Abstract

This project explores the use of graphic novels to improve literacies in middle years’ students. Followed by a description of six characteristics that make a “good” graphic novel in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 offers reviews of Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory which is the theoretical framework for this project, the New London Group’s Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures (1996), as well as an overview of the topics of multimodality and visual literacy. Chapter 2 concludes with a review of a selection of literature on using graphic novels with middle years’ students to increase literacy skills focusing on the different ways these novels have been shown to be beneficial for learning. Graphic novels combine images with print in an engaging comic book style format, which is familiar to most adolescents. The format can support English Language Learners and other students who struggle with reading and writing, and provide opportunities for all students to become more multiliterate. Moreover, the content of many graphic novels exposes students to real-life situations, which can contribute to authentic classroom discussions and help to develop students’ critical thinking skills. Graphic novels can also act as a means through which students can investigate challenging social situations such as immigration, racism and stereotyping. The resource created for the project includes five annotated scholarly articles, an annotated list of 11 graphic novels suitable for middle years’ students, and five multimodal lesson plans which are all based on the four components of the NLG (1996) pedagogy of multiliteracies. The project concludes with a professional reflection on the process of completing this project, and the author’s growth in knowledge as a lifelong learner and teacher.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................. ii  
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................... iii  
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................................... vi  
Dedication ......................................................................................................................... vii  
Chapter 1 ......................................................................................................................... 1  
INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1  
  Multiple Literacies ........................................................................................................ 3  
  Characteristics of a “Good” Graphic Novel ................................................................. 3  
  A Good Story ................................................................................................................. 4  
  Effective Conventions ................................................................................................. 5  
  Colour Palette ............................................................................................................. 7  
Students Who Struggle with Reading and/or Writing .................................................. 7  
  Curricular Connections ............................................................................................... 8  
  English Language Learners ......................................................................................... 9  
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 10  
Chapter 2 ......................................................................................................................... 12  
LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................................... 12  
  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 13  
  Lev Vygotsky: Sociocultural Theory ......................................................................... 13  
  New London Group’s (1996) Pedagogy of Multiliteracies .......................................... 17  
  Multimodality and Visual Literacy ............................................................................. 18
Reflections: A Lifelong Learner .................................................................69
My Initial Understandings .................................................................69
My Learning .......................................................................................70
My Current Understandings .............................................................75
Future Pedagogy ................................................................................77
References ..........................................................................................79
APPENDICES ....................................................................................90
Appendix A: Graphic Organizer Shot Distance Angle ....................90
Appendix B: Exploring Graphic Novels .............................................91
Appendix C: Questionnaire: Exploring Graphic Novels .................92
Appendix D: Teacher Resource: Conventions of Graphic Novels ......94
Appendix E: Graphic Organizer: Conventions of Graphic Novels ....96
Appendix F: Assessment Guides for Lesson Plans .........................98
  Lesson 1 .......................................................................................98
  Lesson 2 .......................................................................................98
  Lesson 3 .......................................................................................98
  Lesson 4 .......................................................................................98
  Lesson 5 .......................................................................................99
Appendix G: English Language Arts: Grade 6 Prescribed Learning Outcomes (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006) .................................................................100
Acknowledgments

I wish to express my sincere appreciation for my tireless “cheerleaders” as I worked towards my MEd. I am grateful for Dr. Deborah Begoray’s insights, suggestions, accessibility and generosity for sharing her time with me. A huge thank you as well to Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo for sharing her knowledge and expertise with me – I appreciate your efforts on my behalf.

I would also like to thank my friends and family, especially my parents, for encouraging me along the way and allowing me to “pass” on family functions so that I could work on my MEd. In addition, I feel blessed to be surrounded by my “bestest” friends: my sisters - without whom I would not have attained my goal of completing my graduate studies. My two “inspirations”, Reyhana and Aneesa, are the brightest stars in my life and it is truly fulfilling to watch my daughters shine as they strive to reach their own goals.
Dedication

I dedicate this project to you, Roger. My best friend, partner and husband.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

One of my greatest challenges as a middle school teacher has been including a variety of texts in my class that will motivate diverse groups of students to read. I teach a Grade 6/7 class in an inner city school where each year I notice that many students who are capable thinkers and listeners struggle with reading and writing skills. For example, many English Language Learners (ELLs) in my class read well in their first language but struggle with making meaning in English with word-only books.

A few years ago, the Special Education teacher in my school diligently checked for any significant disabilities that would prevent students from improving their reading and writing skills. Her investigation revealed no additional students’ learning challenges. In addition, the books I brought into my class reflected my students’ identities and experiences. The school librarian and I also had regular book talks with my class and we shared what we love about the books we chose. Despite our efforts, many students did not engage in reading. I simply could not motivate some of my students to read. When it was time for silent reading of books freely chosen, some students held a book open but never turned the page and stared off into the distance. I knew that for many readers who struggle with reading, reading is not something they do at home, nor do their parents often model it for them. Therefore, many of these students are less likely to give reading a chance. My students often told me that they were not readers, and they found books boring. Struggling with reading had made them more and more reluctant to try.

This situation changed dramatically a couple of years ago when our school’s teacher-librarian suggested I include some graphic novels in my collection of strategically chosen books which I
brought into the class each Monday. I knew little about graphic novels, and quite frankly thought they were a sub-standard form of literature not suitable to include in the classroom.

When my students began to explore the new selection of books, there was a mad dash to scoop up every graphic novel. The demand for them was so high that students – all of my students, not just those struggling with reading and writing – began arranging with each other to be next in line for a chance to read one. I saw first-hand how graphic novels were already of great interest to many students, “thus increasing [their] motivation to engage in literacy” (Ranker, 2008, p. 296).

Even though I saw the students’ interest in these novels, I was still resistant to including them into my teaching practices since I believed interest alone does not legitimize implementing a new format in a middle years’ Language Arts class. It was not until I explored graphic novels further in a university Reading class that I decided the format was worth researching further. What did these middle years’ students find so appealing about graphic novels, and was there a way for me to tap into this interest to increase their literacy skills? This experience is how my study into graphic novels began.

What is a graphic novel? Using a comic-like medium, graphic novels often use several boxes with text and pictures that “enrich and extend the text” (Bucher & Manning, 2004, p. 67). Baird and Jackson (2007) argued that a “successful graphic novel starts with a stellar story told with words and pictures that augment the story, providing insight that text alone cannot do” (p. 5). Similarly, Kress (2003) described how “the image permits kinds of imagination not facilitated by the word” (p. 166). Weiner (2004) posits that a well-done graphic novel “offers the immediacy of the prose reading experience, with the pictures and the words working simultaneously making a graphic novel not only something one reads but something one sees as well, like reading and
watching a movie at the same time” (p. 115) In addition, there are wordless graphic novels which are “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (McCloud, 1993). Hence, it is the ‘comic’ format that defines the genre.

**Multiple Literacies**

Graphic novels, like other multimodal texts that many middle years’ students come across outside of the classroom, include multiple modes of representing meaning other than language alone or “mere [print] literacy” (New London Group, 1996, p. 64). Multimodal texts differ according to culture, context or language and can include visual images, hypertext, and graphic design elements in conjunction with the written word (Kress, 2003; Jewitt, 2008; Serafini, 2011). Many educators realize that in today’s media-dominated society and working with culturally diverse populations, teaching only the conventional literacy of reading and writing, the linguistic mode, is no longer appropriate (Ajayi, 2009; Jewitt, 2008; New London Group, 1996; Serafini, 2011). Chun (2009) argued that the graphic novel is “part of a literacy continuum of multimodal resources with which students need to be conversant in today’s world” (p. 146). However, students must be taught to “read” visual texts (Pantaleo, 2012, p. 52). Teaching visual literacy skills to adolescents can provide them with “the ability to see, understand, think, create and communicate graphically” (Tompkins, Bright, Pollard & Winsor, 2008, p. 319). In addition, the combination of images and print can help increase literacy skills for all students, not only students who struggle with reading and writing (Sadoski, & Paivio, 2013).

**Characteristics of a “Good” Graphic Novel**

Arrival (2006) by Shaun Tan as exemplars, and drawing upon information from Griffiths (2010) as well as Gallo and Weiner (2004), I have determined that the following six characteristics should be used to determine a “good” graphic novel for use with middle years students in diverse classrooms: a good story; effective conventions; a colour palette that matches the content of the story; capacity to increase literacy skills with readers and writers who struggle, including English language learners (ELLs); and curricular connections with the novel that are multiple and varied.


A good story.

Much like any good piece of prose literature, a graphic novel must be able to open up conversations in readers’ minds and between/among readers (McPherson, K. personal communication, November 7, 2013). A good or worthwhile story line is one in which versions may be found in cultures around the world such as a quest or a revenge story (Boatright, 2010; Eisner, 1985; Gallo & Weiner, 2004; Griffith, 2010; Hughes & King, 2010; McPherson, personal communication, November 7, 2013; Schwarz; 2006). Red (Yahgulanaas, 2009) is the archetypical revenge story depicting the tragic tale of a leader so frenzied by a desire for revenge that he guides the people of his village, located off the Northwest Coast of British Columbia, to the verge of war and devastation. It is also a cautionary tale of possible repercussions of rage and vengeance.

Both American Born Chinese (Yang, 2006) and The Arrival (Tan, 2006) are also universal stories dealing with archetypal experiences (Boatright, 2010). While Tan’s wordless graphic novel details the experiences of the protagonist leaving his homeland in search of a better life,
Yang’s novel portrays three connected stories: a coming-of-age story; a mythological tale of the Monkey King; and Chin-Kee, a character whose personality overemphasizes negative Chinese stereotypes including physical appearance, manner of speaking, food choices and academic performance. Unlike Yang’s novel, which portrays racism, blending in with the dominant society, and negative stereotypes, Tan’s story recounts a successful immigrant account of a male character overcoming numerous obstacles in an unspecified foreign land (Boatright, 2010). Tan’s successful, idealized immigrant story may be in direct contrast with many other immigrant storylines which do not end well. Boatright notes that the immigrant experience in Tan’s graphic novel “provides as excellent opportunity for questioning immigrant experiences” (p. 471) in an English language arts class. Although I have outlined the basic storylines of these graphic novels, there are many deeper layers that can be uncovered together with students in a middle years’ classroom. These graphic novels have the potential to “ignite dialogue, [and] force questions” (Boatright, 2010, p. 469), which are key components of a good story, and also foster a dialogic classroom environment (Smagorinsky, 2007); that is an environment in which students participate in authentic discussions and “share a sense of caring, commitment, and responsibility” (Moore & Cunningham p. 137). In order for readers to interpret and understand graphic novel stories, the way in which that story is visually laid out on the page is crucial. I provide examples of conventions in the next section.

**Effective conventions.**

In graphic novels, the number, size and shape of panels/frames per page, gutters, white space, solid or squiggly borders, font type and size, thought bubbles and speech balloons are all examples of conventions (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2011; Gallo & Weiner, 2004; Griffith, 2010; Hughes & King, 2010; Jacobs, 2007) which control the flow of the story, allow readers to make
inferences, and add depth to the meaning of the story (Eisner, 1985; Griffith, 2010). In a well-done graphic novel, these multiple conventions can increase the complexity of a graphic novel.

Panels in graphic novels “structure and organize the images and text” (Pantaleo, 2013, p. 152) to help readers navigate through the story. In addition to serving as indicators that time or space is being divided, panels also communicate information about the characters (Eisner, 1985; McCloud, 1993; Pantaleo, 2013). As the layout of panels in Yahgulanaas’s, Red (2009) is non-linear, it may, at first-read, confuse rather than inform the reader; however, this layout can open up a reader’s potentially rigid Western way of ‘reading’ the story. The author effectively merges Haida iconography with Japanese-inspired manga. Manga is loosely defined as the Japanese form of comics or graphic novels (Allen & Ingulsrud, 2005) depicting characters with large, almond-shaped eyes and long or spiky hair. Yahgulanaas’s poignant novel is a colourful, non-standard swirl of art with varying number of panels per page (Levell, 2013).

On one page in Red (2009), Yahgulanaas uses only one splash panel, which forces the reader to focus on this poignant aspect of the story, much like Yang’s splash panel depicting a mountain of rock burying the Monkey King in American Born Chinese (2006). On several pages Tan uses a grid of 30 smaller panels of clouds on a single page evoking the feeling of the monotonous passage of time as the protagonist crosses the ocean on a ship (Hughes et al., 2010; Stevenson, 2008). This multi-paneled page is juxtaposed with the next one on which is a splash panel showing the picture of the ship set back in the distance on a dark ocean conveying the feeling of time standing still. These few examples reveal how paneling in graphic novels is an integral convention through which meaning is conveyed.
**Colour palette.**

In a good graphic novel, visuals add information and subtle nuances that enhance the meaning of the story (Hughes & King, 2010). In *Red* (2009), *The Arrival* (2006), and *American Born Chinese* (2006), the colour palette assists the reader in interpreting the tone and mood of the story (Griffith, 2010). For example, the pages in *Red* (2009) visually explode with a burst of colours, mainly red, which is sharply contrasted with thick, black panel borders. The colour red can be associated with blood, danger and fire (Bang, 2000) suiting this fast-paced revenge story. The colours pull the reader into the pages of the book to experience the same intense feelings and turmoil of the characters in the story. On the other hand, the soft, muted sepia tones in *The Arrival* (2006) work well to enhance the old-fashioned, mystical air of the immigrant’s story (Stevenson, 2008). In *American Born Chinese* (2006), Yang deliberately emphasizes the characters’ skin tones, which play a pivotal role in the theme of stereotypes and racism. The character, Jin Wang, struggles with his identity and tries to change his physical appearance in order to fit in with the white students. Without the use of colour, this story would lose some of the layered meaning emphasizing the different skin colours of both the Chinese characters and the white characters. This story and many others like it with their engaging layouts and strong visual elements have the potential to support readers who struggle in the classroom.

**Students who struggle with reading and/or writing.**

As graphic novels are a part of popular culture, many students who struggle with literacy are already engaging with them on their own time (Frey & Fisher, 2004; Gallo & Weiner, 2004; Hughes & King, Perkins, Fuke, 2011). This involvement with graphic novels can assist in increasing reluctant learners’ reading and writing skills (Bitz, 2004; Frey & Fisher, 2004; Hughes et al., 2011). Some researchers have described how graphic novels have been used to
entice reluctant readers into the library or into classrooms in order to get students to read the more widely accepted print-only books (Frey & Fisher 2004; Gallo & Weiner, 2004; Schwarz, 2006). This interpretation reinforces the stigma that graphic novels are somehow inferior and only for learners who are struggling. I argue that graphic novels are not a “simpler” form of text but rather are a more complex form of reading because readers have to focus on the usual “literary elements of character, plot and dialogue” as well as consider “visual elements such as colour, shading, and panel layout” (Schwarz, 2006, p. 59). For example, in Red (2009) the author uses Haida art with vivid colours to capture the intensity of the main character’s quest for vengeance. The Arrival (2006) opens up possibilities for different perspectives, interpretations and questions. For example, why is the immigrant’s fantastical pet drawn as such, or why is the appearance of the book itself made to look worn? Why did Tan write it as a wordless graphic novel? American Born Chinese (2006) features an illustration of only half of Jin Wang’s face and torso on the front cover with the other half on the back. Why might the publisher or author have made this visual decision? Discussing, drawing and writing about possible answers to these queries are not only for readers and writers who struggle, but for all students.

**Curricular connections.**

As a middle years’ teacher, I believe a good graphic novel must have a variety of characteristics that help teachers easily connect it to the British Columbia English Language Arts Prescribed Learning Outcomes (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006). The use of graphic novels can help middle years’ students develop various ways of learning and address many Prescribed Learning Outcomes including speaking, reading, writing, listening, viewing and representing (Pantaleo, 2013). Some examples of activities to make curricular connections include helping students develop critical literacy skills, such as asking questions why Red’s
Developing critical literacy skills involves students exploring more than the text’s obvious messages and to question, scrutinize, and/or disagree with the author’s messages (Boatright, 2010). For example, *The Arrival* (2006) provides an excellent opportunity for students to question immigrants’ experiences and the way these experiences are portrayed. Although Tan’s protagonist faces many obstacles, he nevertheless is successful. However, Boatright (2010) questions whether the light skin colour and European-like appearance of the depicted immigrant and his family may have contributed to this success. Students might also discuss what it is like to be alone in an unfamiliar place. Does it feel or look strange?

In *American Born Chinese* (2006), Jin Wang’s overwhelming desire to fit in with the American white society takes him on a journey, which eventually finds him coming to terms with his dual identity. Struggling with identity is a topic many adolescents face. This topic opens the door for interesting discussions about stereotypes in the graphic novels and in the media. Having students synthesize the information from discussions into a thoughtful multimodal way of expressing themselves such as incorporating video with images and text, or sketching, can afford students with creative opportunities to interact with texts in an authentic manner (Choo, 2010, p. 171).

**English language learners.**

While graphic novels are useful for all students, they can be especially helpful for ELLs to explore various themes that are connected to their own backgrounds, and to increase their reading and writing skills (Bitz, 2004; Boatright, 2010; Chun, 2009; Danzak, 2011; Frey &
Fisher, 2004; Ranker, 2008). Klinger (2008) described English Language Learners (ELLs) as “students who speak a language other than English as their first language and who are in the process of acquiring English as a second or additional language” (p. 5). These students are arriving in our mainstream classrooms, and their lack of English, diverse primary languages and varied learning styles often overwhelm teachers. The combination of visuals and print text in graphic novels provide ELLs with clues as to what is going on in the story even if their reading vocabulary is limited. As Red (2009) uses Haida manga art conventions, some ELLs may already be familiar with this comic form, thus making it a viable choice for them. By building background knowledge and information concerning different worldviews, and by tapping into ELLs’ own cultural revenge stories, Red (2009) could be used with ELLs. American Born Chinese (2006) and The Arrival (2006) deal solely with narratives that create immigrant experiences. As such, many ELLs would be able to connect with the experiences of the characters and recognize the expressions on their faces. These personal connections can enrich and deepen their learning.

Conclusion

As graphic novels are a complex form of multimodal text, they can prepare students to better navigate our multimodal world (Chun, 2009; Hughes et al., 2010; Jacobs, 2007; Schwarz, 2006). Although they may look simplistic to some, the stories told in many graphic novels are as “complex and thought-provoking as any traditional text” (Hughes et al., 2010, p. 603). An effective graphic novel provides the immediacy of the print-only reading experience coupled with images working together to create something one reads as well as something one views (Gallo & Weiner, 2004). I maintain that using graphic novels with middle years’ students will help increase their multiliteracy skills.
In Chapter 2 I describe Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory which is the theoretical framework that pertains to using graphic novels in middle years’ classrooms as well as the New London Group’s A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures (1996) before exploring the topics of multimodality and visual literacy. I then review a selection of literature on using graphic novels with middle years’ students focusing on the various ways these novels have been shown to be beneficial for learning. In Chapter 3, I include five annotated scholarly articles that I recommend to my colleagues, provide a list of 11 suitable graphic novels for middle years’ students, and present five multimodal lesson plans for use with Grade 6 students. In Chapter 4, I describe my journey of learning about the potential influence of graphic novels for middle years’ students in my scholarly reflection on the process of completing this project.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

New technologies have profoundly changed the way we communicate in our digitally connected world. This surge in globally diverse ways of communicating permeates the environment of most middle school classrooms, many of which include students who are culturally and linguistically diverse (Ajayi, 2009). Today’s adolescents live in a world bursting with “images, actions [and] sound” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 241), and may have access to a myriad of electronic communication devices that keep them continuously connected. In turn, educators need to be responsive to this explosion of texts. Indeed, the term “text” has expanded to include other forms beyond the printed word, such as “visual, media, and new media texts” (Choo, 2010, p. 168). Scholars (Ajayi, 2009; Jewitt, 2008; Mills, 2010; Perry, 2006) have repeatedly stressed that print-only text is no longer sufficient in preparing students to navigate through this multimodal world. Furthermore, many researchers (e.g., Hughes et al., 2011; Jacobs, 2007; Pantaleo, 2012, 2014; Schwarz, 2006; Wilmot, Begoray, & Banister, 2012) have noted that it is essential for adolescents to understand and respond to specific types of visual design elements in order for them to participate fully in expressing and sharing their unique ideas within the public and private spheres. Without explicit knowledge of the meanings conveyed by and through a variety of complex images, and an understanding of how to use these images, students, especially students who struggle with reading and writing, will be unable to fully join in the conversations of today and of the future. Researchers have emphasized the responsibility of schools to offer more visual, comprehensive and multicultural forms of education from which all students will benefit.
This literature review examines how graphic novels can increase the literacy skills of middle years’ students, especially those who struggle with reading and writing. Following an introduction to Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, and the New London Group’s (1996) pedagogy of multiliteracies, I discuss multimodality and visual literacy. I then review the literature on adolescent literacy, reading and composing multimodal texts, and students who struggle with reading and writing. Chapter 2 concludes with a review of some recent literature on the use of graphic novels to increase literacy skills of middle years’ students.

Theoretical Framework

**Lev Vygotsky: Sociocultural theory.**

Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky’s theory on the social and cultural nature of human development continues to impact educators around the world, more than a century after his birth in 1896 (Cross, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2013). Although Vygotsky died at the age of 37, he produced copious amounts of work written in his native Russian, in which he attempted to develop a comprehensive psychology of the human mind in social context (Smagorinsky, 2007; Smagorinsky, 2013).

Vygotsky (1978) was the first developmental psychologist to suggest culture becomes a part of an individual’s nature, and that learning, together with development, begin on the first day of a child’s life. His interpretation of culture suggests that humans are not independent of outside interference. Rather, human cognitive ability is innately social because it encompasses “socially evolved and socially organized tools” (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992, p. 551). These tools, which include speech, written language, diagrams, drawings and works of art, serve as vehicles through which new thoughts develop (Englert et al., 2006; Smagorinsky, 2007; Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992).
A tenet of a sociocultural perspective is the idea that thought and feeling cannot be separated (Smagorinsky, 2013); thus, all facets of human life and experiences are connected both within the child and with the outside world. Today, with the steady influx of students from diverse cultural backgrounds entering classrooms, Vygotsky’s century-old belief that culture shapes students’ cognitive development resonates among educators and researchers alike (Ajayi, 2009; Bitz, 2004; Boatright, 2010; Cross, 2010; Zammit, 2011). Through the lens of Vygotsky’s sociocultural perspective, students are seen to learn from a combination of values, experiences and actions that are influenced by the people who surround them in the larger environment (Almasi & Garas-York, 2009; Kress & Langer, 2001). Vygotsky’s main insights included that thinking is social in origin, and people frequently believe their cultural ways of knowing and behaving are the norm (Smagorinsky, 2007). Should someone exhibit another way of thinking due to immersion in a separate culture, some may often consider them to be “lesser people” (Smagorinsky, 2007, p. 64) lacking the ability to gain self-respect inside dominant institutions (Mac Ruaric, 2011). Smagorinsky (2007) emphasized that Vygotsky’s use of the term “social” referred not only to placing students in small groups to encourage purposeful discussion; rather, the meaning of social is expanded to include the notion that even when people are alone, their thinking “involves a sort of dialogue with others, including those long gone” (p. 62). This history of experience with language and culture shapes teachers’ and students’ knowledge (Langer, 2001) in the way they view the world. In a social, multicultural classroom community, teachers play a pivotal role in shaping how different knowledge and skills are shared, what is learned and how learning influences the individual student (Ajayi, 2009).

Using graphic novels in middle years’ classrooms is congruent with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory for several reasons. To begin with, Vygotsky’s work focuses on the role teachers play in
shaping cognitive development in students. He proposed that effective teachers bring to light the often invisible cognitive progression involved in the learning process through techniques such as think-alouds and modeling (Englert, Mariage & Dunsmore, 2006). For instance, when exploring with students the conventions of a graphic novel such as the connection between font size and colour, teachers can ‘think aloud’, displaying their inner cognitive progression as they make meaning of those conventions. This step-by-step process can help students increase their own understanding of multimodal images making the implicit become explicit. Moreover, explicitly teaching the conventions and compositional elements of graphic novels can help students learn how meaning is represented and communicated through images which “can enable students’ development as critical viewers, readers and writers” (Pantaleo, 2014, p. 41). Sharing their expertise in this direct way, teachers can provide opportunities for students to create their own links between thinking and doing (Englert et al., 2006).

Vygotsky (1978) further argued that guiding students to attain learning experiences that are beyond their current level of development would put them in the “zone of proximal development” (p. 87). While teaching the conventions of a graphic novel for example, the teacher can help move students into the zone of proximal development by teaching them to identify events that can take place between the panels or in the “gutters” (McCloud, 1993, p. 66). In graphic novels, these gutters separate elements of the story, sometimes jumping forward in time. Rather than telling students how the story moves to the next level and what could happen in between, teachers can use scaffolding, providing just enough information to explain the visual components and help students expand learning and engage further with the story. It is within this zone that students at varying learning levels, with the assistance from teachers and other experts, will continue to expand their learning potential with the use of graphic novels.
Vygotsky strongly believed that teachers must not only include students with diverse learning needs in classroom activities, but also treat them with respect to alleviate possible feelings of inferiority (Smagorinsky, 2013). Vygotsky was “passionate” (Smagorinsky, 2013, p. 195) about removing students’ feelings of inadequacy, which he believed to be worse than the original feeling of being different. Smagorinsky suggested that treating students with respect begins with promoting empathy within the classroom through activities such as students taking the opposite perspective to their own, and writing a story from that perspective.

Additionally, respect for different cultures can be promoted through reading stories from diverse cultures emphasizing those cultural differences as “valued, valuable, and deeply embedded” (McCabe, 1997, p. 467). Creating an inclusive classroom environment fosters healthy self-esteem in students, which can lead them to become more active members of society (Smagorinsky, 2013).

Further, using graphic novels with students who struggle with reading and writing, including ELLs, can offer students a point of entry into the literary discussion connecting their own personal experiences with those found in many graphic novels (Boatright, 2010; Wilmot, Begoray, & Banister, 2013). If students are unable to decipher the print-only text, the use of images together with the printed word assists them in uncovering the meaning of the story. Thus, Vygotsky’s sociocultural framework offers a way to conceptualize teachers’ and students’ learning taking place in a respectful, social environment where all can fully take part in what is learned and how it is absorbed. Sociocultural theory is the foundation of the pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), which I discuss in the next section.
New London Group’s Pedagogy of Multiliteracies

The New London Group (1996) (herein after referred to as NLG) presented an overview of literacy pedagogy departing from the past single literacy, controlled language of the dominant culture to a pedagogy of multiliteracies (p. 60). The sociocultural theoretical foundation of multiliteracies positions the learning as occurring within a personal and social environment, and acknowledges how the classroom environment and the interactions occurring therein can facilitate students’ engagement with texts.

A pedagogy of multiliteracies offers two concepts relevant to our changing communications environment. First, it includes the multiplicity of communication networks and media, which are connected to the growth of mass media and the Internet; as well, it embraces the burgeoning impact of cultural and linguistic diversity as a result of migration and globalization (NLG, 1996). Although in recent years the concept of multiliteracies has extended to include a wide array of academic disciplines, this literature review refers to the original NLG’s discussions about “literacy and literacy teaching and learning” (Mills, 2009, p. 104). The two overarching objectives of a pedagogy of multiliteracies are to enable or facilitate student access to the language of work, power and community, and to achieve student success through satisfying employment (NLG, 1996).

Using graphic novels to increase literacy learning is positioned within the NLG’s multiliteracies pedagogy and is supported by numerous scholars including Choo, (2010), Chun (2009), Jacobs (2007), Mills (2010), Pantaleo (2011), and Schwarz (2006). The NLG’s (1996, pp. 85 & 86) multiliteracies pedagogy involves the following four inter-related components:
a) **situated practice** – teachers guide a community of learners immersed in an authentic activity based on the learners’ experiences. This community must include expert novices who are able to guide new learners.

b) **overt instruction** – teachers actively intervene to scaffold learning activities and explicitly teach tasks. The goal for students is to be consciously aware of what is being learned, and to develop a metalanguage.

c) **critical framing** – teachers help learners frame their growing mastery in practice. Stepping back from their learned task, students can now constructively critique their work, extend their knowledge of the task, and apply or change their learning.

d) **transformed practice** – teachers, with their students, develop ways students can transfer and re-create Designs of meaning from one context to another.

By embedding these four inter-related components into their teaching practice, educators can help students increase their learning potential to be successful both with in-school literacies, and with those literacies students are engaged in their out-of-school lives. For many students, out-of-school literacies involve diverse forms of texts such as graphic novels, text messaging, and video games (Bucher & Manning, 2004). Together, by using the NLG’s four practices, teachers can effectively teach the conventions of such diverse texts in the classroom. Through situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice received *in*-school, students will be better prepared to negotiate their *out*-of-school multimodal literacies.

**Multimodality and visual literacy.**

With increasing numbers of students coming into schools with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013), teachers are urged to include multiliteracies in their teaching practice. Multiliteracies emphasizes making meaning through the many
“culturally shaped resources” called modes (Kress, et. al., 2005, p. 2). Various modes, such as language, visual, textual, audio, behavioural and spatial (NLG, 1996), can be used to represent and communicate meaning. These modes of making meaning are constantly evolving depending upon culture and context, and they can “never occur by themselves” (Kress, et. al., 2005, p. 2), but always with other modes in dynamic relationships.

Many middle years’ students interest with multimodal texts which include various modes of meaning such as page layouts, screen formats, visual images, foregrounding and backgrounding, audio bites, hypertext, and graphic design elements in conjunction with the written word (Jewitt, 2008; Mills, 2009; Serafini, 2011). Chun (2009) argued that the graphic novel is “part of a literacy continuum of multimodal resources with which students need to be conversant in today’s world” (p. 146). Exploring with students this multimodal nature in graphic novels can help prepare them to navigate a globally connected and diverse world overflowing with multimodal images (NLG, 1996), a task for which they need to employ visual literacies.

Many scholars believe in teaching students the skills of visual literacy (Burmark, 2002; Kress et al., 2003) so they may benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community and economic life (NLG, 1996). To become visually literate, Burmark (2002) explained that students must consider the techniques used to design images, be able to name the vocabulary of shapes and colours, recognize the characteristics of an image that actually give it meaning, and “develop the cognitive skills necessary to interpret or create the ideas that inform an image” (p. v). Graphic novels often have complex, eye-catching visual representations that many students find alluring and engaging (Thompson, 2008). This initial attraction to the novels can help students’ progress with their visual literacy competencies. Readers of graphic novels can build multiple literacies as they consider visual elements such as
“colour, point of view, line, perspective, typographic elements, and panel layout” (Pantaleo, 2014, p. 41). By tapping into students’ motivation to read graphic novels, educators can guide them to develop visual literacies (Pantaleo, 2014, p. 41).

With such compelling and comprehensive formats, graphic novels have the potential to be powerful classroom tools for teachers. The National Council of Teachers of English (2004) stated that adolescents are “already reading in multiple ways . . . [and that teachers need] to recognize and value [their] multiple literacy resources” (n.p.). In the following sections, I review the literature on adolescent literacy, reading and composing multimodal texts, students who struggle with reading and writing, and the use of graphic novels as a tool to increase reading and writing skills with middle years’ students.

**Reviewing the Research**

**Adolescent literacy.**

Research findings have shown that young adolescents experience increase success when offered a wide range of texts and activities that meet their specific needs (Allington, 2007; Hughes et al., 2011; Li, 2004). With their popular appeal among middle years’ students, including graphic novels in the English Language Arts curriculum may motivate not only students who struggle with reading and writing, (Bitz, 2004; Boatright, 2010; Danzak, 2011; Jacobs, 2007; Schwarz, 2006) but all students (Brenner, 2006; Hughes et al., 2011) to increase their multiliteracy skills (Brenner, 2006; Choo, 2010; Jacobs, 2007; Schwarz, 2006; Hughes et al., 2011; Pantaleo, 2011, 2013).

The middle school years include vital social and cognitive stages of development for adolescents (Perry, 2006); as such, their unique characteristics “should serve as a basis for selecting instructional strategies” (McEwin & Greene, 2010, p. 55). By recognizing middle
years’ students’ engagement with out-of-school literacies and using those literacies in school, teachers can help students see themselves as valued members of their classroom community (Faulkner, 2005; NLG, 1996; Perry, 2006).

Faulkner’s (2005) ethnographic case study demonstrated how middle school students’ out-of-school literacies needed to be incorporated into classroom literacies in order to make education meaningful for them. The researcher spent six months immersed in the school culture of 11- and 12-year-old students in a middle school in Australia. In addition to talking with and observing this large group, Faulkner was allowed “access” (Creswell, 2013, p. 94) into one of the classrooms at this school where she conducted a case study with the teacher and one of her students. Faulkner examined if and how the middle school model affected the shaping of literacy for young adolescents, and the pedagogic choices made by teachers. The purpose of her study was to explore two questions: “how do teacher constructions of adolescent literacies mesh with adolescent constructions of literacy within a middle school environment, [and] what influence has a middle school approach to schooling had on these constructions of literacy for young adolescents, if any?” (Faulkner, 2005, p. 108).

Analysis of data, collected through discussions and interviews with and observations of students and teachers, determined there were varied constructions of adolescent literacies. From this data, Faulkner (2005) created an “expanded view” (p. 113) of adolescent literacies: the public school-based literacies, which included mostly reading, writing and interpreting predominantly print based texts; and the private literacies such as electronic multiple literacies, music culture, and the awareness of the effect of global communications. These private literacies, Faulkner (2005) reported, influence the “personal, social and individual lives of students” (p. 109).
Mon, the teacher participant in Faulkner’s (2005) case study, revealed that she taught her students that an essay must have “an introduction, two to three paragraphs, and a conclusion” (p. 114). Mon’s notion of teaching writing reflects Murray’s (1977) idea of “teaching a product” (p. 3). The teacher’s pedagogy was influenced by the belief that giving a student an assignment means telling him/her what to say and how to say it. This prescriptive way of teaching, Murray (1997) reported, “cheat[s] . . . students of the opportunity to learn the process of discovery we call writing” (p. 5), and rejects students’ unique interests they bring to learning (NLG, 1996). Struggling with essay writing, Bede, the student participant in this study, felt as though the teacher “spoke another language” and believed that literacy was only “reading, writing and all that” (Faulkner, 2005, p. 116). The teacher and student were unaware that the meaning of literacy had expanded to include a “multiplicity of discourses” (NLG, 1996, p. 61) evident everywhere in the world today. Faulkner explained that rejecting the inclusion of adolescents’ private literacies in public school literacies is often “linked to student alienation and disengagement during middle years of schooling” (Cormack, 1996; Cumming, 1996; as cited in Faulkner, 2005, p. 109).

Faulkner (2005) concluded that although basic reading and writing skills using print-based material are necessary to function in the present education systems, there is “tension and disharmony” (p. 116) evident when considering Bede’s self-analysis of his literacy skills. The researcher witnessed “limited constructions of literacy . . . [which] highlighted the continual marginalization of those students with which the school most intends to engage – young adolescents” (Faulkner, 2005, p. 117). Faulkner (2005) suggested that teachers should ensure students are engaged with “technology in an expanded way, beyond [simply using] technology as a tool” to using technology in “creative applications” (p. 113). Further, Faulkner determined that
technology could be used to bridge public literacies with private literacies, such as multimodal reading and writing practices. Indeed, teachers can consciously re-engage middle years’ students by embedding within the English Language Arts curriculum more meaningful texts to students such as multimodal texts that incorporate visual and audio modes that are more engaging “than many of the printed texts they are assigned in school” (Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011, p. 55).

Mills (2010), another Australian scholar, echoed Faulkner’s (2005) call for adolescent literacy teachers to move away from the exclusive use of traditional, reading and writing forms of communication in their classrooms. The research presented in her article was part of a larger ethnographic study that included numerous schools and classrooms exploring students’ access to multimodal and digital literacy practices in a multicultural school environment. Mills conducted interviews with four culturally diverse students, ages 11-12, from a low socioeconomic area. Only one of these students had a home computer and none had Internet access, which reinforces the notion that not all of today’s adolescents are “digital natives” (Mills, 2010, p. 37). Mills (2010) emphasized that although many middle years’ students are familiar with varied multimodal literacy practices, “they are not all experts of important multimodal and digital practices” (pp. 43-44). She emphasized the importance of teachers providing explicit instruction for students as they engage with the proliferation of new literacies.

Mills stressed the need for teachers to find out which literacies matter to students in their classrooms, and then incorporate that knowledge into classroom multimodal activities. For example, Mills (2010) discovered that when a Tongan student, who was engaged with print-only literacies outside of school, was asked if she liked creating things in school with “words, pictures, movement or sound”, she replied, “yes, because it’s new for me” (p. 38). As multimodal literacy practices were new for this student, Mills reported that the teacher could
bridge the distance between the student’s print-only literacy practices with multimodal ones familiar in the out-of-school context by teaching multimodal ones in class. By providing access to new literacies, the teacher could, within the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87), extend this student’s knowledge.

As part of her study, Mills observed two 11-12-year-old boys creating an educational digital movie about the dangers of prolonged sun exposure. Mills noted the importance of the teacher’s scaffolding the multimodal literacies for the students before they reached a complex stop-motion filming technique using still images with clay figures. She asked key questions such as, “how are you going to make the sun screen stay still though?” (Mills, 2010, p. 41). Rather than providing the information for the students, the teacher guided them to consider for themselves possibilities for “representing movement through still images” (Mills, 2010, p. 41). Highlighting the importance of overt instruction (NLG, 1996), the teacher introduced the students to the filming technique of “switching between different characters in an interaction” (Mills, 2010, p. 41) to allow the viewers to infer that the sunscreen had been sprayed, which focused the students on the specific learning task. By scaffolding multimodal literacies and modeling new techniques for students, teachers can guide students to move “beyond the known to the new” (Mills, 2010, p. 44). In addition, Mills (2010) noted, schools “have a greater responsibility” (p. 44) to make space for students to read popular and multimodal texts in the English classroom. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the term “text” includes other ways of communicating meaning beyond the printed word, such as “visual images and their relationship to the written word” (NLG, 1996, p. 61). I next discuss the link between reading and composing multimodal texts in the following section.
Reading and composing multimodal texts.

Fountas and Pinnell (2001) argued that “the interconnectedness of reading and writing is profound and inescapable” (p. vii). Furthermore, breaking up these complex literacy processes impedes the ultimate goal of literacy education, which is making meaning from and through all text. With regard to reading and writing instruction, Fountas and Pinnell reported that effective teaching in the intermediate grades begins with knowledge about the students’ literacy backgrounds. Once a teacher is aware of his/her students’ unique interests, which may include engagement with visual texts such as graphic novels or Facebook, s/he can then incorporate that information into the lesson activities. Building from information familiar to students, coupled with reading to them, helps students increase their vocabulary and internalize the language structures that can “expand their abilities as readers and writers” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 113). Langer and Flihan (2000) add that writers not only integrate what they have learned about “language, structure and style” (p. 122) from their reading, but also reflect on the experiences they have gained during reading to build stronger connections while generating ideas for writing.

In a quantitative study set in Chile, Parodi (2007) explored the reading and writing connection with 439 Grade 8 students from low-middle class backgrounds. He designed two comprehension tests and two writing tasks to assess “correlations between discourse comprehension and production” (Parodi, 2007, p. 231). The content of both the writing and reading tests addressed topics previously determined to be of interest to the students. The researcher gathered data by requiring the students to write an argumentative text based on directions that explicitly outlined the purpose of the writing and the objective of the task. Additionally, the students were asked to read argumentative texts and answer nine open-ended questions that required them to make text-based inferences. Parodi (2007) analyzed the data by adopting a triangulation method, which is
the “process [of] corroborating evidence from different sources [individuals, types of data, or methods] . . . to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Four experts read the tests based upon the evaluation guidelines and provided answers on a sheet with Likert scales, which is an approach used to score responses along a range from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Gunderman & Chang, 2013). As a result of those analyses, the researcher reported a 51.8% commonality, revealing “a quite extensive intersecting area between comprehension and production” (Parodi, 2007, p. 236). Parodi (2007) further stated that the processes involved in both reading and writing share common knowledge-based strategies and as such, language teachers should be “teaching reading and writing together” (p. 238) as they are “reciprocal and mutually reinforcing” (Fearn & Farnan, 2001, as cited in Fisher & Frey, 2003, p. 404).

Qualitative research by Fisher and Frey (2003) further exemplified how teaching reading and writing together can foster increased student learning. The researchers explored the use of a gradual release of responsibility model of writing instruction in a Grade 9 class in California in which 75% of the students were ELLs. This class of adolescent learners was part of a school in which the student population “mirrored that of many urban schools: 46% of the students were English language learners, [and] 98% qualified for free or reduced-cost lunch” (Fisher & Frey, 2003, p. 397). The students were found to be “significantly below grade level” (Fisher & Frey, 2003, p. 397) readers testing between 3.4 grade level and 6.4 grade level on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test. Although the goal of the course was to increase literacy achievement through a readers’ workshop format, in reality, it was a “homogenous remedial reading class” (Fisher & Frey, 2003, p. 397). Fisher co-taught this class of 24 students from September to January for 90 minutes per day. The class began with a shared reading or read-aloud, followed
by writing instruction for 20 minutes, with the remaining time spent independently reading or working in groups on activities such as use of a word wall, and vocabulary development. In addition, some of the students worked individually with a reading specialist during the week. Fisher used various approaches with the students such as shared reading events, word study, comprehension strategy instruction, and the Language Experience Approach (LEA). The LEA begins with students sharing their thoughts on a topic, while the teacher writes their thoughts on the board. The LEA was successful because the students were “interested in discussing their life experiences” (Fisher & Frey, 2003, p. 399), which created a community of diverse learners (NLG, 1996).

The gradual release of responsibility model, which is founded on Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, emphasizes “what the child can do with assistance today, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87), was used by Fisher and Frey (2003) when it was determined that the struggling students were unprepared for independent writing prompts. This model requires the teacher to move from taking “all of the responsibility for performing a task . . . to a situation where the students assume all of the responsibility” (Duke & Pearson, 2002, p. 211, as cited in Fisher & Frey, 2003, p. 397). When the teacher assumes the responsibility, s/he is modeling the preferred strategy, whereas when the student assumes the task, s/he is practicing the strategy (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). The ideal outcome is a confident learner who assumes responsibility for her/his own learning. As the term progressed, Fisher and Frey (2003) reported that the instruction shifted from teacher-controlled to “student-directed writing” (p. 398).

Collection of data included samples of student writing and assessment of reading practices throughout the five-month term. Analysis of the data revealed statistically significant differences
not only in terms of writing fluency, and length of sentence response, but also on reading achievement of the students over the term. Fisher and Frey (2003) noted that teachers “should connect their reading and writing activities in meaningful ways” (p. 404) as some of the best writing from a group of learners who struggled with literacy came after discussion of readings from books with which the students had previous experiences.

In another qualitative study exploring the reading and writing connection, Early and Marshall (2008) examined whether having students “read” a mandala as a visual text would increase their writing skills and help them show growth in their understanding of short stories. A mandala is a traditional Hindu and Buddhist symbol consisting of a circle framed by a square. The participants were 28 ELLs from Grades 8-11 and one teacher. The researcher observed classes and gathered field notes for over one month in November. In addition, Early and Marshall conducted interviews with groups of four or five students, transcribed the interviews, and gathered and recorded students’ written reflections on the use of the mandala as a mediating tool. The researcher also recorded the students’ self-evaluations of whether they had used their first language in a productive way during the lessons. As well, the teacher provided schoolwork evaluations which were recorded by the researcher.

Using the mandala to visually symbolize the representation of theme, style and character evident in a student selected short story, the students worked in groups of three “going from texts to visuals trying to agree upon the best symbolic imagery” (Early & Marshall, 2008, p. 384) when creating their own mandala. Next, the students decided in their groups which of the three elements (theme, style or characterization) each would choose as their topic for an essay about the short story they had analyzed in the group.
Although the teacher reported difficulty in measuring the degree of the students’ developmental growth in their essay writing, she concluded that the students’ learning was “much richer than [she] ever expected” (Early & Marshall, 2008, p. 393). Overall, in the students’ written reflections and during their interviews, they not only believed their writing had improved, the students also felt more confident using this multimodal approach to “increase proficiency in writing English mainstream essays” (Early & Marshall, 2008, p. 393). In addition, 26 of the 28 students reported that the use of a visual enabled them to better understand and appreciate the text. For example one student reported that, “it made my brain start thinking and opened my eyes” (Early & Marshall, 2008, p. 385). Reinforcing Vygotsky’s belief that thinking is social in origin and learning occurs in collaboration with those around us (Ajayi, 2009), one student noted that “it was better that we worked in a group . . . each of us is going to understand different parts of the text so we share and discuss” (Early & Marshall, 2008, p. 388). Moreover, the “crossing from written and visual to oral” (Early & Marshall, 2008, p. 387) was another example of cross-modal meaning making that transpired during this study.

In the next section, I discuss the potential for increasing literacy skills of students who struggle with reading and writing using a variety of strategies including infusing classroom instruction with access to multimodal literacies such as digital literacies and visual images.

**Students who struggle with reading and/or writing.**

Students who struggle with reading and writing face challenges for a myriad of reasons. Helsel and Greenberg (2007) explain that students who struggle with writing “do little revision without teacher or peer support” (p. 753), and the majority of corrections made by writers who struggle include only minor changes to surface level features of the text. O’Brien (2006) defined adolescent readers who struggle as “lack[ing] the skills and strategies that competent readers
possess . . . [which include] fluent decoding, . . . [the ability to] self regulate, [and to] automatically draw on a repertoire of skills and strategies” (as cited in Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 2006, p. 34). They struggle to keep up with their more capable peers. Moreover, adolescent readers who struggle often come from high poverty areas with additional stresses placed upon them from outside of school (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Palumbo, 2009). Having worked extensively with adolescents who struggle with literacy, researchers Fisher and Frey (2003) described some of the stresses these adolescents experience including spending time in jail, having child care responsibilities for siblings, and lacking parental supervision. Allington (2007) describes students who struggle with reading as “remedial reader[s], . . . pupil[s] with a learning disability, [or] … English Language Learner[s] (ELLs)” (p. 7). ELLs are students who have not yet acquired English as a second or additional language and “they are not yet fully proficient in English” (Orosco, de Schnoewise, de Onis, Klingner & Hoover, 2008, p. 5). In addition, some students may not be only struggling due to a temporary lack of English language skills, but also struggling with acquiring reading and writing skills in general (Li, 2004).

Understanding students’ culture is congruent with the Vygotskian perspective previously discussed calling on teachers to foster feelings of inclusion by learning about their students’ cultural backgrounds, which allows them to become productive members of society (Smagorinsky, 2013). The notion that ELLs can be struggling for reasons other than a lack of English language skills was demonstrated in Li’s (2004) ethnographic study. Li’s focus was to understand the reasons two Chinese-Canadian ELLs (Billy and Jake) were struggling with reading and writing in their Grade 4/5 class and at home. Other participants in the study were the students’ mothers, and the students’ two teachers. The researcher visited the boys’
classrooms for one full day each week from October 2000 to June 2001. As part of the Chinese culture herself, Li was able to immerse herself in the “day-to-day lives of the participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 54) and “move between” (Li, 2004, p. 38) social worlds to “study the interaction among members of the culture-sharing group” (Creswell, 2013, p. 90).

Li’s (2004) multiple sources of data included data collected both in and out of the school setting, such as samples of students’ written work, direct observations, and participant observation of “literature circle discussions [and] book readings” (p. 39). Other documents collected included focus group discussion notes and audio-recorded interviews. The interviews took place separately with each teacher, and with individual parents at home. The at-home interviews with parents were conducted in Chinese and transcribed into English. As culture shapes students’ cognitive development (Langer, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978), the researcher noted the varying cultural perspectives of the teachers, parents and students, which enhanced the breadth of this qualitative inquiry. For example, Billy’s teachers believed his literacy performance was below expectations because of his “serious personality and his extensive first language use” (Li, 2004, p. 47). Billy’s mother, on the other hand, perceived that his current literacy problems stemmed from poor education in Grades 1 to 3, which did not prepare him for Grade 4 (Li, 2004, p. 49). She became “frustrated” at Billy’s lack of desire to complete his homework, and believed the school should provide more homework. Meanwhile, Billy felt he had “too much homework” (Li, 2004, p. 49) and reported that he learned better at home than at school.

Situating her understanding of the two learners who were struggling within a socioconstructivist perspective, Li (2004) brought to light several cultural and pedagogical discontinuities including, “Chinese immigrant parents are reported to favor traditional, skill-
based approaches over holistic practices” (p. 34). At home the children were taught “word-by-word decoding” whereas at school, they learned “semantic oriented reading tasks . . . [and how to] make connections between pages” (Li, 2004, p. 60).

Li (2004) discovered that Billy’s limited vocabulary and low reading comprehension “prevented him from reading more: reading less in turn inhibited his further growth in reading ability” (p. 46). Moreover, because the students’ problems were not formally assessed, the type of support they received was ineffective. The results from Li’s study shed light on literacy discontinuities of ELL students who struggle with literacy. For example, although both ELLs shared some similar aspects of their learning, they varied in many other respects such as in-class behaviour, their willingness to read and write, and their family situations. The researcher further discovered that the use of neutral themes in books used for literature circles seemed “detached from students’ cultural backgrounds” (Li, 2004, p. 63). The latter emphasizes the need for educators to “keep abreast [of] . . . their students’ social-cultural background experiences in order to effectively use this information to mediate learning” (Ajayi, 2009, p. 641).

Li also noted how Billy and Jake struggled differently in different contexts such as at home or at school. Indeed, in some areas of their lives, these “struggling” students did not struggle at all. For example, they both demonstrated capability in multimodal literacies such as using the Internet, and playing video games. The students’ positive engagement with multimodal literacies demonstrates the need for teachers to broaden their teaching pedagogy to one inclusive of multimodal texts.

In another study that involved students who struggle with reading and writing, Casey (2009) discovered that learning clubs, which incorporated multiple literacies in an inner city school, motivated 19 Grade 7 students of whom six were eligible for basic skills learning support. The
researcher worked with the classroom teacher who conveyed that she was “increasingly frustrated” with her middle years’ students’ lack of interest in reading and writing. Based on student-chosen areas of interest, the learning clubs, much like literature circles and book clubs, were structured to support students’ literacy development in a collaborative forum. The study, which took place over six weeks, included gathering data such as six 80-minute observations, two interviews with the classroom teacher, transcripts of a variety of casual conversations, and numerous documents, including lesson plans and photographs. All of the observations and interviews were digitally recorded.

As Casey’s (2009) research was situated within a sociocultural framework, she believed that learning clubs cannot be “plugged in” (p. 285) to the curriculum, rather they must develop in response to the unique needs and interests of the adolescents as well as their social relationships that exist inside the classroom community. The framework for using learning clubs included student choice of the text, temporary grouping structures, and consistent predictable meetings that were dialogue-focused. This shared literacy event differed from how some teachers traditionally teach, since learning was not always connected with a piece of literature or to “conversations around the ‘bound word’” (Casey, 2009, p. 286). Based upon the students’ interests and content area subjects, multiple texts such as “magazines, fiction, the Internet, videos, photographs and conversation with experts” (Casey, 2009, p. 285) could be used as the focus of students’ learning and some were used in these learning clubs.

Casey’s (2009) data from interviews with the classroom teacher revealed that when the middle years’ students who struggled with literacy were engaged with shorter text and the reading and responding occurred within the class period, the latter contributed to student engagement. Ensuring the students who struggled with reading and writing would want to join
in a conversation about literature, near the beginning of the school year the classroom teacher created a safe environment which emphasized that “everyone has an opinion and that every opinion is valid” (Casey, 2009, p. 290). Carefully scaffolding the students’ learning helped move these students who struggled forward in their learning process. For example, when two students were struggling with a task based on reading and became disengaged, the classroom teacher handed them a piece of paper and a marker to create a character storyboard. This option allowed the students to connect with the class material visually in order to progress to describing character development for the assignment.

During her observations, Casey (2009) found that students were actively listening and responding to one another often carrying on the conversation about learning with them as they moved to their next class. The researcher concluded that learning clubs were successful in the Grade 7 classroom because the classroom teacher facilitated the content of instruction considering the unique needs, relationships and interests of her students. Casey (2009) noted that the “21st century finds students engaging in multimodal literacy as part of their daily practice” (p. 292), and learning clubs can facilitate students’ digital literacies which can motivate them to re-engage with literacy.

**Using graphic novels to increase reading and writing skills.**

The potential success of learning clubs and other less traditional forms of classroom learning comes from the diverse activities used to teach students and the use of multimodal texts, including the use of graphic novels. Growing up with the Internet and computers, adolescents are drawn to multimodal texts that combine text and images and require print and visual literacy (Bucher & Manning, 2004). Because graphic novels involve print literacy and visual literacy skills, reading them is a form of multimodal literacy (Jacobs, 2007). A multitude of studies have
documented the value of using graphic novels with middle years’ students to promote reading and writing skills. Below, I review a selection of studies that are possible to replicate or adapt for use with all middle years’ students, especially those struggling with literacy skills. In addition, I discuss two articles by Schwarz (2006) and Jacobs (2007) in which the authors advocate incorporating multimodal forms of texts in our teaching practice to help reach all students.

In a qualitative study, Bitz (2004) worked with urban, inner-city youth from Grades 5 through 8 in an after-school, arts-based literacy project that took place from October to December 2002. Initially, the focus was on a small group of urban youth in the New York City area, but the project quickly grew into a wide-ranging pilot encompassing 733 children at 33 after-school sites. Many children were from high-poverty areas and identified as learners who struggled, and over half of them were ELLs.

Bitz (2004) worked with teachers, students, and administrators from after-school groups as well as artists and designers from a professional comic book design and publishing house. Because the after-school instructors were not certified teachers, literacy specialists from a teachers’ college provided a two-hour workshop that was divided into three parts to explain the Comic Book Project to the instructors. The first part of the workshop included introducing comic books as a learning tool focusing on the visual, textual, creative and motivational connections the after-school instructors could use with their students. The second part of the workshop was dedicated to making connections between traditional literacy such as tone and grammar, with artistic literacy such as line and perspective. Finally, the last part of the workshop was devoted to creating a mini comic book of eight panels.
Bitz (2004) developed focus questions which acted as guidelines for implementing the Comic Book Project. The overarching goals of the project were to increase the students’ literacy and artistic abilities, while engaging and motivating them to design and write their own comic books. Consistent with Vygotsky’s (1978) belief that emotions are inseparable from thinking, Bitz (2004) believed that because many middle years’ students enjoy reading comic books outside of school, “infus[ing] a comic book story” (p. 575) with school work would strengthen the students’ willingness to engage with literacy.

Creating the comic books began with the students writing their stories in the form of manuscripts, which they read aloud to peers and provided one another with “valuable peer support and constructive criticism” (Bitz, 2004, p. 578). The students’ collaboration with each other reflected Vygotsky’s theory that thinking is social in origin and we learn not only words but also ways of thinking through our engagement with the people who surround us (Smagorinsky, 2013). The duration of the Comic Book Project varied widely from meeting once or twice a week in one-to-two hour blocks to running 15 consecutive days for one hour each day. Through varied group and individual lessons, which included optional aids such as a template called the Comic Book Canvas and the Manuscript Starter, the students completed original full-colour, eight-page comic books.

Data collection included samples of the students’ comic book manuscripts and final comic book productions, interviews with youth participants and staff, and on-site student observation reports. In addition, the associates at Teachers College, Columbia University developed a survey consisting of 15 multiple choice items with three open-ended items, which every student and instructor completed. The open-ended items focused on “perceived literacy impact and perceived motivational impact” (Bitz, 2004, p. 582). The Teachers College survey was
measured on a 1-5 Likert scale, while three independent consultants assessed youth participants’ work using the New York State Learning Standards in English Language Arts.

The results from Bitz’s study revealed that all students met the four New York State Learning Standards for English Language Arts with an increased impact on ELLs. Bitz (2004) found that ELLs’ comic books “represented more writing than they had produced in English class throughout the entire school year” (p. 585). Moreover, the instructors noted “noticeable improvement in writing from the manuscripts to the final comic books” (Bitz, 2004, p. 585). He also discovered that the student-created comics were often based on their own painful, inner-city lives. Bitz (2004) reported that it was clear these “struggling” students felt a sense of pride and accomplishment in their effort to create their comic book. In fact, one instructor revealed she played “comic book tug-of-war” (Bitz, 2004, p. 580) with one of her Grade 6 students who did not want to part with her comic book.

In contrast to most other studies, this study was conducted outside school time. Although this project could be replicated in many middle schools, I wonder if Bitz’s findings would have been the same had the study taken place during school hours. Because student work was not being graded, perhaps students felt less pressure, which allowed them to experiment creatively. Therefore, in order to adapt this study for use in a middle school, student participation in the process of creating a rubric for assessing their comic books at the onset of the project could alleviate pressure regarding grading.

Much like Bitz’s (2004) study, which used pedagogical approaches that had a major impact on ELLs’ literacy learning, Boatright (2010) also reported how using images in graphic novels can tap into life-stories of adolescent immigrant ELLs. Boatright (2010) analyzed three graphic novels, and provided an in-depth look at specific novels published during the last 10 years that
connect with immigrant students’ background knowledge. In addition, he provided pedagogical suggestions for English Language Arts teachers interested in using texts about immigrant experiences with their students.

As all immigrant experiences are not the same, Boatright (2010) focused his article on immigrant experiences within a critical literacy framework. When learning about immigrant experiences in class, Boatright (2010) suggested teachers empower readers to question or disagree with the ideology at the core of any text, to “take up, refuse, or contest” (p. 470) an author’s message. By refusing to “paper over real conflicts . . . of interest” (NLG, 1996, p. 69), students can authentically discuss immigrants’ diverse and varied experiences.

Boatright described three graphic novels: Tan’s *The Arrival* (2007); Kiyama’s *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904-1924* (1931/1999); and Yang’s *American Born Chinese* (2006). These novels deal with topics of immigrant experience and the significance of a sense of belonging. Boatright provided practical applications for using graphic novels in the classroom. For example, Kiyama’s text lends itself well for additional investigations of race and immigration issues in English language arts classrooms. In addition, a question for use with Yang’s graphic novel suggested by Boatright (2010) was “why might an adolescent feel compelled to abandon his native or home identity for the identity of his peers?” (p. 475).

Similar to Boatright’s (2010) article, Chun’s (2009) investigation was also situated within a critical literacy framework, through which he invited students to explore how language works both for and against people. Chun described a pilot study in which he collaborated with a classroom teacher to design lessons for teaching with the graphic novel *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986, 1991). Although the ELLs’ class was comprised of students from Grades 9 to 12, the
issues raised by the students are applicable to middle years’ students. Surveying the students about their literacy activities outside of school revealed that a majority of students’ homes had only textbooks currently used for classes, little access to resources such as home computers, and no books for pleasure reading. However, 20 to 25% of the class reported reading comic books or newspapers.

The teacher engaged the ELLs with the graphic novel by building their vocabulary and background knowledge about World War II and the Holocaust, reading aloud to them to expose the sound effects featured in *Maus*, and explicitly teaching the students how to read the graphic novel *visually*. Through *Maus* students learned about multimodal text features such as maps, photographs, detailed drawings and their relationship with the written word. Reading a graphic novel visually involves teaching the conventions of a graphic novel explicitly to students, which is a necessary skill to acquire for interpreting the visual as well as the printed word (Ajayi, 2009; Allen & Ingulsrud, 2011; Pantaleo, 2013; Schwarz, 2006). Teachers can explain how speech bubbles convey speech in a story or how narrative boxes explain what is happening. These conventions can serve as grammar or vocabulary lessons using graphic novels (McCloud, 1993). Chun (2009) discovered, similar to Bitz (2004), that using graphic novels in the classroom had “a positive impact on . . . students’ literacy skills” (p. 151). For example, every student gained background knowledge about the Holocaust, which could then be applied to other books on the same subject. The students also identified with the theme in the story and engaged in class discussions. All of the students were fully immersed in reading the story. Moreover, many students told the teacher this experience was the first time they had been “turned on by history” (Chun, 2009, p. 151). For the students’ final projects, they composed their own family histories using multimodal representations of text, pictures and sound supported by computer software.
The idea of using graphic novels with ELLs to “promote learning that recognizes students’ own knowledge resources, which in turn affirms students’ identities as learners and thinkers” (Chun, 2009, p. 145) was also demonstrated in another study. Danzak (2011) conducted a study called the Graphic Journeys Project in which 32 ELLs from Grades 6 to 8 were asked to create comics to describe their families’ immigration stories. Unlike Bitz’s (2004) Comic Book Project, which occurred over a three-month period, this multimedia literacy project took place over six months during school time in a diverse public middle school on the west coast of Florida. The project was framed through Sfard and Prusak’s (2005) definition of identity. They described identity not as something that is expressed through story, rather, identity is story and as such, people create these narratives for themselves and others. Danzak (2011) noted that as the students created their stories and shared them with “each other, their families and members of the school and local community . . . [they were] “affirm[ing] and reaffirm[ing] [their] own individual and group identities” (p. 188). Building upon this concept of affirming identity, Guthrie (2004) explained that because engagement and achievement are reciprocal, students begin to see themselves as “learners and thinkers; these students internalize literacy as a part of who they are” (p. 6).

Goals of the project included ELLs increasing their knowledge about the English language, and ELLs involved in authentic writing using multimodal texts such as photographs, technology, and graphic novels. To reach these goals, the researcher worked with the classroom teacher to stock the classroom with various types of graphic novels from the local public library. Immersing themselves in this multiliteracies environment, the students were involved in talking about the graphic novels such as the visual style of the pictures, the colour palette of the images, as well as the subject of the stories. Graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams reinforced the
students’ discussions about the graphic novels as they planned and visualized how their own graphic stories could take shape. In addition, the students created journals, which kept all their work pertaining to the Graphic Journeys project such as structured practice with writing comics, written reflections and new vocabulary. The classroom teacher also read a chapter each day for 15 to 20 minutes from Yang’s (2006) award-winning graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*. The use of a document camera was especially helpful for the students as it showed the images working together with the printed words to shed light on the new vocabulary. The new words were explained in context and then reread once again later on. Finally, by using the Comic Life software (Danzak, 2011), the students incorporated their family photographs, clip art, and other images with their written texts in Comic Life. All students published their families’ stories of immigration as comic book style stories, and formally showcased them at a family/community event held at the school. The results of the study revealed the ELLs as successful authors acknowledging their common experiences. Moreover, the large family event provided community members and school administrators insight into the immigrant experience, and an opportunity to acknowledge the ELLs language learning capabilities.

Frey and Fisher (2004) also conducted classroom-based research that involved graphic novels. During a month long qualitative study they explored how the use of graphic novels could scaffold writing instruction in a literacy class. While the 32 participants were in Grade 9 and not middle school, the issues raised by them are similar to those mentioned in studies of middle years’ students. The class was comprised of 72% ELLs who had not yet developed proficiency in English.

The researchers noticed that students were already engaged with graphic novels outside of class; therefore, they chose to use the graphic novel *New York: the Big City* (Eisner, 1981) in
their study. This graphic novel is divided into independent chapters. Each student was given the first six of nine panels of the chapter called *Hydrant*, which is a wordless story that depicts a woman living in a dilapidated house, carrying pails full of water. They pointed out the various ways the artist communicated meaning in the images and brainstormed descriptive words that could be used to capture the story told through pictures alone. After viewing the images, students came up with vivid, descriptive words for the pictures. As the chapter ending was not shown or discussed, the students were asked to write personal stories connecting to their own experiences such as immigrating to North America and being evicted for having too many people residing in one house. After writing their personal stories, engaging for several weeks with excerpts from various other graphic novels, and examining visual imagery as a way of telling a story, the students were introduced to the final project of using disposable cameras to create an illustrated story of at least 15 images with supporting text. The researchers modeled for the class teacher-constructed illustrated stories. Using a think-aloud strategy, they described the processes involved while writing the text.

Data gathered for the study included samples of student writing using descriptive words, evidence of revision in students’ drafts, as well as five-minute timed writing samples of complex sentences and multiple ideas. Although Frey and Fisher (2004) did not specify how the data were analyzed, they did note they read drafts, conferred with students, supported revisions and looked for evidence of how the text and illustrations worked in tandem to convey a story. Frey and Fisher (2004) determined, like Bitz (2004) and Chun (2009), that bringing graphic novels into the classroom helped students engage with literature since they could relate to the combination of images and print in the stories. Moreover, the students improved their mean written sentence length from 11.2 to 12.89 words; all of the illustrated stories included dialogue.
to describe the story, and the average length of the illustrated stories was 478 words. The illustrated stories proved to be some the most “sustained writing these students had engaged in to this point” in the school year (Frey & Fisher, 2004, p. 24). In addition, the researchers noted more evidence of “complex sentences and multiple ideas in students’ work” (Frey & Fisher, 2004, p. 22) even though their vocabulary was limited. The authors stated that using graphic novels to scaffold writing instruction “helped students practice the craft of writing” (Frey & Fisher, 2004, p. 23). However, while this study was set in a school within a diverse and low socioeconomic community of mostly ELLs where the interest in anime and graphic novels was already evident, it does not address the impact on student learning of those within this group who were not previously interested in graphic novels.

In another study involving graphic novels, Hughes et al. (2011) explored how struggling, at-risk, high school students immersed themselves in graphic novels over a period of six weeks. This Canadian qualitative case study also involved the students writing autographics, which are stories based on students’ own cultures and experiences using a graphic novel format. As the participants in this study were in high school, the graphic novels Rabagliati’s *Paul Has a Summer Job* (2003), and Tamaki and Tamaki’s *Skim* (2008) were used as they are appropriate for adolescents ages 13 to 18 (Canadian Library Association, 2009).

The researchers worked with a total of 12 students at two separate locations. At each site, the students were organized into two groups of three and each group was asked to read a different graphic novel. For six weeks of class time, the first group of students at a workplace preparation class read the above-mentioned graphic novels and created a series of their own sequential art panels. The second group of six students at an alternative program spent six weeks focusing on visual literacy, which included reading numerous graphic novels concluding with the composing
of sequential art panels that described a turning point in their lives. Using a literature circle approach, the students read parts of their novel alone and then discussed with their classmates the character, theme, and language. In addition, the ELLs analyzed and synthesized numerous texts with both text and images, and learned how to make inferences across the spaces between the panels called gutters. Using the Comic Life software program, the students began creating a sequence of images and words to describe an important moment in their lives.

Data gathered during the study included samples of students’ autographics, observations during the lessons and semi-structured interviews with some participants. Although the researchers did not explain how the data were analyzed, they reported that the students demonstrated the ability to “build a visual world for their own panels . . . connect [their stories] with both images and text, [and] develop multimodal literacy skills” (Hughes et al., 2011, p. 611). Moreover, students with previous attendance issues began arriving to school on time.

Highlighting Vygotsky’s belief that teachers must treat diverse students with respect (Smagorinsky, 2013), Hughes et al. (2011) discovered, much like Bitz (2004), that when ELLs were given opportunities to communicate their ethnic backgrounds to classmates and teachers through autographics, they developed a sense of belonging in their classroom environments. Although this study involved high school students, the findings are comparable to those reported by Bitz (2004) who worked with middle years’ students.

In a Canadian qualitative study, Pantaleo (2011) used picturebooks and graphic novels with Grade 7 students from a culturally and ethnically diverse school. The overarching goal of the research was to explore how students’ knowledge of literary and graphic elements influenced their understanding, interpretation and analysis of picturebooks and graphic novels. In contrast to some other studies, including Hughes’ et. al (2011) research discussed earlier, Pantaleo (2011)
focused on how the *instruction* about multiple graphic novel conventions impacted the students’ knowledge about the “structural design of . . . multimodal texts” (p. 113).

In this classroom-based study, the researcher worked with the teacher and her students five mornings a week for approximately 390 minutes per week. From September-December 2009, the 16 boys and 9 girls discussed and responded to a selection of picture books and graphic novels such as *Amulet* (Kibuishi, 2008), and *Babymouse: Queen of the World* (Holm & Holm, 2005). A variety of lesson activities focused on the following: students participating in peer-led, small group talks; the qualities of a “good” written response; and compositional elements in graphic novels such as colour, perspective, point of view and line. Students wrote responses to the literature they read and discussed, and the culminating activity required the students to create their own multimodal texts. Rigor is evident in this study as there was extensive data collection, and the students’ written responses to *Amulet*, the focus of the article, were read multiple times to reveal patterns evident in the students’ written work (Creswell, 2013, p. 54).

The results from the analysis of the students’ written responses revealed that the students understood and valued the sophistication of graphic novels as a format of literature (Pantaleo, 2011). For example, 11 students believed it is essential to convey to others that understanding graphic novels’ “compositional conventions and art elements are fundamental” (Pantaleo, 2011, p. 124) in order to read and grasp the meaning that is conveyed by the semiotic resources of image and word. In addition, 11 students understood the importance of looking “deeply and carefully” (Pantaleo, 2011, p. 124) at graphic novels to fully understand and appreciate the stories, while six students believed graphic novels “demand a high level of creativity . . . [and the texts] are works of art” (Pantaleo, 2011, p. 125).
Another Canadian study further demonstrated how adolescents understand and value graphic novels to convey meaning. Capitalizing on the graphic novel format familiar to most young adolescents, Wilmot, Begoray and Banister (2013) conducted a qualitative study, which took place over five consecutive half days, in which six Aboriginal students ages 12 to 15 created the storyline for a graphic novel that “illustrated the effects of media on the developing health habits and attitudes of Aboriginal adolescents” (p. 76). There were two goals of this project. The first goal sought to improve health literacy by reducing health inequities allowing adolescents to “consciously . . . take charge of their health decisions” (Begoray, Wharf, Harrison & Collins-Emery, 2013, as cited in Wilmot et al., 2013, p. 79) while the second goal aimed at “creating a tool [in the form of a graphic novel] that could act as a catalyst to discussion” (p. 80). The audience for the graphic novel was younger Aboriginal readers ages 11 and 12. An Aboriginal artist from a local, semi-rural community supplemented the students’ storyline with pictures. The participants in this project included the six student writers, an Aboriginal teacher and the local Aboriginal artist.

In a reciprocal process, the adolescent student writers worked on the storyline for the graphic novel supported by the Aboriginal teacher and artist who shared their own traditional stories. In addition, the researchers discussed research, strategies and examples of critical media health literacy (CMHL) with the Aboriginal adults who in turn provided traditional stories that linked the researchers’ contributions with the Aboriginal cultural beliefs. Concepts such as “advertisements often create false reflections of reality” (p. 78) were to be included in the graphic novel either as an image, or written text, or in a combined image/text form. Questions such as “what are the advertisers not telling me about this product?” (Wilmot et al., 2013, p. 79) were used to guide students’ discussions around media and health issues. The completed graphic
The novel is 20 pages in length and it is the researchers’ intent to use the graphic novel in health education classes to enhance the development of CMHL especially with Aboriginal adolescent students. According to the researchers, the graphic novel format of print and images contributed to the students’ “understanding and long term retention . . . [of] media-perpetuated health messages” (Wilmot et al., 2013, np).

Rather than using graphic novels to promote health literacy as discussed in Wilmot et al. (2013) study above, Schwarz (2006) described using graphic novels with students to “develop their writing, comprehension and research skills” (Morrison, Bryan & Chilcoat, 2002, p. 59, as cited in Schwarz, 2006, p. 58). Schwarz (2006) commented that unlike other multimodal texts such as films, or television, the graphic novel “holds still and allows special attention to be given to its unique visual and word arrangement” (p. 59). To read and understand graphic novels, students not only focus on the usual literary elements of character, plot and dialogue found in word-only books, but they must also reflect upon visual elements such as colour shading and perspective.

In addition, Schwarz (2006) highlighted several graphic novel titles, and discussed some of the roadblocks educators may come across when including graphic novels in their teaching practice. She also suggested possible classroom strategies such as using graphic novels in classrooms to highlight and celebrate diversity. Schwarz (2006) reported how a Grade 7 teacher brought in manga or a Japanese comic (Brienza, 2014), entitled *Fruit Basket* (1999) by Natsuki Takaya (as cited in Schwarz, 2006, p. 63), which showcases parts of Chinese mythology, such as warrior figures, to capture students’ attention when discussing mythology in class.

Like Schwarz (2006), Jacobs (2007) advocated using comics in classrooms to help students “develop as critical and engaged readers of multimodal texts” (p. 19), reflecting the NLG’s
(1996) assertion that literacy pedagogy must account for the “burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (p. 61). Jacobs stressed that graphic novels should not only be used as stepping stones that help move students towards the reading of print-only texts. Indeed, many graphic novels are a complex, multimodal, advanced form of literacy. In addition, viewing comics in such a limited manner, “places severe limitations on the possibilities” (Jacobs, 2007, p. 20) of their value in literacy education.

Using Naifeh’s *Polly and the Pirates* (2006) as an example, Jacobs (2007) described how graphic novels can engage multiple literacies. For example, meaning is made through features in comics such as panel layout, gutters and text boxes. These multiple signs, combined with the pictures on the page conveying particular facial expressions and body posture, work in tandem to create meaning. Jacobs (2007) argued that a multimodal approach to reading and writing strives to push teachers “to think about literacy in ways that move beyond a focus on strictly word-based literacy” (p. 21). Jacobs, like Schwarz (2006), Hughes et al. (2011), and Pantaleo (2013), suggested that educators can assist students to critically decode our multimodal world by looking analytically at how meaning making occurs in comics.

**Conclusion**

Although the literature discussed in this section validates the significance and benefit of using graphic novels to increase literacy skills with middle years’ students, there remains a lack of research in this area. Since “significant changes are occurring in the form of rapidly emerging modes of communication [and] increased cultural diversity” (Mills, 2009, p. 111), it would be valuable to continue the research in the area of graphic novels to help teacher education programs respond to this explosion in multimodal communication. Moreover, additional
research is needed to determine if there is a significant difference in students’ writing skills after “reading” graphic novels compared with reading print-only text and then writing.

In Chapter 3, I provide five articles that provide ideas on implementing graphic novels into teaching practices, a list of 11 graphic novels with a brief rationale of their suitability for our middle years’ students, as well as five multimodal lesson plans incorporating the use of graphic novels with Grade 6 students in an English Language Arts class. The lesson plans are based on theoretical frameworks of Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, and the New London Group’s (1996) *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures*, and reflect the findings from the research discussed in this chapter.
Chapter 3

Teaching the Graphic Novel: Ideas For Middle Years’ Teachers

Graphic novels are multimodal texts that can be used by teachers to address multiple learning outcomes in the British Columbia English Language Arts (ELA) Grade 6 curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006). Through my research I learned about graphic novels’ varied connections with curriculum outcomes; however, I also observed first-hand that both boys and girls love reading them. Interestingly, many boys who previously were reluctant to read became focused while reading graphic novels once I offered them as a choice. Moreover, the content in many graphic novels such as Yang’s *American Born Chinese* (2004) and Tan’s *The Arrival* (2006) can provide connections for English language learners with characters who are non-white and who struggle with issues of identity (Bitz, 2004; Boatright, 2010; Danzak, 2011).

As I delved further into my research on using graphic novels with middle years’ students, I realized the importance for teachers to consider Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural perspective which explicates how students’ learning is influenced by the people who surround them in the larger environment (Almasi & Garas-York, 2009; Langer, 2001). As teachers our actions and the materials we bring into the classroom are pivotal in shaping students’ cognitive development. A sociocultural lens recognizes the social nature of teaching using not only in-school resources but students’ out-of-school multimodal resources as well. Jewitt (2009) posits that current pedagogies built on multiple literacies encourage teachers to “build classroom work on students’ knowledge, experiences, and interests” (p. 254). Since graphic novels are a format with which many middle school students are already familiar with outside of school (Choo, 2010; Jacobs, 2007; Perry, 2006; Schwarz, 2006), incorporating them into lessons in school will not only show students that teachers recognize these books as legitimate texts, but also help to engage students...
in multimodal ways of learning.

As noted in Chapter 2, the New London Group (1996) described multimodal as making meaning through various modes in addition to language or writing, such as visual, textual, audio, spatial and behavioural. An example of multimodal literacy practice is when students create their Facebook profile or text messages with photos, video and sounds. Words are joined with pictures and sounds as an “electronic, multimedia text” (Mills, 2010, p. 35). Students’ involvement with multiple modes of communication has prompted me and will hopefully encourage my teaching colleagues as well to include graphic novels into their teaching practices. Graphic novels are a form of multimodal literacy; that is, the skill to compose and read through “multiple communicative modes such as words, image and sound” (Choo, 2010, p. 168).

In the next section, I describe five articles that provide ideas on implementing graphic novels into teaching practices, and I briefly explain why I believe each article is valuable for teachers. Following the recommended articles, I include a list of 11 graphic novels with a brief rationale of their suitability for middle years’ students. Finally, I present five multimodal based lesson plans which reflect current theory and research for use with Grade 6 students.

**Articles**


Bucher and Manning’s article provided me with much needed information when I first embarked on educating myself about graphic novels, such as identifying those graphic novels that are part of a series and listing web sites that provide reviews of graphic novels. The authors discussed the importance of using graphic novels, a "dynamic format of image and word that delivers meaning and enjoyment" (Bucher & Manning, 2004, p. 67), in a middle years’
classroom. Most students are likely to be enthused with this non-traditional form of learning due to the images found in them.

Firstly, Bucher and Manning conveyed that there are many types of graphic novels beyond simple adventure stories including the following: superhero tales; realistic stories; science fiction and fantasy novels; future, contemporary, and historical adventure stories; manga (Japanese) tales; humorous works; political satires, and even adaptations of classics. Superhero stories can be escapist allegories or even similar to classic mythology. Manga tend to be more popular among females and have developed an even larger audience after being released with companion television and DVD versions of the stories.

Next, the authors explained why graphic novels can be beneficial for students by dispelling the myth that the format and the focus of graphic novels are inappropriate for use in our classrooms. These texts can also be good examples of writing dialogue and can provide connections to other classic, traditional novels. For example when studying classic literature, students may be attracted to David Wenzel’s graphic novel form of Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (2001), or when exploring legends in class, P. Craig Russell’s adaptation of *The Ring of the Nibelung* (2002) may be of interest to many students.

Thirdly, Bucher and Manning described the features of a good graphic novel focusing on the value of the images. When students take in illustrations along with words, they can learn to make meaning of body language and facial expressions. Other social nuances are conveyed through the partnership of text and images; students can “read” the art along with the text (Bucher & Manning, 2004, p. 69). Since some graphic novels contain mature content, teachers must carefully select stories that offer appropriate and quality content suitable for middle years’ students.
Finally, the authors provided resources for how graphic novels can be used in middle years’ classes. Bucher and Manning included examples of graphic novels that are relevant in various areas of the school curriculum, from history to science. Some of the titles included *A Thousand Ships* (Miller & Varley, 2001), which details the Trojan War; *Dignifying Science* (Ottaviani, 2000), which showcases famous females in science; and *Clan Apis* (Hosler, 2000), which explains the life of a honeybee.


I include this article because I believe Callow’s “Show Me” framework is useful in helping teachers assess multimodal learning outcomes, and integrating multiliteracies in their teaching practice. For example, Callow highlighted the metalanguage teachers need to use as they learn why multiliteracies’ concepts and skills are so important for students to learn, the characteristics and types of multimodal texts to teach, and ways to assess students’ knowledge and skills. The performance indicators and questions he developed for assessments are easy to adapt to fit teachers’ own multimodal lessons using graphic novels. In particular, Callow explored the power of visual literacy in teaching, which is relevant when using graphic novels in lessons. Images can serve as jumping off points for discussions and critiques around emotions and the deeper meanings of stories. I believe this article provides a comprehensive guide to addressing visual literacy in the classroom.

Nixon, R. (2012). Teaching narrative writing using comics: Delainey and Rasmussen, the creators of *Betty*, share their composing strategies as rich literacy resources for elementary teachers. *Literacy, 46*(2), 81-93.

I chose this article because Nixon’s description of the step-by-step process involved in
creating a comic strip may be helpful to classroom teachers as they envision how the process could take shape in classrooms. Nixon suggested that students can work collaboratively to create comics and included charts from two comic creators as examples of how the creative process moves forward. With detailed accounts of the writing and drawing process, Nixon showed how comics and comic strips have a place in middle years’ classrooms. She further explored how comics texts and writing practices can help educators teach narrative writing in middle years’ classrooms. Nixon also included practical lessons plans to incorporate comics into the classroom.


I recommend this article to teachers because it was helpful for me while I was learning a metalanguage about graphic novels, which is “a language for talking about language, images, texts and mean-making interactions” (New London Group, 1996, p. 77). I also find the teaching strategies for incorporating graphic novels into classrooms useful. Serafini (2011) outlined three levels of analysis “for making sense of multimodal texts” (p. 344): 1) call attention to visual elements such as lines and shapes of design in picture books and other multimodal texts; 2) record what is represented in the book; and 3) develop a vocabulary for naming and describing the elements that students identify (p. 344). His chart called “Noticings-Meanings-Implications” is useful to put this theory into practice. In addition, he included “Guides for Analyzing Visual and Design Elements” with ready to use questions with students.

Serafini also discussed the grammar of visual design of three elements: 1) composition including components like relative size, colour and contrast and foreground and focus; 2) perspective or positioning of characters pictured in books, and imagery; and 3) visual symbols or motifs that convey meaning such as a rose signifying love. Teachers can help students connect
with and comprehend class material by exploring these visual design elements more deeply.


In 2007, high school teacher and author of the graphic novel *American Born Chinese* (2006), Gene Yang, wrote “one of the first-ever” (p. 185) journal articles written in graphic novel format. In his article, Yang calls on teachers to include graphic novels in their teaching pedagogy. After reading Yang’s article, I was further intrigued by the compelling nature of the images and text working together to create meaning in graphic novels. As his article is presented in a graphic novel format, and he discussed using that format to engage students, he in turn, engaged me as well.

Yang provided a list of suitable graphic novels for use in classrooms, books for teachers – written by teachers – on ideas for using graphic novels with students, his own on-line easily accessible compilation of lesson plans using graphic novels, as well as on-line resources such as Comics in the Classroom.net. Yang’s article is well worth reading as its visual nature provides ideas on creative ways students can represent their knowledge as well. Next, I identify a list of graphic novels that I recommend for use with Grade 6 students.

**List of Recommended Graphic Novels and their Connections to Middle Years’ Students**

The following list of graphic novels includes books that I have used successfully with my own students such as Tan’s *The Arrival* (2006), and Yang’s *American Born Chinese* (2006). Many of the graphic novels listed below such as *Dracula: A Graphic Novel* (Reed & Stoker, 2006) and *Babymouse: Queen of the World* (Holm & Holm, 2005) are part of my classroom collection because they are popular with my students and they can easily be integrated into multimodal lessons in English Language Arts classes.
Colfer, E., & Donkin, A. (2007). *Artemus Fowl: The graphic novel*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books. This book is part of a fantasy series about an evil, genius boy, Artemus, who is already tangled up in criminal affairs like his father before him. Artemus tries to steal gold from fairies to retrieve wealth stolen from his family. The culture presented in the novel is very different from Western culture; many students would find it interesting to study the book during a unit on multicultural literature or the text could be used for lessons focusing on mythological themes.

Gaiman, N. (2008). *Coraline*. New York, NY: Harper Collins. Gaiman’s story is a horror fantasy involving a girl and her family moving into an old house. The main character, Coraline, finds a mysterious locked door in the far corner of the drawing room, and after opening it finds a mirror realm where alternate versions of everyone in her family live – except in the alternate version, everyone has huge button eyes. This graphic novel has been adapted as a film, a video game and even an off-Broadway musical. These different modes of representing the same storyline would make for an interesting intertextual comparison in a Language Arts class.


This story, based on legends and poems, explores the adventures of seven women through history who disguised themselves as men to experience how males succeed as soldiers, doctors
and even as a pharaoh. This book can supplement lessons on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Social Studies or students can research one of the seven women in the book and create six comic strip panels adding to their existing story.


This fantastical story involves time travel with relatable main characters for middle school students. Meg, the main character, does not fit in at school nor does her younger brother, Charles who has special powers. The story has been adapted from a print-only book and also has a film version. Because the same story is told in three different formats, students could compare two of them and explain which one they prefer and why.


Robin Hood, the hero in this story, disguises himself to become an outlaw to help the people of Nottingham. This content can be connected with topics in Social Studies such as the Crusades, or British history. The book could also be studied in Language Arts when focusing on legends. I have observed how students enjoy this book, due to visually-stimulating illustrations which easily lend themselves to discussions of how colour enhances meaning in images.


Part of a series, *Mouse Guard* grabs the attention of students as the author tells a captivating story of mice struggling to live safely amongst predators. Mouse Guard was formed to help mice journey from one village to another safely. This book lends itself well to a multimodal lesson on various shapes, sizes of panels and how their layout affects meaning in the story. It can also supplement a unit on legends in Language Arts or medieval studies in Social Studies.

*Blindspot* tells the story of Dean and his friends living an army fantasy in the woods in his backyard, which leads to the boys meeting a homeless man. The plot centers on the transition to adolescence. The graphic novel could be used in Language Arts to highlight cause and effect in stories.


Sent to Transylvania, Jonathan Harker meets the mysterious nobleman Count Dracula and discovers Dracula’s secret: he is a vampire. Many students will be drawn to subject of vampires and the black and white artwork in this graphic novel. An interesting lesson that can be used with this book is having students compare and contrast what they know about vampires with the legends about similar creatures in other cultures.


In Chapter 1, I used Tan’s wordless graphic novel as an exemplar to highlight what I consider to be “good” characteristics of a graphic novel. In this book, Tan presents a successful immigrant story of a man seeking better prospects in a new country. Leaving his family behind, the main character embarks on a journey which is told through compelling images using sepia tones and complex panels. This story has multiple and varied uses such as opening discussions with students about immigrant stories and providing content material that may be familiar to ELLs. I have included this graphic novel in my lessons below.


As described in Chapter 1, this graphic novel is set on the West Coast of British Columbia. This Haida revenge story is told through images with vivid colours using panels outlined in black. When a man’s younger sister is kidnapped by pirates, he spends his life finding her. I have used this story with my students and in lessons 3 and 4 described below.

This graphic novel on stereotyping and assimilation has won many awards such as the National Book Award Honour Book for young people’s literature in 2006, and the Eisner Award for best graphic album in 2007. As described in Chapter 1, it relates three separate stories of three characters which all come together at the end. The novel lends itself well to exploring the issues of stereotyping and identity.

**A short story in graphic novel format.**


Although not a graphic novel, I decided to include *Hurdles*, a one-page, black and white graphic story in Chapter 3 as I successfully used it as an introduction to multimodal literacy with my students. *Hurdles* is from Kim’s graphic novel collection entitled *Same Differences and Other Stories* (2004). The story explores issues of racism and stereotyping and is told in just eight panels with the text laid out next to the pictures on the page rather than in speech bubbles or balloons.

Below, I present five multimodal lesson plans for Grade 6 students using some of the graphic novels described above to increase students’ literacy skills. The lesson plans are based on my reflections of the information and concepts addressed in the list of recommended articles outlined above, as well as in the research discussed in Chapter 2.

**Introduction to Creating Multimodal Lesson Plans**

The strategies described in the lessons will help teachers address learning outcomes from the British Columbia English Language Arts (ELA) Grade 6 curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006), as well as the Visual Arts Grade 6 curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010). Although many prescribed learning outcomes in the Visual Arts curriculum
could be addressed, I have focused on the English Language Arts curriculum in these lesson plans. The lessons are structured using four components of NLG’s Multiliteracies Pedagogy (1996). Prior to beginning the graphic novel lesson plans below, students will have demonstrated an understanding of the following prescribed learning outcomes (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006):

- **A 1 Oral Language Purposes.** Using speaking and listening to interact with others for the purpose of contributing to group success. Improving and deepening comprehension (p. 55).
- **A 2 Oral Language Purposes.** Using speaking to explore, express and present a range of ideas, information, and feelings. Using prior knowledge and/or other sources of evidence. Staying on topic in focused discussions (p. 55).
- **A 3 Oral Language Purposes.** Listen purposefully to understand and analyze ideas. Interpreting the speakers verbal and non-verbal messages. Demonstrate active listening in non-verbal ways (p. 55).
- **B4 Reading and Viewing Purposes.** Demonstrate comprehension of visual text (e.g., choice of colour palette) (p. 57).
- **C4 Writing and Representing.** Create meaningful visual representation and uses text features such as colour to enhance understanding (p. 59).

Although each lesson is presented as an hour in duration, each teacher needs to pace the lessons at her discretion, as she knows her students’ capabilities well. Like many teachers, I am constantly cognizant of time constraints, however, I have learned that slowing down the pace of lessons allows for deep thinking to unfold rather than glossing over several concepts (Callow, 2008, p. 623). With time in mind, I recommend teachers using the lesson plans more as menus from which to pick and choose objectives upon which to focus.
The lesson plans present ideas for teaching skills (British Columbia Ministry of Education Prescribed Learning Outcomes, 2006, pp. 57-60) such as:

- make and justify logical predictions, inferences and interpretations about the texts and beyond the texts (p. 58); preview texts; demonstrate comprehension and interpretation of visual or graphic materials (57);
- use writing and representing to express personal responses about texts (p. 60); analyze texts and develop explanations (p. 60); explain how structures/features of a text work to develop meaning (p. 59).
- comparing various viewpoints (p. 59).

These skills are particularly important because when teachers are aware of what draws students' attention (Serafini, 2011) they can incorporate those interests into class lessons. For example, having students demonstrate their interpretation of visual materials can connect with elements such as the placement of the words in panels, or the colour of a character’s skin tone. In the graphic novel, *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006) visual elements about issues of identity as shown through skin colour can keep students more engaged because they can connect with their own personal experiences. By keeping lessons authentic, that is, connected with real-world issues such as racism or stereotyping, students will remain interested in learning throughout the school years and across topics. Choo (2012) argued that “the danger of using inauthentic tasks” (p. 177) is that students will begin to disengage from learning they believe is “uninteresting and irrelevant” (p. 177).

While relevant topics help to keep students engaged, educators also need to be familiar with which multimodal literacies students are already engaged in when they are out of school (Bucher & Manning, 2004; Yang, 2008). For example, many students are proficient at manipulating
digital audiovisual projects outside of the school context. While some of these students are not engaged in schoolwork in the classroom, they may re-engage with course work should educators provide an assignment that recognizes those technologically-based out-of-school literacies. Connecting with students’ out-of-school literacies such as graphic novels and their creation using technology can engage them with learning about the visual aspects of graphic novels. They need multiliteracy skills to be successful in today’s world (Nixon, 2012).
### Lesson Plan 1

**Angles and Shot Distances in Graphic Novels**

**Lesson Focus:** How do readers react to people or characters in an image? Grade 6 English Language Arts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Objectives:</th>
<th>Materials:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- B11 Reading and Viewing.</td>
<td>- Document camera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Explain how structures/features of a text work to develop meaning.</td>
<td>- Copies of Derek Kim’s <em>Hurdles</em> (2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary: Angle, shot distance.</td>
<td>- Graphic Organizer: <em>Shot Distance Angles</em> (Appendix A).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Before: Build/Activate/Connect Learners’ Background:** (Appendix A).

- How do pictures attract our attention? View first image only (*Hurdles*) (not the title or the print text). What do students think this is? *Why* do they think that? *What* questions do they have? As a viewer, from which *angle* are you viewing the images?
- Students will discuss in pairs and share out to the class.

**During: Overt Instruction/Scaffold/Process Information:**

- Explicitly teach points of view, shot distance, and image angles (Appendix A).
- Tell students and post for reference: as we read the story, think of the following questions:
  - *How close* to us is the item/character in the image? Very close? Halfway? Long way?  
  - *Are we* looking up or down at the item/character? Or are we looking eye level?
  - *How do* these different “points of view” make you feel as the reader? About that character?
  - *Why* do you think the illustrator chose these particular visual elements on this page?
  - *Who is* being represented as powerful or important? Who is not? How can you tell from the image?
- Using document camera, read story to the class.
- Hand out copies of the short story *Hurdles*. In pairs, students will discuss/answer above questions.
- As a class, summarize/discuss student responses on chart paper: “Points of view in Images.”
- Ensure students have correct terminology for points of view, shot distance, image angles (see Appendix A).

**After: Transform Practice/Demonstrate Learning:**

- Independently, using graphic organizer, students will redraw a scene from the story changing the shot distance (close, mid or long), and angles (low, eye-level, or high).
- Students will write new text to match their redrawn scene.
- Students will explain *how they know* what shot angle it is and the effect it has on the reader.

**Reflection/Assessment:**

- See Appendix F for specific assessment guidelines.
- Students place their completed redrawn scene on their desk, walk around the class to view other students’ work, and using sticky notes, students will leave a “star” (positive comment/reason why) on each redrawn scene.

**Reflecting on Learning:**

- Reading Response Journals: Why is it important to learn about connections between image angle, shot distance and readers’ reactions?
Lesson Plan 2

Identify Graphic Novel Conventions

Lesson Focus: Identify Graphic Novel Conventions

Content Objectives:
- B5 Reading and Viewing: preview texts.
- B9 Reading and Thinking: analyze texts and develop explanations.

Vocabulary:
- Graphic novel, conventions such as gutters, panels, and speech balloons.

Materials:
- Exploring Graphic Novels (Appendix B).
- Questionnaire (Appendix C).
- Chart paper/markers.
- Assortment of graphic novels.
- Conventions of Graphic Novels (Teacher Resource: Appendix E).

Before: Build/Activate/Connect Learners’ Background: (Appendix B).
- Direct students to start thinking about what they already know about graphic novels/comics as they watch these images.
- Ask students to write/draw/make a web of what they already know about graphic novels. Start off whole class with one or two examples to model process.

During: Overt Instruction/Scaffold/Process Information:
- Form circle. Allow students to choose from a pile of graphic novels in the middle of the circle.
- In partners, students discuss, explore their graphic novel, and fill out questionnaire (Appendix C).
- Encourage discussions of connecting ideas to previous knowledge (e.g., Panel borders can be wavy because the author wants the reader to know that the content is a flashback or a memory.)
- Point out the content in the frames to show how the story would be incomplete without either the visual images or words. Ask questions such as: “How do you think the meaning of this image and text would be different without the image? Without the text?”

After: Transform Practice/Demonstrate Learning:
- Discuss student responses, which will include many of the conventions of graphic novels.
- Summarize student findings on chart paper “Conventions of Graphic Novels” and provide correct terminology.
- Allow 15-20 minutes of independent reading/partner reading time using graphic novels.

Reflection/Assessment for learning:
- See Appendix F for specific assessment guidelines.
- Gather back in a circle to share and summarize learning by reviewing and/or adding to Conventions of Graphic Novels chart.
- Observe engagement (positive/negative) with text (e.g., Looks at images while reading. Comments on pictures. Student use of metalanguage).

Reflecting on Learning:
- Use an Exit Pass: students write/draw to answer questions: What helped you best understand the meaning of graphic novel conventions. Why? What was confusing?

(Adapted from Adventures in Graphica: Using Comics and Graphic Novels to Teach Comprehension, 2-6, T. Thompson, 2008, p. 36).
Lesson Plan 3

Draw/Sketch Graphic Novel Conventions

Lesson Focus: Find and Sketch Conventions  
Grade 6 English Language Arts  
(Note: Prior to this lesson, students would have predicted/read/discussed in groups/responded to questions about the following graphic novels: *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006); *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006); *Red: A Haida Manga* (Yahgulanaas, 2009).

Content Objectives:
- B2 Demonstrate comprehension and interpretation of visual or graphic materials.
- C8 Use writing and representing to express personal responses about texts.

Vocabulary:
- Onomatopoeia.

Materials:
- Document camera.
- Teacher Resource Appendix D.
- Refer to previously created conventions’ chart.
- Reading response journals.
- Graphic Organizer: Conventions of Graphic Novels. Appendix E.

**Before: Build/Activate/Connect Learners’ Background:**
- In partners, ask students to reflect on previous classes and share which graphic novel (mentioned above) is their favourite and why. Discuss in pairs. Share out.

**During: Overt Instruction/Scaffold/Process Information (Teacher Resource: Appendix D).**
- Using a document camera and chart paper (which is the same as students’ graphic organizer Appendix E) teacher will model for students using Think-aloud strategy various graphic novel conventions such as a narrative box, thought bubble, or gutter.
- Explicitly teach a few conventions. Example, in *Red*, “Convention” text/structure/font, p. 69; “Description” WOOSH has swirly letters. “Purpose”: onomatopoeia: letters of the word itself look like the sound the word makes (see Appendix E).
- Students take a few minutes to find an example of onomatopoeia in their books and share out.

**After: Transform Practice/Demonstrate Learning:**
- Hand out graphic organizer (Appendix E).
- In pairs, students will find examples of graphic novel conventions in-above named books and complete graphic organizer: (Appendix E).
- Independently, in reading response journals students will: 1. “Write/draw an example of onomatopoeia” and 2. Answer the question: “Why do you think authors/illustrators use onomatopoeia in graphic novels?”

**Reflection/Assessment:**
- Gather students in circle. Review and summarize conventions.
- Teacher gives students correct terms for the conventions. Complete chart paper while students complete their graphic organizers (which are the same).
- Collect and assess reading response journals, looking for comprehension and interpretation of visual or graphic materials. Respond to students’ journal prior to next class.

**Reflecting on Learning:**
- Visual thumbs up/down/sideways (only teacher can view) understanding of onomatopoeia.
Lesson Plan 4
Making Meaning Through Colour

Lesson Focus: How does colour enhance the meaning of a picture? Grade 6 English Language Arts
(Note: Prior to this lesson, students will have explored the colour wheel and demonstrated knowledge that colour conveys meaning/feelings, which are culturally dependent.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Objectives:</th>
<th>Materials:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• C8 Use writing and representing to express personal responses about texts.</td>
<td>• Document camera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary:</td>
<td>• Refer to previously created colour chart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enhance, intense, mellow.</td>
<td>• Reading response journals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Red: A Haida Manga (Yahgulanaas, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Copies of Derek Kim’s Hurdles (2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• One posted, enlarged copy of Hurdles (2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coloured pencil crayons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Blank piece of paper for each student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Exit Pass”/ sticky notes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before: Build/Activate/Connect Learners’ Background:
• Review colour chart. Do certain colours make you feel a certain way? For example yellow? Grey? Why?
• Would the meaning of the picture be the same without the colour? Why or why not? How does the colour enhance the meaning in the pictures? What if the book was in black and white? How would that affect the meaning of the story?
• Students write their response in their journals.

During: Overt Instruction/Scaffold/Process Information:
• Fold paper so that there are six squares. Use document camera to read pages one to nine from the graphic novel, Red: A Haida Manga (Yahgulanaas, 2009).
• In each square use coloured pencil crayons to:
  1. Write the name of emotion expressed in a colour found in Red (e.g., grey/depressing colour because: __)
  2. How the colour enhances the meaning in the picture.
• Teacher uses Think-Aloud strategy to complete the first square. Students discuss their answers in pairs/class.

After: Transform Practice/Demonstrate Learning:
• Using folded paper as a guide, students colour images in Hurdles (2004) to enhance the meaning of the picture.
• Beside each coloured frame, students explain why they chose the colour and how it enhances the meaning of the picture.
• Encourage students to look back in their reading response journals on lessons on the colour wheel and connecting colours with emotions. Challenge them to use descriptive words describing feelings.
• In response journals: Why do you think the author chose NOT to add colour to Hurdles (2004)?

Reflection/Assessment:
• Collect coloured images in Hurdles. Ensure to provide feedback in time for next class.
• See Appendix F for assessing Lesson 3.
• Assess reading response journals looking for evidence of students supporting their reasons (e.g., the starkness of simply black and white adds to the seriousness/ the racial undertones of the story).

Reflecting on Learning:
• “Exit Pass” (sticky notes). Students write down one thing they enjoyed doing, one thing they had trouble with, and one thing they are wondering about. Place these notes on the enlarged copy of Hurdles (2004).
Lesson Plan 5

Stereotypes in Visual Images

Lesson Focus: Visual Images Can Either Support or Stereotype Minority Groups. (*See cautionary note below). Prior to this lesson students will have read pages one to 40 in Yang’s American Born Chinese (2006).

Content Objectives:
• B9 Reading and Viewing: Thinking.
• Analyzing texts and developing explanations.
• Comparing various viewpoints.
• C8 Use writing and representing to express personal responses about texts.

Vocabulary:
• Stereotype, minority groups.

Materials:
• Document camera.
• Class set of Yang’s American Born Chinese (2006).
• Reading response journals.
• Venn Diagrams

Before: Build/Activate/Connect Learners’ Background: (*Note: Please exercise caution when discussing a possible volatile subject. Prior to this lesson, students will have demonstrated respectful speaking/listening/responding skills).
• Ask students if someone else did not like their appearance, would they change it?
• Why or why not?
• Have students think of a time that they changed their hair or outfit just to fit in.
• Ask students if how they dress defines who they are?
• Have students discuss these questions in small groups or pairs. Gather back together for a class discussion. Summarize students’ responses on chart paper or under document camera.

During: Overt Instruction/Scaffold/Process Information:
• As you read, think about: How the author visually represented the characters?
• Students individually read pages 43 to 52 in Yang’s American Born Chinese (2006).
• Stop. Discuss carefully as a class.
• Ask students to respond individually to the way Chin Yee is drawn. How does it make them feel? Discuss carefully…
• Find visual and verbal examples of stereotyping. For example, visually, Chin-Kee’s eyes are drawn narrowly, he has protruding front teeth, wears traditional Chinese clothing, and verbally he speaks using an “r” sound instead of an “l” sound.

After: Transform Practice/Demonstrate Learning:
• Individually, students draw a Venn diagram in their reading response journals, and contrast the visual and verbal means Yang uses to portray these stereotypes.
• Carefully lead a whole class discussion about the students’ findings of stereotypical images and words in Yang’s novel. How are they the same? Different? Why?
• On the back of the Venn diagram, students answer the question: “Do you think Chin-Kee should change his appearance to fit in? Why or why not? If yes, what should he change and why?” Explain your answer.

Reflection/Assessment:
• Assess students’ Venn diagrams based on how well they understood analyzing texts and providing evidence to support their answers.
• Use Appendix F Performance Indicators.

Reflecting on Learning:
• Why do you think some people stereotype people? Respond in reading response journals by writing or using a combination of pictures and words.
In summary, I offer these multimodal lesson plans in the hope that they may motivate teachers to include graphic novels into their teaching practice. Graphic novels as multimodal texts afford teachers the opportunity to explicitly teach the meaning conveyed by reading images and text together. I believe teaching students multimodal literacies will empower them to participate fully in a rapidly evolving multiliterate world.
CHAPTER 4

Reflections: A Lifelong Learner

My Initial Understandings

I grew up with parents who were always reading – quietly together or immersed in a book or newspaper independently. Not only was reading important in my home, but my grandparents and parents also told my sisters and I stories about their lives and the lessons they had learned. My family impressed upon us the importance of passing our knowledge on to the next generation. My older sisters read to me each night or made up stories full of lively or frightening characters. I then became a reader and storyteller and now my own children are avid readers, writers and seekers of knowledge.

It was no surprise to my family that I became a teacher. Over the years I continually sought out additional learning opportunities such as taking courses in the evenings and on weekends, brainstorming creative lesson plans in school with my teaching colleagues, or simply chatting with my teacher librarian friend about the newest books for both middle years’ students and for adults. I believe that learning is a lifelong endeavour. Seeking new information invigorates my mind and allows me to imagine endless possibilities for my and my family’s future. These beliefs about learning are the ones that I wish to encourage in my students.

During my first years of teaching, I was bubbling with enthusiasm wanting to impart my beliefs about learning to my students. I soon discovered that it was difficult to know the how and what of motivating students. Some of my middle school students had learning challenges, many came from low socioeconomic backgrounds and often did not receive strong academic support at home. In addition, I had students in my classroom from many different parts of the world for whom English was a second language. My desire to learn new teaching strategies to add to my
existing ones grew rapidly. I desperately needed to learn how best to help the many students who struggle with learning to succeed in school and, perhaps, prevent them from dropping out of school entirely (Fisher & Ivy, 2008).

During my first year of teaching, I recall my determination to afford my students the most effective learning opportunities possible, and this commitment has only grown stronger over my teaching career. Having taken thought-provoking classes in the past at the University of Victoria with Dr. Begoray, I asked her to come into my class and meet my students who were from diverse cultures and who had various learning needs. She readily agreed and with Dr. Begoray taking the lead, we taught a sketch-and-draw lesson. Little did I know that a few years later I would be back in class with Dr. Begoray once more. This experience is how my journey into graduate studies began.

A reflection of my growth as a student in the Master of Education program at the University of Victoria is followed by my thoughts on my current learning and teaching philosophy. I conclude Chapter 4 with a brief summary of how my next steps in the field of education will be based upon the culmination of theories and new ideas I have learned during my graduate studies.

**My Learning**

I embarked on my graduate studies feeling excited and overwhelmed at the same time. I quickly realized that many scholars and researchers were studying exactly what I was searching for – ways to help all students increase their literacy skills in school. Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory of cognitive development intrigued me at once. It was not until I read various scholars’ (Ajayi, 2008; Cross, 2010; Langer, 2001; Smagorinsky, 2007, 2013; Wertsch, 1992) interpretations of his theory that I began to appreciate how Vygotsky’s (1978) work is relevant for me as a classroom teacher. A sociocultural framework (Langer, 2001) is a way to
see learning shaped by students’ background and cultural knowledge. The teacher brings her own specific experiences to school which in turn shapes the way in which she teaches the students. It is at the intersection of culture, language, background knowledge, and shared experiences among students and teachers where learning takes place. When teaching students, I needed to acknowledge diverse background experiences and influences. However, I needed to learn more about what that “acknowledging” actually looked like.

Cross’s (2010) study, which highlighted language teacher cognition, solidified my growing understanding that teachers, as well as students, are “historical, sociological agent[s] within larger contexts” (p. 434). Thus, when I am teaching in the context of my classroom, I must be cognizant of my beliefs and how my prior background affects my teaching practices. Cross (2010) further explained that often times there exists “a dissonance between what teachers think and do” (p. 434). For example, while completing an assignment, I now believe it is more important for my students to go through the process of writing and discovering the format that works best rather than having a formulaic product handed in to me (Murray, 1977). If I celebrate only those assignments that conform to a traditional three paragraph finished product, for example, then my beliefs contradict my practice. I became cognizant of my beliefs about teaching while taking classes in the Middle Years Language and Literacy cohort. It was in one of my first classes with Dr. Begoray where I became familiar with Murray’s (1972) article “Teaching Writing as a Process Not Product.” I learned that by encouraging students to choose their own books, subjects or use their own language that teachers are recognizing them as individuals capable of discovering their own ideas. The concept of providing choice for students is reflected in lesson plan 2 where students are choosing their own graphic novel. It is through this recognition that learning is a process that I realized I am a “coach, encourager, developer,
[and] creator of environments” (Murray, 1972, p. 5) in which my students have the opportunity to learn and grow.

A sociocultural approach to learning is reflected in my decision to begin researching graphic novels to promote middle years’ students literacy skills. Recognizing the value of graphic novels as a tool to increase literacy skills occurred after I noticed that many of my students’ out-of-school culture involved engagement with graphic novels. Vygotsky (1978) “was adamant . . . that schoolwork . . . needs to be grounded in what students know from their experiences in everyday activity” (Smagorinsky, 2013, p. 199). Thus, acknowledging their out-of-school social and cultural activities including graphic novels in the classroom enriches students’ learning experience in school. The observation of students’ engagement with multimodal texts during their out-of-school time has been confirmed by researchers and scholars including Choo (2010), Hughes, King, Perkins and Fuke, (2011), and Schwarz (2006), as discussed in Chapter 2.

The knowledge I gained from reading these studies is reflected in Lesson Plan 1, “How to Read Angles and Shot Distances in Graphic Novels” outlined in Chapter 3. This lesson uses a multimodal short story entitled Hurdles (Kim, 2004) to delve into broad social issues while also requiring students to pay attention to the details in various photos. Students are encouraged to unpack layers of meaning related to racism and stereotyping and how it connects to the importance of using angles to convey meaning. For example, one panel in Hurdles shows a close-up, partial-face shot of the “racist” coach, which emphasizes this character as “not a fully human figure” (Schwarz, 2006, p. 60). Juxtaposed with that image is a long shot of the same coach. In this shot, the coach’s “ignorant racism is reflected in his stance” (Schwarz, 2006, p. 60). Thus, connecting angles and shot distances of images within panels with text, needs to occur “in order for the story to work” (Hughes & King, 2011, p. 611).
I was particularly interested when I learned that literacy pedagogy, which traditionally meant learning to read and write with only print-based text, had expanded to include a much broader definition of literacy using different modes such as audio, visual and textual (New London Group, 1996). This idea of an expanded form of the term literacy motivated me to bring into the classroom multimodal literacies to help better prepare my students and myself for our fast-paced ever-changing technological world. The knowledge I gained from Bitz’s (2004) study, which I discussed in Chapter 2, is reflected in my approach when outlining Lesson Plan 2, “Identify Graphic Novel Conventions” in Chapter 3. Bitz (2004) explained that when the instructors were introducing the class to comic books, they “pointed out the visual images and words in every comic book panel . . . to reinforce how the story would be incomplete without one or the other” (p. 577). This lesson encouraged me provide similar explicit instructions for students as described in Lesson Plan 2.

While I was taking courses in my Master’s program, many scholars and researchers impacted my understanding of the value of using graphic novels with my students. For example, graphic novels can promote language development of English Language Learners (Bitz, 2004; Boatright, 2010; Danzak, 2011). This knowledge supported the course work I was completing in English Second Language teaching practices. Moreover, graphic novels can increase student literacy development (Frey & Fisher, 2004; Griffiths, 2010; Schwarz, 2006), and critical thinking skills (Boatright, 2010; Hughes & King, 2010; Wilmot, Begoray & Banister, 2013). In addition, researchers and scholars such as Callow (2008), Thompson (2008) and Pantaleo (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014) have influenced the way I teach graphic novels. In particular, Pantaleo’s (2011) research, discussed in Chapter 2, helped expand my knowledge when creating Lesson Plan 3 Draw/Sketch Graphic Novel Conventions in Chapter 3. The lesson incorporates how students
can engage with graphic novel conventions for a deeper understanding of how meaning is conveyed through multimodal texts.

Through my coursework, research, and talking with my students, I learned about the possibilities of using graphic novels can work in the classroom. The grammar and conventions that distinguish graphic novels from traditional text-only novels have the potential for much more layered lessons such as those outlined in Lesson Plan 4, “Making Meaning Through Colour” presented in Chapter 3. In this lesson I use a Think Aloud Strategy to help increase students’ understanding of ways the artist used images to communicate meaning. I was inspired to create this lesson by the research findings of Frey and Fisher’s (2004) study, because the results of their study, which included using a think aloud technique with graphic novels found students had increased their literacy skills.

As we began to use graphic novels more in my classes, the students and I learned at the same time. By explicitly teaching the conventions of graphic novels, we learned how meaning can be made through the use of distinct visual conventions. One graphic novel convention that stood out to me was the use of gutters or the white space between panels. I was unaware that gutters are the location of much story action in graphic novels. My coursework related to reading and language processes as well as books by McCloud (1993) and Thompson (2008) led to my understanding that gutters provide opportunities for a multitude of lesson possibilities such as predicting what could happen in the next panel, or pausing to infer what could have transpired in the story.

In addition to learning about conventions of graphic novels, I also discovered numerous possibilities graphic novels could be used in the classroom to promote critical literacy skills. For example, in Jacob’s (2007) study discussed in Chapter 2, comics were used in classrooms to help
students grow as critical readers of multimodal texts. Fostering critical literacy skills in students is highlighted in Lesson Plan 5, “Stereotypes in Visual Images” presented in Chapter 3. In this lesson, students are encouraged to critically assess images and text portraying negative stereotypes. These discussions can lead to a deeper understanding of the text and provide a safe place for students to share their thoughts.

Results from studies by Parodi (2006) and Frey and Fisher (2003) discussed in Chapter 2 reinforced my belief of the potential increase in literacy skills when teaching reading and writing subjects together. For example, findings from Parodi’s study revealed that “language teachers should exploit teaching and practicing reading and writing together” (p. 238) which further motivates me to continue having students “read” multimodal texts such as graphic novels instead of print-only texts, and then write about what they discovered, which is evidenced in Lesson Plan 5 in Chapter 3. This lesson requires students to read a section of a graphic novel and then respond to what they discovered. Keeping the concepts of “texts” and “reading” broad to include multimodality is now at the forefront of my thoughts on teaching reading and writing together. As students become immersed in the integrated activity of reading/viewing and writing/representing while creating their own graphic novel (Bitz, 2004; Danzak, 2011) they can effectively bring their own ideas into class work. I was putting into action the ideas I had gained from my research and coursework on reading/viewing and writing/representing.

My Current Understandings

With my new-found knowledge about multimodal literacy, why teaching it is important, and finally how to teach and assess multimodal skills, I planned a graphic story creation unit for my Grade 6 and 7 students in which the task was to write in role as a residential school survivor. Prior to beginning this unit, I worked closely with our school’s First Nations’ counselor and
invited her into my class. I also invited a highly recommended community First Nations member who had lived through the residential school experience into my class. Together with the students, we read a picturebook entitled *Fatty Legs* (Jordan-Fenton & Pokiak-Fenton, 2011). A residential school survivor co-authored this memoir with her daughter-in-law, telling a young Inuit girl’s story of struggle and triumph in the Canadian residential school system. The book is recommended by the Sunshine Coast Literacy Coalition for Grades 4-7. The story makes the disturbing residential school experience accessible to students, and the book has won numerous awards including Best Book for Kids and Teens from the Canadian Children’s Book Centre.

Before starting the graphic story creation unit, my class investigated different cultures including First Nations in Social Studies. While creating their own stories, my students had the choice of drawing their images or using Comic Life, a computer software program loaded onto all of our school iPads. At first I was a little apprehensive about guiding them effectively to create their multimodal stories. I grew increasingly confident, however, as the process progressed smoothly. I felt well-versed in the theoretical background knowledge I had gained in my MEd program, and knew which resources to quickly access should I need further practical or theoretical support in implementing what I had learned. Moreover, the students had already read many graphic novels and explored their conventions. In addition, some of my students were talented artists, and others were extremely capable users of comic creation software. These varying levels of students’ expertise connected to knowledge I garnered during my Master’s coursework and research that had focused on Vygotsky’s (1978) thoughts on the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

My ability to put theory into practice grew immensely during this phase. My instructions to the students to create their stories in their journals or to work on their individual whiteboards
to plan, discuss and think prior to using the Comic Life program was reinforced by reading research conducted by Chun (2009), Danzak (2011) and Pantaleo (2013). I also asked an expert come into my class a few times to work with us about the options available when using the Comic Life program. It was through “collaborative efforts between teacher and student” (NLG, 1996, p. 86) that more difficult tasks were accomplished. Having read the article by the NLG (1996) made me more fully aware of the value of students learning from more experienced teachers to get “explicit information” (p. 86) at the exact time when that information could be most useful in propelling the student further in his or her learning.

After reading several studies (e.g., Callow, 2008; Pantaleo, 2013, 2014) about the value of using graphic novels to increase multimodal literacy skills, my understanding deepened about the importance of using a common metalanguage about visual elements during the process of creating the graphic stories with my students in class. Becoming familiar with a metalanguage is not to “impose rules . . . [or] place unrealistic demands on teacher and learner knowledge” (NLG, 1996, p. 77) rather, a metalanguage is meant to deepen understanding of multimodal literacy. I encouraged students in their use of metalanguage such as angles, perspective, viewpoint and splash page so that they could explain their stories more specifically. While discussing and interpreting their stories with me the students and I were enhancing our understanding of how multimodal texts convey meaning (Pantaleo, 2014, p. 48).

**Future Pedagogy**

I am excited to try different multimodal lessons in my English Language Arts classes, and perhaps like Yang (2006) incorporate multimodal lessons in my Mathematics class as well. I would like to share my knowledge with my teaching colleagues in the hope that they too will recognize the literary and artistic value of graphic novels.
The process of writing this reflection has made me realize that this enthusiasm I have for learning has encouraged me to continue trying to instill in my students – all of them – that they too can master challenging tasks and demonstrate their learning in amazing multimodal ways. Overall, the more I came to a realization of my family’s influence on my values, my determination to learn something that I find difficult, and the sheer perseverance that is necessary to attain my goals, it became clear to me that a lifelong learner is someone who understands that the many experiences in life are actually opportunities to learn. I humbly accept that no matter how old I become, I will continue to seek knowledge because I will never know the answers to everything.
References


Canadian Library Association. (2009). Canadian Library Association Young Adult Canadian Book Award Winners. Retrieved from http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/books-video-music/books/award-winners/award.jsp?awardYear=2009&listId=0AgLJAUL-ax5RdFpuQkN2X0FCRktyNXh0ektjbmxdUE&yearId=od4


Choo, S. (2010). Writing through the visual acts of reading: Incorporating visual aesthetics in


Guthrie, J. (2004). Teaching for literacy engagement. Journal of Literacy Research, 36(1), 1-


http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/adolescentliteracy


Nixon, R. (2012). Teaching narrative writing using comics: Delainey and Rasmussen, the creators of Betty, share their composing strategies as rich literacy resources for elementary teacher. *Literacy, 46*(2), 81-93.


Pantaleo, S. (2012). Exploring grade 7 students responses to Shaun Tan’s *the red tree.* *Children’s*


Serafini, F. (2011). Expanding perspectives for comprehending visual images in multimodal


97*(2), 61-66.

*Language Arts, 90*(3), 192-204.


Books.


Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological process.* In M.
Cole, V. John Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Eds. & Trans). Cambridge, MA:
Harvard University Press.

Ballantine Books.


Appendix A

Graphic Organizer Shot Distance Angle

Created by S. Heatherington (2014).
Appendix B

Exploring Graphic Novels

As you view the images in graphic novels, *think* what you already know about them.

Write/draw/make a web of what you *think* you already know about graphic novels.

Created by S. Heatherington (2014).
Appendix C

Questionnaire: Exploring Graphic Novels

With your partner, take a close look at the graphic novel you chose. Complete the following questions by writing/drawing. Be ready to discuss your answers with the class.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Pick one panel to view. What item stands out to you/grabs your attention?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>What do you think that particular item <em>tells</em> the reader?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>How is the graphic novel different from other books?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. What do you like about it?

Why?

5. What do you *not* like about it?

Why?

Adapted from *Adventures in graphica: Using comics and graphic novels to teach comprehension*, 2-6, (Thompson, 2008, p. 33).
Appendix D

Teacher Resource: Conventions of Graphic Novels

Narrative box/voice over

- Guide readers to what is most significant.
- Alert readers that a *time change* has happened or the panel that is being read is happening at the *same time* as other panels around it.
- Give readers clues as to what the character is thinking.

Speech Balloon/Bubble

- Spaces for the characters’ spoken words or thoughts.
- The shape, style and colour can express meaning. For example, a wavy speech bubble can be used to show that a character is scared; whereas a jagged-edged speech bubble may indicate the “electronic voice of a robot or an answering machine” (Thompson, 2008, p. 28).
- Thought balloons have shapes of clouds and may contain images or words whereas sounds from the radio or television are enclosed within balloons with spiky borders (Eisner, 1985).

Panel/Frame

- Can include simply an image or only words or can unite the image(s) and words (sound) (Bongco, 2000, pp. 58-59 as cited in Pantaleo, 2013, p. 152).
- Size, shape, layout or a sequence of panels can show character(s) or a succession of action moving *through* time or at *one point* in time (Bongco, 2000, pp. 58-59 as cited in Pantaleo, 2013, p. 152).
• Borders (smooth, spiky, bold or none) also convey meaning: Eisner (1985) stated straight rectangle specifies present tense; wavy borders denote flashbacks or memories; unframed images convey unlimited space leaving the meaning up to the reader to determine (p. 44).
• Without one or more borders, or a bleeding panel indicates timeless space (McCloud, 1993).
• Panels give clues to readers which perspective is provided (Bongco, 2000, p. 58 as cited in Pantaleo, 2013, p. 152).

Splash Panel/Page
• There are no other panels. The scene or characters take up the entire page.
• Enhances the story.
• Brings the reader right into the action.

Gutters
• The blank space between panels. Gutters are like the “veins” through which the entire story of the comic flows (McCloud, 1993, p. 73). In the “limbo” of the gutter, reader imagination takes over to transform two separate images into one single idea that links the storyline (McCloud, 1993, p. 66). Panel-to-panel transitions can be categorized as moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, or scene-to-scene.

Motion/Speed Lines
• Convey speed, length and direction of the action or direction in which a character is moving.
• A streaked or blurred background, or many images of the same subject all convey motion (McCloud, 1993).
Appendix E

Graphic Organizer: Conventions of Graphic Novels

Find/Sketch the conventions below using the graphic novels: *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006); *The Arrival* (Tan, 2006); *Red: A Haida Manga* (Yahgulanaas, 2009).

Keep in mind our discussions about different types of panels (e.g., borders, shapes).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convention / Page # / Book Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative box/voice over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Balloon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Bubble</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel/Frame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splash Panel/Page</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gutters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motion / Speedlines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text structure / Font style</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from S. Pantaleo, (2012).
Appendix F

Assessment Guides for Lesson Plans

The following benchmarks and performance indicators are adapted from Jon Callow’s *Show Me Framework* (2008, pp. 620-624). They are aligned with the British Columbia Ministry of Education Prescribed Learning Outcomes (2006) outlined in Table 1.

**Lesson 1**

Visual Features to Assess: Metalanguage to use:

- Describes shot distance used, angle, and character gaze; explains the effect of each.

Performance Indicators

- Uses accurate terms to describe shot distance, angles, and gaze and how these affect the viewer and the portrayed character.

**Lesson 2**

Visual Features to Assess: Metalanguage to use:

- Looks at conventions during reading.
- Comments on specific conventions.

Performance Indicators

- Identifies particular aspects of specific conventions that are appealing.
- Explains what helped him or her understand conventions best.

**Lesson 3**

Visual Features to Assess: Metalanguage to use:

- Uses the term onomatopoeia correctly and is able to provide examples.

Performance Indicators

- Describes how onomatopoeia conveys meanings in graphic novels.
- Explains why authors use onomatopoeia in graphic novels.

**Lesson 4**

Visual Features to Assess: Metalanguage to use:
• Describes why specific colour choices were made by *Red’s* (2006) author Yahgulanaas.
• Describes colours and related moods or symbols.

Performance Indicators

• Explains how specific colours enhance meanings in images.
• Explains why the author chose not to add colour to *Hurdles* (Kim, 2004).

**Lesson 5**

Visual Features to Assess: Metalanguage to use:

• Explains inclusion and exclusion of racial, cultural, and social groups.
• Describes who is represented as being powerful or important and who is not.
• Discussion of what choices were made by the image-maker and why they were made.
• Uses words such stereotype, racism, dominant culture.

Performance Indicators:

• Describes the ways different groups of people are visually represented in a story and how this might affect the interpretation of the story.
• Explains how visual images can either support or stereotype minority groups.
Appendix G

English Language Arts – Grade 6 Prescribed Learning Outcomes (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006)

Reading and Viewing: *Purposes.*

- B2 Read fluently and demonstrate comprehension of grade-appropriate information texts with some specialized language, including visual or graphic materials (p. 57).

- B4 Demonstrate comprehension of visual texts with specialized features (e.g., visual components of media such as magazines, newspapers, web sites, comic books, broadcast media, videos, advertising, and promotional materials) (p. 57).

Reading and Viewing: *Strategies.*

- B5 Select and use strategies before reading and viewing to develop understanding of text, including
  - Accessing prior knowledge to make connections.
  - Making predictions.
  - Asking questions.
  - Previewing texts (p. 58).

Reading and Viewing: *Thinking.*

- B8 Respond to selections they read or view by analysing texts and developing explanations, compare viewpoints (p. 58).

Reading and Viewing: *Features.*

- B11 Explain how structures and features of text work to develop meaning, including literary devices (e.g., imagery, onomatopoeia, simile, metaphor) (p. 59).

Writing and Representing: *Thinking.*

- C8 Use writing and representing to express personal responses and relevant opinions about experiences and texts (p. 60).