

Spring 5-2015

The Implementation of Common Core: Graphic Novels In the Classroom

Chesnie R. Keeler
University of Southern Mississippi

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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMON CORE: GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THE
CLASSROOM

by

Chesnie Keeler

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of English

May 2015

Approved by

Katherine Cochran, Ph.D., Thesis Adviser
Associate Professor of English

Eric L. Tribunella, Ph.D., Chair
Department of English

Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean
Honors College

Abstract

The Common Core State Standards are alive and thriving in schools across the nation, and teachers are constantly looking for the best possible ways to implement these rigorous standards with student interests in mind. These standards set goals, or benchmarks, for students to reach at any specified grade level throughout their primary and secondary education; school districts, administrators, and teachers have the choice of deciding how students meet these standards. As a pre-service teacher who will enter the teaching profession, I examine how graphic novels can be implemented into the English Language Arts classroom by analyzing *Maus*, *Persepolis*, and *Bleach* through different schools of criticism and arguing how these texts can be complex. This study shows how graphic novels can be read in the classroom with theory and how the pictures and words lead to a deep structural meaning of the text. I decided to use graphic novels because they are a very popular genre of young adult literature. Teaching graphic novels can be a stepping stone for sparking student interests in reading and meeting the goals given by the English Language Arts CCSS. The intention of this study is to look at diverse texts in realm of the young adult literature and to provide ways in which graphic novels can be successfully implemented into classrooms to meet the Common Core State Standards.

Key Words: Common Core, Graphic Novels, *Bleach*, *Persepolis*, *Maus*, Theory, English Language Arts

Dedication

Jordan L. Merritt:

Thank you for sparking my interest in graphic novels.

Although you could not finish this journey with me, you will always be remembered.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Katherine Cochran, who guided me through this thesis and provided me with motivation when I needed it the most. This document would not have materialized as such had she not guided me through this experience. I am forever grateful.

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Introduction: The Graphic Novel as Complex Text

In 2010, the Common Core State Standards were created to clearly define what students should master at any specific time throughout their elementary and secondary grades: “The standards... ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live” (“About the Standards”). The Common Core State Standards, known as CCSS, suggest that teachers must introduce students to a wide variety of complex texts in order for the students to meet the required goals of becoming literate enough to succeed in college and careers. Due to this requirement, students must learn to analyze texts through visual, audio, and textual literacies.

Text complexity in the English Language Arts portion of the CCSS is vital because students are “expected to read complex texts with substantially greater independence” (Common Core State Standards “Appendix A” 3). Understanding complex texts requires reading comprehension skills and engagement in meaningful conversation for the student to fully understand the essence of the text. This means that students, along with their teachers, must delve into the texts to look at the implicit meaning that lies behind the words written in the text. Perhaps the reason students are reading complex texts but not looking at them with a critical approach is because they have never been taught how to ask questions of substance about the texts and synthesize information in order to come to an overall conclusion of what the text is trying to convey. Common Core seeks to alter education and to cultivate the growth of students into proficient readers.

One way to encourage that growth is through teaching a wider variety of complex texts. For instance, graphic novels are complex texts that are often overlooked as literature in the secondary English classroom. Despite the stigma of graphic novels being for kids, graphic novels offer a sophisticated yet interesting approach to literature that appeals to today's generation because they rely on visuals to tell an important story. Although graphic novels are not something that we often come across in the classroom, they should be incorporated into the classroom not only because of the ever evolving popularity of the genre with students, but also because it has a complex structure that lends itself to a deeper understanding of the text as a whole. The main aspect of the graphic novel that makes it such a rich and complex text is its format, which includes: the relationship between text and image; details about the illustrations such as motion, time and shading; and details about the text dealing with dialogue and exposition.

The graphic novel's structure provides readers with images and words that come together to create a story, becoming a "marriage of picture and words" (Sabin 9) which shows how the words and images work together to create a deeper meaning of the text. The images and the words are two levels by themselves that have a particular meaning, and when combined comprise one complex facet of the graphic novel. For example, in *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, we see the image shown in the frame is from the window of Vladek's family's house when he returns from the P.O.W camp in 1940 where he thought he would have died. The exposition says, "It was still very luxurious. The Germans couldn't destroy everything at one time" (Spiegelman 74). The panes of the windows appear as bars of a jail cell; all of his family members, who are Jewish, are sitting around a table eating dinner and the bars, or panes of the window, are acting as a metaphorical

jail because being Jewish in this time meant you were either held against your will or killed. Although Vladek claims that he and his family are still living in luxury, they are still in a prison that is controlled by Germans and Vladek knows that soon the Germans will come and take everything that they own. This example shows that what is conveyed by the exposition of the dialogue is not necessarily what the image means, thus resulting in the marriage of texts in which we see the two levels of meaning working together to create the complex story. The marriage of exposition and image that occurs in *Maus* shows a unique complexity of a text that can be used in the secondary classroom not only to captivate the students by the images in the text, but also to help the students think more critically about what is happening between the space of the exposition and dialogue and the space of the image.

Another instance where students will get a different perspective of what is being conveyed through the images and the text comes in the beginning chapter of *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. In the first chapter, "The Veil," Satrapi shows a class picture and the caption says, "I'm sitting on far left so you don't see me" (Satrapi 3). We see the perspective of the picture and it shows her classmates who are all dressed the same in their veils and sit the same. There is no distinction between any of the girls. There's no need to see Marji because it is implied from the image and through the caption that, just like her classmates, she is dressed in the black veil and sits with her arms crossed. Close readers, the students in the secondary classroom, will think critically and assume that Marji is just another part of the whole. She is denied her individuality because of the revolution that her country is going through. The marriage of the image and text, once again, shows that both features of the graphic novel's format work together to create

important information that should be explored deeper in the setting of a literature classroom.

Another vital facet of the graphic novel is the indication of space and time. For instance, most readers can look at panels that are small in size and make an inference to how long or short that moment was. Shorter panels cause shorter pauses, shorter time to think about what is going on in the scene. Some images in the panels are designed to be small and short to convey choppy pauses, and others are moderate in size to convey a normal pause (McCloud 101). Longer panels cause longer pauses and gestures towards how long a scene is. In *Maus*, for example, when students read the scene where the Jewish vendors were hanged for selling goods on the black market, not only will they notice that exposition says the men's bodies were hanged for one full week, the panel is significantly larger than the others, indicating a time for thought about the scene and showing that this happened for a prolonged period of time. The full page shows the Jewish men hanging by their necks. Each frame that is shown depicts how the men look as they are hanging: it zooms in on their faces, their bodies, and then down to their feet. The panels are very specific to show the longevity and the severity of the event that has occurred. Again, students must think about what is conveyed through the text and the images.

Panels are vital parts of the graphic novel, but what is not seen in the panels is just as important as what is seen. What is not seen happens in the gutters, which also create a distinction in time. Scott McCloud tells us that, "nothing is seen between the two panels, but experience tells you that something must be there" (101). The movement between the two panels that are on each side of the gutter gives the reader time to think about what

has happened and what could happen in the next panel. The gutter can also dictate a moment of time that is not seen in the text. In *Bleach* by Tite Kubo, we see that Rukia puts the point of her sword against Ichigo's heart, but we never see her pushing it through his body. However, in the later panel we get a close-up of his back with the sword ripping through his clothes, indicating that in the gutters the sword was pierced through Ichigo's body to end up at the next image, showing the point of the sword penetrated through his back (Kubo 51). In this instance, part of the story is presented in one frame and the other part is drawn in the next, showing that some type of action happened in the space of the gutters that is not apparent on the page. We, by experience, assume that the sword has gone through Ichigo's body.

Gutters shield some of the scene from the readers, and the gutters also act as transitioning points to distinguish what happens in a certain scene. One of the most common transitions in the graphic novel is the action-to-action. The action-to-action scene is important because something in the graphic novel had to have happened to get to the section that is depicted in the next panel. The action-to-action transition captures the moments that become directly before and directly after what happens in the span of the gutters. An example of the action-to-action transition comes from *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, when Art visits his father after almost two years of not seeing him. In the first panel, we see Mala, Art's father's second wife, putting Art's jacket on a wire hanger. In the next panel, we see Art's father, Vladek, hanging Art's jacket on a wooden hanger. We, as readers, assume that some action had to occur in the blank space of the gutter for Vladek to hold the jacket in the second panel. The gutter gives the reader time to think about what had happened and the second panel forces the reader to assume what has

happened. In this case, the reader would assume that in the space of the gutter, Vladek snatches the jacket from Mala, which is emphasized in the caption saying, “They didn’t get along” (11). Because of what is depicted in each panel, we know that the transition is action-to-action because it shows two different actions in two different time frames. Because the reader must put together what has happened in each transition and also in the gutters, it allows the reader to recreate the scene in their minds and synthesize what happened to get from one point to the next.

The format of the graphic novel is not the only facet that is complex; the content of the graphic novel can also be sophisticated. In *Maus*, Art Spiegelman uses animals to represent different races and nationalities to convey a message about how Jewish people were seen during the Holocaust. At the beginning of the novel, Spiegelman makes it a point to quote Adolf Hitler by saying, “The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human” (4). Thus, Spiegelman uses mice to represent Jews in his images, implying that Jews were seen as pests, or as less than human. If Spiegelman had written this graphic novel as just a book, the importance of how the Jewish people were seen as less than human during the Holocaust would not be portrayed in the same light. The subject of discrimination against a race of people is also addressed in a canonical text like *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, but it tells the story through visuals and words in a fulfilling way (understanding through words and pictures) rather than through just words on a page.

The form, the content, and the way both are presented on the page, are complex because students must read closely to understand the graphic novel as a whole. *Bleach* is a manga that gives a different culture and tackles an important view such as the treatment

of women and gender roles imposed by a patriarchal society. *Persepolis* presents the ideas of the Islamic Revolution in a way that is understandable, but in a way that also deals with something that is not frequently taught in the Social Studies classroom. It gives an inside perspective of this time period from someone who actually survived the time period. *Maus* shows a personal account of a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. All the characters in the novel are presented as animals: the Jews as mice, the Germans and cats, and the Polish as pigs. The personification of each group of animals gives context to one of Adolf Hitler's comments about the Jewish people and capitalizes on that comment. These texts are complex and will be more deeply studied in the body chapters of this thesis.

Chapter One: *Bleach* and the Feminist Reading

By the end of high school, the Common Core State Standards insist that students must be college and career ready, which includes being able to interpret complex literary works. The Anchor Standards for grades 9-10 and 11-12 that deal with reading literature express that students must “cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain” (English Language Arts Standards, Reading: Literature Grade 9-10, 11-12). Using strong textual evidence to support analysis of a text is the main goal of using theory. If students are to analyze a text, students need a guide as to how they are supposed to see the text. In addition, many beginning level college English classrooms require students to read works through a literary scope. According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, college professors indicated that 41% of students were not prepared for college level work because they had not previously been exposed to literary theory in high school (Sanoff 9). For students to become as literate as the Standards intend, students need to learn how to use various schools of literary criticism.

Lisa Schade Eckert’s “Bridging the Pedagogical Gap: Intersections Between Literary and Reading Theories in Secondary and Postsecondary Literary Instruction” suggests that literary works can be looked at through the lens of different schools of literary interpretation to determine the meaning of the text. Some of the most common and easy to grasp, user-friendly theories that can be implemented into the classroom are feminist criticism, Marxist criticism, and historical criticism. These three theories are not of the only theories available, but rather the ones I will focus on as I analyze the graphic

novel texts. These three theories are important because they give a different analysis and meaning to the text that another theory cannot. Where feminist criticism asks how women are oppressed by a patriarchal society, Marxist criticism interrogates how economic structures influence people and events, and historical criticism looks at how the text functions in the time period that it was written and also during the time period that the text primarily focuses on.

A feminist reading of *Bleach* by Tite Kubo would note that most of the women are depicted as weak and helpless individuals. Peter Barry articulates, “Feminist criticism...went into exposing what might be called the mechanisms of patriarchy, that is, the cultural ‘mind-set’ in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality” (117). This suggests that there are gender stereotypes in this patriarchal society because how the women and men are depicted in the images (the women as weak and helpless or ignorant and defined by their bodies, and the men as warriors who protect the women who are weak, helpless, ignorant, and defined by their bodies). Retsu Unohana is one of the only women captains in Thirteen Court Guards, but she is over the only squad that heals the wounded. This suggests that women, by nature, are only strong enough to be healers and caretakers, while men, such as Ichigo Kurosaki, can only take on the role of a warrior who protects society. If a woman, like Rukia Kuchiki, is permitted to hold a sword, she is still not seen as an equal to male, whether he is supernatural or not, because an ordinary human male must save her life. For example, Rukia is supposed to be the power figure because she protects people and passes the souls to the afterlife in the district that she has been assigned to. She wears a black Shihakusho that implies that she is supposed to be a powerful figure. When she comes in contact with Ichigo, she at first tries to reprimand

him with a paralyzing spell, but he breaks free from it, leaving her powerless against a human being who is a male. A Soul Reaper is supposed to be stronger than a human, but her title of Soul Reaper and the black clothing that she wears that defines her as a powerful being is negated because of the cultural “mind-set” that is prominent in a patriarchal society that leaves women unequal to men.

In the “Speaking and Listening” standards for grades 9-10 and 11-12, students must “initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions” (English Language Arts Standards Speaking and Listening). The use of theory in the classroom starts academic discussion about the texts that are examined. When students engage in conversation with their peers or English Language Arts teacher, the student must use textual evidence to support the argument they are presenting. Theory supports the use of textual evidence because theory allows for students to choose certain pieces of evidence to analyze for an overall understanding of the text. For example, if students were studying *Bleach* by Tite Kubo, the pictures and the words serve as textual evidence that they would need to support the scope they must analyze the text through. In the first volume of *Bleach*, readers meet Ichigo Kurosaki, a male student who frequently has encounters with the afterlife. He meets Rukia Kuchiki, who is a Soul Reaper that protects and “pass” the wandering souls of the living world into the afterlife, but fails at doing so because she is depicted as a weak female who needs help. When she is hurt and on the brink of death due to the act of trying to protect Ichigo’s family from the wandering souls who have turned into Hollows, she offers to give Ichigo a small amount of her supernatural powers. In the transfer of her power into Ichigo’s body, he takes all of her supernatural powers leaving her powerless (Kubo 56). Because of this act in which Rukia only wants to

protect the human, she is sentenced death because he stole her powers. If this is read through a feminist scope, we can infer that in this patriarchal society, Rukia cannot effectively survive or be seen as a figure of power because she is biologically female; she is not made to take on the role of a powerful figure. This also can be seen as a rebirth for Rukia because she is claiming her life as a “true” woman in a patriarchal society that doesn’t allow her to rise above the “mind-set” of society. Ichigo is allowed to be the powerful figure because he, by nature, is a male and he must take on his masculine role. Rukia resorts to the powerless, non-supernatural state and is dressed in a white shihakusho, or kimono, to show the purity that a woman must represent by nature.

Without the evidence provided, the argument that Rukia cannot survive or live as a power figure because she is biologically female and therefore must take on the role of the feminine and the powerless by wearing the white robe would not persist in an academic setting. Theory needs textual evidence and the Standards focus on using textual evidence to support and make claims stronger. The feminist reading of *Bleach* can only be strengthened if more textual evidence is used and more discussion is generated to explain why the argument is a legitimate argument.

Bleach is published by Shonen Jump, which acts as a publishing company and a magazine that caters to the interests of boys. The word “shonen” in Japanese refers to a boy, which is significant in the portrayal of women because these graphic novels are tailored to the interests of males, and are predominantly written by males. This automatically puts female characters at a disadvantage because these novels are intended to be empowering for males. Because of this, the females in *Bleach* are already seen as a species inferior to men, which is why very few women ever appear in the Shonen Jump

magazines. If they do appear, they are represented as females who are controlled by a patriarchal society, and this reigns true for the series of *Bleach*.

One of the main characters in *Bleach* is Rukia Kuchiki, a Soul Reaper from the Soul Society who has been sent into the world of the living to aid in passing souls peacefully into Afterlife. Rukia is a very stereotypical girl in the sense of the biological look of what the female should be: slender, short with big eyes, inferring that she is innocent and helpless. Although she is depicted in this light, we see that she wields a sword, which demonstrates the power that she has. Since she has been assigned over Karakura Town, she has matriarchal authority over this society, the society that looks to her to pass souls of the dead to the Afterlife so they will not suffer. Rukia acts as a maternal figurehead over the society, which leads to her losing her power and matriarchal authority over the souls she helps. She loses her power because she has to be protected by Ichigo, the strong and typical masculine figure that robbed her of her authority, thus reverting back to what society dictates as being feminine.

Orihime Inoue is another vital female character in the *Bleach* series. She is one of Ichigo's classmates and is illustrated as another female stereotype. She has long flowy, hair and is about the same height as Rukia. Orihime is very busty, a characteristic of the biological female that is attractive to a man. This depiction of her body makes her the epitome of the feminine, the societal "mind-set" of what a female should look and act like. In the novel, we see that Orihime, although not in tune with the spiritual world, is drawn to it by the flowing of Ichigo's spiritual power into her, giving her a power of her own. Orihime's powers are generated when she sees her brother going into the Afterlife. Her powers come from the blue flower barrettes that she wears on either side of her hair.

When she calls out to her barrettes for help, she is protected by them. This power, this non-violent, innocent power, is the characteristic of an innocent female who cannot fight for herself.

Orihime is the equivalent to what is known as a cheesecake: “a photographic display of shapely and scantily clothes female figures—often used attributively” (“Cheesecake”). Her only characteristic that is noted throughout the novel, by male and female characters alike, is her figure, the way that she looks, which contributes to the societal “mind-set” of a patriarchal society. One character refers to her as a “boobs machine” which reduces her character to nothing but a symbol of what the feminine should look and act like (134). Her looks, the long hair and the busty chest, are the only thing that men can see because the “mind-set” that the society has towards women. The images and the way she looks negates the fact that she could be anything more than a cheesecake. Her bust doesn’t allow anyone to take her seriously because characters always comments on her looks. For example a character says to Tatsuki, Orihime’s best friend who is a female, “You’ve got a pretty face but you’re too butch for me,” as if Orihime’s feminine looks are the only thing that she has going for her, which is why the character prefers a more feminine look over a female who does not demonstrate qualities of the feminine (138) This attests to the “mind-set” of society that leaves women unequal to men.

Besides Orihime’s looks, she also has spiritual ability, which is brought out by Ichigo, who saves her from a Hollow. Although she has spiritual ability, her figure and her feminine looks makes her prone to the weakness that a female is supposed to be associated with and also sentences her to being dependent on a strong, male figure to

contrast between what she should be in society. Her spiritual powers are only used to heal or protect herself; they are in no way used for violence, which proves the “mind-set” of a patriarchal society that women can only be viewed as caretakers, not as warriors, as men are.

Karin Kurosaki is another female character that tries to break the stereotype of what society dictates as feminine, but she ultimately reverts to having to be protected by the dominant male character who is an authoritative figure throughout the series. Karin is one of Ichigo’s younger sisters and she tries to break the social norms of what a female should act like. We see throughout the novel that Karin is more carefree than her other sister, Yuzu who conforms to the stereotypical female role of taking on the responsibility of doing all of the house work and cooking. Karin, in form, has black hair and she usually wears shorts and baseball jerseys. This is much different from what other females in the novel, such as Yuzu, Orihime, and Rukia, wear, which consists of dresses and skirts. This kind of depiction in Karin’s character is notable because she does not conform to what the societal “mind-set” says a female should look like. Karin has a very nonchalant attitude, but when the memories of a soul flow into her mind, she becomes a crying and helpless female character. Ichigo says, “It’s been years since I saw Karin cry... Karin didn’t have Yuzu’s fair for homemaking. So she stepped aside, and took care of herself” (31). We see that Karin, after her mother dies, becomes someone who fends for herself, who doesn’t cry, or conform to what society says that she should do, like her sister does. She begins to take care of herself, and become independent. She does not let her biological role as a female determine what she should do, like Yuzu does. When Karin starts to cry and begs Ichigo to save the lost soul of the child, Ichigo cradles her into his

arms as an act of putting her back together and takes her home. This image implies that Karin needs a male figure to take care of her when she becomes hysteric or breaks down into tears. She cannot handle the memories from the lost soul of a child because she is too fragile for it. Karin throws herself into Ichigo's chest, grasping his shirt and begs for him to help the child because she cannot due to being a female. This implies that only males can make a situation go away and soothe females. She is no longer the female who doesn't conform to societal norms; she is now a female who has the societal "mind-set" and depends on a male character to make everything right because she cannot control her feminine feelings, feelings of despair, towards the lost soul of the child.

Although Rukia, at the beginning of the novel, is a female who exerts a supernatural power over Ichigo, the male figure, her power dissolves and she is left to depend on him to protect her and take care of her job. We learn that Ichigo, a fifteen year old high school student, can see souls, so in his own way he tries to help them by comforting them while they are in the human world, but this alone cannot suffice. Rukia is appointed the Soul Reaper, a person who passes souls to the Afterlife, of Ichigo's district to pass those souls to the other world to keep them from turning into resentful souls, called Hollows, who "attack the living and the dead indiscriminately and devour their souls" (24). Rukia acts as the matriarch of the passageway from the Soul Society, where souls who don't turn into Hollows go, and the real world. This is her realm of which she rules over and controls. She takes care to make sure that humans and wandering souls are not in danger because, again, this is her maternal, feminine, instinct. She uses the advantage of being a female to guide those souls and complete her tasks.

When Rukia is looking for a soul to pass onto the Afterlife, she goes into a house where she feels the soul's spiritual pressure and discovers Ichigo, who is not supposed to be able to see her; she is supposed to do her work discreetly, not interfering with the world that she does not reside in. She doesn't look at Ichigo, knowing that a human cannot see her or hear her. She comes to Ichigo's home because a Hollow is coming to attack them, but she says, "I have not been able to sense its presence for some time now... Like some force obstructing my senses..." (25-26). She says this because she cannot fully commit to her job to protect her assigned district because she cannot sense what is coming, nor does she know what is jamming her senses or what the Hollow is seeking. She cannot use her maternal instincts to protect something that she cannot see or sense. This suggests that her maternal instincts do not function as well in the human society, a society that is predominantly ran by men. When Ichigo's family is finally attacked by the Hollow, she tries to protect them, like a mother would try to protect her children. But in the midst of protecting Ichigo and his family, she becomes severely injured by the Hollow who bites her shoulder (44). Rukia sacrifices herself for Ichigo and his family because she is supposed to protect the district that she is appointed to. She protects them like any mother would protect her children, which is when her maternal instinct reacts. Because Rukia severely injured and Ichigo desperately wants to protect his family she suggests that Ichigo takes some of her spiritual power and become Soul Reaper himself. Rukia is exerting her natural maternal instinct because she is willing to sacrifice half of her power for Ichigo and his family. But when Rukia freely gives Ichigo half of her power, he takes it all, robbing her of not only her power, but of her matriarchal authority over a society that she was in charge of. "No... I meant for only half... I have

lost all of my powers” (55). The robbing of Rukia’s supernatural powers revert her to a helpless female who is wide-eyed, surprised, and wears white to define her as an innocent female figure who can only be seen as feminine if she is protected by a powerful, authoritative male figure, which Ichigo now has the role of. Since Rukia is powerless and effectively loses her authority of the district, the society between the Afterlife and the human world now becomes a patriarchal society because Ichigo essentially robs Rukia of her right to her territory, her right to reside over what has been appointed to her.

Before Rukia is robbed of her spiritual powers, she is clothed in a black, bulky shihakusho indicating that she is a Soul Reaper who has authority over the lost souls. After she is void of any power, her robe is white. The black robe is seen as a symbol of authority and to wear that robe, one must be strong and have some kind of power, whether it is masculine power or feminine power. The white robe that Rukia is seen wearing is soft and pure, which symbolizes what women in society should look like. The white contrasted with the black shows the innocence of the feminine, something that is pure and in a sense, helpless. The black shows the strength and authority, which is now the primary clothing that defines Ichigo as a strong, masculine figure who is now appointed to save souls from turning into Hollows.

When Rukia loses her powers, her soul has to be put into a gigai which is a temporary body soul reapers use in emergencies, “Disempowered soul reapers inhabit gigais until their powers return” (71). A gigai is like a human body. Rukia is from another world, the Soul Society, and because she chose to help a male in her appointed district, she suffers the consequences by being stranded in a world that is not her own and trapped in a human body. This indicates that Rukia is in this body that is not her own because she

decided to help a male that essentially took advantage of the power that she lent him because she felt, in a moment where her maternal instinct activates, the need to protect him.

Rukia has to rely on Ichigo, the male authority figure, to protect her, in this body that is not hers, while also fulfilling the duties of her job. Rukia once gave her life freely to protect her assigned district from Hollows and to help souls pass to the Afterlife. Without her powers, she cannot protect anyone, so the wellbeing of the balance of the world is therefore given to Ichigo. He doesn't want to protect other people and indicates this by saying, "I fought yesterday to save my family. I'm not gonna fight those things for total strangers! I'm not that self-sacrificing" (72) He turns his back on Rukia, suggesting that he rejects her job and the responsibility of taking care of others. This shows that males, like Ichigo, are only concerned with protecting themselves. Rukia is a female that acts on her maternal instincts to protect the world of the living; she is a woman that sacrifices herself for the wellbeing of people she doesn't know because she is innately a creature who has those instincts. Ichigo is not; the societal masculine norms deny males of having feelings towards something such as helping others who are in need when it does not benefit them. But since he took on Rukia's powers, Ichigo has to rise to the authoritative masculine figure and transform this society that Rukia is over into a patriarchal society that limits women from protecting others and protecting themselves.

Orihime, although she ultimately gains a set supernatural power that involves healing and shielding others, she has to be protected by Ichigo. Orihime is attacked by a Hollow as well, but this Hollow comes because her brother resents the fact that she is living alone. Because Ichigo's responsibility becomes that of which was once Rukia's, he

must protect Orihime from the Hollow. Ichigo says, "...that is a Soul Reaper's job," when he tries to protect Orihime from her brother who has turned into a Hollow (125). He wields a sword that dictates his strength and brands him as the new protector of the society, which implies that Rukia, being female, was never worthy enough to protect the human world while passing souls to the Afterlife. The image shows that he is blocking an attack of the Hollow, and declaring that protecting Orihime is his job, implying that only a male figure in a patriarchal society can have this job and execute it to the fullest. The job that he takes on to destroy the Hollow and protect human souls was once Rukia's, the former matriarchal head of the society in which she protects. Had Ichigo not robbed Rukia of her powers, Orihime would have been protected by Rukia, which would indicate that she would not depend on a masculine figure to protect her. But because the fact that Ichigo steals Rukia's power and takes on her responsibilities, it is implied that every female that is prone to danger cannot survive without the help of a man, which reverts them to the societal norm of what a female should act like.

The feminine constructs in *Bleach* limit women from rising above the societal norms of what a woman should be. If a woman, such as Rukia, rises above what is feminine, such as being over a society, then this rebellion against the societal stereotypes is shattered and transforms them back into women who must rely on men because they are weak and helpless and cannot defend themselves. Rather than the novel empowering women to rise above the societal norms and stereotypes, it puts women at a disadvantage and forces them to conform to what is the societal construct of what feminine is.

Chapter Two: *Persepolis* and the Marxist Reading

Reading graphic novels through a literary scope requires close attention to what is being said in order to understand the overall meaning. In Lisa Schade's "Demystifying the Text: Literary Criticism in the High School Classroom" she says that she provides her students with guidelines to research authors, history, politics, and literature to find a common theme that resonates throughout the text so she can show students that there are different ways of looking at texts, to see how they are interpreted by certain literary criticisms (31). In the case of *Persepolis*, this graphic novel be taught in a 10th grade class when students are taking World Literature and World History so that this novel can be used across curriculums to show important events that happen in the world. This critical reading of *Persepolis* will focus on a Marxist reading to show how this graphic novel is "influenced by the social and political circumstances" that are going on during the time period of Marjane Satrapi's childhood (Barry 160).

Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel, *Persepolis*, which literally means "city of Persians," tells of the life of Marji growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. In the graphic novel, Marji presents the problem where the newly fundamentalist Iranian society opposes people who demonstrate against the government. These people can be seen as the oppressed, who are tortured for what they believe and stand for. In contrast, Marji suggests that she wants a classless society. I will read and analyze *Persepolis* through the Marxist scope to show that people of the Iranian society in the 1970s and 80s were either oppressed individuals standing up for their rights against the Shah and Ayatollah, or people who were not seen as equal and were therefore discriminated against because they don't have a high social class.

Peter Barry states in his work, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, that “the writers social class and its prevailing ‘ideology’ have a major bearing on what is written by a member of that class” (152). Marjane Satrapi is of the middle class where she is enabled to go to school to become educated, and she also finds that her lineage goes back to the time that her grandfather was the Prime Minister of Iran. Although her grandfather was overthrown, Marji was afforded the type of life that other children and their families could not afford. Marji’s grandfather became a Communist because he was against the social structure of the class system. He says, “It disgusts me that people are condemned to a bleak future by their social class” (Satrapi 23). He questions the beliefs of society and, because he believes differently, he is sent to prison. Marji’s mother says, “Sometimes they put him in a cell filled with water” (25). Although we a visual depiction of the Water Cell is not provided, Marji sits in a bathtub filled with water trying to feel what her grandfather felt when he was sentenced to prison. This implies, from the picture of Marji in the bathtub, and the words that imply that her Grandfather would be put into a water cell, the severity of the punishment for people who go against the societal beliefs.

Marji’s beliefs were certainly different than the beliefs of society when it came to the idea of the social and economic structure of the society she lived in. Although when Marjane is younger and she does not realize that she is in a society that is defined by class, it is clearly shown through the privileges that she has and the type of life that she lives. She recognizes that her friends have jobs at young ages because they are not as fortunate as her family. Marji says, “I finally understood why I felt ashamed to sit in my father’s Cadillac” (33). The frame shows Marji with her eyes closed, feeling ashamed

because of the class distinction; however, the words that are etched onto the page show her anger at society and how it differentiates between people who have social status and those who do not. “The reason for my shame and for the revolution is the same: The difference between social classes” (33). Marjane questions the socioeconomic status of people in society that are defined by their work or lack thereof.

Marji questions the notion of the social classes in the Iranian society, but she cannot do anything but ask why society is the way it is. For example, Marji’s family has a maid named Mehri who Marji looks up to; they even consider each other as sisters. Mehri, unlike Marji, had to leave home when she was eight to work for Marji’s family. Since Mehri’s family could not afford to take care of all of their children, Mehri is forced to become a maid, a person who works under another to complete the tasks they are told to complete. Mehri cannot change her social class because she does not make enough money to do so. When Mehri falls in love with the neighbor’s son, she does not know how to read or write. Mehri is illiterate because she has no knowledge of the art of reading and writing, making her an oppressed citizen in the society who cannot effectively get out of the rut of the uneducated proletariat. Marji, unknowingly, contributes to Mehri being stuck in the lower working class because she, through an intended act of kindness, writes a letter to Hossein, the neighbor’s son, confessing her love for him. Mehri was in love with Hossein, and they even called themselves engaged although he was from a different social class than she was. Although the images suggest that they are not much different and they aren’t aware of each other’s social class, the words imply that they are, in fact very different and can never be together because of their estranged social classes. We see Marji questioning her father as to why their love

could not work. Because of the hegemonic ideals of the authoritative figure of Iran that imposed the notion of the social class system on the citizens of the country, Mehri could not be with a male that is not within the reach of her social class. Marji asks, “But is it her fault that she was born where she was born?” (37). She asks this question because she is conscious of the class structure of society because Mehri, someone that she saw as her sister, was not able to marry or love anyone of a higher social stature, the same social class that Marji was born into. Since she questions the fact that society is divided into a social structure, Marji, through the gesture of writing the notes to Hossein from Mehri, tries to integrate two social classes, “seeking to change” the aims of the society (Barry 150).

Another person who seeks to change the aims of society is Marji’s mother who is photographed at a rally while protesting. Since the photograph taken by a German journalist ends up in a magazine in Iran, Marji’s mother has to change her identity by wearing dark glasses and dyeing her hair blonde for a prolonged time period (5). This instance shows that Marji’s mother cannot demonstrate her power because she is endangered for standing up for what she believed in. The demonstration of one’s beliefs and ideology effectively shows that one is deviating from what the highest social class, which in this case is the Ayatollah, dictates is right. To avoid becoming oppressed against by the repressive structure, which is the followers of the Shah that dictate what is right, Marji’s mother has to dye conceal her identity to not fall into the place of the people who would be tortured for rebelling. Because Marji’s mother is expressing her personal ideology and concurrently denying the rule of the Shah, she is trying to become an individual who is trying to assert herself as an individual who is free from social forces;

to avoid death, she becomes another person in a society determined by class who is controlled by the power of fear that the authority of the Ayatollah demonstrates.

Under the rule of the Ayatollah, people that are fundamentalist and follow the rule of the Ayatollah are separated from the modern people who do not believe in the ideas that the authoritative figures thrust upon them. The separation of these groups shows a divide in the society and gives power to those who do believe in the same ideals of the Ayatollah. The Fundamentalist men usually wear their shirts hanging out to avoid the sexuality the parts of a man can show. They also wear their beards long and unshaven to not reveal their facial, which can be seen as a sexual. The Modern Man, as defined by Marjane, is a man who wears his shirt tucked in and he wears a beard or a mustache. A Fundamentalist woman covers herself completely, only leaving her face out. A Modern woman shows “opposition to the regime by letting a few strands of hair” (75). Society is divided by what people believe, and even more by what people wear. These people that are known as the Fundamentalist of society tend to exert their power, because their beliefs align with the Ayatollah, over the Modern people of society.

Marji recounts a time where her mother, because of her modern beliefs, was threatened by fundamentalists. Marji’s mother Taji says, “They insulted me, they said that women like me should be pushed up against a wall and fucked. And then thrown in the garbage” (74). Taji was insulted by two bearded men, which shows an imbalance of power, not only by the difference in gender, but the difference in number. She is oppressed because a woman like her, a modern woman, does not hold the same beliefs as the people who are for the regime. This shows that because modern people do not hold beliefs that fundamentalists hold, that modern people should be oppressed and threatened.

The authoritative figure, the oppressor, in this situation is the men who harassed Taji, and Taji is the oppressed. This recognition of the imbalance of power in society, not only with social groups, but with genders as well show that the group of people that went against the ideals of the regime of this time was always at a disadvantage because people who were for the rule of the Ayatollah would enforce those rules without being punished for it. This exertion of power gestures towards the imbalance of power through the social stature.

In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno talk about how the source of knowledge is power and to know something is to be a master of it (15). Knowledge is, therefore, a power that can distinguish a person from being a middle-class or a lower class person. If knowledge is taken away, then the stint of fear comes about. The students in Marji's class were previously told that the Shah, himself, was chosen by God. After he was overthrown, the students are instructed to tear the photos of the Shah from their books. Once again, Marji questions the teacher, saying "But she was the one who told us that the Shah was chosen by God" (44). Marji is punished and told to stand in a corner because she decides to question the authority of her teacher who instilled this type of knowledge into her. This knowledge is taken away from Marji and the students which gives the authority more power to manipulate education as well as instill fear into the students because of the lack of knowledge about the past. In this sense, the removal of an important part of education demonstrates the power of the authority over young students in the school system because they are seen as lesser because are not taught the past.

Another instance where knowledge is taken away from the students in Marji's society is when it is mandated that the bilingual schools be closed down because "they are symbols of Capitalism. Of Decadence" (4). Once again we see that a group of children is being robbed of an educational opportunity because of the political agenda to rid the society of anything that is remotely capitalist or anything that represents decadence. Horkheimer and Adorno assert that, "Humans believe themselves free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown" (11). This suggests that the Iranian society lives in fear because they are deprived of knowledge because this knowledge, the opportunity to become fluent in a language to advance the social stature of an individual, is innately capitalist. This lack of knowledge brings fear to the people who do not have it. With the closing of the schools and the information being ripped out of a text book, the people of the society are being reduced to those who do not know about society.

Another instance of knowledge, of decadence, being denied in the Iranian state is the knowledge of the decadence of music and posters in society. When Marji's parents go to Turkey, she asks them to buy her things such as Nike's, a Michael Jackson pin, a denim jacket, and posers of Iron Maiden and Kim Wilde. These items, these symbols of decadence, are forbidden in society at this time because they are seen as modern products that go against the beliefs of the regime. The posters, especially, are a product of decadence because these types of music posters are not allowed to be sold in Iran. Because Marji dresses like a modern woman, which means she is against the beliefs of the regime, she is stopped by women who were a part of the Guardians of the Revolution. Since Marji's beliefs are different from theirs, which is indicated by their differences in clothes, the women criticize her and threaten to take her to the Committee. Because Marji

shows differences in her beliefs, she can be criticized and harassed for it, which shows one group of people exerting their power over another group.

Since the unknown is the catalyst for fear in a society, the teachers in Marji's school would keep information from the students. For example, one of Marji's teachers says, "Since the Islamic Republic was founded, we no longer have political prisoners" (144). This statement is a blatant lie and Marji challenges this statement because her uncle, as is shown earlier in the novel, is imprisoned under the Shah's rule and was executed under the Islamic Regime. Marji spreads knowledge to her teacher and her classmates, which is relieving them of fear, about how the Islamic state has over 300,000 prisoners under the Islamic regime. Because of this, she is punished because of her knowledge, the knowledge that can lead to the end of an uneducated group of people who have been led and persuaded by the lies of propaganda. The punishment comes in the form a phone call to her parents. Her mother insists that if she is vocal about her knowledge that she, like her Uncle Anoosh, could be punished as well. When young women who oppose the ideals of regimes are arrested, they marry the young girls and rob them of their virginity and result to killing them. This shows that women in the time of the Islamic regime cannot voice their opinions or share their knowledge because they could possibly be raped and killed. This sort of oppression shows the imbalance of power in society. In this situation, Marji does not have power because she is a woman and she is denied the right to express her beliefs in fear that she will be alienated from society by death just like the young woman named Nilofar.

A Marxist reading of *Persepolis* shows how people who the people who longed for knowledge were denied knowledge because of the rules that were imposed on society

as a whole. Because of the imbalance of power that the Iranian society demonstrates, many of the citizens that were against the rule of the Ayatollah, including Marji's family, were oppressed because of their ideals and what they believed. We see in the text that the ones who hold the power, the ones who follow after the Ayatollah and the Islamic Regime, are the ones that are in power because they can exert their power against the people who do not believe the way that they believe. We also see that class struggle is prominent in the society dealing with Mehri and Hossein's story of two people from different social classes who cannot remain together because society dictates that people cannot marry outside of their social class. These situations are powerful and mature material that can be expressed in the secondary education English setting that could possibly coincide with the history curriculum. Not only does this novel lend itself to being a complex novel, but it also has a historical context that students would benefit from.

Chapter Three: *Maus* and the Historical Reading

Maus I: A Survivor's Tale by Art Spiegelman recounts the events of World War II through the memories of Art's father, Vladek, a concentration camp survivor. This text is ideal to teach to an 11th grade English class because it corresponds to the U.S. history instruction students receive during this year. This text would not only aid in cross-curriculum dealings with history, but also gives a different perspective of the war that is often not talked about in the context of the U.S History class. *Maus* deals with how the Jews struggled in the war because of their ethnic identity and provides a depth of cultural knowledge about the war and what happened with the Jews and the Germans in WWII. This text aligns with Common Core because it is a complex text that tells two stories in one cohesive novel and uses graphics to aid in the understanding of the text. Since *Maus* relies heavily on a historical background, I will examine it through a historical lens, first talking about how the structure contributes to the story as a whole.

Maus's structure is unique because it is set up as a frame story, a story within a story. Art, the narrator, goes to visit his father to draw information from him to write a novel of the events that took place during World War II and to tell of how he survived. Through this time, Art is trying to improve his relationship with his father while also gaining useful history to incorporate into his book. As previously stated, this text is also interesting because the characters are not drawn as human: the Jews are mice, the Germans are cats, and the Polish are pigs. At the beginning of the novel, Spiegelman uses a quote from Adolf Hitler: "The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human" (Spiegelman 4). This explains why Spiegelman decided to depict the Jews as mice, or vermin, creatures who are seen as the lowest form of life on earth. But using this

quote also suggests that Spiegelman is trying to convey that the Germans and Polish are just like the Jews: animals, but something of a different species.

Spiegelman also uses depicts the Jewish, Germans, and Polish as animals as a distancing mechanism to comprehend what is happening during this time. Robert Faggen says that, “This is hardly the irony of a beast fable which uses great distance to get at moral realities which would be lost in more overtly realistic modes” (24). The Jews are depicted as mice and the Germans are depicted as cats because by nature, cats chase mice and try to hunt them down to kill them; that is exactly what the Germans were doing during World War II. These images imply, along with Hitler’s quote that is cited at the beginning of the novel, that the Germans are also not “human” because of the inhumane ways that they treat the Jewish people. It is also important to note that the reason why the distancing mechanism works in the novel is because if the characters in the novel were depicted as human beings, we would feel closer to what happened and relate to what is happening, making the situation feel too real and too close for something that is still fresh. If genocide is happening towards mice, then humans are disconnected from them because we do not have the experience of being mice. To take the reality out of what has happened makes it easier to face when it is happening to a cat and a mouse. Although the Jews are depicted as mice, readers do get a sense of moral realities and have a sense of what happens in such a time where death for Jews was imminent. Readers get the sense of a moral reality although acts of immorality, such as forcing people out of their homes and killing innocent people, are committed against a group of people who are depicted as mice.

One of the most significant people in Art's life is his father because he holds the key to the past, a past that is not discussed in many high school classrooms from the point of view of the Jewish survivors. When Vladek begins to tell his story, he opens with how he met Art's mother, Anja, who has killed herself before the start of the novel. Vladek intentionally marries Anja because her family does have money to pay dowry, and because of this, Vladek is living a wealthy life with money that his father-in-law helped him make. In an interview, Spiegelman says, "...one thing I really learned from my father was how to pack a suitcase...how to use every available centimeter to get as much stuff packed into a small space as possible" (as qtd in Chute 1). This quote is important because it attests to the type of life that Vladek lived. Throughout Vladek's life, he was very frugal and he learned to live by little and how to make things last. Vladek was accustomed to living in large houses, but during the Holocaust he did have to learn the concept of using all the space that was available to him because the Germans would undoubtedly take them to smaller places which would lead to the eradication of the Jewish people. We can see this quote coming to life when we see Vladek and his family being relocated to a smaller house. At first, Vladek and his family owned a large house, but because the Germans were trying to condense the Jews, and soon, try to do away with their race, Hitler wanted to compress them into smaller homes and spaces. They are lucky because they are not one of the families that have to live on the streets, but at the same time, we see that Vladek has many family members who are all confined to two rooms. In this sense, we see that Vladek and his family utilize what they have, however small the space may be. This is an important factor to the history because it shows that the Jewish people of this time had to take what they cherished the most and make their living work

in small spaces, no matter how uncomfortable it may have been. Having little to nothing in space and in necessities forced the Jews to live with what they had and utilize their necessities to their extent.

Vladek also experiences confinement into a small place when he and Anja are given shelter in Mrs. Kawka's storage locker when her husband, who works in Germany, comes home for ten days. Vladek and Anja lived in the cold among rats, which was very uncomfortable, but the image suggests by how close the two were that they both contented because they were still alive. Since Vladek and Anja have to hide in the locker, they have no way of going out to food and Mrs. Kawka cannot always leave to bring them nourishment. Vladek and Anja starve while they are down there, only eating what Vladek had: "I had still candies I organized on Dekerta. Only this we had to eat" (148). Mrs. Kawka has to protect herself because her husband was getting suspicious of her hiding Jews in the storage locker. She did not bring them food for three days, so they were forced to survive on the candy. This is an example of using every possible resource, such as the candy and the small storage locker, that is available to them.

We also see that the Germans send the Jews a notice saying, "all Jews over 70 years old will be transferred to Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia on May 10, 1942" (86). Vladek and his family hide Anja's grandparents in a bunker, a closed tight space, to keep them from view. Vladek and Anja would sneak to bring her parents food when they felt it was safe. The grandparents survived in their tight shelter until the rest of the family was threatened with death. Although the grandparents were ultimately sent to Auschwitz to be gassed, they still had to utilize the small space that they were given to shelter their elders from the German soldiers.

Another instance of Jewish people utilizing every centimeter of space that is available to them is when the janitor, a Polish man, was hiding Vladek's cousin, Miloch, in the house that the janitor owned. Because Miloch is Jewish, or, as depicted in the graphic novel, a mouse, he is confined to the back yard in a garbage hole. "In each courtyard was a very deep hole to throw in all the garbage. Inside this garbage hole was here separated by a tiny space—maybe only 5 feet by six feet" (153). Miloch, his wife, and their three-year-old son lived in the garbage hole to hide away from anyone who searched the house for Jews. This small space is not ideal for a family of three and surely the location of the space being in a garbage hole is not ideal either. They utilize this little space and what they have available to them to survive, no matter how small or uncomfortable the living situation is. Vladek and his family are not the only ones who had to suffer in tough living spaces. This is important because most Jews from this time had to suffer in less than ideal living situations because they would be executed if they had not learned to utilize what they had. Spiegelman's father's history gives us more than one account of this kind of living to show that during World War II, this was one of the collective Jewish experiences.

Throughout the Holocaust, Vladek lost family and friends because of the brutality that the Germans demonstrated against the Jews. One of the most profound set of frames in *Maus* comes when all the Jews have to report to the Dienst Stadium to be registered (91). "Everyone came very nice dressed. They tried so that they would look young and able to work, in order to get a good stamp on their passport" (90). Although the words say they wanted to look young and able to work, it is implied by the pictures that they needed to look their best to present themselves to the Germans as good Jews who have

family values. They wanted nothing more than to stay close with their families, which is why they attempted to look like what they would deem as acceptable Jews who can contribute to society. Most of Vladek's family were sent to the right and were safe, except Fela, who had four children. She was sentenced to the left, and essentially sentenced to being killed at Auschwitz. Vladek's father didn't want Fela to be alone, so he opted to go to the other side with her. Vladek lost so many people that he was close to that it is suggested that it is hard for him to be attached to something that could be taken away in just a moment's notice, or no notice at all. Items are the only thing that Vladek is allowed to hold on to and because these things, such as jewelry and gold, represent memories, such as the watch that his father-in-law gave him, and he becomes attached to these items. Mala, Vladek's second wife, is frustrated with him because he never buys anything new even though he may have money for it. Mala even says, "He's more attached to things than to people," (93). In the novel, we also see Vladek trying to detach himself from his wife. For instance, we notice that Vladek talks about Anja's depression at the beginning of their marriage and towards the end of her life. She took her life and in turn, Vladek lost a very important part of his life as well. He was attached to her, but due to the fact he lost her in the end, he has to cling to other things to keep himself detached from the fact that she's dead.

The genocide that Hitler has decided to commit against the Jewish people is evident when all of the Jewish people are told to go to the Dienst stadium to be registered. All of the Jews, even the sick and helpless, had to go to the stadium. This demonstrates the brutality of the Germans, the brutality that shows that they have no mercy against Jews, sick or healthy, young or old. When Vladek tells the story of the

registration he says, “And those on the bad side never came anymore home” (91). When he says this, it implies that these people were killed, whether by way of shooting or by way of gassing. This shows Hitler’s idea of the German Empire where no one who was of Jewish decent would be welcome in that territory. This is a slow, systematic genocide that will rid this territory of Jews so their deaths would give the Germans permission to occupy the territory.

When Vladek is telling of his account of the events during World War II, we see that Vladek terribly misses Anja. Towards the end of the novel, Vladek says, “After Anja died I had to make an order with everything... These papers had too many memories. So I burned them” (159). Vladek appears indifferent about burning the papers, but this action implies that he is trying to part from the memories of Anja and detach himself from Anja as a person because the memory takes a toll on him. His indifference to the situation suggests that he wants to be freed from those memories as well as take her memories from the space that he has. His take of “making an order with everything” is doing away with the attachments that he has to a person. Burning the papers is a form of detachment from a human because he doesn’t want to be engaged with the thought of being close to a person that was taken from him by depression.

During the reign of Hitler and his Third Reich, the authority decided to deport and commit genocide on the Jewish people to rid them of the territory to make room for the German expansion. “It was Hitler that adopted the policy of genocide in 1941 out of the conviction that Germany would triumph, that Jewish deaths would facilitate colonization, and that a delay in implementation was unnecessary” (Ritzheimer 665). Around 1941 was when Vladek and his family were forced out of their houses and their belongings were

taken from them. After Vladek and his family was put into a smaller house than what they owned, the Germans would come in and take furniture whenever they pleased. “The Germans looked to grab such furniture because in stores it wasn’t anymore to get” (Spiegelman 79). Although Anja’s mother was sick, and her father pleaded with the Germans not to take her bed, they plan to take her bed regardless because in this time they were allowed to. Vladek asserts that the Germans “always they did everything systematic,” (59). Because Hitler sought to move the Jewish people out of their own land to make room for the German expansion, they decided to take whatever the Jewish people owned because they planned for all Jewish people to be extinct by the time they won. This meant taking everything they owned because the Germans would utilize it after the Jewish people were dead. This systematic approach, moving them out of their homes into smaller places, taking their belongings from them, moving them into even smaller homes, and eventually eradicating the Jews from the small town was part of Hitler’s “Final Solution” to create a powerful German empire (Ritzheimer 665).

Maus is a unique story, in form and in content. It depicts complex characters as animals to ease the facts of the Holocaust into the minds of the readers. This graphic novel lends itself to the unique presentation of important information that the Common Core State Standards mandate be in the classroom. The graphic novel is used for its panels and power to depict images of how Jews were treated so Spiegelman could incorporate vital information that would not be fully conveyed through a standard novel. This unique way of telling a story gives way into a history, a history of the Jewish perspective during WWII with graphics that is not utilized in many other texts.

Chapter Four: Implementing Graphic Novels in Instruction

Throughout my student teaching experience with seventh grade ELA, I learned a lot from students in the way they start to understand concepts and how those concepts stay with them. Students learn by the information being directly linked to their lives using relevant examples. I taught my students about the conventions of writing cause-and-effect essays. The students found the cause by asking “why did this (the cause) happen?” and the effect by asking, “what happened as a result of this?” In discussion, I opened the floor to the students to give examples of cause-and-effect situations. Some ranged from answers, such as “The Great Depression happened because the stock market fell and as a result, unemployment rates rocketed,” to “the boy fell because he tripped and as a result, he broke his leg.” These were good answers because the students understood how to analyze cause-and-effect situations. One girl, a very quiet, but intelligent girl, raised her hand and said, “Goku was revived because of a wish from the Dragon Balls and as a result, he helped his son defeat Cell.” I started to think of other examples of cause-and-effect situations that could come out of the manga I read when I was their age. This was a learning opportunity for her and other students that were interested in this strange fiction. I wondered if students could connect something as popular as the manga to this concept I was teaching, then there must be numerous opportunities to implement graphic novels of all types into the Common Core ELA classroom to benefit their learning experience.

While *Maus* and *Persepolis* are the most commonly selected texts in the classroom if the teacher decides to use graphic novels, there are also other graphic novels that can be just as important, like manga. I decided to implement manga graphic novels in my future instruction because there are many approaches I can take to help my students

learn. The amazing thing about manga is that it can be read along with its media counterpart, anime. This meets the Common Core Standard R.7 which says, “Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words” (“College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading”). There are numerous novels today that have movies or plays as their alternate format, and teachers implement the media into the classroom so the students can draw comparisons and analyze the differences in the two texts. Using manga and anime to incorporate this diverse type of text capitalizes on meeting the Common Core Standards and on drawing inspiration from the interests of the students.

One way to implement manga into the classroom is to divide the classroom up into Literary Jigsaw Groups. This will allow different groups in the classroom to read different volumes in that series and once each group has completed the readings, the class will come together and explain what happened in each volume. This is important because not every group has to read the same text; however, each group will have to have thorough knowledge of the text to essentially teach their peers about the volume that they have been assigned to read.

Another way teachers can implement graphic novels into the classroom is putting the students into Literary Circles where the students will be grouped on their choice of graphic novel that they choose from the various types of graphic novels that are provided to them. This will enable students to discuss the novel in a more intimate setting to examine the deeper meaning of the text. With the help of their peers in their groups, students can engage in critical thinking when they read.

While students may be reading a manga or a graphic novel as a class, teachers can employ the think-aloud strategy to model thinking for the students while reading the graphic novel. Just as the teacher models thinking in canonical texts, the teacher would model thinking about what is happening in the panels and what words imply. This can be used to activate prior knowledge of the students or to make predictions about the text by looking at the images in the text.

Graphic novels can be implemented into the classroom just as we implement canonical texts. The graphic novel is a great genre of literature to implement into the classroom because it sparks the interests of students that are stimulated by seeing graphics. I believe that graphic novels grasp students' attention and make them want to read and understand more.

Epilogue: The Future of Text Complexity

Reading comprehension is an important skill for all people to have, and graphic novels address the types of reading comprehension goals that are set in place by the Common Core State Standards. These graphic novels that are the focus of the bulk of this thesis are great ways to implement the Standards into the classroom. Students can make educated inferences of the text by not only looking at the words on the page, but they must also consider how characters are depicted and how the frames are presented.

Reading each text—*Persepolis*, *Maus*, and *Bleach*—through a critical lens shows that these texts have deep structural meaning, meaning that is important to the reader. These critical readings show that each text is worthy of being read in a classroom because they invoke thought. The form of the graphic novel is a different style of writing, but it asks students to think differently about what is going on. Teaching graphic novels in the classroom will lead to a deeper understanding of words and pictures. Since teachers are asked to implement a variety of texts into the classroom, we have to alter what we teach and make room for other forms of texts such as the graphic novel.

Selecting Graphic Novels for Instruction

When selecting graphic novels it is important that we, as teachers, select texts that do not feed into the stereotypical super hero comic because we want the genre of graphic novels to be seen as a true type of literature that is able to be studied in our English Language Arts classrooms. This means we must find graphic novels that align to the text complexity model that is proposed by the Common Core State Standards. The three-part model measures text complexity through qualitative dimensions, quantitative dimensions, and reader and task considerations. Looking at the complexity of a graphic novel in the

sense of the qualitative measure lends itself to the meaning that students can extract from the text. “Qualitative dimensions and factors refer to those aspects of text complexity best measured or only measurable by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose...” (Common Core State Standards “Appendix A” 4). This means that teachers will have to assess how deeply the students will be able to look at a text with the images and the words in mind and see how they can find meaning through those two conventions. This is pointed out in each graphic novel that has been examined; the students will have to look deeply at the words and the images to garner meaning for themselves to make inferences.

The quantitative dimension of the graphic novel will rely on the text cohesion that is present; how does the text come together, how do the pictures and words come together to create a story? This is a factor that teachers will have to examine to choose what graphic novel best fits into their classroom. The reader and task consideration depends on the students and what is appropriate for them. For example, *Maus* may be appropriate for an eleventh grade class that is studying U.S. History.

Reading Graphic Novels in the Classroom

Reading graphic novels in the English Language Arts Classroom makes reading relevant to students because they will be more interested in learning. The Common Core State Standards are here to stay, and it is important to find the most effective and interesting ways to make the English Language Arts content interesting to students. Graphic novels, when read through a critical lens, can be helpful and insightful to the cultivation of student reading comprehension.

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