I am not Prometheus

Traditional Literacy and Multimodal Texts in Secondary Classrooms

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explored the literacy practices that developed around comics when two secondary teachers (one AP Science and one AP English) used comics in their classroom instruction for the first time. It also explored the ways the teachers and their students positioned comics within their specific classroom contexts. Historically, comics are a marginalized medium in educational circles—widely considered non-academic despite the recognition by scholars for their sophistication as a multimodal medium. Scholars, librarians, teachers, and comics authors have made the case for the inclusion of comics in educational contexts citing their ability to support the literacy development of struggling readers, engage reluctant readers, promote lifelong reading, and convey information visually. However, the roles comics can play in educational contexts are still under researched, and many gaps exist in the literature including a lack of real world contexts and clearly reported instructional strategies. This study aimed to fill these gaps by reporting the literacy practices that students and teachers develop around comics, as well as contextualizing these practices in the classroom contexts and students' and teachers' experiences. Drawing from a social semiotic view of multimodality and the view of literacy as a social practice, I conducted a qualitative case study using ethnographic methods for data collection which I analyzed using an interpretive framework for qualitative data analysis and constant comparative analysis. I found three literacy practices developed around comics in these contexts—Q&A, writing about comics, and drawing comics. I also found that teachers and students positioned comics in four primary ways within these contexts—as a tool, as entertainment, as a medium, and as a traditional form of literature. Based on my findings, I developed three assertions: 1)

there is a disconnect between teachers' goals for using comics in their instruction and the literacy practice that developed around the comics they selected; 2) there is a disconnect between the ways in which teachers position comics and the ways in which students position comics; and 3) traditional views of literature and literacy continue to dominate classrooms when multimodal texts are selected and utilized during instruction.

DEDICATION

To all the kids who love comics but are told that comics are not real reading. They are.

To all the teachers who value comics and other non-traditional texts enough to bring

these texts into your classrooms. You're an inspiration.

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$$\frac{dy}{dx} = 3x^2 \ln(x) + x^3 \cdot \frac{1}{x}$$
$$= ?$$

Unfortunately, being a comics reader in the 90's was no easy feat....
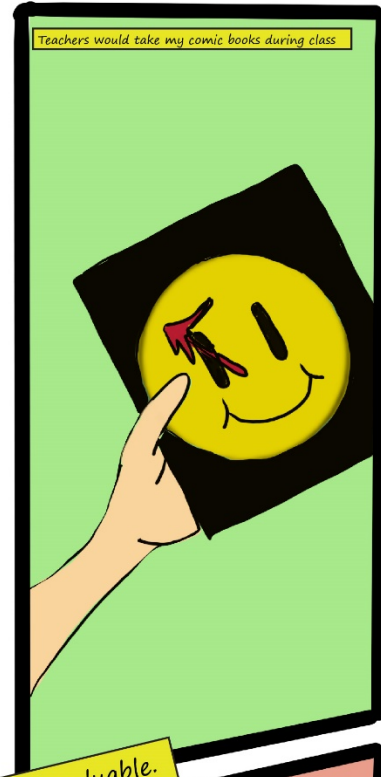
Teachers would take my comic books during class

classmates would tease me about reading books with pictures

My interests were not academically or socially valuable.
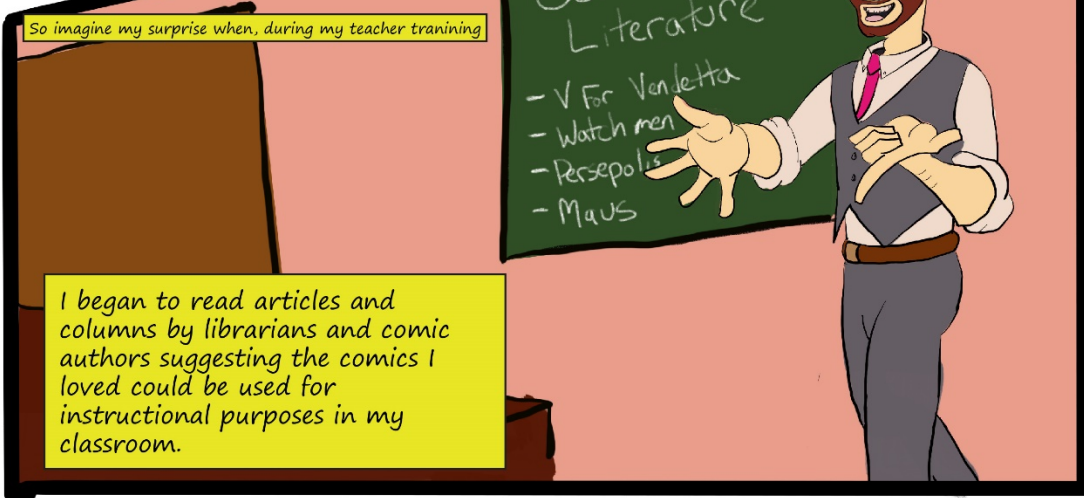
So imagine my surprise when, during my teacher tranining

Comics As Literature
- V For Vendetta
- Watch men
- Persepolis
- Maus

I began to read articles and columns by librarians and comic authors suggesting the comics I loved could be used for instructional purposes in my classroom.

When I became a classroom teacher, I knew I wanted to incorporate comics into my instruction though I was not certain exactly when or how I would go about it. At the time, librarians were actively making the case that comics were fundamentally interesting to kids, and as such, could be used to motivate reluctant readers and promote recreational reading habits (Crawford, 2004; Gorman, 2008; Lyga, 2006). This possibility lingered in the back of my mind as I began my first teaching position and discovered that my middle school students both did not like to read and did not care to read in class. After struggling with students' lack of interest in the adopted curriculum for half a semester, I decided to give comics a chance. I selected two comic series and one single issue—*Iron Man: Extremis* (Ellis & Granov, 2004), *The Man of Steel* (Byrne & Giordano, 1986), and *Amazing Fantasy: Spider-man!* #15 (Dikto & Lee, 2012)—to replace the traditional myths and legends featured in a unit on origin stories. This experiment met with mixed results. As Jennings, Rule, and Vander Zanden (2014) and Spiegel et al. (2013) attest, generally students preferred reading the comics to those texts normally adopted in the classroom (e.g., novels, essays, textbooks). However, students who were fundamentally uninterested in Iron Man, Superman, and Spider-man still resisted reading during class time. While comics worked for some students, they certainly did not work for all of them. Still, I was pleased to discover that comics could be used to cover my curricular content.

The second time I used comics in my classroom I was teaching a dystopian literature unit at a charter high school. The focal text for this unit was *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury, 2008) for which a graphic novel adaptation had recently been published. As the unit progressed, I came to realize that if we read *Fahrenheit 451* as planned we would not be able to finish the unit on schedule. Assuming that the comics were an easier and

faster medium to read than traditional novels, I decided to replace *Fahrenheit 451* with the graphic novel version. I quickly discovered that my assumptions about comics were incorrect. Not only was reading a comic neither easier nor faster, these texts actually proved much more difficult for students to read because of their lack of familiarity with the medium. Students had difficulty navigating certain layouts, attending to images, and synthesizing information across multiple communicative modes (e.g., image and text). While comics readers are familiar enough with variations in page layouts to adjust their reading paths (Cohn, 2013), I was surprised to find that novice readers typically find navigating layouts that deviate from the Z-path (i.e., a left-to-right reading order) challenging (Abel & Madden, 2008; Omori, Igaki, Ishii, Kurata, & Masuda, 2004). Furthermore, expert comics readers attend first to images and then to text before synthesizing the two modes when they read (Jimenez & Meyer, 2016). Since my students tended to ignore the images entirely, it is in retrospect unsurprising that their comics reading experiences were frustrating and confusing.

The third time I used comics in my classroom they were part of a unit focused on World War II literature. This unit included a number of visual texts including comics, photographs, and propaganda posters. Because of my previous experiences with comics, I was concerned that students would struggle with both reading and analyzing these texts. However, I had recently been introduced to the concept of multiliteracies as part of my Masters in Education coursework. This perspective suggested that the reading of multimodal text (i.e., texts comprised of more than one communicative mode) required different skills than reading traditional, print-based texts (Kress, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Luke, 1995). In particular, scholars made a case for explicitly teaching

students a metalanguage of design to support them in discussing and analyzing visual and multimodal texts (Callow, 2011; The New London Group, 1996; Unsworth, 2006). Working from this assumption, I decided to begin the unit by teaching students a metalanguage of comics and visual design. This proved beneficial as developing a shared vocabulary both drew students' attention to visual elements and made it easier for us to talk about these elements. However, the process proved incredibly time consuming due to my lack of familiarity teaching the material and students' lack of familiarity with comics, other visual texts, and the metalanguage.

My experiences using comics—and other multimodal texts—in the classroom led me to ask a number of questions: How do these texts work? How do readers construct meaning with these texts? What roles do these texts play in classrooms? Why do teachers use them? How do teachers approach teaching these texts? How do teachers learn about teaching with these texts? How do students react to and take up these texts and do their perspectives differ from those of the teacher? It was these questions that drove me to pursue a doctoral degree and it is these questions that inspired, in part, my dissertation.

Purpose & Rationale

Today's communicative landscape differs drastically from the landscape of twenty, thirty, or fifty years ago. The advent of information technologies and the subsequent digital revolution have resulted in communication practices that rely on texts that are both visually dominant and modally diverse (Kress, 2003; Serafini, 2012; Serafini, Kachorsky, & Aguilera, 2015). With websites, magazines, traditional and digital picturebooks, PowerPoint presentations, social media outlets, films, and comic books becoming the norm, the multimodal nature of our world is now inescapable

(Duncum, 2004). As such, the role visual images and multimodal ensembles play in representing and communicating information is expansive (Elkins, 2008; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).

As people navigate print and digital environments dominated by visual images and multimodal ensembles, they enact a wide range of literacy and meaning-making practices (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 1991, 2010; Knobel & Lankshear, 2014; The New London Group, 1996). People not only make sense with printed text, but also with other modes of communication such as image, layout, speech, and music. Consequently, being literate in today's communicative landscape involves skills beyond the reading and writing of logocentric texts; rather, contemporary literacy requires people to produce and construct meaning with a variety of modes (Kress, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Luke, 1995). New pedagogies, instructional practices, strategies, and skills are then required to support people's interactions with multimodal ensembles (Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Serafini, 2011; The New London Group, 1996).

Literacy researchers and educators assert that expanding instruction to include visual and multimodal literacies is a necessity if education is to keep pace with the demands of 21st century literacies (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010; Hicks, 2009; Serafini, 2012). While logocentric texts still dominate classroom literacy experiences (Piotrowski & Witte, 2015; Serafini, 2012; Vaish & Towndrow, 2010), multimodal ensembles, such as picturebooks and textbooks, are not new to classroom settings. Picturebooks, in particular, have long been a part of reading instruction (Kiefer, 1995; Serafini, 2008; Sipe, 2001). However, classrooms now utilize a range of other multimodal ensembles which researchers have begun to study including video (e.g., Gainsburg, 2009; Mills,

2010; Ranker, 2015), slide show presentations (e.g., Callow, 2003; Levy & Kimber, 2009; Shanahan, 2013), photographs (e.g., Rowsell & Kendrick, 2013; Vasudevan, 2009), games (e.g., Partington, 2010; Squire & Jan, 2007), social media (e.g., Blaschke, 2014; Halverson, 2009; Vie, 2015), and comics (e.g., Decker & Castro, 2012; Martinez-Roldan & Newcomer, 2011; Sabeti, 2012).

In spite of this attention, some multimodal ensembles have not been studied as extensively as others. The medium of comics, for example, has been under researched by the educational community (Mallia, 2007). A quick ERIC search reveals just over 400 peer-reviewed journal articles focused on comics and/or graphic novels with less than 100 of these featuring in-classroom research. Despite the lack of research, librarians, teachers, authors, and scholars all promote the use of comics in educational settings to accomplish a range of goals and purposes (e.g., Botzakis, 2013; Gorman, 2008; Yang, 2008). What research has been conducted in educational settings focuses primarily on the role comics play as a tool to be used in accomplishing various academic and pedagogic goals including motivating struggling readers (e.g., Brozo & Mayville, 2012; Gavigan, 2011), supporting the traditional literacy development of English Language Learners (e.g., Chun, 2009; Ranker, 2007), developing visual and multimodal literacies (e.g., Connors, 2015; Gillenwater, 2014; Pantaleo, 2011), and promoting student interest (e.g., Bosma, Rule, & Krueger, 2013; Hosler & Boomer, 2011; Spiegel et al., 2013).

In contrast to these academic and pedagogic goals, little consideration has been given to the role comics might play in educational settings as cultural artifacts, objects of study, and/or mediating devices. Furthermore, research at the intersection of comics and education often takes place in after school, lunch-time, or library book clubs (e.g.,

Connors, 2012; Gavigan, 2011; Sabeti, 2012, 2013), in after school programs (e.g., Bitz, 2004; Khurana, 2005; Low, 2015), during summer programs (e.g., Lawrence, McNeal, & Yildiz, 2009; Ghiso & Low, 2013), or in clinical contexts (Jimenez & Meyer, 2016; Martinez-Roldan & Newcomer, 2011; Meyer & Jimenez; 2017) rather than in classrooms. The research that does take place in classrooms usually does not or cannot examine the instructional practices of the teacher (e.g., Brozo & Mayville, 2012; Chun, 2009; Pantaleo, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013). In some instances, the researchers are the ones teaching or are heavily involved in teaching comics to the class (e.g., Brozo & Mayville, 2012; Brugar, Roberts, Jimenez, & Meyer, 2018; Pantaleo, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013). When the teachers' instruction is presented, this is done in such broad strokes that it is impossible to understand how they instructed their students (e.g., Brozo & Mayville, 2012; Decker & Castro, 2012). Finally, little of the existing research is contextualized. Generally, the settings in which research is conducted are presented in broad or generic terms with little discussion of the classroom environment, the teacher's knowledge of and experience teaching comics, the students' previous experiences with the comics, or the groups' interactions with and around the medium (e.g., Brozo & Mayville, 2012; Martinez-Roldan & Newcomer, 2011; Pantaleo, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Sabeti, 2012, 2013). As such, an understanding of how teachers and students take up comics as well as the role(s) comics can play in different content areas is underdeveloped.

Purpose of the Study & Research Questions

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, I wanted to explore the literacy practices that develop around comics when they are used by teachers in secondary

content area classrooms for the first time. Second, I wanted to explore the roles comics play in secondary content area classrooms and the ways in which teachers and students position comics in these contexts. The following research questions inform and focus this study:

1. What literacy practices develop around comics in secondary content area classrooms when teachers include these texts in their instruction for the first time?

2. How do teachers and students use and/or position comics in secondary content area classrooms when teachers include these texts in their instruction for the first time?

Overview of Study

For this study, I draw from a social semiotic view of multimodality (Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2005) and the view of literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Gee, 2010; Street, 1984) to conduct a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998) using ethnographic methods (Green & Bloome, 2015) for data collection which I analyze using an interpretive framework for qualitative data analysis (Erickson, 1986) and constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This qualitative case study comes from a larger study I conducted involving two different school sites—one a public charter school and one a private catholic school—and four different content area teachers—a science teacher, a social studies teacher, and two English language arts teachers. Data collection lasted the course of a semester and included six units of study involving comics. However, for the purposes of this study I focus on the first units conducted by the science and English teacher at the public charter school.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded broadly in a sociocultural view of learning and literacy. According to this perspective, individuals learn through interaction with other individuals in social contexts (Gee, 2015; Wenger, 2009). What needs to be learned by an individual appears first on the social plane and is then acquired or internalized by the individual through social interactions with others who are more skilled at the task (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Rogoff, 1990). In other words, a child does not spring into being with the knowledge and requisite skills needed to read. However, a child can learn how to read by interacting with other people who know how to read because these more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978) can demonstrate and describe the process.

When learning a new skill or engaging in a new activity, individuals rely on those who have more experience (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Individuals actively observe these more skilled others, participating collaboratively in activities that build upon what individuals already know, helping them reach new skills and understanding (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). More skilled others routinely and repeatedly guide an individual's participation in activities, gradually increasing the individual's responsibility as knowledge is internalized (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). This process of learning through collaboration with more experienced individuals is situated within social and cultural contexts (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). As such, the process, practices, and skills that individuals internalize are specific to their communities (Rogoff, 1990). Gradually, individuals become expert practitioners in the skills and activities of their specific communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990).

Within this sociocultural view of learning and literacy, I specifically draw from two theoretical perspectives—a social semiotic view of multimodality and literacy as a social practice—to construct my research questions.

A Social Semiotic View of Multimodality

A social semiotic view of multimodality is an approach to human communication, interaction, and representation that embraces communicative modes other than language and writing (Jewitt, 2009, 2013). According to Kress (2009), modes are "socially shaped and culturally given resources for making meaning" (p. 54) that through use are shaped and reshaped over time (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2009). Writing, speech, image, gesture, and music are all examples of modes. Modes can also be understood as "organized sets of semiotic resources" (Jewitt, 2008, p. 32). Speech, for example, is a communicative mode that consists of several semiotic resources (e.g., words, grammar, volume, tone, etc.).

Semiotic resources have meaning potentials that are socially and culturally restrained (van Leeuwen, 2005) which like the modes to which they contribute are shaped and reshaped over time (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2009). As such, meaning is by no means given or universal, but is instead plural and unstable (The New London Group, 1996). For example, when the word cat is uttered, the word has the potential to mean a variety of things. Depending upon the context and use of the word, cat has the potential to mean a house cat, a tiger, a product line of construction equipment, or a woman's name. A multitude of potential meanings are available to individuals as they construct meaning with semiotic resources within various contexts (van Leeuwen, 2005).

Individual modes realize the work of representation and communication differently (Kress, 2009). For instance, image does not utilize words or syntax as speech

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does, nor does speech rely on color or visual composition. As such, different modes offer different affordances (i.e., meaning potentials and limitations) that are linked to and dependent upon social uses within particular cultures (Kress, 2009). When used in combination, modes form multimodal ensembles: communicative media or products such as picturebooks, textbooks, comic books, films, news broadcasts, talk radio, and so on. Within multimodal ensembles, multiple modes are co-presented, each mode contributing to the whole so that meaning potentials are interwoven (Jewitt, 2009). As such, individuals constructing meaning with multimodal ensembles do so both across individual modes and holistically.

As with all theoretical perspectives, there are certain strengths and limitations. With a social semiotic view of multimodality, the focus is on the semiotic resources with consideration for how social, cultural, and historical factors contribute to their development and use. As van Leeuwen (2005) attests, this perspective is useful for examining multimodal texts themselves and creating inventories of different mediums according to their semiotic resources. However, this is a not an ideal perspective for considering social contexts (Kress, 2011). A social semiotic view of multimodality "invokes and relies on the social, yet does not itself provide detailed accounts of social interaction" (Kress, 2011). To counteract this limitation, Flewitt (2011) recommends partnering a social semiotic view of multimodality with ethnography to produce "grounded, theorized, detailed and holistic insights into literacy as social practice" (p. 297). I follow this recommendation—which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3—in order to counteract the limitations of a social semiotic view of multimodality.

Furthermore, I draw from the theory of literacy as a social practice to better understand the events and practices of the classroom contexts in which I conducted my study.

Within the view of literacy as a social practice, literacy is conceptualized as a range of practices rather than a set of skills (Perry, 2012; Street, 1984). Traditionally, literacy has been viewed as a cognitive ability where reading and writing are mental processes in which people engage (Gee, 2010). However, literacy as a social practice rejects this perspective recognizing instead the everyday meaning making practices and literacy uses of people within specific social, cultural, and real world contexts (Perry, 2012; Street, 1984). Within this perspective, literacy is no longer viewed as something done inside people's heads, but as a sociocultural phenomenon—a way of participating in a group—that needs to be understood within a range of contexts (Gee, 2010). As initially conceptualized, literacy as a social practice applied this sociocultural frame to the reading and writing of printed text. However, I extend this perspective to apply to multimodal ensembles.

Within the view of literacy as a social practice, there are two key constructs that require explication—literacy events and literacy practices.

Literacy events. Literacy events are the observable moments during which people interact with texts in their daily lives (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Perry, 2012). As Heath (1982) explains, a literacy event is "any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive process" (p. 93). Often, literacy events are routine or repeated activities (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) such as the bedtime story ritual or the writing of a five-paragraph essay in high school. With this in mind, literacy events are always socially situated and contextualized

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(Barton & Hamilton, 1998). This means that what writing a five-paragraph essay looks like in one classroom will not *exactly* resemble the writing of a five-paragraph essay in another classroom.

Literacy practices. Literacy practices are inferred from the observable moments (i.e., literacy events) where people interact with texts and one another in social contexts (Perry, 2012). They are social processes shaped by social rules and cultural ideologies as well as internal processes mediated by individual values, feelings, and attitudes (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Perry, 2012; Street, 1993). As such, literacy practices are intertwined with the shared, social, and cultural identities of individuals and their communities (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). For example, while the literacy event of writing a five-paragraph essay might differ from classroom to classroom, there will be some similarities, as well. For instance, the structure of the five-paragraph essay is fairly consistent across different contexts. However, what constitutes a quality five-paragraph essay will differ as will the feelings and attitudes of individuals towards the five-paragraph essay. With this in mind, the community of the classroom as well as the individuals present in the classroom are crucial components to understanding the literacy practices of that particular space.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the literacy practices that develop around comics in different classroom contexts as well as to develop an understanding of the roles comics can play and/or the way comics are positioned in these contexts. This study is grounded broadly in a sociocultural view of learning and literacy wherein literacy is conceptualized 1) as situated social practice that involves readers

transacting with texts and 2) as multimodal in that literacy involves making sense of a

range of communicative modes that are often integrated as multimodal ensembles. I

specifically draw from a social semiotic view of multimodality and theories of literacy as

a social practice to construct my research questions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Today, comics are a familiar staple on the popular culture scene. In recent years, the industry has seen a massive increase in reading popularity, hitting a twenty-year high in sales in 2014 (Miller & Griepp, 2015). According to Schenker (2014), forty-two million Americans self-identify as comic book or graphic novel fans on Facebook with nearly half of these fans being women. Comic book conventions have become commonplace in the United States with 42 different events scheduled in April of 2017 alone (Pate, n.d.). There are currently more than sixty live action television shows based on comics that are in production or are under development (Fleming, 2017). But what exactly are comics?

A number of definitions have been forwarded by comics' creators, scholars, and researchers. Comic book scholar and famed comics' creator, Will Eisner (1985), defined comics as narrative sequential art the purpose of which is to tell a story. However, this definition provides a limited view of comics as stories. Scott McCloud, a comic book creator and theorist, offers a definition of comics that extends to include non-narrative sequences. For McCloud (1993), comics are "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (p. 9). Researchers either define comics broadly as a text that combines words with image and arranges these combinations in a narrative sequence (e.g., Pantaleo, 2011a; Sabeti, 2012), or they fail entirely to define comics at all (e.g., Gomes & Carter, 2010; Khurana, 2005; Norton, 2003) assuming that readers are already familiar with comics in all of its variants (e.g., comic books, graphic novels, etc.).

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From a social semiotic perspective of multimodality, comics can be understood as multimodal texts. Comics rely on the combination of multiple modes such as text and image to realize the work of representation and communication. Readers draw on these modes to make meaning (Carrier, 2000; Low, 2012) by synthesizing the information presented by each mode and across modes to construct the text (Jimenez & Meyer, 2016).

Comics can also be understood as a medium (McCloud, 1993)—a form of production or dissemination (Burn, 2013) such as film, book, or radio broadcast. The medium of comics traditionally combines text and image in the form of panels—"the individual frames or segments that capture or encapsulate the events in the text" (Eisner, 2008)—and arrange these panels in a sequence. Within panels, speech bubbles or balloons are used as a framing device that "attempts to capture and make visible" the mode of speech (Eisner, 2008), and between panels, gutters—the white space in between one panel and the next—act as a transitional device (McCloud, 2006). While these conventions have been adopted by other multimodal texts, their combination readily identifies a particular text as a comic. Within the medium of comics, there are several common print and digital formats. I briefly define these below:

- Print Comics Formats
    - Comic Strips: three-to-five panel narrative sequences often found in newspapers (Cary, 2004)
    - Comic Book: a magazine-like book of roughly twenty to forty pages (Cary, 2004) that features both standalone narratives and episodic stories released over a series of issues

- ○ Graphic Novel: a book-length comic that is larger in scope and sequence than a comic strip or comic book (Cary, 2004)
- ● Digital Comics Formats
  - ○ Webcomics: comics (of any length) that are read exclusively on the internet (Rosberg, 2016)
  - ○ Digital Immigrant Comic: a digitally scanned variant of a print comic (Kachorsky, in press)
  - ○ Motion Books: a digital comic that employs additional modes (e.g., sound and motion) and requires specialized software in order to view (Kachorsky, in press)
  - ○ Motion Comics: a comic and animation hybrid that closely resembles televised cartoons (Morton, 2017)

All of the aforementioned types of comics (e.g., graphic novels, comic books, motion books, etc.) will be referred to collectively by the term *comics* in this dissertation. I chose to use this terminology to reflect the concept of comics as a medium. I have long used the term comics in reference to all comics' variants old and new as a reader of comics and a member of the comics' community. This terminology is widely accepted within these circles. Furthermore, I believe the use of the term comics emphasizes what different comics' variants share and points to the medium's larger role in popular culture.

A History of Comics

Historically, comics have a contentious relationship with education. The origins of this divide can be traced back to the work of psychologist Fredrick Wertham (1954) who wrote the book *Seduction of the Innocent* in which he details his research into how

comics lead to juvenile delinquency and cause children and adolescents psychological

harm. Tilley (2012) debunked Wertham's claims showing his arguments to be largely

baseless—he used unethical research practices and went so far as to fabricate evidence.

However, at the time, Wertham's testimony to Congress regarding the dangers of comics

to children and adolescents contributed to the anti-comics movement of the 50s and 60s

(Tilley, 2012).

The anti-comics movement led to the development of the Comics Code

Authority—regulatory branch of the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA).

The Comics Code Authority implemented a review process that sought to eliminate sex,

violence, gore, profanity, and slang from the comics medium (Nyberg, 1998; Tilley,

2012). Comic books only passed this review and received the Seal of Approval if they

were deemed suitable reading material for young children. This resulted in comics having

long been perceived as a low-quality form of literature (Jimenez & Meyer, 2016) that

lacks complexity (Connors, 2013).

While comics have had this reputation as being a low-quality form of literature

(Jimenez & Meyer, 2016), the reality is that the comics industry has survived in recent

decades primarily by appealing to a core group of readers who started reading comics in

the 1980s and who continue to do so today as adults (Riesman, 2017). Adult readership

along with a number of other factors such as the lifting of the Comics Code (Tilley, 2012)

led to more adult-oriented storylines with few mainstream comics books marketed

directly to children (Riesman, 2017).

In recent years, however, we have seen a shift in comics' readership. It has grown

and diversified with more women, people of color, and children reading comics. This in

turn has changed the content of comics. Women authors and illustrators now write comics with a female readership in mind, and a number of alternative (non-superhero) comics are being produced for children; these texts have been met with staggering popularity by young readers (Riesman, 2017). These comics reflect trends in children's and young adult literature in that they are intentionally written for a young audience and are about characters and issues with which children and teens can identify using language they understand (Blasingame, 2007).

Many children's and adolescent comics have received prestigious awards and honors including *American Born Chinese* (Eisner Award, National Book Award Finalist, and Printz Award), *El Deafo* (Eisner Award and Newbery Honor Book), *March: Book One* (Coretta Scott King Honor and Robert F. Kennedy Book Award), *March: Book Two* (Eisner Award), *March: Book Three* (Coretta Scott King Award; Eisner Award, National Book Award, Printz Award, Sibert Award, YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults), and *This One Summer* (Caldecott Honor Book, Eisner Award, Printz Honor Book, and Ignatz Award). In many instances, these comics were the first of the medium to receive a particular award speaking to a shifting view of comics as legitimate and noteworthy texts.

It is perhaps this shifting view towards legitimacy that inspired librarians and comics authors to call for the use of comics in education during the early and mid-2000s. Baird and Jackson (2007), Cary (2004), and Krashen (2004) encouraged the use of comics in classrooms suggesting that because of their images, comics could be used to support struggling readers. Crawford (2004) and Lyga (2006) suggested that comics could be used to engage traditionally reluctant readers such as boys in the act of reading.

Gorman (2008) argued that comics could be useful for promoting recreational and life-long reading with children and adolescents. And finally, math teacher and comics author Gene Yang (2008) believed comics were an ideal medium for conveying information in a visual way in a visual age for an audience (i.e., adolescents) familiar with consuming visual media.

A Review of Research on Comics and Educational Contexts

As discussed in Chapter One, despite the call by librarians and comics authors to include comics in educational contexts, research focused on the role of comics in instructional practices is relatively minimal (Mallia, 2007). What research has been conducted in this area is spread across a wide variety of topics resulting in some breadth but little depth in researchers' understanding of comics in educational contexts. In this section, I review research related to comics and educational contexts. This research falls into seven categories: 1) educator perceptions of comics in educational contexts; 2) the role of comics in reading motivation, interest, and engagement; 3) the role of comics in supporting traditional literacy development and literary learning; 4) the role of comics in content area literacy; 5) explorations of how *expert* comics' readers read and construct meaning with comics; 6) the role of comics in supporting visual literacy; and 7) the role of comics in critical literacy.

Educator Perceptions of Comics

Research exploring the perceptions educators hold regarding comics in educational contexts has met with mixed results. Researchers note that educators typically have little personal experience with comics causing them to express lack of interest in and doubt about the medium (Clark, 2013; Mathews, 2011; Nesmith, Cooper,

& Schwartz, 2011). This doubt does not appear to be alleviated once educators gain experience with comics. After reading a selection of math and science comics, in-service teachers and teacher educators reported that they found the texts childish and poorly written (e.g., contrived or unclear narratives and "dumb characters") (Nesmith et al., 2011). Concern also exists on the part of educators about the quality of scientific and historical information that is presented in nonfiction graphic novels (e.g., fallacious scientific information and the oversimplification of historical contexts and events) (Mathews, 2011; Nesmith et al., 2011). Furthermore, educators worry that using comics in their classroom instruction will be poorly received by administrators, colleagues, and parents, and could result in people questioning their credibility as teachers (Clark, 2013; Mathews, 2011). The doubts and concerns expressed by educators regarding comics in educational contexts reflect the historically negative reputation the comics medium has sustained.

In spite of these concerns, educators do have some positive perceptions of comics. Nesmith et al. (2011) found that educators view comics as useful for meeting the needs of a wide range of readers including gifted and talented students, English language learners, and boys. Other scholars found that educators believe students will be interested in comics and are more likely to read comics than more traditional texts (Clark, 2013; Mathews, 2011).

Reading Motivation, Interest, and Engagement

The assumption on the part educators that students will be interested in reading comics is supported by research on the role of comics in reading motivation, interest, and engagement. Millard & Marsh (2001) report that when given access to a comics lending

library all 69 elementary school students in their study "responded enthusiastically" and "began taking the comics home on a weekly basis" (p. 31). When interviewing these students, the researchers found that the children liked comics and preferred borrowing comics to traditional books. Similarly, Norton's (2003) research with middle grade *Archie* comics' readers found that students derived pleasure from reading these texts that they did not experience when reading school sanctioned books. Other scholars have also found that students are more interested in reading comics than other types of texts (i.e., essays and traditional books) in classrooms (Jennings, Rule, & Vander Zanden, 2014; Spiegel, McQuillan, Halpin, Matuk, & Diamond, 2013). This interest in comics might stem from the structural similarities between comics and the texts that students engage with outside of the classroom (Dallacqua, 2012).

Researchers have also explored the role comics play in motivating specific groups of readers. Comics have been found to have a positive impact on the reading motivation and engagement of struggling male adolescent readers (Gavigan, 2011). Other scholars report that comics are an excellent tool for motivating and engaging special education students; they speculate that since many students with disabilities struggle to visualize when they read, the comics benefit them by providing a visual scaffold (Gomes & Carter, 2010). Finally, Martinez-Roldan & Newcomer (2011) found that the open-ended nature of wordless comics provided a unique source of engagement for English language learners because they were able to read their own experiences into the comics.

Traditional Literacy Development & Literary Learning

Before reviewing the research focused on the role of comics in supporting traditional literacy development and literary learning, it is important to describe what is

meant by both traditional literacy and traditional literary learning. In the traditional or autonomous view of literacy (Street, 1984), literacy is often considered a cognitive ability where reading and writing are mental processes in which people engage (Gee, 2010). Historically, school instructional practices and literacy practices reflect and privilege the cognitive perspective (Resnick, 1990; Street, 1984). Classroom instructional practices reflect a factory model of instruction and are often teacher-centered with teachers utilizing lecture methods (i.e., the teacher telling students information) and teacher-directed questioning of students (Brown, 2003). Common literacy activities include the predicting, questioning, and summarizing of print-based texts (Alexander & Fox, 2013). From this perspective, reading instruction usually focuses "on a single interpretation, one in which the teacher becomes the single arbitrator of correct meaning" (Young & Bush, 2004, p. 15). Similarly, traditional perspectives of literature and literary instruction draw from formalism and new criticism (Richter, 1998). From these perspectives, meaning is thought to be embedded in the text and can be inferred through careful consideration of the text's form (i.e., narrative structure, point-of-view, imagery, etc.), disregarding the reader as constructor of meaning and the author as producer of such (Abrams, 1999; Cohen, 2017).

The autonomous model of literacy is in contrast to the view of literacy as a social practice used as a theoretical framework for this study. According to Street (2003), the autonomous view of literacy "disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it so that it can be presented as though they are neutral and universal" (p. 77). This privileges one way of being literate (i.e., the literacy of school) and maintains the dominance of those people in society who utilize that set of literacy practices (Zamel &

Spack, 2002). In contrast, the view of literacy as a social practice acknowledges many ways of being literate across contexts and cultures (Gee, 2010).

Comics have been found useful in supporting traditional literacy development. Brenna (2013) found that 4th grade students relied on traditional reading comprehension strategies (e.g., predicting, summarizing, and synthesizing) when reading and discussing comics. These strategies were modeled for students by the classroom teacher and reinforced during small group work. Similarly, Chase, Son, and Steiner (2014) found that because of their sequential nature, comics were ideal for teaching young readers the concept of sequencing. Students were able to use contextual clues to predict the order in which panels should be sequenced and infer what dialogue should appear in speech bubbles. The researchers concluded that comics—like more traditional texts—can be used to support traditional reading practices.

Following this line of reasoning, other scholars have explored the role comics can play in supporting the traditional literacy development and literary learning of English language learners (ELL) and other struggling readers. Ranker (2007) observed the use of comics to model different story or narrative structures and found that first grade ELL students were able to adopt the story structures read in comics into their own writing. Martinez-Roldan & Newcomer (2011) found that wordless comics helped middle school ELL students develop predicting skills. Furthermore, comics have been found to support language use and vocabulary development for ELLs and struggling readers alike (Chun, 2009; Gavigan, 2011).

Finally, scholars have long suggested comics can be used to support traditional literary learning. Professional development books focused on using comics in elementary

and secondary classrooms detail strategies for using comics to teach tone, mood, point-of-view, and foreshadowing (Frey & Fisher, 2008; Monnin, 2010, 2011; Novak, 2014). Research supports these claims. In an afterschool program, Dallacqua (2012a, 2012b) discovered that students applied their existing knowledge of literary devices (e.g., mood and point-of-view) to their readings of comics.

Content Area Literacy

Other scholars and researchers have turned their attention to the role that comics can play in supporting content area or disciplinary literacy. The research in this area has been spread across a range of disciplines including science (e.g., Brozo & Mayville, 2012; Hosler & Boomer, 2011; Lin & Lin, 2016; Spiegel et al., 2013), social studies (e.g., Bosma, Rule, & Krueger, 2013; Ching & Fook, 2013), health (e.g., Albright & Gavigan, 2014), and business (e.g., Short, Randolph-Seng, & McKenny, 2013). Despite being spread across so many content areas, collectively this body of research has revealed that students at varying grade levels are able to gain content area knowledge and learn content area material by reading comics. For example, Albright and Gavigan (2014) attempted to determine if reading a health comic improved students' knowledge about the AIDS/HIV virus. The results of the post-test revealed a "significant increase in the number of correct answers" (Albright & Gavigan, 2014, p. 182). The question, of course, is whether or not it mattered if the text students read was a comic. Would students' factual knowledge about AIDS/HIV have increased significantly if they had watched a documentary or read a pamphlet?

In several studies, researchers compared content area knowledge gains between students who read comics and students who read more traditional texts such as textbooks

or essays. Comics, when compared to traditional texts, resulted in no significant difference in students' ability to recall content area material after reading (Hosler & Boomer, 2011; Lin & Lin, 2016; Spiegel et al., 2013). However, researchers did find that students' preferred reading comics to traditional texts; this lead researchers to conclude that comics might be a more suitable instructional medium for content area material because of students' preference for comics (Hosler & Boomer, 2011; Lin & Lin, 2016; Spiegel et al., 2013).

Expert Readers

A few researchers have also examined how expert comics readers approach reading comics. This practice of observing expert readers to better understand reading comprehension has a long tradition in literacy research (Jimenez & Meyer, 2016). Eye-tracking studies reveal that expert comics' readers navigate various comic page layouts with relative ease (Cohn, 2013; Nakazawa, 2002) while non-expert readers' eyes move erratically from panel-to-panel as they attempt to gauge reading order (Nakazawa, 2002). The work of Jimenez and Meyer (2016) and Meyer and Jiménez (2017) with expert comics' readers in clinical contexts reveals that expert comics' readers: 1) synthesize linguistic, visual, and spatial resources; 2) develop systematic methods for reading comics; 3) navigate through different reading roles as they read (i.e., navigator, interpreter, designer, and interrogator); and 4) construct different meanings with the texts. The finding that comics' readers synthesize linguistic, visual, and spatial resources as they read points toward an important shift in how research in educational contexts approaches these comics. Finally, within the research community comics here begin to be recognized as multimodal ensembles with which readers make sense holistically.

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Visual Literacy

In comics, readers encounter "a synergistic language, with certain unique conventions that must be understood and internalized for readers to develop advanced competency in their interactions" with these texts (Low, 2012, p. 372). As such, reading comics "is not simply a question of alternating between words and pictures, but rather, a different mode of reading which calls for the readjustment of the reading process" (Khordoc, 2001, p. 172). This readjustment in the reading process requires students to develop new skills—specifically, visual literacy skills.

In her study of 4th graders' reading comprehension of comics, Brenna (2013) discovered that in addition to using traditional comprehension strategies, students developed new, "form-specific" skills to make meaning with these texts. Students interpreted a range of design features and semiotic resources common to visual and multimodal texts including typography, color, depth-of-field, interpersonal distance, and design. These findings are echoed by Connors (2013) who studied how high school students in an afterschool book club navigated graphic novels. In this study, students drew most heavily on the facial expressions of characters when constructing meaning with the comics. They used facial expressions to determine the emotional states and motivations of characters. Also, students drew on color, layout, and literary elements (e.g., symbolism and verbal irony). While both these studies suggest that students can use their existing traditional literacy skills to construct meaning with comics, they also point toward the necessity of visual literacy skills. Gillenwater's (2014) research in a high school English language arts class confirms that visual literacy training is important in supporting students' readings of comics. She found that students who received visual

literacy instruction were able to speak more specifically about the visual components of the comics (e.g., color, positioning, layout, size, and placement).

Pantaleo (2011b, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b) found that comics can be used to teach students to use visual design features in their own multimodal authoring. In her research, Pantaleo—and collaborating teachers—provided visual literacy instruction focusing on design features common to comics and other multimodal texts. Then, they asked students to produce short comic narratives and reflect on their own design choices. Pantaleo conducted interviews with students similar to photo-elicitation during which she asked them questions about their design intentions and decisions. Students' comics revealed that students took up the specific semiotic resources about which they were taught in their respective classrooms (e.g., color, line, speech bubbles, panels, typography, framing, borders, perspective, and point-of-view). Students used these semiotic resources intentionally to represent information, and furthermore, expected readers in these contexts to understand their intentions (Pantaleo, 2013b). Their use of semiotic resources and their expectations of readers reflect students' adoption of the literacy practices specific to their classroom contexts (Pantaleo, 2013a). However, students also transformed or changed the semiotic resources about which they learned sometimes moving beyond the norms of the classroom (Pantaleo, 2011b, 2012b).

Critical Literacy

Scholarship on comics and educational contexts has also considered how the comics medium fosters critical literacy and social awareness. Researchers have found that due to their visual nature comics afford critical discussion and writing about representations of race, gender, and cultural identity (Dallacqua & Sutton, 2014; Low,

2015). During literature discussions in a high school classroom, Dallacqua and Sutton (2014) found that students pointed to different visual aspects (e.g., clothing, make-up, and hair) in Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *The Complete Persepolis* as evidence of Iranian expectations of women. Also, students were able to identify and connect with the characters in spite of the differences between the students' contexts and those of the characters. This supports Juneau and Sucharov (2010) claim that the comics medium promotes empathetic engagement with political and social issues.

Low (2015) suggests that it is the medium's reputation as unimportant--at least in educational contexts--that makes comics ideal for having conversations around issues that are often not addressed in school (e.g., race and gender stereotypes). In his work with an after school comics community, Low (2015) found that middle school students both critiqued authors and illustrators for racially stereotyping characters in comics and for excluding racial groups from comics. Students responded to comics in these ways in spite of attending a school where discussions about racial issues were typically suppressed. However, Low (2015) was quick to point out that these discussions occurred in an afterschool setting where critical discussions about race were accepted and encouraged. This suggests that comics in and of themselves are not enough to promote critical literacy. Rather, comics can promote critical literacy in contexts where these practices are welcomed.

Gaps in the Literature

While it is clear that researchers are addressing a broad range of issues and topics at the intersection of comics and education, the fact that the field is still so under researched (Mallia, 2007) results in a variety of gaps in the literature. First, much of the

existing research on comics and educational contexts does not occur in classroom

settings. Rather, research takes place in lunch time or afterschool book clubs on middle

school or high school campuses (e.g., Connors, 2013; Gavigan, 2011; Sabeti, 2012,

2013), in afterschool or summer programs (e.g., Bitz, 2004; Ghiso & Low, 2013;

Khurana, 2005; Lawrence, McNeal, & Yildiz, 2009), in libraries (e.g., Albright &

Gavigan, 2014), in prisons (e.g., Gavigan & Albright, 2015), and clinical settings (e.g.,

Jimenez & Meyer, 2016; Meyer & Jiménez, 2017). With three exceptions (e.g., Khurana,

2005; Lawrence, McNeal, & Yildiz, 2009; Ghiso & Low, 2013), the contexts in these

studies listed here were organized by the researchers for the express purpose of

conducting a study. While these studies are certainly valuable, they do not reflect

classroom contexts or instructional practices in a way that reflects the real-world

experiences of teachers and students.

The research that does take place in classroom contexts usually does not--or,

perhaps cannot--examine the instructional practices of the teacher. In some instances, the

researchers are the ones teaching the class not the teacher (e.g., Brugar, Roberts, Jiménez,

& Meyer, 2018) or the researchers contribute significantly to the instruction (e.g.,

Pantaleo, 2011b, 2012a). In other instances, what the teacher has done in terms of

instruction is presented in such broad strokes that it is impossible to understand how they

instructed their students (e.g., Bosma et al., 2013; Ching & Fook, 2013; Khurana, 2005;

Short et al., 2013). My study seeks to address these gaps by reporting the literacy

practices that students and teachers develop around comics as well as by contextualizing

these practices in the classroom contexts.

Summary

Historically, comics have been a marginalized medium in educational circles. They have widely been considered low-quality form of literature despite the recognition by scholars of their complex and sophisticated nature as multimodal texts. Scholars, librarians, and comics authors have made the case for the inclusion of comics in educational contexts citing comics' ability to support the literacy development of struggling readers, engage reluctant readers, promote lifelong reading, and convey information visually. As educators have taken up this call, researchers have made their way into classrooms and other educational contexts to explore a range of topics including 1) educator perceptions of comics in educational contexts; 2) the role of comics in reading motivation, interest, and engagement; 3) the role of comics in supporting traditional literacy development and literary learning; 4) the role of comics in content area literacy; 5) explorations of how expert comics' readers read and construct meaning with comics; 6) the role of comics in supporting visual literacy; and 7) the role of comics in critical literacy. While this research has covered a broad range of topics, the roles of comics in education are still under researched and many gaps exist in the literature including a lack of real-world contexts and clearly reported instructional practices. This study aims to fills these gaps by reporting the literacy practices that students and teachers develop around comics as well as contextualizing these practices in the classroom contexts.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The goals of this study include exploring the literacy practices that develop around comics when they are used by teachers in secondary content area classrooms for the first time and exploring the roles comics play in secondary content area classrooms as well as the ways in which teachers and students position comics in these contexts. The following research questions inform and focus this study:

1. What literacy practices develop around comics in secondary content area classrooms when teachers include these texts in their instruction for the first time?

2. How do teachers and students use and/or position comics in secondary content area classrooms when teachers include these texts in their instruction for the first time?

In this chapter, I describe the methods used to collect and analyze the data used to answer these research questions.

Methodology

I employ a qualitative case study approach (Merriam, 1998) using ethnographic methods for data collection (Green & Bloome, 2015). In this section, I describe each of these methodologies in turn and provide a description of my role as the researcher within this study.

Qualitative Case Studies

The purpose of conducting case studies is to develop an understanding of the ways of being in an existing social unit (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). The unit of analysis or case is a single thing (e.g., instance, place, social unit, program, person, phenomenon,

etc.) that is conceptually bound in some way, either by location, time, circumstance, or social construction (Smith, 1978; Ragin, 1992; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). Ideally, each case in a study is bounded as an object of research because it is "an instance of some concern, issue, or hypothesis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 28).

Case study research aims to explore what a particular "phenomenon means as it is socially enacted within a particular case" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 34). As such, case study research aligns well with the sociocultural theoretical perspective utilized for this study because both focus on social interaction as they are situated in context. According to several scholars, quality qualitative case studies result in descriptive, in-depth, and intensive analyses of the experiences and meanings of individuals who are part of the bounded system or case being studied (Smith, 1978; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005). These analyses are characterized by holistic description focused on processes rather than outcomes (Merriam, 1998).

I chose a qualitative case study methodology because I wanted to examine the "local particulars" of an existing, small, naturalistic social unit (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 32). Specifically, I wanted to look at classrooms wherein teachers used comics in their instructional practices. These classrooms were conceptualized as cases because they were bound by location (i.e., a high school classroom), phenomenon (i.e., the teachers were using comics in their instruction for the first time), and time (i.e., the teachers used comics in specific units of study that lasted several weeks). Further details about the contexts of these cases will be addressed later in this chapter and Chapter 4.

Ethnography and Ethnographic Methods

Recently, scholars of multimodality and social semiotics have called for the use of ethnography and ethnographic methods in the study of phenomenon related to multimodal texts (e.g., Dicks, Flewitt, Lancaster, & Pahl, 2011; Kress, 2011; Vannini, 2007). This is in part because social semiotics and ethnography both have similar aims—to examine people's social use of semiotic resources in their everyday lives (Dicks, Flewitt, Lancaster, & Pahl, 2011). While ethnography might emphasize the people and whereas social semiotics focuses on various semiotic resources, both consider the social and contextual factors that contribute to what counts as knowledge and meaning to specific groups. However, social semiotics, as a theoretical perspective, "invokes and relies on 'the social', yet does not itself provide detailed accounts" of social interaction (Kress, 2011, p. 241). While social semiotics is interested in how meaning making develops in social environments, it is a theory and not a methodology for exploring particular aspects of the social contexts and events (Kress, 2011). As such, Kress (2011) suggests that ethnographic research methods can be used in concert with the theoretical underpinnings of social semiotics to gain a deeper understanding of the influence social environments have on semiotic resources. Since I am concerned here with the role(s) of comics in education (i.e., multimodal ensembles in a specific social environment), the combination of ethnographic methods with a social semiotic perspective of multimodality is warranted.

According to Green, Skukauskaite, and Baker (2012), ethnography is a "recursive, iterative, and abductive reasoning process" (p. 309) with the goal of learning from people what counts as knowledge and meaning to them in context. In trying to achieve this goal,

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ethnographers consider patterns that develop in daily life by examining group and individual beliefs, perceptions, actions, behaviors, and values (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Green, Skukauskaite, & Baker, 2012). In this way, ethnography is similar in purpose to qualitative case study research. However, ethnography is distinct from case study research in several ways. Most importantly for the purposes of this study, traditional ethnographies are often characterized by researchers spending a significant length of time in the field in order to truly get a sense for the context and the people they are studying (Van Maanen, 1998). According to Green and Bloome (1997, 2015), "*doing ethnography* involves the framing, conceptualizing, conducting, interpreting, writing, and reporting associated with a broad, in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group" (p. 186). With this in mind, a full or traditional ethnography was not possible for this study given the short nature of the phenomenon under consideration. The units in which the teachers included comics in their instruction lasted between two and four weeks.

Since a traditional ethnography was not possible given the circumstances, I used ethnographic methods, or what Green and Bloome (1997, 2015) refer to as ethnographic tools, to conduct the case studies. Ethnographic tools are the methods and techniques often associated or used in traditional ethnographies (Green & Bloome, 1997, 2015). Common ethnographic tools include interviews and artifact collection as well as participant observation and the writing of fieldnotes. In ethnography, these tools have proven useful in gaining insight about culture and social life (Green & Bloome, 1997, 2015). As such, they are ideally suited to answering the questions posed in this study.

Role of the Researcher

According to Tracy (2013), there are four primary roles which a qualitative researcher can play while in the field—complete participant, play participant, focused participant observer, and complete observer. For the purposes of this study, I chose to be a focused participant observer. Sometimes called "observer as participant" (Gold, 1958, p. 221) or "reactive" observer (Angrosino, 2005, p. 732) a focused participant observer enters the research site with an explicit and pre-determined research agenda (Tracy, 2013). In this study, I was explicitly interested in observing the literacy practices of teachers and students that developed around comics when they were implemented in classroom instruction. Also, a focused participant observer enters the research site as a known researcher (Tracy, 2013). This was the case in my study as both teachers and students were aware that I was a researcher and that I was specifically researching literacy practices around comics.

The role of focused participant observer is ideal when the researcher is only able to spend a short period of time in the research context because the researcher enters the site with a clear plan (Tracy, 2013). Since my data collection was limited to the units of study that featured comics, taking on this role helped me both develop a targeted plan for data collection and focus my observations on the practices involving the comics rather than attending to everything that was occurring in the classrooms. However, this did limit my ability to get to know all the participants which is one of the limitations of the focused participant observer role (Tracy, 2013). This also contributes to another limitation inherent in the role—a heavier reliance on the researcher as the instrument of interpretation (Tracy, 2013). As such, my data analysis follows a more etic than emic

approach with my coding scheme constructed by me rather than coming from the language and terminology of the classrooms studied (Merriam, 1998).

Context

This study was conducted at the Douglas Adams School of Science and Technology (DASST) (pseudonym selected by teachers), a public charter school in the Southwestern United States. The school is a science and technology focused charter school meaning more science and technology classes are available to students than are often found at traditional public schools. They offer approximately two to three Advanced Placement (AP) science electives for each grade level. Furthermore, the school is involved in a number of community-based STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) projects. Classes at DASST are 50 minutes in length Monday through Thursday. Fridays feature several alternative schedules during which classes rotate or do not meet for various reasons. School days last longer than average with students arriving at 8am and being released at 4:30pm. The school year is also longer with students attending classes for 200 days rather than the 181 days required by state law.

DASST was built in the neighborhood three years prior to my study. The school's mission is to "transform and improve" the community by providing "students opportunities for advancement by providing needed preparation for the academic rigors of college graduation leading to career success." Both teachers in this study reported believing and agreeing with the school's mission (Interview, February 16, 2017; Interview, March 8, 2017).

At the time of this study, the school served 379 students in grades 7-11. The minority enrollment at DASST was 98.6% with 96.6% of the students identifying as

Hispanic and 1.6% as African-American. In addition, the Caucasian populations was 1.3% of the student population. At the time, the majority of the students at DASST were economically disadvantaged with 93.9% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

AP Science Classroom

The AP Science class was a first period elective course focused on sustainability. It was an AP/dual credit course meaning students could receive college credit for taking the class if they paid a fee of three hundred dollars. This particular class was only available to juniors. I was there for a three-week unit that covered the topic of food sustainability. This unit consisted of exactly 450 minutes of instructional time.

Teacher. The teacher, Mr. Hugo (all names are pseudonyms and all pseudonyms are self-selected), was a white male with three years of teaching experience though this was his first year teaching the sustainability class. He had no experience either reading comics or teaching with comics. He had attended a professional development workshop I conducted at a local Comic Con where I recruited potential teachers for this study. He expressed interest in the study by filling out a sign-up sheet and responding to recruitment emails I sent out to potential teacher participants in the Fall of 2016.

Text. The comic Mr. Hugo selected to use in his food sustainability unit was a graphic novel called *#foodcrisis* (Fraser, 2014). He selected this text for a number of reasons. First, the comic was created by a professor at Guelph University in Canada who is an expert in issues of food sustainability, and this professor based the events of the narrative on his research. Second, the text is divided into two parts—the first half is a graphic novel narrative; the second half presents a series of essays written by the author-

researcher and colleagues. These essays are not in comic form. Mr. Hugo liked that this "true" portion was included in the text (Interview, February 16, 2017). Finally, he selected this comic because curriculum and teaching resources were also provided with the purchase of the text.

Students. There were twenty-two students in the class. Sixteen were female and six were male. Twenty-one students identified as Hispanic and one student identified as Caucasian. Two students identified as comics readers but one explained that he had not read a comic in a "few years" (Fieldnotes, February 24, 2017).

Researcher. As discussed previously, I took on the role of a focused participant observer during data collection. Mr. Hugo and the students were aware of my role as a researcher in the classroom and were aware of my goals in conducting the study. Primarily, my time in the classroom was spent observing the teacher and the students in their daily activities. However, I did interact with the students in an informal capacity asking them questions about their assignments, their thoughts and feelings about classroom activities, and their personal backgrounds.

AP English

The AP English class was a required course for juniors. It was the second class period of the day. I was there for a four-week unit which consisted of a total of 550 minutes of total class time.

Teacher. The teacher, Lord Awesome, was also male. He was Latino and spoke fluent Spanish. He had four years of teaching experience though this was his first year at this school. He did not identify as a comics reader but had taken a course on comics while earning his bachelor's degree in English. He had no experience teaching with comics but

explained that he had "always wanted to get into *Persepolis*"—a graphic novel—but had "never really had access to it" (Interview, July 6, 2017). Lord Awesome found out about the study from Mr. Hugo and asked to become a participant because he believed that including comics in the classroom "invites students to play a role in the conversation of a new literary mode, which is a unique opportunity that I don't believe has ever happened before, at least not pertaining to literature" (Interview, March 8, 2017).

Text. The teacher selected *The Complete Persepolis*, a graphic novel memoir by Marjane Satrapi (2003), in which the author shares her experiences growing up during the Islamic Revolution in Iran. He chose this comic because he had always wanted to teach it but never had the opportunity before. He also believed that *Persepolis* was "an important novel to read" given the current political climate and the relationship between the United States and the Middle East (Interview, March 8, 2017).

Students. There were twenty-two students in the AP English class though only twenty participated in the study. Twelve of these students were also in the AP science class. Thirteen students were female and seven were male. Eighteen students identified as Hispanic and two students identified as Caucasian. There were two students in the class who self-identified as comics readers. One of these students, Jimmy, who was also in the AP science class, read both mainstream comics and Japanese manga. The other student, Samurai Joe, primarily read mainstream Marvel comics.

Researcher. As with the AP science class, I took on the role of focused participant observer. However, Lord Awesome positioned me as more of a "play participant" inviting me to participate in class activities (Tracy, 2013, p. 109). For example, during whole class discussions, he would call on me to share insights with

students. He also positioned me as a curriculum consultant asking me questions about comics and visual literacy the answers to which he would later incorporate into classroom instruction.

<div align="center">**Data Collection Procedures**</div>

As you will read in more detail in this section, I collected data from six sources: 1) classroom observations and fieldnotes; 2) video recordings and subsequent transcripts of classroom instruction and activities; 3) transcripts of pre-, mid-, and post-interviews with the teachers; 4) transcripts of informal interviews with students during independent work time; 5) classroom documents (e.g., lesson plans and student assignments); and 6) researcher memos. In this section, I also describe each data source and explain the rationale behind using each data source within this study. Finally, I outline my framework for data collection.

Data Sources

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative researchers collect data from a variety of empirical sources. The three most common or basic data sources are observational, interview, and archival data (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Merriam (1998) offers a slightly different set of terms for the array of commonly collected data sources in case study research: observations, interviews, and documents. I collected all three as part of this study.

Classroom observation and fieldnotes. Fieldnotes are shorthand or mental notes on the features and actions researchers observe while in the field (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Tracy, 2013). Using a methodological and systematic process, these notes are turned into rich, thick descriptions and a coherent narrative of the researchers'

observations (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Tracy, 2013). As a data source, rich, descriptive fieldnotes can help contextualize research sites, make visible the processes of interaction between participants, and give participants a voice (Emerson, 1995; Tracy, 2013). I was interested in the literacy practices or social interactions around comics as well as the context in which these interactions occur, so fieldnotes were a particularly important data source because they allow for the systematic collection of observable action as well as impressions about the context.

Each day I took short hand fieldnotes during the class period. After each class, I recorded voice notes reflecting on my observations for the day. I combined these short hand fieldnotes and recorded reflections into descriptive passages of five to ten pages in length. In addition to short hand fieldnotes and descriptive fieldnotes, I also reviewed the video recordings when necessary to jog my memory of an event or to confirm an observation I made note of in my fieldnotes.

Video recordings and transcripts. In addition to constructing observational fieldnotes, I also video recorded each class session. Videotaping interactions enabled me to go back to interactions that occurred at the research site and review them. While watching video is not the same thing as being within the context, the ability to examine interactions and body language repeatedly can provide researchers with additional insights (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010) that fieldnotes may not. Video can also reveal aspects of a context that the researcher missed while they were on site. In watching videos, I noticed interactions and heard conversations that I did not notice in the moment.

At the beginning of each class session, I set up a video camera in a corner of the room. I rotated the camera's location in an effort to record different perspectives and

different students. There were two days—one in each class—when I was not able to attend the class. On these days, the teachers set up the camera and recorded the events of the day. As I mentioned previously, I reviewed the video recordings to enhance my fieldnotes, but I also transcribed the video recordings. Transcribing the video recordings provided me with a record of teacher and student dialogue during classroom activities which informed my research questions about how the teachers and students were taking up comics in the classroom contexts.

Teacher interviews. According to Fontana and Frey (2005), interviews are a creative collaboration between the interviewee and the interviewer. Interviews are a particularly useful method of data collection because they enable the researcher to explore aspects of a phenomenon that are not visible in the physical world (Tracy, 2013). During interviews, participants may share their perspectives, reflect on lived experiences, and discuss personal motivations (Tracy, 2013). Interviews with the teachers in this study helped me determine the goals and purposes for which teachers brought comics into their classrooms, their perspectives on the use of the comics in their instructional practices, and reflections on their practices as teachers. As the literacy practices that developed around comics in each classroom were different, the interviews with the teachers helped me understand why the teachers were taking up the comics in specific ways.

I conducted three semi-structured interviews with each teacher—a pre-unit interview conducted prior to the start of the unit and my classroom observations, a mid-unit interview conducted approximately halfway through the unit, and a post-unit interview which occurred approximately one month after the unit was completed. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher uses a list of questions or topics that act as a

guide for the interview (Merriam, 1998). Neither the order of the questions nor the exact wording is planned ahead of time in order to allow the researcher the flexibility to explore additional topics (Merriam, 1998). The interviews I conducted lasted from twenty to ninety minutes. See Appendix A for interview guides used during all three interviews.

Student interviews. Student interviews were assigned in an informal, unstructured format. Unstructured interviews, as described by Merriam (1998), are useful for learning more about the phenomenon under study and are primarily exploratory in nature. There are no predetermined questions or topics for an unstructured interview, and often these interviews occur during participant observation (Merriam, 1998). While these interviews are commonly used at the beginning of a research study to gain insights about the phenomenon and to help develop questions for later interviews (Merriam, 1998), Erickson (1986) suggests using unstructured interviews throughout the data collection process. Tracy (2013) echoes this suggestion pointing out that unstructured interviews allow the researcher to adapt to changing circumstances within the research context and to gain insight into the viewpoints of the participants.

Informal interviews with students helped illuminate their experiences within the classrooms and provided knowledge about students' backgrounds and interests. Because students' perspectives are not something that can be observed in the physical world, a different method of data collection was necessary to gain these understandings. Informal student interviews took place during independent and group work time. Interviews lasted between one and five minutes.

Classroom documents. According to Anderson-Levitt (2006), researchers can learn a great deal about how people construct knowledge in their everyday contexts by

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examining the artifacts they make and use. Artifacts (e.g., tools, documents, and other objects) can embody or represent who we are as individuals as well as reflect our interests and perspectives (Saldana, 2013). Close examination of artifacts can inform a researcher as to the values, history, and ideologies of a particular group, clarify and extend a researcher's understanding of rules, policies, and procedures, and help the researcher become familiar with research site (Tracy, 2013; Saldana, 2013).

During the study, I collected artifacts produced by both teachers and students. From the teachers, I collected lesson plans, handouts, PowerPoints, and assessment materials. From the students, I collected completed assignments as well as copies of artifacts that students did not formally turn into the teacher (e.g., notes). This data proved useful in determining how the students took up comics in their assignments versus their interactions.

Researcher memos. In accordance with a recursive, interpretive approach to data collection and analysis (Erickson, 1986), I wrote daily, weekly, and intermittent memos. The memos were written at all stages of data collection and analysis to keep a record of ideas, questions, concerns, and reactions to experiences or observations, and, as Erickson (1986) suggests, to "stimulate analytic induction and reflection" around my research questions (p. 146). I also wrote memos while I transcribed the video data and the interviews. In this way, the memos served as the first stage of data analysis while I continued to gather data.

I recorded voice memos after each classroom observation. As previously discussed, these memos were used to help construct descriptive fieldnotes. Within these voice memos, I noted interesting interactions that I observed, recorded my reactions to

classroom events and activities, made connections between observations and my research

questions, and generated questions about the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, I

made connections across days and classrooms and between my observations and the

literature. Voice memos were transcribed into a template I designed (see Figure 3.1). This

transcription process often generated additional questions, connections, and reflections

which I then included in the written memo. Additional memos were written using this

template both at the end of each week and at intermittent times during data collection.

The weekly memos allowed me to reflect on each week of data collection as a whole

while the intermittent memos were written when thoughts or questions struck me.

DISSERTATION MEMO TEMPLATE

DATE:
CLASS:
FILES:

Observations/Reactions:

Ideas:

Connections to Research Questions:

Connections to Literature:

Questions/Concerns:

Other:

Figure 3.1: Dissertation memo template used for recording memos and transcribing
voice memos during data collection.

AP Science Data Collection Schedule				
February 13-17, 2017	February 20-24, 2017	February 27-March 3, 2017	March 6-10, 2017	April 10, 2017
Student Consent Obtained				
Informal Observations	Classroom Observations & Fieldnotes			
Pre-Unit Interview with Teacher		Mid-Unit Interview with Teacher		Post-Unit Interview with Teacher
	Video Recording of Classroom			
	Unstructured/Informal Interviews with Students			
	Classroom Document Collection			
Researcher Memos				

Figure 3.2: Outline of data collection procedures for the AP Science class

AP English Data Collection Schedule					
May 8-12, 2017	May 15-19, 2017	May 22-26, 2017	May 29-June 2, 2017	June 5-9, 2017	July 6, 2017
Student Consent Obtained					
Informal Observations	Classroom Observations & Fieldnotes				
Pre-Unit Interview with Teacher			Mid-Unit Interview with Teacher		Post-Unit Interview with Teacher
	Video Recording of Classroom				
	Unstructured/Informal Interviews with Students				
	Classroom Document Collection				
Researcher Memos					

Figure 3.3: Outline of data collection for AP English class.

Data Collection

In this section, I describe the data collection procedures used during the study. An outline of the data collection procedures for the AP science class is provided in Figure 3.2. An outline of the data collection procedures for the AP English class is provided in Figure 3.3.

Data collection for this study took place during the Spring 2017 semester. Prior to data collection, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and school administration approval were obtained. At the beginning of the Spring 2017 semester, I met with both teachers to explain the goals and procedures of the study, answer any questions that they had, and obtain their consent. During this initial meeting, they informed me as to the start dates of the units they were teaching that would include comics. Together we selected a date for me to visit each class to explain the study to the students and obtain their consent to participate in the study.

Students were consented approximately one week before data collection allowing the students time to obtain their parents' permission to participate in the study and return their consent forms to the teacher. Also, during the week prior to start of each unit, I visited the classroom each day to familiarize the students with my presence and familiarize myself with the classroom routines. I also answered students' questions about the upcoming study, learned students' names, and began to develop a rapport with both the teacher and the students. Also, the pre-unit semi-structured interviews with the teachers were conducted during this time. This initial interview set the stage for the upcoming unit as I asked the teachers to describe their unit plans and goals. This interview also provided an opportunity for me to gather background information about

the teachers' personal and instructional experiences using comics. It was during these interviews that I discovered both teachers had never used comics previously in their instruction. Appendix A provides an outline of questions and topics addressed during this interview.

Once the units of study in the classrooms commenced, I began to collect observational data in the form of fieldnotes and video recordings. As previously described, I set up a camera in the classroom at the beginning of each class period, took short hand fieldnotes during each class period, and recorded voice memos about my observations after each class period. Also, during each class period, I photographed students' work samples if they were not turning their work into the teacher and conducted unstructured/informal interviews with students when they were engaged in independent or group work. The interviews allowed me to inquire into students' perspectives and experiences within the classrooms. At the end of each week, I asked the teachers to share assignments that students turned in with me along with lesson plans, handouts, and other materials used in class. I also wrote reflective memos throughout and at the end of each week.

Approximately half way through each unit, I conducted a mid-unit interview. This interview focused on teachers' decision processes for utilizing various instructional strategies and activities in the classroom. It also offered an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their experiences and share their observations regarding students' interactions with and perspectives on the comics' used in the classroom. One month after each unit came to a close, I conducted a final post-unit interview with each teacher. In this final interview, teachers reflected on their experiences using comics in their instructional

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practices, possibilities for altering instruction in the future, and students' interactions with

and perspectives on the comics' used in the classroom.

In between the end of the unit and the final interview, I reviewed and organized

my data. This helped me determine what—if any—classroom documents the teachers did

not share with me during formal data collection. I worked with teachers to collect any

missing documents that were still available. In some cases, I was not able to obtain a

classroom document because the teacher or student had thrown it away or because the

digital system utilized at DASST did not support a permanent digital archive. As I

reviewed and organized the data, I continued to write reflective memos.

Data Analysis Procedures

In this section, I describe the analytical methods that I employed for data

analysis—an interpretive framework for qualitative data analysis (Erickson, 1986) and

constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Then, I discuss my procedures

for data analysis—memos, open coding, axial coding, selective coding.

Data Analysis Methods

The two analytical methods that I utilized for data analysis were interpretive

analysis (Erickson, 1986) and constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

These methods were selected because they align with the goals of qualitative case study

research, sociocultural epistemologies, and with the use of ethnographic methods.

Interpretive analysis and constant comparative analysis are qualitative analytical

procedures aimed at developing an understanding of the meanings and social interactions

people make within their socially situated contexts (Erickson, 1986; Glaser & Strauss,

1967) as are qualitative case study research and ethnographic methods (Merriam, 1998;

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Green & Bloome, 1997, 2015). Furthermore, interpretive analysis like sociocultural

theories looks to understand the lived experiences of individuals (Merriam, 1998).

Interpretive analysis. Interpretive research is an approach aimed at

understanding the meaning of a process or lived experience (Merriam, 1998). According

to Erickson (1986), an interpretive research methodology attempts "to combine close

analysis of fine details of behavior and meaning in everyday social interaction with

analysis of the wider societal contexts" (p. 120). Within education, interpretivist research

is primarily concerned with understanding the nature of classrooms, teaching, and

meaning-perspectives (of teachers and students) (Erickson, 1986). In general, interpretive

research is similar to case study research in that it involves detailed, descriptive, and

intensive analyses of the experiences and meanings of individuals (Erickson, 2012).

Interpretive analysis is a recursive and reflexive process that occurs at all stages

of research (Erickson, 1986, 2012; Merriam, 1998). The researcher inductively generates

assertions by repeatedly reviewing the data corpus and seeking disconfirming evidence to

establish "evidentiary warrant[s] for the assertions one wishes to make" (Erickson, 1986,

p. 146). The recursive nature of interpretive analysis helped me to construct patterns in

the actions of students and teachers around comics, develop questions to ask students and

teachers about their actions around comics, and determine any additional data sources I

needed to collect in order to better understand the actions of students and teachers in

these cases.

Constant comparative analysis. In addition to an interpretive analysis, I

employed elements of a constant comparative analysis. While originally used for theory

building, constant comparative analysis is also helpful for creating conceptual links

between data sets and understanding relationships among data sets (Merriam, 1998). The researcher compares events and incidents during and after data collection; "these comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances" (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). I used a three-step process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to generate assertions and develop my claims.

Analysis Procedures

In accordance with a recursive, interpretive approach to data analysis, my analysis began during data collection in the form of daily, weekly, and intermittent memos. After data collection ended, I transcribed interview and classroom audio/video data during which time I continued to write reflective memos. Once transcription was completed, I began the three-step process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As I coded the data, I looked across different data sources to inform the codes I constructed and to develop initial assertions. Each of these steps is described in greater detail in the following sections.

On-going analysis through memos. The memos were written during data analysis to keep a record of ideas, questions, concerns, and reactions to experiences or observations, and, as Erickson suggests, to "stimulate analytic induction and reflection" around my research questions (p. 146). I also wrote memos while I transcribed the video data and the interviews. In this way, the memos acted as the first stage of data analysis because I began to construct patterns regarding teachers' and students' actions and perspectives as well as to consider how these actions and perspectives informed my research questions.

Open coding. I began the next stage of analysis by open coding. Opening coding involves "breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences" (Saldana, 2013). Rather than starting data analysis with a predetermined coding scheme, the purpose of open coding is to remain open to different theoretical possibilities and reflect deeply on the data (Saldana, 2013). I started with open coding because I wanted to focus on answering my research questions and I also wanted to be open to nuances in the data that might inform my research questions. While Charmaz (2006) recommends researchers engage in detailed line-by-line coding at this stage for transcripts, Saldana (2013) is quick to point out that this is not useful for fieldnotes. Rather than conducting line-by-line coding of either the transcripts or the fieldnotes at this stage, I primarily open coded larger chunks of data. This process resulted in 256 unique codes.

Axial coding. Axial coding involves reassembling data that were separated during the open coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Saldana, 2013). The codes created during the open coding stage are organized into larger categories based on commonalities while eliminating redundancies within the codes (Saldana, 2013). At this stage, I wrote the 256 codes constructed during open coding on sticky notes and looked for commonalities across the codes. For example, open codes such as *answers teacher's question about plot, answers teacher's question about content material*, and *answers teacher's question about essay* all fell under the axial code *student answers question*. Then, I sorted and resorted the sticky notes into parent or broad categories. For example, the axial codes *student answers question* and *student makes a comment* fell under the parent category—*students' actions*. Three of these categories aligned with my research

questions—*teacher actions*, *students' actions*, and *comics use/positioning*. However, three additional categories did not specifically address my research questions but could be used to help understand the other categories. These included the *events* on which the teacher and students spent their time, the *topics or subjects discussed* during activities, and students' *likes and dislikes* about the comics or specific activities.

I organized my codes and sub-codes within these six categories and created a code book for each category. Within this code book, I named and described each code and sub-code within the category and provided examples. Then, I reviewed the coded data corpus using the formal code book. This code book can be found in Appendix B.

The class *events* category led to me to the reorganize the data based on two factors—who the central actors in a particular event were and whether or not the comics played a central role in event. To this end, I created an event chart for each class in which I listed the different activities and events that occurred during each class period, recorded how long each event lasted, and color coded them to keep track of event types, central actors, and the role of comics. This helped me to recognize the similarities and differences in how teachers and students took up comics during teacher-centered events and student-centered events. Since my research questions focus on the literacy practices that develop around comics when they were used in classrooms for the first time and on how teachers and students use and/or position comics within their classroom contexts, I only reviewed the data sources from those events that were focused on comics. These data sources became the foundation for my extended analysis with teacher interviews, student interviews, and classroom documents being used to inform preliminary findings constructed at this stage.

Selective coding. For the next stage of data analysis, I moved into selective coding. Selective coding involves clarifying different codes, "filling in categories that need further refinement" by stratifying the larger axial codes, and "validating relationships" by constantly comparing data points and triangulating data with other sources (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 116). Ultimately, codes and data sources are integrated and "systematically linked" to construct primary themes (Saldana, 2013). To accomplish this goal, I began by creating and printing frequency count charts of the various codes and sub-codes within two of the three categories that aligned with my research questions—*teacher actions* and *students' actions*. I compared *teacher actions* and *students' actions* both within and across teacher-centered events and student-centered events to develop initial findings. After developing my initial findings, I considered the other four categories and other data sources looking for evidence that either supported or disconfirmed my findings. I found three primarily literacy practices that developed around comics in these classrooms—a *Q&A* literacy practice, a *writing about the comic* literacy practice, and a *drawing comics* literacy practice developed which involved students producing comics of their own design. I also found that teachers and students positioned comics in four primary ways within these classroom contexts—*comic as a tool*, *comic as entertainment*, *comic as a medium*, and *comic as a form of traditional literature*. These findings are presented in detail in Chapter 4.

Finally, I looked across my findings and my data sources to construct three core assertions: 1) there is a disconnect between teachers' goals for using comics in their instruction and the literacy practices that developed around the comics they selected; 2) there is a disconnect between the ways in which teachers position comics and the ways in

which students position comics; and 3) traditional views of literature and literacy continue to dominate classrooms when multimodal texts are selected and utilized during instruction. These assertions are discussed in full in Chapter 5.

Summary

In this chapter I described my methodology, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. I employed a qualitative case study approach (Merriam, 1998) using ethnographic methods for data collection (Green & Bloome, 1997, 2015) which I analyze through an interpretive framework for qualitative data analysis (Erickson, 1986) and constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I chose a qualitative case study methodology because I wanted to examine the "local particulars" of an existing small, naturalistic social unit (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 32). Specifically, I considered two classrooms—an AP Science and an AP English class—wherein the teachers were implementing comics in their instructional practices for the first time. I relied on ethnographic methods for data collection including participant observation, fieldnotes, and interviews because these tools have proven useful in gaining insight about culture and social life (Green & Bloome, 1997, 2015) and for considering patterns in daily life (Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Green, Skukauskaite, & Baker, 2012). I used interpretive analysis in which a recursive and reflexive process was used to inductively generate assertions. I applied a constant comparative analysis to compare events and incidents both during and after data collection. I used a three-step process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to create conceptual links and understand relationships among data sets. Doing so guided my analysis and helped me understand how teachers and students took up comics in these classroom contexts.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings of my analysis for this research study. This chapter is organized into two sections focusing on the case studies outlined previously—Case One: AP Science and Case Two: AP English. The reporting of qualitative case study research is characterized by rich, thick description of participants' experiences and meanings within a specific context (Smith, 1978; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005). In accordance with this methodology and because one of my goals during this study was to fully contextualize and investigate the literacy practices that developed around comics and the roles placed on comics within classroom contexts, I begin each section describing the units taught, the daily routines of the classroom under study, and the breakdown of time dedicated to various events within the context of the study. Next, I describe the literacy practices that developed around the comics in each individual case in order to answer my first research question. Finally, to answer my second research question, I describe the various roles or positions that the teacher and the students in each case assigned the comic.

Case One: AP Science

In this section, I present the findings of my two research questions as they pertain to the AP Science class. First, I set the stage for these findings by describing the unit of study, the daily routines of the class, and the breakdown time spent on various classroom and literacy events. Then, I describe the literacy practices that developed around the comics when the teacher and his students took up comics in this context for the first time as well as the roles and/or uses they assigned the comics.

Setting the Stage

One of my goals with this study was to fully contextualize the literacy practices that develop around comics and the roles placed on comics within classroom contexts. I begin by describing Mr. Hugo's curriculum unit. Then, I provide a detailed account of a typical day in the AP Science class and describe the amount of time that was spent on various activities and tasks in class during the study.

Description of unit. The unit for which I collected data focused on the topic of food sustainability. Food sustainability was identified as a key sustainability issue within the state that would impact students' futures. As such, the curricular goals of the unit included familiarizing students with the concepts of food deserts and food crises; discussing local agriculture, water conservation, and produce exportation; understanding human nutritional needs and how food accessibility impacts those needs; and generating solutions to local problems related to food sustainability. The unit featured lectures on food production, food scarcity, and food deserts. Assignments included answering questions about food production and scarcity maps, tracking calorie intake and food cost, reading *#foodcrisis*, and writing a compare/contrast essay.

In addition to the specific curricular goals already mentioned, Mr. Hugo had two goals or reasons for using the comic, *#foodcrisis*, in this unit. First, he wanted the students *to learn* the content area material (e.g., what a food desert or a crisis is) and believed *#foodcrisis* was "great" for this purpose because "[the comic] shows them what [a food crisis] is" (Interview, February 16, 2017). Second, he hoped the comic would help his students *remain engaged* with the content area material:

"I think the kids are going to find it a lot more engaging than normal papers

because we've read journal articles and we've read news articles and stuff and they

tend to lose interest about halfway through and so I'm hoping that this keeps them

a little more engaged because it's got pictures. They like pictures." (Interview,

February 16, 2017)

This view of comics as a tool for supporting engagement is a common one (e.g.,

Crawford, 2004; Lyga, 2006) though what scholars and educators mean when they refer

to engagement is often very different. For Mr. Hugo, engagement referred to when

students are "doing the work and they're not complaining about doing the work"

(Interview, April 10, 2017). This view of engagement echoes Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and

Paris's (2004) dimension of behavioral engagement which is characterized compliance

with teacher expectations and classrooms norms through participation in academic

activity.

A typical day. A typical day in the AP Science class began with Mr. Hugo

greeting students at the door as they entered the classroom. As students entered, they

chatted among themselves, traded jokes with Mr. Hugo, and retrieved power cords from a

table littered with odds and ends so they could charge their laptops. Once the bell rang,

Mr. Hugo would call the class to order and assign their bellwork—"Your question is to

summarize chapter three. You were supposed to read chapter three last night for

homework" (Video, February 23, 2017)—which, within this particular unit, involved

writing about the graphic novel *#foodcrisis*.

During bellwork, Mr. Hugo lingered at the front of the classroom organizing his

materials for the day and monitoring Google Classroom, a free web-based platform for

creating, distributing, collecting, and grading assignments, as he waited for students to submit their bellwork. Students primarily chatted among themselves, completed late assignments, and watched YouTube videos until he gave them a two-minute warning at which time they frantically typed their summaries. Once all bellwork was submitted through Google Classroom, Mr. Hugo led the class in what he termed a "class discussion" in an effort to make sure they "were all on the same page" (Interview, February 27, 2017). This involved anywhere from three to eight minutes of question and answer (*Q&A*).

Upon completing the *Q&A* with the class, Mr. Hugo would launch into the content area material he planned to cover for the day. This either involved an approximately twenty-minute lecture or a short explanation of an assignment followed by student work time. On those days that Mr. Hugo lectured, students copied information off of the Google Slides presentations Mr. Hugo used as a guide while simultaneously playing games, watching YouTube videos, and checking Facebook on their laptops. On those days that students were expected to complete assignments, approximately half the class would rush through the assignment while the other half would put off the assignment until Mr. Hugo pronounced a five-minute warning at the end of the class period. Regardless of whether or not students were on task at these times, they chatted amongst themselves while Mr. Hugo paced around the room giving feedback on students' assignments when it was requested.

The class period typically ended in a flurry of action. As Mr. Hugo announced that the bell was about to ring, students who had previously not worked on their assignments would scramble to complete their work and then bargain for a prolonged due

date. Others would frantically search for assignments that were due in their next classes. Those students who did not retrieve a laptop charger at the beginning of class would attempt to charge their devices in the remaining minutes. Amid this chaos, Mr. Hugo would announce the evening's homework—most often reading the next chapters in *#foodcrisis.*

Breakdown of time spent on events. Time in this class was broadly divided across three categories: 1) teacher-centered events, 2) student-centered events, and 3) unstructured time. Teacher-centered events were defined as events in which the teacher led an in-class activity typically from the front of the room. During teacher-centered events, the teacher controlled the pace of the activity and directed students' actions within the activity. These events accounted for 42% or 190 minutes of class time during this unit. Of these 190 minutes, only 60 minutes (13% of the total class time) were both teacher-centered and comics focused events (TCCF).

Student-centered events were defined as events in which a student or a group of students was responsible for completing an activity or an assignment during a designated period of class time. In these activities, students were supposed to produce something that the teacher expected them to turn in at the end of the designated time period. Student-centered events accounted for 53% or 239 minutes of total class time. Student-centered events that were also comics focused (SCCF) accounted for 28% or 126 minutes. The remaining 5% or 21 minutes of class time was unstructured. During unstructured time, the teacher did not give students any sort of direction as to what to do with a specific time period in the classroom. When this occurred, students socialized or work independently without having a designated class related task to complete.

Literacy Practices

Two literacy practices associated with the use of the comics dominated class time. TCCF events almost exclusively consisted of a Question and Answer (*Q&A*) practice (75% of TCCF events or 45 minutes of total class time) while SCCF events were primarily dedicated to writing about the comic (98% of SCCF events or 123 minutes of total class time). A description of each practice is provided in the following sections.

Q&A. The *Q&A* literacy practice that developed around the comic during TCCF events consisted of Mr. Hugo asking students questions, telling students information, managing classroom behavior, repeating or restating what students said, and answering students' questions. Students performed similar actions—answering teachers' questions, asking questions, and making comments about activities. Table 4.1 provides frequency counts of the actions Mr. Hugo and the students performed during literacy events that fell into the *Q&A* literacy practice category.

Table 4.1

Frequency of Teacher & Student Actions (Q&A – AP Science)

	Teacher	Students
Action		
Asks Question	45	20
Answers Question	17	43
Restates/Repeats (Student/Teacher)	24	2
Tells Information/Makes Comment	23	13
Manages Class	29	
Reads	5	
Off-Task		32

The following transcript excerpt is an example of the *Q&A* literacy practice in the

AP Science class. This excerpt was selected for two reasons. First, it demonstrates the

only time during *Q&A* events (five total events) that a student answered a content area

material question. Second, the second half of the excerpt resembles the remaining five

Q&A events transcribed. In this example, Mr. Hugo begins by telling the class what

happened in the chapter. Then, he poses a question about how the comic, *#foodcrisis*,

relates to the topic they are studying (i.e., food sustainability). One of the students, Jude,

asks a question to clarify what they are discussing. Mr. Hugo answers her question

explaining that they are specifically talking about food deserts and then asks a follow up

question which Jude promptly answers. Mr. Hugo restates what she said, and then asks

several questions without waiting for a response from the students. This continues until

the end of the Q&A which lasted eight minutes:

Mr. Hugo:	So, in these chapters we start to see the culmination of everything that has happened so far, you have all that political, we'll call it politics, coming to a head. You have people beginning to riot because they can't get food. And you start to see some of the impacts. So, tell me, how does what we talked about yesterday relate to the chapters?
Jude:	What did we talk about yesterday?
Mr. Hugo:	Food deserts. First off, what is a food desert?
Jude:	A place where access to healthy and fresh food options are not available.
Mr. Hugo:	Access to healthy and fresh food options that you do not have. So for— Usually, people are going to either community stores or fast food for their main nutrition. So how does that play into what was going on in the last several chapters of *#foodcrisis*? What happened in the last several chapters?

Pixie:	Food prices are—went up.
Mr. Hugo:	Food prices went up. Why were they going up?
Jimmy:	They started rebelling.
Mr. Hugo:	Who started rebelling?
Jimmy:	The rebels started rebelling.
Mr. Hugo:	The rebels started rebelling, along with the xxx. What did that cause?
Jimmy:	It meant there was no one working on making food.

(Transcript, March 1, 2017)

Given Mr. Hugo's goals of students' learning of and engaging with the content area material through the comic, it might be expected that during *Q&A* events content area material would be the primary focus of the teacher's questions and students' answers. This was not the case. The codes I developed are included here to demonstrate my analytical procedures as follows:

Mr. Hugo:	So, in these chapters we start to see the culmination of everything that has happened so far, you have all that political, we'll call it politics, coming to a head. You have people beginning to riot because they can't get food. And you start to see some of the	TELLS INFORMATION (NARRATIVE)
	impacts. So, tell me, how does what we talked about yesterday relate to the chapters?	ASKS QUESTION (CONTENT AREA MATERIAL)
Jude:	What did we talk about yesterday?	ASKS QUESTION (OTHER)

Mr. Hugo:	Food deserts. First off, what is a food desert?	ANSWERS QUESTION (OTHER) ASKS QUESTION (CONTENT AREA MATERIAL)
Jude:	A place where access to healthy and fresh food options are not available.	ANSWERS QUESTION (CONTENT AREA MATERIAL)
Mr. Hugo:	Access to healthy and fresh food options that you do not have. So for— Usually, people are going to either community stores or fast food for their main nutrition. So how does that play into what was going on in the last several chapters of *#foodcrisis*? What happened in the last several chapters?	REPEATS STUDENT TELLS INFORMATION (CONTENT AREA MATERIAL) ASKS QUESTION (CONTENT AREA MATERIAL) ASKS QUESTION (NARRATIVE)
Pixie:	Food prices are—went up.	ANSWERS QUESTION (NARRATIVE)
Mr. Hugo:	Food prices went up. Why were they going up?	REPEATS STUDENT ASKS QUESTION (NARRATIVE)
Jimmy:	They started rebelling.	ANSWERS QUESTION (NARRATIVE)
Mr. Hugo:	Who started rebelling?	ASKS QUESTION (NARRATIVE)
Jimmy:	The rebels started rebelling.	ANSWERS QUESTION (NARRATIVE)
Mr. Hugo:	The rebels started rebelling, along with the xxx. What did that cause?	REPEATS STUDENT ASKS QUESTION (NARRTIVE)
Jimmy:	It meant there was no one working on making food.	ANSWERS QUESTION (NARRATIVE)

(Transcript, Marcy 1, 2017)

In this example, narrative elements of the comic come up nine times—Mr. Hugo begins the *Q&A* by describing the plot of the chapter and asks a question about plot. This launches a series of questions and answers specifically related to narrative elements of the comic. This continues until the end of this *Q&A* event which lasted eight minutes. In contrast, content area material was mentioned five times—four times by the teacher and once by a student which also represents the only time during TCCF events in the AP Science class that a student answered a question about content area material.

During the *Q&A* literacy events, the majority of the teachers' questions (30 of 45) and, therefore, students' answers (35 of 43) focused on narrative elements of the comic such as the plot, characters, and setting. A similar pattern occurred during *Q&A* literacy events when Mr. Hugo told the students information with narrative elements of the comic featuring most prominently in these instances (12 of 23). See Table 4.2 for frequency counts of the topics covered for Mr. Hugo's questions and students' responses during *Q&A*.

Writing about the comic. As previously mentioned, 98% (123 of 126 minutes) of SCCF events were dedicated to *writing about the comic*. This literacy practice was spread across two activities: 1) the writing of chapter summaries for bellwork at the beginning of class (35% or 43 minutes) and 2) the writing of a compare and contrast essay which functioned as a culminating assignment at the end of the unit (65% or 80 minutes). Both variants of this *writing about the comic* literacy practice that developed in the AP Science class consisted primarily of students writing, reading, and asking questions. During this time, Mr. Hugo managed students' behavior, answered questions,

and gave feedback on students' writing. Table 4.3 provides frequency counts for

students' and teacher actions during *writing about the comic* literacy events.

Table 4.2

Frequency of Topics (Q&A – AP Science)

	Teacher	Students
Topic		
Asks Question		
Narrative Elements	30	0
Content Area Material	7	0
Author's Purpose	6	0
Activity/Assignment	0	17
Other	2	3
Answers Question		
Narrative Elements	0	35
Content Area Material	0	1
Author's Purpose	0	6
Activity/Assignment	16	4
Other	1	0
Tells Information/Makes Comment		
Narrative Elements	12	4
Content Area Material	7	5
Author's Purpose	2	0
Activity/Assignment	0	4
Other	2	0

Table 4.3

Frequency of Teacher & Student Actions (Writing About Comic – AP Science)

	Teacher	Students
Action		
Asks Question	2	22
Answers Question	6	6
Tells Information/Makes Comment	3	7
Manages Class	23	NA
Reads	0	24
Off-Task	NA	25
Gives Feedback	5	4
Writing	NA	118

It is important to clarify that while 98% of SCCF events were devoted to *writing about the comic* and there were 118 coded instances of students writing, students did not utilize all of the allotted time to complete the writing assignments. As described earlier, a typical day in the AP Science class opened with students writing summaries about the comic for bellwork, but students often did not turn their attention to the assignment until Mr. Hugo provided them with a two-minute warning. Similar behavior was observed during the two class periods given over to writing the compare and contrast essay with some students working diligently on the assigned task and others waiting until the last thirty minutes on the second day to begin. The following excerpt is a representative (1 of 2) example of this literacy practice pulled from the fieldnotes:

> Jude looks up from her essay to inquire how many points will be deducted from their grade if they turn the essay in "tomorrow". The Milk recommends that half the points for the assignment should be taken away. Mr. Hugo agrees with him much to Jude's chagrin. Jimin and Alex move to the back of the class. They lay on their stomachs on the floor facing each other with their laptops stretched out in front of them as they begin to write. The Milk gets up from his seat, cracker box in hand, and skirts around the two girls to deliver the crackers to Jvo.

> "Remember you need four quotes," Mr. Hugo cautions from the front of the room.

> The Milk returns to his seat—the long way. In the front row, Groovy stretches her legs out in front of her and begins to play with her hair as she chats with Ted. Beside them Robin reads the prompt for the essay that is provided on GoogleClassroom. Yami opens the comic and leans over it to begin reading but is almost immediately distracted by Mako Tsunami who askd him about a Yugio card.

> Luna pulls her backpack onto her lap and rifles through it until she finds her copy of the comic. Behind her, Mrs. Flamethrower actually has a laptop today though she still fiddles with her phone. She confirms the due date with Mr. Hugo, as he walks up the aisle in her direction.

> Mr. Hugo pauses at Silvia's desk and she hands him her laptop with the essay open on it. She wants him to look it over and give her feedback before she submits it. Before he has a chance to look at it, The Milk and Pixie call him over

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to inspect a necklace. They want to know what the pentagram and the moon on the necklace represent, but Mr. Hugo doesn't know. Mr. Hugo returns to Silvia and settles on top of a desk crossing one leg over the other leaning Silvia's laptop against his makeshift stand.

Jimmy reads through the last chapter of the comic while next to him Groovy looks at pictures of celebrities on the internet. She and Ted check the clock.

Mr. Hugo finishes reading through Silvia's essay and reviews it with her. He reminds her to talk about why "the author did what he did" and suggests that she decide if "he did a good job" representing the potential food crisis.

Mustard flips through her comic looking for quotes. In the back row, Esme points out a section of the comic to Mrs. Flamethrower but is ignored. Esme continues to flip through the pages until Mrs. Flamethrower leans over to ask about the quote requirement. "How many..." Esme tells her four and then points to the page she is reading which has an example she thinks is useful.

Jude sits quietly working on her essay. Her fingers fly over the keys. In front of her, Kanye works quietly, as well. Her headphones are in as she streams *How I Met Your Mother* in the top corner of her laptop screen while she searches for images from the comic using the Google Image search—an activity that is not particularly successful.

(Fieldnotes, March 6, 2017)

In this passage, some students consistently worked on their writing assignment (e.g.,

Jude, Alex, Jimin, Esme, and Mrs. Flamethrower) alternating between writing the essay,

reading the comic (as a point of reference), and asking questions of the teacher and other

students about the assignment. Others (e.g., The Milk, Groovy, and Ted) engaged in a

variety of other activities that were not specifically assigned or sanctioned by the teacher.

Regardless of how the students spent this time, the end result was the same. By the end of

the assigned time period, all students who were present submitted a piece of writing that

focused on the comic.

The majority of students' writing focused on narrative elements of the comic

(e.g., plot, characters, setting, etc.). Writing prompts for the bellwork writing assignments

asked students to summarize the chapters they read. Of the 72 submitted bellwork writing assignments, 66 reported on the narrative with students writing short statements such as "the food riots happened," "Sonia is arrested/framed for poisoning food," and "the father steps down [from his position as Senator] to help his daughter" (Bellwork, February 28, 2017). Similarly, the prompt for the compare and contrast essay asked students to "summarize what happened in the graphic novel," but also asked students to "talk about WHY the author decided to make the decisions that he did, talk about at least two different food issues, and include at least four quotes" (Essay Prompt, March 2, 2017). Despite this directive, of the twenty-two students in the class only ten wrote about food issues (i.e., content area material).

Comics Positionality

According to Anderson-Levitt (2006), cultural meaning can be left in the things people create and use. As Tracy (2013) explains, how artifacts are "taken up, ignored, or resisted" in everyday practices within context can tell a researcher a great deal about what and how these artifacts mean to participants (p. 83). Within the context of this study, teachers and students positioned comics in four key ways—*comics as tool*, *comic as entertainment*, *comic as a traditional form of literature*, and *comic as medium*. In the AP Science class, Mr. Hugo and the students positioned comics according to the first three positions to different degrees. However, while the teacher and students took up comics from multiple positions and often transitioned through multiple positions during a literacy event, two dominate positions became apparent through data analysis. For Mr. Hugo, the comic primarily became *a tool* for content area learning, while for the students the comic was primarily positioned as form of *entertainment*.

Comic as a tool for content area learning. As previously described, Mr. Hugo had two goals or reasons for bringing the comic, *#foodcrisis*, into his classroom. He wanted students to learn the content area material, and he hoped the comic would promote student engagement with the content area material. While he fell into the habit of questioning students about the narrative during *Q&A* literacy events, his perspective on the comic did not change throughout the study. From the outset, Mr. Hugo positioned *#foodcrisis* and comics more generally as a tool he could use in his classroom to teach content. As he explains below, Mr. Hugo selected *#foodcrisis* because it dealt specifically with the topic the unit was set to cover and contained factual accounts of real food crises that have occurred in the past:

> "It's great. It shows them what [a food crisis] is. It has decent supplemental material, and I really liked the fact that it had essays that tell the facts about past food crises in the back. I like that [the author] talks about, like, 'this is a bit—It's a bit sensationalist and I admit this, but this is why I did this.' And so, he freely admits what he's trying to do with the book which I think is cool. There's an annotated bibliography which is great and it shows them what that is. They can go back and reference all the different things which will be useful at the end for the essay" (Interview, February 16, 2017).

As the study continued and the unit progressed, Mr. Hugo continued to emphasize (13 instances) that the comic covered or contained content area material and factual information:

> "It just kind of gives the background on some of the [topics] and has a whole bibliography of references and things so you know it's research based. They can

go through that. I think it's a little more academic: Here's what the author wrote. Here's research from the author. What's the connection and disconnection between the two?" (Interview, February 26, 2017).

For him, what he deemed the "factual" component of the comic (e.g., the essays, the historical references, and the bibliography) outweighed the "sensationalist" narrative (Interview, February 16, 2017). The factual component gave students "a concrete example to latch on to" (Interview, April 10, 2017). This perspective wherein the purpose or goal of reading is to take away information about the topic is reflective of Rosenblatt's (1978) efferent reading stance: "The reader's attention is primarily focused on what will remain as a residue *after* the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out" (p. 23).

More generally, Mr. Hugo's decision to use a comic in his classroom instruction further demonstrates his view of *comics as a tool* for teaching content area material. When I asked him to explain his purpose for bringing a comic into his classroom, he said:

"I think the kids are going to find [comics] a lot more engaging than normal papers because we've read journal articles and we've read news articles and stuff and they tend to lose interest about halfway through and so I'm hoping that this keeps them a little more engaged because it's got pictures. They like pictures" (Interview, February 16, 2017).

For Mr. Hugo, students' loss of interest is linked to the form reading takes (i.e., journal articles and news articles) in his classroom rather than the content area material. In talking with the students, I discovered that there was some basis for Mr. Hugo's perspective. Twelve of the twenty-two students in the class did not read the essays in the

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back of *#foodcrisis* when it was assigned. Jude explained that essays "are boring. There's no feeling in them" (Fieldnotes, March 2, 2017) and Mrs. Flamethrower told me that the essays contained "too many words" so she did not bother to read them (Fieldnotes, February 28, 2017). According to Alex and Jimin, who started to read the essays but quit after the first paragraph, essay reading was "something they've done a lot. They always have to read essays and articles, so it was the same thing they usually do which makes Alex roll her eyes. She is apparently over the usual (Fieldnotes, March 2, 2017). Students' perspectives on essays support Mr. Hugo's belief that students' lack of interest during class time stemmed from the format of the reading material rather than the content area material. However, another possibility becomes apparent when the position taken up by the students is examined.

Comic as entertainment. The comic was taken up differently by students than by Mr. Hugo. While some students did use *#foodcrisis* as a tool to complete their writing assignments, only one position was taken up by students across TCCF events, SCCF events, and informal student interviews—*comic as entertainment*. Note that the use of the term entertainment within this positioning of the comic is not intended to imply that students' interest in or interactions with *#foodcrisis* were not valuable, academic, or in depth. Students' readings of the comic were often very thoughtful. The term entertainment was used because it is able to encompass students' interest in the comic and their feelings of liking particular aspects of the narrative, as well as other interactions that occurred between the students and the text. For example, during one class period, Mako Tsunami, Carrera, and Yami photographed different panels in *#foodcrisis* and applied Snap Chat filters to these photographs. They shared the resulting images with

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classmates and the teacher resulting in a great deal of laughter and entertainment. In this

sense, the term entertainment is used to reflect some sort of pleasurable experience that

resulted from students' interactions with the comic.

Of the twenty-two students in the class, 17 of them indicated that they found the

comic entertaining or interesting to read for reasons that did not connect to content area

material. Six students referenced specific plot points and characters that they found

interesting, seven students explained that they liked the images, and five students

reflected on their emotional and personal connections to the comic. Consider the

following excerpts from my fieldnotes and informal student interviews:

I wander around the room and ask students their thoughts on the comic. The Milk

tells me that the comic is more fun because there are pictures and illustrations.

"We normally look at research," he adds, "This is more entertaining" (Fieldnotes,

February 22, 2017).

Mako Tsunami:	If I read something really interesting, I get into it. This is really interesting.
Dani:	What makes it something really interesting? What makes you get into it?
Mako Tsunami:	For me it's the pictures.
Dani:	So, it can be anything with pictures?
Mako Tsunami:	Yeah. Without the design, I couldn't imagine it and when I could imagine it my head, I started getting into it.

(Interview, March 2, 2017)

The Milk, Mako Tsunami, and five other students identified the images in *#foodcrisis* as what made reading a fun or interesting experience. Six students were drawn to the narrative expressing personal preference or emotional investment in the plot or characters:

> Yami:　　　　I don't really like reading that much but I liked the book.
>
> Dani:　　　　So, what parts did you like or what did you like about it?
>
> Yami:　　　　I liked the revolution part...showing how to stand up for things you believe in.
>
> 　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Interview, March 2, 2017)

> You honestly would expect what will happen but then the next second 'BAM' you get the unexpected. I love stories like this because it makes me think about every possibility that can happen and really engages me in the story. In this book, I really got engaged in this story because it was like this (Mako Tsunami's Essay, March 6, 2017).

As Yami explains above, a specific part of the plot motivated his liking of the comic while for Mako Tsunami it was the *BAM* factor or the unexpected moments in the plot that made him love the comic.

Four students expressed dislike for the characters, but in doing so still positioned the *comic as entertainment*. In the following excerpt, Jude and Mrs. Flamethrower expressed disdain for certain characters—Senator Terri Barnes and Sonia:

> Jude finishes her summary and continues to read the comic. She leans back in her chair as she reads, feet stretched out in front of her in a leisurely position. As I walk by, she comments, "I hate that girl." This makes me laugh and I come over to see who she is pointing at (the female senator). She leans back in her chair to

point the character out to The Milk. 'This one,' she says and explains that the

female senator is rude. Then, she points to Sonia: "She got upset and went and got

a tattoo of corn." Mrs. Flamethrower flips through her copy of the comic to find

the picture. When she does, she shakes her head, "That's dumb" (Fieldnotes,

February 28, 2017).

In addition to experiencing disdain for the actions of a specific character, Jude's

expression of hate for Senator Terri Barnes suggests an emotional investment in plot. She

has witnessed the senator's behavior which she identifies as rude and experienced an

emotional reaction to it.

Finally, five other students liked the comic because of personal connections they

made with the story. Legendary explained to me that "the immigration part" reminded her

of her own experience emigrating from Mexico to the United States, while Robin found

the comic "relatable" because she knew people who were immigrants even though she

wasn't an immigrant herself (Interview, March 2, 2017). The personal connections,

emotional investments, and feelings of *liking* the comic fall under what Rosenblatt (1978)

describes as an aesthetic reading stance wherein "the reader's attention is centered

directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p.

25). In this stance, the transaction between reader and text is evokes memories and

feelings; reading is done for the sake of pleasure (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Case Two: AP English

In this section, I present the findings of my research questions as they pertain to

the AP English class. As with the previous section, I set the stage for these findings by

describing the unit of study, the daily routines of the class, and the breakdown of time

spent on different events within the classroom. Then, I describe the literacy practices that developed around the comic when the teacher utilized a comic in this context for the first time. Finally, I address the positioning of comics by the teacher and by the students in this classroom.

Setting the Stage

To help contextualize the literacy practices and roles/positioning of comics in the AP English class, I first set the stage by describing the curriculum unit for which I collected data as well as the daily routines of the class. I end this section with an account of the time spent on various events over the course of my data collection in this classroom.

Description of unit. In the AP English class, the curricular unit in question focused on the graphic novel memoir, *The Complete Persepolis*. The teacher, Lord Awesome, identified *Persepolis* as an important text that students needed to read:

> "I think that that is an important novel to read given the climate of the world and just all the distillation of news and our lack of understanding of other cultures, especially in the Middle East, and I feel like Iranian culture is one of those ones that's incredibly misunderstood and people don't understand why America could possibly have enemies. This would be a good way of saying, this story is going to continue to repeat itself until we acknowledge that we're not always the good guys and that nations perceive any influence from another country as a threat initially" (Interview, March 8, 2017).

With this in mind, one of Lord Awesome's two goals for the unit of study was for students to understand historical and contextual aspects of the United States of America's

relationship to the Middle East (Interview, March 8, 2017). His second goal specifically related to the teaching of comics. He wanted to give students a unique experience and opportunity that he believed comics—as a *new* type of literature—afforded:

> "It invites students to play a role in the conversation of a new literary mode, which is a unique opportunity that I don't believe has ever happened before, at least not pertaining to literature… We're discussing something brand new that is as literary in nature, that needs attention" (Interview, July 6, 2017).

As such, his second goal for the unit was for students to be aware of comics as something wholly different than other literary formats.

The instructional unit featured one formal lecture on comic conventions (e.g., panels, gutters, speech bubbles, etc.), read alouds of the comic and expository texts, and class discussions. Assignments included a quiz on comic conventions, critical thinking questions about the Islamic Revolution, and the drawing of two comics sequences. In addition to the unit, a portion of class time was dedicated to a weekly assessment on literary terminology (e.g., simile, metaphor, exposition, climax, etc.).

A typical day in AP English. As with the AP Science class, a typical day in the AP English class began with the teacher, Lord Awesome, greeting students at the door. As students entered the class, they would chat among themselves as they found their seats and then turn their attention to the bellwork directive Lord Awesome projected on the board. Unlike in the AP Science class, students did not get out laptops or go in search of chargers. They typically did not use the computers in this class. Instead, bellwork often featured hand writing an answer to a question. These questions sometimes, but not always, related to the content of the day's lesson. After one to ten minutes of independent

bellwork, Lord Awesome called the class to order by counting down from five and a calling on a student or several students to share what they did during the bellwork. After reviewing bellwork, Lord Awesome would spend approximately a minute reviewing the agenda and objectives of the day.

The bulk of each AP English class involved some sort of teacher-centered event wherein Lord Awesome would alternate between asking the class questions about the day's topic or lesson and telling the class information about the day's topic or lesson. Occasionally, a student-centered event would be inserted into the teacher-centered event with students discussing a question posed by the teacher in groups before answering him directly or writing answers to questions prior to a whole class discussion. Typically, the teacher-centered event would proceed to the end of the class period. An exception to this trend occurred during the last three days of the unit. These days were dedicated exclusively to the drawing of students' own comics.

Breakdown of time spent on activities. Time in the AP English class was divided across the same three categories as the AP Science class—teacher-centered events, student-centered events, and unstructured time. Of 550 minutes of total class time, teacher-centered events accounted for 264 minutes or 48% of class time. As previously explained, teacher-centered events were defined as activities in which the teacher led an in-class activity, controlled the pace of the activity, and directed students' actions within the activity. TCCF events made up 201 minutes or 37% of total class time.

Student-centered events (i.e., activities in which a student or a group of students was responsible for completing an activity or an assignment during a designated period of class time) occupied 51% or 279 minutes of total class time. In these events, students

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were supposed to produce something that the teacher expected them to turn in at the end of the designated time period. The majority of this time was comics focused (i.e. 251 minutes or 46% of total class time) Only 1% (7 minutes) of class time was unstructured in the AP English class.

Literacy Practices

Two primary literacy practices around the comic dominated class time in the AP English class. As was the case in the AP Science class, TCCF events almost exclusively consisted of a Question and Answer (*Q&A*) literacy practice (91% or 191 minutes of TCCF events) making this practice the dominant TCCF literacy practice in the AP English class. The dominant SCCF literacy practice involved drawing comics (71% or 177 minutes of SCCF events). A description of each practice is provided in the following sections.

Q&A. The *Q&A* literacy practice that developed around the comic during TCCF events in the AP English class proved very similar to the *Q&A* literacy practice that developed around the comic in the AP Science class. *Q&A* literacy events consisted of the teacher, Lord Awesome, asking students questions, telling students information, managing classroom behavior, giving feedback, repeating or restating what students said, and answering students' questions. Students also performed similar actions to those of the students in the AP Science class. They answered teachers' questions, asked questions, and made comments about activities. Table 4.4 provides frequency counts of the actions Lord Awesome and his students performed during literacy events that fell into the *Q&A* literacy practice category.

Table 4.4

Frequency of Teacher & Student Actions (Q&A – AP English)

	Teacher	Students
Action		
Asks Question	140	51
Answers Question	34	207
Restates/Repeats (Student/Teacher)	64	13
Tells Information/Makes Comment	94	64
Manages Class	111	NA
Reads	10	8
Gives Feedback	108	NA
Demonstrates	1	NA

The following transcript excerpt is a representative example of the *Q&A* literacy

practice in the AP English class. In this transcript, the teacher leads a discussion in which

the AP English class discusses page 95 of *Persepolis* (Figure 4.1):

Lord Awesome: You guys were all able to explain what they
were doing 'cause you read the caption.
Right? But you see some features of this, so
we know they're mourning the dead. Is that
how you mourn?

Jude: No.

Lord Awesome: No, right? You cry. Do you do this in a group?

Jude: [scoffs]

Lord Awesome: You don't do this? You don't cry in a group? Pound your
chest? Guess I'm the weird one. [class laughter] Just
kidding. So, basically, does this caption, really caption
the image then ... I mean of course it's telling you the
purpose but are these children really mourning?

Class: No.

Lord Awesome: What are they? [cross talk] That's a good way to capture
their expression on their faces. I heard some anger, I
heard some sadness, I see one looking kind of confused. I

	mean, there's sort of traces of those emotions as well, you can tell by the xxx, right? Just a slight shift in the angle. Which one's Marjane? Marjane, the protagonist, does anybody know? Why don't we know? Why don't we know? Why don't we known which one's Marjane. Mustard? Why don't we know which one's Marjane?
Mustard:	They all look the same.
Lord Awesome:	They all look the same, they all are also, what the same?
Oliver Slice:	Dressed the same.
Lord Awesome:	Dressed the same, look the same, what are they doing?
Samurai Joe:	The same thing.
Jude:	The same thing [she imitates the images by tapping her chest]
Lord Awesome:	The same thing. So, in that sense, this ritual of mourning takes away something very, very personal.
Samurai Joe:	Individuality.
Jude:	Individuality.
Lord Awesome:	Individuality, right? I mean, even our right to mourn, in the way that we're comfortable is stripped away in this ritual. And it's forced to be something communal. On top of that, you just kinda lose that identity, right? You're just someone else beating your chest because they told you to.

<div align="right">(Transcript, May 23, 2017)</div>

While the content of this transcript is different from that of the AP science class, the

structure of the *Q&A* literacy practice remains the same. Lord Awesome poses questions

to which students respond. He often repeats or restates the students' answers, and he tells

the students additional information about the topic (i.e., the panel) that they are

discussing. This pattern is reflective of the Initiate-Respond-Evaluate discourse pattern found in many traditional classroom interactions (Mehan, 1979; Serafini, 2009).
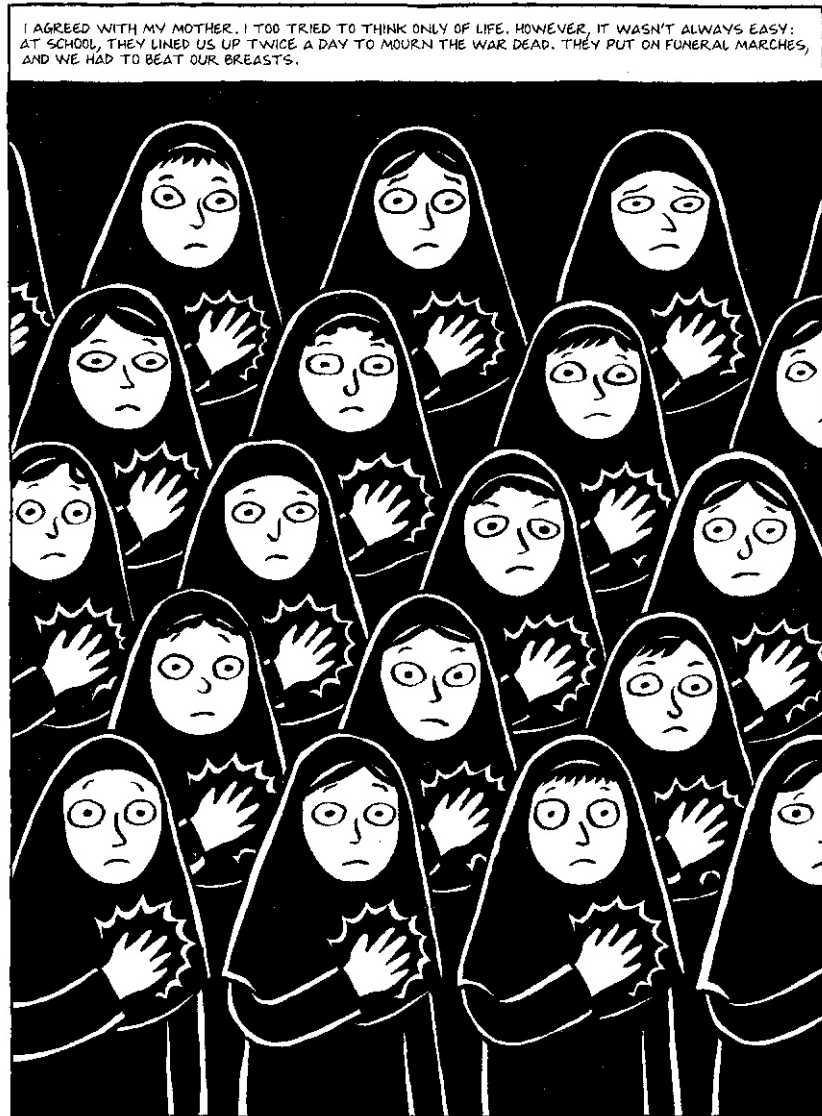

Figure 4.1: *The Complete Persepolis* page 95.

In this traditional classroom interaction, the teacher frequently Initiates a discussion by posing a question to which students are expected to Respond. Then, teachers Evaluate the responses of the students (Serafini, 2009).

Like Mr. Hugo, Lord Awesome's own experiences and preferences motivated his decision to use the *Q&A* structure in his classroom (Interview, July 6, 2017). However, it should be noted that he did not view his most common instructional practice as being teacher-centered. Instead, he called the *Q&A* structure that dominated his instructional time a "Socratic Seminar" (Interview, July 6, 2017) and explained:

> "I've always been partial to the Socratic Seminar… I suppose I like it so much just because it doesn't feel academic all the time. You know? And I think that when we're having a discussion about something like literature, there has to be a lot more enjoyment, a lot more passion behind it. I like the Socratic Seminar because students are then able to participate. They are able to draw parallels from other bits of literature, they are able to include themselves, and incorporate themselves in an academic conversation without realizing they're being entirely academic" (Interview, July 6, 2017).

Socratic Seminars (Moeller & Moeller, 2002) are an instructional strategy wherein responsibility for discussion is turned over to the students. Students read a text, generate questions, express opinions, and provide feedback to peers generally with minimal direct involvement from the teacher (Copeland, 2005). At most, the teacher acts as a "co-leader" during the Socratic Seminar (Moeller & Moeller, 2015, p. 12). In this capacity, the teacher asks follow up questions to students' answers but does not make statements, share opinions, or provide correct answers about the text (Moeller & Moeller, 2015). During the *Q&A* literacy practice that developed in Lord Awesome's classroom he did all of these things. Specifically, he asked 140 questions and told students information 94 times.

As with the AP Science class, what Lord Awesome and his students discussed proved important to highlight. Lord Awesome had two goals or reasons for including a comic in his instruction. First, he wanted students to develop an understanding of the historical and contextual aspects of the relationship between the United States and the Middle East. To this end, he asked nine questions related to historical/contextual considerations, told students historical/contextual information 13 times, and answered three questions—of the seven students asked—about historical/contextual factors regarding the relationship between the United States and the Middle East (See Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Frequency of Topics (Q&A – AP English)

Action	Teacher	Students
Asks Question		
Image/Comic Conventions	52	7
Narrative Elements	31	6
Historical/Contextual Factors	9	7
Assignment/Activity	20	19
Personal Experience	19	5
Other	9	7
Answers Question		
Image/Comic Conventions	9	66
Narrative Elements	3	67
Historical/Contextual Factors	3	11
Assignment/Activity	12	23
Personal Experience	6	32
Other	1	8
Tells Information/Makes Comment		
Image/Comic Conventions	28	7
Narrative Elements	17	9
Historical/Contextual Factors	13	4
Assignment/Activity	0	5
Personal Experience	25	29
Other	11	10

The majority of Lord Awesome's questions focused on image and comic conventions (52 of 140) and narrative elements (31 of 140). Similarly, students' answers predominately focused on these two topics—narrative elements (67 of 207) and image and comic conventions (66 of 207)—as did those instances when Lord Awesome told students information—image and comic conventions (28 of 94) and narrative elements (17 of 94). This focus on image and comic conventions during the Q&A literacy practice is reflective of his second goal: getting students to be aware of comics as a unique literary form.

Drawing comics. Drawing comics was a literacy practice that developed exclusively in the AP English class. Seventy-one percent (177 minutes) of SCCF events were dedicated to this practice and occurred during two discrete instances. On the first day of the unit, Lord Awesome assigned the making of a three-page comic sequence as a post-lecture assessment. Students were expected to use all the comics conventions (i.e., panels, gutters, and speech bubbles) he covered in the lecture. At the end of the unit, a second three-page comic sequence was assigned as a culminating project. As with the first assignment, students were required to use comics conventions learned throughout the unit. In addition to those conventions covered during the comics' conventions lecture on the first day, these requirements include the use of composition zones (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), salience (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) and image-text relationships (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006) which Lord Awesome introduced during the reading of *Persepolis*.

When *drawing comics*, students primarily drew (48%), made comments (24%), asked questions (20%), and gave each other feedback on their comics (8%). Additionally, in four instances, students assisted their peers with the task of drawing. While students worked on their comics, the teacher told the students information (33%), answered students' questions (25%), and gave students feedback on their comics (23%). The following is a representative (one of five instances) example of this practice taken from my fieldnotes:

> Lord Awesome gets out paper for the students. He leaves it on a desk in the front row and tells them to get whatever paper they need when they need it. The students start drawing or talking about their stories. Lord Awesome walks around the room to check in with each student to see what they're going to draw about. His first stop is Jimmy's desk. Jimmy explains that he will be drawing a Mario knock off.
>
> The noise level rises as students begin to chat while they draw. Some of their conversations deal with the comics but mostly they just talk about whatever. Occasionally, one of them will ask another for help. Mrs. Flamethrower isn't sure how to draw straight lines and Acorn Winters gives her a ruler.
>
> Lord Awesome stops next to Oliver Slice and Samurai Joe. Samurai Joe explains the idea he has for his comic: "Oh, so I was thinking about doing like a backstory for a school shooter. It would be like everything stacked up in his mind. Like everything that's leading up to the event, but I won't actually do the [shooting]." Lord Awesome responds that Samurai Joe's idea is "an interesting concept" and recommends he read a graphic novel called *My Friend Dahmer*. The conversation turns from Samurai Joe's comic to a TV show that Oliver Slice just started watching on Netflix while the two boys use rulers to draw their panel layouts.
>
> Dragon Nickles bends over his drawing while next to him Acorn Winters explains to Mrs. Flamethrower and Samalamadingdong what he's going to draw. He was going to do something with people but explains that he forgot the plot he came up with. While he talks, Samalamadingdong uses markers to color in her top panel while Mrs. Flamethrower erases something from the bottom corner of her first page.
>
> Lord Awesome sits down with Mustard, Mama Bear, and Sylvia to talk about their comics. Once he's finished, Evan goes back to the front of the room to sit in

his swivel chair. He listens to the conversations that flow around him occasionally adding his opinion into the mix.

Mrs. Flamethrower calls Lord Awesome over to explain the purpose of the assignment to which he responds: "To show that you know how graphic novels work. You're intentionally using gutter space to your advantage and captions. You understand embellishment, contradiction, salience. That sort of thing." She nods in confirmation and bends back to her drawing.

Jimmy examines images on his laptop. He studies what they look like and then applies what he's seeing to his sketches. Behind him, Mama Bear and Sylvia chat while they draw. They're talking about the weekend and makeup.

Acorn Winters gets up from his seat and gives his comic to Jimmy and asks Jimmy to draw an "enemy with anime eyes" for him. On the other side of the room, Samalamadingdong is trying to decide what is the best order in which to tell her story. She calls over the classroom to ask Acorn Winters for advice. He returns to his seat so she can tell him a couple different options. He gives her another idea but then tells her it is up to her to decide.

(Fieldnotes, June 5, 2017)

During this practice, the classroom turned into an informal work space. Students were free to sit in different seats, retrieve materials as needed, and have social conversations presumably as long as they worked on their comics. In contrast to the *writing about comics* practice that developed in the AP Science class, there were no recorded instances of students participating in an activity that was not assigned or sanctioned in some way by the teacher while drawing comics. As such, Lord Awesome did not spend much of his time managing classroom behavior or redirecting students to work on the assigned task.

Comics Positionality

As previously discussed, there were four primary ways in which students and teachers positioned comics during this study—*comic as a tool*, *comic as entertainment*, *comic as a form of traditional literature*, and *comic as a medium*. All four of these positionalities occurred at some point during the AP English class. However, the teacher

and the students primarily positioned *comics as a medium* within this class though a

secondary position—*comic as a form of traditional literature*—was taken up by Lord

Awesome that seemed to overwrite his positioning of comics as a medium. To illustrate

this distinction, I first present findings regarding the students' and teachers' positioning

of *comics as a medium*. Then, I address the position of *comics as a form of traditional*

literature.

Comic as medium. When Lord Awesome or the students positioned the *comic as*

a medium, they did this by talking about, using, or creating the medium with particular

attention to what makes the medium different than other mediums or texts (i.e., image,

design, or comic conventions). For Lord Awesome, this positioning of comics began with

one of his goals for instruction. As he explained in his post-unit interview, he saw comics

as something new and different that deserved attention in the classroom:

> "It invites students to play a role in the conversation of a new literary mode,
>
> which is a unique opportunity that I don't believe has ever happened before, at
>
> least not pertaining to literature… We're discussing something brand new that is
>
> as literary in nature…that needs attention" (Interview, July 6, 2017).

This positioning continued throughout his instruction during TCCF events. During the

Q&A literacy events in particular, Lord Awesome directed students' attention toward the

images and conventions (31%) that make comics different from more traditional texts.

(See Table 4.5 for frequency counts regarding the number of times Lord Awesome asked

questions, answered questions, or told students information about images and comic

conventions.) Consider this excerpt from a Q&A discussion focused on two panels from

page 102 of *Persepolis* (Figure 4.2). In this classroom discussion, Lord Awesome

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specially directs the students to "look" at the images and to tell him what they "see"

(Transcript, May 23, 2017):

THE KEY TO PARADISE WAS FOR POOR PEOPLE. THOUSANDS OF YOUNG KIDS, PROMISED A BETTER LIFE, EXPLODED ON THE MINEFIELDS WITH THEIR KEYS AROUND THEIR NECKS.

MRS. NASRINE'S SON MANAGED TO AVOID THAT FATE, BUT LOTS OF OTHER KIDS FROM HIS NEIGHBORHOOD DIDN'T.

MEANWHILE, I GOT TO GO TO MY FIRST PARTY. NOT ONLY DID MY MOM LET ME GO, SHE ALSO KNITTED ME A SWEATER FULL OF HOLES AND MADE ME A NECKLACE WITH CHAINS AND NAILS. PUNK ROCK WAS IN.

I WAS LOOKING SHARP.

Figure 4.2: *The Complete Persepolis* page 102.

Lord Awesome: We're gonna look now on page 102, 'cause this is some brilliant juxtaposition.

Oliver Slice: Oh, yeah!

Lord Awesome: Did you get that too? [Oliver Slice nods] Yeah, it really sticks out doesn't it? Okay, so if you just looked at these panels, what do they have in common, what do they have different. Take a moment to think about that. In silence, don't want you to say a thing…no talking in groups. So good, so good.

                   Alright, tell us. What did you see going on?

Kanye: I see the [clothes] for sure. Marjane has like a chain. I can't really tell.

Lord Awesome: Right.

Kanye: And then, while she's the one going to her first party, all the other kids, like, are going to the minefields, they're wearing the Key to Paradise.

Lord Awesome: So, you're focusing on just like the jewelry and what they're wearing?

Kanye: Yeah.

Lord Awesome: Interesting. Do you guys remember what else Marjane's outfit featured by any chance?

Class: Holes.

Lord Awesome: Holes, right? Don't you think that's kina funny? She's going to a party, dressed as if she was in an explosion? Like the shrapnel hanging from her neck? What else do you see in the two images? Like just the images as a whole, not just focusing on the attire.

Samurai Joe: Like, the top panel, looks like a reflection of the bottom one. Like, they're both, like that guy in the middle, he looks like he was the other guy in the middle, the explosion.

Lord Awesome:
                   Yeah, I mean, there's definitely some parallelism, right? Like either way, both of these, in both sets, bodies are in the air,

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right? One of them is supposed to represent paradise, or at least how you get to paradise, but, which one looks like it's more paradisiacal?

Jude: Bottom one.

Lord Awesome: Bottom one, right? But they don't have the keys. It's kind of a really powerful way of showcasing that lie, right? Just manufacture that plastic key, tell a kid to go die, get into paradise. It's the living who enjoy that paradisiacal life style. This one gets to me, it's so sad. Kids younger than you, are out there, it's just like, minefield fodder, alright? Like you don't want to actually lose the professional military, so you just send the kids.

(Transcript, May 23, 2017)

In this particular passage, he uses words related to looking and seeing five times and references images or panels three times. He also references the juxtaposition of the two panels and acknowledges their similar compositional structures when this is brought up by Samurai Joe. Over the entirety of all the *Q&A* literacy events that occurred in his classroom, Lord Awesome mentions images or comic conventions a total of 89 times. During SCCF activities, he mentions images or comic conventions an additional 17 times.

For students, the positioning of comic as a medium occurred during the teacher-centered *Q&A* literacy practice, during informal student interviews, and during the *drawing comics* literacy practice. As demonstrated in the above transcript, students answered questions about the images and comic conventions 66 times during *Q&A*. They also asked seven questions and made seven comments about images and comics conventions.

During informal interviews, three students, Oliver Slice, Mrs. Flamethrower, and Samurai Joe, shared insights about comics that spoke to an awareness of comics as a medium that is different from traditional logocentric texts. For example, Oliver Slice told me:

> "With *Persepolis* it's like you need both the pictures and the words, like you're getting something from both of them that's different, you know? They do different things and without both of them together you don't get *everything*."

> (Interview, June 6, 2017)

Similarly, in the following statement, Mrs. Flamethrower explains the role of images on page 74 of *Persepolis* (Figure 4.3). She references a previous class conversation wherein Lord Awesome and another student, Jude, posited that Marjane's mother in *Persepolis* was not only attacked and insulted but also raped:

> "I feel like the pictures are crucial to the book. They are like—that's what makes them. Basically, it plays out in more ways than just telling the story via words. That one scene where her mother came crying to the rest of them about, you know, like a woman should be that… The picture was showing a lot more than just her getting attacked. It's emotional."

> (Interview, June 5, 2017)

Mrs. Flamethrower's acknowledgement that "the picture was showing a lot more than just her getting attacked" (Interview, June 5, 2017) suggests that she was developing an understanding for how readers infer information across the gutters—the white space between panels—in a comic (Low, 2012). On page 74 of *Persepolis*, no attack is depicted
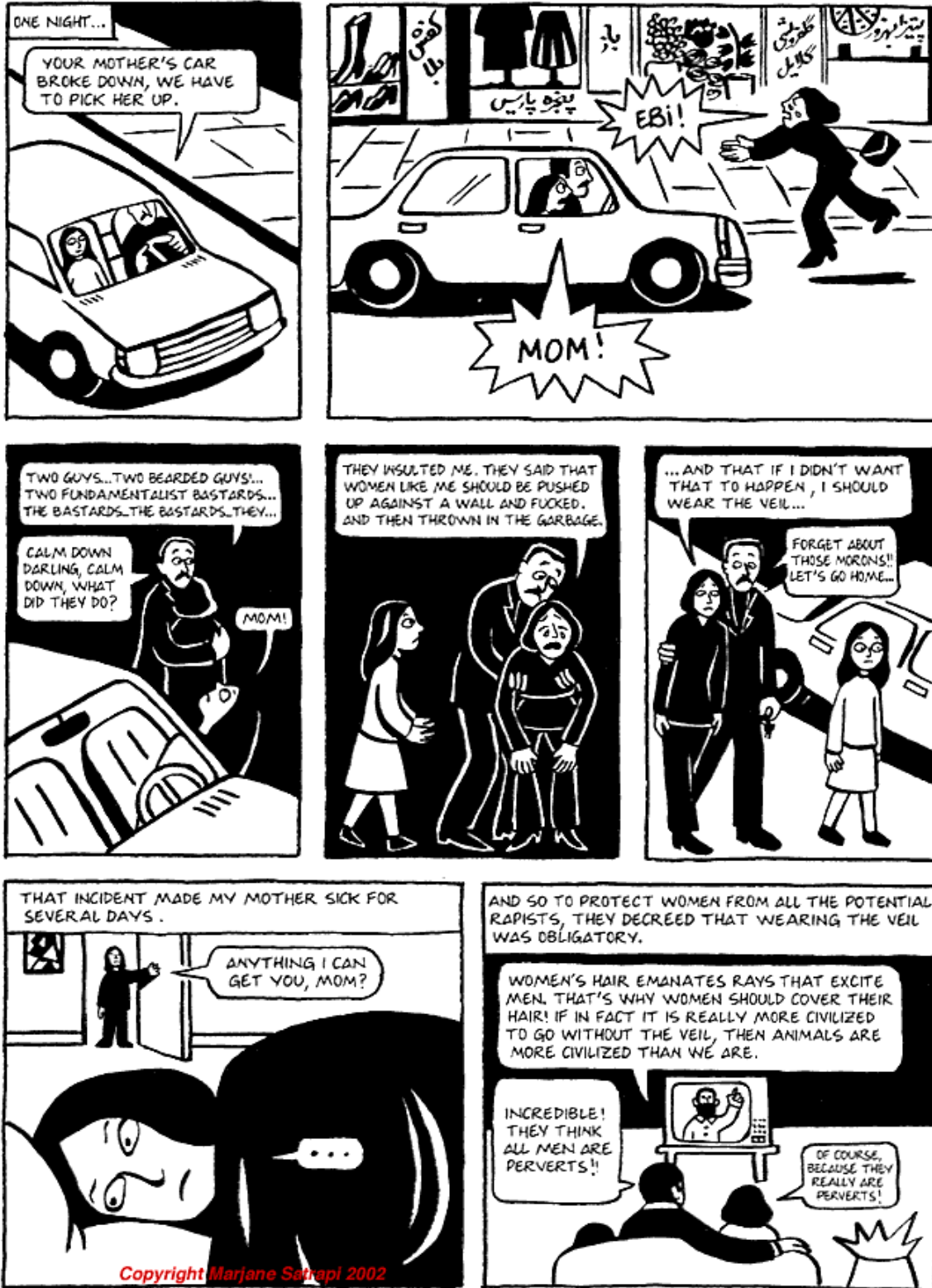
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Figure 4.3: *The Complete Persepolis* page 74.

in the panels. Rather, Marjane's mother explains what happened to her. As such, the

information about the attack is limited to the text that appears in the speech bubbles.

However, the panel images do depict the mother's emotional distress both immediately

after the attack and in the days that follow. The reader is responsible for constructing the

attack from the information provided in the speech bubbles and the images. For Mrs.

Flamethrower, the fact that the mother was affected so much by the attack as to stay in

bed for several days afterward implied that the mother was raped. Mrs. Flamethrower

created this scenario. She was starting to see how gutters worked as a unique feature of

the comics' medium.

Students also positioned the *comic as a medium* during the *drawing comics*

literacy practice. Within this practice, they not only positioned the *comic as a medium*,

but positioned themselves as designers of that medium. According to the New London

Group (1996), a person takes Available Designs (i.e., the grammars of different semiotic

systems) and reshapes and recontextualizes them through the act of Designing to produce

the Redesigned (i.e., a new cultural resource). To illustrate this point, I revisit a section

from my fieldnotes:

> The noise level rises as students begin to chat while they draw. Some of their
> conversations deal with the comics but mostly they just talk about whatever.
> Occasionally, one of them will ask another for help. Mrs. Flamethrower isn't sure
> how to draw straight lines and Acorn Winters gives her a ruler.
>
> Lord Awesome stops next to Oliver Slice and Samurai Joe. Samurai Joe explains
> the idea he has for his comic: "Oh, so I was thinking about doing like a backstory
> for a school shooter. It would be like everything stacked up in his mind. Like
> everything that's leading up to the event, but I won't actually do the [shooting]."
> Lord Awesome responds that Samurai Joe's idea is "an interesting concept" and
> recommends he read a graphic novel called *My Friend Dahmer.* The conversation
> turns from Samurai Joe's comic to a TV show that Oliver Slice just started
> watching on Netflix while the two boys use rulers to draw their panel layouts.

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Dragon Nickles bends over his drawing while next to him Acorn Winters explains to Mrs. Flamethrower and Samalamadingdong what he's going to draw. He was going to do something with people but explains that he forgot the plot he came up with. While he talks, Samalamadingdong uses markers to color in her top panel while Mrs. Flamethrower erases something from the bottom corner of her first page.

Lord Awesome sits down with Mustard, Mama Bear, and Sylvia to talk about their comics. Once he's finished, Evan goes back to the front of the room to sit in his swivel chair. He listens to the conversations that flow around him occasionally adding his opinion into the mix.

Mrs. Flamethrower calls Lord Awesome over to explain the purpose of the assignment to which he responds: "To show that you know how graphic novels work. You're intentionally using gutter space to your advantage and captions. You understand embellishment, contradiction, salience. That sort of thing." She nods in confirmation and bends back to her drawing.

Jimmy examines images on his laptop. He studies what they look like and then applies what he's seeing to his sketches. Behind him, Mama Bear and Sylvia chat while they draw. They're talking about the weekend and makeup.

Acorn Winters gets up from his seat and gives his comic to Jimmy and asks Jimmy to draw an "enemy with anime eyes" for him. On the other side of the room, Samalamadingdong is trying to decide what is the best order in which to tell her story. She calls over the classroom to ask Acorn Winters for advice. He returns to his seat so she can tell him a couple different options. He gives her another idea but then tells her it is up to her to decide.

(Fieldnotes, June 5, 2017)

In this section from my fieldnotes, students created and collaborated on their designs. They discussed their specific stories both in terms of content (e.g., Acorn Winters, Samurai Joe, Mustard, and Mama Bear) as well as sequencing (e.g., Samalamadingdong). They helped each other with drawing sometimes offering advice (e.g., Acorn Winters to Samalamadingdong), providing resources (e.g., Acorn Winters to Mrs. Flamethrower), and functioning as an artist for hire (e.g., Jimmy for Acorn Winters). Jimmy goes so far

as to find Available Designs on the internet which he uses as models for his own production. By talking about and collaborating on the images and comic conventions included in their comics, these students recognized an essential difference between comics and logocentric texts—that comics are comprised of the modes of image and design in addition to text. By focusing of these elements, the students recognized that image and comic conventions were crucial to creating a comic. If they had simply written out their stories, they would not have ended up with a comic. Thus, their actions focused around image and comic conventions implies an awareness of and a positioning of comics as a medium that includes more than text.

   Comic as a traditional form of literature. While Lord Awesome often positioned the *comic as a medium* as demonstrated during the *Q&A* literacy practice previously described, he also positioned the comic *Persepolis* and comics more generally as *a form of traditional literature*. This position of comics was characterized by the discussion of literary elements, an emphasis on mastering reading skills, and a belief in a singular, correct interpretation of the text—all traditional English language arts approaches to literature (Beach, Thein, & Webb, 2015; Coleman & Pimentel, 2012). From the outset, Lord Awesome emphasized this traditional perspective:

   "I think, especially for more visual learners who have difficulties conceptualizing

   some of these extended metaphors or figurative devices the graphic novel is a

   really effective medium for both developing interpretive skills and mastering

   them" (Interview, March 8, 2017).

In this interview, while Lord Awesome does refer to *comics as a medium*, he emphasizes the position of *comics as a traditional form of literature* as well by mentioning both literary elements and the reading skills he believes are needed to understand literature.

As the study progressed, the position of *comic as a traditional form literature*—in a traditional English language arts sense—proved to be his dominate view. Consider the following transcript in which Lord Awesome and his class discuss page 140 of *Persepolis* (Figure 4.4). In this exchange, Lord Awesome asks students to select the panel on page 140 that stood out to them the most. Presumably, this is an open-ended question with students able to share which panel was most impactful or interesting to them. However, as the *Q&A* progresses, it becomes clear that Lord Awesome is looking for students to talk about a specific panel—the second panel:

Lord Awesome:	Looking at page 140 of the text at the sequence of panels, which of these sticks out and why do you think it does?
Mustard:	The first one.
Lord Awesome:	This one sticks out to you? Why do you think it sticks out?
Mustard:	'Cause it's there's glass. She's walking through shattered glass.
Lord Awesome:	So what? She's walking through shattered glass. Do you think that means anything in terms of the narrative? About what's going on?
Jimmy:	I think it's foreshadowing because it's shattered glass, right? And then in the next page when you see that she goes to a shattered house.
Lord Awesome:	Interesting. So I mean, we know that she's on her way home. Why? Why is she on her way home right now?
Jimmy:	Because of the bombing.

|	
Lord Awesome:	Because of the bombing. So I mean, we could expect some debris. Did anybody else say that there was a different panel that stuck out to you? Or do agree that it's the first one.
Jude:	The first one.
Dragon Nickles:	Even though she was the only one home she survived. And the look on her face it looks like something terrible has happened. And when you go to the next page, it's really that-
	Interesting.
Lord Awesome:	--everything just died.
Dragon Nickles:	Yeah, interesting, interesting. Did anybody pick the second panel?
Lord Awesome:	Yeah.
Samurai Joe:	Yes! Samurai Joe, walk me through that. Why did you say that that one was the one that stood out to you?
Lord Awesome:	I mean, to me, you see all the panels, they're all like with a white background.
Samurai Joe:	They have a white background.
Lord Awesome:	Yeah. And the black background just makes it ... It sort of makes me realize how bad a position she's in.
Samurai Joe:	Right. It's a very dark place that she's in metaphorically as presented in this. And what is the one source of brightness there? Her mom calling her name. So that darkness is broken
Lord Awesome:	and you can tell with like these action dialogue balloons in the next panel that that is the moment she feels intense relief. I don't know if you've seen it ... If you go back a little bit, all these panel sequences, they create profound anxiety. Right? Like you are worried about her parents. You're like, "Oh, my God, what's gonna happen?" And then you finally ... There's a lot of darkness, there's a lot of play on light and then you finally get to this and ... Sweet relief. Goodness, yes. Good.

(Transcript, May 25, 2017)

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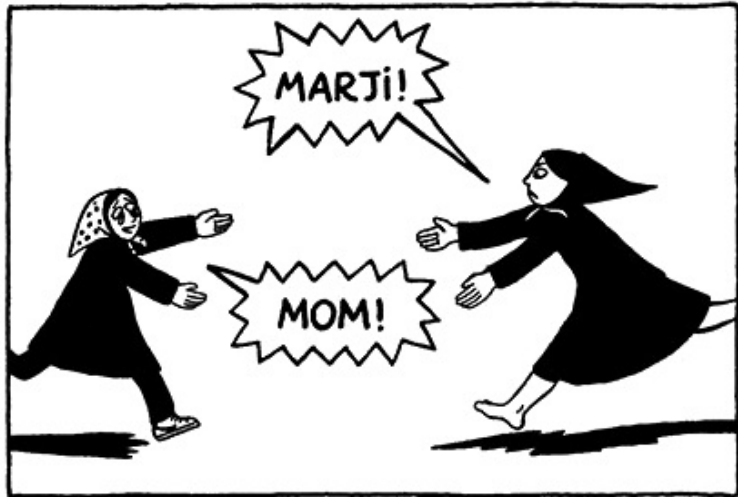
Figure 4.4: *The Complete Persepolis* page 140.

As the students begin to discuss the first panel, Lord Awesome stops asking follow up questions on students' answers and simply states that their perspectives are interesting. Towards the end of the passage, he asks the class if the second panel stood out to anyone. When Samurai Joe responds in the affirmative, Lord Awesome directs Samurai Joe to share his perspective before explaining to the class why this is the one that stands out.

This interaction demonstrates that Lord Awesome perceives there to be one correct answer to the question—which panel stands out to you? Lord Awesome was expecting for students to tell him that the second panel stood out to them the most. However, as students began to answer the question, their focus was on the first panel. While students' responses that fell outside this correct answer were interesting, they were not the target or correct answer that he was looking for. Once Lord Awesome finds a student whom states that the second panel stood out to them, Lord Awesome accepts this answer with an enthusiastic "Yes!" indicating that this was the response he was looking for and goes on to explain in detail what the panel represents.

<center>**Summary**</center>

In this chapter, I presented the findings of my analysis for this research study. I presented my findings for my research questions across my two cases—the AP Science class and the AP English class. In the AP Science class, two literacy practices developed around the comic—a *Q&A* literacy practice during teacher-centered comics-focused events and *writing about the comic* during student-centered comics-focused events. In the AP English class, a *Q&A* literacy practice also developed around the comic during TCCF events while *drawing comics* became the primary literacy practice during SCCF events. In terms of the positioning of comics in these contexts, Mr. Hugo primarily positioned the

comic as a tool for content area learning while his class positioned the *comic as entertainment* in the AP Science class. In the AP English class, Lord Awesome vacillated between positioning the *comic as a medium* and positioning the *comic as a traditional form of literature*. The students in the AP English class predominately positioned the *comic as a medium*.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the literacy practices that developed around comics when they were used in secondary content area classrooms for the first time and to develop an understanding for how teachers and students use and/or position comics within their classroom contexts. I drew from a social semiotic view of multimodality (Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2005) and the view of literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Gee, 2010; Street, 1984) as theoretical frameworks. In addition, I utilized a qualitative case study approach (Merriam, 1998) and ethnographic methods (Green & Bloome, 2015) for data collection. The following research questions were used to inform and focus this study:

1. What literacy practices develop around comics in secondary content area classrooms when teachers include these texts in their instruction for the first time?

2. How do teachers and students use and/or position comics in secondary content area classrooms when teachers include these texts in their instruction for the first time?

I used an interpretive framework for qualitative data analysis (Erickson, 1986) and constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to analyze my data and address my research questions.

To address my first research question, I found through data analysis across two case studies—an AP Science class and AP English class—three literacy practices developed around comics. In both cases, a literacy practice labeled as *Q&A* developed that involved a teacher-directed question and answer structure. A second literacy

practice—*writing about the comic*—developed in the AP Science and involved the students writing about the comic, *#foodcrisis*, after reading a portion of the text. In AP English, a third literacy practice—*drawing comics*—developed which involved students producing comics of their own design.

Addressing my second research question, I found that teachers and students positioned comics in four primary ways within these classroom contexts—*comic as a tool*, *comic as entertainment*, *comic as a medium*, and *comic as a form of traditional literature*. While all four of these positions were identified in some way across the two cases, different positionings of the comics proved meaningful in different contexts and with different participants. In AP Science, the teacher, Mr. Hugo, primarily positioned the *comic as a tool* for content area learning while the students positioned the *comic as entertainment*. In AP English, students primarily positioned *The Complete Persepolis* and the comics they drew *as a medium*. Lord Awesome, the AP English teacher, also adopted this positioning of comics. However, in addition to positioning *comics as a medium*, he also positioned *comics as a form of traditional literature*.

In this chapter, I discuss my findings and reflect on the study as a whole. My discussion is organized around three assertions:

1. There is a disconnect between teachers' goals for using comics in their instruction and the literacy practices that developed around the comics they selected.

2. There is a disconnect between the ways in which teachers position comics and the ways in which students position comics.

3. Traditional views of literature and literacy continue to dominate classrooms when multimodal texts are selected and utilized during instruction.

In discussing each assertion, I draw on evidence from the findings of both cases in this study and explain why these findings matter in these specific contexts and in educational contexts more generally. This chapter ends with a section in which I reflect on the study as a whole, discuss implications, address limitations, and propose directions for future research.

Disconnect Between Goals and Literacy Practices

When planning and implementing classroom instruction, teachers make a range of decisions from what texts to read and what strategies to use to what assignments to give and what assessments to administer (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2016). These decisions often start with the consideration and articulation of instructional goals and learning objectives (Skowron, 2006; Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2016) or are grounded in teachers' goal setting orientations (i.e., affective or cognitive) to students' classroom experience or performance (Prawat, 1985). The implicit assumption is that what is done in the classroom (i.e., the teacher's instructional practices) will align with the goals that have been considered and articulated. However, the literacy events organized by the teachers in the AP Science and AP English classrooms investigated for this study did not always align with the goals that the teachers expressed related to the use of comics in their instructional practices.

Learning New Material

In the AP Science class, Mr. Hugo wanted students to learn the content area material (i.e., food sustainability) through reading and discussing *#foodcrisis*, the comic he selected. With this goal in mind, one might expect content area material to come up with some degree of frequency during in class discussion and activities focused on the

comic. However, as presented in Chapter 4, content area material was rarely mentioned during *comics-focused events* in Mr. Hugo's classroom. During the *Q&A* literacy practice that developed around the comic in AP Science, content area material was only brought up by the teacher a total of 14 times. He asked seven direct questions and told the students seven pieces of information about food sustainability or a related topic. Students only mentioned content area material once across all *Q&A* events. Instead of content area material, narrative elements (e.g., plot, characters, setting, etc.) were the predominant topics covered by both the teacher and the students during *Q&A* events. The focus during *Q&A* events on narrative elements represents a disconnect between Mr. Hugo's goals for using the comic in his instruction (i.e., students learning content area material) and what actually happened during the literacy practices that developed around the comic in his classroom.

Similarly, Mr. Hugo addressed content area material only twice during the *writing about the comic* literacy practice that developed around the comic in the AP Science class. When writing the compare and contrast essay, students wrote about content area material ten times, asked questions about content area material twice, and made a comment only once about content area material. The predominate topic of discussion when students were writing the compare and contrast essay was the assignment itself. Students were concerned with requirements (e.g., the number of quotes needed) and the assignment's due date. In their essays, students focused on narrative elements by retelling or summarizing the plot or shared their perceptions about the author's purpose in writing the comic. They did not appear to understand that the comic was connected to the content area material being taught because of the twenty-two students in the class, only ten wrote

about content area material even though writing about content area material was explicitly required in the essay prompt. As with the *Q&A* literacy practice, the lack of attention to content area material while students wrote about the comic represented a disconnect between Mr. Hugo's goal of content area learning with the comic and the reality of the literacy practices that developed around the comic in his classroom.

In the AP English class, Lord Awesome's goal of students developing an understanding of historical and contextual aspects of the relationship between the United States and the Middle East also failed to manifest during the *Q&A* literacy practice that developed around the comic in his classroom. The majority of Lord Awesome's questions, answers, and statements of information focused on image and comic conventions and narrative elements rather than historical and contextual factors related to United States/Middle East relations—see Table 4.5 for frequency counts. Similarly, students' questions, answers, and comments during *Q&A* rarely related to historical/contextual factors while image and comic conventions and narrative elements were frequently mentioned. Furthermore, Lord Awesome's goal of familiarizing students with the historical and contextual factors that characterize the United States' relationship with countries in the Middle East was not addressed at all during the *drawing comics* literacy practice that developed in the AP English class. Also, no formal measures or assessments about historical and contextual factors were implemented during *comics-focused events* in AP English so it is difficult to say whether or not students did or did not learn this material. However, the sheer lack of attention to the content material by both the teacher and the students makes it doubtful.

Informal interviews with the students also suggested that students did not learn content material related to the goals expressed by their teachers. In the AP Science class, students were asked what connections they saw between *#foodcrisis* and the content area material they were learning about (i.e., food sustainability). Two of the twenty-two students in the class reported seeing a connection but these connections were broadly conceived. For example, Jvo "guessed" that the comic and content area material were connected because they both related to food (Interview, February 27, 2017). In AP English, none of the eighteen students interviewed made a connection between the comic and Lord Awesome's goal of students developing an understanding of historical and contextual aspects of the relationship between the United States and the Middle East.

According to Gee (2015), two things are necessary when students are learning new content. First, the new content needs to be situated within a larger context. Second, students need to understand what goal(s) they are trying to meet. Without context or goals, students are unable—or at least unlikely—to integrate new content with their existing knowledge. As such, when there is a disconnect between stated goals and teachers' instructional practices, students often do not learn the intended content material (English & Kitsantas, 2013). When the teachers' goals and the literacy events the teacher orchestrated did not align, students did not appear to learn the identified content (i.e., food sustainability in AP Science and historical/contextual factors in AP English). As such, simply inserting a comic into classroom instruction is not enough for students to acquire new material even though some scholars have implied this may be the case (e.g., Crawford, 2004; Gorman, 2008; Lyga, 2006; Spiegel et. al, 2013). For acquisition of new

material to take place, an explicit connection between the teachers' stated goals and the events/activities enacted in a classroom is necessary (Barron et. al., 1998).

Engaging with Content Area Material

Mr. Hugo's second goal for using *#foodcrisis* as part of his instructional practice was for students to engage with the content area material through the reading and use of the comic. According to Spiegel et. al. (2013), comics might be a preferable medium for teaching content area material because students find comics more engaging than more traditional texts (e.g., essays and textbooks). Mr. Hugo assumed that this would be the case with his students because "they like pictures" (Interview, February 16, 2017). He hoped the comic would keep students engaged with the content area material. In a previous curricular unit, Mr. Hugo incorporated news articles and journal articles into his instructional practice and found that students "tend to lose interest about halfway through" (Interview, February 27, 2017).

When asked to clarify what he meant by engagement, Mr. Hugo explained that he wanted to see students "doing the work and…not complaining about doing the work" (Interview, April 10, 2017). Engagement in this sense reflects a behavioral perspective which is characterized by compliance with teacher expectations and classroom norms through participation in academic activity (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). With this definition of engagement in mind, a second disconnect between the teacher's goals and the literacy practices that developed around the comic in the AP Science class was noted during data analysis—students were not "doing the work" as Mr. Hugo had hoped.

During the *writing about the comic* literacy practice that developed in the AP Science class, students often participated in *off-task* actions or activities which were

defined as actions or activities that were not assigned or in some way sanctioned by the teacher. There were 25 instances of *off-task* actions and activities over the course of the two days dedicated to writing the compare and contrast essay of which the comic was a focal point. On the first day, 15 students or 68% of the class did not write the essay as directed by the teacher, and on the second day, 10 students or 45% did not write until Mr. Hugo gave the students a 20-minute warning. A similar pattern occurred when students wrote about the comic during bellwork. Typically, students socialized during the few minutes dedicated to this activity and only turned their attention to "furiously typing as Mr. Hugo [gave] them a one-minute warning" (Fieldnotes, March 1, 2017).

Using Mr. Hugo's definition of engagement as "doing the work" (Interview, April 10, 2017), the inclusion of the comic in this literacy practice did not appear to engage students in the content area material or their assigned tasks. This finding pushes against existing literature that calls for the inclusion of comics in educational contexts because kids find comics inherently more interesting than other types of texts (e.g., Crawford, 2004; Gorman, 2008; Lyga, 2006). Simply put, students' liking of, interest in, or engagement with the comic does not necessarily equate to students' engagement with the content area material.

Being Aware of a New Literary Form

Barron et. al. (1998) recommends that teachers make explicit the connection between their instructional goals and the events/activities enacted in the classroom in order to ensure that new content material is learned. Students need to understand what goal(s) they are trying to meet in order integrate new content with their existing knowledge (Gee, 2015). In the AP English class, Lord Awesome did not explicitly tell

students that one of his learning goals was for them to be aware of comics as a unique literary form. While it is impossible to say whether or not the students in his class were aware of comics as a literary form unique from other texts based on this study, the data collected suggests that this goal and the literacy events he orchestrated more strongly aligned than did his goal of familiarizing students with the historical and contextual factors of relations between the United States and the Middle East and the literacy events he orchestrated in the classroom.

As previously reported, during *Q&A* events in his classroom, the majority of Lord Awesome's questions, answers, and statements of information focused on image and comic conventions (31%) rather than historical and contextual factors related to United States/Middle East relations (9%). The greater frequency with which Lord Awesome focused his questions and comments on image and comic conventions during *Q&A* events demonstrates an alignment between Lord Awesome's goal (i.e., for students to be aware of comics as a unique literary form) and the literacy events he orchestrated in his classroom because the images and comic conventions are some of the characteristics that make comics unique from other media.

Further alignment between Lord Awesome's goal for students to be aware of comics as a unique literary form and the literacy events that occurred in the AP English class was evident during the *drawing comics* literacy practice that developed in this classroom. As students drew their own comics, 29% of the comments they made focused on narrative elements of their own comics while 20% of the comments they made focused on the images and comic conventions in their own comics. Another 17% of students' comments during the *drawing comics* literacy practice in this class revolved

around comics in popular culture (e.g., students talked about the DC Comics'
Multiverse). All together when *drawing comics* 66% of students' comments related to
comics in some way.

While the frequency with which students commented on comics does not
necessarily indicate an awareness of comics as being unique from other literary forms,
informal interviews with the students provided some evidence that students were starting
to notice that comics worked differently from logocentric texts (e.g., novels). Three
students, Oliver Slice, Samurai Joe, and Mrs. Flamethrower, shared insights about comics
that spoke to an awareness and appreciation of comics as different or unique. As Oliver
Slice explained:

> "With *Persepolis* it's like you need both the pictures and the words, like you're
> getting something from both of them that's different, you know? They do
> different things and without both of them together you don't get *everything*."

> (Interview, June 6, 2017)

Similarly, Mrs. Flamethrower shared her thoughts about the relationship between words
and image in *Persepolis*. In the following statement, Mrs. Flamethrower references page
74 (Figure 4.3) and a previous class conversation wherein Lord Awesome and another
student, Jude, posited that Marjane's mother in *Persepolis* was not only attacked and
insulted but also raped:

> "I feel like the pictures are crucial to the book. They are like—that's what makes
> them. Basically, it plays out in more ways than just telling the story via words.
> That one scene where her mother came crying to the rest of them about, you

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know, like a woman should be that… The picture was showing a lot more than

just her getting attacked. It's emotional."

Oliver Slice's and Mrs. Flamethrower's comments suggest that both students are starting

to be aware of two things that comics do differently than logocentric texts. First, in

comics "words and images work interdependently…[to] create new ideas and sensations

beyond the sum of their parts" (McCloud, 2006, p. 128) or as Oliver Slice explained,

"You need both the pictures and the words" (Interview, June 6, 2017) to construct

meaning with the comic. Second, when reading comics, readers infer information in the

gutters (i.e., the white space between panels) (Low, 2012) to construct meaning. For

example, none of the panels on page 74 of *Persepolis* explicitly show Marjane's mother

being raped, yet in a previous class conversation, Lord Awesome and Jude concluded

Marjane's mother was indeed raped prior to this scene. They inferred this information in

the gutters using information in the panels as clues (e.g., the characters' facial

expressions and the exposition boxes). Mrs. Flamethrower does not explicitly reference

the gutter and instead suggested that it is "the picture" that showed "a lot more than just

[Marjane's mother] getting attacked" (Interview, June 5, 2017). She recognizes that there

is more to constructing meaning with the comic in this instance than simply reading the

text or looking at the images.

When Lord Awesome's stated goals and the literacy events he orchestrated in the

classroom did align—as they did with his goal for students to be aware of comics as a

unique literary form as well as the *Q&A* and *drawing comics* literacy practices that were

developed in the AP English class—students appeared to learn the new material (i.e., the

conventions and structures associated with comics and images). When Lord Awesome

reflected on assessing the comics students drew, he noted that the students were able to

"use the same techniques that were used [in *Persepolis*] to communicate in their own

graphic novel" (Interview, July 6, 2017) suggesting students learned enough about the

conventions and structures of comics to utilize various conventions in their own work. It

should be noted that students in the AP English class were required to include certain

conventions within the comics they produced, so students' use of comic conventions

could be attributed to this requirement. However, as evidenced by students' lack of

adherence to the content area material requirement in writing the compare and contrast

essay in the AP Science class, just because a teacher requires something of his students

does not mean that students will fulfill that requirement especially if they have not

acquired the new material. All 20 students in the AP English class were able to use the

conventions Lord Awesome required them to use in the comics they drew again

suggesting that some learning related to the conventions and structures of comics took

place in this classroom.

Disconnect Between Teachers' Positioning and Students' Positioning of Comics

According to Rose (2012), what people do with visual objects (e.g., comics)

within a particular context can indicate how those people construct those objects. In other

words, what people do with visual objects can tell a researcher what those visual objects

mean to the individuals within that context. Furthermore, these ways of doing

demonstrate different positionalities or roles (Rose, 2012) for both the visual objects and

the people using them. In turn, the ways in which people position visual objects can

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either embrace or reject the dominant, accepted, or taken-for-granted practices and perspectives within a context to varying degrees (Tracy, 2013).

The AP Science and the AP English teacher who participated in this study had not previously used comics as part of their instructional practices or in their classrooms. As such, the practices associated with and the positioning of comics in these spaces were not well-established. Rather, these instructional practices and the various positions taken up developed around these comics as the teachers and students began to do things with the comics in their classrooms. Interestingly, the ways in which the teachers positioned the comics often differed from the ways in which the students positioned the comics.

Tool vs. Entertainment

As discussed in Chapter 4, the AP Science teacher primarily positioned *comics as a tool* to be used for content area learning. He selected the comic, *#foodcrisis*, because it "shows them what [a food crisis] is" (Interview, February 16, 2017), and he repeatedly emphasized that he wanted students to learn about food sustainability. While he hoped students would be more engaged in the material because the comic contained pictures and his students "like[d] pictures" (Interview, February 16, 2017), ultimately the comic and its pictures were positioned as a resource that served the acquisition of content area material. Positioning *#foodcrisis* in this way is reflective of Rosenblatt's (1978) efferent reading stance wherein the purpose or goal of reading is to take away information about a topic from one's reading. When taking up an efferent stance, "the reader's attention is primarily focused on what will remain as a residue *after* the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out" (p. 23). The efferent stance is one that is commonly associated with content area instruction, such as

science, where an emphasis is placed on reading to learn (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Sutherland, 2008; Vacca, Vacca, Mraz, 2016).

The position of *comic as a tool* taken up by Mr. Hugo in the AP Science class differed from the position taken up by his students. While 10 students did position *#foodcrisis as a tool* for completing their writing assignment (i.e., the compare/contrast culminating essay), the students in the AP Science class primarily took up the position of *comic as entertainment*. During classroom activities, literacy events, and informal student interviews, 17 of the twenty-two students referred to *#foodcrisis* as interesting, entertaining, or likeable. Six students referenced specific plot points and characters that they found interesting, seven students explained that they liked the images, and five students reflected on their emotional and personal connections to the comic. Such personal connections, emotional investments, and feelings of liking fall under what Rosenblatt (1978) describes as an aesthetic reading stance wherein "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p. 25). In the aesthetic stance, the transaction between reader and text evokes memories and feelings; reading is done for the sake of pleasure (Rosenblatt, 1978).

The different positions taken up in the AP Science classroom demonstrated a disconnect between the teacher's positioning of the comic and the students' positioning of the comic. In positioning the comic in different ways, the teacher and the students took on different reading stances. Before continuing, it is important to stress that it is not my intent to suggest that one reading stance is better or preferable to another. Aesthetic reading and efferent reading serve different purposes. However, the disconnect between

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the way in which the teacher positioned the *comic as a tool* and the way the students'

positioned the same *comic as entertainment* might account for why students did not

attend to content area material while talking or writing about *#foodcrisis*.

Reading for information is a common practice in school settings (Resnick, 1990)

and one that is emphasized in secondary schools (Swanson, 2016). Content area or

disciplinary reading in science in particular is often characterized by the reading of

scientific research, textbooks, and other informational texts (Lee & Spratley, 2010).

However, the students in the AP Science class were not reading the comic for

information as Mr. Hugo expected them to do. Rather, in adopting an aesthetic stance, the

students were reading against common school reading practices (e.g., reading to complete

an assignment, pass a test, or answer teachers' questions) (Resnick, 1990). The personal

reasons (e.g., being entertained by the plot, liking the images, and having a personal

connection with the comic) identified by students in the AP Science class for reading the

comic are motivations for reading often affiliated with recreational reading, out of school

reading, or reading for fun (Alvermann et. al., 2007; de Naeghel et. al., 2012; Gorman,

2008).

Historically, comics have been positioned as non-academic texts (Hatfield, 2010;

Jimenez & Meyer, 2016), so it is possible that students associated reading a comic—even

in a school context—with non-academic reading. However, it is also possible that the

way in which Mr. Hugo positioned the comic and the literacy practices that developed

around the comic in his classroom did not engage students in a manner "from which they

might learn the habits and skills of using texts to understand public issues and participate

in public decision making" which Resnick (1990, p. 125) argues is one of the main

purposes for reading for information in school. To illustrate, Ashketchup explained

during an informal student interview, she "like[d] the comic because it [was] scary…

things like this have happened before but no one really pays attention to it" (Interview,

March 2, 2017) suggesting that positioning the *comic as entertainment* enabled her to see

broader implications related to the content area material (i.e., the possible impact of a

food crisis) than Mr. Hugo's positioning of the *comic as a tool* for content area learning.

Medium vs. Form of Traditional Literature

In the AP English class, the students and the teacher primarily positioned the

comic as a medium where medium can be understood to mean a form of production or

dissemination (Burn, 2013). The positioning of *comic as a medium* was reflected in Lord

Awesome's goal for students to be aware of comics as "something brand new…that

needs attention" (Interview, July 6, 2017). During the *Q&A* literacy practice that

developed around the comic in the AP English class, the questions asked, the answers

given, and the comments made by both teacher (31%) and students (25%) predominately

focused on the characteristics that make comics a unique medium from other types of

texts (i.e., images and comic conventions). This positioning of *comic as a medium* was

also reflected in the *drawing comics* literacy practice that developed in the AP English

class. When *drawing comics*, students became designers or creators of comics finding

models for their artistic endeavors, discussing the content and sequence of their comics,

and collaborating during the design process by offering advice, providing resources, and

drawing sections for each other.

The positioning of *comics as a medium* in Lord Awesome's AP English class is

reflective of perspectives expressed in comics' studies and by comics' creators. Since the

turn of the century, scholars in comics' studies have positioned the *comics as a medium* within the visual arts (e.g., Beaty, 2007; Groesteen, 1999; Hatfield, 2005; Versaci, 2007). In particular, many scholars argue that comics are first and foremost a visual system characterized by visual elements and conventions found in other visual media (Beaty, 2007; Goesteen, 1999). In the AP English class, the emphasis Lord Awesome and his students placed on image and comics conventions during *Q&A* events is reflective of attention paid by comics' studies scholars to *comics as a medium*. For comics' author and illustrator Scott McCloud (1993), comics are a co-designed medium that incorporates visual and linguistic sign systems—a position students embraced in their own design process when *drawing comics*.

In addition to positioning the *comic as a medium*, Lord Awesome positioned the *comic as a traditional form of literature*. Traditionally, approaches to teaching literature and literacy involve the teaching of literary elements and reading skills as well as determining a *correct* interpretation of a text (Beach, Thein, & Webb, 2015; Coleman & Pimentel, 2012). Lord Awesome did all three—which I discuss in more detail in the next section. The positioning of *comics as a traditional form of literature* is one that has been promoted and endorsed in professional development materials for teachers that promote the use of comics in classrooms (e.g., Monnin, 2010, 2011; Novak, 2013). Unfortunately, positioning comics in this way (i.e., as a form of literature) has the potential to ignore the multimodal nature of these texts by relegating comics to the service of traditional literature and literacy instruction. For example, Monnin's (2010) *Teaching Graphic Novels* professional development book focuses on reading strategy instruction and

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elements of fiction and non-fiction texts with only one chapter dedicated to the conventions of the comics medium.

In comics studies, the situating of comics within the visual arts was done by these scholars (e.g., Beaty, 2007; Groesteen, 1999; Hatfield, 2005; Versaci, 2007) to explicitly divest comics from traditional literary perspectives and practices (Hatfield, 2010). As Hatfield (2010) explains, positioning comics as literature or within logocentric traditions delegitimizes the comics medium as a visual form. As such, Lord Awesome's positioning of *comics as a traditional form of literature* directly contradicts the *comics as a medium* position taken up his students and at times by himself. Consider the following transcript excerpt taken from an informal student interview. In this excerpt, Lord Awesome first positions *comics as a medium* when he asks the students, Samurai Joe, Oliver Slice, and Legendary, if they believe comics to be a legitimate new form (i.e., medium). However, when the students raise the comics' medium above traditional forms of literature, Lord Awesome rejects their premise and positions *comics as a traditional form of literature*:

Lord Awesome:	Can I—let me ask you something? Do you see this as a legitimate new form?
Samurai Joe:	I think it could be.
Oliver Slice:	I think, yeah, because this book—it brings your attention to what's happening but then it also brings in something—moods—from poetry and other things like the pictures and the hidden meanings and everything. It takes you deeper.
Samurai Joe:	But with the pictures it takes a lot less description.
Oliver Slice:	Like at the beginning of a book, they explain the kids—main character—and where they are and all that. And like this, it just went straight to it. Otherwise, when you read like normal pages, you have to go back and read a couple of times. You have to go back and be like "oh, that's what they meant."

	But with the pictures and the dialogue, it's all right there.
Lord Awesome:	You have no imagination.
Dani:	[to Legendary] What were you going to say?
Legendary:	It has a theme. It has everything a normal book has.
Oliver Slice:	More.
Samurai Joe:	Yeah, more.
Lord Awesome:	[scoffs] I shouldn't listen to you guys. Now you're just making me mad. We can do poetry and novelry and epics and graphic novels.
Samurai Joe:	But comics and graphic novels have been on a big rise in the past couple of years. Plus, the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the DC Stuff and everything. It's only going to get bigger. That's my opinion.

(Interview, June 6, 2017)

In posing the question about the legitimacy of the comics', Lord Awesome appears to value the comics medium as a visual form. The students—Oliver Slice and Samurai Joe—position *comics as a medium*, as well, pointing out characteristics that separate comics from logocentric texts (e.g., the juxtaposition of image and text). In expressing their views, the students appear to position comics as a superior medium to traditional forms of literature. Samurai Joe suggests that the juxtaposition of image and texts "doesn't waste [reading] time", and Oliver Slice indicates that the multimodal nature of comics "takes you deeper" into the text (Interview, June 6, 2017). In response to the students' sentiments, Lord Awesome rejects their position of *comics as a medium* when he states that they are "just making him mad" and tries to re-legitimize traditional forms of literature by couching comics as one among many forms when he states that "we can do poetry and novelry and epics and graphic novels" (Interview, June 6, 2017). In

positioning *comics as* one form of *traditional literature*, Lord Awesome ignores the multimodal nature of comics and implies that comics are not worthy of study as a unique medium directly contradicting his espoused goal for students to be aware of comics as a unique form.

Dominance of Traditional Views of Literacy and Literature

As described in Chapter 2, in a traditional or autonomous view of literacy (Street, 1984), literacy is often conceived a cognitive ability where reading and writing are mental processes in which people engage (Gee, 2010). School instructional practices and literacy practices historically reflect and privilege the cognitive perspective (Resnick, 1990; Street, 1984) and often involve teacher-centered instructional practices (e.g., lecture methods and teacher-directed questioning of students) (Brown, 2003). Common literacy activities include the summarizing, questioning, and predicting of print-based texts (Alexander & Fox, 2013). The propensity of teacher-centered instruction as an instructional model directly influenced Mr. Hugo to use teacher-centered instructional practices in his classroom. He explained that he learned teacher-centered instructional practices in a class he took "about content literacy in college that I used a lot of information I remembered, and [I] based some of it off my own experiences" (Interview, February 28, 2017). Mr. Hugo experienced these instructional practices himself as a student and was taught these instructional practices as a pre-service teacher. As such, he replicated them as a teacher.

Reading instruction from a cognitive perspective usually focuses "on a single interpretation, one in which the teacher becomes the single arbitrator of correct meaning" (Young & Bush, 2004, p. 15). Similarly, from traditional perspectives of literature and

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literary instruction, which draw from formalism and new criticism (Richter, 1998),

meaning is thought to be embedded in the text; it can be inferred through careful

consideration of the text's form (i.e., narrative structure, point-of-view, imagery, etc.),

disregarding the reader as constructor of meaning and the author as producer of such

(Abrams, 1999; Cohen, 2017).

      The autonomous view of literacy "disguises the cultural and ideological

assumptions that underpin it so that it can be presented as though they are neutral and

universal" (Street, 2003, p. 77). According to Zamel and Spack (2002), this view

privileges and maintains the dominant way of being literate that has historically been

adopted in Western schooling. In contrast, the view of literacy as a social practice

acknowledges many ways of being literate across cultures and contexts both in and out of

school (Gee, 2010).

      In the AP Science and the AP English class, traditional perspectives of literacy

and literature instruction were evident in the teachers' focus on narrative elements during

the *Q&A* literacy practice that developed around comics in both classrooms. For Mr.

Hugo in the AP Science class, what was embedded in the text constituted the *right*

answer; the students' role was to discover the correct meaning. When asked a question

about narrative elements, students responded with simple plot-based answers. Mr. Hugo

accepted such plot-based answers as correct which is demonstrated in the following

sequence:

    Mr. Hugo: What happened in the last several chapters?

    Pixie: Food prices are—went up.

    Mr. Hugo: Food prices went up. Why were they going up?

Jimmy:	They started rebelling.
Mr. Hugo:	Who started rebelling?
Jimmy:	The rebels started rebelling.

(Transcript, March 1, 2017)

In the above passage, Mr. Hugo asked simple plot-based questions about *#foodcrisis*.

Students were able to discover the correct answers to these questions by reading the

comic and repeating plot points. Mr. Hugo accepted these answers—indicating that he

viewed them as correct—and asked follow up questions also related to the plot. Mr.

Hugo's stated goal of students' learning content area material by reading *#foodcrisis*

became overshadowed and forgotten during *Q&A* literacy events as he focused on

particular aspects of the comic's narrative elements.

Street (2003) explains that "for many people the literacies they engage with come

from elsewhere and are not self-invented" (p. 80). Mr. Hugo specifically drew from his

pre-service teacher training and his previous experiences to orchestrate the literacy events

he implemented. In other words, Mr. Hugo did what he knew and what he knew were

traditional literacy practices. However, by adopting traditional instructional practices, he

lost some opportunities to address the content area goals he set out to achieve. While

literacy can be a diverse and localized practice (Street, 1995), the practices that

developed around comics in the AP Science class continually fell within traditional views

and practices at the expense of the goals the teacher set for himself.

In the AP English class, Lord Awesome acted as "the single arbitrator of correct

meaning" (Young & Bush, 2004, p. 15) during the *Q&A* literacy practice that developed

around comics in his classroom. The following excerpt serves as an example of this

perspective on the part of the teacher. As a reminder, this exchange begins with Lord

Awesome asking students which panel on page 140 of *Persepolis* (Figure 4.4) stood out

to them the most. In spite of this question's apparent open-endedness, Lord Awesome

was looking for a specific answer, in this case—the second panel. Prior to the following

excerpt, several students stated that the first panel stood out to them and explained why.

As more students shared their perspectives, Lord Awesome told them that their answers

were interesting but continued to encourage them to look for a different answer. Finally,

he asked specifically if anyone picked the second panel:

Lord Awesome:	Yeah, interesting, interesting. Did anybody pick the second panel?
Samurai Joe:	Yeah.
Lord Awesome:	Yes! Samurai Joe, walk me through that. Why did you say that that one was the one that stood out to you?
Samurai Joe:	I mean, to me, you see all the panels, they're all like with a white background.
Lord Awesome:	They have a white background.
Samurai Joe:	Yeah. And the black background just makes it ... It sort of makes me realize how bad a position she's in.
Lord Awesome:	Right. It's a very dark place that she's in metaphorically as presented in this. And what is the one source of brightness there? Her mom calling her name. So that darkness is broken and you can tell with like these action dialogue balloons in the next panel that that is the moment she feels intense relief. I don't know if you've seen it ... If you go back a little bit, all these panel sequences, they create profound anxiety. Right? Like you are worried about her parents. You're like, "Oh, my God, what's gonna happen?" And then you finally ... There's a lot of darkness, there's a lot of play on light and then you finally get to this and ... Sweet relief. Goodness, yes. Good.

<div align="right">(Transcript, May 25, 2017)</div>

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This interaction and others like it demonstrated the taking up of a traditional view to reading instruction, in particular the reading of literary texts, in this classroom. It was assumed there was one correct answer to the question and Lord Awesome knew what that answer was.

Reflections

"…I'm not Prometheus, I was not bringing fire to teaching the graphic novel."

(Interview, July 6, 2017)

In this final section, I present some potential limitations of this study as well as some its implications for classroom practice and literacy research. I will also discuss potential directions for future research.

Limitations

As with all research, this study has certain limitations. First and foremost, the amount of time spent in these classrooms was rather short—three to four weeks depending upon the unit observed. As such, while I was able to collect data using various ethnographic methods, this study did not address the procedures and expectations of a traditional ethnography (Green, & Bloome, 1997). The understandings constructed from this study are only some of the experiences and meanings produced by the teachers and students involved. As the only researcher involved in the study, there was a heavier reliance on a single researcher as the instrument of interpretation (Tracy, 2013). As such, my data analysis follows a more etic than emic approach with my coding scheme constructed by me rather than coming from the classrooms (Merriam, 1998). This

presents another possible limitation which is inherent in the focused participant observer role that I adopted (Tracy, 2013).

Another potential limitation stems from the nature of the research itself. As previously discussed, relatively few studies that focus on comics in educational contexts have been conducted (Mallia, 2007). One possible reason for the limited number of studies on comics in educational contexts is that not many teachers are using comics in their classrooms as I discovered when recruiting participants for this study. I recruited teachers at a well-attended local Comic Con and several professional development workshops directly related to the use of comics in classroom instructional practices. Of the potential participant pool of approximately 40 teachers, only one teacher, Mr. Hugo, volunteered to participate during recruitment events. The second teacher participant, Lord Awesome, asked to participate after hearing about the project from Mr. Hugo. With this limited participant pool in mind, there are not many research sites where this study could have been conducted which suggests that the implications for classroom practice from this study are limited.

The limitations on possible research sites and teacher participants contribute to another potential limitation of this study. During the recruitment process, I was not able to find teachers who were themselves experienced comics' readers or who had previous experience using comics in their instructional practices. As such, the literacy practices that developed around comics in the AP Science class and the AP English class as well as the ways in which the teachers and students positioned comics in these classes reflect a minimal level of knowledge and experience on the part of the teachers. How might the

literacy practices and positionings of comics differed if the teachers were familiar and knowledge about these texts?

Implications

When new texts—in this case, comics—are selected for use in particular classrooms, a myriad of possibilities become available to teachers and students (Dallacqua, 2016). As scholars, researchers, educators, and librarians have suggested, comics can potentially motivate struggling readers (e.g., Brozo & Mayville, 2012; Gavigan, 2011), support traditional literacy development (e.g., Chun, 2009; Ranker, 2007), develop visual and multimodal literacies (e.g., Connors, 2015; Gillenwater, 2014; Pantaleo, 2011), and promote student interest (e.g., Bosma, Rule, & Krueger, 2013; Hosler & Boomer, 2011; Spiegel et al., 2013). However, what has become evident from this study is that simply including comics in one's classroom does not mean that comics will be studied, respected, or used in ways that reflect their unique nature as multimodal texts. For instance, Mr. Hugo positioned the *comic as a tool* to be used to teach content area material rather than as a text or medium to be studied in its own right, and while Lord Awesome did position *comics as a medium* worthy of study in his classroom, he often contradicted this position by also positioning *comics as* another *form of traditional literature*. By adopting these perspectives (i.e., *comics as a tool* and *comics as a traditional form of literature*), the teachers perpetuated a logocentric view of text that historically devalues comics which are both visual and multimodal in nature (Hatfield, 2010).

While the teachers in this study were excited to do something they viewed as new and different (i.e., use a comic in their instructional practices), the literacy practices that

developed around the comics in the AP Science and the AP English classroom reflected the traditional practices these teachers usually employed. As Lord Awesome told me during our final interview, he was "not Prometheus…bringing the fire to teaching the graphic novel" (Interview, July 6, 2017). According to Applebee (1993), teachers are often creatures of habit using the same instructional practices to teach the same material year after year. The instructional practices teachers rely on tend to reflect the instructional practices they have been taught (Applebee, 1993) either as pre-service teachers or as members of their local teaching communities. Both teachers in this study cited previous teaching and learning experiences as the motivating factors for their instructional practices and for the texts they selected. As such, the literacy events they orchestrated in their classrooms resembled many traditional approaches for teaching literacy and literature. By adopting traditional instructional practices, the teachers in this study became the gatekeepers of meaning. For Mr. Hugo meaning was embedded in the texts while Lord Awesome became the "arbitrator of correct meaning" (Young & Bush, 2004, p. 15) which could be found in his head. Students were required to guess at the meanings authorized by the teachers in these contexts—essentially playing the game of school.

Historically, the literacies and learning that takes place in schools is often identified as lacking practical, real-world application (Miettinen, 1999; Resnick, 1990). For example, students' ability to guess at the meaning sanctioned by Lord Awesome does little for them outside of his AP English class. The differences between in school and out of school literacies are well documented (Hull & Schultz, 2001; Street, 2003) with out of school literacies often proving innovative and productive (Mills, 2010). This is not to imply that in school literacies cannot also be innovative and productive. However, in this

study, the traditional instructional practices frequently adopted by these teachers around the comics did nothing new.

Teachers would also benefit from aligning their instructional practices around comics with their goals for using comics in their classrooms. According to English and Kitsantas (2013), when there is a disconnect between instructional goals and teachers' instructional practices, students often do not learn the intended content material. In this study, the traditional instructional practices the teachers implemented appeared to detract from their instructional goals. Mr. Hugo and Lord Awesome both wanted their students to learn content area material, but instead guided them through the narrative elements of the comic. Perhaps consequently, their students did not appear to learn the content area material. Furthermore, the teachers did not appear to recognize the disconnect that occurred between their goals of students learning content area material and their instructional practices wherein they focused their questions and comments on narrative elements. For this reason, it is important for teachers to clearly articulate those goals (Barron et. al, 1998) for which they bring comics into their instructional practice in order to accomplish.

Furthermore, teachers need to be aware and reflective of the ways in which they and their students position comics when they bring comics into their classrooms. First, the way in which teachers position comics can value or devalue the medium. For example, in this study, Lord Aswesome's positioning of *comics as a medium* demonstrated an inherent value to comics as objects worthy of study. Students took up this positioning as well noting—on occasion—that images and text within comics did different things and required equal consideration during reading. However, when Lord

Awesome repositioned *comics as a traditional form of literature*, he treated comics as one of many logocentric texts in essence devaluing what he claimed to value. When teachers devalue texts or mediums that they bring into their classrooms, they run the risk implying that in class work around these texts is not as important as work that centers around more traditional texts.

In this study, teachers and students primarily positioned comics in different ways. This may account for why some of the teachers' instructional goals were not met (i.e., students simply did not see the comics as being for the purposes which the teachers selected them). For example, the students in the AP Science class primarily positioned *comics as entertainment* and did not use it as a tool to learn content area material. However, different positionings of comics and different reading stances of comics do not need to be mutually exclusive. As Lewis (2000) suggests, critical, personal, and pleasurable experiences of reading need not be divested from each other. Potentially, teachers can leverage the ways students position comics to serve the instructional needs of the classroom. In the AP Science class, the plot points the students identified as liking related to content area material. Potentially, focusing on connections between the text and the content area material alongside the narrative elements would have helped students read for information in addition to reading for pleasure.

Future Research

As I reflect on my experience doing this research, it surprised me how prevalent traditional perspective on literacy and literature were in these classrooms. As a scholar who views literacy as a social practice, reading as a transaction, and texts as multimodal, my views did not align with those that the classroom instructional practices were

grounded. Since teachers have a tendency to do what they have always done (Applebee, 1993), it is likely that researchers working from non-traditional (e.g., multiliteracies and multimodality) perspectives will do research in contexts where these traditional practices are routine. Reconciling these perspectives may prove challenging, and research that explores how these positions are reconciled around comics and other multimodal texts is needed.

Ultimately, comics are both multimodal texts and a unique medium, and we as scholars have just begun to explore the roles these texts can play in educational contexts. Much of the research focused on comics in educational settings does not take place in classrooms. What research that does take place in classroom contexts usually does not examine the instructional practices of the teacher. In some instances, it is the researchers who are teaching the class through comics or about comics rather than the teacher (e.g., Brugar, Roberts, Jiménez, & Meyer, 2018). In other instances, while the researcher does not exclusively control classroom instruction, they contribute to it significantly (e.g., Pantaleo, 2011b, 2012a). The results of these studies are overwhelmingly positive and successful, but as this study shows, the inclusion of comics in real classroom contexts is not necessarily a tidy and successful thing. In conducting future research, scholars focused on comics in educational settings should be conscious of real world contexts and the messiness that accompanies them. Presenting comics as a golden ticket that accomplishes great things in the classroom is a high pedestal for the medium to fall from. The comics themselves only bring new potentials into the classroom. It is what the teachers and the students do with them that matters.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Pre-Unit Interview

Please describe…

The unit of study and instructional plan for the unit

Your decision process or reasons for using comics in your instruction

Your instructional goals for the unit and for using comics in this particular unit

Your perspective on comics (generally)

Your personal experience with comics as a reader, a student, and/or a teacher

Mid-Unit Interview

Please describe…

What you have done in the unit of study so far

Your decision process or reasons behind X instructional move

Your experience using the comic as part of your instruction including any successes or challenges you are experiencing

Your perspective on students' reception of the comic as part of instruction

Your observations of students' interactions with the comic

Post-Unit Interview

Please describe…

How the unit culminated

Your decision process or reasons behind X instructional move

Your experience using the comic as part of your instruction including any successes or challenges you experienced

Would you do this unit again?

Changes you would make to the unit and the reasons behind those changes

Your perspective on students' reception of the comic as part of instruction

Your observations of students' interactions with the comic

APPENDIX B

CODE BOOK

Classroom Activities

Code Name	Description of Code	Example of Code
Teacher Centered Event	The teacher leads an in-class activity (typically from the front of the room) through a combination of talking to the class, asking the class questions, and showing the class information/texts. The teacher controls the pace of the activity and directs students' actions within the activity.	Mr. Hugo begins by going over some information about the dual credit partnership that the class has with ASU. He reads an email sent by the contact person to the class. The girl in the middle claims that "he is neglecting us" in reference to the ASU contact person who was supposed to visit the class the previous week. The email outlines the payment information for students who want to receive dual credit. They need to pay $500 by the end of the semester. It also explains that, more than likely, there will be no additional reductions though the contact person suggests that there may be ways for students to get funding from the college if they still can't pay for the class because of financial issues. They need a list of students who are on free and reduced lunch. Mr. Hugo suggests that if they can afford it, they pay for the class because it is significantly cheaper than normal ASU prices. He needs to know by Thursday.
Student Centered Event	A student or a group of students is responsible for completing an activity or an assignment during a designated period of time. They produce something that they are expected to turn into the teacher or share with the class.	The class comes in and sits down at their desks. They are light a few students today. Lord Awesome has the bellwork projected on the board: If a power vacuum ever arose in the U.S., how do you think it would be filled in? As the students settle, they pull out their laptops and begin to answer the question. Mrs. Flamethrower, Jude, Samalamdingdong, and Acorn Winters start discussing the question instead of writing their answers down. Jude and Mrs. Flamethrower are the only ones who don't get laptops out right away. They both snack while they chat.

Comics Focused Event	The purpose, goal, or content of the activity is directly connected comics. The specific graphic novel selected for the class or comics as a medium feature as a main discussion or reference point in order to complete the activity.	The students start drawing or talking about their stories. Lord Awesome walks around the room to check in with each student to see what they're going to write about. His first stop is Jimmy's desk. He asks what amphibian Mario and Luigi will be fighting in Jimmy's story. The internet browser is Jimmy's response.

Teacher Actions

Code Name	Description of Code	Example of Code
Demonstrates	The teacher demonstrates an action, activity, or an assignment for the whole class or an individual student to help student(s) understand what they need to do. This can take a formal "modeling" approach where the teacher specifically models an activity or can be an impromptu event inspired by a student's question.	Lord Awesome: *(while drawing a sample comic on the board)* So I tell a story of my day, on page one, I might pick honestly one giant panel ... This is my page one. And it's just me sleeping. That was the most important part of my day. Not gonna lie. Here's Heather. She's asleep. Here's me. I'm smiling, cause I'm happy. And asleep. And here's my phone, silent. But then the next one, I'm gonna focus on the phone being loud and then my eyes are gonna be red and angry. Aw man. I need some color here.
Reads Out Loud	The teacher reads something out loud to the whole class. This can include reading student answers that students submitted for bellwork, an article, or a section of the comic.	Lord Awesome: *(reads from introduction of comic)* Okay introduction: "In the second millennium, or the common era, the Islam nation was developing a civilization alongside dogma. Indo-European invaders gave their name to immense Iranian plateau where they settled. The word Iran was derived from XXX which means the origin of the Irans. These people were semi-nomads whose descendants were the XXX and the Persians. The XXX founded the first

		Iranian nation in the 7th century BC. It was later destroyed by Sirus the Great.
Answers Question	The teacher directly answers a question that is asked by a student.	Oliver Slice: So if it's that big, it doesn't need to fill it up? You don't need to put it up for like- *[he puts his hand up above his head to indicate height]* Lord Awesome: You can do a whole page. If an event was that significant to you Nick, as long as that's your purpose, you can draw it big.
Repeats/Restates Student	The teacher repeats or restates something a student said. (Restatements do not significantly alter what was originally said by the student, but might change word tenses or add a pronoun.)	The Milk: They came back for them. Mr. Hugo: They came back for them. These are loan sharks, they got beat up. Just a word of advice, never go to a loan shark for a loan. It's just a thing you shouldn't do. It doesn't end well.
Gives Feedback	The teacher gives a student, a group of students, or the class feedback on an assignment, activity, or answer. This can include both positive or negative feedback such as saying things like "good answer" or "not quite", and can include content oriented feedback such as providing ideas for an assignment or suggesting an edit to a paper.	Jude: Maybe because it's like in, like, a time of darkness, like everyone likes sympathizes with each other changed, there's no separation from people. Lord Awesome: Potentially. I mean, I think that's a more of a grieving style. Right? Like that could be true. What else could it be? Think about a time that you were profoundly in a dark space.
Tells Information	The teacher tells a student, a group of students, or the entire class information about a topic. This can be a single statement or a longer lecture. It is not an answer to a question.	Lord Awesome: You'll notice that not all of them have a gutter. It's the three in the middle that have two gutter spaces between them but there's not a gutter separating the front or the bottom. Now if we were discussing this particular page we might look at why the author choose to do that but space, colors, paneling size. Those are all features that we

		should be paying attention to because they're always done with purpose. They're not randomly selected to be that way.
Manages Classroom	The teacher performs an action for the purpose of managing or organizing the class. He explains how the day will go or be organized, gives directions or instructions for how students should participate in, perform an, or complete an activity or assignment, or performs or cues a practice for getting students attention or transitioning to a new activity.	Mr. Hugo: So you need to finish that for tomorrow so we can have a discussions on it. (11:59) Today we are going to be talking about food deserts.
Asks Question	The teacher asks a question to a specific student, a group of students, or to the whole class. This can include cold calling students individually, posing a question to the class more generally, or asking a follow up question to something a student said.	Mr. Hugo: Good, so supplies are starting to run out, people are starting to hoard. So think back to the simulation we did last week. Where you had the different amounts of points. There's plenty of it and everybody was fine to share. Then enough people started hoarding to themselves. So we see kind of echoes with that … what were some of the consequences of people starting to hoard. How did the public react?

Jude: Rioting. |

Student Actions

Code Name	Description of Code	Example of Code
Answers Question	The student directly answers a question that is asked by a student or the teacher.	Mr. Hugo: So he got the money from the loan shark, used the money to buy seeds and fertilizer and they rot. He wasn't able to grow them, so what happened to them.

		The Milk: They came back for them.
Asks Question	The student asks a question to a specific student, a group of students, or to the teacher.	Nicholas: So if it's that big, it doesn't need to fill it up? You don't need to put it up for like- [he puts his hand up above his head to indicate height] Evan: You can do a whole page. If an event was that significant to you Nick, as long as that's your purpose, you can draw it big.
Off Task	The student performs an action or activity that is not assigned or in some way sanctioned by the teacher. (This does not include students having conversations with each other while completing independent assignments.)	Yami calls to The Milk to get his attention and shows him what looks like a Pokémon card on his phone. In the front of the room, Groovy continues to fix her hair over and over and over again.
Gives Feedback	The student gives another student or a group of students feedback on an assignment, activity, or answer. This can include both positive or negative feedback such as saying things like "good answer" or "not quite", and can include content oriented feedback such as providing ideas for an assignment or suggesting an edit to a paper.	Acorn Winters returns to his seat and gets his comic out. He hands it Samalamadingdong who looks over it and comments on the art and the storyline.
Makes Comment	The student makes a comment about any topic that is not prompted by a question or functions as feedback.	Mrs. Flamethrower: We are writing poems for our … Lord Awesome.
Reads	The student reads a text of some sort either silently to themselves, out loud to others, or collaboratively with others.	A few students begin to flip through the pages of the graphic novel just before Mr. Hugo tells them to take a look at it. He paces the aisle flipping through the book as he settles on what to assign them to read for tonight. He

		settles on chapters 1 and 2. Pixie and The Milk begin to read.
Writes	The student writes as part of a class activity.	At the three-minute warning, the click and clack of computer keys speeds up as the students finally turn their attention to the writing assignment—summarizing chapters 4, 5, and 6.
Draws Comic	The student draws a comic as part of a class activity.	Olive Slice begins to draw on his paper. Lord Awesome inquires as to why he is using gutters. Olive Slice tells him that "it just looks better" which leads to a conversation about whether or not authors/illustrators are always making decisions to achieve an effect or if sometimes they do things just because it looks good.
Collaborates on Comic	The student's action directly involves working with another student in some way on the production of a comic. This includes giving feedback on another student's comic or providing draw assistance.	Acorn Winters passes his comic to Jimmy and asks Jimmy to draw an enemy with "anime eyes". Jimmy complies.

Comics Use/Positioning

Code Name	Description of Code	Example of Code
Comic as Tool	The teacher or the student positions the comic as a tool to be used to accomplish a goal. This is done through talk, use, or action.	Jude, Mrs. Flamethrower, The Milk, and Pixie all have copies of the comic open on their desks to reference while they complete their bellwork assignment.
Comic as a Form of Traditional Literature	The teacher or the student positions the comic as a piece of literature or a text that is literary in nature. This is done through talk, use, or action that addresses the comic as a narrative or comprised of literary elements.	Mr. Hugo: I mean I'm not a literature person. I'm just trying to come up with 'how do I facilitate a discussion about something—about literature'—was not something I knew or had training about, so that was kind of difficult to—'Ah, so what does that mean or why would he make this choice?' Then being met with a

		couple of blank stares or the one kid who always kinda talks talks and then OK now what, so that was probably the hardest part.
Comic as Medium	The teacher or the student positions the comic as a unique medium. This is done through talk, use, or action about image, design, or comic convention.	Lord Awesome: You'll notice that not all of them have a gutter. It's the three in the middle that have two gutter spaces between them but there's not a gutter separating the front or the bottom. Now if we were discussing this particular page we might look at why the author choose to do that but space, colors, paneling size. Those are all features that we should be paying attention to because they're always done with purpose. They're not randomly selected to be that way.
Comic as Entertainment	The teacher or the student positions the comics a source of entertainment or enjoyment. This is done through talk, use, or action.	Mama Bear turns to her partner and asks "have you read it yet?". The other girl shakes her head no. "It's really good," Mama Bear tells her. Samurai Joe turns around in his seat. "I'm really enjoying it so far." From across the room, Lord Awesome overhears this conversation and adds "me, too."

Topics/Subjects Discussed

Code Name	Description of Code	Example of Code
Narrative	The teacher or the student asks a question, answers a question, makes a comment, or tells information about a narrative aspect of the comic (e.g., plot, character, setting, etc.)	Jude: Also, her grandma, when they go to the airport, she doesn't come with them. (Describes plots.)
Image/Comic Convention	The teacher or the student asks a question, answers a question, makes a comment, or tells information about an image or a comic	Lord Awesome: And so that's what you see. And so the border will end right here [he points to the image on the screen with his finger tracing the traditional border edge.] but the arch continues outward. A good

	convention (e.g., border, gutter, panel, etc.) that is in the comic.	way that it was explained to me in college was that it was like breaking the forth wall. So it's reaching out. It's exceeding the limitations.
Content Area Material	The teacher or the student asks a question, answers a question, makes a comment, or tells information about content area material. (In the AP science class, this includes material about food sustainability. In the AP English class, this includes material related to traditional English Language Arts topics (e.g., symbolism) and material related to the teacher's goal of familiarizing students with the context of the Middle East.)	Lord Awesome: Uh, that's because it was broadcast or seeing that broadcast through the Spanish channel. Do you notice it's also like the, like the Persian Gulf is [crosstalk 00:04:58]. Okay. Good. So, that's what we have so far. We have this little girl who's brought up in a very tumultuous time in Iran with the Islamic Revolution and the War with Iraq, which was a war that the Islamic Revolution needed, right? Like she says there like we would later learn that like to sustain this war just to give legitimacy to their power. And so it's hard for her growing up, and it's hard for her parents who, at first, wanted the revolution, but then when they see who comes into power, they're like, "Maybe not. Maybe not so much." It was a lot more severe as we see through the illustrations.
Author's Purpose	The teacher or the student asks a question, answers a question, makes a comment, or tells information about the author's purpose.	Mr. Hugo: They think the food is running out. So those first two chapters. So lets talk a little about why the author in writing this. So this is a fictionalized account. So it takes place in 2025, in about 8 years. What do you think the authors purpose of this is? You're saying something under your breath.
Personal Experience	The teacher or the student asks a question, answers a question, makes a comment, or tells information about themselves or a personal experience.	Lord Awesome: It does smell good. My grandma loves the smell of gasoline. Whenever I smell gas I think of my grandma. [crosstalk 00:19:32] Alright. So, since Acorn Winters doesn't have any memories, let's call on somebody else. Scent

		triggered to memory. Mrs. Flamethrower? The Milk: She's the one who likes food. Mrs. Flamethrower: There's a lot of them. The most strong one is probably ... Almost everyone in here has had a love one die around them, right? You know the smell of death? Not like, they're actually dead yet, but you can feel it coming.
Assignment/Activity	The teacher or the student asks a question, answers a question, makes a comment, or tells information about an assignment or an activity.	Jude: What's the prompt?
Comics World	The teacher or the student asks a question, answers a question, makes a comment, or tells information about the great comics' landscape.	Lord Awesome explains a theory about the Justice League to Olive Slice and Samurai Joe that he read on the internet. They are skeptical. It is a time travel scenario where Batman travels back in time and kills his own parents in order to set the series of events into motion that turn him into Batman because the Justice League needs him to be Batman.
Other	The teacher or the student asks a question, answers a question, makes a comment, or tells information about any other topic.	Lord Awesome, Olive Slice, and Samurai Joes start talking about a TV show that Olive Slice just watched on Netflix.

Student Likes/Dislikes

Code Name	Description of Code	Example of Code
Likes	The student expresses a positive feeling toward an activity, assignment, text, or experience. This	Mako Tsunami liked it (the comic). He likes reading comics (in general) but specifically he explains to me

	is indicated through positive oriented words such as like, fun, happy, and so on.	that "When they were talking about the geography, that was really cool."
Dislikes	The student expresses a negative feeling toward an activity, assignment, text, or experience. This is indicated through negative oriented words such as dislike, hate, bored, annoyed, and so on.	Yami: I don't like reading that much.