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Students and Graphic Novels: How Visuals Aid in Literary Term Recall and Students' Perceptions of the Tools

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STUDENTS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

Students and Graphic Novels:

How Visuals Aid in Literary Term Recall and Students' Perceptions of the Tools

By

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Supervised by

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Abstract

This study examined how graphic novels can reinforce students' understanding of literary terms and what students' perceptions of using graphic novels as a learning tool are. The research was conducted with three reading clinic students who completed pre and post unit questionnaires on the literary terms used studied, filled out a questionnaire about graphic novels, created pre and post unit creative pieces based on the literary terms and were observed for behaviors and attitudes. The findings show that using graphic novels can enhance student recall of literary terms and they are a text type students enjoy.

Teachers should use graphic novels in classrooms because they are an engaging tool that aids in students' comprehension of literary terms.

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Students and Graphic Novels: Literary Term Recall and Perceptions

Since Howard Gardner introduced the theory of multiple intelligences in 1983, education has shifted from standard practices that focus on reading and writing as one-size-fits-all to the use of hitherto ignored intelligences, such as musical, visual, and bodily-kinesthetic practices (Kellough & Kellough, 2008). The creation of this theory was a monumental step to opening the door for more learners. As educators can testify, many students struggle with more traditional teaching practices that involve reading a text or writing a paper. Implementing the multiple intelligences increases the level of students' engagement and their success in school by catering to their particular learning styles.

Visual literacy is an area of growing interest in education as many students are visual learners. Accompanying this growing interest in visual literacy are new literacies, which range from the use of rap music, television and movies, and, relevant to this study, graphic novels and comic books. The implementation of new literacies in schools, as with Gardner's multiple intelligences, is meant to engage students as well as to make education relevant to their lives. Graphic novels have become an increasingly popular textual form in American culture and have great potential for the classroom. Using such a popular textual form in schools serves multiple purposes of engaging reluctant readers, aiding students who are visual learners, relating schooling to personal lives and interests, and familiarizing students with new text formats that are growing increasingly present in society. If educators continue to ignore the needs of visual learners and disregard the powerful connection that graphic novels and comics can serve in connecting with students, they are disregarding the educational needs of students and robbing them of

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educational opportunities and enjoyment in class. Exploring the use of these materials will aid reluctant and struggling readers, connect with students who are disengaged, and help students hone skills in visual literacy. Educators will also have a valuable tool at hand to better their teaching methods, aid students, and make their classes more interesting and relevant to modern youth society.

Graphic novels and comics are a popular print source amongst adolescents and several researchers have already noted and studied the importance of using graphic novels and comics in the classroom (Bitz, 2004; McCloud, 1994, Schwarz, 2006). In this study, I looked into the benefits of using graphic novels to teach comprehension of literary terms via visual stimuli. To do so, I conducted research into how graphic novels and comics can be used to better students' learning of literary elements. I have spent three weeks working in a small group setting with three students, using a graphic novel, a comic strip, and print texts while completing various before, during, and after reading literary term comprehension strategies. During this time, I have connected the educational work we completed to a resource that the students found engagement and enjoyment in using. During our practices, I have also activated the students' visual learning and worked with them to strengthen their visual intelligence skills and apply them to print sources.

Based upon research and my own findings, the use of graphic novels and comic books can benefit students due to their multimodal format, their activation of visual literacy, and their popularity in current adolescent culture. These factors make them relevant to aid in engagement issues as well as visual literacy needs.

At the beginning of this study, I asked how teachers can use graphic novels to

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reinforce students' understandings of literary terms and then asked what were students' perceptions to the usage of graphic novels. To answer these questions, I set up a study with three students enrolled in an afterschool reading clinic that met once a week. During clinic, the students worked with a graphic novel and a comic to study the literary terms setting, characterization, and tone/mood. Though this study focuses mainly on graphic novels, comics were also researched and used minimally in the study due to their similar nature to graphic novels and their presence in classrooms. To study their recall of literary terms, the students had to give their own definition of the literary terms studied before a shared definition was created as a group. The students then used the shared definition to study the graphic novel and comic used. At the end of the study, the students were asked to recall the shared definition, using the lessons on the literary terms. The students also completed a pre and post unit assignment to determine if using the graphic novel and comic aided in literary term recall. The students were also observed and questioned about their attitudes towards graphic novels to gain insight into their perceptions of graphic novels and the use of such visual texts in class. Through the lenses of new literacies and media literacy, educators can see the value of graphic novels. New literacies propose the importance of using texts other than traditional print works in learning, such as a graphic novel that combines pictures and words, or uses only pictures to tell a story. Media literacy furthers the graphic novel cause by stating how important it is for students to be able to read different types of media, including visual based texts. As seen in the literature associated with graphic novel and comic usage in school, many students prosper using graphics as a learning tool, whether it be used to access language, enhance understanding of texts, create detailed projects, or engage reluctant readers. The findings

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of this study show that educators can use graphic novels to reinforce comprehension of literary terms and reveals that students typically enjoy working with graphic novel texts. Not only did the students' recall of literary terms generally increase from the beginning of the study, but questionnaires and behavior also revealed that the students enjoyed using the graphic text and would be willing to read one again inside or outside of class.

Theoretical Framework

Children are exposed to various forms of media daily that they must be able to 'read' and understand if they are to successfully navigate the world around them. The new medias that they interact with shape how they view and interact with the world around them. Literacy in this day and age is no longer solely about reading and writing, but now includes abilities and skills, such as fluency, phonics, and, with the advent of new technology and media, being able to navigate the different forms of writing used inside and outside of school. As our students become more dependent and proficient on technology and new media, new literacies becomes an essential part of any classroom. If educators become out of touch with the media and technology students use, they alienate the students and run the risk of making learning more difficult for them because they are not catering to the students' needs and strengths. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) state that as new literacies are created, such as new media sources or technology, educators' knowledge must also evolve to understand those new literacies. This idea of evolving pedagogy is key in educational settings today. As technology changes at such a rapid rate and students master skills to use and understand those new literacies, educators must keep pace. The archaic methods of reading a text and writing an essay no longer fit with

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students' needs; educators must understand and utilize the new literacies in order to create a useful learning environment for students. Two of those new literacies to be used in the classroom are the comic book and graphic novel, as they are popular culture staples. To utilize them in the classroom would be to bridge a gap between the students' lives inside and outside of school.

Buckingham (2003) sees an equal importance in what he has deemed 'media literacy'. He describes media as forms of communication that involve moving or nonmoving pictures, audio, or written language and states that "media literacy", is just as important for young people as the more traditional literacy of print" (2003, p.4). Media literacy entails that students will be able to read different media sources and create using those same sources. The world now uses various forms of print, images, and audio, thus literacy studies now must include how to examine the different new literacies.

Buckingham (2003) recognizes that students are "producers and consumers of media" and that as such using that media fosters "critical understanding *and* active participation" (p.4). Due to the immense exposure children have to media, theorists believe, they should be taught how to read those different media types as well as produce using the medias available (Buckingham, 2003). Buckingham (2003) continues to say that due to the "commercialization and globalization of media markets" children's experiences with media have changed from simply being viewers of media to targets of media (p.15). Media has changed in children's lives to the point that they must now critically examine the media that surrounds them as well as use it to their advantage. Graphic novels and comic books easily fall within Buckingham's (2003) definition of tools of media literacy and they are a media type gaining in popularity that already has a huge adolescent

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following. Using a media type that students already ‘consume’ would, as Buckingham (2003) states, culture active participation. There is no better motivation for students than to learn via a media source they enjoy. Also, as a media source, graphic novels and comic books promote critical understanding of the visual aspect of culture by teaching them skills to interpret and assess what they see.

Though the meaning of literacy has altered vastly in the previous years, initial literacy acquisition has essentially remained the same. The acquisition of language and literacy skills begins at an early age. Goodman (2001) describes initial written literacy as children talking about writing, which eventually leads them to identify words and begin reading. When children identify signs or print as having meaning, they are becoming literate. The reading of signs and creating meaning through that reading is an important factor to consider when children read graphic novels. Because the text relies on images as much as or more than word text, children must be attuned to visual signs and symbols and they must be able to assign meaning to those signs and symbols. To be literate in reading graphic novels and comics, students must take those same beginner steps to identifying meaning in the works they are reading. When children discuss the written word it is often, Goodman (2001) says, to ask what symbols or signs mean. They are connecting shapes with meaning, helping to construct their fledgling knowledge of print (Goodman, 2001). These same practices of asking about meaning and assigning meaning can be used with visual texts. By discussing the images present in comics and graphic novels, students can learn various symbols unique to the text format and symbols that can translate to multiple texts, written or image based. This early literacy practice of learning symbols comes prior to entering school and the more exposure children have to the print

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environment and the more they participate in literacy activities and discussions of print, the more print knowledge they will acquire. Before they enter school and begin formal learning, children who participate in such literacy events will better be able to acquire literacy skills and proficiency because they will have already been using said skills. Likewise, students who learn how to assign meaning to symbols and signs prior to entering school will be able to translate that ability to reading comics and graphic novels. In turn, as their skills grow in reading visual texts, students can re-translate their learning back to written texts.

Similarly, Heath (1982) found that, in regards to oral language, children learn to be literate by being immersed in oral language. Children's first experiences with oral literacy introduce them to the numerous structures and principles that govern the language. In her examination of children's acquisition of literacy, Otto (2008) found that as children participate in literacy activities, they learn five foundations of speech knowledge: phonetic language, semantic knowledge, syntactic knowledge, morphemic knowledge, and pragmatic knowledge. As children speak and listen to speech, they learn that sound comes from symbols, words stand for concepts, they learn the proper structure of sentences, they learn word structure, and they learn different ways of speaking in different settings (Otto, 2008). Speech knowledge can also be learned through graphic novels and comics, once children have acquired enough print knowledge to read. Within the stories of comics and graphic novels, artists and writers present various settings and situations wherein different language skills are used. Because those texts are also dialogue heavy, students can see the way language works and have a visual representation of how language can work in situations as well as how sentences can be

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properly formed. Children acquire speech skills by hearing them often and participating in different speech uses in various settings. Using graphic novels would provide students with similar experiences rooted in a visual source. Though graphic novels cannot replace actual speech usage when children first develop speaking skills, they can aid in developing those skills further as children progress in their schooling.

As researchers have found (Heath, 1982; Otto, 2008; Goodman, 2001), literacy skills are acquired by seeing and then partaking in literacy practices. Following that model, students must be schooled in the reading of media and new literacies that will teach them how to view and assess the visual media of the world around them. Reading that world requires the same skills as reading print texts and interposing those skills upon a new visual text. Students can begin their education in reading media and understanding new literacies early in their schooling by applying reading skills to visual texts, such as comics and graphic novels. Reading skills can also be enhanced by the visual tools of comics and graphic novels. The visual nature of the text can reinforce reading skills by having students employ said skills and providing them a visual source that can give them a new frame of reference to them. Like any textual form, graphic novels and comic books require knowledge of how to read them in order to understand the story and comprehend the subtle nuances in the art that enhances the story. Similar to how children acquire print knowledge, students who do not already have prior knowledge of comic books and graphic novels will need to speak about the text type and study its format to understand how to read it, and from there they will build their reading skills to garner meaning from the text. Once students have learned how to read graphic novels and comics though, they will have mastered the reading of a media source and will have available to them a new

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textual source that can enhance their reading skills.

Research Question

Based on the theories regarding the importance using new literacies and media literacy in the classroom, this study focuses on the use of graphic novels as reading tools to teach and reinforce comprehension of literary elements. Both theories point out the importance of incorporating the growing popular media in the classroom to enhance student learning and engagement. Based on the understanding that incorporating new literacies in classrooms is not only a method to engage learners, but to also enhance their reading skills, this action research project asks, “how can teachers use graphic novels to reinforce students’ understanding of literary terms and what are students’ perceptions of using graphic novels as a learning tool?”

Literature Review

The following literature review examines the various educational issues raised in studies and informative texts regarding the use of comics and graphic novels in the classroom. Though research is limited, several key points emerge in the literature. First, I will examine the multiple roles gender plays in the reception of graphic novels. Secondly, I will explore the benefits researchers have found in using comics and graphic novels with students with needs, such as students with disabilities, ELL learners, and reluctant readers. Thirdly, I will discuss the reading comprehension skills studies show students use while reading comics and graphic novels. Fourthly, I will look at the benefits of using graphic novels and comics in teaching media literacy and critical literacy. Finally, I will examine how graphic novels and comics aid in reading and writing composition using literary terms.

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Gender and Graphic Novels

Graphic novels are a unique text source that educators can use to enhance or supplement their teaching units. Their visual nature makes them ideal tools for different types of learning styles and offers a firm visual of literary concepts. Incorporating graphic novels in the classroom requires careful consideration of story, art, and appropriateness. Issues regarding gender have become increasingly hot topics in schools and teachers now find themselves looking for books that portray strong females, disregard sexist attitudes, and books that appeal to both boys and girls. Research indicates that graphic novels provide excellent literature to entice boys and girls as well as disrupt the continuum of books that feature weak females as supporting characters. One form of graphic novels currently popular is manga, compilations of Japanese comics that tell elaborate stories. Allen and Ingulsrud (2005) examined the reading practices of 500 high school students in Tokyo and found that 99% of their interviewees had read manga, indicating the text type's popularity. Their study goes on to show that boys and girls had similar reading practices with only small percentage variables (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005). Boys reread manga 93% more than girls, who only reread manga for pleasure 85% of the time (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005). While comparing reading comprehension strategies, Allen and Ingulsrud (2005) found that when encountering problems reading, boys would ask someone for help 16%, as compared to girls who only asked 13% of the time. Boys would also reread for clarification 78% while girls would reread 74%; however, girls would employ other reading decoding strategies 13% more often than boys, who only used other strategies 6% (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005).

Gender issues are also relevant when picking which graphic novel to use.

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Research indicates that boys are pickier about the characters in the stories and the story types, whereas girls have more variety in text choices and are open to different story types (Moeller, 2011; Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005). Working with 15 high school students, Moeller (2011) found that boys and girls had opposite reactions to the graphic novel *X-23*, which features a teenage girl as the protagonist, a parody of the X-men character Wolverine. The girls, who admitted to being reluctant to read the novel, reported that they were pleased to read about “an intelligent and physically strong girl” (Moeller, 2011, p.479). On the other hand, the boys disliked the story, viewing the character as a low-grade parody of the X-men character (Moeller, 2011). Boys appear to be resistant to texts with female leads, whereas Allen and Ingulsrud (2005) found that as girls aged, there were more manga titles for them to read. They explain in their study that “girls read more widely than boys” (Allen & Ingulsrud, p.275, 2005). As girls grow, they expand their reading preferences into shonen manga, a manga type that is typically aimed at male readers (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005). The apparent distaste that boys have for texts that feature female leads or stories aimed at females raises issues for teachers as to how to select appropriate graphic novels based on the characters and plot, which may repel some students and attract others.

Gender issues are not only relevant to the consumers of graphic novels, but they are also features in the texts themselves. Schwartz and Rubinstein-Avila (2006) state that in manga “gender is addressed more flexibly, less moralistically, and in greater complexity”, allowing deeper exploration of gender topics, as well as presenting readers with unique characters who, outwardly, defy standard gender norms (p.42). Schwarz and Rubinstein-Avila (2006) break manga types down into three subsets: boy’s manga, girl’s

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manga, and ladies' manga. While boy's manga typically focuses on themes such as "friendship, perseverance, and winning", girl's manga breaks away from traditional female roles and places them into positions of empowerment (p.44). In their study, Allen and Ingulsrud (2005) saw that female manga readers grew as readers and consumed manga from multiple subsets, indicating that female readers can enjoy texts with females seen in multiple views. Male readers however, seem to limit themselves to the subset of boy's manga that Schwarz and Rubinstein-Avila (2006) break down, hinting at a resistance to stories featuring female leads and stories with strong female cast members (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005). As Moeller (2011) saw with her female study participants, seeing female characters in unusual roles of power enticed them to read. Even in roles of power though, Schwartz and Rubinstein-Avila (2006) point out that the females still maintain traditional roles of dutiful women as either daughter, wife, or mother. A strong female protagonist makes a powerful graphic novel; however, if the character continues to fall prey to traditional roles and expectations, teachers should be wary of using such a text. Graphic novels used in class must be evaluated carefully to ensure that the issue of gender stereotyping is avoided and that the text engages readers of both sexes. Male readers must be equally engaged in the texts they read, or educators run the risk of having biased readers. As with Moeller's (2011) male study participants, if male readers or resistant female readers begin reading a text with a biased attitude, they color the characters they read about. A biased reading distorts the characterization and could alter the student's entire reading of the text.

Readers with Special Needs

One reason educators are eager to incorporate graphic novels and comics into

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their curriculum is because they are viewed as an engaging, easy way to cover essential reading comprehension skills that speak to students of all levels. The use of visuals to enhance texts has benefitted students with needs, such as ELLs, deaf students, and the population of reluctant readers. Deaf students have a unique language of their own in American Sign Language, but school also require that they are fluent in Spoken English (Smetana, Odelson, Burns, Grisham, 2009). While working on their comprehension skills, the use of pictures help students build stronger understandings of the texts they work with (Smetana, et al., 2009; Gentry, Chinn, Moulton, 2005). In their study of 28 students working with media texts, Gentry, et al. (2005) saw significant enhancement of reader comprehension when the texts students read were paired with pictures. Their findings indicated that deaf students' story comprehension was lowest when given only print text, while comprehension was highest when print was accompanied by pictures (Gentry, et al., 2005). Smetana, et al. (2009) discovered similar findings while teaching a summer course for deaf students in grades 9-12 who had failed English class. During the course of Smetana, et al.'s (2009) study, students were continually reading graphic novels. The culmination of the class was a project where the students had to use all of the skills they had learned and create a comic book wherein they had to write a script, design page layout, create characters, and create interesting plots (Smetana, et al., 2009). Smetana, et al. (2009) found that the students who succeeded most in completing the project were the ones who had read the most graphic novels over the course of the study. It is a similar finding to Gentry, et al. (2005), who saw their students' reading comprehension enhanced when pictures were used alongside print text. Smetana, et al.'s (2009) students who read more graphic novels consumed more examples of mixed print

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sources, thus enabling them to understand the text source better and learn ways to read print and picture sources.

Both Gentry, et al. (2005) and Smetana, et al. (2009) found that the visual nature of graphic novels enhanced the students' comprehension of the accompanying print. Because of the nature of deaf students' visual learning, Smetana, et al. (2009) selected graphic novels as a tool to meet their students' visual needs. They continued to explain that deaf students have difficulty acquiring basic communication skills and working with visual texts aids students in developing communication skills, as well as reading skills, and enhances their vocabulary (Smetana, et al., 2009). Graphic novels and comics are a choice text for working with deaf students because they are like printed texts; Smetana, et al. (2009) defends the use of such texts by pointing out that graphic novels require analysis of the art and the story to garner full comprehension. Similarly, Gentry, et al. (2005) found that visuals help "bridge the gaps between printed text and signed communication" (p.401). As visual learners, graphic novels and comics are ideal resources for deaf students because they feature literary elements along with visual aids. As Smetana, et al. (2009) indicated in their final project, the graphic novel is an excellent tool to aid in deaf students' reading comprehension of literary elements. By having the students create comics of their own that focused on characters, plot, and other literary elements, they had to consider the text's pictures carefully and use them as a guide to understanding deep literary meaning. Both Gentry, et al. (2005) and Smetana, et al. (2009) saw that their students' reading comprehension increased when using pictures to enhance the text, indicating that graphic novels have the potential to aid in enhancement of literary features of texts.

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The visual nature of graphic novels and comics benefits English language learners by providing them with ways to comprehend the print they read. Because many ELL students struggle with learning the intricacies of English, comic books and graphic novels are an accessible gateway through which teachers can guide their students in reading comprehension (Ranker, 2007; Chun, 2009; Norton, 2003). While teaching elementary ELL students, Ranker (2007) observed that the use of comic books in class brought interest and motivation because the students knew the format and enjoyed reading it, which lead to opportunities to increase reading comprehension. In a similar study, Chun (2009) observed that secondary students had equal interest in using graphic novels as reading texts. Unlike Ranker's study (2007), which focused on basic reading comprehension due to the students' ages, Chun (2009) saw students move beyond reading the pictures to asking critical questions, making connections, and generate discussion of language used in the comics. Though Ranker (2007) and Chun (2009) found that using graphic novels and comics were met by the students with enthusiasm, they also have education merit. The visual texts are not only appealing, but they enhance reading comprehension by aiding students in making connections and meaning making (Norton, 2003). Norton (2003) accredits the power of these texts to their visual nature, which relates information "more efficient[ly] in the visual rather than the verbal mode" (p.143). Though the levels of reading comprehension will differ at the elementary and secondary level, ELL teachers can use the visual format to touch upon the reading skills at each appropriate level.

Students with disabilities and ELLs are not the only readers with needs to garner deeper comprehension skills. Teachers are constantly searching for ways to connect to

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reluctant readers and aid in developing their reading comprehension skills. Working with ninth and tenth grade students, Seglem and Witte (2009) used visual projects to help their student's connect with texts. By having students use visuals to make connections between text and themselves, they were able to engage a reluctant writer into creating a detailed tattoo and provide an explanation that showed deep understanding of and connections to the text (Seglem & Witte, 2009). Like Chun (2009), Seglem and Witte's (2009) students employed critical thinking skills along with visual skills to connect to texts. By creating her detailed tattoo design and offering a strong explanation, the student demonstrated her ability to read visual texts and comprehend them. In another instance, Seglem & Witte (2009) worked with a tenth grade male student to create a book jacket to demonstrate his knowledge of the novel. By teaching the student how to read visuals, they were able to show the student how to communicate through art (Seglem & Witte, 2009). The final product demonstrated how the student had navigated his way through reading the text, to understanding what had happened with the plot and to the characters, and created a sophisticated piece of artwork to display those understandings (Seglem & Witte, 2009). Again, like Chun (2009), the student was able to use visuals to move from basic comprehension of the story he read to critically thinking about it and producing a piece of work that reflected that critical thought. Visuals helped the students to showcase their understandings and to strengthen them by turning them into a concrete piece of art. The creations that Seglem & Witte's (2009) students produced reflected various uses of literary elements, such as knowledge of plot, symbolism, and tone. Their success in producing quality work shows the potential graphic novels and visual texts have to teach literary elements.

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Using visual texts such as graphic novels does not always draw reluctant readers in with their visuals. In contrast to Seglem & Witte's (2009) success with enhancing student comprehension with graphic novels, Warrican (2006) found her students opposed to the idea of reading them. In a study with 17 Caribbean youths, Warrican (2006) worked with students who had repeatedly failed English class. To engage these students with reading, Warrican (2006) enticed the students by describing graphic novels. Their initial response to the idea of using graphic novels in class was positive, but when the books arrived the students refused to use them, citing that they were too much like comic books and that "comic books...were for children" (Warrican, 2006, p.36). There was no enthusiasm for the text, as with Chun's (2009) students, which rendered the texts virtually useless to the students. Warrican's (2006) students did not connect to graphic novels the same way Seglem & Witte's (2009) and Ranker (2007) and Chun's (2009) students had, thus they refused to even attempt to see them as a valid text source. Even though Warrican's (2006) attempt to entice students with graphic novels failed, visual texts have helped many teachers engage students in reading. The visual nature of comics and graphic novels capitalize on visualization techniques and offers a unique way to show stories as well as teach comprehension skills of literary elements.

Graphic Novels and Reading Skills

Though the research on the use of graphic novels is limited, many researchers found that the use of such multimodal texts demanded students to use reading and linguistic skills to comprehend material. Graphic novels and comics combine visual and literary elements together, which promotes visual comprehension as well as reading comprehension (Serafini, 2011; Griffith, 2010). Researching graphic novels, Serafini

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(2011) states that when working with graphic novels, students not only have to ‘process’ the visual design of the text through visual reading skills, but they must also use literary skills, such as “visualizing, summarizing, asking questions, and predicting” (p.342). He continues to say that as students read, they move from analyzing visual elements of the text to chronicling literary elements, such as “inventorying objects, characters or actors, design features, and other images” (Serafini, 2011, p.244). The visual nature of the text enhances the students’ reading, as the story depends on the art. In a similar study, Refaie (2009) surveyed eight adult men and women about their reading comprehension in regards to comics rooted in current events. Her results found, similar to Serafini (2011), that comic readers utilize various literary skills to comprehend the comics (Refaie, 2009). The participants also needed familiarity with visual readings skills and comic ‘conventions’ to form a concrete understanding of the text (Refaie, 2009).

In contrast, Griffith (2010) narrows her view of visual and textual reading and maintains that though the visuals of a graphic novel are important, it only “contributes to half the ability to comprehend it fully” (p.183). She admits that the pictures in the text are “equally as important as the text”, yet they account for only half of the students’ reading comprehension with that type of text (Griffith, 2010, p.183). The visual nature of graphic novels and comics walk hand-in-hand with reading skills, requiring that readers use both sets of skills to maintain complete comprehension. In order to fully comprehend the texts, readers must attend to the visual elements of the story and employ literary skills to make sense of it.

Further studies and research have looked into what types of literary skills graphic novels and comics bring to reading. Overwhelmingly, researchers have found that these

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visual texts promote critical reflection skills and look deeply into story elements. When Jacobs (2007) explains the important qualities graphic novels bring to teaching, he says that the art touches upon several of Gardner's dimensions of multiple intelligences. The format of graphic novels and comics touches upon "linguistic, audio, visual, gestural, and special modes", thus drawing on a number of student strengths (Jacobs, 2007, p.21). The visuals enhance students' understanding by capitalizing on multiple modes of comprehending texts. A similar instance that Fukunaga (2006) observed in his college students was that their consumption of anime, a term which he groups into both watching Japanese cartoons and reading manga, helped them build linguistic skills in their Japanese language class. While in class, the students built upon their background knowledge from reading graphic novels and watching the cartoons and put them to use in class work (Fukunaga, 2006). The visual stimuli aided in reflecting on what they had read and seen and put the knowledge to use. Though these students were learning Japanese, a similar outcome could be hoped for in English students learning language conventions through graphic novels and putting that understanding to use in their education. A similar occurrence could also be hoped for in ELLs new to American culture.

Several researchers point out the fact that graphic novels tell stories through art, thus they are excellent tools to aid in story comprehension and construction (Morrison, Bryan, Chilcoat, 2002; O'Neil, 2011). Developing a graphic novel project, Morrison, et al. (2002) describes how students have to go through multiple stages to create their project. To construct their stories, students need to consider page layout, story development, drawing, and narration (Morrison, et al., 2002). While creating their stories, students need to consider literary elements and the importance of strong plots and

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characters. Similarly, O'Neil, (2011) describes particular story elements that translate into the presentation of a graphic novel. The art of the text must establish or create the story, make use of color for tone, use style that creates the story's setting and tone, and compose characters and plot (O'Neil, 2011). In order to create or comprehend a graphic novel, students need to use these reading elements to make sense of the story.

When reading a graphic novel or comic, readers need to understand and employ the same literary techniques the authors use to create the story in order to comprehend the text. When reading a graphic novel, Seyfried (2008) says, students analyze the text to comprehend it. Students question the author's choices of images, words, and story pace to form a critical understanding of what they are reading. Anstey (2002) also notes that readers of graphic novels employ critical literacy skills, such as analysis and deconstruction and reconstructing skills. Students read the story through the art, but they must also employ story comprehension skills to fully understand the text. As O'Neil (2011) discussed and Morrison, et. al. (2002) saw in their study, employing knowledge of literary terms advances a reader's comprehension of the story. By looking closely at the author's use of setting, color, characterization, and other literary qualities, readers garner essential information to read and comprehend the story.

While reading, it is important to connect with the literature; having a connection ensures that readers care about what they are reading and will work to comprehend the text. By connecting with the texts, researchers have found that students are more invested in reading graphic novels and completing the projects involved with them. By connecting to the texts they are reading, Seelow (2010) states, students will be able to view the material and impose on it their own sets of skills, understandings, beliefs, and history.

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Using those personal connections, students further their comprehension and build personal meaning with the text. D'Angelo (2010) also believes that connections strengthen students reading; if the students feel that what they read relates to their lives or their community, they will form stronger bonds with the literature and understand the story and its elements better.

One way that researchers believe students will connect with graphic novels is through the use of stories that portray young or teenage characters (Schwarz & Crenshaw, 2011). Students enjoy seeing characters that reflect their own youth and troubles in adolescence. If students can see a reflection of themselves in the stories they read, they will, as D'Angelo (2010) believes, forge a personal connection with the text. By creating that important bond, young readers can then use their reading skills and project their personal beliefs, histories, and skills upon the work, as Seelow (2010) states. Most curriculums feature coming of age stories; Schwarz & Crenshaw (2011) mention the graphic novel as a way to introduce students to young adult literature (YAL), specifically bildungsroman stories. In these stories, characters not only face challenges of coming-of-age, but they specifically display characters learning as they journey for “love, social justice, or the meaning of life” while they also face conflicts with “self, family, and society” (Schwarz & Crenshaw, 2011, p.47). Schwarz & Crenshaw (2011) point out that there are many graphic novels that address the bildungsroman format. Because those particular types of stories involve characters growing and coming into themselves, bildungsroman text may be easier for young readers to create the personal connection that D'Angelo (2010) speaks of.

When students connect graphic novels to their personal lives, studies have found

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that those students who make it through the initial phase of struggling create thoughtful comics and enjoy the creation process (Hughes, et al., 2011; Bitz, 2004). In their studies of two sets of students in different schools, Hughes, et al. (2011) had the study participants create a graphic novel based on a situation in their own life. They found that initially most students were resistant to the work and “not motivated to add much detail” into the stories they were creating (Hughes, et al., 2011, p.604). In a similar study, Bitz (2004) launched a large-scale study with 733 inner-city children in after school programs. In this program, students went through steps to create a graphic novel (Bitz, 2004). Participating instructors found that the most difficult phase was creating a lengthy manuscript for the project, which resulted in 58 (9%) students dropping from the program (Bitz, 2004). Despite this apparent lack of interest, most students in Hughes, et al. (2011) completed the project. The results varied based on students’ confidence in their artistic skills and their understanding of the project they were participating in, but Hughes, et al. (2011) report that when they saw the final project, students were pleased with their work. Likewise results were seen in Bitz’ (2004) study. Though the project was intended to help students with their reading and writing skills, Bitz (2004) found that many students also connected with the project on a personal level and told stories of the difficulties of their own lives. Hughes, et al. (2011) attribute the success of the students to the level of engagement in the studies; though some students did not put much effort into the project and a select few did not finish, the authors believe that the level of engagement made their project a success. By connecting to students’ personal lives, the students had a sense of ownership over the story, which motivated them to tell their stories. Once again, for the students to create a comprehensive story for both Hughes, et al. (2011) and Bitz’

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(2004) study, they needed to understand and utilize various literary elements. Part of their success in story making could derive from their understanding of literary elements that enhance stories.

Connections can and should be made not just with students' lives, but with the other classes students take. The stories graphic novels portray range widely in genre, audience, and topic. Many researchers have observed the spectrum of topics and commented on how graphic novels can be used not just as a literacy tool, but as a cross-curricular text as well. D'Angelo (2010) states that graphic novels can connect English class with media and social studies by examining current issues. Bucher and Manning (2004) expand on the idea, calling graphic novels a bridge to history. They list numerous graphic novels that focus on historical topics, scientific topics, and social issues to demonstrate how easy it would be to build such a bridge (Bucher & Manning, 2004).

In a more in-depth commentary on the cross-curricular use of graphic novels, Schwarz (2006) points out how many graphic novels of all genre types are "designed to inform and persuade" (p.60). Students can examine cross-curricular texts that relate to social studies or media studies and explore the rhetoric used by the author to persuade their audience (Schwarz, 2006). Schwarz states that graphic novels are also good cross-curricular tools because they "affirm diversity, give voice to all, and helps students examine ideas and practices that promulgate inequity" (p.62). Similarly, Carter (2007) examines the cross-curricular potential of graphic novels by pointing out how many texts "make clear political statements or get at issues of nation or international import" (p.51). These issues can be examined in multiple classes through the use of a single graphic novel. The wide array of topics graphic novels features allows for critical exploration of

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mature topics in various classes.

Media and Critical Literacy

Students are barraged with visual images outside of school and media and critical literacy practices call on students to use literacy skills to look critically at those images and assess what they mean and how they pertain to the students themselves. Because graphic novels and comics are multimodal texts, they can aid in teaching students how to read and assess the world around them. Monnin (2010) states that graphic novels and comics can be used as scaffolding devices to critically examine media. By using five media literacy questions that focus on questioning messages and who they were made for and by, what they portray, and how messages are constructed, Monnin (2010) suggests that students can first employ their critical reading practices in graphic novels. In a study using practices similar to Monnin's (2010) suggested scaffolding using graphic novels and comics, Lawrence, McNeal, and Yildiz (2009) taught twelve students in a three-week summer program to critically examine media messages. In this program, students had to create comic strips about themselves, an informational comic strip, a group project, and write a book review (Lawrence, et al., 2009). Once students have gained proficiency in questioning images within comics and graphic novels, Monnin (2010) states, they can move on to examine other media images. The writing of each assignment in Lawrence, et al.'s (2009) study focused on "writing for authentic purposes and real world audiences", thus having students think critically on the images they would use to create their message and how they would inform audiences (p.489). As Monnin (2010) suggested, the students in Lawrence, et al.'s (2009) study critically questioned content of messages and media and then used that critical understanding to create their own products. At the end of their

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study, Lawrence, et al. (2009) found that by interacting with images and constructing meaningful projects, students' communication skills increased, as did their skills in writing informational pieces.

Media literacy also incorporates online fluency and Rowsell and Burke (2009) found that reading online enhanced students' general reading skills. In a study featuring two middle school students, an urban struggling student and a suburban student who did not struggle in school, Rowsell and Burke (2009) had the students work online with webpages of interest to them and asked recall questions as the students worked. The webpages featured numerous pictures and visual stimuli, which students had to navigate through using visual comprehension skills similar to those used when reading graphic novels (Rowsell & Burke, 2009). In a study featuring similar theories of enhancing students' reading skills via usage of media tools, Hobbs and Frost (2003) implemented a yearlong media literacy study class for 293 eleventh grade students. Over the course of the year, students critically studied print, visual, and audio texts to increase their comprehension (Hobbs & Frost, 2003). At the end of the year, students took an evaluative test where they were presented with print, visual, and audio sources that they had to critically evaluate in written responses; the students were assessed based on reading, listening, and viewing comprehension, writing skills, and multiple analysis categories (Hobbs & Frost, 2003). The collected data was then compared to a control group school that did not have a media literacy class; the schools were evenly matched in socioeconomic status and access to technology, which researchers believed would give an accurate portrayal of whether or not media literacy classes improve comprehension skills (Hobbs & Frost, 2003).

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The results of Rowsell and Burke's (2009) study demonstrated that both students understood the digital texts they were working with. The results of Hobbs and Frost's (2003) study demonstrated similar findings, discovering that the students who took the media literacy course performed better on most areas assessed. The students who received media literacy classes performed better on comprehension questions and analysis recognition (Hobbs & Frost, 2003). Hobbs and Frost (2003) also found that, though the writing of both groups was generally of the same quality, the group who attended media literacy classes typically wrote more than the control group. Rowsell and Burke (2009) consider the success of the students' web navigation to be in part related to the myriad of reading skills that students need to employ when working with multimodal texts. By employing reading skills that are not typically used with print text, the students were able to comprehend the detailed texts of the digital webpages. Hobbs and Frost (2003) demonstrate similar thought; by having the students learn skills to read the world around them and critically examine it, they had better reading comprehension. Those same skills are used and can be taught through the use of graphic novels.

Graphic Novels and Teaching Reading of Literary Elements

Graphic novels tell stories through pictures, so they employ many of the same literary techniques print stories use. This usage of the same techniques makes graphic novels and comics key tools to aiding in visualization processes of various techniques. When discussing the importance of visual literacy for learners' empowerment, Falihi and Wason-Ellam (2009) point out that people rely on visuals more than ever now to gather information, thus it is crucial for people to be able to read visuals. Graphic novels are another way of displaying information. Anstey (2002) draws a parallel between print and

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visual texts, noting how the authors use the same literary devices, such as plot, characters, and voice. The difference in reading a visual text, however, is that the reader must interrupt these literary devices in light of the visuals provided (Anstey, 2002). Falihi and Wason-Ellam (2009) make a similar statement, saying that in order to properly read visuals, readers must make sense of “relationships between elements such as color, line, shape, or texture through which one can discern meaning” (p.411). Literary techniques are so engrained in graphic novels that Griffith (2010) suggests that educators evaluate the graphic novels they may use based on the visual set up of the story and the techniques the artist used in creating the story. She specifically calls attention to color supporting mood, pictures that “refine characterization”, and art that supplies enough details to enhance the story (Griffith, 2010, p.183). The pictures used in stories and visual messages display their content through the use of literary techniques, which makes graphic novels ideal for teaching those elements.

O’Neil (2011) and Serafini (2011) investigate further into the specific use of literary elements in graphic novels, pointing out how literary elements are essential to making meaning in the stories. O’Neil (2011) discusses how the art of the graphic novel not only works with the words, but also enriches the story and solidifies meaning. The pictures establish such literary techniques as tone via the use of color and style, as well as characterization through composition of characters throughout stories (O’Neil, 2011). Serafini (2011) advances O’Neil’s (2011) commentary on how graphic novel art furthers literary techniques by noting how the composition of pictures supply subtle details through size, color, and focus. He goes on to look at how perspective is key in many graphic novels, with panels that use a variety of angles and positions (Serafini, 2011).

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Symbolism is also used often within graphic texts to represent themes without using words (Serafini, 2011). As O'Neill (2011) points out, pictures “carry deeper and more subtle connotations”, which will aid readers’ understanding of literary elements (p.214). The literary elements are already present in the story, the pictures then serve to solidify meaning of those concepts.

Graphic Novels to Teach Literary Elements in Composition

Writing and reading go hand in hand, often employing the same literary techniques, which is why using graphic novels are an excellent method to teach literary elements. The knowledge learned from reading graphic novels and comics, understanding how literary elements are employed in them, can be transferred over to writing and creation of comics. Figueiredo (2011) discusses the usefulness and practicality of using images to relay information through comics by relating images to audience. In order for an author to relate to an audience and get their message across, the author needs to use specific images that evoke feelings and understanding in the audience. Smetana, et al. (2009) believes that because graphic novels and comics rely on visuals to communicate, they are tools to teach deaf students. Figueiredo (2011) argues that authors need to use symbols and signs that the audience will recognize and connect with (2011). Similarly, Smetana, et al. (2009) states that deaf students use symbols to form understanding of visuals texts by using “color, light, shadow, and lines” to see how those elements impact the story (p.230). By analyzing the literary elements of symbolism and the various facets of tone, students can come to deeper understandings of texts. Though Figueiredo (2011) discusses comics as a means to communicate instructions, the same principles he indicates are important in any visual creation. When students create comics,

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informational or otherwise, they need to connect to their audience. To do so, they must make use of symbols that their audience will recognize, which can be enhanced by literary terms such as tone and symbolism.

As Figueiredo (2011) discusses, visuals are key to communicating meaning, that is why when students create visual works, they must draw on their knowledge of literary elements and incorporate that understanding to create a piece of work that clearly communicates ideas. In their work with struggling students, Seglem and Witte (2009) drew upon the students' visualization skills, using literary terms as a base, and helped them create strong visual projects that depicted deeper meaning. Hughes, et al. (2011) used similar techniques when working with students to create comics about their lives, having the students be mindful of their use of space, expression of characters and body language, and consider point of view to enhance their stories. Though the students in both Seglem and Witte's (2009) and Hughes, et al.'s (2011) studies struggled with writing and reading, many excelled when turning stories into comics. Seglem and Witte (2009) found that, once their students understood literary terms, they were able to use them in their work. Two of the noted students in their study used symbolism, one of them also drawing upon setting, plot, and tone to create an effective final project (Seglem & Witte, 2009). Once the students recognized the literary elements and gained insight into how they could be used in the creation of their comics and visual projects, they produced effective visuals that communicated ideas and concepts, with strong use of literary elements.

Images are an important part of print compositions as well as visual compositions. Writing should use language that provokes visualization. Literary terms are bases upon which writing should be built and used to enhance writing. Even when creating comics,

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students in Bitz' (2004) and Lawrence, et al.'s (2009) study had to write manuscripts first. While writing, students had to draw upon literary elements and consider how they would present their projects. In their study, Lawrence, et al. (2009) had students consider the information they wished to present and, as they wrote, select pictures that would communicate their information. To do this, the students needed to consider what they wished to communicate and consider how to enhance their message with such literary terms as "dialogue, irony, and flashback" as well as consider color, transitions, and settings (Lawrence, et al., 2009, p.488). Bitz (2004) had students undergo a similar comic creating process that included manuscript writing, requiring them to use literary elements. To develop a strong story, the study had students consider characterization, the progress of the story and the overall tone in order to visualize their comic. Both Bitz (2004) and Lawrence, et al. (2009) saw students build their work based on various literary terms and shape their stories using those elements. As was discussed previously, authors and illustrators use many of the same literary devices in their creations, thus it is important for students to be able to 'read' those literary terms when they are used, be it in print or visual texts.

Method

Context

The context of this study takes place at St. Henry College, a small local college located in suburban Yorktown, New York, during a Literacy Practicum course for education teachers. Given names of the school and town are pseudonyms to protect privacy. The literacy practicum course is designed to aid educators in developing their knowledge of literacy strategies and assessments and put that developing knowledge to

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use on students. The class runs once a week at night and students are enrolled by their parents. There are no prerequisites or grade scores required for entrance into the program, thus students come from all grades, K-12, and may be at, above, or below grade level standards. The course is designed not just to aid educators, but the students enrolled come to gain help with their reading, writing, and word knowledge. The particular participants in this study were taken to an open room in the school, where they could sit with a table and few people around them. Original placement for the participants was in a room with four other tutors and their students, leading to a disruptive environment that the participants did not like.

Participants

This study focuses on three participants: David, James, and Catherine (all pseudonyms). All three students are African-American and attend urban schools. The abilities of each student range from below grade level, at grade level, or above grade level. The participants were assessed during the practicum course to see where they fell in regards to reading, writing, and spelling. Students completed interest surveys to supply further information about themselves. Their parents also supplied information regarding their child's needs and strengths.

David is a fifteen-year-old boy in tenth grade that enjoys playing sports and videogames as much as he enjoys reading and writing. He is polite and eager to assist others and share his knowledge and will endeavor to answer the tutor's questions when called upon. On the Fountas and Pinnell reading inventory, he reads at a level Z with high comprehension, on target for his grade level. His writing rates a 5.6 on the 6+1 rubric, the highest score achievable being a 6. He has also passed all of Fry's sight word lists with

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above 90% accuracy, indicating that he knows the majority of the sight words. David receives high grades and does not receive any services at school. He takes his education seriously, though he will also complete work quickly and sloppily.

James is a thirteen-year-old boy in eighth grade. His favorite pastimes include playing videogames and spending time with friends. He is polite and willing to listen, assist, and answer a tutor's questions, but he does not always put a high level of effort into his work. On the Fountas and Pinnell reading inventory, James scored a reading level X, which is on target with his grade level. Though James' overall writing score on the 6+1 rubric is 4.8, he has low scores in certain areas, such as sentence fluency and overall organization. His Fry sight word scores are all above 90% accuracy, indicating that he is a fluent reader, though he admits he does not like to read. When producing work, James will put thought into what he wishes to say or create, but rush at times to finish the work.

Catherine, a fifteen-year-old girl in ninth grade, is an avid writer as well as a sports player. Though she is resistant to certain types of books and activities in the practicum setting, she will complete work when prompted. She is polite, even when expressing her disinterest, and seeks help when needed, and helps others. On the Fountas and Pinnel reading inventory, Catherine scored a reading level W, which is below grade level standards. Though she likes to write, her overall writing score on the 6+1 rubric is a 4.6 with low scores in fluency and conventions. Catherine has also scored 90% and above on the Fry sight words.

Researcher Stance

As the researcher in this study, I worked in a group setting with all three participants in the St. Henry College's literacy practicum course. I am currently a

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graduate student at St. Henry College, working to earn my degree in literacy education, grades 5-12, part of which includes completion of the literacy practicum class. I also have a bachelor's degree in English Literature and secondary education.

During this study, I took on the role of an active participant observer. Mills (2011) defines an active participant observer as one who is “engaged in the teaching” and sees the “outcomes of their teaching” (p.74). By taking on this role, I observed whether implicit instruction with literary elements via graphic novels produced gains in students’ understanding of literary terms. As an active participant, I was also able to adjust my teaching methods according to students’ needs (Mills, 2011).

Method

During this study, I explored how the use of visual images from graphic novels and comic books aid in the comprehension of literary terms with the three participants. I also explored the students’ perceptions of graphic novels by examining their reactions to the texts and having them fill out a questionnaire focused on their attitudes and enjoyment towards of graphic novels. To examine how graphic novels and comics aid in literary term comprehension, I used various observation strategies and assessment measures to judge whether the students’ understanding of each term grew. I observed students’ pace and looked for confusion about assignments. The assignments completed each session were assessed for completeness and comprehension of the literary term. Students were also assessed based on their ability to answer questions about the texts read and their ability to analyze the text using the literary terms. Throughout instruction, the students used look back strategies to alter their work and they applied their understanding by creating work based on their understanding of the terms. By examining how the

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students' definitions of the terms changed and how the change in understanding alters their work, I was able to see whether the students' comprehension of the terms grew and whether they understood how to apply those terms to print and visual texts. To do so, I first had students define the literary terms to create an understanding of the term. Then, as a group, we created a shared definition of the terms to be used in reading and work.

Students then applied their knowledge of the term to print texts by examining the words and searching for specific parts of the printed text that demonstrated usage of the literary term discussed. To apply their knowledge to visual texts, students were asked to use the shared definition of the term and point out parts of the graphic novel that demonstrated specific terms. For example, to apply their knowledge of tone to a visual text, the students examined color and space. To apply that knowledge to a print text, they looked at word choice that evoked feelings. My observations allowed me to see whether direct instruction of literary terms, supported by visual texts, aided in furthering their comprehension of the literary terms. David, Catherine, James, and I met three times, each session lasting one hour and 45 minutes. During each session, we focused on a single literary term (setting, characterization, tone/mood). Before we began analyzing texts, the students were asked to create their own definition of each literary term.

Afterwards, we expanded on their definitions to create shared definition, which was used to analyze the texts, building on their prior knowledge. After studying a visual text along with the literary term, they returned to their work to see whether they had a new understanding of the term.

For the study of setting, the students were asked to define for themselves what they believe setting is. They then read a passage and highlight which portions they

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believed indicated setting. Once they finished highlighting, the students shared their definitions of setting and together we defined the term, including all the components of setting. The students then began reading Sara Varon's graphic novel, *Robot Dreams*. In this graphic novel, a dog creates himself a robot friend; however, a fateful day at the beach leaves Robot rusted and unable to move, so Dog leaves his friend alone on the beach. What ensues is Dog's quests for friendship to fill the hole left by Robot, while Robot lays on the beach, suffering numerous abuses, dreaming of a way back to dog and happier times. After they had finished reading the assigned section, we discussed the various settings throughout the novel, including time of day, time of year, place the story is set in, and time period. The students then returned to their highlighted passages and, using a new highlighter color, highlighted portions of the text they considered setting, or crossed out parts they did not think were setting.

To study tone and mood, I had the students again define the term for themselves and then we defined the term together to create our shared definition. Afterwards, I read two poems aloud. While reading, I had the students circle the portions of the text that they believed provided the poem's tone. After reading the poems and discussing the words circled, we discussed how tone is depicted visually. The students then read the next portion of *Robot Dreams* to decipher the text's tone. Using the techniques discussed to create a mood, the students then wrote their own tone poem.

To study characterization, the students and I created a definition of the various parts of characterization. Using prompts to spur students' background knowledge, together we defined characterization, including character's appearance, actions, thoughts, and speech. We then examined a Sunday comic of *Prince Valiant*. The students used

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post-it-notes to tag parts of the comic they believed showed characterization through thought, actions, and appearances. Afterwards, the students went through the text *Robot Dreams* and tagged specific scenes to indicate instances where the author demonstrated various characterization methods.

While examining the students' perceptions of graphic novels, I observed their behavior when they were first presented with the book, how they interacted with the book in sessions, and analyzed their questionnaire that focused on graphic novel perceptions. On the questionnaire, the students were asked several questions about their reaction to the text used in the study and their willingness to interact with such texts again. The students were also asked to explain their answers in order to garner insight into why or why they did not like working with the graphic novel.

Credibility of Research

To ensure the credibility of the research done, I used triangulation of data so that my study was not biased. Mills (2011) defines triangulation as using multiple sources of data so that a researcher does not rely too heavily on one source and bias their study. Part of ensuring an unbiased study is also ensuring its credibility. Credibility, as Mills (2011) defines it, is a researcher's ability to account for complexities in a study and to "deal with patterns that are not easily explained" (p.104). To account for credibility in my study, I persistently observed my participants, looking for trends or unexpected behavior (Mills, 2011). I also used peer debriefing with a colleague in the practicum class (Mills, 2011). By having a colleague, they offered an unbiased view of the methods used with the students as well as offered insight I missed in my initial observations.

During the study, I also had to ensure transferability. Transferability refers to a

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researcher's belief that what they are studying is bound in context and that their study is not meant to develop statements of perceived truth that can be generalized on large numbers of people (Mills, 2011). To do so, I collected detailed descriptions of the context of my study to compare with possible contexts in which this work could be performed (Mills, 2011). I also collected descriptive data from my study so that comparisons of other contexts might be considered (Mills, 2011). By collecting this data, I ensured that the study is not viewed as a statement of truth but so that its findings can be compared to other contexts and its merits weighed in comparison.

Dependability also needed to be ensured during the study. Dependability is "stability of data" (Mills, 2011, p.104). To ensure that my data is stable and not biased, I used triangulation of data to ensure that I was not relying too much on one data source. I observed the participants as they worked, analyzed questionnaires that they answered, and examined the artifacts that they produced during the study.

Lastly, I had to ensure confirmability in my study. Confirmability is defined by Mills (2011) as "neutrality of the collected data. Again, the triangulation process of using different sets of data sources ensured that my findings are not biased in one direction. The data was checked against one another to see if growth had been made. I also practiced reflexivity, which Mills (2011) describes as considering underlying biases and taking those biases into account when formulating study questions.

Informed Consent and Participants' Rights

Before beginning my study, I needed to ensure the rights of my participants were protected. Because this is a qualitative study, based on group work done with minors, I had to receive consent from David, James, and Catherine's parents and receive the

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students' assent to write about them in my study. Before beginning the study, I explained to the students what my study was about and what we would do during it. They were given an assent form to look over and sign, if they agreed to be part of the study. I also explained that there would be no ramifications if they did not wish to participate. After receiving the participants' assent, I asked for parental consent, explaining to them what my study was about and explaining that their children would not be named or identified in the study. To guarantee this, each student was given a pseudonym.

Data Collection

Due to the process of triangulation, I collected several forms of data for my study. While working with the students, I actively observed their behavior towards the texts used, how they reacted to assignments and how quickly and thoroughly they completed said assignments. While observing, I wrote field notes that allowed me to note any and all behaviors and reactions. The notes allowed me to recall specific reactions and thoughts the students had and provided data for assessing how each session went. The students also filled out questionnaires at the beginning and end of the study. In the questionnaires, they were asked to briefly define the terms we worked with and then rate their comfort of using the term on a 'yes', 'no', or 'sometimes' basis. They were also asked if they know what each element is, based on a 'yes', 'no', or 'sometimes' basis. The questionnaires from before and after the study were compared to assess whether the students' definitions and comfort level with each term grew. To garner insight into students' perceptions of graphic novels, they were also given a questionnaire at the end of the study about their feelings towards graphic novels. They were asked to rate the experience using the graphic novel, to state and explain elements they liked and did not like about the graphic novel,

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and asked to consider the enjoyment they would have if a graphic novel were used in a variety of ways in class. Lastly, I used student artifacts to judge whether the students' level of literary term comprehension had increased. The artifacts collected were made during work sessions and compared to the shared definition of the literary term taught that session.

Data Analysis

After the initial data collection, I gathered my typed field notes, questionnaires, and student work together to code and look for themes. I compared the students' pre and post unit assessments, which included three panel comics from David and James and a short writing passage from Catherine, all based on one of the three literary elements that we focused on. The students were allowed to pick which type of assessment they would complete, a drawing or writing sample, based on personal preference and perceived strength, so long as they could accurately, in their own perceptions, depict the literary term chosen. While coding, I noted any growth or lack of growth each student made based upon the expansion of their literary term definition when their post-unit definitions were compared to the shared definitions created and used during the activities. Their pre and post unit assessments were similarly scored based on demonstrated growth of understanding of the literary terms in their drawings or writing pieces. Their work needed to reflect further growth by addition of pictures that depicted various parts of the terms or further uses of the facets of the terms in writing form. Afterwards, I examined the students' work highlighting the setting passage and tone passage. For both passages, I examined the portions the students highlighted on their own, then compared that to the students' highlighting done after the lesson. While comparing the pre and post lesson

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highlighting for setting, I looked for growth, lack of growth, and any notations the students made on their sheets. Growth was measured based on the students' ability to highlight portions of the setting they had previously overlooked and their ability to identify and cross out previously highlighted portions that were not setting. To go along with the tone lesson, I examined the tone poems that students made after the lesson, looking for usage of the specific elements we discussed during the lesson, such as color, word choice that evoked images, space, line, and isolation. When coding the questionnaires, I examined the students' pre and post unit responses regarding their comfort levels using the terms and their ability to define the term in the post questionnaire. Their comfort level and ability to define the terms was based on their answers to the questionnaire's query of how comfortable they felt using the term on a 'yes', 'no', and 'sometimes' scale, as well as the expansion of their term definition based on the shared definition created during lessons. Lastly, I compiled my field notes and the second questionnaire on graphic novels and examined the students' actions, attitudes, and responses to the lessons and the book read. While coding, I looked for their reaction to the text, examined their questionnaire answers to see how they liked the book, and also examined the questionnaire answers to see if they would be willing to use a graphic novel again.

Once all of the data had been coded, I examined the three data types and looked for themes. After the initial coding process, I examined my codes and looked for similarities in the data findings. I noticed that the data collected from the students broke down into four sections. The first section examined the students' responses to print texts and their ability to use literary terms and visualization of those terms on a printed text. In

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a similar theme, the students' data reflected their response to reading visual texts. The collected data also demonstrated the students' success or lack of success in application of the information taught during the lessons and unit. Lastly, the students' responses to literature emerged as a prominent theme. Thus, the data will be presented in four themes: difficulty with print texts, mixed success with visual texts, growth from intervention, and overall student enjoyment using graphic novels.

Findings and Discussion

Students' ability to visualize concepts has the potential to aid in their reading comprehension. To answer the question of how teachers can use graphic novels to reinforce students' understanding of literary terms and to examine students' perceptions of graphic novels, I used print and solely visual texts, along with various assessments to measure whether the students in this study had any growth in their literary term comprehension after using a visual text. To measure any growth made in literary term definitions, the students were observed interacting with the texts as well as given multiple assignments and a questionnaire to assess whether their literary term comprehension grew. They were assessed based on expansion of definitions in written and visual format (David and James' three panel comics) as well as the ability to apply their understanding of the literary terms to the reading passages and assignments given during the unit. To view this data, it will be broken down into the sections of pre-test, interventions, post-test, and perceptions. Within those sections, the themes presented will be difficulty with print texts, mixed success with visual texts, growth from intervention, and overall student enjoyment using graphic novels.

Difficulty with Print Texts

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To begin this study, I needed a baseline of the students' understandings of the literary terms we were going to examine. Before beginning the study, students were given a questionnaire to fill out. On this questionnaire, they were asked to define the three terms used in the study as best they could, the terms being characterization, setting, and tone/mood. The supplied responses created the baseline upon which their growth of literary term understanding would be assessed, based on their expansion of their definitions of the terms after the study. The students' responses were compared to a literary definition selected by the tutor for specific elements of that literary term. The selected definitions included multiple parts. Setting was expected to have multiple meanings of place and time, characterization incorporated actions, thoughts, and traits, and tone/mood focused on the way feelings were expressed by word choice, colors, space and line. For each term, the tutor looked for a number of components in the selected definition, such as the parts listed above by each definition.

Before each lesson, the students were given a worksheet that focused on the literary term of the day. On the sheet included the name of the term and space for a definition. Prior to the lesson, students worked alone to define the term using their background knowledge. Once the students had completed their own definition, they shared their answers with each other. When they shared, the students offered their own personal definitions of each term, which they had written.

As students shared their definitions with one another, I listened for the components of the term that I desired the students know. For setting, I listened for different types of time, such as time of day, time of year, time period, and actual time. I also listened for specifications of place to be mentioned, such as cities. When describing

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tone, I looked for students answers to include feelings, word choice, space and color. Finally, when they were defining characterization, I looked for thoughts, actions and traits to be mentioned in the students' answers. When the students shared all they had, I prompted them further with questions, asking if there was "anything else" to the definitions and sometimes outright asking "what about..." and offering another part of the definition (field notes, February 14, February 21, March 13, 2012). During the lesson on setting, after the students had shared their definitions, I asked, "Are there any other parts to setting?" (field notes, February 14, 2012). At this point, I also flipped through the book *Robot Dreams* to point out the months labeled on pages. By pointing out those pages, I hoped for students to be reminded of seasons and time of year and to connect them as part of setting. I also had the students examine the pages for any indications of time, as they had all noted on the questionnaire and their setting sheet that time was a part of setting. By prompting them to look for various parts of time, I hoped that they would narrow their use of the word time to include time of day, time of year, and time period (field notes, February 14, 2012). When attempting to define tone and mood, I prompted them to think about how a book made them feel by asking "How does this make you feel, seeing him all alone?" (field notes, February 21, 2012). I also focused on color and asked, "What do these colors make you feel?" (field notes, February 21, 2012). Further questions asked, "How would you feel if you were in his place?" and "What does the use of space here make you feel?" (field notes, February 21, 2012). During the lesson on characterization, once students had shared their definition of characterization as how a character looks and is developed, I prompted them by asking, "How does the author develop the character?" (field notes, March 13, 2012). I used guided prompting as well,

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asking, “Does the way a character look help define him?” Once the students had supplied me with characters’ feelings as part of characterization, I prompted again with, “Anything else about the character?” (field notes, March 13, 2012).

If the students could not come up with the desired components of each literary term, I would provide the information for them. When defining setting, I advanced the students’ concept of time by telling them that setting included “time of day, time of year, and time period” the story took place in (field notes, February 14, 2012). When defining tone and mood, James was able to communicate that it described whether a story “sound good, bad, evil” on his questionnaire (questionnaire, February 14, 2012). When the students ran out of ideas to define tone/mood, I told them to “look at the words the authors used to create images” (field notes, February 21, 2012). Looking at the visual text, I also told them that color, lines, isolation, and space used in the texts attributed to the story’s tone and mood (February 21, 2012). While defining characterization, I supplied the students with further characterization elements until our shared definition included characters’ thoughts, actions, feelings, and reinforced their idea of appearance as part of characterization (field notes, March 13, 2012).

As I added components to the students’ literary term definitions, we created a shared definition that would be used in their work. This shared definition was used to judge growth in literary term comprehension by comparing pre and post unit definitions to see if they included the elements of the shared definition. The students recorded the shared definition on a master sheet they had been given on the first day of the study. Each literary term was present on the sheet with space for a definition.

Part of the work done in this study involved the students using the visualization

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techniques studied in the graphic novel and applying said techniques to print passages.

During the tone lesson, we focused on the techniques of color, lines, and space the illustrator used in creating the story's tone. Afterwards, I discussed with the students how these elements could also be seen in print texts. When switching to print text, I explained how authors use specific words to invoke mood, such as color, describing space to create isolation or companionship, and words that describe or invoke feelings (field notes, February 21, 2012). Students could draw on their prior knowledge, the definitions that we created as a group, and the lessons on the literary terms to complete the assignments done with print texts. During the lesson on tone, the students defined what tone was on their own, shared their definitions, and then we created a shared definition to use while working. Once a shared definition was created, the students read the next section of *Robot Dreams* and were instructed to pay close attention to the illustrator's use of color, lines, and space and what mood those components evoked. After completing their reading, I asked Catherine and James "what mood did this section make you feel?" (field notes, February 21, 2012). While listening to their responses, I looked to see if they used the elements of space, color, and word choice that we discussed. Catherine had trouble answering, as she had only flipped through the book. James replied that the story was "sad" because of what was happening to the robot (field notes, February 21, 2012). I then prompted them to look specifically at the colors the illustrator used. Showing them a sepia scene, I asked them "what do you feel when you see these colors?" (field notes, February 21, 2012). James supplied that it was "dark" and Catherine elaborated saying that "it isn't happy" (February 21, 2012). In the same scene, I drew attention to how the robot was alone in each panel and asked Catherine and James what the use of space in the

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scene represented. After Catherine said that “he’s alone”, I connected the use of space to the idea of isolation and how space can evoke feelings (field notes, February 21, 2012).

Afterwards, Catherine and James were asked to read poems and pick out vocabulary that helped them define the poem’s tone. I explained how authors use deliberate words to evoke feelings and told them to look for words and phrases in the poem that demonstrated isolation, feelings, and color. David was absent that day. As Figueiredo (2011) states, authors use symbols and signs that audiences will connect with, and it was hoped that the students would pick out symbols that defined the tone in each poem read. This assignment was given after the lesson on tone and after we had discussed various ways to pick out tone in print works, including select vocabulary. The students were given a copy of Edgar Allen Poe’s poem ‘The Raven’ and told to pick out vocabulary from the first two stanzas that demonstrated the poem’s tone. It was desired that the activity would assist students in reinterpreting what they had learned about tone in a visual manner and put it to use on a traditional print text. The poem, however, was on a higher reading level than Catherine and James were currently able to access. Though James reads at grade level, he is only in eighth grade and ‘The Raven’ was not an appropriate grade level text. Similarly, though Catherine is in ninth grade, she reads below grade level and thus it was also an inappropriate reading level for her as well. Of the two stanzas they were meant to examine, both students only circled words in stanza one. James and Catherine both circled the words “weak”, “pondered”, “quaint”, and “curious” (students artifacts, February 21, 2012). Catherine also circled the word “weary” (student artifact, February 21, 2012). After the students shared the words they had circled, I asked what type of mood these words elicited from them. James could not

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articulate why the words created the mood they did, but he asserted that the poem was “dark” (field notes, February 21, 2012). It is likely that, due to the advanced reading level the poem was at, the students only circled words in stanza one because of confusion and lack of confidence. While sharing the words they had circled, both Catherine and James asked for definitions to words, including ones they had circled, such as “pondered” and “quaint” (field notes, February 21, 2012). Again, the inappropriate reading level inhibited their success with the task. The vocabulary was too advanced for them, thus they could only infer from specific words they did know what the poem’s tone might have been.

As a group, we read the second stanza and discussed word meanings and how they related to the poem’s tone. I read the stanza aloud and afterwards defined any words Catherine and James were unsure of. Before looking at the words the students had circled, I asked again, “what type of mood does the poem have?” (field notes, February 21, 2012). James repeated that it was dark and Catherine agreed (field notes, February 21, 2012). Once they had decided that it was a dark poem, I asked them to defend their answer by explaining which words they circled and why. Both James and Catherine circled “bleak”, “dying”, and “vainly” (student artifacts, February 21, 2012). Again, Catherine circled more words, including “ghost”, “sorrow”, and a passage that read “angels named Lenore- / Nameless here for evermore” (Poe, 11-12). James also circled the word “surcease”, though he did not know what it meant (student artifact, February 12, 2012). Catherine appeared to hone in on the tone of the poem after it had been discussed and selected words that evoked sadness. James also knew the poem’s tone and, after I had defined what “bleak” and “vainly” meant, he circled those words (field notes, February 21, 2012). The bulk of word circling in the second stanza was done as a group with my

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aid in defining words the students were unfamiliar with. Despite the difficulty with vocabulary, James was able to pick out the poem's tone and wrote in bold letters on the side "dark" (student artifact, February 12, 2012). Even though he lacked the vocabulary strength to read and comprehend that specific poem, James was able to infer from the reading of the poem that it was a dark poem. With teacher aid, the students could succeed in defining the tone of the poem, however because of the advanced reading level, they were unable to look closely at how isolation and darkness were created in the poem. The students' analysis focused on word choice that evoked sad feelings and images of death.

The poem 'The Raven' was too advanced for Catherine and James' reading level, which created difficulty for them when reading. When presented with Shel Silverstein's poem 'hug-o-war', both Catherine and James easily defined the poem as happy and circled the words "hugs", "giggles", "kisses", "grins", and "cuddles" (student artifacts, February 21, 2012). James also circled the word "play" (student artifact, February 12, 2012). The vocabulary of this poem was easily accessible to both students and the words were simple, drawing a clear image for them. Despite Anstey's (2002) claim that comic and graphic novel authors use the same literary elements in their work, James and Catherine were unable to deconstruct the text of both poems and easily find the elements of tone. Again, the likely reason that they had trouble with 'The Raven' was due to its advanced reading level, which would be out of reach for an eighth grader and a ninth grader who reads below grade level. The Shel Silverstein poem was accessible because it was below their reading level, thus they could easily pick out the tone and the words that supported their reading of the tone. When dealing with the print texts, the vocabulary either hindered or helped James and Catherine define the tone.

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During this exercise, the students' understanding of tone was assessed based on their understanding of the words circled in the poems and whether their answers reflected the shared definition of the term tone that we created prior to the activity. Table 1 shows the elements of tone in the shared definition which the students were meant to use while defining the tone of each poem. Because of the inappropriate reading level, the students had limited understanding of the words in 'The Raven', thus they could not articulate how it demonstrated tone. When dealing with the Shel Silverstein poem, the students understood the words and could explain how they attributed to tone. When asked how the words create tone, Catherine explained that the "words are happy" (field notes, February 21, 2012). Though they could comprehend the words, neither James or Catherine mentioned space, line, color, or isolation, which constituted our definition of tone along with word choice.

Table 1

Use of Tone Elements to Define Poems

<u>Elements of Tone</u>	<u>Catherine</u>	<u>James</u>
Word choice	X	X
Line		
Space		
Isolation		
Color		

Legend: X= Noted in responses

While reading and circling words, the students focused on word choice, partly because elements like line and color were not to be found in the Shel Silverstein poem.

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However, color was used in the first stanzas of ‘The Raven’, but the reader must infer the literal darkness of the scene (field notes, February 21, 2012). Neither Catherine or James were at a high enough reading level to be able to infer isolation and color from ‘The Raven’.

Mixed Success with Visual Texts

During this study, I used the graphic novel *Robot Dreams* in an effort to reinforce literary terms through visual representation. Visuals may aid in students’ recall of such terms if they are visual learners or if they have difficulty with all of the various facets of the literary terms. Visuals can provide a concrete example of what the literary terms are composed of, as opposed to students receiving only a verbal or written definition of terms to use on print texts that may be difficult to glean literary elements from. As Smetana, et al. (2009) and Gentry, et al. (2005) saw with their deaf students, the addition of visuals to print material aided in students’ reading comprehension.

As was discussed previously, the students in this study first wrote their own definition of each literary term, shared their answers with one another, and then together they formed a shared definition with any necessary additions by the tutor. During the sessions on setting and characterization, I then turned to the graphic novel to reinforce the definition and components of the literary terms. While studying setting, I had provided the students with further information on the various components of setting by using the graphic novel. I had pointed out time of day and time of year. I had then told them that time period was a part of a story’s setting as well and asked them to examine the graphic novel and tell me what the time period was. David examined the first pages of the section and readily supplied that the story took place in “modern times” (field notes, February

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14, 2012). After we had created a shared definition of setting, the students read the first section of the novel. Once the reading was complete, I had the students return to the graphic novel to find examples of the various facets of setting. Based on the definition that we had created and the elements I had pointed out, students should have been able to find various places, time of day, time of year, and the time period in which the selected portion of reading took place. Catherine was disinterested in the lesson and only flipped through the pages of the book while David and James reread and looked for examples (field notes, February 14, 2012). After approximately five minutes, I called the group back together and asked the students to “give me examples of the setting in the story” (field notes, February 14, 2012). James listed several places, including the library, the house, and the beach as the current setting of the story (field notes, February 14, 2012). David also said that the beach was the main setting while Catherine supplied similar answers to James by saying that the story started out at the library then moved to the apartment (field notes, February 14, 2012). The students focused primarily on the locations given in the story, which prompted me to ask them, “What about the different times?” (field notes, February 14, 2012). After my prompting, David eagerly pointed out that the story went back from night and day (field notes, February 14, 2012). He also pointed out an alarm clock that had a time on it (field notes, February 14, 2012). Neither Catherine or James added anything (field notes, February 12, 2012). After David had given examples of time of day, I asked what time of year it was in the story. All three students supplied that it was summer and Catherine supported her answer by saying that “if they’re at the beach it has to be summer” (field notes, February 14, 2012).

When using the graphic novel to reinforce comprehension of setting, the students

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had limited growth. After reading the portion of the text and asked to look for the various parts of setting, they continued to focused on places, even though their original definitions on their pre-unit questionnaire all included time and we had previously gone over the different aspects of time that setting included. To gauge their growth, I listened for them to include various places as part of setting, as well as time of day, year, and time period, as was discussed. Only when prompted did they begin to look for the elements of time. When initially learning the literary terms in school, it may be possible that the students' focus was on the place of stories, thus when they were asked to search for setting in this study, they ignored the aspect of time in favor of places. It is also of note that it was not until prompted by the tutor that the students thought to look for time of year and time period in the story. It appears that their understanding of the term 'time' is limited in scope, again perhaps due to the focus on place as comprising setting and not the various parts of time.

During the lesson on characterization, the students partook in the same process of writing down their definition of the term, sharing their definitions, then working together to create a shared definition with input from the tutor. After creating the shared definition, we discussed as a group how each of the elements of physical traits, personality, actions, and thoughts contributed to characterization. Once we had discussed the aspects of characterization, I presented them with the comic *Prince Valiant* by Gianni and Schultz (2012). They took turns tagging the comic using post-it-notes, marking instances where the author and illustrator used the elements of characterization we discussed, either through words or pictures. I was looking for the students to make note of character's looks, their thoughts, or their actions. When examining the text in the

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comic, students again struggled to identify the elements of characterization, as they had with 'The Raven'. Before beginning the individual tagging exercise, I read the comic title to them and asked what the word valiant meant. None of them knew the word's meaning, but after I had them examine the main character and said, "he's a knight. What do you think a knight's character is like?", they were able to come up with the synonym 'brave' (field notes, March 13, 2012). Some of the text in the comic may have been above the students' reading level, making the comic inaccessible to them. After discussing what the word valiant meant, Catherine examined the text boxes, looking for the signs of characterization from the shared definition. The text discussed the character's actions, however, she was unable to articulate the prince's actions without prompting from her tutor. When Catherine appeared confused, I read some of the text aloud for the group. After reading, I asked them "what did the Prince do", which David answered "he led the monster away" (field notes, March 13, 2012). As a group, we then looked at the panels. I pointed out how the prince was being chased by a monster in order to let his friends get to freedom. When we thoroughly discussed the prince's actions and how Catherine reacted to those actions as a reader, she was able to characterize him as 'smart' on her post-it-note (field notes, March 13, 2012). After our discussion of the Prince's actions, David tagged the comic, saying that the Prince was "brave", while James said he was "heroic" (field notes, March 13, 2012).

The students seemed to struggle with comprehending how characterization was presented in the comic, possibly because the comic was on an advanced reading level. Similar to how Griffith (2010) stated that pictures contribute to half a reader's understanding of a graphic novel, or in this case a comic, and words used in the Prince

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Valiant comic were above the student's comprehension, thus they could not fully comprehend the comic. When the students were given word definitions and situations were explained to them, they were able to understand the text, otherwise they struggled. As Refaie (2009) noted, comic readers must understand and use various literary elements to comprehend the text. Perhaps because the students had only recently been introduced to the various parts of characterization, their comprehension was not strong enough to make the reading a simple task. Combined with difficult vocabulary, their overall comprehension of the comic suffered and they were only able to succeed with help from the tutor.

Growth from Intervention

At the end of the lesson on tone and the end of the unit, students were assessed to see whether intervention with visual reinforcement via the graphic novel aided in their comprehension of literary terms. Once students had completed the reading of the poems during the tone lesson, 'The Raven' and 'Hug-O-War', they were asked to write their own poems that invoked tone. For this task, they were instructed to use several of the elements we discussed, including color, space and isolation, ability to evoke and demonstrate feeling, and to focus on word choice. The students work was assessed based on their ability to illicit reader response through word choice, use of feelings, and whether they applied use of colors and space and isolation correctly.

During the writing process, Catherine created two tone poems. Her first poem began, "My first love is wild ride it was a crazy ride / See he was mine and I was his" (student artifact, February 21, 2012). She was able to capture feelings of affection and excitement in her poem by using love, fulfilling the feeling requirement of the task, using

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possessive language, and strong word choice with the adjectives “wild” and “crazy” (students artifact, February 21, 2012). Catherine also used possessive language to show the strength of the love she felt. By using two of the discussed tone techniques, feelings and word choice, Catherine succeeded in making a clear tone poem; however, she proclaimed the poem was too embarrassing and stopped writing. Her second poem demonstrates some ability to evoke feelings. She wrote, “My winter days my summer days / This mood I have can’t compare to what I feel inside / How I got here? How I feel? / My winter days are my sad days where it’s cold” (student artifact, February 21, 2012). Again, she focuses on feelings, but instead of a clear feeling, as in her first poem, she does not define what she feels and waffles between “summer days” and “winter days” which are her “sad days” (students artifact, February 21, 2012). In her second poem, she lacks strong adjectives or verbs to describe her feelings. It is worth noting that her second poem was also unfinished, due to the session ending.

In contrast to Catherine’s success in creating a tone poem, James was unable or refused to write a poem using tone. He created a haiku that said, “It don’t have to rhyme / because its not on the dime / and it on the time” (student artifact, February 21, 2012). Despite the lesson on tone and how to find it in poetry and print texts, James’ poem did not feature feelings, color, space or isolation, or strong word choice that helped to create a mood.

It is possible that Catherine had success with the assignment because she is a self-professed poet. Before beginning writing, she proudly told me that she had a binder of poems at home that she had written (field notes, February 21, 2012). If she is familiar to writing poetry, then she would understand how to write about and evoke feelings. Her

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writing background also explains her ability to use strong words, as she would use such language regularly when writing her poems. Similar to Seglem and Witte (2009) whose students needed help creating work using literary elements, James' did not seem to be able to create a tone poem on his own. He focused his effort on making the poem rhyme, instead of considering the elements of tone discussed. His lack of success could be caused by his disinterest in writing; when presented with the task of writing poetry, James protested and slumped in his seat unhappily (field notes, February 21, 2012). If he was unmotivated to write because he disliked the genre, then likely he would not put forth much energy into creating a poem.

At the end of the study, to determine whether the usage of graphic novels had aided in students' recall and expansion of literary definitions, the students answered the same questionnaire they had completed before the study began. On this questionnaire, they again had to define each of the literary terms and state whether they felt they knew what each term was on a "yes", "no", or "sometimes" scale. When scoring the students' definitions of the literary terms, I looked for specific usage of the elements we discussed, as displayed in the following tables. Tables 2 through 4 demonstrate each student's response and reveals growth or lack of growth.

Table 2

Definition Growth in Catherine

Literary Term	Pre-unit definition	Shared definition	Post-unit definition	Tally	Growth
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Setting	A time and place and where a book takes place	Time, place, city, time of day, historical period, season/time of year	Time, place, historical time period	3/6	+1
Tone/mood	It describes what mood/tone is in a story/book	Word choice, Imagery, Personal feelings, Colors, isolation, Space, line	Authors volume/ feelings in a story	1/8	+1
Characterization	It the developing of a character	Physical traits, Actions, thoughts, feelings,	Developing a character(physical traits, actions, appearance)	2/4	+2

Note: **Bolded** words indicate desired words in definitions

Catherine's results show the most growth out of the students in the study. When defining all three terms, she was able to use parts of the shared definition that we created and used during lessons. When defining setting, she continued to use time and place, but she also included historical time period, which we had discussed. In her definition of tone, though she does not specify what type of feelings tone evokes, she knew that feelings were part of tone, thus she earned a point. While defining setting on her post-unit questionnaire, Catherine was able to move beyond saying that it was simply "developing a character" and added that developing a character included actions and physical appearances/traits (questionnaire, March 13, 2012). Catherine's overall growth equated to a +4, the highest number of the three students. Table 3 looks at David's pre and post unit questionnaire results.

Table 3

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Definition Growth in David

Literary Term	Pre-unit definition	Shared definition	Post-unit definition	Tally	Growth
Setting	A place, time, and area	Time, place, city, time of day, historical period, season/time of year	A time , place , and anything describing the place	2/6	+0
Tone/mood	The tone or mood someone is portraying	Word choice, Imagery, Personal feelings, Colors, isolation, Space, line	How a character feels	1/8	+1
Characterization	I am not 100% sure	Physical traits, Actions, thoughts, feelings	Were you describe a character	0/4	+0

Note: **Bolded** words indicate desired words in definitions

When describing setting, David continued to use time and place as characteristics, but he could not articulate what else contributed to “describing the place” (questionnaire, March 13, 2012). Because the definition lacked any of the setting elements discussed, he earned no growth points. Interestingly, even though he was absent during the lesson on tone, his definition grew to “how a character feels” (questionnaire, March 13, 2012). As with Catherine’s answer, because we discussed feelings as part of tone, he earned a growth point. While defining characterization, David could supply a definition on the post-unit questionnaire, which was not the case on the pre-unit questionnaire, but it

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lacked any of the elements discussed during the lesson, earning no growth points.

Because David's definition of characterization and setting lacked any of the term elements learned and he did not earn any growth points. The only point earned was on his definition of tone. Table 4 demonstrates James' results, which were similar to David's.

Table 4

Definition Growth in James

Literary Term	Pre-unit definition	Shared definition	Post-unit definition	Tally	Growth
Setting	It where the time and place is	Time, place, city, time of day, historical period, season/time of year	It the place, time	2/6	+0
Tone/mood	It how the story sound good, bad, evil	Word choice, Imagery, Personal feelings, Colors, isolation, Space, line	It how the character feels the problem he have	1/8	+1
Characterization	It who the characters are and what they do	Physical traits, Actions, thoughts, feelings	It how you describe a character	0/4	-1

Note: **Bolded** words indicate desired words in definitions

James' definition of setting in the post-unit definition essentially reminded the same, mentioning only time and place, showing no growth. When defining tone though he mentions "how the character feels", using the element of feelings that was discussed during the tone lesson (questionnaire, March 13, 2012). Because he could supply feelings as part of his definition, James earned a growth point. In contrast to his other definitions,

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James actually had negative growth when defining characterization. In his pre-unit definition he said characterization included “what they do”, indicating characters’ actions (questionnaire, February 14, 2012). When defining the term after the unit, the element of action is lost and James says it is “how you describe a character” (questionnaire, March 13, 2012). Due to the lack of action, which James had included in his pre-unit definition, he earned a negative point.

Of note in the results is the fact that Catherine made the most growth overall and in her definition of characterization, which grew by two points. The post-unit questionnaire was completed after the lesson on characterization, which may contribute to her two point growth with that definition. In contrast, James’ definition of characterization weakened by -1, though the questionnaire was given immediately after the lesson. Of equal note is how David’s characterization definition also did not grow, despite the lesson given previously.

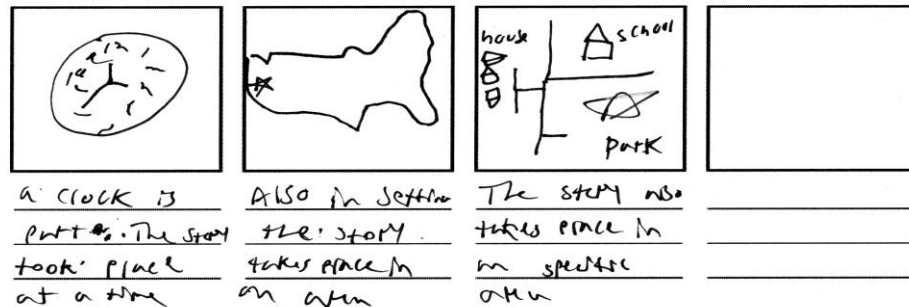
Also worthy of note is how all three students had growth in their definitions of tone, as they were able to connect feelings to tone. David’s growth is of interest, due to the fact that he was absent the day of the tone lesson. His ability to define tone as including feelings may be attributed to the fact that, when he asked what was studied when he was absent, Catherine and James told him about the tone lesson and offered a definition for him (field notes, March 13, 2012). Despite the growth in defining tone/mood, growth was not made in each literary term’s definition. When describing setting, both David and James’ definitions continued to focus solely on time and place, showing no growth. Catherine’s grows slightly with the inclusion of time period.

At the end of the study, the students also completed a comic or short writing

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passage, identical to the one they made at the beginning of the study. David and James created a comic and Catherine wrote because those were the assessment types they chose at the beginning of the study. They also had to use the same literary term their previous comic or writing piece used in order for growth measurement to take place. In his three-panel comic, David chose to focus on setting. Figures 1 and 2 show David's pre and post unit comics.

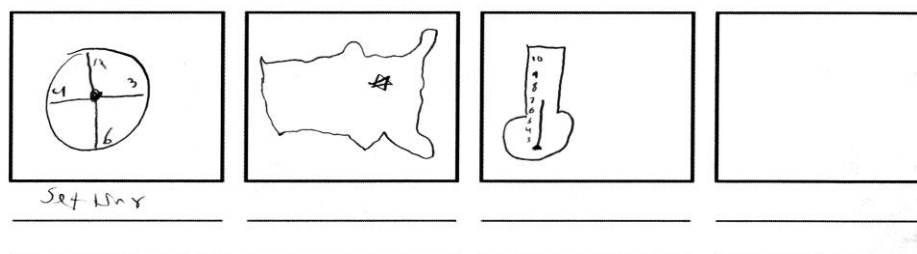
Figure 1. David's Pre-Unit Setting Comic



David focuses his comic on time and place. The second and third panel both indicate “place”, but David does not explicitly say in his caption of the pictures how stories focus on a “specific area” (student artifact, March 13, 2012). Possible specifications he could have made would be city, state, town, a person’s home, etc. This pre-unit comic demonstrated that David’s understanding of the term setting was limited to time and place. After the unit, David’s post-unit comic showed an equally simplistic understanding of setting, as seen in figure 2.

Figure 2. David's Post-Unit Setting Comic

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The first two panels of David’s pre and post unit comics are identical, distinguishing time and place as parts of setting. After completing the comic, I asked David what the third panel was and he replied, “A thermometer. Temperature is part of setting, right?” (field notes, march 13, 2012). Similar to how the questionnaire results were assessed, the comics were scored based on the knowledge students demonstrated of the literary term, using the traits from the shared definition. Table 5 shows David’s growth, based on the pre and post unit comic.

Table 5

David’s Literary Term Growth in Comics

Literary Term	Pre-unit comic	Shared definition	Post-unit comic	Tally	Growth
Setting	Time, place, Specific area	Time, place, city, time of day, historical period, season/time of year	Time, place, temperature	2/6	-1

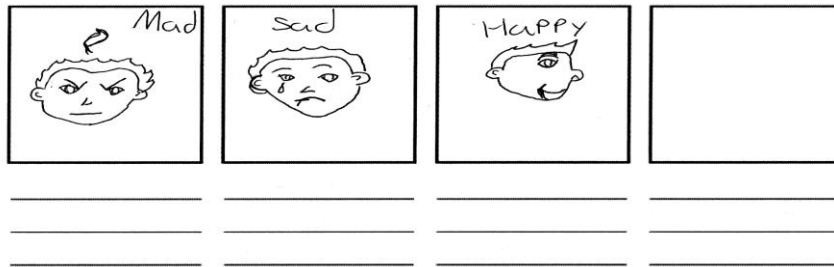
Note: **Bolded** words indicate desired elements in assessment

David’s comic continued to use time and place in basic terms, maintaining two of the six traits discussed in the setting lesson; however, temperature was not mentioned during the lesson. Adding temperature to his comic subtracted from David’s score. Though his pre-unit comic included “specific area”, because it tied in with the element of place, it did not detract from David’s overall score (student artifact, February 14, 2012).

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James also completed a comic for his literary term assessment. James' comic focused on the literary term characterization. Figure 3 shows his pre-unit comic.

Figure 3. James' Pre-Unit Characterization Comic



James' comic focuses solely on a character's emotions, as evidenced by the range of faces and the emotions listed above the pictures. Though James' written definition on the pre-unit questionnaire stated that characterization is "who the characters are and what they do", his comic illustrates emotions and leaves out actions (questionnaire, February 14, 2012). His focus on emotions may be attributed to uncertainty on how to depict actions in drawings. James' understanding of characterization appears to have grown at the end of the unit, as seen in figure 4.

Figure 4. James' Post-Unit Characterization Comic



Again, the first three panels focus on character's emotions. Although he focused characterization on feelings, James added a fourth panel featuring a shirt with a skull on it and labeled it "goth" (student artifact, March 13, 2012). The addition of the skull shirt ties in with the lesson on characterization, as when we discussed a character traits,

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personality was mentioned. James had made the connection that personality types included social cliques, “like Goths”, which explains the appearance of the shirt in his comic (field notes, March 13, 2012). Table 6 displays the scored results of James’ pre and post unit comic, based on the inclusion of elements of the shared definition of characterization.

Table 6

James’ Literary Term Growth in Comics

Literary Term	Pre-unit comic	Shared definition	Post-unit comic	Tally	Growth
Characterization	Character’s emotions	Physical traits, Actions, thoughts, feelings	Character’s feelings, personality type	2/4	+1

Note: **Bolded** words indicate desired elements in assessment

As was stated, James’ comic moved beyond focusing solely on emotion, and incorporated the element of personality. By using another element of characterization, James’ showed growth in his literary definition and earned a growth point.

Catherine chose to write her assessment piece and focused on setting. Her pre-unit piece created a setting by saying, “It was 6:30 A.M. in the morning and I was waking up in the bedroom getting ready for school” (student artifact, February 14, 2012). Her piece incorporated three of the six elements of setting in the shared definition, which were time, time of day, and place (student artifact, February 14, 2012).

Her follow up piece summed setting up in a simple sentence: “Setting: 6:15 P.M., library, March 13, 2012” (student artifact, March 13, 2012). Table 7 demonstrates Catherine’s scored pre and post unit assessment.

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Table 7

Catherine's Literary Term Growth in Written Form

Literary Term	Pre-unit comic	Shared definition	Post-unit comic	Tally	Growth
Setting	Time, place, Time of day	Time, place, city, time of day, historical period, season/time of year	Time, place, time of day, date	4/6	+1

Note: Bolded words indicate desired elements in assessment

Though the piece lacked story content, it demonstrated Catherine's understanding that setting included multiple times, as was discussed in the lesson on setting. Catherine's piece showed growth. She included the actual time, time of day and place, as her pre-unit piece had, but also added in the date (student artifact, March 13, 2012).

Catherine had similar growth like Hobbs and Frost's (2003) students who participated in studying visuals. Hobbs and Frost (2003) saw improvement in their students' comprehension when paired with visuals. We had discussed seasons and time periods during the lesson on setting, which Catherine applied to her post-unit piece by including the month and year. The addition of a date earned her a growth point, though it was not an explicitly stated as part of the shared definition of setting. It is possible Catherine added the date in connection to time period, as when we discussed setting I had offered "present time" as a time period (field notes, February 14, 2012).

Overall Student Enjoyment of Using Graphic Novels

The intent of this study was not only to determine whether graphic novels can aid in students' understanding of literary terms, but to see what their perceptions of the usage of graphic novels as teaching tools are. To study this, I examined how the students reacted to the texts we used throughout the study and had them complete a questionnaire

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that focused on their enjoyment using the graphic novel in the study and their opinions of graphic novels. While observing, I looked for their reaction to the texts and their willingness to use the texts.

When initially presented with the study, all three students were willing to participate. Before the study began, David asked me “do you read any graphic novels?” and then listed off two titles that he had read prior to the beginning of the study (field notes, February 7, 2012). When the study began and I introduced Sara Varon’s novel, *Robot Dreams*, David proclaimed he had already read it. James and Catherine, who had not encountered the book before, picked it up and flipped through it, examining the pictures. James looked interested, whereas Catherine frowned the entire time she examined the book (field notes, February 14, 2012). As Moeller (2011) saw with her girls, Catherine was immediately reluctant to read the text. However, unlike Moeller’s (2011) girls, who were opposed to graphic novels because they felt they were ‘boy books’, Catherine opposed the graphic nature of the book, asking, “How are we supposed to read this? There aren’t any words” (field notes, February 14, 2012). After I explained that we would ‘read’ the novel by “looking at the pictures and figuring out the story” and then use it to explore literary terms, Catherine continued to rebel against the graphic novel (field notes, February 14, 2012). During reading time, she refused to pick up the book for approximately five minutes, despite coaxing from her tutor and an observer. When she opened the book, she looked at the cover, attempted to read two pages, and then flipped through the rest of the designated section. During the same reading exercise, David sped through the work and James read the section at a steady pace (field notes, February 14, 2012). Even though Catherine showed displeasure at the reading material,

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David and James appeared to enjoy it. For them, the graphic novel provided an engaging educational tool, which they were pleased to use. If students in classrooms show interest similar to David and James and have a positive attitude towards graphic novels, then teachers can enhance their lessons and units by incorporating this visual tool.

While studying tone and reading the next section in *Robot Dreams*, Catherine continued to have a negative view towards the book. As with Warrican's (2006) students, who saw the graphic novels to be used in class and dismissed them as children's books, after seeing the graphic novel, Catherine deemed it too childish for her to learn from by saying "this is a kid's book" (field notes, February 21, 2012). When reading time began, Catherine busied herself picking up the table, then interrupted the others while they were reading (field note, February 21, 2012). When I placed the book in her lap, she placed it on the table. When I picked it up again and put it on her chair, she placed it on the table once more. When asked why she did not want to read, she asserted her belief that she could not learn anything from the graphic novel, saying that, "the book has no words" (field notes, February 21, 2012). Contrary to Catherine's apparent dislike, James was enjoying the graphic novel. After completing the reading section assigned that day, he read on, engaged in the story (field notes, February 21, 2012). When I noticed that he was reading ahead, I outright asked James "do you like the book?" to which he nodded before returning to reading (field notes, February 21, 2012). The reluctance Catherine demonstrated is a potential flaw to using graphic novels in the classroom. Students need to see value in the reading they are doing, otherwise they will refuse to do the work. David and James, however, demonstrated the potential these texts have. Similar to Ranker's (2007) students, who were enthusiastic about using a graphic novel because

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they knew the format, James, who had read a graphic novel once or twice and liked the experience, was thoroughly engaged and willing to read more. His attitude shows that, when students see value and purpose in the text, graphic novels can be a powerful tool.

On the final day of the study, Catherine was pleased to work with the comic Prince Valiant because it had words. She seemed to feel that as long as the text had words, it had merit as a learning tool. When it came time to study the comic, she eagerly pulled it to herself first and examined it for the elements of characterization that we were studying (March 13, 2012). Unlike Warrican's (2006) students, Catherine was able to find some merit in the visual texts, so long as it had words to accompany the pictures. Only then could she find meaning in it. Her attitude drastically altered towards the texts used depending on the amount of print. Similar resistance could be met in classrooms due to the visual nature of the books.

Both David and James responded well to the graphic novel, as did Ranker (2007) and Chun's (2009) students because of the format, which they found engaging. Having read *Robot Dreams* previously, David completed his reading quickly. James also read quickly, often reading ahead because he was engrossed in the story. When Catherine refused to read on the first day, James attempted to coax her into reading by telling her it was a good story and that it would "make [her] cry" (field notes, February 14, 2012). James was sharing his engagement and enjoyment of the story by trying to get Catherine to read. Both David and James read without any complaints and enjoyed the reading, asking reflective questions about the story throughout the study. Though Catherine was resistant to the text, both boys were welcome to the experience of using a graphic novel as a learning tool. The boys' attitudes towards the graphic novel demonstrates the ability

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these texts have in reaching children, with special educational needs or not. Even though one student did not enjoy the text, the others did and found usefulness in studying it.

However, Catherine's disinterest of the graphic novel also reinforces Moeller's (2011) findings that revealed girls are less interested in reading graphic novels than boys.

Interestingly, in the post-unit questionnaire on literary terms, Catherine claimed the graphic novel helped her because, "I understand characterization using the book we read and the comic" (questionnaire, March 13, 2012). Though she did not say that she enjoyed the book, she admitted that she felt it helped her. When asked for her comments on the study, she said the book was "ok, but I prefer reading a book and not using visualization" (questionnaire, March 13, 2012). Both David and James agreed that using the book helped them to visualize literary terms. David added a short comment, saying that "I got to practice more" (questionnaire, March 13, 2012). Catherine's apparent change of mind is somewhat like the girls in Moeller's (2011) study, who, after reading the graphic novel, found they enjoyed it. The responses demonstrate that overall graphic novels and comics do aid in visualization practices and can be met with great enthusiasm from some students. The texts can therefore be great tools in classrooms to help budding and struggling readers with visualization and engagement.

To finish up the study, the students were asked to complete a questionnaire about how they felt about graphic novels and their use in school. The first question asked, based on a scale of one to ten, to rate how much they enjoyed reading the graphic novel. A one indicated that they did not enjoy working with it at all, a ten indicated that they loved the graphic novel. David rated the experience an eight, while James rated it a nine. The follow up question asked why they rated the book that way, to which David replied that

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he “got a lot of details of the picture” (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). James said he enjoyed the story “because it was fun” (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). Both of the boys’ answers indicate that they found working with the graphic novel engaging and fun, as shown in their high ratings of the experience. Catherine rated the experience a six, and gave a detailed explanation of her response, saying, “I didn’t really like it at first because I thought the book wouldn’t help me. But, then I got use to it and I like it” (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). Her rating indicates that she did not entirely like the experience of working with the graphic novel, but she did not completely dislike it either and she goes so far as to say that she liked it at the end.

Based on Catherine’s former complaints about the book not having words, the questionnaire asked whether not having words made the story more difficult to understand. All three students replied “no”, it did not make it more difficult (questionnaires, April 3, 2012). When asked why the lack of words did or did not hinder their understanding, James answered that “it was easy to understand” (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). David responded that “the picture did all the talking”, so it was not difficult to understand (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). Though Catherine circled “no” when replying to the question, she also wrote in “I don’t know” as an option and circled that as well (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). In her response, she said that it was not difficult “because it is like making up a story” (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). Even though she says that she understood the text without the words, by adding in the “I don’t know”, Catherine hints that she wasn’t entirely certain about the story. Catherine’s difficulty with the graphic novel is similar to Gentry, et al.’s (2005) deaf students, who had a difficult time understanding print texts without words. Her situation was reversed in

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that she appeared to need words to help make sense of the story. Because the boys found the reading easy, it is possible that their experience was more enjoyable, thus resulting in their higher experience ratings from the previously discussed question. In Catherine's case, she had trouble with comprehending the text without words, as hinted at in her questionnaire, but also in her responses to reading the texts. During the tone lesson, she flipped through the section of *Robot Dreams* and then said to me, "I don't know what's going on" and proceeded to ask follow up questions as to what was happening to the main character. This confusion likely contributed to her somewhat unpleasant experience, which explains her rating of six.

The students were outright asked what parts of the graphic novel they liked and what they did not like. When responding to why they liked the story, Catherine answered that she liked the "moral/theme" and David said he liked it because "It was sad" (questionnaires, April 3, 2012). James answered he liked "the setting" (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). Catherine and David picked out key factors of the text that they enjoyed. When asked what they disliked, Catherine again mentioned the lack of words, saying, "at first I didn't like it didn't have words" (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). The lack of words in the text appears to have made a deep impact on Catherine's overall enjoyment of the graphic novel. If that is all that caused her displeasure with the experience though, it is a factor easily worked around when selecting graphic novels, as most typically use words in their stories. David admitted that one thing he disliked was that "some parts were unclear" (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). It is possible his confusion was also contributed to by the lack of words in the text. In contrast to Catherine and David, James said that there was "nothing" he disliked, leading to an overall enjoyable experience with the

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graphic novel. All the students were able to find something that they liked about the story, which shows that graphic novels can be an enjoyable reading text for students; however, there was also some confusion with the text. Teachers must find ways to work around comprehension troubles and consider their graphic novel choices carefully.

Several questions asked the students to consider using graphic novels in class. When asked if they would like it if teachers used graphic novels in lessons, all answered “yes” (questionnaires, April 3, 2012). When asked to explain their answers, David said “it would be fun discussing the story”, a similar answer to James who said “it would be interesting” (questionnaires, April 3, 2012). Catherine also felt that using a graphic novel in lessons would be enjoyable, saying that “it would make the class be fun” (questionnaires, April 3, 2012). The students’ answers demonstrate that they enjoyed working with the graphic novel and that they perceive it to be a fun and unique text. When next asked if they would enjoy it if the teacher taught a unit with a graphic novel instead of a traditional print book, all three answered “yes”, though Catherine also wrote in “maybe” and circled that as well (questionnaires, April 3, 2012). Again, their perception of the graphic novel as a “fun” source is evident, though Catherine seems wary of using it as the basis of an entire unit. James responded that he would like to use a graphic novel as a unit book because “it seems fun”, while David said “it’s better to understand” (questionnaires, April 3, 2012). Catherine did not write in a response to why she would or wouldn’t like a unit based on a graphic novel. The students’ enjoyment of the graphic novels extends to the point that, for the most part, they would be interested in spending an entire unit working with such a text.

The students professed interest in using graphic novels in the classroom, but to

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garner further information on their overall perceptions of graphic novels, they were also asked if they would read a graphic novel on their own. All three students answered “yes” (questionnaires, April 3, 2012). When explaining their answers, David’s interest appeared to be because “I used to read em” (questionnaires, April 3, 2012). His answer shows that he enjoys the genre so much that he already had previous experience reading graphic novels. James responded that he would read a graphic novel on his own “because there fun to read” (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). Like David, he found enjoyment in graphic novels. Catherine also answered that she would read a graphic novel on her own, but her answer does not clearly articulate why she would read that type of text. She says, “I sometimes like to read on my own but I think it’s better if read aloud it become a better reader” (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). Her answer may be indicating that she would read a graphic novel alone, as the question asked if she would read “on her own” and she is saying she would also read aloud (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). Based on the answers the students supplied, their willingness to read graphic novels on their own hints that they have a positive perception of graphic novels. They are a text source enjoyable enough that the students would spend time out of class reading them.

Though the students saw graphic novels as an enjoyable book type and one they would like to use in class, they did not all feel that the books were of equal reading value to traditional print books. When asked if they felt graphic novels were of equal value to print books, James and Catherine said “yes”, while David said “no” (questionnaires, April 3, 2012). When explaining their answers, James and Catherine focused on the content of the books. James said that graphic novels were of equal reading value to print books “because they could contain the same information” (questionnaire, April 3, 2012).

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Catherine furthers this belief by saying, “As long as graphic novel have title, a book cover, and have a theme to the story then their equal to traditional print books” (questionnaires, April 3, 2012). David on the other hand believed that graphic novels were not on par with print books because “there is less reading” (questionnaire, April 3, 2012). Though the students enjoyed the graphic novel, not all of them saw it was reading of equal value to traditional print texts. The overall perception of graphic novels is fun and enjoyable, as seen in the answers to the questionnaire, but David also does not see them as equals to print texts. Despite David’s belief, James and Catherine maintain that if the graphic novel has a solid story, like a print text, it is of equal value. Though graphic novels by rule have less reading than print texts, many have deep and thoughtful stories, which can equate to a valuable reading session. Teachers must choose their texts carefully so that the books are not perceived as simple reading, but as thought provoking texts that happen to be visual based.

Implications and Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, several implications can be drawn about how educators can use graphic novels to their advantage in class and students’ perceptions of graphic novel usage. Though some of the students in this study showed progress with their expansion of literary term definitions, teachers would have greater success in expansion of literary term definitions if the students had lengthy and repeated reinforcement of the terms and the visuals associated with them. The visuals used in this study appeared to aid somewhat in the students’ recall of literary terms, however it may have benefitted students more to be presented with wordless graphic novels as well as those with words. In a formal classroom, teachers should use both types of graphic novels

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to ensure that the needs of students who need text with visuals are met. Overall, the students in this study enjoyed using the graphic novel to teach literary terms, though there were initial problems for some getting interested in the text. To avoid confusion and disinterest caused by it, better scaffolding is needed to introduce students to the comic style, especially for a wordless graphic novel. The overall pleasant reception to the use of graphic novels as well as the growth in literary term comprehension demonstrates that graphic novels are not only a tool to increase student's engagement and interest in reading, but can also be used to promote growth in areas of study, be it literary terms or otherwise. As the literature saw, many students found enjoyment in using graphic novels and, with teacher aid, completed educational tasks and assignments that otherwise daunted students or students thought they could not complete. Seeing this growth in student engagement and achievement, teachers ought to consider not only supplementing classroom libraries and lessons with graphic novels, but also teach them as literature on par with print texts.

At the beginning of this study, I asked how teachers can use graphic novels to reinforce students' understandings of literary terms and then asked what were students' perceptions to the usage of graphic novels. To answer these questions, I set up a study with three students enrolled in an afterschool reading clinic that met once a week. During clinic, the students worked with a graphic novel and a comic to study the literary terms setting, characterization, and tone/mood. Though this study focuses mainly on graphic novels, comics were also researched and used minimally in the study due to their similar nature to graphic novels and their presence in classrooms. To study their recall of literary terms, the students had to give their own definition of the literary terms studied before a

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shared definition was created as a group. The students then used the shared definition to study the graphic novel and comic used. At the end of the study, the students were asked to recall the shared definition, using the lessons on the literary terms. The students also completed a pre and post unit assignment to determine if using the graphic novel and comic aided in literary term recall. The students were also observed and questioned about their attitudes towards graphic novels to gain insight into their perceptions of graphic novels and the use of such visual texts in class. Through the lenses of new literacies and media literacy, educators can see the value of graphic novels. New literacies propose the importance of using texts other than traditional print works in learning, such as a graphic novel that combines pictures and words, or uses only pictures to tell a story. Media literacy furthers the graphic novel cause by stating how important it is for students to be able to read different types of media, including visual based texts. As seen in the literature associated with graphic novel and comic usage in school, many students prosper using graphics as a learning tool, whether it be used to access language, enhance understanding of texts, create detailed projects, or engage reluctant readers. The findings of this study show that educators can use graphic novels to reinforce comprehension of literary terms and reveals that students typically enjoy working with graphic novel texts. Not only did the students' recall of literary terms generally increase from the beginning of the study, but questionnaires and behavior also revealed that the students enjoyed using the graphic text and would be willing to read one again inside or outside of class.

There were several limitations which factor into the outcomes of this study. Due to the timeframe of the practicum course, this study was done in a four-week period with four sessions with the students. Several weeks were lost, due to the students' having

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spring break and then the college having spring break. Were this study to be duplicated, I would have a longer overall timeframe as well as more than a single weekly session. The addition of more time would allow for further instruction as well as supply more time to reinforce lessons before moving on to a new literary term. I would also use more than a single graphic novel and be sure to include a graphic novel with words as well as one without. By having both wordless texts and texts that feature words, I would be able to study students' success with literary term comprehension through both sets of graphic novels, as well as inquire after which type of text they preferred: with or without words? Were it possible, it could also be of interest to do a comparative study featuring a control group that did not use graphic novels to study literary terms and then compare the results of the two groups to see whether there is a correlation between graphic novels and recall of literary term definitions.

This study has provided insights into possible ways educators can use graphic novels to teach literary term comprehension, as well as insights into students' perception of the use of graphic novels. Knowing that students' comprehension can grow through the use of graphic novels and that they seem to enjoy using them, questions arise about how graphic novels are currently used in class. Are they used solely as supplements? Are they used at all? In the cases where graphic novels are used as primary texts, one must consider which graphic novels teachers use in their classes and on what basis those teachers select their texts. Though graphic novels are a fairly new text source that has only recently begun to find its way into schools, teachers should not dismiss their ability to engage and teach students. The visual nature of graphic comics reaches visual learners, but they also teach students of all strengths how to read visuals, a prominent

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form of media in the world. To read a graphic novel not only tells a story, but promotes reading of the world around students and opens doors for them to succeed in that world.

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Appendix A**Literary Terms Questionnaire**

Directions: Answer the questions with as much detail as you can

Do you know what Setting is?

___ Yes ___ No ___ I think so

Do you feel comfortable using it in your writing?

___ Yes ___ No ___ Sometimes

Describe what setting is:

Do you know what Characterization is?

___ Yes ___ No ___ I think so

Do you feel comfortable using it in your writing?

___ Yes ___ No ___ Sometimes

Describe what characterization is:

Do you know what tone/mood is?

___ Yes ___ No ___ I think so

Do you feel comfortable using it in your writing?

___ Yes ___ No ___ Sometimes

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Describe what tone/mood is:

Do you feel that using the book to visualize the literary terms helped you? Explain.

Any comments you would like to make about the book or study?

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Appendix B**Graphic Novel Questionnaire**

1. On a scale of one to ten, how much did you enjoy working with the graphic novel? One being 'didn't enjoy at all', 10 being 'loved it!' Please circle one.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Why did you rate the book this way?

2. Did not having words make the graphic novel more difficult to understand?

Yes

No

Why or why not?

3. What was one thing that you liked about the graphic novel used in the study?

4. What was one thing that you disliked about the graphic novel used in the study?

5. Would you like it if your teacher used a graphic novel in lessons?

Yes

No

Why or why not?

6. Would you like it if your teacher taught a graphic novel as a unit instead of a traditional print book?

Yes

No

Why or why not?

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7. Would you read a graphic novel on your own?

Yes

No

Why or why not?

8. If your teacher allowed you to read a graphic novel for a project, would you consider reading a graphic novel or a traditional print book?

Yes

No

Why or why not?

9. Do you consider graphic novels of equal reading value to traditional print books?

Yes

No

Why or why not?

10. Do you read graphic novels outside of class? If yes, please list any titles.

Yes, I read graphic novels

No, I don't read graphic novels

If you do read graphic novels, why do you like them? If you don't read graphic novels, why don't you prefer to read them?

Titles, if any: