“These books give me life”: Considering what happens when comics and graphic novels are welcomed into a middle school space

DISSERTATION

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By

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Abstract

This year-long, ethnographic study documents the use of comics and graphic novels as academic literature across the curriculum in a suburban middle school. Because the use of this medium in classrooms is relatively new, it is a process that has not been extensively documented. While comics and graphic novels can provide a complex and valuable experience for readers, they can also be challenging to both students and teachers.

In particular, this dissertation documents the tensions that surfaced as comics and graphic novels were integrated into a curriculum. This study is situated in a middle school entrenched in neoliberal ideologies, with focuses on high-stakes testing, a standardized curriculum, and individual, rather than collaborative work. Yet, the faculty in this middle school was also inviting nontraditional texts into classrooms, and operating in tension with a neoliberal agenda. By focusing on teaching and learning literacy practices with comics and graphic novels and talk about those practices, this study also addresses negative assumptions and hesitancies around such texts being used for academic purposes. Participants included seventh grade teachers and students engaged in working with and talking about comics. This research considers how comics and graphic novels were welcomed into this school, as well as impacts around time and space, and positioning. All of these themes point back to how comics and graphic novels were working within and against normative structures in this school.
This study is positioned to consider conventional literacy practices and how teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels supports and disrupts those practices. Serving as an example and a starting point for bringing this dynamic medium into classrooms, this study fills a significant gap, supporting and challenging traditional literacies practices and analyzing potential for new ways of operating in a school.
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I am humbled by the people in my life who have been so supportive and invested in this dissertation and my PhD journey. I had the opportunity to work with amazingly talented and passionate teachers at Trail; I am so grateful for all of the time and energy you put into teaching and learning with comics and everything else! I am especially grateful for “Penny.” Your dedication to young readers and literacy is inspiring. Thank you for inviting me into your school and your life. I am looking forward to continuing to work with and learn from you. And I was so lucky to get to hang out with some of the smartest and most interesting seventh graders around; thank you for teaching me so much!

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And finally, thanks to Joe – my favorite person on the planet. I started researching comics because of you. Who knew it would take us here? Thank you for talking with me, cheering me on, challenging me, listening to me, and making sure I eat dinner. You make me braver. In my opinion, anyone getting a PhD needs a Joe. Onward to the next adventure; I’m glad I’m doing it with you.
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Publications


**Fields of Study**

Major Field: Education Teaching & Learning
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Chapter One: Introduction

I did not begin researching comics in education because of my own, personal love for the medium. In fact, when I began teaching fifth grade in 2005, I had only ever read one comic: Bone, by Jeff Smith (2004). I included this series in my own fifth grade classroom library. And as I watched my fifth grade students engage with this comic series repeatedly, I began wondering about these books, why so many of my students were interested in them, and what their place might be in my own classroom. This wondering began a research trajectory that started in my own classroom, but has lead me to examine a school-wide effort to integrate comics and graphic novels across the curriculum.

My initial research with comics and graphic novels (Dallacqua 2012a and b) took place with a small group of young readers in an after school book group. While discussions took place outside of the classroom, I found many implications for classroom practice. In particular, I noted how students recognized the literary qualities in comics as they read and talked about them. I also had an opportunity to observe and study a Socratic seminar discussion around Persepolis (2003) in a classroom setting, taking note of the discussion around gender and culture the visual text fueled (Dallacqua and Sutton, 2014). Each of these studies were small in scale, regarding participants, time spent in the field, and classroom sites. And each of these studies has influenced how I have approached this study, addressing what happens when comics and graphic novels are
welcomed into a school space? Faculty at Trail Middle school (the research site for this study) invited Nathan Hale, a graphic novelist, to their school as part of a biannual author visit event. I was also invited to Trail to support teachers and students in teaching and learning with comics as they prepared for this visit.

As my central research question suggests, this study examines comics and graphic novels operating on a larger scale: a school. Data was collected from three different classrooms and the school’s library and media center across a school year. Therefore, this study is longer term and larger in scale than my past research, building and extending from my experiences teaching and researching comics in education. Further, the school’s faculty approached me with an established interest and many questions about using comics and graphic novels in their school. I, along with comics and graphic novels, was invited into the school and into classrooms across a school year. In this study I document how comics and graphic novels were welcomed into a school and the impacts of the teaching and learning that occurred with those texts.

Statement of the problem

Reading and writing with multiple modes is a skill gaining value in our twenty-first century world (Kress, 2003). Along with this, multimodal texts like comics and graphic novels continue to gain legitimacy as complex and high quality (Groensteen, 2007; McCloud, 1993, 2006). Comics and graphic novels offer the dynamics of multiple modes and a variety of design choices, requiring and strengthening critical reading skills (Connors, 2013; McCloud, 1993, 2006). Readers of these texts must engage, not only with the narrative, but also with how it is presented on the page. Overall, quality comics
and graphic novels tell stories in unique layers that require complex and close reading analysis skills.

Recently, our educational system began recognizing comics and graphic novels as valid academic texts for classroom use. For example, current Common Core Standards require that fifth graders have experience “analyze[ing] how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem)” (Common Core Standards Initiative, p. 12, 2012). As students continue through middle and high school, graphic novels are included as texts within a range, quality, and complexity of literature expected to be integrated within the curriculum. Middle school students are also expected to respond and present their ideas, not only through writing, but visually and by utilizing multimedia effectively (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2012). Further, the comic medium can address the Common Core’s conceptualization of text complexity. For example, reading comics and graphic novels requires considering multiple levels of meaning, structural and graphic conventions, and new and/or multiple perspectives, all of which are part of text complexity, as outlined by the Common Core. Schools are slowly catching up to a 21st century perspective on reading and writing by inviting comics and graphic novels into classrooms.

Because the use of comics and graphic novels in classrooms is relatively new, it is a process that has not been extensively documented. And while reading comics and graphic novels can be a complex and valuable reading experience, it can also be challenging to both readers and teachers (Connors, 2013; Rice, 2012). Rice, while
analyzing her own practices, notes her frustration as a teacher, wanting to include graphic novels in her classroom, but not knowing where to start when identifying quality texts and struggling with the overall structure and format of the medium. Her frustrations mirror many conversations I have had with teachers, as they struggled with integrating graphic novels into their classrooms. While Rice was able to locate some suggestions (empirical, theoretical, and instructional) around using graphic novels for instruction, she found them lacking in describing the difficulties and problems that might also arise. Rice found that scholarship she was reading did not address the difficulties in locating quality graphic novels to teach, and then teaching them to their fullest potential.

Literary scholars focus on textual analysis of graphic novels (Chute, 2010; Groensteen, 2007; McCloud, 1993, 2006), arguing for a legitimization of comics as academic literature. Educational researchers, especially in literacy, promote the use of graphic novels and comics in schools, particularly as a means to support student engagement in reading (Bucher & Manning, 2004; Carter, 2007; Frey & Fisher, 2008; Juneau & Sucharoc, 2010; Monnin, 2010, 2011; Schwarz 2002, 2007), shifting away from negative assumptions commonly associated with the medium (Krashen, 2004, Versaci, 2008). However, little empirical research exists on the actual use of comics and graphic novels as part of K-12 classroom instruction, with virtually no work done in content areas beyond English language arts. Empirical research that does exist notes that comics and graphic novels are used for academic purposes and for meeting curriculum standards. A small part of that empirical research extends beyond, addressing critical issues and artistic choices that may not necessarily be part of the curriculum. As
standards and an evolving culture demand that students be prepared in using twenty-first century literacy skills, the medium of comics has much to offer. Yet, the medium still combats negative conceptions. And teachers remain uncertain of this medium, requiring experience and understanding to teach and learn with comics and graphic novels.

**Purpose**

This ethnographic study documents the use of comics and graphic novels as academic literature across the curriculum in a suburban middle school. There is a significant gap in empirical research documenting teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels in a classroom setting. This research strives to fill this gap, as well as act as a resource for teachers wishing to include graphic novels in their classrooms.

I am particularly interested in how using nontraditional, multimodal texts like comics can operate across the curriculum and affect literacy practices. I document the process of teaching and learning with comics as well as shifts in ideology for teachers and students concerning what comics and graphic novels are, impacts on reading and composing, and the (unlimited) potential comics might have in schools. Ultimately, this study considers what counts as literacy in a school and how literacy counts in a school. This study seeks to contribute to scholarship pushing the boundaries of nontraditional resources as academic texts and considers how working with such resources impacts teacher and student learning.

**Research questions**

This research will focus on a middle school whose faculty has removed the hurdle for the comics and graphic novel medium to be included. This is largely due to the
district-wide invitation of a graphic novelist to each of the five middle schools for their 2014-2015 bi-annual author visit. Teachers at Trail Middle School saw this invitation as an opportunity to welcome and integrate comics and graphic novels into classrooms. Similar to Rice (2012), several teachers and support staff at Trail Middle School were enthusiastic, but daunted by using comics and graphic novels in their classrooms. This resulted in the school librarian reaching out to me, ultimately inviting me into the school’s classrooms to support teachers and act as a resource for teachers and students preparing for this author’s visit. With this in mind, I am interested in what happens when comics and graphic novels are welcomed into a school space? In order to answer this question, I focused on teachers’ and students’ processes of using comics and graphic novels in classrooms. I also identified ideologies about their experiences (see Table 1). As this is work that would happen over time, I identified shifts in processes and ideologies across a school year. Because this was a school-wide initiative, there were a variety of potential teacher participants and students with whom to work. Although I was a presence in the school across all grade levels (6th, 7th, and 8th), I focused my study on a smaller sample in order to take a more detailed look at how teachers and students were teaching and learning with comics. By focusing on one seventh grade interdisciplinary team, where the English language arts teacher, Social Studies teacher, and Science teacher are all interested in using comics and graphic novels in their classrooms, I was able to capture multiple ways in which teachers use graphic novels in their classrooms across the curriculum.
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Teacher-focused questions

In order to document three teachers’ and one librarian’s processes around graphic novels I asked: *How are teachers planning for, implementing, and assessing teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels across the curriculum?* Further, as teachers planned, implemented, and assessed this work, I was interested in their thoughts beyond their process of teaching with this medium. I was also asking: *What are teachers’ ideologies around comics and graphic novels? And do they shift during a school year, given the welcoming environment?* By investigating both the processes and opinions around teachers’ integrating with comics and graphic novels across the curriculum, I gained a wide perspective on what it takes to teach with these texts and the impact teaching comics and graphic novels has on teachers’ pedagogical practices and their values and ideologies related to texts and literacy learning.

Student-focused questions

As teachers began working with and teaching graphic novels in their classrooms, students became part of this research. It was valuable, then, to also capture students’ processes in working with graphic novels, as well as their personal opinions about the work and the texts. This study also asked: *How do students engage with comics and graphic novels in a school setting?* Further, I gained insight around students’ thoughts by asking: *What are students’ personal opinions about the comics and graphic novels and how they are used in their classrooms across the curriculum?* Again, by looking at both
the process of teaching and learning as well as students’ perceptions of that and the texts used, this study was able to capture the possibilities of these texts and what they offer students.

**Questioning positioning across participants and texts**

This investigation documents practices, opinions and ideologies of teachers and students engaging with comics and graphic novels. Documenting shifts around these requires me to step back and widen the scope of my view, looking for impacts across people, practices, and texts. Further, the teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels is situated with professional development and a visit from Nathan Hale, the graphic novelist. All of these events had implications for how teachers and students saw themselves, each other, the visiting author, and the texts they were reading. For this reason I was also asking *How are students, teachers, authors, and comics and graphic novels being positioned?* This question offers a larger lens for documenting the shifts that were occurring across this school year around literacy practices and what counts as literacy.

**Theoretical assumptions**

**Literacy**

This study focuses on teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels in academic spaces (including classrooms and the library). While I am interested in the skills students need to read these texts in a classroom setting (Dallacqua, 2012a), I am also interested in what teachers and students do with these texts and how reading, analyzing, discussing, and using comics impacts classroom and school literacy practices.
In order to examine literacy from this perspective, I draw from New Literacy Studies. This frame requires researchers to examine the social, cultural, historical, and political relationships in which the literacy practices and events are situated (Larson and Marsh, 2005; Street, 2003). Collins and Blot (2003) note that “we must conceptualize literacy as literacies, as embedded in a multiplicity of social practices, rather than as a monolithic technology or tradition” (p. 60). The term literacies signifies literacy as multiple in context, use, and interpretation.

I am researching under the assumption that literacy is not about a single text or set of skills, but about the process or doing of literacy. By “‘doing’ literacy, students learn ‘what counts as literacy’” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 248), and I am interested in how comics and graphic novels count in readers’ lives and in this school environment. In terms of this study, ‘doing’ literacy involves reading, analyzing, and talking about comics and graphic novels within a classroom context, as well as composing multimodal work. It also involves how students describe engaging with those texts outside of their classrooms. Scholars have advocated for literacies to be accessed and available in order to engage adolescents in relevant literacy practices that matter to them (Jacobs, 2008; Alverman, 2009) and that highlight individual student achievements (Vasudevan and DeJanyes, 2013).

**Medium and mode.** The medium of comics is also influential as I consider literacy and classroom practices. Rogers (1999) asks,

What kinds of classroom communities will we create in order to provide dialogic spaces in the institution of schooling, in which, drawing on literature as an art, we
help children to know in new ways, read the world in new ways, and negotiate their responses in a post-modern world? (p. 143-144).

Comics and graphic novels lend themselves to being both literature and art, because of their multimodal nature. As such, this study seeks to address Roger’s question, understanding modes within literacy and art work as socially shaped communication resources that are continually drawn on, altered, and reused. This is true in any environment, but can be essential in classrooms. Kress (2011) contends that in classrooms where students are comfortable reading and writing through several modes as cultural resources there will be “a wealth of cultural resources and therefore of perspectives on understanding and knowing: a conceptual wealth which cries out to be used” (p. 249). By including sequential images with the range of literacy practices in classrooms, educators offer multiple pathways to making meaning.

**Comics and graphic novels**

**What comics are.** The definition of comics has been widely debated, resulting in a range of descriptions that are often limiting and/or self-serving (Groensteen, 2007). “So great is the diversity of what has been claimed as comics, or what is claimed today under diverse latitude, that it has become almost impossible to retain any definitive criteria that is universally held to be true” (Groensteen, 2007, p. 14). Eisner (1985), both a comics artist and theorist settles simply on “sequential art” to capture the broadness of what can be included as a comic. McCloud (1993), working from Eisner’s definition, attempts to expand it, defining comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the
viewer” (p. 9). Here McCloud adds to Eisner’s definition and directly points to the reader’s place in defining comics. In these definitions, the images are primary, suggesting that words are not always a part of this medium. While Groensteen, too, privileges images in his conception of comics, he also notes that “comics are essentially a mixture of text and images” that work as a language (p. 3). For my own interests, I also privilege the image. However, while the interaction of image and text is one of great importance and interest when examining comics as a medium, it is the format, structured with panels, that makes comics a unique form of narrative.

Also drawing from Eisner’s original definition, Carter (2007) shifts into defining the graphic novel, describing it as a “book-length sequential art narrative featuring an anthology-style collection of the comic art, a collection of reprinted comic book issues comprising a single story line (or arc), or an original, stand-alone graphic narrative” (p. 1). This broad and all-encompassing definition notes that length is the indicator between comics and graphic novels. While comic books traditionally run twenty to twenty-four pages, graphic novel lengths vary much more, and may go beyond the short episodes that comics are structured around. However, as Carter’s definition acknowledges, comic books are often bound together to form a graphic novel.

Cart (2011) notes another aspect of the graphic novel by describing them as “library-friendly comics” (p. 166). In fact, when graphic novels began to be written and sold, the name shift from comic to graphic novel was purposeful, in the hopes of attracting a new, older fan base and to move away from the negativity associated with comics (Gordon, 2012). This negativity was largely due to the Wertham trails, which
labeled comics as harmful and causing delinquency in young readers (Sabin, 1996, Krashen, 2004, Versaci, 2008). By describing graphic novels as library-friendly, Cart acknowledges the negativity associated with comics and the library and other social structures as gatekeepers for what counts as acceptable reading material.

Considering Groensteen’s observation that universal criteria for comics and graphic novels is almost impossible to develop, I have structured my own definition, for the purposes of my research. In the school where this study takes place, shorter comics as well as longer graphic novels were being read. For me, a comic book differs from a graphic novel only in length. Drawing primarily from McCloud’s definition of comics, I define a graphic novel as: juxtaposed pictorial and other images formatted in deliberate sequence with the use of panels and other

Figure 1 – image from Sousanis (2015)

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structural devices, to construct a book-length narrative intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the reader/viewer. (Other structural devices may include gutters, word balloons, color, or text). This definition privileges images while also recognizing the structural elements that go into graphic novel story-telling. Including the intention to reach readers/viewers in the definition is essential for me, as it acknowledges that graphic novels are meant to be read and experienced; the choices comic artists make are fueled by that understanding (McCloud, 1993; 2006).

**What comics can do.** Comics, as a medium, can be useful in questioning conventional ways of communication. In considering comics, Sousanis (2015) explores his own conceptions of communication, noting that “not only space, but time and experience too, have been put into boxes” (p. 10). Playing off of the panel boxes that are part of comic medium and how time and space are constructed in that medium, Sousanis takes note of how comics communicate. His text appears alongside images of faceless people sitting in a classroom-like space, behind desks, receiving and then rewriting series of boxes repeatedly (Figure 1). Within a closed-in space like the one drawn in Sousanis’s work, he theorizes that people have been born into and therein accept the rhythms of communication across time and space, without questioning other options or alternative paths. Instead, he seeks to complicate how we communicate in order to make a case for multimodal ways of being. Sousanis suggests comics as,

…a multidimensional compass, to help us find our way beyond the confines of ‘how it is,’ and seek out new ways of being in directions not only northwards and
upwards, but outwards, inwards, and in dimensions not yet within our imagination (p. 46).

His theoretical perspectives consider comics as a medium that can disrupt the typical and assumed way of communicating.

Instead, Sousanis suggests communication, as part of seeing, being, and reading in the world, is a more fluid and nonlinear process. Reading and constructing comics brings this process to bear and helps to ground the argument that there is more to communication. Sousanis draws from the rhizome metaphor (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) in thinking about nonlinear movement and unseen connectedness that can exist while operating and communicating in the world. By breaking free of the linear way of thinking (and reading and writing) we can acknowledge other possibilities and ways of communication. Image, Sousanis suggests, is one medium for this work. And comics, more specifically, operate, according to Groensteen, as a network, “a connected space not reliant on a chain-like sequence linearly proceeding from point to point” (p. 62). This conception of comics is especially valuable to this study when considering new or shifting ways of operating and engaging with literacy in schools. Comics, in their form, have a potential for surfacing and disrupting the linear and confined, enacting a more fluid and multidimensional (and multidirectional) way of communicating.

**Scholarly significance**

As the Common Core now includes graphic novels and the popularity for this medium continues, educators will require more resources as they prepare to use these multimodal texts in their classrooms. My research provides an intimate and in-depth look
into multiple teachers’ perspectives, techniques, and outcomes while using comics and graphic novels in their classrooms coupled with students’ views on these experiences. This research establishes this medium as complex and academically valuable, as well as a layered art form. Extending beyond the research that has already considered comics in the classroom (Chun, 2009; Connors 2007; Chase, Son, Steiner, 2014; Dallacqua & Sutton, 2013; Farrell, Arizpe, & McAdam, 2010; Martínez-Roldán & Newcomer, 2011; Pantaleo & Bomphray, 2011; Pantaleo, 2013), I am documenting their use long term as classroom literature across content areas. This documentation illustrates the possibilities of working with comics and graphic novels within the curriculum.

This research will contribute to how the field of literacy in education examines and contextualizes the study of comics within literacy and literacies. Consequently, this study is positioned to consider conventional literacy practices and how teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels supports and disrupts those practices. Serving as an example and a starting point for bringing this dynamic medium into classrooms, this study fills a significant gap, supporting and challenging traditional literacies practices and analyzing potential for new ways of operating in a school.

Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. In chapter one I provided a background of my own research experience before briefly introducing this research study. I outlined the problem and purpose this study seeks to address, along with the research questions I am considering. This study is a long-term, multi-classroom ethnography that examines teachers and students teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels.
Chapter one also briefly reviews relevant theoretical assumptions regarding literacy in
general and comics specifically. Finally, I point to the significance of this study, as it fills
a substantial gap in empirical research.

Chapter two reviews the applicable literature and theoretical framing for this
study. I review the theoretical and empirical research that has examined teaching and
learning with comics in academic settings, taking note of the negativity the surrounds this
medium, as well as how this research has positioned comics. I continue this chapter by
introducing New Literacy Studies as my primary frame, specifically considering
multiliteracies and multimodality. I also address critiques around multiliteracies
pedagogies. Finally, I draw from structural perspectives in comics and visual culture as
frames that help me attend to the visual and art-based work this study entails.

Chapter three explicates my methodologies for this study. I begin by describing
my role as the researcher and participant-observer, which was constantly and reflexively
negotiated. I move on to review the context of the study, describing the research site,
participants, and subsequent events (including professional development, author
presentations, and classroom lessons) that involved teaching and learning with comics
and graphic novels. Finally, I describe my methods of research, outlining data sources,
collection, analysis.

Chapter four addresses my central findings in this study. To begin, I frame this
chapter around the tensions between neoliberal and progressive teaching practices that
were coexisting in this school space. De Certeau’s conceptions of grids, strategies and
tactics are described, theoretically grounding what was happening in this study.
Following this introduction I detail my findings, describing the invitation to comics and how that invitation became a reality, the impacts of and on time and space, and how teachers, students, authors, and comics were being positioned and repositioned as they engaged in teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels.

Chapter five addresses each research question point by point, as a discussion of my findings. I consider future questions and look ahead to potential research. In particular, I consider professional development, ideologies and norms, and joy in schools, as our teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels pointed towards a need for further consideration in these areas.
Chapter Two: Review of literature and theoretical framing

Teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels comes with baggage (Chute, 2008). In this chapter, I will first explore scholarship, both theoretical and empirical, around the use of comics and graphic novels in academic spaces and how this “cultural baggage” impacted that work (Chute, p, 453). Scholarship in this chapter considers opinions and ideologies around working with comics and graphic novels in academic spaces as well as purposes and potential for such work. Academic spaces include classrooms, as part of regular class curriculum and instructions, as well as after school reading groups and school libraries. This research is of particular value to this study, considering that comics and graphic novels were invited into a school.

That fact that comics and graphic novels were being welcomed into a middle school was remarkable, given the negativity the medium has endured. Comics have a history of being conceptualized adversely: as harmful, simple, or as stepping stones for ‘higher level reading’ with print-based texts. These conceptualizations impact teachers’ ideologies around comics and graphic novels and their (lack of) uptake in classrooms. And when comics and graphic novels are used in educational spaces, they are typically used to support conventional literacy and reading practices that are addressed. These practices include already established goals, standards, and requirements in schools. Scholarship also addresses potential comics and graphic novels have for extending
beyond the standardized curriculum, drawing on the arts to consider aesthetics and addressing social and political issues. However, empirical research with comics and graphic novels is scant. In particular, there is a lack of scholarship that extends over long periods of time and considers work across the curriculum. This is a gap this study hopes to fill.

In order to consider the many ways comics are being used, along with the ideologies and social contexts that accompany those practices, I draw from New Literacy Studies. Street (2003) notes that New Literacy Studies “takes nothing for granted with respect to literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated, problematizing what counts as literacy at any time and place and asking ‘whose literacies’ are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant?” (p. 77). After reviewing literature focused on teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels I will review tenants of New Literacy Studies. Through this lens I will examine multiliteracies and multimodalities, as they remain major influences in theoretical and empirical work with comics and graphic novels. Further, I will consider possibilities extending beyond multiliteracies as conceptualized by the New London Group (1996). This allows me to think about how comics and graphic novels can support new, unknown possibilities.

Finally, this chapter will draw from arts and theory. Working with the arts is one way that schools might encourage practices that are more open new possibilities and surprises (Jacobs, 2013). In order to think about comics and graphic novels not only as literary works, but pieces of art as well, I draw from structural and narratological theory
as a way of approaching comics. Further, visual culture, as a way of providing vocabulary and perspectives of art viewing and art making, was influential to the ways in which comics and graphic novels were introduced, read, and discussed during this study. Making room for comics and graphic novels to be both literary texts and art provides opportunities for unknowable potential in school spaces.

**Comics and graphic novels: A review of literature**

Much of the research that exists within the crossover of comics and education is related to pedagogical practices, however, without the support of empirical research. This research is in opposition to a history of negative opinions around comics as a medium. This review of literature outlines these opinions as they appear in scholarship, as well as the ways in which comics and graphic novels have been written about as educational texts in educational spaces. Comics and graphic novels are framed as having rich potential for classrooms. There is also a small amount of empirical research that considers comics and graphic novels in academic settings such as classrooms, school libraries, and after school reading groups, which I focus on in this review. Particularly, this scholarship focuses on comics’ ability to engage students and to build literacy skills valuable to an academic environment. However, it is important to note that in the small amount of empirical work that exists, there is a noticeable gap in work across content areas. Comics use is particularly valued in English Language Arts settings, acting as a text that can support reading development and complex literary skills.

While there is some work that focuses on specific aspects of the medium (such as image, shading, color, spatial arrangement), it is often times in the service of supporting
reading engagement more broadly and literacy practices grounded in print. Comics and graphic novels have also been posed as resources in approaching social issues and critical discussions, both in theory and practice. Currently, while both empirical and non-empirical scholarship characterizes comics and graphic novels as complex and valuable (Carter, 2007; Connors, 2007, Low, 2012) for all types of readers (Carter, 2007; Rice, 2012) much of the scholarship with this focus is situated within and supports literacy practices that are print-based. Further, work with comics and graphic novels is often able to fit within already established educational structures and goals.

**Popular opinions of comics**

In the 1940’s, the comic medium experienced widespread popularity. But in 1953, Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent* was published. This study, based primarily on anecdotal data, concluded that comic books caused juvenile delinquency and was followed by a set of nationally televised hearings (“Kefauver Hearings”) which investigated the comics’ negative effects on children (Versaci, 2008). Since then, comics have been met with resistance, especially in schools. Concern over censorship, quality, and complexity all contribute to the engrained ways of scrutinizing comics as a whole. And “when societies around the world have shown outrage at comics, they have tended to attack comics as a medium, as a form that is wrong at the core, rather than an issues-by-issue or even as a title-by-title basis” (Sanders, 2013, p.70). These generalized attacks make ideologies around comics difficult to disrupt.

Aside from Wertham’s conclusions that comics were inappropriate for young readers, comics have a reputation for being narrowly defined. They are often
characterized as a *genre* of literature that only involves simple stories about super heroes. As such, comics are perceived as simple or easy and often looked at as “lowbrow” literature (Op de Beeck, 2012, 468). Literary theory has made efforts to analyze comics as a *medium* and work to complicate these opinions and position comics and graphic novels as complex and worthy of academic attention (Smith and Duncun, 2012). Yet, there is still a substantial gap in empirical research involving comics, particularly with young people, that supports or contests this position. Eisner writes that “comics as a reading form was always assumed to be a threat to literacy” (1985/2002, p. 3). Comics, in their form, challenge conceptions of literacy as print-based, but only when counted as texts. And comics often remain threatening to or in service to literacy practices with alphanumeric texts. Even current educational research that does exist and does count comics as texts often positions them (intentionally and unintentionally) as conduit reading material (Krashen, 2004, Carter, 2007).

**Teachers’ ideologies around comics**

The negative history around opinions of comics and graphic novels has impacted their existence in schools. While there is research that points to the value of comics and graphic novels, there still remains a hesitancy and a lack of use in education. Much of the scholarship on this medium is primarily aimed at a teacher/practitioner audience, but it serves more as general advice and encouragement. There is little that documents actual practice or warns of the difficulties of using comics and graphic novels. Instead, scholarship points towards the potential positive outcomes, including engagement, reading and writing skill building, aesthetic reading, and critical questioning (which will
be discussed in more detail). One exception is Rice’s (2012) own documentation of bringing comics into her classroom from the first time in her article “Using graphic texts in secondary classrooms: A tale of endurance”. Rice, positioning herself as teacher/researcher anecdotally documents her highs and lows of integrating the graphic novel medium into her classroom. Rice documents her struggles with learning to read, plan for, and teach graphic novels. She writes: “Teachers deserve to know that learning to engage with new literacies is difficult, the road is long, and the rewards may be few” (p. 42). Time gaining access to new books and learning how to read them was the hurdle for her. Yet, she concludes that the time and work she put into bringing comics and graphic novels to her classroom engaged and interested students in positive ways.

Teachers’ ideologies have been the subject of some empirical research involving comics and graphic novels previous to this study. Teachers, like Rice often see the potential value in using comics and graphic novels in classrooms (Rice, 2012; Clark, 2013; Lapp, Wolsey, Fisher, and Frey, 2011/2012), yet remain hesitant for various reasons. This hesitancy connects to a lack of knowledge on their part or assumptions about knowledge and opinions held by colleges, administrators, and community members (Clark, 2013). Connors (2011) notes that there is a lack of teacher education when it comes to the visual literacy skills needed to approach texts like comics and graphic novels. “Instead, classroom teachers are left largely to their own device to figure out how best to address a subject with which they might lack experience” (p. 72). Lapp, Wolsey, Fisher, and Frey’s (2011/2012) survey study of fifty-eight elementary school teachers aligns with Connors’ suggestion, noting the responses from teachers “suggest[s] that the
majority of these teachers have very limited knowledge or experience related to reading graphic novels.” Lapp et al describe a disparity between elementary teachers’ interest and perceived value and actual use in classroom lessons. While access, time, and curriculum demands have all been referenced as roadblocks to actual use, the majority of teachers in this survey still believe comics and graphic novels have value as academic texts.

Clark (2013) worked with preservice teachers engaging in non-fiction graphic novels for the purposes of teaching Social Studies. He also found that participants saw value in these texts, particularly due to their ability to present multiple representations of history and entry points for examining historical events critically and contextually. Yet, participants also expressed a hesitancy to use comics and graphic novels in their classrooms regularly. These preservice teachers particularly noted fears that administrators, other teachers, parents, and even their students might view their class as “easier” because of the use of comics and that they may not be able to meet content standards appropriately, resulting in their needed to ‘justify their use of graphic novels” (p. 43). Even the engagement and a positive shift in opinions of this medium did not encourage teachers to use these texts. Clark’s findings bring to bear further questions about how to continue to shift ideologies about these texts and how to get them into classrooms.

However, some educators are using comics as a way to continue to challenge school and what counts a literacy there. Martínez-Roldán and Newcomer (2011) posit that “the use of wordless books and graphic novels to support students as readers needs to
be located within a broader and more contemporary view of what “reading” and “texts” mean.” In this way, comics and graphic novels are used to promote standardized literacy practices, yet, they can also be used to question those practices. Acknowledging the complexity of comics and graphic novels, Versaci (2001) argues that reading and including comics and graphic novels as classroom texts provides “opportunities to raise larger questions of literary merit and canon formation” (p. 65) ultimately “enact[ing] a powerful lesson about the dangers of literary presumption” (p. 66). The scholarship here illustrates that working with comics and graphic novels is difficult for a number of reasons, including a lack of background knowledge and a need to combat existing negative assumptions. Yet, as teachers invite comics into their curriculum they open the door for opportunities to challenge the standardized literary expectations and broaden perspectives of reading and texts, therein challenging strongly held ideologies around comic and graphic novels.

**Comics and graphic novels in educational settings**

Much of the research interest in comics stems from the hope of capitalizing on the popularity of the medium, drawing in reluctant readers, or supporting struggling readers and English Language Learners (Chase, Hye Son, Steiner, 2014; Chun, 2009; Martínez-Roldán, & Newcomer 2011). In this way, comics are seen as valuable, but potentially transitional reading material. However, as the medium grows and becomes more popular and diverse, educators and researchers are taking interest in what else is possible. Issues of engagement, standardized skills in reading and writing, aesthetic reading, and critical
social and political uses of comics and graphic novels are all common themes explored in scholarship and are reviewed below.

**Engagement.** Reading comics and graphic novels is often described as an engaging experience. Alvermann and Guthrie (1993) note that “highly engaged readers are motivated, knowledgeable, and socially interactive” (p. 2). This framing of being an engaged reader “is informed by the work of reader-response theorists and researchers who argue that readers’ active, multifaceted involvement is critical to their comprehension and evaluation of literary texts” (Enciso, 1996, p. 172) as well as the entire reading experience (Rossenblatt, 1978). In this way, engagement depends on a readers’ interests, understandings and active ways of interacting with texts and each other.

Comics and graphic novels invite such engagement, drawing on motivation, knowledge, and interaction. Much of this is due to their structure, as the images, panels, and the gutter space in-between invite readers to make meaning. In fact, it has been argued that readers must be active participants in the reading of a comic in order to engage with them (McCloud, 1993, Dallacqua 2012a). Comics, McCloud (1993) contends, “command[s] audience involvement” necessitating readers “be conscious collaborator[s]” in the reading process (p. 59). Sipe (1998) also describes the complex oscillation taking place when reading a multimodal text that requires, for example, decoding both printed text and image to engage in a narrative. Structurally, comics engage readers in what they ask readers to do with the text, inviting active interaction. Each mode offers new information, and readers rely on multiple reading strategies and
layers of attention (Dallacqua, 2012a). And as a multimodal text, the structure of comics and graphic novels may be reflective of texts that students are engaging with outside of the classroom, furthering their interest and engagement (Dallacqua, 2012b). (The structure of comics will be discussed in greater detail in a later section in this chapter.).

Comics structure also invites students to fill in gaps with their own stories and opinions, furthering the engagement. Low (2012) points specifically to the gutter in comics as “provid[ing] students with the ideal medium for exploring a wide range of literacies and for taking an agential role in meaning making (p. 371). With this freedom to interpret, students can draw from their own stories to make meaning while engaging with comics (Chun, 2009; Farrell, Arzpe, and McAdams, 2010; Martínez-Roldán and Newcomer, 2011). Farrell, Arzpe, and McAdams (2010) found that student readers drew from their own lives in order to analyze the images in this text and make meaning. Students interacted with the text via annotated spreads as they made observations and connections. These spreads offered a new space for students to write questions and comments directly onto photocopies of The Arrival’s (2006) (a wordless graphic novel) pages. This process of viewing images and responding provided an opportunity for “‘re-writing’ the narrative through their ‘inner-conversations’” (p. 206). These students, in their image viewing, brought their world reading forward to re-write The Arrival into a story that reflected their own lives. The format and content of The Arrival, made it possible for the book to become personally significant and potentially more interesting to readers, in this way. Their engagement was an interactive experience involving their own personal knowings.
Martínez-Roldán and Newcomer (2011), while reading this wordless graphic novel with immigrant students found students reading and engaging with the graphic novel in similar ways. Reading images here became a cultural event that was reliant on students’ personal histories. They also noted that the open-ended-ness of the text and reading enhanced the engagement. By widening traditional views of reading and text, scholars offer *The Arrival* as an ideal text to engage immigrant students. It allows for developing visual literacy skills, draws on familiar themes of immigration, and “is well suited to inviting multiple interpretations” (p. 190) as a wordless novel. Martínez-Roldán and Newcomer conclude that:

> With wordless picture books...[students] can instead read ‘between the pictures’ while using various reading comprehension strategies. This text allowed for several students at varying levels of language and academic skills to engage, interpret, discuss, and co-create narrative. This space between the pictures serves as an invitation for them to fill in those spaces with their own questions and experiences (p. 196).

Structure, image, and personal connections contributed to students’ ability and motivation to engage in reading.

**Standardized skills in reading and writing.** The structure of comics and graphic novels, particularly the gutter space and open-endedness of images, has been documented to draw young readers in, keep their attention, and encourage them to interact with a text. This engagement was often personal, but lead to conventional understandings in the instruction of English Language Arts as well. Some researchers in the field argue further
that engagement with these texts reflects a complexity of narrative that “stands on its own” in its affordances for classroom and literacy practices (Low, 2012, p. 382). Throughout current scholarship, this complexity is often used in the service of teaching literacy skills that are standardized in schools. These skills include print-based reading and writing and literary skills and devices such as tone or point-of-view.

Even though comics and graphic novels are positioned to engage readers, often struggling readers, scholarship contends that they are valuable for a “wide range of subjects and benefit various student populations, from hesitant readers to gifted students” (Carter, 2007, p. 1). In a traditional, academic environment, this medium is gaining legitimacy and value by promoting literacy skills that are standardized and required (Carter, 2007; Frey & Fisher, 2008; McCloud, 1993). There are opportunities reviewed in theory for comics and graphic novels across content areas (Bucher & Manning, 2004, Schwarz, 2002), with a strong focus in literacy skills in an English Language Arts classroom.

**Reading and language learning.** Decoding, sequencing, and making inferences, reading skills are that are traditionally closely connected to alphanumeric language skills, have been taken up with graphic novel reading in classrooms. Connors’s (2013) empirical work with graphic novels and adolescent readers suggests reading these multimodal texts requires a “wealth of resources” to decode, analyze, and make meaning—skills that are often underestimated when considering approaching comic texts (2013, p. 48). Connors (2013) highlights comic and graphic novel reading as a complex process requiring “considerable knowledge” (p. 48) from the reader. In order to think about reading,
language use, and understanding, Farrell, Arzpe, and McAdams (2010) took advantage of the wordlessness of the graphic novel *The Arrival* (2006) With their students, they took part in “careful looking in order to decode visual signs, construct sequences, and generate hypothesis that will be confirmed or redefined” as they read (p. 198).

Chase, Hye Son, Steiner (2014) also used comics in their classroom for the purposes of approaching sequencing with young students. Students were introduced to features of graphic novels, including speech bubbles, frames, and narrative boxes for the purposes of examining comic strips that were out of order and “putting the frames into the right order” (p. 438). This work transitioned into writing, as students produced dialogue, and then eventually created their own comics. The authors suggest that work with graphic novels can support common concepts and skills including making predictions, inferencing, and setting (p. 442). Using visual and multimodal texts to consider how language and understandings of language can be constructed has shown to be successful for these researchers. For them, work with the comic form is supporting the reading and writing that students are required to be doing successfully.

Researchers have also examined a variety of students using comics and graphic novels working to improve their language skills, learning “how to use language, or at least parts of it, correctly” (Chun, 2009, p. 146). Scholars argue that it is the form that invites this type of work. As readers consider when and how print-based text is used in comic narrative, the use of language, including expression and tone, is modeled. Along with engaging readers, multimodal texts invite young readers to fill in the gaps, potentially enriching meaning-making and requiring high-level inferencing skills (Sipe
and Brighton, 2009). Reading becomes a dynamic process that requires and fosters these specific skills for meaning making. This active interaction supports students reading and language learning.

**Literary learning.** Along with language use and meaning-making, the use of literary devices in comics and graphic novels has also been explored with young people. Graphic novels are beneficial in exploring tone and mood, using the color and visual cues from the images along with the printed text (Fisher & Frey, 2008). Monnin’s (2010, 2011) work, specifically, includes teaching suggestions and guides for teachers using graphic novels, covering literary elements like point of view, foreshadowing and symbols as well as the visual set-up of the novels. This includes how gutters, word balloons, color and other visual elements contribute to how graphic novels are working to create opportunities for meaning making. This way of reading promotes traditional and standardized literary skills through visual texts.

My own previous research supports this claim. I worked with a voluntary after school reading group reading two graphic novels (Dallacqua, 2012a&b). Young readers (fifth graders) prepared for this by reading the graphic novels independently, and then creating their own annotated spreads (Farrell, Arzpe, and McAdam, 2010) by placing post-its with questions and comments throughout the text. Students drew on their own understanding of literary devices such as point of view and mood in order to understand and discuss the graphic novels they were reading. In this way, students were drawing from past understandings of work with alphabetic texts. Similarly, students can draw on
their work with comics and graphic novels to contribute towards understandings of texts they approached after reading (Dallacqua, 2012a).

**Skills and resources for aesthetic learning.** Along with supporting standardized literacy practices, some work with comics and graphic novels points towards working with the medium to promote aesthetic reading and responses. In this way, the medium is framed as a complex text that can evoke both literary and art-based responses. Some researchers have carefully tended to the visual nature of comics, in particular (Connors, 20013; Pantaleo & Bomphray, 2011; and Pantaleo, 2013). Teachers and researchers have situated comics as art, considering the beauty and style that in part of the text. Research also thinks about an aesthetic reading process, one in which readers transact with a text, that can surface with reading and discussion comics and graphic novels (Rossenblatt, 1978). Pantaleo & Bomphray (2011) and Pantaleo’s (2013) work with *The Arrival* focused heavily on exploring the graphic novel form and the visual analysis through discussion. In both studies the researchers specifically made class time for mini lessons and instruction about how to read graphic novels and what it means to respond aesthetically, “where students articulated their opinions, emotions, and thoughts about a text and provided supportive reasons/explanations” (Pantaleo & Bomphray, 2011 p. 128).

This value of a personal transaction with the text, is similar to Martínez-Roldán and Newcomer’s (2011) work, connecting to the social and contextual aspects while reading comics and graphic novels. The study observed small student-group discussions about the text, and responded through writing and multimodal composing. By analyzing student writing specifically in response to *The Arrival*, Pantaleo concluded that students were
inspired by the text intellectually and emotionally. Further, “when students receive instruction about literary and visual elements and conventions, and when students are expected, encouraged, and given time to ponder and savor texts, they do indeed make ‘deeper meaning’ from texts and generate aesthetic oral and written responses” (p. 133). Both explicit instruction around literary understandings and time to analyze and discuss the art of the page were valuable factors to Pantaleo & Bomphray (2011) and Pantaleo’s (2013) research.

**Critical literacy.** Comics and graphic novel scholarship has also considered the ways in which these texts invite readers to be critical readers and to take up social and political issues. I use Jank’s (2013) definition of critical literacy (drawing form Freire & MaCedo, 1987) as “enabling young people to read both the word and the world in relation to power, identity, difference, and access to knowledge, skills, tools, and resources” (p. 227). Because of its form, the graphic novel medium also has the ability to engage readers in a way that makes it possible to approach political or social issues with empathy (Juneau & Sucharov, 2010). Comics and graphic novels have also been discussed as material that creates social awareness, inviting a critical literacy stance.

Bucher and Manning (2004) note that there are many graphic novels that can be used when teaching social issues, such as homelessness, rape, war, racism, or incest. For the purposes of studying history in the classroom, Christensen (2006) reviewed graphic novels that could “initiate conversations about racism, social justice, war, and global conflict” (p. 227). Indeed, comics and graphic novels are powerful tools for addressing and respecting differences. Chute (2010) reflected on comics that were part of the
underground comix revolution during the late 1960s and 1970s and the political and social issues they would address. She notes,

   The aesthetic and political issues raised by the underground [comix scene] about the affect and impact of visual-verbal narratives that externalized, that put the body on the page, that push against easy consumption, have not gone away: they continue to present themselves forcefully today (p. 26).

Furthermore, the drawn artwork of comics and graphic novels makes them unique resources for deep, personal connection through texts. “There is an intimacy to reading handwritten marks on the printed page, an intimacy that works in tandem with the sometime visceral effects of presenting ‘private’ images” (Chute, p. 10). This intimacy that reading comics can invoke speaks to their ability to address issues around diversity, power, and identity, encouraging a critical reading.

   Educators and researchers have used this intimacy to their advantage, working to spark critical discussions with young people with the use of comics and graphic novels. Low (2015) argues that the comics “medium is uniquely situated for engaging in critical work” (p. 268). As often an overlooked text in educational spaces they instead provide “counter-spaces” in which to question (p. 268). Working in a school library, both during school hours and after school hours, Low read, discussed, and made comics with middle school readers. His research located affordances of the visual medium for contributing to critical discussion and writing, particularly when it came to representations of race and cultural identity. My work with Sutton (2014) also used a graphic novel to approach critical conversations with students in their classroom space. We found that the medium
of the graphic novel contributed to students’ discussions around gender, specifically, as they pointed to clothing, make-up, and other visual cues to Iranian expectations of women. The text itself also served as a space for some young readers to identify with characters, and for others connect with a new and unfamiliar place. All of these reading experiences contributed to valuable discourses around power, both positive and negative, in a classroom environment. Chun (2009) discusses the value of multimodal, critical literacies by way of teaching the graphic novel, *Maus* (1986) in an ELL classroom. Chun’s work notes both engagement and literary possibilities of this work, but ultimately connects to Freire and Macedo (1987) as he speaks to the ability graphic novels have to “enable students to acquire the necessary critical literacy that will...aid them in the important tasks of reading both the world and the word” (p. 152). Students were able to read, interpret, and question as they read.

Critical literacy can be contingent on conventional literacy, literary, and reading skills. Often, taking time to ask questions of the text like comics more broadly comes only after teachers have addressed the literacy standards in place. However, questioning texts can also contribute to students’ understandings of the comics and graphic novels within the categories of literature and art, inviting deeper analysis and an appreciation of literary qualities. Conventional, critical, and aesthetic literacy practices can work symbiotically. Scholarship around comics promotes literacy skills and other goals teachers focus on in classrooms, but may also contribute to larger questions and concerns around literacy, school, teaching and learning. Teaching and learning with comics, then, engages readers, inviting them to be active readers of the word and world.
New Literacy Studies: Literacies, events, and practices

This study draws considerably from New Literacy Studies, a framework that has been instrumental in situating research with comics and graphic novels occurring throughout school spaces. From this perspective I assume that literacies are socially and culturally constructed and situated, and therefore manifest differently for different groups of people and in different places. For the purposes of my research, I theoretically take into account the broad range of occurrences in a school that include all instances of reading, writing, and talk around comics (as literacy events), along with larger social and cultural happenings (literacy practices) that occur and develop in a school space over time.

New Literacy Studies has sought to reject the ‘great divide’ between literacy and orality (Street, 1984 and 1993). Considering the broader range of social contexts aligns with ideological modes of literacy. Street’s concepts of autonomous and ideological models of literacy have served as a base for New Literacy Studies. Viewing literacy primarily as written text, an object and/or set of learned skills, is intrinsic to an autonomous model of literacy, placing literacy independent of a social context. On the other hand, Street, among others (Finnegan, 1988; Heath, 1983), promotes an ideological model of literacy which focuses on “studying social practices rather than literacy-in-itself for their relationship to other aspects of social life” (p. 7). With this view, literacy goes beyond printed text and disrupts the continuum concept of orality and literacy, promoting complexities of literacy that cannot be contained on a straight path. In this way, literacy is conceptualized as events and practices. I define literacy events through the work of Heath
Street (2003) describes A.B. Anderson’s et al (1980) work, noting that literacy events involve an attempt to comprehend graphic signs, broadening the scope of texts to include more than alphanumeric-based literacies. These events are also part of larger literacy practices, which are defined “at a higher level of abstraction and refer to both behavior and the social and cultural conceptualization that give meaning to the uses of reading and/or writing” (Street, 1995, p. 2 quoted in Larson and Marsh, 2005, p. 19). Practices develop, are sustained, and change over time, and remain connected to the social and cultural context in which they occur (Street, 2003). Yet, much of this framing still is grounded in alphanumeric language. I am especially concerned with literacy events and practices that are grounded in or stem from visual and multimodal texts. That comics and graphic novels count as literacy in this school necessitates a consideration of multiliteracies and multimodality.

**Multiliteracies and multimodality**

Through a New Literacy Studies lens, The New London Group (1996) began thinking about pedagogical implications for conceptualizing literacy as plural and socially constructed. While New Literacy Studies considers literacy as something that is not simply learned and existing as skills taught in school, there are ways classrooms can consider literacies that exist inside and outside of the classroom. In the outline of their multiliteracies pedagogy, The New London Group suggests a more global and diverse approach to literacies teaching and use in classrooms, arguing that print is not the only
mode in which communication occurs, especially outside the classroom. They outline modes of communication, with a specific focus on multimodality.

Pahl and Rowsell (2006) note that multimodality makes it possible to talk “about communication in the widest sense, including gesture, oral performance, artists, linguistic, digital, electronic, graphic, and artifact-related” (p. 6). Kress (2003), one of the members of the New London Group has gone on to argue that multimodality is critical in communication, particularly considering image use in classrooms and other social formats. Communication, through texts, spoken word, or other semiotic symbols now exist as “multimodal phenomenon[a]” (Kress, 2000, p. 184). Image, action, sound, gesture, and others are all considered modes from this perspective and contribute to mediating meaning-making. This perspective is valuable to this research as we worked with multimodal texts, considering them as something that counted within the realm of literacy. Further what students did with those texts (creating through talk, writing, drawing, and movement) during their work with comics and graphic novels was also of importance. Jewitt and Kress (2003) contend that multimodality is a feature of all communication and representation, and I found this to be the case in the classroom work I observed and was part of. For example, even when looking at the printed text and dialogue throughout the comics we were reading in classrooms, students also considered font, size, color, frequency and spatial placement as they were reading, analyzing, and making meaning. The ways in which alphanumeric text operated, because it was part of a visual narrative was unique in this way. Along with the literal meanings of the words, other modes were part of the meaning making process.
This research acknowledges that not only are texts multimodal, but that each mode contributes to meaning-making in a unique way. I draw specifically from Kress (2003) and Jewitt (2008), looking at all modes as having potential for meaning making. Different modes not only offer multiple pathways to understanding and meaning making, but different ways of learning and knowing, as Kress (2003) concludes that, “meaning is realized differently in different modes” (p. 170). As our 21st century world becomes increasingly more digital, visual, and therein multimodal, utilizing multiple modes in classrooms invites students to bring their outside world in. They also prepare students to interact and engage in their world as educated citizens. For educators and researchers, “multimodality offers new ways to think about learning” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 263).

Currently, educators and researchers have been considering the potential of comics and graphic novels for multimodal literacy practices, both theoretically and empirically. There is a clear influence from this framework and it continues to impact my research in this field.

A focus on multiliteracies is particularly valuable to research considering nontraditional texts for classroom use, especially multimodal texts like comics and graphic novels. While the legitimacy of comics and graphic novels is often questioned or challenged (Sabin, 1996, Krashen, 2004, Versaci, 2008), the suggestion that multimodal texts belong in classrooms and counts as an academic text supports the work that teachers and researchers are currently attempting. It opens the door for claiming legitimacy for these kinds of texts and their potential value in literacy education. However, The New London Group’s work is primarily theoretical, not empirical, and is lacking specific
examples for practice. And while much of this work offers multimodal texts as options for educational purposes, many of those options connect back to more traditional content that is print-based. Because of this, A Multiliteracies pedagogy has been challenged, calling instead for opportunities to consider the fluidity in literacy practices.

**Questioning multiliteracies and potential classroom practice.** A multiliteracies pedagogy has been taken up and held up as exemplar scholarship, calling for changes in the texts we bring into classrooms and how they are used, designed, and redesigned. However, there are limits to what is possible when only working within this frame. As was pointed out in the review of research, comics and graphic novels are often being used to support and maintain traditional, already established literacy practices. Leander and Bolt (2012) suggest a more fluid approach to literacy practices. Their article challenges the New London Group’s original construction of literacies and how it has been taken up in empirical research. Specifically, they focus on the indeterminacy that exists in, for example, reading a manga. This practice involves multimodal and complex reactions that expand across time and space.

By following a single Manga reader, Lee, for the afternoon, Leander and Boldt argue that while Lee may be the kind of reader A Multiliteracies Pedagogy was aimed towards, there was more going on than this reader simply redesigning his manga text. This study illustrated the complexity, as well as fluidity and unpredictability that embodied literacy practices can have. As he reads, Lee wears and gestures to his head band, retrieves and moves action figures, moves locations, and engages in a full on sword fight. Throughout the day, he picks up and puts down the physical manga book to engage
with it and other texts, including his body. There is no intended audience or expected outcome for the multiple ways Lee reads. And it is within that constantly changing engagement that Lee expresses pure delight in literacy. It is room for the “fluidity and indeterminacy” that comes with the kind of literacy practice, which were literally embodied by Lee, that Leander and Boldt call for (p. 44).

Shifting to a multiliteracies perspective is more than just an issue of design, but an issue of expectations and constraint. Many resources, such as time, space, and multimodal resources (such as toys and clothing) are actively controlled in classrooms spaces. And there is an overarching focus on production, rather than process. Students and teachers are often working towards final projects, papers, and texts. To that end, a multiliteracies pedagogy, in Leaner and Boldt’s estimation is limiting and ignoring possibilities, arguing that “the individual is in the state of becoming rather than knowing what is to emerge” (Jacobs, 2013, p. 271). Yet, Leander and Boldt also argue that the fluid and free way of participating in literacy practices as they suggest is not necessarily possible in a classroom. For them, in addition to a multiliteracies pedagogy, there is a need for shifts in space, time, and freedom with literacy. This shift would necessitate changes in typical classroom practices or a shift in perspective around what is realistic for this kind of work. “Thus, Leander and Boldt’s critique is not so much of multiliteracies as it is of schooling. Schooling, as currently conceptualized, lacks playfulness and exploration, and movement is discouraged as children are taught to remain at their desks and on task” (Jacobs, 2013, p. 272). Therefore, for a multiliteracies pedagogy to enacted in a school, shifts in what school is are necessary.
Ultimately, “Rereading ‘a pedagogy of multiliteracies’ questions the benefit of popular culture and nontraditional texts in classrooms without the open space for students to authentically respond to them. Jacobs (2013), in her review of Leander and Boldt’s work, suggests that “perhaps insights from the world of art, in which creativity is a mix of the intended and the serendipitous, may provide an answer” (p. 272). The arts provide opportunities to embrace emotions, surprise, and creativity. When considering teaching with primarily visual texts, I drew from scholarship around analyzing comics and graphic novels and scholarship stemming from visual culture. These theoretical frames remained influential throughout this study. Using structural comic analysis and visual culture as tools classrooms was one way we were integrating and supporting the arts being part of a school curriculum.

**Comic and graphic novel analysis**

To attend to the visual structure and art of the comics medium, scholars often draw from structuralism and narratology in particular. The intersection of narrative theory and comic studies “draw[s] attention to the great variety and imaginative power of graphic narrative practices” (Gardner and Herman, p. 12). The medium, formatted with panels, gutters, and often speech balloons, is easily recognizable (Kukkonen, 2011). This structure communicates with potential readers; Groensteen (2007) argues that comics act as a language. And even more, as that language communicates, it will “command audience involvement” (McCloud, 1993, p. 59). The structure necessitates it. An audience to a graphic novel must actively contribute to the reading process: which includes filling the gutters and finding links (or disconnects) between image and text.
Groensteen conceptualizes comics as a system that “offer[s] the reader a story that is full of holes” that lends itself to a collaborative interaction between text and reader (p. 10). Comic artists, then, structure their work with readers in mind (McCloud, 1993).

As comics are structured to interact and engage readers, there are parts and pieces that make them up and are part of this back and forth. Voice balloons are one piece of the graphic novel that contributes to the “control of the reader’s ear” (Eisner, 1985, p. 129), but they also require the readers’ participation and engagement. Noticing placement, font, and shading in voice balloons contributes to the literal and inferred meanings of what is written. The lines used to create these balloons, and other images, are also part of the storytelling. Gardner (2011) argues that analyzing the line in comics is a valuable, yet underutilized narratological method. Much of Hale’s work, for example, is drawn with in a cartoon mode that is more simplified than realistic, therefore each line is meaningful to the story (Witek, 2012). The line that forms comic images, Gardner (2011) notes, works to tell the story, but is also “the handprint of the storyteller” (p. 56), a constant reminder that comics are told by someone. In this way, the artistic structure connects the artist and reader.

Literary scholars have also drawn from the narratological concept of focalization in order to analyze the visual layers within comics and graphic novels. “Narratorial focalization in particular is neither necessarily nor exclusively concerned with consciousness presentation, but with the filtering of all events and extents in the storyworld” (Horstkotte and Perdi, 2001, p.335). Focalization can also be used to represent multiple perspectives and voices throughout a narrative (Cadden, 2000).
Different from simply noting point of view, focalization is concerned with the many layers in storytelling, particularly visual storytelling. Shifts in visual vocabulary, repetition and shading, and multi-stage braiding of identical visual material are all signals of focalization in comics and graphic novels (Horstkotte and Perdi, 2001). Horstkotte and Perdi (2001) stress that focalization “almost always invites the reader’s inferential activities” (339), therefore calling attention to images and multiple narrators and leaving it for the readers to interpret and decide. Yet, “form is anything but a neutral container of content in the comics medium; forms, shape, content, form suggestion interpretations and feelings” (Lefèvre, 2012, p. 71). Recognizing these layers of focalization help readers and scholars to question and analyze events in texts.

The structure of graphic novels involves many layers of information for a reader to interpret and understand. Panels, gutters, angles, shading, lines, and focalized perspectives are all part of the language of comics. McCloud (2006) suggests that as comic artists, “You just need to decide how much you want your readers to see for themselves and how much you want them to imagine” (p. 131). Each choice an artist makes connects the reader to the text in a particular way. And when focalized through multiple narrative perspectives, readers are constantly challenged to interpret and personally consider their own opinions about a narrative. For the purposes of this study, while we did not draw on these theorists by name, students, teachers, and I were examining the layers, parts, and pieces on the comics and graphic novels we were reading.

Visual culture
For the purposes of this research around a primarily visual, multimodal text, I also drew on visual culture as a tool for providing new ways of operating in a classroom. Teachers and students were encouraged to reach outside of their typical toolbox to teach and learn with a comic. Drawing on structural comic analysis and concepts from visual culture were influencing and supporting their work with a new text. This framing provided a way of approaching comics and graphic novels, not just as literary texts and for the purposes of working towards practice grounded in print (which is how comics are often positioned in schools), but as art as well. Visual culture “analyzes and interprets how visual experiences are constructed within social systems, practices, and structures” (Tavin, 2003, p. 197) and encourages visual readings that interrogate the values, privileges, and hierarchies that exist in the art, the art making, and the art viewing (Eisner, 2002; Tavin, 2003; Duncum, 2004). As a compliment to the New Literacy Studies theoretical framing, the concept of visual culture acknowledges the context of art objects and provides a way to analyze images and image-making critically. It also continues to consider the reader as active participants in the reading and analysis of a comic.

Using visual cultural as a framing tool for classroom practice provides medium specific tools that focus on an appreciation for what the other modes of communication (such as color or shading) do. Zoss (2009) suggests that in order to successfully integrate visual arts into a literacy curriculum, medium-specific tools are necessary (p. 188). “In an integrated literacy context, valuing medium-specific tools for thinking and learning in both visual and linguistic media places language and image on a more equal footing”
In this way, theory requires that specific and common vocabulary is necessary for working with texts like comics. It positions them as doing work that is separate from conventional literacy work. Connors (2011) argues that as teachers approach teaching an unfamiliar text, such as a comic or graphic novel, that not only is there a hesitancy (as other studies reviewed previously have shown) but that they may rely only on their literacy knowledge, “accustomed as they are to analyzing print text” (p. 75). Instead, approaching comics and graphic novels could rely on “the language of art.” As part of a semiotic toolkit, Connors suggests considering shape, perspective, left-right visual structure, as well as color value, or composition, among others. Building background knowledge of such artistic language contributes to common vocabulary unique to the medium.

Drawing from visual culture to teach and read comics and graphic novels also challenges readers of this art to consider time. A close analysis of the visual encourages time, a “slowing down” of looking (Efland, 2002, p. 118). Further, this looking is not just to gather information (Albers, 2008), but to see, allowing art to “open our eyes…stir our flesh” (Greene, 1995, p. 143). Albers discusses the transaction with an art text, which invites our social and cultural experiences to influence our seeing. Taking this into account, we can understand art as “more influential in the development of readers’ understandings and perceptions about the world than is currently considered” (Albers, 2008, p. 179).
Visual culture values the process of art viewing and art making, not the final product. As Leander and Boldt noted of multiliteracies, the process of working in the arts is most effect with there is fluidity and indeterminacy. Eisner (2002) writes,

To pursue surprise requires the willingness to take risks, for while surprise itself may emerge, its pursuit is a choice. In choosing to pursue surprise, one selects an uncertain path, and it is here that familiar schema and customary techniques may prove ineffective. One of the challenging features of work in the visual arts is the tendency to revert to familiar routines in order to resolve a problem…When the arts are well taught, flexible purposing is encouraged” (p. 79).

Ultimately, this slow and indeterminate analyzing offers a way to acknowledge the robust work, within and beyond traditional conceptions of literacy, that can result in reading or creating a comic or graphic novel.

Art education, in particular, has been increasingly valuing visual culture over ‘art as an object’ only (Duncum, 2004), acknowledging that “the study of art should not be studied in isolation but seen in relation to its social context (Efland, 2002, p. 49). Therefore, “the purpose for teaching the arts is to contribute to the understanding of the social and cultural landscape that each individual inhabits” (Efland, 2002, p. 171) and also to affect those landscapes. Visual culture challenges readers/viewers to find the influence of life and popular culture in visual images. It, therein, can contribute to knowing one’s world and oneself more deeply.

Scholarship concentrated on teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels, drawing on the suggestions originally posed through a multiliteracies pedagogy,
concentrates primarily on curricular potential. Drawing from a New Literacy Studies perspective opens up opportunities for more nontraditional texts to enter into a classroom space as legitimate, academic texts. It offers a focus on process and social context, rather than only text objects and learned skills. However, much like how a multiliteracies pedagogy is concentrated on the final designed products, the end ‘product’ of working with comics and graphic novels is often already defined through instructional practices. In this way, comics and graphic novels are operating as a means to an established end, without considering that there are possibilities that we, as educators, couldn’t even imagine. There is value in this way of reading and using comics, but these established goals and systems still limit their potential. Along with exploring their instructional usefulness, this study is interested in how comics and graphic novels work outside of the instructional limits to create possibilities for change within a school.
Chapter Three: Methodologies

This chapter reviews details the methodology used in this study, and describes influential factors and contexts. I will first describe how I came to be welcomed into Trail Middle School, my research site, and describe myself as a researcher and participant in this study. Next, I review the places and people that are part of this study, including the school demographics, classrooms, teacher and student participants, as well as describe comics and graphic novels used and review lessons taught. Finally, I describe my methods for data collection and analysis for this study before noting the limitations of this study.

How I found myself here

Throughout my graduate studies I have focused my personal research projects and studies around comics and graphic novels. During the spring of 2014 I received a message from an old college friend requesting my advice about teaching with graphic novels in classrooms, knowing my interest and background. This friend was currently a math teacher at a near-by middle school and was making the request on behalf of his school’s librarian and an eighth grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher who were hoping to use a graphic novel in the classroom for the first time. After meeting with the teacher and librarian and talking with them about their hopes for this small unit, I volunteered to come back (per their request) to spend two days in their classrooms,
introducing comics and graphic novels as a medium of literature and doing some image analysis with the students. From the beginning, I was positioned as both an expert on comics and graphic novels and a previous middle school teacher. I relied on theory around structural analysis of comics and graphic novels (Groensteen, 2007; McCloud, 1993, 2006) and thought about how to help students slow down (Efland, 2002) and really dig into what was happening on the page as we entered into analysis. This approach was largely in response to what both the librarian and English Language Arts shared as needs and desires for their work with this medium. They had asked questions about what to call these texts and the parts that make them up, as well as how to introduce them to students as complex texts.

During my time volunteering in this 8th grade classroom, the librarian, literacy coordinator, and other teachers stopped by to watch, ask questions, and show me books that they were interested in teaching. It was this interaction with Trial Middle school that provided my access for research the following year. Following my volunteering with this classroom I remember the Librarian, Penny, timidly asking me if I would be around the following year (2014-15 school year). She explained that they invited an author to visit their school every other year and that next year the author was a graphic novelist. She wondered if I would be willing to share the lessons I had helped develop for this 8th grade classroom with the school during a professional development day at the school. After discussions with my university and with Penny, who became my touchpoint at the school, I was invited to spend time in the school throughout the 2014-15 year. This invitation included providing instruction during a professional development day, but was also an
invitation into the library and classroom spaces to support and co-teacher with teachers and students throughout the year, as they planned and taught lessons using comics and graphic novels, ultimately preparing to welcome a graphic novelist into their school the following spring.

During the summer of 2014, I began the IRB approval process in order to gain required permissions for my presence in this school. What resulted was a study examining the use of comics and graphic novels across multiple classrooms and curriculums. Aligning with previous scholarship conclusions (Rice, 2012), many teachers and support staff at Trail middle school were enthusiastic but daunted by using comics and graphic novels in their classrooms, hence their invitation to me. With this in mind, I am interested in what happens when comics and graphic novels are welcomed into a school space? In order to answer this question, I focus on teachers’ and students’ processes of using comics and graphic novels in classrooms. I identified ideologies about that work. Sub questions for this research are as follows:

- How are teachers planning for, implementing, and assessing teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels across the curriculum?
- What are teachers’ ideologies around comics and graphic novels? And do they shift during a school year, given the welcoming environment?
- How do students engage with comics and graphic novels in a school setting?
- What are students’ personal opinions about the comics and graphic novels and how they are used in their classrooms across the curriculum?
- How are students, teachers, authors, and comics and graphic novels being positioned?
Because this is work that was happening over time, I will be identifying shifts in processes and ideologies across a school year. Although this is a school-wide initiative, I am focusing my study on a smaller sample, in order to take a more detailed look at the teaching and learning occurring.

**Role of the researcher**

Before reviewing the research site and participants involved in this study it is necessary to examine myself in this research. I am a white female in my early thirties with experience teaching fifth grade for seven years before returning to graduate school full-time. I have researched my own practices and have experience teaching comics and graphic novels in my own classroom. This background is influential in how I am perceived and how I interact in the research site. This is a qualitative ethnographically-informed research study in which I act as both researcher and participant. I entered this research site negotiating a complex position. Positioning in research is a constant negotiation. It is my job, as a researcher, to not only be aware of what is going on around us, but also how my presence is affecting it.

Keeping time and a rhythm, as a qualitative researcher, means becoming attuned to the tempo and patterns of the research context and participants and implies a willingness to adapt and be flexible, as reality does not adhere to a strict research protocol. (Green, 2014, p. 157)

This requires reflexivity and transparency. Ultimately, as ethically sound researchers, all positions should be serving the participants first, the research second.
In this particular middle school, I had already been positioned as an experienced teacher and a resource. To gain legitimacy and buy-in for my presence, the librarian had described me as an experienced teacher to the school. My seven years of teaching experience also meant I had as much or more teaching experience than many of the focus teachers in this study. Similar to Almasi, McKeown, and Beck (1996), Pantaleo and (2011) and Pantaleo (2013), I was invited to present a professional development around strategies for teaching graphic novels, because of my experience and expertise. Even during my introduction to the staff in August 2014, I was labeled as a ‘great resource’ for the teachers. While I did not have my own classroom agenda, space, or expectations, I was an adult in classrooms who was part of the teaching and learning. Planning for using comics and graphic novels with teachers, while different from teacher to teacher, was something I was a part of. Lessons often involved the classroom teacher and myself speaking, answering questions, and maintaining a shared responsibility. During end of the year interviews the focus teachers labeled me as a ‘co-teacher’ when reflecting on our work together.

I had never been employed to work in this school before, and I operated as and was treated as both outsider and insider (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). I was invited to eat lunch with the team of teachers taught with regularly and participated in staff pot lucks and dress down days (after being gifted a Trail Middle School t-shirt to wear). I was also provided a desk and work space in the library. During school tours and staff introductions I was always introduced and greeted warmly by administration, along with the rest of the staff. In this way, I was treated very much like an insider in this school, although not
employed by it. In classrooms students referred to me as Ms. Ashley, illustrating my in-between-ness, as both an adult in the room using a suffix and first name (which was not done by the other teachers in the building. Teachers and staff went by their last names primarily) (Ma’ayan, 2012). Students were aware that I was not assigning grades or in contact with their parents, as their teachers were. Yet, they were also told to respect me as they did their teachers. There were times when I lead class lessons or discussions or was left alone with students, if a teacher needed to step out. Finn (the Social Studies teacher and focus participant) commented to me after a lesson in his classroom that he felt the students really respected me when I was leading a lesson and that the transitions between his and my leading classroom lessons were smooth (field notes, 2.11.15). Therefore, I was positioned, not just as a resource and previous teacher, but as an active participant in this research, and this positioning continued through to the end of the project.

As mentioned earlier, I also lead a professional development for the teachers, introducing ideas around the graphic novel medium and how one might approach using them in their classrooms. I will go into greater detail about this presentation later in this chapter. I bring it up here in order to acknowledge that what I presented at the professional development influenced my work with teachers throughout the rest of the year, as for many of them it was their first interaction with comics and graphic novels. This professional development set the pace, expectations, and initial opinions about the possibilities my presence in the school held and was referenced back to repeatedly throughout the year.
Engaging in classroom teaching and learning was a day-to-day negotiation with each teacher and group of students. I made it a goal to be aware of the teachers’ comfort level and overall expectations by maintaining open communication before, during, and after classroom lessons. (I will detail individual teacher expectations and relationships later in this chapter.) Smagorinsky (Smagorinsky and O’Donnell-Allen, 1998), while contemplating his involvement in his research site as both a teacher and a researcher noted the ethical dilemma of how this could affect data collection. Smagorinsky maintained detailed and reflexive field notes and includes them in his data writing, providing a transparent view of his complex role. He specifically notes the Hawthorne effect, acknowledging that his presence as a researcher and more active role in the classroom may positively impact the data to a greater extent, making the research difficult to repeat elsewhere. But he concluded that “if conducting research creates an environment in which people perform better, then we ought to encourage classroom research more frequently. What better benefit could there possibly be than better learning and teaching?” (p. 210). While my role in this school and in classrooms continually shifted, my ultimate goal was to contribute to a positive learning environment. I was invited to be a resource to the school first, and granted permission to be a researcher in that same space second. I constantly reflected on my role in the research, striving to remain reflexive and maintain transparency throughout my field notes, reflections, and memos kept throughout the 2014-15 school year.

Research Site
Context

**Trail Middle School.** The research site, Trail Middle School, is part of the River school district, which lies in the suburbs of a major, Midwestern city. River school district has been part of their community since 1911, and since 1990, has increased their enrollment tremendously. As of 2014, the district served 18,679 students. Statistics from 2014 show that 8% of the district’s students received free or reduced lunch and 10.4% that qualify for special education services. At Trail Middle School, 71.08% of those students identified as white, 11.18% as Asian, 7.95% as African American, 2.53% as Hispanic, 1.15% as American Indian / Alaskan, and 6.11% as one or more races. During the 2014-15 school year Trail is divided into eight teams, three sixth grade, three seventh grade, and two eighth grade teams. I will be focusing on one seventh grade team, which includes 109 students.

**Professional development.** On September 15th, following initial interviews with staff members, I presented an hour long professional development activity. Basing my presentation from requests teachers had been making and questions they had, I introduced the medium, engaged the staff in discussion and analysis, and made suggestions for potential future work. After showing versions of comic strips, books, and graphic novels, I discussed the benefits of viewing comics and graphic novels as a medium, rather than a genre of literature. Then together, we analyzed pages from Nathan Hale’s (2012) *One Dead Spy* taking note of the structure, artistic choices and how that impacted mood and theme. By showing each piece (panels, frames, dialogue bubbles, and gutters) of a page individually, the teachers were guided through a slower reading process and took note of
layers that are part of the graphic novel. I specifically directed our discussion back to standards and curriculum when possible, as connecting this way of reading to curriculum already seemed to be important to this school. My goals for this professional development were to ease the staff’s hesitancy about using comics and to show potential for complex, critical, and relevant classroom work with this medium. Taking place within the community of the school, this professional development serves as an apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1995) meant to help teachers prepare for teaching Hale’s graphic novels (and others if they choose) in their classroom. Following this professional development, I was invited into eleven different classrooms and interacted in countless ways with students, teachers, and comics. (for a more detailed description of the professional development, see Appendix A)

**The 2015 author visit.** Every other year the River district selects one author that visits each district middle school. During this visit the author spent a full day at each middle school presenting to the grade levels, working with students, and meeting teachers. The author was selected by the district’s middle school librarians, and for the 2015 school year Nathan Hale, a graphic novelist, was named as the visiting author. Hale has published several graphic novels that focus around American History as part of a series: *Nathan Hale’s Hazardous Tales: One Dead Spy; Donner Dinner Party; Big Bad Ironclad*; and *Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. He is also the graphic novel artist for *Rapunzel’s Revenge* and *Calamity Jack*, two alternative versions of traditional fairy tales. School-wide, teachers and students not only taught with these particular graphic novels, but also other comics and graphic novels individual teachers were interested in using,
based on their content area and curriculum. Therefore, this research is focusing around
the medium of comics and graphic novels, which became prominent in this school
environment because of the arranged author visit. Hale presented to each grade level,
telling his version of the Lewis and Clark expedition through verbal and visual modes,
drawing on an iPad projected to the audience as he talked. He also presented to a smaller
group of students at the end of the day about the creative composing process. During the
day, Hale ate lunch with teachers, talked with students individually, and sat down for a
formal interview with me. (For a more detailed description of the author visit day, see
Appendix B)

Research participants

Teacher participants. I had the opportunity to work with many educators at Trail
during the year and I started the year without a narrowed focus group of participants. In
order to introduce myself, I attended the staff’s in-service meeting before the school year
began, in which the librarian, Penny, briefly introduced me, and I shared my contact
information. During this introduction I also shared that I was available to assist any
interested teacher attempting to integrate comics and graphic novels into their classrooms
and that we could work together to plan any level of engagement they wished for. All
potential participants were teachers at Trail Middle School. Participation in this study
was voluntary. The criterion for participation required the teacher’s involvement in
teaching a comic and/or graphic novel during the 2014-15 school year. Because this study
and the introduction of Hale’s books was school-wide, there was potential for at least
forty teacher participants. These potential participants had the option of contacting me
through e-mail (which was given during my introduction to the staff the week prior to the school year beginning) and through the librarian, who was in charge of preparing the school for the author visit each year. Potential participants could have come from the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade teams, as well as technology teachers, special education teachers, and other extra-curricular teachers throughout the building. While seventeen teachers ultimately requested to work with me and were willing to be potential participants in this study, I wanted to narrow this participant number in order to focus on several specific lessons, rather than across a larger data set. Early on, three seventh grade teachers all approached me separately, interested in teaching with comics and graphic novels. Because these three teachers worked on the same interdisciplinary team, with the same students, I saw this as a way to examine comics across a curriculum. For this reason, I focus on Penny the librarian, along with a Science teacher, Liz; Social Studies teacher Finn; and Gillian an English Language Arts teacher as the participants in this study (Table 2). (The math classes were organized separately from the teams and no math teacher that worked with seventh grade volunteered to be part of this study.) The purpose of the following sections is to illustrate the different environments I was taking part in, but not to judge or critique teachers or teaching styles. Each teacher relationship and each classroom was negotiated differently, based on the comfort level and need. All participant names are pseudonyms.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Participants</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Texts Taught</th>
<th>Unit Days with Ashley</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Penny</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Introduced Nathan Hale as an author to classes across the school</td>
<td>Intermittent throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Gillian</td>
<td>7th grade English Language Arts</td>
<td><strong>703</strong></td>
<td><em>Rapunzel’s Revenge</em> (Hale, Hale, &amp; Hale; 2008) and <em>Calamity Jack</em> (Hale, Hale, &amp; Hale; 2010)</td>
<td>Nine</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Finn</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td><strong>703</strong></td>
<td><em>World History Ink: The Black Death</em> (2009)</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Dorothy 7th grade English Language Arts 701 *Rapunzel’s Revenge* (Hale, Hale, & Hale; 2008) & *Calamity Jack* (Hale, Hale, & Hale; 2010) Four
- Kate 7th grade Social Studies 701 *World History Ink: The Black Death* (2009) Two
- Linda 7th grade English Language Arts 702 *Rapunzel’s Revenge* (Hale, Hale, & Hale; 2008) and *Calamity Jack* (Hale, Hale, & Hale; 2010) Four
- Katie 7th grade Intervention Specialist 7th grade ELA Support *Rapunzel’s Revenge* (Hale, Hale, & Hale; 2008) and *Calamity Jack* (Hale, Hale, & Hale; 2010) Intermittent throughout

*Focus Teacher Participant

** Focus Student Participants’ Team

Table 2 - Teacher participant table
Penny. As I have already mentioned, Penny was my touchpoint at this school, paving the way for my accesses by initially contacting her administrators about me and by actively making connections between other teachers in the school and me. While I didn’t work directly in the library, I include a brief description of Penny here because she was intimately involved with the graphic novel work in the school, especially in connection with the author visit. Penny also provided a space in the library for me to work and to interview participants and observed the student participants in the library space on a regular basis. After seeing me teach with the eighth grade last year, she hoped that my presence in the school would support the author visit, one of her biggest responsibilities during the year. Penny also facilitated my part of a professional development by making requests for content I provided, helping organize my resources, and giving me feedback afterwards. As a whole Penny was incredibly passionate about her work, constantly looking to improve her resources and be a support to staff and students using the library.

Penny came to this year valuing comics and graphic novels but not feeling completely confident in her knowledge of them. At the time of our initial interview she believed there was more to them than she could articulate, especially artistically. As part of the school, Penny interacts with many (if not most) of the teachers regularly, as well as their students, as they come through and used the library.

Liz. Although I assumed that I would be working primarily with English Language Arts and Social Studies teachers within this project, Liz sought me out the day I was introduced to the staff asking if this is something we could do with Science. She
thinks of herself as creative and her classroom already included movement (such as station work or labs), drawings as response, reading alternative texts like lab instructions and magazines, as well as diagram making and reading. Over all, Liz was enthusiastic, very inviting, and very collaborative. When I visited her room or worked with her kids (whether it was a lesson using comics or not), she was comfortable using me to help out, asking me to work with particular groups and circulate to groups during lessons. She seemed to make an effort to get and keep students’ attention, plan ahead, and overall came across as a responsible and knowledgeable team member. Often when I was working with her in her room she would ask me questions and critically examine her practice, hoping to improve it for the next period.

This was Liz’s second year teaching and second year at Trail MS. She previously worked as an engineer, and received her bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering. After earning her Master’s degree in education and her teaching license she began teaching 7th grade Science. Liz’s experience with comics or graphic novels does not extend beyond reading short comic strips. In her classroom last year, students created comic strips twice, but Liz has never taught them as a text.

Finn. Finn first approached me through e-mail, after I had sent out a broad e-mail to the teachers that had approached Penny about working with me. Finn did the e-mailing for all of the 7th grade Social Studies department and invited me to meet with all of three of them, which included Mark and Kate, during one of their curriculum meetings. Finn comes across as laid back but enthusiastic about his work and for trying new things. He was as very open and up for trying anything in his classroom. Based on my interactions
with the other teachers on his team and with him, I found that he also uses film and
videos regularly. Also, he operates comfortably ‘on the fly;’ For instance, he (along with
the other 7th grade team members) let me know that I was welcome to visit his room any
time. When I set up a date and arrived, he let me know that he was just showing a video
that day, and it may not be the most interesting thing to watch. When I said I didn’t mind
what he did, I would like to hang out anyways, he added an unplanned review game so
that I “wouldn’t be bored to death” (Field notes, 12.10.14). Finn was very comfortable
hanging lessons over, preferring for me to lead discussion when there was a focus on
comics.

Finn has been teaching for seven years; after teaching a year in a near-by city, he
returned to Trail, where he had also completed his student teaching. During his career,
Finn has taught English and History in both 7th and 8th grade. He received his Master’s
degree in educational technology through an online program.

Finn has never taught a graphic novel before this year, but he was very interested
in and open to ideas. We bounced ideas off of each other frequently and easily when we
met. Overall, Finn was interested in using new texts like comics and graphic novels as a
concept; he has no background in teaching comics and graphic novels.

**Gillian.** Gillian and another 7th grade teacher she works closely with, Dorothy,
contacted me through Penny hoping to do some work with me during the year. Gillian
was open, easy to communicate with, flexible, and a planner. Gillian, Dorothy, and
Linda, all seventh grade English Language Arts teachers, planned and worked very
closely. Much of this is because this is Gillian’s second year teaching and Linda’s first
year in seventh grade. Katie, the intervention specialist was also working across the English language arts classes and participated in department meetings and interviews.

Gillian was working on her Master’s degree online in curriculum, instruction, and assessment during the time of this study. Gillian took on the central role of planning for the graphic novel unit that the 7th grade English Language Arts teachers were hoping to accomplish. Of the three English Language Arts teachers, she is also the one with the most experience with comics and graphic novels. Gillian and I planned together easily, establishing a give and take of ideas. During teaching time, this rapport continued, working through lessons as a tag team. Sometimes we would discuss who would do what during instruction, other times we fell into a back and forth in the moment.

Gillian was interested in using graphic novels because of her experience learning about them in college. She participated in a unit dedicated to teaching graphic novels. Because of that, during her first year of teaching she lead a book discussion on *Persepolis* with a small group of seventh graders.

**Student participants.** I had the pleasure of working closely with six seventh grade student participants (See Table 3). To determine participants, first, I organized the one hundred and nine students on this team into groups in order to determine which students shared English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies cores. I identified small groups of those students who were members of the focal teachers’ team and who had each core period in common. As there were many small groups of students who shared a core schedule, I relied on two additional factors to choose student participants. First, as I was invited into classrooms, I had the opportunity to observe students and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participants</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Perceived competence (as described by students' core teachers)</th>
<th>Comic Reader (as described by the student)</th>
<th>Comics read in class</th>
<th>Comics read voluntarily in preparation for the author visit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 3 – Student Participant Table
notice who was comfortable talking with peers and with me. I also relied of teacher’s advice and recommendations of students in order to identify students that would be comfortable sharing and to maintain a variety of readers. Based on the lists of small groups I shared with the three teachers, they pointed to one group in particular as potential participants. Teachers thought that it was made up of a diverse group of readers and abilities, but also that several of the students listed in the group might be enthusiastic about being more closely involved with a research study involving comics and graphic novels. Of the eight students in the group I sought assent from, six were interested in participating. Initially I was only able to gain parental consent for five participants. Letters and forms were sent home with each potential participant, but only five were returned. Near the end of the study the sixth potential participant (Kitty) brought her parental consent form back and participated in one lunch discussion session and a final interview. The seven grade participants are described briefly below.

**Ben.** While often considered a quiet student, Ben was also marked as a strong student and reader by his team teachers. He has a sweet demeanor and inquisitive nature, and is very observant of what is going on around him. Ben works hard in class and is sensitive to his friends. For instance, Kitty, the student participant that joined our conversations later in the year did so at the urging of Ben to get her permission slip signed. Ben also volunteered his free period to work in the library. Penny noted specifically that Ben really evolved and came out of his shell this year, going from barely making eye contact to introducing the author at the school assembly at the end of the
year. Ben shared that he read comics avidly as a child, often with his father, but then moved on to chapter books, not continuing the comics reading habit.

**Alice.** Alice is a self-proclaimed comics reader and lover. She describes herself as a slow-reader, but also as an artist. Others also acknowledge Alice’s love of comics, games, media, and her impressive artistic abilities; it was this part of her personality that made her teachers recommend her as a participant. Also a quiet student, rarely talking in class, Alice maintains high grades and is regarded as a top student on this team. She is also recognized for her punk style and regularly changed the color of her hair throughout the year. She is proud of her artistic talents and loved talking about and sharing her love for comics with me and the group of participants.

**Timothy.** Timothy’s teachers described him as a smart student who frequently didn’t do or turn in his work. Throughout our time working together, Timothy and I also maintained a running joke about work he never turned into me either (meaning class work I wished to photo copy). Timothy was smart, funny, and well spoken, albeit unorganized. He was a confident student, and though he struggled to complete work, he was never at a loss of critical and thought-out opinions about what we were reading and doing together in class. He came across as very honest with his opinions and never seemed to worry about what others thought. Timothy came to this study never having read a comic or graphic novel before, although he did have some exposure to the structure from online reading.

**Sienna.** Sienna was also a quiet student and was this way often when we spoke as well. She was active in school actives, including sports and student government, and was
very social outside of class. Her teachers considered her an organized student who performed at an average, sometimes above average level academically, depending on the subject. Sienna had a small amount of exposure to comics before being part of this study and didn’t have a strong opinion about reading them or other texts. While the rest of this student group preferred art and drawing as a way to respond to texts, Sienna preferred print-based writing and used writing more regularly in her class work.

**Estelle.** Always aiming to be unexpected and nontraditional, Estelle is a passionate young person and similar to Alice, was well versed in comics, gaming, and popular online media. She labels herself an artist and usually has her art supplies with her. Estelle also considers herself a nontraditional student, frustrated by deadlines and parameters. Although she worked hard, she often lost work or did not complete assignments; her teachers saw her as bright, but someone who struggled. And although she described herself as not participating orally in class, she was very social and comfortable outside of class; her personality is often very warm. For instance, after Estelle and I worked together for about a month she began hugging me hello and goodbye regularly.

**Kitty.** Kitty joined our group late, due to miscommunication with her parents (as she explained it) over the consent form. Kitty is known by her teachers as being painfully shy, but extremely bright. While she rarely talks in class, her work is always completed and with care. Kitty describes herself as shy as well, but she noted that she wanted to join our group because she likes being able to share opinions when she can. I believe the small group environment that included several of her friends (Alice, Estelle, and Ben) put
Kitty more at ease, which resulted in her deciding to joining us. Kitty is an avid reader of everything (for example, she read all of the Nathan Hale books, the only participant to do so) and also calls herself a writer. She has written several short stories and hopes to publish them one day.

**Lessons and classroom work across the curriculum**

**Social Studies.** Finn and the other seventh grade social teachers had recently purchased class sets of *World History Ink: The Black Death* a comic book produced by Jamestown Education. Because of my presence in the school and their interest in using this comic, Finn contacted me asking for advice and assistance. *The Black Death* is a twenty page narrative, historical fiction following the character Martina as she witnesses the plague’s impact on her home town of Genoa. Visually, the comic is dark in both color and mood, with black gutters, uneven panel frames, and ample shading and shadowing. Throughout the story, readers are given both historical facts and emotional influences of the plague, as the main character loses her mother and must leave her father and brother behind. Finn’s goal in bringing this comic into his curriculum was to help his students engage more deeply with this historical time period as well as make art part of the texts in his room. The seventh grade spent three class periods reading and talking about this text, one of which overlapped into English Language Arts. On Day One, I led an introduction the comic medium and structure to classes using this text as an example. This lesson occurred in students’ English Language Arts classroom, creating a clear connection to literary understandings that we hoped would carry over into the lessons following in Social Studies. After identifying structural and literary parts of comics (including page,
panels, frames, gutter, dialogue bubbles, setting, mood, and symbols), Finn’s students read the comic in class in small, assigned groups (Connors, 2013; Martínez-Roldán and Newcomer, 2011; Pantaleo & Bomphray 2011; and Pantaleo, 2013), keeping track of their thoughts in the form of guided notes (see Appendix C). On the third day of work with this text, students shared their thoughts and ideas from their notes and group discussions before moving on to a writing assignment in which students could either write about the comic or create their own (see Appendix D, see also Table 4 for a summary of resources and practices for this and other units).

**English Language Arts.** Using *Rapunzel’s Revenge* (Hale, Hale, & Hale; 2008) and *Calamity Jack* (Hale, Hale, & Hale; 2010), Gillian and I co-taught a two-week unit. Both books are fractured fairy tales imagining Rapunzel and Jack (and the Bean Stalk) as the unlikely heroes and friends. Structurally, the books are traditionally formatted. Each is one hundred and forty-four pages long with varying panel and page structures for narrative affect. The use of color and other visual elements (flashbacks and symbolism, for example) also adds to the visual story-telling. Thematically, the books take-up the issue of ‘the damsel in distress,’ questioning (not necessarily successfully) traditional gender roles in fairy tales. Throughout the two weeks students read in class, kept and shared notes identifying literary elements, and discussed the visual and structural elements of these texts (see Appendix E). Another large focus of this unit was gender. Gillian provided nonfiction reading and led a discussion around gender stereo-types, hoping to impact how students read the rest of the book (see Table 4 and Appendix F). We also considered the topic of identity. Using the books as examples, students created
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Comic or graphic novels used</th>
<th>Pedagogical strategies</th>
<th>Other Texts and Resources Used</th>
<th>Student participation</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td><em>Cartoon guide to the environment</em> (Gionick, 1996) &amp; Graphic Library’s <em>The powerful world of energy with Max Axiom</em> (2009)</td>
<td>- Direct instruction</td>
<td>- Science text</td>
<td>- Collaborative Reading</td>
<td>- Completing biome checklist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Image analysis</td>
<td>- Nonfiction articles on energy resources (from textbook company)</td>
<td>- Collaborative lab work at stations</td>
<td>- Guided Notes Packet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Whole class discussion</td>
<td>- Brainpop video “Energy”</td>
<td>- Filling in guided notes</td>
<td>- Lab Packet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Small group work</td>
<td>- Lab equipment: images of energy sources, electric toys, Comic templates</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Station work (including reading, viewing film, illustration, lab experiments, and explanatory writing)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td><em>World history ink: The black death (introduced in ELA)</em></td>
<td>- Video viewing</td>
<td>- Brainpop video “Black Death”</td>
<td>- Collaborative Reading</td>
<td>- Choice: illustrating or explanatory writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Image analysis</td>
<td>- Horrible Histories video “The Plague Song”</td>
<td>- Filling in guided notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language</td>
<td><em>Rapunzel’s Revenge</em> (Hale, Hale, &amp; Hale, 2008) &amp; <em>Calamity Jack</em> (Hale, Hale, &amp; Hale, 2010)</td>
<td>- Image analysis</td>
<td>- A variety of other versions of <em>Jack and the Bean Stalk</em> and <em>Rapunzel</em></td>
<td>- Collaborative Reading</td>
<td>- Completing guided notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Whole class discussion</td>
<td>- Nonfiction articles: *Reinforcing gender stereotypes: how our schools narrow children’s choices; Little Girls or Little Women? The Disney Princess Effect; What’s Wrong with Cinderella?</td>
<td>- Independent Reading</td>
<td>- Participation in Socratic Seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Small group discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Filling in guided notes</td>
<td>- Completing comic drawing, written explanation, and oral presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Socratic Seminar discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Independent work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 – Content area lesson descriptions
Science. Liz tried several forms of comics during the school year, as test prep reading, topic introductions, and as a base text for a whole unit. For example, Liz drew from parts of Larry Gonick’s *Cartoon Guide to the Environment* (1996) to introduce their biome unit as well as attempt to show students the information they can get from images. Throughout the year Liz and I struggled to find comics that fit the curriculum, but we agreed to try out Graphic Library’s *The Powerful World of Energy with Max Axiom*. This twenty-seven page comic is non-fiction, using fictional characters, but with no plot or story arc. The art is bright and bold, riffing off of stereotypical superhero comic elements such as onomatopoeia. The text is informative and straight-forward, and relied on the visual heavily in explaining concepts. For this reason, Liz used it as a base for her energy unit. Students used this text to take notes, work collaboratively, and to complete a series of hands-on labs over a six-day unit. Liz and I created both content and lab packets (see Appendix I and J for sample pages from these packets) that connected back to the comic, requiring students to read, discuss, draw, and move. Students still completed the traditional, building-required test at the end of the unit, although their unit was a departure from the other seventh grade Science classrooms.

**Research design and methodology**

Much of the research done in comics and graphic novels currently involves text analysis and theoretical writing. In fact, out of the twenty-one studies included in Smith and Duncan’s (2012) collection, *Critical approaches to comics: Theories and methods*, only four involve empirical research. In contrast, this is a year-long qualitative, ethnography took place during the 2014-2015 school year. Because this was an
ethnographic study, there were implications for my methodologies. I aimed to answer the question, *what happens when comics and graphic novels are welcomed into a school space?* Studying ‘what happens,’ allowed me to observe changes and tensions around operating across a school year. Stemming from anthropology origins, ethnography involves studying and then describing a particular group. In the case of my research, I focus on a team of seventh grade teachers and a small group of their students over the period of one school year. Methods associated with this include long-term field work, observation, and interviewing of participants/group members (Glesne, 2011, p. 17). As teachers and students worked to meet learning goals across the curriculum, they read and worked with comics and graphic novels. Ethnographically informed, my methodologies captured the process of that teaching and learning and how teachers and students are experiencing that work personally. I took note of tensions, shifts, and changes involved in working with comics and graphic novels throughout the school year. This is information that is impossible to gather without being present in the field long-term, conducting interviews, and being part of the culture, therefore requiring an ethnographic lens (Glesne, 2011). The “broad-brush stroke use of the term” *ethnographic* is one that Glesne takes up with discussing “practices that seek to interpret people’s constructions of reality and identify uniqueness and patterns in their perspectives and behaviors” (p. 19). As a participant in the field I was not only observing but part of shaping constructions and patterns that occurred in the field.

**Teacher-focused research**
This study began by focusing on teachers planning, implementing, and assessing of teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels in their classrooms. I chose to focus on one team of teachers (a Science, Social Studies, and English language arts teacher who share a team of students) interested in teaching with comics, in order to narrow my scope and capture the use of comics and graphic novels across the curriculum. After identifying teacher participants in the fall of 2014, I conducted initial interviews with each teacher (or in some cases, that teacher with her and her content team) which were video and audio recorded. (Throughout this study, as with other studies I have conducted using comics and graphic novels [Dallacqua, 2012a&b; Dallacqua & Sutton, 2014], video recording was a necessary method of data collection, capturing engagement on multimodal levels.) The purpose of these interviews was to gain information about each teacher’s opinions, ideologies, and past experiences with comics and graphic novels. This also provided information about their hopes for using these texts in their classroom this year and how they were positioning them. This information also influenced the professional development I lead for the staff in early September.

I also participated in, observed, and completed informal interviews during each teacher/participant’s planning procedures, which were either audio recorded or documented through field notes. I co-taught, observed and videoed recorded classroom lessons with each of the three focus classroom teachers and collected any materials used to complete and assess these lessons in order to document the process for using comics and graphic novels in classrooms across the curriculum. Co-teaching serves as an example of guided participation, marked by our mutual “communication and coordinate
efforts” towards planning and teaching these texts (Rogoff, 1995, p. 142). A final interview with each teacher/participant was completed following all of the teaching and learning with the graphic novels and the author’s visit. In the case of Gillian and Finn, I also interviewed them individually and with their curriculum department members as a small group in order to observe and document how they planned together and experienced their work in similar and different ways (Liz was the only Science teacher who used comics and invited me to be in her classroom, so I did not meet with the Science team department). These final semi-structured interviews were video-recorded, focusing on capturing teachers’ experiences and shifts in opinions and ideologies around comics and graphic novels after using them in classrooms.

**Student-focused research**

As teachers begin to experiment with using graphic novels in their classroom I also identified a small group of students participating in those classroom lessons to follow. By following a group of students I was able to document a range of learners’ engagement, work, and opinions about comics and graphic novels in the classroom. As other empirical research in comics has done (Connors, 2013, Dallacqua, 2012a&b), I completed small group interviews with these participants. Small group discussions were another way that talk became a data source across these studies. Ma’ayan (2012), who utilized small group discussion for the bulk of her research, writes:

> Studies have indicated that in a research situation where there is inherent imbalance of power between an adult researcher and youth participants, group discussions can allow for a safer and more comfortable environment for the
participants by allowing them to be with their peers, to have more room to lead
group discussions, and to receive validation from others in the group (p. 11).

Group discussions focused on making participants’ voices the focal point of discussions
and drew from their own lives and experiences in and out of school. Initially I planned to
interview student participants as a group four times, following major lessons or units with
comics across the curriculum. Following the first interview, which occurred in the library
over lunch, students began asking when we would be able to talk again. Eventually, the
following week in their English Language Arts class the group asked if we would be able
to meet over lunch more regularly, just to eat, talk about comics, and be together.
Including member checking, we met a total of eight times, seven of which were video
and audio recorded. Following the author visit, each student participant was formally
interviewed one-on-one as well. I also collected focus-student work, which I scanned and
returned, that was generated during or as a result of in-class lessons.

The author visit

Finally, I was able document the author visit, video recording Hale’s
presentations to classes and through observation and field notes during his other
interactions through the day. Hale also agreed to be interviewed. This interview lasted
approximately ninety minutes and focused on Hale’s writing and artistic process and
choices, as well as his thoughts and opinions about his books being used in a school
setting. Being able to include the voice of the author provides rich perspective of the
author’s intent. Further, a graphic novelists’ viewpoint on his work being used in schools
contributed to answering my overall question: *what happens when comics and graphic novels are welcomed into a school space?*

**Measurement and instrumentation**

**Data.** Comics and graphic novels are multimodal texts and engaging with them can be a dynamic experience, therefore multiple data sources in multiple modes are necessary for authentically documenting literacy events and practices in this school. I have several sources of data to analyze (See Table 1). From the team of teachers and librarian I have video of four teacher pre-interviews and four post-interviews, plus an additional two post-interview recordings of the English language arts and Social Studies departments. I have video of each lesson included in the units across the curriculum, thirteen forty-fifty minute classes recorded in full. Material artifacts that were used in the planning, teaching, and assessing process were also collected. These included handouts for students, rubrics, teacher notes, and other resources such as articles and photocopies of other texts. I also kept regular field notes, written either in the moment or the same day, following participation/observation. I collected video of seven small group interviews with focus students, as well as one individual interview with each student participant completed at the end of the year. Focus students’ classwork completed during lessons with the comics and graphic novel lesson as research were collected and scanned as research artifacts. My own observations around student work and informal discussions with students, teachers, and staff were also documented through field notes and memos.

**Analysis. Grounded Theory.** I drew on grounded theory to methodologically approach and produce my data (Charmaz, 2001). Therefore, theories generated from
analysis come “directly from the data, not from preconceived concepts or hypotheses” (Charmaz, 2001, p. 336-337). Through this process I have remained open to larger questions and possibilities in this research, asking “What is happening here?” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Strauss and Corbin write that “theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continues interplay between analysis and data collection” (1994, p.273). By engaging in analysis through memo writing in the field, initial codes emerged and influenced data collection for my research. For instance, because collaboration was a consistent theme across my memo writing, when it came time for interviews, I asked explicit questions about collaboration to all the participants. Codes emerged as I collected and studied data, and codes were combined and reorganized as I repeatedly approached data and engaged in focused coding (Charmaz, 1994) as I developed theories. These processes are described in greater detail below.

**Writing memos.** My analysis began in the field through writing conceptual memos (Heath and Street, 2008). These memos were a place to note “generic ideas that come from particular events, along with queries raised” (p. 79). Following Heath and Street’s construction for these memos, I organized thoughts in classifications: Problems and Setbacks, Overview (indicating logistical information) and Patterns, Insights, and Breakthroughs. These memos mapped out emerging categories that eventually became my theories. Starting in October 2014, memos were written monthly, as much of my time was spent in casual discussion and observation within the community school space. Following Christmas break, all three focus teachers began planning and implementing units using comics and graphic novels, providing more data to organize and more time
spent in the field for me. As I spent more time in the research site as the year continued, memo writing occurred on a bi-weekly and weekly basis, depending on the classroom work. These multiple analytic memos (twelve in all) served as a space to begin indexing in order to find common and frequent themes. Initial themes included *negative perceptions of comics, time, enthusiasm, collaboration, and connections to content*, for example. As I wrote each memo, I referenced all memos previously written in order to consider and build on these emergent themes, again engaging in an interplay between analysis and data collection that is primary in grounded theory.

**Indexing.** Leading up to final interviews, I also indexed all of my audio and video data sources, time stamping each recording and marking major themes, and shifts in topics of conversation. Indexed data and themes generated from memo writing informed my final interviews with participants. This way, I was able to test potential theories (Hubbard and Power, 2003) and was “simultaneously becoming involved in data collection and analysis” (Charmaz, 1994. P. 336). Final interviews, which were one-on-one with each focus participant (with additional small group interviews with the seventh grade English Language Arts and Social Studies department teachers), took place in April of 2015. Following final interviews, indexed data and themes from memo writing were reorganized according to which research questions they addressed, then integrated into conceptual categories (Hubbard and Power, 2003; Glesne, 2011). This process connected all that I was seeing and experiencing with the teachers, students, and their practices, as well narrowed my focus. Finally, I met with the teacher and student participants one last time to complete member checks around my conceptual categories, now organized by
research question. In order to make the results as reliable as possible, member checking was an important step to the research. I met with Fin, Liz, and Gillian together, student participants together, and Penny individually (for her convenience) to talk through these categories. Participants confirmed emergent themes with few additions or changes. In particular, Penny brought up the change she felt had taken place in the library space during member checking, as it was not a primary focus of the data themes at that time.

Following member checking, rigorous qualitative analysis continued. With categories in mind, focused transcription of all video and audio data was completed, followed by coding of all data sources. Coding was a recursive process that was influenced as I was reading and continuously developing my theoretical framing. Initial categories that emerged during memo writing, like collaboration and enthusiasm became part of larger categories, like space. Transcripts and other data sources were coded, based on these categories, then recoded and mapped according teacher talk, student talk, author talk. This mapping processes, much like Charmaz’s description of memo-writing (1994) allowed me to take my “categories apart by breaking them into their components,” and examine the connections across each. Ultimately, this led me to developing four theoretical themes: the invitation of comics and graphic novels, time, space, and positioning. Theories from these themes were drafted and tested against the data collected, which included my field notes, transcripts of teacher and student interviews, transcripts from classroom lessons, student work, and any materials the teacher used to plan, teach, and assess these lessons. This variety of data enables me to triangulate. All data sources support, or do not negate, the findings at which I arrived.
Chapter Four: Findings

February 10th, 2015

Seventh grade students file into their Social Studies classroom, taking their seats. Their desks have been rearranged from the typical long rows, with desks side by side, facing the front of the room. Now each desk is separate, not touching any others around it, isolated. Students’ attention is drawn to the board where lists of numbers, test scores, have been written. Today, much of their class period is to be spent taking their second Student Learning Objective test of the year. To begin class, the teacher points towards the posted scores of the three previous seventh grade Social Studies classes he has given this test to already today. Students see each of the class’s averages from August, as well as the scores each class has earned that day. Their class average from August, 41%, is also posted, and the space next to it waiting to be filled by today’s test scores. “I’m putting this up here to put a little pressure on you. I want you to improve drastically,” their teacher explains. Previously, this teacher had shared that this particular class has been one of the lower scoring classes, and their past SLO score, in comparison to the other class scores, illustrates this. Nervous energy fills the room, pencils tap their desks, and knees bounce up and down as the SLO test is distributed. For the next thirty minutes, students silently answer questions, filling in bubbles on a scantron sheet. Once everyone has completed their tests the teacher shows a film about the plague so he can slip out to
have the SLOs scored. The students then engage in a brief review of the spread of the plague in preparation for their next project, reading the comic The Black Death. But nervousness remains until the test has been run through scantrons. As the period ends, the teacher announces the class score, which has raised to a 74%. Individual students receiving high scores are also announced and cheered for, one by one. As they exit, the rest of the students, those not receiving high scores, swarm their teacher nervously to see their scores and how they compare.

April 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2014

As the seventh grade students file into the gymnasium their attention is drawn to the large, single screen they are being seated on the floor in front of. They are directed by the librarian and myself to take a seat on the floor, forming a large semicircle around the screen. Students talk, laugh, and watch as live illustrations are being projected on the screen in front of them. Because of the brightness of the screen and the movement of the illustrations forming, students focus on the screen, rather than the illustrator, a graphic novelist who has been invited to the school. Off to the side, the featured graphic novelist and speaker for the day hunches over an iPad, quietly drawing, almost detached from the rest of the room. He illustrates images: a dragon, a dinosaur, even the directions he hears given to students to shift forward on the floor. Behind the students, teachers also watch, captivated, as their students are, with the illustrating happening in front of them. A student walks past me with a smile, asking if this was about the author that we had been reading in class. He shares in my and other’s excitement that we get to meet the
author and illustrator whose work we studied together in his language arts class. Finally, students quiet down as Ben, a seventh grade student, stands in front of the three-hundred-person audience. Ben had previously been described as a shy and quiet seventh grader; yet now, he invites his peers to welcome the graphic novelist who has been invited to their school together. A hushed excitement fills the air. Ben reads the introduction he had practiced for me a few days prior, “Hello. Um, I’m honored to introduce, not only an author, not only a writer, but an artist, Nathan Hale.”

Operating within and against grids using comics and graphic novels

The above vignettes are indicative of two competing ideologies that came into focus as I spent the year documenting teaching and learning with teachers and students, addressing the question “What happens when comics and graphic novels are welcomed into a school space?” Trail Middle School, like most schools, was operating under the pressures of high stakes testing, standardized curriculum, and teacher accountability measures. These pressures speak to how neoliberalism is currently working on and in our educational systems. In contrast to the neoliberalist agenda in this school, teachers were also taking up a more progressive, student-centered ideology by inviting comics and graphic novels into their school (Dewey, 1928; Greene, 1995). Together we introduced a new medium into classrooms, engaged socially and collaboratively in reading, composing, and art viewing and making. By bringing my ethnographic research question to bear on the work teachers, students and I were doing together with comics and graphic novels, I am able to consider the tensions between these ways of operating in a school.
examine day-to-day activities to illustrate these tensions, as well as the shifts that occurred as we taught with new texts in this environment.

In the midst of the standards and testing, this school’s faculty was inviting in new texts, through the welcoming of a graphic novelist (and therein, comics and graphic novels), into their school. As I consider my research questions about comics and graphic novels being welcomed, I also attend to the other practices that impact and are impacted by this invitation. Throughout this section I address several sub questions:

How are teachers planning for, implementing, and assessing teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels across the curriculum?

What are teachers’ ideologies around comics and graphic novels? And do they shift during a school year, given the welcoming environment?

How do students engage with comics and graphic novels in a school setting?

What are students’ personal opinions about the comics and graphic novels and how they are used in their classrooms across the curriculum?

How are teachers, students, authors and texts being positioned?

It is through these sub questions that I consider both the processes that teachers and students were engaging in (such as lesson planning or reading) and the opinions and ideologies that were present. The processes and ideologies involved in inviting comics into this school were complexly intertwined with the testing and curricular norms, as well as (shifting) assumptions regarding comics as texts. I have arrived at four central themes in my findings that address these questions: the invitation of comics and graphic novels, time, space, and positioning, all of which will be addressed in this chapter.

**Grids of discipline and neoliberalist ideologies**
Schools, Trail included, are part of what de Certeau (1984) calls grids of ‘discipline,’ with set paths for intended use and maneuvering throughout. Larger policies and neoliberalist agendas are part of these systems, influencing how schools are functioning. At the same time these gridded systems are benefitting from schools that “produce…highly individualized, responsibilized subjects.” (Davies and Bansel, 2007, p. 247). de Certeau likens the concept of grids to city grids laid out by city planners that literally map intentional paths for dwellers to move through. Paths are mapped strategically, establishing intended use and direction in ways that remain subtle, sometimes invisible. Ways of operating in a school and the larger normative structures they support are so engrained into our consciousness, it is difficult to imagine other possibilities (Lipman, 2011, p. 6). In Trail Middle School, as comics and graphic novels were integrated, these larger systemic issues which were operating in and on this school became visible to me, as a researcher. For instance, during this school year, teachers and students were preparing for a new standardized test, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) test. High stakes testing operated as a way to quantify what constituted learning and success in this school. As all teachers are, teachers at Trail Middle School were working under the pressures of testing and addressing a standardized curriculum.

Curriculum and testing were part of the culture of this school, designed to maintain and reproduce the status quo. Through the integration of competition, testing, and performance pay for teachers, a neoliberal agenda has been deeply integrated into a schooling framework (Clark, 2013, May 22). Lipman (2011) defines neoliberalism as “an
ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and sharp retrenchment of public sphere” (p. 6). And “the context of education is clearly a highly relevant site for such structuring to take place” (Davies and Bansel, 2007. P. 247). For this school, the pressures to address a standardized curriculum and earn high test scores were powerful and were supporting neoliberalist ideologies. And as the opening vignette illustrates, this “pressure” was passed onto the students as well. For teachers, test scores influenced their job and their own success, as defined by educational policies put in place. “High stakes accountability as a mechanism of surveillance is taking a toll in increased stress, demoralization, and exit from the profession” of teaching (Lipman, 2011, p. 128). Therein, in choosing to invite and support comics in their classrooms and school, a medium that did not mirror the tests being implemented, teachers were taking risks.

The stress of learning a test, implementing it, and gaining high scores was palpable across the school year at Trail. Greene (1995) calls this “seeing schooling small” by being “preoccupied with test scores, ‘time on task,’ management procedures, ethnic and racial percentages, and accountability measures, while it screens out the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual living persons” (p. 11). And Costigan (2013) writes that “test-based reforms effectively create a curriculum where reading and writing look nothing like reading and writing in the real world” (p. 142). Neoliberal ideologies value success through tests and numbers, often overlooking ‘actual living persons’ and operating ‘in the real world.’ Teaching progressively, on the other hand, requires
imagination and connection between people (Green, 1995). Dewey (1928) notes that progressive education (which remains in stark contrast to neoliberal ideologies) is primarily dedicated to “social contact, communication, and cooperation upon a normal human plane” (p. 116). It respects student guided inquiry and active learning experiences.

**Strategies.** Tests and standards are put in place strategically and maintained strategically. For example, the culture of testing does not take full account of the privileges (or lack thereof) of the students taking test, managing a status quo. De Certeau outlines *strategies* as “seek[ing] to create places in conformity,” enforcing ways of operating through carefully structured environments (p. 29). Toby Morris, a cartoonist, illustrates this idea, describing the privilege, such as economic stability, that “sneaks by unnoticed.” He compares two people’s life trajectories, going to school, college, and finding a job and the ways in which economic status quietly impacts these paths (see Figure 2).

Describing his comic, Morris notes that...
“I just think people often forget or don't reali[z]e that our starting points, or our paths to success, aren't all even.” (quoted in Willard, 2016, January 20). Unfortunately, “school-based literacies generally emphasize ahistorical and vertical forms of learning,” not taking into account individual starting points. (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 149). School policies move along vertical continuums, measuring success and achievement in hierarchy, much like the test scores listed as comparisons on the classroom dry erase board described in the vignette above. And these practices, like testing, can point back to other grids, reinforcing and maintaining them. Testing measures a particular type of success that can then influence future success and power. And through this, the grids of discipline are recycled. As norms are reinforced in schools, they, in turn, strengthen the grids operating around them.

Economic stability, as depicted in Morris’s comics, is part of many norms that are influencing and being influenced by schools, testing, and ways of operating. And schools are situated within, around, and by many normative structures that regulate the way people function. Race, gender, sexuality, and economic status are examples of parts of grids of discipline that can be imposed within and outside of a school, impacting, even if invisibly, how anyone in the school is operating. Because testing and standardized curriculum were a central focus of this school during this school year, I choose to focus on their influences. In the case of our teaching and learning with comics, I became more aware of the curriculum, testing, and text choices occurring as teachers and students attempted new ways of operating in their school. And in many ways, comics and graphic
novels were being used strategically, taught to be aligned with standardized curriculums and assessments.

**Tactics.** I also became more aware of times when teachers and students were resisting and pushing against the normative structures in their school. In a space that is maintaining a neoliberal agenda, there are also cracks. In opposition to the strategical moves in place, *tactics* are not defined or identified by the law of a place, but instead make those laws visible and can manipulate them (de Certeau, 29-30). De Certeau notes that those acting tactically “must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. [The space of a tactic] poaches in them. It creates surprise in them. It can be where it is least expected” (p. 37). In this way, comics and graphic novels had the potential to be used as tactics by teachers and students in the face of structural norms.

While the vignettes above describe two contrasting events in this school and occur over time, I do not wish to suggest that the school was shifting from a culture of testing to a culture of multimodal engagement as we were teaching and learning with comics. Instead, both events illustrate that a variety of work was occurring in this school across time. Tests were not eliminated (or even decreased) based on the integration of comics into the curriculum. Throughout the school year, the processes involved in teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels supported curriculum and testing, reinforcing the norms of this school. But these practices were also pushed against in many ways. Teachers and students made changes in their views and practices as they participated in both existing and new ways of operating.
As the second vignette illustrates, teachers and students were locating cracks, finding value in visual composing, laughter, and new texts. In order to “make use of the cracks” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37) in this school system, educators made visible the “imposed systems” and use them “to compose new stories” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 35). Being open to new ways of operating in the classroom created a potential for “new spaces to be made that have not yet been named” (Leander and Rowe, 2006, p. 452). Teachers and students found that teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels could satisfy the academic, neoliberal agenda strategically in place. And it also provided opportunities for them to approach education more progressively, operating in new ways and moving in new directions toward unknown potential.

**Comics and graphic novels in schools: A chapter map**

Teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels was complex; it was being used in a variety of ways to address many goals in this school, including preparing for a visiting graphic novelist and supporting standardized curriculum. Along with a graphic novelist, I was invited into this school to support teachers (and their students) interested in bringing comics and graphic novels into individual classrooms. I was positioned as and referred to a co-teacher throughout the year. Our teaching and learning was negotiated on a class by class and teacher by teacher basis. For instance, some teachers in the school were in a constant back and forth with me as we planned and co-taught; others preferred me to lead lessons in their classroom. And our methods varied as well, including discussion, silent reading, writing, drawing, moving, and so on, maintaining both conventional and progressive education stances. In this chapter I specifically consider
how comics and graphic novels were welcomed into this school and impacts around time and space and positioning. All of these themes point back to how comics and graphic novels were working within and against normative structures in this school.

Working within and against a neoliberalist school system began with the invitation of comics into this school. In this introductory section I document teachers’ concerns around testing and curriculum as they taught with new texts in new ways. I also explore the other motivations teachers had as they considered a more progressive and student-centered way of teaching and learning.

As part of the established practices in this school, time and space were operating and changing (and being changed by) teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels. And these changes highlight the tensions between neoliberal and progressive teaching and learning practices. Teachers and students were considering how they were operating in a variety of school spaces, noticing and making change. In some ways, time and space were constraining and controlling, part of this gridded system. For instance, in the first vignette, students were arranged in a controlled space, sitting in silent rows. And students were impacted by the time limits of the class and time it took their peers to take their test. Even Hale’s presentation, also described above, was limited in time and space, as a particular amount of time was set aside for this presentation within a space that lacked ideal lighting and seating. However, the presence of comics and graphic novels in this school also acted as a catalyst for changing how time and space were used and organized.
Across the school year teachers and students also (re)positioned themselves and each other, influenced by the many ways comics and graphic novels were being taught. Positioning of comic texts and the authors who compose them was also considered. This positioning was influenced by the maintenance of the status quo and how testing and conventional school practices measure success. At times, teachers and students considered and questioned measures of success and ways of operation in school (including the testing occurring in the vignette above). However, teachers and students also limited each other and texts with their talk, falling back into the grids. Students were often positioned as high or low level performers. And comics were often positioned by both teachers and students merely as a conduit to other, print-based books and existing practices. Yet, ideologies around who students and teachers are and what texts are and can do were in no way fixed. Questions continued to be asked and shifts continued to occur as comics and graphic novels were invited into this school’s ways of operating.

**The invitation of comics and graphic novels**

This study is addressing the overarching question, “*What happens when comics and graphic novels are welcomed into a school space?*” However, it is necessary, first, to consider what made it possible for this question to be asked. The fact that comics and graphic novels were invited into a school is significant, remarkable even. As reviewed above, comics and graphic novels are still at the periphery of many schools, particularly for the purposes of supporting academic learning. Because of the negative ideologies that accompany comics, many educators remain hesitant to use with them in their classrooms.
And with high stakes testing and curriculum mandates, there is an ideological tension created with the invitation of comics.

While it has been argued that they are complex texts that can support classroom instruction, comics and graphic novels are still not actively welcomed into schools (Clark, 2013; Lapp et al, 2011/12). Teachers in this school, by welcoming a graphic novelist, were opening themselves to potential new ways of operating. And by inviting comics and graphic novels into this school, faculty at Trail were also agreeing to a number of other things. Providing resources such as new texts, a researcher/expert, and a graphic novelist visit were all part of inviting them comics into this school space. Teachers also managed curricular requirements and testing while integrating a new medium into classrooms. In this section I document what choices and actions made it possible for comics and graphic novels to be invited and engaged with throughout the school, across a school year. In some ways, comics and graphic novels were being used strategically to reinforce and regulate normative structures. But comics and graphic novels were also used tactically, encouraging teachers and students to try something new, disrupting engrained ways of working.

In the school context

In the River School district, an author is invited to the middle schools every other school year. Even with the administration and district support, there were still difficulties in welcoming comics into classrooms. One way the school administration prepared for this visit was purchasing books for the students and teachers, so that all students have had access to the author’s writing in some way. This meant financially supporting the reading
of comics and graphic novels; however, this proved to be difficult. Comics and graphic novels, according to the librarian at this school (who does much of the book purchasing for the school), are more expensive than the books they had purchased in the past. Instead of purchasing books for each student, the school and PTO purchased class sets that English Language Arts teachers shared. The PTO’s involvement signals the wide reaching support for inviting a graphic novelist and his books into Trail. However, for the seventh grade teams that I was working with, this made planning more difficult, as they were sharing a set of books, needing to rotate reading among classrooms. Time and space had to be negotiated by teachers in order to share texts, plan, and teach in new ways.

Other teachers, including the Social Studies and Science teachers in this study, who were interested in teaching comics and graphic novels outside of the Hale series, purchased books with their own classroom budget, and even with their own money, in order to get them into their classrooms. The Social Studies teachers had come across the comic, *The black death* (which closely aligns with the Social Studies curriculum), several school years prior. Because Mark (a seventh grade Social Studies department member) was so interesting in using this comic, he had been trying to acquire class sets, which had finally been purchased through the school at the end of last school year. In science, Liz was unsure if there were comics or graphic novels that even existed that would help her teacher her curriculum. I offered her several suggestions for books to bring into the classroom, but we were left with the problem of getting enough copies to the students. Liz photocopied small portions of Gonick’s *Cartoon guide to the environment* comic for her biome lessons. Later, we sought monies for purchasing a class set of several Max
Axiom texts together, and ultimately, the Science department was able provide money for these sets. However, they would not arrive in time for this year’s work. Therefore, Liz and I made the decision to purchase a small number of one of the sets, each of us using our own money to do so. Even before teaching these books personally, teachers were hitting road blocks, but continuing to make efforts to bring them into their classrooms. Teachers and staff worked hard and pushed past initial struggles in order to teach with comics and graphic novels.

The school administrators also agreed, as it does with every author visit, to pay that author, and provide room in the school and in its schedule for a visit to occur. At this school, along with the instruction happening within classrooms, this visit and preparation for it included a number of other things. Teachers decorated the school with student work, banners, signs, and bulletin boards welcoming Nathan Hale (See Figures 3 and 4). A staff luncheon was organized, which provided an opportunity for the staff to talk with Hale. And time was taken out of the school day for students to attend a presentation by the author. Penny, with the administration’s permission, also invited me, as an expert in
teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels, to be in the school to aid in the preparation for the author visit. Time during a professional development day was set aside for me to present to the staff. I was also provided a space in the library to work, keep materials, and meet with students. Again, during a year when many resources were being dedicated to a new standardized tests, efforts were also made to support working with new, nontraditional texts.

Finally, teachers throughout the school voluntarily integrated comics and graphic novels into their curriculum, providing time and space for that work. While it is assumed that the teachers and librarians will, at minimum, make books and information about the author available to students, setting aside time for multiple days or full units using comics and graphic novels was not the expectation of the school for author visits. However, when I was introduced to the staff in August, before the school year began, both Penny and the school principal suggested that bringing comics and graphic novels into classrooms would be very beneficial for their students. This worked as a suggestion, not a requirement, but it was obvious to the staff that the principal was in support of this medium in the school. And this was no different from past years’ expectations. The only
difference was that I would be present to support, plan and co-teach with teachers. A number of teachers chose to carve out time and space to plan, implement, and assess teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels within their curriculum. This required teachers to push past the constraints in a school that make it difficult to try something new within their given curriculum and test preparation. Further, teachers had to take risks in teaching with new texts and new mediums, which can be complicated, as well as time consuming. However, in some ways, constraints like these also worked as opportunities. In an atmosphere that was saturated with concern for standards and standardized testing, Trail Middle School also chose to support inviting new texts that required extra time and support to integrate.

**Supporting curriculum and literacy practices**

Teachers were concerned about meeting the learning targets set in their given curriculum. This particularly impacted how they viewed and invited, sometimes cautiously, comics and graphic novels into the classroom. The standardized curriculum often acted as a heavy weight on teachers as they planned lessons and made room for new ways of operating as teachers. Liz, the seventh grade Science teacher in this study approached me the day I introduced to the staff wondering if comics could actually find a place in the Science curriculum. After agreeing to try it out, she shared, “My main concern would be that it’s not, like, too off topic” (interview, 9.5.14) before walking me through her learning targets for the year. Finn, the Social Studies teacher shared similar concerns. Referencing the content of the Hale books not aligning with his given curriculum, he noted, “I think that’s probably my only one reservation, is that we don’t
actually have a physical novel in our curriculum….We’ve got a lot of different units that we have to cover. You know, our academic content standards, I mean, we have a lot” (interview, 9.9.14). Teachers felt that they could only make time for a comic or graphic novel if it helped support their curriculum. Therefore, finding and capitalizing on those alignments was their first priority. Even after planning, Gillian printed the learning targets addressed on each handout or set of guided notes we used in class and distributed to students (see Appendix E and F). In this way, the standards we were addressing were clear, making it more difficult to question the presence of comics in her classroom. I did not observe Gillian outlining other handouts with other texts or topics with learning targets so directly. This suggests that Gillian still felt the need to prove that this work was meeting her standards to administrators and parents who might see our handouts and wonder what place comics had in her classroom.

However, teachers also saw potential in these texts to support curriculum. In fact, the librarian believed that a primarily visual text was “important to help [students] understand what’s going on,” especially when documenting a historical event, as many of Hale’s books do (interview, 9.3.14). Penny, who was making the arrangements for the author visit and had sought me out to support teachers in their teaching of these texts, remained a champion of comics, increasing her enthusiasm as she observed teachers and students integrating them into classrooms. Comics and graphic novels were being presented by her, as not only something added to an already full curriculum timeline, but something that might be an important part of reaching standardized goals. Across a
Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies curriculum, comics and graphic novels were used to actively support given learning goals.

In Language Arts, for instance, Gillian was concerned about standards, but found that once she got comfortable with the medium, the visual components could be more beneficial than she has originally thought. She and the other seventh grade Language Arts department teachers taught the fracture fairytales illustrated by Nathan Hale: Rapunzel’s Revenge and Calamity Jack. This choice was made primarily because of the opportunities for curricular alignments, however, teachers approached this choice with flexibility. As we planned together, we paid close attention to the learning goals for that quarter, and as I noted before, notated learning goals on handouts and guided notes. Gillian took the opportunity to review literary devices or consider theme, for instance, while reading these graphic novels. We also asked students to actively compare traditional versions of Rapunzel and Jack and the Bean Stalk with the fractured versions that we were reading in class, another standard for seventh grade. (See Appendix K). Gillian found that teaching with comics and graphic novels “does actually connect to the common core” which added to her comfort in integrating these texts into her classroom (interview, 4.21.15). For her it wasn’t about the particular text, but learning how comics and graphic novels are structured that helped her recognize how they supported her curriculum.

For Science and Social Studies, the choice of text mattered. Teachers found it necessary to use a comic that was based around content they were required to teach (see chapter 3 for descriptions of each focus text). Social Studies teachers, for example, had entered into the year having already located a series of comics that, while not part of the
Hale series, aligned with their given curriculum. Seventh grade Social Studies focused on World History through the Middle Ages, making a comic about the plague a curricular match. *The Black Death* was a short comic that offered a narrative arc while still integrating historical fact. As historical fiction, this comic was a departure from the other texts used in the classroom (including nonfiction video, text books, and additional handouts and guided notes). It provided opportunities for students to think about characters and realities of the time period emotionally, supporting the factual curriculum they were also learning. Across the curriculum, comics and graphic novels were being used to support the given standardized curriculum.

**Engaging Students**

While teachers hoped, and ultimately found that comics and graphic novels were capable of operating within and supporting their given curriculum, teachers also saw them as an opportunity to engage and motivate students (Alvermann and Guthrie, 1993). They saw the potential for reaching students that they didn’t always reach or “children who don’t necessarily like to read” (interview with Gillian, 9.4.14). Beyond engaging students that teachers perceived as struggling readers or uninterested in reading, teachers saw potential in reaching and differentiating for a wider range of learners. Gillian explained that,

I like [comics and graphic novels] because I feel as if it reaches all of, it would reach all of my kids. So I have kids that are on IEPs all the way up to very, extremely gifted kids. And I feel as if I would be able to connect with all of them
with the book - or graphic novel. And that I wouldn't have any kids struggling… I think it can reach all of them (interview, 9.4.14).

Teachers, while concerned about their curriculum, were also concerned about their students. They recognized a value to not just addressing the content, but also addressing needs and wants of their students, highlighting the progressive and neoliberal tension existing in this school. Along with seeing comics and graphic novels as reaching students, they also felt these texts would interest students, conceptualizing them as “fun” and thinking “kids will like it” (interview with Liz, 9.5.14). Within a gridded system, teachers were mediating a balance constantly between requirements and desires for their classroom. And at times, comic and graphic novels worked as a way to overlap the two.

Finn, for example, believed that his personal excitement in comics would also translate to his students. “If you show excitement in something, whether it's a graphic novel or anything, I think the kids are going to enjoy it.” (interview, 9.9.14). He continued later in our conversation, sharing, “I’m looking forward to, you know, seeing students’ interest in something new…I want them to be engaged, want them to be excited about it” (interview, 9.9.14). So aside from meeting the Social Studies curricular goals, literacy goals, and addressing new goals around art analysis, Finn was focused on student engagement and excitement. Teachers, then, tactically moved through the school system in order to implement a new medium, “using imposed systems” (De Certeau, p. 18) to meet what they saw as student needs and wants. Because teachers saw comics and graphic novels as able to be used tactically as part of the school system, supporting curriculum and exciting students, they were more able to step into a new, unknown space
to teach a medium of text for the first time. Because comics were invited and found to support the grids in place, teachers felt validated in using them more actively in their classrooms.

**Operating within the unknown**

As teachers were operating within the school system, they were introducing new texts, learning that they could operate and support their required learning goals and targets. Leander and Rowe (2006) suggest that new, unnamed spaces are possible when working with new or untraditional texts (p. 452). In considering more progressive educational stances, Greene (1995) references Dewey (1934), inviting teachers to “venture into the unknown” (p. 21). Yet, it is important to recognize that moving towards “new spaces to be made that have not yet been named” requires teachers and students to exist within the unknown (Leander and Rowe, 2006, p. 452). Leander and Boldt (2012) ask if teachers can “make space for fluidity and indeterminacy” and be open to “paths that are not rational or linear” (p. 44). These more progressive ways of thinking about educational practices were not a regular part of this school as testing and curricular focuses were. I argue that teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels, though, invited indeterminate and, at times, nonlinear paths. Much of this stems from these texts being new. Teaching them was a new experience for many teachers. And, because their multimodal structure is so different from the print-based texts that saturated school spaces, teachers often don’t feel they have the tools or background to teach them (Connors, 2011). Yet, teachers made choices and found support as they integrated comics
and graphic novels into their classrooms, engaging with and pushing against the tensions in their school.

By choosing to step into the unknown, particularly one full of expectations of achievement, was difficult to do. It has been noted that while teachers, like the ones in this study, recognize the need and benefit for new texts like comics to be invited into schools, there still remains a gap in it actually occurring (Clark, 2013; Lapp et al, 2011/12). Curriculum and testing were operating as grids that regulate what and how teachers teach. Finding cracks in their regulated system took active choices and working with or towards something different. Penny believed that teaching with comics could help teachers to recognize the comfortable rhythms they fall into in their teaching. “I think it’s going to get us all out of our comfort zone,” she noted as a potential positive outcome of bring comics and graphic novels into a school (interview, 9.3.14). She recognized that this was a text that many of her colleagues were unfamiliar and/or uncomfortable with. Yet, teachers were willing to put forth effort and take risks, as they saw teaching with new texts in new ways could potentially make a difference in their classrooms (particularly in regards to student engagement, as described above).

As working with comics and graphic novels in this school was something new for teachers, they approached it both hesitantly and with excitement. Finn noted that “the fact that I’ve never done it” gave him some reservations. “I think I would say it’ll be a struggle at first. Just because I don’t have any background actually teaching [comics]” (interview, 9.9.14). But because the Social Studies team had purchased sets of comics aligning with their curriculum, they took the graphic novel visitor and my volunteering in
the school as an opportunity to teach with their comics. Finn explained at the end of the year, “Your presentation kind of came along at the right time… We had ordered some [comics], we had discussed it. We didn't know what to do.” (group interview, 4.23.15). Teachers here had already made the choice to bring comics into their classrooms, without knowing how best to teach or use them. Their path was undetermined, but still set in motion. By stepping into the unknown, these teachers were willing to travel along indeterminate paths. Teachers maintained openness for operating in the unknown and located strong support systems with each other and with my support across the school year.

**Being open and vulnerable.** To make this work possible, teachers, students, and other support staff needed to be open to the possibilities. Receptiveness was part of operating in the unknown. After reflecting on the year’s events, Penny explained,

> If you get in your mindset, 'it's just a comic' you're never going to go anywhere with that. There's just no place to go. But if you get in your head 'I can do something with this. And I might be reaching a group of kids that I maybe not have been able to reach before,’ it's just so beneficial (interview, 4.22.15).

Penny recognized that trying something new required teachers to see the potential, rather than focus on their or other preconceived notions about comics and the constraints that were operating around them. And to do this was a choice, not something that could just happen within the already established rhythms of their classroom and school.

**Asking for help.** In addition to being open for something new, teachers were also open to and welcoming of help. In this way, teachers embraced being vulnerable,
acknowledging that they needed and wanted help and that they had more to learn. This vulnerability impacted my place in teachers’ classrooms as well. Along with comics and graphic novels, I was invited and welcomed into classrooms to support teaching and learning, offering help and expertise. And that help was individualized and long term, across the entire school year. That teachers were open to help and welcoming not of just comics and graphic novels but of my presence in the classroom also fueled teachers’ extended work with comics and graphic novels. As mentioned above, teachers positioned me as a co-teacher and noted that my presence “chang[ed] the way I thought about graphic novels” (interview with Gillian, 4.21.15). Gillian stressed that my support served as a model for potential new ways to operate in a classroom.

Liz was not collaborating with other Science teachers during this process, as the other focus teachers were. While she would pass ideas along to her colleagues, she was operating alone. She underscored how valuable it was to have “another body in here the first two days,” of her comics unit, helping her to develop a new rhythm to her teaching. “This was new for me. And it made me feel more comfortable branching out from the other teachers, because then I had someone to bounce ideas off of” (interview, 4.22.15). Having a knowledgeable support system made a difference when trying something that was new and different. In fact, teachers agreed that it made the work we did, to the extent that we did it, possible. Further, this way of planning for teaching and learning with graphic novels speaks to the value in collaboration and the need for support when trying to operate in new ways. As teachers ventured into the unknown vulnerably, they were open to new ideas and open to help and collaboration.
Using new pedagogical practices. Teachers, as noted above, recognized their lack of background knowledge in working with and teaching with this medium. Along with being something new and different, working with comics and graphic novels was also “daunting” in some ways (Interview with, 9.13.14). Penny was who originally reached out to me the previous year as she was trying to learn how to bring comics into classrooms successfully. She, and others in this school, found that while they could recognize comics and graphic novels as texts with literary qualities and merit, they believed there was more to them that went beyond their current understandings. Penny explained,

There is an art piece to it. And I wasn't familiar with the art side of it. Like what the bits and pieces where called and what they have to do. I mean, definitely while it is telling a story, in my mind it's more of an art form, I guess, is how I look at it. And I knew that there where specialized things about it, but I just didn't know what they were, all put together. (interview, 9.3.14)

Penny suggests that when teaching and learning with a comic or graphic novel, there are different pedagogical practices teachers need to make to do them “justice” (interview, 9.3.14). As we approached these texts during professional development with attention to them as literature as well as “art pieces,” visual culture remained an influence. For example, we used medium-specific tools (Zoss, 2009), which were art-based, including a consideration of color, shading, line, spatial arrangement, as well as shape, perspective, and left-right visual structure (Connors, 2011). And our attentiveness to comics as art and literature continued as we read and analyzed in classrooms with seventh graders.
Teachers’ openness to my introducing these new pedagogical practices impacted how we were reading and composing, challenging ways of operating in place (These practices will be discussed in further detail in the following sections). Teachers were able to approach a new text in a new way, thinking not only about the literary and content components they were already familiar with, but also the art and structure that comes with primarily visual texts. Teachers were working within and against the curriculum constraints of the school in this way.

Framing comics and graphic novels as an art form was introduced during the professional development and picked up and build upon through the rest of the year. Building from that, I worked with teachers individually to plan for lessons that fit into their classroom and curriculum. Across the curriculum, teachers valued the visual structure of comics, in part, because it encouraged something different from their usual way of teaching. Each content area took time to appreciate the art in and of itself, along with the information that it could provide. For instance, while looking at the biome examples in Gonick’s comics, Liz and I removed the words to encourage students to analyze the images for a longer period of time, after noticing that students were skipping over images as they read. As a class we looked at the black and white shading, the shape
and size of the plant leaves, and the diversity of animals in this single panel of a rain forest (see Figure 5). Further, drawing from visual culture also made it possible to meet the curriculum goals. Students in this Science class connected the visual shading with where sunlight hits the forest floor and the variety of vegetation telling them about the sunlight and rain that must be present in order to photosynthesis to occur. All of these facts aligned with their Science learning targets for that unit, but addressed them in new ways.

The Social Studies team of teachers also confirmed approaching comics in a different way, taking note of the artistic qualities and the work that they are doing. Each of the Social Studies teachers carved out time for students to talk about the images, colors, lines, and themes in the text, analyzing and discussing (similar to how we analyzed pages during the professional development). We discussed, as a class, the significance of the changing sky colors, signifying safety verses disease. In this way, the Social Studies team was supporting, but also pushing against their given curriculum, providing potential for other ways of learning about history through art and discussion. During a department meeting, one Social Studies teacher, Mark, who had tried reading a comic in class once before explained,

We tried to do a lot of 'What is this showing you about the Black Death?' But, uh, we didn't really know how to say that… But you bringing in the analysis of the frames, the colors. I mean, I hadn't noticed the colors that were - look at when the colors are all dark when she's in the city. She goes out in the country, they're all bright. You know, that kind of stuff we can now use and say, look for visual
elements in there. You know? Or examine that and what do you think that's trying to say? Get them to make the next connection. You know? Get them to talk about what we want [students] to know about The Black Death, um, just through the visual elements of the graphic novel. (group interview, 4.23.14)

Teachers recognized prior to and following teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels the expertise that went beyond their background understanding was necessary to approach and work with these texts as visual objects. This expertise, which came from me and from their own collaborations helped teachers to make connections and encourage analysis in a way that felt valuable and meaningful to them.

**Recognizing multiple steps.** Much was required in order for experiences in classrooms to occur. Teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels did not come down to a single, determining moment, but many moments that created small shifts. Those shifts paved the way for the next ones. It was a path that couldn’t have been outlined ahead of time, but one that was responsive to steps that came before, both for individuals and for the collective. For me, after being invited and welcomed into this school, addressing the (mis)conceptions and questions about comics and graphic novels through professional development was the next step. Penny, as the organizer of the author visit, felt the responsibility of making it a success. This meant helping teachers to be comfortable teaching comics in their classrooms. For this reason, the professional development purposefully provided an opportunity for teachers to learn as students in order to actively engage them in reading and analyzing the many levels in comics and graphic novels. Penny was also aware of the hesitations and “misconceptions about
graphic novels” that teachers already carried. Penny stressed the importance of the professional development in that process, “so [the teachers] could see, right away, ‘oh there’s more to graphic novels than I thought’” (interview, 4.22.15).

Penny continued to describe how she experienced a shift in teachers, noting their initial willingness, then their active engagement in the professional development. As a participant in the professional development, Penny was privy to teachers ‘ah ha’ moments because she was working with them and listening to them throughout. She describes teachers’ growing enthusiasm as they participated in the professional development. A member from the Social Studies department noted that “having [Ashley] model how you were going to teach it to the students, um, and trying it ourselves kind of opened, open me up a little bit more” (group interview, 4.23.15). Gillian had a similar reaction following the professional development. After already meeting with me to plan for teaching with comics in her classroom, Gillian approached me with excitement. She shared that she had previously thought she understood how graphic novels worked, but that this experience gave her so much more understanding and she was looking forward to implementing these new ideas (professional development reflection, 9.17.14).

Still, even with this growing enthusiasm, there was work to do to bring comics into the hands of students as part of their curriculum. From this enthusiasm came more willingness on the part of teachers, but also new hesitations. Penny described teachers asking, “But again, how do I teach it? And how do I connect it to the standards?” (interview, 9.3.14). For her, and for me, the next step was pushing “to get you in the classroom” (interview, 9.3.14). Without connecting to the standards, it seemed that such a
nontraditional text could not be invited in to classrooms in this school. It was during this part of the process that teachers began experiencing comics, not just as students and readers, but as teachers. And the ideological tensions between tests and standardized curriculum that neoliberalism supports in schools and being student-centered was part of this experience. Teachers cared about meeting their standards but also cared about student engagement and enjoyment and students having the freedom to guide their own learning, as a progressive educational stance promotes. As Gillian thought about our teaching practices with comics and graphic novels, she recognized how it impacted her students. In particular, it highlighted for her how students were reading and their comfort levels with reading. “It wasn't as in my face as it was [when we were working with the graphic novels]” (LG-A-10-11). Our work seemed to bring students’ ways of operating to the forefront, for Gillian.

And teaching comics in classrooms was not the final step or end of the process. As Gillian reflected, along with the other participants, it became about looking ahead to what was next with their teaching comics as they planned for following units and following years. Acknowledging that this was a process, that was and remains ongoing, helps to more closely consider what is necessary when comics and graphic novels are welcomed into a school.

*Experiencing.* During our planning and teaching with comics and graphic novels in this school, teachers repeatedly hit roadblocks as well has experienced moments of inspiration and excitement. I found that throughout the process of welcoming comics and graphic novels, teachers came to rely on their own experiences of learning about, reading,
analyzing and teaching these texts. As teachers reflected on a year of teaching, they came to believe that engaging in the actual teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels, rather than reading about it or hearing about it, was a valuable step in their own learning. This was not something that they were able to only read about or hear about. Experiencing the teaching as a teacher was essential. Further, each experience influenced the next, illustrating a collective process that was also individual and responsive. This process was ongoing and began to highlight the value of how we were teaching, learning, and collaborating, rather than just a final product.

Regardless of teachers’ willingness to try something new, they still had to operate around what Gillian called “the stigmas that come along with graphic novels” (interview, 4.21.15). Comics and graphic novels are still conceptualized negatively as easy, dumbed down, simple, or too explicit for young readers. And as multimodal and primarily visual, it can be difficult to see a direct connection to these texts and the high-stakes tests students are also preparing for. These conceptualizations continued to impact teachers, even if indirectly. They agreed enthusiastically to try the medium in their classrooms, yet hesitation continued to be a roadblock. For example, as I was working with the department of seventh grade language arts teachers, I experienced Gillian’s department members as “stand off-ish” as we planned. Gillian had already integrated the medium into her classroom and was feeling successful in what she was seeing, particularly noticing her students’ enthusiasm. During a conversation following the “stand off-ish” department meeting, Gillian shared that she thought her department’s hesitancy remained because “neither teacher has seen the students interact with the graphic novel yet” (field
notes, 3.11.15). Looking back on her continued meeting and planning with the English Language Arts department, Gillian shared “I remember repeating it. ‘Just wait till you do it. Just wait till you do it’” as she encouraged the teachers to push past their hesitancy (interview, 4.21.15). Gillian could relate to their hesitancy, as she had also felt it, even after agreeing to integrate comics and graphic novels in her teaching. Because Gillian had continued, with support, her experience as a teacher working with comics and graphic novels continued to shift. Gillian reflected on her original discomfort, actual experiences and how it could impact future practice, sharing,

I originally [was], not as comfortable teaching a graphic novel, because I don't, I haven't had much experience with it. But seeing how the graphic novels reached all levels of my kids, especially pulling in the kids who don't necessarily like to read, or like my class, I have to do it [again] next year (interview, 4.21.15).

It wasn’t until experiencing teaching and learning with comics on multiple levels that Gillian could truly see the value and, in turn, encourage and support others to experience it for themselves. This experience speaks to the necessity for individual practice alongside a collective practice when working towards new ways of operating. Along with taking part in group professional development and planning in departments, teachers needed to experience this for themselves. By that, I mean teachers acknowledged the changes in their opinions and practices that occurred as they engaged in teaching comics and were witness to their students’ learning. And teachers’ individual experiences teaching comics became opportunities to support other teachers engaging in similar practices. Penny shared a similar sentiment. Having the opportunity to be both inside and
outside, working with students and observing teachers, she explained, “I think it’s more than just librarians, and you, and authors standing up and saying it. You just, you have to experience it. I don’t know how else to do it” (interview, 4.22.15). For Penny, only inviting the author, or only participating in professional development wasn’t enough. It was also about individual teachers teaching and observing actual teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels in classroom settings and then passing on their experiences to others.

Across the school year, teachers and students maneuvered the tensions of teaching and learning with comics in a school engrained in a culture of testing and neoliberal ideologies. We took into account curricular and testing requirements, such as learning targets of biomes, as well as the art of the comics, analyzing shading and color as symbols for health in *The Black Death*. And while teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels was able to occur while still maintaining the school’s ways of operating, it also invited teachers to an unknown place. These were new texts to teachers, and they approached teaching them with both enthusiasm and hesitation. Operating in the unknown required an openness as well as guidance through the process. But with that, teachers were able to shift and find cracks in their own system by embracing these new ways of operating.

**Time and space**

As teachers moved through the school year, other shifts were occurring as they were teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels, particularly connecting to time and space. And time and space were part of the tensions around ways of operating in
this school, things teachers were constrained by, but could also manipulate. Returning to my original research question, I was interested in *What happens when comics and graphic novels are welcomed into a school space?* Data collection to answer this question took place across a significant amount of time and within multiple places in the school. In keeping with my way of thinking about literacy events and practices observed over time in a school, I became interested in perceptions of time and space. By being in multiple places and observing over time, theoretical conceptions of time, pace, place, and space became a focus I needed to attend to. The following sections examine many ways in which time and space were operating and shifting, particularly in connection with comics and graphic novel work in this school. Taking note of space and time highlighted for me shifts from the limitation imposed to the “unlimited diversity” of operations that are possible in a school integrating a new medium (de Certeau, 1984, p. 99).

**Time**

As the previous section documented, comics and graphic novels were being used within a system of grids and limits. Parts of this system are clearly defined increments of time and space. In considering operating through time, “It is not simply a matter of how much time is given to academic learning (time as quantity) but also how time is socially constructed that influences what, how, when, where, and by whom is learned (time as process).” (Bloome, Beierle, Grigorenko, Goldman, 2009, p. 313). Time was experienced and constructed by teachers, students, and myself as we taught with new texts in a classroom space. Bloome et al. continue, “people take hold of time, they structure, organize, and represent it, give it meanings and social significance, and experience it both
individually and collectively in terms of meanings and social significances” (p. 314-315). As time was shaped by (and shaping) teachers and students teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels, there were shifts and ruptures in typical ways of operating that occurred. These shifts occurred not only because a multimodal text was introduced into a space, but also because educators made tactical moves and drew on resources within the system in new ways. This research makes visible the constraints within the time of a school trying new literacy practices and how those constraints were pushed back on.

**Time, pace, and lasting impacts: Teachers’ perspectives.**

Time was operating in multiple ways throughout our work with comics in graphic novels. As part of the grids in this school system, time often functioned as a constraint that teachers pushed up against, managed, and manipulated as they engaged in their day-to-day. Especially as teachers were pressured to make time to prepare for the PARCC and other mandated standards, integrating comics and graphic novels was risky. However, the teachers and I were able to manipulate time tactically, which shifted how teachers saw and used comics. Further, teachers began recognizing the value of time as something beyond a constraint they needed to manage. Pointing to a slower pace and additional time spent with comics and graphic novels, teachers constructed time in a way that supported their required literacy practices. Along with supporting literary goals already in place, shifts in time and pace also provided opportunities for teachers to consider and even question current practices, opening doors for unlimited and unknown potential.
Finding time. Working as a constraint, time surfaced as an issue when attempting to welcome a new medium into a school. Initially, teachers worried about making time within what already felt like a full schedule. While finding or making time to try something new is a consistent concern for teachers, it was of particular concern while teachers were still learning about the medium of comics and combating their own hesitancies about using these types of texts. This impacted how teachers chose comics to integrate into their curriculum. Finn shared that one of the reasons his Social Studies team was “leaning towards” a shorter comic was because they would take a shorter amount of time to read. This suggests that this team was already operating on a schedule that felt stretched for time. It also suggests that, “because this is a new experience” there was a recognizable concern that this work might not be worth dedicating a large amount of time to. (interview, 9.9.14). Liz shared a similar sentiment, requesting a shorter comic that would not require as much time to read in class. However, it was a recent requirement addressed in the Common Core that literacy practices be addressed across the curriculum, not just in English Language Arts. While comics provided a path for integrating literary practices, shorter ones were safer options, so as not to lose too much time if the lesson or unit was not successful or did not meet the curriculum standards in the ways teachers needed it to.

In a school space, time is allotted, monitored, and often inflexible. Making tactical moves in a school requires a “clever utilization of time” (De Certeau, 1984, p. 39). Across the year, teachers found ways to manipulate time in order to make room for something new. As reviewed in the previous section, testing was a major part of how
time was structured around this school. In English Language Arts, while test preparation and testing was occurring, Gillian also attempted balancing time, making adjustments in her pre-established schedule in order to make more time for working with comics and graphic novels. As I planned with Gillian she took note of all of the testing (standardized and not) in her schedule in the upcoming months and having to integrate test prep weekly leading up to the PARCC testing. She worried out loud about the fairness of the time testing takes up as we were planning her graphic novel unit, going back and forth with her lesson plans as we outlined our calendars (planning meeting, 2.18.15). Here, integrating comics into her classroom lead to more recognition of and questioning of testing, along with some heartache and a large amount of frustration. At one point she asked if her testing schedule was “evil,” as she rearranged plans to make room for our graphic novel unit in her quarter. Gillian recognized the pressures of these tests, especially when attempting to change her schedule to make room for teaching a new text. While testing had become a normalized part of her job, it was also being recognized as an inverse of the graphic novel lessons we were planning for in her class.

Recognizing classroom pace. While time continued to operate as a constraint, teachers were also recognizing and shifting how they thought about comics and graphic novels as academic texts they would use, moving towards wanting and making more time as teaching continued. As teachers read comics and graphic novels and engaged with them in class, they recognized both the pace at which we could read and discuss in class as well as the increments of time we could spend in approaching these texts. I consider both the amount of time and the pace at which our teaching and learning occurred.
Teachers noted the amount of time that reading took. This included what is measured by the clock and calendar and how that time is structured within the school day and its class periods. Teachers also considered how quickly or slowly texts were being read and the rhythm of class discussions around comics and graphic novels, thinking about pace as well. Pace is connected to amounts of time, in that it sets a rhythm within the measured amount of time in which we worked, as a metronome does for musicians. However, pace also connects to how time was feeling and being socially constructed by teachers and students.

As teachers engaged with and reflected on teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels, they began to recognize, and even question the pace of their classrooms. This occurred as we engaged together in planning to teach, beginning with the pace I set during the professional development (See Appendix A). While introducing a single page of one of Hale’s novels, the staff and I spent twenty minutes of an hour-long professional development workshop analyzing two pages. Teachers were impacted by the professional development, feeling motivated and validated in bringing it into their classrooms because of the close and detailed reading we were doing. As noted in a previous section, immediately following the professional development Gillian approached me explaining that approaching comics in this slow way, analyzing structure and art, provided her with a new understanding around using comics in the classroom. Based on this, she wanted to emulate this way of introducing comics with her students. Finn shared a similar sentiment during our planning time. He asked,
Are you going to do the things you did with us? That was really cool, I thought, how you looked at like, the size of each strip. How like, like you know how the strip, and the size is like fifty percent of the page…. Are you going to talk about? Cause I thought that was so cool…. Cause that’s just stuff you kind of just skip right over. You don’t ever really think about… The kids are so, all they want to do is just breeze right through stuff. They don’t want to actually look at it… I found it really interesting, so I think they would too. (planning meeting, 1.27.15)

Both Gillian and Finn specifically reference how the professional development impacted their own way of looking at comics, recognizing details and author choices. Based on this, they requested that we take time to introduce and discuss the graphic novels they were teaching in a similar manner with their students. Finn specifically noted the tradition of breezing through texts and wanted to take time to notice details like panel size and how those details influence the reading and narrative experience. This way of analyzing these texts set an expectation with teachers, and in turn, their students in how we read and talk about comics and graphic novels. As the English Language Arts department reflected, “When we did the beginning we really broke stuff down…and so the expectation [was]: no, you need to delve deeper” (group interview, 4.21.15). Teachers recognized the impact of our initial analysis. By setting this expectation, teachers noted that students took up this practice in reading and discussion.

Teachers would also follow my lead as an expert and co-teacher in the room. Finn noted that the pace I set when asking questions during class affected students’ participation and reading processes, contributing to discussion. This way of operating
pushed against the already established, normative rhythms of the school and individual
classrooms. Finn also noted how our discussion pace around comics “wasn’t this speedy
pace” that is typical in his classroom (interview, 4.22.15). As he said this he snapped his
fingers rapidly, suggesting the rhythm at which his classroom traditionally operates. The
English Language Arts team noted that students “are used to [the teacher] moving on
after two people say something,” illustrating the given pace of classroom activities (group
interview, 4.21.15). Instead, together the teachers and I encouraged a slower, more
deliberate reading of comics and graphic novels. This not only made teachers more aware
of their teaching pace, but created small shifts in the pace of their classroom. As Gillian
described, “I feel like you slowed me down…. Where I would tend to speed up in certain
areas, you were able to…take a different perspective or view and slow it down”
(interview, 4.21.15).

Setting and maintaining a slower pace to find and analyze the details of a comic
did just that: provided time for students to locate details that contributed to meaning-
making. Gillian reflected,

Those high level kids who just fly by things - they actually have to slow down and
stop. Because they aren't going to pick up on every change in color or change in
mood, because they're not paying attention to the actual, the pictures and whatnot.

So it forces those higher kids to slow down. (interview, 4.21.15)

Gillian found that the structure and visual nature of comics encouraged readers to slow
down in order to make meaning, particularly meaning around the literary value of the
text. She noted that this slower pace, particularly for students she perceived as being
higher lever readers, wasn’t something students were used to. Our work and our pace challenged them to slow down in order to make meaning deeply. Students were asked to resist their regular rhythm of skimming, skills they learned to keep up with the fast-paced teaching and timed tests, in order to make sense of these texts.

Our slow, detailed pace addressed a variety of learners, ones perceived as struggling or reluctant readers along with high-level readers. The English Language Arts team noted that higher-level readers likely entered into reading comics with an assumption that this work “is so elementary” (interview, 4.21.15). Gillian continued,

And when we did make them slow down and actually look at things, they became more interested. Because they're not used to slowing down. They know that they can read a chapter and comprehend everything and answer whatever questions you give them. But, like, forcing them to slow down, look at what's going on in the visuals and then verbally explain it and analyze it, that's something that they weren't used to. (interview, 4.21.15)

Gillian and other teachers noted that this slow pace matched with the complex structure of comics challenged readers. On the other hand, they also found that a slow pace also made students that they saw as struggling participate in class more actively. Across the curriculum, particularly in classes where whole class dialogue was taking place (English Language Arts and Social Studies), teachers noted how the pace supported “lower” level learners and that they “enjoyed [the lessons] more,” given the slowing down (interview with Finn, 4.22.15).
This slowing down also made teachers more aware of their students’ needs. Gillian continued, explaining, “I go at the pace that I am comfortable at. I don’t always think about what the kids are comfortable at… so [slowing down] helped a lot.” (interview, 4.21.15). Teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels provided opportunities for teachers to acknowledge more closely how class is paced in their classroom and how that impacted student learning and engagement. Time is part of the school system grid that is so often either unacknowledged or unchallenged. Moving at such a fast past in order to get everything done has become second nature, engrained in the rhythms of this school’s ways of operating. Intertwined with a neoliberal agenda, time had a way of controlling teaching and learning, limiting not only what was read, but also how it was read. Teaching and learning with comics operated in tension with that control.

**Recognizing depth in production.** Teachers took time to carefully read and analyze the comics and graphic novels used in class during professional development, during planning, and by analyzing alongside their students. The detailed reading we all engaged in together encouraged shifts in teachers’ ideologies around comics and graphic novels. Moving from “a book…out of pictures” (interview, 9.4.14) to describing comics and graphic novels by saying, “They’re not a picture book,” Gillian highlighted a shift in perception (interview, 4.21.14). This shift is largely due to the time we spent, both during the professional development and in class recognizing the layers within a comic text and the literary elements working visually throughout. “I was surprised at the depth at which we could go” when analyzing these texts with students, Dorothy (a member of the English Language Arts department) shared (group interview, 4.21.15). Dorothy was
encouraged by the close reading that was possible with this medium. During discussions
with the Social Studies team Kate shared her realization that “this isn’t just fluff reading”
as she had originally seen it (group interview, 4.23.15). This verbal acknowledgment of a
shift in how teachers perceived comics and graphic novels is indicative of how teachers
were also shifting their thinking around authoring comics and graphic novels. As the
English Language Arts teachers were describing their evolving thoughts they shared,

Linda: I was surprised at how much goes into them. Like, the thought of
Dorothy: Every detail.
Linda: Right, what color the gutter is going to be, how big, what about the frames,
which one’s big and which one's smaller? I had no idea. I look at them totally
differently now.
Katie: I do too.
Linda: Because, holy cow, Nathan Hale spent a ton of time illustrating this book.
(group interview, 4.21.15)

First, as the teachers describe their surprise, they refer back to terms and structural, visual
vocabulary that were originally introduced as part of professional development. These
concepts were integrated into comic introductions across the curriculum and contributed
to teachers’ shifting views about comics and graphic novels and “how much goes into
them.” Along with spending time and recognizing the artistic layers and literary
qualities, teachers also became more aware of the author and the work he put into
creating. Because of the detailed layers we spent time locating, teachers acknowledge the
time that must have gone into the creation of these comics. In analyzing a final product, teachers recognized the process that was required for composing it.

**Manipulating time.** As teachers taught with comics and graphic novels in their classrooms, time was operating as a major factor. Teachers noticed how time was impacting their reading and pace of reading. In this way, time was not only operating as a constraint or limitation. We were also constructing and manipulating how time was functioning in classrooms while reading comics and graphic novels. This way of working with time was something that was also influenced by other grids in the school system. As it was mentioned earlier, making time during test prep and having time in a packed curriculum was something teachers were constantly navigating. Early on, Gillian made a choice to manipulate her testing time in order to make time for our teaching and learning with comics. As she rearranged her schedule she was taking an active part in how time was working and being distributed in her classroom.

This way of manipulating time was also done in the moment, responsively, as teachers recognized a need for more time. This happened across the curriculum. One example that stands out is the time for the Language Arts unit final project. Within a two-week unit, Gillian had assigned students to create comic versions of themselves. During our planning, Gillian began thinking about time. “If we want... good projects, we have to at least give them one day... add an in-class work-day [for the comic project]” (planning meeting, 2.18.15). Her students were assigned to design a comic-version of themselves, creating either a single image or a set of panels about themselves, reflecting back on our discussions of representation through images. (See Appendix G and H.) Gillian
recognized early on that students had to be provided with the time, if we were expecting them to put time into their projects.

When thinking about the amount of detail, effort, and time both teachers and students where noticing in the graphic novels students were reading, as well as the acknowledgment of the effort graphic novelists put into their texts, there was an expectation that students would draw on that in their creating. With that in mind, we set aside one full work-day for students, previous to the due date for this project. It was during this time that Gillian and the other department teachers had also began to recognize the work that goes into making comics and the pace at which we were reading and analyzing them. During a department meeting, the teachers discussed giving students even more time in which to work on their projects, which involved drawing, writing, and being prepared to share their projects orally. Later that week, Gillian made the decision to add an additional work-day, hoping to encourage students to slow down and complete their project with detail and care. As we introduced the project we reviewed details and art choices that Hale had made in designing his text as a way to encourage students to bring a similar level of detail into their stories (field notes, 3.11.14). Gillian recognized that to expect that detail, time was needed for students to have the opportunity to work in that way.

Further, a greater amount of time was spent in production than was spent presenting, by adding an additional day of work time. This time for process was significant and illustrated a value to the time it takes to produce “good projects.” So often, these teachers felt pressured to rush through projects that are outside the paper-
pencil test or conventional literacy practices. Instead, while students worked through the process of art making, creating a project that was primarily visual, Gillian demonstrated that she valued time for that process by making it available to her students.

(potential) Impacts across time. I had the opportunity to observe instances and teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels across an entire school year. Further, I have maintained a relationship with the school into this current school year (2015-16), allowing me to consider the potential impacts this work is having across time. Lemke (2000, 2001) considers how time impacts classroom spaces, taking note of happenings within and across timescales. This measure of time offers a way of tracking small moments and if or how those moments reach larger timescales (across many years). Lemke (2000) is interested in locating “what processes, what kinds of change or doing, are characteristic of each relevant timescale of organization of the system/network? And, how are processes integrated across different timescales?” (p. 276). Yet, also relevant to this research, Lemke notes that larger timescales are also impacting and constraining what is possible in smaller timescales. This way of looking at time is fruitful here, as I am interested in the moments and classes in which we were working with or talking about comics and graphic novels. Much of that work was within the constraints of what needed to be accomplished within a day or a semester or a school year, larger timescales in which we were operating. Also of interest to Lemke’s (2000, 2001) timescales are the materials used in a space and across time. “It is the circulation through the network of semiotic artifacts (i.e. books, buildings, bodies) that enables coordination between
processes on radically different timescales” (2000, p. 275). In this study, comics and graphic novels act as semiotic artifacts that influenced interactions across timescales.

After units with graphic novels were complete, impacts continued to surface. Gillian mentioned noticing this specifically. As we reflected on our work at the end of the year she shared that she noticed more students carrying comics and graphic novels following our unit, “and they’re still reading them now” (interview, 4.21.15). She saw students’ interest in the medium extend beyond our unit time. Further, she recognized long-term shifts in her students. Gillian had experienced her students as enthusiastic about comics being used in the classroom. She shared that our teaching of graphic novels left many students feeling confident, having completed a book and enjoyed the process. She said that in the weeks following the unit, “I had kids still coming up and discussing that unit, even though it was done….And for them to approach me and further discuss something, that’s when I noticed that I reached, or we reached kids that typically would never involve themselves in a novel” (interview, 4.21.15). Gillian perceived this confidence extending into the next unit, as students were enthusiastic and continuing to discuss their reading with her. Teachers across both the Social Studies and English Language Arts departments discussed similar experiences with the comics work having a lasting impact on students, what they read and how they felt about their reading. One English Language Arts department member, Kelly, noted that “if we hit them earlier on in the school year I think we’ll have more success and get more kids to read” (group interview, 4.21.14). That teachers recognized not only our work with comics as successful, but also as having potentially long-term impacts, is significant. So much so,
teachers believed that by starting a new year with teaching comics could offer more success throughout the year. In this way, teaching with comics provided more opportunities to manipulate and take hold of time, with the potential for long term change.

Ultimately, teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels was impacted by the structured time in a school. Yet, we found ways for our work to occur within the grids and constraints of time. Teachers also became more aware of how time was operating, providing opportunities for them to “take hold of time…[and] give it meanings and social significance” that were valuable to them and their classroom practices (Bloome et al, 2009, 314-315). In this way, we were pushing against mandated and neoliberal influences on education. Teachers recognized their classroom pace and questioned it after bringing a new medium into their space. And they considered and manipulated time to benefit student learning. The process of constructing and analyzing comics was acknowledged and influenced expectations for students’ own projects. Teachers manipulated time in the moment as well, becoming more comfortable with unknown potential and without set paths. Drawing my attention to what they saw as lasting effects of this work, teachers’ were noting how their ways of operating and ways of thinking about comics and graphic novels were shifting.

**Time and more of it: Students’ perspectives**

While teachers were making shifts and cracks in how time was operating for them and their classrooms, students had their own reactions and opinions about the class work being done and the graphic novels being read. Much of how the students experienced the
teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels aligned with how teachers talked about it. Time for students impacted and was impacted by how they read, the speed of their reading and analysis, as well as their creating products in response to reading comics and graphic novels. Students, in fact, valued time learning with comics so much that they requested more of it. And students pointed to the departures that learning with these new texts facilitated from the fast-paced, test-focused atmosphere they were accustomed to.

My discussions with student participants about comics in and out of class were ongoing, addressing in-class topics, as well as student-generated questions and opinions. Along with interacting with seventh grade students during class time, I had the opportunity to talk with a small group of seventh graders on a semi-regular basis over lunch. This occurred in classrooms where I was working as well as the library space. Students would grab their lunches, then come to eat and chat with me during the twenty to thirty minute breaks we would all have. On some afternoons, students would drive these conversations, starting to talk and ask questions before I even had a chance to turn on my video camera. Other times I brought specific questions to the table. We laughed, ate, and shared stories, both personal and academic. We also talked one-on-one at the end of the school year. During this time we explored their opinions about our teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels and what the experience was like for them.

**Reading quickly; reading for detail.** As we met to talk over lunch, students shared what reading comics and graphic novels, in general, was like for them.

Consistently, students described reading comics and graphic novels as something they
could do quickly. And for them, this was a positive attribute of the books. For these students, “comic books [were] really cool and really quick to read.” (J-2). And students saw this as a reason for their popularity in their classrooms and future classrooms. Alice explained that given a choice, students may choose a graphic novel, “because it’s quicker and everything.” (interview, 4.29.15)

Reading quickly is often associated with comics and other image based texts, especially when placed in contrast to chapter books or other print-based novels. This is one reason we introduced comics viewing and reading in a slower pace. Cool, fast reads, then, were not the only ways these students described the comics and graphic novels they were reading in school. In fact, students spent a significant amount of time discussing the details in their reading. As Ben explained during our first lunch discussion, “Well, I learned one thing. I never knew there was so much to one page of a comic…I just never really took the time to appreciate how much that, like, they influence the story” (student lunch, 2.18.15). Here Ben is referring to the visual details we spent time analyzing during our introduction to *The Black Death* comic in Social Studies. In fact, during this introduction, students spent close to thirty minutes reading and talking about the opening pages. Ben reflected back on that analysis noting they “went through that book and dissected the heck out of it,” (interview, 4.28.15) which was something he enjoyed.

Considering comics and graphic novels as quick reads and full of important details created a tension in how they were perceived by young readers. On one hand, a quick read suggests that there isn’t much information to process or what there is to process doesn’t take much time or energy. Yet, these seventh graders discussed details at length,
in class and out of class, recognizing their importance and ‘influence’ on the story. This appreciation of details seemed to stem from the visual culture stance we took as we worked with these texts. Even with a text students were capable of reading quickly, relying on a “slower looking” (Efland, 2002, p. 118) that scholars of visual culture reference, guided students to see and appreciate more. In fact, it helped students to become aware of their reading and viewing, noticing the work they do when reading a primarily visual text. By developing a meta awareness of their reading of these texts, students began to appreciate the effort that goes into their creation and the work they do as readers to interpret them. This may have contributed to the tension around these texts being read both quickly and slowly, (especially in an atmosphere that is saturated with print-based reading). And it was only through our teaching and learning together that students came to see and value both ways of reading comics.

Similar to what the teachers experienced during the professional development, we took our time introducing comics and graphic novels in each classroom. There was a focus on building a foundation of understanding around the structure of comics and how the details throughout were functioning and helping readers to make meaning. Sienna, one student who had little experience reading comics and graphic novels prior to this study, shared that, “sometimes they’re hard to follow….If you don’t read comic books that much, then you don’t know, like how the story, like, goes” (student lunch, 3.12.15). Here, Sienna recognized that these texts can be not only new, but complex. In a previous study, I found that readers arrived at a similar sentiment, as Jason, a fifth grade participant shared,
If this is your first graphic novel, you really won’t understand it… because if you don’t know that a graphic novel is pictures and panels, um, showing you the story, while telling you the plot at the same time. If you haven’t read a graphic novel before, you won’t, you won’t understand it as much as everyone else, because some of the pictures show action, and like, um, it shows emotions…they wouldn’t know to look at the facial expression or what they are doing. (Dallacqua, 2012)

Contrary to many assumptions about young people as ‘digital natives,” young readers do not necessarily approach multimodal texts with automatic understandings, requiring guidance as they read. Mills (2010) points out that access and ability are not equalized when it comes to work with multimodal reading and composing and require connection to out of school practices and scaffolding. “Without scaffolding of multimodal practice in formal learning contexts such as schools, students will not be taken to the outer limits of their potential in multimodal design” (p. 42). It became important, and as students saw it, helpful to take time to in breaking down these texts and their parts. Together we built a common, medium-specific vocabulary that students and teachers drew from throughout the year (Zoss, 2009). Students agreed that addressing “how it’s set up” was important to their learning in class. Alice explained that, “it was helpful to know…if somebody else was talking about [comics], what they might say, so you know what it is…It’s so we can get more vocabulary into our language” (student lunch, 3.12.15). Knowing the vocabulary around comics and their structure was something Alice found valuable so that she might be able to talk with others about comics and maintain an understanding.
As this common vocabulary was introduced, we modeled a slow way of reading to encourage students to recognize and appreciate details. In turn, students recognized this way of approaching comics and graphic novels as valuable and important to teaching them. Estelle’s advice for teachers wanting to teach this medium was to,

…talk more about the illustrations and text, more than pointing out the features of, like, the characters. Like, you, you have to kind of pay attention to the backgrounds sometimes, because there are important, key elements in graphic novels that are symbols throughout the book. (student lunch, 4.9.15)

And Ben agreed, adding that teachers and students should, “talk about how the different elements are portrayed through drawing, not necessarily though the words, like how you did.” (student lunch, 4.9.15). Here, Ben is referring back to how comics were introduced in his classes, and how we spent time breaking down pages, focusing only on panels, then images, then only on words. This, he found, helped him to pay more attention to the images, something he felt he didn’t automatically do when reading with all of the modes of the medium present at once. Students also acknowledged that reading a comic in class is different from reading other texts and should require a different way of teaching as well. As Estelle explained above, paying attention to the artwork is essential to understanding the story, rather than only focusing on character traits, which is more the norm in a Language Arts lesson while reading a print based text. She and Ben agreed that time should be spent learning how to analyze the images and structure.

Along with acknowledging images as a primary source of information in comics and graphic novels, students also referenced how the texts were “challenging.” Ben also
described their work with *The Black Death* as “challenging” noting that readers “had to pay attention to every little detail” in order to make sense of the text. He went on to say that “if you just read the words, it wouldn’t make any sense” (interview, 4.28.15). For Ben, reading comics and graphic novels like the ones we read in his classes required close reading, particularly because of the images. Students were consistently aware of what and how they were reading and the importance of the details that get noticed during a slower reading of a page. Working against the argument that comics and graphic novels are simply easier reads, students took note of the effort it takes to read and appreciate these texts. Reflecting back on their reading, discussion, and composing about *The Black Death*, students made constant references to the little details that were part of the story. In particular, students returned to images of a bracelet that are repeated throughout the text (Figure 6). Estelle described the difficulty of making sense of these images and the “light-bulb” that would come when she would make connections. In thinking about the bracelet, which appears on the central character’s mother and is repeatedly shown as her mother gets sicker, Estelle commented on how “when you pay attention to certain details more often, you start to notice them more” (student lunch, 2.18.15). She had to pay
attention in order for her light-bulb moments to take place. Near the end of The Black Death, the body collector is pushing a cart of bodies, one of which is covered in buboes and wearing the bracelet readers have come to know as Martina’s mother’s. It is through this image that readers learn that the central character has lost her mother to the plague. While this was a detail that students did, in fact, locate and interpret on their own, Ben commented, “I really think if you didn’t point out … the bracelet, I think a lot of people would miss that” (student lunch, 2.18.15). To Ben, this was a complex part of the story that could have easily been looked over. It took time and effort to make sense of this detail. However, because of our initial detailed work introducing this text, students approached The Black Death by taking their time and engaging in dialogue with their peers about these details. And students conclude that this way of reading is a valuable, and was different from the other skills they were building in their classrooms.

**Recognizing classroom pace.** Teaching and analyzing details remained consistent, and it impacted students and how they were operating in class. Students began to recognize our pace as we worked across the content areas, and while they agreed that this way of reading was helpful, they also resisted it. Teachers had reflected that the pace at which we worked with comics and graphic novels was slower than their typical classroom practices and that students were not used to slowing down. Sienna, in her final interview described our breaking down the structures as “helpful, but, also, I didn’t like it” (interview, 4.28.15) Ben shared a similar sentiment in his final interview, “We spent a little too much time on [analyzing pages]” (interview, 4.28.15). However, even as students resisted our slow pace and spending so much time breaking down the details of
comic pages, they still concluded that it was an important part of learning about comics and graphic novels. Alice suggested that “as long as we kind of know what we’re talking about” it isn’t necessary to analyze in such depth (interview, 4.19.15). Alice thought that once students developed a base of information, they could approach the texts at their own pace and in their own way. This echoes Sienna’s original sentiment around needing to have a basic understanding of graphic novels and how they operate, structurally to actively engage with and comprehend them.

Still, this slow way of reading impacted students’ ways of operating in class. Estelle, in particular, discussed the influence our pace had on her experiences in class. She described herself as a student that typically struggled to talk in class. “I don’t have that kind of capacity in my mind to be able to take in a lot of information and just spit it back out” (interview, 4.29.15). She considered herself a quiet student who didn’t participant much in class. However, during our time teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels, I observed Estelle participating and volunteering to share her observations in class regularly. She even agreed to participate as a primary speaker in a Socratic seminar discussion around the graphic novels used in her English Language Arts class. When I asked her about this, she explained,

When we worked on it, we went on it slow. And I don't think that that was the right pace. Even though it was good to go slow, I feel it should have been medium, and not, like, super fast… And I felt that was easier for me, because it really did get it stuck in my head. But for other students, I could see them [getting] antsy. (interview, 4.29.15)
For Estelle, reading and discussing slowly benefited how she understood the text and her comfort levels in participating in class. Yet, she was concerned with how this pace was perceived by other students who she assumed wanted to move more quickly. As a co-teacher in the room, I did not experience the class in this way; but Estelle did. She concluded that if she could keep up, the class must be moving too slowly. The fast pace of the classroom was so engrained in students, that even when the pace slowed and felt helpful, Estelle and others resisted it. Students like Estelle were too used to a quick pace that left them working to keep up. This ‘speedy’ pace, as Finn described it, is a large part of how this school is operating. By purposefully slowing down, teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels made students aware of this pace shift, recognizing both the previous fast pace, as well as a slow pace that helped students participate and understand.

Our attention to detail was something students took up and saw as important work. This pace was in tension with the normalized pace, strategically maintained by neoliberal ideals. Because students were so used to their previous pace, which likely has been part of their learning environment for longer than just this year, their inclination was to speed up. In returning to think about what grids were operating in this school, considering time and pace is significant. Students began to recognize their speed as part of the conventions of their school space; but recognizing pace and how it impacts learning does not permanently adjust it. Students resisted this slowing down, regardless of how useful or beneficial it seemed. Even when its influences were personally experienced, as they were with Estelle, and helpful to her learning, further change to the
pace of a classroom reading and discussion was protested. Instead, Estelle compared her ways of operating with how she perceived others’ ways of operating, assuming that she was moving too slowly.

Creating visual art. As students read and discussed comics and graphic novels in class, they became aware of the time we were spending talking about them. In turn, they found value in the details they located, engaging (even reluctantly) in a slow detailed reading. When students began to consider these comics and their details, they also began to consider the time it took to create them, not just to read them. This was highlighted even more so when Nathan Hale, the graphic novelist, visited the school and talked about his process. In fact, Hale’s presentation included him illustrating as he presented. Analyzing visual texts paired with watching the artist draw, live in front of them, provided students with a new perspective about this art form.

As students became more aware of the author’s process, they connected his work to ideas around the time he was spending composing. Estelle described how she was looking at Hale’s work differently, after our experiences with his books, seeing him present and talk about his process, and considering her own artistic abilities. She shared:

I really thought it was important to keep in mind that he works on books for over two years, sometimes. And that it takes so long to develop what he works on and stuff. And it's just like really important to remember that you're reading a book that might take you a day to read. But it took him three hundred sixty-five days, plus to write and develop... It just kind of makes you appreciate all of the art and the different components to make that book. (interview, 4.29.15)
As students read, they became more aware of the presence of an author and the amount of time those authors must spend composing. This became even more apparent after meeting an author and graphic novelist. Students were aware of the medium but hadn’t fully “appreciated” the work to read and create them. But as awareness increased, the more students recognized and pointed out this process. In this way, welcoming graphic novels into a school visualized cracks that spread, inviting new ways of thinking about texts, author’s work, textual forms, and the way students read and discussed in their classroom discussions.

As students’ recognized the time and process that went into teaching and learning with comics, they transferred this sentiment into their own compositions. Estelle talked often about a love for art creating, but found time to be a consistent roadblock, particularly because she valued the detail of her art. She found completing the comic project difficult, because “I wanted to include all those different components” (interview, 4.29.15). Estelle was also influenced by the details we spent so much time on in class, wanting to include many components in her own work. Yet, she also recognized how much time that details takes to create, as she tried to embed them into her own work. This contrast highlights the impact teaching and learning with comics had on students’ own projects, as well as how they felt about their project. It also speaks to the constant pressures of time that move through the school and how they influence what students can accomplish.

As noted above, teachers began to recognize the need for more time, if they expected good, detailed work from their students. Because teachers gave this time, the
process of art making became a focus for students. And this is in significant tension with a testing culture that measures success through final products and scores. Students’ attention to detail and valuing of process became apparent as they worked on their projects during our lunch meeting. And I found evidence of this as I spoke with students about their artmaking in English Language Arts. For instance, Ben agonized over selecting just the right color for the dragon that was a feature in his drawing. Students went on to describe their art on the back of their projects. As a finale to this unit, each student presented their project to the class. However, these presentations were brief and the writing not extensive. I came to truly appreciate the depth and process of the students’ work during our one on one interviews at the end of the year. It was during these discussions that students had time to fully explain their process in detail (Figure 7). Returning to Ben’s finished project, Ben explained his choices and process:

I kind of wanted an evil vs good sort of theme, I don't know why. But, so I made this volcano because I think that, I always thought volcanoes were kind of cool. And, I wanted that to symbolize evil. And then, I drew the dragon, because, who doesn't like dragons? And then, I drew the castle, I think, next. And I considered that, and I put the water around it, almost, as if to balance out the lava from the volcano, as if it's like good versus evil (interview, 4.28.15).
During his presentation, Ben briefly notes the dangerous mood he is trying to create in his image. In particular, Ben points out that he has drawn himself so small because “a lot of people think I am just a little guy who can’t really do anything…basically just a nerd... That’s not necessarily true and I tried to show that here.” (class lesson, 3.13.15). However, there wasn’t time for Ben to go into all of the carefully designed details he shared above. Ben’s project was not just deeply considered; it was deeply personal. He thought about how he sees himself alongside how he believes others see him, attempting to show the tension between these versions of himself through images, color, and spatial arrangement of objects in his drawing. Throughout his image he is able to build contrast and tension through image, color, theme, and symbolism. This work is apparent in his final project, but it takes time and discussion for it to be realized. It was the process of working, whether it is through reading, discussion, or creating, that became valuable to students, rather than just the final product. Ben’s teacher was never fully aware of the
processes behind Ben’s comic project. His process remained hidden to those who did not have the time to ask him about it.

Invisible processes were something to consider across student art work. Alice’s final illustration provides a revealing example of how the thought behind her work remains hidden to viewers who only look at the finished product (Figure 8). In Alice’s illustrations are shelves filled with objects. One object was a small yellow square, which I asked Alice to describe. Not only was this box representing a personal item of Alice’s, she could explain its significance and what was inside of it. “I got the idea from my dad's house. And, at my dad's house I have this box full of rocks from where I've been” (interview, 4.29.15). Similar to Ben, Alice’s drawing was deeply personal. Embedded in her project existed stories of significance that weren’t visible to the viewer. In this way, Alice’s drawing, while produced as a final unit project, was more focused on her process and her personal stories. She was the only one who knew what was in that box, a detail

Figure 8 – Alice’s final comic project
she did not share or even point out during her presentation. It is the process of art making and art viewing, not the final product, that became the focus in Alice.

Ultimately, this slow and indeterminate reading and creating offered a way to acknowledge the robust work, within and beyond traditional conceptions of literacy. Here our process of reading for details, while resisted as too slow at times, was also shifting how students approached their own work. They located enjoyment in their process, paid close attention to details, and focused on their own, personal process within a larger school process dictated by time and final products. The added time students had to compose their own comics (rather than prepare for a standardized test in standardized ways) illustrated (literally) the complexity and rich potential of multimodal ways of operating in classrooms.

**Asking for more time.** Time was operating in many ways as students engaged with comics and graphic novels across a school year. They recognized their pace and the value (and frustration) of time spent reading, analyzing, discussing, and creating. Similar to the teachers, students wanted more time to spend talking about comics. On March 5th, after they had participated in a short Social Studies unit and introductory lessons in Science and English Language Arts, students directly asked for more time. They had been interviewed by me, as a group, once. Collectively, the focus students decided that they would like more time to share their thoughts and talk about comics and graphic novels. They requested that we meet more regularly during their lunchtime to talk. I eagerly agreed. That the students had more to share speaks to the excitement and joy that
can stem from learning with comics and graphic novels. This request for more time also aligns with the teachers describing the feeling of not having enough time for class work.

These lunch meetings gave students opportunities for collaborative discussion that maintained ongoing conversations. In some cases, their discussions were continued conversations and considerations from class. Students returned to details like the bracelet in *The Black Death* repeatedly during conversations at lunch. Students also took that time to share opinions that they weren’t able to in class. For instance, during a Socratic seminar discussion in English Language Arts class, not all students were required to participate orally. Students elected themselves to sit in the inner circle, taking on the responsibility of asking and addressing questions of others in the inner circle. The rest of the class sat in a larger circle around this discussion circle, making observations and comments on the discussion in writing. At the end of the discussion Gillian made time for the outer circle to share, if they chose to. During the Socratic seminar that took place during our reading of *Rapunzel’s Revenge* and *Calamity Jack* two focus participants (Ben and Estelle) took part in the inner circle discussion, but they left the discussion frustrated. Some students, in their opinion, took over the conversation on several occasions. Even students who did participate did not always have opportunities to talk and share. Immediately following this discussion was one of our lunch sessions, in which students immediately began deconstructing and critiquing the Socratic discussion, giving me advice for guiding the next one, and sharing thoughts they had wanted to share in class. Students argued that circles should have been divided up based on which book the student was reading, so that the rest of the circle would be able to participate in the
discussion with more ease. They also wanted to talk about what made Jack a hero, if he was one at all. In this way, lunch-time meetings served as time and space for students to have a voice.

Lunch time also provided opportunities for conversations that they felt couldn’t take place during class time. Returning again to discussions during English Language Arts time, students and teachers took part in focused discussions around representations of gender and stereotypes throughout *Rapunzel’s Revenge* and *Calamity Jack*. I noticed that students, within and outside of my focus group, continued considering gender stereotypes beyond the time set for class (field notes, 3.5.15). Gender was also brought up and returned to on multiple occasions during our lunch meetings, by myself and by the students. This provided time for students to share in more detail but also to share thoughts and opinions that they felt couldn’t be brought up during class time. This included reflecting back on other classwork or situations previous to our time together. Estelle, for example, shared frustration when describing a novel themed project that provided an option to focus on LGBTQ themes. She explained that the ‘LGBTQ movement’ group’s work was deemed “too sensitive” to be presented to the entire class. Alice, who was part of the group, explained that students needed to obtain parental consent to participate in the class project and to observe the presentation, which took place outside the classroom, “in a secluded room” (student lunch, 3.20.15). The student group shared this story as we were bringing up other ways gender is represented and questioned in comics and other media. They drew on other sources like Marvel and Youtube to think about how gender and sexual identity is represented across media and expressed continued frustration in
how the female heroines in books, including the one we read, still relied so much on male characters. These were discussions that didn’t happen in their classrooms to the extent we were able to have them over time, outside of the classroom. In thinking about the normativity circulating in this school, conceptions around gender and sexual identity were approached, but restricted, remaining primarily an additional grid that teachers and students were operating within, but not yet actively against. With additional time to talk, question, and challenge, students began to push against these grids, making time a tactic for new ways of operating and challenging the norms students were experiencing. Yet, even our time during lunch was limited, allowing only so much time to start, but not finish such conversations.

For many reasons, students found our time in the library talking about comics valuable. As the end of the year grew near, our lunch meetings happened less frequently. Yet, the students still continued to meet, to talk about comics (and other things) and exchange their own art and stories. This continued meeting speaks to how much these students valued extended time to talk, but also of the developed agency over these discussions. While I started these discussions through my research, students maintained them through the rest of the year and into the following year.

While reading comics both quickly and slowly was something that students acknowledged and valued, they ultimately came to appreciate the complexity of their own reading as we engaged in close reading and slow looking. Yet, students remained influenced by the regulation of time, challenging a slower pace. However, this pace impacted, not just their reading but their composing as well. Students put time into their
work, continuing to value detail and complexity. By the end of the school year, students couldn’t get enough time, continuing their time to talk into the following school year. In this way, students were pushing against the grids of time and acting in tension with the mandated educational system they were operating in.

**Space**

In order for students and teachers to have more time and manipulate time, space and place in the school became another major factor (and limitation). As space changed across the school year, ways of operating in this school for teachers and students were challenged. Changes to the physical and emotional spaces of the classroom were moments I took note of. I am drawing from de Certeau (1984) in my thinking about how spaces operate and how teachers and students were operating in the space of a school. De Certeau differentiates between *place* and *space*, considering a place as a set and stable location. While there maybe multiple potentials for spaces, a place is more rigidly defined by coordinates. Space, then, acts as “a practiced place,” operating as people use it, manipulate it, and work in it (De Certeau, p.117). Blackburn and Clark (2014) summarize de Certeau (1984) and Talburt (2000) writing that “*places* exist in and of themselves, but *spaces* are places brought to life” (p. 94). In the context of this study, I am working in a school place, in which there are classrooms, the library, and other locations in which teachers and students operate. The place of a school becomes a space as we work in it and live in it, for whatever purpose.

Often school work is structured around goals and outcomes set by a higher level of organization (such as a school district or state mandated test). Collins and Blott (2003)
note that de Certeau “…enables us to inquire into the relation between everyday language use (including literacies) and institutionally regulated use, without forgetting that the one always informs the other” (p. 33). The school, as an institution, is run by administrators and government officials with power that influences literacy practices in that space. While engaging with comics and graphic novels, we worked together within and against the enforced power organization of the school space. And teachers managed and manipulated their spaces and were open to the potential shifts that could occur.

**Arranging and changing spaces: Teachers’ perspectives**

Because I was present in this school for an entire school year I was able to observe teachers teaching with comics and graphic novels, as well as lessons that were already part of their more standardized curriculum. I began to consider how space was being used, changed, and manipulated across the school year. For example, I noted in field notes and memos that the physical space of the classrooms was being rearranged in preparation for teaching with comics and graphic novels. Previously, classroom spaces were often organized in rows. I noticed not only that teachers were rearranging their space, but also that students were surprised by these changes. The change to the physical space, then, had rippling effects on how the spaces in the school felt and were used by students and teachers. Here I explore how school spaces shifted, encouraging collaboration and agency for teachers and students. Teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels also extended into new spaces, transforming ways of operating beyond the classroom walls.
Operating in a school space collaboratively. While teachers were implementing comics and graphics novels into their classrooms, the space shifted in noticeable ways. As noted above, teachers actively changed the physical space of their rooms in order to impact pedagogy and learning with comics. While teachers and I planned together, I suggested opportunities for collaboration, partner, and group work actively. As we moved into comics and graphic novel lessons, teachers would rearrange the desks as one way to prepare. In Social Studies, students read together (which will be discussed in more detail below) and engaged in small and whole group discussions. In English Language Arts, while most of the students’ reading was done independently, students also regularly engaged in small group discussions as well. And in Science, the entire energy unit, including reading the text and completing labs, was done in lab groups. However, regular group work seemed to be a departure from the norm in many of the classrooms I observed. And in thinking about the strong neoliberal focus on individualized subjects and achievements, it makes sense that group work was not a regular part of these classrooms.

Finn explained that while students had done group work before, this set up was different. This was clear, observing students coming into the classroom, disoriented at the change in arrangement and new seating assignments. This shift in space was meant to encourage collaboration, and in many cases, it did. Collaboration became a way that teachers and students brought this place to life and made changes to the norms of operation. Returning to Social Studies, Finn and I asked students to read the comic, *The Black Death* with their table groups. During the introduction of the lesson, Finn explained
that students would be working collaboratively today noting, “I know that’s a foreign topic for some of you” (video lesson, 2.11.15). Kate, another seventh grade Social Studies teacher agreed that “I don’t normally let them read aloud in groups” sharing that she worried about the noise level and productivity (group interview, 4.23.15). The norms and grids in this school maintained a strong hold on pedagogical choices, when faced with potential change.

While at one point or another, teachers expressed concern about collaborative learning while reading and analyzing comics and graphic novels, several came to find collaborative work “was key” (group interview, 4.23.15) to its success in their rooms. The Social Studies department shared that some of this was based on the medium itself. “I think it was beneficial for this, especially since not everyone’s going to understand it” (Kate in group interview, 4.23.15). Because students were learning, not only with a new text, but a new type of text, teachers recognized their need for support as they read and made meaning. Being able to read and discuss with others helped new comic readers make sense of the structure and story. Further, the group work encouraged a space that was “more discussion-based than it was content-driven” (interview with Finn, 4.23.15). The comic *The Black Death* was based on content around the time period that Social Studies was covering, and students were completing guided notes to help direct their reading and talk. Yet, it was discussion, Finn contended, that drove the class. Students led what was talked about, in small groups and whole class discussion, rather than the initiation, reply and evaluation (IRE) structure of discourse that was prominent in Finn’s class (Mehan, 1979). This way of working moved the class away from the IRE rhythm.
the class often takes up, changing the space into one where students are given more agency and autonomy in their learning, while also working collaboratively. Further, teachers recognized the value of collaboration. Liz noted that working with others is a skill, “I think they need that. I think they struggle with it” (interview, 4.22.15). As the space changed to support a collaborative environment across the curriculum, students were also building skills that educators felt they needed to operate in the school and beyond it.

However, not all teachers saw the possibility of reading comics and graphic novels collaboratively. Even after using them in her classroom Gillian shared that “I don’t think [reading comics or graphic novels] lends itself, necessarily, to reading as pairs or small groups” (interview, 4.21.15). While the Social Studies teachers found this work not only successful, but a valuable part of the process of teaching a comic or graphic novel, others like Gillian couldn’t imagine it working well in any capacity. She believed that it was too difficult to read side by side, and that it would disrupt reading rhythms and pleasure. Some theorist of reading comics and graphic novels agree, noting that comics are structured for an individual reader, setting them apart from picture books, in particular (Sanders, 2013). Sanders argues that comic readers are able to read chaperone free, giving more power and control over the experience to the individual reader. However, reading and discussing graphic novels can be a communal experience (Pantaleo, 2013; Pantaleo & Bomphray, 2012; Connors, 2013). Regardless of the number of readers, comic artists often make distinct choices that purposefully guide the reading experience, creating an intimate and connected relationship between readers and comic
artist (McCloud, 1993, 2006, Groensteen, 2007). As different teachers shared their experiences, there was a definite tension around reading individually, verses reading collaboratively. This tension was also felt by students and will be discussed further in the next section.

Even when students were reading independently, as they did often in their English Language Arts class, they would often end up in conversation with one another, as they read and compared their own reading experiences and interpretations. As the space had already been arranged for collaborative work, even when collaborative work wasn’t assigned, students would literally lean into it, in order to share and talk. For example, students were reading quietly during the first day for extended independent reading of the Hale texts. After students had been reading for several minutes, I noticed them pointing in each other’s’ books, whispering about what they were seeing. This continued, quietly, throughout the class (lesson video, 3.3.15). Gillian remained open and flexible to this, making new space in the room for students who wanted to talk as they were reading. She invited students to talk quietly, even encouraging a group to use an empty table in a different part of the room to gather around and talk. Again, in this instance, student interest and desire was privileged as they read comics and graphic novels, a progressive move on Gillian’s part. Collaborative learning remained something students wanted as they read. While it wasn’t the way classroom spaces operated regularly, teachers were open to collaboration at the very least, and acquiesced to the need for collaboration, based on student interest that occurred. In the face of a neoliberal agenda that conceptualizes
work and success as individual, our reading a new text encouraged a more progressive mentality that was about the collective.

**Operating in a school space with agency.** Teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels continued to open up a space where teachers handed over more power to students. Along with promoting a space that was discussion driven, teachers also structured learning with comics that would guide them towards more independence. To illustrate this, I focus particularly on Liz’s teaching throughout the year and how she rearranged her classroom space to create more agency for her students and for herself. As a Science teacher, Liz pointed out that her typical lessons revolved around power points and lecture, with some labs and creative work built into that. Further, as a second year teacher, she relied on her other Science colleagues for planning purposes, yet none of her colleagues were interested in teaching comics. This left Liz planning on her own, but still tethered to her department’s way of operating. For example, Science unit test scores from each homeroom were posted and compared in the hallway of the school throughout the school year; there was a central bulletin board reserved for these test scores. This positioned teachers and student teams in competition with one another, but also required that department members give the same tests and follow an identical timeline. This meant that regardless of the resources Liz wanted to use, she had to remain within the grids of the standards and testing timeline set by her department.

At the beginning of the year Liz shared with me that “I’m limited in this room.” While she was specifically thinking about where her desk was placed and her lack of technology devices, I found that Liz felt limited in other ways too. She thought of herself
as a more creative teacher, always looking for ways to integrate art, movement, and media into her lessons. Yet, Liz felt bound by the tests she had to give and the obligatory planning imposed by her department. During my observations of Liz, I found that she was working hard to make time for both the tests and more creative, nontraditional ways to teach and learn. Along with power point lectures, I observed students drawing, writing, moving, building, and discussing. Liz’s unit using the *Max Axiom* comic became a way for her to completely restructure how her classroom was working, changing the space physically and ideologically.

By the time we began her energy unit, Liz had rearranged her room, shifting her desk and other tables, making technology more accessible to students and making the place a space to easily move through physically. Together, we planned for a unit that hinged on students working collaboratively, but also independently from the teacher. Liz explained to the class at the beginning of the unit that they “wouldn’t be doing traditional power points” and that she “wants the work to be as self-guided as possible” (field notes, 4.7.15). Liz hoped that using a new text would invite students to try other new ways of operating in her class. She worked to cultivate a space that encouraged students’ independent work. After giving directions, Liz and I moved around the room, where stations and answer keys were displayed. We spoke with students as groups, but not as a whole class, so that each group could navigate their work more independently. In some ways, this was successful. Liz noted the great discussions she overheard, which aligned with my own observations of students. And together we encouraged and supported groups that struggled to work together or communicate. However, Liz’s primary worry of
making sure students were prepared for the department created test remained throughout the unit. While actively pushing against the norms of her classroom (and those of her department), Liz needed to be able to meet the curriculum goals set in place.

Eventually, for Liz, her teaching with comics stopped being about the comic itself, and became more about the opportunities it opened up for her to change the space she was operating in. First, it provided her with a reason to shift from her typical practices. As something new, teaching with a comic constituted a potential new way of structuring her class. Students were given the opportunity to guide themselves through their work, locating information themselves. This allowed Liz to take a step back and operate as a support, rather than a provider of information, a broadminded and student-centered approach to teaching and learning. All the while, she had a support system in me, as we planned and started the unit together. That support to try something new, which Liz did not find in her department, made her feel more confident and comfortable departing from the teaching structure in place.

This also shifted the way Liz was seeing herself as a teacher and her own agency in her department and school. She found ways to change her own space in order to try something new in the face of what she perceived as resistance. When reflecting back on how nervous she was about teaching in a different way from her department she shared,

"It actually felt like really good. And that's what I wanted to do all year long…I didn't have to [pause] feel like I had to do what they did. And [the other Science department teachers] knew that from the beginning, so it was kind of like, my, [pause] my out to…do what I wanted to do. (interview, 4.23.15)"
Here, Liz explains that this unit provided her with an opportunity to teach in the way that she wanted, something that she had wanted to do “all year long.” Liz shared this somewhat hesitantly, though. She paused several times, and looked away as she thought about how to explain this departure from the typical ways her department operates. As she explained how teaching with comics was her “out,” Liz also held up her hands in front of her, as if tip-toeing and feeling her way through a new space. Her gestures and words suggest that while this work was successful in many ways, it was something Liz had to approach quietly and alone, not to disturb the other ways of operating around her. But her experiences also provided confidence in what is possible when changing a space. While Liz believed that using a comic could change how her students approached Science, she found that it became an opportunity to change her classroom as well.

Liz’s changes became a long-term investment. I had the opportunity to visit with Liz during the school year following my study. One of the first things she said to me was that she was working on her own schedule and timeline now. Liz also shared that she was implementing a consistent space for students to engage in independent research, similar to how she had set up her Max Axiom unit. Further, she is not feeling bound by the department testing schedule, but moving at her own pace. (field notes, 10-27-15). Using a new text, for this teacher became less about what comics, in particular, can do, and more about what introducing something new can do. And for Liz, using a new text also came with year-long support. She and I communicated more than any other classroom teacher in the school, meeting after school, talking on the phone, and e-mailing regularly. Liz was able to locate a small crack that has continued to spread, resulting in lasting change for
her and how she is teaching in this school. While she still gives mandated tests and addresses the standardized curriculum, she does so with a little more autonomy and agency. Working within and against the grids of her space, Liz feels less confined after experiencing new ways to support students in their learning.

**Impacts across spaces.** While teachers were attempting to shift and change their spaces, teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels traveled across spaces in this school. First, teachers found that teaching with comics and graphic novels provided a space that fosters cross-curricular work. For instance, when we introduced *The Black Death*, we did so first in English Language Arts class. We focused on analysis, literary devices, and other narrative structures that the text set up for readers, drawing on their background understandings of using those devices and structures with other texts. This way of reading and analysis was grounded in English Language Arts, and then transferred into other curricular spaces. As standards are now also based in literacy for Social Studies, integrating comics in the curriculum provided the opportunity to focus on literacy in a Social Studies classroom.

As our work moved into the Social Studies curriculum, students’ activities drew from our introduction, pointing out structural and literary elements as they read. Finn reflected, describing their work as “combining literacy standards with Social Studies standards, which is fantastic. I mean, that’s an ideal environment…when you can take what you learn over there and apply it here and vice versa. Same thing with Science” (interview, 4.22.15). Teachers recognized that our ways of reading and talking about comics and graphic novels were helping them and their students make connections,
specifically literacy based connections, across the curriculum. And this blending of curriculum was both supporting standards but also implementing educationally progressive cross-curricular practices.

While this movement of our literary work across content areas was primarily directed by the teachers, students also actively took their learning with comics and graphic novels to new spaces in the school, which was recognized by teachers. Penny shared how the library became a space that the students reallocated for their own purposes. Originally, the library was a space that students visited to check out books or visit for class research projects. Ben also volunteered in the library during his free period. Because students had requested more time to talk with me about their work and opinions about comics and graphic novels, the library became one space we used for this. Penny also invited students to help decorate for the author visit, a task they readily volunteered to do. This work carried into the library, making it a space not just for reading, checking out books, and having meeting about comics. Now students were drawing about comics and contributing to the preparation of a school event. Near the end of the school year, after the bulk of my study and interviewing had been completed, Penny informed me that “Even now that you guys aren’t really meeting all the time, [Ben]’s been asking to come in the library with that same, a few of the same group, during lunch. So I’ve been writing passes. Um, and they seem to be very connected” (interview, 4.22.15). Students continued using this space to talk about comics and graphic novels, but on their own. They also made time to draw and create their own work connected to that, along with
exchanging other pieces of art, books they recommended, or stories they were
composing. The library became their space for their own, self-directed literary practices.

During a member checking discussion with Penny she shared that she was
viewing the library and how it was used differently. She noted that she wanted the library
to be a space for students to use in ways that felt valuable to them, rather than only how
she imagined it should be used, especially after watching students use the library in such
different ways during this school year. This year made Penny think about how the library
space, for which she was responsible, was working for her students. Given the freedom,
students used this space more actively to engage in their own literacy practices. Penny
recognized this and continued to shift her space to work for students. She valued and
enjoyed the fact that students were using the library for themselves. During a recent visit
to this school (September 2015) Penny had printed and laminated passes for students to
come and pick up daily, to return to the library during their lunch time. Now, students
across all grade levels use the library to work, talk, and share during lunch. Further, the
space has been rearranged, with new areas. Most notable is Penny’s “Make A Space”
area created for creative work, including puzzles, Legos, and art materials for students to
use at any time. Penny shared, during this September 2015 visit that she was feeling more
comfortable taking risks and trying new ways of operating, including shifting her space,
how it works, and who makes those decisions. This confidence, she explains, is directly
tied to teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels during the previous school
year. “[Penny] shared that she is more comfortable not being or feeling like she needed to
be the expert in everything” (field notes, 10.27.15). Penny was deeply considering the
risks involved in trying new things and shifting spaces. There are risks in change, how others may or may not take it up, as well as risks in handing over control in how a changed space gets used. In the end, this active change to space had impacts on teachers and students, who are now regularly using the library for more than checking out books.

**Arranging and changing spaces: Students’ perspectives**

Teachers found ways to arrange and change spaces in order to engage with comics and graphic novels across the curriculum. As places became spaces for students to interact and engage with comics and graphic novels, they also became spaces in which students interacted and engaged with each other in new ways. Collaborative learning became a major part of how the classroom spaces operated with this medium, and students had a range of opinions about that work. Students recognized their learning spaces shifting in other ways too, as they read, talked about, and created image-based texts. They recognized a departure from textbooks and power point lectures that felt more typical to them. And ultimately, students considered the enjoyment they found in their work with comics and graphic novels.

**Operating in a school space collaboratively.** As discussed in a previous section, one way that the space of these classrooms shifted, both physically and tactically, was to provide opportunities for collaboration while reading and engaging with comics and graphic novels. While teachers arranged for teaching each in their own way, collaboration occurred and reoccurred across the curriculum throughout this school year. This was one way that teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels was undermining the individualized approaches of a neoliberal education. Just as the teachers had differing
opinions about collaborative learning with comics, so did the students. In some cases, working collaboratively was a point of frustration for students. Early during my time at Trail I recognized that students did not often work in groups. During my first introduction with a seventh grade class I asked students to turn and share with a partner, to talk about a page from *The Black Death*. Students had to be coaxed into this process, preferring to keep to themselves. Working independently was also engrained in their schooling processes.

Focus participants shared that group work would benefit from careful organization. Students argued that they should be grouped thoughtfully, so that friends are paired together, or at the very least, students with similar interests are working together. They recognized an ease in learning with people with whom they shared commonalities. They felt that similar interests and attitudes would make a positive difference in their group work. But some students remained frustrated with group work. Similarly, teachers’ acknowledged that learning in groups can be something that students struggle with. Kitty, for instance, was paired with two students she did not know well for her Science labs and struggled to communicate with them (field notes, 4.7.15). She connected her frustrations to time, noting that she could work faster on her own. Kitty also explained that she didn’t know the group members well. I also observed her desire to work quietly and quickly; her group members fell behind her regularly. Liz interacted with Kitty’s group repeatedly, however this group struggled to work together consistently through the project, leaving both Kitty and Liz frustrated. And students were aware of their teachers’ concerns about group work. Estelle shared that “I think the group work is
amazing. Yet, that is not so great for the teachers. Because they find it difficult to control people. And they feel like their students are like, aren't actually doing their work” (interview, 4.29.15). As teachers had explained above, there were concerns from them about the benefits and logistics of groups work. Teachers have to give up “control” for collaboration to occur amongst their students. Control, explicit and implicit, was part of how the space of a school was being managed within the grids. Collaboration pushed against this. But as Liz found with Kitty’s group, there is no guarantee for success in collaboration.

Working collaboratively, according to the focus students, provided multiple benefits. In particular, students recognized that by learning in groups they “get to see different perspectives” (interview with Timothy, 4.28.15) on the reading and work they are doing. “If there are, like, a lot of people in a group you get, like, more ideas (Alice during student lunch, 4.9.15). For students, having multiple perspectives was beneficial for a number of reasons. First, they thought that multiple perspectives offered more ways to draw conclusions and make meaning. Together, groups could puzzle through questions and assignments. As Ben described, “I love group work…two minds are better than one. And eight minds are, like, awesome!” (interview, 4.28.15). He really valued others’ perspectives when it came to reading and discussion in class. More perspectives made the learning more interesting and enjoyable to Ben. Further, students saw group work as a way to offer and receive support. Estelle explained that, “it sort of helps, almost, think up of the answer. Because you don’t have to do it all independently. And you don’t have to go ask for, like help or something. You just ask your partner and see if they knew”
For Estelle, being placed in a group was being placed in a support system. She didn’t have to worry about asking for help, which can be difficult for students to do. For her, collaborative learning automatically assumed that students would have questions and need help. This automatic support has the potential to, then, encourage questions and create a space where students could be more comfortable to ask them.

Students also directly tied the benefits of collaborative work and having multiple perspectives to the medium of comics. Alice explained that “when you read in groups you can interpret things differently…each picture was really interesting to see the different views” (student lunch, 2.18.15). Students recognized early on the many different ways that images, in particular, may be interpreted. Ben described his experiences in more detail, as he read *The Black Death* with Alice. He noted that Alice picked out a small image of a skeleton hanging on a door, something he didn’t notice as he was reading (Figure 9). The group went on to reference this small detail for the rest of the school year. First, they recognized its importance and symbolism in a story that documents a deadly time period. Alice shared her thoughts about the information the

![Image from *The Black Death*](image-url)
image gave to readers, seeing it as a reference to art from the time period symbolizing the
closeness of death. She and Ben engaged in a back and forth about the image during
class, Ben pointing to the sickle, reinforcing the deadly sickness that must be present
behind the door where this image is posted. As they talked, Alice referred to her ideas as
a “theory” (class lesson, 2.11.15). In this way, she is acknowledging that her thoughts are
just one among other possibilities. As Ben observed that the image may be meant to ward
people off from the house, due to the sickness within, Alice replies, “There’s that
possibility too. That’s what we can infer with that piece” (class lesson, 2.11.15). Again,
she is acknowledging the layers of possibility that the image points too, neither of them
settling on a definite conclusion, only theories. And Alice and Ben are making strong
claims about this text as they discuss, supporting them with textual evidence. As students
collaborated together, they were learning together, building and strengthening their
literacy skills.

Ben referenced this collaborative discussion as a moment when he realized that
reading images with someone made a difference. “I just feel like you can get more
accomplished with two people than you can with one…Especially, like, in the graphic
novel…I think, cause of the pictures” (interview, 4.28.15). For Ben, and the other focus
students, the comic medium lent itself to collaborative reading and discussion, because of
the details and multiple ways of interpreting that could occur. During a separate
conversation, Alice also reflected on reading with Ben. “I thought it was good to have
somebody to talk to, cause I mean, when you’re reading The Black Death, I was the one
who pointed out the skeleton horse to Ben” (interview, 4.29.15). She went on to describe
how she and Ben would read and talk together, making meaning and enjoying the details
of the images together. They had thought about what the skeleton could mean, and even
shared those observations with the whole class. For her, this collaborative reading
changed the way that she was approaching the text. And two months later, during their
final interviews, they were both still talking about this reading experience. Although
Alice was an avid comic reader, she recognized that reading with another person changed
the experience, and for her, enhanced it. “Oh my goodness. I would have never noticed
that [skeleton] or thought that idea unless [Ben] was sitting next to me reading the same
book” (interview, 4.29.15). While some teachers, as Gillian described, did not see
collaborative reading with comics as fruitful, the students certainly located its benefits.
Yet, those benefits are difficult to measure quantitatively. Teachers were concerned with
how to assess learning being done, when it wasn’t individual, but dependent on the
group. For instance, returning the analysis and claims Alice and Ben were making and
supporting while reading *The Black Death*, there was a clear indication of learning
occurring as they talked. However, their collaborative discussion doesn’t get to count as
evidence of learning in the world of standardized, individualized assessment. Therein, our
reading and discussing comics and graphic novels was challenging the norms of
measuring success in classrooms influenced by neoliberal agendas.

As students reflected on their collaborative learning alongside their typical ways
of operating, they noted that group work was “uncommon in the classroom” (interview
with Timothy, 4.28.15). This also opened up a space for students to recognize and
question other ways of operating in their classrooms.
Estelle:…ever since we started learning about graphic novels and started all these units where we use them as reference, we started to get to know our classmates better…

Ashley: Oh wow. Do you think, do the rest of you think that's true? I think that's interesting.

Sienna: We mostly do independent work, like we never

Estelle: Let's take notes, and raise our hands, and answer questions. Or, let's read all alone and then do a packet. And when…you came to our school and you started teaching us about graphic novels, it's normally better to learn in groups, when you're visualizing something, so you can share about the details.

As Estelle and Sienna are thinking about the benefits of collaborative learning, they are considering how this is a departure from how they are typically working in their classrooms. Further, along with noting the independent work, Estelle brings up other ways of operating: taking notes, packet work, and an IRE discourse that is typical, not just in her classrooms, but in many classrooms. Collaborative learning with comics and graphic novels disrupted these ways of operating, changing the space for this group of students. Interacting with new texts and then having a space to share their observations provided opportunities for students to be more directly aware of their typical ways of operating and began to question them.

Along with critiquing these ways of teaching and learning in their school, students also described their frustration with other multimodal texts they were interacting with on a regular basis, including power points, videos, and their text books (“of doom”, as
Estelle described them), which were often accompanied by an audio recorded reader (student lunch, 2.18.15). Because videos in class are often short and fast paced, students did not often find them valuable. And the audio recording was “always the monotone reader” (interview with Ben, 4.28.15). These critiques suggest that providing multimodal texts in classrooms is not enough. Their quality matters; how much time we spend on them matters; how students engage with them matters. The closest students typically came to collaborative reading, in their estimation, was “popcorn” reading, where students call on other students to take over reading out loud from a collective text as a whole class. Finn references this way of reading in his class, noting its fast pace, leaving little time for digestion of the information or reflection. The ways in which we read together with comics and graphic novels surfaced a significant contrast to popcorn reading. For students, working with comics, specifically collaboratively, created changes in their learning space that impacted their engagement and learning.

**Operating in a school space with agency.** As students requested more time for talk about their experiences with comics and graphic novels, students also took action in order to have more opportunities to talk and maintain agency in those spaces, growing and sustaining a student-centered atmosphere. These shifts continued as students requested the library as a space to continue conversations, after my time at the school had come to an end. Having both the time and space not only to have conversations, but to have control over them was something students came to value. And this changed the library space and how it was typically used as well. As Penny noted, after observing these students using the space to do more than check out books, she began to change how she
thought about the library, who uses it, and how. This practice of conversation, exchanges in stories (orally, print-based, and image-based), friendship, and food became a permanent shift in the library. In fact, several members of the group of focus students have continued to meet for lunch during the 2015-16 school year. During a visit in late September of 2015, I shared lunch with Alice, Estelle, Kitty, Ben, and Timothy. Similar to how our lunch meetings would go in the year of this study, each member would enter the library after picking up their lunch. However, this time they carried a shiny, new laminated library pass, a new addition to the space to accommodate for students’ frequent visits. They shared stories of the year with me. Alice and Estelle specifically discussed a comic art class they took together during the summer. Along with catching up, I observed students exchanging a short story they were drafting, as well as sharing art work. This library space had become one where these students continued to learn and engage in literacy practices, outside of (and yet, still within) the constraints of school requirements. None of the work exchanged was part of a school assignment or requirement, but occurred around the students’ wants, needs, talents, and delights. This exchange felt reminiscent of how Leander and Boldt (2012) describe their participant Lee’s engagement with manga. His practices were not meant for an audience or outcome, however they illustrated a playfulness and delight in the freedom and surprise that came from engaging with manga reading. This group of now eighth graders found joy in their own writing, drawing, and talking; learning that included but now extended far beyond our own engagement with comics and graphic novels.
Affect in school spaces. As we continued working across the year with comics and graphic novels students described the work as feeling different on a number of occasions. “It just is [a] different feeling of not sitting there in a classroom, just staring,” Alice pointed out (interview, 4.29.15). Along with physical, social, and power changes to a space, students noted a more personal, affective impact that came as the space shifted. To them, their classrooms felt different. For some it was about learning with a text that felt comfortable and enjoyable to them in a way that was “fun.” During one of our lunch discussions I asked:

Ashley: What was, what felt different about this, aside from the fact that it was a graphic novel?
Timothy: The fact that we didn't have to do so much work.
Ashley: It felt like less work?
Timothy: Yeah.
Ben: Don’t tell.
Estelle: It was like a weight off of my shoulder to be able to express what I like to do and to get to do something that I enjoy to do.
Ben: Don't tell [Gillian], but it was more fun.
Alice: But, like, we had to go more in depth in the pictures. (student lunch, 3.20.15)

Here the group is touching on several ways in which our work felt different. First, Timothy noted that it felt easier to him. While he also shares how complex several of the texts we read were, he consistently describes this work with these texts as easy for him.
However, Alice enters the conversation to add that she saw them also going “in depth in the pictures” as a way to offer a counter point to Timothy’s description. For students like Timothy, the enjoyment and engagement with a multimodal text impacted how they felt about the difficulty of the work. Other students came to recognize, meta-cognitively, the efforts that went into their comic reading. Rather than think about our learning work as “less work” Estelle and Ben focus on the enjoyment they got from it. And the “weight” that was lifted from Estelle suggests how school may feel for her more regularly. In our reading and engaging with comics and graphic novels, she felt as if she could be herself and focus on what she liked. Enjoyment was significant. Further, students didn’t want to share how much more they enjoyed the teaching and learning or how much easier it felt with their teachers. Some of this has to do with being sensitive to teachers’ feelings. But it also signals a larger issue around enjoyment in the classroom. Students talk about it secretively, Ben asking twice for me not to tell, as if when someone found out that the work is fun, it won’t remain in that space. This is interesting, considering many teachers wanted to try comics in their classrooms because it could be “fun” for students. This contrast in perspectives points to a real disconnect between teachers’ and students’ beliefs when considering joy in the classroom.

Along with the texts and pedagogical practices, the way in which we approach the units made a difference in how participating and learning in class felt to students. In fact, for Estelle, the space changed significantly. As noted previously, Estelle described herself as a student that did not often like to participate in class, for fear of getting an answer
wrong. This shifted during class lessons with comics and graphic novels. She explained that during class discussions,

…When I get to see that other people in the classroom are all, ‘I want to answer this question,’ I'm like, ‘I want to answer it too.’ Because I know the answer. I know I'm right, because that was in the book. And you, you would say ‘There's no wrong answers.’ And it made me feel so much better. Cause in normal classrooms, there are wrong answers. Where you could say, the answer is B, and oh it's not B. But try again. I mean, I already ruled out all the other ones!

(interview, 4.29.15)

Bringing comics and graphic novels into a classroom in the way we did changed a number of things for Estelle. Because we were introducing comics both structurally and as art through a visual cultural lens, we modeled a focus on art viewing, rather than final conclusions and correct answers. I actually did say, on a number of occasions that there weren’t wrong answers, just opinions that we want to work to support. For Estelle, this way of teaching and learning made her not only desire to participate, it made her confident in participating. She had a love for this medium and appreciated the openness for responses. She goes on to compare this way of operating in a space to “normal” classrooms, suggesting that what we were doing was not the norm in her schooling history. She takes this comparison a step further, drawing on testing language, referencing not only multiple choice questions but testing strategies for eliminating answers. For her, our work with comics and graphic novels was her counterpoint to the testing atmosphere she was so apart of, but also frustrated by. Comics in the classroom
was not just something different or something fun, it was something that was important for her and how successful she felt at school.

Comics and graphic novels contributed in making school spaces shift and come alive in new ways for students. They found frustration and value in collaboration, for many reasons. And students made direct connections with the nature of comics as a multimodal medium and the value of collaborative learning. Students also found ways to gain power and change spaces to benefit themselves. Engaging with comics and graphic novels across the school year also created pathways for students to consider their enjoyment in school. Further, they were also able to critique ways of operating, considering teaching methods and learning they experienced in their day to day. Student voices here are strong and clear, demonstrating a deep understanding for how this medium of text can work in a school, as well as larger issues that surround and influence their school and how it can operate. Comics and graphic novels were used in ways to combat a neoliberal ideology, providing opportunities for students-centered, non-traditional, collaborative learning. In this way, the space was brought to life through the teaching and learning with new texts.

**Positioning teachers, students, authors, and comics**

As teachers and students engaged with comics and graphic novels during this school year there were opportunities to think about how their school and classroom were functioning and about the constraints they were working under. Time and space were operating and shifting within and against grids. Along with the professional development that occurred at the beginning of the school year and the teaching and learning that
occurred in the classrooms across the school year, the visit from an author acted as a culminating event. All of these activities offered opportunities for teachers and students to teach, learn, and engage with comics and graphic novels. As shifts occurred across the school year, teachers and students were also considering how they were operating. Teachers and students positioned and repositioned each other across the school year, and also positioned comics and graphic novels in a number of ways. And in many ways, this positioning reinforced hierarchies and norms regularly found in education. The ways in which teachers, students, and texts were being positioned also spoke to larger questions about confidence, difference, and what it means to be a reader and composer.

In some ways, the talk about students, teachers, and texts led to a complication of what texts do and which texts should count in schools. It also surfaced questions about who gets to be a successful student. As teachers talked about their students and how they saw them impacted by this work, their talk often remained within a binary of “high” and “low” descriptions of students as readers, in particular. Even as teachers considered the complexity of the texts and the hard work of their students, teaching with comics also seemed to reinforce traditional conceptions of what counts as reading and who is considered to be a “high” level performer. Positioning hierarchies stem from the engrained normative structures that are operating on, around, and throughout schools as part of a neoliberal ideology. Students, too, also considered these questions and began to position themselves, their teachers, and texts in many ways. Students also thought about the ways in which they were composing, positioning themselves as authors and artists.
They found inspiration and support through reading and working with comics and graphic novels, and being able to interact with a graphic novelist.

**Positioning**

In order to think about how teachers and students are talking about each other in connection with our work with comics and graphic novels, I am considering how teachers and students were positioning and being positioned. Positioning “involves socially producing particular individuals and groups as culturally imagined types such that others and, even the person herself, at least temporarily, treat her as though she were such a person” (Holland & Leander, p. 130). Wortham (2004) notes that individuals and groups are positioned into categories that are recognizable to them and those around them. In the case of this school, teachers, for instance, drew from the familiar conceptions of high and low performing readers to position their students. And these conceptions have deep roots in neoliberal ideologies that work to maintain the status quo. For the purposes of this study I am thinking about both interactive and reflexive positioning in order to consider how a person positions others and themselves. Both teachers and students thought about how they were operating as they engaged with comics and graphic novels and positioned themselves and each other in a number of ways. I am also working under the assumption that, just as identity “is multiple, fragmentary, and contradictory” (McCarthey and Moje, 2002, p. 230), the ways in which people are positioned is unstable and not always intentional (Davies and Harré, 1990).

With positioning, the focus is on the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a
resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions. A subject position is a possibility in known forms of talk; position is what is created in and through talk as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as persons. (Davies and Harré, 1990, p. 62).

In this way, positions can be assigned by others, but can also act as an opportunity for one to define herself.

Positioning impacts how teachers and students see each other and themselves, operating both as opportunities to construct oneself and others, but also enforcing and reinforcing cultural norms. Davies and Harré (1990) argue that positioning allows us to locate “ourselves in conversations according to those narrative forms with which we are familiar” (p. 52). In some ways, this encourages people to remain in the comfort of what is recognizable, rather than consider complex and complicated new ways of seeing and being. However, I recognize that new ways of seeing and being within a network embedded as a “grid of discipline” is not easy (De Certeau, xiv). “It is true, we struggle with the diversity of experience to produce a story of ourselves which is unitary and consistent. If we don’t others demand of us that we do” (Davies and Harré, p. 59). By drawing on positioning to consider teachers and students talk about themselves and each other, I am able to consider the ways in which they challenge and fall back into the normative structures of school.

As a network, the space of the school remains a regulating force when considering the grids in which this school is operating and the positioning of students and teachers as educators, readers and composers. Considering space continues to be valuable in this
way. “Local settings like a classroom develop versions of more widely circulating models of identity, and participants in these settings come to presuppose those models in their events of identification” (Wortham, p. 185). As the school operates and influences how teachers and students are positioned, I am able to consider “a set of academic values and practices” (Leander, 2004), and how they were disrupted and reinforced.

Further, positioning can also rely on interaction with multiple resources and cultural forms over time (Holland and Leander, 2004; Wortham, 2004). These resources include people and multiple types of texts. I am interested in how comics and graphic novels influenced how teachers and students were being positioned at this school. Further, the texts, themselves, were being positioned in multiple ways. I considered how they were used, including how they were used to engaged readers, and how they were used to challenge the ways in which teachers and students thought about reading, composing, and school.

Who is confident?

Teachers took note of the wide-spread impact teaching and learning with comics had on students, “reach[ing] a lot more kids than I ever would have been able to do without this unit” (interview with Gillian, 4.21.15). They consistently shared noticing the confidence levels of their students while reflecting on their classwork with comics and graphic novels. Confidence was primarily marked by students’ active participation. For these teachers, participation meant volunteering to share in class, collaborating with group members, and completing assignments successfully (with a passing grade). Gillian, for example, believed that more students participated confidently in class while working
with comics and graphic novels. The seventh grade Language Arts department shared similar stories, noticing more students participating, acting as “leaders in discussion” and “put[ting] their heart into everything that we did in here. And that had not happened before” (interview, 4.21.15). These teachers valued both that students took on leadership roles in the classroom and that their passion was tangible. For them, comic and graphic novel teaching and learning was directly linked to these occurrences across the seventh grade English Language Arts classes.

Reaching a larger number of students was a benefit for teachers, especially because they saw this work as reaching “certain kids” (Dorothy in a group interview, 4.21.15) that “really struggled prior to this” (interview with Gillian, 4.21.15). Teachers described these struggling readers as students who did very little reading, completing of assignments, or participating in class. Gillian shared,

They, those lower level kids really struggled prior to this. Giving them a graphic novel and helping them break it down, like giving them the skills that they would need to transfer that to a novel, I think it truly helped bring up their confidence and their ability to be successful in this class. (interview, 4.21.15)

Using comics and graphic novels made a difference to students who struggled in these classes, students Gillian didn’t typically recognize as confident. However, the focus was on how this work supported practices already in place, rather than the creation of new ones. Teachers used their traditional ways of marking success in a classroom, noticing when students were able to participate as they expected. This positioning of students as (not) confident impacted how teachers saw our teaching of comics and graphic novels as
successful too. Gillian, for example, noted that because of the confidence and engagement with her students, “I have to do it next year” (interview, 4.21.15). Comics and graphic novels, in this way, supported and reinforced typical ways of operating and ways of measuring success and confidence in these classrooms.

While teachers saw confidence growing across their students collectively, and in struggling students specifically, Penny talked about the transition of one student in particular: Ben. As has been mentioned earlier, many of my student group discussions occurred in the library. Further, students began using the library as a place to continue discussions during lunch, beyond the scope of this project and without my arranging it. Because discussions occurred in this space, Penny observed the student participants’ interactions throughout the entire year. Further, Penny worked closely with Ben in particular, as he volunteered as a library aid during a free period. Ben was described as one of the academically strongest focus students by his core teachers. But Ben was also known as being a quiet student who didn’t interact much with other students. Watching Ben interact over the school year, particularly during our work with comics and graphic novel, this was difficult for me to picture. I had experienced Ben as a vocal and confident student with strong opinions. Yet, Penny, who had worked closely with Ben as a library aid previous to this study, described Ben’s participation in this study as transformative. “I’ve noticed that since he’s participated in this workshop, it’s just like a change… this incredible change. He’s more outgoing. He seems more confident” (interview, 4.22.15). She noted that Ben had taken on a leadership role in this group. He was the student who requested more space and time in the library. He recognized the value of these lunch
meetings and took action to help them to continue. He also took on a leadership role in
the membership of our focus group. It was Ben who approached me about Kitty wanting
to join the group. He asked if she could join us during our lunch discussions, which she
went on to do. And when Nathan Hale visited Trail, it was Ben who introduced him to
the seventh grade. Even Ben seemed shocked by this. I remember him bursting into a
classroom to tell me he had been selected to introduce the author, full of nervous energy.
Penny had arranged the introductions, and because she had seen so much enthusiasm and
confidence grow in Ben as he participated in reading, talking about, and working with
comics, she purposefully asked Ben to introduce the author. She saw this as her way of
encouraging his confidence. Ben was being positioned, not just as more confident, but
also as someone with agency, as he made decisions and took advantage of opportunities.
Ben enacted this positioning, defining and redefining himself and disrupting previous
conceptions about him. Penny shared with me that she believed that this shift in the
whole focus group and in Ben was directly linked to the comics medium. She thought
that reading comics and finding a collective enthusiasm for them made a difference in
how these students operated and connected with each other. I also wonder about the
impacts of the increased discussion, control, and agency on confidence levels. As
students talked and shared more often, in and out of the classroom, their comfort and
confidence levels seemed to increase. They were positioned to have more authority and
autonomy, and took it on. Further, the focus group, in particular, valued their space and
time during lunch discussions. This opportunity to share their voices and opinions may
also be linked to the confidence Penny observed.
Several of the student participants also recognized newfound confidence in themselves. They shared how personally valuable and validating comics and graphic novels were for how they operated as students. For Estelle, inviting comics and graphic novels into her school made a difference to her. “When you came, I was like, we have someone who will understand my love for graphic novels and my love for art” (interview, 4.29.15). For her, this learning with comics spoke to who she was as a person and the ways of working that made her feel successful. Sienna agreed, describing a similar experience to Estelle. Both Estelle and Sienna described themselves as quiet students who didn’t like to share in class. Yet both volunteered regularly during lessons with comics and graphic novels. “I feel like I could answer more…I think I like, connected…Cause all the questions you asked, like, they were all, like, in the book. And I could, like, remember it” (interview, 4.28.15). Estelle described a similar experience, noting that reading a comic supported her and provided confidence to participate in class. It is also interesting that Sienna commented that she could locate all of the answers in the book. The questions teachers and I focused on were more open-ended questions that required inferencing and drawing connections between the text and the world, rather than questions with single answers. Sienna noted, though, that she could locate answers in the book, showing her ability to draw from the text as we discussed in class. The comics and ways we read them contributed to student enacting a confidence that their teachers also recognized. Finn named both Estelle and Sienna as students that stood out as participating more often in class during this work, forgetting that they were focus participants (interview, 4.23.15).
Learning with comics and graphic novels had implications academically, helping students to feel comfortable and confident in class, aligning with and supporting entrenched school ideologies. But it also impacted students on another level. Estelle concluded that, “These books give me life. The art in these books give me life” (student lunch, 3.12.15). For her, beyond contributing to her confidence levels in the classrooms, it was personally meaningful to be working with visual texts and taking time to explore them as art. In this way, confidence manifested academically, as teachers are accustomed to recognizing it. However, it also, for Estelle, was a personally validating experience that was more internal, supporting a student-centered approach to education.

**Who is different?**

As students considered themselves and their peers, they recognized the ways in which they operated differently in school, as students, as readers, and as composers. Students thought about this as they thought of themselves. Collectively, student participants saw themselves as unique. In particular, they acknowledged that Nathan Hale, during his visit, really thought about the students as an audience during his visit. Along with finding Hale’s presentation engaging, students felt that it was a presentation for them, not for the adults or the school as a whole. Kitty noted that “[Hale] did it to appeal to us, I think, too. Cause, like the thing with the pill that cured constipation, I mean, that was totally for us, because not many people would be like, ‘oh, that's hysterical,’ when you're an adult” (student lunch, 4.21.15). While we eventually agreed that there were some adults who would be able to key into the humor and content of Hale’s presentation, these seventh graders felt that Hale was presenting to and for them in
many ways. They positioned themselves, then, as readers and graphic novel readers as they took part in this author visit, distancing themselves as different from others who may have been viewing the presentation.

As a group, the focus students were enthusiastic about comics and graphic novels. One of the reasons teachers recommended this particular group of students was because students like Alice, Estelle, and Kitty stood out to them as comic readers and creators. And those focus students who were not avid readers of comics also talked about our work as enjoyable for them, personally. However, all of these students also recognized that not all of their peers were drawn to the comic medium as they were. When I asked Kitty what teachers needed to know about comics and graphic novels, she replied that “kids might not like it.” Generally, these students recognized, as they did above, that each student is different, so enjoyment with multimodal texts “depends on the student” (student lunch, 4.9.15). While students referenced their enjoyment in activities that involved reading comics or responding in artistic or multimodal ways, they also acknowledged that “maybe it’s a mind difference. It’s kind of like we’re all different in the mind and everything” (interview with Alice, 4.29.15). Estelle talked at length about the enjoyment and benefit she got from learning with comics and graphic novels, but referenced classmates that didn’t prefer to work with comics and graphic novels as we did. “There’s people like that. And I always have to think ‘I’m not the only person in the world.’ Crap. I wish it was only me. I wish my opinions were everything” (interview, 4.29.15). While Estelle felt “like [comics] should be used all the time,” she recognized that they did not appeal to everyone as they did her (interview, 4.29.15). And she saw classroom practices
as needing to address students collectively, rather than individually. “I know that, probably some other people would prefer just looking at articles” as opposed to reading a comic, Timothy concluded as he reflected back on our work and how his peers responded to it (interview, 4.28.15). Ultimately, students valued a range of texts and ways of reading, talking about, and learning with them, and believed that choice was important in classroom work. Integrating a new text into classrooms, then, provided ways for students to appreciate their own interests and recognize others, shifting away from the individualized ways of operating that grids work to maintain.

As Estelle shared, school shouldn’t be all about only one way of doing work as an individual. Still, though, students valued options to make it possible for each student to draw on their strengths and learning preferences. Students positioned themselves as learners who operate differently. By thinking about comics and graphic novels, the focus participants found examples of new mediums as both enjoyable and not for their classmates. In this way, they were also positioning the comic texts as a medium that isn’t automatically appreciated by all young people. Students were also aware of teachers’ opinions around new texts too. Estelle noted, when thinking about comics feeling more fun to her that “we know that the teachers work hard.” She understood that trying a new text in a new medium required teachers to push themselves; she recognized the challenge. Students like Estelle were sensitive to the difficulties that comes with teaching and operating in such a constrained educational environment. In this way, she positioned her teachers as hard workers and risk takers teaching towards their students’ individual and collective wants and needs.
There were also opportunities for teachers to see their students differently and recognize their different ways of operating. Gillian reflected,

Because in reality [some students] struggle at reading, like, a traditional novel, because that's not how their mind works. That's not their learning style. So seeing those visuals and adding that to them, I wouldn't even say it was a differentiation. It's just that that is how they see the world. And so, to provide that graphic novel to them and give them, or help them gain that confidence was huge. (group interview, 4.21.15)

Gillian recognized the confidence coming from students that typically did not show in class. Here, instead of focusing on these students only as struggling, she recognizes that they “see the world” differently. It is notable that she references differentiation here, something that was talked about regularly at this school. For Gillian, differentiation focuses on students’ varying academic abilities, and this work was doing something more than that. Rather, she saw it as helping students to gain assurance in the ways that each of their minds operated. This acknowledges that not all students’ learning and ways of operating are the same and that school is not only focused on reading levels and traditional academic skills. She also alludes to popular conceptions of ‘learning styles,’ cushioning a description of a struggling reader by categorizing their skills as a different, in terms of visual and linguistic learning styles. While this research has been generally discredited, it still engrained in the language of this, and many other schools. However, Gillian suggests she was able to support students’ individual needs through the use of a multimodal text.
Because of the multimodal nature of these text and the various ways in which we read them (slowly, as both art and literature), Gillian recognized how different students responded to different texts. While students learn in many different ways, this school often catered towards the print-based skills. She also shifts her wording when describing this, from giving confidence to “helping them gain confidence” (emphasis added). In this way, she also recognized the agency in her students and that their confidence is not something that only she or a book can give. However, the work with a new medium provided new opportunities for this to happen for each student. Still, Gillian is also drawing strong connections between struggling students and the visual support that comics and graphic novels provide. In some ways, this visual support adds complexity to a reading experience. But Gillian describes it as helping students that struggle with reading and writing in a more traditional sense, a traditional novel. This positions comics and graphic novels as a building block for reading and writing of more advanced texts, such as traditional novels, minimizing their own value and benefits.

Teachers also considered the visit from Nathan Hale and how it impacted their students. Teachers felt that Hale’s visit, along with inviting and drawing on comics in class, validated students who aren’t often validated at school. Dorothy, while meeting with the seventh grade English Department, described that this work helped her to appreciate her students in a new way.

Dorothy: …Those people that kind of don’t fit the main, like, I feel like that was so powerful for certain kids, were really validated when they saw [Nathan Hale].

Gillian: I agree.
Dorothy: Those kids who are either artsy or who are quieter or who are into, like, anime or fandom type stuff, like, I feel like it would be good for them. (group interview, 4.21.15)

Here teachers are thinking about the students that are often on the margins of the school and their classrooms, students who “don’t fit the main.” In a way, Dorothy is noticing that their school, the texts it uses, and the ways in which it operates caters to the main group of students, the norm. Hale’s presence influenced this positioning of students as not fitting in. First, teachers noticed that Hale, himself, was not always socially comfortable in the school, even as an accomplished and invited illustrator and graphic novelist. Gillian thought back about interacting with Hale over lunch saying,

Um, what I noticed about him was he was more, I guess, an introvert. …He was more, almost secluded because he was focused on his drawing. I understand that, it's hard being in a social situation. Which is fine. But, I had trouble with even listening to what he was saying, because I wanted to watch what he was drawing. So for me, to uphold a conversation with someone who was drawing was challenging. But he seemed very nice. (interview, 4.21.15)

What stood out to Gillian was the awkwardness of Hale and her difficulty communicating with him, personally. Perhaps Gillian, in seeing a successful author as also awkward, uncomfortable, and quiet, she also saw some of her students. The ways in which the author was being positioned aligned with how teachers were positioning comic readers. But their interactions with both the author and their students held potential for teachers to begin to question this positioning, who the school was serving, and how.
Hale also positioned himself as a reader and previous student, which influences how he writes and how he positions his readers, particularly readers who may not be traditionally successful students. And this positioning aligns with how teachers were positioning comic readers as different or at the margins of the school. During my interview with the author, he shared,

As an author and as a kid who hated assignments, like I don’t want my books assigned, cause that takes all the fun away… Really, when I write these it’s as a reader who wants to read these books. And I want to have a good time reading a book. If somebody assigns it to me, they’ve stolen some of my good time away. (interview, 4.14.15)

Hale also noted that his books aren’t aimed at a “reader-y” type of student, necessarily, but someone more unassuming who may find his books by accident. This ideal reader was not automatically someone who loved to read or was a traditionally successful reader or successful student. And while Hale appreciated that his books were being invited into schools, the reading experience Hale imagined was about pleasure and enjoyment. He positioned readers as students who may not appreciate the typical ways of school, assignments and reading, but may get “lost in the aisle [of the library] reading and laughing.” Hale also saw his readers as those who may not “fit the main,” as Dorothy described.

This work with what some consider a marginalized text provided opportunities for teachers to begin to recognize students that don’t often get recognized in a setting that reinforces narrow ideologies around students and school. It also helped teachers to be
aware of the impact texts and the authors they invite for school visits have and the messages that such opportunities may send to their students. The English Language Arts teachers, in particular, acknowledged that by inviting comics into their classrooms they were challenging what typically counts as reading. I observed both Gillian and Dorothy reassuring students that, “Yes, you can count this! This is a book!” when students asked if they could place a reading sticker next to their name after completing *Calamity Jack* and *Rapunzel’s Revenge*. Alice, in thinking about comics and graphic novels as books ultimately concluded, “I don't understand why people don't consider them books. And it was also, [Trail] decided to actually have [Nathan Hale] come here, cause he's a graphic novelist.” For her, inviting and welcoming comics, graphic novels, and a graphic novelist into her school and classrooms validated comics as texts. And, as teachers noticed, this can impact how students who are positioned as different might validated. Dorothy went on to reflect:

I think we're sending an important message to the kids too, about traditional learning and traditional reading. We're validating not only different learners, but different types of people…I think that’s important. Because they see school so rigidly. Especially the higher kids. And some of the lower ones too…And the, you know, what's school? And what's learning? And I think we push ourselves, which is a good example for the kids. And it's important to do that.

Here Dorothy is asking a lot of questions as she considers what teaching and learning with comics and inviting a graphic novelist to the school did for her students. She saw students that usually remain at the periphery come forward and seem validated. She also
recognized ways in which this work was pushing against the boundaries of what books are, what school is, and what learning is. Further, these texts and this author’s visit challenged how teachers were seeing themselves and what their job looked like. And that the teachers see their work as challenging for themselves (as they were entering into the unknown and uncomfortable work with a new medium) they positioned themselves as setting examples for their students to do the same. They were challenging themselves, challenging their students, and challenging a normative school system that perpetuates supporting a certain type of learner. Teachers acknowledged that bringing comics and graphic novels into their classrooms helped them to take on these challenges and benefited students, particularly students who operate on the outskirts of the system.

Who is a (successful) reader?

Teachers were able to recognize that teaching with a new text and medium provided opportunities for students who are not always participating in normative ways. However, teachers also fell into talk around these students that kept them at these margins. As teachers reflected on teaching and their students, they consistently thought about student performances by separating them into categories of “high” and “low” students. The differences teachers noticed in students fell into a hierarchy. And talk around teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels seemed to reinforce this way of categorizing students. It is important to note here that all of the teachers I worked with at this school cared deeply for their students and volunteered to teach with comics and graphic novels to push themselves as teachers and to help them better serve their students. I believe teachers had students’ best interests at heart when they engaged in this
work and as they reflected on it. Unfortunately, thinking about students alongside
regularizing and often rigid testing scores and numbers has become an engrained way of
talking. A school can operate as “a network of already established forces and
representations” that position students and teacher as others (De Certeau, 1984, p. 18).
Even as teachers recognized a positive shift in students who often struggled, this work
did not change how students were categorized as “high” or “low,” conforming, even if
unwittingly, to their imposed system with their language. Being successful with comics
and graphic novel work did not change how teachers leveled students. As Dorothy
reminded the group of English Language Arts teachers above, this experience helped to
question what school and learning is. Teachers considered these new ways of operating
and asked questions that created the potential “to compose new stories” in their school
space (De Certeau, p. 30). And teachers were actively repositioning comics and graphic
novels in their classroom spaces. But their repositioning of students only went so far;
students remained labeled in accordance with neoliberal ideologies of school and
learning.

This way of describing students as high or low level was prominent with English
Language Arts teachers who are consistently thinking about the reading and writing skills
they feel (and their school system dictates) students should have. Gillian talked about the
“higher level learners” who liked English class and “really grasp[ed] and dug into this
and loved it” when discussing how her students reacted to their work with comics and
graphic novels. “As far as the lower level kids, um, they, I mean, I’m clumping them
together, but they don’t necessarily like English. It’s challenging for them.” (interview,
4.21.15). She went on to explain that those lower level students “that typically would never involve themselves in a novel or actually do more than what was expected of them” were engaged. Gillian saw the different ways in which her students learned and found that comics and graphic novels worked to challenge and engage all kind of learners and levels of learners.

Gillian also admitted to “clumping” students as she talked. Some of this is the nature of answering broad questions from a researcher. As I stated previously, it was clear, after working in this school for a year, that teachers cared about their students and saw them as individuals as well. However, this language was drawn on regularly, suggesting, for these teachers, the sedimeted nature of students’ identities and literacy practices (Rowsell & Pahl, 2007), and the privileged status that more traditional, print-based texts hold in defining success in schools. Instead of reevaluating students who were successful with this new way of operating, her talk remains bifurcated. Gillian also brought up students who enjoyed English class, but does not question why. Her class, as described by Gillian consisted of “reading comprehension, writing, speaking lesson, vocabulary,” activities that were “challenging” for some students (interviews, 4.21.15).

As has been noted previously, the lessons we did in English class did support her traditional ways of operating and could transition to print based text work as well. However, comics and graphic novels also provided different and new opportunities like engaging in art analysis, art making, collaboration, and making adjustments to pace. This may also be part of why different students were successful during our teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels.
Gillian also brings up expectations, noting that lower level students seldom “do more than what was expected of them.” Thinking about the normative structures that teachers were constantly operating in (even when also pushing against them) and how teachers described the ways in which their classes operate, is helpful in addressing expectations, where they come from, and how they impact students. If teachers are operating around, as Dorothy labeled it, a rigid school structure, expectations remain fixed, rather than being adjusting based on other shifts and students’ ways of learning. Expectations of how to be a high or low level student, then, makes it very difficult for students to be something outside of or beyond those categories.

As teachers thought about how students were operating as higher and lower groups, they also drew connections between those labels and the visual nature of our work. Lower level students seemed to be synonymous with visual learners, implying that comics benefit those struggling students. Finn reflected, “I think the lower students got the most out of it. They were more, you know, visual learners” (interview, 4.22.15). Finn also thought about students that traditionally struggled or obtained lower tests scores as visual learners. He noted that, “I felt like it reached the lower groups more than it reached the higher groups. Um, I don’t know if there’s just more visual learners in those courses or if it’s just…it’s hard to say what reached kids and why” (interview, 4.21.15). Both the Social Studies and English department teachers thought about the fact that a primarily visual text connected with students they perceived as struggling or low performing. In this way, struggling students were “more visual.”
However, recognizing the potential of a visual text did not draw their attention to the ways in which classrooms where not always serving those students. Teachers didn’t question labeling “visual” learners, reinforcing typical ways in which we view struggling students and how comics and graphic novels can operate as helpful tools for them. As Mark shared, “I think it’s a format that really makes some of the lower kids jump up and want to partake in class” (group interview, 4.23.15). Teachers saw the format of this medium as attractive to students who don’t always like to participate, share in class, or academically succeed in the ways that are traditionally acceptable. This reinforces a positioning of comics as conduit reading material. While there were times when teachers thought about students as individuals with unique skills, students who were successful with comics-focused class work were not just unique and did not come to be considered higher-level students. “Visual learners” were not automatically viewed as successful. As teachers talked about their teaching with comics and graphic novels, they fell back into patterns of examining students that align with the norms supported by test scores and traditional ways of operating around traditional texts. While teaching with a nontraditional text did encourage teachers to question and challenge these ways of operating, there is still work to do in examining how we talk about and position students and who they are as learners.

While students didn’t draw from language that separated themselves into distinct “high” and “low” groups, they suggested that students work at different levels academically as well. This varied across traditional academic work as well as how different students approach and feel about reading and writing. They also acknowledged
that teachers thought about their students in this way. This influenced, then, how these students positioned comics and graphic novels. Alice explained that her English Language Arts class was seen as more “advanced.” “I know our class is, [Gillian] calls it her, our advanced English class, kind of -ish. Cause we're all, like it's a smaller class, but we all are like, ahead of people apparently, or something like that.” She goes on to describe this class as a “book class” (interview, 4.29.15). Alice first brings up that she is aware that classes are leveled or grouped in certain ways and that her teacher has also acknowledged this. But talking about this seemed to make Alice uncomfortable, as she hedges through her description of it. She doesn’t claim this as her own conclusion, but something that “apparently” is true.

Alice also aligns being an advanced class with being a “book class” further suggesting that success in this classroom aligns with print-based work. The focus students, when talking about print-based texts and graphic novels consistently used the phrase “book-books” when talking about print-based texts, in contrast to the comic books we were also reading, writing, and talking about. The group returned to thinking about what constituted a book multiple times, sometimes including comics and graphic novels, sometimes not. Alice referred to being a book class as a way of describing their skills with such “book books,” noting that some students prefer them to comics and graphic novels. Those skills and preferences, as well as the active consideration of where comics fit points to how “high” and “low” classes were defined.

Considering what counts as a book continued across the school year and students complicated and questioned what counts regularly. As I noted earlier, students asked if
the graphic novel we read in class counted towards their reading chart goals. They found how to define or count a graphic novel as ambiguous. Student language also repeatedly fell back into engrained ways of defining what a book was. However, after weeks of conversation, students began to question and even reject this ‘book divide.’ As Ben reflected on his reading practices he remarked,

Once I started reading book-books, I was like. Oh man. I can't believe I just said that. I actually just said book-books, because I still consider them actual books, and not [comics and graphic novels]. Wow. I can't believe I said that. (interview, 4.28.15)

Ben became more aware of how he was talking about comics, and how engrained his opinions about them were. He thought deeply about what he considered books, never arriving at a stable definition, realizing how complicated those definitions can be. Over time, students became more aware of their language and how it was positioning comics and graphic novels.

Other students found comics and graphic novels to be motivating in different ways and for different types of readers. Ben described “three groups of people” when it came to reading in a classroom: those who hate reading, those who like reading, and those who love reading. And graphic novels offered something different to each kind of reader. For those who don’t like reading, he felt that comics drew on entertainment and media structures, which could appeal to those students. Further, he felt that comics and graphic novels would be entertaining for those who like reading, but sometimes see traditional books as “just a bunch of words.” Still, he goes on to suggest that those
readers will transition from comics to “reading actual books,” falling back into the familiar norms of school. This is a conception that Ben returns to and questions, and there is a clear tension Ben is working through during this final interview. An engrained separation between comics and other, print-based texts persists, but it is acknowledged, as we see in Ben’s comments above. Ben continues, considering himself as a student who loves to read, but needed our more in depth way of approaching and dissecting comics in order to really appreciate them. But Ben’s ways of conceiving comics and readers speaks to the intimate connections between how books and readers are positioned.

While students noted that comics were able to address a variety of learners, as their teachers did, their language was not as dichotomous around who those students were. However, some of their perspectives are working in ways to reinforce negative assumptions about comics as being easier texts to read and working as a motivational tool that helps to transition readers to “actual,” print-based texts. This “cultural baggage” around comics and graphic novels, while actively challenged through the year, was a heavy influence on readers of all kinds (Chute, 2012). And that baggage can impact how we see students (especially those successful with comics) as successful readers.

Who is a (successful) composer?

Students had opportunities to compose in a number of ways as we worked with comics and graphic novels throughout the year and across curriculums. Because of the visual nature of comics, students responded to them in visual, multimodal ways. There were opportunities for students to be positioned and position themselves as composers beyond reading and writing in print-based ways that mirrored their standardized tests.
Instead, students studied and were influenced by multiple modes and media, composing in sophisticated and creative ways. This continued to challenge the test-centered and standardized curriculum that was a large part of the culture of Trail Middle School and of neoliberal ideologies in education.

Students regularly talked about themselves as composers, gave feedback on each other’s art work, and were informed as artists and writers as they engaged in composing in school. In particular, as students were working on their comics versions of themselves, the unit project for English Language Arts, they reviewed each other’s work. As we met over lunch, students worked and talked about their projects, asking questions and complimenting styles and techniques. Students were drawn to Timothy’s cartoon-like depictions of himself (Figure 10) and impressed with Alice’s details (Figure 8). Through their talk, they positioned each other as composers and critics, feeling compelled to provide feedback as composers with valuable opinions. Engaging in multimodal composing positioned students as knowers and doers, reinforcing student-centered and collaborative ways of operating in schools.

![Figure 10 - Timothy’s final comic project](image-url)
Students were also inspired, as composers, not only by learning about and with comics and graphic novels, but by getting to meet, observe, and engage with a graphic novelist. Hale’s creative workshop presentation (see Appendix B for a description of Hale’s visit) began with a focus on how Hale worked on his drawing abilities at a young age, “saying yes” to designing logos for friends, decorating teachers’ doors, or working on theater sets. Alice remembered when she started thinking of herself as an artist, doing drawings for teachers and helping with the sets for the drama club, connecting to the very similar stories Hale shared during his visit. As he shared, Alice turned to look at me in disbelief (field notes, 4.14.15). She was hearing her story, down to their shared love of Scooby Doo! Alice began to think about where her path as an artist could go following this visit. “I wonder if it's going to build up to more of how he did it, maybe?” (interview, 4.29.15). She also began thinking about how this work and the Hale visit could inspire her peers. Alice saw how opportunities for drawing in-class responses “has brought out more of the artistic piece of it in some other people” (interview, 4.29.15). And Hale’s visit reinforced that. As Hale spoke, he sketched. These drawings were rough, but impactful. Students were captivated as they watched the process of creating occurring in front of them. Alice explained,

It made me think more into the kids that said they can't draw. Cause if you, like, even in [Hale’s] drawings, he had stick figures too! …And everybody considers stick people not to be art. Cause they're like, oh I can't draw people, so I'm going to draw these people with the circular head and sticks for legs, and everything. And I'm like, ‘he's a professional artist, but he is using stick figures as base
people, or even as characters in his stories.’ That made me think differently when he did it. (interview, 4.29.15)

Alice found Hale’s illustrating in front of her to be inspiring personally, but also motivational for students who may not consider themselves artists. She was impressed by what Hale could accomplish through rough sketches and stick figures, reframing what she, and possibly other people consider to be art. And she hoped it impacted her peers in the same way it impacted her.

As students engaged in composing, they were influenced as composers. Kitty talked about how her perspective about comics shifted as she read and worked with them in class and attended the author’s presentation. Structuring pages was something Hale attended to carefully. During his interview with me he shared that he tried to think about “each page [as] almost its own little standalone that starts with a little premise and ends on a little kicker, the funny little joke that makes the whole page, makes you laugh. Then you jump onto the next page…It makes the reading just really pleasurable” (interview, 4.14.15). Kitty, who chose to read all of Hale’s texts after reading *Rapunzel’s Revenge* and *Calamity Jack* in class picked up on this. In particular, she noted the art of placing panels together on each page and how because of this placement, we felt propelled to the next page.

I didn't know there was an art to doing that… But then you figure out, it's like, [graphic novelists are] doing it on purpose, in this order. And I never knew like, they did it in a certain… captivating order to get you to want to read it more. Like,
he made it suspenseful…And if I knew that they were trying to do that on purpose. I thought it just happened that way. (interview, 4.28.15)

Kitty, over time, recognized that the details she was paying attention to were purposefully placed and working on her, grabbing her attention. This kind of acknowledgement can be empowering for readers. Kitty shifted in how she was viewing comics and realized the purposeful way that Hale constructed pages. With similar purpose, Kitty constructed her own comic, considering timing and details and how readers may approach the text. And she recognized her power as she made structured decisions in her comics. For example, Kitty chose to break up the thought bubbles throughout the comic (Figures 11-18). When I asked her about them she shared,

    Well, it's kind of like, the way, like, you hear it movies, like when they take a long pause. Well, you can't really do that. So I kind of spaced it out. So it's like, she's thinking. And then she takes a break. (interview, 4.28.15)
Figure 12 - She’s tried to talk to me before. Hello! I noticed you’re a little shy. I would like to be your friend. Maggie
Figure 13 - And yet little did she know, I wasn't really shy. Just thinking.

Figure 14 - Brushing through memories, remembers people, places, things. Friendships...
Figure 15 - But eventually, I'm back. Besides, we shouldn't be moving anytime soon. I guess I need a friend.

Figure 16 - And maybe she would be nice. but..
Figure 17 - She could change her mind. NO! I will take this chance. Old friends are still nice while they last.

Figure 18 - She might like the fact I'm quiet....
Drawing from her discoveries around authors’ purposeful moves in comics and the control around time that film directors have, Kitty manipulated her thought bubbles in order to purposefully structure time in her comic, guiding readers through pauses, moving reading so it is aligned to her characters’ pace. Kitty’s sophisticated composing shows a deep understanding of how the medium can function, and how she drew on other texts as inspiration (including Hale’s text, his presentation, as well as film). Further, her comic exemplifies the complex and thoughtful work that is possible outside of print-based writing. These were skills that could not be tested or standardized and remain in tension with the other work Kitty is completing in school.

Ben also noted the significance our learning with comics and graphic novels had on his own composing. As was discussed previously, Ben put a lot of thought and effort into his comic illustration of himself. And he saw implications for how this work influenced other ways of composing for him. Ben shared that previous to composing his own art for the English Language Arts unit, he did not enjoy writing, in the traditional sense. He struggled to come up with ideas and to get them down on paper. Yet, Ben enjoyed the writing he did that accompanied his drawing for his English Language Arts comic project. Composing in multiple modes to tell one story impacted Ben’s composing process. As Ben worked through his drawing for English Language Arts, he was able to mentally picture, physically draw, and then write about his ideas. “And then eventually I think I found out, well, I guess you don’t have to draw all the time to make it fun” (interview, 4.2.15). He shared that currently he is writing a science fiction narrative and “it’s awesome, I know exactly what I’m going to do!” He went on to explain, “I feel like
when I write now, after this, I feel like this changed me. When I write, I picture it in my head. I picture all the events happening” (interview, 4.29.15). Ben noted specific implications of his own multimodal composing. Along with the value this work held for Ben as an artist, it impacted other ways in which he composed and how he felt about the process. Further, Ben began positioning himself as a composer, due to the multimodal reading and composing he was doing in class. This continues to illustrate how teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels can work within (supporting print-based writing) and against (using drawing and creative practices) the constraining system of a school.

By teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels across a school year, teachers and students thought about who was confident, different, and successful in this school. This year’s teaching and learning provided opportunities for many students, often ‘other’ students, to be recognized and to feel successful. Yet language rooted in dichotomies and hierarchies continuously resurfaced, positioning students and comics in complicated ways. While not always intentional, students successful with comics class work were still seen as struggling readers. And while shifting views around comics ultimately positioned them as complex, they were also seen as support resources and stepping-stones for those struggling readers.

Yet, teachers and students also began to push the boundaries of what school is, what books are, and who is being served through teaching and learning practices in place. With these questions of who is (and can be) successful came the potential for new answers and new questions that have yet to be considered. As teachers and students found
ways to operate within and against the ideological at work in this school, and of schooling more generally, they treading upon new territory, not yet explored. Within the unknown, time and space were working as both constraints and as opportunities for new ways of operating. By beginning to recognize these norms and shifts that were occurring, some teachers and students have looked forward. They continue to share, question, and value these new practices in this school. In this way, the potential for what is possible with new texts and new ways to consider literacy practices is unlimited.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

Review of dissertation

Throughout a school year, comics and graphic novels were invited, welcomed, and integrated across curriculums by educators. This medium of literature is slowly gaining legitimacy, catching up to a twenty-first century literacy perspective on reading and composing. Yet, even as a medium invited into a school, teachers were hesitant about teaching with something new. Comics and graphic novels carry engrained “cultural baggage” that impacts uptake and ideologies (Chute, 2008). Consciously and subconsciously, teachers positioned comics and graphic novels as easy, light reading. These were assumptions they shared beginning with our professional development work. I entered into this study drawing from a New Literacies Studies perspective in order to consider the contexts and histories that influenced comics and graphic novels. In this way, the social practices, opinions, and histories that were part of our reading and composing could be documented. As I approached this study and data analysis, I kept in mind that teachers were working with a new medium and operating in new ways, entering into the unknown. Further, students engaged in reading and composing processes that were dynamic and in some ways, surpassed the final products that are often the focus of school work. I considered the risks, processes, and products that all
were part of teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels, open to the “unlimited diversity” of what was possible (De Certeau, 1984, p.99).

As a year-long, qualitative, ethnographically informed study, I was given the opportunity to engage with a group of people trying something new, support them, work alongside them, and gather information. This is significant for a number of reasons. First, there is little empirical research involving comics and graphic novels in schools. That I had the opportunity to not only document teaching and learning events and practices, but events and practices occurring across an entire school year and in multiple classrooms is remarkable. As a long-term study, this also gave me the opportunity, as a participant observer, to be part of the school when comics were and were not being used. Across time and spaces in the school, I was able to follow new practices and document shifts in pre-existing pedagogies and ideologies as these functioned both strategically and tactically over time. I could not have captured this teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels in such a dynamic way if not for the opportunity to engage in long-term, participant observer methodologies in Trail Middle School.

I entered into this research asking *What happens when comics and graphic novels are welcomed into a school space?* I consider this question through themes that surfaced during analysis. Chapter four documented how comics and graphic novels were being used both strategically and tactically. And teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels influenced positioning of teachers, students, authors, and texts. Below, I return to my original sub questions to summarize my findings.

**Review of research questions**

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In thinking about teachers’ processes, I asked *How are teachers planning for, implementing, and assessing teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels across the curriculum?* Teachers’ planning began with the professional development, when I invited teachers to think about how comics and graphic novels could be integrated into each of their individual classrooms. Individual planning continued with me, as each teacher negotiated how comics could work for them and their students. Groups of teachers, like the Language Arts and Social Studies teams, also relied on each other to brainstorm, learn from others’ experiences, and support one another. The Science teacher, Liz, did not have the support of her department in planning for using comics and graphic novels, therefore, she and I worked together closely in and outside of class. This planning speaks to the importance of collaboration and support as teachers engage in new practices. Liz wanted and felt she needed support as she made changes to her classroom practices and took advantage of my presence, seeking me out and communicating with me regularly as we planned, taught, and assessed. As teachers seek to make changes and try new ways of operating, they need support.

In this planning it was necessary that teachers were addressing curricular demands. Choosing texts that aligned with their specific content standards was vital in this process. But teachers also made time in their teaching for students to be introduced to comics and graphic novels as a new medium. This involved time for image analysis and learning new vocabulary around the parts and pieces of comics. Comics and graphic novels, then, impacted literacy practices, not just by being present, but also by being explicitly taught with the concept of medium structure at the forefront. This suggests that
having comics and graphic novels available in classrooms or even included in the curriculum is not enough, if one is hoping to make meaningful change for readers and literacy practices in schools. Pedagogical practices around these texts must also change, since these influence teaching and learning with new texts and shape what can be done with them as part of the curriculum.

Image analysis was part of how teachers were implementing comics and graphic novels into their curriculum. Teachers approached integrating comics by treating them as something new, in that they made time to examine the structure. For instance, in Science, when Liz noticed that students seemed to be skipping over pictures, we took a step back and spent more time reading and analyzing images, devoting a mini lesson to this concept. Teachers recognized and adjusted time and pace in their classrooms, making time for our reading, discussing, and composing. They also began to think about the pace in their classroom, questioning how they were operating and how pace was, and at time was not, supporting student learning. By introducing comics and graphic novels into classrooms, teachers were also arranging and changing their classroom spaces, encouraging a collaborative atmosphere and creating opportunities for both themselves and their students to gain agency.

Teachers were also intentionally choosing graphic novels and comics and using them instructionally in ways that supported their curriculum and stretched them professionally. In Social Studies, for instance, reading The Black Death aligned with the time periods being studied and also supported the integration of literacy in the social studies content areas, as mandated by the Common Core. However, implementation of
comics was also about trying something new for teachers. This lead to risks, collaboration, and asking larger questions about how their classrooms were working for their students. Even as comics were smoothly aligning with curriculum, teachers noticed other ideological tensions and some teachers began to question the larger structures of school. It is notable that many of these questions surfaced during reflective interviews with groups of teachers talking together. This indicates that when working with new texts this time to socially and collaboratively reflect may be a powerful and creative space for continued and future change.

In general, assessment, while a continuous concern, remained consistent with teachers’ previous ways of teaching and learning. While teachers did provide opportunities for students to compose beyond print-based assignments, ways of assessing that work (using rubrics and numeric scores – See Appendix H) remained the same. Teachers used rubrics or considered nontraditional student work as preparation for more traditional testing. Liz, for example, was using a test provided by the district and had to align her lessons to support that format. Teachers did not make many changes in the ways they assessed their students, even when working in new ways. Perhaps this is connected to the ways in which teachers were ultimately positioning their students as high or low level learners. While students where participating in new ways of operating in class, using new texts, teachers’ measurement modes remained static. Thus, their evaluations of students as high or low also remained. It seems that since comics and graphic novels were able to support traditional testing and standardized curriculums, they were unable to
disrupt, if not reinforce the testing norms in this school, even as they invited new ways of working among students and teachers.

As teachers were planning, implementing, and assessing work with comics and graphic novels, they reflected with me about these practices during interviews. I asked: *What are teachers’ ideologies around comics and graphic novels? And do they shift during a school year, given the welcoming environment?* Particular ideologies around these texts became apparent to me across the school year. These texts were new to teachers. They came to this work hesitantly, and with assumptions about these texts being less complex and easier reading. Further, teachers felt a need for my help and support as they were implementing these texts. Teachers asked not only for professional development, but also for extended support in their classrooms. As the year progressed, teachers were surprised by the possibilities afforded by teaching with comics and graphic novels. They noted the details and complexity and the ways in which they engaged their students, particularly students who they positioned as struggling. They also came to agree that using comics and graphic novels did, in fact, support their standardized curriculum as well. This shift would not have been possible without the experience of working with new texts over time, with extended support. And as teachers began to shift how they viewed comics, they began to ask more questions about the structure and rigidness of their school.

In considering my question, *How do students engage with comics and graphic novels and how they are used in their classrooms across the curriculum?* I found students’ processes sometimes working in alignment with and other times working
against the norms of this school. Students noticed and valued the detailed analysis and collaborative atmosphere that our teaching and learning with comics cultivated. Yet, they also shared their frustration when they felt class may be moving too slow or when they struggled with working with others. Students ways of working were engrained, so much so, that even when the pace of class was helpful for learners like Estelle, they still resisted this slowing down. Both teachers and students recognized the impact of our work with comics on student reading and composing and that this carried over into their other literacy practices. For instance, Ben noted that he thought about his writing differently, after having the opportunity to engage in multimodal composing. Ben used the opportunity afforded by composing in modes beyond printed text to think more deeply about himself and to translate how he sees himself, in contrast to how others see him. For Ben, multimodal composing impacted literacy practice that were both academically sanctioned and practices that were personally meaningful. Penny even referred to Ben’s work and interactions, as a whole, as transformed. Sousanis (2015), in considering comics and the image as part of communication notes that “we draw not to transcribe ideas from our heads but to generate them in search of greater understanding” (p. 79). Multimodal reading and composing, then, creates opportunities for new ways to communicate, but also new ways to think and operate.

Ultimately, this group of focus students engaged with teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels with enthusiasm, confidence, and appreciation. They enjoyed talking and working with their peers, saw the value in their work, and believed that a variety of text mediums and ways of responding in class (through writing, drawing,
talking) was beneficial. Still, they acknowledged that not all students enjoyed working with comics or felt comfortable working outside of written responses. In this way, students recognized that comics and graphic novels could push against the conventional expectations of school and take teachers and students outside of their comfort zones. This reminds us that using a new and popular, nontraditional text is not a catch-all when wanting to engage and support students. Comics did not appeal to everyone; variety and choice, according to the students in this study, are key. Johnston (2004) writes that “choice is central to agency” (p. 36). As students engaged and made choices, they gained power over some of their ways of operating, including time they spent talking about texts and how spaces were used by them in schools. Work with a popular medium, while not always appealing to everyone, provided opportunities for choice and power to be more in the hands of students. In this way, teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels was supporting a progressive framework for education (Dewey, 1928; Greene, 1995).

Students’ engagement with comics and graphic novels and their personal opinions about them are closely tied. I came to this study asking *What are students’ personal opinions about comics and graphic novels being used in their classrooms across the curriculum?* Students enjoyed working with a new medium and drawing on new pedagogical practices. And the comics medium, in particular, was valued as humorous, complex, and as a dynamic piece of art. Students described their classes with comics as “fun,” although they did so hesitantly, asking me not to tell their other teachers. That ‘fun’ and other, more conventional practices in school remain so dichotomized is significant. Teachers and students have found value in the fun and joy of this work, yet,
fun and joy are not described as a regular part of school, and to some extent, were seen as contrary to and even unsanctioned in the realm of schooling. What’s more, students worried that if their fun was discovered, learning experience like the ones they had with comics may become unsanctioned or removed from their school arena. Should students have to be concerned with hiding their excitement in the classroom? Asking about student opinions, then, helps us to think about what school is and how it is working and not working for students and teachers who value enjoyment in the learning process.

Students were also validated in our work with comics and graphic novels, feeling comfortable and confident in their work. Estelle, in particular, felt connected and fueled by the integration of art into her content area classes. As a student that considered herself “different,” having the opportunity to read comics in class changed how Estelle participated and felt in class in positive ways. This suggests that there is value in actively supporting a variety of authors and texts in classrooms. Inclusion and support of authors and texts matter to students like Estelle.

Finally, I wondered How are teachers, students, authors, and comics and graphic novels being positioned in this school? Students were often placed in hierarchies that remained unaffected by work with comics and graphic novels. These hierarchies align with the testing culture that neoliberalism perpetuates. Even as teachers acknowledged students’ increasing engagement as they read comics and graphic novels, and even as they recognized comics as complex texts, teachers still described those students that were highly engaged by these texts as “low” or “struggling” readers. This positioning points to larger questions around who is (and who gets to be) confident, different, and successful.
Because norms around these questions are so engrained, it is difficult for students to reposition themselves, even when demonstrating success through participation or engagement. This leaves me asking: do students remain positioned as low because their success is outside of print based, conventional literacy practices? How do students become successful readers and composers when they are already positioned as struggling?

Through this work, teachers were positioned, by themselves and their students, as risk-takers. Teachers and students recognized the effort it can take to work with new texts in new ways. Teachers made themselves vulnerable through this work, positioning themselves as non-experts in comics and graphic novels. This led them to ask for help and created opportunities for them to rethink classroom practices. They asked for and invited help and support from me and from their colleagues. As they engaged in challenging themselves through this work they also hoped it would be an example for their students to do the same.

Finally, comics and graphic novels and the authors of those texts were positioned in a number of ways. Hale was positioned as a writer and artist, and as both successful and socially awkward. Yet, as teachers positioned this author, they began to reevaluate how they positioned their students as different. Teachers noticed the excitement and validation students experienced, particularly students with whom they struggled to connect. In this way, teachers began to notice students who were often on the margins of their classrooms. Also, teachers may not have taken the opportunity to consider teaching comics in the ways they did if not for the invitation to Nathan Hale. By inviting a graphic
novelist, the school administration was sanctioning a nontraditional text to be part of the curriculum and positioning Hale as a valid author. This shifted how teachers were thinking about their students, their practices, and the texts they taught.

Students were inspired by Hale’s presence as an author. Students like Alice connected with him on a personal level, seeing him as both an expert author and someone who made similar choices and was interested in similar things as her. Students positioned Hale as someone who was composing and presenting for them, as young readers. And students went on from Hale’s visit to position themselves and each other as reader, as writers, and as artists. This is notable when considering the value of the arts and visiting artists and authors in schools. The presence of a graphic novelist in this school had profound impacts on teaching and learning practices, as well as how students were seeing themselves and being seen.

Comics and graphic novels, as texts, were positioned as both complex, but also transitional reading. The presence of a graphic novelist in this school seemed to validate comics and graphic novels as books that belong in schools. However, comics were constantly aligned with supporting “struggling” and “visual” readers and were sometimes valued more for how they could build skills for approaching print-based texts, as opposed to holding value and complexity in their own right. While teachers and students were surprised at the complexity, detail, and depth in comics and graphic novels, it was very easy to be influenced by the “cultural baggage” that remains with these texts (Chute, 2008, p. 453). More work with comics and graphic novels in school spaces is needed if
we are to continue to push back on that baggage and capitalize on the full potential of these texts in schools.

**Limitations**

Looking ahead, this research has the potential to shift the ways we are thinking about and talking about success and difference in schools, disrupting the hierarchies between visual and print-based media. As the call for more diverse books continues, I argue that more diverse modes and mediums of texts are also needed. However, research like this needs to occur in schools and communities that may not have the same material resources and access as Trail Middle School did. Trail was able to commit, not only time and space, but money and books to this work. What would this research look like in a school that is not as highly funded? What could the presence of a new medium do for teachers and students in schools that are not able to host authors or continue to grow their library selection based on student interest? Or what could it do in a school where high stakes testing is a heavier weight to a greater numbers of students who are categorized as “struggling”? This work becomes even riskier for teachers and students in environments where school funding is low, and the stakes of testing are higher, particularly in “failing” schools. The consequences for “underachieving” could not only determine teachers’ jobs or school funding, but might also determine whether schools remain open or closed.

**Lingering questions and implications**

Throughout chapter four I argue that while teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels, teachers and students reinforced and challenged many normative structures in their school space. Reflection on this work leaves lingering questions and
concerns about how schools operate and how we can best support teachers and students as they engage with and challenge literacy practices:

How can we continue to support teachers in being vulnerable as they operate in unknown spaces? And how can we foster collaboration among teachers?

How can time and space continue to be used as ways of resisting and disrupting norms in a school, rather than simply perpetuating them?

How can we change our measures of success in reading and composing?

Work with comics and graphic novels in this school was exciting and new for many of the teachers and students involved. And that work provided opportunities for change, for new ways of operating, and new ways of thinking about texts and schooling.

Professional development in schools

There are implications from this study around how to introduce new practices and texts into schools. Professional development has been conceived in many ways, but often it involves a single day of work and participation for teachers with little or no follow up.

“Staff development programs have often been recognized as failures” (Richardson and Hamilton, 1994, p. 109). This study approached professional development very differently, considering teachers’ questions and needs, curricular requirements, and time. This professional development was grounded in theory while also addressing teachers’ questions around what comics and graphic novels were and how they could be used to address specific content standards and mandated curriculum. Richardson and Hamilton (1994) argue that successful professional development is “driven, in part by participants personal, practical knowledge, beliefs, and skills” (p. 110). They suggest that long-term,
process-focused, and collaborative professional development is necessary to create change that lasts.

I found teachers taking risks in inviting comics into their classrooms and curriculums, spending more time and slowing their pace in order to engage with comics, and encouraging collaboration and agency through their (re)arranging of space. For teachers to be open to risk and vulnerability in trying something new, support in the form of professional expertise was required. Moreover, much of this risk revolved around a primary visual text and pedagogical practices that stem from visual culture, grounding our work in both literacy and the arts. Uhrmacher (2009) writes, “how…is appreciating art risky? Where is the risk in having a private aesthetic experience? The answer to these questions lies in the risk of opening up of oneself to something new” (p. 625). In the atmosphere of this research project, teachers had opportunities to ask questions, see examples in professional development, and then access me, the facilitator of professional development, as comics and graphic novels were integrated into their classrooms. It isn’t easy to ask for help, so my presence in the school long term made help and support more easily sought and received. Penny, in particular, reflected back on this support and how it impacted her own teaching and how the library was operating. For her, inviting comics into the school had intimidated her, yet she wanted to support teachers in using this medium and help them prepare for a graphic novelist visit. “I think the thing [this year] taught me the most, out of all of this, is not to be afraid to ask for help. We tell that to the kids all the time. Don’t be afraid…Ask for help” (interview, 4.22.15). While working in a school system that heavily relies on test scores and teacher evaluations to quantify
success in classrooms, inviting comics into this school was a risk. Yet, having focused support across a school year encouraged teachers to take this work up and be open to the risk. But professional development, as mentioned prior, does not traditionally work this way. Penny connecting Trail with a university researcher opened up possibilities. This work, then, speaks to the community relationships that schools build and cultivate. Welcoming research and inquiry made it possible for me to be in this school long term, providing that support. And by connecting schools and learning centers with universities, there are more possibilities for this inquiry, and therein an openness to trying new things.

Many teachers also relied on the support from each other through this school year, while planning for, teaching, and assessing work with comics. The Social Studies and English Language Arts departments planned together, built from each other’s work, and shared resources regularly during the year. Kate, one of the Social Studies teachers shared with me that she was passing along her lessons, as well as sharing a set of *The Black Death* with another Social Studies teacher at a different school. And even Liz, who wasn’t planning with her department, passed along book titles and lesson ideas to her department teachers. Teachers became resources for each other as they engaged in teaching comics. Penny also organized professional development and facilitated communication between teachers and myself. And currently Penny in planning a workshop for an upcoming conference in which she hopes to share the experiences of her school. She has invited me and another graphic novelist to present. Penny has become a vocal advocate for working with comics in schools, after her experiences, and is taking action to share her experiences, as an expert herself. Teachers, as they learned from me
and experienced this work for themselves, became the experts, sharing their experiences, making adjustments to lessons, and guiding teachers wanting to follow their example through the process. This suggests that experience with a new medium can be empowering to teachers, motivating them to teach others. As part of ongoing professional development, then, building in time to explicitly consider how to pay it forward, when it comes to teaching and learning with a new medium like comics, needs to be considered.

**Ideologies and norms in schools.** This study also speaks to ideologies and norms in classrooms, questioning who is and gets to be a successful reader and composer in school. This study showed that when shifts in time and pace occur alongside multimodal reading and composing, students engaged deeply in the process of reading and composing. This pace suggests that students are engrained in their ways of operating, and while they may resist the slow reading we were engaging in, students also found it helpful. “When students receive instruction about literary and visual elements and conventions, and when students are expected, encouraged and given time to ponder and savour texts, they do indeed make ‘deeper meaning’” (Pantaleo, 2013, p. 133).

Recognizing and shifting paces in classrooms not only helps to recognize regularized patterns in classrooms, but also makes a difference to students who don’t always feel confident or successful in classrooms. Shifts in space also led to a more social way of operating, in which students felt more connected and supported in their work.

There are also implications to what authors and texts are invited into classrooms and supported by teachers. Notably, Gene Yang was named the 2016 Ambassador for Young People’s Literature. NPR reported that "Yang's selection signals an important shift
in a decades-old war over the role of comics in education in general and literacy in particular." The more often we are validating a variety of texts and a variety of ways of reading and composing we are, as Dorothy pointed out, “Validating not only different learners, but different types of people.” And this validation stemmed from large moves, like inviting a graphic novelist to the school, and small moves like awarding a reading sticker for the graphic novels read in the same way that other texts were read and credited in English language arts class.

As teachers were making these changes and students were responding, teachers still remained fixed in the language they used in describing these students, however. Johnston (2004) suggests “think[ing] more carefully about the language we use to offer our students the best learning environments we can” (p. 1). While teachers spoke consistently about the engagement that was occurring in their classrooms with comics and graphic novels and shifted their opinions about how complex these texts were, they did not (re)consider the language they were using to describe their students. This research suggests that more than only teaching new texts is needed to make greater shifts in what it means to be successful in school. “If we want to change our words, we need to change our views” (Johnston, 2004, p. 84). While teaching and learning with comics and graphic novels did make it possible for some teachers to begin to question how school was working and seen “so rigidly,” it also aligned closely with the rigidity of schooling. Teachers must also begin to recognize their own language and how it can hold students back. One way to address this might be to involve teachers in reading and analyzing their own transcripts, continuing to research *with* teachers and students.
Joy in schools. Finally, this research speaks to the joy that can be (but isn’t always) located in schools. So much debate around comics and graphic novels in classrooms stems from their reputation as light reading or guilty pleasure reading. However, the space of some of the classrooms in this school shifted in ways that made students think about the “fun” in their learning at school. And students and teachers felt more agency and support as they took risks and worked to bring something new and enjoyable into their classrooms. I began to see the joy that sparked when readers slowed down to appreciate the comics they were reading as well as the influence of working and talking together, across spaces. In this joy, students were building and maintaining personal and thoughtful connections with the texts, authors, conversations, and compositions they were interacting with. “When students are connected to the subject matter they are learning and find a kind of engagement in the sensory experiences they are undergoing, there is joy in the educational process” (Uhrmacher, 2009, p. 629). By validating joy in reading, composing, texts, and in classrooms, we are thinking about our students. We are not just thinking about what they can and can’t do, but who they are and how they feel.

As Estelle shared, “these books give me life.” Above all else, I found that welcoming comics and graphic novels into school spaces made a significant difference to life at school for some students, regardless of the cultural baggage comics may carry. I saw students excited, interested, and validated by the presence of comics and a graphic novelist. And I saw teachers notice and appreciate this, even moving on to question norms in their school that do not validate all students. By teaching and learning with such
nontraditional and marginalized texts, teachers and students were able to begin to recognize who was and was not supported and privileged in the literacy practices in place. While working within neoliberal ideologies and discourses, teachers and students also pushed against grids of power. This began by inviting something new, comics, into school spaces. Teachers and students recognized and made adjustments to how time and space were being used and maintained, ultimately resulting in positioning and repositioning of themselves, their texts, and the authors who write them. There is still work to be done, as positions are strategically maintained. But, by valuing texts that bring students to life, teachers and students located shifts and cracks that continue to grow, reshaping what is possible in schools.
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Appendix A: Summary of professional development
Professional Development Summary

On September 15th, 2014 I ran a short professional development morning session with the staff of Trail Middle school. I found myself in the position of running this session following my volunteering to work with the librarian and eighth grade English Language Arts teacher the previous year. I had co-planned and taught for two days, introduction and analyzing a graphic novel with the eighth grade students. For those lessons and for the work during the professional development I relied on theory around structural analysis of comics and graphic novels (Groensteen, 2007; McCloud, 1993, 2006) and thought about how to help students slow down (Efland, 2002) and really dig into what was happening on the page. In order to do this, I also drew from visual culture theoretically. This approach was largely in response to what both the librarian and English Language Arts teacher shared as needs and desires for their work with this medium.

The session begins a general question: “What do you think of” when someone says ‘comics or graphic novels? What are the stereotypes we associate with these texts? Teachers listed their ideas orally: they are easier to read, don’t have as many words, and super heroes. One teacher mentioned they might be an easy way out of reading. With these opinions out, I went on to share how I defined comics and graphic novels. I had spent the weeks leading up to this professional development doing initial interviews with fifteen staff members, many of whom asked for a clearer definition of comics and graphic novels. I introduced and showed physical examples of comic strips, comic books, and full length graphic novels, showing examples that were targeted towards young readers (such
as Calvin and Hobbs, Spider Man, Ultimate Spiderman) and adult readers (Watchman). I specifically noted the difference in length and the similarity is structure, drawing on Eisner’s (2008/1985) term, sequential art. I suggested that there are a range of definitions for these kinds of texts, and for me the medium is made up of sequential art and structure (the panels and gutters being an important element). Also important to how I defined comics was that they are composed to be read, meaning the author’s and illustrator’s choices are deliberate in the art making and writing. Finally, I introduce the medium verses genre debate when it comes to comics, sharing my personal opinion (which I acknowledge is debated) that comics operated as a medium, not a genre; instead, many genres exist within the medium (Cart, 2011; Chute, 2010; Gardner, 2012; Op de Beeck, 2012; Smith and Duncan, 2012). I discussed examples of genre and how books like Nathan Hale’s can challenge genre classification (Hale’s books in particular are labeled nonfiction, but hold many fictional elements.) I explained that I was drawing on common arguments and that these ideas were my own opinions. I felt that these arguments were important to include because so many people I had chatted with over the past two weeks ask (sometimes hesitantly, insecure in their understandings and assumptions) what counts as a comic or graphic novel. Also, genre was used regularly to describe these kinds of readings by the teachers.

The initial introduction to comics and graphic novels lasted approximately ten minutes, and I am the primary speaker during this time. By minute twelve I check for questions (there were none) and move on to explore the parts and pieces of comics and graphic novels. In preparation for this professional development, I created a PowerPoint
that literally breaks apart the parts and pieces of several pages from a graphic novel so that they could be seen and analyzed individually and together (see the final page of this Appendix A). This allowed me to introduce a vocabulary that we could share and return to throughout the year, including terms such as panel, frame, and gutter. We also drew from artistic terms such as shading and positioning and considered color, line, and spatial arrangement in depth. This part of the presentation begins with looking at one page (page 78 in One Dead Spy [see the final page of Appendix A]). I choose pages from One Dead Spy, primarily because this is the first book in the series of books many teachers will be focusing on. I choose several pages (we had time for two) that we broke down as a whole group, then as tables – after viewing all of the parts and pieces, accompanied with guiding questions. I have found that the work and reading I had done previously in structural analysis really impacted how I was able to talk about these pages. It also contributed to choosing pages that were diverse and dynamic to break down into parts. As a group we look at the page on a projector screen, but teachers also had a photo copy of it in front of them. I asked, ‘What stands out the most?’ We noted the empty space and how it angled down towards the “Pow, bang, crack” exclamations in the middle of the page as well as the actual long to short panel structure. I brought their noticings back to content, asking them to think about mood and the anticipation the page is setting up. In this way, I was beginning to tie what they were seeing with other literary terms and aligning our analysis with the Common Core.

Next, we look at only the panel structure, empty frames (with images digitally removed), the teachers pointing out the size and positioning. I ask about how the panels
impact time on this page. We particularly think about time and space on this page, as time seems to be moving slowly, then speeding up and things go zooming into battle.

The next PowerPoint slide adds the dialogue bubbles back in and I shared that these can be helpful in thinking about mood and tone of voice. Teachers note the calm to not calm transition on the page by looking at these bubbles. Next I point of the gutter space, and share that I think this is the most important part of a comic, as it makes reading a much more complex experience. Readers are required to make connections, filling and interpreting the gutter space. With the gutter, the reader has to be fully engaged and active as she reads.

At this point, we are about twenty minutes into the professional development and have been talking about one page for about ten minutes. We see page seventy-eight in full again, and together look for other visual details that we haven’t picked up on yet. We notice the highlights of red used throughout and the facial expressions. Again, I bring it back to curriculum, noting the themes and character analysis we are doing.

Around minute twenty-three, I share a new page from this book (pg. 108) which is on the projector screen in front of teachers and photocopied. I ask them to chat with their tables, after I quickly break down the page for them. Teachers are supplied with writing utensils and post-its and five minutes to do some analysis with this page. The volume increases as they work. As teachers worked on breaking down the next page on their own and with people close to them, I got the impression that the majority of teachers were engaged. I saw talking, writing, and sharing as I passed tables. But I also saw some people on their phones and disengaged. During this time, the vice principal asked about
how I was able to break down the images like I did – predicting that teachers would want
to use that for other graphic novels that they try teaching. Penny and the principal added
to that short conversation saying that they had never really thought about the different
levels and many choices that authors are making.

After five minutes, we talk for another five as a group, sharing what we all saw.
This includes discussing multiple perspectives and points of view, foreshadowing, power,
standing for what you believe, and other elements of characterization.

For the next eight minutes I share a few more pages, more briefly this time,
pointing out other examples of setting, symbolism, and other literary perspectives to read
books like this. We also considered a critical stance for reading comics and graphic
novels, noticing the American perspective of this book, as well as the accuracy. I also
introduce the Correction Babies who, while strange, give permission to question this
historic representation, positioning themselves as unlikely researchers of these nonfiction
texts.

Finally I share examples of how I have taught comics and graphic novels in the
past, drawing from my own teaching experience. In this way I am positioning myself as a
teacher here too, not just researcher or professional development leader. I share work
from teaching Bone and The Arrival, showing lessons and handouts I have used.

The last five minutes are filled with questions, asking for clarification over the
gutter space (which I compare to strips of film, describing how a past student called
reading comics his mind movie [Dallacqua, 2012]). This sparks more interest, especially
with the Tech. teachers, who ask about potential for using this medium to teach film and
storyboarding. There were genuine questions posed in front of the whole group and asked afterwards. The vice principal also asked for me to remind people how to connect with me.

Overall this professional development felt very successful, largely due to the enthusiasm that came from the teachers during and after. Penny noted specifically that teachers commented to her that it was one of the best professional development days they had had. Another notable interaction was with Gillian, who eventually became a focus teacher. She shared with me, as she handed me a post-it as a formal request for me to come to her classroom: “I would like to implement almost this exact lesson with my students. Because I thought I understood how they worked, but this gave so much more” (from professional development reflection written 9-17-14). There are a few reasons I believe the professional development worked well for teachers. First, I asked teachers ahead of time what questions they wanted answered and addressed those directly in the professional development. I also drew from my own teaching experience and connected the presentation back to classroom curriculum regularly. I also showed examples of long term and short term lessons with comics (looking just at pages to teach structure Vs full narrative work). Finally, I engaged teachers in discussion and analysis. This offered the opportunity for teachers to experience this work as their students might.
SPIES FOR THE BRITISH HAD LED GENERAL HOWE THROUGH AN UNGUARDED PASS WITH 10,000 MEN.

WOOPS.

OUR MAIN FORCE WAS NOW TRAPPED BETWEEN TWO ARMIES!

RETREAT!

THROUGH THE SWAMP! IT'S THE ONLY WAY!

FOLLOW ME!

MARYLAND TROOPS! STAND WITH ME! WE'LL ATTACK NEAR THAT OLD STONE HOUSE!

RUN, BOYS! WE'LL TRY TO BUY YOU SOME TIME!

RETREAT! TO THE HEIGHTS!

ATTACK!

THOSE MARYLAND BOYS ARE BRAVE!

HESIANS!

SLASH

GET US OUT OF HERE, GIRL!

BLAM

DID I HIT ANYTHING?

KEEP RUNNING, GIRL.

TAKE US TO THE BROOKLYN HEIGHTS!
SPIES FOR THE BRITISH HAD LED GENERAL HOWE THROUGH AN UNGUARDED PASS WITH 30,000 MEN.

WOOPS.

OUR MAIN FORCE WAS NOW TRAPPED BETWEEN TWO ARMIES.

RETREAT!

THROUGH THE SWAMP!

IT'S THE ONLY WAY!

FOLLOW ME!

MARYLAND TROOPS!

STAND WITH ME! WE'LL ATTACK NEAR THAT OLD STONE HOUSE!

RUN, BOYS! WE'LL TRY TO BUY YOU SOME TIME!

RETREAT! TO THE HEIGHTS!

ATTACK!

HESSIANS!

THOSE MARYLAND JOYS ARE BRAVE.

GET US OUT OF HERE, GIRL!

GRRRR!

KEEP RUNNING, GIRL.

DID I HIT ANYTHING?

TAKE US TO THE BROOKLYN HEIGHTS!
Spies for the British had led General Howe through an unguarded pass with 10,000 men.

Woops.

Our main force was now trapped between two armies.

Retreat! Through the swamp! It's the only way!

Follow me!

Maryland troops! Stand with me! We'll attack near that old stone house!

Run, boys! We'll try to buy you some time!

Great! To the heights!

Attack!

Hessians!

Those Maryland boys are brave!

Get us out of here, girl!

Keep running, girl.

Did I hit anything?

Take us to the Brooklyn Heights!
Appendix B: Summary of Nathan Hale’s visit
Nathan Hale’s visit

Nathan Hale visited Trail Middle School on April 14, 2015. Leading up to this visit, Penny and her library aids had spent time decorating the school with banners, signs, and information about the author. This visit was part of a series of visits he was making to the surrounding middle schools in this district. On this day, Hale arrived as school started and presented or visited throughout the entire day. Hale presented to each of the grade levels (sixth, seventh, and eighth) individually, then offered a “creative workshop” for a small group of students who asked to participate further. To present, Hale During his presentations (which was the same presentation for each grade level), instead of talking about himself or his books, Hale selected a time in history and presented verbally, accompanied by drawing as he narrated. He relied on an iPad hooked up to a projector and drew as he talked. In fact, even as students were entering the gym for the presentation, Hale was drawing a random assortment of illustrations, grabbing students’ attention from the beginning. He began his presentation abstractly drawing the benefits of remaining a quiet audience with concentric circles, showing how a quiet room helped his drawing skills. As Hale presented, he did not address his audience directly, but remained bent over his iPad, talking. Student, then, focused their eyes on the screen, rather than Hale himself.

During this school visit Hale recounted a version of the story of Lewis and Clark, focusing a good deal of his attention on the explorers’ diet, eventually leading them to become sick and constipated. For a group of middle school students, getting what could be described as a history lesson with a poop joke punchline held their attention. Students
appeared to be captivated by this presentation, with very little movement or talking, only
laughing, as the presentation took place. Teachers agreed that students’ attention
remained with Hale through the entire forty-minute talk. My student participants
described the presentation as “cool” and “unique” and that “it was neat seeing how he
had the unique way of learning and whatnot.” They saw this presentation as a different
way of teaching and learning, reflecting both the author’s and students’ ways of
understanding.

Hale also visited with teachers during their lunch breaks, as the school hosted a
pot luck lunch in the library across the afternoon. During this time, Hale had pen and
paper out, drawing again, as he engaged in conversation with teachers. Drawing was also
how Hale occupied himself when not in conversation at the lunch tables.

Finally, Hale presented a fourth time to a smaller group of students about his own
path as an illustrator, author, and graphic novelist, beginning with his drawing as a young
child. Again, Hale was primarily drawing through this presentation, while also showing
images of past work. In order to participate in this presentation, students made a face-to-
face requests to Penny. This workshop was not widely advertised, therefore Penny was
able to accommodate the majority of the student requests, turning away only a handful of
students. I had asked Penny near the beginning of the year, before I had selected
participants, if the students I eventually worked with could participate, which she was
happy to agree too. Only Kat, who joined our group later in the year was unable to
participate in this workshop.
Hale ended his visit signing books for the school and sitting down with me for a more formal interview with me. He shared that he had felt very welcomed to the school and it was clear that the school had prepared for his visit.
Appendix C: Guided notes for *The Black Death*
Draw, label, and/or write out examples and evidence as you read *The Black Death*

**Setting** – What have you seen and read that give you information about the setting (*the time, place and mood of the story*) of this book? Start by considering clothing, food, transportation, and ways of communication that you see or read about.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page #</th>
<th>What are you seeing and reading?</th>
<th>Why is it important?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**The Plague** – What have you seen in the images and words that give you information about the plague? Start by considering the following questions: How did the plague come to Italy? How is it transmitted? How does it affect people physically? Emotionally? Treatments for and ways to prevent the plague?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page #</th>
<th>What are you seeing and reading?</th>
<th>Why is it important?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
**Other Visual Details** – What other information are you getting from the comic through images, color, and page set up?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page #</th>
<th>What are you seeing and reading?</th>
<th>Why is it important?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Appendix D: Create your own comic! assignment
Create your own comic!

Step one: Choose from the following prompts in order to create your comic:

What do you think was happening right before the first page began? Create a panel or page that would go before page 3.

What do you think happens next in the story? Create the next set of panels for this book following page 20.

What would it be like for the plague to be in our town today? Create a comic that would show a modern version of this story.

This book takes place in the town of Genoa and it begins by keeping a ship out at sea.

What do you think it was like to be on that ship? Create a comic that explores what could have been happening.

Create a comic that might go in an informational or advice pamphlet telling readers about the plague and how to keep themselves safe.

Step two: create a comic (a minimum of FOUR panels, but no longer than ONE full page) that addresses the prompt of your choice. You may want to make a rough draft / sketch before starting a final copy.

Step three: As you are working, think about the choices you are making as a comic artistic. On the back of your work, list at least three choices you made and the reasons for those choices. Make sure your work adds to your comic story.
Example from The Black Death:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artistic Choice</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Gutters</td>
<td>They create a dark, depressing mood, which is appropriate for such a horrific topic as the plague.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close up on hands</td>
<td>This choice brings the readers’ attention to how easily disease can be spread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On page 12 – the first / top panel is a shot from up above and far away</td>
<td>This shows how empty the outside of town has become, because of the plague. It also may symbolize how lonely her journey will be.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alternative assignment option –

**Analyze!**

Choose two pages from *The Black Death* that you feel best represents and explains the plague. In an essay explain why you choose these pages. Be able to support your choice with at least five of evidence from the words and visual images and format of that page.

Start with your **claim:** Introducing your pages as the best representation of the plague

**Evidence:** details from the pages that give information about the plague. Make sure to explain how they are connected to the plague!

**Warrant:** a concluding statement that restates your claim and how the evidence supports that claim
Example Ideas:

Page Three – Evidence

-The faces in the last/bottom panel show both anger and fear, capturing the emotions brought on by the plague.

-In the top and third panel, the main character looks like she is overlooking her town, suggesting that she knows and sees everything that is going on. Her face is either sad or dark, letting readers know that the information we will be getting may be difficult and won’t be a happy ending. This is accurate, based on the fact that the plague killed millions of people, including the main character’s mother.

-Throughout the page there is shouting and questions – showing the high emotions that come with such a deadly disease.

-The colors and faces are dark, creating a mood that is both scary and sad.
Appendix E: Literary elements guided notes
Graphic Novel Unit

Guided Notes

*I can identify the literary elements of a graphic novel.

*I can explain how the elements of a graphic novel interact and affect one another.

Directions: As you read parts 1 and 2 of your graphic novel, find two or more examples of each literary element (include page #, quote if applicable, then write a one sentence explanation).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literary Element</th>
<th>Page #/quote/explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting: time, place, atmosphere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreshadow: previewing an event to come; indication of a future event</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flashback: transition in a story to an earlier time, that interrupts the normal chronological order of events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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| **Mood:** feeling or emotion that is evoked in the reader |
| **Symbolism:** using an object or a word to represent an abstract idea. |
| **Point of View:** 1st; 2nd; 3rd |
Appendix F: Gender stereotypes guided notes
Graphic Novel Unit
Introduction: Gender Stereotypes in Fairy Tales

*I can compare/contrast a fictional story to a nonfiction text.
*I can actively participate in a grade-appropriate discussion with my peers.

Examples of Gender Stereotypes in Literature and Media:

•
•
•

Find examples (at least five) of Gender Stereotypes in parts 1 and 2 of CJ or RR.
Appendix G: Graphic Novel unit final project description
Graphic Novel Unit
Brainstorming: Create the comic version of YOU!

Think back to how Rapunzel and Jack are drawn, what they wear, and what stereotypes they defy... then connect that to yourself!

Directions: After you have answered the questions below, create an illustrated comic version of yourself. Label and explain your illustration. You will present this work at the end of the unit, explaining all of your choices. Your presentation should address all of the questions below.

Consider Art

What kind of drawing style will you use? Will you look more realistic or cartoon-like? Will you use color or not? What colors? Why?

What mood will your comic portrait portray? How will you create that mood? And Why?

Consider Clothing and Objects

What do you wear that makes you most comfortable?

Will you be carrying anything? What and why?
Will there be anything in the background? What and why?

**Consider Actions and Powers**

Do you (could you) have powers? What are they and how will you represent them?

What things are important to you? How will you represent them?

How do you like to spend your time? How will you represent them?

How will you represent what makes you unique? What stereotypes do you defy?
Appendix H: Comic version of your project rubric
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TARGETS</th>
<th>6/10 help needed</th>
<th>7.5/10 in the right direction</th>
<th>9/10 proficient</th>
<th>10/10 beyond the goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMPLETION *I can follow assignment</td>
<td>fewer than half of the questions answered</td>
<td>at least half of the questions answered</td>
<td>answers number of questions required</td>
<td>answers more than number of questions required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILLUSTRATION *I can create an illustration that represents how I view myself.</td>
<td>none present</td>
<td>illustration is complete but does not represent or include all required questions</td>
<td>illustration represents and include all required questions and is done well</td>
<td>illustration represents you, all questions have been answered, time and thought was spent on creating this visual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DETAILS, OUTLINE *I can use relevant and descriptive details to capture the action and convey the experiences and events.</td>
<td>none present</td>
<td>not enough details to fully develop piece</td>
<td>details are of good quality; details create a picture in the reader's mind</td>
<td>details are thorough and help develop or strengthen piece; details create a picture in the reader's mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STYLE *I can establish and maintain a formal style</td>
<td>too much informal language, does not consider audience</td>
<td>some informal language, sometimes considers audience</td>
<td>maintains formal style throughout, audience is clearly addressed</td>
<td>maintains formal style and keeps audience interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUNCTUATION, SPELLING, MECHANICS</td>
<td>More than 15 errors</td>
<td>10-14 errors</td>
<td>5-9 errors</td>
<td>4 or fewer errors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: ____/50
Appendix I: Sample pages from Science content packet
THE POWERFUL WORLD OF ENERGY WITH
SUPER SCIENTIST MAX AXIOM

MAX AXIOM WILL TAKE US ON A SCIENTIFIC ADVENTURE TO
EXPLORE OUR LEARNING TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF
ENERGY UNIT

In this unit, we will...
1.) I can define, identify, and explain energy and the different forms.
2.) I can explain and apply the Law of Conservation of Energy
3.) Explain the relationship between potential and kinetic energy.
4.) Explain how mechanical energy is transferred when a force acts upon an object
5.) Describe how thermal energy can be transferred. (radiation, conduction, and convection)
6.) I can explain that energy can change from one form to another while being conserved
7.) Compare open and closed energy systems and provide examples.

You will be working with a group to complete the challenges for this unit. Everyone will be expected to participate
and respect the thoughts and ideas of each member. Although you are working in a group, each member will be
responsible for completing the notes and activities. Stay at the pace of your group and enjoy the experiences and
knowledge that each person has to share. As you progress through the book and notes, there will be times where you
need to get signed off by your teacher to ensure that the key concepts are understood. Please do so, then move on
to the next section.

List your team member here

If someone is absent, please see your group members and promptly make up the work.
Look at the table of contents. This book is divided into 4 sections. Write the title of each section

Section 1

Section 2

Section 3

Section 4

Section 1 — What is Energy

Read pages 4 and 5

Define Energy: ____________________________ (cause change)
Define Work: ____________________________

NOTE: Energy is not mass
Energy does not take up space

Read pages 6-7

Use context clues to define and explain the following

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinetic Energy</th>
<th>Potential Energy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define/Explain</td>
<td>Define/Explain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples:
1.
2.
3.

Examples:
1.
2.
3.

Look at the bottom of page 7. Explain how potential energy is transformed into kinetic energy in the rollercoaster example
Appendix J: Sample pages from Science lab packet
Now that you've finished the book and have a better idea about the concepts in this unit, let's take another look by starting over from the beginning. You will read the book through again but this time there will be different tasks. As there was before, you will need to get items checked off by your teacher as you go.

**Section 1**

**TASK #1**
Reread pages 1-7

Use the picture below to discuss with your group how the three different types of systems are being represented. Record your thoughts in the table.

### Three Types of Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISOLATED</th>
<th>CLOSED</th>
<th>OPEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TASK #2
You've studied potential and kinetic energy before so try your hand at taking the brain pop quiz as a group (the hand outs are next to the student computer). After you answer all ten questions, use the student computer to watch the video and check answers from the quiz.

Section 2
TASK #3
Reread pages 8-13, noticing all of the forms of energy throughout. List them below (there should be 5):

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mechanical</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now you are ready to visit station 3!

Create a comic about getting ready in the morning. Your comic should show an example of each energy form. Revisit the Forms of Energy table from packet 1 if you are having trouble remembering examples of those forms. There are comic page outlines to choose from at station 3, or you can design your own page. Be sure to label each of the EIGHT forms of energy in your comic. Attach your comic to the back of this packet when it is complete!

Reread pages 14-15

Look at the bottom of page 14 and analyze the transfer of energy with your team. Draw/ recreate the steps below. Make sure to add descriptions of what is happening and where energy is being transferred. Where is energy being “wasted”?  

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