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Importance of Reader's Advisory Interview in Graphic Novel Promotion

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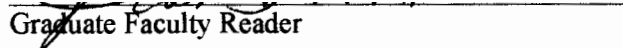
by

Lori Petersen

December 2010

This Research Paper by: Lori Petersen

Titled: IMPORTANCE OF READERS' ADVISORY INTERVIEW IN GRAPHIC NOVEL
PROMOTION

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
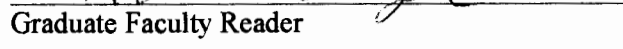Degree of Master of Arts.

Jean Donham

12/16/2010

Date Approved

Graduate Faculty Reader

Karla Krueger

12/16/2010

Date Approved

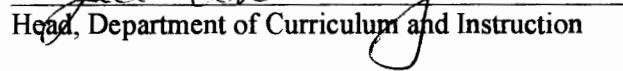Graduate Faculty Reader

Jill Uhlenberg

12-17-10

Date Approved

Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Figure 1

From The Last Man. Vaughan, Guerra and Marzàn, Jr. (2003), p. 5.

Web sites, magazine articles, books, and even summer library programs are promoting graphic novels as an almost magic cure for those children who struggle with the written word or who may be simply lack interest in reading. Much of the appeal of the graphic novel for teachers and librarians is based on the pictures, and it is easy to assume this makes reading easier.

This research sought to explore the graphic novel reading experience for young readers to ascertain (1) the nature of their understanding of the graphic novel; (2) their tendency to draw inference and interpretation from text and graphic; (3) their reliance on text, graphic, or both in interpreting meaning. Insight into these elements of the reading experience may qualify the appropriateness of recommending these texts to children.

Importance of Illustration in Story

Illustration bolsters the sequence and mood that propels a story. Illustrations help young children who are learning to read gain understanding of the text, close gaps in the

story, and highlight key elements of the narrative. Illustration can also be used to break up the text to make it more palatable and can be used to highlight key elements for the older reader as well. It seems that even Martin Luther promoted the use of illustrations; he felt that "image serves as a feast for the eyes on the one hand, and as support for the individual memory on the other" (Zipes, 2006, Vol. 2, p. 277). This idea has been echoed throughout the centuries by educators, philosophers and illustrators.

When the printing press was first invented, illustrations were carved from wood cuts that were placed next to the text in the press and could be exchanged from one text to another. In other words, the pictures of the wood blocks were interchangeable from one story to the next because they lacked specificity. Eventually, wood cuts gave way to copperplate engraving and etchings; this process helped develop the picture into a separate entity from the text and enclosed it with a decorative frame (Zipes, 2006, Vol. 2).

John Locke promoted the use of illustrations with children because they "encourage enquiry and knowledge" (Zipes, 2006, Vol. 2, p. 277). Locke was not interested in pictures as aesthetics but instead insisted that they gave meaning and clarity to the text. Locke's radical views sparked a new era for the picture book, and the genre flourished. One such author to benefit from the proliferation of this genre was Wilhelm Busch, author of the 2865 book, *Max and Moritz*; done in black and white drawings with comical verses, *Max and Moritz* is credited with being the predecessor to the comic strip (Zipes, 2006).

The early 1900s brought about mass-produced visual artwork that appeared in circulars and flyers; such artwork then made appearances in the daily newspaper as single

panel comics. Panels evolved into comic strips that were often a popular form of Sunday morning entertainment for families, enjoyed by both children and adults. It was in 1929 that Belgian artist Hergè began writing *The Adventures of Tintin* about a roving reporter and his sidekick, a dog named Snowy, who seem to find misadventure where ever they go. This began a new chapter for comics as Hergè developed a new style for this format referred to as *clear line* (Miller, 2005).

The Eastern Color Printing Company of Waterbury, Connecticut was the first to gather some of these comic strips and publish them in book form. It was 1933, and these books became an overnight success. In June of 1938, the world's first superhero was born; Superman was the creation of two boys by the names of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. Superman's success brought about a host of caped crusaders and the golden age of comics began. Even at the end of the depression and the war years; however the comic book seems to have thrived (Haugen, 2005).

In post World War II, our nation's comic book readers began to look for something different; something with blood, gore, and carnage. The comic book industry was happy to oblige. They also, however, began to produce comic books that contained more thought-provoking storylines dealing with racism, poverty, the court system and other social injustices (Haugen, 2005). Hajdu (2008) wrote:

> Uninhibited, shameless, frequently garish and crude, often shocking, and sometimes excessive, these crime, horror, and romance comics provided young people of the early postwar years with a means of defying and escaping the mainstream culture of the time, while providing the guardians of that culture an enormous, taunting, close-range target" (¶ 14). "This began a war between two generations that would lead all the way to Congress. Churches, community groups and parents led rallies denouncing the comic book and burned them in effigy with all the flair of a Ku Klux Klan meeting. Over one hundred acts of legislation were introduced on state and local levels restricting comic sales, culminating in

Congress launching an investigation into the causes of juvenile delinquency with comic books as the prime suspect. Televised hearings of the industry signaled its demise as the comic book publishers took no organized defense (¶ 14).

Evolution of the Graphic Novel

Will Eisner first coined the phrase *graphic novel* in 1987 to describe his work entitled *A Contract with God* (Gorman, 2003). Critics assert that the term graphic novel was merely a tool used by Eisner to "legitimize a new, costlier way of selling comics to the initiated direct market reader" (Hatfield, 2000, p. 143). Hatfield asserts that the "graphic novel" would be promoted to the more distinguished customer, who was self-conscious, affluent and ready for the comic book to be recognized as an art form. Marketing ploys aside, Miller (2005) points out that this book was so well received that an award was created for other titles with the same high degree of excellence, and named after the author, calling it the Eisner Award. Readers were thrilled that they no longer had to wait for the next installment, as would happen with the comic book; they also liked the high quality paper and print on which the graphic novel was found. Eisner went on to give readers an insider's perspective of "the how and why" of graphic novels in *Comics and Sequential Art* (p. 15). As positive reviews of these materials became more abundant, the local book store, library, and school library began to add these titles to their collections. Publishers outside of the comic world took notice of this trend and began to publish individual comics to later be published as graphic novels.

After forty years of self regulation with strict guidelines formulated by the Comic Code Authority, many publishers of comics and graphic novels began to forfeit their membership (Haugen, 2005). Over the years American culture had changed, and these companies took note that the institution had not evolved with the times. This signified a

change in the rules as to what was appropriate material for this format and opened the door for people who had new and innovative ideas for what a graphic novel could be. *Maus* by Art Spiegelman was a defining moment in the history of comics; published in two parts 1987 and 1992, it chronicles one man's story of survival during the Holocaust (Gorman, 2003). *Maus* was one of the first biographical graphic novels and won Spiegelman the 1992 Pulitzer Prize for Literature for his efforts. He was the first cartoonist ever to be recognized with this honor. It is interesting to note that Maus was originally published in serial form (Miller, 2005).

What is a Graphic Novel?

Graphic novels are similar to the comic books of yesterday but are of higher quality and longer (Zipes, 2006). There are, however, as many definitions for the term graphic novel as there are books on the subject. Rollins (2006) agreed that "there can be no one definition of graphic novels" (p. 8). Alan Moore, the author of *Watchmen* and *From Hell*, two pioneering graphic novels in the industry, refers to them as a "big expensive comic book" (Rollins, 2006. p. 8), while Art Spiegelman, another ground breaking graphic novelist, referred to them as "a comic book that needs a book mark" (Rollins, 2006. p. 8). Rollins (2006) suggested defining a graphic novel in this way, "Big, fat, expensive, hoity-toity comic book that wants to soar with Hemingway and Faulkner, but can't get the mud of its Super-Friends-and-Wonder-Woman birthplace off its wings" (p. 8). Charles Hatfield (2000) described graphic novels as "a term of commerce, not necessarily an accurate description of content" (p. 101). To add even more confusion, the subject matter of this genre encompasses a broad range including biographies, history, science, art, science fiction, fantasy, horror, the classics, basic fiction, and superheroes

(Zipes, 2006). The graphic novel is usually a complete work in itself, while the comic book usually ends in a cliff hanger and is considered a short serial leaving the reader in a constant state of turmoil until the next installment. The graphic novel may be darker in nature than a comic book and more serious in tone or material. For this reason, graphic novels are generally not thought of as appropriate for the younger child, but of course, there are exceptions (Zipes, 2006). Even critics have been discouraged and object to such an ambiguous term. The format in some circles has come to mean anything more substantial than the standard comic book or longer in length than forty-eight pages, regardless of the literary content (Hatfield, 2000).

Elements of the Graphic Novel

One who has never attempted to read a graphic novel and has the belief that it is as simple as looking at the pictures may be surprised when bombarded with images and text and may not know where to let the eye travel. Simply knowing graphic novel conventions can be of great service.

In American comics, the eye moves from the upper left corner of the page and continues in sequence to the lower right corner, just as if one were reading a book. The page is set up to show emphasis in certain areas. When a large panel or box that contains the scene appears, it is meant for the eye to rest and hold the reader's attention (Rudiger, 2006). A series of small panels would indicate action and much more can be conveyed through the placement and size of the panel (Goldsmith, 2005). The gutter is simply the narrow blank space between the panels; here the reader must infer what action is taking place from the clues given in the surrounding panels. The balloon contains the text-dialogue spoken by the character; one can easily see which character is speaking by the

direction of the tail. The tail is the point on the balloon that points directly to the speaker (Eisner, 1990). A bubble is used for a character's thoughts when they must be revealed and looks much like a cloud (Goldsmith, 2005). A series of small bubbles indicates from whom the thought is originating. A caption will take a small part of a panel or be a separate panel of text. It will convey dates or other explanations that were not illustrated by the character within the panels themselves. Reading the graphic is indeed a unique experience; the elements mentioned above when viewed in their entirety combine to form a language unto themselves (Eisner, 1990).

The Influence of Manga

While American comics were going through a financially difficult time in the 1950s, Japanese comics were developing independently into something very different from that of the American comics or graphic novel. This became a style of graphic novel referred to as Manga, a distinctive artistic style and method used to tell the story. Manga is different from American or Western style comics because it shows exaggerated features of the character, subjectively placed motion, and a focus on the visual cues rather than the text. While Manga is often shelved in stores and libraries away from other graphic novels, it is not a separate genre; it differs only in artistic style. In the same way that American/Western graphic novels may come in different genres, Manga may do the same (Miller, 2005).

The artistic style of Manga has been slow to show its influence in American graphic novels but has done so with a few select artists as far back as the late 1960s. Some artists have even used the elements of Manga to tell their story in all manner of degrees and method. In the 21st Century the influence of this style is readily discernible in

many graphic novels. Many publishers in the United States now go as far to have manga as its own marketing label (Miller, 2005).

Before Manga became popular, comics were viewed as material for children in Japan. Throughout the 1960s Manga became more and more popular with students and continued to evolve into the 1980s. As Manga has evolved, the content has become more suitable for the teenager and/or adult. A few titles still cater to the young but for the most part teens and adults are the target audience and the content reflects this. Cultural differences amplify this divide on what is acceptable for the young person in Western culture and what would be considered appropriate in Japan. For example, in Japan some nudity is perfectly acceptable in comics for the younger generation and in some cases may even be viewed as humorous. In the United States this same material would be frowned upon for this age group (Miller, 2005).

The Audience

One may wonder if this format is simply a passing fad or if it will survive this period of reinvention and gain a place of permanence. Very few statistics have been published on the typical age and gender of the consumer of the graphic novel. Despite this lack of information, sales totaled 330 million dollars in 2006 for graphic novels (MacDonald, 2007). To gain some insight about what this figure means for sales, it is helpful to compare it to past sales. Since 2001 sales have quadrupled for this genre. One reason for this increase is the rise in female readership, in part, due to an increase in titles that are more appealing to this population, many of which are for the mature reader. It is thought that graphic novels that are written for younger children have the most opportunity to gain readers. While there are some titles that sell well to younger children,

this age group has not been seriously considered as a target audience because the industry believes that most parents will not spend ten dollars on what they may consider a comic book (MacDonald, 2007). However, libraries can afford them and are always looking for new ways to draw new customers. The irony is that the teaching and librarian professions that so despised the comic book are the same professions that have embraced the graphic novel as evidenced in Springen's 2006 Newsweek article.

Graphic novels have gradually entrenched themselves into Americana. Today's children are becoming increasingly visually literate with video games, television, computer and cell phones. Graphic novels can provide such a connection for print. Reminiscent of the picture books they have read, or still read, the comic-style format invites the reader to integrate the images and text to comprehend. Neither the picture nor the text can stand on its own to tell the reader the complete story (Gorman, 2003). The reader must be drawn in and actively participate to understand the graphic novel. According to Lyga (2006), in order to comprehend a graphic novel, "many essential literacy skills are required, including the ability to understand a sequence of events, interpret characters' nonverbal gestures, discern the story's plot, and make inferences" (p. 56). Miller (2005) adds that the reader must carefully take in the story and make deductions on how the words and pictures work together to give one new meaning and a deeper understanding of the story told. Lyga (2006) believes graphic novels give the brain a better work-out than the traditional book because "as a reader takes in a graphic novel's print and art through a series of panels, word balloons, and captions, the reader's brain is bombarded simultaneously with the graphic novel's characters, setting, plot and action" (p. 56). Miller (2005) supports this belief with his idea that this "visual

layer…can improve the reader's appreciation and understanding of the narration and dialogue" (p. 2). He also believes that the words as well as the art are essential for the reader to extract the full meaning of the story.

Lure of Graphic Novels

Although comics and graphic novels are slowly gaining respect, many readers still see them as a guilty pleasure and are hesitant readership. Versaci (2001) used this to his advantage when teaching a group of high school students in English class. He felt that classroom students often found the material dull or irrelevant. By introducing biographical comic books, "teachers can catch students off guard in a positive way, and this disorientation has, in my experience, led students to become more engaged by a given work" (Versaci, p. 62). For Newkirk (2006) it was more of a matter of maintaining a format familiar to the student and bringing it into the classroom. He believed that the classroom should reflect what culture and he suggest this as a strategy to make the learning environment more engaging to the student.

Guthrie (1978) recalled that the amount of time one spends in an activity greatly increases the amount of success one may achieve at that activity. If the comic or graphic novel readers are interested, they will read for sustained periods, thereby increasing their reading skill. McPherson's (2006) beliefs support this theory as well. He believes that students need to find their own motivation for reading in whatever it may be that inspires them. Many teachers claim that using comics and graphic novels as a means to lure struggling readers has turned them into students who love reading (McTaggart, 2005).

Building Readers

Learning to read is a complex task that involves many layers of skill to become successful. While there may be physiological reasons for a student who struggles with the task of reading such as dyslexia, those who have trouble reading in general need to be taught how letters, words, and sounds relate to each other. Awareness of letter and sound relationships are how fluent readers decipher words they do not know. In other words, children who have a learning disability that is language based have a more difficult time than other students with the sounds of letters and words and need more assistance with this task than the average child (Turkington, 2006).

It is important to acknowledge that there is no correlation between intelligence and difficulty in the ability to read (Stanovich, 1991). According to Turkington (2006), a child simply needs practice to become a fluent reader. The child who has more difficulty reading needs a teacher who is well versed in reading strategies to facilitate this process. The National Institutes of Health (2006) found that children need a chance to read on their own and at their own reading level to develop enjoyment and meaning in their reading experience.

While some futurists believe that reading is no longer an important skill, others believe that reading is a fundamental skill that is essential to be successful in all that one does (Turkington, 2006). Research conducted with children who struggle to read has found that they have trouble keeping up with their peers and do not enjoy reading, have a stagnant vocabulary, and lose opportunities to develop comprehension strategies when reading (p. 191). Fortunately, this does not have to be the case, studies show that 90% of

children who struggle with reading can become average readers with the proper intervention (p. 192).

It would be very tempting to use such a new and appealing format as the graphic novel with those children who are uninterested in the majority of reading material. Miller (2005) asserted that understanding the text of the graphic novel is just as important as understanding the artwork to "extract the full meaning of the story" (p. 2). This may lead one to believe that it is not so simple as just handing out graphic novels to those who are reluctant to pick up a book; perhaps, this is a more complex issue.

Readers' Advisory

One tool teachers and librarians utilize to encourage reading is the readers' advisory. Moyer (2008) asserts that through readers' advisory librarians give readers what they want by first listening to how they describe their reading experiences and desires and then finding books most likely to meet those needs. Moyer cited a study by Jill Heritage in explaining that readers' advisory for children takes on special conditions of not only interest, but also level of difficulty of the text, "saving face," and the capacity of the reader (p. 87). She continued by asserting that librarians who attempt to provide young readers with reading material that interests them and suits their capacity also recognize the importance of peer approval and attempt to protect the image of the reader – especially those readers whose capacity may be below grade level. Sullivan (2005) acknowledged readers' advisory to be the most basic form of book promotion. Essential to this process is the personal interview, this involves asking the child what his or her needs or interests may be. Determining the child's reading capacity is an important part

of meeting their needs. Once determined, careful consideration must be given to the specific titles that may be suggested to the reader.

This is not a one-way conversation. The interviewer must continually ask probing questions to refine the needs of the reader and carefully reassess their likes and dislikes. Sullivan (2005) placed the focus of book promotion on the reader and not on the validity of the literature. Support for this approach may be found in the work of Rosenblatt (1985) who asserted that reading is a transaction. She borrowed from Vygostsky and added to his words "The 'sense' of a word is 'the sum of all the psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word'" (p. 99). She explained "This is the experiential and linguistic reservoir, the cognitive and affective residue of our past experience with life and language, on which each must draw in any linguistic transaction, whether speaking or listening, writing or reading. Here Rosenblatt acknowledged what the reader brings to his or her experience of the written material and how that interpretation may be vastly different from reader to reader depending on the personal connections they make. Even more startling Rosenblatt pointed out that same text may have different meaning "involving a particular individual and a particular text, happening at a particular time, under particular circumstances, in a particular social and cultural setting, and as part of the ongoing life of the individual and the group" (p. 100). In short, the teacher or librarian must unite the right reader with the right material at the right time.

Problem Statement

Reading a graphic novel calls for complex comprehension skills of drawing inference from both text and graphic and interpreting plot events through both text and

graphic. It is unclear whether young readers succeed independently in applying these comprehension strategies to arrive at meaning when reading graphic novels.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the nature of the graphic novel reading experience for young readers. The findings of this study could inform the reader's advisory role of librarians when they are considering the graphic novel format for young readers.

Research Questions

This qualitative study sought to describe the nature of the reading experience for young readers engaged with graphic novels. These questions guided the study:

1. What was the nature of the reader's engagement with the graphic novel?

2. To what extent did these readers interpret meaning from both the text and the graphics?

3. In what ways did these readers apply inference to make meaning of the graphic novel?

4. What implications might the reading behaviors of these readers have for reader's advisory?

Definitions

Captions – "boxes in a comic book page that contain text. Like word balloons, they are usually subjected to a variety of effects to create different "moods" or concepts. A caption can be any shape, size, or color. While sometimes used to convey dialogue, they are more often used to impart a character's thoughts or as a narrative device" (Lyga & Lyga, 2004, p. 161)

Clear Line – "Coined by Joost Swarte in 1977, ligne Claire (clear line) described comic art that gives equal weight and consideration to every line on the page. By forgoing shading with ink, the artist creates a depth of field on the page that brings equal amounts of focus to the background and foreground" (Pleban, 2006, ¶ 6)

Comic – "a fusion of images and words that form a cohesive narrative told in a frame-by-frame format" (Gorman, 2003, p. xii) "stories told in a series of issues, each with a cliff-hanger ending" (Weiner, 2001, p. 3)

Graphic novel – "an original book-length story, either fiction or nonfiction, published in comic book style or a collection of stories that have been published previously as individual comic books" (Gorman, 2003, p. xii)

Panels – "a single frame of a comic" (Miller, 2005, p. 5)

Word balloon or Speech bubble – "is the element in which the words spoken by the characters are written" (Miller, 2005, p. 7)

Serial – "A bibliographic resource in any format that is issued in successive parts (usually bearing numerical or chronological designations) and intended to be continued indefinitely" (Gorman, 2003, p. 157)

Significance

The complexity in reading the graphic novel may not be readily apparent. Hence, the level of difficulty in graphic novels may challenge their appropriateness for all young readers. The findings of this study sought to inform teachers and librarians about the complexities of recommending graphic novels to young readers.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The problem presented in this research was that young readers might not comprehend what they read in graphic novels. The purpose of this research was to determine considerations to be taken by teachers and librarians in promoting and using graphic novels with young readers, and perhaps in particular those who lack enthusiasm for reading. Previous research related to this issue falls into three categories: illustrations and their effects on the reader, reluctant readers and their preference for reading material, and the effectiveness of using graphic novels as a tool for reading intervention with struggling readers. These studies provided a foundation for further study into graphic novels and how they might be used most effectively with young readers.

Illustrations and Their Effects on the Reader

Denburg (1976) sought to determine whether or not pictures benefit children in learning to read, with the idea that a child beginning to read could take clues from syntactic, semantic and graphemic clues that are used by established readers. Denburg tested this theory by looking at the effect of adding increasing pictorial information to word identification and learning and the relationship between the graphic clues and the syntactic, semantic and graphemic clues used by good readers.

A group of first graders near the end of the school year was selected to participate in the study. Forty-eight children were chosen, with an equal ratio of boys to girls. The subjects were chosen on their ability to understand and use, but not decipher, 48 stimulus words.

A Subjects X Treatments design with repeated measures on the Treatment factor was decided upon for the experimental design. The amount of graphic information was manipulated for the independent variable and was shown with a printed simple active declarative sentence. Four levels of the material were used. The first level did not include a picture with the printed sentence. The second level included a complete picture, showing the actor and object nouns in interaction. The third level had a graphic missing the object represented by the object noun with the printed sentence. The final level, level four included the printed sentence with the graphic but was missing the section of the graphic shown by the actor noun (Denburg, 1976).

Twenty-four sentences were then made from the 48 stimulus words, which were then broken down into 4 groups. The group of children was also broken down into four groups with an even distribution of gender and graphemic skill. A 4 x 4 Latin square was used to arrange sentence groups and picture type, so that each child saw the entire group of sentences but never with the same type of picture. The children were asked to identify the words chosen and read the sentences with a limited amount of feedback from the researcher (Denburg, 1976).

The researcher found that as the amount of available information such as an illustration increased, the number of correct responses or word identification also increased. Including the word in a sentence, however, seemed to have no effect on word identification. Of even greater interest, is that the child did not even need the full picture to achieve the same amount of correct word identification of the pictured nouns. Denburg (1976) believed that this indicated that an excess level of information in the picture may not be detrimental for the child attempting to read words. It is important to note that

Denburg is not referring to extraneous, misleading, or confusing illustrations found in text, but to information available to help understand statements in the text. The non-pictured nouns that were illustrated with partial pictures were also identified more correctly than the nouns in a sentence with no picture. Denburg interpreted this to mean that not only did pictures have a direct effect on reading, but they also show an indirect effect as well.

Some worry that when an illustration is present, the emerging reader will bypass the printed word and rely solely on the picture. The Denburg (1976) study indicated that information is taken from both the illustration and the printed word, both being integrated and that this integration will result in learning. Over time the reader will no longer need to rely on the illustration, but will come to rely more steadily on the printed word. This was evident in both groups, the high and low level readers from examining their pattern of errors. Again, the introduction of the picture had a large impact on decreasing the number of missed responses and helped to ensure that the answers were more appropriate. While studying the picture and tying it to the printed word takes time Denburg surmised that the confidence and skill gained by the emerging reader will be well worth it in the end.

Rice and Doan (1981) were also interested in illustrations and the role they play in reading. The purpose of their study was to isolate one factor in reading instruction and study its influence in detail. The problem statement became, "What effect does the use of pictures have on reading speed, comprehension and interest of second grade readers?" (p. 309)

Sixty students from the second grade ages seven and eight were randomly selected from a school. The school was located on an army installation near a mid-sized south-eastern city. The group of sixty was then broken down into groups of 15 and all were tested in one setting with the same test-administrator who read the same instructions for each group. These precautions were taken to ensure uniformity between groups. Two sets of booklets were used; an excerpt was taken from Else Holmelund Minarik's book *Little Bear* and re-titled "What Will Little Bear Wear?" one set was made with illustrations, the other without. These were placed in front of the students face down. Once the instructions were read, the students read the booklet without any intervention from beginning to end. When they were finished they held up a card with their identification number for the teacher to see. Once this occurred, the reading time was recorded in seconds for each subject (Rice & Doan, 1981).

Later, the subjects took an eleven item questionnaire to measure the reading comprehension of the student on the written content of the story with no references to the pictures. A Likert-Type scale was also given to the students to determine their interest in the story. The scale depicts four faces with varying facial expressions from happy to sad. The same procedure was followed for each of the four classes with the independent variable being the picture or no picture condition (Rice & Doan, 1981).

The data collected in this study were first analyzed by using analysis of variance. Comparisons were broken down in several different ways: Time by Sex and Class; Time by Sex and Picture; Comprehension Score by Sex and Class: Comprehension Score by Sex and Picture; Achievement by Sex and Class; and finally Achievement by Sex and

Picture. Analysis of variance showed only one significant difference; this occurred in the comparison of Time by Sex and Class (Rice & Doan, 1981).

Rice and Doan (1981) then looked for significant differences in the mean scores or standard deviations found by using the girls' and boys' separately for time, achievement, and comprehension. There was no significant difference in the reading times between boys and girls. The group without pictures was shown to have the fastest mean reading time but did not show any difference in comprehension for achievement. This same group also had the highest mean achievement score, but not the highest mean score for comprehension.

The results of the study showed that pictures do increase the amount of time it takes a child to read. It also found however, that the two groups that had the books with illustrations had a higher mean comprehension score than the two groups whose book had no illustrations. This indicated that illustration help to improve reading comprehension. Unfortunately, interest levels could not be considered a factor in this study since the subjects indicated that they liked the book with and without illustrations. This study suggested that whether or not one uses illustrations with text should depend on one's goals and objectives. If one is intending to build the speed of the reader, illustrations would clearly not be of use. However, if the goal is to aid in comprehension, illustrations may prove themselves useful (Rice & Doan, 1981).

Reinking, Hayes, and McEneaney (1988) conducted a study to explore why poor readers do not know how to use graphic aids in textbooks effectively and wanted to determine what might be the cause. They thought it possible that the readers did not know when to use the graphics in order to gain the full benefit from them. These ideas brought

about many questions for their research, such as "Would cuing result in increased awareness of graphic aids? Would it result in improved recall of information contained in tests' graphic aids? And perhaps most importantly, would it result in improved comprehension?" (p. 231).

For this study, 167 seventh and eighth-grade boys and girls who attended a rural high school were selected as subjects. The researchers examined scores from the students' school records from a reading test. These scores determined which of two groups in which the subject would be placed. The 35th percentile and below were grouped as the poor readers, the remaining students, whose scores were above the 35th percentile, became the good readers group, or comparison group.

The groups were randomly assigned to five different treatment conditions. These were made up of three different subjects; these were then broken down into five different treatment conditions. These consisted of fairly lengthy passages that each contained one of the five different levels of prompting to look at the graphic, beginning with no graphic, and then no prompt at all, or one of three prompts. Excerpts that contained graphic were divided into two types. Some graphics repeated information in the text and were designated as redundant, while other graphics introduced new information not specifically discussed in the text. Two multiple choice tests were used to determine the effectiveness of the prompting.

Reviewing the data showed that the students using graphics with prompting information recalled the information of the redundant and non-redundant text better than those students who had no prompts at all. Isolating the poor readers' comprehension scores from the rest of the group produced similar results. The scores were still greater

under these conditions. The difference between this group and the good readers, however, was that the good readers' scores were not significantly affected by the prompting. The good readers' scores were, for the most part, maintained throughout the study. It is true that they also benefited from the prompting to look at graphics, but as the prompting became more explicit for the poor readers, the poor readers closed the gap on comprehension with the comparison group (Reinking et all., 1988).

Those subjects who received no prompts had similar scores to those of the subjects who had no graphics at all. It seems that subjects paid little attention to the graphics while reading the text without specific prompting. It was not surprising to learn that scores were greater for questions where the content of the text was repeated or supported by the graphic. The overall findings of this study suggested that all of the students benefited from prompts to look at the graphic aids of texts, the poor readers gained the most from learning to use these visual aids (Reinking et all., 1988).

Elizabeth Sulzby (1985) has a long history of conducting research on the stages of how children become readers. Sulzby's follow-up study supported her past research and refined her categories for these stages by conducting not one, but two in-depth studies. More accurately Sulzby wanted to determine:

> Is the proposed classification scheme detailed enough to describe children's storybook reading attempts? Can the scheme be used to describe children's progress over time? Does it describe the same child's storybook reading with some consistency? Does it distinguish between children of different ages in such a way as to indicate a developmental progression? (p. 463)

The first study, examined the existence of categories and subcategories of Sulzby's (1985) storybook reading classification scheme and whether or not change occurred over a period of time, in this case with kindergarten age children. Twenty-four

children who had participated in an earlier longitudinal study continued participation in this particular study; these students ranged in age from four to six. The children included in the study were from a middle-class kindergarten classroom that was located in a suburb of a large Midwestern city.

The classification scheme developed by Sulzby (1985) had a general branching tree shaped structure and described the stages through which emergent readers ascend. In the first stage, the child attempted to read the pictures and only described each picture as he or she came to it and did not attempt to connect the story throughout the pictures. In the second stage of the hierarchy the child still used the pictures to tell the story but attempted to connect the pictures and told the story much like an oral story teller would and not as if it were written in text. In the third level, the child read using the pictures of the book and vacillated in between using something resembling oral storytelling and what appeared to the listener as though they are reading from the text. The fourth level was met when the child was reading by using the pictures but sounds as though they were reading verbatim from a text. In the final level, the child was actually using the print to read, although it should be kept in mind that there were subcategories at this level where the child simply refused to read for print related reasons (Valencia, 1991).

Study I found that the findings fit within the categories and subcategories previously recognized and supported the existence of some sub-categories that had not been frequently observed. While this study supported Sulzby's earlier findings, it also gave indications of patterns that lead up to independent reading. That these categories and sub-categories appeared to be in a hierarchy; one step had to be met in order for the student to precede onto the next. Unfortunately, the sample size was determined to be

insufficient to prove this hypothesis. Therefore the researcher performed a second assessment at the end of the kindergarten year to determine if the children's progress showed stability over time. If the hypothesis was correct, one would expect the students' placement in the classification to shift, to have shown progression in their emergent reading behavior. Overall, this was found to be the case. The student showed a progression up through the categories. These findings further substantiated the reliability and validity of the classification system (Sulzby, 1985).

Sulzby (1985) recognized the need to address the stability of reading behaviors across books, as the previous study let the child determine his or her (favorite) storybook to read for the study. This time the same two books would be used with each child. At the same time Sulzby wanted to further explore the development of the emerging reader by studying a younger and wider age range. The subjects included were from a privately operated day care also in the suburb of a large Midwestern city. These data were taken from a larger preliminary study conducted by Sulzby. The students were of the ages of two, three and four; this made up a group of thirty-two children (Sulzby, 1985).

Sulzby's (1985) second study substantiated a reasonable amount of stability across the two storybooks read. The relationship between sub-categories was also determined to occur much greater than what would have happened by chance. These findings carried even greater weight when one takes into consideration that the books were not chosen by the child yet the (reading) that the child demonstrated in this study was more consistent than in the previous study. There were very few cases in study II where the student's reading attempt did not fall within two categories or for the most part

within an actual related category. When the results were taken into consideration it seemed that emergent reading behaviors remain stable across familiar storybooks.

A pattern emerged from these studies. Sulzby's (1985) classification scheme drew distinctions between the age levels in their reading attempts. The range and distribution increased predictably by age within the classification scheme. Understandably, there was a wide range of reading behavior within these age groups, however, the two year olds, for example, made up the majority of the lower level readers and the four year olds increasingly made up the higher level reading attempts. The other age groups followed this pattern on a continuum.

Many types of reading behaviors have been identified in this research and Sulzby (1985) conceded that more may be found. What is most important about this research was that the children in this study exhibited how children develop their reading skills through reading picture storybooks. They began by telling a story with an isolated picture and honed their skills by further interaction and repeat tellings, building their skills into developing full fledged print reading skills. This process did not occur with just one picture storybook; the children were able to take these skills they have learned and applied them across storybooks.

Jun Liu (2004) at the University of Arizona sought to investigate the effect of including comics as visual aids for English as a Second Language (ESL) texts and reading comprehension. She took the research a step further by asking whether using comic strips with a text geared toward the student's proficiency level improve the student's reading comprehension more than using comic strips with a text that is either above or below the student's proficiency level.

The subjects of this study were from adults who had registered for ESL summer classes at a large southwestern university. From an essay writing test, that was mandatory for all students in these courses, scores were taken and divided evenly into two groups. The students with greater number scores made up the high level proficiency group and the other group, made up of the lesser scoring individuals, was determined to be the low level proficiency group. Fifty-three students made up the low intermediate proficiency group, while 54 students made up the high intermediate proficiency group (Liu, 2004).

A comic strip was carefully selected by the researcher and then modified into separate narratives. The first narrative, text 1, was written at a lower reading level for easier comprehension, while text 2 was made more complex for the students in the high intermediate level. Although, the narrative differed in difficulty, they both conveyed the same meaning. With the help of the instructors, four different treatments were administered to the students. In order to accomplish this, the two groups were broken down even further. The first of four groups was given the low-level text alone, while the second group received the low-level text with the comic strip. A third group received the high-level text alone and the final group was given the high-level text with the comic strip. The subjects read the narrative and/or comic and were then asked to return the materials after taking as much time as they needed. The subjects then proceeded to record everything they felt they understood (Liu, 2004).

The actual data revealed low-level students reading the high-level text without the visuals received a 19.14% in the recall of information. When compared to the students who received the comic strip and were also in the lower proficiency group, these students were able to show a 38.7% recall of information (Liu, 2004).

The results of this study indicated that the comic strips did not have the same level of success for all students. The low level students who received the high-level text were the students that benefited most from the comic strip and scored much higher than the low-level students who received the high-level text without the comic strip. The high-level text given to the high proficiency group scored the same with or without the aid of a comic strip (Liu, 2004). Lui found that the comic must relate the complexities of the linguistics of the text or it will not help the student recall the information. One way to think of this would be as repetition; the more closely the narrative and picture support each other the greater the chance for understanding as there are two opportunities to comprehend the same information.

Reading Materials of Choice

Ujiie and Krashen (1996) asked the question: to what extent does comic book reading, differ across social classes? The researchers also tried to determine what link, if any, exists between comic book reading, book reading, and reading enjoyment. In order to study these relationships, the researchers chose subjects from two different middle schools that were thought to be representative of the middle class and another of the less affluent.

The first group of subjects was referred to as sample I. This group was made up of 302 seventh graders from a city near Los Angeles. This school was chosen to represent the less affluent, on the grounds that the school qualified for Chapter 1 funding as 82% of the students qualified for free or reduced meals. Twenty-eight percent of the students were determined to have limited proficiency in English. The second group of students referred to as sample II was made up of 269 students that were also seventh graders. This

school was located in a suburb of Los Angeles and only 31% of the students were eligible for free or reduced price meals and only 4% were determined to have limited proficiency in English. Sample II also included 156 students that participated in a program for gifted students (Ujiie & Krashen, 1996).

The students in sample I and II were asked to fill out a questionnaire that focused on their comic book reading and book reading habits. It also asked questions regarding the amount of time they spent reading for pleasure and reading enjoyment (Ujiie & Krashen, 1996).

When the data were assembled, girls had to be excluded from the study due to the lack of statistical significance in their readership habits. The sample of girls from both schools indicated that half of them never read comic books and a scant few always read them. When looking more closely at the data for the boys, there was no difference in frequency of reading comic book for the two samples. Both groups indicated that of the students who read more comic books, most also did more reading for pleasure and in general read more books (Ujiie & Krashen, 1996).

Revisiting the findings for the two samples' frequency of reading for comic books, these researchers questioned how the less affluent students were able to gain access to just as many comics as the more affluent. Ujiie and Krashen (1996) surmised that given the expensive price of comics from one dollar to a dollar and fifty cents, that less affluent students were purchasing them anyway and in doing so were asserting just how attractive comics were to these readers.

Despite the data for the comic book reading, overall, the boys in the Chapter 1 school did not read as much in general, nor did they indicate enjoying reading as much as

the students from the middle class school. Still, it remains that the comic book readers of this school read more than their fellow classmates and more than the non-comic book readers of the middle class school. (Ujiie & Krashen, 1996).

Heisler (1974) was concerned about effects that comic books may have on devoted readers. For this reason she conducted a study to determine what effects, if any, occurred to children who read excessive amounts of comics and how these children may differ in chronological and mental age, educational achievement, socio-economic status, social adjustment, and personal adjustment to other children. To do so, she chose an elementary and junior high school in Farmingdale, New York, to gather data for her study. Six hundred students were used in this study, the majority of the students from the two schools, however, a few had to be eliminated due to incomplete records. A lack of appropriate testing methods also forced the researcher to eliminate the first graders from this study.

The subjects were given tests to determine the nature of their mental maturity, personality, and school achievement. The researcher inventoried the comic books each child read by personal interview and then reviewed these inventories with parents and siblings for accuracy. The children were classified into groups according to their socio-economic status. Once all of the information was recorded the children in each grade who were not comic book readers were compared with an equal number of students who read the greatest numbers of comics still within each grade level (Heisler, 1974).

Heisler (1947) found no significant correlations in the data. The reading of comic books did not seem to indicate that the student would be any more likely to be intelligent or less intelligent than a person who does not read them. The comic book readers and non

readers alike had varying scores for reading, vocabulary, and English that in no way would identify them as belonging to one group or another. Similarly, socioeconomic class and personality were not reliable indicators of whether or not a student read comic books. Chronological and mental age gave no indication of whether or not one was a comic book reader. The number of books one owned was not an indicator of the amount of comics one read. For some students, the decoding of the picture did little to help or hinder the development of the student in language or reading skills. Heisler believed that some of what the students took away from the comic book experience may not be revealed by the tests taken in this study.

With the recent sales increase of graphic novels and interest in the genre might be tempted to redirect this interest to course subject material for students by putting it in the graphic novel format. Students would be getting the same information they would learn from the traditional text book in a format they prefer. It would be a winning situation for the students and the instructor. Wilson and Shaffer (1965) from Florida State University had a similar idea in 1965. At this time, comic books were enjoying the widespread popularity that the graphic novel is today. They too, thought that this interest could be transferred into education by combining the subject content into a comic book form. The null hypothesis became, "When children are given a free choice to select a source of information offered in three forms – that is, textbook, comic, and expository – there will be no significant difference in the proportion of children selecting each of the three sources" (p. 81).

Wilson and Shaffer (1965) selected sixty-three third graders for their study from Sealey Elementary School in Tallahassee, Florida. This group was made up of 27 girls

and 36 boys, all of whom were asked to select the preferred reading material of their choice. All three texts were written at a reading level slightly higher than third grade and contained the same information. Precautions were taken so that subjects would not influence each other in their choice of reading material.

The majority of the children (64% of the boys and 60% of the girls) chose the textbook to learn the scientific information (Wilson & Shaffer, 1965). Given that a slightly higher percentage of students preferred the type written page over the comic strip, surprisingly, the percentage of preference for text was very similar between the boys and girls, and boys had an even higher preference for text than the girls. A chi-square test revealed no significant difference in choices between the boys and girls. Once the study was completed the children who chose the textbook were asked why they chose this format over the others. The children explained that they preferred to use comic books for entertainment purposes. They also associated comic books with fantasy, distortions of reality and caprice (Wilson & Shaffer, 1965).

Alverman, Hagwood, Heron-Hruby, Hughes, Williams and Yoon (2007) sought to determine if students who had been labeled as struggling readers read popular culture by choice. Popular culture items included magazines, comics, TV, video games, music CDs, graffiti, e-mail and other text from the Internet.

The 60 subjects were selected from a group of three middle schools and two high schools that were located in a low income, small city school district in the Southeastern part of the United States. These students were enrolled in seventh, eighth, or ninth grade. The majority of the students were of African American descent with the exception of one Latino and three subjects of European descent. Ninety percent of the students selected for

this study were chosen because of their low scores on a standardized reading test; an even higher percentage of these students professed to be uninterested in reading (Alvermann et al., 2007).

The subjects were divided equally into two groups. One group attended weekly meetings outside of the regular school day and called itself the Media Club; the other group had no meetings or outside activities in conjunction with the study and were considered the comparison group. Both groups, however, kept activity logs for the duration of the study which lasted fourteen weeks (Alvermann et al., 2007). Participants were paid for completed logs and earned ten dollars a week; incomplete logs earned a portion of this sum. The activity log consisted of six questions that the subject merely circled the response that reflected his or her activity for the day.

The amount of time spent reading by the Media Group was 29.4 minutes reading everyday (Alvermann et al., 2007). This may not seem as likely behavior for students labeled as struggling readers. The students reported that they voluntarily read a wide range of materials; a few examples of what they read include: directions, song lyrics, internet searches, video games and billboard advertisements. The comparison group read on average 33.9 minutes every day. The comparison group actually read 4.5 minutes longer than the intervention group.

The question remains: why did they read? The Media Group's response was "that someone had recommended the reading material and it sounded interesting" (Alvermann et al., p. 44).

Aarnoutse and Van Leeuwe (1998) conducted a study to determine if it was possible to predict reading comprehension, vocabulary, reading pleasure and reading

frequency over time and "the degree to which path models (with certain assumptions about the direction of influences) and common-factor models explain the correlation structure of the development of these four aspects of reading" (p. 144).

This study included twenty-one schools and 562 students in the Netherlands. The schools participating in this study had a student body with a mixed ethnic origin, households of average income and fairly educated parents. The study was conducted over a period of time from 1989 to 1995 and followed the same children from first through sixth grade. These children were tested three times a year with various tests in each grade, which in totality, tested for decoding, conceptual knowledge, vocabulary, reading attitude and reading comprehension. The first graders were excused from the study because the reading attitude test could not be administered (Aarnoutse & Van Leeuwe, 1998).

The evidence supported Aarnoutse and Van Leeuwe in their prediction that reading comprehensions, vocabulary, reading frequency and reading pleasure can be "adequately predicted by the same skill at a previous point in time" (p. 151). It seems however, that reading comprehension and vocabulary can be more accurately predicted than reading frequency and reading pleasure. Reading attitude, reading pleasure and reading frequency appeared to have a strong influence on each other. While the children's scores for reading pleasure remained constant over the five years they were in the study their reading frequency steadily declined.

Aarnoutse and Van Leeuwe's (1998) research also supported earlier research that found what children read outside of school has no bearing on the amount of achievement they have in reading comprehension. To reiterate, reading pleasure and reading frequency

were found to have a strong correlation; conversely, reading comprehension and reading frequency have very little influence on each other. On the basis of this study it appears that much more research needs to be done. The research indicates that simply reading for large amounts of time will not increase reading achievement. It may be possible that the material one chooses to read is an important factor in reading achievement. Their study does not suggest that one should disregard free reading, however, it does suggest that reading for comprehension and vocabulary is not interchangeable with reading for pleasure or frequency but that these are two separate entities of reading and should be treated as such (Aarnoutse & Van Leeuwe, 1998).

Graphic Novels and Reluctant Readers

Lamanno (2007) investigated how effective small group reading interventions would be with high school students who had been identified as having profound reading problems. Lamanno was cognizant of how important motivation and student interest is on the impact of reading comprehension.

The following research questions where addressed in Lamanno's research:

a) Does the use of graphic novels in an intervention result in measurable improvements in reading comprehension b) Does the use of graphic novels in a small group intervention result in an increase in student's oral reading fluency? c) Does the type of reading problem (decoding versus comprehension) the student experiences impact whether they show an increase in reading comprehension and oral reading fluency scores? d) Do the students who were exposed to the treatment for the greatest number of sessions and who had the most opportunity to choose their own supplemental reading materials show the greatest improvements in reading and motivation? e) Does the use of a graphic novel intervention in small group instructional setting result in an improvement in student's motivation levels for reading? (p. 30-31)

Initially twenty high school students who had continually received low reading achievement scores and of whom the majority of the students had been diagnosed with

mental retardation or a learning disability volunteered for this study. The students attended one of two schools in the northeastern part of the United States, both of which were located in same school district. The subjects were from a predominately white population in a small county with a mid level income. Parental permission was required to participate in the study and an initial reading achievement test was given that placed these students anywhere from the third to ninth grade (Lamanno, 2007).

Several of the students dropped out of the study for various reasons; the remaining students were divided into groups with persons of similar reading levels placed together. In addition to the comprehension test the groups were subjected to more tests to determine each student's oral reading fluency and decoding skills and a questionnaire was given to determine the level of the students reading motivation. The graphic novels were used as the main reading material with graphic organizers, vocabulary worksheets, and discussion questions used by the researcher throughout the semester to help the students' comprehension in the group reading instruction. Students were also encouraged to borrow graphic novels from a small library the researcher had carefully selected for the purpose of the study (Lamanno, 2007).

Despite the enthusiasm of the participants, who purported to have become fans of graphic novels and indicated that they would be reading more of this format in the future, they checked out few or none of the graphic novels available at the time of the study. At one point during the study the researcher felt it necessary to provide behavior modification or incentives such as candy and gift certificates to garner participation, although the researcher did not make it mandatory for increased effort on the part of the subject to receive the incentive. Lamanno (2007) felt that rewards at this age level would

have been more successful than intrinsic motivation. These findings bring into question the use of the graphic novel as a successful motivator for reading material. In fact, throughout the study it appeared as though the students were more interested in the social camaraderie than the actual intervention itself. Many of the students seemed to be happy to just be part of the group.

For the tests regarding reading comprehension there was little gain for students; in fact, a few student's scores were shown to decrease. In particular, one test, looking for the same type of data showed an increase in the correct number of items but at the same time showed an increase in the number answered incorrectly. Of these students, the students who scored higher were also the students who began the study with stronger reading skills and these were the students who were more likely to show greater gains throughout the testing process (Lamanno, 2007). The results for the student's oral reading fluency scores also remained stagnant and one student actually decreased in fluency.

In the beginning of the study Lamanno (2007) felt that the high school students should be able to comprehend material at nothing less than a sixth grade reading level. However, throughout the study students expressed frustration with the text being too difficult. Students became frustrated with others regarding the amount of time it took them to read the text in a group setting. Lamanno (2007) shared their frustration and felt that the students were not able to read the selections with a high degree of accuracy; and that the graphic novels targeted towards high school students contained vocabulary that was far too difficult for persons with severe reading problems.

For the most part, graphic novels were largely unsuccessful in aiding readers with severe problems in reading. Graphic novels did not show improvements in

comprehension or oral fluency and perhaps the most disappointing finding; they did not increase the motivation of the student to read.

Summary

While there have been conflicting reports on the effects of pictures and readers; the literature reviewed here, when taken in its entirety seemed to share certain conclusions. Rice and Doan (1981) did indeed find that pictures slow the reader but that the readers benefitted by increased comprehension of the material. Denburg (1976) indicated that the picture must be accurate to the text and not misguide the reader with added details. Overall, it was found that pictures can decrease the amount of frustration for the beginning reader and enhance their reading skills and increase fluency.

Reinking, Hayes and McEneaney (1988) extended this knowledge when they looked at middle school students' use of graphic aids in text books. They found that while these items where included to enhance the text or present it in another context for the students to gain more meaning, some paid little or no attention to them. When poor readers and good readers where reminded to use them it improved both groups comprehension of the text.

With the benefits of illustrations firmly established Sulzbys' (1985) studies exhibited the process of how the emergent reader uses the illustrations of the picture story book in different stages to become readers. These studies further established Denburg's (1976) research of how the reader (trades off) from taking just what information they need from the picture to decode the text. Sulzby (1985) was able to further demonstrate these stages by looking at each separate age group from two to four and was able to place

them in the hierarchy with the first stage as just (reading) the picture and the end result of this process becoming reading the actual text.

When the illustrations of comics were used with ESL learners to increase reading comprehension the effects were not found to have the same level of success for all students. The students who benefited the most were the students who were the poor readers and who received the more difficult text with the comic strip. Most surprising was the finding that the good readers scored the same with or without the aid of a comic strip (Liu, 2004). Arlin and Roth (1978) had a somewhat different finding for comic books. These researchers found that comic books did not increase the reading comprehension of poor readers, who appeared to gain more from the traditional text in this study. What's more, the illustrations of the comics did not increase the amount of time the subject spent on the text.

Ujiie and Krashen (1996) found that when examining reading habits across the social classes there was no difference in the amount of comic books read. Of even more interest, it was found that the students who did read comics simply read more books overall than their classmates. Heisler (1947) also found that comic book readers came from many different socioeconomic backgrounds and that these students were no more or less intelligent than students who did not read comic books, nor did they differ in maturity level. In addition, Hiesler did not find that the comic books helped the students in language or reading skills.

Wilson and Shaffer (1965) observed that when children were presented with a choice of material to learn scientific information they chose a text book over a comic strip. Alvermann et al. (2007) more recently showed that struggling readers voluntarily

read directions, song lyrics, internet, video games and billboard advertisements. The most common reason for reading was that "someone had recommended a reading material and it sounded interesting." Aarnoutse and Van Leeuwe (1998) found that simply reading for large amounts of time will not increase reading achievement; that what one reads, is just as important, if not more important, as how much one reads. Furthermore, Lamanno (2007), in one of the few studies actually conducted with graphic novels, found that graphic novels were largely unsuccessful in motivating readers and building reading comprehension.

There have been conflicting findings as to whether or not illustrations help the comprehension of the more mature reader and if they serve as sufficient motivation to read. As students reach the fifth grade and their reading frequency steadily declines materials that entice and promote reading comprehension and fluency must be found.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Graphic novels are often promoted to young readers by well- meaning public librarians, teachers and teacher librarians. This study explored the graphic novel reading experience for young readers in order to gain insight into the considerations librarians might take as they advise young readers regarding graphic novels.

This study followed the protocol of a multiple case study. Wildemuth (2009) defines a case study as "a description of a particular situation or event. The description of the case serves as a learning tool, providing a framework for a single case or set of cases" (p. 51). In order to meet the criteria for this type of study it was important that the researcher establish him or herself as part of the natural setting. To accomplish this goal the researcher invited fourth through sixth grade children to participate in a graphic novel club at the local public library.

Young readers in the community were already familiar with researcher in this particular role within the library, thereby promoting a more authentic experience for the student. The information regarding the meeting dates and times were given to the library's marketing staff member for promotion. In the first meeting, the researcher solicited four volunteers to participate in the study, and asked parents to sign a consent form. The group met for six weeks; only the volunteers arrived early for interviews with the researcher so that their responses could be recorded. The responses sought were guided by these questions:

1. What is the nature of the reader's engagement with the graphic novel?

2. To what extent do these readers interpret meaning from both the text and the graphics?

3. In what ways do these readers apply inference to make meaning of the graphic novel?

4. What implications do the reading behaviors of these readers have for reader's advisory?

Finally, the results were categorized according to themes in search of factors teachers and librarians should consider when recommending graphic novels to young readers.

Justification

The researcher chose this methodology in order to examine the young reader's experience in reading graphic novels. Case study research provides the opportunity to describe in depth a phenomenon. As a participant observer, the researcher became an insider and experiences the situation firsthand, from the same viewpoint as the participant (Creswell, 2008).

Population

This study's target population was four fourth through sixth grade students willing to attend a local public library book club. This library served a community of 68,387 residents: 81.61% White, 13.86% African American, 0.22% Native American, 0.85% Asian, 0.05% Pacific Islander, 1.44% other, 1.97% biracial and Latino 2.63%" The majority of the community population were blue collar, and the setting was centrally located within the Midwest agricultural markets (Community A Fact Sheet, 2009). The library's location made it easily accessible for those students residing in the downtown

area. For this reason, the library was a popular hangout for students of all ethnic backgrounds. Approval was sought from the Institutional Research Board at the University of Northern Iowa for human subject participation by members of this population.

Limitations

One criticism of the case study method is the "lack of generalizablity" (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 55). No random sample is drawn to represent the population; the focus is on a few individuals to inform exploration into a contemporary phenomenon, in this case the graphic novel. In this study, four children were observed, and it is possible that they may not have been representative of their peers' reading habits. Further, the researcher did not isolate a particular behavior, but rather described in depth the behavior of the four participants. This method generated large amounts of descriptive data to be organized, categorized and analyzed. Finally, the role of the researcher as a participant observer was a limitation for this study. This researcher's training as an educator, experience in libraries and status as a parent have influenced perspectives on reading materials and reading motivation. This raised awareness of what to look for in quality reading material. It also increased the researcher's awareness of the frustrations and joys of motivating readers. The researcher was vigilant that these values, assumptions and biases served to help identify and describe the behavior of participants and not to influence it or record it in such a way to misrepresent the children's reading behavior.

Data Collection

One concern in qualitative research was researcher bias. Triangulation of data collection was one strategy to increase the validity of the research (Wildemuth. 2009). A

common method of triangulation is to identify multiple data sources that can be used to verify findings. In this study, data sources included videotaped interviews of children, researcher notes during observation of children during the discussion groups, children's written reading reflections, and a questionnaire for parents (See Appendix A). The researcher collected data by individually videotaping the children during an interview relating to the selected graphic novels. The researcher reviewed the recording and noted observations about children's interaction with the text. Study participants were interviewed three times by the researcher; researcher observations of the interviews were recorded ex post facto (See Appendix B). Children were interviewed at each meeting using an information interview technique. Interviews focused on asking children to relate the story, to share inferences about character motivation and plot events, and to describe how they used the text and the graphics to understand the story and the characters. At the end of each graphic novel reading experience, children wrote a reflection on the book describing their reaction to the book and the experience of reading it. During the first interview children were asked first to describe their reading habits and the results will be recorded. Parents will also be asked to respond to a questionnaire of the child's reading patterns (See Appendix A).

Procedures

Four study volunteers were sought from a graphic novel club. The members of the club were assembled through promotional materials and distributed through the Marketing Manager of the local public library. The parents of the volunteers were asked to sign a consent form; these same parents were then asked to complete a questionnaire on their child's reading patterns. The researcher then distributed the graphic novel

reading material and arranged meeting dates and times for the next six weeks. Those participating in the study were asked to arrive prior to the meeting time on three separate occasions to complete individual interviews with the researcher. During the first interview each participant was asked to describe his or her reading patterns. At subsequent interviews, the participants were asked the following questions in reference to specific graphic novel texts being read by the group:

1. What caught your attention on this page (referring to a particular page)?

2. Did the words or the picture tell you the story?

3. What did it tell you about what will happen next (referring to specific predetermined frame)?

4. Did you ever want or need to look at a page again?

5. As the author was there anything you would have done differently? The same?

6. When you begin a graphic novel where do you start?

Students also submitted a written reflection describing their reaction to the book and their experience reading it. If they had not already done so, they were asked to write it at this time. When the rest of the graphic novel group arrived the book discussion began.

This researcher studied the videos looking for particular patterns or themes throughout the data. This researcher payed particular attention to themes relating to the research questions, however, unexpected themes were also recorded. The questions from the interview, results from the questionnaire and the written reflection were compared. The researcher organized information from the data sources of each of the four cases according to themes. When the research was completed, the participants' video recordings were erased.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Children's Background

This study examined four cases; each case represents one volunteer reader from the public library graphic novel discussion group. Parents of the four volunteer readers were asked to describe the reading habits of their child. Grace was described as a reader who loved to read before bed and in the car. Her reading material of preference was the chapter book. Her parent reported that she was required to read 20 minutes a night but frequently read more than asked and generally read more than one book a time. Her parent believed she had great comprehension skills. Madison's parent also described her as a reader whose main reading material included email, chapter books and occasionally nonfiction. t was reported that Madison read mainly for personal enjoyment and had demonstrated a good understanding of what she had read. Madison also enjoyed reading before bed.

Bob was described as being an excellent reader at a very early age; he enjoyed reading: chapter books, graphic novels, nonfiction and biographies. Bob was reported to read for personal enjoyment and school without any prompting. He is also able to describe what he is reading in great detail.

Tom was not described as a reader; his parent felt that he did not enjoy learning to read, and it was difficult for him. In second grade, he was able to identify a genre he enjoyed and would then read if it was a subject that interested him, otherwise prompting was necessary. Tom preferred adventure, mythology, nonfiction, and comics and his

parents did feel that he had a good understanding of what he read although he was not always able to present a good summary in written form.

Description of Graphic Novels Selected

The first title selected was *The Stonekeeper (Amulet Book 1)* by Kazu Kibuishi. This was a dark story that began with a tragic car accident. Emily and her parents were on their way to pick up her brother Navin from a friend's house when the accident occurred and the father dies when the car fell over the side of a cliff. The financially strapped mother relocated the family to their great-grandfather's abandoned home. It was here where their mother was kidnapped and taken to a strange, dark alternate world called Alledia. Emily and Navin set out to rescue their mother with the help of Miskit, Cogsley, a couple of robots and a very powerful amulet.

For the second title, the children split up into groups, the girls selected *Yotsuba&!* by Kiyohiko Azuma. Yotsuba was an energetic, green-haired little girl who baffled the neighbors with her lack of knowledge in commonly found objects. These items included swings, air conditioners, door bells and cicadas. This humorous story included her father and an uncle named "Jumbo" who tried their best to keep Yotsuba out of trouble and explain the world to her. Future installments of this title explain Yotsuba's lack of cultural knowledge.

The second title chosen by the boys was *Out from Boneville (Bone Book 1)* by Jeff Smith. This story was centered around three cousins who were exiled out of their town for carrying out unethical schemes on the unsuspecting town folk. Each character's shape vaguely resembled a bone and went by the names of Fone Bone, Phoney Bone, and Smiley Bone. This story was told in the style of a jumbled fairytale. The Bones became

separated in their adventure, as they stumbled their way through a mystical valley where they come across a dragon, a princess named Thorn, baby possums, a grandmother called Gran'ma Ben who aided them in their quest to reunite and return home. In order to accomplish this task they battled and defeated the multitudes of evil rat creatures. In spite of their victory, the appearance of a dark spector left readers with a sense of foreboding for future installments.

The final book selected was *The Unsinkable Walker Bean.* This story was about an unlikely hero who set out on a seafaring adventure to save his grandfather from a curse. The plot of this book was part *Odyssey* and part *Pirates of the Caribbean.* Walker Bean the main character needed to return a pearlized skull to lift the curse that sentenced his grandfather to a deadly illness. He fought deadly pirates and strange creatures that were half lobster, half witch, with gadgets, gizmos and a little help from his friends, Shiv and Genoa.

Reviewing the Data

The researcher reviewed the data by content analysis and searched for themes that emerged in the children's responses. Due to the amount of data generated, these responses were also categorized by title. The themes that emerged were Inferential Thinking, Linear/Nonlinear Reading, Critical Reading, Text or Graphic Reliance, Choosing to Read, and Background Knowledge. Many of the same themes occurred in each text, but not always. Table 1 summarizes the themes that emerged from the first book, *The Stonekeeper.*

The Stonekeeper

As shown in Table 1 all four children engaged in inferential thinking when reading *The Stonekeeper*. Specifically, all four children felt the amulet was not just trying to help but had its own purposes; it was trying to control the main character "Emily" and was seeking more power. Bob thought the amulet might be trying to gain power over Alledia, a fictional alternate world in the graphic novel. Tom, Madison and Grace agreed that Emily was angry with the amulet and blamed it for her mother's coma. Grace also surmised that Emily was probably scared and conflicted on whether or not she should have listened to her brother.

Table 1

The Stonekeeper

	Bob	Grace	Madison	Tom
Parent Description	Reader	Reader	Reader	Occasional Reader
InferentialThinking				
		The amulet is calling to Emily		Worried about the risk of the harpoon injuring the mother Worried about trusting the marksmanship to the little boy (Navin)
	The amulet may be trying to gain power over Alledia Noticed power struggle between Emily and amulet	Emily is angry with the amulet	Emily is angry with the amulet Noticed power struggle between Emily and amulet	Emily is angry with the amulet Noticed power struggle between Emily and amulet

	Understood when vitamins were mistakenly used in place of tranquilizers	Understood when vitamins were mistakenly used in place of tranquilizers	Understood when vitamins were mistakenly used in place of tranquilizers	Understood when vitamins were mistakenly used in place of tranquilizers
		Can visualize voice of character using text and graphic		Realizes Miskit is a robot by patch on ear and plate on chest
	Relied on heavily on character's expression to tell story	Relied on heavily on character's expression to tell story Points out that one can tell by other character's faces, they don't realize they have a problem as you can with the main character	Relied on heavily on character's expression to tell story	
		The Elf Prince has an evil smile with sharp teeth, his eyes glow when he eats and he has pointy ears		

Linear/ Nonlinear Reading				
	Started with Miskit's exaggerated features, then went back	Started with Miskit's exaggerated features, then went back	Read panels carefully in order and noticed that Miskit took over the driving position	Started with Miskit's exaggerated features, then went back
	Started with test tubes, then went back			
	Stated that one must read the story in its entirety in order to comprehend it			
	Pointed out where reading too fast, one would miss important information Read page 55 to quickly and didn't understand why Emily was zapping an animal Missed some panels and did not understand how Navin got into the squid Expressed frustration with friends who read too fast and as a result lacked understanding		On one occasion felt she read too fast and then needed to reread for comprehension Reread and noticed Mom moved to side of squid to avoid getting harpooned	Felt he always read the pictures and the words well enough making rereading unnecessary

Critical Reading				
	Suggested that some graphics should have been drawn more clearly or simply, except that the amulet should have had more detail to suggest its power	Thought it was implausible that the children would have gone with a stranger	Thought Miskit's picture should not be on the cover since he is not mentioned in the prologue	Thought ghost was not essential to the plot and should removed from story
		Thought Emily should have sacrificed herself to save her brother	Suggested that the title should be centered on the cover	
		Thought it was implausible to have a walking house, there would be at least one gap resulting in flooding		
Text or Graphic Reliance				
	Felt a picture is worth a thousand words since you can tell the who, what, where and emotions			Felt pictures just slowed him down and states that words told him the story
	Used text to support the story	Demonstrated use of graphic and text in finding meaning	Felt she relied on both the words and the text for meaning, generally using the text first	Demonstrated use of graphic and text in finding meaning, despite complaint

		You can see by the eyes that he was trying to say something, but he died too soon		
Choosing to Read				
	Looks for good designs	Would stop at any point if it did not look interesting		Tries to find reasons to read more
	Looks for good vocabulary with long words and letters that make the words pop like q, x and z	Checks to see if the title is interesting	Reads blurb and middle to see if she is interested	Looking for clues to see if it is interesting
	Attempts to make connections with books he's already read	Attempts to make connections with books she's already read, including author Scans book to formulate questions and then reads for answers		Attempts to connect what he sees with what he knows Material must be accurate with what he knows

One device used by three of the children to make these inferences was to study the character's facial expressions to tell the story. Grace was able to give many examples in how she was able to use this device when making inferences in the story. For example, she felt that the Elf Prince had an evil smile, sharp teeth, pointy ears, and his eyes glowed when he ate and that this revealed something about his motivation. Grace also pointed out that in at least one panel, not all of the characters realize they had a "problem," the problem only registered on the main character's face. When she combined the

information of the graphic with the text, Grace felt that she could visualize the character's voice.

All four children understood when vitamins were used accidentally in place of tranquilizers on the creature that had kidnapped their mother. This was not an easy inference to make as one would have had to have learned this information from the graphic; it was not explicitly stated in the text. Another point that could have been easily missed, as Tom pointed out, was that Miskit was actually a robot, as indicated by the patch on his ear and plate on his chest.

The majority of the students indicated that they had not read in linear fashion. They tended to gravitate toward facial features and then went back to fill in the missing information as they had when Miskit discovered that he had used vitamins instead of tranquilizers. Despite the nonlinear reading pattern, Bob felt that it was still necessary to read the story in its entirety in order to understand it. While two of the students felt that they read too fast on occasion and needed to go back to fill in missing information, Tom explained that he always read each picture and word carefully, so that he did not need to go back and reread.

All four children exhibited that they were not passive readers and had used critical reading skills; they each had their own suggestions for making improvements upon the story. Tom would have eliminated the ghost like creature because he felt he did not contribute to the story. Grace felt it was implausible that the children would have gone with a stranger and would have changed the story to depict the children as less trusting. Another change she would have made was to have "Emily" sacrifice herself to save her brother, which she pointed out would have made the brother's job easier. Madison would

have liked to have seen Miskit's picture removed from the cover as he is not mentioned in the prologue and readers would find this confusing. She would also have placed the title in the center of the front cover because it was also confusing. Bob felt that some of the graphics were confusing and should have been more clearly drawn or simplified. He would also have made the amulet more detailed because, he did not feel that the simple drawing was indicative of its power, and he felt it was important that the reader understood this.

In the Text or Graphic Reliance theme all four students demonstrated or verbalized that they used both the text and the graphic when reading a graphic novel. Bob stated that, "A picture is worth a thousand words because you can tell the who, what, where, and emotions." All of the students noted that they used the text to support what they had learned from the graphic. Grace went on to point out where lack of text was equally telling, "You can see by the eyes that he was trying to say something, but he died too soon." Despite what Tom demonstrated, that he used text to support the graphic, at one point during the interview he lamented that "pictures just slow me down."

Interest and connections were a theme that occurred during the interviews for this title. Each child had different interests, such as design, vocabulary, and inquiry. As Bob stated, "I look for good vocabulary with long words and letters that make the words pop like q, x and z." Three of the four students also looked to make connections, either with other books, authors or information. One child not only looked to make connections with what he knew, but also wanted that information to be accurate.

Yotsuba&!

This selection was read only by the girls. In Table 2, the category of Inferential Thinking shows that both of the children were able to infer that a cicada would fly out of the open cage Yotsuba is holding. Grace took this a step further, deciding that Yotsuba must be young since "she did not know that bugs can escape."

Table 2

Yotsuba&!

	Bob	Grace	Madison	Tom
Parent Description	Reader	Reader	Reader	Occasional Reader
Inferential Thinking				
		Yotsuba opened the cage door, so the bugs will want to get out and they will Yotsuba must be young because she does not know that bugs can escape	Yotsuba opened the cage door and they were hunting cicadas, therefore a cicada may fly out	
Critical Reading				
		Thought it was funny Yotsuba didn't know what a swing was	How could Yotsuba Not know what an air conditioner is?	

		Concerned neighbor girl just walked away when Yotsuba was injured with swing	Concerned that the father called Yotsuba an idiot, why would he say that to his own daughter? Concerned that the uncle was mean to the neighbor girl, felt the uncle thought he was funny, but he was not	

Text or Graphic Reliance

		Felt words and pictures told her the story Eyes show that she is in the "zone," focused and ready to go The text states, "I'll get one now"	Felt words and pictures told her the story In this story felt she relied more on the words Inferred Yotsuba&! and uncle were ready to catch cicadas	

Background Knowledge

		Unfamiliar with word cicada	Unfamiliar with word cicada	
		Confused by title, Yotsuba&!, so investigated further to find an explanation	Unfamiliar with word hayaa	

		Began reading slow because she was not used to reading manga, as she became more comfortable she was able to read faster	Did not understand father's facial expressions, wondered if father was mad at Yotsuba	
			Noticed the large size of the uncle in panel wondered if the rectangles placed in graphic were to draw the eye to the action, punctuated with "Bam, Bam" in text	

Critical reading was a theme also found among readers of this title. Both girls thought it was odd that Yotsuba did not know what some commonly found objects were, such as a swing and air conditioner. Both children were also upset by a few interactions in the story line. For example, when Yotsuba is hit by a swing the neighbor just let her walk away, without making sure she was alright. In another instance, the father called Yotsuba an idiot. In yet another instance, Madison felt that the uncle was mean to the neighbor girl as she put it "he thought he was funny, but he was not."

In the Text or Graphic Reliance theme both children had similar statements, although, Grace was more articulate. She pointed out that Yotsuba's eyes showed that she was in the "zone, focused and ready to go." She then pointed out that the text supported this idea where, it read "I'll get one now." This referenced Yotsuba and the neighbor girl cicada hunting. Yotsuba became discouraged when the neighbor turned out to be an accomplished cicada hunter and Yotsuba's small stature made it difficult for her.

Background knowledge was a new theme that emerged in this selection. Both children were unfamiliar with the word cicada and had difficulty in figure it out from the clues in the story. Madison also had trouble with the word hayaa. Yotsuba&! had been the only Manga selection; due to Grace's lack of familiarity with this type of selection, she felt that she had to begin reading slowly, but that as she became more comfortable she read faster. Grace had trouble interpreting the father's facial expressions and had difficulty in understanding the story because of this. However, in the Manga style she determined that the rectangles placed at different points on the uncle in the graphic were meant to draw the eye to the action, and hypothesized that the "Bam, Bam" found in text punctuated this action.

Out From Boneville

This selection was read by only the boys. As with the other titles Inferential Thinking was found to be a theme. Both children explained examples of symbolism to the researcher. Bob felt that Kingdok carried a spiked club, because as he put it, "the leader always carries a symbol of his power." Tom pointed out another instance, he felt that the cloaked figure holding a scythe symbolized "someone is going to die." Tom also asserted that Kingdok's large size, small arms, big face, stooped posture and large legs like a tyrannosaurus rex, meant that "he must be more scary and dangerous than the rest."

Table 3

Out From Boneville

	Bob	Grace	Madison	Tom
Parent Description	Reader	Reader	Reader	Occasional Reader
Inferential Thinking				
	Looked for symbolism in the illustration			Looked for symbolism in the illustration
	Explained that the leader always carries a symbol of his power and Kingdok must be the leader because of the spiked club he carried			Felt cloaked figure with scythe symbolized someone was going to die
	Stated that it is obvious that an attack is going to happen tonight, when referring to illustration			Kingdok is really big with small arms, a big face, stooped posture and large legs like a tyrannosaurus rex, he must be more scary and dangerous than the rest
	Explained that Rat creatures either have really good eyesight or bad as indicated by their large eyes			Rat creatures are like gorilla type things
	Stated rat creatures leave behind desolation, referring to an illustration			Explained that you can tell a lot about a character by their facial expressions and/or sweat on a creature: "Man I'm tired, or hot, or sad"

Linear/ Nonlinear Reading			
	Reinforced by rereading Was surprised to see Smiley as the bartender wanted to verify Smiley did get the job			Reinforced by rereading Interested in the appearance of the dragon also wondered why it had fluffy ears, lack of scales and head like a horse
Text or Graphic Reliance			
	Felt he relied slightly more on the words in this book, explained text/graphic reliance depended upon story			Relied more on the pictures to tell the story, used words to verify his interpretation
Choosing to Read			
	Read because he liked others in the series			Reads because he makes a connection with a chapter book he has read
	Read because something didn't distract his attention			Reads because something has attracted his attention
	Looked at the cover for two minutes for something that looked weird and would cause him not to read			

The Linear/Nonlinear Reading theme emerged in *Out From Boneville.* Both

children indicated that they reread for reinforcement. For example Bob was surprised to

see that Smiley found a job as a bartender, so he reread to reinforce that notion. Tom was

surprised that a dragon appeared and reread to find out why it had fluffy ears, no scales

and a head like a horse. In the theme of Text or Graphic Reliance Bob felt he relied more

heavily on the text or graphic differently in each graphic novel. In this selection Tom felt

he relied more on the graphic and used the text to verify his interpretation.

Both students reported similar reasons for Choosing to Read. They each read

because they made connections to other books. While Tom also looked for something

that attracted his attention, Bob looked for something that didn't distract his attention or

something that turned him off of that particular book.

The Unsinkable Walker Bean

Inferential Thinking was a strong theme that emerged in *The Unsinkable Walker

Bean.* The majority of the children felt that the sphere in the chest had a purpose and was

meant to direct the characters in some way. Later in the story a panel shows an

illumination on the wall that, for the most part, looked like speckles across the panel. All

the students these speckles were significant and were some type of message or map. Half

of the students inferred that an ornate bottle in the chest meant that a "message need to be

sent."

Table 4

The Unsinkable Walker Bean

	Bob	Grace	Madison	Tom
Parent Description	Reader	Reader	Reader	Occasional Reader
Inferential Thinking				
	Noticed sphere in Walker Bean's treasure chest had a "particular" design, thought it might be significant	Wonders the purpose of the sphere		Felt the sphere in Walker Bean's treasure chest must be some kind of map

	Noticed the text with the graphic indicated the treasure chest was pressurized		Realizes that a gas is escaping from the chest, but is unsure of its meaning	
	Page 55 last panel, thought illumination on wall may be a map of the stars "leading" the characters and "showing them their final destination" to answer their questions	Page 55 last panel, thought illumination on wall "looks like stars, the thing is like a globe," felt this meant something significant was going to happen	Page 55 last panel thought illumination were stars meant to send a message of encouragement and instruct the characters to go on a long journey	Page 55 last panel thought illumination on wall meant that the characters would follow the stars and by doing so their questions would be answered
		Noticed the bottle on page 54, felt it meant "write me back"		Noticed the bottle on page 54, felt it indicated that a message must be sent
Linear/ Nonlinear Reading				
	Reviewed due to interest Reread page 47 to learn more about what was happening, story posed questions making him curious			Reviewed due to interest Reread page with two witches, felt it was interesting that they both had lobster bodies and were on glowing bones
		Reasons to reread Reread because she was confused as to why they threw out a character for listening to a story	Reasons to reread Felt the story was "not messy" so she did not need to reread	

		Reread because she was confused as to why a character would want to go to Mango Island	Reiterated that she is a "slow reader," she studied each picture carefully so she did not need to review	
Critical Reading				
	Felt the flashback and flash forward could be confusing to some readers who do not read carefully			Felt the flashback and flash forward could be confusing to some readers who do not read carefully
Text or Graphic Reliance				
	Felt he relied more on the words in this selection	Felt she relied more on the pictures in this selection	Felt she relied more on the pictures in this selection	Felt he relied more on the words for this story
	Utilized the words and graphic If there were no words on page 35 in the first panel, you wouldn't know what Walker Bean was screaming at you However, he did use the picture to determine what the "situation is like" and where they were Explained that you need both the words and picture to know what is happening and what they are saying	Stated that 1 out of 5 pages she relied on the words		However, explained that he looked at the pictures first and then let the words explain the story

Choosing to Read				
	Felt graphics in this novel were interesting	When deciding to read this title Grace reviewed the title, blurb and a few selected pages. Despite being turned off by the title and first page, made the decision to read on based the blurb in the front of the book and went on to enjoy the story.	When deciding to read Madison reads a couple of pages to see if she relates to it, asks herself if she likes it, if it fits her mood and if it is what she is looking for today?	When deciding to read this title, Tom just started reading because he thought it looked "really interesting"
			Made statement: "Does this book fit? It is just like a pair of shoes."	
Background Knowledge				
	Recognized name Daedalus and recalled some facts previously known about this person and wanted to read more Had prior knowledge of Brian Selznick and trusted his recommendation on the front cover to read the book	Did not make connection to "Bean" as a last name, turned her off as a potential reader because the title didn't make sense	Points to a fictional place "I could tell it was a place because of the comma, like with a city and state."	Explained that he made a connection to prior knowledge of the north star and that is how he knew the illumination was a map

In regard to the theme of Linear/Nonlinear Reading the young readers expressed

the same reason for a nonlinear reading pattern. When they reread they were looking for

more information, either because they were interested or because they had incomplete

information to understand the story. Madison made the comment that she did not need to

reread because the "story was not messy" and reiterated that she was a "slow reader and

read carefully" so she did not need to review. Tom and Bob had similar comments to Madison that fell into the Critical Reading theme. The children were concerned that some readers who do not read carefully may be confused when Walker Bean flashes back into the past and then flashes forward into the future.

In the Text or Graphic Reliance theme, all of the children exhibited or stated that they relied on the pictures for background information then the text for supporting information. As Bob stated "I used the picture to determine what the situation is like and where they were." He went on to explain to the researcher that even with this information "If there were no words on page 35 in the first panel, you wouldn't know what Walker Bean is screaming at you." The word incidentally was "Pirates!"

When Choosing to Read all of the children had definite ideas on why they did so. The majority of the answers centered around interest. However, Madison's were more complex. She first read a few pages to see if she related to it, asked herself if she liked it, did it fit her mood, and was she looking for today? Her final statement was "Does this book fit? It is just like a pair of shoes."

The final theme that emerged in *The Unsinkable Walker Bean* was Background Knowledge. Each of these children made connections to things they already knew in order to make sense of the story. Bob in particular made an interesting connection to the name Daedalus and recalled what he already knew; this led him to search for commonalities between the character in the book and the mythological character from Greek writings. He felt that there must be a reason the character was given this particular name.

Recurring Themes

Two themes reoccurred throughout all four graphic novels, these themes were Inferential Thinking and Text or Graphic Reliance. Overall, the children had quite a lot to say about what they "understood" from each graphic novel and how they went about gathering the information from "Text or Graphic Reliance." In only *Out From Boneville* did the students not make any "Critical Reading" comments. Likewise, *The Stonekeeper* was the only title where the students did not make any comments on "Choosing to Read." It was of interest to this researcher that *Yotsuba&!* and *The Unsinkable Walker Bean* were the only titles where the theme "Background Information" emerged.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Problem

Web sites, magazine articles, books and even summer library programs promote graphic novels as a cure all for children who struggle to read or who are simply uninterested in reading. The stories reliance on pictures makes this format appealing to teachers and librarians who assume this makes reading easier or more palatable.

This research sought to explore the graphic novel reading experience for young readers to ascertain (1) the nature of their understanding of the graphic novel; (2) their tendency to draw inference and interpretation from text and graphic; (3) their reliance on text, graphic, or both in interpreting meaning. This researcher conducted a case study looking for insight into these elements of the reading experience for young readers with the intent to qualify the appropriateness of recommending these texts to children.

Methodology

Four volunteers were sought from a graphic novel club at a local public library. Parents of the volunteers were asked to complete a survey of their child's reading habits. Each child was interviewed three times using questions included in Appendix B with the same set of questions and three separate graphic novels. The children wrote summaries for each of the graphic novels read.

Findings

The students had definite ideas about what they were looking for in reading material, graphic novels in particular, and were surprisingly articulate about making their needs known. In some cases, the children volunteered information relating to a research

question with little or no probing by the investigator. Research questions and emerging themes frequently intertwined, further supporting the notion that reading is a high level skill where it is difficult to separate one aspect for study. For that reason themes that emerged during this study are interwoven between headings and may not be exclusive to that particular heading.

Engagement

The first research question was "What is the nature of the reader's engagement with the graphic novel?" All four children completed the three graphic novel selections. Given Lamanno's (2007) difficulty in gathering research data simply because the students did not read the material, this indicated that the students were interested in the material. The children were also able to respond to all six of the interview questions posed to them. This also indicated the extent of their involvement with the format, as Smith and Wilhelm (2002) found boys made the decision to continue reading in the first few pages. Not only did the children of this study read, but they continued to read each selection in its entirety. Each child seemed to make a personal investment in the characters indicating this by worrying about their safety or taking issue with the way a character was treated. For example, Madison pointed out where the father called Yotsuba an idiot, "Why would someone say that to his own daughter?" Tom worried about the possibility of the harpoon injuring the mother with a little boy (Navin) as the marksman in *The Stonekeeper*. Grace made many comparisons and contrasts with how she would have handled certain situations. The other children made comparisons as well, but none to the same extent as Grace.

When asked where they would start to read a graphic novel nearly all of the children looked through the book and pointed to connections they had made in the reading material to things they knew or identified. For example, Bob made a connection with Daedalus, "I knew some things about the guy, and I wanted to read more." Tom agreed, "...trying to connect what I see to what I know." This draws together three different themes that occurred during the current study: Inferential Thinking, Background Knowledge, and Critical Reading. In regard to the readers' engagement, it seemed that the readers were continually making connections with what they knew (Background Knowledge) to what they had read in order to make inferences. It may be possible that the reason the theme Background Knowledge emerged in *Yotsuba&!* is that it was the first Manga that these children had read. It may be that they were unfamiliar with the Japanese culture and style of art. This may explain why Madison failed to find certain passages humorous and had difficulty in interpreting some facial expressions. *The Unsinkable Walker Bean* was another selection that had many references to historical culture which may account for the theme's emergence here as well. It seemed that once the inference was made, the child then thought critically about the information, and if they were unable to connect this to background knowledge on the subject, it was difficult for them to make an inference. Connections and interest gain importance in the discussion of readers' advisory.

This is of particular interest when considering the 1996 findings of Ujiie and Krashen's that among students who read more comic books, most also did more reading for pleasure and in general read more books. Another difference in the success between these students and those of the Lamanno (2007) study was that the students of her study

were unable to read the selections with a high degree of accuracy. All of the students in the current study were able to demonstrate a high degree of understanding and two of them verbalized how they determined that these books were appropriate. Bob looked for "…good vocabulary – long words, letters that make the words pop like z, q and x." Madison summarized, "Does this book fit? It is just like a pair of shoes..." This observation may indicate the sophistication of the readers in this study.

All of the children at some point went back to reread certain panels or pages to fill in missing information as recorded in the Linear/Nonlinear theme. This behavior suggested that the children were interacting with the text. This idea is supported by the work of Rosenblatt who believes that "meaning does not reside in the written word or in the reader, instead, the text and reader come together to create a poem, a new meaning" (Mills, Stephens, O'Keefe and Waugh, 2004, p. 48). This idea was further reinforced by the children looking for connections in their possible reading material. "Children may comprehend the text in similar ways, but they will necessarily interpret it in personal ways" (Mills, Stephens, O'Keefe, and Waugh, 2004, p. 48). Rosenblatt (1985) posited that the reader cannot be studied in isolation from the text when she described: "a particular reading act as an event involving a particular individual and a particular text, happening at a particular time, under particular circumstances, in a particular social and cultural stetting, and as part of the ongoing life of the individual…" (p. 100). Madison summed her decision-making succinctly when she stated "I read a couple of pages to see if I relate to it, do I like it, does it fit my mood, is it this what I'm looking for today?" Research suggested that there are many variables when choosing reading material for

others or even oneself. When making recommendations one must take great care in selecting material that has an intimate personal connection with the reader.

Text or Graphic Reliance

Research question 2 sought to determine "To what extent did these readers interpret meaning from both the text and the graphic?" The children of this study overwhelmingly reported the insight they were able to extract from the characters facial expressions. These images also gave them clues for what details to look for in the story, "I noticed that Miskit's eyes are huge, so then I looked to see why" (Bob). Despite some claims of the children that they depended on the words, this researcher noticed that during explanations they first referred to the picture and then followed up with the text. As Tom mentioned, "I looked at the picture first and then let the words explain their meaning." This may not be entirely accurate, as the text may not have been redundant to the picture, but may have played more of a supporting role. Tom appeared to have been inherently searching for comprehension and was able to use the words and picture interdependently. This supports Rice and Doan's (1981) finding that if one is intending to build the speed of a reader, illustrations are not of use, but if the goal was to aid in comprehension, illustrations may prove themselves useful. Tom, a reader when interested, complained that" pictures just slow me down." Despite his complaint, during the interviews he demonstrated a heavy reliance on the graphics, as did the rest of the children. As Bob stated "So a picture is worth a thousand words, you can tell where, what, who and emotions." These children did not seem to fit the profile of the subjects in Reinking, Hayes and McEneaney's 1981 study where the students needed prompting to use the graphic included. However, the current study findings seem to correspond with

Sulzby's (1985) classification scheme through which emerging readers ascend, the first step being the reader describing the picture. Sulzby's study was important because it demonstrated how children use picture books to develop their reading skills. Reinking et al. (1988) found that poor readers benefited by using graphic aids in recalling information. This research suggested that the children instinctually looked for supporting information. Recall Bob's words "If you weren't good at reading expressions you could read the words to support." For this to work, it was essential for the words to be redundant to the illustration. This may help explain why Lamanno's (2007) work with graphic novels as a motivator for reluctant readers was unsuccessful. Despite Lamanno's care taken in the selection of the reading material, both the students and the researcher felt they could not read the graphic novels with a high degree of accuracy. Despite the low reading level of the selections, they did contain difficult vocabulary for persons with severe reading problems. Lamanno's findings further suggest that graphic novels are not simplified reading material to be used carelessly with the emerging or struggling reader. Of the participants in the current study described by their parents as readers, half of them voiced concerns about not knowing words and in one case frustration at having the word covered with a graphic. These students explained how they used learned strategies for deciphering the word, not just reading the picture. This need was further evidenced by the need of the children to read in a nonlinear fashion in order to fill in missing information. Nonlinear reading is a complex process that if needed to be simplified to ease frustration of the reader could be done with redundancy in the text and graphic to aid in comprehension as suggested by Liu's 2004 research. If this were done, would graphic novels retain their essence?

Inferencing

Miller (2005) stated

> "Comic art is a unique storytelling method that uses text and images to express the mood and action of story. These draw the reader into the story visually. Just like a text based book, comics require active participation by the reader. With a graphic novel, however, the reader must make inferences and associations between words and pictures in order to understand the story. From an educational viewpoint, this can be a benefit" (p. 2).

This is a bold statement by Miller and this researcher sought to determine the truth of this statement, (research question 3) In what ways do these readers apply inference to make meaning of the graphic novel? The level of meaning these children were able to make from fairly sophisticated graphic novels was sophisticated. As noted, they were able to infer a great deal simply from the facial expressions of the characters. Further, they were able to tell that the nondescript charm that occasionally glowed, as Bob stated "has its own purposes, it doesn't just want what Emily wants and it wants more than she wants" in *The Stonekeeper* by Kazu Kibuishi. Another sophisticated inference was the motivation of the character by characteristics as Grace pointed out "character has an evil smile and eyes ...the character's teeth are sharp and his eyes light up when he eats and he has pointy ears."

The children of this study stressed the importance of making connections with their reading material. This preference suggested that just graphic novel or not, they did not want an easy read. These students wanted to be challenged by the graphics, but not confused by messy or unclear words and images. In other words they did not want to make "easy" inferences they wanted to interact and "interpret it in a personal way" (Mills et al., 2004, p. 48).

Readers' Advisory Implications

Finally, the fourth research question was what implications did the reading behaviors of these readers have for reader's advisory? An unanticipated theme that continually emerged throughout the study was Choosing to Read. This theme emerged when the children were asked "When you begin to read a graphic novel where do you start?" Two key words that recurred were *interest* and *connections*.

The readers in this study did not need help inferencing, help with comprehension, or motivation to read. They were, however, demanding readers and self-aware readers; they knew what they liked, they knew what they wanted, they knew their mood, and they knew their own abilities. Aaronoutse and Van Leeuwe (1998) replicated earlier research that showed what children read outside of school has no bearing on their comprehension skill. The current research found that these students knew what they were ready to take on and continued to make connections and inferences despite the "pretty pictures."

When recommending reading material it would be tempting to profile the potential reader. Heisler (1974) cautioned against making these snap judgments. His research indicated that age, intelligence, socioeconomic class, nor personality would be useful in identifying a comic book reader. Gender was also not an indicator; the number of girls who signed up for the graphic novel club in this study slightly outnumbered the boys. This is supported by the research of Wilson and Shaffer (1965) who found 36% of the boys and 40% of the girls, when given the option, chose their scientific information in the comic book format.

These findings suggest that just as with any other format, it is important to get to know the reader when recommending graphic novels. The readers' advisory interview is

essential to their successful promotion. One must ask "What are the needs of the user? What do they like? What is their mood?" Aaronoutse and Van Leeuwne (1998) found that if this reader is looking for increased comprehension, the text must be redundant to the picture. As Lamanno (2007) found, to date this is difficult to find in a graphic novel. Perhaps, with Miller's (2005) interpretation of how the reading transaction takes place with a graphic novel this is not even possible. If, as Miller states, that the "reader must make inferences and associations between the words and pictures in order to understand the story" it may be possible that if we undertook the task to rewrite the graphic novels to aid in comprehension, they would lose the very essence of what makes them interesting?

Aarnoutse and VanLeeuwe (1998) found a strong correlation between reading attitude, reading pleasure and reading frequency. Librarians need to trust the reader, have a two-way conversation, find out what it is that they are looking for and trust that they know what they need. The overall scores in Aaronutse and VanLeeuwe's research showed that the reading pleasure remained constant over the five years they were in the study, but that their reading frequency steadily declined. Graphic novels may be of use when reading frequency begins to wane. Alvermann et al. (2007) found that the students read because "someone had recommended the reading material and it sounded interesting" (p. 44). What the children of this study revealed supports Alvermann' et al. findings. "Interesting" was a recurring theme throughout the research interviews, and nearly all of the children expressed that they wanted a recommendation by a trusted friend. The findings suggest that librarians, as a knowledgeable friend, need to add the graphic novel to their repertoire, with a note of caution. The level of sophistication demonstrated by the four readers in this study suggest that graphic novels can demand much of the reader and

therefore are not an easy solution particularly for non-motivated readers, but rather one option to offer in readers' advisory.

Recommendations for Further Study

Overall, the readers in this study reinforced the idea that reading a graphic novel is a transaction by their interest, connections, pattern of nonlinear reading, interpretations and inferences. These findings suggest that reading a graphic novel is not the same as reading the picture book or the graphic novel. Further the importance of inference shown in this study suggests the graphic novel may be cognitively challenging and so, not always a good choice for emerging readers or struggling readers. For the purposes of this study, the graphic novel met the needs of the reader as shown by the reading transaction that took place. Further research is necessary to determine whether graphic novels may be as good a fit for all readers.

The research indicates profiling may be too simplistic in identification of the graphic novel reader. A readers' advisory interview would help to determine if one is advising a reluctant reader who would benefit from a graphic novel or a struggling reader who may not. This study revealed the importance of background knowledge to the reader. For example, when promoting Manga some students may benefit from an introduction and cultural awareness to this type of reading material. Likewise, graphic novels including geographical, factual, or emotional information not found in the readers' schema may need to be addressed before a certain graphic novel is promoted.

The terms graphic novels and comics were not meant to be interchangeable. These are two separate entities, because graphic novel is a relatively recent publishing phenomenon, research on graphic novels with depth and rigor was rare. For this reason

the researcher had to rely on research conducted on picture books and comics for reference. Much of this research was outdated and would benefit from replication. This research becomes even more critical in our increasingly visually literate society.

The readers who participated in the current study were competent readers. A follow-up study with struggling or emergent readers would provide insight into the appeal, interest, and value of the graphic novel format for these readers. It is still unclear whether graphic novels are yet popular enough to entice the reluctant reader. An investigation into the role of coaching for assisting less capable or less motivated readers would inform the place of the graphic novel among readers. More research is needed to determine what type of reader the graphic novel fits and how the text and graphics should relate to, engage and support the reader. In short, the graphic novel is coming into its own in the publishing and library world, providing opportunities for systematic study of its appropriate place among the various formats available to young readers.

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APPENDIX A
SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE USED WITH PARTICIPANTS' PARENTS

1. What types of materials does your child read? Examples would include: chapter books, picture books, graphic novels, nonfiction, and/or email.

2. Does your child often choose to read? Do you ask your child to read?

3. Does your child read mainly for school purposes, personal enjoyment, or other reasons?

4. Do you believe that your child has a good understanding of what they have read?

5. Would you describe your child as a reader?

APENDIX B
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ASKED OF PARTICIPANTS

1. What caught your attention on this page (referring to a particular page)?

2. Did the words or the picture tell you the story?

3. What did it tell you about what will happen next (referring to specific predetermined frame)?

4. Did you ever want or need to look at a page again?

5. As the author was there anything you would have done differently? The same?

6. When you begin a graphic novel where do you start?