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On the Use of Comic Books and Graphic Novels In the Classroom

B.A. Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis describes the origin of comics and their sub-genres and explores how the use of comic books and graphic novels can be of help in the classroom. Comics and graphic novels are not new in the world but they do not seem to have gained their status within the educational community and the reason for that is examined in this thesis. Ways to change that situation are also examined along with ways to implement the use of comic books, graphic novels and all the sub-genres of comics into the classroom and into today's curriculum. Historical cases both for and against the use of comics in the classroom are presented and discussed. The reasons why comics should be used in the classroom are explored and discussed alongside the reasons why they may not suit all classrooms. This thesis describes the multiple ways of teaching i.e. reading and writing, speaking and listening and arguments both for and against are provided in each category. The recent resurrection of comics is also discussed and how films based on comic books and superheroes are creating a new generation of comic book fans and lovers all around the world. The thesis also discusses the possible consequences of this new wave of fans and how the resurrection may help the argument that the comic book world can help motivate students to learn. Finally, the thesis suggests ways to improve the connection between the student, classroom and the comic book in the present and what the future of comic books and graphic novels might entail.

Preface

This thesis is a 10 credit final assignment for a B.A. degree in English at the University of Iceland. The subject I chose is very dear to me because when I was growing up, comics and graphic novels were the thing I turned to when I had nothing to do and in that, I started realizing that my grasp of the English language was getting stronger and my ability to read, write, speak and hear English at a far stronger level than my classmates.

I want to give thanks to first and foremost my instructor Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir for giving me the guidance that I knew I would receive from her. My final thanks go to bands and artists for their music that got me through this whole process. I would like to thank the boys of Hatebreed, In the Company of Men, and Nails. These bands and their music got me through this paper.

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1. Introduction

Comic books and graphic novels have always been of interest to the younger generation. Despite this, comics have not been considered appropriate for the classroom. Some literacy purists dismiss the idea that reading comprehension and literacy can be taught through the medium of comic books and graphic novels ("*Using Comics and Graphic Novels in the Classroom*"). For comics to be dismissed by some as possible tools for teaching seems rather short sighted, given students' interest and, especially considering the fact that the comics have text, historical context and have a storyline. One should be able to learn something about literary texts from them. They may even be better for young learners than reading novels and short stories that are often outside their field of interest and with the language use that is often beyond their proficiency. Comics have been used as a resource for teaching for many years. One can easily find research and studies that are on the subject of learning language through video games and the effects of video games on the second language learning with children and today, some of the most popular video games within the teenager market are created from comic books and graphic novels. Since the comic book is an obvious tool for learning and perhaps something to be used in regards to children's' literacy, it should be quite apparent that both the comic book and the graphic novel are quite the tools for learning.

This essay will present an overview of the nature of comics and graphic novels and especially the benefits of using new and exciting methods in teaching that include the use of comic books, graphic novels and other media related to them. This thesis is structured into chapters based around their thematic content. The first chapter of this thesis will deal with the comics themselves and their origin will be described. In the following chapters multiple issues are discussed and problems surrounding the issues are put forth. Finally, there are discussions on how comics and graphic novels could be of further use in light of how popular they have become recently and a few concluding words.

2. Comics and their origin

This chapter will describe the nature of comics and graphic novels and presents a short history of their development and examines what makes a comic. Comics can be divided into four different types of 'comics'. First, there are the 'comic strips', then one has the 'comic book', the 'graphic novel' and finally, the 'webcomics' (Smith, n.d.).

Comic strips are mainly utilized today in newspapers and magazines and stand by themselves in three to four squares i.e. they do not require the reader to have read the previous paper or magazine. These strips mainly focus on humor and have little value in today's society regarding both storyline and richness of pictures since they are only there for simple amusement and most of the time, do not serve as a reference point for society or what is happening in the real world (Smith, n.d.).

The comic book is, generally speaking, a comic strip but the difference is that in this format, the strip runs for several pages and follows a storyline. Although a single comic book is meant to stand on its own, the story develops between issues and the comic book requires the reader to have some knowledge in regard to previous issues and the backstory of the characters and the theme. Another thing with comic books is the detail of drawings and pictures and how the richness of the pictures aids the storyline in such a deep way (Smith, n.d.).

The graphic novel is similar to a comic book in a way that it is built up with the text-and-picture/drawing format but the graphic novel contains a storyline that has a start and a finish within the same book and has little requirements for knowledge of any previous storyline or anything of that nature. The graphic novel is a much longer book than a simple comic book and the story is more complex. Two good examples of graphic novels that have both been made into movies are *Watchmen* and *Sin City*. As one reads these works, one realizes that the graphic novel is clearly aimed more towards an adult demographic since these works do have adult content. These movies were released with an R rating (not fit for audiences younger than 17 years old) (Smith, n.d.). Graphic novels are older than the medium itself since man has

been using graphics and pictures for storytelling since the dawn of time. Paintings that have been found in old caves along with writings tell their own story and one can see that through time these paintings have always been used to tell some story. Before the whole world was introduced to literacy, this was the only medium to portray thoughts and other visions that people had in that time. Back when the times were different, the average worker could not make use of written texts and so he turned to pictures and cartoons to understand and make others understand what was going on outside their usual frame of knowledge. The industrial revolution brought forward the magic of printing things. One of the first cartoons that was printed was *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Benjamin Franklin decided to print that piece in the year of 1732 and that particular cartoon deals with the American Revolution and the causes thereof. However, the piece that is noted as the first real graphic novel is '*The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck*' by Rodolphe Toffler, printed in 1842, about 90 years after Benjamin Franklin printed his piece. About 50 years later, '*The Yellow Kid*' by Richard Outcault was published and that was the graphic novel that was the first piece to gain some success in a commercial way (Yildirim, 2013).

Webcomics are quite similar to comic strips except they are online and are more often than not published by the creators themselves. Some of these webcomics are simply old comics that have been republished online but the internet did and does give the comic a new platform to develop more. The webcomics mostly focus on humor and laughable situations. Most of the webcomics would not be suitable for children under the age of 14 (Smith n.d.).

In the first quarter of the twentieth century a way was found to promote sales of comic strips. The way was to collect the strips into softcover-magazine form. After the end of the first world war a lot of comics and pictured stories about science fiction and war became quite popular but then in the year of 1933, *New Funnies*, the first official comic book, was printed. The *New Funnies* were a compilation of comic strips and were published on a Sunday like the newspaper. A company called Humor Publications decided to publish the first original comic book, *Detective Dan*, in the same year. The year 1938 marks the beginning of the golden age of comic books in America with *Action Comics* which starred Superman (Carter, 2007a). The rise of comic books was quite

visible in the 1940s since the selling of comic books was grossing in millions of copies and these comic books were popular amongst adults as well as teenagers and children. These comic books featured people and characters that had powers beyond human and followed one adventure or a specific action storyline. Then, following these stories came '*The Archies*' and they mainly dealt with the issues of being an adolescent. No superpowers involved (Gorman, 2003).

There was a decline in the industry of comic books during the mid-1950s but that decline was brought on about with the attraction that television had created and the fascination that it brought (Monnin, 2010). In that wave of newfound criticism, there were even critics that said that comics were leading to reading disabilities amongst children (Carter, 2007a).

The time period that followed this decline mainly went into preventing a further decline by rewriting characters from television programs and so on into comic books. Comics Code Authority, a kind of censor for comics in America, tried its best in slowing down the comic industry to just let it die and not worry about it. But as one can guess, instead of slowing down and obeying some bans and laws against it, writers and illustrators became even more vigilant and determined in their writing but many publishers would not use the Comics Code seal of approval. During this time, many comic books and comics that contained inappropriate content started to appear on the market. For example, 1968 saw the premier of '*Zap Comix*' which was of this rebellious kind and it contained quite the inappropriate stories and images (Yildirim, 2013).

In the latter half of the 20th century, the market became more open and it became easier to buy, sell, publish and distribute comic books. 1978 marks the year of the first graphic novel that was owned and published by the creator. Will Eisner published his graphic novel '*A Contract with God*' and in that graphic novel, the popularization of the term "graphic novel" became a reality (O'English, Matthews, and Lindsay, 2006). It was also in that period of time that these graphic novels started being used inside the classrooms as a tool for education. What the success of Eisner's short story collection did was quite important because it genuinely showed that graphic novels have the potential to be taken seriously as a form of literature.

In the last two decades of the 20th century, the rise of graphic novels has been recognized by a larger audience. With the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman, *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and, of course, *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller, critical acclaim was brought on and commercial success for not only the writers and illustrators but for the genre as a whole (Yildirim, 2013).

In the very beginning of this century, the 21st, there was another breakthrough in the popularity of comics. This was when Chris Ware published his graphic novel *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* in the year 2000 and Satrapi published her graphic novel *Persepolis* in the year 2003. The biggest growth spurt can however be credited to the American movie industry. Since Universal, Paramount and all those big film companies have begun making films out of comics and graphic novels, the buying and selling, reading and writing has never been as frequent as it is today (Yildirim, 2013). In the next section the uses of comics in the classroom are discussed.

3. Using Comics as teaching tools

In this section, the use of comics and graphic novels as teaching tools will be discussed and explained. When using comics in the classroom, one can find many advantages to the comics as a tool for teaching. When using comic books for reading and understanding, the material becomes easier to understand for children whose stronger side of learning is within the visual sense and also for children whose attention span is not the longest since the illustrations help with the comprehension of the text. For children, the comic books can also trigger their imagination to another level because of the imagery. With the visualization of the text that goes along with it, the children are far more easily able to visualize the characters and the story as a whole. The power of words becomes stronger since the words are not just words on a page but the children see the words in action in the illustrations. For those children who are not that fond of reading, the comic books might trigger the want for further reading if the children enjoy the reading of the comic books. The motivation seems to lie within the fun behind reading. Comic books can also easily help the development of analytical skills in the sense that the reading of comics is more than just reading a text and then looking at a picture. One has to put those two together to fully understand the story and to see how the text and the picture interact with each other in order to create meaning. This serves as encouragement for the child to pay close attention to the graphics alongside the text that is given. By doing this and fully understanding this, the students build a better understanding of the use of satire, symbolism and humor that is used quite a bit in comics. The use of comics also helps with vocabulary acquisition because of the visual aspect. To take an example, if Superman needs to do something before a skyscraper collapses, the text would surely read something about the building and include the word *skyscraper* and along with the text would be a visualization of a skyscraper. The input is presented in a text and therefore the learner can take a step back, analyze the text again along with the illustration and develop a better understanding of the given concept. This is less practical with audio materials (Smith, n.d.).

As one looks at the status of the graphic novel today, one can easily see the change that has happened to the medium itself. With the level of popularity that has been rising for the last decades, the graphic novel has been transformed into a medium of total expression. The medium that was once discarded and thought of as childish and with no literary value has now become a respected genre and is thought of as an important corner of the literary world. Today, the age of the reader can be from three to seventy, because everyone seems to be attracted to this fascinating medium of literature. What was once a medium considered mainly for young children and the younger generations, it has become dependent in a way on the adult reader market since the adult readers have started to read the graphic novels in a manner that they did not do before. Nowadays one can easily walk into almost any library or bookstore in the world and find a graphic novel, even a whole graphic novel section and it is not harmful to the genre that major newspapers and webpages are giving graphic novels reviews, commenting on their contents and even giving feedback on how the graphic novel was, is or should be and discussing them back and forth. One major newspaper has been publishing reviews of comic books and graphic novels for quite some time now and that is *The New York Times* (Yang, 2008). In these days, the publishers of graphic novels are growing and expanding their operations at a much faster pace when compared to the publishers of traditional literature (Gorman, 2003). Right now, if the literary world would be compared to Hollywood actors - the graphic novel would be Leonardo DiCaprio. The biggest themes within the graphic novel genre these days are science fiction and fantasy along with the superhero theme being still as current as it was about eighty years ago. There are still some graphic novels that are written about the more serious and realistic matters such as history and politics but also domestic matters such as love, family and abuse (Gorman, 2002).

Another advantage to using comic novels could be to introduce students to classic literature. To take an example, one can easily find a graphic novel version of many of the major literary works and that even without going online. One can easily walk into a library, bookstore or better yet, a comic book store and find graphic versions of *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Moby Dick* and even *Metamorphosis*. Even historically accurate texts regarding the American

Revolution have been turned into the form of a graphic novel (Bickers, 2007). Graphic novels have also now been accepted and are appreciated as an art form in regards to the level of excellence in view of their content (Haugen). The graphic novel can help students with different learning styles understand content better. Nowadays the graphic novel is settling into the classroom as a tool for teaching quite well as different styles for learning are always being discovered. The fact that these things are being researched is also encouraging. The effect of the use of graphic novels in education is one of those things that have been researched for quite a bit now (Jacobs, 2007).

An informal survey showed that about 75% of students in the sixth grade in America have read a graphic novel and enjoyed it (Carter, 2007a). One could easily say that the graphic novels are now experiencing kind of a Golden Age when it comes to today's education (Carter, 2007b).

With the need for more diverse learning material to cater to different learning styles being stronger than ever, graphic novels should become more than just entertainment. With children learning from video games these days, and becoming more visual, it seems such an obvious thing to use the graphic novels for teaching. Carter (2007a) talks about the non-text visual media being quite the appropriate choice for learning material for today's youth since the visualization of the novel plays such a huge role both in understanding and in making use of the imagination at a level that is not too much but not too little.

Now there are many cases that can be used against the use of comics and graphic novels in the classroom. One of the biggest criticism is that graphic novels and comics are not a legitimate form of literature. The criticism against the use of comics goes all the way back to the anti-comics campaign in the United States. During that period of time there were book burnings of comics and graphic novels and slanderous remarks were made about the characters. Batman and Robin were even accused of the ridiculous thing of spreading homosexuality, as that would be something that could be spread like a disease. Wonder Woman was a bad role model for girls since she was a strong and independent woman and finally Superman was promoting an unreal sense of reality. People used to think in a different way than they do now although fiction has always something that people can rely on in regards to being an escape of some sort. These characters, amongst many others, were seen as a corrupting

power on the youth of America. Although these attitudes are so outdated that it is quite ridiculous that they ever existed, they did however form a sort of a legacy that is still harmful to the graphic novel medium and is still harming comics to this very day (Yildirim, 2013).

There are many theorists, scholars and teachers that are still arguing that the graphic novel and the comic books are only an extracurricular type of activity and it should be held outside of the classroom. There is one aspect of the graphic novel that has been criticized more than any other and that is the fact that the graphic novel involves substandard literature. There are educators and scholars that believe that the use of these non-traditional texts that go along with well-illustrated pictures and images as tools for teaching is no more than a blatant waste of both the educators and the students' time and energy. This view along with the view that is firmly refusing to see graphic novels as real books and real literature is of course a thing to be worried about for both the writers of the novels and the supporters who truly believe that with the depth and cultural importance, the graphic novel is neither more nor less than any other reading material (Gravett, 2005).

Criticism also targets the content of the graphic novels. The scenes in some of the novels may be depictions of violence and sex and that is what seems to be bothering some of these critics. There is actually a link in peoples' mind between the word graphic and pornography and therefore some people see these graphic novels as a thing of danger for kids who are starting to learn. There is no denying the fact that there do exist sexually explicit novels but it is also a fact that their sexual content has not and does not exceed that of many traditional texts (Rudiger & Schliesman, 2007). Now, teachers who have some traditional novels on their curriculum that may be depict sexual acts or any other vulgar things, they ask permission from the parents before deciding on using those novels in the classroom and of course they should just do the same with the graphic novels in question (Schwarz, 2002). Gorman has also mentioned that the censoring of graphic novels is just as and even no more critical than with any other books or any other mediums of literature that may be found in a public library (Gorman, 2003).

The case of graphic novels being used as a tool for teaching may also cause difficulties in the classroom. The read-aloud part of teaching is seen as

problematic with the use of graphic novels and therefore the group reading could be quite restricted in its activities. There is also the matter of the reading pace of each individual being an unfavorable factor for the graphic novel (Hughes et al., 2011).

Differences between boys and girls appear to be yet another concern for teachers. Moeller conducted research in which graphic novels appeared to be more attractive for boys than girls since the boys seemed to be more interested in the action packed comics and the adventure of it all while the girls were more focused on the relationships of the characters. With these differences, it becomes quite the problem for the teacher to bring the students together in a common viewpoint (Moeller, 2011). There was also a sense of discouragement in the research since many of the students that were quite enthusiastic about reading the graphic novels and the comics did not believe that the accomplishments and milestones they would reach with their reading would be valued evenly to the accomplishments and milestones they would reach with a traditional novel (Jacobs, 2007).

The biggest problem that may concern teachers in regards to the graphic novel is how to integrate of them into the curriculum. The pros and cons must be quite visible and clear to the teachers who decide to use a graphic novel as tools for teaching. The background knowledge must be in place for them to be fully able to assess the risks and to successfully help them to integrate these graphic novels into the multiple aspects of their curriculum (Schwarz, 2002). The risks become threatening at an even higher level since the progress of the student in the target language can be drastically damaged and hampered. The reasons behind the teacher's reluctance to use graphic novels as tools for teaching can maybe be because there is such a lack of testimonials from teachers and also a total lack of tradition and guidelines in regards to the use of graphic novels as tools of pedagogy (Carter, 2008). These days, most of the criticisms that the teachers have against the use of graphic novels and comics within the classroom seem to be groundless and also to be total misconceptions of the reality of new ways of teaching (Yildirim, 2013). The newer generations are rapidly being caught up in the appeal of visual media and there does not seem to be any end to the visual stimulation of the younger generation. Television and the computers seem to be doing a fine job in educating the

students in the language classroom. Today, technology seems to be the leader in shaping the styles of learning in which these kids apprehend. The only question seems to be how and when we will take on graphic novels and comics and turn them into the powerful learning and teaching tools that they truly can become.

Even though there are these voices in the world that do not agree with nor condone the use of comic books nor graphic novels in the classroom, there are also voices that do condone the use of graphic novels and comic books as a tool for teaching. The use of these tools has been proven to be quite effective with studies that were kept and maintained by both teachers and scholars alike. Clever use of comics and graphic novels can work well with students' imagination and creativity. By the use of stimulating art forms and by keeping the learning material appealing, that can help develop the critical skills in the learning of language with today's students.

Comics may appeal more to young students who are used to visual stimulation through media. Young students are basically surrounded by technology where they do not see text without some form of imagery. With all this technology at their fingertips - phones and computers, tablets and television, their learning methods are bound to change at some point, and perhaps they already have, drastically. Monnin referred to the ways of the newer generation by talking about how the visual world in which we live in is truly the product of what many teachers in literacy would consider a revolution in how we tend to communicate. This revolution Monnin believes is in second place only to the invention of the printing press (Monnin, 2010).

One of the hardest things to do while teaching young students is being able to find material that is both interesting for the student and fits the level of proficiency at any given time. With the short attention span of the youth today, long texts that are nothing but texts often cause the students to become frustrated and become quite reluctant towards the text, especially since the will to participate in the reading activities may already not be at its highest value. When considering all this, the graphic novel can be sort of a "meeting them halfway" without becoming a hindering object in the language acquisition (Yildirim, 2013).

Today, graphic novels have the possibility to offer up a huge variety of genres but like the traditional novel, they also seem to play a large role in the student's life-long reading (Crawford, 2004). By creating a diverse bank of material with the aid of pictures and illustrations, one could create a better chance for the poorer reader to better develop the required skill to fully become a capable reader. By helping and maintaining reading comprehension, the graphic novel could truly act like a catalyzer that could help the students deal with far more complex material with much more confidence. Gorman said, in a truly clever way, that more than half of the story in a comic book or a graphic novel is understandable to the reader just by looking at the pictures, even to a reader in his early stages of reading (Gorman, 2002). When reading a graphic novel, even the most insecure and doubtful reader is helped through the story with the visual stimulation and even though the reader is very hesitant and unsure if what he is reading may be correct or not, the imagery does guide the reader through the story and through the, at some times, complex vocabulary that the reader might not recognize nor fully understand. To be able to link words to imagery could be quite helpful to the doubtful reader. In this way, the insecure reader is given the chance to open up to classic works that are often quite complex and even out of reach for the hesitant reader. These works are made available and put forth at the level of the reader. Today, one can easily find graphic versions of Shakespeare and even Jane Austen and read those classic stories with ease and all the while the text versions are hard to understand even for an advanced reader, let alone a reader at a novice level. By the simple combination of the visual and the verbal element - the graphic novel can easily serve as an effective tool to simply stimulate the interest of the reluctant and discouraged reader, who are made so by simply failing to read these difficult texts in their traditional form (Frey & Fisher, 2004). Although, by saying that the graphic novels can only be used effectively towards the readers who are reluctant is quite misleading. McTaggart talked about a kind of a chain effect that the graphic novel can truly have. He talked about that the struggling reader becomes interested and that the reluctant readers would become motivated beyond those text-only novels and that the learner who is learning at a higher level would become challenged. It has become quite obvious though that when thinking about the advantages of the use of the graphic novel for

teaching, the reluctant reader does play quite the role in regards to the progress of the readers who have become even more proficient (McTaggart, 2008).

3.1 Using Comics to teach writing

This section will be about how using comic books can help students learn how to write because now, finally, the graphic novel is regarded as a fine resource for genuine and authentic writing activities as well. They both help in developing creative writing assignments (Bucher & Manning, 2004). They can also help the students in developing their writing skills and become more efficient and better writers. (Frey & Fisher, 2004). The improving of non-verbal skills can also be brought on by the help from graphic novels and an ease to learning new vocabulary items in a context that is meaningful and, last but not least, engage in a more life-like sort of dialogue. When practicing writing activities through the use of graphic novels, having the students maybe create their own graphic novel or comic book truly gives the students a chance to focus on and build up their meaningful conversations, communications and relationship and that would always be considered more real, interesting and helpful than simply writing a classic and traditional composition (Morrison, et al., 2002). Matching written text with pictures can both help in comprehension and understanding writing sequences.

3.2 Help with visualization

This section is about how the visual aspect of the comic books is of so much help because those graphic novels with rich illustrations can be both visually stimulating and encouraging and help students to develop their cognitive strategies which in turn can improve reading or writing skills, intellectual development and language competence (Schwartz, 2002). The study shows support that the graphic novel as a medium can help students to fully acquire metacognitive strategies for reading and writing but the power of graphic novels as tools of pedagogy is not confined to these two skills. The same would apply to learning second and foreign languages where pictures can help with understanding meaning.

3.3 Using Comics to develop speaking and listening skills

This section of the essay is about how the use of comics can be stimulating for the students in improving their verbal and audio skills because graphic novels are not only good for teaching reading and writing, they can also be used as a useful resource for improving language skills such as speaking and listening. The graphic novel can help students of all ages to develop and form critical thinking skills through the encouragement of discussion and by offering diverse and provoking subject matters. This in turn encourages conversation skills. There are of course many graphic novels that fall under the category of being provoking in thought. To take a quick example, *Superman: Peace on Earth* that was published in 1999 and written and illustrated by Alex Ross and Paul Dini focuses on issues that are happening everyday all around the world. Issues such as world hunger and the rule of military. These topics can easily inspire students to discuss these issues in a far better manner than just showing them a picture of a dying animal and telling them to talk about it. (Schwarz, 2002). It is also a matter of fact that if one would put a graphic novelization and the original text of something side by side, the graphic novel would be far easier to understand. It would also be shorter and it would take far less time to read through it without losing the understanding element behind reading the text. The time could be spent on exchanging views rather than reading long texts. These factors truly do promote the critical thinking of the students during classroom activities that are based on the graphic novels. Just to take a quick example, again, there was a class of college students that read a simple, three-page graphic novel by John Callahan and that had the whole class in a heated discussion for two class periods (Versaci, 2001).

There is also one thing behind the graphic novel and that is their potential to be appealing towards many different intelligences (Gardner, 1983). For quite some time now, instructors have known that there are more than one intelligences and to be able to design more effective teaching programs, they should be taken into consideration in education. When choosing the right materials for the classroom it is truly important to be fully aware that in one single classroom there are multiple students and therefore many types of

intelligence and the learning styles can be just as many as the students and just as diverse. Now, since the graphic novel can offer so many options and is able to cater for different learning styles, it also has the possibility to be well adjusted for language courses as well as many other subjects. The visual learners and those who learn better through flash cards are those who could use best with graphic novels as a teaching tool in language. The type of intelligence that can best be described as the ability to fully visualize with the mind is quite common amongst the younger of learners. The imagery in these graphic novels is appealing to this group of learners. The group that is quite comfortable with shapes, images, colors and learn more avidly through the simple combination of those things with textual material. Linguistic intelligence, on the other hand, that refers to the analytical skills and the verbal skills can be a great asset and while dealing with comics and graphic novels, it can be quite the source of inspiration. Stimulating elements can of course be found in a graphic novel for students that have linguistic intelligence and those elements would encourage them to learn new vocabulary in a much faster pace and their critical thinking skills would be highly improved. However, the third type of intelligence that the graphic novels could cater for is the interpersonal intelligence which would involve the simple interaction between the student and other people. These students that have this type of intelligence are more in touch with both their feelings and others and are quite a bit more sensitive to other peoples' emotions and they also are quite the effective workers in teams. The key to understanding interpersonal intelligence is to understand communication. Graphic novels have always had the potential to prepare the environment necessary for communicating effectively through group work and group activities. The dialogues that are accompanied by images do also serve as a source of motivation and helps as this particular group of students are usually adept at reproduction activities and activities thereof (Yildirim, 2013).

It is understandable that the average person who has once or maybe never read a graphic novel thinks about this medium as childlike or something that people grow up from doing but when the graphic novel is given a closer look and the stories are read, one could bet his lifesavings on people changing their mind. One graphic novel has been widely credited and is used for the teaching of culture, history and language as well. The graphic novel *Maus* by

Art Spiegelman, published by *Pantheon*, is a story about Art's father, who survived the Holocaust. Art Spiegelman decided to depict the Jewish people in the form of mice who walked on two legs and spoke, while the Germans were depicted as cats. The books (part I and II) do have their comedic moments as almost every graphic novel does but when looked at as a whole, the story is a powerful telling of a Jewish family that goes through the three stages of the Holocaust - before, during and post. The format of a non-fiction graphic novel helps the student to read about and realize the real world problems that may be happening outside the window of their classroom, as one could also do by reading a non-fiction book of some kind but with the motivation of both seeing and reading (Wing, 2015).

Another example of the use of this medium in a relatable manner, in December of 2001, a special edition of *The Amazing Spider-Man* was released in honor of the people lost in the 9/11 terrorist attack. The issue of that comic book was very tasteful in all of its aspects and was made quite relatable for people that were affected by the 9/11 attacks and at that time of shock that was imposed by the terrorist attacks (Smith, n.d.).

Many comic books and graphic novels depict the harsh realities of the world in which we live in a quite tasteful manner, though often it can get gruesome and quite morbid and vulgar at some points, but the visualization of these problems such as diseases, drug abuse, violence and even suicide have been the platform the creation of role models for children, men and women (Smith, n.d.).

When deciding to use comic books and graphic novels in the classroom, the teacher must realize that the comic book is in fact no different to the paper back novel in that its uses must be taught. That is, the students must be taught how to read and analyze the comic books just as they were taught how to read and analyze *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The activities that could be used with the comic book or graphic novel are quite many. Like with the basic novel, one could start with the 'reading aloud' approach to teaching oral skills but alongside the simple reading of a text, the student would be asked to describe the illustrations without showing the rest of the class the imagery and to say aloud what the scenario is behind the text written (Smith, n.d.).

The teacher could have the class analyze the characters and their backstory as to who they are and why they have become what or who they are. This would help with analytical skills and have the students think both inside and outside of the box since the reason for some superheroes becoming who they became are not given down to the letter. The student would, in most cases, have to use their imagination and even take on the situation at hand and apply it to themselves and figure out their own backstory for the character at hand. This also creates the need for critical thinking within the student since the reasons, although sometimes idiotic, need to make sense (Smith, n.d.).

The teacher could create a handout with a single comic strip where the students would have to carry on without the rest of the storyline. The teacher would then be relying on the creative writing skills of the students and this assignment would without a doubt improve that skill since there is a part of the story in front of the student but not the ending and therefore it can end however the student wants (Smith, n.d.).

The students could read a comic book and/or graphic novel that has been made into a film or a television series and then the teacher could have them compare the two in regards to the information left out or added to the film/television version. This, again, would help with the analytical thinking and prepares students to cross media analysis. Since the storyboard is already there within the comic strip, the comparison would be easier but at the same time, it would create a kind of 'wanting' within the student to find some differences between versions. To use an example already mentioned, the graphic novel *Watchmen* by Alan Moore was transferred into film in 2009 and is noted to be quite the true adaptation of a graphic novel. *Watchmen* would probably serve as quite the good candidate for cross media analysis. Another example would be *V for Vendetta*, a graphic novel by the same author, Alan Moore (Smith, n.d.).

Finally, with cross media analysis in mind but not to its full extent, the student could read two of the many *Batman* stories, the 1988 graphic novel *The Killing Joke* and the 1996 series *The Long Halloween*. Those two stories were the main inspiration for the second film of the *Dark Knight Trilogy* directed by Christopher Nolan. The students could then be asked to analyze the similarities between the stories and the film with a critical aspect and asked to think of

things that could have been done in a better fashion and what went wrong in the production (Smith, n.d.).

So to summarize and finalize all of the benefits of graphic novels that have been mentioned here above before one makes the decision of using the graphic novel as a tool for teaching in the classroom and for teaching language, one must bear in mind that the literacy for text and the literacy for the visual are quite different in the ways of dealing with the printed material that lies before the student. The codes and also the conventions of graphic novels should firstly be made quite clear to the students and they should be clearly informed about them. These codes can easily be defined as the signs that we use when we try to convey meaning but the conventions would be the usual, repeated ways of simply doing things. Firstly, the teacher would have to introduce the student or the students to the convention of reading comics i.e. how one reads comics. Since the student is used to reading the conventional text as he or she reads it, the format of the traditional graphic novel should be no trouble for the student since he is expecting a plot with an introduction and build up to a climax and a resolution which is common in western novels. The student must always be instructed on the reading no matter how easy one might think it is because it always depends on the material. As said before, Manga is read in a different way and so the student might be confused if all of a sudden he starts on the end for no reason and without any warning. As for the codes, the group working students may per chance be asked to identify the features which make a graphic novel. By using this method, the students can be easily made familiar with the use of the more major codes of the graphic novels (Yildirim, 2013).

4. Conclusion

There is of course a lot to be thought about when considering such a change to the teaching methods that are being used and that have been validated and accepted for such a long time but there does not have to be a standstill in the methods of teaching. Whether it be the teaching of a language, history or culture, the use of comics, comic books and graphic novels seems to be well justified as an addition to conventional teaching materials and instructional methods. So as one can see from the information gathered, there can truly be a change and the use of comics is possible and the benefits outweigh the cons in my opinion.

Whether it comes down to kids watching television, playing video games or just reading the comics that they are given, people can all agree that children are always learning and what matters is how well they learn from each medium. Many children today are not learning as well from standard novel reading as people did forty years ago because the attention span has become quite shorter because of the constant flow of information.

In this essay, the evidence for and against the use of comics in the classroom were put forth and one could argue that the job was done in a good manner but as one starts the writing process, it becomes apparent that the issue behind the sound effects of comics is quite the troubling matter to discuss and how those sounds might affect both thinking and learning process within the younger generation especially.

The resurrection of comic books and graphic novels is certainly a discussion point in itself and how well they have been updated to fit the modern world through the use of computers, films and television, but also through the reprinting of old comics and relating them to the cinematic universe. This resurrection that is being referring to is actually creating a whole new fan-base that can and has connected to the older fan-base of comics and graphic novels. What this is doing without people realizing is that it is bridging that gap between books and movies in an even easier way, especially for the younger generation. Imagine a young child seeing Spiderman on television and think "Wow, he's

super cool". That same young child would definitely read about Spiderman after that if someone were to offer him some reading material about the subject.

One could easily say that the comic book is a dying format since everything is done on a computer these days but that is where an argument can be. A lot of these old formats of media is selling like crazy these days and it is because of multiple reasons. Quality, rare items or just pure nostalgia. It does not matter because history will always repeat itself when it comes to media. Vinyl records are selling out these days and even cassette tapes are making a comeback. Why not comic books?

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