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# Teachers' Perceptions of the Use of Graphic Novels to Teach Reluctant Readers

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Teachers' Perceptions of the Use of Graphic Novels to Teach Reluctant Readers

by  
Bret Ginsberg

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the  
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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## Approval Page

This applied dissertation was submitted by Bret Ginsberg under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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## Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the *Student Handbook* of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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Bret Ginsberg  
Name

July 3, 2018  
Date

## Acknowledgments

Obtaining my doctorate has been a journey for me. When I started, I was a single man and had all the time in the world to work on it. Soon after, I met Nichole, the love of my life. We got married, had a child, and started our little family with her son Jayden. I could not be happier. I lost time to work on my paper and soon realized finishing my doctorate would take longer, but now I was doing it for my family. My wife gave me unconditional support and encouraged me to continue, even when I felt like giving up. This paper is dedicated to my wife, Nichole, and my beautiful children, Harrison and Jayden. I also thank my mother and brother for their support and believing in me.

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## Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of the Use of Graphic Novels to Teach Reluctant Readers. Bret Ginsberg, 2018: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. Keywords: graphic novels, reading instruction, middle school students, teacher perceptions, reluctant readers

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of teachers in a suburban private school in Florida serving prekindergarten through Grade 8 regarding the use of graphic novels to increase student motivation to read. The problem was teachers were concerned with students' inability to complete the required novels, demonstrate comprehension of deep meaning from the text, read silently, and read outside of school. Teachers raised serious concerns about the reading achievement of middle school students. Teachers also noted a frequent mismatch between the preference of the middle school reader and the instructional opportunities provided. The study was designed to help determine how the inclusion of graphic novels could benefit struggling and reluctant readers. The scope of the qualitative study was to understand the teachers' perceptions of the use of graphic novels in the classes. The utilization of graphic novels in the classroom has become more commonplace, yet they are still viewed as a new tool in schools.

A qualitative case study approach was chosen for this study. The study relied on data collected from 38 teachers who completed open-ended questions on a teacher questionnaire on graphic novels as well as curricula across several subjects.

Themes emerged from the coaxial coding of the data, revealing that teachers may choose to use graphic novels in their classes, but the school curriculum makes no mention of graphic novels. Teachers also noted that reluctant readers may have difficulty with reading or may simply not be interested in the material, which is not chosen by students. Finally, teachers were open to using graphic novels and considered them literature. Suggested best practices included using graphic novels as supplements to texts, to reach visual and reluctant readers, and to teach comprehension and vocabulary and well as subject matter. The teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the use of graphic novels in the classroom.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	1
Phenomenon of Interest.....	2
Background and Significance.....	3
Deficiencies in the Evidence .....	7
Audience.....	7
Definition of Terms .....	7
Purpose of the Study.....	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	9
Theoretical Framework .....	9
Visual Literacy .....	10
Building Literacy With Graphic Novels.....	11
The Definition of a Graphic Novel.....	13
The Rise of Graphic Novels in the Classroom .....	15
Reading Graphic Novels.....	18
Reading Comprehension and Graphic Novels .....	19
Incorporating Graphic Novels Into the Curriculum .....	22
Building a Graphic Novel Section in a School Library.....	27
Gender and the Graphic Novel .....	28
Opposition to Using Graphic Novels .....	29
Graphic Novel Studies.....	31
Research Questions .....	31
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	33
Aim of the Study .....	33
Qualitative Research Approach.....	33
Participants .....	34
Data Collection Tools.....	35
Role of the Researcher.....	36
Data Analysis.....	37
Ethical Considerations.....	38
Trustworthiness .....	39
Potential Researcher Bias .....	40
Chapter 4: Results.....	41
Sample .....	41
Findings for Research Question 1 .....	42
Findings for Research Question 2 .....	46
Findings for Research Question 3 .....	49
Findings for Research Question 4 .....	50
Member Checks.....	53

Chapter 5: Discussion.....	55
Overview .....	55
Expanding on Findings and Linking to Research.....	55
Limitations.....	59
Implications .....	60
Recommendations for Further Research .....	62
Summary and Final Conclusion .....	62
References .....	64
Appendix	
Graphic Novels—Teacher Questionnaire.....	78
Tables	
1 Time Frame and Procedures of the Study .....	37
2 Content Area of Participating Teachers ( <i>N</i> = 38).....	41
3 Summary of Research Questions and Emerging Themes .....	54
Figure	
Graphic Novels Can Interest Reluctant Readers: A Cartoon by Lunarbaboon .....	20

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem addressed by this study was the reluctance of many middle school students to read traditional novels presented in classroom curricula. Engaging students' interest in reading is no easy task (Richardson & Miller, 2001). Teachers have expressed concern with students' inability to complete the required novels, demonstrate deep meaning from the text, read silently, and read outside of school (Woodford, 2016). Reading is necessary, and comprehending different types of text is crucial to increase reading comprehension and result in higher achievement (Moss, Lapp, Grant, & Johnson, 2015). Middle school students read texts across varied disciplines and need to understand the importance of having the ability to comprehend these completely different texts (Moss et al., 2015). Teachers have raised serious concerns about the reading achievement of middle school students. Teachers also have noted a frequent mismatch between the preference of the middle school reader and the instructional opportunities provided (Little, McCoach, & Reis, 2014).

Schwertner (2008) noted that he had two types of readers in his class, the motivated reader and the reluctant reader. The motivated readers would read the required texts as well as seek out literature on their own. These readers enjoyed reading for pleasure and sought out independent reading time. The reluctant readers only read the required readings for class and showed a poor attitude towards the reading material. The reluctant readers also would participate minimally in group discussions about the literature.

## Phenomenon of Interest

The phenomenon explored in this study was the use of graphic novels in classrooms to help motivate student readers. The use of graphic novels may fill a void for a student who is reluctant to read a book (Schwertner, 2008). Struggling readers reading 1–3 years below grade level (Lettenmaier, 2013) may particularly benefit from reading graphic novels. In one study, Sloboda, Brenna, and Kosowan-Kirk (2014) noticed students who were thought to be reluctant readers were actually struggling readers. Many teachers have seen a decline in recreational reading as well (Heard, 2015), and graphic novels may interest students.

Graphic novels have become popular, fueled by the pop culture landscape, and often are new and innovative works (Rednour, 2017). With graphic novels being so popular, some teachers have chosen to use them in classrooms. The purpose of this study was to gain teachers' viewpoints about using the graphic novel to help students who have no interest in reading a traditional novel. Educators' perspectives on the use of graphic novels in the class are important, as they are course instructors. Instructors may choose the books to be used in class as well as how the material is taught. Determining how instructors feel about graphic novels, particularly with regards to reluctant readers, will add to the knowledge base about utilizing graphic novels in the classroom to increase middle school students' interest in reading.

Finding the right types of material is vital (Danielson, 2016). An educator at the research site added a graphic novel version of *Fahrenheit 451* to accompany the text-only version. The educator stated,

Ever since I introduced the graphic novel, the kids in the class are more eager to

read the book, and I have even noticed that when they annotate the novels, they are finding more to annotate about than when they read the traditional novel. I think the images give them more to go on and they can see things more clearly. (J. McCallister, personal communication, December 17, 2017)

### **Background and Significance**

Many English teachers at the local research site reporting difficulty motivating their students to read traditional novels, defined as a novel with one or fewer pictures per chapter (Jennings, Rule, & Vander Zanden, 2014). One teacher noted having difficulty getting students to read the novels (T. Davies, personal communication, September 15, 2016), whereas other teachers said the students had trouble with reading a classic novel and performed poorly on written essays and short-answer questions. These struggling or reluctant readers were having difficulty with their classwork and said the material was too hard to read and understand. (T. Davies, personal communication, October 1, 2016). Another teacher came to this conclusion on students reading novels:

Kids are overstimulated and do not like the quiet idea of reading, they lack the patience for it. It is not about new literature versus old literature, it is about patience. The act of reading is too slow of an activity for them, and the gratification is not immediate. (M. Alvero, personal communication, October 1, 2016)

When asked about using graphic novels, one teacher responded, “Using graphic novels is something I have thought to use before with my students who are not motivated to read. However, when I mentioned it to my students, the girls in the class were highly against it” (J. McCallister, personal communication, September 15, 2016). Another

teacher told me, “I have tried using graphic novels in my classroom, but the students had a hard time reading it. Perhaps I should have given a lesson on how to read a graphic novel first” (M. Garcia, September 15, 2016). A third English teacher asked about using graphic novels stated,

Students should be able to and be encouraged to read any material they like. The important thing is they are reading, and whether they realize it or not have a better chance at becoming a lifelong reader if they are reading things that encourage them to continue reading. (M. Alvero, personal communication, October 1, 2016)

Teachers at the site have the freedom to add graphic novels to the curriculum if they choose. Gaining teachers’ perceptions of graphic novels was useful as some teachers had tried using them and others had not. Research is continual on the topics of what students want to read and whether a teacher can implement other reading materials into the curriculum.

The study took place at a private school in Florida serving prekindergarten through Grade 8. The school population in 2014 (the most recent data available from the National Center for Education Statistics) was 48.3% White, 26.3% Hispanic, 16.9% Asian, 3.4% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 3.4% mixed race, and 1.7% Black (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

My title in the school is administrative associate. I stand in for teachers who are absent from school or have to leave in emergency situations, monitor lunches, supervise student arrival and dismissal, and assist with building-wide discipline issues. Also, I head the middle school math team and direct several clubs. In this role, I have worked with almost every middle school teacher in the school at some point. I had the full backing of

the administrative team to conduct a study at the site.

Many students today are not reading books at home (Stanny, n.d.). The idea of students reading for pleasure seems to have vanished (Ludden, 2014). When the research site has a book fair, many students do not buy books. Instead, they buy items like posters, pens, markers, and rulers. English teachers noted that students do not read or even open their novels.

Reading is an important part of growing up and becoming a functioning adult (Paige & Magpuri-Lavell, 2014). In middle school, one of the main ideas of reading is to access knowledge found in the text (Paige & Magpuri-Lavell, 2014). According to Job and Coleman (2016), students from fifth grade and beyond are expected to read for content and comprehension.

Teachers should understand the importance of motivation to read for students based on their gender and age (McGeown, Duncan, Griffiths, & Stothard, 2015). This understanding will help the teacher choose reading activities of interest to students (McGeown et al., 2015). Daniels and Steres (2011) noted when teachers of middle school students prioritized reading and students became active participants in reading, students were motivated to read and viewed it as important. Reading is an essential part of school, but to motivate some students to read, teachers must make reading something the students want to do, not something they must do (Daniels & Steres, 2011).

Graphic novels may be beneficial in helping to decrease disparities in academic achievement among different races and ages (Downey, 2009). Graphic novels are most likely to be used as a tool for reluctant readers and a motivator for those students who do not enjoy reading (Connors, 2015). Middle school students show motivation in reading

when the material is relevant to their own lives. Students are also motivated to read when peer interaction is used in the class (Guthrie, Klauda, & Ho, 2013). Researchers have found a strong positive correlation between reading achievement and those students who read outside of school for pleasure (Mucherah & Ambrose-Stahl, 2014).

Using graphic novels is one way teachers can improve student literacy. Adding graphic novels to a school's curriculum can be beneficial. Connors (2015) stated that although many teachers believe graphic novels lack the complexity to tie to the Common Core State Standards and prepare students for standardized tests, graphic novels do provide a sophisticated environment for the negotiating of meaning by using the idea of multimodal literacy. Connors (2015) also stated educators could use graphic novels to help students engage critically, with ways of making sense of the world around them.

The Common Core State Standards include an emphasis on digital print, encouraging schools to include sophisticated and challenging texts (Tomasevich, 2013). The inclusion of graphic novels is specifically mentioned in the Common Core State Standards to be a part of Grade 5–12 standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Using graphic novels to analyze a particular skill such as setting in a story is an effective way to teach students skills (Tomasevich, 2013). Furthermore, using graphic novels is a way to differentiate instruction (Tomasevich, 2013). Graphic novels can be used to teach complex skills such as finding the main idea, comparing and contrasting, and evaluating the quality of the writing, while using visuals to help students break down these complex skills (Tomasevich, 2013).

Clark (2013) studied preservice teachers using graphic novels to teach history class and reported noteworthy findings recommending teachers consider using graphic

novels. Each teacher in the preservice program found that graphic novels were valuable in the classroom (Clark, 2013). Teachers also offered reasons graphic novels might not be added to a curriculum; one reason was that the community might not respond well to the use of graphic novels. As every teacher has a unique way of teaching, it is important to know how teachers feel about using certain materials in their classroom (Barberos, Gozalo, & Padayogdog, n.d.). Thus, understanding teachers' perceptions of using graphic novels in the classroom to teach reluctant readers is valuable.

### **Deficiencies in the Evidence**

There is not a lot of literature on using graphic novels to motivate reluctant middle school readers. Much of the literature on graphic novels focused on high school and college students. This study adds to literature on how teachers feel about using graphic novels to help motivate reluctant readers. Hammond (2009) suggested a survey be conducted to find out if and how teachers are using graphic novels. Graphic novels can help students learn to read, get their attention, or help students who are not interested in reading (Yildirim, 2013).

### **Audience**

English teachers who are looking for a way to involve and engage students in reading would benefit from reading this study. School librarians and administrators also may find the study valuable. School personnel, such as guidance counselors and extra support teachers, may find this study useful to engage readers who are often reluctant to read a traditional novel.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Graphic novels.** For this study, a graphic novel is defined as a long comic book

that needs a bookmark (Spiegelman, 2013). The graphic novel is an extended comic book that treats nonfictional as well as fictional plots and themes with the depth and subtlety typically associated with traditional novels and extended nonfictional texts (Tabachnick, 2009).

**Literacy.** Literacy is a complex set of cognitive skills and social practices that involve people's use of one or more modes (e.g., print, image, music, color) to make meaning (Connors, 2015).

**Reluctant reader.** The reluctant reader shows doubt and is not willing or eager to read. The person is not unable to read but will not read voluntarily (Bennett, 2016).

**Schema theory.** This theory posits how knowledge is stored, based on knowledge being organized in units within systems (Brozo, Moorman, & Meyer, 2014).

**Sequential art.** Images are displayed in succession to convey a message or a story (Brozo et al., 2014).

**Traditional novel.** A traditional novel, unlike a graphic novel, has one or fewer pictures per chapter (Jennings et al., 2014).

**Visual literacy.** This term refers to the ability to interpret, negotiate, and make meaning from information presented in the form of an image, as well as to produce visual images (Bakis, 2012a).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of teachers in a private school in Florida regarding their students' use of graphic novels to increase their motivation to read. The study helped determine how the inclusion of graphic novels can be used to benefit struggling and reluctant middle school readers.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

For this study, diverse topics were researched to gain an understanding of what other practitioners have done before, as well as to learn about different aspects of graphic novels and how they relate to the current study. The chapter begins with a brief explanation of the theoretical framework of this study: Brozo et al.'s (2014) schema theory. Then, visual literacy is explained, followed by a discussion of building literacy with graphic novels. The graphic novel is then defined, and the rise of graphic novels in the classroom is discussed. Literature on reading graphic novels and impact on reading comprehension is reviewed. Incorporating graphic novels into various curricula as well as building a graphic novel section in a school library are described. Gender is discussed in relation to the graphic novel, followed by a review of opposition to using graphic novels in the classroom. The chapter ends with the research questions guiding this study. Saturation of the literature was reached after extensive journal searches led to no new information on the subject, as well as books repeating the same information.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The schema theory as identified by Brozo et al. (2014) was used as the theoretical framework for this study. All people develop a metaphorical place in their mind where knowledge is stored (Brozo et al., 2014). The teachers involved in this study were expected to create a graphic novel schema after completing the survey. Teachers would create a place in their mind where they might store information about using graphic novels for helping reluctant readers.

The theoretical framework for this study came from the work of Brozo et al. (2014), who noted the theoretical perspectives of schema theory. All people develop

schemas based on personal experiences. Brozo et al. explained,

When new information is encountered, no matter in what form, it is assimilated into existing, related schema. For example, when a child first encounters a dog, the child creates a “dog schema.” Each new encounter with a dog enriches the existing schema. (p. 7)

Schema theory fits into this study by teachers answering questions about graphic novels, since this survey was a new encounter with teachers and their thoughts about graphic novels. More importantly, the use of graphic novels can activate student interest in reading by engaging their prior experience, or schemas. Gavigan (2014) stated teachers need to build bridges using the content that is taught and existing schemas, or learners’ previous experiences. Introducing graphic novels can help teachers refocus attention on the knowledge structures that students bring with them to school (Brozo et al., 2014).

### **Visual Literacy**

Graphic novels engage readers in two modes or types of literacy: complex reading skills, or critical literacy, and interpreting images, or visual literacy (Dallacqua, 2012). Graphic novels are a recognized form to support students who learn not only from reading but also from visual clues (Huseyin, 2015). “Visual literacy is education that enhances understanding of the role of function of images in representation and communication, especially in the media” (Newfield, 2011, p. 82). Picture books such as graphic novels can help serve a pedagogical function and teach children how to decode and cultivate reading skills (Joseph, 2012).

Joseph (2012) also stated that these types of books could help introduce new readers to the idea that books can bring pleasure and power. Many educators believe that

the graphic novel can be an important tool to help students learn visual literacy skills (Connors, 2015). The use of graphic novels can be a potent tool in education. Burmack (2008) noted, according to research from the 3M Corporation, that humans process visuals 60,000 times faster than text. Images are powerful due to the way humans are wired physiologically (Burmack, 2008). Teaching students to be visually literate is as important as teaching them how to read (Froschauer, 2012). The artwork in graphic novels uses visual clues, which help students figure out word meaning (Crowley, 2015). The Association of College and Research Libraries (2011) has competency standards for learning using visual literacy.

Color is the major part of an image, according to Burmack (2008). Color visuals increase a student's desire to read by up to 80% (Burmack, 2008). Burmack also noted that color has a positive effect on comprehension and recall.

Designing visual literacy for students with disabilities can be beneficial for helping these students demonstrate what they know (Kluth, 2008). Students enjoy learning in an environment where visual supports are provided. Kluth (2008) explained students with a disability often have trouble with traditional presentations, which contain content lecture and whole-group discussion. Everyone sees an image as they want to see it, one of the boundless parts about reading a graphic novel. This perspective can lead to creative discussions, with students interpreting different things happening in an image (Connors, 2015).

### **Building Literacy With Graphic Novels**

Addressing literacy in schools today has become a top priority (National Literacy Trust, 2016). Many schools are looking for ways to make students become readers for

life. Some students complain that reading is boring and at times difficult to comprehend. Some students who are considered reluctant readers are in fact able to read well; their interest just depends on the material they are reading (Crawford, 2004). Many young readers prefer comics and graphic novels to traditional books due to the pictures that help them better understand the story.

Teachers are also using graphic novels to help students in a response to intervention program (Smetana & Grisham, 2011). Helping students in a response to intervention program read with graphic novels is a way to increase students' excitement about reading (Smetana & Grisham, 2011).

Time also has been a factor for students not wanting to read. A traditional novel can take a long time to read, especially when a student is struggling to comprehend everything that is happening. When a graphic novel is used, a student can read that book in a single sitting or over a few days. The pictures help the student understand what is happening in the story (Sabeti, 2013).

According to the research, mixing words and images is an excellent way to foster comprehension and memory skills (Carter, 2007). Students have a higher success rate when they encode words using visuals, as opposed to encoding them verbally. Literacy requires the reader to engage much more in the act of reading. Readers need to be able to create images in their mind as they read; this is where graphic novels come into play (Versaci, 2008). To foster literacy, students should be engaged in reading materials that reward meaningful analysis; help them make connections with their lives; and make them active members of the literary education, rather than consumers of it (Versaci, 2008). According to Versaci (2008), one of the best kinds of engaging reading material that

achieves these goals is the graphic novel. Using various texts in helping to build literacy is important. Every student has his or her way of obtaining factual information and processing that information. Therefore, using different formats is important to help nurture different learning styles (Fleishhacker, 2017).

The mixture of words and visual aids to convey messages occurs frequently (Carter, 2007). Public signs guide people to food, hotels, and dangers on the road, all through the use of text and images. Showing students text alongside visuals is similarly as essential as instructing students to read text without them. In some cases, visuals are much more important than words. For example, pictures for traffic signals are usually wordless, requiring the driver to either know what they mean or to decipher the meaning. No matter the application, the end goal is to join reading proficiency with visuals. Students should choose reading materials that interest them; pictures combined with words can interest a variety of students, including reluctant readers (Fleishhacker, 2017).

### **The Definition of a Graphic Novel**

After many years of publishing comic books, publishers began to print graphic novels, initially taking stories that spanned over several comic books and placed them into a book format, thus creating the graphic novel (McCloud, 1993). Authors had the idea to skip writing individual comics and to tell a story in graphic novel form. Many stories were stand-alone tales, which focused on a superhero or told an original story created by the author (McCloud, 1993).

Comic books and graphic novels are not the same. Although the authors of both formats tell stories, there is a significant difference between the two. The graphic novel focuses on a more complex story, which contains multiple characters and intertwining

story arcs, whereas a comic book focuses on a much simpler story, usually told in a single issue of a comic book series (Baetens & Frey, 2015). They also differ in the how they are published; a graphic novel is released as a book, and a comic is more of a magazine. Graphic novels are also distributed differently; they are sold through bookstores and comic books shops. They are aimed at the regular consumer and not just fans of comic books (Baetens & Frey, 2015). Spiegelman (2013) noted, “It’s a great marketing term. What I called *Maus* while I was working on it was a long comic book that needed a bookmark and has to be reread” (para. 21).

Another type of graphic novel is the nonfiction graphic novel. *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb*, by Fetter-Vorm (2012), tells the history of the atomic bomb in a graphic novel, which is a fine testament to the power of graphic storytelling in serious nonfiction (Legro, 2012). In a conversation with Jonathan Fetter-Vorm, he said,

I would classify nonfiction graphic novels as any sequential visual narrative that derives its authority from documentary evidence of the testimony of lived experience. That is a provisional definition. . . . No one has ever asked me to put it into words. (J. Fetter-Vorm, personal communication, January 22, 2018)

Fleishhacker (2017) noted science-based nonfiction graphic novels combine humor and eye-popping images to teach students science topics. These types of graphic works engage students as if they were there in the moment, activating their imaginations while they learn about biology, anthropology, archaeology, anatomy, or physics (Fleishhacker, 2017).

Graphic novels can be useful in helping students improve reading skills. Moeller (2011) stated graphic novels could help to improve reading skills of students whose

native language is English, as well as students learning English as a second language. The graphic novel is similar to a regular novel, except the reader uses both verbal and visual clues to arrive at the meaning of the work (Tabachnick, 2015). Moeller (2013) noted that graphic novels are a format and not a literature genre. The distinction is important, because graphic novels can have many genres.

McCloud (1993), an expert in the field of graphic novels, stated, “The first step in any such effort is to clear our minds of all preconceived notions about comics. Only by starting from scratch can we discover the full range of possibilities comics offer” (p.

199). Satrapi, the author of a graphic autobiography, stated,

I had the idea about comics that everyone else had about comics. It’s really for kids, or adolescents, then I read *Maus* . . . and I realized, it was just a medium like any other to express yourself. In my mind the images and the text, they are not separated. (IFC News, 2007)

Another explanation of the definition of a graphic novel is the following:

Graphic novels are similar to comic books because they use sequential art to tell a story. Unlike comic books, graphic novels are stand-alone stories with more complex plots. Collections of short stories that have been previously published as individual comic books are also considered graphic novels. (“What Are Graphic Novels?,” 2007, para. 2)

### **The Rise of Graphic Novels in the Classroom**

Graphic novels have become more popular due to digital technology (Lubin, 2014). The graphic novel emerged from comic books, which were multimodal and an early form of hypertext, because words and images were used in the process of sequential

art (Brozo et al., 2014). Using the visual cues is an important part of reading graphic novels and can help students navigate through difficult reading strategies (Brozo & Mayville, 2012). Brozo and Mayville (2012) argued that graphic novels are a real-world teaching resource that comes from the everyday lives of youth; when put in the hands of skilled teachers, graphic novels can heighten student engagement, build their knowledge of disciplinary topics, and expand students' literacy. The use of graphic novels in schools has increased since reports have been shared widely about their potential to help in the classroom (Moeller, 2011).

According to Gavigan (2014), graphic novels have emerged as a top literary format among visually literate youth. Understanding or learning new knowledge is the process of relating to the unknown (Gavigan, 2014). Teachers need to build bridges using the content that is taught and existing schemas, or learners' previous experiences (Gavigan, 2014). Introducing graphic novels can help teachers refocus attention on the knowledge structures that students bring with them to school (Brozo et al., 2014).

The School Board of Calgary found graphic novels similar in literature structure to traditional novels (National Council of Teachers of English, 2005). They contain a beginning, middle, and end. Main characters are also established, and they change through conflicts in the story (National Council of Teachers of English, 2005). The biggest difference between a traditional novel and graphic novel is the graphic novel's text is both written and visual (National Council of Teachers of English, 2005).

Graphic novels are being seen in a new light by many educators, and with the Common Core State Standards placing importance on using informational text, many schools are recognizing the potential of using graphic novels for helping students reach

grade-level Common Core State Standards (Bakis, 2012b). Every student is required to read a novel at some point in his or her school career. Reading graphic novels promotes better reading skills, improves comprehension, and complements other areas of the curriculum (McTaggart, 2008). According to McTaggart (2008), students who, due to a physiological, environmental, or cultural background, are unable to form pictures in their head while reading the printed word are not reading. These students are simply identifying and recalling words; the words give them no meaning and do not bring enjoyment to the reader (McTaggart, 2008).

Yildirim (2013) noted that graphic novels could be used in the classroom with an array of purposes. They have the ability to facilitate comprehension by combining images with text, and images along with the text are especially helpful for visual learners. Educators who have used graphic novels in their classrooms have given positive feedback on their use as a pedagogical tool (Yildirim, 2013). Reading graphic novels in the classroom can offer many benefits for struggling readers. Struggling readers comprise the bottom 10% of their class; they are not able to decode or comprehend text well, so they spend much less time trying to read books (Green, 2010). Many struggling readers will often guess at what the words are. Also, they will use pictures associated with the story to help figure out the meaning of words they are reading (Green, 2010). Bakis (2012a) suggested she can teach more graphic novels in the same amount of time as she would spend teaching lengthier texts; hence, she can introduce students to a wide array of stories and genres, which help keep students engaged. Bakis (2012a) also noted when students read graphic novels in the classroom, they can reread the novels for deeper understanding, which is often difficult to do with traditional novels.

Although the research is scarce, there is reasonable evidence that graphic novels motivate reluctant readers, provide assistance for struggling readers, foster visual literacy, and support English language learners (Brozo et al., 2014). Graphic novels are useful for teaching new reading skills as well as introducing students to new vocabulary (Alverson, 2014). The graphic novel also reinforces the left-to-right sequence, which is an important skill for an early reader to have (Alverson, 2014).

### **Reading Graphic Novels**

Reading a graphic novel is different from reading a traditional novel. A traditional novel is read from left to right and usually contains few to no pictures, whereas a graphic novel contains many pictures. Graphic novels are usually but not always read from left to right. Dialogue can be read from starting at a bottom panel and then moving to a top panel (Monnin, 2013). The dialogue in a graphic novel can sometimes be read in the left column, continue down the page, and then end on top right of the page. Sometimes the dialogue can even move diagonally on a page. Maniace (2014) concluded from her study that if a teacher uses graphic novels in the classroom, students need specific instructions on how to read them. Someone new to comics or a graphic novel may initially experience confusion on how to read the material. Many people who try and read a comic for the first time follow the Z-path, reading left to right and down (Cohn & Campbell, 2015).

Paying attention to pictures in a graphic novel is just as or more important than reading the words. The pictures help tell the story and move it along (Friese, 2013). Friese (2013) explained the first time she read a graphic novel she had no idea what she had read. She admits that she just read the words without looking at the picture. Friese realized she had to retrain her brain; slowing down was important, and taking the time to

look at the visuals was as important as reading the text. Reading a graphic novel is very different from reading a traditional novel because of all the visuals. Teachers cannot assume that a graphic novel can be given to a student without a brief explanation on how to read through it.

Monnin (2013) identified 11 types of graphic novel panels, whereas McCloud (1993) identified the six types of gutters (the space between the panels), where the reader has to infer what happens between panels. Understanding how to read from panel to panel and gutter to gutter will help a reader navigate through a graphic novel with ease. Not only are the panel and gutters important to understand when reading a graphic, but according to both McCloud and Monnin, word balloons also are an important part of a graphic novel.

McCloud (1993) stressed the many different types of word balloons. Whereas some are common and most readers will understand them immediately, for other types, the reader has to learn what the word balloons mean (McCloud, 1993). Some graphic novels contain word balloons that have very faint text, indicating that the person is whispering. Another type of word balloon might be easier to infer, such as one dripping with ice, clueing the reader that the person talking is being unfriendly to someone.

### **Reading Comprehension and Graphic Novels**

Monnin (2013) and Brenna (2013) noted that reading graphic novels can help increase students' reading comprehension, because students use the images to help them recall what has happened in the story. Maderazo et al. (2010) found that when students put pictures and words together, they developed better critical thinking skills and comprehension. Students also are more likely to improve their reading skills when they

are not made to read, especially when they have little to no interest in the material (McTaggart, 2008). Meuer (2016) noted that students are better able to retain plot elements after reading a graphic novel and also remembered graphic novels days after reading them.

**Benefits of graphic novels with reluctant readers.** Motivating students to read can be a daunting task. A cartoon by Lunarbaboon (see Figure) shows a girl who is bored by reading, but when her father turns her book into a graphic novel, she responds, “Reading is awesome.”



*Figure.* Graphic novels can interest reluctant readers: A cartoon by Lunarbaboon. Reprinted with permission from “Graphic,” by Lunarbaboon, 2017, retrieved from <http://www.lunarbaboon.com/comics/graphic.html>. © 2017 Lunarbaboon.

This cartoon in the Figure demonstrates the power that a graphic novel can have on motivating someone to read. According to Bakis (2012a), students will read a graphic novel and not just pretend to follow along with the teacher. Not only can graphic novels help students who are less motivated about reading, they also can also offer various benefits, such as students wanting to read more and increasing literacy skills (Tomasevich, 2013).

Many students also find the experience with visuals aesthetically pleasurable (Bakis, 2012a). Children look and recognize before they can speak (Berger, 2006). Jennings et al. (2014) noted when using graphic novels with students, reading comprehension increased, and they developed a deeper understanding of the material.

Graphic novels are not just used to target reluctant readers. McTaggart (2008) noted that graphic novels would benefit strong readers as well as reluctant readers. Graphic novels serve as an equalizer between academically achieving and struggling learners (McTaggart, 2008). Students tend to develop a sense of togetherness when they feel a common interest and passion for what they are doing (McTaggart, 2008). The pairings of words and images can give learning a jump by creating new ways to create memories and associations (Alverson, 2014).

**English language learners and graphic novels.** English language learners also can benefit from the use of graphic novels. Howard (2012) found English language learner students preferred to read graphic novels, especially fiction stories. Graphic novels can be used to bridge the gaps between reading levels, and struggling readers develop necessary reading skills (Wetta, 2013). The novels are also helpful for visual learners; the reader must decipher what is happening between text and the images. The

reader must look at the facial expression and body language of a character to determine the mood; this will replace the learner having to read through long text passages to learn how the character is feeling (Howard, 2012). Graphic novels also teach advanced reading skills, such as inference, which can be very beneficial to a struggling reader.

According to Basal, Aytan, and Demir (2016), the use of visuals and text in a story line is more efficient in teaching idiomatic expressions than using traditional methods. When these two modalities are used together, they help create strong connections between the visuals and the figurative idioms. In a study by Sloboda et al. (2014), when using graphic novels to teach comprehension, the researchers noticed an increase in the students' vocabulary. Sloboda et al. credited the increase in vocabulary to the graphic novel's use of sequential art.

### **Incorporating Graphic Novels Into the Curriculum**

The use of graphic novels can drive current traditional curriculum goals, accompany the instruction of new literacies, offer new topics with which teachers and students can engage, and enable new ways of learning (Schwarz, 2010). Teachers first used graphic novels in English literature classrooms as a teaching tool for struggling or reluctant readers (Brozo et al., 2014). Graphics combined with text can make decoding and comprehending the story a simpler task (Brozo et al., 2014). However, age-appropriate graphic novels can be incorporated into many subject areas (McTaggart, 2008). Many graphic novels are available to help supplement history, literature, science, math, and history (McTaggart, 2008). In addition to using graphic novels to teach the core subjects, McTaggart (2008) gave suggestions for using them to teach music, health, and art. McTaggart also suggested that the graphic novels are not a replacement for the

required text but should be used to supplement the subject. Using graphic nonfiction can make a dry topic more appealing (Fagan & Fagan, 2011). Perhaps this is why teachers are using graphic novels to teach many literary skills; they can use them to teach across the curriculum and cover almost any subject area.

**Graphic novels in history classes.** Graphic novels can be beneficial in teaching history. Many graphic novels are based on historical events, and when paired with history textbooks, students can open up their world to a new way to learn about the past (Cromer & Clark, 2007). Traditionally, students' development of historical, social, and political understanding relied heavily on the textbook (Brozo et al., 2014). Students were taught to memorize important dates and facts from history (Brozo et al., 2014). Rich, multilayered graphic novels are one means to help students appreciate the complexity of history (Cromer & Clark, 2007). Schneider (2016) noticed Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* was a powerful learning tool and could assist teacher instruction about the Holocaust.

According to Alverson (2014), rather than having their students read for specific dates from history, teachers would assign their class to read a graphic novel such as Butzer's (2008) *Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel* paired with a history textbook. Students can scan the graphic novel, and it makes distant events live and breathe (Alverson, 2014).

For example, to lay the foundation of a lesson on the pre-Civil Rights period of the early 20th century, a graphic novel such as Johnson and Pleece's (2009) *Incognegro* may be used along with the textbook (Brozo et al., 2014). This graphic novel tells a pre-Civil Rights story, using text and visuals to give the students an understanding of what life was like during that period (Brozo et al., 2014). After students have read the book, they are instructed to recreate important scenes from the novel, only using present-day

speech and slang (Brozo et al., 2014). Students do not have to be artists for the assignment, as they can use a website that allows students to create comic book panels (Brozo et al., 2014).

**Graphic novels in science courses.** The use of graphic novels in a science classroom can have positive benefits (Brozo et al., 2014): (a) increasing student attention and engagement; (b) “fostering greater science learning for all students, particularly reluctant learners” (p. 77); (c) increasing higher order and critical thinking; (d) offering access to science concepts; (e) clarifying misconceptions; (f) “making science learning fun” (p. 77); and (g) allowing unique options to assess student knowledge. Science-related graphic novels use a variety of dialogue and images; students can interpret science concepts through an accessible and unique format (Brozo et al., 2014). This format can open a gateway to science for many reluctant learners (Brozo et al., 2014). Brozo and Mayville (2012) described using graphic novels as a supplement to the exploration of science units. Students remember the science from an entertaining story because the knowledge is presented in context (Brozo et al., 2014).

Fleishhacker (2017) identified numerous science graphic novels. Many are nonfiction graphic novels, such as *Human Body Theater: A Nonfiction Revue* (Wicks, 2015), which teaches complex biology topics with a vaudeville flair (Fleishhacker, 2017). Science biographies presented as graphic novels also can be a tool for teaching about famous scientists, and these graphic novels contain illustrations depicting these scientists’ contributions to the world as well as their experiments (Fleishhacker, 2017). Fiction novels can be used to tell stories based on ideas that are yet to come to fruition, such as time travel (Fleishhacker, 2017). Younger students can even learn science with the

*Batman Science* graphic novels for Grades 3–9 (Fleishhacker, 2017).

**Graphic novels in mathematics courses.** Integrating graphic novels into a math curriculum may not be as difficult as it sounds (Hughes, 2016). It is possible with properly researched novels, such as *The Manga Guide to Calculus* by Kojima and *The Manga Guide to Linear Algebra* by Takahshi (as cited in Hughes, 2016). Students taking math courses need to learn a variety of skills, ranging from learning facts to procedures (Brozo et al., 2014). Developing the capacity for new ways to learn helps students expand their understanding and solutions to new problems (Brozo et al., 2014). The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (2003) made an important connection between math and literacy: “Students who have opportunities, encouragement, and support for speaking, writing, reading and listening in mathematics classes reap dual benefits: They communicate to learn mathematics and they learn to communicate mathematically” (p. 60).

During a visit to geometry classroom, Brozo et al. (2014) met a teacher who used graphic novels in the classroom to introduce and help comprehend difficult concepts. The teacher incorporated stories, books, and articles into the geometry course without sacrificing any essential content, while increasing the interest level of the students (Brozo et al., 2014). *Introducing Fractals: A Graphic Guide* by Lesmoir-Gordon and Edney (as cited in Brozo et al., 2014) takes a complicated subject and, with the use of text and visuals, makes the material easier to learn.

**The graphic novel and 21st century learning.** The ability to communicate effectively in the 21st century necessitates multiple literacies (Connors, 2015). Versaci (2008) recommended using graphic novels to teach children, as using words along with

images helps students with their communication skills when engaging in discussions. Traditional teaching involves many different types of material to differentiate the lesson. Brozo et al. (2014) described one observation of a teacher, who used a graphic organizer, study guide, and a textbook. Students read the textbook to answer the questions from the study guide. Upon completion of the study guide, the teacher led a discussion on the material (Brozo et al., 2014). Once the material had been reviewed, students were encouraged to review the study guide to prepare for a test (Brozo et al., 2014). Conversely, the 21st century teacher is fluent in the language of newer technologies and media, and his or her teaching heightens student engagement and learning (Brozo et al., 2014). The use of graphic novels in a lesson eliminates barriers between students' outside-of-school interests and literacies and the teacher's classroom practices (Brozo et al., 2014); the inclusion of the graphic novel allows students to read material they might never have tried before.

**Schemas form a complex filing system.** Understanding new information and gaining new knowledge is the process of relating to the new to the known (Brozo et al., 2014). Teaching is the process of building a bridge between the content to be learned and students' existing schemas or knowledge structures. Learning is accommodating, that is, adjusting, both the new information in relation to what is already known to the new information. Too much of current curriculum efforts, including Common Core State Standards, focuses only on new content. Graphic novels can help teachers refocus attention on the existing knowledge structures that students bring with them to school (Brozo et al., 2014).

## **Building a Graphic Novel Section in a School Library**

Since 2000, the number of graphic novels has increased exponentially, with some having appeared on recommended book lists (Williams & Peterson, 2009). A graphic novel section in a school library can open the door to a whole new genre of reading. However, many librarians are reluctant to add a graphic novel section (Pattee, 2014). School librarians must act as leaders and create an environment in which students can develop their attitudes and capacities (Gavigan, 2012). Stephens (2014) noted that comics and graphic novels differ vastly from a textual narrative. Graphic novels can be found in student-centered library collections (Stephens, 2014). Still, many librarians resist the inclusion of graphic novels in their school libraries and devalue the reading pleasure of students who appreciate the visual text (Stephens, 2014). School libraries that provide a wide selection of high-quality reading material enable students to choose books that appeal to their general interest and will motivate them to read more (Fleishhacker, 2017).

School and public librarians must create a section for young readers to find books that appeal to them (Pattee, 2014). Librarians have begun to recognize the importance of reorganizing the space for teen readers. This new section would be composed of a variety of multimedia, ranging from graphic novels to teen novels (Pattee, 2014). The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010) also explained the significance of comprehending different types of media:

To be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and

extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new. (p. 4)

### **Gender and the Graphic Novel**

Emerging research has shown graphic novels have an abundance of educational value when used with male students (Tomasevich, 2013). Tonegato (2012) stated that using graphic novels with struggling male readers helped as a motivational factor.

Moeller (2011) conducted a study of reading graphic novels among high school girls and boys. The boys in the study were surprised at the number of girls who wanted to be in the study (Moeller, 2011). One boy commented on how he thought reading graphic novels was a cultural thing, and he did not expect many girls would be interested in reading graphic novels. This led Moeller (2011) to determine the reading of graphic novels is in fact associated with gender. During discussions of the graphic novels, Moeller (2011) noticed the girls discussed the stories differently than the boys. The boys were interested in the actions taken or not taken by the characters, whereas the girls were interested in the characters' feelings and relationships with other characters.

When Moeller (2011) started out to do her research, she noted the majority of graphic novel readers were male. Moeller's (2011) attempt to get female students to read graphic novels was first met with resistance, with many girls saying, "Those are boy books" (p. 1). Moeller (2011) concluded from her study that male students were drawn to the vivid colors and nonfiction; both were characteristics of male interest, whereas female students enjoyed books with deep meaning and character relationships.

To interest females in graphic novels, graphic novel publisher Papercutz launched a graphic novel imprint called *Charmz* (Alverson, 2015). According to Alverson (2015), *Charmz* focuses on relationship-driven stories aimed towards preteen and early teen girls.

These new graphic novels align with what Moeller's (2011) study concluded about females wanting to read stories focused on the relationships between characters and not too action heavy. Each creative team behind *Charmz* graphic novels features at least one female writer; the publishing company indicated this might help make the novels appealing to a younger female audience (Alverson, 2015).

Moeller (2011) also noted boys' enjoyment of reading differed from the girls. Whereas both groups enjoyed the graphic novels, girls preferred to read a traditional novel, using their imaginative skills in their reading experience. Whereas the girls liked to use their imagination, the boys enjoyed the illustrations, which helped to move the story along and showed exactly what was happening (Moeller, 2011). This does not mean boys do not think creatively; in fact, in one study, boys scored higher than girls on figural items in divergent thinking measures (Ülger & Morsünbül, 2016).

Moeller (2011) noted both groups used the word *nerd* to describe people who read graphic novels. Further, the boys did not mind being called nerds; many were self-proclaimed nerds who took pride in knowing about computers and writing code. However, the girls did not feel the same way. The girls conducted much of their reading at home, for fear of being labeled a nerd by their peers (Moeller, 2011).

### **Opposition to Using Graphic Novels**

**Criticism from outside the classroom.** Much criticism for the use of graphic novels comes from outside the classroom, from noneducators who feel strongly against them (Hansen, 2012). An article by Concordia University (2012) noted,

Critics who oppose the use of graphic novels in academics are afraid of "messing with the classics." Since much of the story in a graphic novel is expressed in

pictures, rather than words, some worry that replacing too many standard books with graphic novels will result in a decline in overall literacy. (para. 3)

Those who oppose the use of graphic novels may do so because at the secondary level, students should be able to read text (Connors, 2010). Connors (2010) noted that students should be able to read a text and create images with their minds. Hansen (2012) noted that much criticism against graphic novels also stated they gave misinformation about love, morals, and social class. Much opposition has come from the use of the term *graphic novel*; the definition is imprecise, as people associate the term *graphic* to mean the book will contain bloody, sexual, and violent images (Hansen, 2012). Some people oppose graphic novels claiming that they are too childish and the images of cartoons do not belong in books (Hansen, 2012). Hansen also noted that the biggest opposition to graphic novels is that they rely so heavily on visual elements.

**Criticism from inside the classroom.** Opposition for using graphic novels from inside the classroom also exists (Hansen, 2012). Kern (2016) noted that if graphic novels are not incorporated into standardized tests, they are unlikely to be taught in the classroom. Further, much stigma comes from teachers, many of whom feel that graphic novels should only be used with students who show poor reading skills (Hansen, 2012). Students even have opposition to graphic novels. Connors (2010) noted that many students were against graphic novels in the classroom. Many students felt that illustrations belonged in elementary level books, as young students are still learning to form ideas and comprehend things. Students reported that as they get older, they are more than capable of reading books without pictures and forming their ideas (Connors, 2010). Some students also stated that providing pictures strips away a young mind from being

creative and a critical thinker about books (Connors, 2010).

Clark (2013) used preservice teachers to evaluate nonfiction graphic novels in history classes. One teacher in Clark's study said that although he enjoyed reading the graphic novels, he would not use them in his class, as he thought he might lose his credibility. Another teacher said that using graphic novels to teach history might lead students and parents to view the class as easier than classes not using graphic novels (Clark, 2013).

### **Graphic Novel Studies**

Studies have investigated the use of graphic novels and whether or not they are beneficial in schools. Clark (2013) noted that preservice teachers felt that graphic novels have a place in the classroom but were hesitant to use them, fearing negative stigma. Jiménez, Roberts, Brugar, Meyer, and Waito (2017) noted that reading novels in graphic form benefited comprehension in one sixth-grade class. They noted that the combination of words and pictures in the text helped students decode words on pages. Jiménez et al. also noted that during free reading more students turned to a graphic novel than a traditional novel. While the study was aimed at teaching students strategies for reading graphic novels, the researchers never specifically addressed reluctant readers. Clark discussed how graphic novels have been used to motivate reluctant readers, but their study of preservice teachers did not indicate whether teachers viewed using them as a tool for reaching reluctant readers; conversely, although preservice teachers viewed graphic novels as a useful tool, they still feared stigma in the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by four research questions, using a case study design:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of graphic novels to help teach reluctant readers?
2. How do the teachers feel about using graphic novels across the curriculum?
3. What suggestions do the teachers have regarding best practices in using graphic novels along with traditional, text-only novels?
4. How do the current curricula outline the use of graphic novels?

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Aim of the Study**

This qualitative study was designed to understand teachers' perceptions of the use of graphic novels in the classroom. The use of graphic novels in the classroom has become more commonplace since 2008, yet they are still viewed as a new tool in schools (Jennings et al., 2014).

### **Qualitative Research Approach**

A qualitative case study was chosen for this study because the study purpose was to explain how a group of people felt about using graphic novels in school (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). The case study approach was used to explore the activities of a small group rather than the shared patterns of a group's behavior (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). Stake (1995) stated that in a qualitative study, the research questions typically orient to cases or phenomena.

As stated by Stake (1995), a case study was expected to show the complexity of a single case, the object studied in the case study. When using a case study, researchers must look for the detail of interaction within its context (Stake, 1995). Stake also stated that a single phenomenon, whether a leaf or a classroom, has unique complexities, which makes using a case study ideal for gathering information for teachers' perceptions of graphic novels. The study relied on data collected from a teacher questionnaire on graphic novels as well as the curricula across several subjects. The goal was to gain insight into a problem without actually being there (Stake, 1995). Triangulating the data from the two sources helped to increase the validity of the study (Terrel, 2016). Using the curricula to look for any mention of the use of graphic novels and comparing the findings

to the teachers' responses helped to make the findings valid. Qualitative data are more vivid than quantitative data; qualitative data are clear and give information to help determine meaning (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008). After the study was concluded, I have a better understanding of how teachers perceived the use of graphic novels in their classrooms to reach reluctant readers.

Using this approach also would indicate whether teachers were interested in using graphic novels in schools. The teachers' responses would indicate why or why not they chose to include graphic novels.

The researcher of the case study, as described by Yin (2002, 2016) gets as close to the subjects as possible, by means of direct observation in a natural setting and gathering information through thoughts, feelings, and desires. The case study approach is used to explore the meaning of a lived experience of the phenomenon. Using this approach helped examine the commonalities across individuals. In this study, the triangulation between the teachers' answers and the curricula they use gave further insight.

### **Participants**

The study took place at a suburban private school in Florida. The population of the staff was diverse, with 20 males and 72 females with an age range between 27 and 65. The researcher used convenience sampling, which involved selecting participants who were both easily accessible and willing to participate in the study (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008). The population was 92 middle school teachers in Grades 5–8. Fifty-one teachers followed the link and agreed to take the survey; of these, 13 did not answer any survey questions after clicking on the link and therefore provided no data. The final sample was 38 teachers who completed the survey. Convenience sampling was chosen

because of the large size of the teacher faculty. The names of the teachers were given as master list from the schools assistant principal.

After I gained Institutional Review Board approval, teachers were informed of the study during a faculty meeting. The teachers were told that I was conducting a study on the use of graphic novels. The teachers were told that participation was not mandatory. An information letter was given out at the faculty meeting with a link to the questionnaire at the bottom of the letter.

All of the names of the teachers would remain anonymous, and their answers would not be shared with other teachers who took the questionnaire or any other school personnel. The questionnaire was administered through SurveyMonkey (2018). The teachers who opened the link to the questionnaire completed a consent form, which was Question 1 of the questionnaire. Failure to consent prevented the participant from completing the questionnaire. The teachers had 1 week to complete the questionnaire.

### **Data Collection Tools**

I used a researcher-created questionnaire (see Appendix) with elements pulled from Voss's (2011) survey and a survey by Lapp, Wolsey, Fisher, and Frey (2011). With permission of the authors, I used three questions from Voss's survey (Questions 5, 6, and 12 in the Appendix) and modified a few questions from Lapp et al.'s survey to fit into the structure of a qualitative study. Specifically, the original questions from the Lapp et al. survey were Likert agreement statements regarding whether graphic novels are "excellent texts for teaching inferences," "excellent texts for teaching visualizing," "useful for teaching students about dialogue," and "useful for teaching outlining skills." The modified question for this study was "Do you think graphic novels can help teach basic

reading skills, and why or why not?” Instead of having a survey question about reading skills, the new question let teachers answer in their own voice. This made the question appropriate for a qualitative study.

Lapp et al. (2011) investigated whether teachers found instructional value in using graphic novels. Voss’s (2011) survey gathered information from teachers to determine whether a teaching strategy involving graphic novels could help struggling readers. My questionnaire was used to explore attitudes or opinions of the population of interest. The format was a questionnaire containing 15 questions on teachers’ feelings towards graphic novels and reluctant readers. I sought to learn how teachers perceived the use of graphic novels with reluctant readers as well as how they viewed graphic novels across the curriculum. Some of the questions asked how teachers accommodated reluctant readers. Other questions asked how teachers felt about the inclusion of graphic novels across curricula and whether use of graphic novels could enhance a subject. Furthermore, some questions examined how teachers felt about using graphic novels to help teach basic reading skills. The findings were triangulated with the curricula from math, science, history, and English departments at the school to see how graphic novels were being used. Table 1 shows the time frame of the study

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role at the site of the study is an administrative associate. Previously I was a fourth-grade English and writing teacher. I hold a Florida Department of Education professional certification as a teacher of English for Grades 6–12 and Educational Leadership. My role as researcher was to facilitate the study from an outsider’s perspective. Because I work at the site where the study took place, it was important that I

distance myself from the teachers taking the questionnaire. I did not engage in any conversations about the questionnaire or answer specific questions regarding the questionnaire. Furthermore, I did not observe teachers taking the questionnaire or evaluate them based on their responses. Responses were anonymous.

Table 1

*Time Frame and Procedures of the Study*

Time	Instrument or materials	Activities
Week 1	Participant letter of anonymous questionnaire	At a faculty meeting, teachers were told about the questionnaire and given an anonymous participant form. The bottom of the letter contained a URL address for teachers to access the online questionnaire, including consent information.
Weeks 2–3	Graphic Novels—Teacher Questionnaire	Teachers accessed the Graphic Novels—Teacher Questionnaire through surveymonkey.com. Teachers had 1 week to complete it.
Week 4	Graphic Novels—Teacher Questionnaire results Qualitative software School curricula	I analyzed the results of the survey using qualitative software to determine themes. Then, I triangulated data with the school's curricula, looking for correlations between the results of the questionnaire and use of graphic novels in the curricula.
Week 5	Data analysis from the Graphic Novels—Teacher Questionnaire	I conducted member checks.

**Data Analysis**

Stake (1995) and Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) noted that the search for meaning often is a search for patterns and for consistency within certain conditions, termed *correspondence*. Stake noted that a qualitative study capitalizes on ordinary ways of making sense. I used Creswell and Plano Clark's (2017) approach to coding data in the

study. Starting with small phrases, assigning a label, then grouping the codes into themes led to the emergence of broader themes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Looking for the reappearance of important meanings repeatedly was an important part of the data analysis (Stake, 1995). As I went over the data several times, patterns would emerge from the analysis (Stake, 1995).

The data collected in this study were qualitative; the participants in the study gave their opinions and thoughts in their own words about using graphic novels with reluctant readers. All of the answers to the survey were coded into themes that arose from the data, and these codes were grouped into broader themes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Stake (1995) and Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) noted that coding data would help divulge the broader findings of the study. The coding method for this study utilized preset codes initially; then, as the research moved along, emergent codes were used to help identify relationships, themes, concepts, and meanings arising from the data.

The researcher also utilized triangulation to help maintain accuracy and give alternative explanations (Stake, 1995). Yin (2016) referred to *triangulation* as an analytic technique used during fieldwork and formal analysis to corroborate a finding using evidence from two or more sources. When using triangulation, the results from the teacher questionnaire were compared to curricula that the research site uses and Common Core State Standards.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Yin (2016) stated that behaving properly during a study is a matter of research integrity. Research integrity means that the data are accurate and the researcher can be trusted in making truthful statements in regards to the study (Yin, 2016). According to

Terrel (2016), ethical research is considered ethical only if the researcher ensures that all participants participate voluntarily and the participants are not harmed in any way. All of the data were real and were not tampered with in any way. All of the teachers' responses were private; no names were on the surveys, and I had no way of knowing how a particular teacher answered the questions. All documents will be kept on my personal computer for at least 3 years after the study has been completed. Only the researcher will have access to the computer, which is password protected. Any printed material will remain in the researcher's home under lock and key. After keeping the documents for 3 years, they will be shredded and recycled, and all documents on the computer will be deleted.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a function of four factors: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Terrel, 2016). As the researcher, I must feel confident in my findings and using member checks, which allow the researcher to ask key participants in the study if the findings are an accurate reflection of their experience (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Using member checks can help to achieve trustworthiness (Kornbluh, 2015).

The study also should be transferable, which means that the findings can be used in a similar context (Terrel, 2016). This means that findings could be applicable to another school experiencing the same phenomena of teachers not using graphic novels and students being reluctant to read. However, qualitative findings are typically not transferable beyond the case studied other than as a foundation for further research.

To ensure confirmability was met in the study, I did not discuss the questionnaire

with the participants and did not influence their responses or try to sway them to answer questions in a certain way (Terrel, 2016). Furthermore, I presented the results of the questionnaire accurately to make sure the data reflected those who participated.

### **Potential Researcher Bias**

Avoiding bias depends on being transparent with the data and reporting all of the findings, as Yin (2016) noted with data exclusion. I monitored my own work and knew when I might be tempted to exclude part of the findings (Yin, 2016). Furthermore, I acknowledged any preconceived notions before I collected the data in order to avoid allowing these preconceptions to influence data collection or analysis (Yin, 2016).

## Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 presents the findings for this qualitative case study. The data are sorted by research question and presented in themes, which emerged from the coaxial coding of the data.

### Sample

Participants were 38 teachers at a private middle school in Florida. Eight participants were men, 29 were women, and 1 did not respond to the question. Thirty-seven participants answered the survey question asking their age; the participants ranged from 29 to 67, with a mean age of 45. Table 2 shows the subject area taught by participants.

Table 2

*Content Area of Participating Teachers (N = 38)*

Content area	<i>n</i>
English/literature	11
Social studies/history	7
Science/engineering/computer science	6
Counselor	3
World languages/Spanish	3
Math	2
Administrator	2
Music	1
Drama	1
Journalism	1
Physical education	1
Social emotional learning	1
Pedagogical coach	1

*Note.* The two administrators offered two content areas as well.

Teachers seemed knowledgeable about graphic novels. Survey Question 5 asked

respondents to define a graphic novel. Only three teachers responded, “A comic book.” The rest provided an accurate definition of graphic novels as having a story line and being a long-format comic using visuals to tell the story in addition to narrative and dialog. Participant 16 even used the phrase “sequential artwork.” Participant 26 observed, “The brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text,” echoing research from the 3M Corporation (as cited in Burmack, 2008) cited in this dissertation’s literature review.

### **Findings for Research Question 1**

What are teachers’ perceptions of the inclusion of graphic novels to help teach reluctant readers? In general, teachers were open to the idea of using graphic novels to teach reluctant readers. The idea that a graphic novel could be used to motivate and engage reluctant readers appealed to teachers. Currently, reading materials are chosen by school staff; teachers believed the resources in the classroom could be changed, as long as the students are engaged and learning from the materials that the teachers choose. Teachers noted that graphic novels seemed to be beneficial to struggling readers.

**Theme 1: Teachers are open to using graphic novels.** After reading all of the responses on using graphic novels in the classroom, I concluded that 37 of the 38 teachers were open to using them in their classrooms to teach reluctant readers. Only one participant, a counselor who defined a graphic novel as “a comic book,” stated she did not think she would use them, although she stated she was ambivalent about graphic novel use and believed they might have value.

Survey Questions 7 and 8 asked participants to describe their thoughts and feelings about the use of graphic novels in their classroom. Participant 36 responded, “I think they would be helpful and engaging for some reluctant readers or readers who

benefit from visual support, it may open students up to a new genre they enjoy.”

Participant 2 wrote, “I think that graphic novels would benefit those that struggle to read more traditional forms of literature.” Participant 1 replied, “I think they can be a different way to interest students to read.”

Survey Question 10 stated, “Describe how you accommodate students who are reluctant to read in your classroom.” Participant 12 replied, “Reluctant readers benefit from the use of graphic novels. In reading regular novels, I accommodate reluctant readers by guiding their analysis closely in class.” Participant 1 noted, “If a student discovers a joy of reading through graphic novels, perhaps they will seek out other materials which might give them enjoyment.”

Knowing that teachers are open to using graphic novels to teach reluctant readers is important. Also important is to understand why teachers believe students are reluctant to read. The participants in this study had different views as to why students are reluctant to read, which led to Theme 2 as well as Themes 4 and 5.

**Theme 2: Schools dictate reading materials.** The school and the teachers have the overall authority on what students read in school. Survey Question 11 asked, “Why do you think students are reluctant to read?” Eight participants indicated students did not find the material interesting, and four specifically noted students’ lack of choice in material. Participant 26 responded, “Teachers/adults are making most of the choices of what they [students] will read, how they will be processing the text, how they should interpret the text.” Participant 33 answered, “Because they have to read what the school wants them to read and not what they want to read. Although it is important to know about great literature, it deters some students from the joy of reading.” Furthermore,

Participant 29 replied, “I think they are reluctant to read because it is seen as work. Some love to read but the majority just read what they have to in order to answer questions.”

Correspondingly, 11 participants mentioned trying to reach reluctant readers by allowing them to select materials they are interested in.

**Theme 3: Graphic novels aid those who have difficulty with reading.** Eleven respondents specifically used the word “difficulty” explaining why students may be reluctant readers. Others mentioned lack of confidence and potential embarrassment as well. One of the responses to Survey Question 11 mentioned students learning English as a second language. Participant 38 stated, “Sometimes they [students] are reluctant to read because English is their second language. Other times if they see too much writing, they will try to complete the assignment without reading it.” Difficulty with reading can be the reason a student is reluctant to read.

Participant 36 mentioned both themes of struggling readers and lack of student choice of material:

I believe with most students who are reluctant to read there is an underlying difficulty that may not be known, making it difficult for the student to comprehend what they are reading. Another primary reason I feel students shy away from reading is limited exposure to choice and variety.

Similarly, Participant 25 said, “Could be difficult for them or they just do not like to sit still and read about topics that don’t interest them, or they may have not liked previous literature books and now have an aversion to reading.” Participant 27 responded succinctly, “Could be skill level or interest.”

Some students may feel they are not proficient enough to read. Participant 22

stated, “Some students feel like they are not as fluent as they should be. Participant 19 noted, “Students might have a fear of embarrassment.” Some students may have a fear of reading out loud, as noted by Participant 18: “Pressure to read quickly and afraid of reading out loud.” Participant 23 noted middle school students are “vulnerable” and thus afraid to show their reading level to their peers.

Participant 8 noted graphic novels might give readers “confidence to read more difficult/traditional novels.” Similarly, Participant 7 stated, “Yes. Once students can tackle a graphic novel, they have more confidence when faced with other pieces of literature.”

**Theme 4: Reluctant readers are distracted by technology.** Respondents stated that many reluctant readers found reading boring compared to video games, social media, and other visual technology. Seven participants used the word “distractions.” Participants 3 and 14 specifically mentioned the “instant gratification culture,” and Participant 37 mentioned the current fast-paced culture. Three respondents mentioned short attention spans. Participant 3 stated, “Reading requires time—they are used to an instant gratification kind of cultural milieu.” Participant 1 stated, “I think students rely too much on technology, and books just bore them.” Participant 6 mentioned students’ “rushed lives” and “more things to disrupt their learning—video games and social media.” Participant 7 noted “many other distractions (video games, Netflix, YouTube) that students find more exciting.” Participant 12 explained, “Students are reluctant to read because it is a time-consuming activity that requires focused attention for an extended period of time, and technology has sped up their lives to the point where they find reading tedious.”

**Theme 5: Teachers use varying formats in the classroom to reach reluctant readers.** Tied to the emphasis on reluctant readers perceiving reading as “boring” compared to technology, teachers described using varying formats to reach readers. Teachers described using audiobooks and videos, as well as giving shorter assignments. Pedagogical strategies included interactive reading and partner reading. Participant 36 stated, “I try to accommodate reluctant readers by offering different formats such as audiobooks, as well encouraging them to explore different genres.” Participant 6 explained, “Today, students want information faster, and with a graphic novel, students may show more excitement towards the material.”

### **Findings for Research Question 2**

How do the teachers feel about using graphic novels across the curriculum? Findings revealed that, in general, teachers considered graphic novels to be literature. Teachers in the English and Social Studies Departments in particular stated they would use graphic novels in their classrooms. The participants also stated using graphic novels could help teach basic reading skills.

**Theme 1: Teachers consider graphic novels as literature.** When asked if graphic novels were literature, 35 of the 38 respondents answered yes. Participant 18, a science teacher, was not sure. Participant 10 stated it depended on the author and subject. Participant 3 noted that the graphic novel version of *Fahrenheit 451* was abridged to the point of compromising its literary value. The other respondents, however, were overwhelmingly positive. Respondents noted the graphic novel contained a story line and the same literary elements as a traditional novel. Participant 12, an English teacher, stated, “Yes, I do consider them literature because I believe that anything that sheds light

on or analyzes the human condition is ‘literature.’” Participant 15 stated, “100%, I think it is a fantastic way for students who struggle with creating their own visuals, based on words, to engage with literature.”

**Theme 2: Teachers in the English Department could use graphic novels, although they were not part of the curriculum.** Survey Question 16 asked, “How does your school incorporate graphic novels into the curriculum?” Four participants thought the English curriculum might use graphic novels, specifying the use of a graphic novel of *Fahrenheit 451* for eighth-grade English. Teachers in the English department indicated that teachers could use graphic novels in their classrooms, but such use was not part of the school’s curriculum. “There are several English teachers who use graphic novels,” Participant 19 said. Participant 17 said, “They are used in some lower level English classes.” Participant 16 referenced the use of graphic novels in the curriculum, stating, “The eighth grade curriculum incorporates the reading of several graphic novels. Some compared to the prose version of the same novel, and others are used as a reference and starting point for research assignments.” Participant 7, an English teacher, went into detail:

A good graphic novel has depth of plot, character development, theme, etc. In short, it has the classic areas of study found in a prose text. It also has the elements of film we study with students, allowing them to develop literacy in the interpretation of image for meaning. When students combine both aspects to investigate a text’s effect on readers, they develop varied insights into how meaning is communicated and interpreted. It makes for a very rich literature study.

**Theme 3: English teachers consider graphic novels as useful to teach students basic reading skills.** Survey Question 12 asked, “Do you think graphic novels can help teach basic reading skills. Why or why not?” The overall response was positive. Participant 38 responded, “Yes I think graphic novels can help teach basic reading skills, especially if they are on a topic of interest to the student.” Participant 26 stated, “Yes! You can easily find high-interest low-vocabulary graphic novels.” Participant 16 explained, “Yes. All the same skills required in reading comprehension are present in graphic novels. For many, however, the visual stimulation enables reluctant readers to more clearly process the visual stimuli they see on the page into their mind.”

Conversely, Participant 2 stated,

I do not think graphic novels can help teach basic reading skills because of how the pages are naturally set up. It is difficult at times to determine which “box” comes next—what order to read the pattern or layout of the graphic novel.

This response reflects previous researchers’ claims that students may need instruction on how to read graphic novels (Friese, 2013; Maniace, 2014).

**Theme 4: Teachers in the Social Studies Department used graphic novels, although they were not part of the curriculum.** Social studies teachers indicated their interest in using graphic novels to teach history, even though graphic novels are not part of the official curriculum. Survey Question 9 asked participants how they might use graphic novels for classroom instruction. Participant 25 replied, “Since I teach history, I could use it to teach a particular time period such as the American Revolution and that could be our ‘textbook.’” Participant 29 said, “I could use them in illustrating the story line of the Trojan War or the Greco-Roman gods and myths. There are numerous ‘big

concept' ideas in history where this approach would be beneficial." Participant 28 stated graphic novels are "a great way to preview the lessons in history or geography. It gives the children manageable content and pictures to help the visualize the stories." Participant 4 would use graphic novels with appropriate content as an "add on" to a specific topic.

### **Findings for Research Question 3**

What suggestions do the teachers have regarding best practices in using graphic novels along with traditional, text-only novels? Teachers stated they would use graphic novels to supplement or accompany a textbook and to make the subject matter easier to understand, such as reading a graphic novel about a time in history. Other teachers responded that they would have students read a traditional novel and, if a graphic novel were available, read it after. Additionally, some teachers mentioned the importance of using graphic novels with visual learners.

#### **Theme 1: Use a graphic novel as a supplement to accompany the text.**

Participants frequently used words such as "enhance," "supplement," or "ancillary" to describe the use of graphic novels in the classroom. Survey Question 8 asked participants' general feelings about using graphic novels in their classroom. Participant 12 responded, "I believe in studying them after the original novel has been read." Survey Question 9 asked how participants might use graphic novels for classroom instruction. Participant 3 responded, "Definitely as ancillary texts, if we are reading a graphic novel based on an actual book, I would make every effort to read that book as well with the students."

**Theme 2: Use graphic novels to teach a subject and reading skills.** Survey Question 15 asked participants about research showing graphic novels can enhance a

lesson in an academic subject. Participant 28 replied, “I do think this is true, just look at the book *Economix* [Goodwin, 2012], for it is a great book to understand economic history, and it is a graphic novel.” Participant 18, a science teacher, said, “I use them [graphic novels] to show short segments and develop vocabulary, and sometimes they help with critical thinking.” Participant 7 stated, “If a graphic novel makes the literature more engaging for students, then I am all for it.” Participant 5 said, “I would use them, I have used *Tintin* (a comic book) in the past with beginners in French, and *Persepolis* in advanced classes.” *Tintin* is a Belgian series that began in 1929; *Persepolis* is a graphic autobiography by Satrapi (2007) describing her life in Iran.

**Theme 3: Use graphic novels to reach visual learners.** Ten respondents referred to the use of graphic novels with visual learners. Participant 6 stated, “Many students are visual learners” and noted graphic novels could spark interest and lead to their success with traditional text-only material. Participant 30 stated, “Many learners are visual, and the use of graphics will allow more students to remain engaged in the lesson.” Participant 11, a counselor, noted the use of graphics to help teach guidance lessons as well as to “help with memory for a test.” Participant 15 also indirectly referenced the use of schemas in memory, stating, “The visuals assist in creating a scene which leads to better comprehension usually and allows students an additional cue to return to when thinking about the subject.”

#### **Findings for Research Question 4**

How do the current curricula outline the use of graphic novels? The overarching theme was that the school’s current curricula did not include the use of graphic novels in any content areas.

**Theme 1: Graphic novels are not in the curriculum.** Survey Question 16 asked, “How does your school incorporate graphic novels into the curriculum?” Twelve participants did not know. Participant 20 replied, “I have not seen it incorporated at my school.” Participant 12 said, “Our school doesn’t require us to teach graphic novels, only a variety of literary genres. However, we are allowed to use them, it is up to the teacher’s discretion.” Participant 11 said, “I am uncertain about the classroom curriculums, but I know we carry them [graphic novels] in the library.” Participant 1 stated, “My school does not use them.”

Participant 16 referenced the use of graphic novels in the curriculum, stating, “The eighth grade curriculum incorporates the reading of several graphic novels. Some compared to the prose version of the same novel, and others are used as a reference and starting point for research assignments.” However, the curriculum described does not mention graphic novels. Teachers do have the discretion to use graphic novels in their classrooms.

**Triangulation.** After reading through all the questionnaire data, I then looked at all of the responses that mentioned curricula. These data were then compared to the research site’s curricula. The school’s curricula did not mention the use of graphic novels at all. Participant questionnaire responses, especially to Survey Question 16, evidenced that whereas teachers have the freedom to choose what materials would be used in class, only one participant responded that graphic novels were part of the school’s curriculum.

The research site uses a curriculum outline for each subject. The curriculum for English Literature College Prep for eighth grade is written as an outline and states the overarching objectives for the school year. The English curriculum for eighth grade

includes by quarter what novels will be read as well the types of literary elements to be taught in each novel or novella. The outline was based on what the teachers wanted to teach in their classrooms, and state standards were not a factor. The outline also listed literary terms and comprehension skills. The novels chosen for reading were as follows: *That Was Then, This Is Now*; *The Giver*; *Son*; *Fahrenheit 451*; *Secret Life of Bees*; *The Pearl*; and *Lord of the Flies*. None of these is the original text-only novel (abridged versions are used), and the curriculum outline made no reference to a graphic novel or using images to supplement the texts.

In conversation I was told the following: “The Social Studies Department has never used a graphic novel to teach any part of history in our courses” (F. Franklin, personal communication, December 21, 2017). Curricula in other subject areas did not mention use of graphic novels or even of multimedia or multimodal texts.

Although the research site did not include graphic novels in the school curricula, the results were triangulated with the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core State Standards for English language arts do include graphic novels for Grades 5–12 (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Specifically, English language arts Standard 10 addresses the range, quality, and complexity of student reading. Literature covered under Standard 10 for students in Grades 6–12 “includes the subgenres of adventure stories, historical fiction, mysteries, myths, science fiction, realistic fiction, allegories, parodies, satire, and graphic novels” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p. 57). Graphic novels are also mentioned for Standard 7, the integration of knowledge and ideas, for students in Grade 5: “Analyze 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 State Standards Initiative, 2010, p. 12). Interestingly, only two responses echoed the Common Core State Standards. Participant 12 stated, “Our school doesn’t require us to teach graphic novels, only a variety of literary genres. However, we are allowed to use them, it is up to the teacher’s discretion.” Although not specifically referring to the school’s curricula, Participant 26 stated, “I think a blend of all types of literature are important. Students need to be exposed to fiction, nonfiction, poetry, prose, etc.”

### **Member Checks**

After the researcher had reviewed all of the data and coded the data, using coaxial coding to look for emerging themes, the data were then e-mailed back to all of the staff members who might or might not have participated in the questionnaire. The researcher asked the participants to review the data to see if the results were an accurate depiction. Only a handful of participants responded to this request. The overall outcome of the member checks was that the participants felt that the responses were honest. These participants also validated that they agreed with the findings and were not surprised to learn that teachers would be open to using graphic novels in their classrooms. A summary of the thematic findings is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Summary of Research Questions and Emerging Themes*

Research Question	Themes
1. What are teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of graphic novels to help teach reluctant readers?	<p>Theme 1: Teachers are open to using graphic novels.</p> <p>Theme 2: Schools dictate reading materials.</p> <p>Theme 3: Graphic novels aid those who have difficulty with reading.</p> <p>Theme 4: Reluctant readers are distracted by technology.</p> <p>Theme 5: Teachers use varying formats in the classroom to reach reluctant readers.</p>
2. How do the teachers feel about using graphic novels across the curriculum?	<p>Theme 1: Teachers consider graphic novels as literature.</p> <p>Theme 2: Teachers in the English department could use graphic novels, although they were not part of the curriculum.</p> <p>Theme 3: English teachers consider graphic novels as useful to teach students basic reading skills.</p> <p>Theme 4: Teachers in the Social Studies department used graphic novels, although they were not part of the curriculum.</p>
3. What suggestions do the teachers have regarding best practices in using graphic novels along with traditional, text-only novels?	<p>Theme 1: Use a graphic novel as a supplement to accompany the text.</p> <p>Theme 2: Use graphic novels to teach a subject and reading skills.</p> <p>Theme 3: Use graphic novels to reach visual learners.</p>
4. How do the current curricula outline the use of graphic novels?	<p>Theme 1: Graphic novels are not in the curriculum. Confirmed through curriculum documents as triangulation. However, Common Core State Standards do refer to graphic novel use.</p>

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Overview

Schwertner (2008) noted that he had two types of readers in his class, the motivated reader and the reluctant reader. This study was created to find out teachers' perceptions of using graphic novels to teach the reluctant reader. Graphic novels are a way to help get reluctant readers to read, but would the teachers be interested in using them? This qualitative study was designed to explore teachers' perceptions of using graphic novels in the classroom to help teach reluctant readers in a private school in Florida. In this case study, 38 teachers responded to an open-ended questionnaire.

### Expanding on Findings and Linking to Research

**Research Question 1.** The findings for Research Question 1 suggested that teachers are open to using graphic novels to teach reluctant readers. Based on the teachers' responses, teachers thought students who were reluctant to read could benefit from the use of reading graphic novels because of the images. Graphic novels could help reluctant readers by offering an alternative to those students who struggle to read traditional novels. As Connors (2015) stated, many educators believe that the graphic novel can be an essential tool to help teach students to learn visual literacy skills. This ties into how teachers feel about graphic novels to teach reluctant readers; visual literacy is important and can help a student become a better and motivated reader. Teachers reported that reluctant readers could benefit from reading graphic novels, supporting previous research. Tomasevich (2013) noted graphic novels could motivate those students who do not want to read and help to increase literacy skills.

The participants identified several reasons why students are reluctant to read.

Schools dictate reading materials, giving students a lack of choice in materials that reflect their interests. Teachers' opinions are supported by literature. Students should choose reading materials that interest them (Fleishhacker, 2017). Further, pictures combined with words can interest a variety of students, including reluctant readers (Fleishhacker, 2017).

Difficulty with reading was another reason teachers gave for students' reluctance to read. Students who have difficulty reading do not enjoy reading. The student also may lack confidence in reading in front of peers. This finding matches the literature; Sloboda et al. noted reluctant readers were often struggling readers. The reluctant reader may be an English language learner. Howard (2012) found that English language learners preferred to read graphic novels over purely textual material.

Students today live in a fast-paced culture and do not take the time to read books, according to the participants. Teachers noted the distraction of social media, video games, YouTube, and all types of visual technologies as deterring readers. Teachers noted this tendency also in their best practices to reach reluctant readers, which included using video or audiobooks in the classroom. Bakis (2012a) suggested she can teach more graphic novels in the same amount of time as she would spend teaching lengthier texts.

**Research Question 2.** Results for Research Question 2 indicated teachers' perceptions of using graphic novels across the curriculum. The data determined that the teachers considered graphic novels to be literature. This finding should be encouraging to teachers or administrators considering adding graphic novels to the curriculum. The attitudes of the teachers also contradict Clark's (2013) findings that preservice teachers were concerned about losing credibility if they used graphic novels in the classroom.

Additionally, nearly all the teachers would use graphic novels across the

curriculum. Participants from the English and Social Studies Departments were particularly apt to use graphic novels in their classrooms, although graphic novels were not part of the official curriculum. As Brozo et al. (2014) stated, the initial use of graphic novels in classrooms was by English teachers as a tool for struggling or reluctant readers. Cromer and Clark (2007) noted that many graphic novels are based on historical events, and pairing these graphic novels with the traditional text opens up a whole new way for students to learn about the past. Even science teachers in the current study described using graphic texts to build vocabulary. Researchers have reported on successful use of this format to teach complicated science topics (Brozo et al., 2014; Fleishhacker, 2017).

Using graphic novels to teach basic reading skills was also evident from the responses. Teachers noted that all of the same skills required in reading comprehension are present in graphic novels. According to Wetta (2013), graphic novels can be used to bridge the gaps between levels, helping struggling readers develop necessary reading skills. Sloboda et al. (2014) reported reading comprehension increased with the use of graphic novels; further, the use of sequential art helped increase vocabulary skills. Teacher responses in this study support the previous research; teachers indicated student vocabulary could be increased by using graphic novels.

In regards to basic reading skills, Yildirim (2013) noted that graphic novels could be used in the classroom with an array of purposes. They can increase reading comprehension by combining images with text. Participants indicated that visual stimulation enables a reluctant reader to process and comprehend more clearly what is happening in a story.

**Research Question 3.** Research Question 3 explored what suggestions teachers

had regarding best practices in using graphic novels along with traditional text-only novels. Teachers reported of the use of graphic novels as a supplement to traditional text-only novels was a good idea, especially when the graphic novel version was taught after the students read the text-only, original version. Furthermore, the participants stated graphic novels can be used to teach other subject matter in addition to using the original textbook. Overall, if a graphic novel could help increase interest in the subject matter or encourage students to read, teachers were willing to use them in their classrooms.

Hughes (2016) also mentioned using graphic novels to teach in a subject, such as *The Manga Guide to Calculus* by Kojima and *The Manga Guide to Linear Algebra* by Takashi. Teachers using these graphic novels can make difficult material easier to learn.

Additionally, teachers referred to using graphic novels to reach visual learners. Related to the theoretical framework of this study, Gavigan (2014) stated teachers need to build bridges using the content that is taught and existing schemas, or learners' previous experiences. Graphic novels can help access student schemas and knowledge structures to increase their engagement in the content and the act of reading (Brozo et al., 2014; Versaci, 2008). Participant 15 stated, "The visuals assist in creating a scene which leads to better comprehension usually and allows students an additional cue to return to when thinking about the subject." Participant 11 noted the connection between visuals and long-term memory. Participant 26 stated, "Because the brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text, graphic novels are a powerful way to impart information that will be remembered and applied."

**Research Question 4.** A school's curriculum is the map teachers use to teach students what they need to learn. Research Question 4 explored how the research site

utilized graphic novels in the curricula. Many of the participants did not know whether their current curriculum contained any mention of graphic novels. Others noted the teachers could choose to incorporate graphic novels into their classrooms. Schwarz (2010) stated graphic novels can drive current traditional curriculum goals and can offer teachers new ways of learning for their students. McTaggart (2008) and Fleishhacker (2017) noted that many graphic novels are available to supplement history, literature, science, and math.

I compared the findings to the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of using varieties of informational text; many schools are turning to graphic novels in their curriculum to help students reach grade-level Common Core State Standards (Bakis, 2012b). Graphic novels are among the types of literature covered under Standard 10 for students in Grades 6–12 and Standard 7 for students in Grade 5 (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010).

### **Limitations**

Authenticity, the soundness of the data sources (Yin, 2016), was a concern because there was no way to know if the person whom the questionnaire was intended for actually completed the questionnaire. Following up with teachers for member checks after the questionnaire was completed was another limitation, as an anonymous questionnaire was used and the names of the participants were not on it. However, the teachers' exact words were used to provide validity. Furthermore, because the questionnaire was to be completed online, potential respondents might have had issues with the Internet or computer functionality.

Threats to external validity include anything that happens during the study that

might affect the generalizability of the results (Terrel, 2016). Threats to external validity in a survey approach include the sample of people who received the survey (Yin, 2016). Perhaps some teachers completed the questionnaire in the same room at the same time and talked about what they were writing, which might have affected the results of the study. For the study to be valid, it must have transferability and demonstrate the findings from the study are applicable in other contexts (Terrel, 2016). However, qualitative case studies are not intended to be completely transferable but rather to explore a topic in depth at a site (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Several factors limited internal validity. The entire middle school faculty did not complete the questionnaire; of the 90 faculty members, 38 completed the questionnaire. However, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) noted, “Rather than select a large number of people or sites, the qualitative researcher identifies and recruits a small number that will provide in-depth information about the central phenomenon or concept being explored in the study” (p. 174). Creswell and Plano Clark noted samples under 10 may be appropriate for a case study. With a sample of 38, data saturation was achieved.

### **Implications**

One main finding from this study is the teachers’ positive response to using graphic novels in the classroom. As Brozo and Mayville (2012) argued, graphic novels are a real-world teaching resource, and when put into the hands of a skilled teacher, graphic novels can heighten student engagement. The teachers also considered graphic novels to be literature. Clark (2013) reported, however, that preservice teachers were concerned about losing credibility if they used graphic novels in the classroom. Therefore, one practical implication from this study is that education should be provided

to teachers and administrators on the appropriate use of graphic novels. They then might consider adding graphic novels to the curriculum without feeling that potential loss of credibility.

Another finding of the study was that the research site's curricula across subjects and departments had no mention of graphic novels. Several teachers stated wishing graphic novels were added to the curriculum; these teachers spanned departments, including social studies, English, counseling, and science. Based on the teachers' positive perceptions about using graphic novels, a practical implication is that perhaps the school could incorporate graphic novels into the curriculum. Teachers repeatedly mentioned using graphic novels to help students learn vocabulary, regardless of content area. More specifically, teachers could use graphic novels as supplements to literature texts in literature courses. History teachers could use graphic novels as supplements to the text, appealing to visual learners and appealing to students' imagination and personal experience. Teachers could be encouraged to use graphic novels with students learning English as a second language.

Current standards refer to visual literacy. For those teachers not ready to use graphic novels, image-based materials as supplements can be used to reach visual learners and teach vocabulary. Using visuals with instruction increases the likelihood of information being retained long term (Brozo et al., 2014; Carter, 2007; Moeller, 2011).

Moreover, teachers seemed unsure about whether graphic novels were part of the school's curricula or their specific departmental curriculum. These responses suggest teachers may need a refresher training on existing curricula by department or subject area. Refresher training on the standards and existing curricula should be part of ongoing

professional development.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Further research to discover teachers' perceptions of using graphic novels to teach reluctant readers could be focused on students labeled as reluctant or unmotivated to read traditional novels. Teachers could ask the librarian to help choose grade-level-appropriate graphic novels across a variety of genres. Perhaps one traditional novel written in graphic novel form could be used, such as a graphic novel based on *A Wrinkle in Time* by L'Engle (1962). One could be a story from history, such as *Maus* by Spiegelman (1991). Another could be a Marvel or DC Comics graphic novel like *Batman: Year One* by Miller and Mazzucchelli (1988) or *Marvels* by Busiek and Ross (2010). The last one could be an award-winning graphic novel such as *American Born Chinese* by Yang (2008). The researcher could read these graphic novels with students, engage in group discussions, give short quizzes, and have the students take surveys to determine students' attitudes toward reading the graphic novels. Findings could be presented to the teachers at the research site.

Additional research could use mixed methods to determine whether use of graphic novels increases students' vocabulary, reading comprehension, or attitudes toward reading. This study was a case study at a single site and thus could be used as a foundation for expanded research.

### **Summary and Final Conclusion**

In conclusion, teachers' perceptions of using graphic novels to teach reluctant readers at the research site were positive. They considered graphic novels to be literature and a useful supplement to textbooks and text-only novels. Graphic novels can be used in

almost every subject in school; at the research site, English and social studies teachers were particularly open to using them. However, teachers of languages, science, teachers, and counselors also indicated the use of graphic novels.

Teachers also provided reasons students were reluctant to read at the research site. Teachers noted that reluctant readers could be struggling readers (including English language learners) whose lack of proficiency could make reading a traditional novel difficult. The use of images from graphic novels can help these students read, instead of not wanting to participate. Teachers also noted a fast-paced society heavy with technological distractions led to students' reluctance to read. They reported using multimedia to try to reach such reluctant readers, including graphic novels.

Given the positive attitudes of teachers at the school to using graphic novels, graphic novels could be added to the school's curriculum without much resistance. In addition, teachers can use the traditional novels they teach and acquire the accompanying graphic novel if available. One history teacher noted lack of resources for acquiring high-quality graphic novels, which might be an issue to address. The data from this study indicated that the teachers at the research site are open to using graphic novels to reach reluctant readers. Reluctant readers include students distracted by technology, with short attention spans, with limited reading proficiency, learning English as a second language, and with visual learning styles. If teachers use graphic novels in the classroom, they may interest students to read more and result in fewer reluctant and unmotivated readers in the school.

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## Appendix

### Graphic Novels—Teacher Questionnaire

## Graphic Novels—Teacher Questionnaire

1. Do you give your consent for your answers to be used from this questionnaire?
2. What content area(s) do you teach?
3. How old are you?
4. Are you Male or Female?
5. Please define clearly in your own words what a "graphic novel" is.
6. Do you consider graphic novels literature? Why, or why not?
7. What are your thoughts about the use of graphic novels in your classroom?
8. What are your general feelings about using graphic novels in your classroom?
9. If you said you might use them, comment on how you might use graphic novels for classroom instruction.
10. Describe how you accommodate students who are reluctant to read in your classroom.

11. Why do you think students are reluctant to read?

12. Do you think graphic novels can help teach basic reading skills, and why or why not?

13. Do you encourage students to read graphic novels during independent reading time, and why or why not?

14. Do you think that graphic novels could lead to students reading traditional novels, and why or why not?

15. Some researchers have shown that graphic novels can enhance a lesson in an academic subject. Do you think this is true, and why or why not?

16. How does your school incorporate graphic novels into the curriculum?