Student engagement within the use of graphic novels

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Abstract
Student engagement in novels is a key factor in whether or not a student can be successful in reading. The purpose of this study was to analyze student engagement with graphic novels and traditional novels, and to describe any preferences students had when selecting novels to read independently. The study was centered around two questions: How does the reading of graphic novels impact the level of reading engagement? Do students prefer the use of graphic novels over traditional novels within their own independent reading? The study consisted of interviewing eleven sixth grade students about a graphic novel that they picked to read over the course of four weeks. The intent of this study was to see how graphic novels compared to traditional novels, in terms of reading engagement and student preference. It was found that participants preferred reading graphic novels over traditional novels, and that participants could remember overall plot details of their graphic novels, but could not remember specific character details.
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITHIN THE USE OF GRAPHIC NOVELS

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has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts.

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<th>Date Approved</th>
<th>Joan Bessman Taylor, PhD. - Graduate Faculty First Reader</th>
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ABSTRACT

Student engagement in novels is a key factor in whether or not a student can be successful in reading. The purpose of this study was to analyze student engagement with graphic novels and traditional novels, and to describe any preferences students had when selecting novels to read independently. The study was centered around two questions: How does the reading of graphic novels impact the level of reading engagement? Do students prefer the use of graphic novels over traditional novels within their own independent reading? The study consisted of interviewing eleven sixth grade students about a graphic novel that they picked to read over the course of four weeks. The intent of this study was to see how graphic novels compared to traditional novels, in terms of reading engagement and student preference. It was found that participants preferred reading graphic novels over traditional novels, and that participants could remember overall plot details of their graphic novels, but could not remember specific character details.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Walking through the stacks within the library, I overhear my students browse books with a dismissive attitude. Two boys (6th graders) are reading over the back cover of a copy of *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan. After a minute of further discussion and debate, they decide to put the book back, and they continue to walk the stacks in search of something to satisfy their requirement of finding a work for independent reading. I asked the boys what they did not like about *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, and the boys replied that they found the idea of Greek mythology boring. I gave the suggestion of reading the first few pages to see if they might change their minds, but the boys still said they were not interested. I decided to let them continue to wander, and some time later I found them together again by the graphic novels. This time the boys were discussing *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. They were flipping through the pages, and discussing the different pictures and all of the color. The boys then came forward and asked if they could each check out a copy of the graphic novel, to which I replied “yes”. At that point, I asked them why they preferred *American Born Chinese* over *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, as both contain elements of mythology. The boys replied that the graphic novel seemed more appealing because of the design and all of the colors.

**Problem Statement**

It is common knowledge that some students may struggle to engage in school, and more specifically, with the texts used in school. Student engagement is defined as, “the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show
when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education” (Student Engagement, 2014). With regard to reading, this definition applies to students being curious when selecting books based on their passions and interests, an activity that can be intimidating for students who have an aversion to reading. However, when presented with choice, student engagement can grow, as students begin to value their own thoughts and interests and apply those to their work (Fraumeni-McBride, 2017).

**Reading Motivation**

When students see the value in something they are working on, or when they are engaged within a lesson or a text, their motivation to do well increases. According to Anmarkrud and Braten (2009), “Good comprehenders are knowledgeable and strategic readers. However, comprehension of challenging text seems to require not only cognition but also motivation” (para. 1). The authors also demonstrated that if students are not motivated to read a novel, then their engagement within the novel and subsequent assignments will falter (para. 25). Furthermore, the authors explained that motivation is critical for any students wanting to be successful in any assignment, including reading (para. 25).

**Reluctant Readers**

When students come into school with a negative disposition toward reading, it can cause students to be reluctant to try anything new with their reading. According to Afton Schwertner’s study, *Motivating Reluctant Readers through Graphic Novels*, “There were those [students] who were reluctant to read anything and those reluctant to read anything school related or recommended” (Schwertner, 2008). Students who are reluctant to read
class assigned novels will ultimately lack motivation to complete school work, as their engagement within lessons will dwindle. Reading is supposed to aid students in gaining further knowledge and in inquiry. However, if a student is reluctant to read, then they will ultimately be reluctant to learn.

Summary of Problem Statement

As educators and librarians, we need to give students every opportunity to be successful and engaged when it comes to reading independent books. The inclusion of graphic novels among the works from which students are permitted to choose for independent reading may be a means to increasing student engagement in reading.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze student engagement with graphic novels and traditional novels, and describe any preferences students have when selecting independent novels.

Research Questions

1. How does the reading of graphic novels impact the level of reading engagement?
2. Do students prefer the use of graphic novels over traditional novels within their own independent reading?

Assumptions and Limitations

The researcher is only analyzing data from one class of 6th grade students within one middle school in Illinois. Every middle school in the State offers a selection of graphic novels within their school library.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to analyze student engagement with graphic novels and traditional novels and any student preferences when selecting independent novels. Previous studies can be viewed as relevant to this current study and were grouped into three subthemes: student engagement in reading, student perception of reading novels for independent reading, and student engagement with reading graphic novels for independent reading. These three subthemes were relevant to this study, as they provided research to help formulate the current study.

Student Engagement Within Reading

Ivey and Johnston (2015) focused on studying eighth grade students’ engagement in reading shifts based on their teachers’ willingness to adapt their instruction. More specifically, the research involved four teachers who volunteered to instruct their lessons with the goal of having more engaged students. Ivey and Johnston stated “Research on student engagement has been grounded in a cognitive perspective with a social dimension added on as a fertile context for inducing intellectual engagement and consequent academic achievement,” (para. 5). Their research questions included, “what are the historical processes through which teaching activities are transformed, and how do these transformations affect the classroom activity system?” and, “In what ways are students and teachers transformed and transformative within the relational engagements of the classroom?” (para. 3). The methodology consisted of four eighth-grade teachers in one public school along with 258 eighth-graders. Ivey and Johnston used teacher interviews, student interviews, and observations to gather data for the study. The results of the study
showed that when students selected their own books they became emotionally engaged and the students wanted to discuss their books with fellow classmates and teachers (para. 44).

Using similar methods as the aforementioned study, Barone and Barone (2018) conducted a qualitative study that centered around whether students read more when they had access to any book of choice and whether students called themselves readers because of having the option to choose their books (p. 21). They posed the question, “How can teachers develop students who love reading, so they can enjoy print and digital text, when most read minimally in and out of school?” (p. 22) to drive their study. Essentially, the study focused on student engagement with reading, with the condition that students got to choose the books for their own independent reading. Participants included 30 fourth-grade students who provided descriptions of reading identities along with what genres they read, books they read, and statements of the volume each student read (p. 24). The results of the study indicated that 27 students improved to above grade-level for fluency (p. 28). Barone and Barone’s study showed that student choice lead to better engagement in reading, and that choice also led students to become more willing readers.

In the same way, Neugebauer’s (2014) study focused on students being intrinsically motivated to read; “being motivated to engage in a reading activity for its own sake or because of curiosity or interest” (p. 391). The researcher questioned, “Are students’ current reading motivations associated with teacher’s perception of students’ behavioral engagement in reading?” (p. 394). Neugebauer studied how motivation and engagement correlated with students’ abilities to be successful with the school setting. The researcher’s participants consisted of 140 middle school students, from 15 middle
schools. The researcher utilized a motivation questionnaire to gather qualitative data. The results of Neugebauer’s study showed that there was no correlation between teacher reports with student ratings of motivation. This meant that it was difficult for teachers to observe how engaged students were when it came to their independent reading. These studies shared a perspective with this current study, as student engagement, with individual book choice, is a key component to the overall study.

**Student Perception of Reading Novels for Independent Reading**

Student engagement is only one component of this study. Another subtheme presented within this study focused on student perceptions of reading. McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, and Meyer (2012) focused on analyzing students’ attitudes about reading, and to explain certain attitudes towards academic and independent reading (para. 34). McKenna et al. asked, “Do middle school reading attitudes differ for recreational and academic purposes?” (para. 35) as the main question of their study. Their research participants consisted of 913 middle and high school students (para. 40-45) who were administered a survey that contained 32 questions. The students’ teachers volunteered to give the survey by using scripts provided by McKenna et al. (para. 45). The results of the study showed that as students grew older, their attitudes towards recreational reading declined; students became less likely to enjoy reading recreationally as they got older (para. 67). Consequently, students’ motivation to read may decline as well.

In similar fashion, Coddington and Guthrie (2009) centered on students’ motivation to read, and whether or not girls differed from boys in relation to reading motivation. The researchers’ purpose of the study was to understand the relationship
between reading motivation and gender (p. 226). The research question the researchers asked was, “To what extent do student and teacher perceptions illustrate different levels of motivation and are these levels related to gender?” (p. 230). Coddington and Guthrie had 84 participants (40 boys and 44 girls), who were in first grade. The students spanned across eight classrooms and two elementary schools (p. 231). The researchers used the, “Young Reader Motivation Questionnaire,” to collect qualitative data on students’ perceptions of reading (p. 232). Students were interviewed individually by the researchers. The study’s results included that if students found a book difficult, then their motivation to read went down (p. 245). Furthermore, Coddington and Guthrie found that girls perceived themselves as more willing readers than boys (p. 246).

In like manner, a study conducted by Smith, Smith, Gilmore, and Jameson (2012) had a purpose of finding out if reading achievement is based on reading motivation, and how students perceive themselves as readers (p. 202). The researchers used the question, “What are the relationships among self-efficacy in reading, reading enjoyment, and reading achievement in samples of 8-9 and 12-13 years old students?” (p. 203), as the main research question for their study. Smith et al. included participants who consisted of 480 third graders and 480 seventh graders (p. 203). These students were pulled from over 280 schools within New Zealand. The researchers used the National Education Monitoring Programme (NEMP) as a guide for their research, and conducted one-to-one interviews that were videotaped for the purpose of the study (p. 203). The results showed that reading enjoyment declined from third grade to seventh grade. However, the researchers also noted that the students did not have a strong sense of their own reading abilities (p. 206). These studies help to inform the current study by providing an
understanding of student perceptions of reading, and how they might influence choices made related to independent reading.

**Student Engagement with Reading Graphic Novels for Independent Reading**

The final sub-theme presented within this study centered around student engagement and graphic novels. Jennings, Rule, and Vander Zanden’s (2014) study examined the efficacy of graphic novels compared to other forms of novels, and it compared those forms in terms of student interest and comprehension (p. 258). Jennings et al. had a research question that centered around how students’ perceived comprehension, interest, and enjoyment varied between graphic novels, picture books, and traditional novels (p. 259). The researchers answered this question by having 24 fifth grade students (13 male and 11 female) read selections from all three forms of writing (p. 262). Students completed journals, discussions, creative projects, and surveys during and after reading their selected novels (p. 262). The results of the study showed that the majority of students preferred reading graphic novels based on their interest and enjoyment (p. 267). Furthermore, student comprehension was greater when students read graphic novels versus the picture books or traditional novels. (p. 267).

In like manner, Gavigan’s (2011) study investigated using graphic novels as a tool to help improve reading motivation and engagement in struggling male readers (para. 3). The researcher questioned whether graphic novels could be a valuable literacy format for engaging students in reading (para. 3). The study’s participants consisted of four male eighth grade students, who were low-level readers (para. 7). Gavigan had the students select graphic novels of their choosing, and after 20 minutes of SSR (Sustained Silent Reading), Gavigan had the students discuss their novels (para. 8). The researcher used the
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) to interview the students and their teachers (para. 11). Gavingan’s results showed that the students’ showed improvements in reading engagement, motivation, and vocabulary after choosing to read graphic novels (para. 15).

Likewise, Edward (2009) had the purpose of seeing if graphic novels would be a valuable tool for motivating students to read (p. 56). The research question that was the main focus of Edwards’s study asked if reading graphic novels during “free voluntary reading” (FVR) would change student engagement and comprehension (p. 56). Edwards’s participants were 148 seventh grade students (51% male and 49% female), who were permitted to self-select graphic novels for FVR (p. 57). The researcher had the students complete the Motivation toward Reading Questionnaire (MTRQ) before and after reading their graphic novels, and the researcher also completed interviews with each student after reading their novels (p. 57). Students reported that they understood more of their novel, and that they were able to successfully answer more questions about their novel due to being more engaged and motivated to read (p. 58). However, the data did not show statistical significance in terms of vocabulary skills (p. 57). The previous three studies help inform the current study in terms of understanding the use of graphic novels within students’ independent reading time, and how having the choice to read a graphic novel could improve student motivation.

**Literature Review Summary**

In summation, these studies have shown how student engagement in reading can have benefits for a student’s willingness to read (Ivey & Johnston, 2015; Barone & Barone, 2018; Neugebauer, 2014), how a student’s perception of reading can help
improve independent reading, based on student input and choice (McKenna et. al., 2012; Coddington & Guthrie, 2009; Smith et. al., 2012), and how student engagement with reading graphic novels can have benefits in independent reading, also based on student input and choice (Jennings et. al., 2014; Gavigan, 2011; Edwards, 2009). These studies provide this researcher with tools to guide the current research. Previous studies used student interviews, teacher-led surveys, AMRP interviews, student journals, and MTRQ interviews to gather data to help answer their research questions. After reviewing the literature, this researcher will use similar techniques to help gather data for her own research, focusing on answering the research questions stated earlier in this paper.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Prior studies revealed that there is a need for qualitatively analyzing student perceptions of graphic novels within the context of their own independent reading. The purpose of this study is to analyze student engagement with graphic novels and traditional novels, and any preferences students have when selecting independent novels. The researcher focused on the following research questions: Does student engagement increase with the use of graphic novels within the classroom? Do students prefer graphic novels over traditional novels for their own independent reading?

Research Design

The current study is a qualitative case study. As defined by Wildemuth (2017), a case study is, “A description of a particular situation or event” (p. 52). Wildemuth (2017) also describes qualitative study stating, “The flexibility of this research strategy and its incorporation of a rich array of data collection techniques” (p. 58). It is the combination of these two approaches that provides the design for this research. It is true that a qualitative case study has its weaknesses: “The lack of generalizability of the study findings is the weakness of case studies” (p. 55). My research will be useful through its generation of specific data, focused on reading engagement and student opinions. However, this design is appropriate for the current study given that “the strength is the flexibility of this research strategy and its incorporations of a rich array of data collection techniques” (p. 58). By collecting and studying students’ perceptions, a case study will benefit the overall research. Students have individual opinions, thoughts, and feelings.

Participants
The participants in this study consist of 11 sixth grade students who attend a middle school in Illinois. Students are from a typical sixth grade ELA class and volunteered for the study by signing consent forms along with their parents. These students are 11 or 12 years-old and are of mixed abilities, meaning that the students range from low-readers to higher-level readers based on their MAP assessment scores. The participant sample is in this study make sense for the overall research, as the research is based around student perceptions on reading and on reading graphic novels.

Procedures

Data Sources

Over the course of this four week study, the researcher conducted individual structured interviews, along with unstructured interviews, (Wildemuth, 2017). The researcher conducted the interviews, as doing so is a strength for the data collection process, as stated in Wildemuth (2017), “It is generally preferable that the interviewers present himself or herself as a learner, a friend, and a member of the interviewee’s group” (p. 241). Participants were 6th grade students in the researcher’s classroom. The use of various types of interviews and questioning (individual structured interviews, focus group, and Google Form response) helped deter any student fear of teacher bias, as students had a variety of ways they could respond to questions. Furthermore, within the school’s curriculum are lessons about sharing opinions on various topics, which the students have been taught before the study began. This allowed for a more comfortable setting for the students to openly share their opinions. The questions the researcher asked were based upon the graphic novels selected by the students during scheduled book checkout time within the school library (Appendix A).
The other method the researcher used to collect data was a focus group, (Wildemuth 2017). The focus group took place during Silent Reading Time within the researcher’s classroom. At the start of the four-week span of the study, the researcher conducted individual structured interviews with each of the 11 participants and asked the student participants six questions (see Appendix A). The researcher then asked another five questions half-way through the span of the study in the form of a focus group, which contained all 11 participants. The researcher asked these questions (see Appendix B) to allow the participants to respond in an open response. Wildemuth (2017) confirms this by stating, “The social nature mimics the setting in which people often form their opinions and attitudes” (p. 258). Having someone else with whom to exchange ideas might spark a more solid discussion amongst the participants. Once the four-week period was over, the researcher posed another series of questions (see Appendix C) and the students answered the questions by filling out a Google Form. This is also where students provided a final recommendation of their graphic novel. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews, focus group session, and Google Form into a Google Doc.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher used qualitative analysis of content (p. 319) to analyze the data provided by the individual structured interviews and focus group. This analysis of data is part of a “process designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inferences and interpretation” (p. 319). The researcher reviewed interview discussions and answers provided by the students and used the transcripts to interpret the responses into quality data. This researcher prepared the data; the transcripts from the various questions, focus group responses, and Google Form responses (p. 320). According to
Wildemuth, the researcher needed to decide on how much of the interviews needed to be transcribed (p. 320), so the researcher decided to transcribe statements that the participants made about their graphic novel that were clear, provided their opinion, and were elaborated on when asked to do so. After coding the transcripts, the researcher needed to “draw conclusions from the coded data” (p. 322). This researcher’s individual structured interview questions, focus group questions, and Google Form questions were derived from the study of Smith et. al (2012), in terms of student opinions and input on reading and engagement, and from the study of Gavigan (2011), in terms of basing questions around student selection of graphic novels and how graphic novels affect student perception on reading.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study included the limited number of participants, and the fact that participants are all from one school within one school district. Furthermore, as stated in Wildemuth (2017), “Your choice of moderator is one of the three most important decisions you will make” (p. 260). I will be the one conducting the focus group, which caused some hesitation during the initial interview process, as participants were nervous to speak with a moderator (this researcher) who was also one of their teachers. Finally, the data was collected during a four-week period, and only reflected on what students were thinking during that short time period.
Prior studies revealed that there is a need for qualitatively analyzing student perception of graphic novels as independent reading. The purpose of this study was to analyze students’ reading engagement with graphic novels and with traditional novels, and any preferences students had when selecting novels for reading independently. Study data was derived from interviews and focus groups. Participants in the study were 11 sixth grade students, who participated in individual structured interviews and a focus group with the researcher, and participants answered questions through a Google Form, where they openly discussed their views on reading their graphic novels.

**Student Reading Engagement**

The first research question this study focused on answering was: How does the reading of graphic novels impact the level of reading engagement? The participants in this study answered questions in an individual structured interview setting with the researcher prior to selecting their graphic novels. The results are in Table 1.

Table 1

*Initial Individual Structured Interviews*

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<th>Question Asked</th>
<th>Data from Student Responses - Individual Structured Interviews</th>
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| 1. Describe yourself as a reader. | 8 (73%) participants described themselves as readers, in terms of willingness to read when required.  
3 (27%) participants described themselves as a “non-reader,” meaning they try to avoid reading as much as possible.                                                                                                                                               |
2. How much do you like reading at school, when it is done independently? 10 (91%) participants prefer to read independently while at school, instead of reading in groups or as a class.

3. Do you choose to read in your own time? 7 (64%) participants stated that they do read on their own time.

4. Have you ever read a graphic novel? 11 (100%) participants had read a graphic novel before the start of this study.

5. How do graphic novels compare to other materials you have read? 11 (100%) participants stated a common theme of graphic novels being quicker to read, along with being easier to read as well.

6. Would you choose a graphic novel for independent reading? 9 (82%) participants said they would choose to read a graphic novel for independent reading.

When reviewing the initial individual structured interviews with the participants, all of them have said that they have read a graphic novel previously. However, when given the choice, not all of them would select to read a graphic novel for independent reading. Participant 5 stated, “I don’t like how it’s very little writing, because [like] it may not explain everything all at once,” meaning that this student (and others) preferred having more words to read, as the words would give them more information than the pictures would. With that being said, the majority of the participants stated they preferred graphic novels because they can, “see what is going on,” within the story, and the pictures, “help explain the plot better, because of the images.” This means that the majority of participants found graphic novels to be more engaging, as they could comprehend the plot more due to the aid of pictures and other graphics.

The researcher then conducted a focus group interview with all participants in the office of the school library, asking a series of five questions (Appendix B), and letting the students discuss their thoughts and opinions about their graphic novels freely. When it
came to engagement within the reading of their graphic novel a majority of the participants stated that they felt they were more engaged in their graphic novel, compared to traditional novels that they have read in the past. As Participant 2 explained, “The pictures make it easier to understand the setting. I get a visual of the where the book is placed, and that helps me.” When the participants were asked what they liked about reading their graphic novel, all participants expressed that they enjoyed the genre of graphic novel they have chosen. Many (55%) of participants chose to read historical books (a mix of nonfiction and fiction). When asked why they chose that particular genre, those participants expressed that besides the pictures, the details helped to explain adult themes to younger readers; Participant 7 stated, “It explains more for younger readers...Usually WWII movies I can’t watch, because...you know, so I can read about WWII in a graphic novel and understand more.”

At the end of the study, participants were asked to give their final input and opinions about their graphic novels. Participants answered questions through a Google Form that was posted on their Google Classroom page. The results are in Table 2.

Table 2

*End of Study Google Form Responses*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question Asked</th>
<th>Sample Student Responses from Google Form</th>
<th>Data from Student Responses (tallies may include multiple responses from each student)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What was your graphic novel about?</td>
<td>“My graphic novel is about world war 1, world war 2, and the nam war and in every one of them is about a dog in war and them taking care of the dog”. “My graphic novel was about world war 2”</td>
<td>6 participants selected a historical graphic novel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“My graphic novel was about how not just Helen Keller having a hard time but also the person who taught her everything that she knows today.”

5 of those historical novels were about WWII.

2 of the participants chose a realistic fiction graphic novel.

1 participant selected a biography graphic novel.

2. What specific details do you remember about the plot?

“That the Vietnam war started when the French colonist were overthrown by a communist backed north Vietnam.”

“I remember seeing what Helen sees and how she feels everything and how her teacher, Annie Sullivan had a really hard past life. The thing I most remembered was Annie being in a mental hospital/orphanage and her brother leaving her there to go to a family.”

11 participants remembered the setting of their graphic novel, and overall plot.

9 participants could not remember specific character names.

3. What about the graphic novel helped you to remember those details?

“The pictures helped a lot to process any ideas i could've thought or forgot.”

“The pictures and some quotes”

“I knew when it was flashing back to her child life and I knew that because it was her as a child and I feel like if it was a regular novel I wouldn't be able to tell.”

10 participants said the pictures helped them the most.

1 participant said the descriptive feelings of the character helped the most.

4. Did you enjoy the graphic novel?

“Yes I enjoyed it because it explained a lot about roller derby which I didn't even know was a thing! Another thing I liked was that it talked about friendships that can drift apart and that that's okay.”

“I did like my story because it was really visual and I could tell what Helen was seeing.”

11 participants stated they enjoyed their novel.
| 5. Would you read a graphic novel in the future for your own independent reading? | “Yes I enjoyed it because I like the pictures and the action that was in the book” | 8 participants said they would read a graphic novel again.  
3 participants said they would not read a graphic novel again. |
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<td></td>
<td>“Yes because they are more fun than a chapter books because they have images the help me understand more detail and the plot”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Yes, I would read a graphic novel in my future, I would read one because it is an easy read and I personally like reading graphic novels better than regular novels because you can see what is happening and not have to look back at the book because they didn't use a lot of detail.”</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>“No, I would not because it is not into much depth as the novel that don't have graphics.”</td>
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</table>
| 6. Would you recommend your graphic novel to others? | “Yes I would because if people want to learn more about how the war started and it is action packed” | 10 participants would recommend their graphic novel to others.  
1 participant said they would not recommend their graphic novel. |
| | “Yes, I would, because you can visualize what Helen saw and it is very interesting to see Annie's childhood.” | |
| | “No because a lot of people have already read it.” | |

When reviewing the data from the Google Form responses, the majority of participants were engaged with their graphic novel, as they were able to remember plot details by the end of the study. It was interesting to see, however, that participants did struggle to remember names of characters, including main ones. When asked what helped the participants remember the plot of their graphic novel, the majority (91%) of participants said it was the use of the pictures in their graphic novel that helped them to remember; Participant 4 wrote, “The pictures helped a lot to process any ideas [1]
could've thought or forgot.” The Participant 11 explained that the, “Descriptive feelings of the characters that the author wrote,” helped to keep her engaged with her novel.

**Preference of Graphic Novels for Independent Reading**

The second research question asked: Do students prefer the use of graphic novels over traditional novels within their own independent reading? Within the initial individual structured interviews, the majority of participants stated that they would prefer to read independently while at school, instead of in a group or as a class. When questioned about why they would prefer to read on their own, participants shared the common opinion of being able to go at their own pace, and having the option of reading ahead. As Participant 1 said, “I like doing it on my own time, because it’s easier for me to read, instead of getting assigned different chapters.” Participants preferred to read at a pace that they dictated, rather than at a pace that is assigned to them by either a teacher or a group’s ability. Furthermore, participants showed that they would prefer a graphic novel over traditional novels when it came to independent reading. As stated earlier, most of the participants cited the fact that the pictures are the main reason as to why, “Umm...well...I like that they have pictures, because normal books wouldn’t have pictures to show what the characters look like,” stated by Participant 8.

During the focus group interview, when participants were asked, “Do you enjoy reading this novel over others you have read?” (Appendix B), roughly 60% of participants stated that they did. As Participant 3 stated, “Books with no pictures get boring. Graphic novels make me want to read more.” For the participants that expressed they did not enjoy reading a graphic novel over a traditional chapter book, they explained that they felt details were missing that traditional chapter books contained. Participant 9
explained, “Graphic novels show a blank image...They lack the details that an author usually gives in a chapter book.”

Referencing the data in Table 2, all of the participants stated that they enjoyed reading their graphic novel. They described that they enjoyed having the pictures to reference, and that the stories were good. A majority (73%) of the participants said they would want to read a graphic novel again, while 27% said they would not want to, because they prefer having more details and words. However, when asked if they would recommend their graphic novel to anyone 91% of participants said they would recommend their novel to others. The remaining participant only said no because, “a lot of people already read it.” This means that that particular graphic novel was already popular among other students.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Student engagement in novels is a key factor to whether or not a student can be successful with reading. The purpose of this study was to analyze student engagement with graphic novels and traditional novels and to describe any preferences students had when selecting independent novels. The study was centered around two questions: How does the reading of graphic novels impact the level of reading engagement? Do students prefer the use of graphic novels over traditional novels within their own independent reading? The study consisted of interviewing 11 sixth grade students about a graphic novel that they picked to read over the course of a four-week span. The intent of this study was to see how graphic novels compared to traditional novels, in terms of reading engagement and preference. It was found that 73% of participants preferred reading graphic novels over traditional novels, and that 100% of participants could remember overall plot details of their graphic novels, but 81% could not remember specific character details.

Conclusions

Over the course of the four week study, participants got to read a graphic novel of their choosing. The researcher asked questions at the start of the study, in the middle, and at the end. The questions were asked (in order) during an individual structured interview, a focus group, and through the use of a Google Form. At the end of the study, it was found that the majority of students were engaged by their graphic novels, as 100% said they enjoyed their graphic novel and were able to remember and report on the overall plot of their graphic novels, including the conflict of the story. Some participants did struggle
with reporting back character names, but could still give descriptions of feelings, emotions, and character development for their graphic novels. The students that stated they struggled with staying engaged claimed it was due to lack of written details that would normally be found in a traditional novel.

When looking at whether participants preferred the use of graphic novels over traditional novels, 73% of participants would prefer to read a graphic novel for independent use over a traditional novel. Participants claimed that graphic novels were easier to understand, due to the pictures, and they were easier to read due to the smaller word count, and correlating pictures. However, 27% of participants that said they would not want to read another graphic novel for independent reading preferred traditional novels, as those types of novels had more details and description from the author. The overall conclusion of the study is that many participants were more engaged with their reading while reading a graphic novel, and they said they would prefer to read a graphic novel over traditional novels, when it came to their own independent reading.

**Recommendations**

Improving student reading engagement is an important undertaking. With that being said, based on previous research as well as this study’s data and results, this researcher makes the following suggestions for future research and studies. Having participants read not only a graphic novel, but also reading and responding to a traditional novel of their choosing would provide more comparison data, and would help expand upon the data from previous research. Also, having a larger pool of participants, or even comparing different levels of students, would help to differentiate the data in future studies.
Furthermore, having students complete a formative response assessment that would explain their opinion about their graphic novel, would help show a clearer level of student engagement. This formative response could be compared to other graphic novels, or even traditional novels that the participants have read previously. This formative response would also help to gather data about clearer preference of graphic novels versus traditional novels. It would help to explain further why students may prefer graphic novels over traditional novels. This would help teachers and librarians determine not only what graphic novels to buy, but what genre, story, or author to purchase as well.

When looking at the larger picture of how teachers might best encourage student reading, it is strongly suggested that teachers allow their students to not only choose their own novels for independent reading, but to also allow students the option of selecting graphic novels as well. Even teachers who are not traditional English teachers should take into consideration how they can use graphic novels within their own classroom, as students do engage more with that type of text, which can help students engage more with a lesson or unit. Teacher librarians should also take note of the fact that more and more students want to read graphic novels, as those types of novels are becoming more prominent in the genres of historical fiction and nonfiction. This recommendation is consistent with the study conducted by Edward (2009), who found that students showed an increase in motivation to read when they were allowed to select a graphic novel. The library should help promote new genres of graphic novels that are being published and should help explain to students, teachers, and parents how graphic novels contain details that can help students comprehend more and stay engaged more with the text. The findings of this study show that students engage with text in different ways, and
providing different types of texts can help foster student enjoyment and engagement within reading.
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APPENDIX A

INDIVIDUAL STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions, focus group questions, and Google Form questions were derived from Smith et. al (2012) and Gavigan (2011). Questions from Appendix A were asked at the start of the study in an individual structured interview.

1. Describe yourself as a reader
2. How much do you like reading at school, when it is done independently?
3. Do you choose to read in your own time?
4. Have you ever read a graphic novel?
5. How do graphic novels compare to other materials you have read?
6. Would you choose a graphic novel for independent reading?
APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus group/unstructured interview questions that will be asked once, half-way through the span of the study.

1. Do you feel that you are a good reader when you read graphic novels?

2. Do you feel that you engage more with the story because you are reading a graphic novel?

3. What do you like about reading your graphic novel?

4. Do you enjoy reading this novel over others you have read?

5. Are you enjoying independent reading more because you are reading a graphic novel?
APPENDIX C

GOOGLE FORM QUESTIONS

Questions that will be asked after the span for the study is conducted. Students will answer in Google Form posted on Google Classroom.

1. What was your graphic novel about?
2. What specific details do you remember about the plot?
3. What about the graphic novel helped you to remember those details?
4. Did you enjoy the graphic novel?
5. Would you read a graphic novel in the future for your own independent reading?
6. Would you recommend your graphic novel to others?