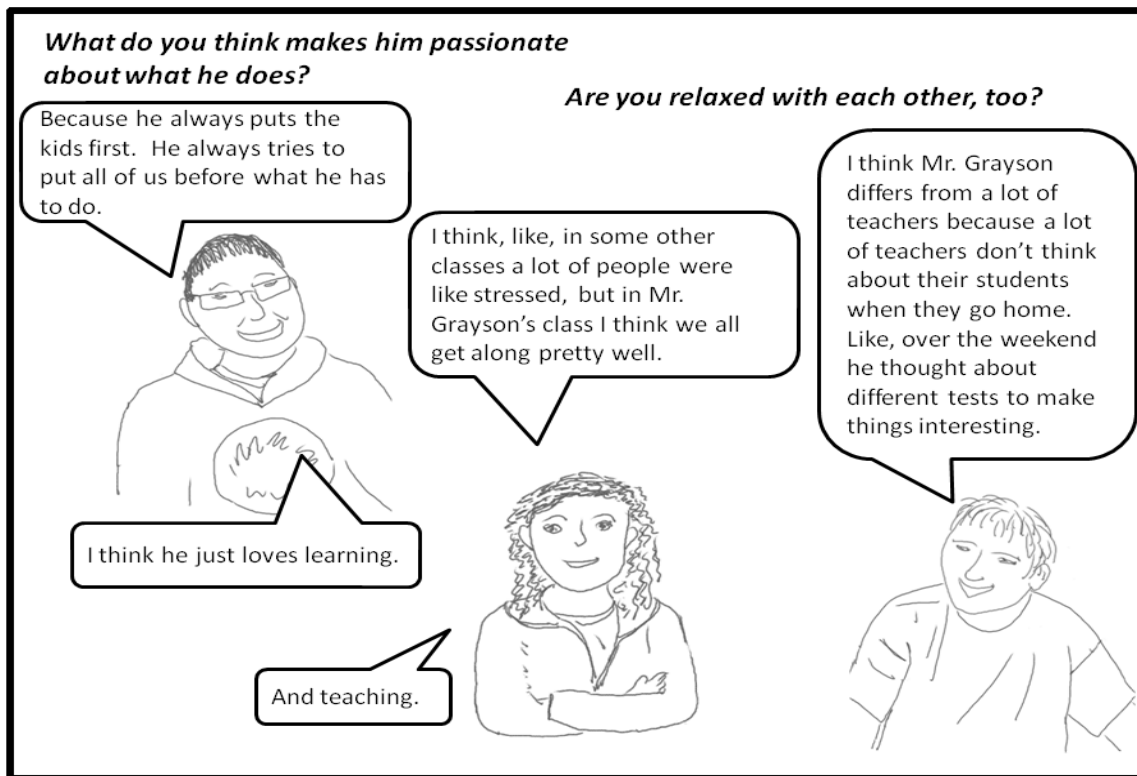


Figure 4.145 John, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2

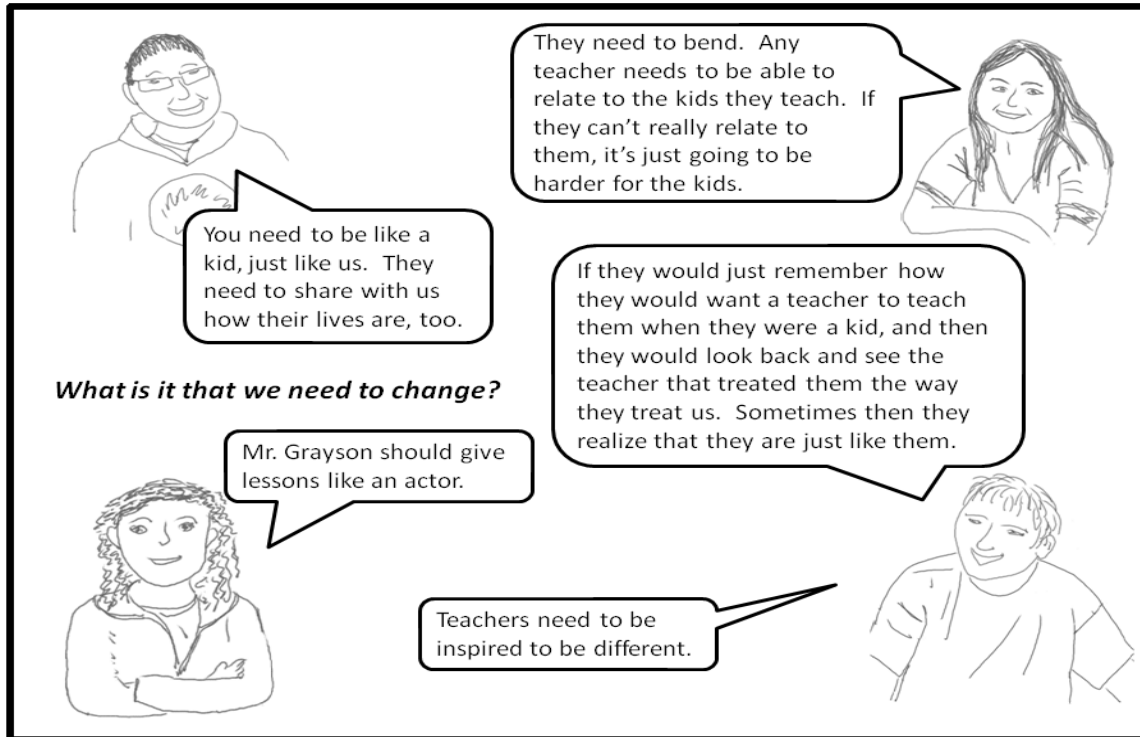


Figure 4.146 John, Sophia, Alice, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2

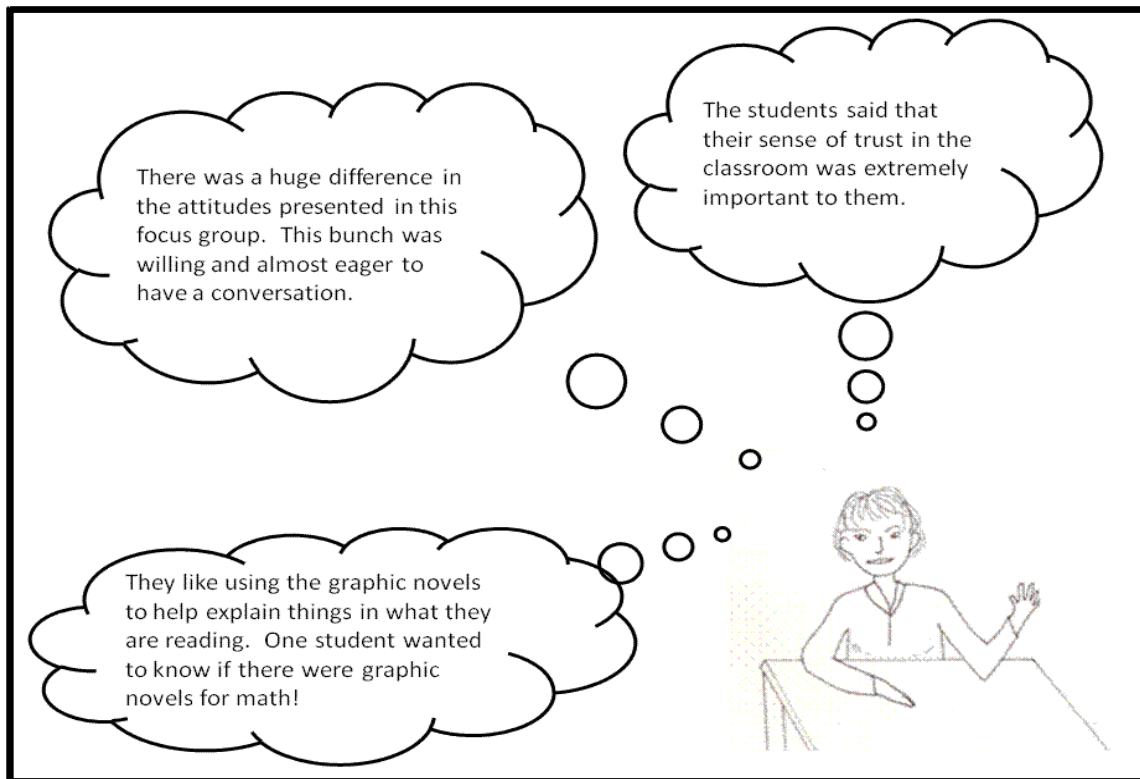


Figure 4.147 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Focus Group 2

**Focus group 3.** This final focus group session occurred on the last day of observations as well as the last day of the semester. Over the course of the semester, one student had moved away, leaving the final eight students for the focus group. This group included four boys and four girls; however, one boy refused to respond to questions and one girl responded minimally. The other six students appeared comfortable and relaxed when answering questions. Because of the timing in holding this focus group on the last day of the semester, there appeared to be less interest in the process. While this did affect the quantity of responses, there was a quality in the discussion that included their willingness to share some insight into their thinking even though some prodding was necessary. The same original questions were asked as in the first two focus group sessions, and again as the conversation progressed new questions emerged.

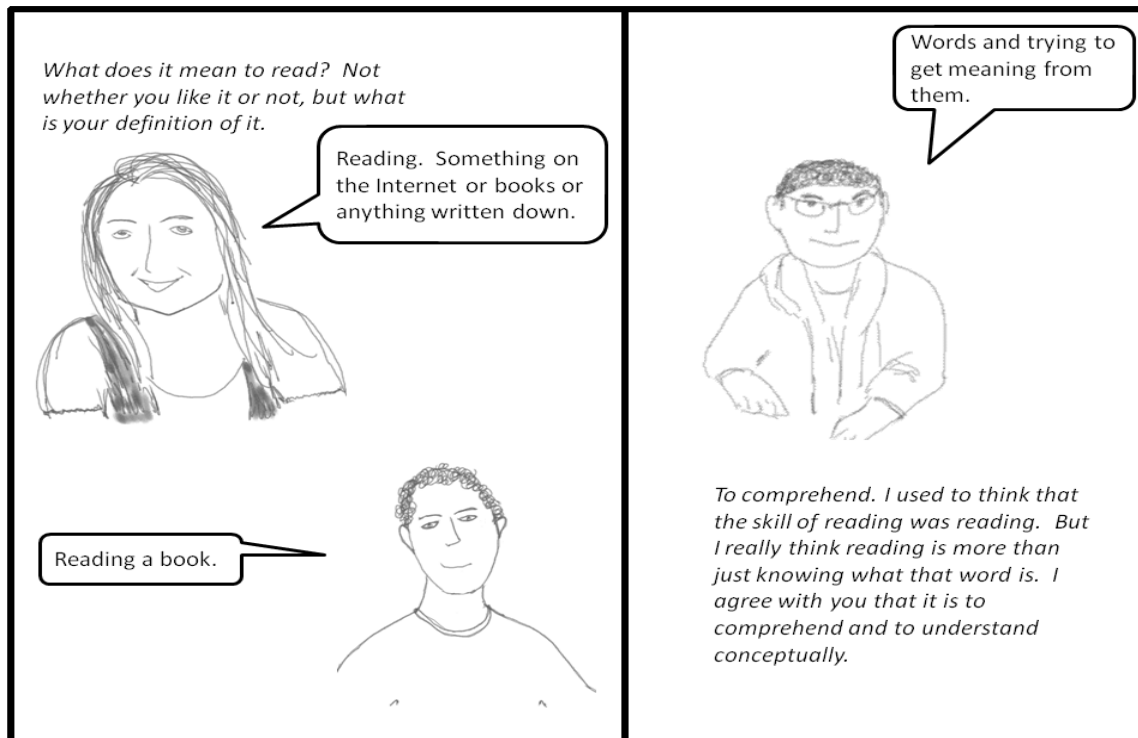


Figure 4.148 Robin, Brad, Carl, 2011, Focus Group 3

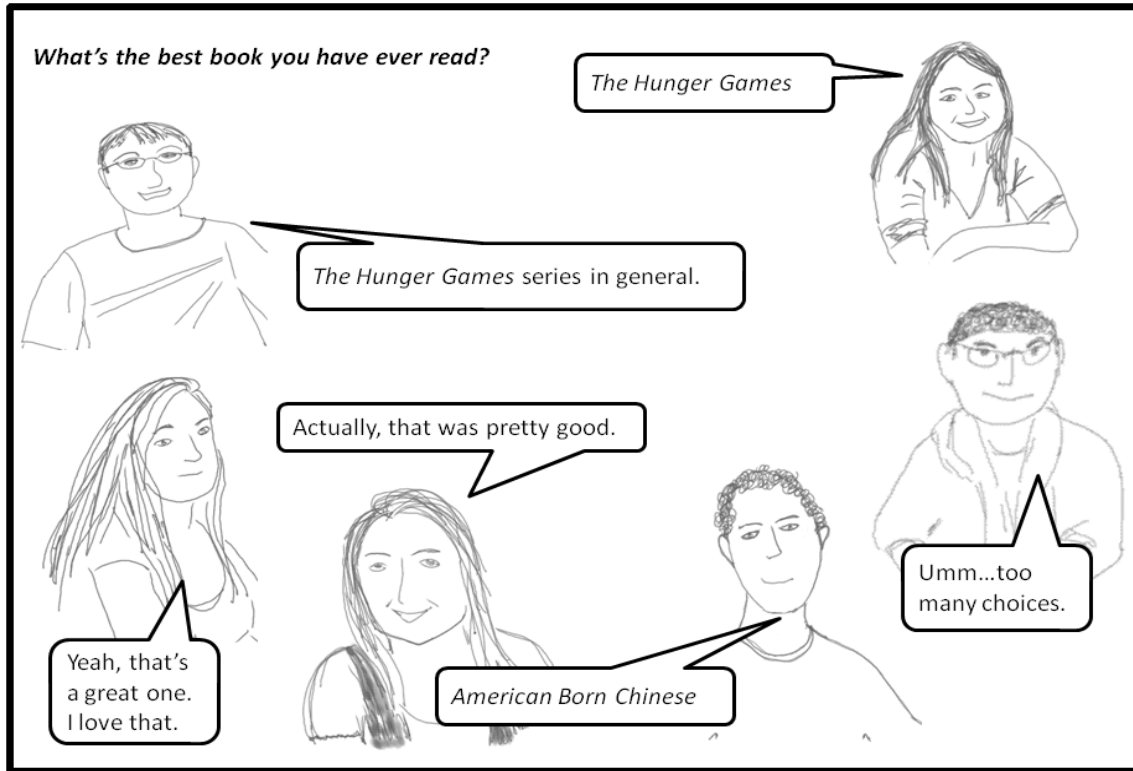


Figure 4.149 Kirk, Amy, Robin, Brad, Carl, Mary, 2011, Focus Group 3

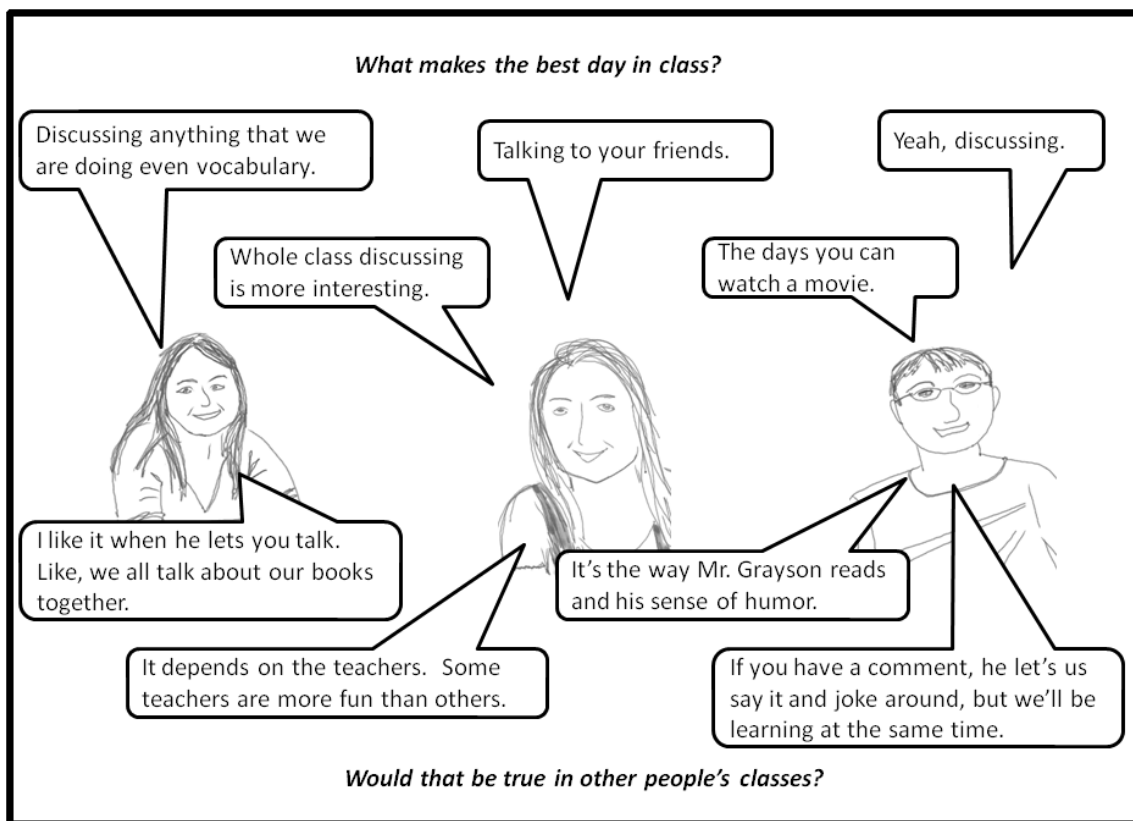


Figure 4.150 Mary, Robin, Kirk, 2011, Focus, Group 3

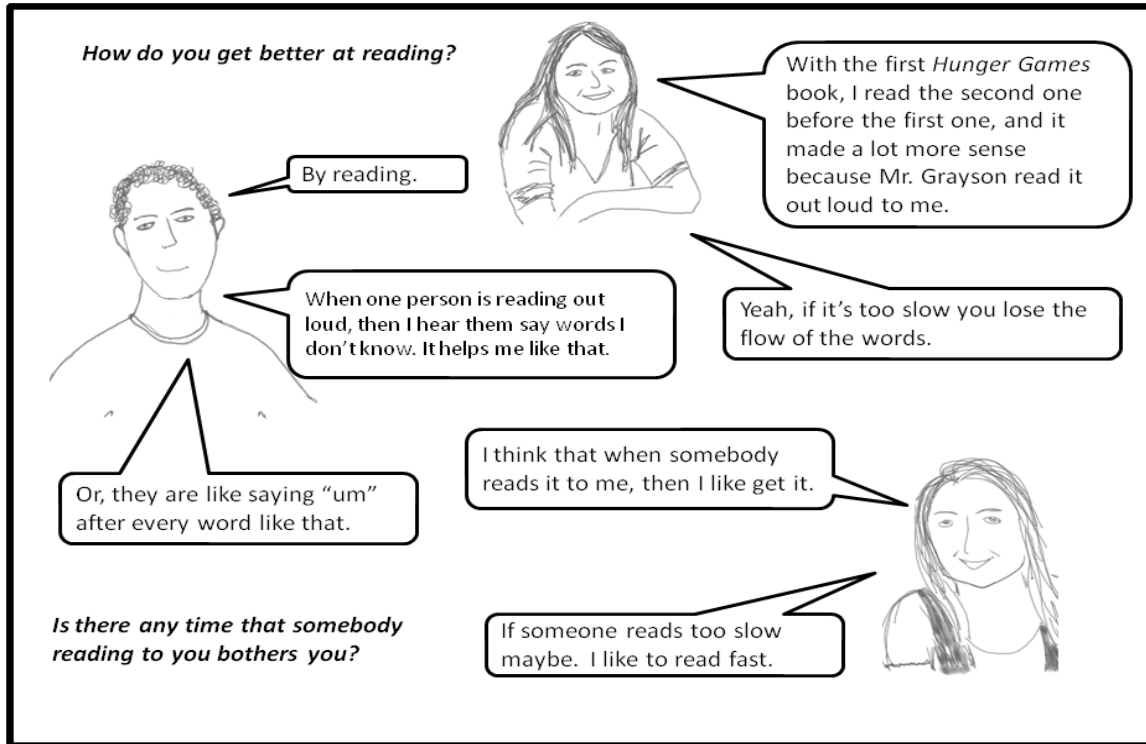


Figure 4.151 Brad, Mary, Robin, 2011, Focus Group 3

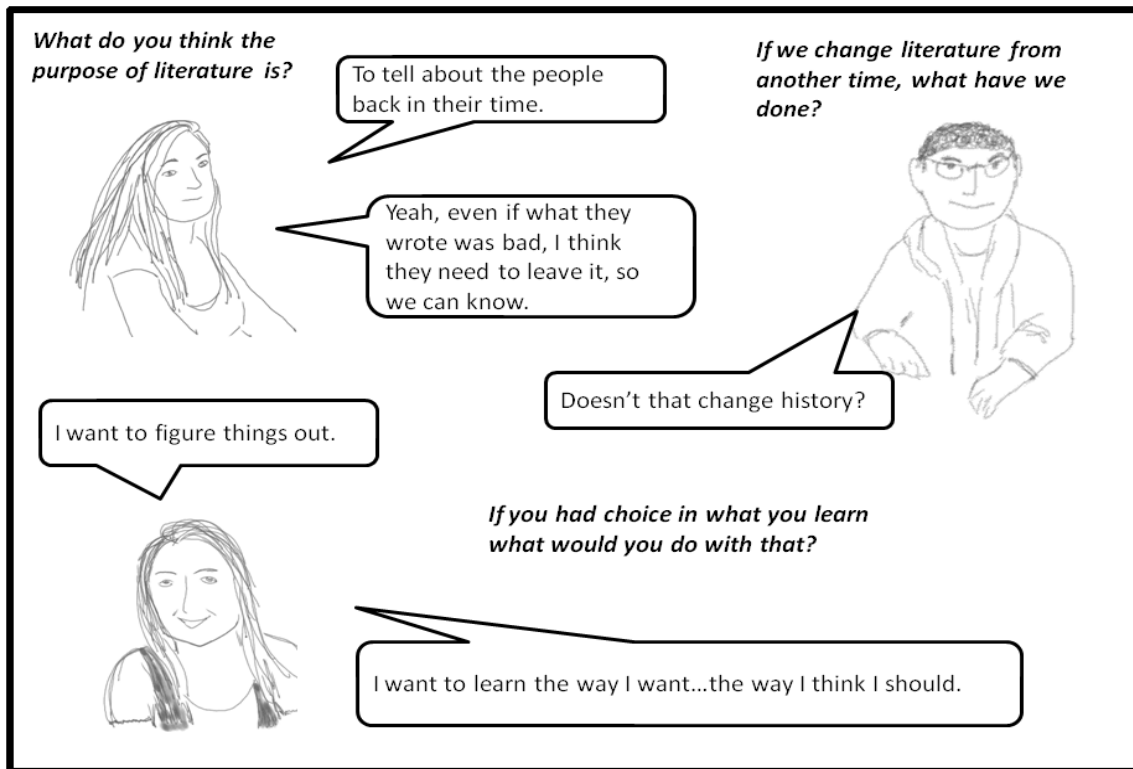


Figure 4.152 Amy, Robin, Carl, 2011, Focus Group 3

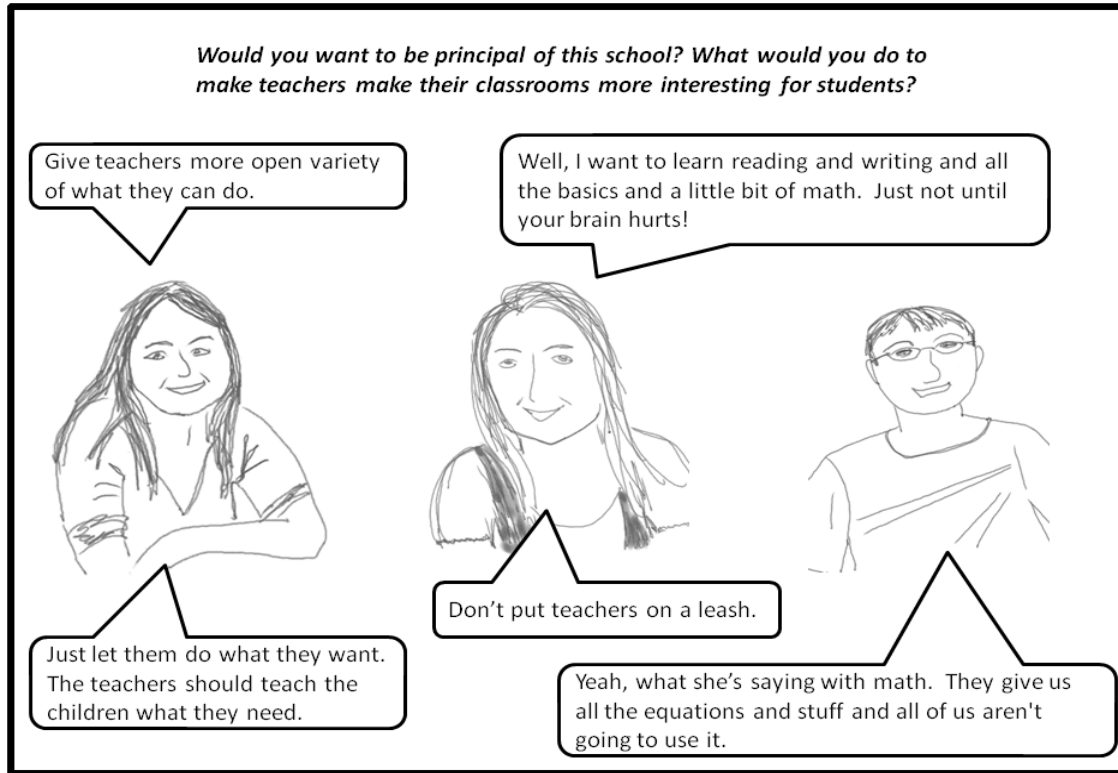


Figure 4.153 Mary, Robin, Kirk, 2011, Focus Group 3

**Final Participating Teacher Interview**

A meeting was set up after the final observation to discuss the events included in the case study. It was important to review the thoughts, concerns, and questions that had arisen over the course of the study and the semester to understand their possible implications for future instruction by this teacher. His comments were considered a reflection of his experiences as a participant in the study and as a teacher developing new practices in his classroom.

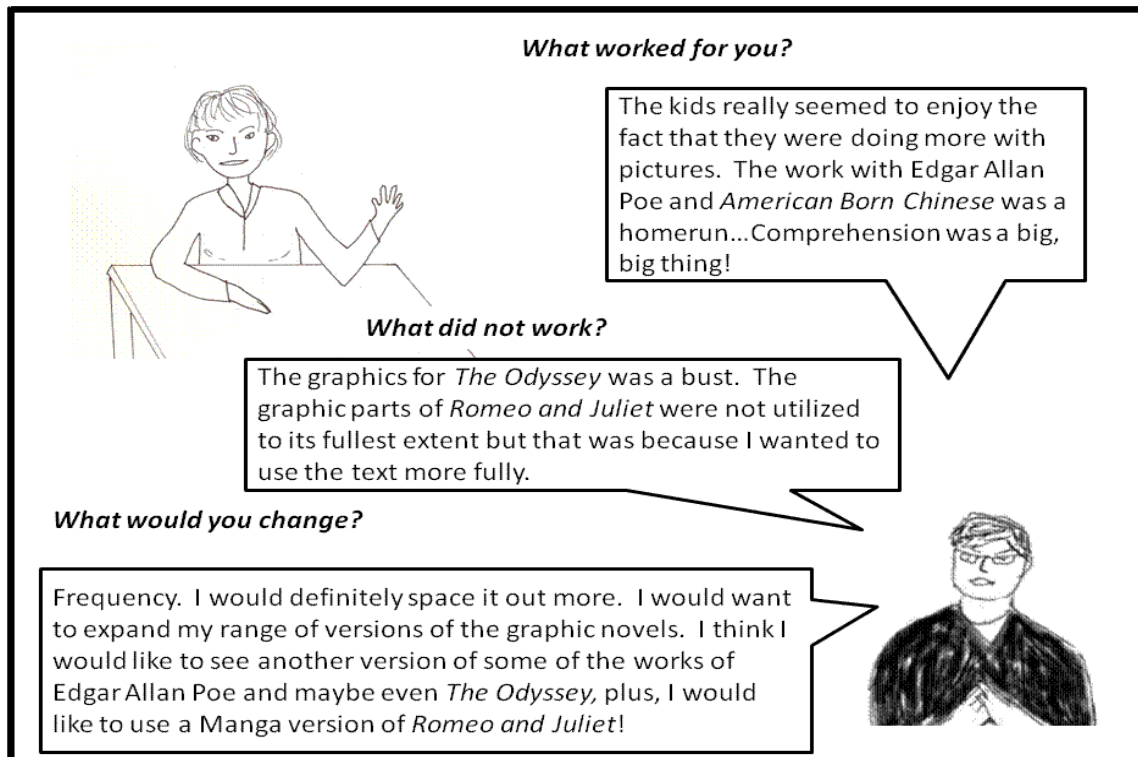


Figure 4.154 Greene, Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview



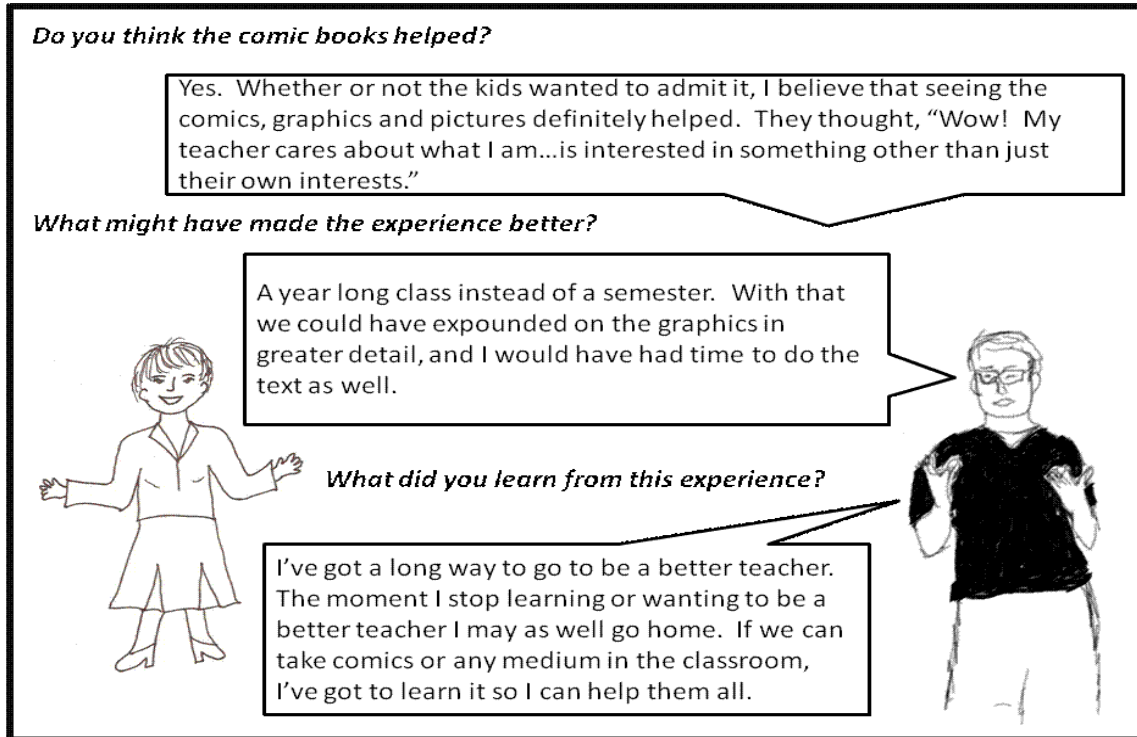


Figure 4.155 Greene, Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview

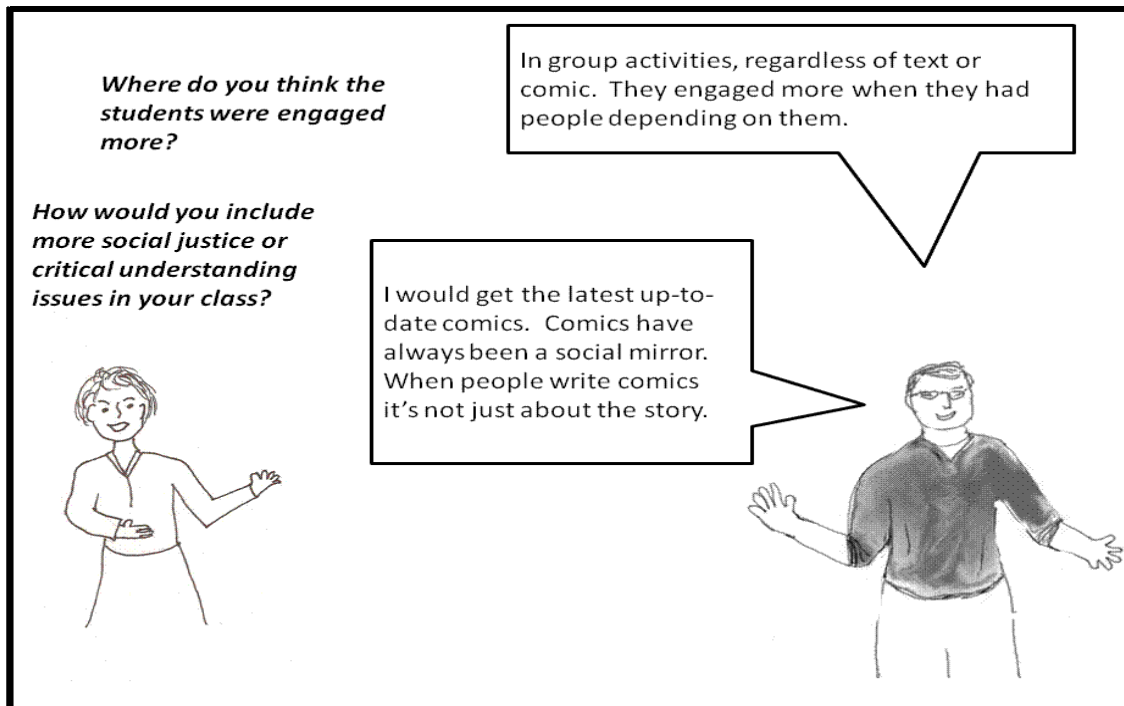


Figure 4.156 Greene, Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview

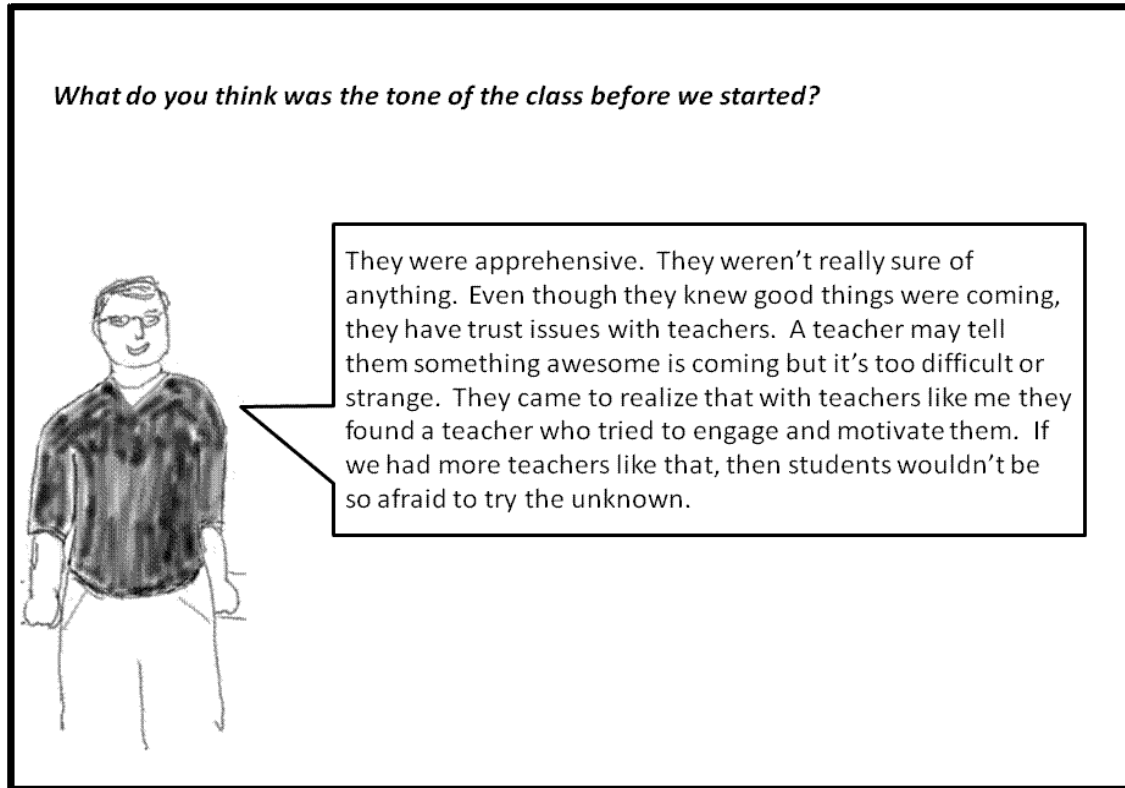


Figure 4.157 Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview

### Essay Responses

Following the unit in which the students read the graphic novel *American Born Chinese*, they were assigned an essay that was included as part of the final exam for the class. This was not the original intent of the essay, but due to the loss of class days because of inclement weather, Mr. Grayson and the observer made the decision that the essay should become part of the final exam. The students then generated responses to the following writing prompt: “Describe an experience where you have been stereotyped because of the way you looked, the way you dressed, or the things you have said or believed.”

One student, Carl, wrote some revealing insights into his point of view. Of note, this is an identified gifted, African-American student and generally remains silent

throughout the class period. He was responsive during his focus group session but usually did not respond much in the open class setting. He writes:

“Nigger” is a word that I heard forty-two times yesterday. I counted. I wasn’t surprised with the results. In fact, I thought it would be about fifty. Another thing I hear very often would be people offering me fried chicken or watermelon. Apparently, black people like fried chicken and watermelon. That is true, but it is true of everyone. Personally, I do not like fried chicken, and I do not like sports like basketball. (Carl, 2010, Essay Response)

Another student, Jake, wrote of a personal experience that had significantly affected his relationship with a family member. In an earlier class discussion with Mr. Grayson, Jake had discussed how other students had called him “emo” because of the way he chose to dress. He wrote of a similar experience with a family member.

I was in seventh grade [and] I started to wear black clothing. This [family member] said to me, ‘Are you gay? You keep dressing like a homo. Get a life!’ I felt like I was in a state of depression for most of my time there. (Jake, 2010, Essay Response)

Sean calls himself a “skater” and brings up the issue of why people may discriminate against others. He relates that at one time he had long hair and people would call him names because of that. Sean appears to recognize the connection between what people see and what people think. He states:

People discriminate against others if they act, dress, talk or look different. They think they’re different when nobody dresses or acts perfect. We are all different in our own way. Skaters, punk, rockers, prep, goth, emo, black, or white—we are all

different. There is no wrong or right. No one is perfect. (Sean, 2010, Essay Response)

Another student, Karen, responded differently to the prompt. This student was pregnant over the course of the semester and had delivered her baby prior to its end. She sees her experience in the context of stereotyping and writes:

Well, to be honest I don't really pay attention to what people have to say about me...People call me 'baby mama'. You might consider that a stereotype. I consider it just another nickname. I just might as well consider it my name...Does that consider me a stereotype? Probably. (Karen, 2010, Essay Response)

Another female student, Cathy, considered the problem of stereotyping groups of people. She considered her own experience outside the "group" of more popular girls when she wrote:

I have been called weird or a loser by many people. I was stereotyped like this because I wasn't in a group like most people. (Cathy, 2010, Essay Response)

### **Survey Results**

A survey was administered to the students at the beginning of the case study and again at the end. The purpose of this survey was to determine the general reading attitudes of the students in the study and then determine if there had been any significant change in reading attitudes at the end of the study. McKenna and Stahl (2009) state that "student responses enable teachers to tease out important attitude profiles that might offer clues about how best to reach older students" (p. 209). This particular survey contains the four subscales of (1) recreational reading in print settings, (2) academic reading in print settings, (3) recreational reading in digital settings, and (4) academic reading in digital

settings. The subscales are presented in tables 1 and 2. While some difference was noted between the two administrations of the survey through these subscales it was felt that a more focused look at individual questions and the changes that occurred between those questions lead to greater insight into the evolving reading attitudes of the students which is the reasoning behind the report of responses related to each question for both administrations.

**Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey**

August 2010 Guide to Interpreting Scores

Subscale	Negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral/ indifferent	Somewhat positive	Positive
Recreational Reading in Print Settings	13	6	2	2	0
Recreational Reading in Digital Settings	2	7	6	7	1
Academic Reading in Print Settings	12	7	3	1	0
Academic Reading in Digital Settings	9	7	3	4	0

Table 4.1

January 2011 Guide to Interpreting Scores

Subscale	Negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral/ indifferent	Somewhat positive	Positive
Recreational Reading in Print Settings	7	8	5	1	1
Recreational Reading in Digital Settings	2	5	8	6	1
Academic Reading in Print Settings	5	10	7	0	0
Academic Reading in Digital Settings	4	10	3	5	0

Table 4.2

Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey Questions

<b>Reading Activities</b>	<b>August 2010 High Score</b>	<b>Percentage/ Like Response</b>	<b>January 2011 High Score</b>	<b>Percentage/ Like Response</b>
Reading news online	1 Very Bad	65.2% (15)	3 Indifferent	31.8% (7)
Reading novels assigned by my teachers	1 Very Bad	56.5% (13)	4 Okay	33.3% (7)
Texting friends	6 Very Good	78.3% (18)	6 Very Good	59.1% (13)
Starting a new book	1 Very Bad	52.2% (12)	4 Okay	36.4% (8)
Reading for information on the Internet	1 Very Bad	30.4% (7)	4 Okay	30.0% (6)
Reading textbooks in school	1 Very Bad	60.9% (14)	2 Bad 1 Very Bad	27.3% (6) 27.3% (6)
Instant messaging friends	6 Very Good	60.9% (14)	6 Very Good	40.9% (9)
Reading graphic novels/ Manga	2 Bad 1 Very Bad	30.4% (7) 30.4% (7)	4 Okay	31.8% (7)
Researching online	2 Bad	26.1% (6)	2 Bad	23.8% (5)
Reading out loud in class	1 Very Bad	69.6% (16)	1 Very Bad	47.6% (10)
E-mailing friends	6 Very Good	43.5% (10)	6 Very Good 5 Good	23.8% (5) 23.8% (5)
Reading novels for fun	1 Very Bad	47.8% (11)	3 Indifferent	36.4% (8)
Using an online dictionary	1 Very Bad	43.5% (10)	1 Very Bad	36.4% (8)
Reading a newspaper	1 Very Bad	52.2% (12)	1 Very Bad	52.4% (11)
Reading for fun on the Internet	1 Very Bad	56.5% (13)	3 Indifferent	27.3% (6)

---

Reading during my free Times	1 Very Bad	60.9% (14)	1 Very Bad	36.4% (8)
Using an online encyclopedia	1 Very Bad	69.6% (16)	1 Very Bad	50.1% (11)
Answering questions about what I read	1 Very Bad	43.5% (10)	3 Indifferent	38.1% (8)
Reading magazines online	1 Very Bad	39.1% (9)	1 Very Bad	40.9% (9)
Reading different types of books	1 Very Bad	30.4% (7)	3 Indifferent	38.1% (8)
Working on an Internet project with classmates	6 Very Good	30.4% (7)	4 Okay	27.3% (6)
Using a dictionary in book form	1 Very Bad	68.2% (15)	1 Very Bad	40.9% (9)
Reading books online	1 Very Bad	56.5% (13)	1 Very Bad	40.9% (9)
Reading magazines	4 Okay 1 Very Bad	21.7% (5) 21.7% (5)	4 Okay 1 Very Bad	22.7% (5) 22.7% (5)
Learning from electronic displays like PowerPoint	3 Indifferent	26.1% (6)	4 Okay	27.3% (6)
Using an encyclopedia in book Form	1 Very Bad	69.6% (16)	1 Very Bad	59.1% (13)
Chatting online about what I'm reading	1 Very Bad	60.9% (14)	1 Very Bad	36.4% (8)
Going to a bookstore	1 Very Bad	52.2% (12)	1 Very Bad	31.8% (7)
Playing educational computer Games	1 Very Bad	47.8% (11)	3 Indifferent	27.3% (6)
Someday having a job that requires reading	1 Very Bad	30.4% (7)	3 Indifferent	31.8% (7)
Finding song lyrics online	6 Very Good	43.5% (10)	6 Very Good	31.8% (7)
Going to a library	1 Very Bad	39.1% (9)	2 Bad	31.8% (7)

---

Someday having a job that requires reading online	1 Very Bad	47.8% (11)	1 Very Bad	36.4% (8)
Participating in classroom discussions about what we are reading	2 Bad	39.1% (9)	2 Bad	31.8% (7)
	1 Very Bad	39.1% (9)		
Participating in online chat rooms	6 Very Good	34.8% (8)	4 Okay	31.8% (7)
Getting a book for a present	1 Very Bad	65.2% (15)	1 Very Bad	36.4% (8)
Discussing class material online	1 Very Bad	56.5% (13)	1 Very Bad	31.8% (7)
Reading from various sources of print to complete class work	1 Very Bad	34.8% (8)	1 Very Bad	31.8% (7)
Talking about something I'm reading with friends	1 Very Bad	65.2% (15)	1 Very Bad	50.0% (11)
Reading to relax	1 Very Bad	65.2% (15)	1 Very Bad	54.5% (12)
Reading before I go to bed	1 Very Bad	73.9% (17)	1 Very Bad	59.1% (13)
<b>Total Respondents</b>		<b>23</b>		<b>22</b>

Table 4.3

### Test Scores

A review of previous test scores for each of the students was included to help understand the general strengths and weaknesses related to academic achievement in reading and language arts. The most current information available included results from the Georgia Writing Assessment (GWA) administered in January of 2010 and the Georgia Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT) administered in May of 2010. Both assessments are required by Georgia law for students in eighth grade. Student 23 did not have the appropriate consent completed and was not included in the results of



these scores. Student 24 moved out of the class after three weeks in the semester and was also not included in the results of these scores.

8<sup>th</sup> grade CRCT Scores

Student	CRCT Reading	Performance Level	CRCT Reading	Performance Level	Georgia Writing Assessment	Performance Level
John	839	Meets	812	Meets	N/A	N/A
Evan	828	Meets	826	Meets	193	Did not meet
Brad	807	Meets	814	Meets	184	Did not meet
Mary	839	Meets	825	Meets	212	Meets
Mark	843	Meets	850	Exceeds	N/A	N/A
Carl	870	Exceeds	893	Exceeds	234	Meets
Morgan	860	Exceeds	842	Meets	N/A	N/A
Travis	826	Meets	832	Meets	216	Meets
Sophia	805	Meets	785	Did not meet	203	Meets
Sean	832	Meets	842	Meets	212	Meets
Cathy	843	Meets	850	Exceeds	212	Meets
Jake	817	Meets	796	Did not meet	183	Did not meet
Faith	823	Meets	814	Meets	161	Did not meet
Alice	N/A	N/A	820	Meets	212	Meets
Karen	814	Meets	777	Did not meet	188	Did not meet
Robin	854	Exceeds	825	Meets	208	Meets
Nathan	826	Meets	838	Meets	203	Meets
Kirk	850	Exceeds	838	Meets	170	Did not meet
Jared	829	Meets	814	Meets	207	Meets
James	832	Meets	842	Meets	244	Meets
Susan	835	Meets	814	Meets	213	Meets
Amy	820	Meets	838	Meets	207	Meets

\*N/A = Not Available

Table 4.4

Of the CRCT Reading scores all students with scores met or exceeded the standard for this grade. One student did not have available scores for the Reading section of the CRCT. Scores for the CRCT Language Arts segment included three students who

did not meet the standard expected for 8<sup>th</sup> grade. In reviewing the scores for the Georgia Writing Assessment, six students did not meet the writing standard, thirteen met the standard, and three scores were not available at the time of data collection.

#### 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Literature End of Course Test (EOCT) Scores

Student Name	Scale Score	Performance Level	Grade Conversion
John	430	Meets	82
Evan	415	Meets	76
Brad	408	Meets	73
Mary	420	Meets	78
Mark	427	Meets	86
Carl	464	Exceeds	91
Morgan	442	Meets	87
Travis	431	Meets	82
Sophia	401	Meets	70
Sean	427	Meets	81
Cathy	461	Exceeds	91
Jake	401	Meets	70
Faith	392	Does Not Meet	67
Alice	410	Meets	74
Karen	388	Does Not Meet	66
Robin	417	Meets	77
Nathan	419	Meets	78
Kirk	450	Exceeds	90
Jared	408	Meets	73
James	439	Meets	86
Susan	442	Meets	87
Amy	415	Meets	76

Table 4.5

The end of course test for 9<sup>th</sup> grade Literature was administered in the final month of the semester prior to the holiday break. This test was taken by twenty-three of the original class members in the case study. Student twenty-three did not have appropriate consent for data collection and was not included in the data representation. Results of this

test demonstrate that twenty of the twenty-two students met or exceeded the standards for 9<sup>th</sup> grade Literature. Three of those twenty exceeded the standard and two others did not meet the standards indicated for this class.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Findings and Recommendations

“A vital spark that drove me onward through long months of marching...”  
Pedrosa, 2007, p. 255).

This final chapter will examine my observations in relation to the research questions outlined for this study that include:

1. What impact do graphic novels and comic books structured around traditional literature have on motivation?
2. How does the integration of graphic novels support the engagement and motivation of adolescent readers?
3. Where does the graphic novel and comic book fit in the theoretical basis of critical literacy?

Each of these purposes were specifically addressed through the progression of the study and reflect the interaction and ultimate themes that emerged as a result of the interactions of the students with their teacher, the students’ interactions with text, and their interactions with the infusion of graphic novels and pieces throughout this study. Relative to the issue of motivation and engagement in questions 1 and 2, the following findings were noted:

1. There is a positive connection between student attitudes toward reading and their engagement with text.
2. The reaction of students to elements of popular culture that included graphic novels and references to common television shows, movies, and music acted as a bridge to traditional literature and improved student relationships with reading standard text.

3. The use of graphic novels promoted engagement in actual text when used as a means to support students in the reading of difficult passages.

4. The combination of tasks that included graphic novels appealed to most of the students as an initial reason for focus on the actual text even when the graphic pieces were not introduced or included until following that reading.

The third purpose of this case study included the question of where graphic novels fit in the theoretical basis of critical literacy. Findings related to this question include the following:

5. Challenging students to view text whether from a traditional standpoint or through the medium of sequential comic art supports the students' ability to redefine reading from a critical point of view.

6. Preparing students to read material that promotes critical understanding supports higher level thought and discussion of social issues.

7. Critical readings of traditional text and graphic novels either as a support to comprehension or as the focus text gave voice to the students as direct agents of their own learning particularly as it related to real-world social issues and real-life, relevant circumstances in the students' lives.

There were two other findings noted that were not unrelated to the purposes but developed unexpectedly throughout the case study. These findings included:

8. The motivation and engagement of the students was directly related at least in part to the students' perception of commitment from the teacher.

9. Student motivation toward independent and academic reading was improved by teacher passion and commitment to the understanding and connection of text and

graphics to the students through active and dynamic immersion into the literature formats.

The remainder of this chapter will explore and view these findings from the context of the case study and add to the research base of literature related to the motivation and engagement of the adolescent reader and learner. This case study includes many examples of critical dialogue and outlines a progressive path toward greater student voice regarding issues of educational freedom. The students in this study challenged the teacher to be “prepared to hear questions we might not like; questions that force us to think differently, to listen and hear other voices and opinions, including those of children...and to honestly ask ourselves sometimes painful questions” (McDaniel, 2006, p. 5). Those questions were asked by students and demanded a response from the teacher and other students at first timidly and grew in intensity as the study unfolded.

### **Finding 1: Student Attitudes about Reading**

The set of students within the class chosen for this case study represented their own mixture of diverse characteristics that contributed to the findings in this study. Each of these students were administered the Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey (Appendix A) to assess attitudes before the application of graphic novels into the proposed 9<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum as well as at the end of the study to assess change in attitudes following their use. The survey provided a guide to interpreting the scores and divided the individual elements into the four categories of 1) recreational reading in print settings; 2) recreational reading in digital settings; 3) academic reading in print settings; and 4) academic reading in digital settings. In a review of this data, both administrations showed a majority of negative or somewhat negative responses to the elements; however,

responses to specific elements showed dramatic changes in attitude regarding reading that require some discussion and are relevant to the findings and purposes in this case study. This study demonstrated a positive connection between student attitudes toward reading and their engagement with text (Finding 1) as illustrated through the administration of the survey. This finding was further accented through discussion in the focus group settings and classroom discussions.

According to the Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey administered prior to the application of graphic novels over half of the students surveyed did not respond favorably to recreational reading in print settings, academic reading in print settings, or academic reading in digital settings. What is more telling is that of the forty-one specific elements of the survey, twenty-four of those elements received a score of Bad or Very Bad in over fifty percent of the responses. Another important indicator in the specific elements is that only six of those elements received a Good or Very Good score in the responses. Those elements in which student did respond favorably included texting friends, instant messaging friends, e-mailing friends, working on an Internet project with classmates, and finding song lyrics online. The remaining elements were noted as Indifferent. This survey reflected the overall negative attitude toward reading as expressed by the group with the important exception of social media interactions. Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) suggest that reading has changed from a format of the printed page in that “today’s reader interprets a broad range of texts that use a variety of symbols, or signs, to communicate their messages” (p. 9). These students chose favorable elements to some extent primarily of those involving current social media, gaming, and texting.

The student responses at the beginning of the semester seemed to concentrate in

the Bad or Very Bad category and were mirrored in the first focus group session. That particular session was difficult to deal with due to limited responses from students and a general discomfort with the process.

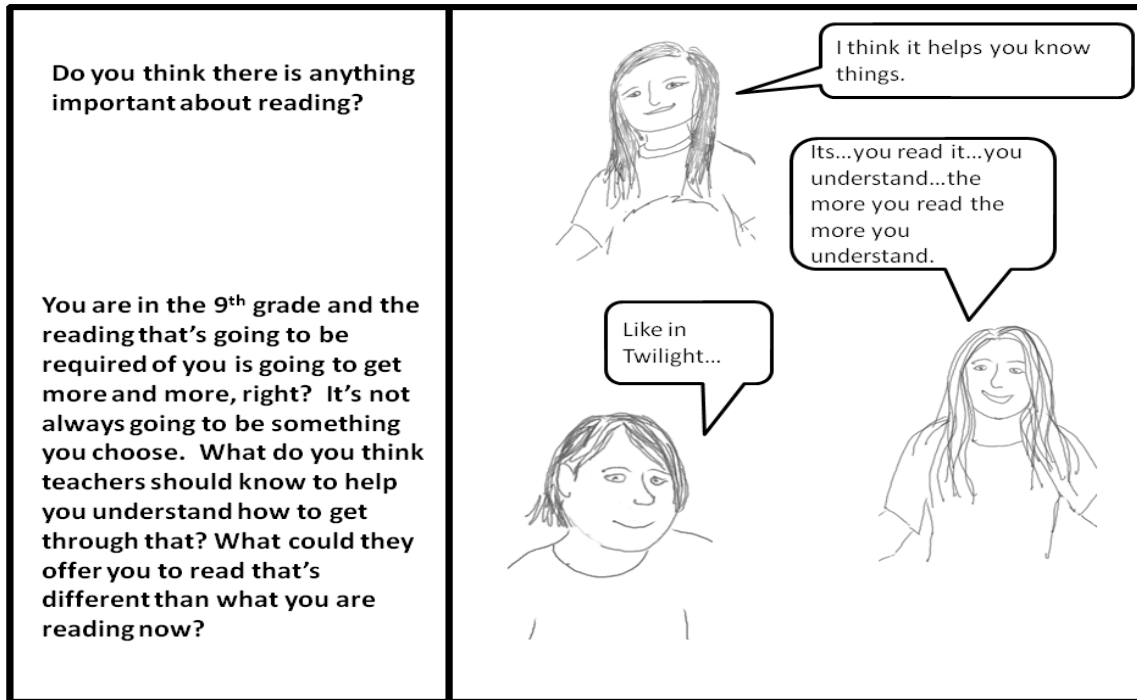


Figure 5.1 Faith, Morgan, Cathy, 2010, Focus Group 1

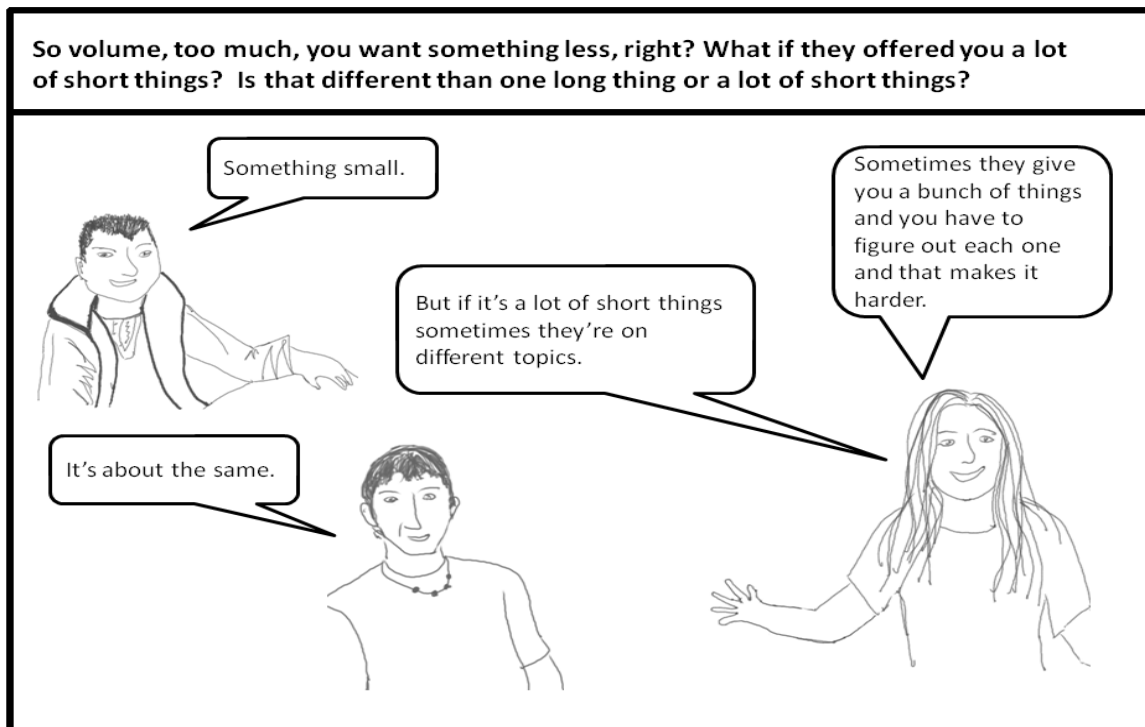




Figure 5.2 Evan, Morgan, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1

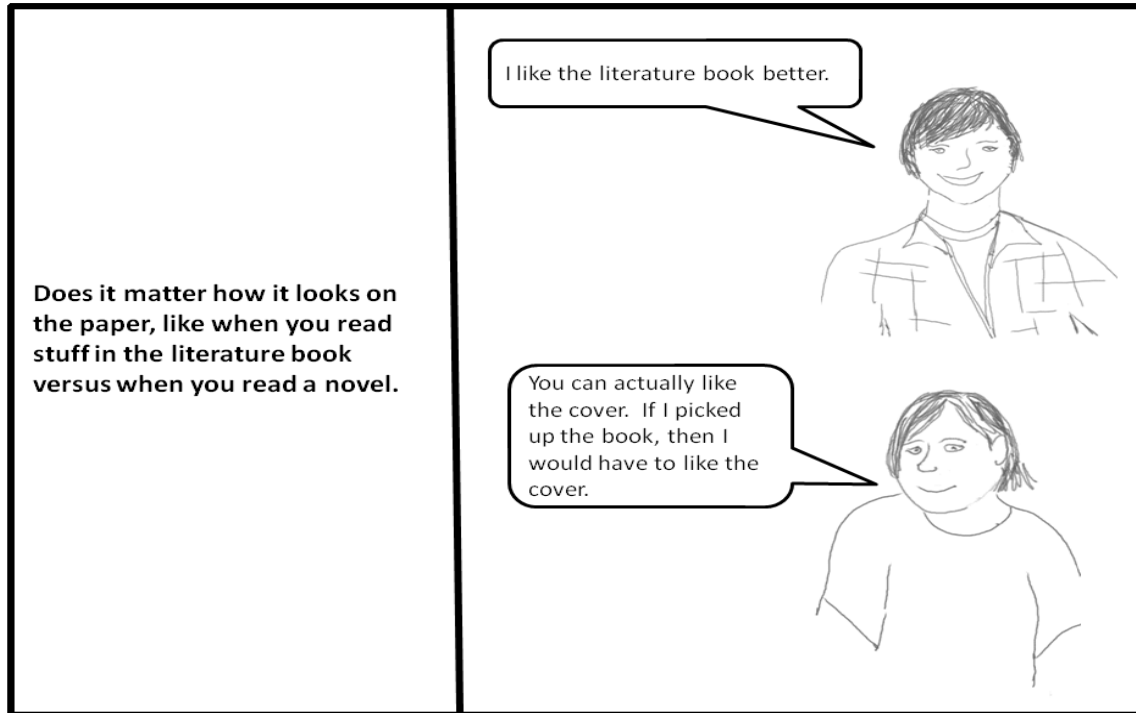


Figure 5.3 Travis, Faith, 2010, Focus Group 1

The initial responses of the students were limited and lacked much in detail. This could be a result of the lack of trust and recent experience with the observer, yet the closeness of the survey results to the reticence and hesitation in responding may well have to do with their lack of interest in reading and in attempting to view this class from a different perspective. The past history of traditional presentation of text, minimal reading choices, and few opportunities for integration of relevant contemporary material may well have affected responses.

The second focus group occurred around mid-semester and presented a different attitude and emotional connection to the process. The students randomly chosen for this group provided greater insight into the attitudes regarding reading in the context of this class and were much more willing to demonstrate a more reflective tone in their responses. This may be influenced by the greater comfort in the observer's presence and

interactions with students over the several weeks of the case study and may also be a reflection of the changes in student attitudes because of their interactions with the teacher and his presentation of the material.

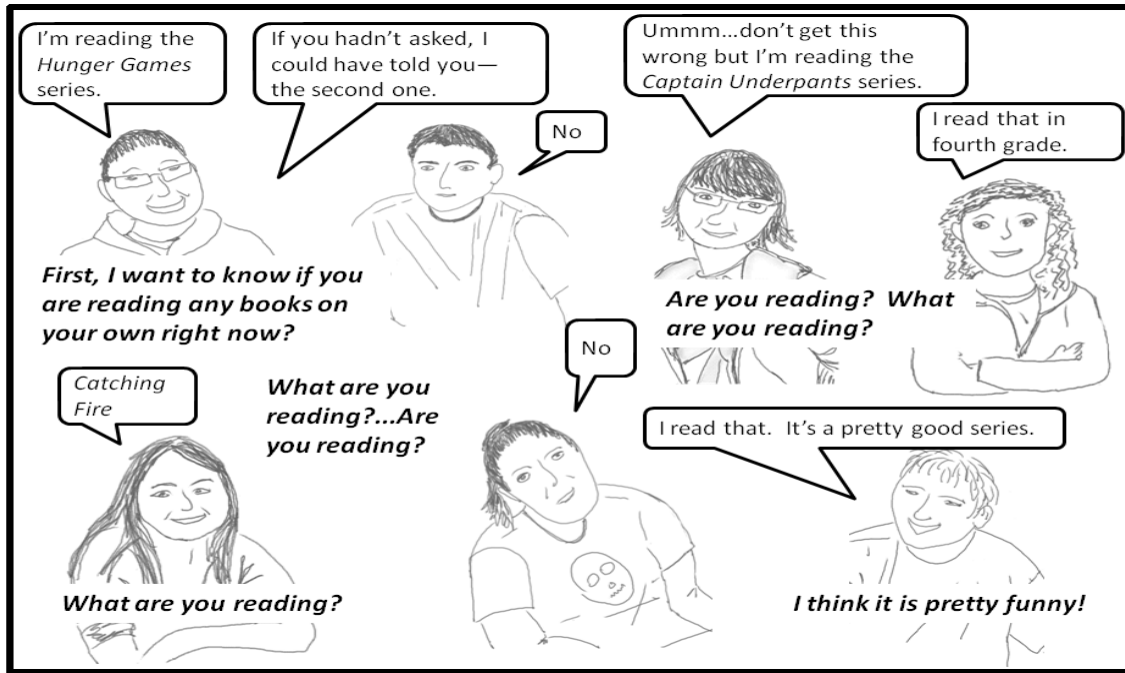


Figure 5.4 John, Alice, Sean, Karen, Mark, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2

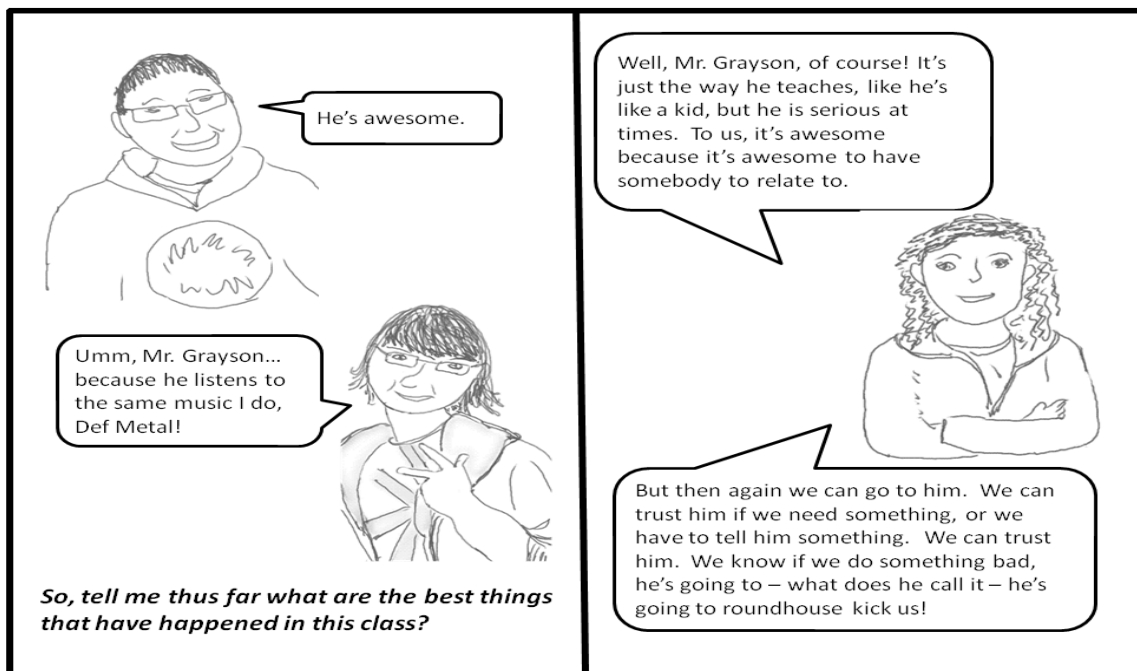


Figure 5.5 John, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2

Student responses at the end of the semester showed decreases in the Bad or Very Bad category and increases in the Good, Very Good and Okay categories. For instance, the item “reading novels assigned by my teachers” scored as Very Bad by 56.5% of the students in August and scored as Okay by 33.3% in January as the highest percentage of response for that item. The item “starting a new book” scored as Very Bad by 52.2% of the students in August and scored as Okay by 36.4% in January. In reviewing all the student responses the percentage of negative scores decreased in most areas and the percentage of positive or indifferent scores increased across the board. This strongly supports a change in attitude related to reading text in a variety of formats following the participation in this class. Students continued to prefer more social contexts such as “texting friends”, but even in that area, student responses were at 78.4% in August and decreased to 59.1% in January.

During class lessons, as Mr. Grayson began offering graphic novel or panel choices in connecting to traditional literature, the students began to perceive the material from a differing more relevant point of view for them. Comic art has the dual ability to set a concrete boundary in interpretation and understanding based on the images; however, McAllister, Sewell, and Gordon (2006) suggest that “the use of storytelling devices such as captions and thought balloons can make the themes and values in a comic especially explicit” (p. 3-4). The use of visual imagery within the panels, gutters, thought balloons, and backgrounds provide a means for multiple interpretation and depth of thought. These individual responses supported the student responses in the first survey that indicated reading from the Internet or social media was preferred. The use of these technologies demonstrates the disparities between literacy in school and academic

settings and literacies in the home and peer networks. Deshler, Palincsar, Biancarosa, and Nair (2007) note that “the work of bridging sometimes widely disparate worlds of home and school can be so challenging. [Students’] out of school practices tend to be ignored or, worse, denigrated” (p 31). In this case study the students articulated the belief that their connection with text had nothing to do with their connection with the Internet but even then they were not interested to a strong degree in reading at any level as reflected in the first survey and in the first focus group session.

Student choices related to reading strongly determined whether they “liked” or “disliked” the reading. According to the survey at the beginning of the semester, reading novels assigned by teachers was considered very bad by 56.5% of the students. Remarkably, at the end of the semester, this had changed to 33.3% considering this as “Okay” in making reading choices. The curriculum in this course did not offer student choice in text or literature. Each of the text choices were made by the teacher and presented to the students suggesting that the students experienced the ability to make choices through other options within the presented material, discussion, or project outcomes.

The Suzanne Collins contemporary novel, *The Hunger Games*, was considered a highlight of the semester and represented several aspects of change in reading attitudes of the students in this study. The students articulated their intense desire to read and work with this novel during focus group sessions as well as the culminating graphic novel project expressing high interest in specific details related to the story as well as problem solving skills in determining which events and scenes would become part of the overall project. One of the problematic issues in dealing with adolescent readers is “the

predictable and consistent declining interest in reading that accompanies entrance to the middle and secondary grades” (Bean, 1998, p. 150). The declining interest in reading has been attributed to issues such as lack of choice, interest, and collaboration (Quate & McDemott, 2009; Alderman, 2008; Riggs & Gholar, 2009; Lesesne, 2003; Beers, 2003). While the students did not have choice in the book read, they were given multiple opportunities for choice in preparing complicated individual and group storyboards as well as in the final decision regarding which group would ultimately prepare the scenes for student publication. These learning opportunities fostered those same three issues through collaboration in group storyboards, choice in determining favorite scenes, and curiosity and interest in the dynamics of the plot presented.

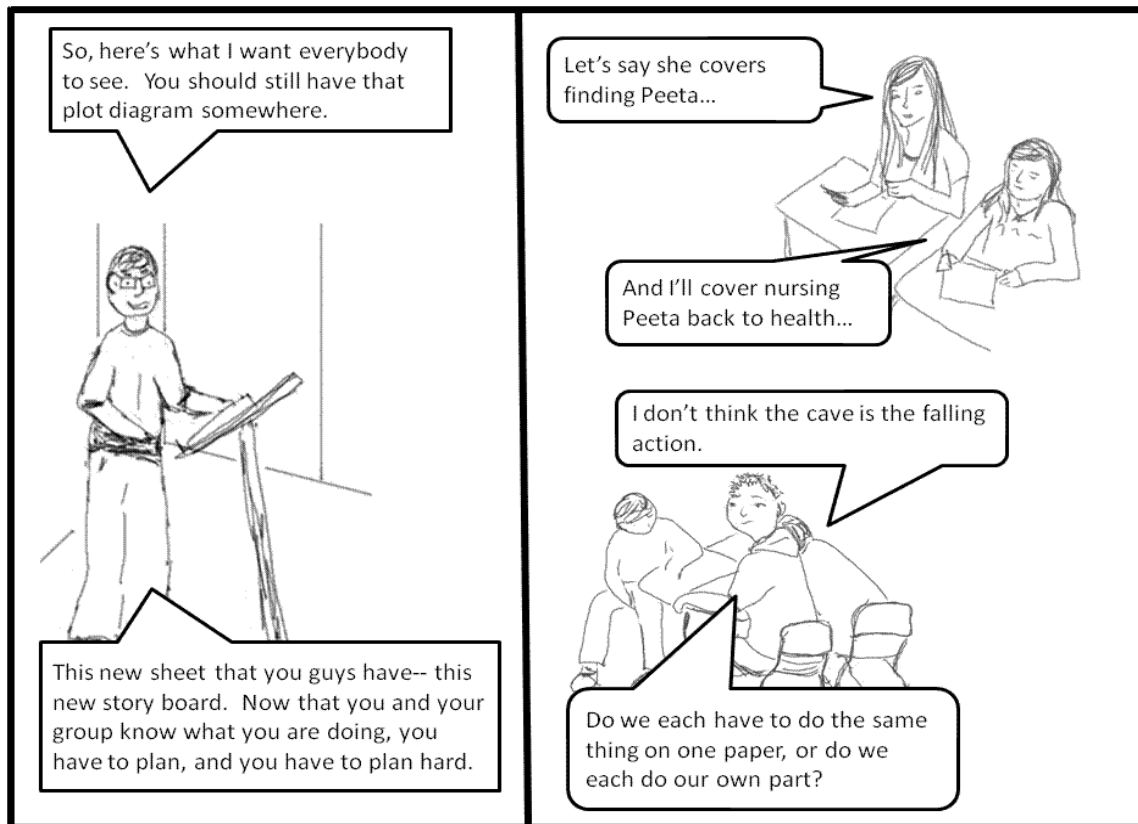


Figure 5.6 Grayson, Susan, Amy, Mark, Evan, 2010, Observation 6

The knowledge needed to prepare the graphic panels required a deeper

understanding of the plot, specific characterizations, and conflicts found in the novel as well as an understanding of how to present these elements graphically. Booth and Lundy (2007) posit that “images are part of the serious business of making meaning” and, therefore, support the need for students to sort through and make decisions about what is important in text as well as highlight essential ideas, and isolate supporting details (p. 59). The students in this case remained focused on this task through multiple days of work while continuing the process of reading the main text. Each segment of reading the text and then creating storyboards and panels served to deepen student understanding and create opportunities to explore student connections with the text.

The study of *Romeo and Juliet* was not originally met with positive reactions from the students. In my reflections related to the seventh observation, comments were made that indicate the students’ engagement with the text as they articulated their desire for him to continue reading without stopping to explain.

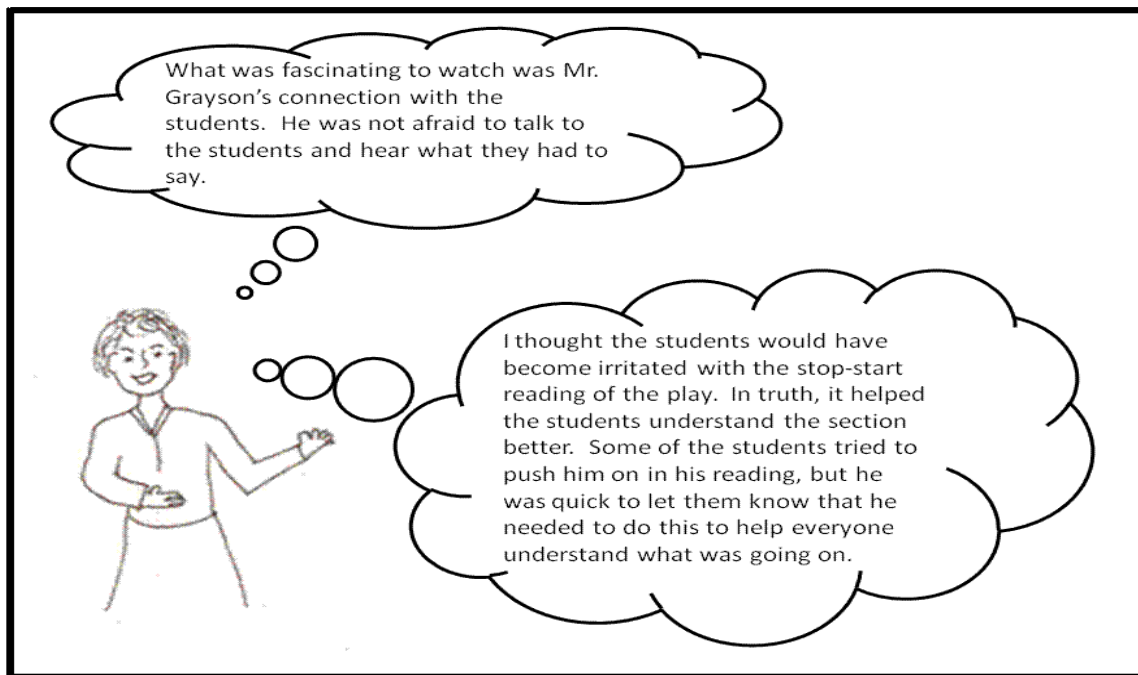


Figure 5.7 Greene, 2010, Reflections to Observation 7

The students articulated their surprise in working through this text in the focus group setting. Their comments indicated the confidence these students had in Mr. Grayson in preparing them to take on the challenge of the material presented in Shakespeare’s play. Quate and McDermott (2009) suggest that “the power of challenge, when designed appropriately, is a motivator and an essential factor in engagement” (p. 9). In this particular focus group, John was quick to point out that the “words are complicated,” and that he needed Mr. Grayson’s explanations to understand the material.

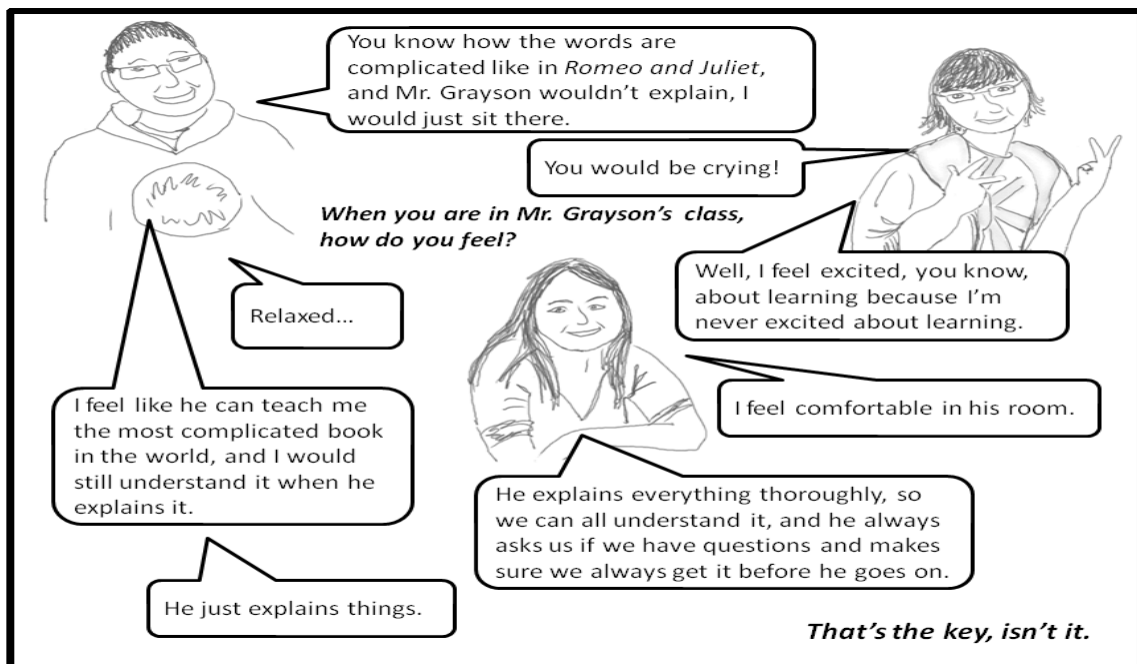


Figure 5.8 John, Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2

The comments of Jake are particularly important in that he was one of the identified members of the special education group within this class. Jake’s work in middle school indicated his difficulties with writing and comprehension of difficult material. His work at that time was minimal, and his motivation was limited due to his lack of success in this area. Reading was labored and was only performed when required. However, Jake’s experiences in Mr. Grayson’s class began to ignite a renewed love for learning. He

articulated a moment in the lunchroom this year while Mr. Grayson was on duty in which he yelled to Mr. Grayson “I LOVE LEARNING!” His newfound excitement about learning also has caused him to think about his possible future as an English teacher. Jake would like to explore the possibilities of being a teacher like Mr. Grayson and speaks very highly of the energy and joy he finds while in his class.

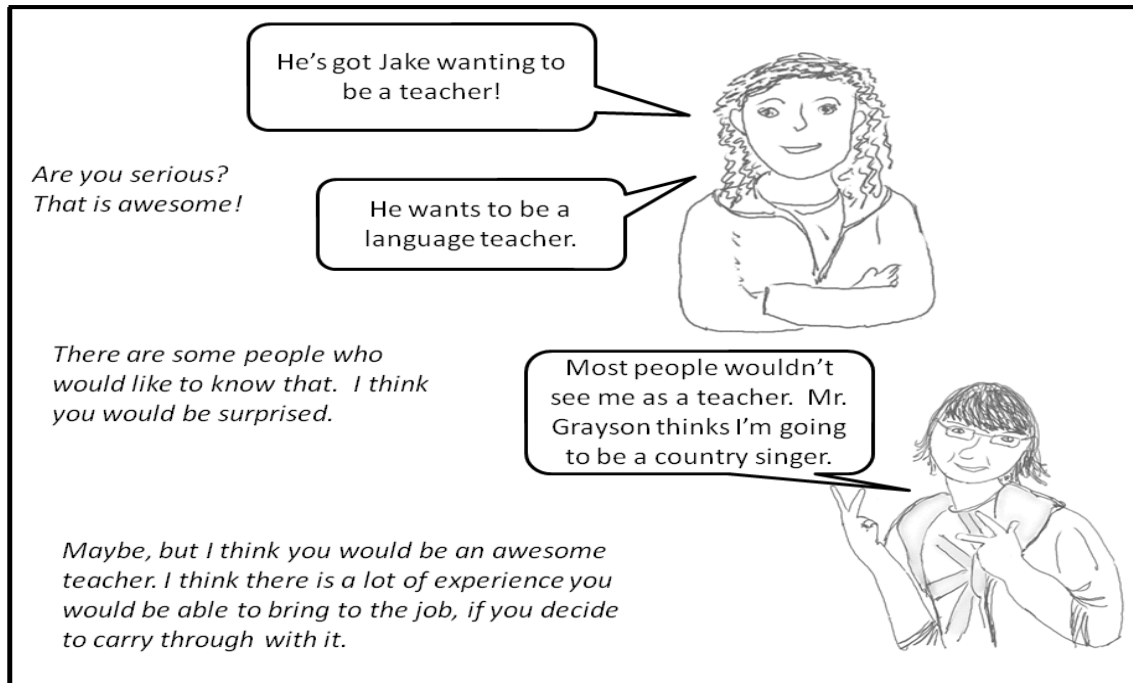


Figure 5.9 Greene, Sophia, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2

During the second focus group session, the students articulated their desire to continue reading the actual text rather than move to the graphic pages as the only source of reading.



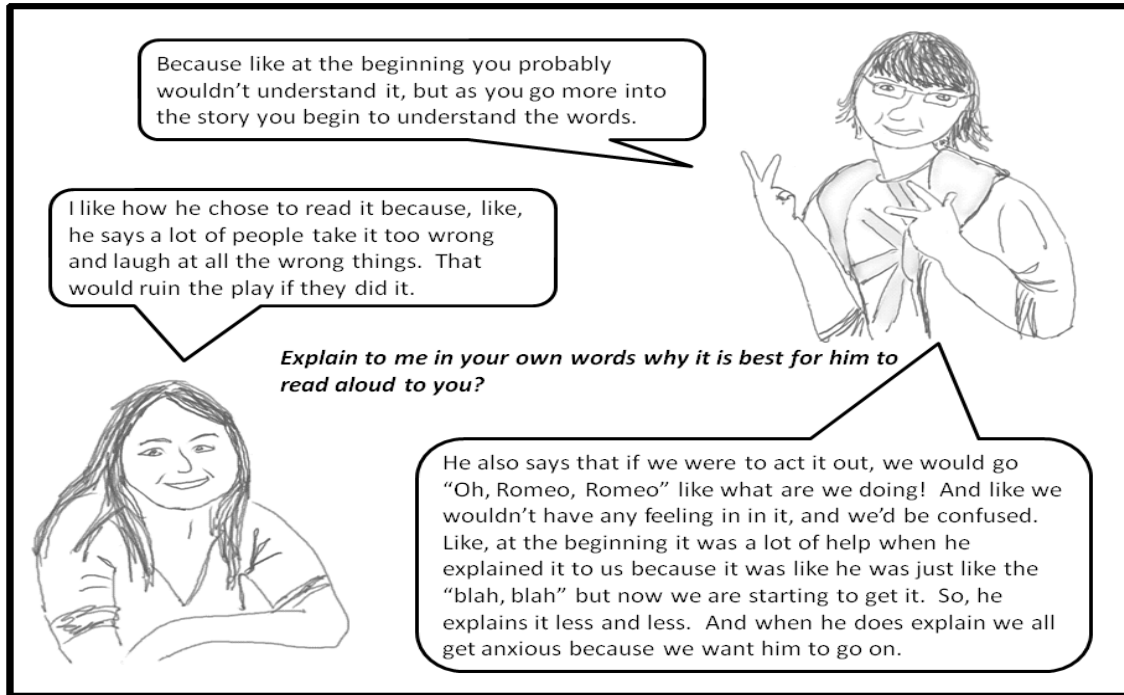


Figure 5.10 Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2

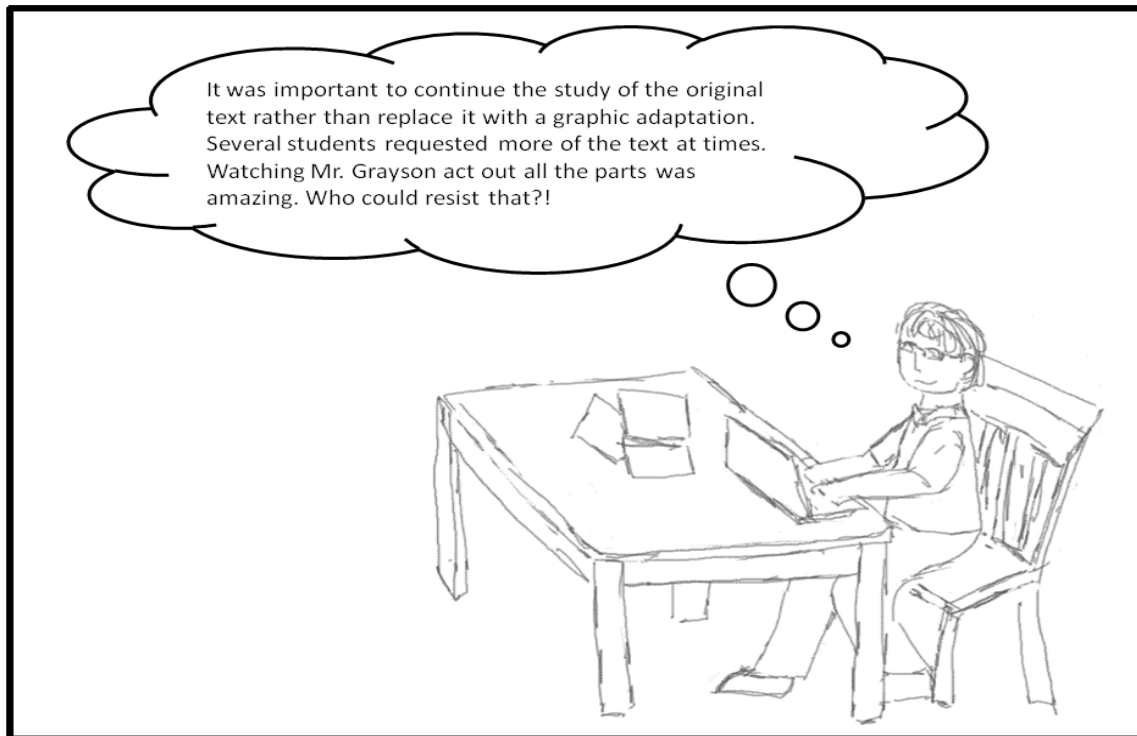


Figure 5.11 Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 7

There were several opportunities in which the students felt the graphic pages

enhanced their understanding of the material and increased their desire to continue reading from the text. They were quick to determine that it was easier to “see” the emotions of the characters from the graphic panels and were better able to put a picture in their mind as they were reading the text from support with the graphic pages. What is important about these observations is that the students began to see the graphic pages as supports for their reading, but they did not consider the graphics as replacements for the text. This was observed during the readings in each of the units and confirmed Finding 1 in setting up a positive connection between student attitudes toward reading and their engagement with text. The use of graphic novels to promote engagement in actual text as a support of difficult passages (Finding 3) was determined through the on-going dialogue in observations and in the focus group settings throughout the traditional short story readings, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the contemporary novel. Several examples of classroom discussions demonstrate the integration of the graphic novels into the readings and the development of student understanding because of them. This particular interchange occurred after the reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Tell Tale Heart*.

Now, the opinion question, and you cannot get this wrong as long as your answer has to do with the story. What did you like or dislike about the graphic novel? Do you think you would understand the story if you just had the pictures, or if you just had the text?

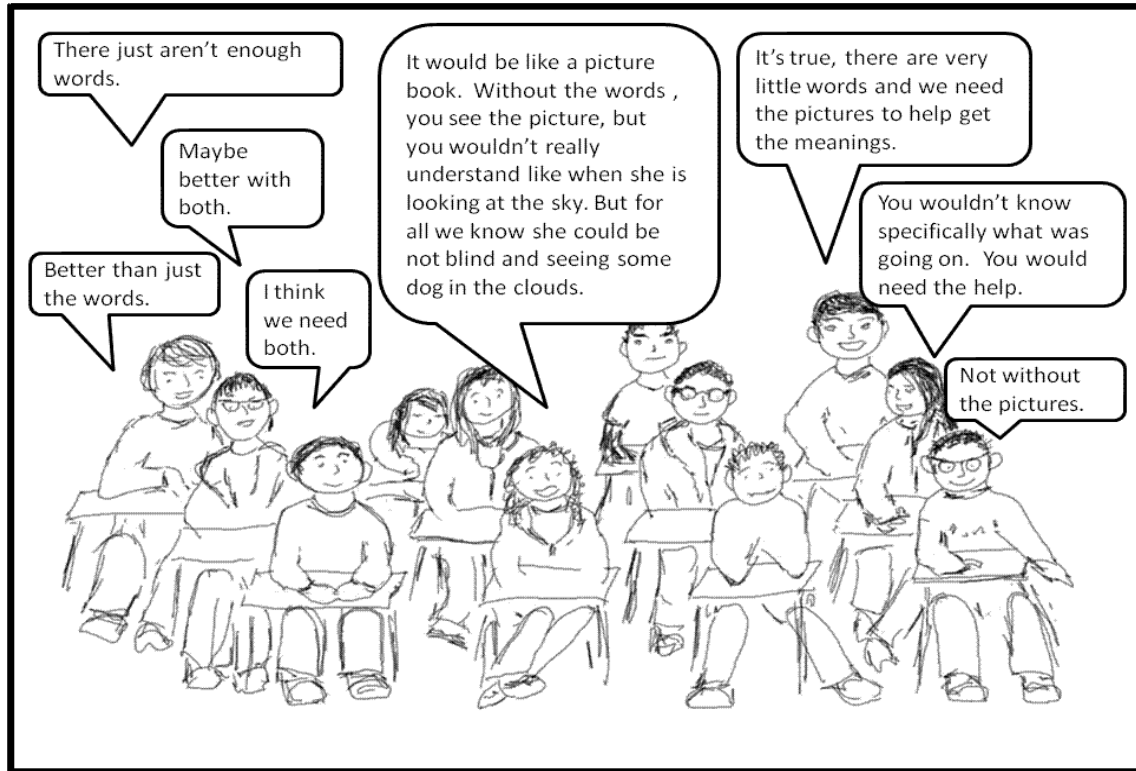


Figure 5.12 Tyler, Jake, Sophia, Mark, Morgan, John, 2010, Observation 2

Another conversation as part of the study of *Romeo and Juliet* focused on viewing the visual graphics to confirm characterizations. In this case, the curiosity expressed by the students continued from one view of a scene to another and helped the students to gain confidence as learners. Mr. Grayson recognized the engagement of his students' learning was connected to their need to be "curious, to feel competent, and to be convinced that they are in control" (Quate & McDermott, 2009, p. 7-8).

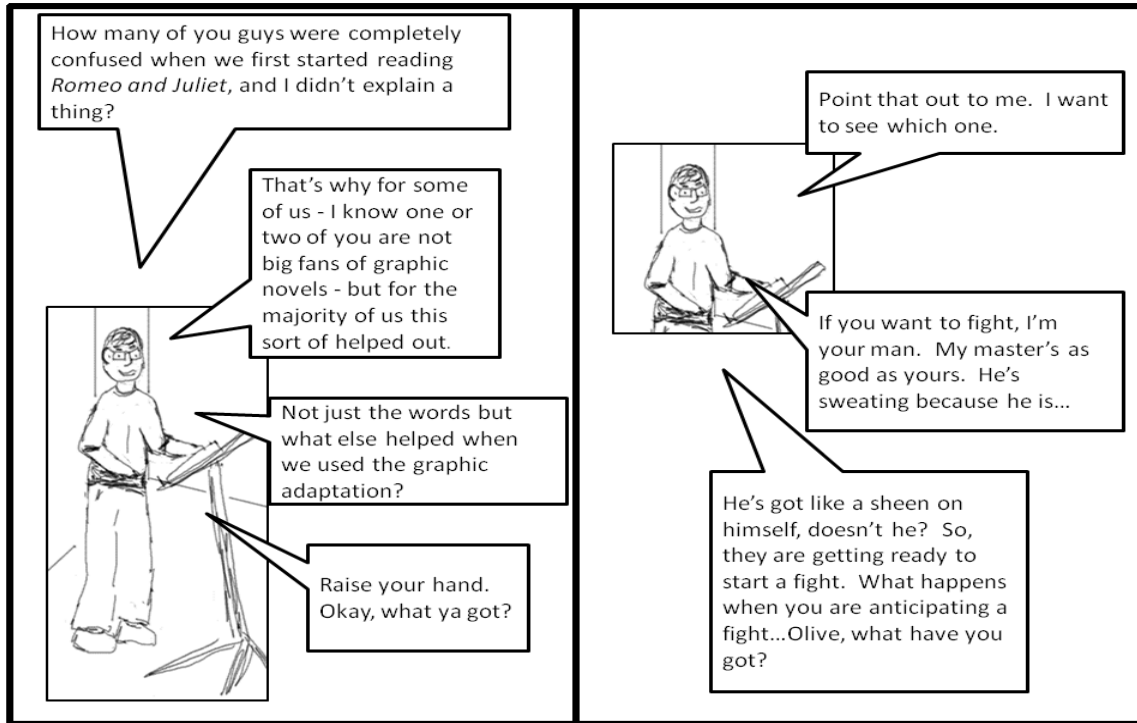


Figure 5.13 Grayson, 2010, Observation 9

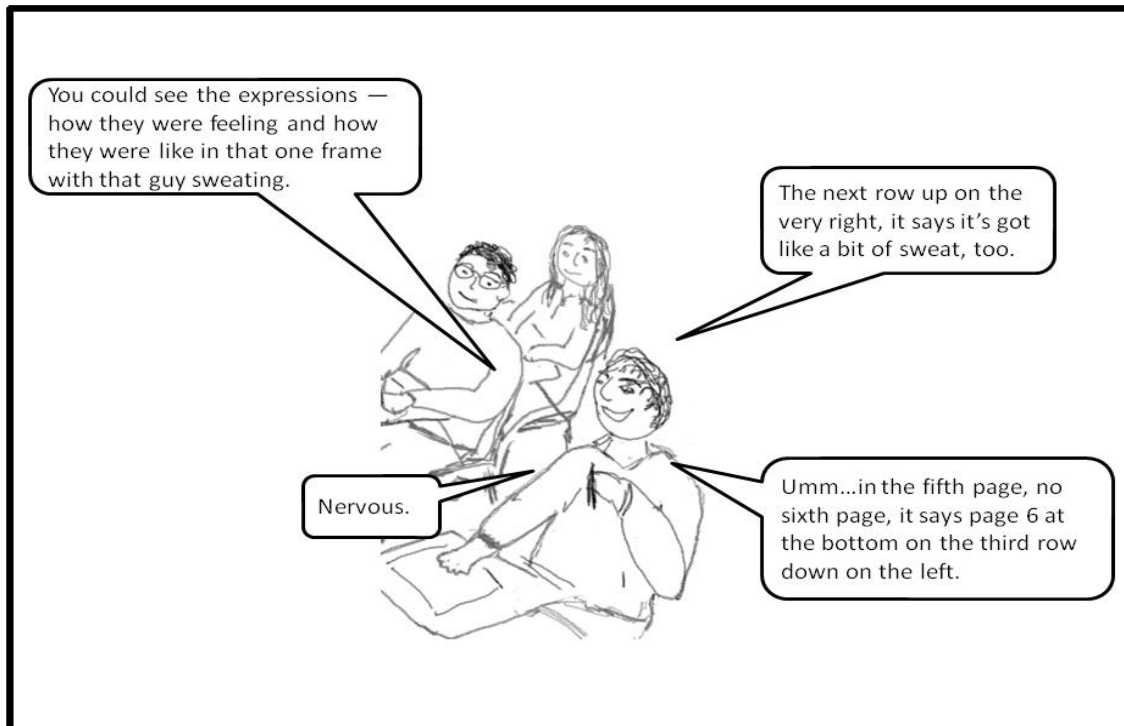


Figure 5.14 Carl, Mary, Mark, 2010, Observation 9

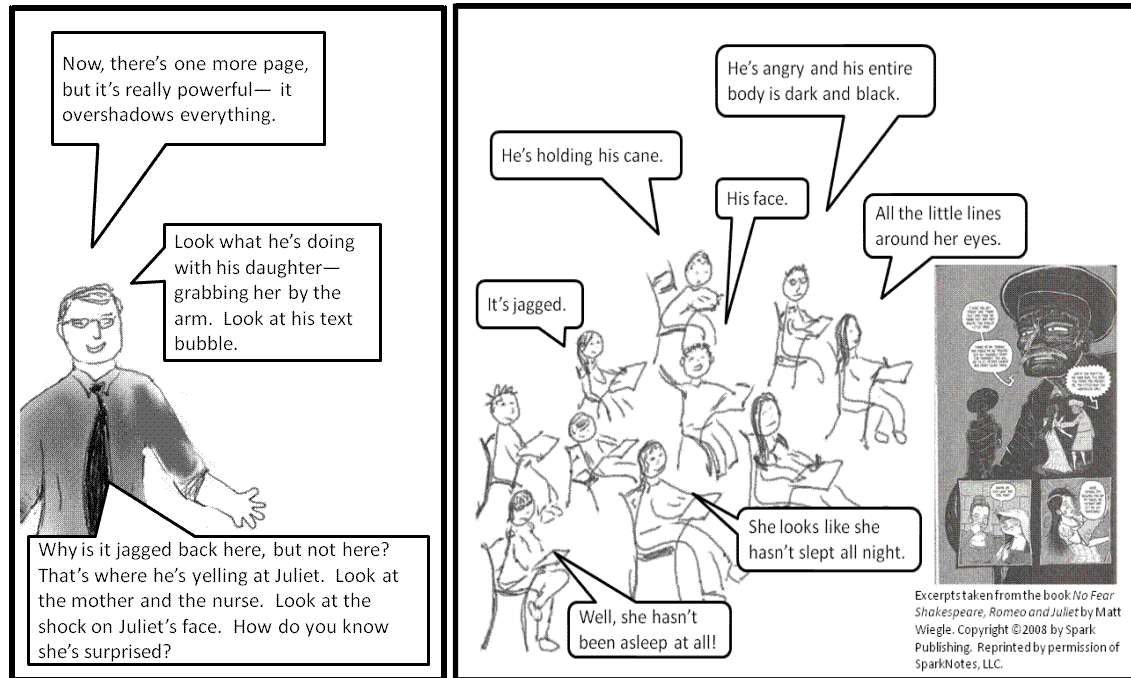


Figure 5.15 Grayson, 2010, Observation 9

What was particularly important to the students was their ability to understand the characters better through the use of the graphic pages. Much of what the students were looking for in their reading was the emotional actions and reactions related to the plot that were difficult for them to interpret through the text alone. Mr. Grayson's dynamic and extreme reading techniques were arguably significant contributors to student comprehension regarding the characters but several students expressed their positive attitude toward the use of graphic pages to help them to more closely "see" and "hear" what they read. The graphics made it easier for them to recognize the emotions and feel the tone of the scene more readily.

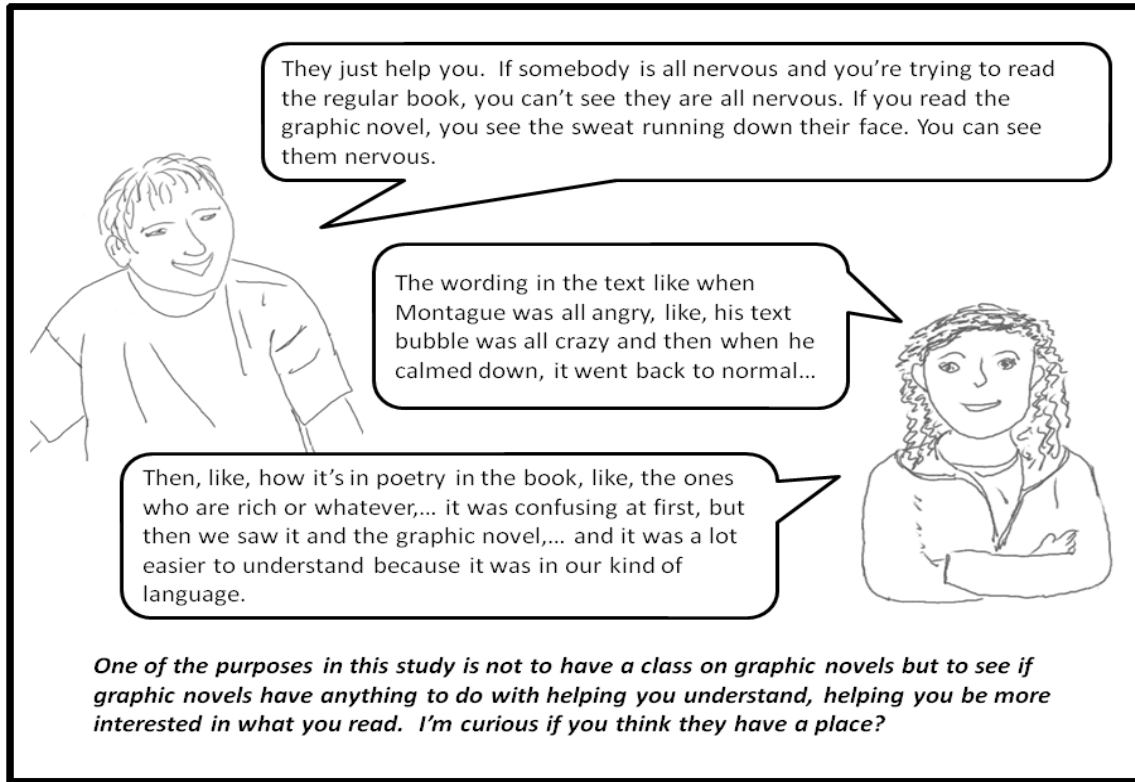


Figure 5.16 Mark, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2

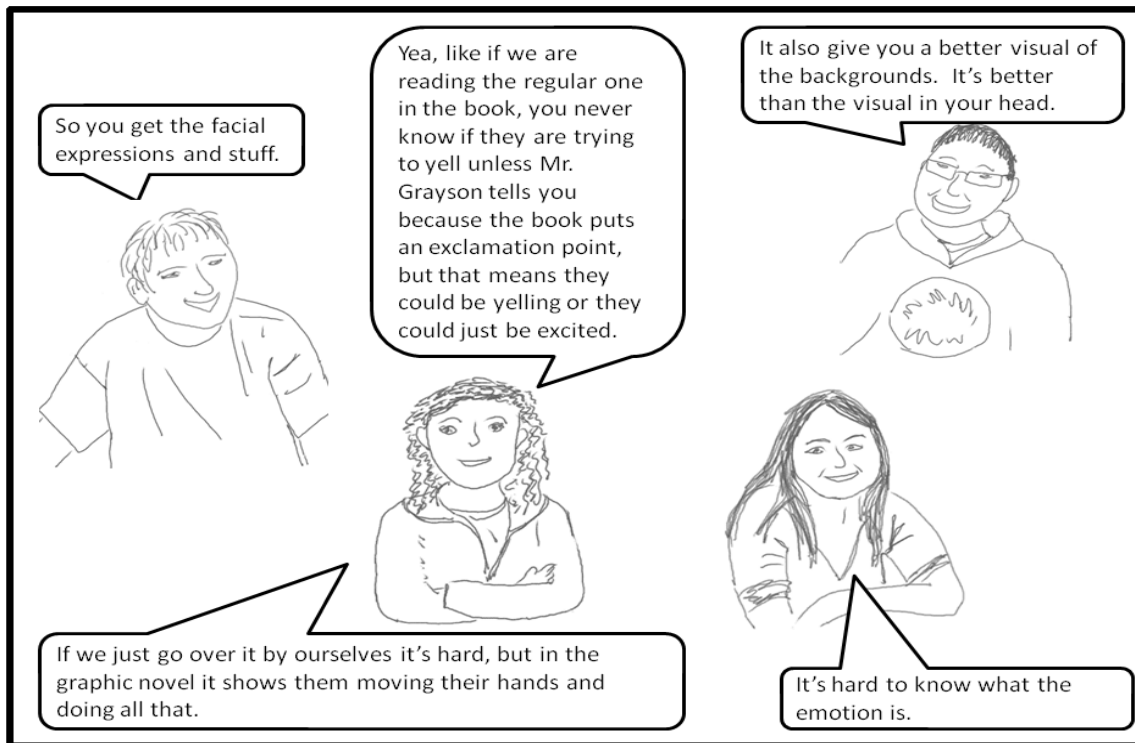


Figure 5.17 Mark, Sophia, John, Alice, 2010, Focus Group 2

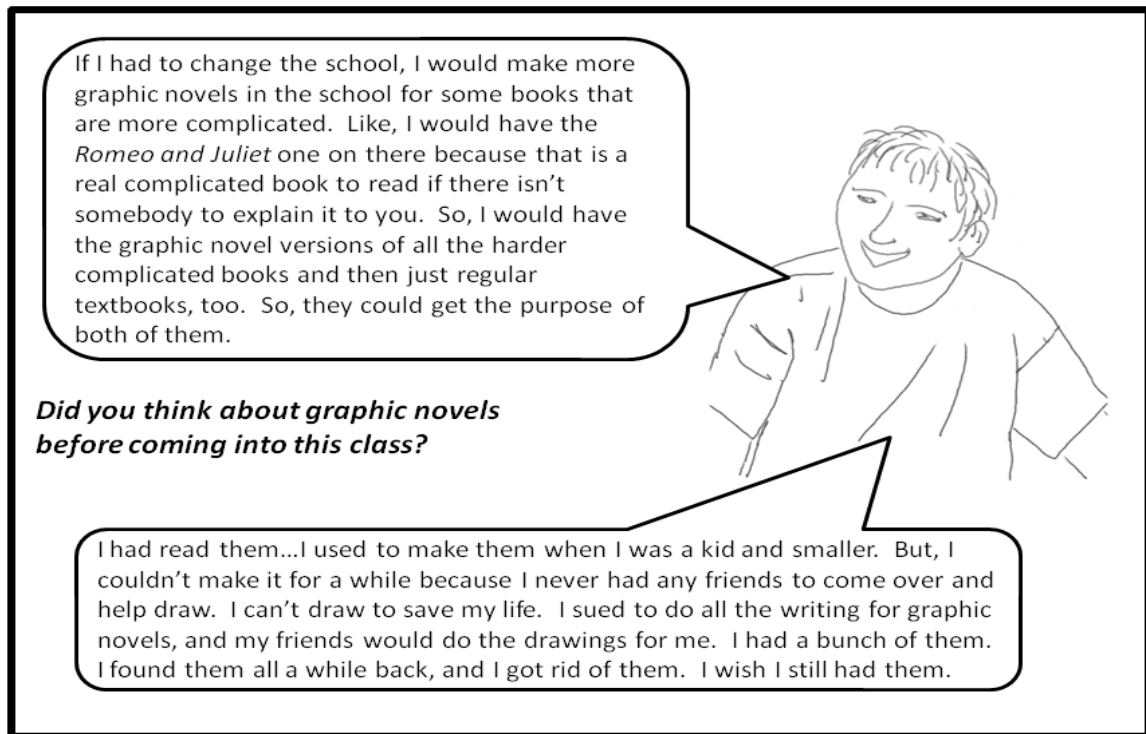


Figure 5.18 Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2

Mr. Grayson's recognition of and deliberate attempts to nurture these needs provided ample sources of detail to support findings 1 and 3 in connecting student attitudes toward reading as well as the use of graphic novels as a support for encouraging students to accept the challenge of reading unfamiliar or difficult passages.

### **Finding 2: Popular Culture—What are they talking about?**

This study concentrated on levels of motivation and engagement in this particular class between the class and the text, the class and the graphic novels as well as the interactions between the class and their teacher. Mr. Grayson consistently infused common reality television shows, comic features, popular music, fashion and style into each lesson creating an innovative interplay of popular culture within the context of instruction. Students accepted these references as evidence of Mr. Grayson's understanding and validation of their own culture as an adolescent. He did not present or

“poke” these references into the lessons as open attempts to connect with the student, instead his remarks and asides were a natural part of the conversation, related to the circumstances in the lesson or focus point in the story. Finding 2 recognized the reaction of students to these elements of popular culture that included graphic novels and references to common television shows, movies, and music as a bridge to student relationships with reading traditional literature.

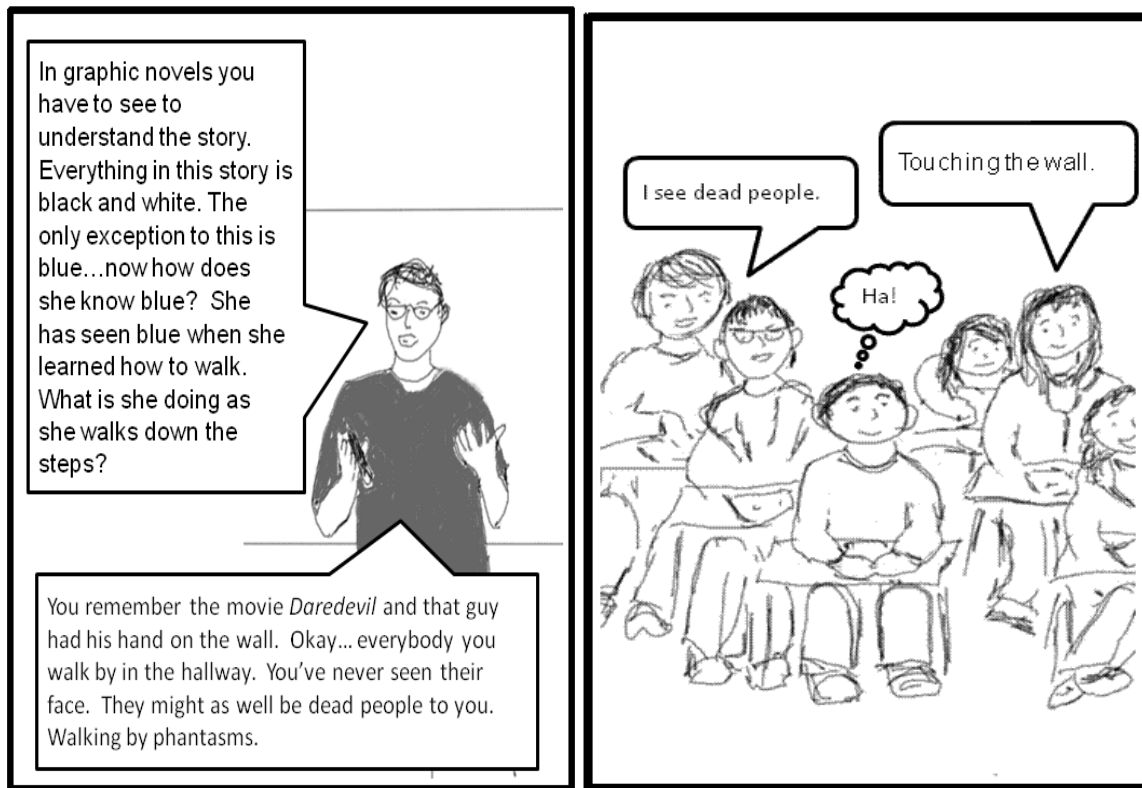


Figure 5.19 Grayson, Jake, Mary, 2010, Observation 2



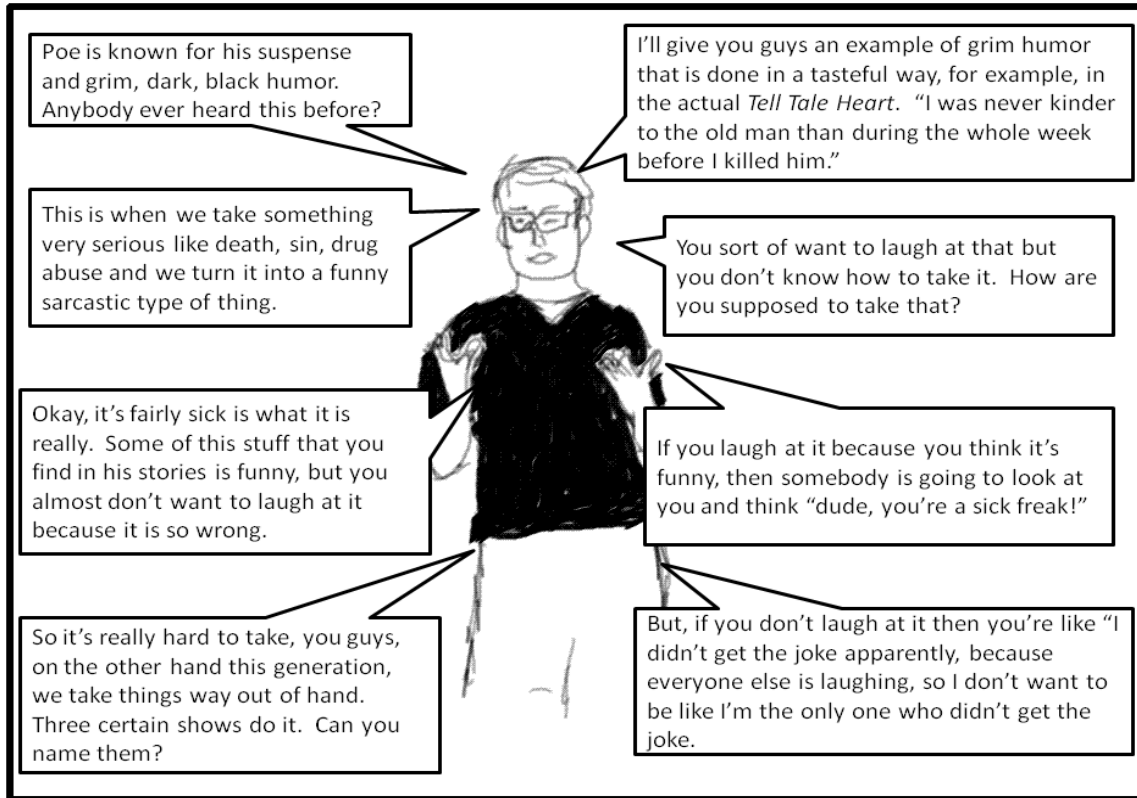


Figure 5.20 Grayson, 2010, Observation 2



Figure 5.21 Jake, Mark, John, Travis, 2010, Observation 2

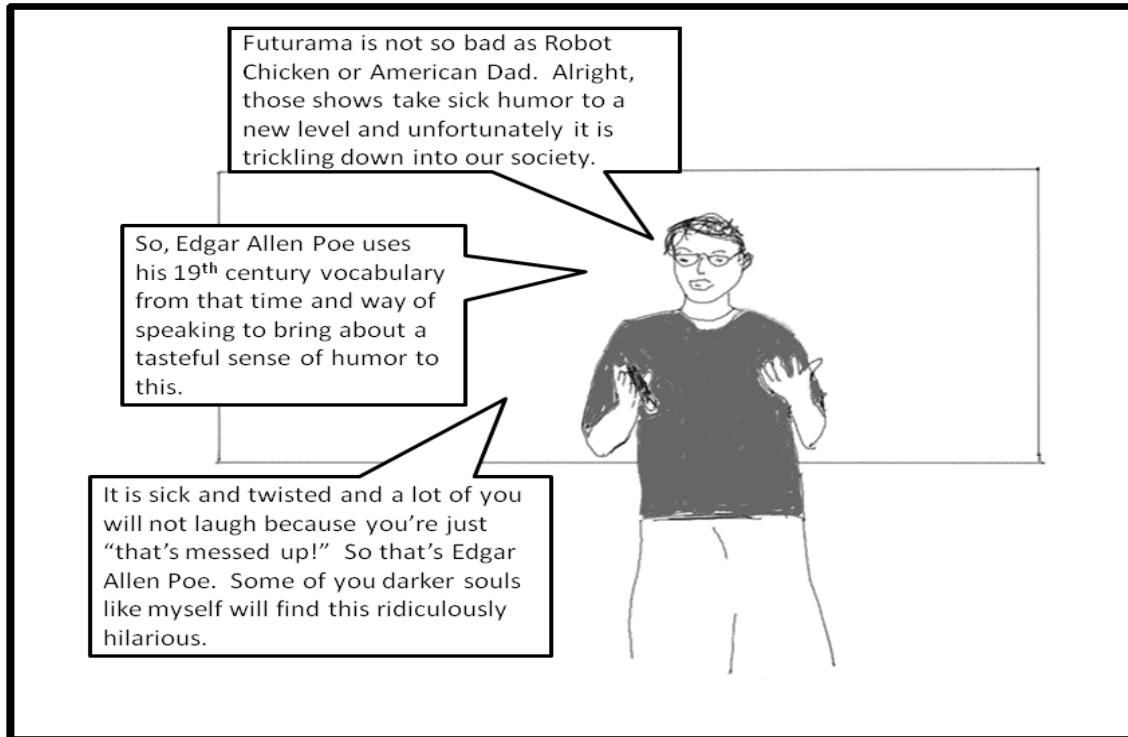


Figure 5.22 Grayson, 2010, Observation 2

This commentary illustrates Mr. Grayson's smooth and natural transition between traditional literature and popular culture in discussions that promote student integration into the lesson and spark their interest through making common student practices in media and entertainment relevant in the school setting. This serves to increase student motivation and maximize student opportunities for active engagement in the learning process. Alvermann, Moon & Hagood (1999) suggest that "the construction of meaning and pleasures depends on the knowledge of a particular group at a particular time and about a particular popular culture text" (p. 29). Mr. Grayson requires an active rather than passive construction of meaning from traditional texts that includes the knowledge of common contemporary media and film. This allows the students to utilize prior knowledge from the media source or element of popular culture to support meaning within the literature. What was even more evident than motivation was the ability the

students had in utilizing the pleasure of popular media to move their thinking beyond the standard and into alternative points of view and interpretation. The Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey in both administrations emphasized the positive appeal of texting, email, and the use of the Internet. Students today combine this media to develop their own construct of the world. Often, media such as these and including graphic novels and comics are clouded by negative perceptions of little or no educational value. According to Richard Beach (2007) “audiences experience high levels of pleasure in responding to texts as forms of entertainment that evoke emotions of suspense, admiration, intrigue, fear, power, envy, and so on” (p. 4). The act of choosing text whether print or some other media must also consider whether or not students will be engaged “to the extent that they actually want to learn how to read them” (p. 4). Mr. Grayson bridged the use of traditional text with the possibilities of popular culture through continued and consistent commentary, discussion, and development of various media intended to support engagement in the process.

In the early days of the case study, as evidenced in the opening activities of daily oral language practice, the student demonstrated an unwillingness to respond and connect until Mr. Grayson began introducing more comical elements and direct connections to the television, music, and activities in which they participate on a daily basis. For instance, the lesson occurring on the first observation related to grammatical concepts including a direct association with the popular television advertising of the “Geico” cavemen. First the students found this amusing and then began to follow in the spirit of the simplistic renderings Mr. Grayson was looking for when breaking down the sentence into its grammatical parts. His approach and presentation was amusing and promoted

engagement represented in attentive facial expressions, sitting forward in seats, increased impromptu responses and direct interaction between Mr. Grayson and individual students. However, even with this approach, students remained on task and interactive with the lesson. This type of interaction while desired in many classrooms may be feared or designated even less favorably as a “dog and pony show.” bell hooks (1994) has expressed the thought that:

If there is laughter, a reciprocal exchange may be taking place...anyone can entertain...They can take this attitude because of the idea of reciprocity, of respect, is not ever assumed. It is not assumed that your ideas can be entertaining, moving. To prove your academic seriousness, students should be almost dead, quiet, asleep, not up, excited, and buzzing, lingering around the classroom. (p. 145)

Relationships within the classroom between teacher and student as well as student to student serve to promote motivation and engagement developing trust within the classroom setting. “If pleasure in the classroom is feared” as suggested by hooks (1994, p. 145), then the definitions of engagement are challenged as well. Directive approaches that include humor, entertainment, and connections to popular culture support a connected-ness to the curriculum and a position of respect by the teacher in taking the potentially risky opportunity to employ more direct connections to those current realities that appeal to students and drawing those connections to traditional content.

The task assignment related to the novel *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins viewed comics and graphic novels from a student construction and required the students to render complicated scenes into their own preferred meanings. They were then asked to

utilize comic frames to conceptualize what they had read into a blend of visual imagery and text. This contemporary novel was chosen for its high interest and compelling plot detail. Miller (2001) believes that “all novels tend to create a virtual reality in the minds of their readers” (p. 43). The assignment related to this novel required the students to take what they “saw” from their own “virtual reality” sequence and translate that to cohesive comic panels. This activity required the students to examine particular scenes and elicit meaning from them in a way that could be portrayed with a blending of graphics and text to construct meaning following Miller’s (2001) thought that “the interior space a novel generates in its reader’s mind works as a strong vehicle of meaning” (p. 43). Pulling on those inner spaces in the mind focused students on details related to plot that needed to construct meaning through the blending of text and graphics and contain strong support in the metaphor and symbolism.

The ultimate goal for this activity was to create the series of comics through a website designed to work with students in producing comic pages. The students were given the opportunity to work in the computer lab during school hours as well as at home on the Pixton.com website to create their graphic pages. Student access to this site supported their desire as reflected on the Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey as a positive task related to their reading with direct connections to their interest in the Internet. Mr. Grayson commented on the use of the online website for comic creation as “one of the best teaching tools I could have used in the classroom. It helped to motivate the students to learn about literature in a new way. We covered everything from plot to characterization and beyond using Pixton as our medium for comprehension” (Grayson, 2010, Planning Session 3). Requiring students to create their own comic text responded

to the “need to recognize that today’s adolescents are actively involved in participating in and constructing media, and that schools and teachers must be instrumental in helping students build on and further develop these various literacies” (Beach, 2007, p. 8).

Support for students in these areas challenges traditional modes of teaching and learning and validates common adolescent practices and reading choices beyond the standard required in schools. In addition to the creative aspects of the comic, the material generated by the students was published and a copy was given to the principal, assistant principal and each of the students. They also requested that Mr. Grayson send a copy to Suzanne Collins. At the time of this writing, they had not received a response.

Gee (2003) suggests “that active, critical learning in any domain should lead to learners becoming, in a sense, designers” (p. 99). The exercise in creating the comic panels placed the students in a different more contemporary role of designing visual and textual examples of internalized meanings as produced through the reading and discussion of the novel. Carrier (2000) suggests the possibility that “comics represent that relation of inner states and outward bodily expression which characterizes persons” (p. 73). The groups used this exercise to create scenes through the medium of comics in an effort to “mimic narrative sequences [and reinforce] that process which characterizes perception” (p. 73). One particular scene in the book struck an emotional chord with many of the students. This scene involved the death of a favored character and the reactions of the protagonist. Heated discussion between the student groups occurred that demonstrated their perceptions of the significance of this scene in the story as well as the personal performative act of infusing their emotions into the reading of it. The students’ comments were pointed in their understanding of the implications and consequences for

the main character and changes that must occur in plot because of this character's death.

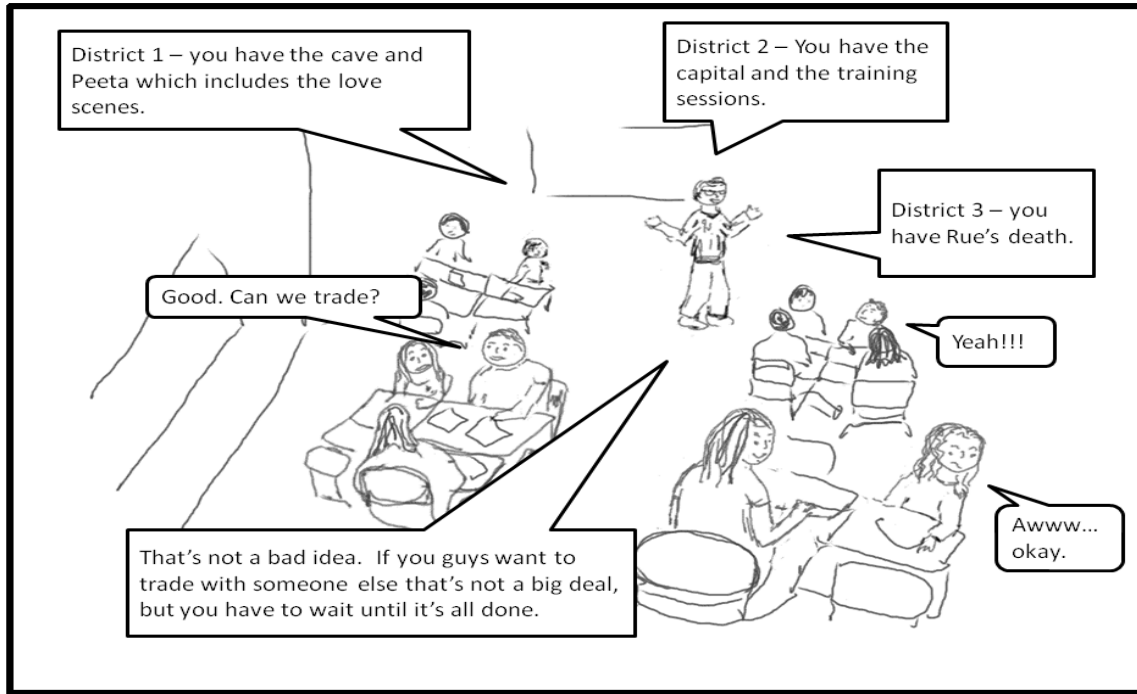


Figure 5.23 Grayson, 2010, Observation 6

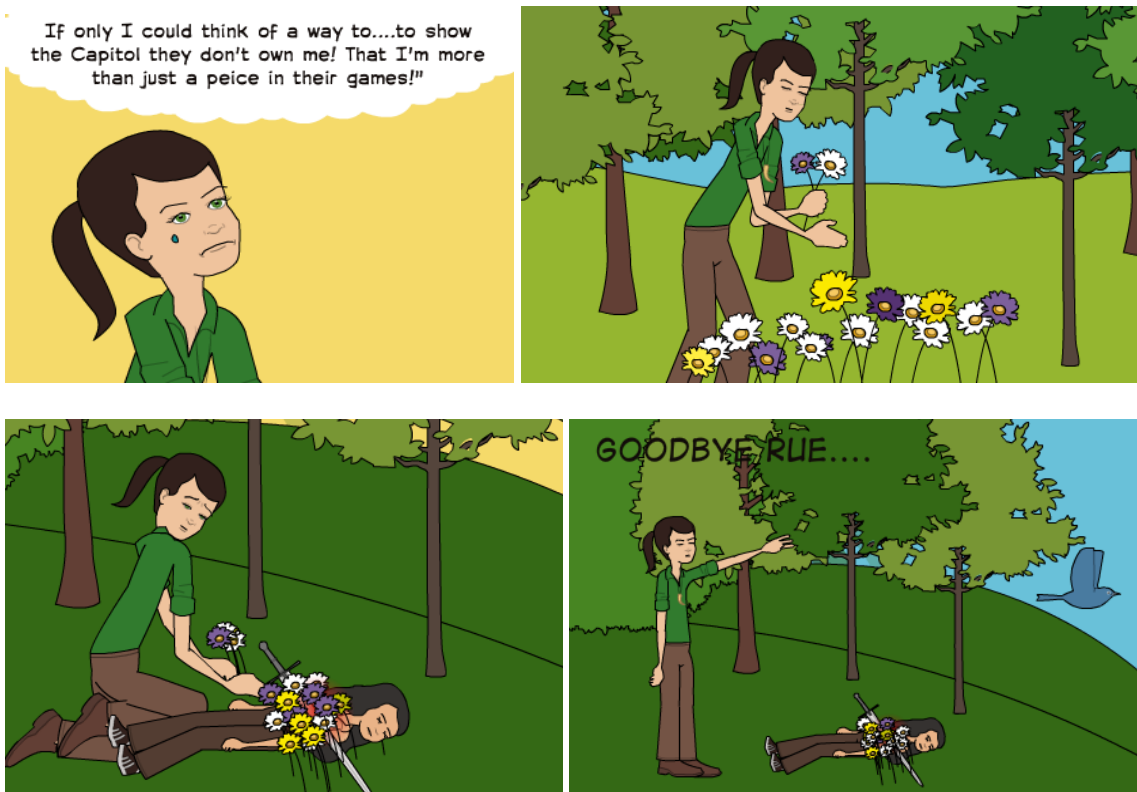


Figure 5.24 Images © 2011 Pixton Comics Inc. Pixon.com

Frank discussion of current issues, media connections and textual renderings with real-world connections set the stage for deeper investigations in critical understandings within the literature study.

### **Finding 3: Reading, Motivation and Adolescent Readers**

Finding 3 was identified how graphic novels promoted engagement in the actual text when it was used as a support for reading motivation and acceptance of challenging passages in literature. One of the on-going problems in adolescent literacy addressed through this case study was the issue of motivation. However, understanding the impact of student beliefs in his or her own ability in meeting the demands of middle or high school content, vocabulary, and comprehension revealed a more complicated view related to achievement. Pressley (2006) addressed the problem with decreases in adolescent reading as due in part to differences in ability and effort related to motivation. Students in the early elementary years do not tend to differentiate between ability and effort in their reading experiences; however, as they move into the middle grades “students are explaining successes and failures more in terms of ability than effort” (Pressley, 2006, p. 275). With increasing demands on adolescent content reading, vocabulary, as well as limitations in student choice and interest, student belief in ability as reason for perceived “failures” in academic tasks contributes to decreases in motivation in reading.



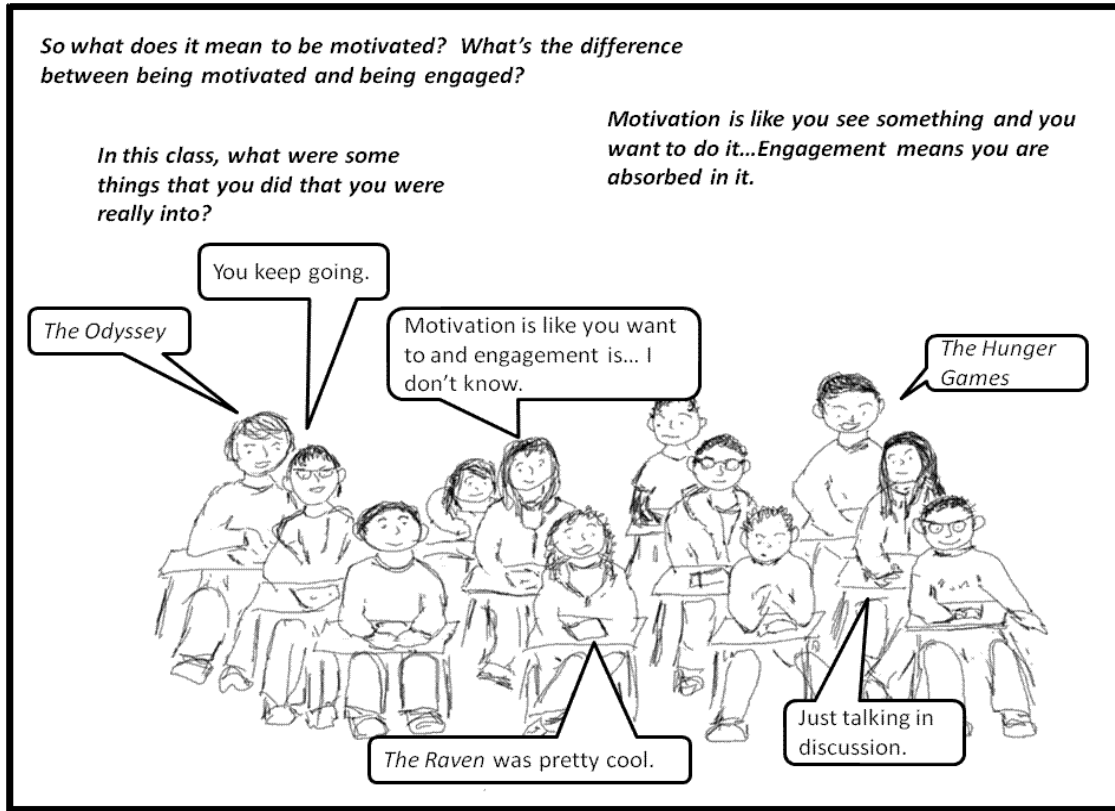


Figure 5.25 Greene, Travis, Jake, Morgan, Sophia, Mark, Mary, 2011, Observation 14

The first focus group mirrored some of the negative attitudes toward reading and school in general illustrated by limited and stilted responses to questions, but even more telling were the changes suggested by the students in the types of classes they would prefer.

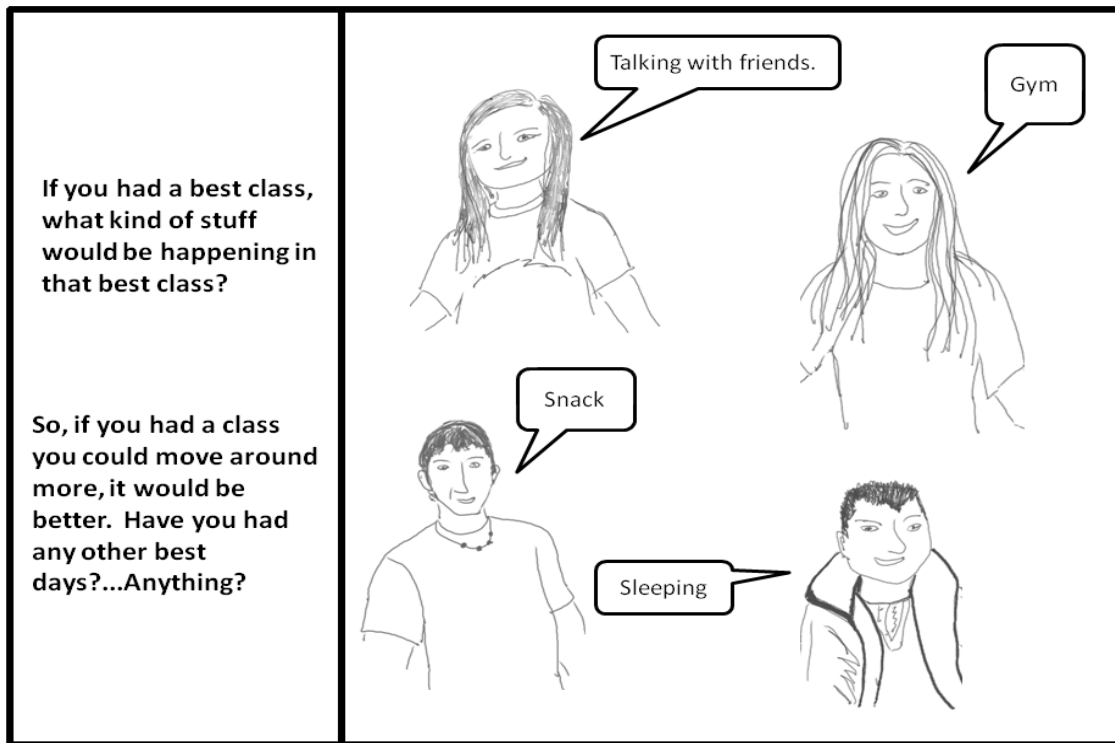


Figure 5.26 Jared, Evan, Cathy, Morgan, 2010, Focus Group 1

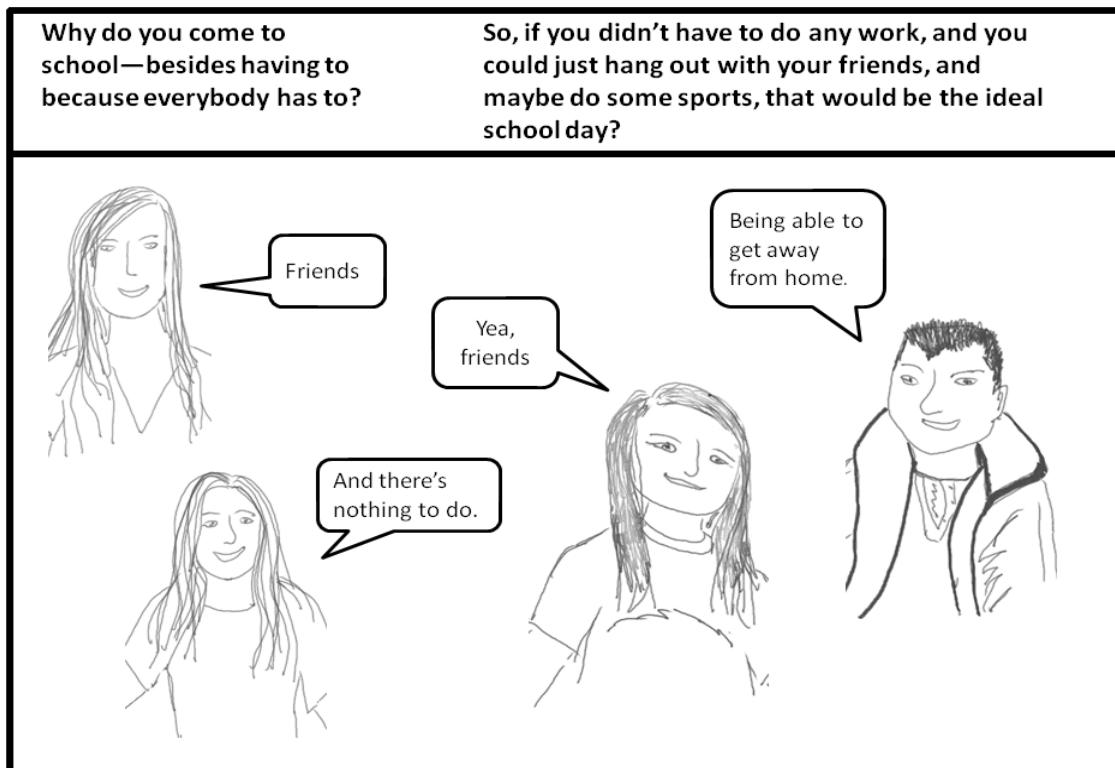


Figure 5.27 Susan, Morgan, Cathy, Evan, 2010, Focus Group 1

These students gave responses that indicated their desire to be in school for the social contact, but their lack of interest in the academic settings. When asked what they would suggest to make school or their classes better, they responded with several ideas that appealed to them that included the commitment and zeal Mr. Grayson uses in his class as well as more interesting material in the form of graphic novels, as well as giving them opportunities to discuss points of interest whether in the material they read or current issues of the day.

Beers (2003) comments on the negative attitudes of the adolescent reader tagged with the label of “struggling” as having “had so many moments of failure with reading that they not only dislike it but have come to believe that they cannot do it... Their attitudes toward reading keep them distanced from reading” (p. 17). Through a review of the first survey, many of the students expressed a disconnection with the assigned academic reading and were not interested in reading books assigned by the teacher, academic research and reading from the Internet, or in visiting the library to read or check out a book.

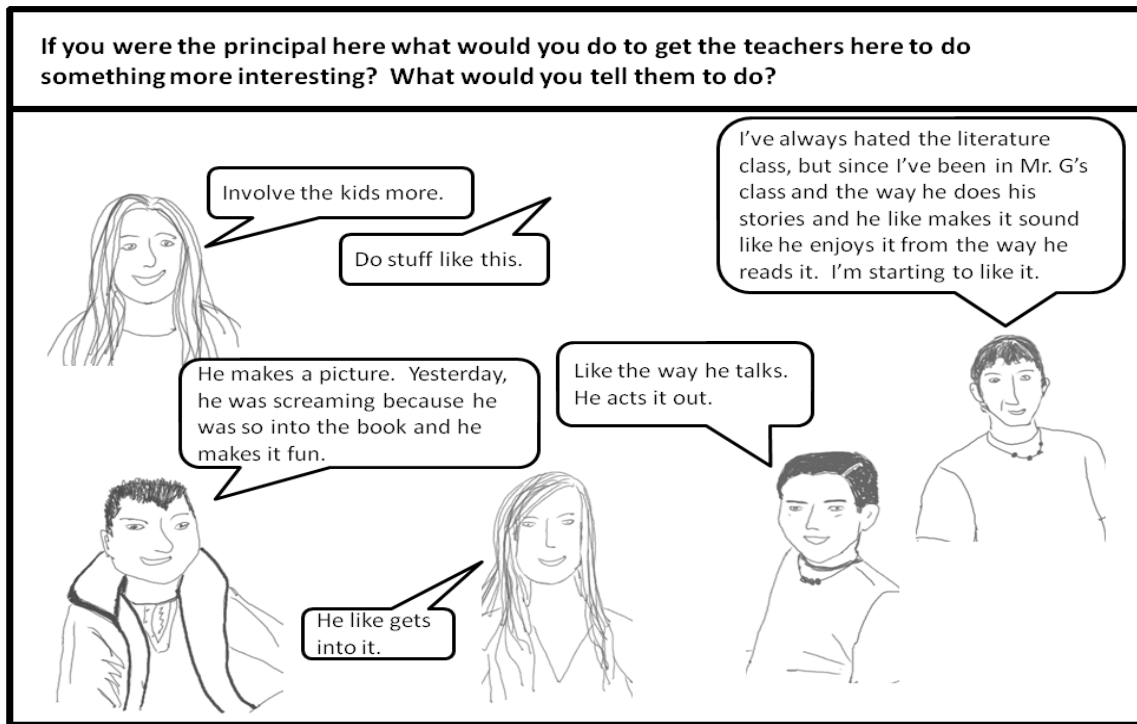


Figure 5.28 Morgan, Evan, Cathy, James, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1

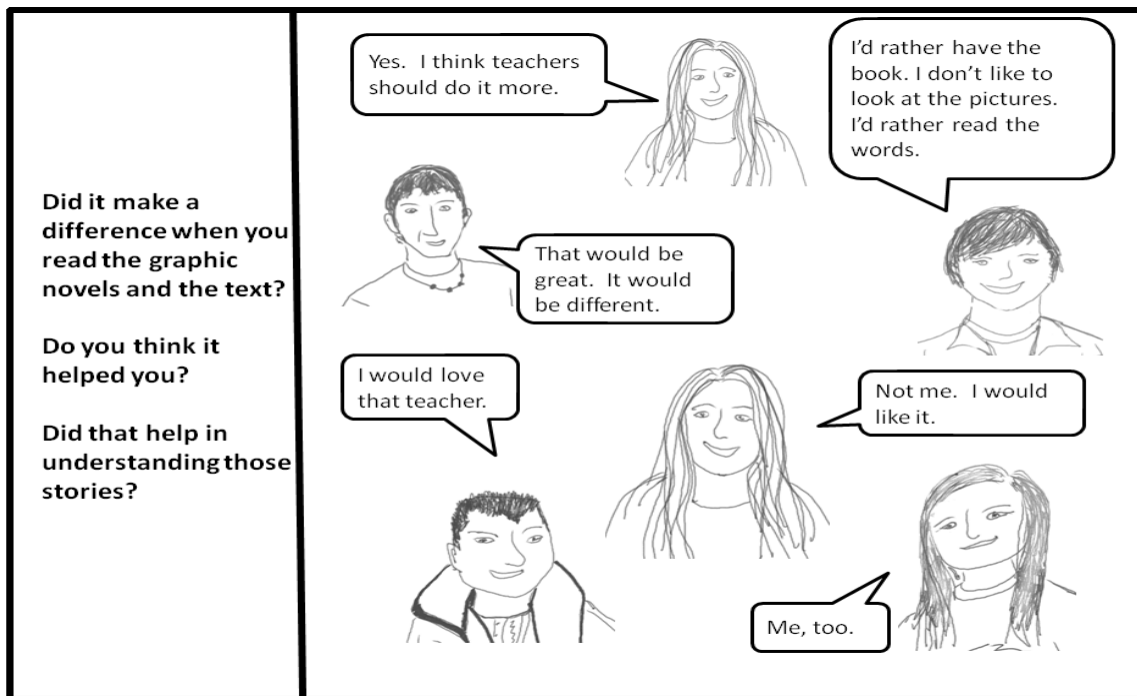


Figure 5.29 Evan, Jared, Taylor, Cathy, Travis, 2010, Focus Group 1

Given the negative reactions of students toward reading in the early days of the semester, it was important to note that these perceptions of students began to change as

the semester progressed. Opportunities arose for Mr. Grayson to encourage students to press through difficult passages and readings by direct instruction in comprehending those passages, explanation of difficult vocabulary, and complete commitment to presentation of that material. Most of the discussion in the classroom involved all the students in most of the units. Small group discussion techniques were utilized in the contemporary novel, *The Hunger Games*, and the graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*. These techniques contributed to the student interest by appealing to their desire for discussion with their friends as well as provided a platform for testing meaning and comprehension with their peers. While appealing to the students' preferences, Mr. Grayson used graphic techniques even without a formal comic panel or graphic novel to support difficult passages and understanding of the literature (Finding 3).

During the discussion related to Connell's *The Most Dangerous Game*, Mr. Grayson utilized rich visual imagery in his presentation through his oral embellishments of the text combined with his visual renderings of some of the key elements related to plot structure during the rising action of the story. He fostered centered student attention and suspense through creating a visual image of the "trap" to be sprung in the story. This particular imagery focused students on plot elements and utilized graphic elements drawn by Mr. Grayson to snap students to attention within the lesson. This particular story was powerful in the development of plot yet a traditional reading of this short story was not met initially with desired connected-ness from the students until Mr. Grayson began to implement vocal accents, graphic descriptions, and visual cues to let the students in on the meaning and emotions attached to the specific language.

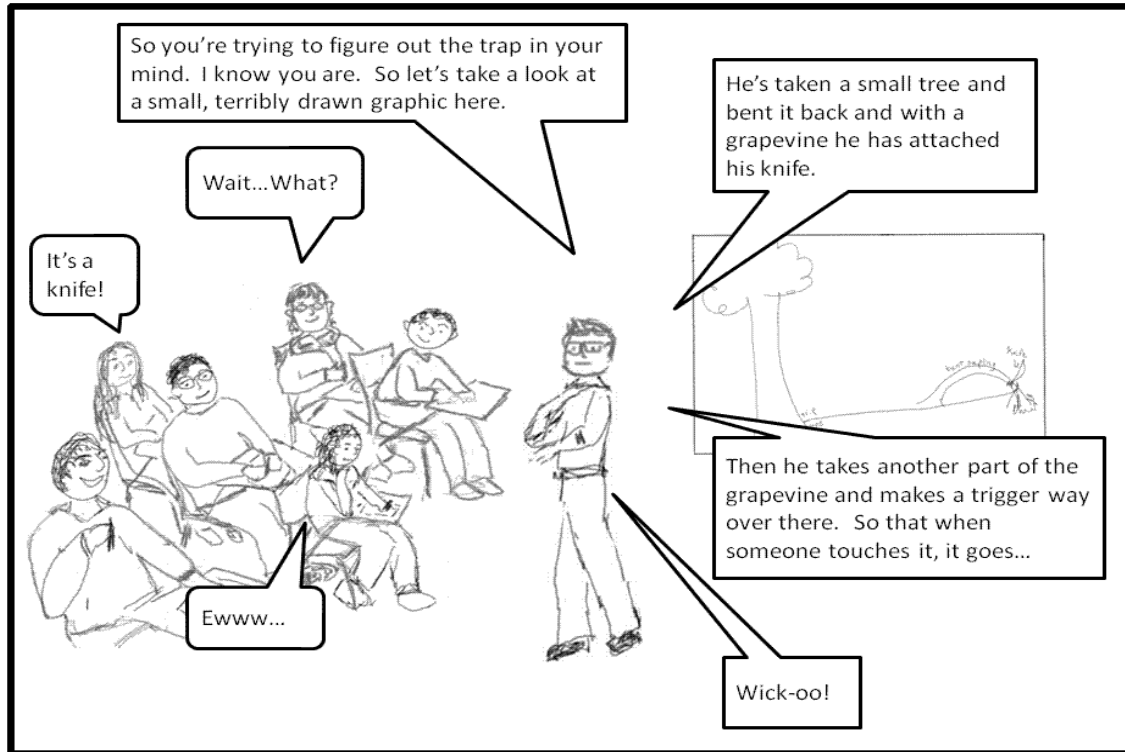


Figure 5.30 Grayson, 2010, Observation 1

The discussion included some of the basic and graphic elements of the character's crude plan to save himself and kill one of the other characters. Mr. Grayson utilized the text, his acting abilities, and visual imagery to promote understanding of this story. The natural pace of the story and Mr. Grayson's desire to increase the suspense and thrill of the reading caused him to vary the tone and depth of the words in his cryptic description of the trap and its deadly consequences. The students appeared mesmerized by the discussion further punctuating the positive effects of this teacher's immersion into the literature and his creative presentation.

Mr. Grayson made note of student connections and made it a practice to bring some of his observations to the attention of the students. During the unit on *Romeo and Juliet*, Mr. Grayson included several forms of the play and invited interpretations from the actual text, graphic frames, discussions, and the viewing of two different versions of

*Romeo and Juliet* in film. Throughout the study, Mr. Grayson was focused on increasing student understanding but increasingly made reference as well as contributed to the real world applications of the literature. For instance, in his opening statements, Mr. Grayson emphasized that the content of this play was a tragedy of love. He states:

No matter how bad you want this to end well, we are going to kill these teenagers.

You will beg me to make the characters think clearly. However, instead you [the students] will begin to think more clearly. (Grayson, 2010, Observation 7)

Mr. Grayson chose to open the discussion with relevance to loving relationships. He states:

Love does not conquer all. Logical thought, faith, spirituality, love for one another and complete teamwork helps to conquer things.” (Grayson, 2010, Observation 7)

This immediately led to student interaction, comment, and engagement.

Of note here as well is the focus on the notion of love by Mr. Grayson and the students’ personal understanding of it. In the conversation between the students and Mr. Grayson, he speaks of the typical behaviors in high school relationships. At one point he even paints a verbal picture stating that:

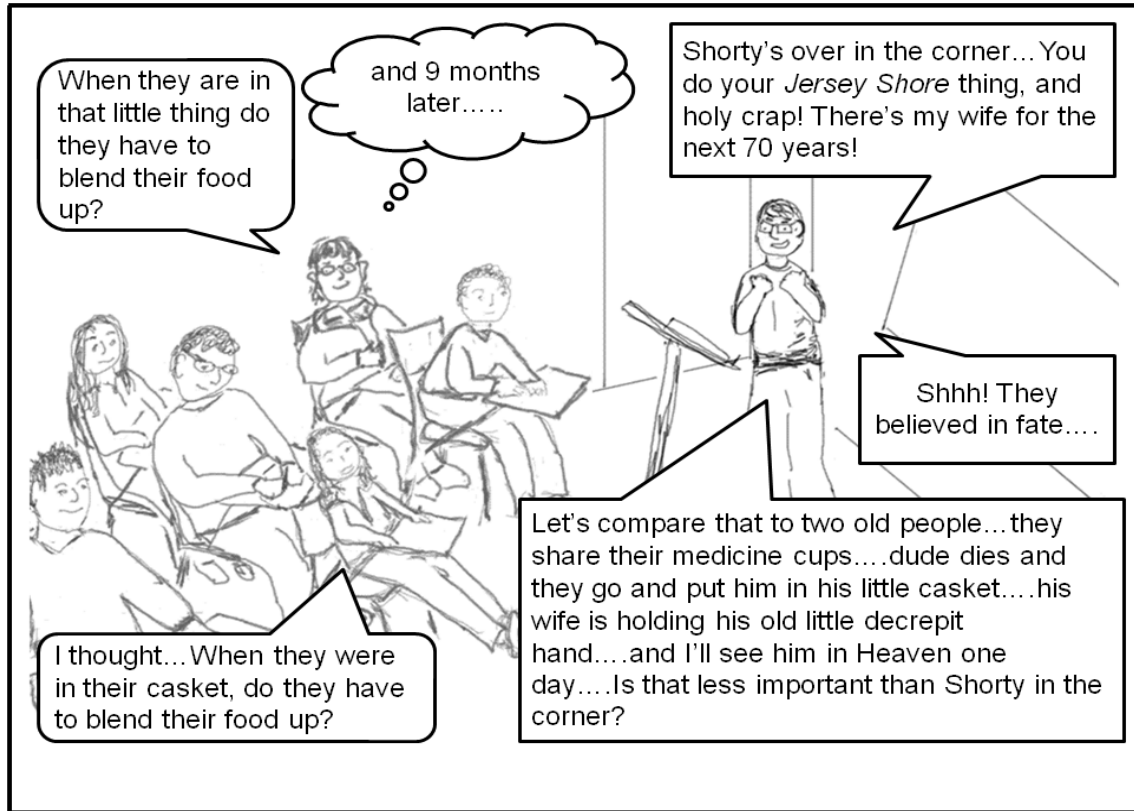


Figure 5.31 Grayson, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Observation 7

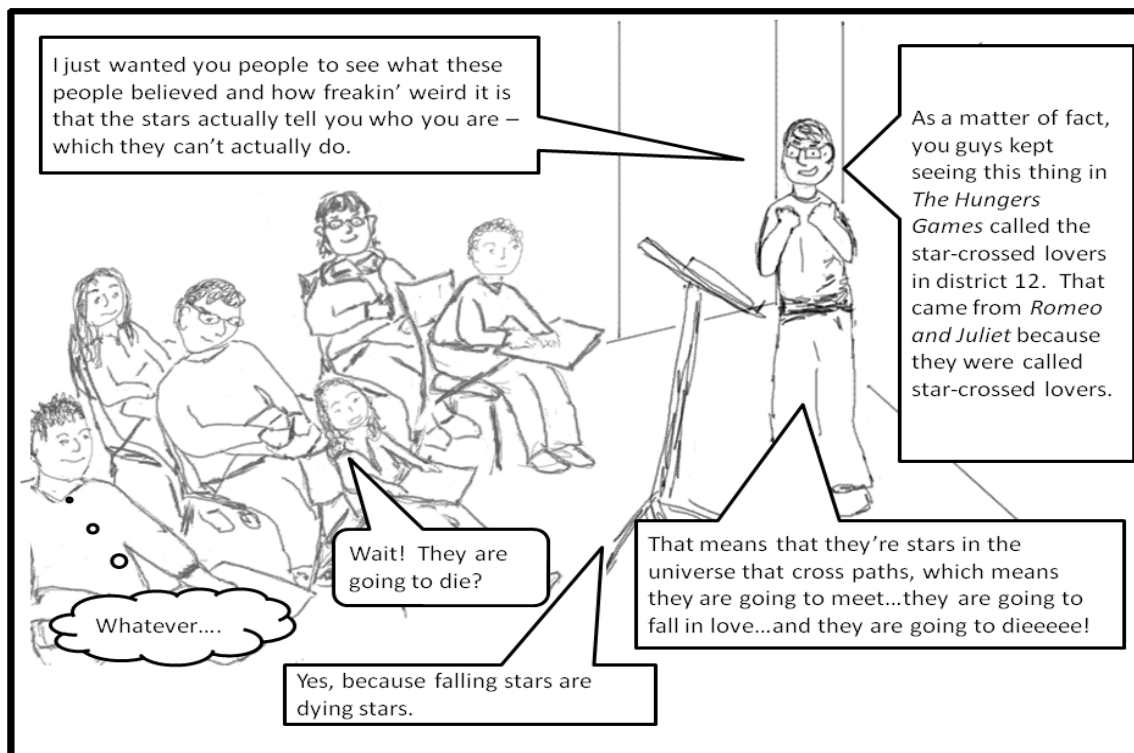


Figure 5.32 Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 7



Mr. Grayson disrupts the students' former and accepted understanding of the concept of love. This "deconstruction" makes the learning uncomfortable, throwing them off-guard in their expectations and common notions of what love is. According to Caputo's (1997) rhetoric in discussing Jacques Derrida's ideas on deconstruction "the very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need—do not have definable meanings and determinable missions (p. 31)" and applies to the breaking down of ideas Mr. Grayson attempted when discussing the relationships in the play *Romeo and Juliet*. Asking the students to reconsider their point of view related to love, forced a new idea and new thinking that "[was] always more than any mission would impose, [and] exceeded the boundaries they currently occupy" (p. 31). The finding that the use of traditional text and student attitudes toward reading directly affected connection and engagement with text was determined through Mr. Grayson's careful and deliberate attempts to challenge student thinking, insert new ideas into the conversation, and break down traditional pathways of learning in essence "deconstructing" the education process in this case.

The questioning of traditional beliefs and morals alters or "transform[s] into something meaningful and become[s] important news (Britzman, 2003, p. 138)" and forces that transformation into the students' responses as well. That being said, the difficulties associated with changes such as this not only change the student but change the teacher or adult as well and increases "its capacity for working through (p. 138)" the difficulties and potential for pain in the change. Student responses in each of the focus groups clearly were positive to Mr. Grayson's attempts to interrupt traditional thinking

and were translated into his caring about their learning and their personal connection to life. The students came to accept his demonstrative antics as cracks and deviations in conventional approaches so prevalent in teaching and learning in their past experience.

To open the discussion to areas that require a greater depth of thought opened the students to a new participation in their learning. Maxine Greene (1995) suggests:

This approach to reading strongly suggests how we might come to conceive of our curriculum and of learning itself...Not only is there no presumption of an objectively existent world to be uncovered but once the reader becomes entangled with the characters' thoughts and perceptions, she or he finds herself or himself conscious of questions and concerns buried in her or his ordinary experience." (p. 97-98)

The ability to create trust within the room that allowed the students to investigate the text through a variety of mediums allowed for the development of scaffolding of thought beyond a one-sided interpretation of the text.

The dynamic personality of Mr. Grayson and the real-world connections made throughout the reading of the text provided ample opportunities for students to contribute to the discussion and look at this play from a more contemporary point of view. The students appreciated his energy in reading the text and commented on the use of the graphic novel to help with understanding some of the passages. One such comment or question required the students to think about the choices Shakespeare made in the plot design of this story. Toward the end of Act V, Mr. Grayson read of the friar's explanation of what events had occurred to bring Romeo and Juliet to their deaths. This provoked some questioning on the part of the students as they had difficulty putting the friar's final

monologue in their own words after reading the text and requested a review of that text through the use of the graphic novel representation. The students had converted the graphic novel into support for comprehension while still maintaining a connection to the text. Mr. Grayson’s reading provided the support for the performative nature of the words and text; however, the students requested and desired the support of the graphics in addition to the text and explanation in order to glean and sustain meaning over what appeared confusing passages to them. In so doing, Mr. Grayson helped the students “see” the text.

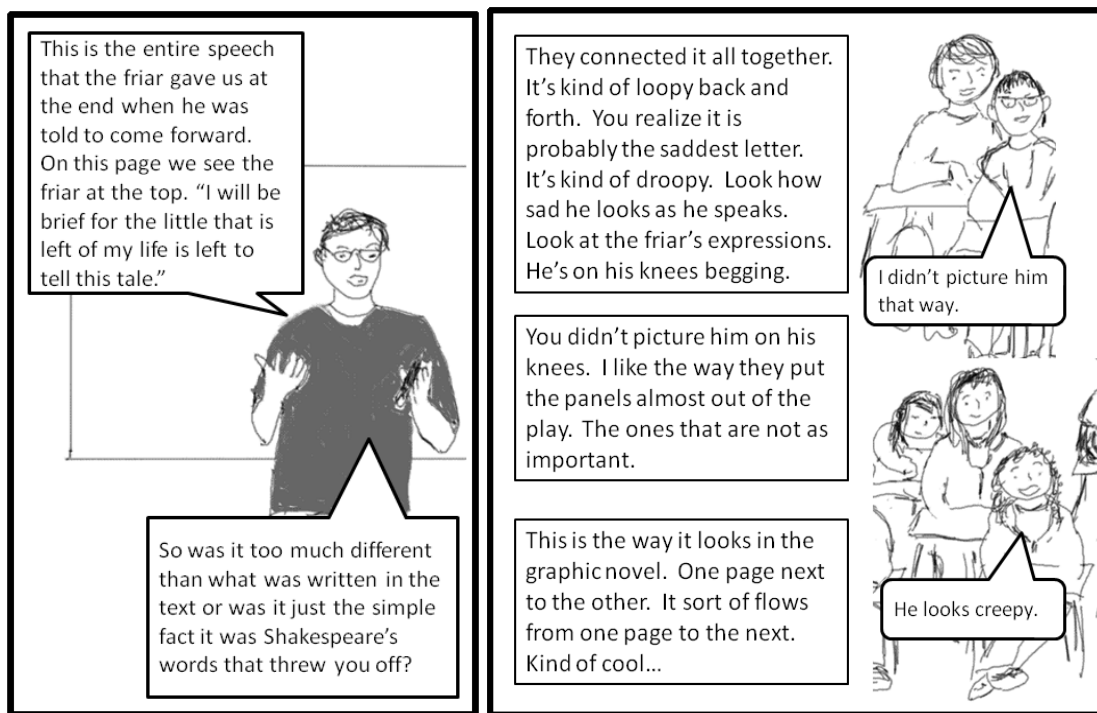


Figure 5.33 Grayson, 2010, Observation 10

Mr. Grayson responded to the students’ confusion with a short review of the text through the graphics allowing them a chance to recognize the friar’s explanation of the entire play. The students began to “see” his words through the graphics and understand the meaning behind the words better. Twelve students expressed that this technique

helped them understand the material better; seven students already knew what was happening; and two students did not care one way or the other about using the graphic novel. After the detailed discussions including instruction regarding the visual cues in the graphic novel passages, the students developed a greater savvy in analyzing the graphic representations after reading the text.

This active discussion refers to a form of reading as “an active responsible response that renders justice to a book by generating more language in its turn, the language of attestation, even through that language may remain silent or implicit” (Miller, 2001, p. 104). Student engagement with the material produced questions and responses that required a more developed understanding of the material. This supported a more reflective interchange between Mr. Grayson and the students throughout the question and answer periods. The graphics gave the students a new definition of reading that pushed the students to “an active, transformative intervention, not a passive reception” (Miller, Others, p. 150). In asking for the additional resource from graphic panels to enhance student understanding, they had come to rely on the panels as a trusted way to gain understanding that went beyond the explanations of Mr. Grayson.

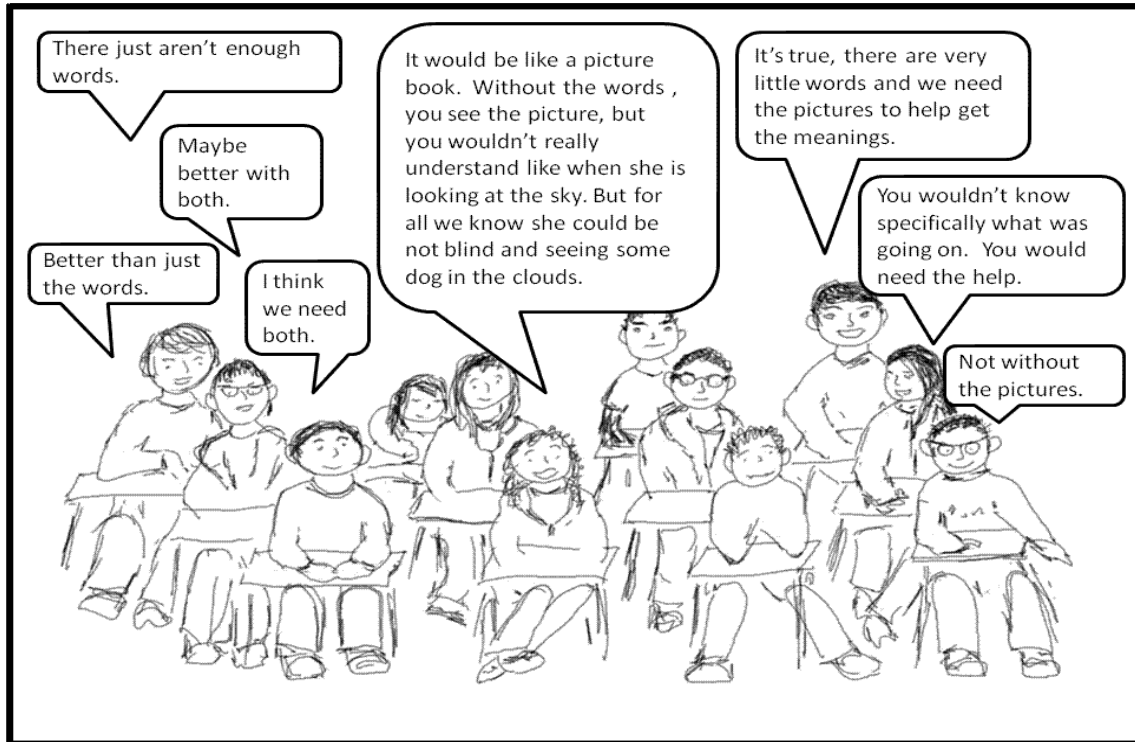


Figure 5.34 Mark, Jake, Sophia, Travis, Carl, Mary, 2011, Observation 14

Mr. Grayson's explanations and performances related to the material provided a one or two dimensional tool for focus and concentration, however, the additional use of graphic panels allowed the students the choice of more visual metaphor and graphics to support their line of thinking. Between Mr. Grayson's reading and the visual support of the graphic panels, students have begun to view the process of reading from a broader and deeper perspective thus gaining a wider level of comprehension and thus support the finding (Finding 3) that the use of graphic novels promoted engagement in actual text when used as a support for motivation in reading challenging passages of literature.

#### **Finding 4: The Integration of Graphic Novels**

Viewing the use of graphic panels and novels in this study was intended to act as a variable in understanding student motivation and engagement with text. The combination of tasks that included graphic novels appealed to most of the students as a

reason for focus even when the graphic pieces were not introduced or included until following the reading (Finding 4). This finding is important in recognizing that explicit instruction and practice in how to learn from text may be enhanced by the use of visual strategies presented in graphic panels.

Early in the case study, the students were presented with *The Tell Tale Heart* and *The Raven* by Edgar Allan Poe in both standard text and graphic adaptations. Several other short stories were also used in this unit but were only presented in their traditional text. Mr. Grayson chose these pieces in which to use graphic panels in an effort to support comprehension as well as introduce elements of graphic panels and visual imagery. It was important to teach the elements of a graphic panel if the expectation for the students included the ability to connect the written text to the visual perceptions strengthening comprehension and promoting engagement with the text. The graphic adaptation of *The Tell Tale Heart* had actually made some character and plot changes to the story. The teacher used these changes to compare the graphic storyline to the actual text and deepen the understanding of the actual text through the recognition of those differences. Also, because of those differences, Mr. Grayson was able to focus the students on some of the literary elements of the graphic novel and their uses in applying meaning to the visual and textual information found in the adaptation for use later in other graphic representations for other stories. For instance, following the reading of the graphic adaptation, Mr. Grayson spent a great deal of time focusing the students' attention on specific elements of the panels and connections those elements made toward understanding the text. He added the component of the dependency of text on the visuals to support meaning. These applications were used throughout the study in an effort to

adjust student perceptions of the material and help students “see” the text. Discussion centered on specific direct instruction of those visual tools intended to capture reader attention as well as defining how the imagery in the graphics is blended with the text in narration or thought/text bubbles to convey meaning, theme, setting, and plot development.



Figure 5.35 Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 2

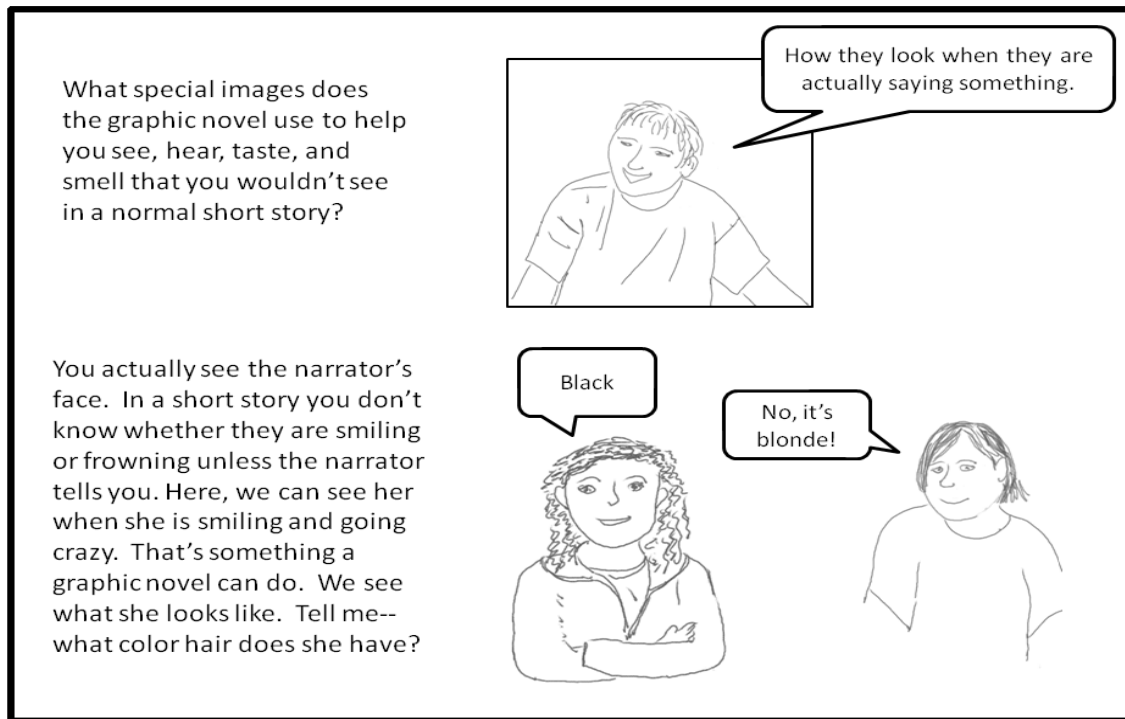


Figure 5.36 Grayson, Sophia, Faith, 2010, Observation 2

This class was made up of students with varying abilities and some with known problems with reading, written expression, and comprehension. The survey administered at the beginning of the semester documented the overall negative attitude toward reading in this class and included reading from a variety of sources including personal choice. McTaggart (2008) suggests that “many struggling readers are unable to visualize pictures in their heads. They cannot “see” in their minds what is happening in the text, and consequently they do not comprehend the text’s message...they need graphics to help them understand the message” (p. 32). This class also includes those students who have skills in reading but are more reluctant to read because of lack of choice or interest. The graphic novels portions used in this segment sparked interest and engagement in the task of understanding the works of Edgar Allan Poe even throughout the traditional reading of the text. Making comparisons between the two served to improve and better manage the



comprehension of text as well as increase student desire in reading more. Students were able to recognize the strong connection in comprehension of graphic novels between text and graphics while applying the understandings gained there to the written literature presented.

As noted earlier, Mr. Grayson utilized some of the short stories and poetry of Edgar Allen Poe. In this case he spent time developing knowledge of Poe and his time through a personally developed PowerPoint presentation and then read a graphic adaptation of Poe's *The Tell Tale Heart*. The adaptation had changed the characters to some extent in that the main character in the original text was male and in the adaptation was female. While the discussion of the story, characters and plot were compared, this lesson was also used as an introductory lesson in understanding the mechanics, vocabulary, and visual metaphors found in graphic novels. This was done in an effort to begin the process of understanding reading from a different point of view. The students responded to this with varying levels of understanding based on what they were seeing in the graphics and what they already may have known about this particular short story from readings in previous middle school classes. In observing the interplay between Mr. Grayson and members of the class, students appeared to view the written text as "from the literature book" (Travis, 2010, Focus Group 1) and more like school work. They accepted the comic adaptations as "extra" or outside the norms expected in the classroom. What is significant about this is that the view of graphic novels began to evolve from another special activity to another form of literacy. Panels from observations collected from the *Tell Tale Heart* and *The Raven* differed from the final observation panels from *American Born Chinese*. For instance, Mr. Grayson led much of the discussion and

pointed out many of the metaphors found in the graphic pieces to the students. Discussion revealed that the students had difficulty seeing these metaphors in relation to the story, yet were surprised to begin to view the text with different “eyes” following the graphic readings.

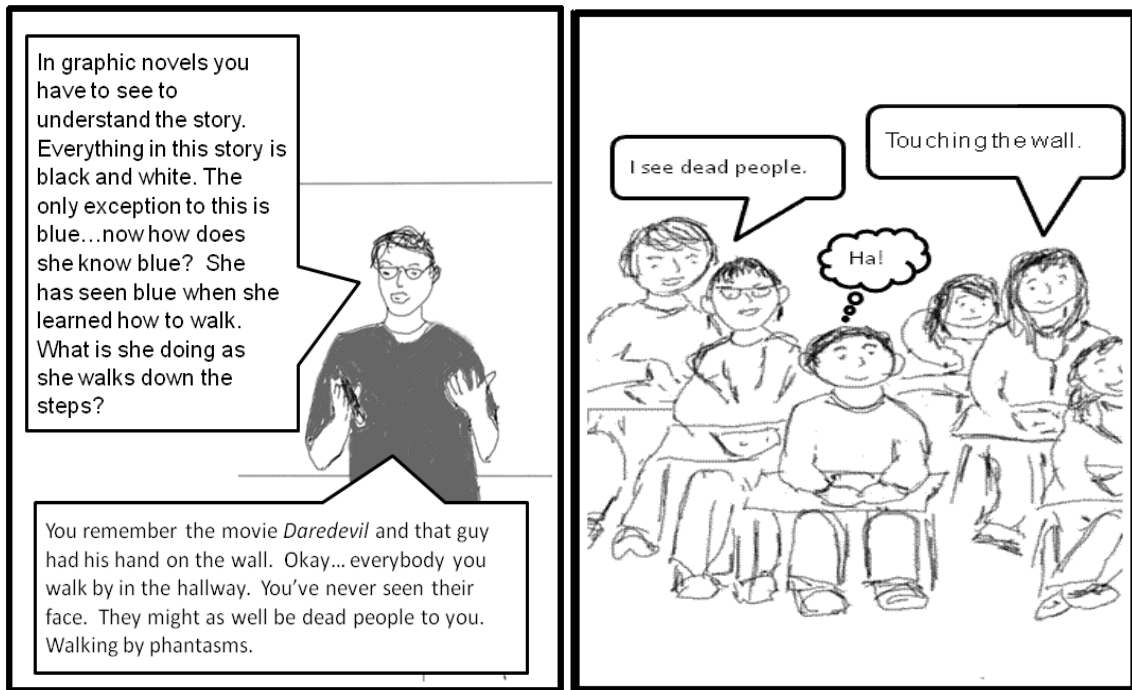


Figure 5.37 Grayson, Jake, Morgan, 2010, Observation 2



Figure 5.38 Grayson, Sophia, James, 2010, Observation 2



Figure 5.39 Grayson, Sophia, 2010, Observation 2

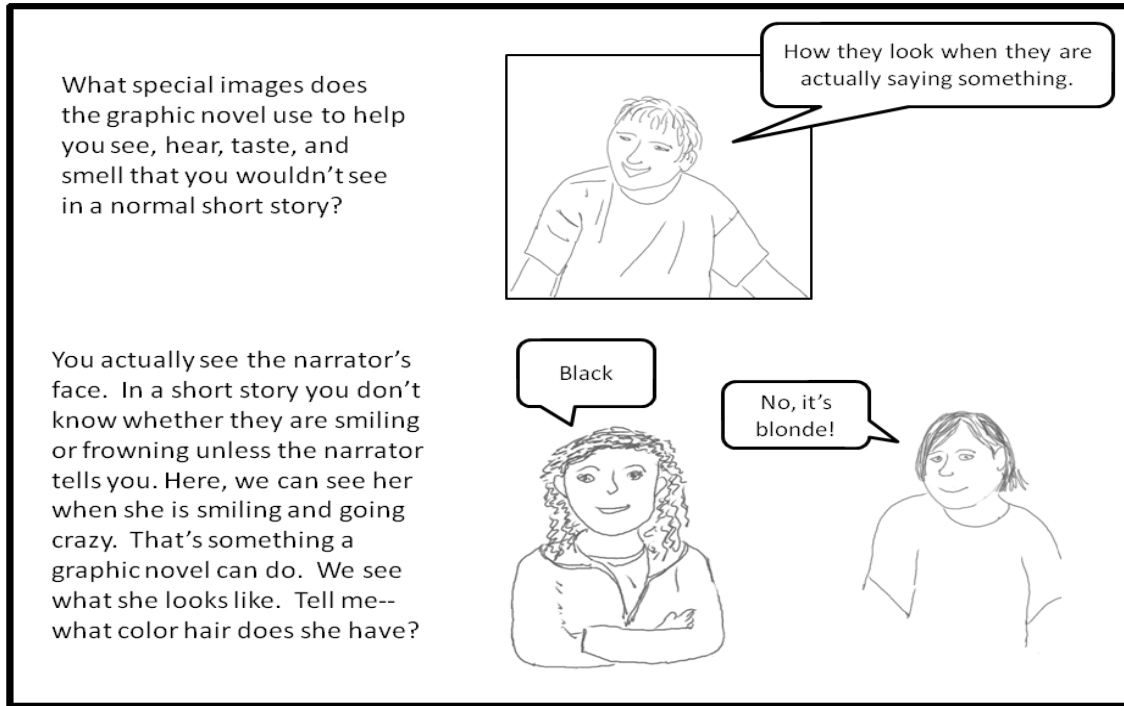


Figure 5.40 Mark, Sophia, Faith, 2010, Observation 2

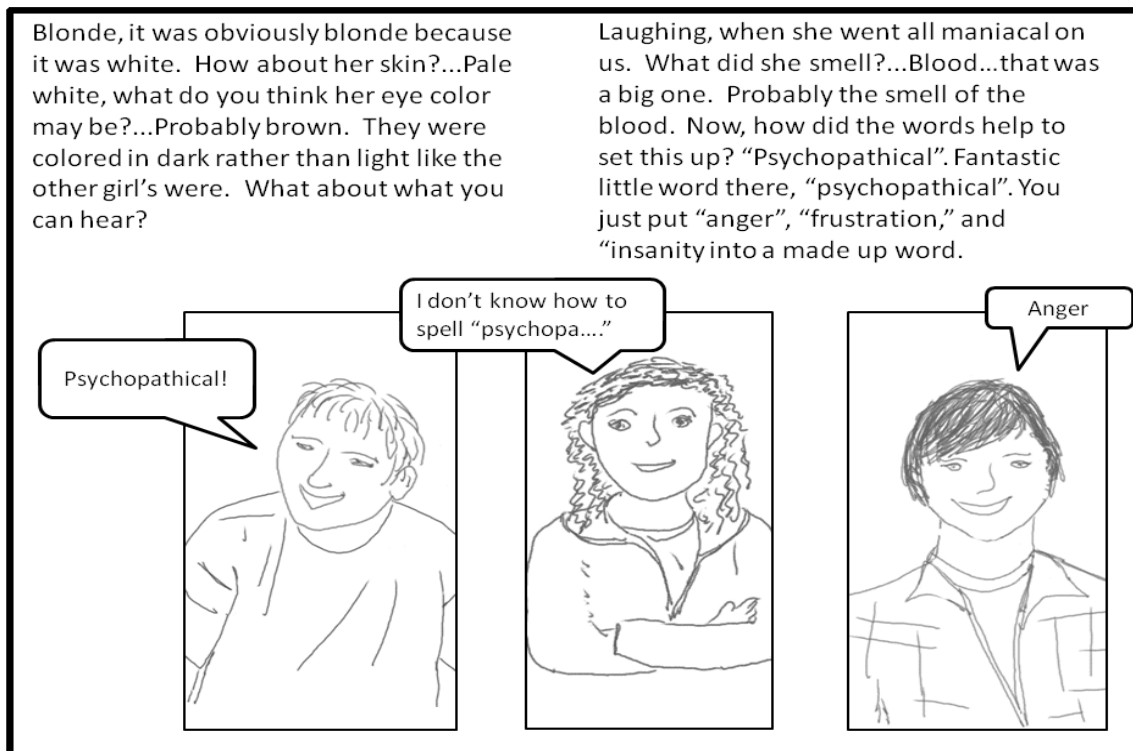


Figure 5.41 Mark, Sophia, Travis, 2010, Observation 1

Of note, Mr. Grayson continued this discussion following a reading of the

traditional text for homework that same evening. According to Mr. Grayson, the students were better able to compare the text with the graphic and developed more meaningful understandings because of the readings of both. This included a reading of Poe's *The Raven* from *Nevermore: A graphic adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories* (2008) which utilized the actual text from the poem and integrated it into graphic panels and slides. What was important in these initial experiences with graphic panels was the evidence of student insight into the metaphors from the graphics and how they tie to the text. In one such case, Robin questions the use of the set of graphics that focus on the eye of the raven.

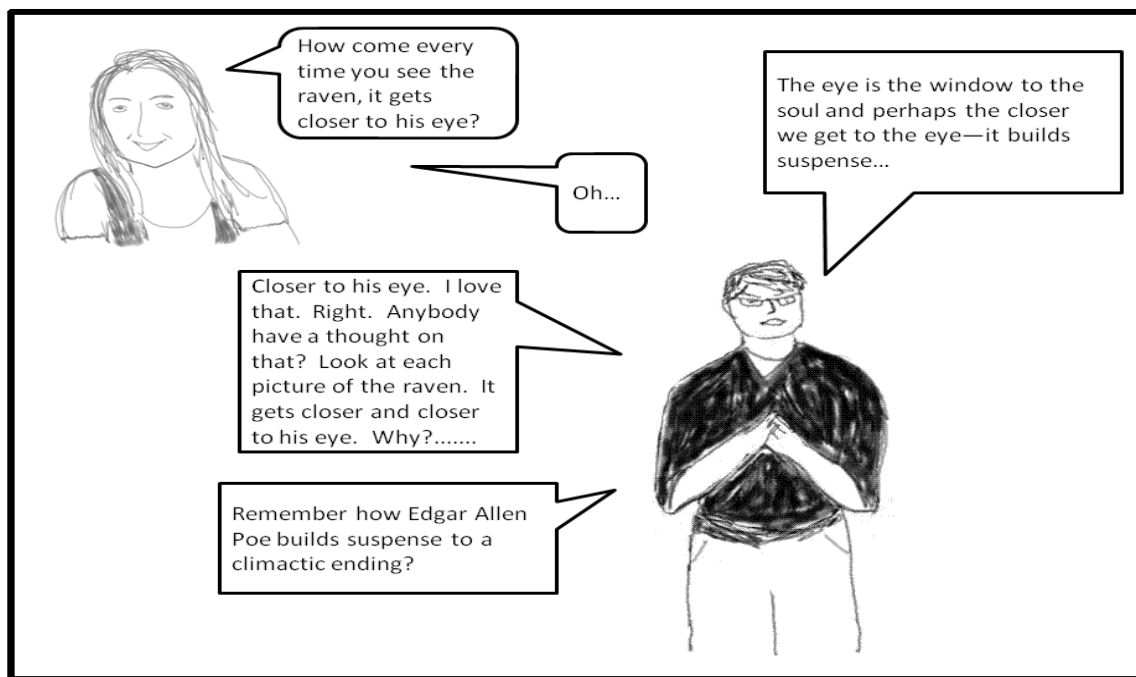


Figure 5.42 Robin, Grayson, 2010, Observation 3

The middle of the semester was primarily centered on Shakespeare's play, *Romeo and Juliet*. The students had the initial direct instruction through graphic integration in to short stories as well as the experience of writing and developing their own comic with the contemporary novel, *The Hunger Games*. From these introductory experiences the

students had become to accept graphic panels as a source for “constructing meaning, making hypotheses, and predicting future developments” (Norton, 2003, p. 143) in a literary text.

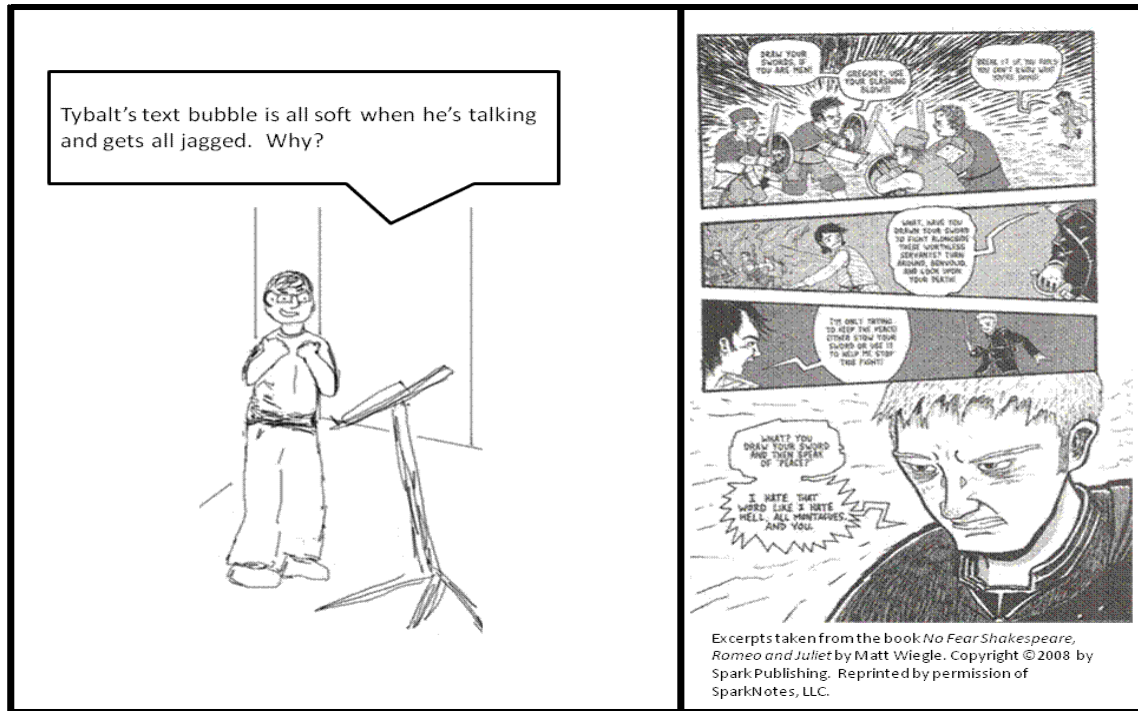


Figure 5.43 Grayson, 2010, Observation 8

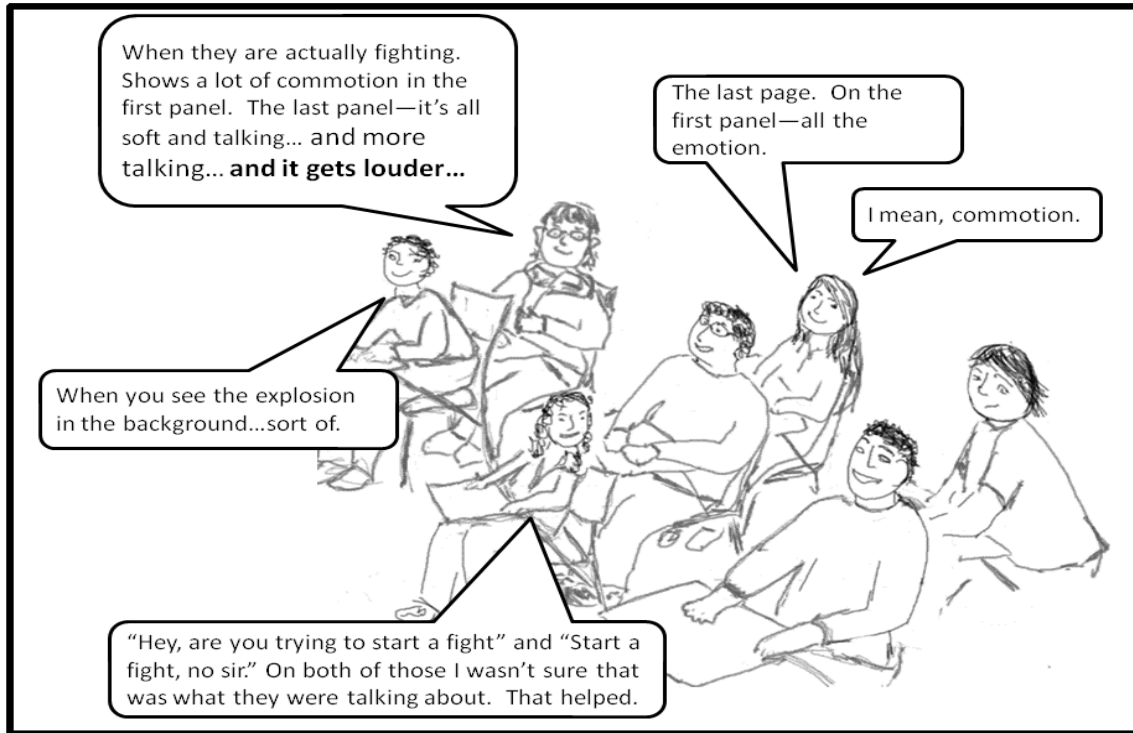


Figure 5.44 Sophia, Morgan, Jake, Jared, 2010, Observation 8

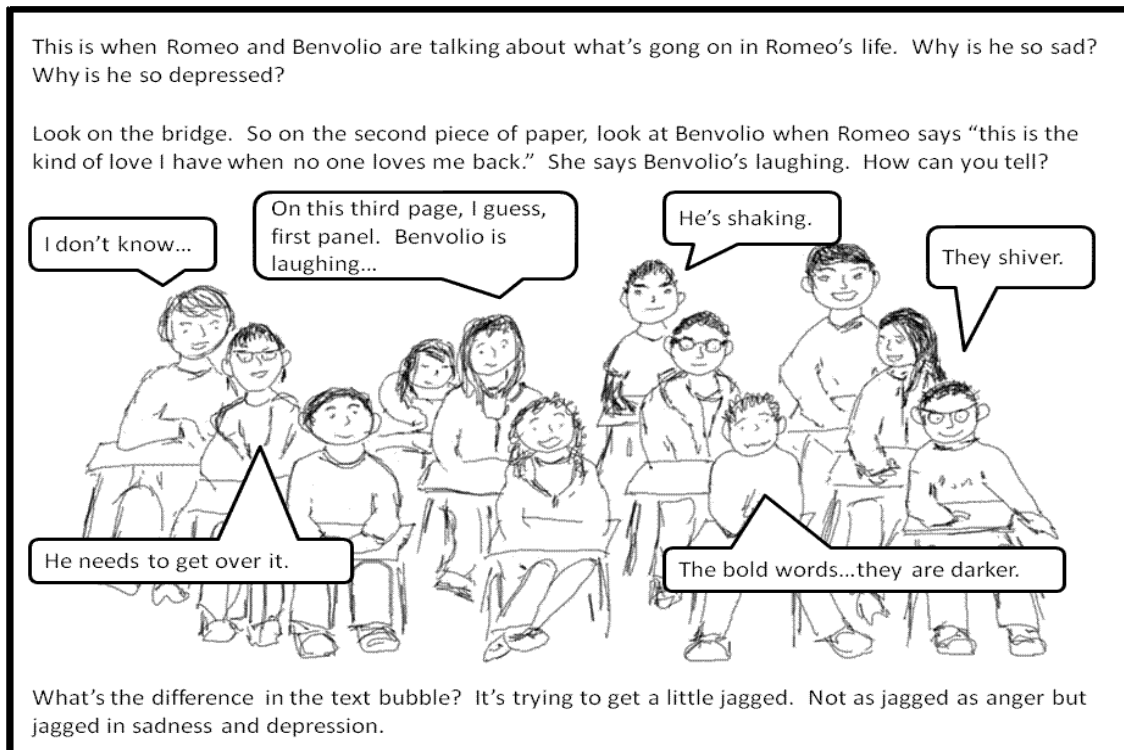


Figure 5.45 Grayson, Travis, Jake, Morgan, James, John, Brad, 2010, Observation 8

By the end of the semester, the students were able to view the graphic novel,

*American Born Chinese*, from a completely different critical point of view. The visual cues became more apparent, and there was much less emphasis on the relationship of the structure of the graphic panels to the construction of meaning within the story.

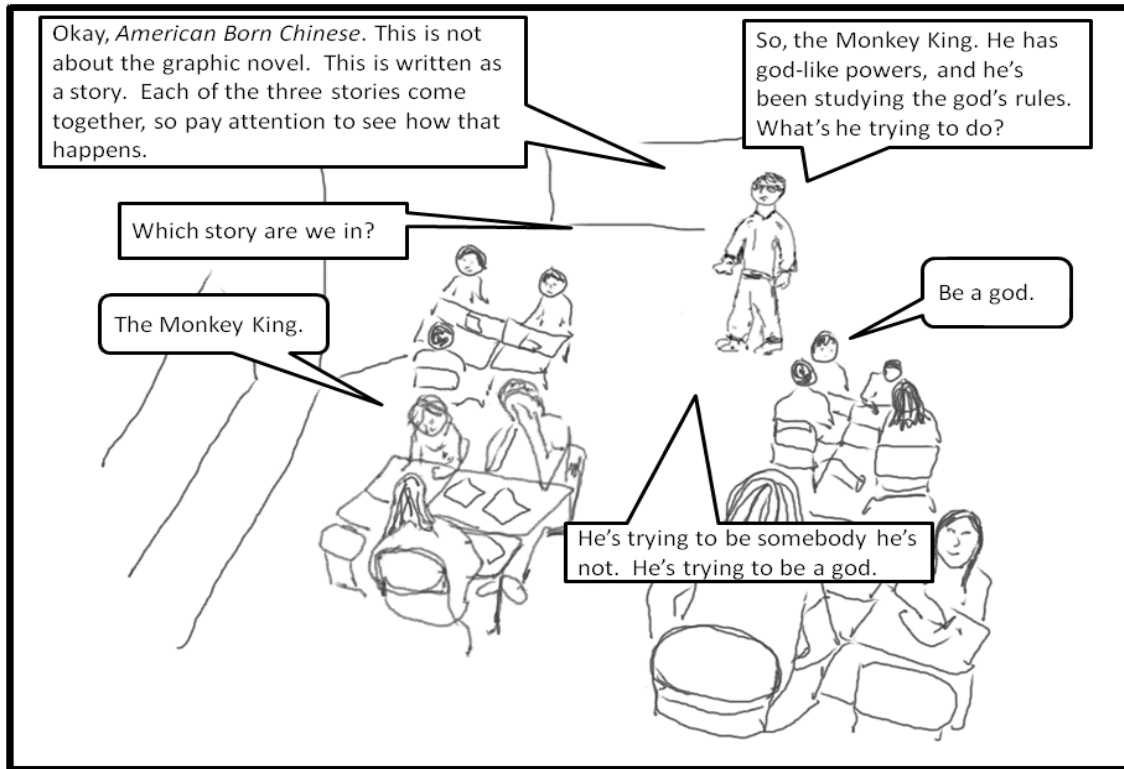


Figure 5.46 Grayson, Jake, Faith, 2010, Observation 12



Excerpts taken from the book American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang. Copyright © 2006 by Gene Yang. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

*He grabs the dude by his ponytail and starts slashing him about—knocking out all the other gods fighting, throwing him up against the clouds.*

*He left all the gods in a big, bloody pile... Why would he want to get rid of the stink of monkey fur?*

*I'm a monkey and that's why I can't get into the god's party. I hate the smell now of my fur. What are you guys starting to see in this monkey?*

It makes him think that he's a monkey.

He hates himself.

*He hates himself—low self-esteem. The next story we move into with Jin Wang. What's going on in that panel?...*

Figure 5.47 Grayson, Mark, Travis, 2010, Observation 12

Excerpts taken from the book American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang. Copyright © 2006 by Gene Yang. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

*So now he sees this kid, Wei-Chen, going through the same thing he went through, and the first thing he thinks of is... I want to beat this kid up. But then he takes out a toy robot... notice he's speaking Chinese...*

*Remember what he wanted to be when he grew up?*

*A transformer... so the toy has now sparked things like maybe I need to say something he can understand.*

*That's the second part of the story. Now, we're on to the third part. Get your laughs out while you can...*

So why did he switch to Chinese?

So the other kid would understand what he is saying.

He saw the toy robot.

That's one thing.

A transformer.

He probably sees the toy robot. He really wants to be friends now.

Figure 5.48 Grayson, Faith, Jake, Travis, Robin, 2010, Observation 12

Booth and Lundy (2007) address the ability of graphic novels to concentrate on symbolic and representative images to convey a theme. They suggest that “simple, visual language often communicates more effectively than words” (p. 71). This use of symbols and abbreviated language in thought and text bubbles convey concepts and ideas in a concise and often metaphoric fashion to convey ideas and themes. Mr. Grayson’s use of graphic panels to support student understandings of difficult concepts while reading traditional text provided an alternate, contemporary perspective that appealed to the students’ sense of interest as well as their desire for greater connection of traditional material to popular culture. (Finding 3) The graphic adaptations were not presented as alternatives to the text, rather as a variation in point of view and visual rendering of abstract concepts. Even more to the point, the students began to describe these interactions with the graphic text as meaningful and interactive in the sense that the social relationships presented were seen by them as “an extension of [their] own personal world” (Norton, 2003, p. 145).

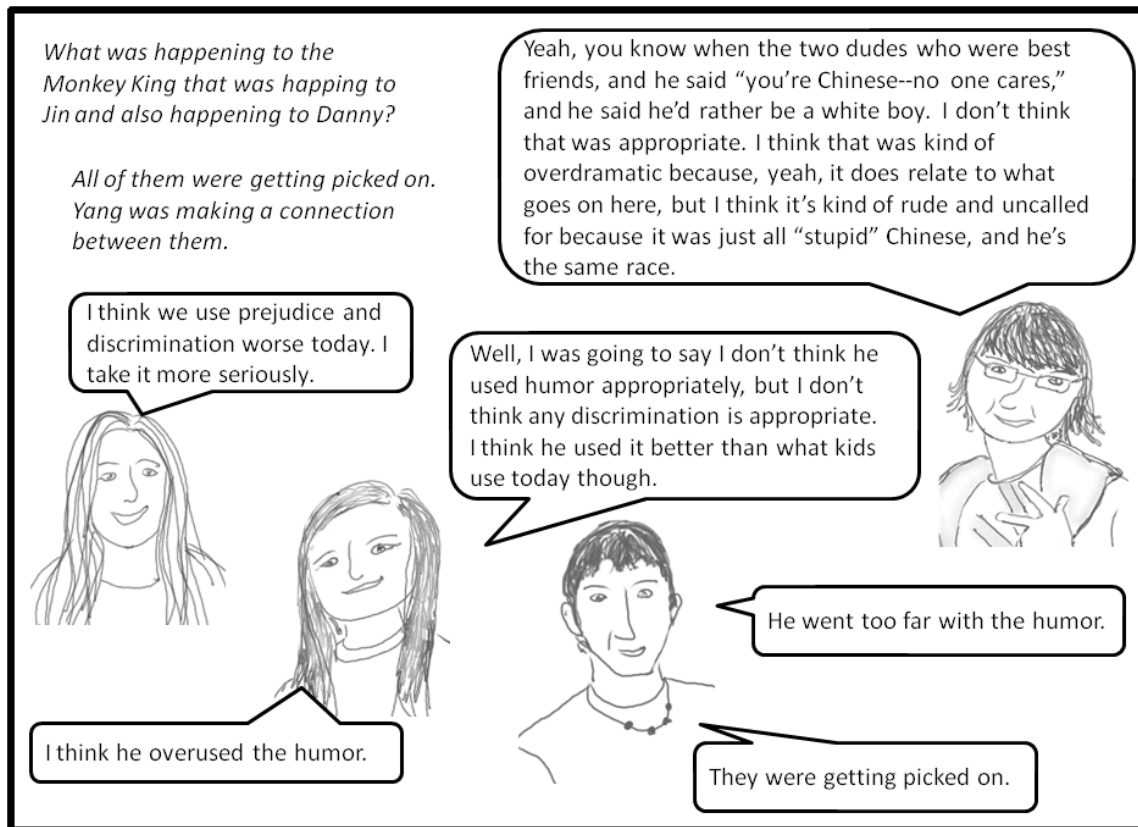


Figure 5.49 Morgan, Cathy, Jared, Jake, 2011, Observation 13

The students merged the text and the graphics together to construct meaning and thus had utilized graphic pieces over the course of the semester to connect back to textually as well as graphically based literature (Finding 4).

**Finding 5: The Graphic Novel and Critical Literacy**

Planning sessions occurred with Mr. Grayson and the observer that required us to make reading choices that considered student reactions, belief systems and values that connected back to the students' own identities and at times challenged those same issues. Examples within the study presented themselves that provided a platform of critical examination of real issues of power, race, culture, religion and prejudice. The investigation into these issues provided varying levels of dialogue that provoked learning, challenged traditional thought, personal values, and beliefs held by students and

supported Finding 5. Several examples occurred during the reading of *Romeo and Juliet* and included one scene involving the Friar's use of herbs to create a poison. The reading of this scene lead to a discussion of drugs, medications and the consequences of their overuse, misuse and abuse. This quick and candid conversation moved to various tangents of dialogue but further engaged students in reading this play.

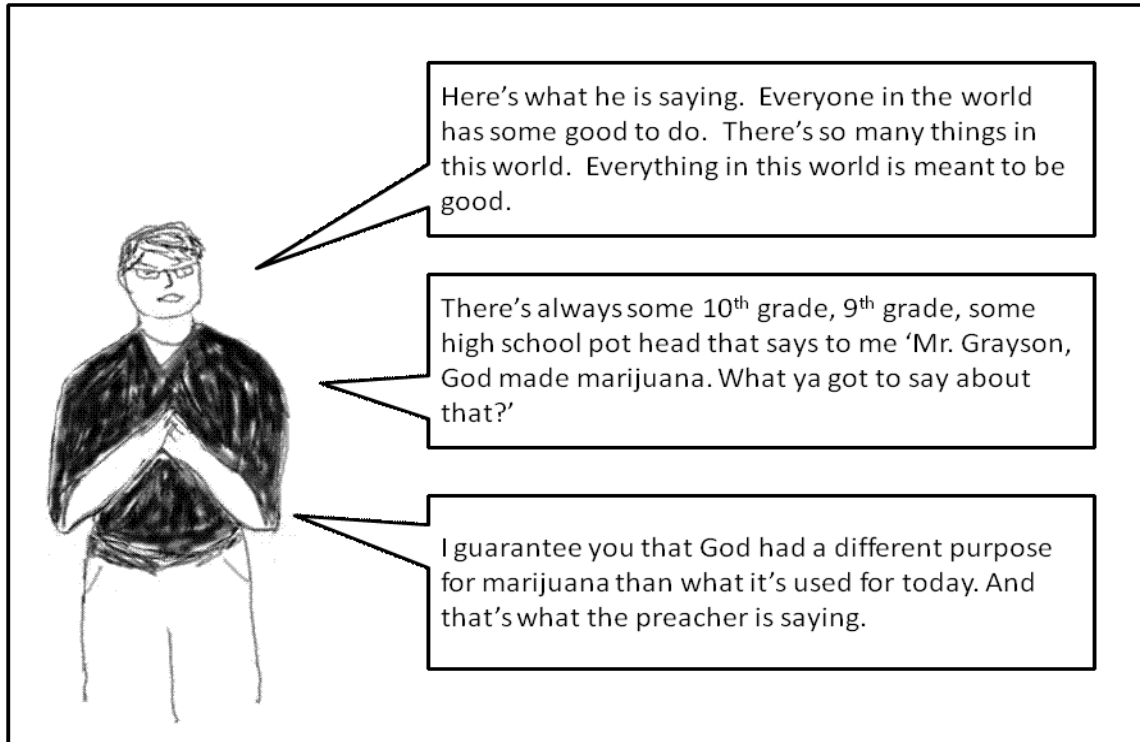


Figure 5.50 Grayson, 2010, Observation 8

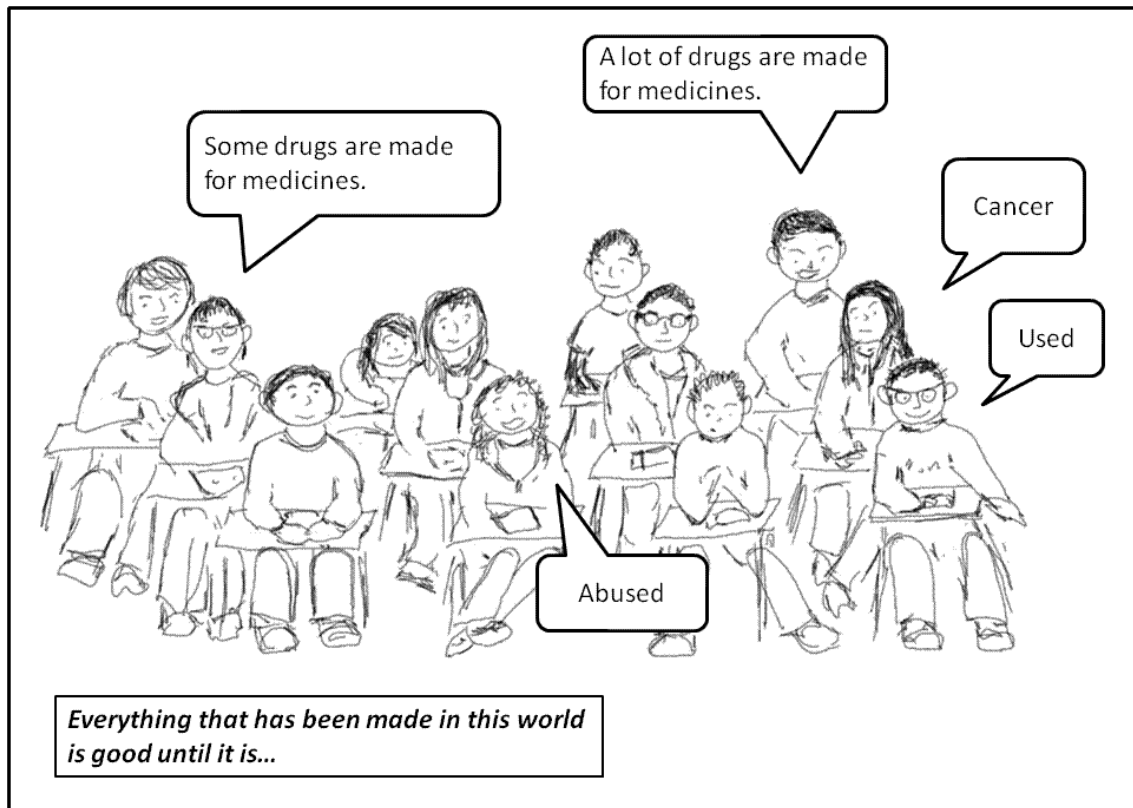


Figure 5.51 Jake, Sophia, James, Morgan, John, 2010, Observation 8

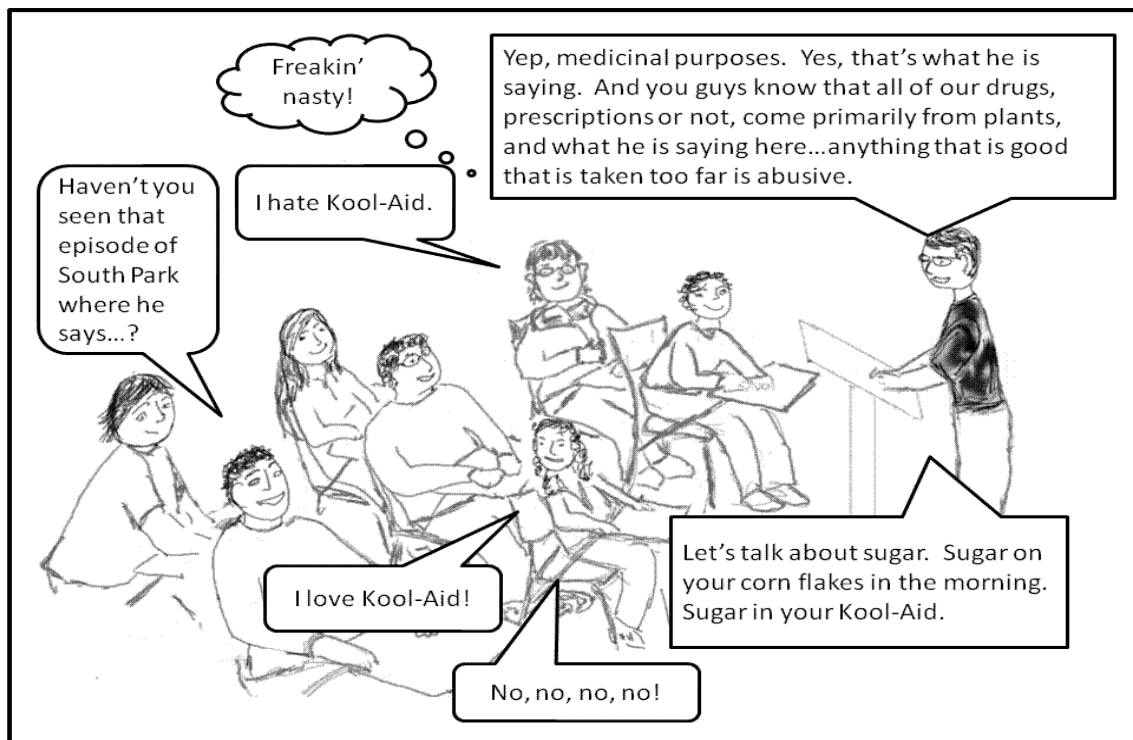


Figure 5.52 Grayson, Mark, Sophia, Jake, 2010, Observation 8

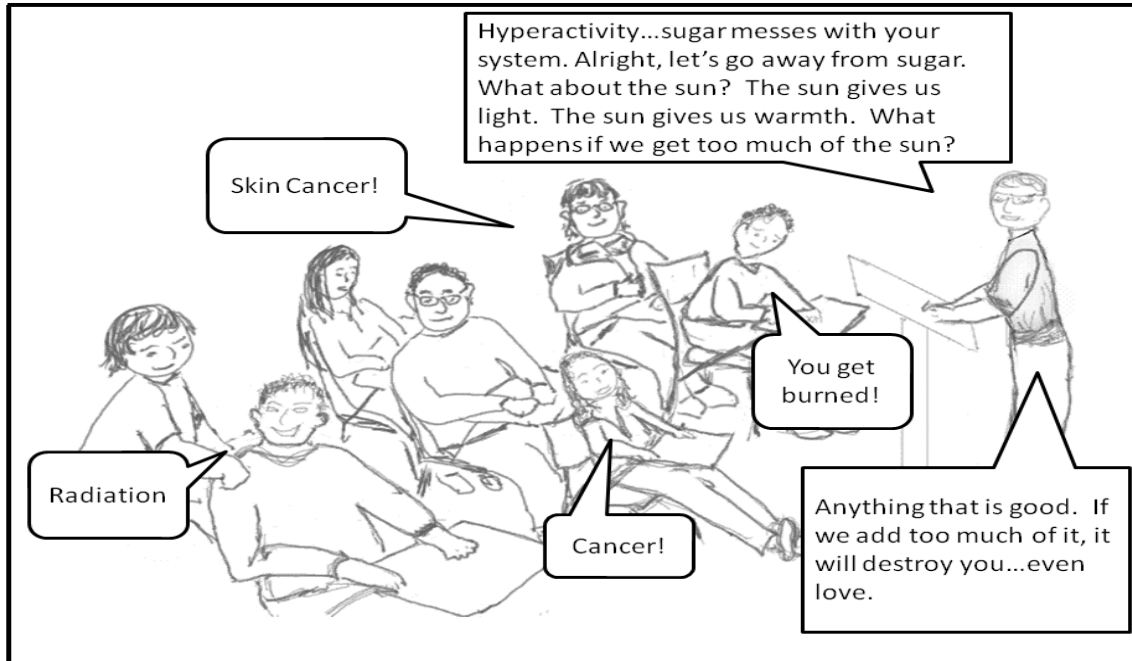


Figure 5.53 Grayson, Mark, Jake, Sophia, John, 2010, Observation 8

This conversation was quick and rapid fire, but engaging to the students and recognized by them in focus group settings as the type of discussions that interested them and made them enjoy the class best.

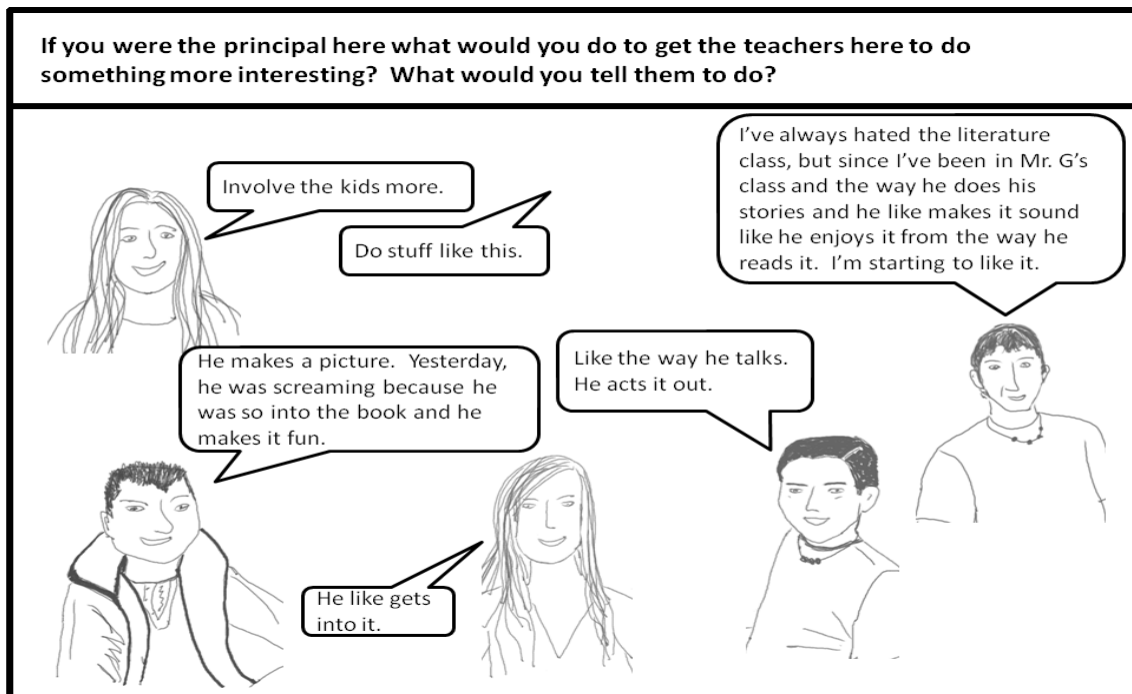


Figure 5.54 Morgan, Susan, Evan, James, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1

In traditional classrooms opportunities for following a path of thought as in this experience is considered frivolous and a waste of time however, Freire (1987) challenges this in that literacy must be “a dialectical relationship between human beings and the world, on the one hand, and language and transformative agency, on the other” (p. 7) such that student and teachers in conversation and dialogue become agents for change. Critical dialogue and even simple ones such as this between teachers and students leads to greater understanding and questioning of why things are as they are.

Continuing in the study of *Romeo and Juliet*, Mr. Grayson began discussing the characters of Romeo and Juliet and comparing them to teenagers today.

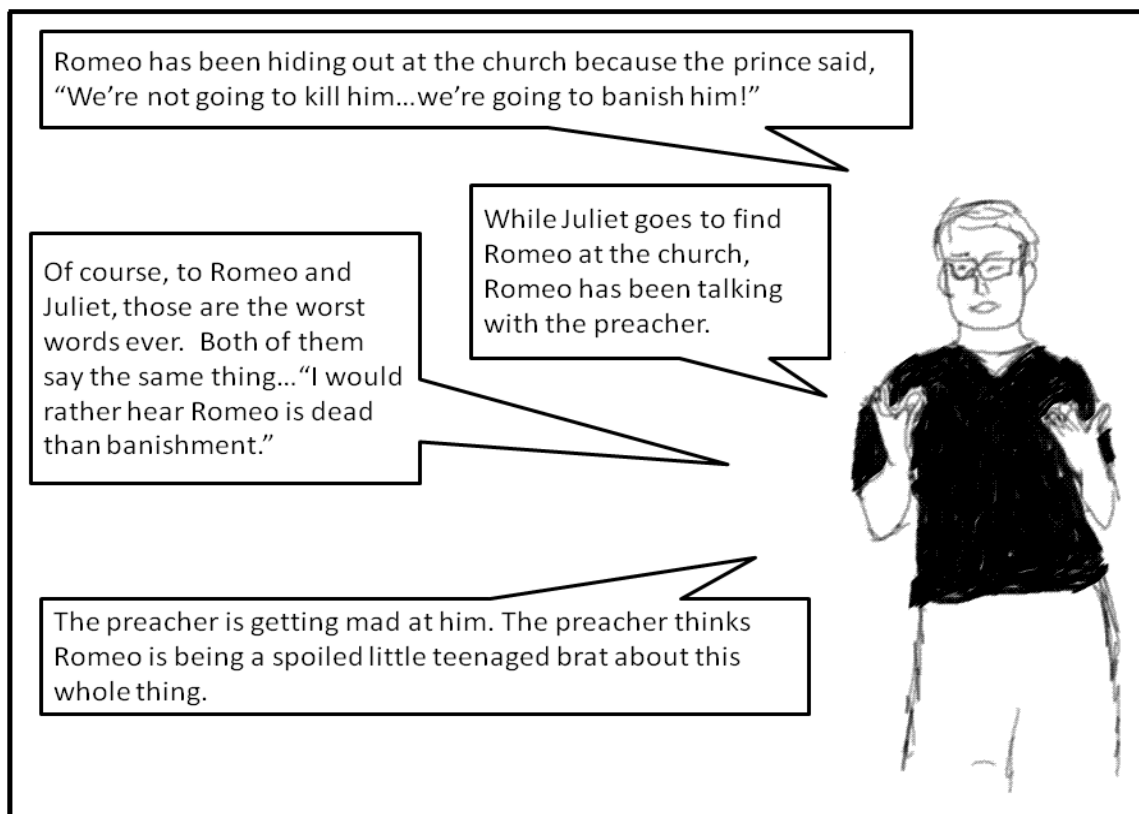


Figure 5.55 Grayson, 2010, Observation 9

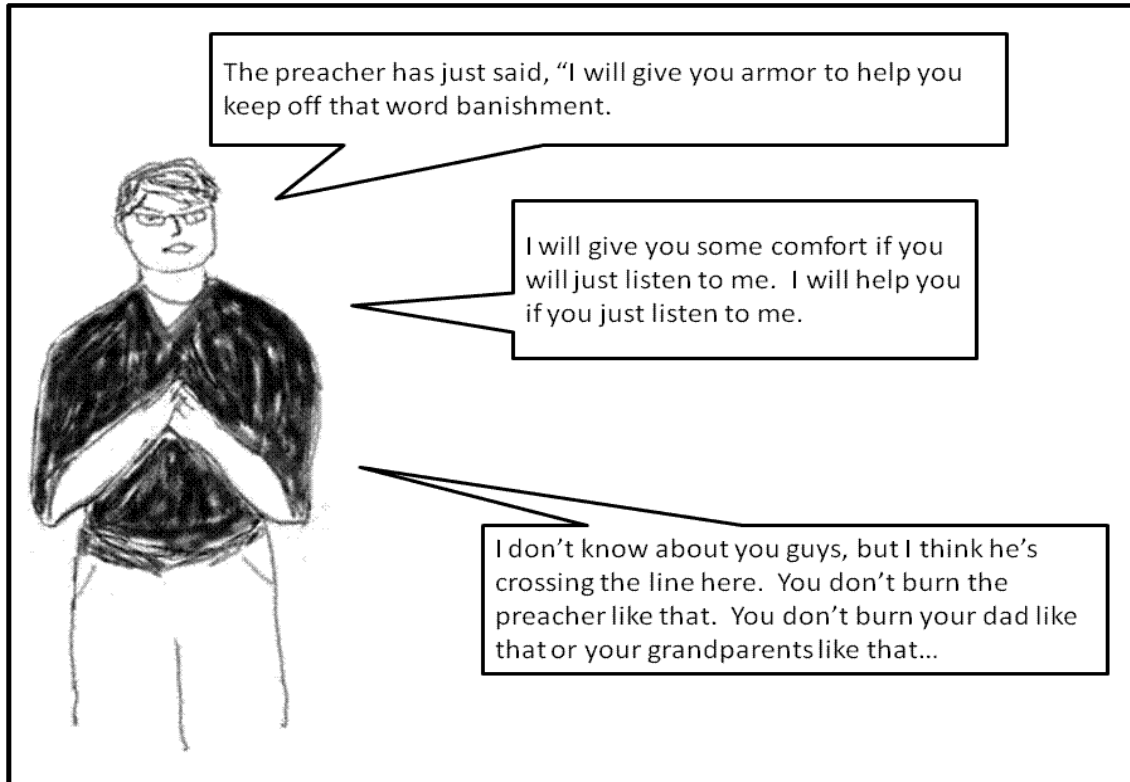


Figure 5.56 Grayson, 2010, Observation 9

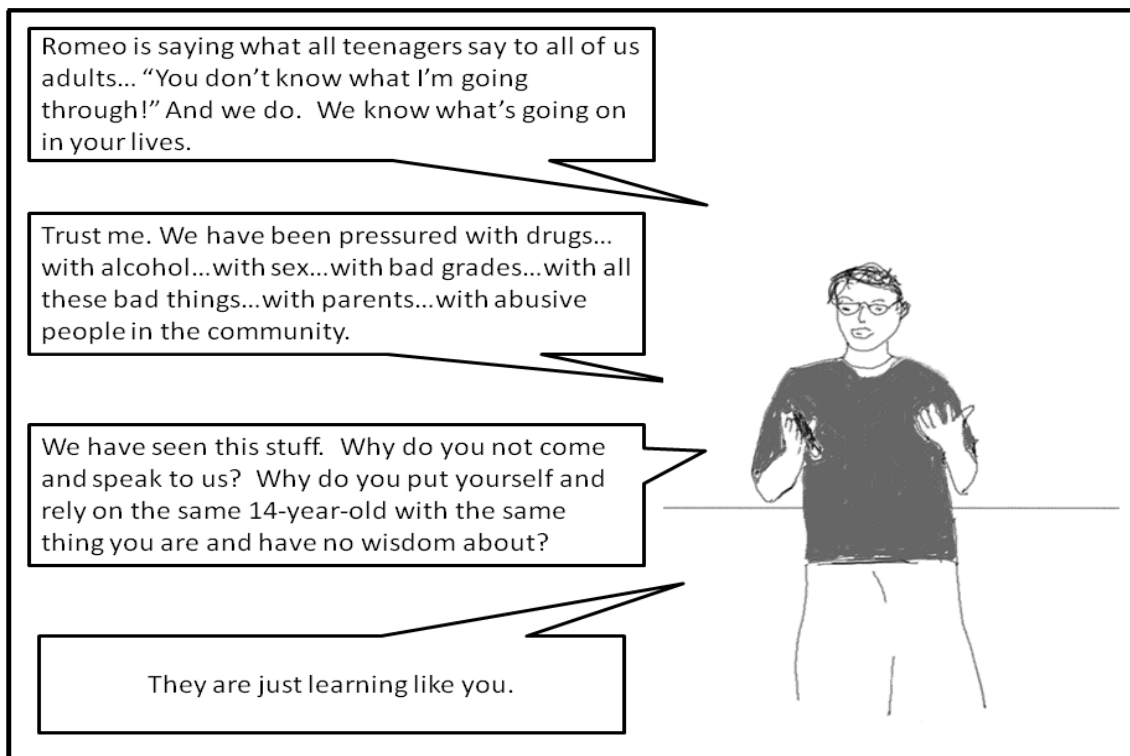


Figure 5.57 Grayson, 2010, Observation 9



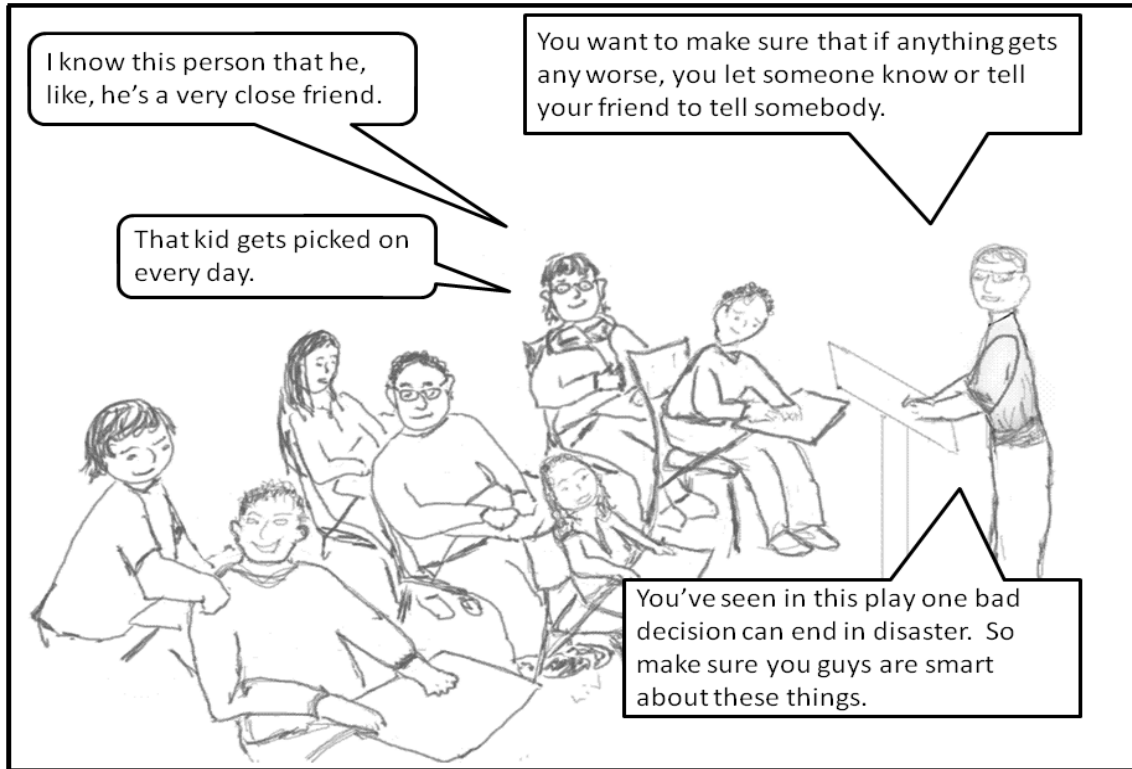


Figure 5.58 Grayson, Jake, 2010, Observation 9

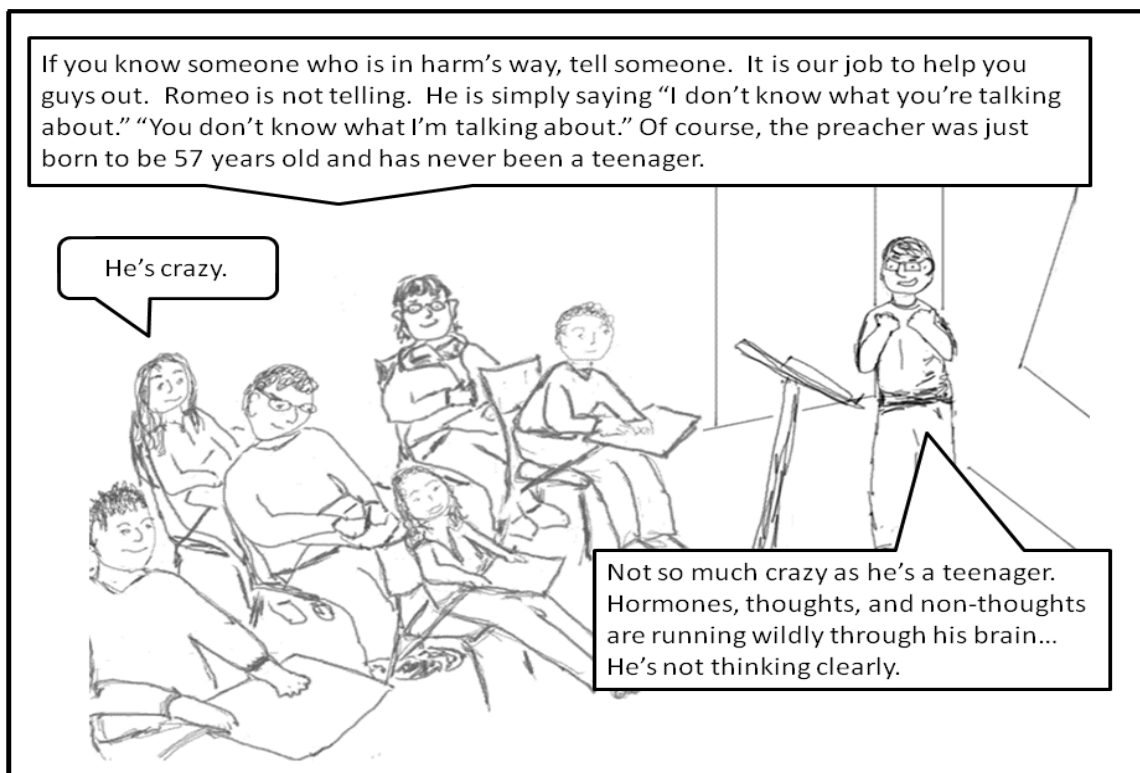


Figure 5.59 Grayson, Mary, 2010, Observation 9

In this play one bad decision leads to disaster as often happens, and he suggests that better decisions now make a better life later. Mr. Grayson suggests that the students should always find the good in a bad situation which is somewhat contrary to Romeo's decisions because "if all you do is focus on the negative for the rest of your life, you're going to be miserable" (Grayson, 2010, Observation 9). This continued theme of relationships directly and specifically brought social and critical relevance from the text to the students in a frank discussion with Mr. Grayson.

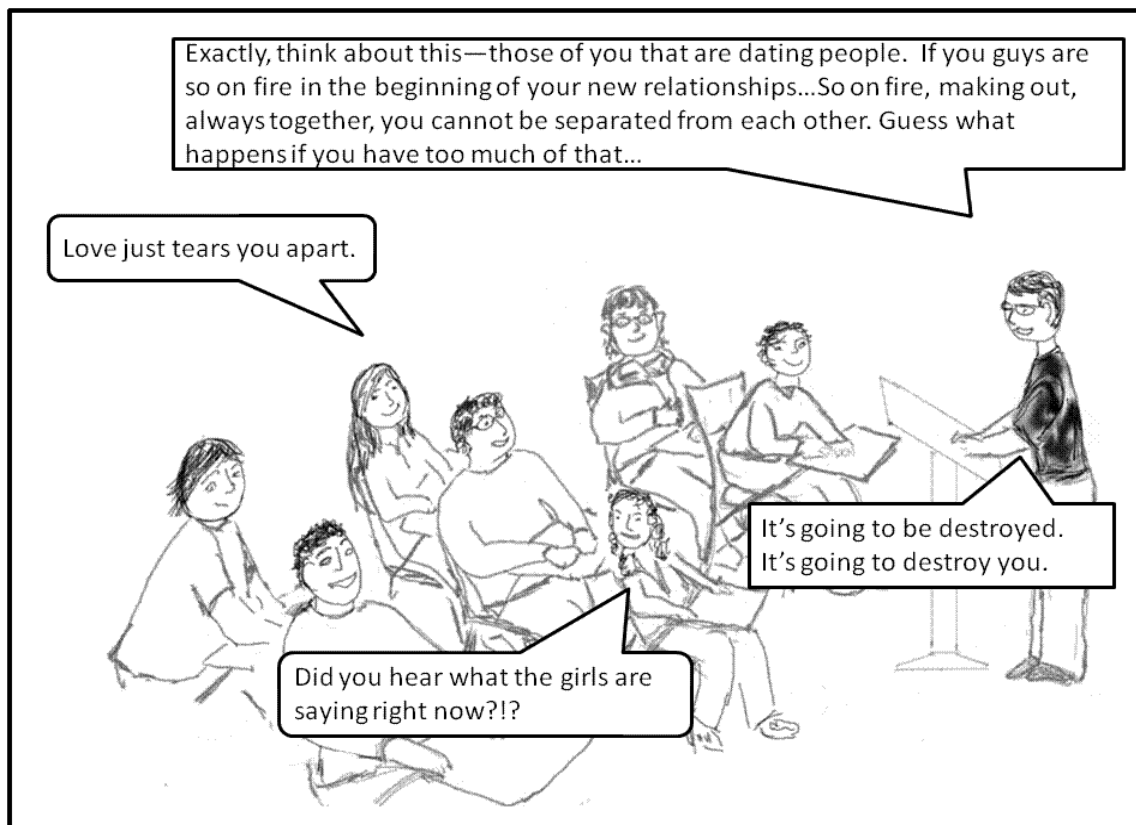


Figure 5.60 Grayson, Mary, Sophia, 2010, Observation 8

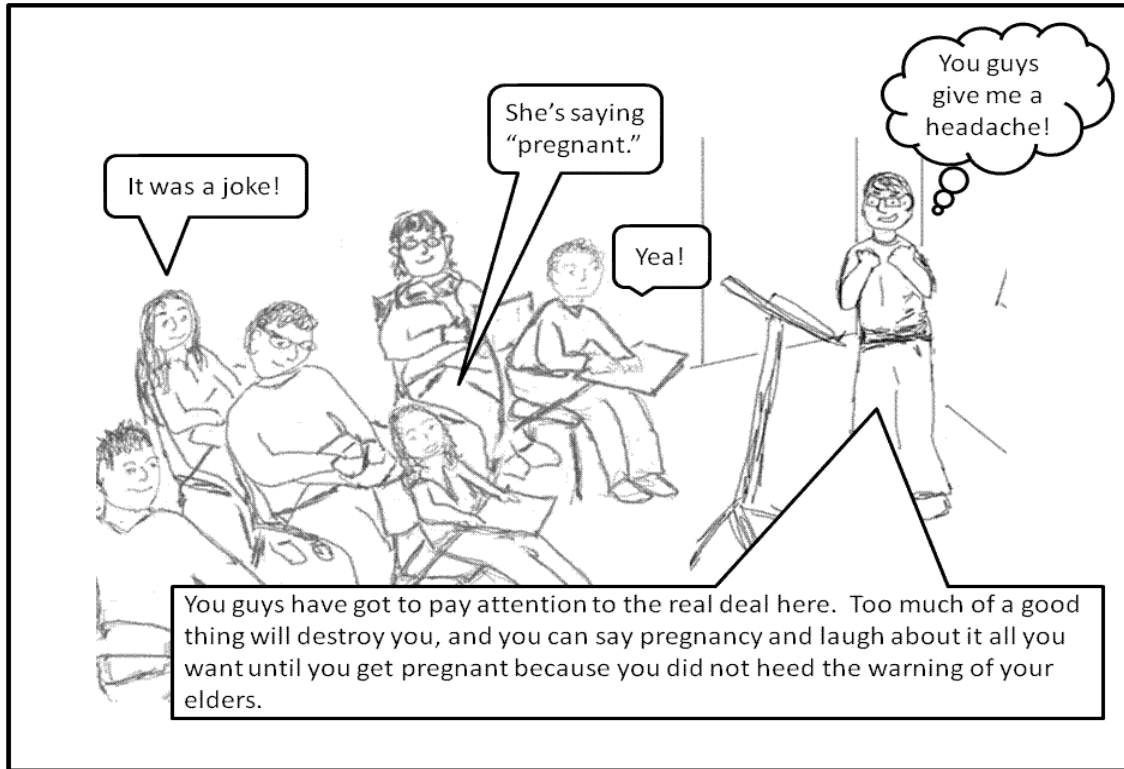


Figure 5.61 Grayson, Mary, Sophia, John, 2010, Observation 8

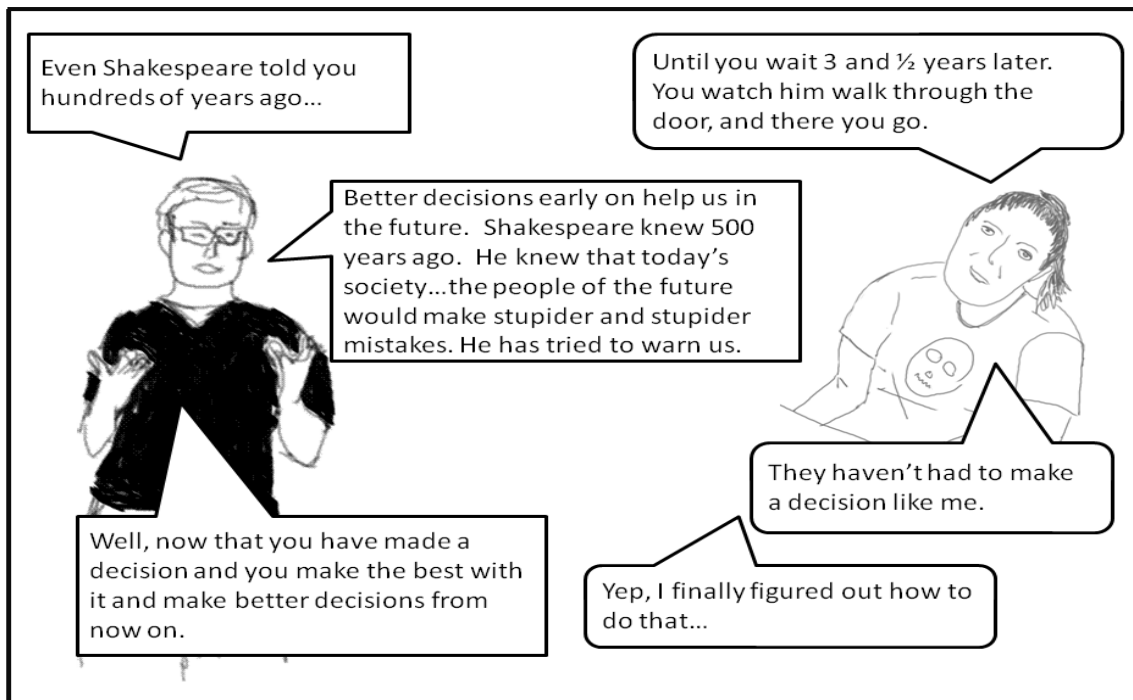


Figure 5.62 Grayson, Karen, 2010, Observation 8

This particular dialogue was important and brought the language home in a way that may have been avoided in other traditional settings. Critical issues related to teen relationships and pregnancy were brought to the forefront of discussion because of the personal experience of one of the students in the classroom. Of note, the student, Karen, had not participated in previous discussions and was unwilling to contribute to the focus group discussion; however, this particular discussion struck a personal chord with her and prompted her to express her comments. The other students were then able to recognize the bridge between the experience between the characters and the experiences of their own. In this instance, the students began to recognize that the words represented experiences, dreams, values, and beliefs seen through another's eyes and in this case through the eyes of one of their own.

Freire (1987) challenges us with the understanding that “reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world” (p. 35). These students brought the reading of the words and the classroom dialogue to a place of understanding issues of the world and in this case a more personal world involving choices, relationships, and adolescent misconceptions regarding those choices and relationships. This supports the thought that integrating pedagogy of critical and cultural literacy into school curriculums allows for a discourse which reflects and evaluates knowledge and consciousness “within the contemporary context of theory in language, literature, and rhetoric” (Berlin, 1993, p. 264). Critical pedagogy manages to break traditional boundaries and moves student to a greater understanding of who they are in the world as social beings. Reading socially conscious material “provides vicarious experience [through the stories], but the encounter with the story is a real experience, and

imagination can make vital connections to one's actual life" (Noddings, 2006, p.78) as was recognized in this specific experience. Thoughtful dialogue such as this recognizes that personal and social attitudes and beliefs are intertwined into:

A notion of literacy that connects relations of power and knowledge not simply to what teachers teach but also to the productive meanings that students, in all of their cultural and social differences, bring to classrooms as part of the production of knowledge and the construction of personal and social identities. (Giroux, 1987, p. 17)

The controversies of power, race, culture, religion, and prejudice are necessary to provoke learning, and challenge thoughts, values, and beliefs all of which are important to adolescent learning.

#### **Finding 6: Critical Understanding of Social Issues**

Reading became a consuming act such that all else was subjected to the imagination within the reading and was not limited except by the student's own interpretations. The class demonstrated this idea in a variety of ways. In the first focus group interview, students responded to the question "what is reading" with the following responses:

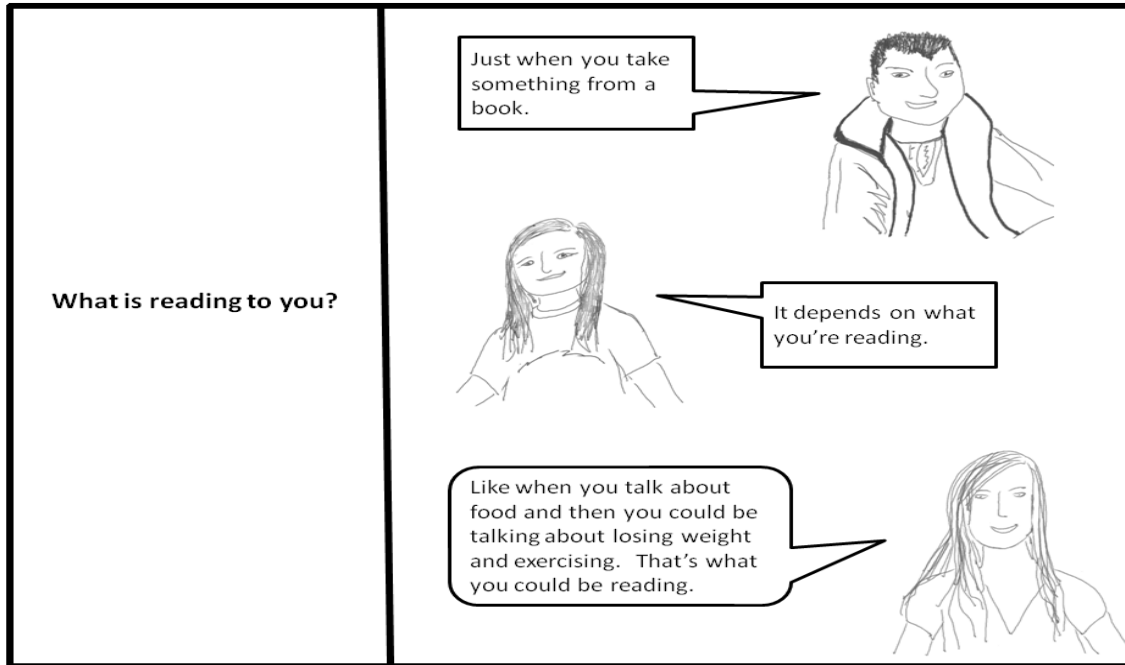


Figure 5.63 Evan, Morgan, Cathy, 2010, Focus Group 1

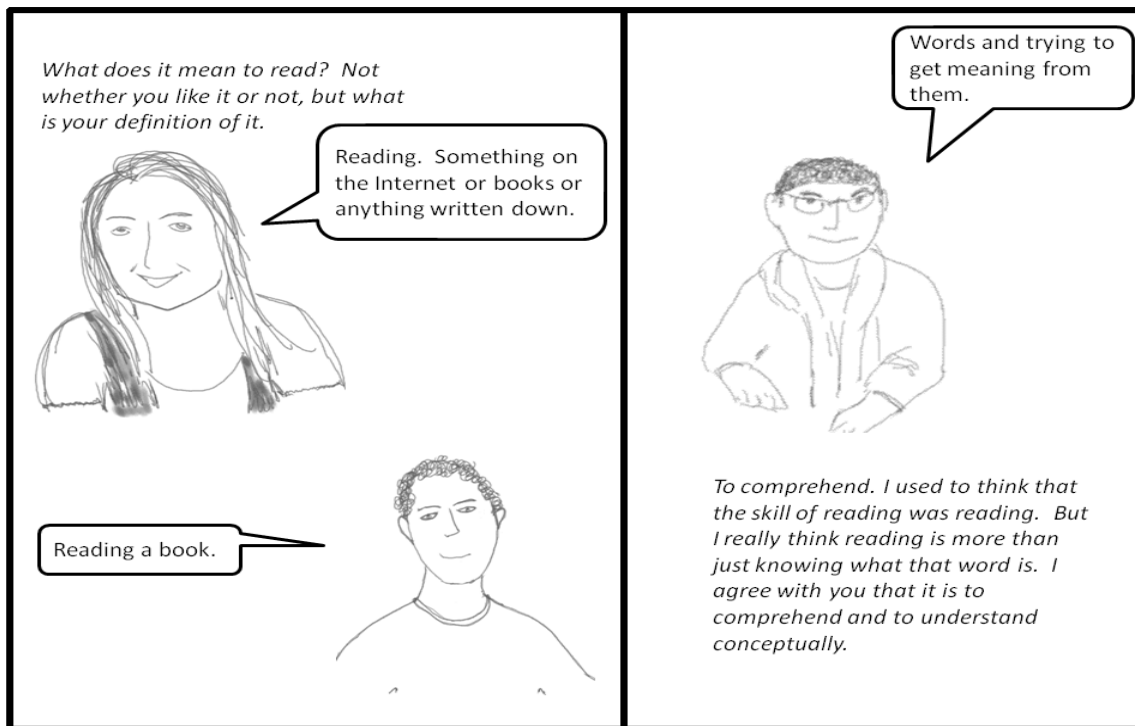


Figure 5.64 Robin, Jared, Carl, 2010, Focus Group 2

Throughout this case study, one of my personal questions included the definition of reading beyond skills and even notions of comprehension based on the interpretation

of one person, primarily the teacher's notion of what is right in a reading and what is wrong. Kamuf (2005) pointedly reinforces the idea that:

Reading, when it occurs, happens beyond what any observer may see, since it consists less in the act some subject performs on an object, than in an act of utter passivity, if one can say that...Suffice it to say that the act or activity of reading, as it is understood in this abyssal passage, operates a reversal whereby the reader is read, indeed devoured by the words, more than he or she reads." (p. 173)

Literature and art must capture the reader and transform them into more of a participant into the experience. Its power lies in the ability to open up a stagnant past to new facets of experience and see those experiences with energy, ideas, and creativity beyond the standard. Given the performative nature of novels and reading, Miller (2002) suggests that "their [novels] performative function is to give the reader access to a realm that seems to exist apart from the words, even though the reader cannot enter it except by way of the words" (p. 54). What is suggested here is that ability of the imagination to carry the reader beyond the words on a page, but those words are the spark that begins this journey.

The common definition of reading based in skills acquisition places students just on the periphery of reading by working out the words, even reading the words, but never experiencing the words beyond their frame nor inclusive of their idea. The idea of reading as performative takes the rigid structure of common assumptions related to reading and conceptualizes it beyond the words. Kamuf (2005) reinforces that "the act or activity of reading...operates a reversal whereby the reader is read, indeed devoured by the words, more than he or she reads" (p. 173). To accomplish this act in the skills based

norm of public school settings is difficult and reflected in the responses noted by those students. Carl's response related to words and their meaning may demonstrate his desire to go beyond the instruction and immerse himself into the conceptual meaning of reading. Even so, the somewhat superficial meaning of reading suggested by these students demonstrates the limited emphasis on reading as a performative act that is found in reading programs in typical schools across the country.

The use of graphic novels in this class was not a totally novel idea except in the scope in which they were used. Four specific purposes were determined necessary in utilizing graphic panels and the graphic novel in this case study. (1) It was determined through planning sessions that the students needed an opportunity to view graphic panels through a close lens allowing for direct instruction in the mechanics of how to read the panels. This included instruction in understanding the vocabulary associated with the panels, prediction and anticipation of the storyline, and understanding the dependency of text and graphics in generating a storyline and making meaning. (2) Following a series of planned uses of graphic panels, students would then be presented the notion of generating scenes and stories in the form of a class graphic adaptation of a contemporary novel read in its text form during class. The purpose of this exercise was to further explore the nature of the graphic panel in representing story components and enhance the use of visual imagery and metaphor in conveying meaning. (3) The third component involved making the use of a supplementary graphic novel to aid as a tool in comprehension of the traditional text from standard works as well as promote critical understandings of the material through the comparative or contrasting lens of the graphic panels; and (4) Finally, the students would be presented a graphic novel as literature with the intent to



read the material from a more critical point of view.

It was important to understand that the conceptual connection of reading to the reader appeared to drive the instruction. On several occasions, the observer asked the question of students: “What is reading.” And on most occasions the responses included the notion that reading was flat, unemotional, and skills based—much of what might be expected from traditional classrooms often with the purpose in mind to communicate, get a good job, read and write a resume, or maybe decipher some how-to type of book. While all of the purposes especially used for reading in a school setting include those mentioned; the primary reason for reading goes well beyond a passive accumulation of facts or short-term accumulation of stories and is supported by the evolving responses of the students over the course of the study.

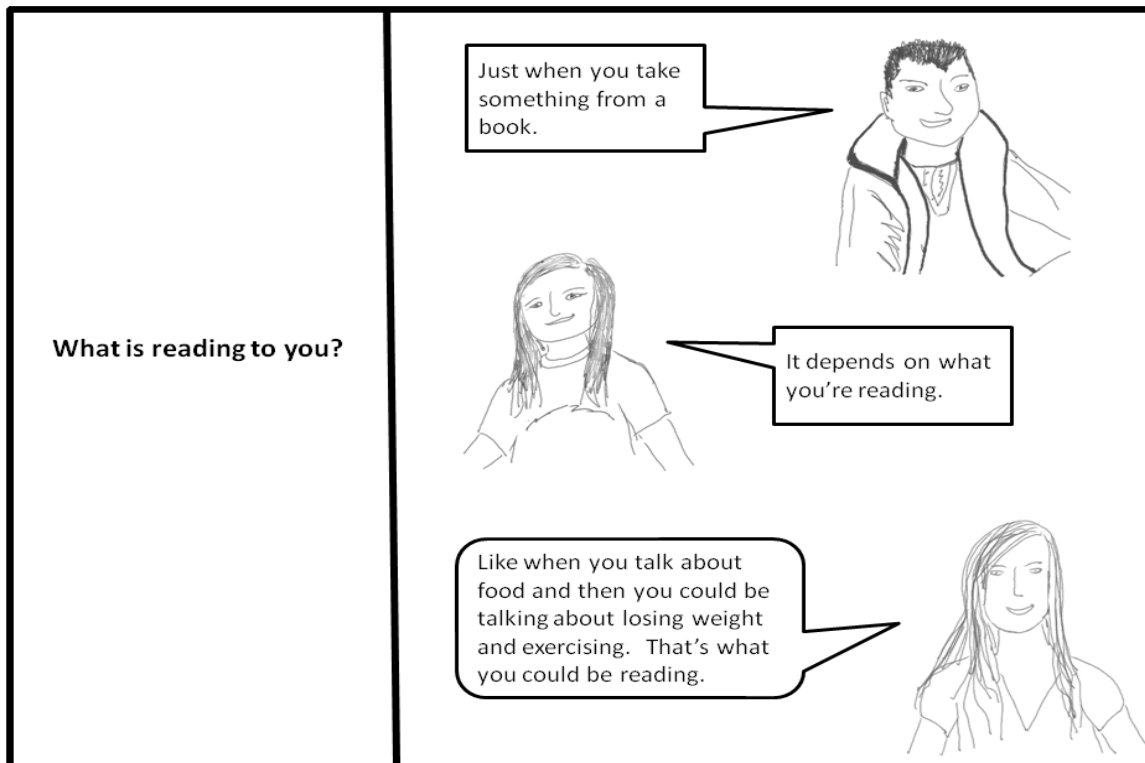


Figure 5.65 Greene, Cathy, Evan, Morgan, 2010, Focus Group 1

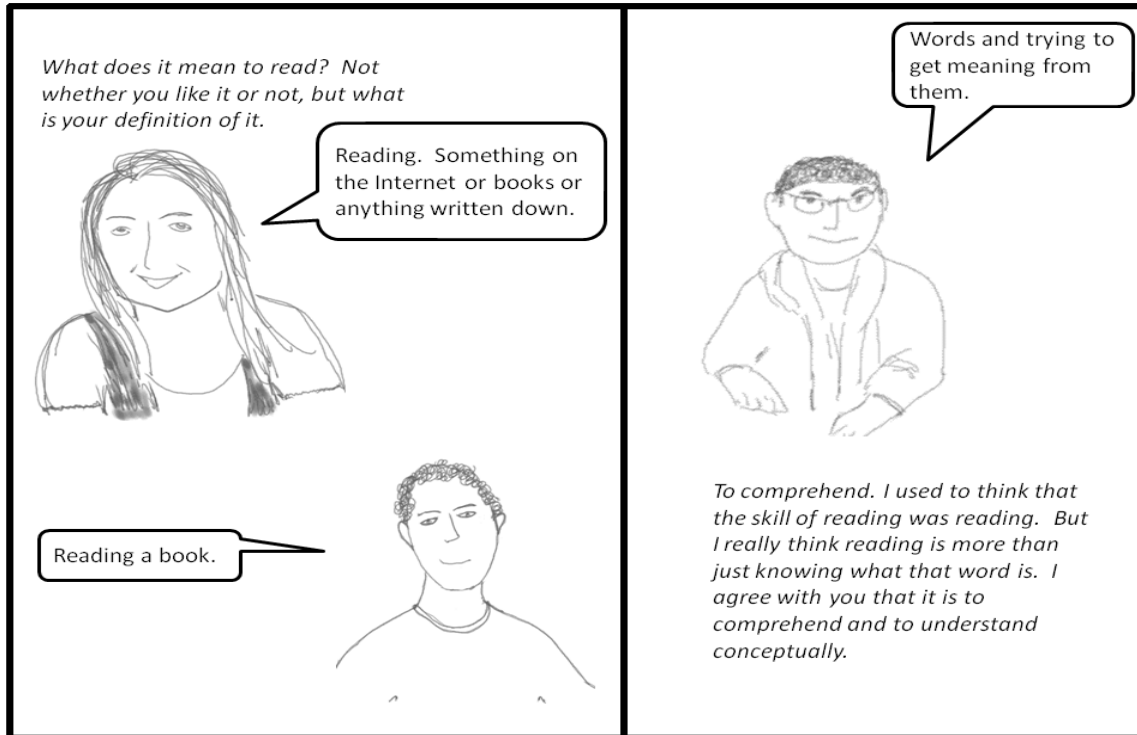


Figure 5.66 Greene, Robin, Brad, Carl, 2011, Focus Group 3

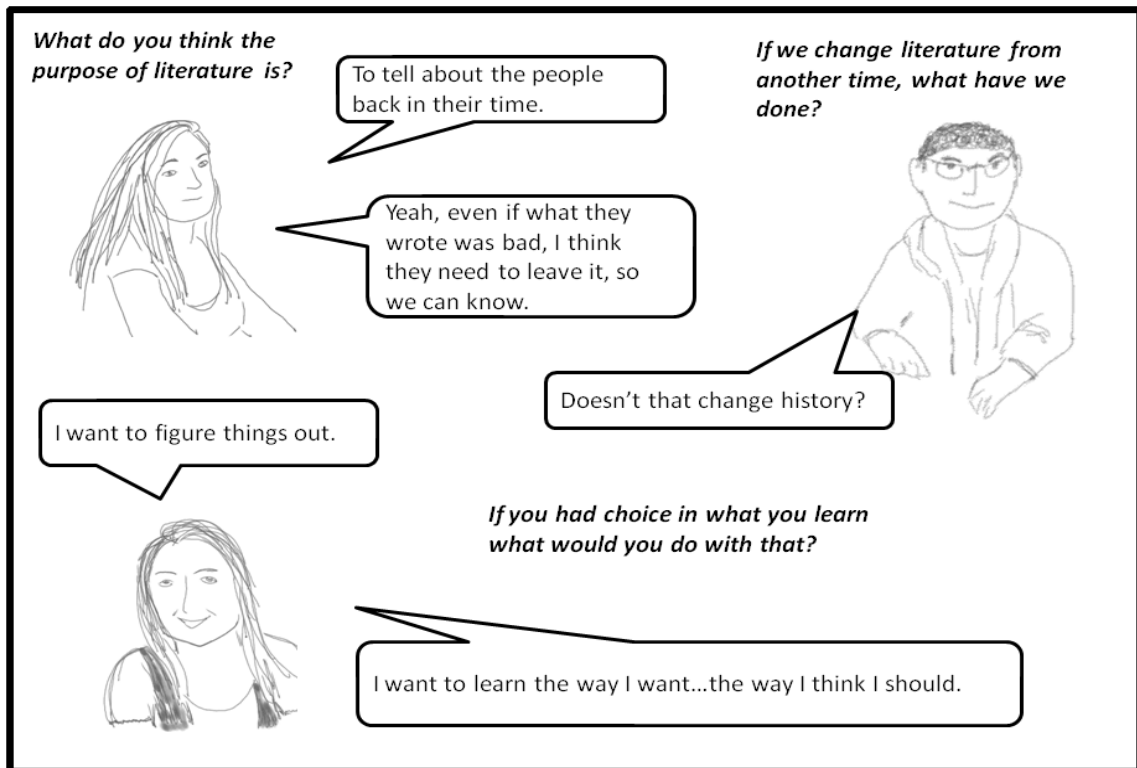


Figure 5.67 Greene, Amy, Robin, Carl, 2011, Focus Group 3

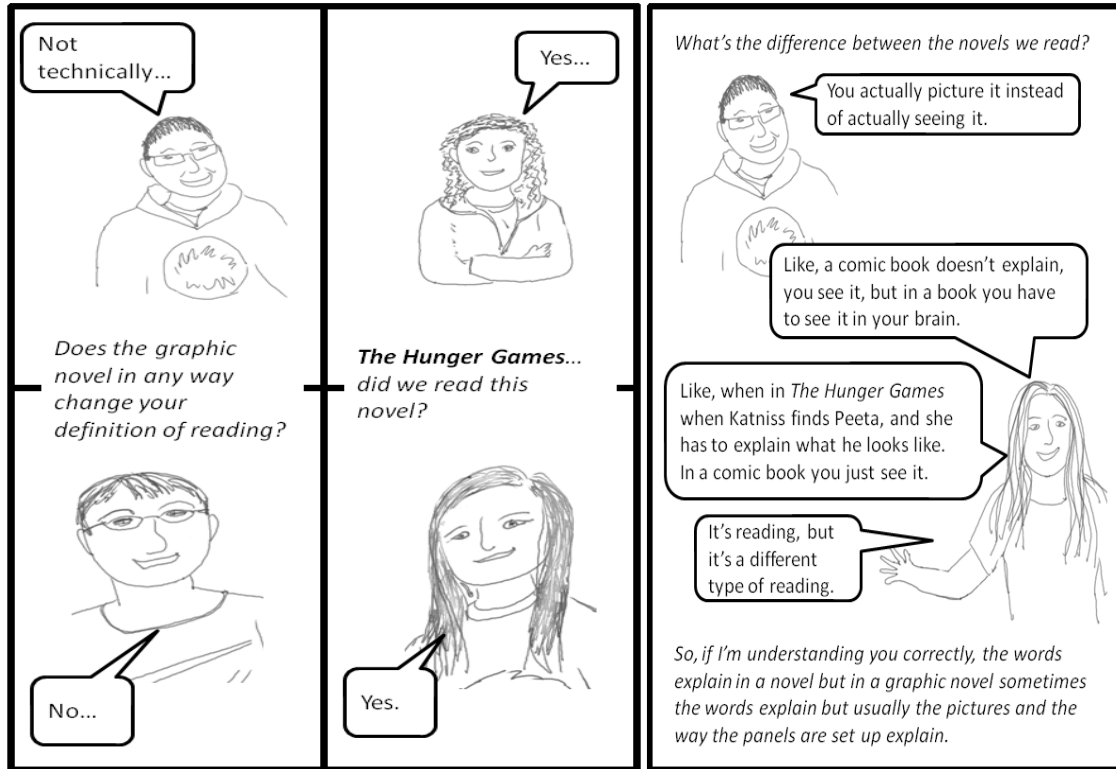


Figure 5.68 Greene, John, Kirk, Sophia, Morgan, Cathy, 2011, Observation 14

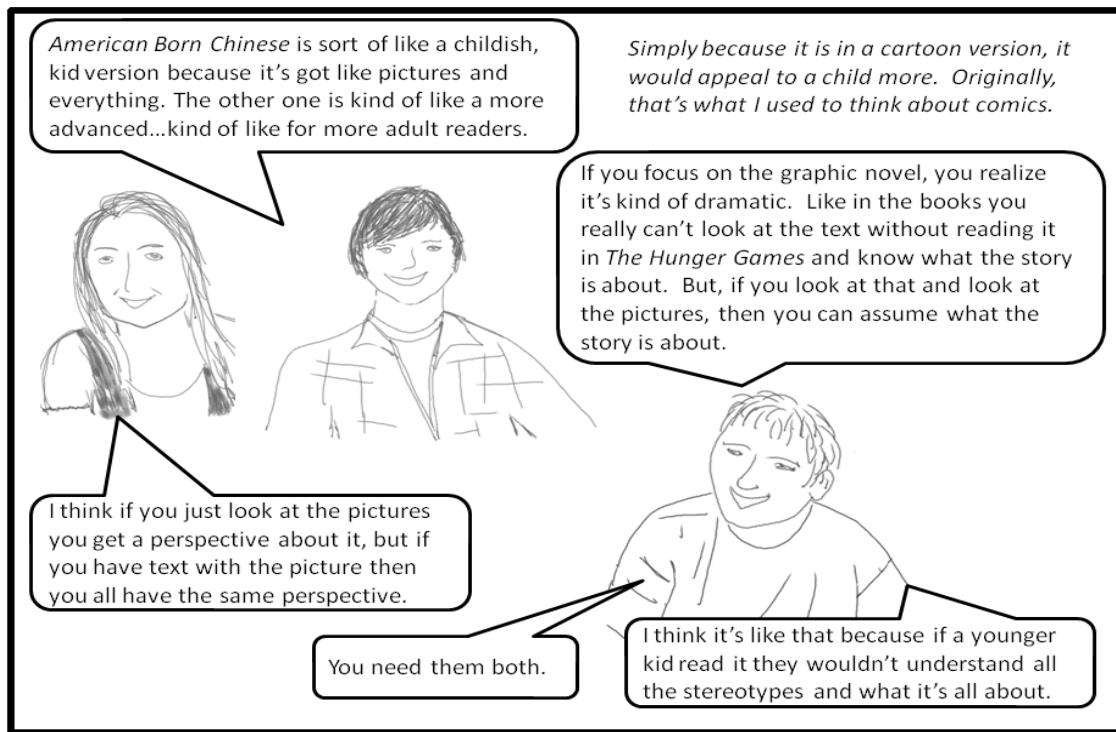


Figure 5.69 Greene, Robin, Travis, Mark, 2011, Observation 14

Reading creates a visual construct of comprehension in the mind—one that allows the students to see the setting, imagines the characters, and anticipates the actions while becoming consumed by the words. Miller (2001) suggests that “all novels tend to create a virtual reality in the minds of their readers” (p. 43). This virtual reality transforms thought and deepens the connection between the words and the reader creating a point for the imagination to take over and allowing the reader to learn from the reading. The connections of students as readers to the content and more importantly the concept of what they are reading in that natural processing, questioning and reflection occurs often spontaneously, reinforces the idea that reading is a performative act requiring the opportunity for dialogue, discussion, and contemplation. The responses of the students in this case study continuously reinforced the challenge they face in understanding reading from a more conceptual and critical stance and thus supports Finding 6.

### **Finding 7: Critical Readings and Student Voice**

Candid experiences such as these in the classroom were examples that were prompted by the reading of the text; however, the conversations were supported by the graphic novel connections that enhanced student understandings of expressions and emotions primarily associated with the characters and the relationships between the characters. There were elements within the text that made it difficult for the students to recognize those emotions and the point of view of the characters. The students took the initiative in interacting with the text and at times requested the use of the graphics to “see” what it was that Mr. Grayson was referring to as he read. Thus, they utilized the graphic portions as a tool toward both their literal understanding of the text as well as

prompting thought toward deeper understandings as reflected in the conversations. bell hooks (1994) suggests that:

Coming to voice is not just the act of telling one's experience. It is using that telling strategically—to come to voice so that you can also speak freely about other subjects. (p. 148)

Finding 7 supported this understanding and incorporated the ability of the graphics and/or the text to give a voice to the students as direct agents of their own learning. Many experiences included dialogue that directly connected this learning to real-world social issues directly relevant in their own lives as teenagers as well as to the societal group in which they were a part.

The use of the graphic novels was particularly accented in the study of the graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*. This novel required the students to delve into issues that had the potential for being glossed over or ignored because of the controversial nature of the content. In planning sessions with the observer, Mr. Grayson articulated his concern about the possibility for negative or inappropriate comments. He also believed that a misunderstanding of the material could result in a superficial reading that only gave some students fuel for teasing and maligning other student groups.

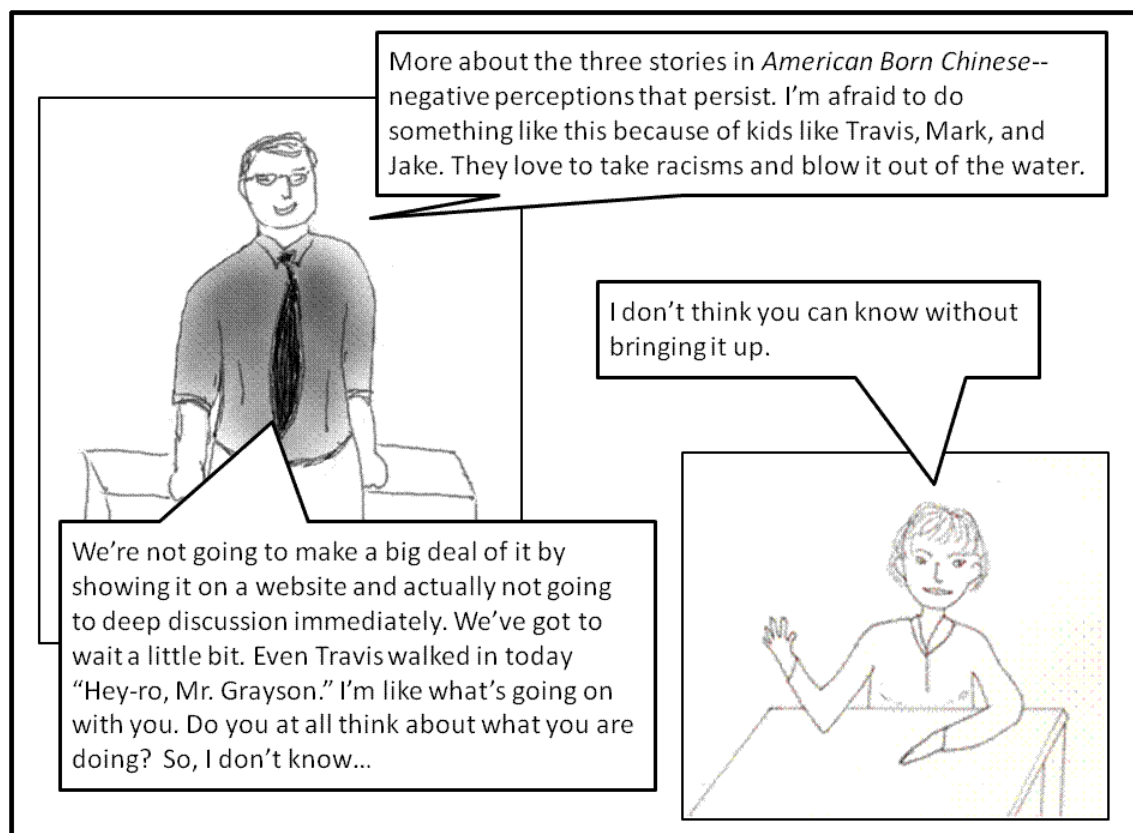


Figure 5.70 Grayson, Greene, 2010, Planning Session 3

Mr. Grayson's desire to include the novel and give students a chance to become involved in the distinct and specific focus on the issues and themes in this novel of cultural identity and social stereotyping were an example of his drive to change traditional and binding teaching practice that limits student choice and impedes their voice regarding their personal real-world experiences. hooks (1994) challenges educators in understanding "that's the difference education as the practice of freedom makes. The bottom line assumption has to be that everyone in the classroom is able to act responsibly. That has to be the starting point—that we are able to act responsibly together to create a learning environment" (p. 152). Each member of this class was expected to become an integral part of their learning and act responsibly in addressing some of the cultural and social identity questions expressed in the graphic novel *American Born*

*Chinese*. The ability to move beyond the boundaries of stereotyping and articulate some of those issues lead to discussion and dialogue reflective of introspective thinking from the students as well as from their teacher.

For instance, in his introduction to *American Born Chinese*, Mr. Grayson spent some time in discussing stereotypes and how they influence the beliefs and notions about individuals and groups of individuals based on race, color, belief systems, and perceptions of difference. In the early weeks of the semester, the students felt no sense of power within the classroom nor significant voice to articulate their point of view or interpretations beyond what was expected by other teachers as observed by their limited level of response to questioning and early lack of engagement. This was powerfully changed due to purposeful and progressive questioning techniques as well as intentional connections to real-life student experiences through popular culture and frank discussions. This progressive change in student expectations within this classroom related to their ability to have a voice that was meaningful and carried with it the expectation that each student had something valuable to contribute to the conversation set the stage for a dialogue focused on social issues related to power and control.

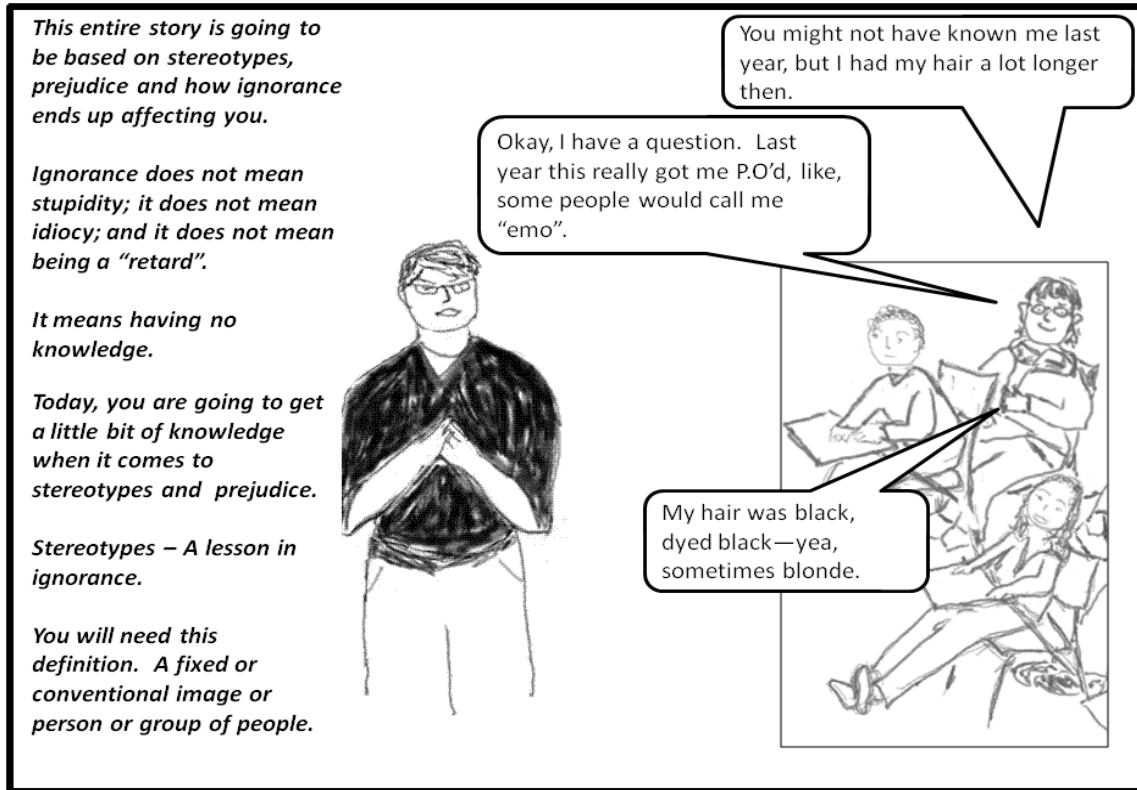


Figure 5.71 Grayson, Jake, 2010, Observation 11

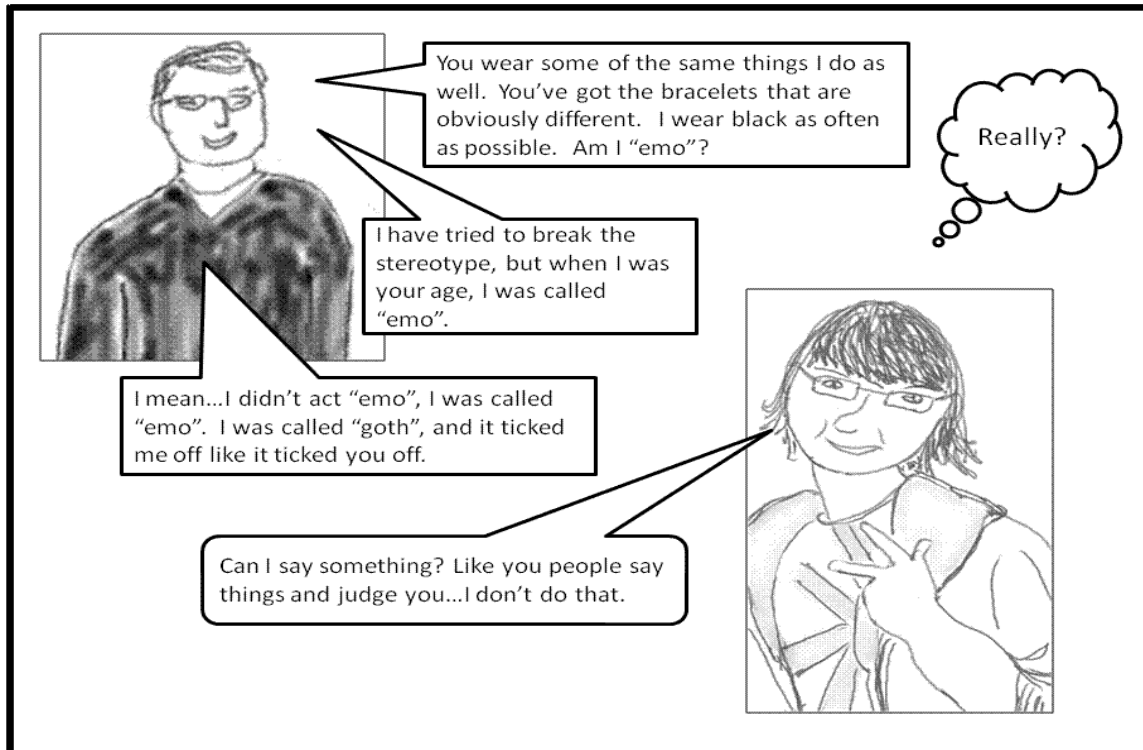


Figure 5.72 Grayson, Jake, 2010, Observation 11



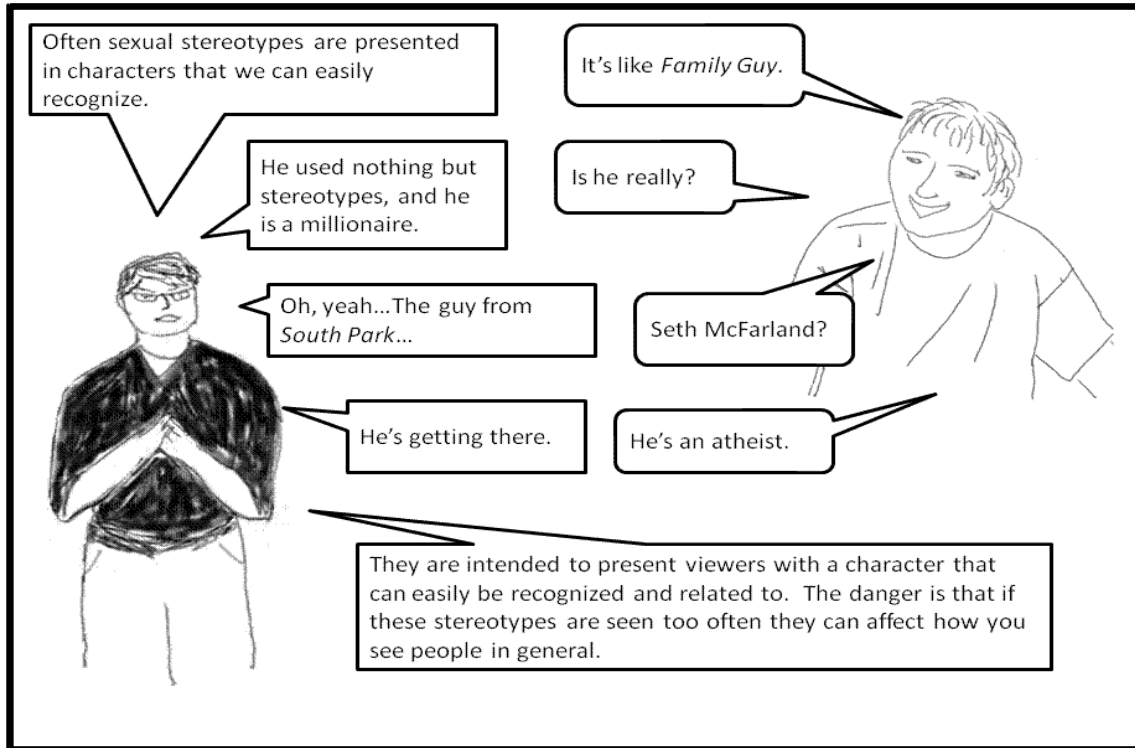


Figure 5.73 Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 11

According to Greene (2001) “education is a process of enabling persons to become different, to enter the multiple provinces of meaning that create perspectives on the works” (p. 5). The progression of questioning and introduction of non-standard elements into traditional teaching and learning provided a new lens for students to exercise their voice and critically examine traditional text. Mr. Grayson took the time to include real-world connections to the reading of *American Born Chinese* through his questioning techniques and class discussion and thus added strength to the component of critical literacy in this case study.

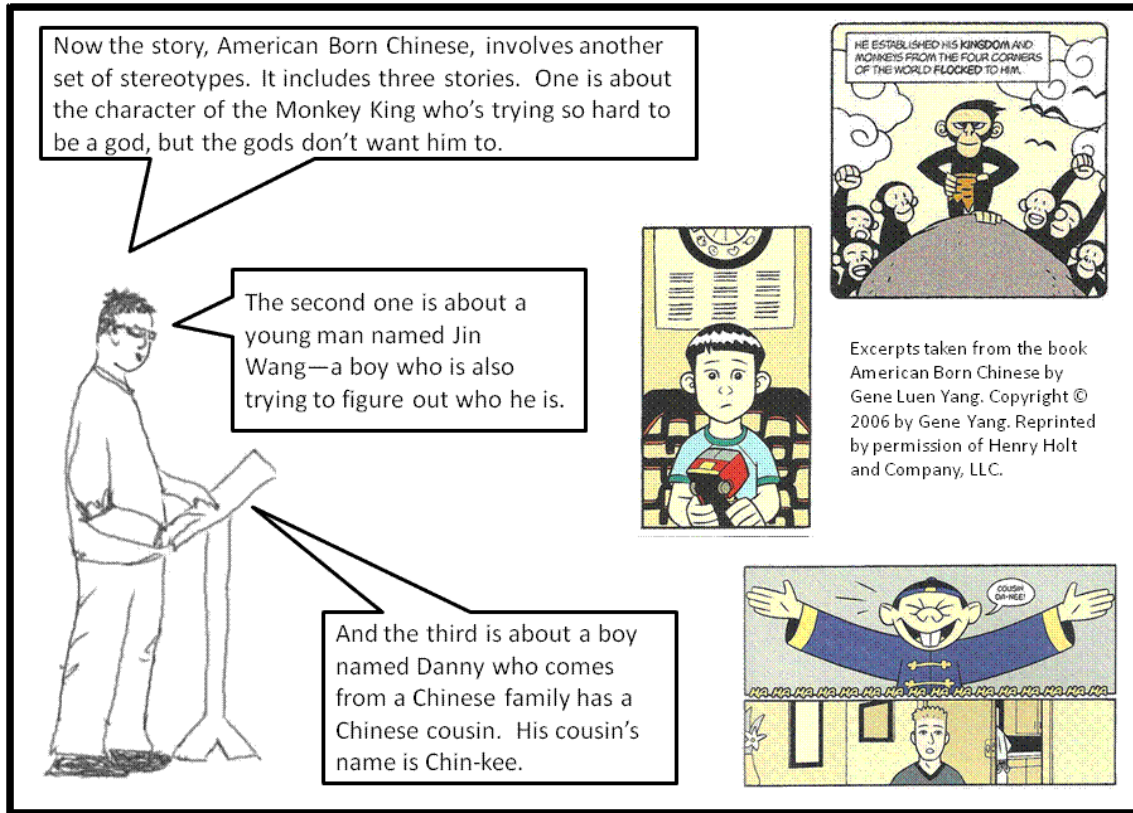


Figure 5.74 Grayson, 2010, Observation 11

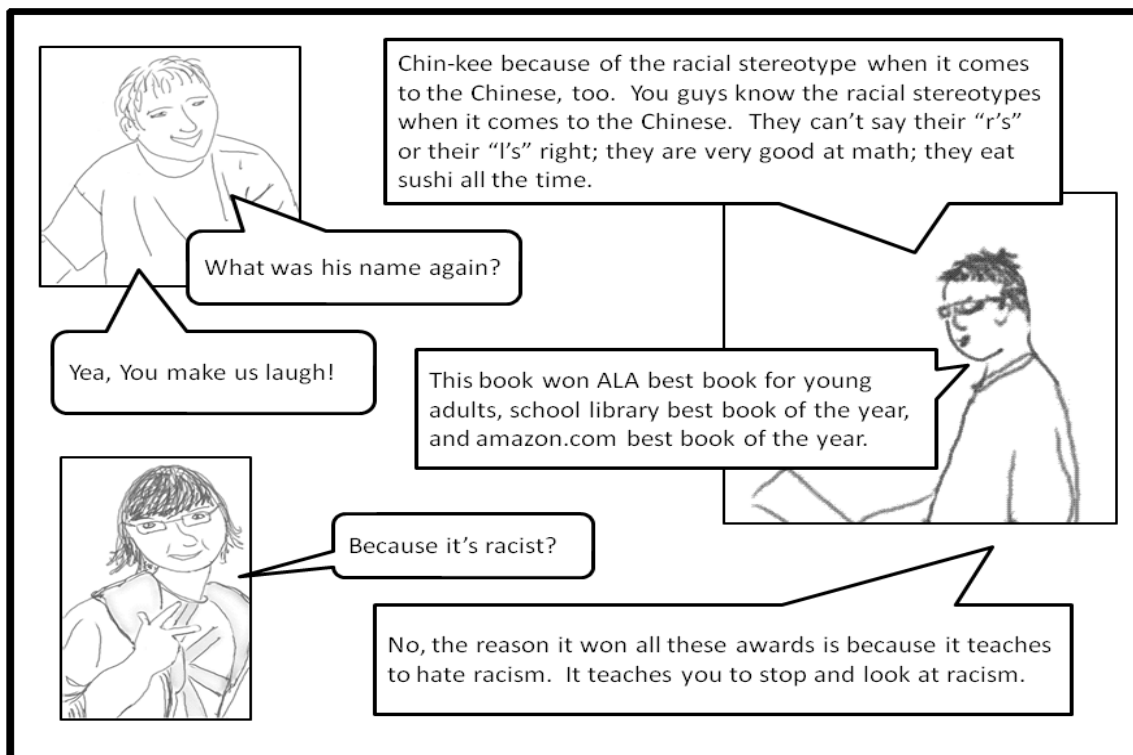


Figure 5.75 Grayson, Mark, Jake, 2010, Observation 11

Several examples pointed to critical relationships and sparked questions from the students that promoted discussion. The students felt prepared and trusted the teacher and their classmates in being able to share their thoughts, feelings, and at times their beliefs regarding these issues.

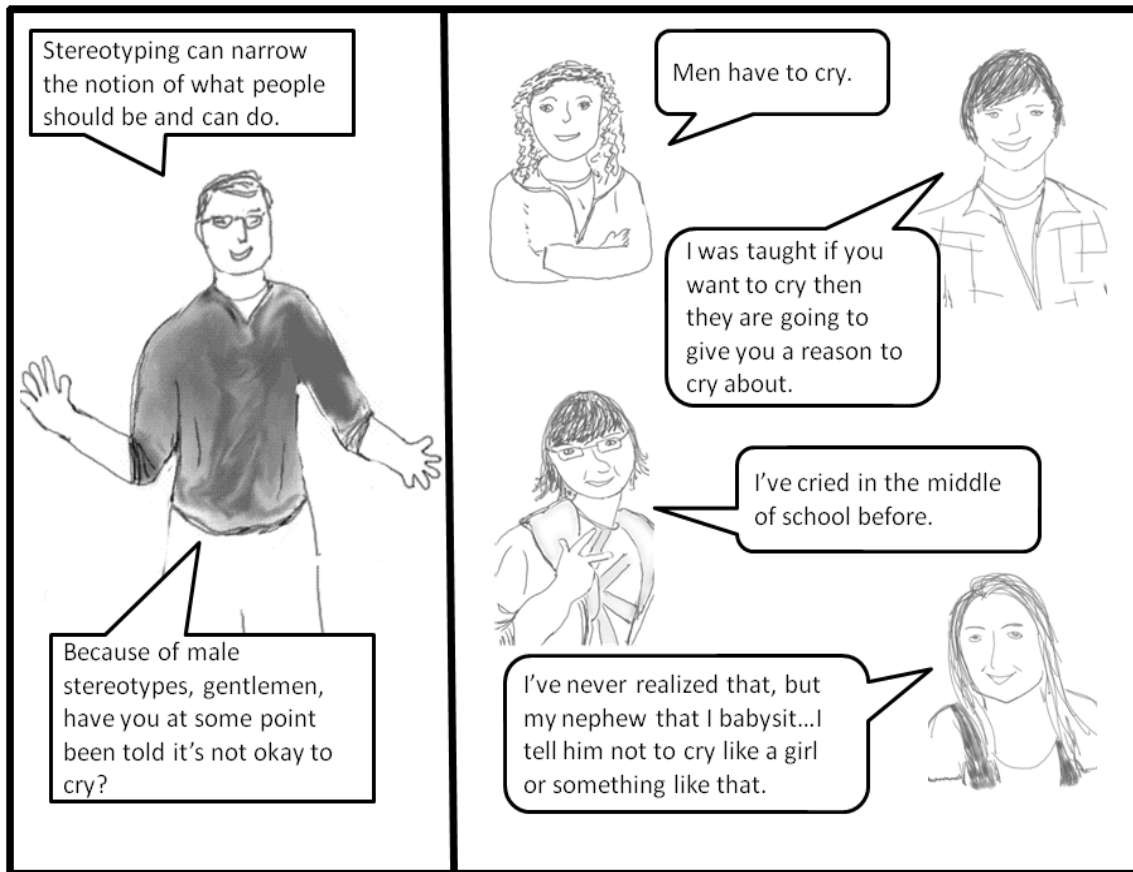


Figure 5.76 Grayson, Sophia, Travis, Jake, Robin, 2011, Observation 11

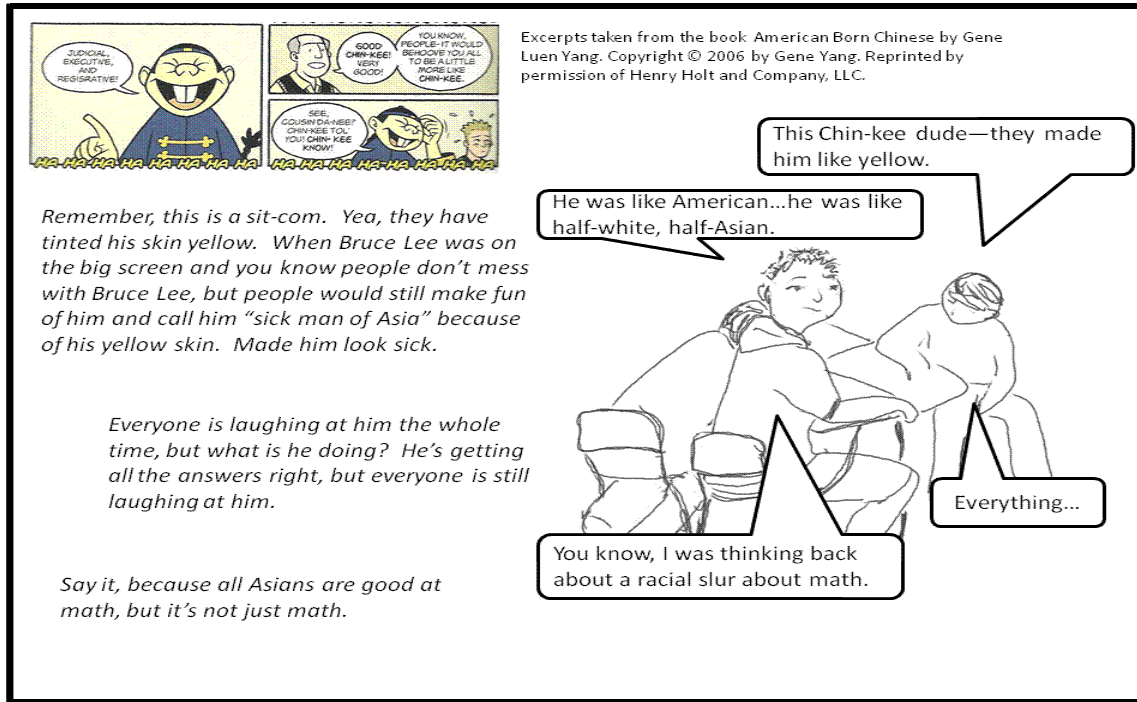


Figure 5.77 Mark, Travis, 2010, Observation 12

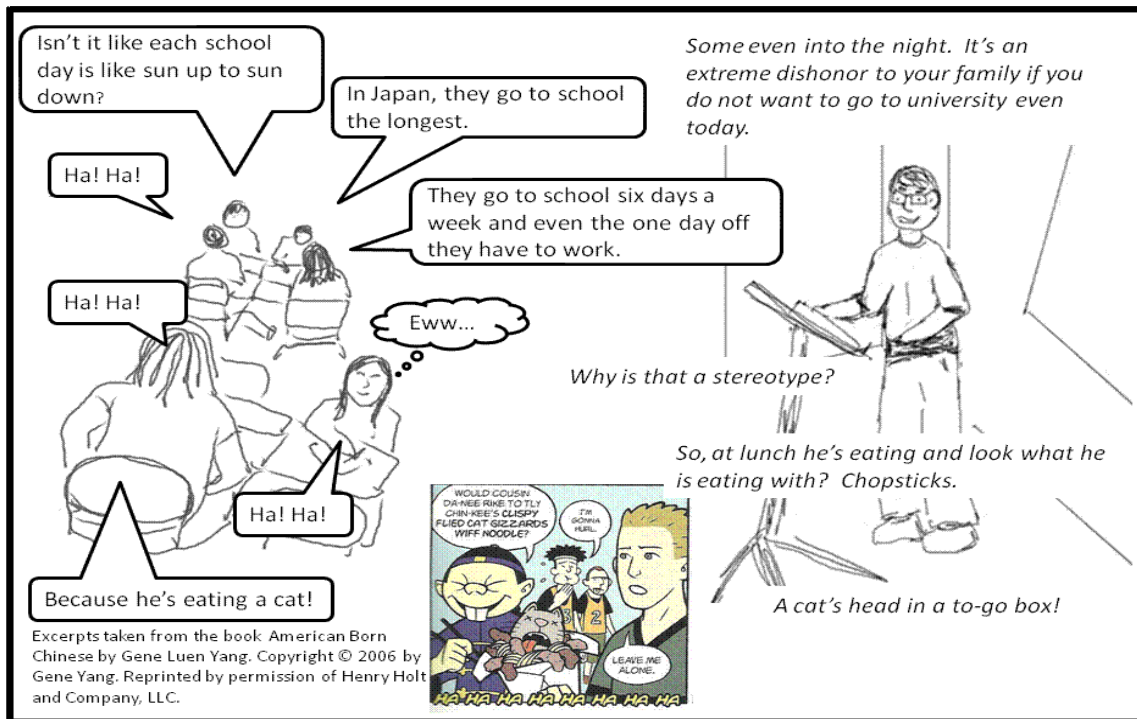


Figure 5.78 Grayson, Jake, Faith, Travis, Sophia, 2010, Observation 12

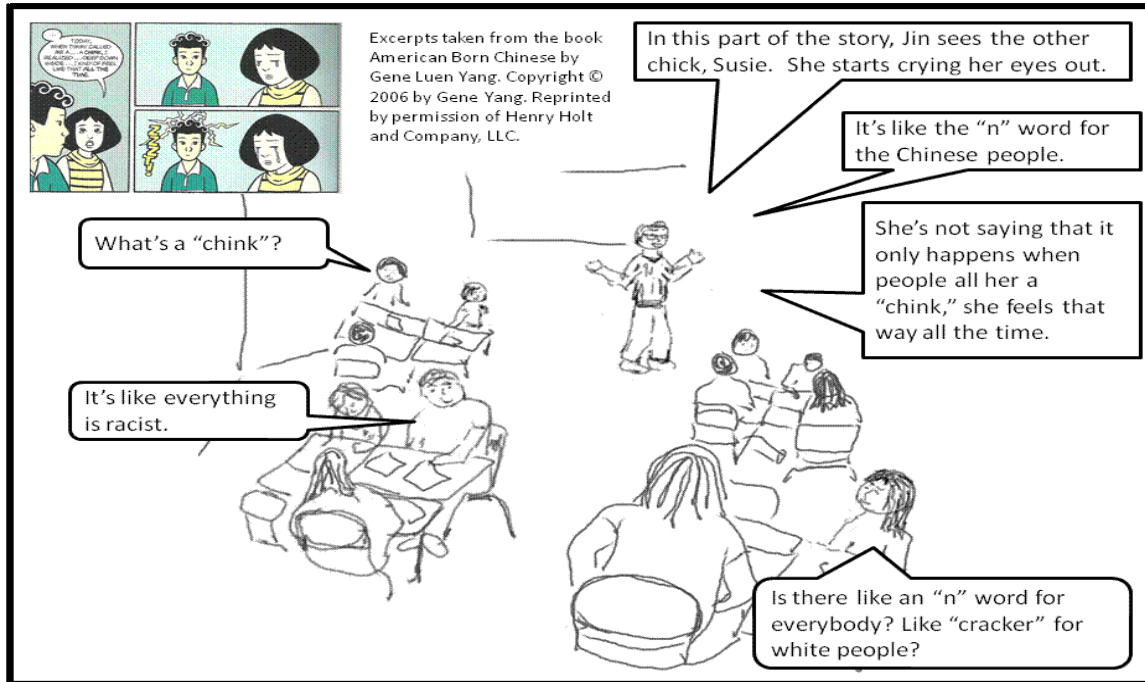


Figure 5.79 Grayson, Jake, Mark, Morgan, 2010, Observation 12

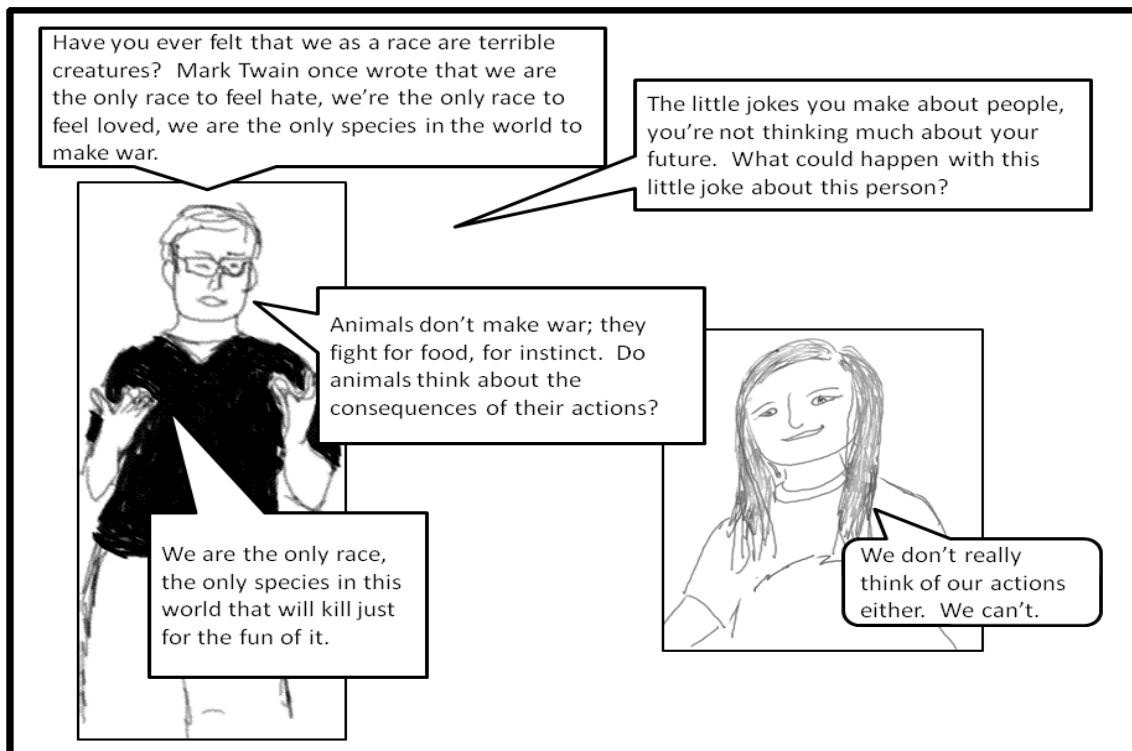


Figure 5.80 Grayson, Cathy, 2010, Observation 12

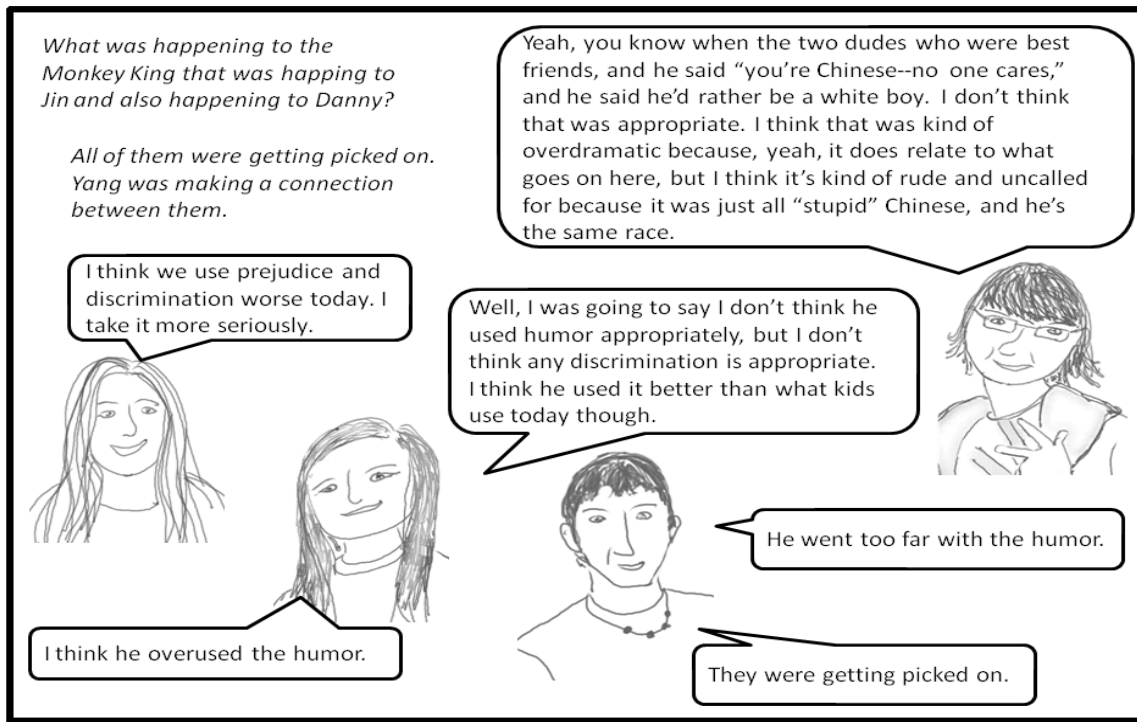


Figure 5.81 Morgan, Cathy, Jared, Jake, 2011, Observation 13

This evidence of student engagement in examining critical issues emphasizes the key point made by Giroux (1987) that:

It is important that teachers recognize how they often silence students, even when they act out of the best of intentions. This suggests being critically attentive not only to the immediacy of one's voice as part of the established apparatus of power, but also to the fears, resistance, and skepticism that students from subordinate groups bring with them to the school setting. (p. 23)

In this case, the subordinate group may well be the students as "others" in that as adolescents they are often silenced by teachers because of the nature of what is perceived as a troubled, apathetic, self-centered individual with limited if any focus on learning.

The students found personal connections to these stereotypes and accepted the approaches used by Mr. Grayson to articulate their own questions about traditional

beliefs regarding racial stereotypes presented in this novel. Adolescents as a marginalized group may well reflect some of the problems associated with working with traditional and routine teaching practices rather than looking to integrate alternative literacies such as elements of popular culture, social networking applications, television and film so integral to the adolescents' reality. Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood (1999) ask the question "if notions about readers and texts are changing, so, too, are the contexts in which the various sign systems are being interpreted" (p. 10). Often students have a greater knowledge of these changing media literacies than the teachers. In bringing concepts of "critical media literacy using popular culture texts with groups of students who often know more than we do about current trends in alternative rock music, film making, computer technology, and video software" teachers are challenged with constantly playing "catch-up" and "keep-up" with those same students.

The advantage of utilizing a novel such as *American Born Chinese* forced the students to view the text and the graphic as inseparable in finding meaning and thus seamlessly find a new definition for reading that allowed them to synthesize their thoughts and the ideas of others through new constructions. Sumara (1993) explains that "literary text does not diminish the reader or subsume the reader into the text; rather, it allows the reader to engage in a type of personal reflection within the experience of reading the text—a way for us to come to know ourselves" (p. 293). I would suggest that included in literary text would be the medium of graphic sequential text such as what was presented in *American Born Chinese* and other similar graphic novels that allow for a new interaction with the material. Through this process of interactions with the text "the reader of the novel is sometimes able to find feelings, ideas, possible worlds that s/he did

not have prior to the reading” (p. 293) that may support or challenge prior notions or beliefs. Another interaction with the class illustrates this point.

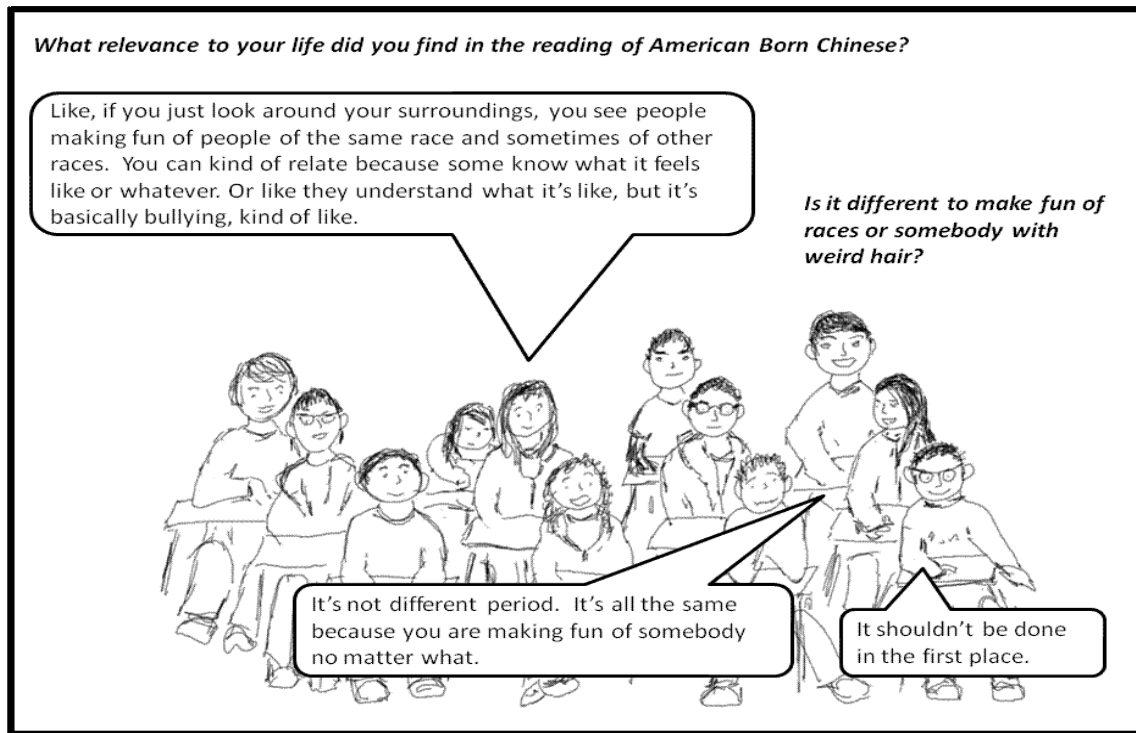


Figure 5.82 Morgan, Mary, John, 2011, Observation 14

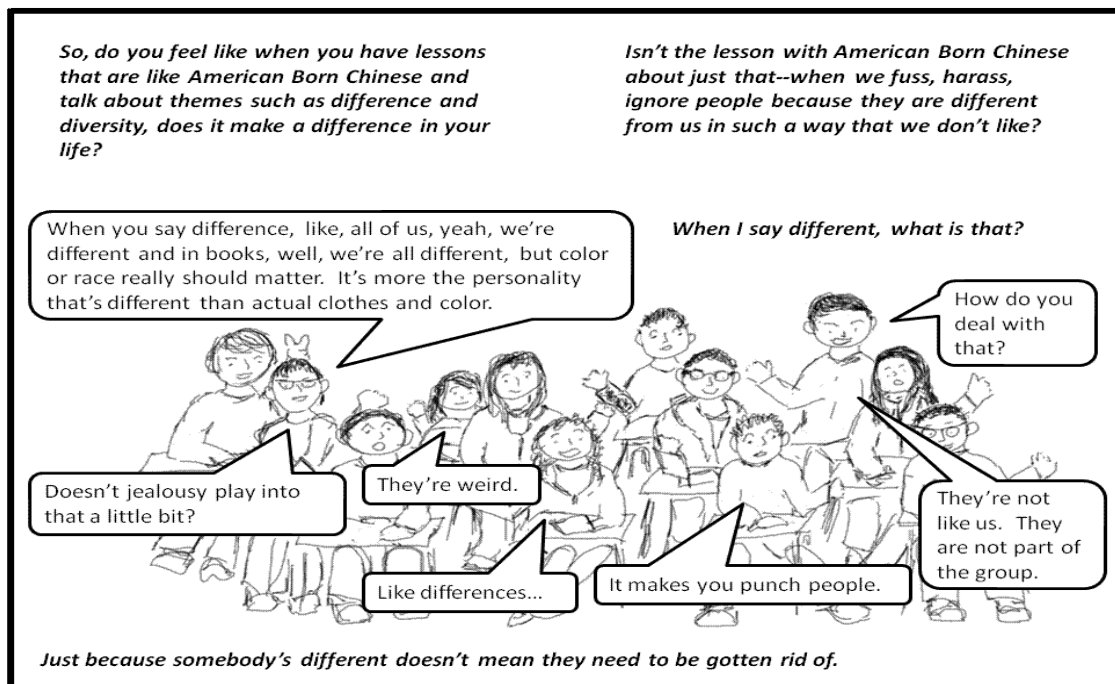


Figure 5.83 Jake, Travis, Faith, Sophia, Brad, Mark, 2011, Observation 14



One student, Carl, who had spent most of his time in the class quietly watching others and remaining in what could be termed as intentional invisibility, spoke out in an essay regarding an experience the students may have had involving stereotyping. To put this in perspective, Carl is an African-American male and has also been identified as gifted under the standards set by the state of Georgia. He is the only African-American in the class and is one of a very few minority groups enrolled in this rural school. He responds in this way:

“Nigger” is a word that I heard forty-two times yesterday. I counted. I wasn’t surprised with the results. In fact, I thought it would be about fifty. Another thing I hear very often would be people offering me fried chicken or watermelon. Apparently, black people like fried chicken and watermelon. That is true, but it is true of everyone. Personally, I do not like fried chicken, and I do not like sports like basketball. (Carl, 2011, Essay Response)

Carl’s brief statements gave strong testament to his place in the social community of his school and perhaps even his home. His willingness to share these statements knowing that Mr. Grayson and the observer would both be reading his comments also signified his trust in what we may do with his words. The words of Maxine Greene (2001) resonate with meaning related to Carl and those like him to “think what it would mean in our increasingly diverse classrooms for teachers to be enabled to imagine what it signifies to be ‘invisible’...and to realize as well how such invisibility stands in the way of community, and how the arts enable persons to create their own visibility, to change their lives” (p. 145). The question must be considered if Carl gave us as his teachers the words he wrote in an effort to become visible in the conversation as an attempt to change his life

through his connection with the character from *American Born Chinese*. The comments made through Carl and his classmates supported the finding (Finding 7) that critical readings of traditional text and graphic novels served as the focus text to give voice to the students as direct agents of their own learning particularly as it related to real-world social issues and real-life, relevant circumstances of their own lives.

### **Finding 8: Commitment of the Teacher**

Finding 8 developed over the course of this case study as experience after experience was observed and recorded that suggested that the motivation and engagement of the students was directly related at least in part to the students' perception of commitment from the teacher. As a middle school teacher and especially one focused in the instruction and teaching of reading, I have struggled with the apparent opposing dichotomy between reading instruction and engagement with reading. Adolescent readers have an increased level of expectation in the schools to learn more and do more independently while experiencing less actual reading instruction in the classroom. (Deshler, Palincsar, Biancarosa, Nair, 2007; Beers, 2003; Ivey, 1999). Elementary students begin with interactive lessons that oftentimes include creative lessons and games that gradually diminish as the increase in content knowledge takes over the demands of more independent learning and time. Generally, by the time a student reaches high school, the textbook has achieved primary status in learning new material and the student is expected to read silently, work independently, and conform to a more bound setting of direct instruction. Deshler, Palincsar, Biancarosa, and Nair (2007) contend that "when textbooks are the only reading material available to students, disengagement is a likely outcome, even for the brightest students" (p. 26). Similarly, those students who have

struggled with reading through their academic career continue to be placed in remedial programs or “groups” designed to concentrate on those skills related to remediation such as phonics, but neglect the skills needed to comprehend and understand grade level content creating a disconnect between the reader and the text.

One of the most obvious aspects of this classroom in the early days of the semester was the use of traditional settings to deliver material. At least in the opening weeks, the classroom retained a look of students in rows with a podium in the front from which Mr. Grayson delivered his instruction. Much was in the form of lecture and utilized a direct instruction approach. His teacher’s desk held a position in the front corner of the room in front of the single window with file cabinets and materials placed against the walls and in the far reaches of the room. Five computer stations were conveniently placed along the farthest wall from the hallway door sporting black office-type chairs at each. The room was surprisingly bright with what felt like natural light even with the one window and mainly fluorescent overhead lighting. Mr. Grayson did attempt to soften the effect with floor and accent lamps and frequently changed the lighting depending on the lesson. He also kept an air freshener with some very light and gentle scent unobtrusively in the corner near his desk.

bell hooks (1994) addressed the common assumption that “our [teacher’s] fear of losing students’ respect has discouraged many professors from trying new teaching practices” (p. 146). The pull of measuring student achievement, discipline, and efficiency have clouded our thought about what makes education, knowledge, and learning creative, interesting, engaging and fundamentally human. Current practices within the context of schooling and the programmatic content of it then establishes a “quality that is

hidden and that gradually incites rebelliousness on the part of children and adolescents (Friere, 1987, p. 121)” creating a rift between the school and the students. Initially, Mr. Grayson’s class had the structure and feeling of typical classroom, standards based instruction, and reading and writing expectations set up to pass end of course tests that permeates the educational world and sets up the disconnect and “rebelliousness” of students from a world reality. Friere (1987) suggests that “because of the rebelliousness of children and adolescents who . . . refuse to engage in the intellectual activity predetermined by the curriculum, these students end up refusing to comprehend the word. Thus they remain distant from the practice of reading” (p. 122). However, even with this traditional setting, the overall classroom tone proved to be different from traditional expectations in large part due to the commitment of Mr. Grayson.

The framework under which Mr. Grayson’s 9<sup>th</sup> grade classroom received instruction included a teacher focused direct instruction approach commonly found in many high school classrooms as well as several small group collaborative experiences designed to promote deeper comprehension of previously read material. The basal textbook was the primary source of studied text with the secondary use of portions of graphic novels, teacher designed worksheet packets, and one complete graphic novel. Care was taken in planning sessions including the observer and Mr. Grayson to introduce textual material in its original format through the textbook, then utilize the graphic panels as both supportive of the text as well as independently from the text. Mr. Grayson maintained a philosophy of providing all the oral reading in the class because of his belief that comprehension is enhanced through his expressive presentation style and provides

direct evidence to students of passage meaning and illustrative explanation of literary elements. Sumara (1993) supports this belief suggesting that:

By performing an oral reading of the text, teachers choose to show more deliberately their relational connections to the text in this deliberate act of interpretation...The oral reading, then, transforms the engagement with text from a private one which students might have, to a public one. (p. 301)

Evidence of the student engagement with this process was evident through observations as well as reaction to related questions and commentary from each of the focus group settings. In the first focus group setting the students were asked the question: “If you were the principal here, what would you do to get the teachers here to do something more interesting? What would you tell them to do?” (Greene, 2010, Focus Group 1). This sparked responses from the six of the eight students in this focus group related to Mr. Grayson’s presentation of material.

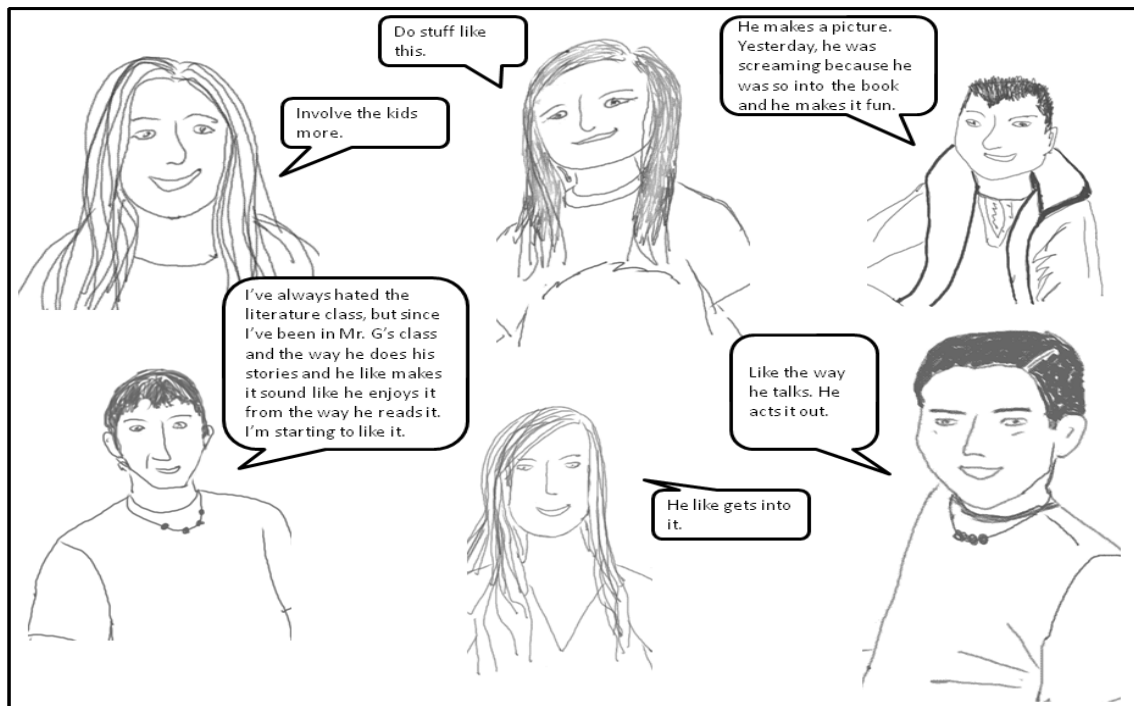


Figure 5.84 Susan, Morgan, Cathy, Evan, Jared, James, 2010, Focus Group 1

The second focus group took this a bit further. The question was asked: “Explain to me in your own words why it is best for him [Mr. Grayson] to read aloud to you?” (Greene, 2010, Focus Group 2). Each of the participating students in this focus group was eager to have their responses heard. Several comments supported their desire to understand the text presented and used Mr. Grayson’s graphic and expressive interpretation of text in order to find meaning for themselves.

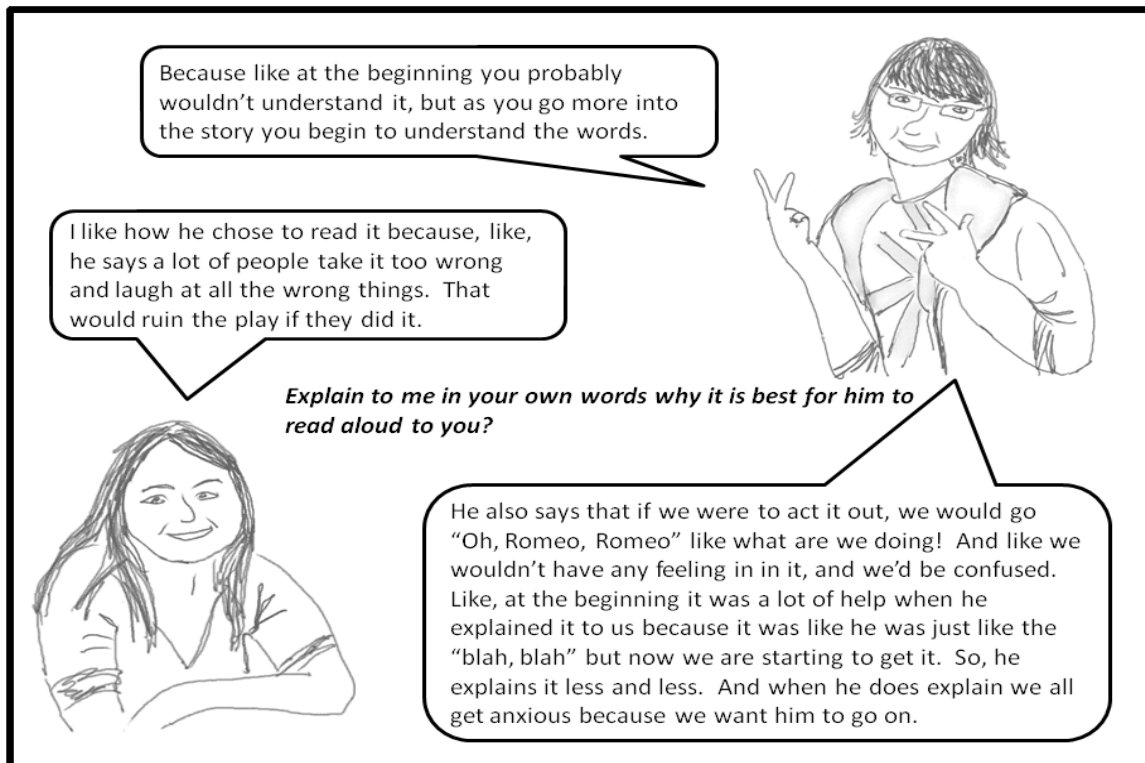


Figure 5.85 Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2

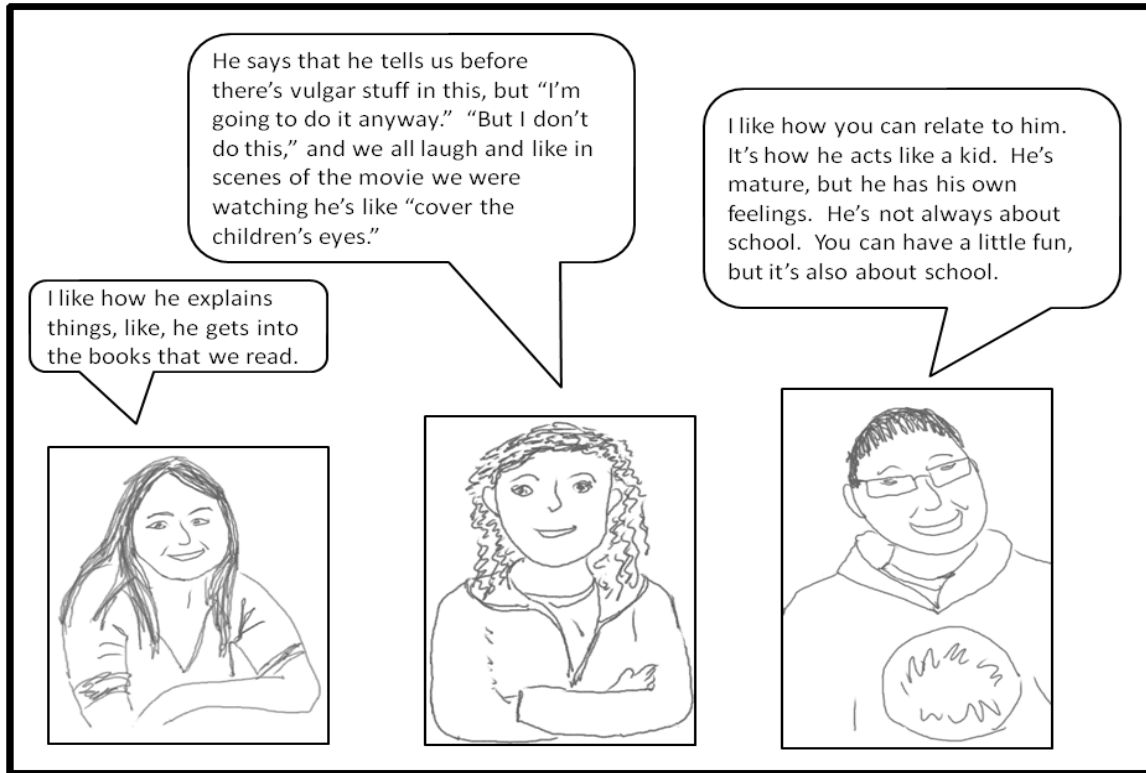


Figure 5.86 Alice, Sophia, John, 2010, Focus Group 2

The relationships developed between Mr. Grayson and his students have begun with his interpretations of text and his connection to real world meaning. The students responded to these connections and anticipated the energy and emotion attached to his oral readings with engagement and commitment to the tasks assigned. Delpit (1995) describes this as “teachers interact with content in order to help students interact with content...where the strongest relationship is between student and teacher, with content only one aspect of their relationship” (p. 139). The relationship between the students and Mr. Grayson is what promotes success and is articulated by the students as indicated by Jake, Sophia and Mary in particular.

Jake is a member of a subgroup in this classroom made up of special education students with problems related to written expression. The subgroup is supported by a special education co-teacher utilized to help with skills and monitoring of student

progress. In some setting this co-teacher participates in actual teaching of lessons, but in Mr. Grayson’s class, this particular co-teacher depends on him for all content instruction and utilizes her skills primarily in small group and individual work with students. The real connection between all these students is with Mr. Grayson. Jake particularly described his relationship with Mr. Grayson as affecting his future goals in becoming an English teacher—a far cry from his frustration with school in general before taking this class.

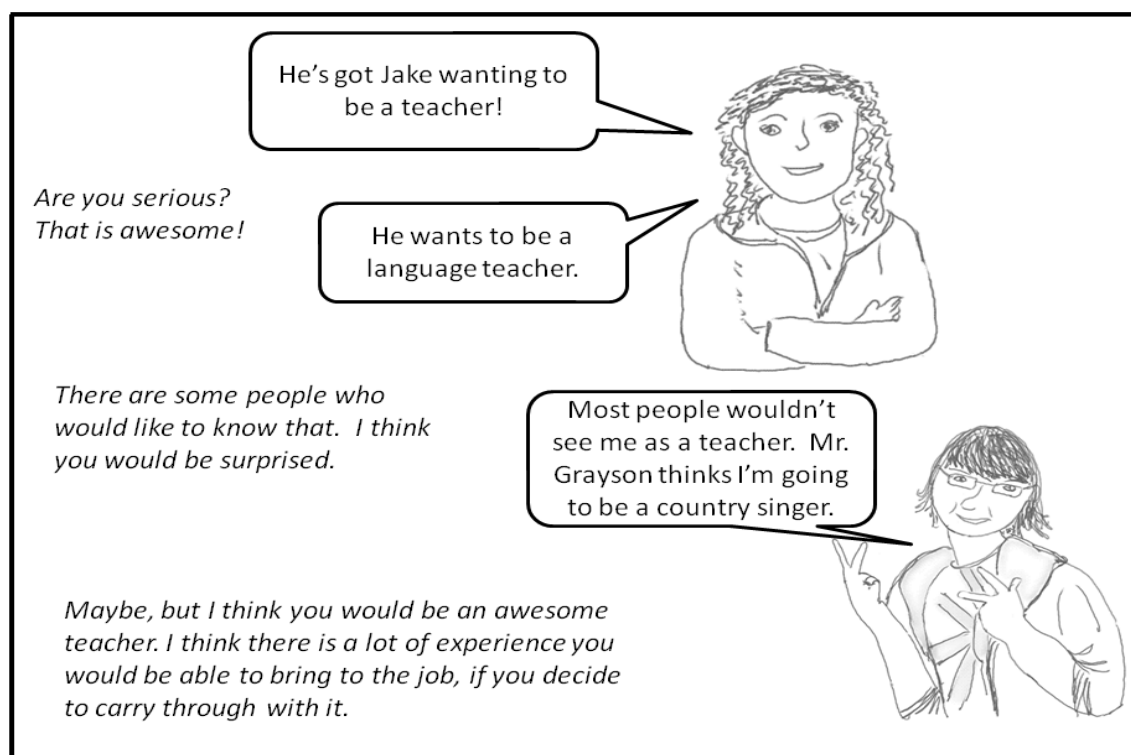


Figure 5.87 Sophia, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2

Sumara (1993) supports the importance of relationships between teachers and students suggesting that “like everything in the world, the classroom is relational. Understood in this way, the classroom cannot merely be seen as a place where subject matter is ‘mastered,’ where curriculum is ‘covered’ or where learning is ‘tested’” (p. 290). The classroom becomes a myriad of ever-evolving relationships: between teacher



and students, students and each other, teacher and texts, students and texts. The relationship between Mr. Grayson and the students appeared to be the driving effect on motivation to task and supported the finding that the motivation and engagement of the students was directly related at least in part to the students' perception of commitment from the teacher (Finding 8). The student reactions to Mr. Grayson's atypical, expected behavior was also met with surprise and energy from the students in the learning process. To illustrate this point, Mr. Grayson allowed a quick divergence from the discussion of the graphic adaptation of *The Raven* to one related to zombies and the possibility of the Poe's character, Lenoir, to return to the narrator's home as a zombie.



Figure 5.88 Grayson, Mark, 2010, Observation 3

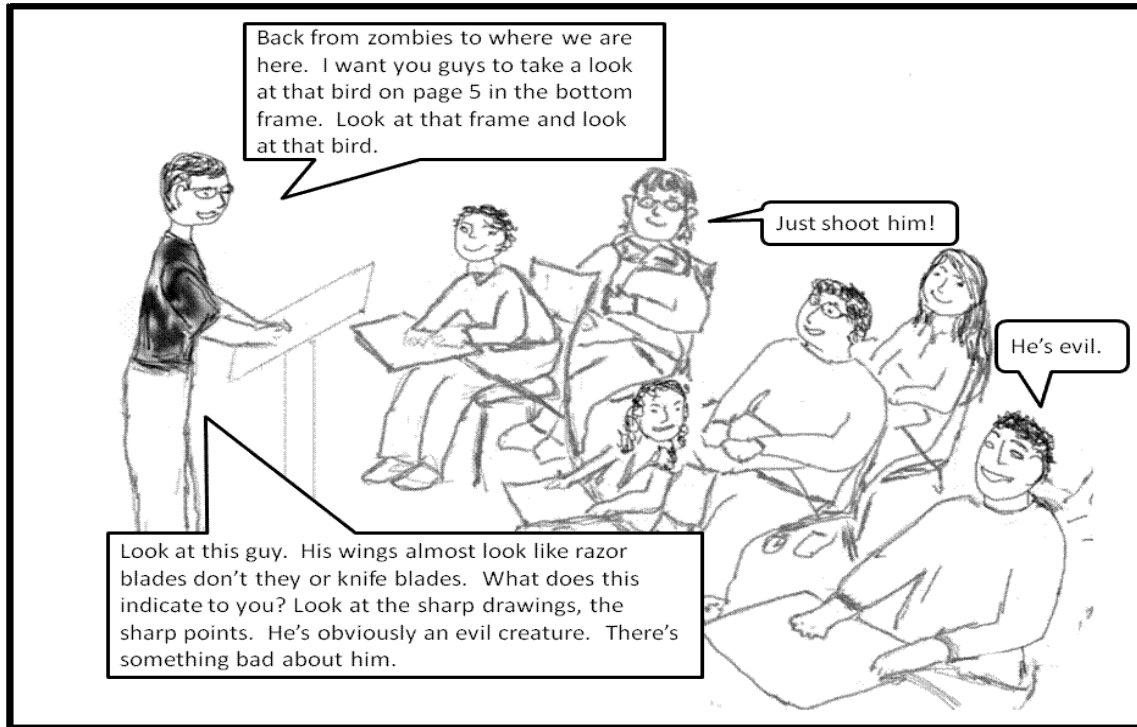


Figure 5.89 Grayson, Jake, Mark, 2010, Observation 3

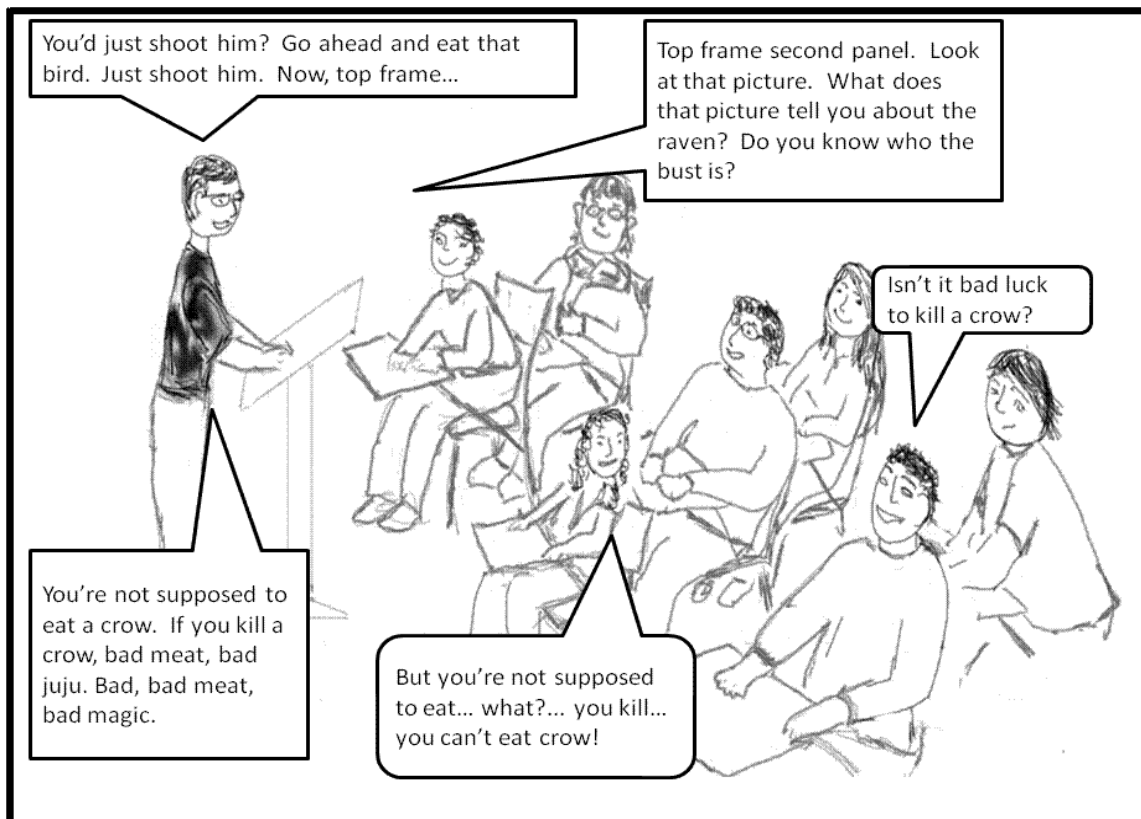


Figure 5.90 Grayson, Mark, Sophia, 2010, Observation 3

His techniques encouraged student integration and responded to the fact that “reading and instruction are human processes” (Shannon, 2007, p. 39) and thus supported a curriculum of learning focused on real students with thoughts, ideas, and emotions intentionally bonded to real world experience as well as compassionate understanding from the teacher.

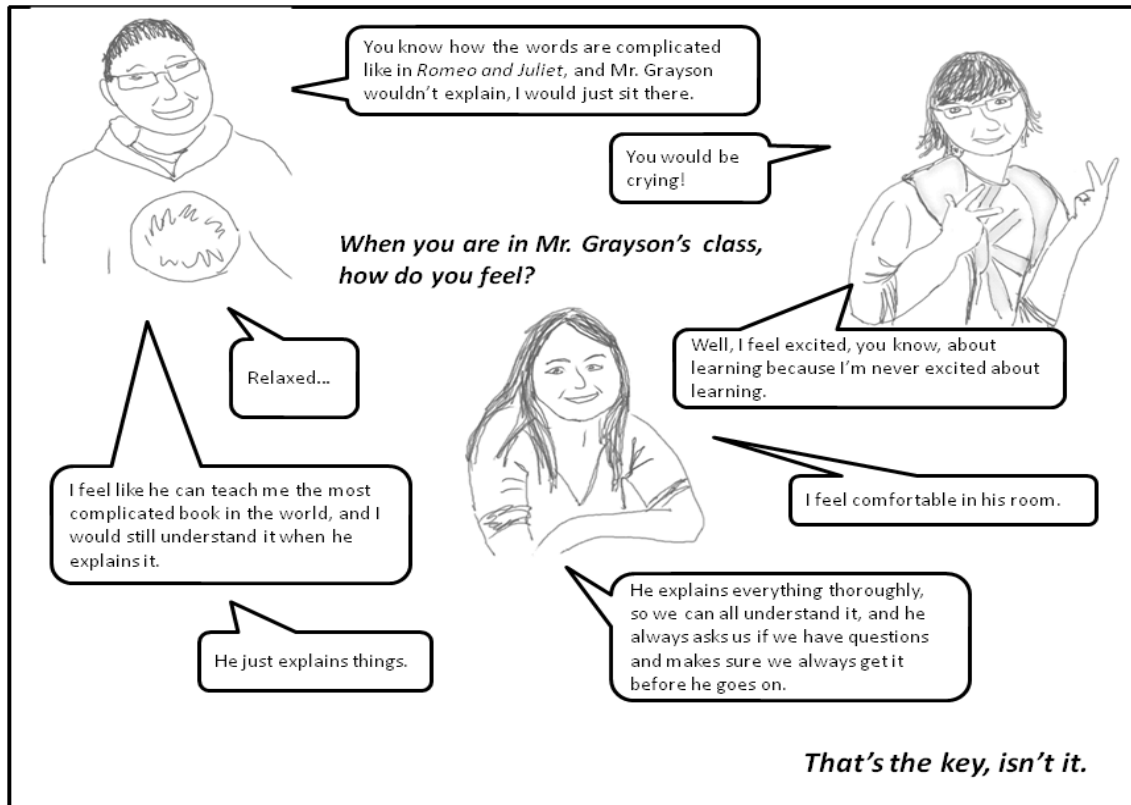


Figure 5.91 John, Alice, Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2

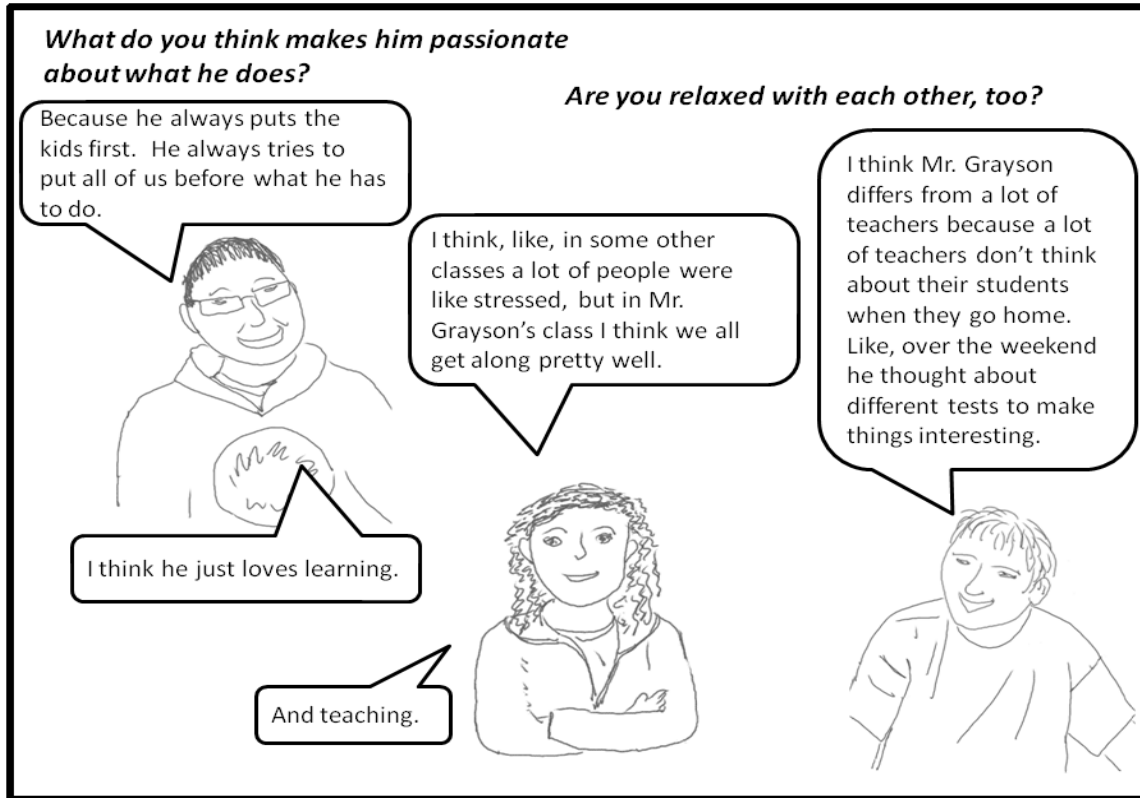


Figure 5.92 John, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2

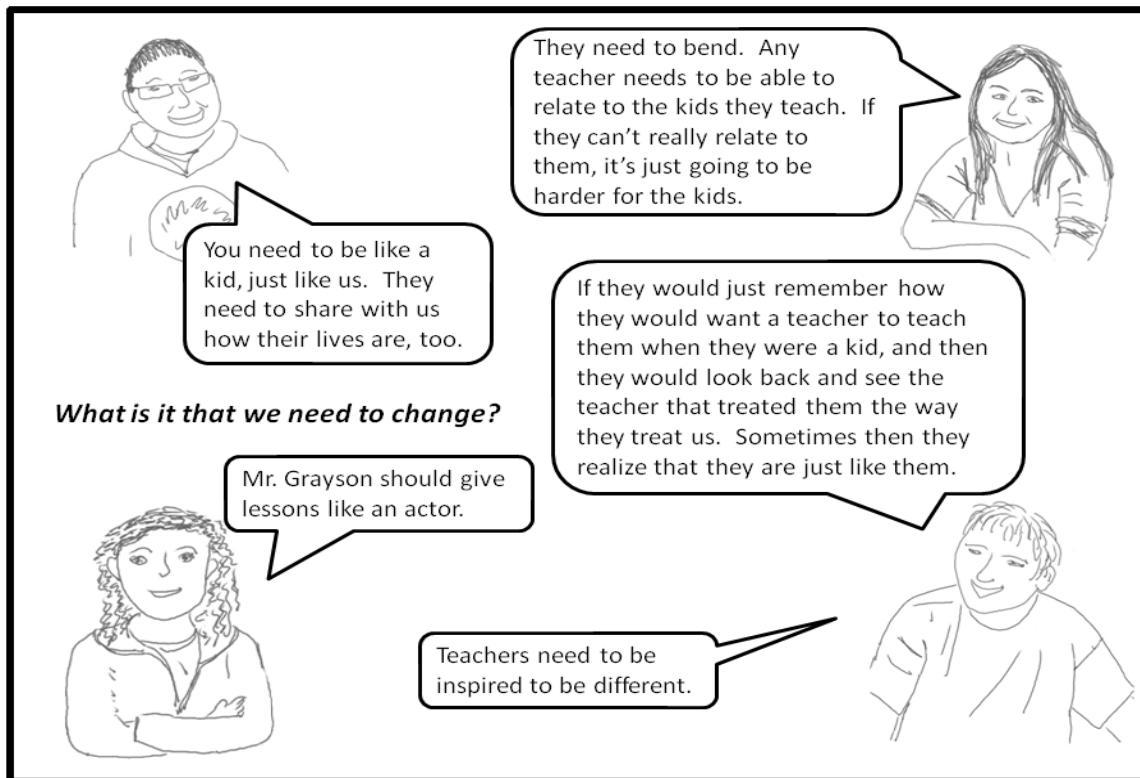


Figure 5.93 John, Sophia, Alice, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2

The statement made by Mark that “teachers need to be inspired to be different” displays an insight into student desire and need for connections with teachers and the power found there in the process of learning (Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2). Compared with the directed standards for each grade level, yearly testing, and scripted programs, student need, desire, and recognition of the influence of significant relationships in the learning process emphasizes the need for a different atmosphere in our schools. The relationships developed between teachers and students and contextually between students and text alters the perception and role of each in that classroom. The weaving of these relationships and the interrelated threads of those relationships to text make the experience “inextricable from life itself; these texts influence, affect, and change the fabric of all of the relations in the classroom” (Sumara, 1993, p. 290). The summative effect of the teacher in this case study must be included in the findings as significant and influential on the attitudes students had toward reading in general as well as specifically in the reading material found within this course.

The fact that Mr. Grayson included graphic novels and comics as part of his instruction further confirmed to students that his desire to make connections with students both personally in their education as well as real-world applications was real, defined, and consistent. The relationships developed and supported a level of trust in the room defining a change in the expectation for what was meant by learning as well as what was meant by reading that went beyond the confines of traditional methods and standard interpretation of text. The willingness of Mr. Grayson to seek out new possibilities utilizing the graphic novel tended to focus his desire to open up new ideas and possibilities to his students. His “traditions” in teaching did not necessarily include

“traditional” points of view but were still originally based in what he had done previously as well as his relatively short term experience in teaching. However, his desire to improve and change his practice that included a variety of popular connections to the realities in student lives provided a palette of ideas open to an evolution of thought. The constant and deliberate commitment and passion demonstrated by Mr. Grayson illustrated the finding (Finding 8) by the observer of the improvement in student motivation toward independent and academic reading because of the active and dynamic immersion into the literature formats.

### **Finding 9: Graphic Novels and Traditional Literature**

One of the purposes of this case study was to investigate the impact of graphic novels and comic books structured around traditional literature on motivation in the classroom. Students in Mr. Grayson’s class were presented graphic panels after careful planning between Mr. Grayson and the investigator. The idea behind the introduction and inclusion of graphic novels was to follow the curriculum map as defined previously by the instructor to insure the ability to cover necessary standards required from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade Georgia Performance Standards. Once the curriculum plan was determined, graphic panels and novels were introduced as a supplement to comprehension of traditional text, an alternative perspective on traditional text, enrichment to a contemporary novel, and as a sole source of graphic and textual contemporary material. Each presentation of graphic material was specifically determined ahead of time during planning sessions for its usefulness and purpose in meaningful instruction intended to promote learning and enhance motivation toward the task. The planning sessions gave a way for Mr. Grayson to articulate some of the feelings he was having in making changes in his point of view

while working with the idea of this case study. In the first session he commented on his own initial hesitation and actual personal dislike of graphic novels.

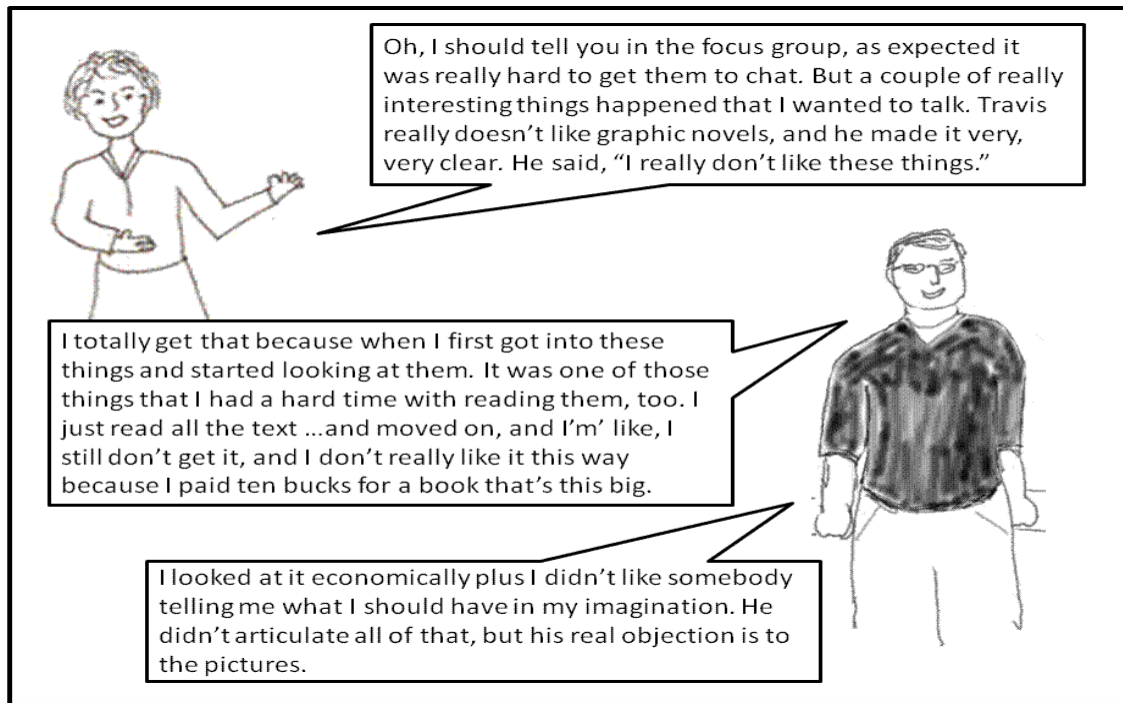


Figure 5.94 Greene, Grayson, 2010, Planning Session 2

Mr. Grayson continued the conversation in this early planning session into some of the real reasons he has changed his personal take on traditional teaching into something more performative and interactive with students.

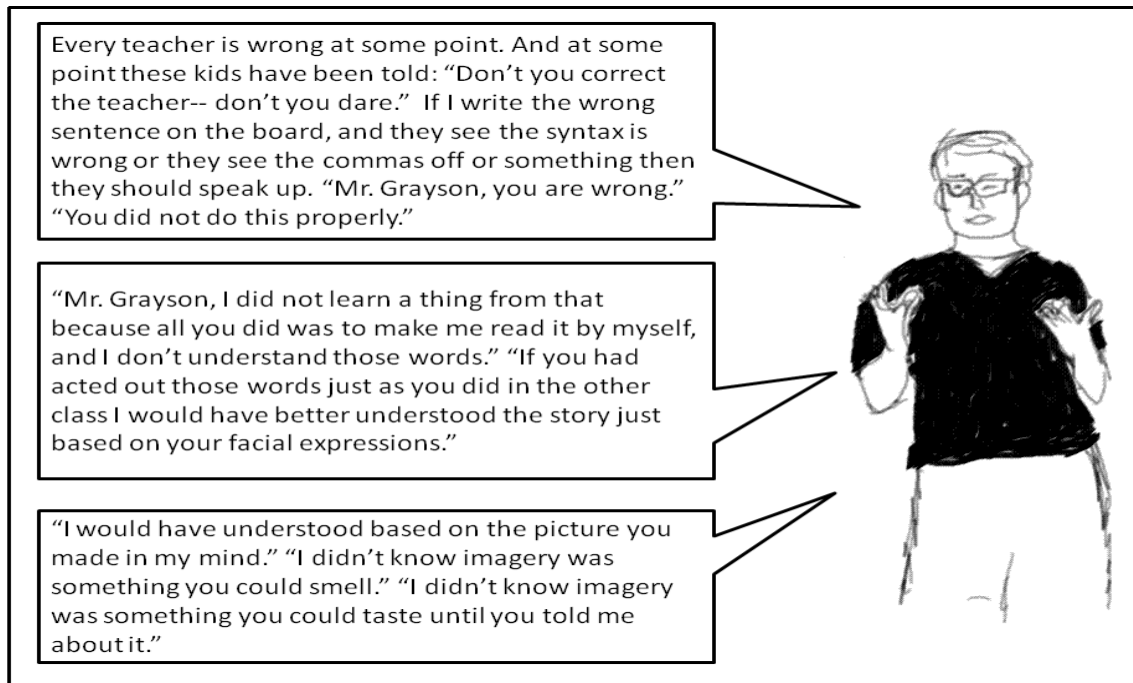


Figure 5.95 Grayson, 2010, Planning Session 2

bell hooks (1994) suggests that “many teachers who do not have difficulty releasing old ideas, embracing new ways of thinking, may still be as resolutely attached to old ways of practicing teaching as their more conservative colleagues” (p. 142). While Mr. Grayson was willing to make changes regardless of his more traditional colleagues, he did suggest the problem many students have with traditional teaching methods and the difficulties they may have in “picturing” the text in their minds. In focus groups and classroom discussions, Mr. Grayson’s techniques that supported visual imagery and textual connections were highly desired and acknowledged by students as what made his class different from most if not all others they had attended.



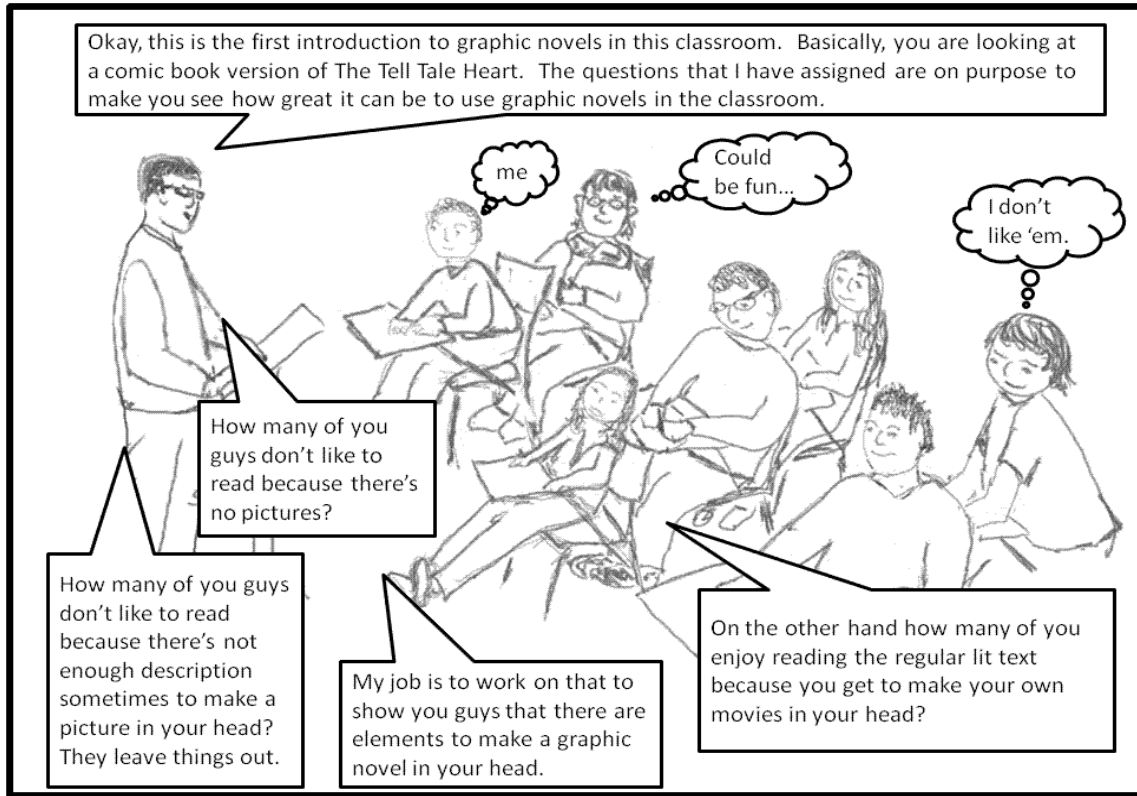


Figure 5.96 Grayson, 2010, Observation 2

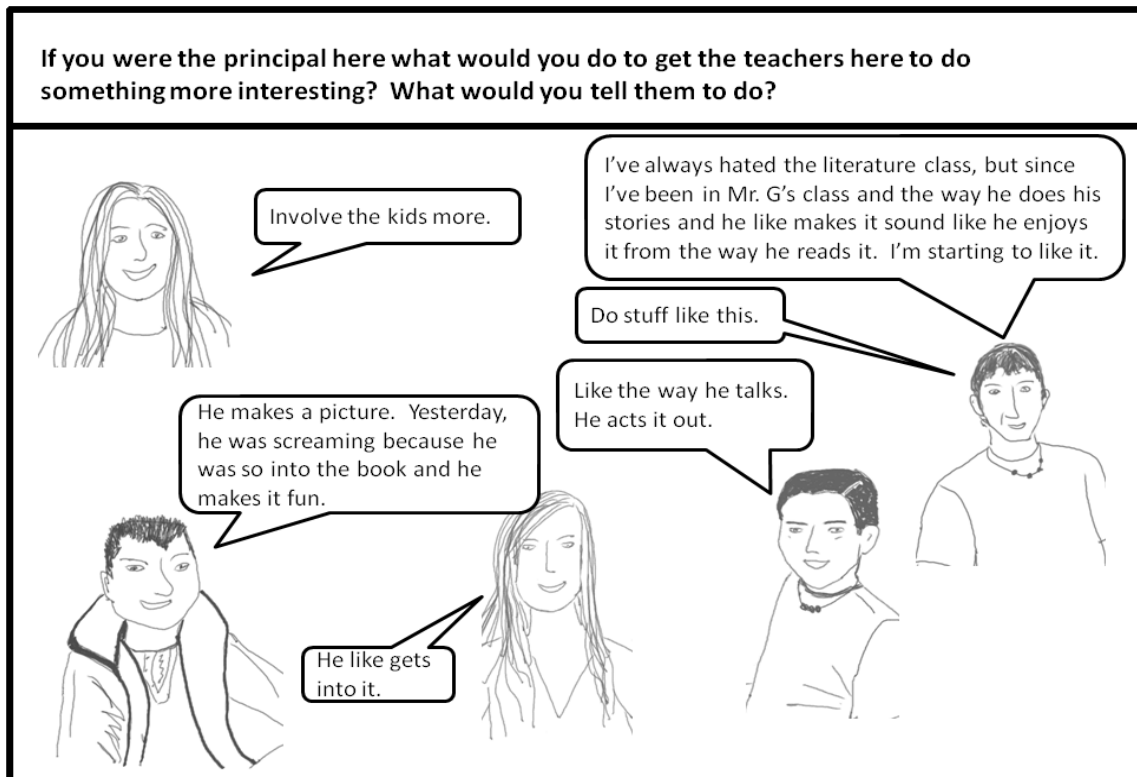


Figure 5.97 Morgan, Evan, Cathy, James, Jared, 2010, Focus Group 1

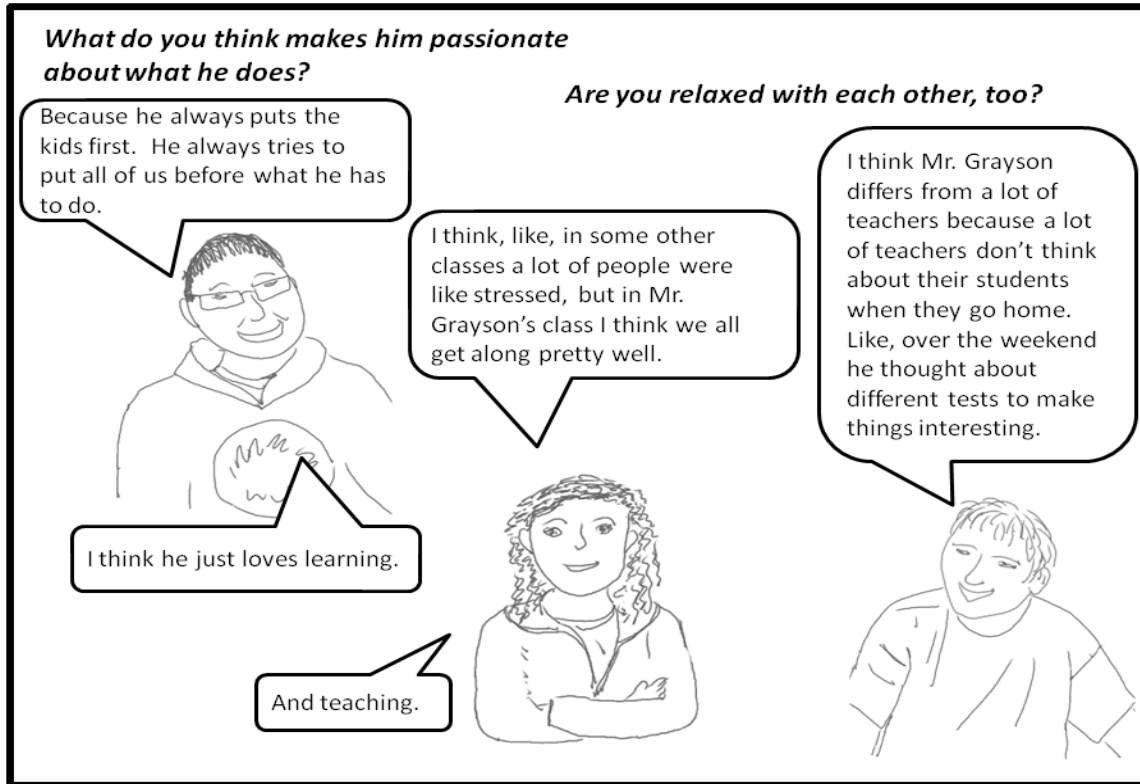


Figure 5.98 John, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2

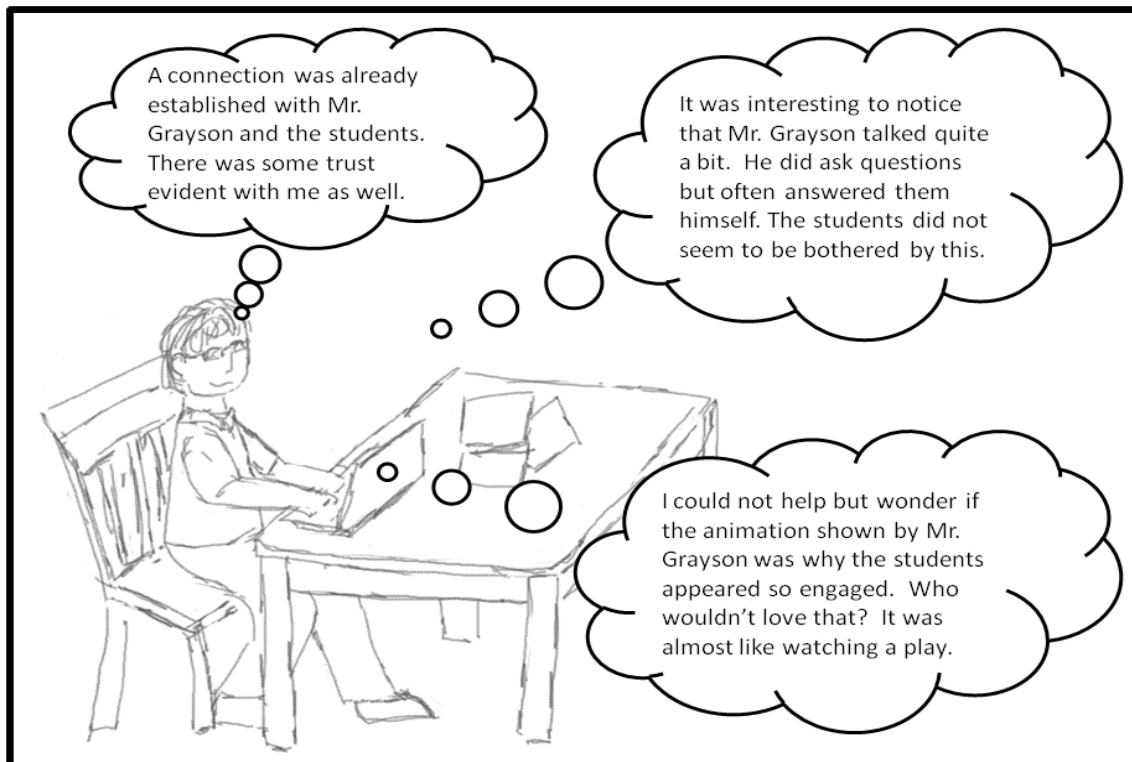


Figure 5.99 Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 1

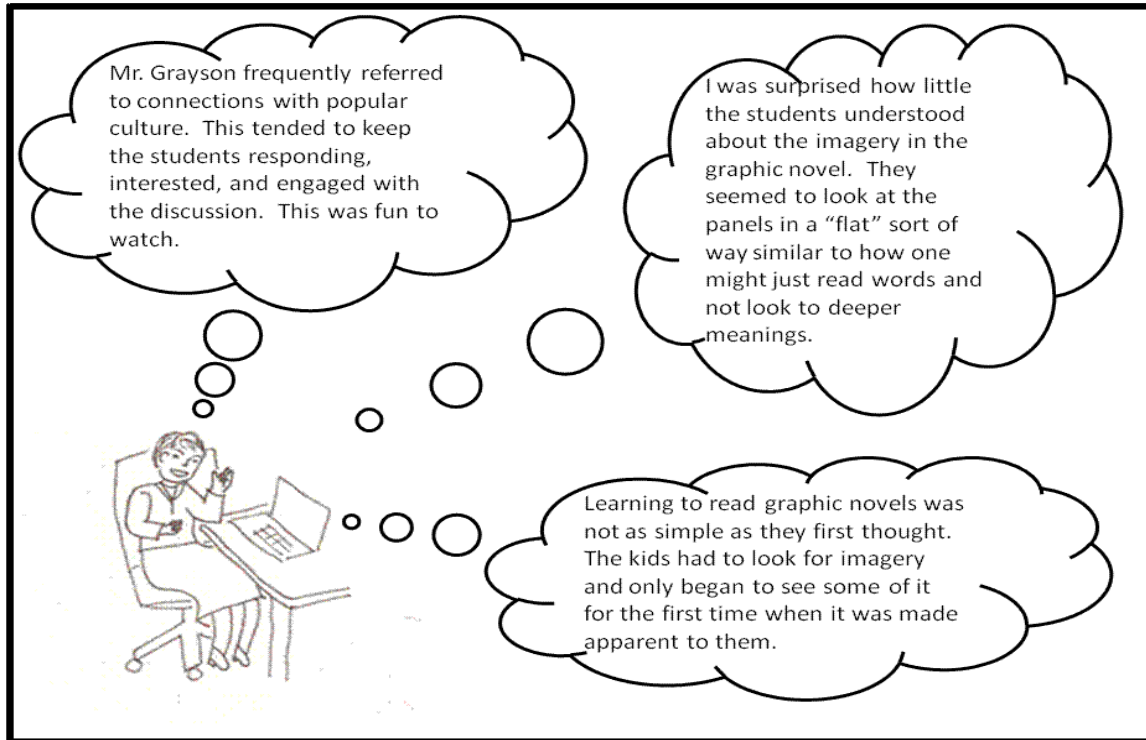


Figure 5.100 Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 2

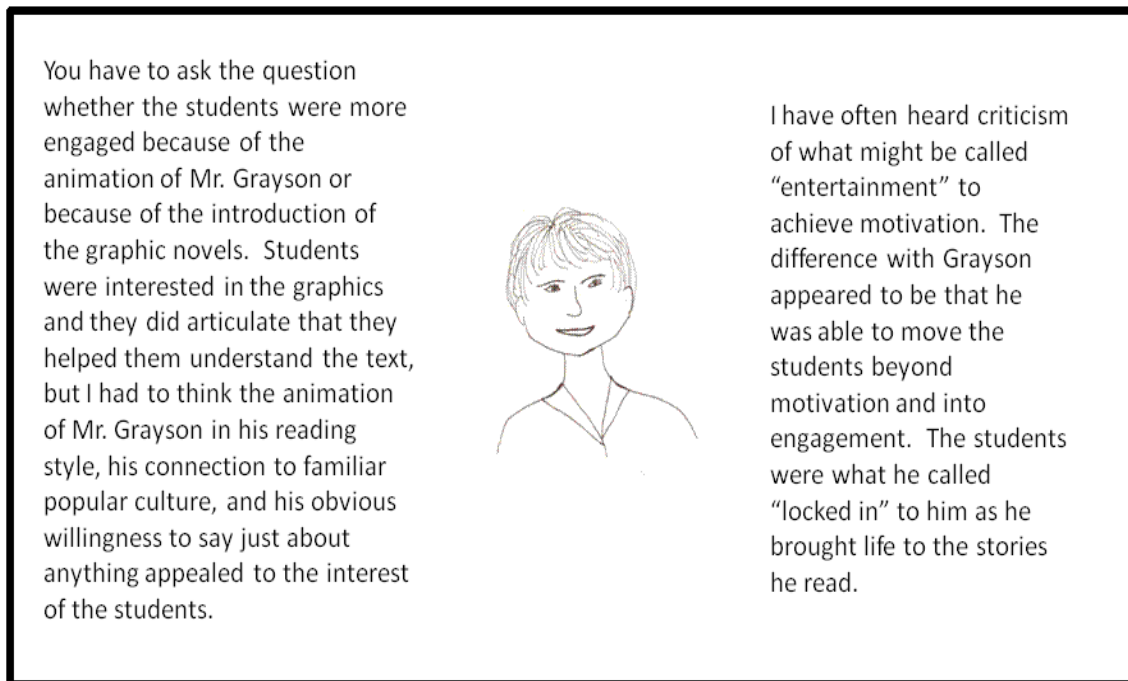


Figure 5.101 Greene, 2010, Reflection to Observation 3

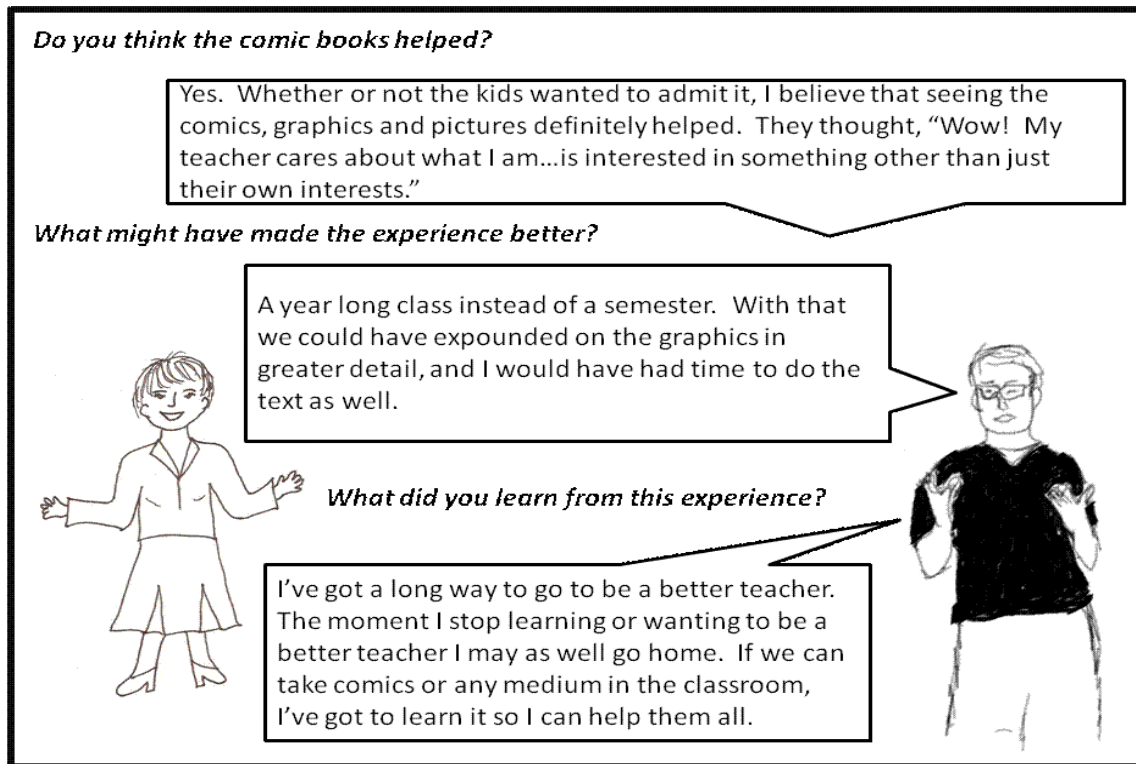


Figure 5.102 Greene, Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview

Educational practices in the time of annual yearly progress and No Child Left Behind place limitations, whether actual or perceived on teachers and students that compartmentalize and marginalize true student potential in learning even when there is desire to change. This hobbling of teacher ideas and innovative thinking creates patterns of resistance toward practices that break out of the traditional norm. In this case study, the resiliency and determination of Mr. Grayson to develop and improve on his teaching skill beyond the traditional supported the finding that student motivation toward independent and academic reading was improved by teacher passion and commitment to the understanding and connection of text and graphics to the these students through active and dynamic immersion into the literature formats (Finding 9).

### **Implications for Curriculum Studies and Recommendations**

The artwork of graphic novels has filled the dimensions that text is unable to convey by itself. Together, both mediums have presented something that requires more than a passive approach in its reading. Miller (2001) suggests that:

A book itself does not explicitly confirm or disallow any of the ways we may read it. It passively abides our readings and misreading, though it would not be wise to count too confidently on the passivity of the texts we read, since they may have unforeseen power over us. No measure exists to distinguish correct and incorrect readings, even though a given text strongly calls us or demands of us that we read it. (p. 71)

Comic and graphic readings allow for textual boundaries to be crossed that open up dialogue and discussion into critical arenas.

Critical readings open new dialogues between the reader and the material read that brings issues of race, gender, political, and class status to the discussion requiring the evaluation and reflection of current practices, points of view, attitudes, beliefs, and biases in text and non-textual circumstances. Graphic novels do not shy away from representations of critical issues and boldly walks through doors that do not carry the limitations of text, word, and phrase. Rich (2001) suggests that “for a poem [writing] to coalesce, for a character or an action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive” (p. 20-21). If we speak of the adolescent reader we must consider the fact that motivation is charged by the depth of the connection with the material read. Shannon (1995) makes the statement that:

Critical perspectives push the definition of literacy beyond traditional decoding or encoding of words in order to reproduce the meaning of text or society until it becomes a means for understanding one's own history and culture, to recognize connections between one's life and the social structure, to believe that change in one's life, and the lives of others and society are possible as well as desirable, and to act on this new knowledge in order to foster equal and just participation in all the decisions that affect and control our lives. (p. 83)

Critical issues presented from a graphic perspective allow students to make close connections to his or her life and surroundings.

Issues of critical literacy force students to compete in traditional classrooms for the ability to be successful from that critical stance and generally find limited outlets for that dialogue. The dim view found regarding infusion of artifacts of popular culture into the contemporary classroom in most traditional settings de-values the ability of those artifacts including graphic novels and comics as a form of contemporary literature.

According to Shannon (1995), "cultural literacy works against human diversity by privileging one set of knowledge over all others and establishing literacy as a process of accumulating a standard culture" (p. 87). In the scope of current educational systems it makes sense to think "that someone's tradition, someone's construction of what is important to know and how it should be used, is always incorporated into our planned curriculum" (Apple & Beane, 1995, p. 15) leaving little room for challenge of those traditions. Current educational practices that focus primarily on measures of achievement based on testing and minimal standards do not engage in pedagogy that supports knowledge based in critical analysis and social development.

With the current political state of affairs surrounding the educational systems in the United States, the limitations and controls placed on textbook adoption and production, the measurement of achievement with high stakes testing, and limited engagement in creative, higher-level problem-solving and reflection we find ourselves at odds with the expected depth of understanding in students and the defensive position of many teachers and administrators. Critical reflection at the adolescent level allows for the imagination “to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life [our students] are living at that moment” (Rich, 2001, p. 21). In breaking open the boundaries of literature by utilizing the possibilities of graphic and visual interpretation; we open the mind to a change in thought.

Graphic representations of sequential comic art bring together the power in perception of images with the strength of words and text used similar to poetry for the greatest effect. Words and images are combined to convey the strongest meaning with the simplest of patterns, icons, position, and even space. Mitchell (2005) would have us understand that “images are active players in the game of establishing and changing values. They are capable of introducing new values into the world and thus of threatening old ones” (p. 105). In an age of technology that mandates its world members young and old to access the digital and textual networks with immediate responses and flashy connections, the idea of the traditional novel or stories of old dead white men carries less meaning and certainly less connection to the relative lives of those whose teachers demand absorption of this material.

It is with this thought that I believe reading must encompass more than a dry reading of literature and include “those visual displays that challenge and tussle with the

boundaries of preconceived/constructed notions of picture space, illusionism, realism and force a re-conceptualization of the graphic space that we call a page” (Adams, 1999, p. 74). Reading requires a connection to its audience—a connection between the author, writer, or artist, and I challenge the archaic thought that reading is only defined by one set of skills or choices that limit the intelligence and understanding of those meant to be audience members. The study of reading from the point of view of curriculum studies must be willing to open a dialogue that questions even the choices of superheroes such as Batman, or mice, cats and pigs as in *Maus* whose decisions in character create questions in critical review—questions that challenge our students’ understanding of the fictional world as it relates to situations and realities in their own world. Pinar (2004) looks to curriculum as “not just the site of our labor, it becomes the product of our labor, changing as we are changed by it. It is an ongoing, if complicated, conversation” (p. 188). If we as educators work with students to view curriculum beyond the boundaries of public education and look to more engaging and inspiring levels of student meaning with print and non-print materials in this age of multiple and changing literacies, we may find ourselves as educators powerfully changed because of it. So, too, is reading.

My experiences throughout this case study continue to reinforce to me that the dip in motivation with adolescent readers does not mean that they do not want to become better readers. In a study regarding middle school readers, Ivey (1999) noted that “if we placed struggling middle school readers in classrooms where they could experience good teaching, I believe their potential to improve and their motivation to be literate would become increasingly apparent” (p. 35). This statement applies as well to the case study with these 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. Initially, as found in the first survey as well as comments



made at that time, students were not interested in what was read and were participating in class only to the point that they were required. Mr. Grayson's dynamic presentation and continued energetic commitment to the learning of these students planted seeds of change in these students. What appeared to make the most difference to these students was his commitment to them as people that fostered their desire to do their best and sustain motivation and engagement in the tasks and readings he required.

Mr. Grayson's willingness to utilize graphic novels and panels illustrated his willingness to bridge gaps in traditional schooling with the contemporary literacies and interests in students' lives thus validating their interests and promoting a higher platform toward critical awareness and real-life meaning.

My recommendations for further study would be the need to investigate the impact of the teacher on student achievement as it relates specifically to motivation and engagement. Over and over again the students desired the commitment from Mr. Grayson and appreciated this commitment through their increased learning.

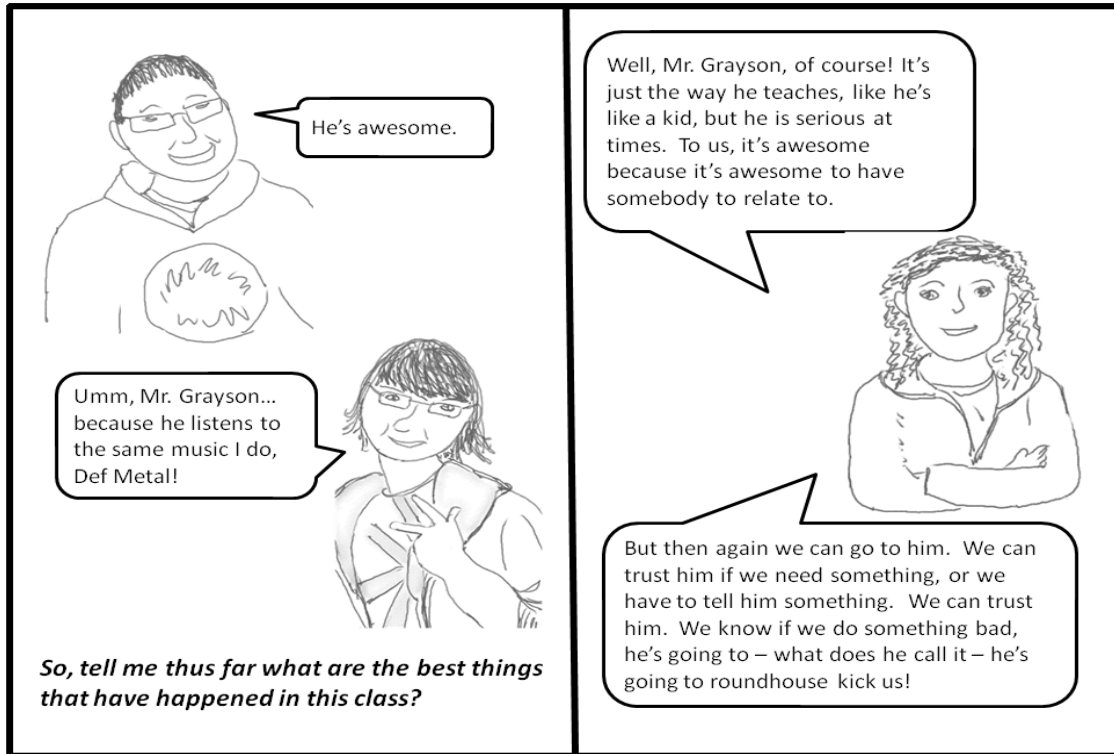


Figure 5.103 John, Jake, Sophia, 2010, Focus Group 2

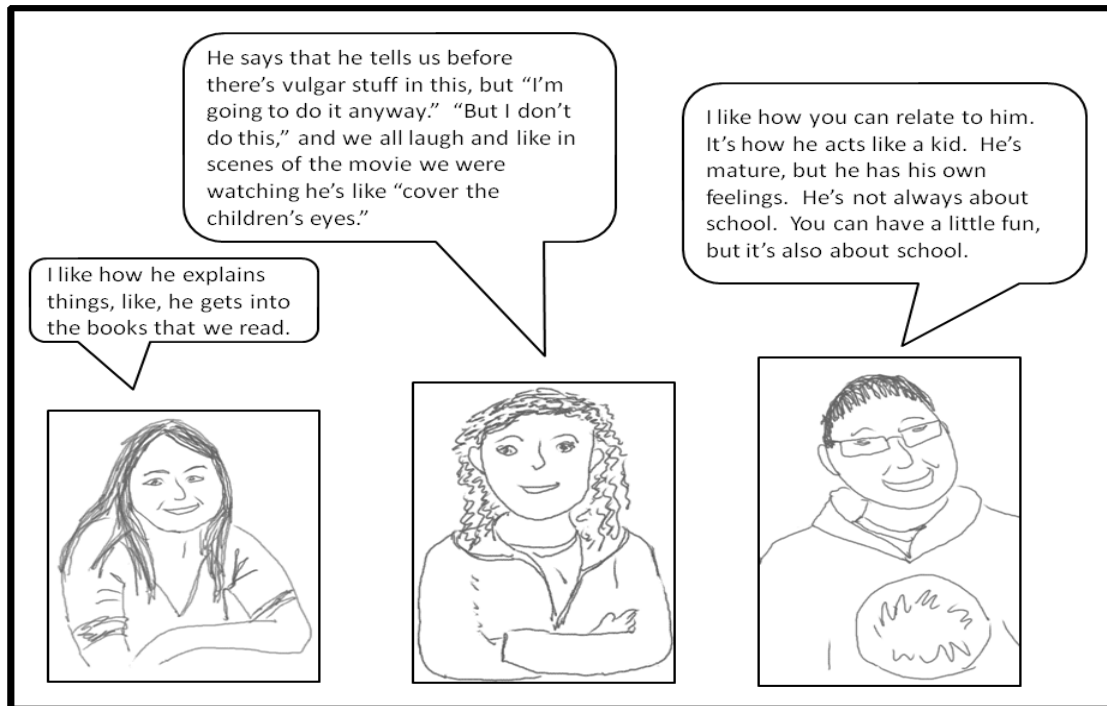


Figure 5.104 Alice, Sophia, John, 2010, Focus Group 2

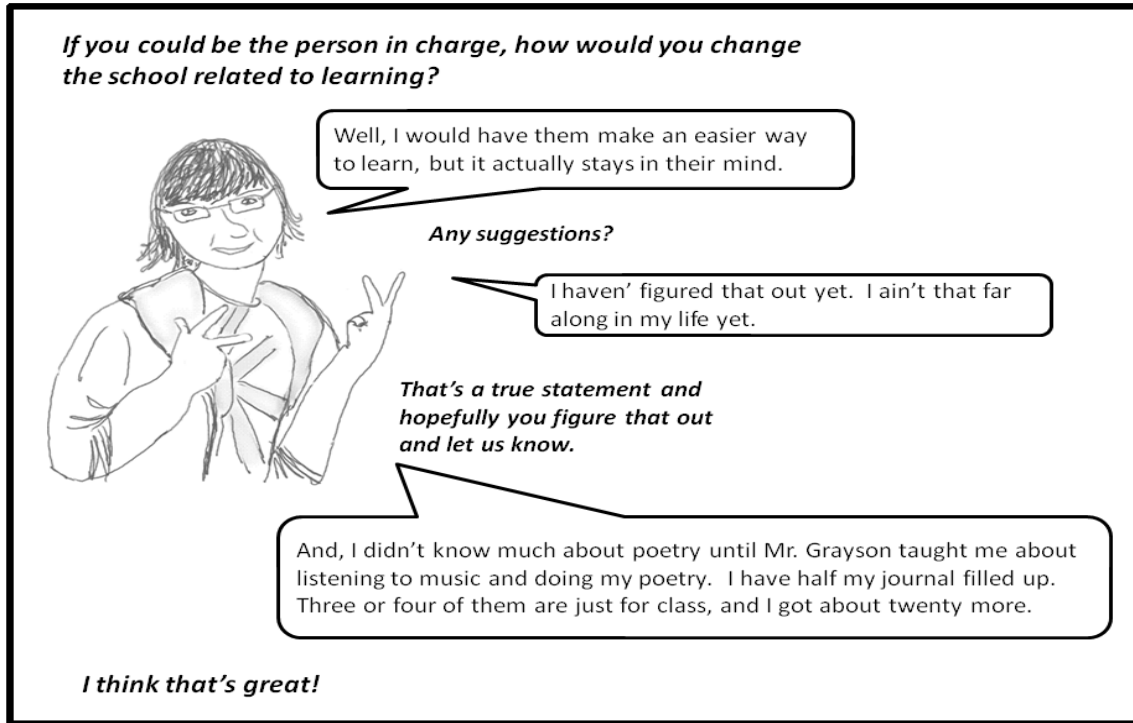


Figure 5.105 Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2

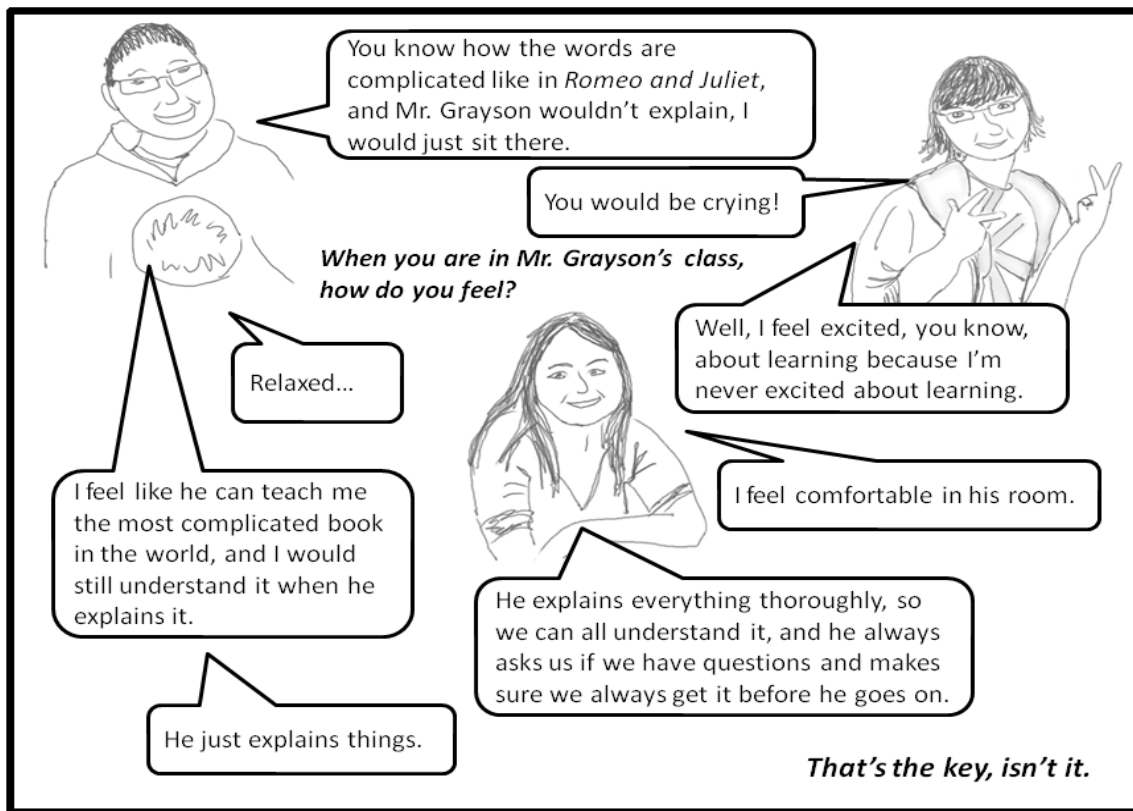


Figure 5.106 John, Jake, Alice, 2010, Focus Group 2

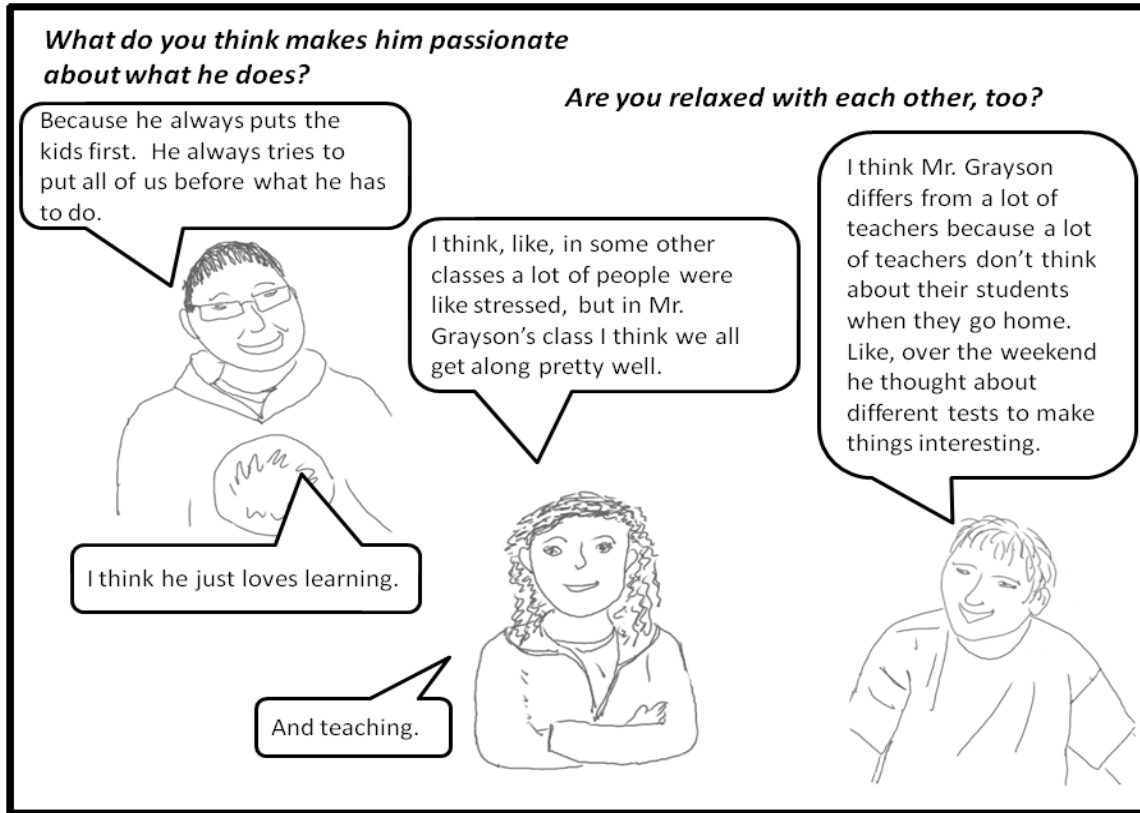


Figure 5.107 John, Sophia, Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2

The central thread in this study seemed to provide a new interest in traditional material. However, what was even more telling was the request by students to include graphic pieces due to the support they found from them as tools toward constructing meaning. Further, the graphic pieces acted as a bridge to the traditional literature rather than as an alternative to text. The students noted their preference to the text on several occasions, but desired the support of graphics to develop the mental picture. Berger (1997) describes form of reading in understanding that “the readers of comics must unify these frames in their imaginations and create a coherent story from them” (p. 101). Transferring this to a more cognitive level requires students to understand and decode the various signs, thought bubbles, panel lines and gutters as well as “understanding something about the thought processes of the characters, which are not always spelled

out, and their emotions” (p. 101) not unlike the decoding of the language of reading.

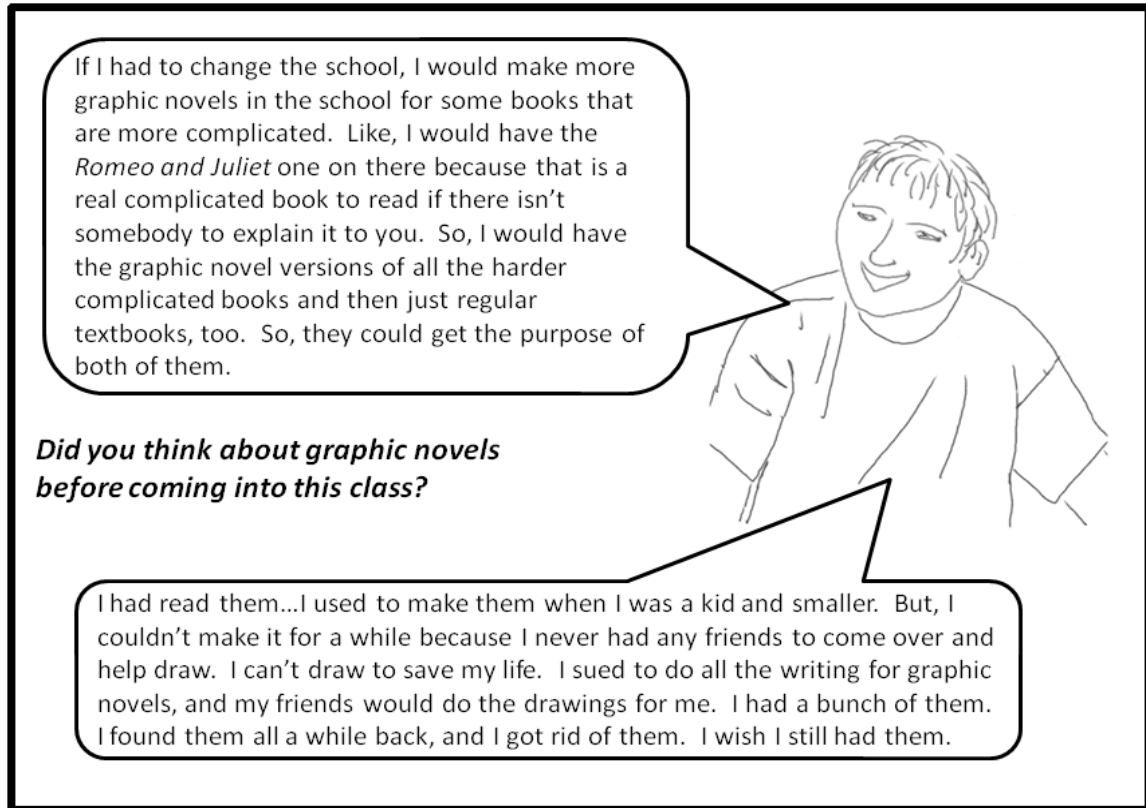


Figure 5.108 Mark, 2010, Focus Group 2

Mark's comments show his desire to continue reading traditional text, but reinforce his concerns with having help with "complicated books." My recommendation is not necessarily that classrooms all adopt the use of graphic novels as companion to text. It would be more to use graphic and visual terms and experiences that may well include graphic panels to predict, confirm and support meaning in text.

The student, Jake, was very frank about his desire to learn. In his opinion, Mr. Grayson had given him new reasons to want to learn, had "fired up" his motivation and truly felt he had gained a new sense of who he was as a learner. Further, his comments again turned toward his need to relate learning to what he could "see" in his imagination.

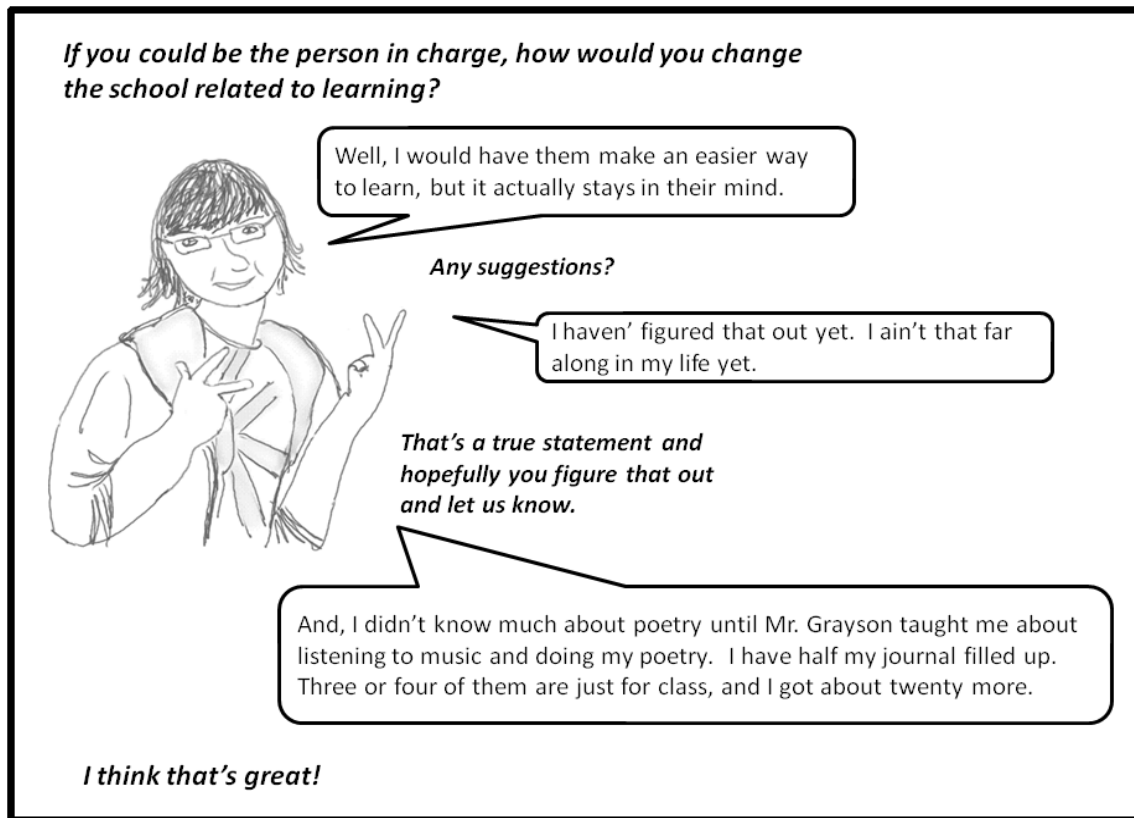


Figure 5.109 Jake, 2010, Focus Group 2

The final recommendation I would make is in support for teachers who are continually bound by restrictions on time and topic due to expectations and assumptions surrounding standards and testing. The students in this study desire for connections with their teacher but even more so, they desire for connections with learning. The problem as I see it is not in motivation to learn. Most of the students I encountered wanted to learn. What had been changed for them in this class was the sense that what they were learning had meaning to them, their teacher, and to their collective lives. My recommendation is for teachers to recognize the need for students to view the facts, history, writing, and reading from a critical context that is meaningful to their personal lives or their lives within their societal settings. According to Giroux, (1987):

To define literacy in the Freireian sense as a critical reading of the world and the

word is to lay the theoretical groundwork for more fully analyzing how knowledge is produced and subjectivities constructed within relations of interaction in which teachers and students attempt to make themselves present as active authors of their own worlds. (p. 17)

These students articulated some of these desires as “active authors”.

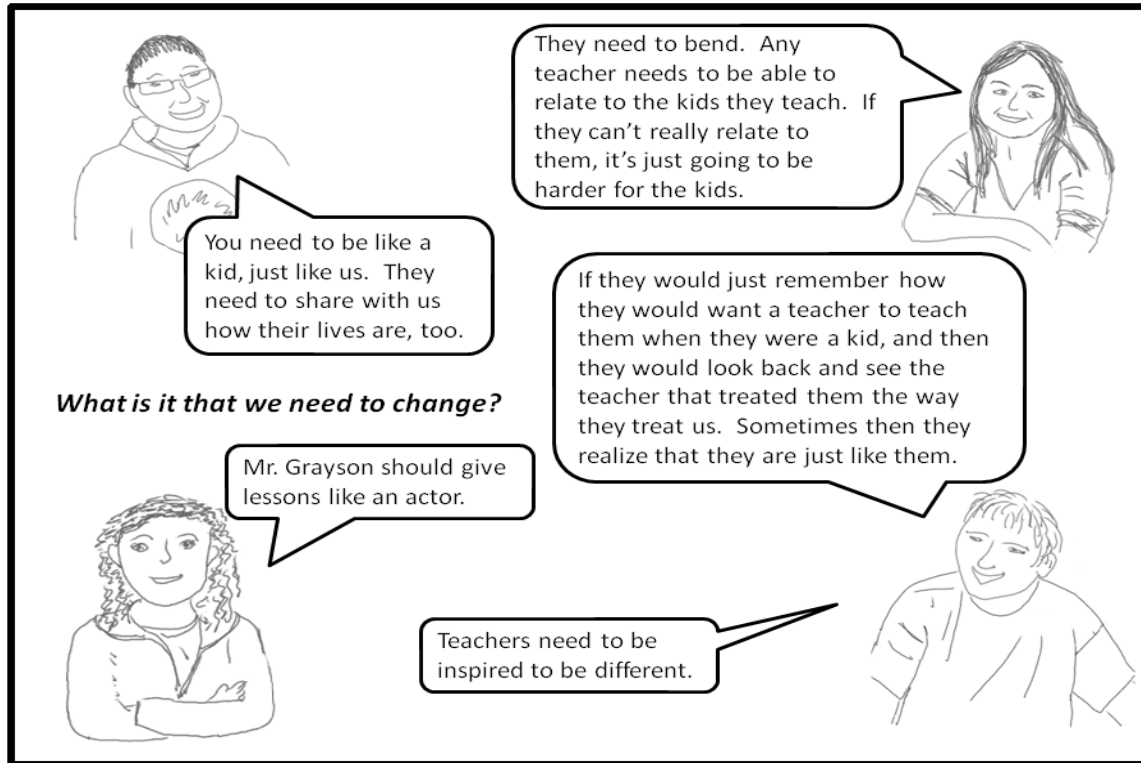


Figure 5.110 John, Sophia, Cathy, Mark, Focus Group 2

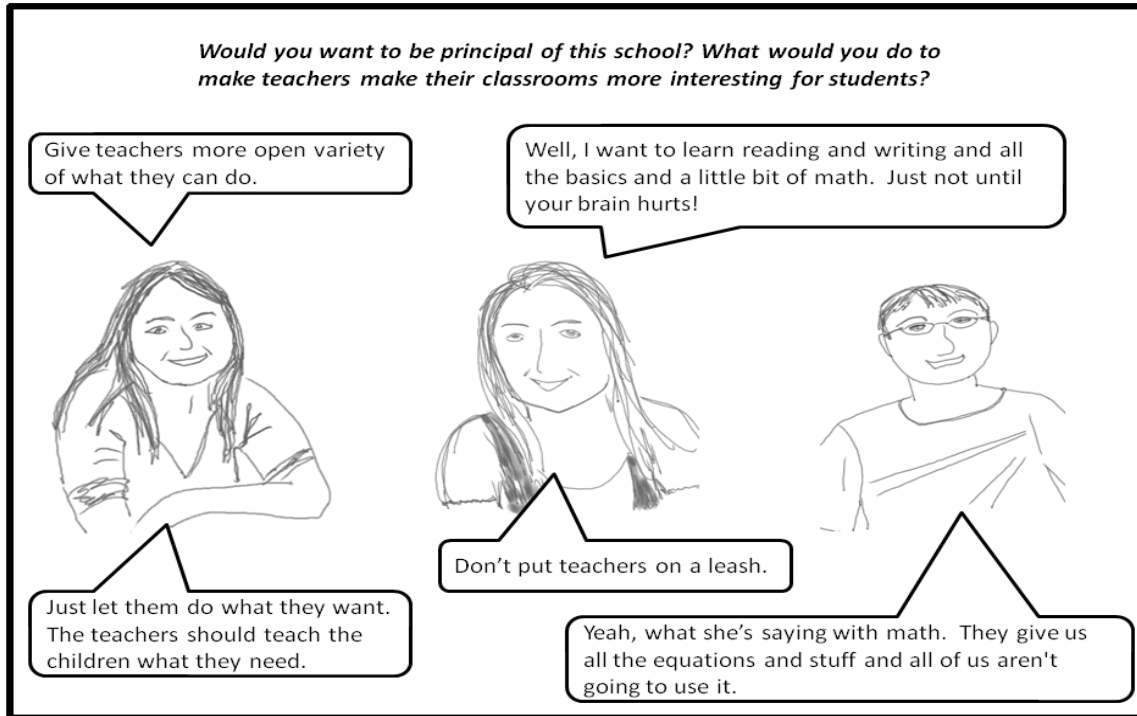


Figure 5.111 Cathy, Robin, Kirk, 2011, Focus Group 3

Mr. Grayson’s own comments articulated some of this same sentiment regarding his own practice.

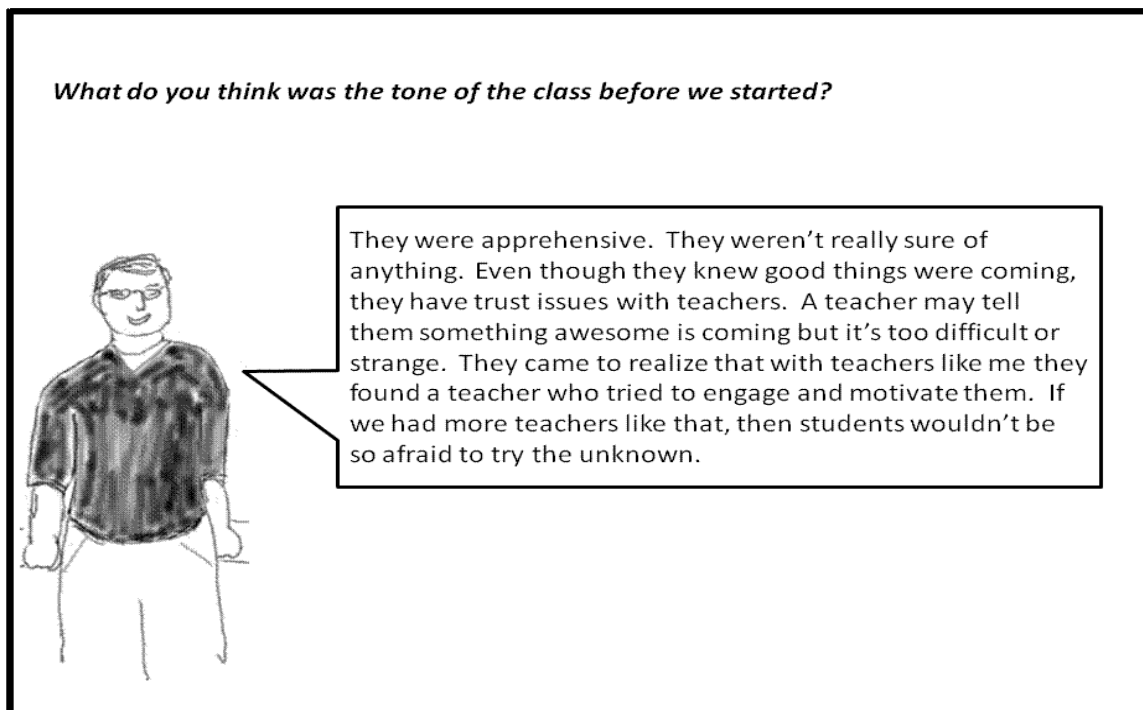


Figure 5.112 Grayson, 2011, Final Participating Teacher Interview



All of these comments display an array of ideas that supports the adolescent learner's desire for the different, the unknown, and the strength in being "inspired to be different" (Mark, 2011, Focus Group 3). This inspiration to be different and find relevance may be reflected in the comic books of today and yesterday. Wright (2003) suggests that "in this culture, comic books do have a place. And they will endure so long as they bring out the superhero in us all" (p. 285). Is that "superhero" also found in the individual who questions and challenges personal beliefs, traditions, and cultural claims in seeking higher and greater learning? Perhaps these students were looking for their own reflection in the superhero.

On the closing day of observations, the observer and students had an impromptu discussion session of their thoughts and feelings over the course of the study. In the final moments of my time with them I expressed my appreciation for the work they had done and the truthfulness in their responses. One student, Mark, then expressed his feeling that "so, we got lucky!"

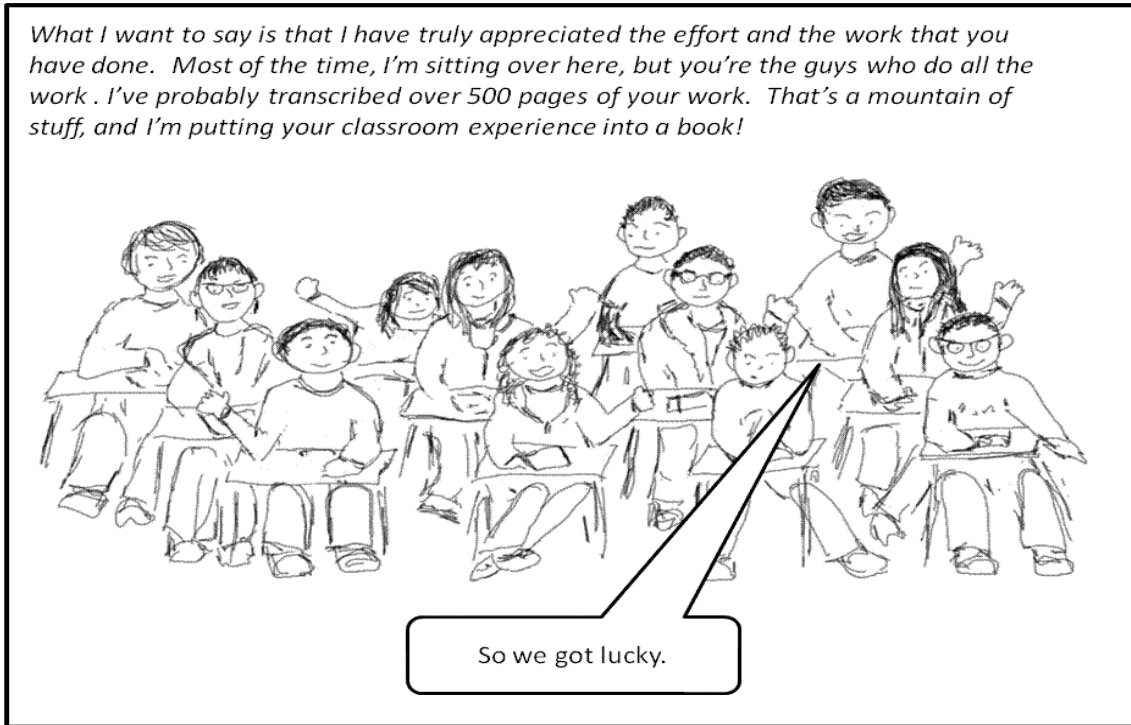


Figure 5.113 Greene, Mark, 2011, Observation 14

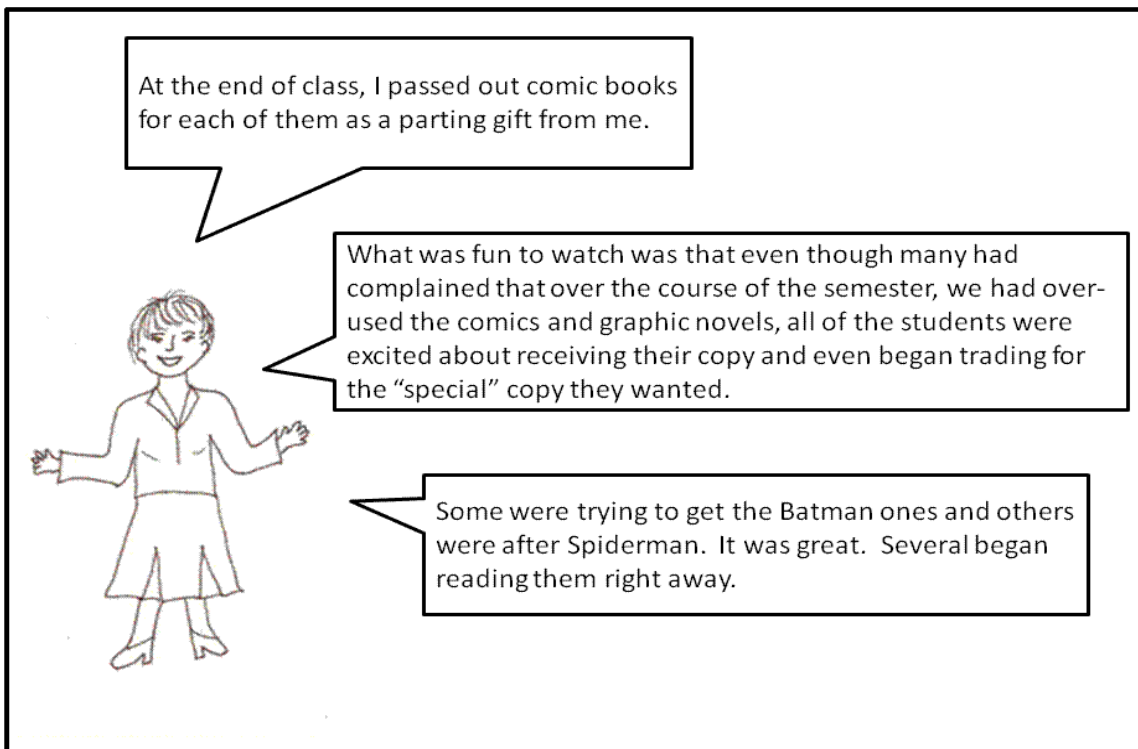


Figure 5.114 Greene, 2011, Reflections

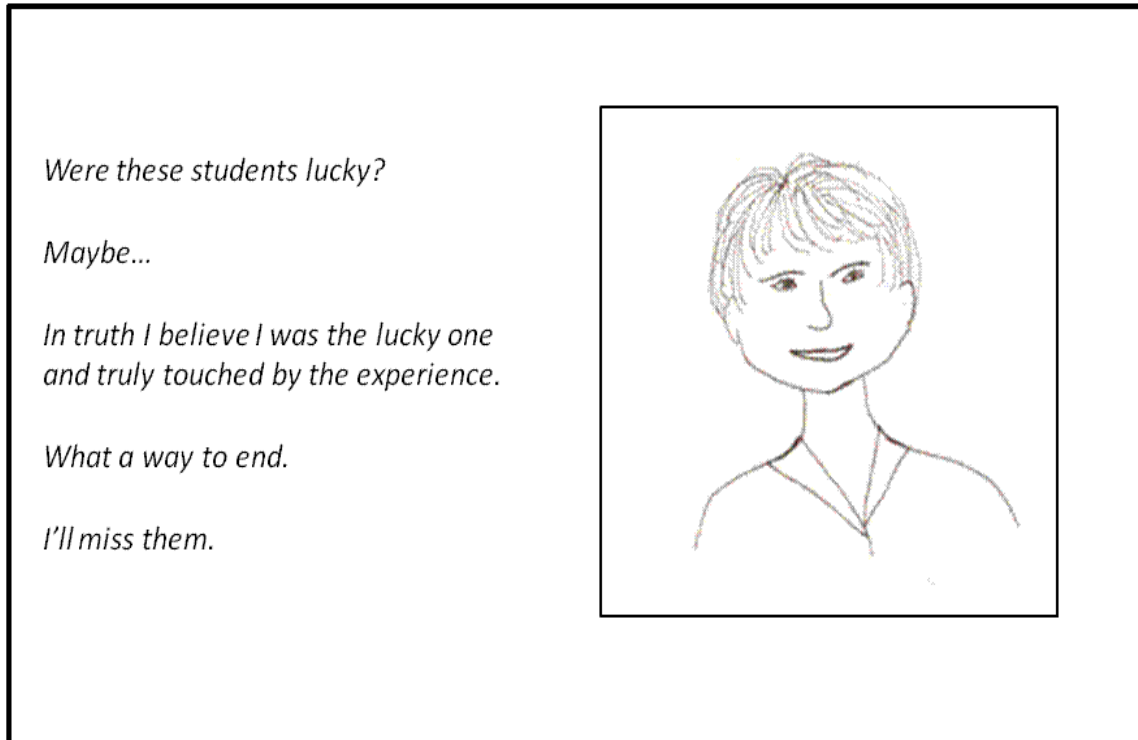


Figure 5.115 Greene, 2011, Reflections

**REFERENCES**

- Adams, J. (1999). Of mice and manga: Comics and graphic novels in art education. *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 18(1), p. 69-75.
- Alderman, M. (2008). *Motivation for achievement: Possibilities for teaching and learning*. New York: Routledge.
- Allington, R. (2002). *Big brother and the national reading curriculum: How ideology trumped evidence*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Alvermann, D. Moon, J., Hagood, M. (1999). *Popular culture in the classroom: Teaching and researching critical media literacy*. Chicago: International Reading Association and the National Reading Conference.
- Anderson, G. & Irvine, P. (1993). Infusing critical literacy with ethnography. In Lankshear, C. & McLaren, P. (Eds.), *Critical literacy: Politics praxis and the post modern*, (pp. 81-104). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Anderson, R., Wang, Q., & Gaffney, J. (2006). Comprehension research over the past three decades. In Stahl, K. & McKenna, M. (Eds.), *Reading research at work* (pp. 275-283). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Apple, M. (1995). *Education and Power*. New York: Routledge.
- Apple, M. (1993). Between moral regulation and democracy. In Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. (Eds.), *Critical literacy: politics, praxis, and the postmodern* (pp. 193-217). Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Apple, M. & Beane, J. (Ed.). (1995). *Democratic Schools*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Ayers, W. (2006). *Trudge toward freedom: Educational research in the public interest*.

- In Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate, W. (Eds.), *Education research in the public interest* (pp.81-97). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Beach, R. (2007). *Teachingmedialiteracy.com: A web-linked guide o resources and activities*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bean, T. (1998). Teacher literacy histories and adolescent voices: Changing content area classrooms. In Alvermann, D., Hinchman, K., Moore, D., Phelps, S., & Woff, D. (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing the literacies in adolescents' lives* (pp. 149-170). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Beck, A. (2005). A place for critical literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48(5), pp. 392-400).
- Beers, K. (2003). *When kids can't read: What teachers can do*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Berger, A. (1997). *Narratives in popular culture, media, and everyday life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Berghoff, B., & Borgmann, C. (2007). Imagining new possibilities with our partners in the arts. *English Education*. 40(1), pp. 21-40.
- Berlin, J. (1993). Literacy, pedagogy and English studies. In Lankshear, C. & McLaren, P. (Eds.), *Critical literacy: Politics praxis and the post modern*, (pp. 247-270). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Booth, D. (2006). *Reading doesn't matter anymore*. Portland, Maine: Heinemann.
- Booth, D. & Lundy, K. (2007). *In graphic detail: Using graphic novels in the classroom*. Markham, Ontario: Rubicon Publishing.
- Brilliant, R. (1984). *Visual narratives: Storytelling in Etruscan and Roman art*. Ithaca:

- Cornell University Press.
- Britzman, D. (2003). *After-education: Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, and psychoanalytic histories of learning*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Bronowski, J. (1978). *The visionary eye: Essays in the arts, literature, and science*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Burmark, L. (2008). Visual literacy: What you get is what you see. In Frey, N. & Fisher, D. (Eds.), *Teaching visual literacy: Using comic books, graphic novels, anime, cartoons, and more to develop comprehension and thinking skills* (pp. 5-25). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Caputo, J. (Ed.). (1997). *Deconstruction in a nutshell: A conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Carrier, D. (2000). *The aesthetics of comics*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University.
- Carter, J. (2008). Comics, the canon, and the classroom. In Frey, N. & Fisher, D. (Eds.), *Teaching visual literacy: Using comic books, graphic novels, anime, cartoons, and more to develop comprehension and thinking skills* (pp. 47-60). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Collins, S. (2010). *The Hunger Games*. New York: Scholastic, Inc.
- Collopy, R. and Connell, R. (2005). The Most Dangerous Game. In Marshall, K. & Mongello, L. (Eds.), *Elements of literature* (pp. 4-25). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (2003). Introduction. In Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (Eds.),

- Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Derrida, J. (1988). *Limited, Inc.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Deshler, D., Palincsar, A., Biancarosa, G., & Nair, M. (2007). *Informed Choices for struggling adolescent readers: A research-based guide to instructional programs and practices*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.
- Doll, M. (2000). *Like Letters in Running Water: A Mythopoetics of Curriculum*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Drohan, C. (2009). A timely encounter: Dr. Manhattan and Henri Bergson. In White, M. (Ed.), *Watchmen and philosophy: A Rorschach test*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Eisner, W. (2008). *Comics and Sequential Art*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc.
- Freire, P. (1974). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (2007). *Daring to dream: Toward a pedagogy of the unfinished*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Frey, N. & Fisher, D. (2008). Introduction. In Frey, N. & Fisher, D. (Eds.), *Teaching visual literacy: Using comic books, graphic novels, anime, cartoons, and more to develop comprehension and thinking skills* (pp. 1-4). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

- Gee, J. (2003). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gee, J. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling*. New York: Routledge.
- Gee, J. (2005). *An introduction to discourse analysis: theory and method*. New York: Routledge.
- Giroux, H. (1987). Introduction. In Freire, P. & Macedo, D. *Literacy: Reading the word and the world* (pp. 1-27). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Giroux, H. (1993). Literacy and the politics of difference. In Lankshear, C. & McLaren, P. (Eds.), *Critical literacy: politics praxis and the post modern*, (pp. 367-378). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Giroux, H. (2003). *The abandoned generation: Democracy beyond the culture of fear*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Goodman, K. (2004). Ten alarming facts about no child left behind. In Goodman, K., Shannon, P., Goodman, Y. & Rapoport, R. (Eds.), *Saving our schools: The case for public education*, (pp. 7-11). Berkeley, CA: RDR Books.
- Green, T. (1995). Using motivational theory with at-risk children. *Educational Leadership*. 53(1), pp. 37-40.
- Greene, M. (1978). *Landscapes of Learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Greene, M. (1988). *The dialectic of freedom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and*



- Social Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Greene, M. (2001). *Variations on a Blue guitar*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hajdu, D. (2008). The ten-cent plague: *The great comic-book scare and how it changed America*. New York: Picador.
- Hall, L. (2006). Anything but lazy: new understandings about struggling readers, teaching, and text. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41(4), pp. 424-426.
- Hatfield, C. (2005). *Alternative comics: An emerging literature*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.
- He, M. and Phillion, J. (2008). Personal~Passionate~Participatory Inquiry: Research for Social Justice. In He, M. and Phillion, J. (Eds.), *Personal~Passionate~Participatory Inquiry: Research for social justice*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- Heer, J. & Worcester, K. (2004). Early Twentieth-Century Voices. In Heer, J. & Worcester, K. (Eds.), *Arguing comics: Literary masters on a popular medium*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.
- Heidegger, M. (1971). *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Hursh, D. (2006). Carry it on: Fighting for progressive education in neoliberal times. In Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate, W. (Eds.), *Education research in the public interest* (pp. 46-63). New York: Teachers College Press.
- IES National Center for Educational Statistics. (2005). *NAEP 2005 Assessment Results*.

- Retrieved June 21, 2009 from  
[http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nrc/reading\\_math\\_2005/](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nrc/reading_math_2005/)
- Ivey, G. (2000). Reflections on teaching struggling middle school readers. In Moore, D., Alvermann, D., & Hinchman, K. (Eds.), *Struggling adolescent readers: A collection of teaching strategies*. (pp. 27-38). Newark, DE: International Reading Association, Inc.
- Jetton, T. & Alexander, P. (2004). Domains, teaching, and literacy. In Jetton, T. & Doyle, J. *Adolescent literacy research and practice*. (pp. 15-39). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Kamuf, P. (2005). *Book of addresses*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Krashen, S. (2004). *The power of reading: Insights from the research*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M. (2006). *New Literacies: Everyday practices and classroom learning*. New York: Open University Press.
- Lesesne, T., (2003). *Making the Match: The right book for the right reader at the right time, grades 4-12*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- McAllister, M., Sewell, E., & Gordon, I. (2006). Introducing Comics and Ideology. In McAllister, M., Sewell, E., & Gordon, I. (Eds.), *Comics & Ideology* (pp. 1-13). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- McCloud, S. (2000). *Reinventing Comics: How imagination and technology are revolutionizing an art form*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

- McDaniel, C. (2006). *Critical literacy: A way of thinking, a way of life*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- McKenna, M. & Stahl, K. (2009). *Assessment for Reading Instruction*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- McLaughlin, M. & DeVoogd, G. (2004). Critical literacy as comprehension: Expanding reader response. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48(1), pp. 52-62.
- McQuillan, J. (1998). *The literacy crisis: False claims, real solutions*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- McTaggart, J. (2008). Graphic novels: the good, the bad, and the ugly. In Frey, N. & Fisher, D. (Eds.), *Teaching visual literacy: Using comic books, graphic novels, anime, cartoons, and more to develop comprehension and thinking skills* (pp. 27-46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Meloy, J. (1994). *Writing the qualitative dissertation: Understanding by doing*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associations, Publishers.
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, F. (2002). *Batman: The dark knight returns*. New York, NY: DC Comics.
- Miller, J. H. (2001). *Others*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Miller, J. H. (2002). *On literature*. New York: Routledge.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (2005). *What do pictures want?* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Morgan, D. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

National Council of Teachers of English. (2006). *NCTE principles of adolescent literacy reform: A policy research brief*. Retrieved June 22, 2009 from

<http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/PolicyResearch/AdolLitPrinciples.pdf>

National Reading Panel. (2006). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: an evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Retrieved June 21, 2009 from <http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/summary.htm>

Nehamas, A. (1985). *Nietzsche: Life as literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Neilsen, L. (1998). Playing for real: Performative texts and adolescent identities. In Alvermann, D., Hinchman, K, Moore, D., Phelps, S., & Waff, D. (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing: The literacies in adolescents' lives* (pp. 3-26). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associations, Publishers.

Neufeld, J. (2009). *A.D. New Orleans after the deluge*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Noddings, N. (2006). *Critical lessons that our schools should teach*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Norton, B. (2003). The motivating power of comic books: Insights from Archie comic readers. *The Reading Teacher*. 57(2), pp. 140-147.

Nuthall, G. (2005). The cultural myths and realities of classroom teaching and learning: A personal journey [Electronic version]. *Teachers College Record*, 107(5), p. 895-934.

O'Brien, D., Stewart., & Moje, E. (1995). Why content literacy is difficult to infuse into

- the secondary school: Complexities of curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture [Electronic version]. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30(3), p. 442-463.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Pedrosa, C. (2008). *Three Shadows*. New York: First Second.
- Phelps, S. (1998). Adolescents and their multiple literacies. In Alvermann, D., Hinchman, K., Moore, D., Phelps, S., & Woff, D. (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing the literacies in adolescents' lives*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Phillion, J., He, M., & Connelly, F. M. (2005). The Potential of narrative and experiential approaches in multicultural inquiries. In Phillion, J., He, M., & Connelly, F. M. (Eds.), *Narrative & experience in multicultural education* (pp. 1-14). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Pinar, W. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Pitcher, S., Albright, L., DeLaney, C., Walker, N., Seunarinesingh, K., Mogge, S., Headley, K., Ridgeway, V., Peck, S., Hunt, R., & Dunston, P. (2007). Assessing adolescents' motivation to read. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50(5), pp. 378-396.
- Prentiss, T. (1998). Teachers and students mutually influencing each other's literacy practices: A focus on the student's role. In Alvermann, D., Hinchman, K., Moore, D., Phelps, S., & Waff, D. (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing the literacies in adolescents' lives*, (pp. 1-2). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

- Pressley, M. (2000). What should comprehension instruction be the instruction of? In Kamil, M., Mosenthal, P., Pearson, P., & Barr, R. (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research*, Vol. III, (pp. 545-561). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Pressley, M. (2006). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Quate, S. & McDermott, J. (2009). *Clock Watchers: six steps to motivating and engaging disengaged students across content areas*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Rich, A. (2001). *Arts of the possible*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Richardson, L. (2003). Writing: A method of inquiry. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 49-541). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Riggs, E. & Gholar, C. (2009). *Strategies that promote student engagement: Unleashing the desire to learn*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Roberts, G. (2004). Understanding the sequential art of comic strips and comic books and their descendants in the early years of the new millennium. *The Journal of American Culture*. 27(2), pp. 210-217.
- Rosenblatt, Louise M. (2004). The transactional theory of reading and writing. In Ruddell, R. & Unrau, N. (Eds.), *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, (5th ed., pp. 1363-1398). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Sabin, R. (1996). *Comics, comix & graphic novels: A history of comic art*. New York: Phaidon Press, Inc.
- Sartrapi, M. (2003). *Persepolis*. New York: Pantheon Press.

- Schiller, F. (2004). *On the aesthetic education of man*. Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc.
- Schwarz, G. (2006). Expanding literacies through graphic novels. *English Journal*, 95(6), pp. 58-64.
- Searle, C. (1993). Words to a life-land: Literacy, the imagination, and Palestine. In Lankshear, C. & McLaren, P. (Eds.), *Critical literacy: politics praxis and the post modern*, (pp. 167-192). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Shannon, P. (1995). *Text, lies, & videotape: stories about life, literacy, & learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Shannon, P. (2004). What's the problem for which no child left behind is the solution? In Goodman, K., Shannon, P., Goodman, Y. & Rapoport, R. (Eds.), *Saving our schools: The case for public education*, (pp. 12-26). Berkeley, CA: RDR Books.
- Shannon, P. (2007). *Reading against democracy: The broken promises of reading instruction*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Shippen, M., Houchins, D., Calhoon, M., Furlow, C., & Sartor, D. (2006). The effects of comprehensive school reform models in reading for urban middle school students with disabilities [Electronic version]. *Remedial and Special Education*, 27(6), p. 322-328.
- Siegel, J. and Shuster, J. (2006). *The Superman chronicles*. New York: DC Comics.
- Slater, W. (2004). Teaching English from a literacy perspective: The goal of high literacy for all students. In Jetton, T. & Dole, J. (Eds.), *Adolescent literacy: Research and practice*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Smetana, L., Odelson, D., Burns, H., & Grisham, D. (2009). Using graphic novels in the

- high school classroom: Engaging Deaf students with a new genre. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*. 53(3), pp. 228-240.
- Spielgelman, A. (1991). *The Complete Maus*. New York: Penguin books.
- Stahl, S. (2006). Understanding shifts in reading and its instruction. In Stahl, K. & McKenna, M. (Eds.), *Reading research at work* (pp. 45-75). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Stake, R. (2003). Case Studies. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 134-164). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Sumara, D. (1999). Of seagulls and glass roses: Teachers' relationships with literary texts as transformational space. In Pinar, W. (Ed.), *Contemporary Curriculum Discourses: Twenty years of JCT* (pp. 289-311). New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Thompson, J. (2007). *Manga: The Complete Guide*. New York: Del Rey Books.
- Thompson, T. (2008). *Adventures in graphica*. Portland, Maine: Steinhouse Publishers.
- Ujiie, J. & Krashen, S. (1996). Comic book reading, reading enjoyment, and pleasure reading among middle class and chapter I middle school students. *Reading Improvement*, 33(1), p. 51.
- Underwood, T. & Pearson, P. (2004). Teaching struggling adolescent readers to comprehend what they read. In Jetton, T. & Doyle, J. (Eds.), *Adolescent literacy: Research and practice*, (pp. 135-161). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Versaci, R. (2001). How comic books can change the way our students see literature: One teacher's perspective. *English Journal*. 91(2), pp. 61-67.
- Versaci, R. (2008). "Literary literacy" and the role of the comic book: or, "You teach a



- class on what?" In Frey, N. & Fisher, D. (Eds.), *Teaching visual literacy: Using comic books, graphic novels, anime, cartoons, and more to develop comprehension and thinking skills* (pp. 91-112). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Waid, M. (2005). The real truth about superman: and the rest of us, too. In Morris, T. & Morris, M. (Eds.), *Superheroes and philosophy: Truth, justice, and the Socratic way*. (pp. 3-10). Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Company.
- Whitehead, D. (Ed.), (2008). *Nevermore: A graphic adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories*. New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc.
- Wiegler, M. (2008). *No fear Shakespeare graphic novels: Romeo and Juliet*. New York: Spark Publishing.
- Wolk, D. (2007). *Reading comics: How graphic novels work and what they mean*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Wright, B. (2003). *Comic book nation: The transformation of youth culture in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Yang, G. (2006). *American born Chinese*. New York: First Second.
- Zinn, H., Konopacki, M., and Buhle, P. (2008). *A people's history of American empire: A graphic adaptation*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books.

Appendix A

**Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey**

Circle the number in the box that tells how you feel about each of these activities.

	Very Good					Very Bad
Reading news online	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading novels assigned by my teachers	6	5	4	3	2	1
Texting friends	6	5	4	3	2	1
Starting a new book	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading for information on the Internet	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading textbooks in school	6	5	4	3	2	1
Instant messaging friends	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading graphic novels/manga	6	5	4	3	2	1
Researching online	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading out loud in class	6	5	4	3	2	1
e-mailing friends	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading novels for fun	6	5	4	3	2	1
Using an online dictionary	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading a newspaper	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading for fun on the Internet	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading during my free times	6	5	4	3	2	1
Using an online encyclopedia	6	5	4	3	2	1
Answering questions about what I read	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading magazines online	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading different types of books	6	5	4	3	2	1
Working on an Internet project with classmates	6	5	4	3	2	1
Using a dictionary in book form	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading books online	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading magazines	6	5	4	3	2	1
Learning from electronic displays, like PowerPoint	6	5	4	3	2	1
Using an encyclopedia in book form	6	5	4	3	2	1
Chatting online about what I'm reading	6	5	4	3	2	1
Going to a bookstore	6	5	4	3	2	1
Playing educational computer games	6	5	4	3	2	1
Someday having a job that requires reading	6	5	4	3	2	1
Finding song lyrics online	6	5	4	3	2	1
Going to a library	6	5	4	3	2	1
Someday having a job that requires reading online	6	5	4	3	2	1
Participating in classroom discussions about what we are reading	6	5	4	3	2	1
Participating in online chat rooms	6	5	4	3	2	1
Getting a book for a present	6	5	4	3	2	1
Discussing class material online (e.g., writing and reading class blogs, wikis)	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading from various sources of print to complete class work (articles, historical documents, etc.)	6	5	4	3	2	1
Talking about something I'm reading with friends	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading to relax	6	5	4	3	2	1
Reading before I go to bed	6	5	4	3	2	1

(continued)

**Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey Scoring Guide (page 2 of 3)**

Score each survey as follows:

1. Place the number of each response (1-6) in the white space for each item.
2. Tally the scores in each column.
3. Interpret the score for each column using the scoring guide.

	Recreational print	Recreational digital	Academic print	Academic digital
Reading news online				
Reading novels assigned by my teachers				
Texting friends				
Starting a new book				
Reading for information on the Internet				
Reading textbooks in school				
Instant messaging friends				
Reading graphic novels/manga				
Researching online				
Reading out loud in class				
e-mailing friends				
Reading novels for fun				
Using an online dictionary				
Reading a newspaper				
Reading for fun on the Internet				
Reading during my free times				
Using an online encyclopedia				
Answering questions about what I read				
Reading magazines online				
Reading different types of books				
Working on an Internet project with classmates				
Using a dictionary in book form				
Reading books online				
Reading magazines				
Learning from electronic displays, like PowerPoint				
Using an encyclopedia in book form				
Chatting online about what I'm reading				
Going to a bookstore				
Playing educational computer games				
Someday having a job that requires reading				
Finding song lyrics online				
Going to a library				
Someday having a job that requires reading online				
Participating in classroom discussions about what we are reading				
Participating in online chat rooms				
Getting a book for a present				
Discussing class material online (e.g., writing and reading class blogs, wikis)				
Reading from various sources of print to complete class work (articles, historical documents, etc.)				
Talking about something I'm reading with friends				
Reading to relax				
Reading before I go to bed				
Totals:				

(continued)

**Guide to Interpreting Scores (page 3 of 3)**

Subscale	Negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral/ indifferent	Somewhat positive	Positive
Recreational Reading in Print Settings	12-24	25-36	37-47	48-59	60-72
Recreational Reading in Digital Settings	9-18	19-27	28-35	36-44	45-54
Academic Reading in Print Settings	10-20	21-30	31-39	40-49	50-60
Academic Reading in Digital Settings	10-20	21-30	31-39	40-49	50-60

## Appendix B

## Student Interview Questions:

1. What is your definition of reading?
2. What is the best book you have ever read? Tell me about it.
3. Give me an example of the best day you had in a particular class?
4. Tell me what made that example the best day.
5. If I followed you through a typical morning at school, what would I see you doing?
6. What do you believe is important about reading?
7. If you knew you had time to read what you wanted to read in a class, what would you bring to read?
8. What kinds of reading materials would you have in your perfect classroom?
9. Do you like to read magazines or newspapers? If so, which ones.
10. What types of books would you like to read at school that teachers never use?
11. What would you like to see happen in your classes that is different than what goes on for you now?
12. What if you were the teacher and could make your class as interesting as you wanted. What class would it be?
13. Suppose you were the principal at this high school. What would you do to help teachers make their classrooms more interesting for students?
14. Explain three things that make a class great for you.
15. If I were to give you a passage to read, how would you figure out the main idea of the passage?
16. Think of a book you liked a lot. Describe a scene from the book that you remember well.
17. Do you read comic books or graphic novels?
  - a. If yes, which comic books or graphic novels have you read?

- b. Did you like them all? Why or why not?
  - c. When did you start reading them?
  - d. Who introduced them to you?
  - e. How do you read a graphic novel?
  - f. What do you know about the features of a frame in a graphic novel?
  - g. What details in a frame help you understand the story better?
  - h. Are the frames of a graphic novel easy or difficult to understand?
  - i. Which do you think helps you understand the story in a graphic novel most: the dialogue bubbles or the pictures?
  - j. If you do not read comic books or graphic novels, why not?
  - k. Have you ever read any comics or graphic novels?
  - l. What bothers you about them?
  - m. What do you prefer to read?
18. Have you ever had a teacher use graphic novels in your class?
- a. If yes, how did this teacher use them?
  - b. As a student, did the use of graphic novels help you understand the lesson?
  - c. As a student, did the use of graphic novels confuse you more?
19. Besides the pictures, what's the difference between reading a book and reading a graphic novel?
20. What is your opinion about using graphic novels or manga as reading assignments in your classes?
- a. Is using graphic novels a good use of class time for you? Why or why not.
21. Suppose this was the first day of class and your teacher said he wasn't going to have you read any books for this class, just comic books. Would you like that? Why or why not?

Appendix C



CHRISTOPHER L. WILLIAMS  
PRINCIPAL

PICKENS HIGH SCHOOL

500 DRAGON DRIVE  
JASPER, GEORGIA 30143  
706-253-1800  
FAX 706-253-1815

HAROLD CULBRETH  
LISA GALLOWAY  
MILTON TURNER  
ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

SHANNON GABLE  
CAREER, TECHNICAL AND  
AGRICULTURE DIRECTOR

March 17, 2010

This letter stands as confirmation of our intention to allow Sandra to conduct a research project in our ninth grade English classes. Ms. Greene's research, *Reading the Word and the World through Graphic Novels: The Challenge of Motivation and Engagement in Adolescent Literacy*, provides an opportunity for our teachers and students to enrich our curriculum through relevant active learning.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you,

Lisa Galloway

Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction

Appendix D

March 10, 2010

The Guilford Press  
A Division of Guilford Publications, Inc.  
72 Spring Street  
New York, NY 10012

To whom it may concern:

I am requesting permission to copy the Adolescent Reading Attitudes Survey found in the Guilford publication: McKenna, M. and Stahl, K. (2009). *Assessment for Reading Instruction* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.

It is my intent to use this survey as part of a case study I will begin in August of 2010 as part of research for dissertation. This study will focus on a 9<sup>th</sup> grade classroom and investigate the impact of graphic novels and comics on adolescent literacy and motivation. I expect to complete my data collection by May of 2011. I plan on making copies for the class which includes approximately 30 students, the teacher, my dissertation committee, IRB panel, and myself.

Please let me know your decision at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Sandra D. Greene  
504 Springwater Cove  
Woodstock, GA 30188  
770-778-5651  
[sandradgreene@bellsouth.net](mailto:sandradgreene@bellsouth.net)

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR ONE TIME USE.  
FEE: MC  
DATE: 6/14/2010  
THE GUILFORD PRESS  
72 SPRING STREET  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10012







Henry Holt and Company 175 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10010

Mimi Ross  
Director, Copyrights and  
Permissions

tel (646) 307-5299  
fax (646) 307-5261  
mimi.ross@hholt.com

March 30, 2011

via e-mail

**Sandra Greene**  
264 Carrington Way  
Canton, GA 30115

Pursuant to your specific request dated: March 15, 2011

Re: AMERICAN BORN CHINESE/ Yang  
Your title/project: Reading the Word and the World through Graphic Novels

PLEASE NOTE: ONLY THE ITEMS MARKED "X" APPLY TO YOU.

We are pleased to grant you permission for the above use, on a gratis basis,  
provided that you follow all conditions set forth in this document, and include the  
credit line **exactly** as shown below:

Excerpts taken from the book *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang.  
Copyright © 2006 by Gene Yang.  
Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

To the best of our knowledge, the above material is in the **public domain**. As a  
courtesy, please acknowledge the source.

Other: Rights granted to include up to ten pages of unaltered panels from the  
above named Henry Holt title, solely for your dissertation at Georgia Southern  
University, in the English language. Please apply separately for all other uses.

Sincerely,

//Mimi Ross//

---

Subject: Permission to use Pixton Comics  
From: Pixton Comics (support@pixton.com)  
To: sgreene188@yahoo.com;  
Date: Wednesday, March 30, 2011 7:43 PM

Dear Sandra,

You hereby have our permission to include Pixton comics in your academic dissertation. Please include the following attribution in association with each comic:

Images © 2011 Pixton Comics Inc. [PIXTON.COM](http://PIXTON.COM)

Sincerely,  
Clive Goodinson

--

Pixton Comics  
Email: [support@pixton.com](mailto:support@pixton.com)  
Twitter: [twitter.com/pixton](http://twitter.com/pixton)

Print

<http://us.mg5.mail.yahoo.com/dc/launch?.gx=1&.rand=35i0ogaftumra>

**From:** John Crowther (jcrowther@book.com)  
**To:** sgreene188@yahoo.com;  
**Date:** Thu, April 7, 2011 4:14:24 PM  
**Cc:**  
**Subject:** permission to reprint

Dear Sandra:

I received your request dated March 23, 2011, to reproduce portions of eight pages of No Fear Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet for your dissertation. You have our permission to do so.

Yours,

John Crowther  
Director, SparkNotes  
76 Ninth Ave, 9th Floor  
New York, New York 10011  
tel: (212) 414-6081  
fax: (212) 414-6210

This electronic mail message contains information that (a) is or may be CONFIDENTIAL, PROPRIETARY IN NATURE, OR OTHERWISE PROTECTED BY LAW FROM DISCLOSURE, and (b) is intended only for the use of the addressee(s) named herein. If you are not an intended recipient, please contact the sender immediately and take the steps necessary to delete the message completely from your computer system.

Not Intended as a Substitute for a Writing: Notwithstanding the Uniform Electronic Transaction Act or any other law of similar effect, absent an express statement to the contrary, this e-mail message, its contents, and any attachments hereto are not intended to represent an offer or acceptance to enter into a contract and are not otherwise intended to bind this sender, barnesandnoble.com llc, barnesandnoble.com inc. or any other person or entity.