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Characterizing protagonists in graphic novels for teens

Danielle Lahr
University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to utilize qualitative content analysis to examine the main characters in teen graphic novels from 2018. This study is designed to analyze the main protagonist in graphic novels to find patterns to help secondary librarians and teachers choose graphic novels that will appeal to students in grades 9-12. Three questions this study asks are: 1)What traits make a compelling protagonist for high schoolers? 2)Are there any traits shared between protagonists in graphic novels? And 3)What roles do protagonists of graphic novels play in the storyline?

CHARACTERIZING PROTAGONISTS IN GRAPHIC NOVELS FOR TEENS

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of School Library Studies
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
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by
Danielle Lahr
May 2020

This Research Paper by: Danielle Lahr
Titled: Characterizing Protagonists In Graphic Novels For Teens

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts.

Date Approved

Joan Bessman Taylor, PhD. - Graduate Faculty First Reader

Date Approved

Karla Krueger, EdD. - Graduate Faculty Second Reader

Date Approved

Robin Dada, PhD. - Head, Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to utilize qualitative content analysis to examine the main characters in teen graphic novels from 2018. This study is designed to analyze the main protagonist in graphic novels to find patterns to help secondary librarians and teachers choose graphic novels that will appeal to students in grades 9-12. Three questions this study asks are: 1)What traits make a compelling protagonist for high schoolers? 2)Are there any traits shared between protagonists in graphic novels? And 3)What roles do protagonists of graphic novels play in the storyline?

Utilizing two lists, the top-selling graphic novels of 2018 from Amazon and YALSA's Top Ten List of Great Graphic Novels for Teens 2018, I selected 10 books for review; five from each list. The selected novels were then read and documented twice: first, for reader appeal and second, for the role of the protagonist in the story. Universal themes of identity, love, and family were found in all ten graphic novels. A majority of protagonists have a Person vs Self conflict relating to Person vs Society that gives the main character an intrinsic motivation for self improvement and discovering one's identity. Other results reveal common trends in protagonist demographics and physical appearance. The economic class, culture, and setting have a big impact on the educational opportunities, careers, and actions of the protagonist.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“We were all taught to value words over images, but I have certainly learned... that images can express what cannot be written” (Connors, 2012, p. 87).

Problem Statement

People use visual literacy in their everyday lives such as deciphering symbols on street signs, flags, or the colors on a stoplight. However, in American schools, visual literacy is not taught as frequently or as in-depth as textual literacy. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) (2018) defines visual literacy as the ability “to understand and use images including the ability to think, learn, and express oneself in terms of images” (p. 280). In secondary education, in particular, the emphasis of instruction is placed on textual literacy (Connor, 2012, p. 74). Textual literacy refers to the “ability to read, write, analyze, and evaluate textual works of literature, and personal and professional documents” (AASL, 2018, p. 280). Examples of textual literacy are writing in a journal, examining a character in a short story, and reading a chapter book. While visual literacy is seen as a skill to be mastered in elementary education through the use of picture books, secondary education heavily relies on textual literacy (Yildirim, 2013; Connor, 2012). This tendency may shortchange secondary students as both visual and textual literacy are building blocks educators can use to encourage high school students to read more of what is assigned to them as well as engage in voluntary reading.

Librarians and teachers need to recognize, train, and teach multiple literacies, including textual and visual, to engage the interest of high school students. Librarians

need to bridge the gap between required readings and free reading to encourage students to read. Since students are not engaged in their required readings, different types of texts are needed in the classroom (Cantrell et al, 2017, para. 9). However, more research is required to understand how multiple literacies work and how such relates to adolescent comprehension (Griffith, 2010, p 185). Graphic novels are one means to engage students in visual literacy, but there is little research on reader interest in graphic novels for teens (Carter, 2007). One solution is to have relatable main characters teens can identify with to promote reading interest. There is research on teens' reading interest, young adult novels, and identity formation (Kordeliski, 2017; Zimmerly, 2016; Cantrell et al, 2017). This study aims to find patterns to categorize the protagonists in young adult graphic novels, and if any patterns emerge advise teachers and librarians in selecting graphic novels for teens.

Value of Multiple Literacies

Another reason graphic novels may be useful for increasing student reading achievement is that they engage and also help to enhance students' multiple literacies. Given the variety of reading interests among teens, it is beneficial for librarians to utilize multiple literacies to help support and extend them. A shift toward developing multiple literacies is recognized in the AASL's 2018 *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*: "The definition of information literacy has become more complex as resources and technologies have changed" (AASL, 2018). As definitions of literacy have shifted so should the teaching of literacy in the secondary classroom to include more sources of literacy. For example, many teenagers

use a variety of media in their everyday lives to complete tasks such as cooking a dish of noodles, sharing a picture on Instagram, playing a video game on a PC and streaming it on Twitch to share with viewers online. Gillenwater (2009) in her article “Lost Literacy” recommends including visual literacy in secondary classrooms to enhance skills teens are already using outside of the classroom (p. 35). By providing a variety of resources, materials, and options, young people are able to construct knowledge in ways that meet their individual learning needs.

Teachers should capitalize on students’ skills and interests in the classroom not only to promote multiple literacies, but also to create “transmedia experiences” in the classroom (Lamb & Johnson, 2010, p. 77). Transmedia in the classroom or library means combining multiple forms of media or creating a story or project. This world of multiple literacies “means many different technologies and channels of communication can provide opportunities and options for differentiation in the classroom and library” (Lamb & Johnson, 2010, p. 78). However, “if we as educators fail to capture the ability to understand and use the discourse of this generation... we will also simply continue to widen the chasm between teachers and students to the point where the contact... will be akin to shouting across the Grand Canyon” (Fitzsimmon, 2007, p. 20). If librarians fail to teach using multiple literacies and fail to utilize students’ skills, then students will be isolated from genuine learning.

Although multiple literacies are emphasized differently in secondary education, visual literacy is not viewed as a subject worth studying for secondary education. Gillenwater (2009) finds educators have a “preference” toward textual literacy and

“neglect, devalue, and/or misuse images” (p. 33). Visual literacy, as indicated by sample lesson plans available to teachers, is expected to be understood and mastered in elementary grades with the use of picture books. Connors (2012) finds that the preservice teachers she works with “are prone to dismiss texts that incorporate images as inappropriate for use with secondary students...being that they assume that images are readily grasped and inspire little thought” (p. 87). One approach to teaching visual literacy in high school is through the use of graphic novels. To do this, teens need graphic novels that will interest them and enhance their viewpoints through multiple literacies. Several studies have determined that graphic novels can improve reading comprehension and increase student engagement in the classroom (Cook, 2017; Snowball, 2008). One path librarians can use to increase the attention of students is through the use of graphic novels.

Librarian's Role in Book Selection

Thus, librarians are in a critical role to bridge the gap between reading engagement and student interest in the classroom. A librarian's role is to provide quality texts and advise teachers on book selection. The American Library Association's (ALA) (2011) Bill of Rights supports librarians in their responsibility to provide resources “for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves” (para. 2). The demand for graphic novels has been steadily increasing and teachers want to include graphic novels in schools. However, some teachers are hesitant to use graphic novels in the classroom due to inexperience or misconceptions (Williams & Peterson, 2009, p. 167). Boerman-Cornell (2013) warns, “Teachers should not present

graphic novels as an alternative to regular text-only reading, but as a different and useful format” (p. 77).

However, problems exist for including and picking out quality graphic novels for secondary education. First, there is the misconception that graphic novels are not appropriate literature for teens because their subject matter is not age appropriate for teens. This can be demonstrated through the fact that Moeller (2011) faced opposition to finding participants at a high school for his study on gender and graphic novels: “My request was rejected based on the assistant superintendent's expressed judgment that graphic novels, in general, were inappropriate material to be shared with teenagers because they depicted violence and sex” (p. 481). Moeller resubmitted the application with examples of the text he intended to use with the teens which “ultimately proved to satisfy the administration's concerns” (p. 482).

The second issue impacting the selection and use of graphic novels with teens is that some adults and teens do not recognize young adult literature or graphic novels as complex literature for teens. Complex literature cannot simply be defined by a type of literature or genre. *Text Complexity and Young Adult Literature* (Glaus, 2014) defines complex literature as incorporating levels of meaning, language conventionality and clarity, structure, and knowledge demands appropriate for the reader and task (p. 409). The rise of graphic novels and their recognition as complex literature began with people passionate about the value of comics as illustrated in groundbreaking books such as Will Eisner's (1995) *Comic and Sequential Art* and Scott McCloud's (1993) *Understanding Comics*. Will Eisner coined the term “sequential art” to describe his comics in book

form. McCloud further defined comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response” (p. 7).

One study, in particular, has shown how teens value graphic novels and how they can function as complex texts. Moeller’s (2011) study shows that students express an interest in graphic novels: both males and females from the study liked “more sophisticated literary graphic novels as well as the superhero graphic novel” (p. 481). But a few students feared being judged a “nerd” by their peers while reading the graphic novels and their teachers’ disapproved on the basis that they were not reading “real” books (p. 481). During focus group interviews, the participants discussed that with the graphic novels they could use the pictures to better understand the storyline and argue the author's intentions (Moeller, 2011, p. 479). Moeller proved that graphic novels are a complex text because students were able to identify information from the text to support their argument. Students recommended that the graphic novels from the study be added to the library and suggested ways for the graphic novels to be used in the classroom.

Teachers and librarians must have an open-minded view of literature and the interests of students. The ALA’s (2002) Bill of Rights also supports an open-minded view of literature selection. “Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation” (ALA, 2002, para. 3). While a librarian has the responsibility for book selection, teachers must be open-minded about the reading of their students as well. Prince (2010), an author and teacher, recounts his experience picking books for teens: “As a teacher, I quickly learned that the

traditional literary canon was useless in terms of inviting average readers into the world of reading, so I sought out books they would read” (para. 4). Prince had to redefine his view of literature to accommodate student interests.

The third issue in selecting quality graphic novels for secondary education is finding what teens enjoy reading in order to increase engagement. Cook’s (2017) study supports the use of graphic novels in the classroom, how it can improve the reading comprehension of high school students, and what students like in a graphic novel. The study compared the reading comprehension of students reading Poe’s short story, “The Cask of Amontillado” to that of students who read a graphic novel adaptation of that story, or both the graphic novel and short story. Students who read the graphic novel significantly outperformed their peers who read only the traditional text. Another result found many students reported being engaged with the graphic novel, finding benefits from the images, and preferring the graphic novel adaptation to more traditional texts (Cook, 2017, pp. 41-42). This supports the notion that teachers and librarians should include graphic novels in the classroom to increase reading engagement and classroom performance.

Therefore, teachers should take full advantage of students’ reading interests in the classroom. Students possess a variety of reading interests that often includes graphic novels. In a study by Poerschke and Abrahamson (2005) of the reading interests of high school students, about 46% reported they choose to read comics, cartoons, comic books, and graphic novels. Though many teens are reading graphic novels, “high school students have highly diverse reading interests” affected by many factors: gender, age, grade level,

and ethnicity (Poerschke & Abrahamson, 2005, para. 14). Thus, librarians may find the perfect graphic novel for a teen, but other factors can also affect reading engagement. Graphic novels are not the sole answer to increasing reading engagement but they are a significant contributor to engagement for many students.

Reader Appeal of Teens

“Books can be both mirrors and windows, all kids can find themselves, both who they are and who they want to be, reflected back to them in the pages of a book” reflects Kordeliski (2017), a high school librarian, in her article, “Establishing a Community of Readers in a Secondary Library” (p. 14). The selection of library materials should be made with the wants and needs of high school students in mind. Prince (2010), an author and teacher, recounts his experience picking books for teens. “YA novels were one form of literature that they would pick up independently, so I decided to embrace what they were reading instead of constantly forcing them to read what I was reading” (para. 4). While teachers should aim to provide engaging reading materials to students, they must also provide texts with complexity (Griffith, 2010, p. 183). Graphic novels are a form of literature that is both complex and engaging at the same time. Teens find in graphic novels “accessible stories that feature characters that teens can identify with in some way” (Prince, 2010, para. 6). Looking at the bestselling lists for young adult graphic novels on Amazon.com (2018), graphic novels cover a range of subjects from book adaptations to superheroes. Fitzsimmon (2007) realized how young adults connected with literature: “I realized that these young adults read these narratives and viewed these stories to pull together the elements of the text and link them together to make meaning

of the world they live in and to find answers that touch the soul, not the intellect alone” (p. 21). Teens try to connect with their reading, and see themselves in the characters they relate to. Graphic novels can provide one venue for stories with which teens can identify.

Rationale

This paper will analyze the characteristics of protagonists in teen graphic novels in order to find elements that make a protagonist compelling to a teen. If any patterns emerge, these patterns will be used to create guidelines and recommendations for teachers, librarians, and students in selecting diverse, quality graphic novels with compelling protagonists.

Deficiencies in Past Research

Past studies have examined graphic novels through the lens of diversity including gender, socioeconomic status, race, and other factors. There are studies that identify strong female roles in graphic novels, character traits that appeal to young women and how these have progressed through the decades (Jorgensen & Lechan, 2013). Other studies have explored teenagers’ feelings about reading graphic novels (Moeller, 2011). Conor (2012) recommends equipping “preservice teachers with a vocabulary for analyzing visual texts” (p. 71). Other studies of young adult literature separately explore the diversity of characters across gender, race, or socioeconomic status, however, they do not examine the characteristics and traits of the characters as a whole. There are even fewer studies that address the importance of visual literacy in the classroom and the selection of graphic novels to teach it.

Summary of Problem

There is little research to inform teachers and librarians of the types of protagonists in graphic novels that appeal to teens.

Purpose

This study is designed to analyze the main protagonist in graphic novels to find patterns to help secondary librarians and teachers choose graphic novels that will appeal to students in grades 9-12.

Research Questions

1. What traits make a compelling protagonist for high schoolers?
2. Are there any traits shared between protagonists in graphic novels?
3. What roles do protagonists of graphic novels play in the storyline?

Assumptions and Limitations

This study will be limited to fiction graphic novels featured in two lists: Amazon's Best Graphic Novels of 2018 and YALSA's Top Ten Graphic Novels for Teens for high school readers in grades 9-12. Books not included in the study are graphic novel anthologies, manga, and individual issues of comic books. This study assumes that teachers and librarians have a beginner's knowledge of graphic novel terms and know how to read graphic novels. It also assumes that graphic novels are vetted by the lists' authors and included due to their appeal to teens and by the publishing companies to be free of errors with clear understandable artwork. A further limitation of the work is that it relies on the perspective of a single researcher to determine the aspects that make a work compelling to its readers.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is designed to analyze the main protagonist in young adult graphic novels to find patterns to help secondary librarians and teachers choose graphic novels that will appeal to students in grades 9-12. Young adult books typically include these literary elements: teenage protagonists, a distinctly teenage voice and/or attitude, and a journey toward identity discovery and separation from adults (Stephens, 2007, pp. 12-13). Previous research, relating to young adult literature, teens, and graphic novels, informing this study falls into several categories: the effect of literature on the identity of teens, reading habits of teens, character roles in young adult fiction, the impact of graphic novels in the classroom, teacher education using graphic novels, and teachers' (or preservice teachers') perceptions of teen readers.

The Effect of Literature on the Identity of Teens

Young adult literature affects how a teenager forms their identity, behaviors, and emotional attachment to fictional characters. Researchers Becnel and Moeller (2015) conducted a study on the reading habits of rural young adults to find how their reading preferences, behaviors, and desires are distinct from urban young adults by directly interviewing teens. The participants were students in grades 9-12 from three different high schools. The researchers conducted audio and videotaped focus group interviews with a predetermined set of questions. One research question of particular interest here addressed the topic of adolescent identity and literature. Results of the study showed rural teens read widely in the realm of current, popular young adult materials and used

literature for exploring identity, forging strong emotional connections to the characters in their favorite books, and using them to help process situations they are encountering and as models for the character traits they most want to embody. The majority of students tended to describe personal connections to their favorite titles. The literature that teens read seems to help them explore not only who they are but also “who they want to be,” and provided a safe space to think about their beliefs, their priorities, and the ways in which they interact with others (Becnel & Moeller, 2015, pp. 299-305).

Another study focuses more on the identity construction of female teens rather than the reading habits of rural teens. This study conducted by Kokesh and Sternadori (2015) explores how girls and women are portrayed in 10 young adult fiction novels published between 2000-2010. Next, the researchers interviewed 14 female teenage readers aged 13-18 to determine how these young women identified with fictional characters, formed “one-sided friendships,” and rated realism of each book. The researchers posed two research questions related to identity: what degree do adolescent readers consciously identify with characters in young adult fiction and do adolescent readers develop one-sided relationships with characters in young adult novels (Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015, pp. 141-144).

The results of the study found girls identified with characters “experiencing situations, thoughts, and feelings highly similar to their own,” characters their own age, and characters “who resembled the ideal person” the reader wanted to become (p. 151). Another finding found after the reader finished a novel, they were emotionally attached to one character. It was easier to connect with characters in books because readers could

gain insight into the character's thoughts and feelings. Other readers felt they were "active participants" in the life of the main character and the fiction was realistic (p. 152). Limitations of the research found the sample size of girls and books were small (Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015, p. 155). The study showed a small window into the minds of teens, but a larger sample size is needed to provide more solid evidence.

The sample size of a dissertation by Poerschke and Abrahamson (2005) studied the reading interests of high school students on a much larger scale. The participant population was nearly nine thousand high school students in a suburban school district. The data was collected by a survey given to all students in the district and used to analyze student's self-reported reading interests of print and non-print sources. Non-print texts included television, video games, movies, music, and electronic text. Print sources included books, magazines, newspapers, and comics (Poerschke & Abrahamson, 2005).

Results of the study found participants indicated more interest in reading the media texts of television, music, and movies rather than other text categories. About 46% of the students reported they chose to read comics, cartoons, comic books, and graphic novels, many indicating an interest in the relatively new sub-genre of anime/manga. With the exception of the text categories of video/computer games and comic reading, the results indicated males read less than females in all remaining text categories. This study documented that many high school students are reading and expressing their literacy interests across a wide variety of textual categories, suggesting a need for educators to provide ample diversity and choice in their classrooms with regard to reading materials

(Poerschke & Abrahamson, 2005, para. 40- 43). In summary, these studies inform the current study on how teens select texts and how they use texts to explore their identities.

Character Roles in Graphic Novels

Characters in graphic novels influence teen identity through side characters, gender, and racial diversity. The sidekicks of young adult literature have not been the subject of significant critical study. Zimmerly (2016) found that young adult literature has embraced the sidekick because it emphasizes growth and finding one's place in the world (p. 3). He covered 20 books, a mix of books and graphic novels. He chose books on their popularity and strength of secondary characters. There were four types of sidekicks he found in his research. The first sidekick is the narrative gateway which the author uses the sidekick as a doorway to understand the hero. The second sidekick is the devil's advocate which is the voice of reason to the hero, an advisor. The next sidekick is the comic relief, whose role is to provide humor to the story. Finally, the last sidekick is the intellectual foil serves to highlight the hero's traits, but also to become the hero during parts of the story. The author gave examples of each type of sidekick and calls for more research on sidekicks in young adult literature. Young adult literature is affected by the role of sidekicks (Zimmerly, 2016).

In Moeller's (2011) study, she sought to find if there were gender differences in teens when reading graphic novels. The participants were 15 high school students, 8 females, and 7 males. The students attended a mostly white, middle class, a Midwestern public school in grades 9-12. The students read three graphic novels randomly selected from Great Graphic Novels for Teens. After reading each graphic novel, students

attended a focus group interview divided by gender. Each student was interviewed after the first and third focus group one on one. The interviews were video and audiotaped (Moeller, 2011, p. 478).

Students experienced various levels of interest in graphic novels. The girls expressed their feelings and desire to know more about the characters and the relationships between characters while the boys spent most of their time discussing those actions taken or not taken by the characters. The graphic novel readers that emerged from this study preferred more sophisticated literary graphic novels. However, both genders described reading graphic novels in public would leave them open to ridicule by peers. Students felt that their teachers did not encourage them to read graphic novels over real books. The inclusion of graphic novels into the curriculum can balance the reading interest of both sexes (Moeller, 2011, pp. 482-483).

While gender can affect the reading of graphic novels, race also influences the character roles of graphic novels. Moeller and Becnel (2018) wanted to see how race is depicted in young adult graphic novels. Each researcher read a total of 57 books three times each. The first time to focus on the text, then the art, and finally the art and text together. They classified the character first by their role in the story such as main, supporting, or background, “to get a better sense of how significant a role that character played in the text” (p. 6). Next characters were classified by race using context clues in the text (p. 8).

Seventy six percent of the graphic novels included characters of color, while 27% were people of color classified as the main character. Thirty six percent were supporting

characters, and 70% were background characters (pp. 6-7). Of the 57 titles analyzed, twelve were identified as having either an author or illustrator of color. This study suggests that the creative and publishing forces behind the graphic novel explosion in the youth literature market understand the need to tell diverse stories and to accurately represent our multicultural world (Moeller & Becnel, 2018, pp. 8-9).

The Impact of Graphic Novels in the Classroom

Graphic novels have many positive effects on students in the classroom if educators are properly trained in their use. Paula Griffith (2010) created guidelines for middle and high school level librarians and teachers to judge graphic novels on the format, illustrations, and literary elements of fiction and nonfiction (p. 183). Griffith created a list of recommended readings for middle and high school graphic novels noting grade level, theme, and classroom use (pp. 187-188). Griffith found teens like reading about a protagonist two years older than them. The advantages of blending words and pictures provide students the ability to read text “too difficult in length or in use of language” in graphic novels (p. 184). Finally, the themes and conflicts presented in works written for young adults should also fit teen interests. Graphic novels appeal to many teenage readers due to the wide variety of content they include and many teenagers select them for pleasure reading. Griffith found through her research that both teacher and students read the same images, but each had their own interpretations of the graphic novels and that graphic novels “provided new opportunities for developing in-school literacies” (p. 185). Next, she found that high school seniors responded to graphic novels, by adjusting their normal reading process to include image analysis. However, more research is needed to

“understand more about how multiple modalities work and how they are related to adolescent comprehension” (Griffith, 2010, p. 185).

Just as Griffin found that graphic novels provide opportunities for literacy development, Cook (2017) examined the effects of graphic novels on high school students’ reading comprehension (p. 22). Few studies have been conducted to investigate the educational uses of graphic novels. Questions Cook’s work sought to answer are: How does grade level, text type or gender affect student reading comprehension test scores? What are student perceptions of working with graphic novels? What are teachers’ observations and perceptions of students working with graphic novels (p. 30)? Cook selected Graham High School for her research study because it had a diverse population, produced low test scores, and received permission to involve all English classes and teachers in the study. Graham was a small public high school with 600 students in the Southeast United States that serves a diverse, rural, and agrarian community. Study participants were 217 students in grades 9-12 taking an English course during the fall semester with five teachers. Texts used in this study are Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “The Cask of Amontillado” and Pomplun’s graphic novel adaptation of the same story by Poe (p. 29).

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to examine the effects of graphic novels on students’ reading comprehension. The researcher broke the students into three groups. The control group read the traditional short story. Experimental group one had only the graphic novel and experimental group two had both the short story and graphic novel. The researcher used and designed reading comprehension tests to rate and score

vocabulary background knowledge, content schema (elements of a text, organization & structures of a text, and reader attributes (motivation and engagement). At the end of the study, she used interviews to gauge students' and teachers' perceptions of interacting with the graphic text by randomly choosing students from both experimental groups. The control group was not interviewed (Cook, 2017, pp. 30-33).

Cook found a variety of results from the English unit. First, text type had a significant effect on comprehension scores. Students who read the graphic adaptation benefited from less text and more visuals. Second, grade level had a significant effect on comprehension scores. This finding suggests that those students in ninth grade have not benefited from the additional years of instruction regarding reading traditional texts that their older peers have received. Third, gender had a significant effect on comprehension scores. Across all types of texts, females scored significantly higher than males. Fourth, while most students self-reported being engaged with the graphic novel, a couple of students reported having trouble reading the images. Most students reported preferring graphic novel texts, but several noted a preference for familiar traditional texts. Cook showed that if teachers are to utilize graphic novels regularly, they must first understand that graphic novels can, in fact, be complex, rigorous texts. Specifically, these findings suggest that graphic novels are not simply texts for struggling readers and should not be implemented as such. The students in this study, regardless of their grade level or their gender, largely found success by interacting with the graphic adaptation (Cook, 2017, pp. 33-35).

The purpose of Block's (2013) research study is to survey classroom teachers' dispositions toward graphic novels as quality literature and the rationale for their beliefs and attitudes. These participants are language arts teachers for grades three through eight and range in age from 20 to 60 years. All participants are current teachers in a suburban, Midwestern school district, including six elementary schools and two middle schools. Data was collected from each teacher filling out a survey (pp. 13-15).

First, Block's (2013) survey found about 80% of the teachers surveyed did not read graphic novels as a child or read a graphic novel in the past year for enjoyment (p. 16). Another finding found pre-service education may have an impact on teachers' perceptions of graphic novels. Only 15% of teachers surveyed had brief exposure to graphic novels as pre-service teachers. Overall, the majority of teachers surveyed have not received any instructions related to using graphic novels in their classrooms or use graphic novels (p. 17). However, 91% of the participants allowed students to read this format during independent reading time and noted their use has increased student motivation toward reading (p. 19).

Block found the younger the teacher, the more likely they are to use graphic novels. Teachers aged 50-59 show an average use of graphic novels only eight times per year (p. 24). The data indicated that younger teachers have had more pre-service training on graphic novels, on average, and encourage students to read them more often. The data suggest that the majority of teachers, regardless of age, agreed that graphic novels can be beneficial in the classroom, effective for direct teaching, and can help students become better readers (p. 29). Future research calls for effective professional development in the

use of graphic novels and the extent to which graphic novels are motivating and effective teaching tools for students (p. 31). These studies on graphic novels inform the current study on how to create criteria for judging graphic novels.

Teacher Education of Graphic Novels and Their Perceptions of Teen Readers

Sulzer and Their's (2016) study focuses on preservice teachers analyzing young adult novels. The goal of this study was to understand preservice teachers' ideas of hypothetical teen readers through evaluating young adult literature and how it can affect their teaching (p. 164). Data was collected at a large Midwestern University in the US from a course titled "Reading and Teaching YAL." It is a semester-long class for preservice teachers. Thirteen participants include college juniors and seniors. Nine were female and four were male.

Assignments for the class included group discussions, book talks, three literary analysis papers, a philosophy paper, and weekly participation in an online discussion of YAL text assigned each week. These posts were the focus of the study. Participants posted one paragraph evaluation a week and responded to two peers. Data analyzed was transcripts of online discussions (p. 165). The three books discussed in this study are *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon (2003), *Tender Morsels* by Margo Lanagan (2008), and *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang (2006).

The goal of the course was "to explore the complex portrayal of young people and consider how they fit into their worlds" (Sulzer, 2016, p. 165) Researchers found two strategies students used. The matching strategy which identified "a vision of adolescent needs and matched those needs to the message or lesson of the novel." In other words,

when using the matching strategy, participants read adolescents as universally abled and in need of textual lessons that would disrupt their preconceptions toward those with disabilities. Similarly, the matching strategy seemed to rely on a reading of youths as universally white and in need of lessons about racial equality (p. 166).

The second strategy, the Salvaging Strategy was used when a text was “deemed problematic for the hypothetical adolescent reader.” Participants had two ways to salvage the text because of subject matter such as rape, sex, incest by using the text as independent reading or literature circle for teens outside the norm and using the book for instructional purpose without engaging the subject matter (Sulzer, 2016, p. 167).

Researchers also found three strategies these students imagined as their hypothetical readers. Positioning teens as monolithic, a unified group with predictable qualities, that the participants would describe with a statement of overarching opinions that all adolescents hold, react to, go through, pay attention to, or think about (Sulzer, 2016, p. 167). Positioning Self as a Former Teen tended to naturalize white, middle-class teen experiences and denounce teen experiences of the current generation. This gives the idea that all teen's “preferences and responses to literature ” are unified (p. 168). The study suggested that classroom teachers should select texts that provide complex and unexpected depictions of youth experiences and approach young adult instruction in a manner that reflects the real teen (p. 169).

Teenagers deserve a variety of texts that an experienced teacher is willing to use in the classroom. James Carter (2014), a professor, found that many educators are not using comics and unaware of its potential. By integrating comics into a college course,

he hoped to enhance their knowledge. The professor set the goal for his students to “consider expanded visions of adolescents, schooling, and textuality” and what it means to be a teen in an American school for this study (p. 53). English 5340: Literature for Youth is a graduate-level course for 26 experienced K-12 English Language Arts teachers and graduate students with student teaching experience at the University of Texas. Students read 25 graphic novels, posted several messages on an online forum related to the weekly readings, and wrote a 20-page research paper on their topic of choice relating to adolescence. Many students expressed their excitement or anxiety to learn about graphic novels (pp. 54-55).

Professor Carter (2014) found that all graphic novels in the course support “the profound shifts that newcomer immigrant youth undergo as they struggle with who they are and the changing circumstances” (p. 56). Another result found students in the course agreed there was a need for teachers to “facilitate spaces” for teens to be themselves after this class. Teachers need to give students the space to be teens and graphic novels can help students explore themes of identity. “YA graphic novels can help students build connections between and among peers in ways that might facilitate acceptance and understanding” (p. 58). David Coleman, a major player in the construction of the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards, seems to support the notion that texts that build connective tissue between students’ identities and lived experiences need to take a backseat to informational texts and rhetorical writing (p. 58).

The students in the class did learn how to make connections between academic scholarship, central characters from the comics, and educational research. Carter (2014)

found many preservice teachers wanted exposure to the adolescent identity research (p. 58). Further understanding is needed for teachers to use young adult literature with teens to consider “multiple selves” to create an enriching experience in the classroom. These studies of perception inform the current study on attitudes and experiences of teachers and how graphic novels are needed in school (p. 60).

Summary

In summary, several studies showed that teens do make strong emotional connections to characters in young adult fiction and readers to explore their identities (Becnel & Moeller, 2015; Kokesh & Sternadori, 2015; Poerschke & Abrahamson, 2005). The group of studies in character roles in graphic novels showed characters influence identity through the roles character play, gender, and racial diversity (Zimmerly, 2016; Moeller, 2011; Moeller & Becnel, 2018). The group of studies on the impact of graphic novels showed they appeal to many readers due to a wide variety of content, are complex, rigorous texts, but more training is needed to train teachers to use graphic novels during classroom instruction (Griffith, 2010; Cook, 2017; Block, 2013). The next group of studies for teacher education and their perception of teen readers recommended teachers select complex texts that provide depictions of teens, and realistically think how teens respond to a text (Sulzer, 2016; Carter, 2014).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A prior study has called for further research for main characters in young adult novels. This study is designed to analyze the main protagonist in graphic novels to find patterns to help secondary librarians and teachers choose graphic novels that will appeal to students in grades 9-12. This study evaluated what traits the protagonists share to classify them into categories.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative and quantitative analysis of content to evaluate selected graphic novels. Zhang and Wildermuth (2017) defined qualitative analysis of content as “a research method of the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p. 318). Moreover is its ability for this study to “condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation” (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2017, p. 319). Through data collection, researchers see “themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher’s careful examination and constant comparison ”by using inductive reasoning (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2017, p. 319). This research design fits this study because of the selected books, popular graphic novels, written for high school students to find themes and patterns on similarities of protagonists. Past research has developed criteria for teen appeal in graphic novels and the literary merits of graphic

novels, so the current study used this research to develop a rubric for collecting data in the selected graphic novel (Pagliaro, 2014; Letcher, 2008).

Sample of Books

The sample of books (see Appendix A) evaluated for this study include fiction books from bestselling Amazon's list of Best Comics and Graphic Novels of 2018 and YALSA Great Graphic Novels for Teens 2018. The first list was selected for its popularity while the second list was selected for its quality of books. 2018 was chosen as the current year to allow for relevant and current findings for this study. Next, the lists were compared side by side to eliminate duplicates, then nonfiction, anthologies, next eliminating books, not in the target audience, and finally the second or following volumes in a series. Only the first volume in a series was considered on a list. After eliminating these books, five books were chosen from each list.

Procedures

Data Sources

The selected novels were read and documented twice; first for reader appeal and second for the role of the protagonist in the story. During the first reading of the story, I used the chart in Appendix B for noting the background of the book. Notes on the chart include quotes and observations from the research. The chart is coded to differentiate evidence for images and texts in graphic novels. The evidence for images is written in italics while textual evidence is normal text. After reading the graphic novel, *The Rubric of Literary Merit in Graphic Novels* (Appendix C) is used to score the appeal of the book. The rubric is taken from Pagliaro's article, "Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words?"

(2014). Next, the researcher read the graphic novel a second time to focus on the protagonist. Two charts were used to analyze the protagonist of the graphic novel. First in the Character *Analysis* chart (Appendix D) was used to record observations and quotes divided between text and image evidence. The final chart was used to determine the role of the protagonist in the story. A list of traits was used to consistently code the traits of the protagonist.

Data Analysis

The first reading of the book was used with Appendix B and C to determine the appeal of graphic novels. Scores for each graphic novel was scored in four categories: expressive characters, detailed settings, authentic language, and function of form from a scale from one to five. Observational notes divided the evidence between visual and textual evidence (Pagliaro, 2014). Observational notes, divided between visuals and text, are compared to numerical data from Appendix C. Appendix C was compared to Appendix B to carefully compare scores and notes to determine the appeal of the graphic novel. During the second reading, the research focused on the protagonist of the graphic novel. When analyzing the data for Appendix D the researcher looked for the frequency of phrases and patterns when comparing the protagonist of each graphic novel. Next, the researcher sought to define the roles of the protagonists into categories. Finally, results from the first and second readings are compared to find patterns between graphic novel appeal and the role of a protagonist.

Limitations

This study is limited to fiction graphic novels recommended in professional journals for high school readers in grades 9-12. It will also be limited to graphic novels published between 2017-2018. Books not included in the study are graphic novel anthologies, manga, and individual issues of comic books. Other limitations are having one researcher read and analyze selected graphic novels.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to utilize qualitative content analysis to examine the main characters in teen graphic novels from 2018. This study is designed to analyze the main protagonist in graphic novels to find patterns to help secondary librarians and teachers choose graphic novels that will appeal to students in grades 9-12.

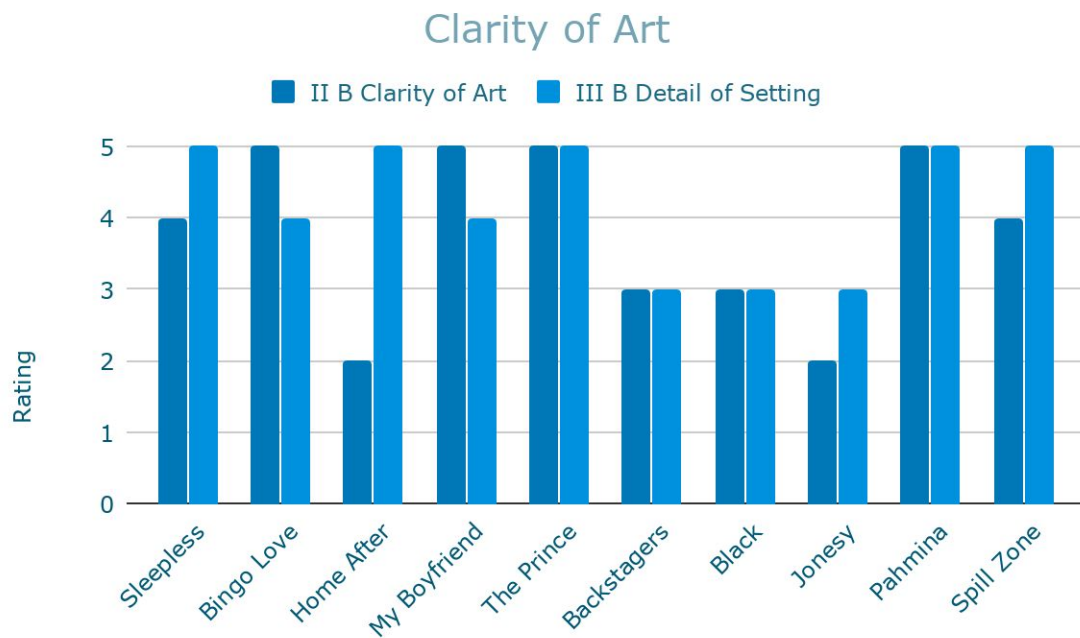
This study evaluated the traits the protagonists share and classified them into themes. The graphic novels were selected from two lists. The first list is the top-selling graphic novels of 2018 from Amazon while the second list is YALSA's Top Ten List of Great Graphic Novels for Teens 2018. See Appendix A for the full list of books. Five books were chosen from each list. Each book was assigned a number, then a random number generator picked ten numbers that matched with 10 books. Books were only considered if it was a standalone story, or the first volume of a series by referring reviews from *School Library Journal*. The selected novels are then read and documented twice: once for reader appeal and twice for the role of the protagonist in the story. During the first reading of the story, Appendix B for noting the background of the book. After reading the graphic novel, The Rubric of Literary Merit in Graphic Novels (Appendix C) is used to score the appeal of the book. Next, the graphic novel is reread to focus on the protagonist. One chart is used to analyze the protagonist of the graphic novel, Character Analysis chart (Appendix D) will be used to record observations. This chart is used to

determine common themes between protagonists. See Appendix A for summaries of books.

The graphic novel appeals were analyzed for its appeal and clarity of the story. The following categories about protagonists were analyzed: physical traits, trademark colors, facial expressions, unique abilities, job, personality, sexuality, the dialogue of the character, relationship with characters, motivations, and conflicts. The initial list included subcategories that were combined to create categories in the final list. Results found themes of family, love, and identity, and common protagonist demographics, physical features, characterizations, and graphic novel appeal.

Graphic Novel Appeal

When it came to reading and evaluating graphic novels the type of art used affects the understanding of the story. See table Clarity of Art for data.



Books were graded on a scale from one to five. Five is the highest score while one is the lowest. Six books that scored more than three points in both categories were determined to have art that was easy to interpret and detailed backgrounds. Three books with scores of three or less in both categories had art that was hard to determine in the panels and sparse backgrounds to accurately depict the setting. One book *Home After Dark* scored five in backgrounds, but two in clarity of art. The artist David Small does feature detailed backgrounds however in other panels there is only a gray background. His art style without a background makes it hard to read panels. The appeal of graphic novels can be graded by the clarity of art in order to tell a clear story.

Family: What is family?

Another major finding was the theme of family. The theme of family is divided into family acceptance and family dynamics. This section talks about family acceptance.

The acceptance or disapproval of family can shape the relationship and behaviors of the protagonist. Two examples from the graphic novels deal with the acceptance or disapproval of family shape the relationships protagonists have with their families. A positive example, in *The Prince and the Dressmaker*, Prince Sebastian relieved as a crossdresser also known as Lady Crystallia to his parents and the whole royal court. At first Prince Sebastian is ashamed of his actions, runs away, joins a monastery, gives his dresses back to the dressmaker. His family is first surprised and ashamed of him, then both the king and queen realize they want their son to be happy. In the end, the king and prince embrace each other and wear a dress in a fashion show. The family shows acceptance of Prince Sebastian's crossdressing so their relationship becomes stronger.

The family's relationship grows stronger because the family values relationships over a perceived socially unacceptable behavior.

However, a family's disapproval can alter the relationships of a protagonist. Protagonists do care about how their families think of them because they perceive their families as an anchor to keep them moored in society. For example, in *Bingo Love*, Hazel pursues a romantic relationship with a girl during the 1960's. Both families find out, forbid the romance, and separate the girls. Hazel's relationship with her parents becomes distant, but Hazel does her best to conform to her family's wishes. For her family's approval Hazel suppressed her sexual preference by marrying a man but she still secretly thinks about her forbidden love, Mari. Her relationship with her husband is a relationship of convenience. Hazel lives with this secret for fifty years and does not act on her feelings of love until she is in her sixties. Both women divorce their husbands and marry each other. Society now accepts same-sex marriages, but many of the children disapprove of the new marriage. This disapproval comes from both Hazel's and Mari's children feeling betrayed by their parent's divorce and not truly knowing their parents. There is conflict, arguments, and tears, but in time, open communication, and understanding everyone comes to accept the new normal. These family values relationships over keeping an unhappy secret.

Another finding found there are two main different family dynamics. The first type of family is a biological family. Six out of ten graphic novels feature biological families. Biological families are related by genetics or related by marriage that grows a family. Most of the stories revolve around family relationships influencing events in the

story or influencing the actions of the protagonist to keep the family together. For example in *Spill Zone* Addison takes dangerous jobs to earn money to care for her younger sister. Her motivation for taking these jobs is to keep her family together. *Sleepless* is another example of family relationships influencing events in the story. The events of the story starts after the King dies, Lady Poppy, his daughter, becomes a target for assassination. Another story that revolves around biological families influences the protagonist in *Pashmina*. It heavily features mother-daughter relationships.

The second type of family dynamics is found families. Four out of the ten books feature found families. Found families are a group of people who become families due to unforeseen circumstances. An example of a found family is from *Black Hammer* where a group of superheroes becomes a family after they are trapped in another dimension for ten years. They are forced by unforeseen circumstances to cooperate and build a life together. The first member to attempt an escape, Black Hammer, was killed by trying to cross the dimensional barrier and exploded in front of everyone. The members of this found family found living in the new dimension with each other preferable than trying another escape after the death of Black Hammer. Found families learn to live with each other, protect and cover for other members, and take on roles to benefit the family. In *Home After Dark*, people come together to form a family. The Mahs take on the role of parents to Russel by feeding, teaching, and sheltering him after his father abandons him. Russel takes on the role of their son learning the family business and counting on the Mahs to bail him out of trouble.

Love

Love is another theme found in these teen graphic novels. Love is directly related to family relationships and the type of love the protagonist gives and receives from the family. Also, a big factor of love is romantic relationships found in the graphic novels as well as romance felt by the protagonist. Two main types of love are found in graphic novels: family and romantic love. Family love is divided into parental, sibling love, and friendships. While romantic love is divided into forbidden love and romantic love.

Parental Love

Parental love is defined by Your Dictionary as the “love of parents towards their children and by extension, love which is similar to parental love.” Parents of the protagonist are featured in 8 out of the 10 graphic novels mentioned in conversation, or pictured in art. Seven of these graphic novels have parents either taking part in the story by showing their love for their children, taking care of their children’s needs, giving advice, protecting children from harm, forbidding an action, and assigning punishments.

Two graphic novels have a protagonist with dead parents at the beginning of the story. A protagonist has one parent in four of the graphic novels. Two out of the four graphic novels with one parent, had one parent die and the other two graphic novels had a parent abandon the protagonist. Only two graphic novels out of ten have a protagonist with two living parents. Four out of the ten graphic novels had the parent(s) forbid an action or object the protagonist has an interest in. If the protagonist continues with the action or object the parent(s) and punishes the protagonist by taking the object and separating them from the action. In turn, this can cause a strain in the relationship between the teen and parent(s) which will lead to further conflict in the story. The

relationship between the teen and the parent leads to a closer relationship with the parent or a completely distant one.

While some graphic novels have parents who care for the protagonist, the protagonist can also take on the role of a parent. The protagonist takes on the parental role either to care for a sibling, a child, or others in three out of ten graphic novels. In *Spill Zone*, Addison, a teenager, has a younger sister she cares for after the death of both parents. Addison takes on the parental role caring for her sister, maintaining a job for money, and protecting her sister from supernatural forces. In *Black Hammer*, Abraham takes on the role of a parent caring for others in the found family. He becomes a farmer to earn money, he monitors the health of the family, provides comfort after fights, assigns punishments, and protects the family's secrets. In *Bingo Love*, Hazel does have children with her husband and becomes a parent.

Three out of ten protagonists have a parental role model outside of the family unit. These parental figures are used to guide the protagonist when they are in need of guidance and experience the parents cannot provide. In *Pashmina*, Priyanka, an Indian American, visits her aunt and uncle in India to experience the culture. She visits them to experience India that living in the United States cannot provide and having a mother that wishes to forget her time growing up in India. These role models also provide training for the protagonist to take on independent responsibilities and become the next role model for younger kids. In the *Backstagers*, Tim and Jaime are stage managers and leaders of the group; they parent the group when they are in trouble, need guidance, or

need a rescue. Due to their graduation, they are training a member of the group to take their place as a leader.

Sibling Love

Only two graphic novels feature a protagonist with a sibling. In *Spill Zone*, Addison has a younger sister for whom she provided care. In *Jonesy*, Jonsey has a younger sister she fights with sometimes. Siblings in these books are a chance for the protagonist to be responsible for caring for a person. Siblings are a source of conflict in the graphic novel such as annoying the protagonist, starting arguments, and taking items to antagonize the protagonist. On the flipside, siblings are a major motivation for the protagonist to grow and change. The protagonist takes on more responsibility to care for a younger sibling and changes their behavior to be a role model.

Friendships

Six out of ten books feature strong friendships with the protagonist. Friends support each other for who they are and do not have to be similar backgrounds or personalities. A majority of friendships in these graphic novels have friends of different backgrounds and values than the protagonists. The protagonist uses their friends to ask for advice, to seek comfort, for their physical presence at a social event, help on a project, or to be together. Three books have friendships between two or fewer friends with the protagonist in *Jonesy*, *Sleepless*, and *My Boyfriend is a Bear*. Two books have an enemy of the protagonist turn into a friend in *Sleepless* and *Jonesy*. These enemies are turned into friends by going through a situation with the protagonists that require the enemy's

cooperation. The protagonist and the enemy resolve their differences and become friends.

Three books feature large groups with the protagonist. *Black Hammer* does feature a strong group dynamic however the group acts more as a family living together and caring for each other than as a group of friends. *The Backstagers* and *Home After Dark* feature friendships that include large groups of friends. *The Backstagers* have a large group of friends that positively influence the protagonist to take on more responsibility and form stronger relationships. *Home After Dark* also features a large group of friends but these friends negatively influence the protagonist to lie, steal, and bully other kids.

Romantic Love

Three books *Sleepless*, *The Prince and the Dressmaker*, and *Love Bingo* have the protagonist form strong friendships with one person that turns into a romance. The protagonist is usually without a friend in the graphic novel before the friendships start due to social status with peers, position in society, or parental influence. The protagonist's desiring companionship grows close to this friend. This friend is trusted and usually shares some secrets with the protagonist. Eventually, these friendships grow into love forbidden by society or people.

Seven out of ten graphic novels have a protagonist with a romantic love interest with *The Backstagers*, *Black Hammer*, *Jonesy*, *Sleepless*, *Love Bingo*, *My Boyfriend is a Bear*, *The Prince and the Dressmaker*. Five out of ten protagonists have a romantic love

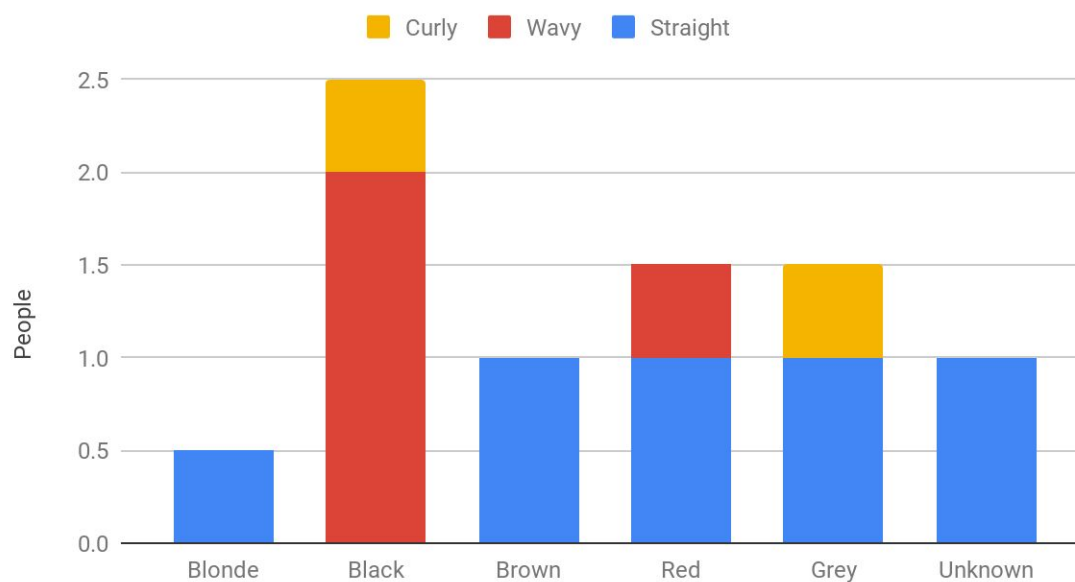
interest that is a forbidden romance. The romance is forbidden by the protagonist's parents, by society or social class.

Another type of love that affects romantic relationships and other relationships is Controlling love. A family's or friend's approval or disapproval can influence a character's decisions. In *My Boyfriend is a Bear*, Nora hears many different opinions from her friends and family about dating a bear that affects her relationship with her boyfriend. Another example of controlling love is from *Jonsey*. Jonsey, the protagonist, has the power to make anyone or anything fall in love with anyone or thing. She uses this power for her own benefit at the expense of others. She tries to foil the budding romance between her single dad and the tattoo lady, or make the school prom a disaster. While she controls these relationships for her own benefit, it never works in her favor: the tattoo lady and Jonsey's Dad go on a second date and the school prom is a success.

Physical Features

Hair

Hair

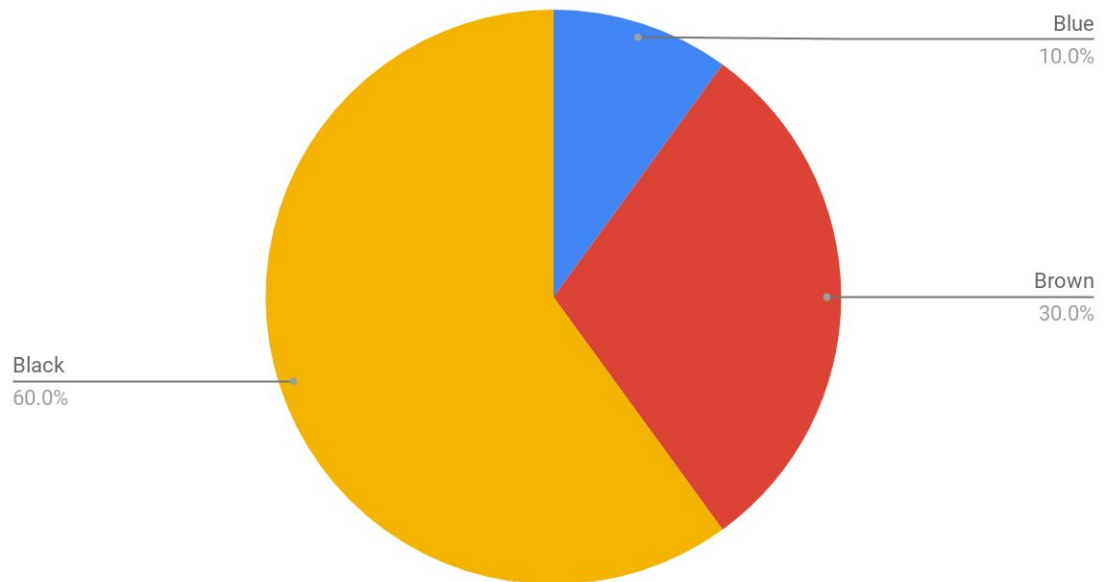


Hair is an important feature of a protagonist in a graphic novel. Hair is an extension of a protagonist's personality that can show character development, changing mood, or artistic choice. Sixty percent of the protagonists have the same hairstyle for the whole graphic novel. The reason for these styles is either for the short duration of the story, a choice of the artist to keep the art consistent, or to show a character's lack of attention to personal looks. Protagonists with static hairstyles on average are a female with long hair in a ponytail or a male with very short hair. There are 40% of the protagonists that do change hairstyle and color. These protagonists change their hair to follow current trends, to stand out, express their personalities. The length of hair is longer on females than on males. The color of the protagonist's hair can be an artistic choice or be used to highlight certain character traits. Protagonists with red hair are in their teens are very bold in their actions and take many risks. Gray-haired characters are in the 56-67 which is a sign of wisdom and age. Twenty percent of protagonists have freckles which are an artistic choice to show youth or naive personality.

Eye Color

Eye color can change color in response to a supernatural event. In *Spill Zone* Addison's eyes change from blue to green when she enters the Spill Zone or when she encounters a supernatural creature. Eyes have symbols that appear in the pupils depending on the plotline. For example, Jonsey will have stars in her eyes when she is excited or hearts when she is using her love powers.

Eye Color



Fifty percent of graphic novels apply artistic choices across all character designs.

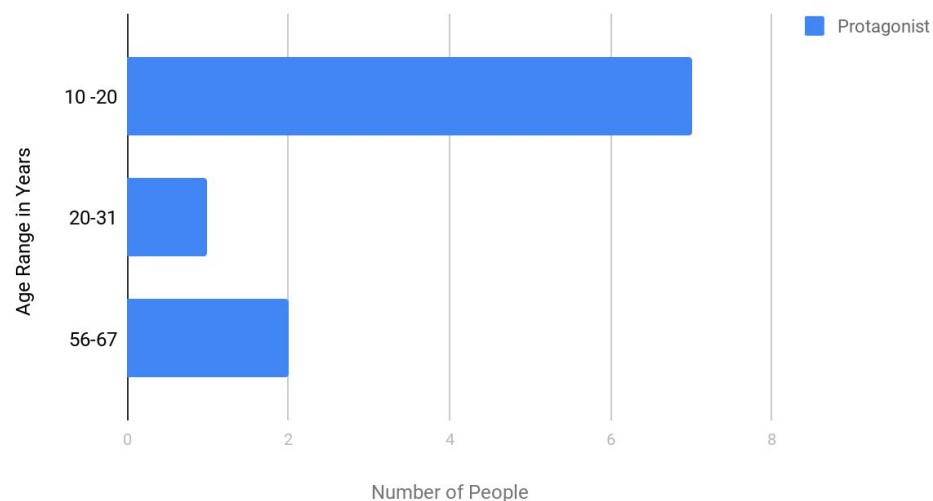
Everyone has black eyes and expressive eyebrows in *Pashmina* and *My Boyfriend is a*

Bear. Another artistic choice in *The Prince and the Dressmaker* every character has

blush under the eyes. In *Home After Dark*, the whole graphic novel is done in black ink.

Protagonist Demographics

Age Range of Protagonists

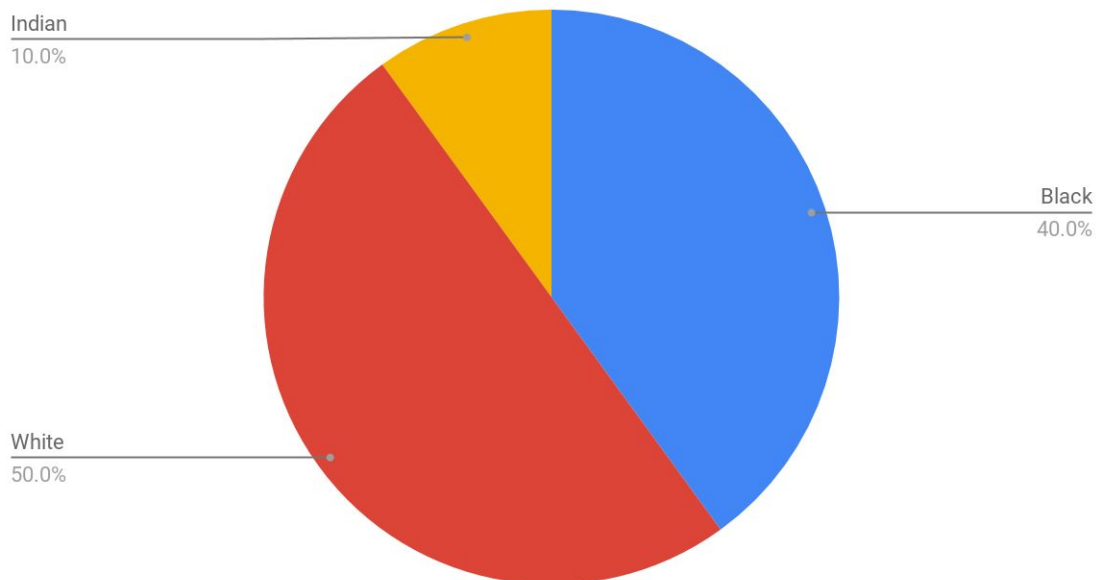


Age

The 80% of the protagonists are teens for some part of the story during the graphic novels. 70% of the protagonists are teens during the whole graphic novel. 20% are 56-67 years old. 10% of the main characters are 20-31 years old. A protagonist's age does affect how they respond and react to events in the graphic novel. The 10-20 age group is more willing to explore, experiment, and change. This age group is kids learning to transition to teen then young adults. 20-31 age group is surer of themselves than teens, but are still unsure how to be an adult. This age group does desire and actively seeks out better quality relationships with friends, families, coworkers, and romantic partners. They keep relationships that allow them to grow and change, give out honest advice, and support their life choices. The 56-67 age group are less willing to make quick decisions. They are more willing to accept their life as is. This age group has built or created a found or biological family. The older age group will think long and hard before making a big life change because it also affects their family. Older age groups will actively resist change in order to protect their way of life. The 56-67 age group are the head and leaders of families, and actively protects and cares for the family.

Race

Races

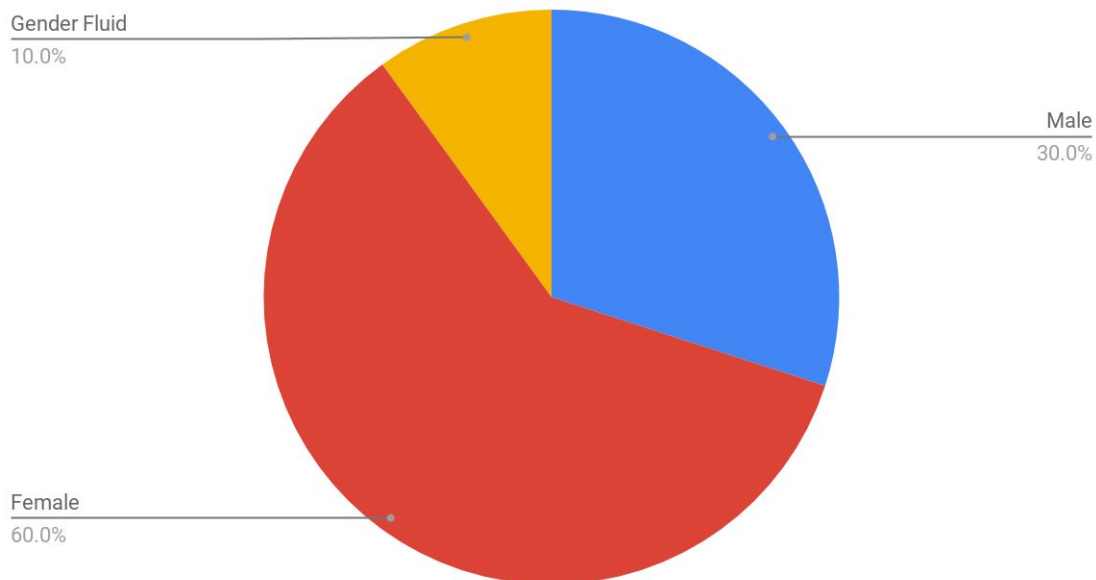


Fifty percent of the protagonists are white, 40% are black, and 10% are Indian.

Thirty percent of the graphic novels focus a plot line around a protagonist's racial identity. However, only one graphic novel *Pashmina* exclusively focuses on a protagonist's discovering their cultural and racial identity. The other two books have a small plotline relating to racial identity. In *Bingo Love*, Hazel is an African American growing up during the Civil Rights Movement and the story continues to the present day so some of the actions in her life are influenced by her racial identity. In *Home After Dark* Russel is taken in by a Chinese couple during the 1950's. During the 1950's the town people discriminated on the couple with derogatory comments. This a background detail that does not majorly affect the main story. Seventy percent of graphic novels do not feature a plotline that focuses on exploring a protagonist's racial identity.

Gender

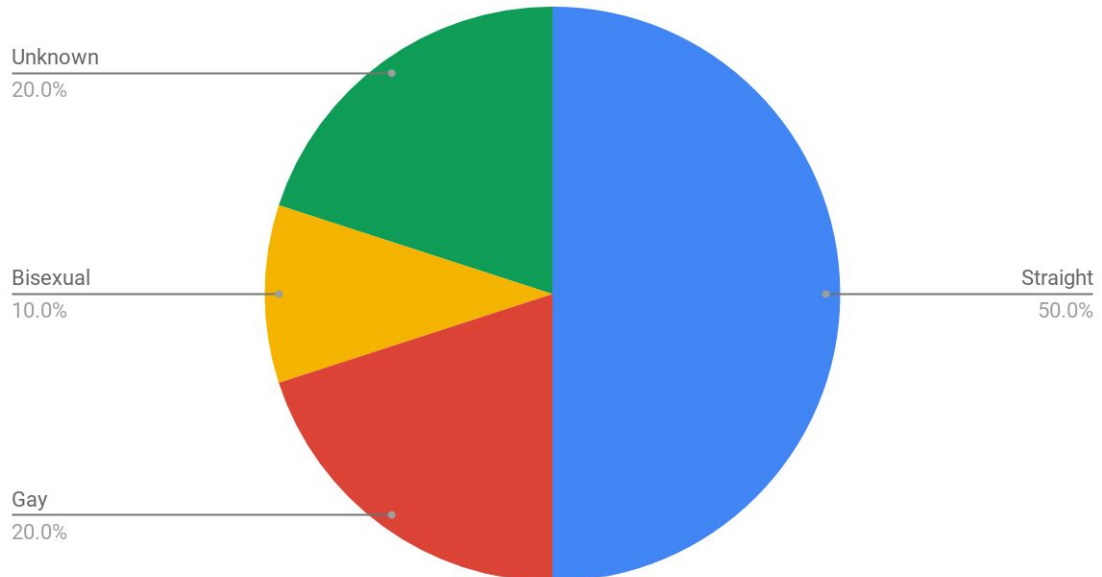
Gender



A majority of the protagonists are female 60% while 30% are male. All males have short hair that does not grow past their neckline. All females have hair that is shoulder length or longer. One main character is gender fluid. According to *LGBTQ+ Glossary* (2020) from the It Gets Better Project, Gender Fluid means “someone whose gender identity and/or expression varies over time”(section 3, para. 20). Prince Sebastian also known as Lady Crystallia dresses as male or female depending on how they feel. However, for most of the graphic novel, Prince Sebastian must hide his female side. Prince Sebastian’s parents want him to marry a handpicked princess and do all activities expected of a prince: horseback riding, sports, diplomacy. If it is discovered he is a Lady Crystallia the reputation of the royal family could be ruined, family relationships are destroyed, and exiled. All this does happen but Prince Sebastian grows closer and accepted by his family, and freely dresses and acts as they want.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual Preference



The sexual orientation of protagonists is 50% straight, 20% gay, 10% bisexual, and 20% unknown. There was an exploration of teens experimenting with sexual preferences. Thirty percent of protagonists were unsure of sexual orientation. These protagonists spent time questioning their identities and values, exploring media relating to sexual preference, and experimenting with relationships. Twenty percent of protagonists were sure of sexual identity but could not pursue relationships or tell family about orientation for fear of death or injury because of sexual orientation. Fifty percent of the protagonists were comfortable and sure of their sexual identity and spent time pursuing romantic relationships.

Two protagonists have an unknown sexual preference from the graphic novels *Home After Dark* and *Spill Zone*. After several readings of the graphic novels, there were

no hints or plot lines that lead to a clear ruling of their sexual preference. These graphic novels had no romantic plotline for the protagonist. Also, these protagonists have no close friends and avoided authority figures, and kept to themselves, but very loyal to family.

Class and Culture

The economic class, culture, and setting have a big impact on the educational opportunities, careers, and actions of the protagonist. Two protagonists are royal members of the ruling class. Both stories are set in a kingdom ruled by a monarchy in the 16th or 18th century. These protagonists have more wealth than other protagonists, but have more restrictions on their behavior or movements. These royal members are expected to receive a rounded education to include diplomacy, dancing, foreign languages so they are ready to rule one day. Romantic partners must be approved by the king or queen, or the protagonist must have a love affair in secret. Their dress is regulated too for the season, social event, and time of day. Royalty is expected to dress in elaborate tailored dresses and suits. The daily wear for Prince Sebastian is brown shoes, black pants, white shirt with button cuffs, gold epaulettes, a cape, and a sash. While as Lady Cystallia she wears fashionable backless, strapless dresses in very vivid colors. Lady Poppy wears early 16th-century medieval dresses that are a combination of the Mediterranean and Moroccan culture.

The middle class does not have the same opportunity as the royal class, but protagonists do have more freedom to pursue hobbies and other education. Five protagonists are middle class. The setting for the graphic novels is present day America,

but one starting the 1960's to present day. One protagonist is an adult that is middle class, she works as a telemarketer. Her job allows for economic stability, she can pay bills, afford a hobby, and go out with friends. The other protagonist that grows from a teen to an old woman stays middle class. She marries, has children, and becomes a stay at home Mom with a hobby as a dressmaker. Both she and the husband provide and support their children as they grow, and have good relationships with the adult children, and grandchildren. These two women do love to dress in colorful dresses. Three middle class protagonists are teens throughout the whole graphic novel while one is a teen that grows older. There are one to two parents working with a stable income that allows for economic stability. These protagonists have a stable home life, but parents are absent for most of the day from work. The protagonists go to a public or private school and join activities without worrying about the cost. The protagonist does not have a job but does have hobbies and extracurricular activities. These hobbies give the protagonist an activity to focus on and allow for projects that may lead to money or opportunities. Other extracurricular activities allow for social opportunities and friendships, in turn, can lead to big adventures. These three protagonists wear similar clothes: jeans, long or short sleeve T-shirt, that some accessorize with a plaid button-up shirt.

The working class works for a living either have just enough to get by or are one paycheck away from financial ruin. The working class has very little economic stability due to low wages or job availability. Three protagonists are working class. Two protagonists are working class due to supernatural events. In *Black Hammer*, Abe is a farmer because he is trapped in a dimension that is an American town stuck in the 1950's.

He has been trapped there for ten years and has nothing else to do. In *Spill Zone*, Addison is a photographer paid by each picture she takes in the supernatural weird place called the Spill Zone. If she doesn't take pictures, her sister will not have money to live because their parents died. Addison must spend money to keep her equipment in working condition and replace objects lost while working. In *Home After Dark*, Russel and his father move from place to place taking odd jokes. They end up in Marshfield, California in the 1950's and his father's job allows them to buy a house, but they have only enough money to buy essential furniture. The house does not have adequate food. Russel has very little stability in his life. After his father abandons him the Mah's take him in as their own son. Only then does he have stability in his life. Russel is the only protagonist in the working class to attend school, but he frequently skips school. These protagonists are outcasts in their community and looked down upon by others. They live outside of town or on the outskirts. They are wary of people outside their families. They are wary of outsiders because they are protecting a family member, hiding a family secret, or a distrust of strangers because of an unstable background. All protagonists wear jeans and t-shirts.

Characterization

Identity

One major theme found throughout the graphic novels was the theme of identity. Two questions of identity were found through ten graphic novels: Who am I? And Who do I want to be? First Who am I? explores where the protagonist comes from and how

they act. For example, in *Pashmina*, the protagonist explores her Indian identity and learns about female oppression. As a character through the use of her pashmina, she learns how previous owners empower themselves to change their lives.

The second question of identity is Who do I want to become? This question explores characters embracing oppressed character traits judged to be wrong by society in the graphic novels. For example, in *Bingo Love*, Hazel learns to repress her identity as a lesbian from her disapproving family by marrying a man, becoming a housewife, then having children. After finding the love of her life fifty years later she marries this love became the person she wanted to be.

Another answer: Who do I want to become deals with personal inner conflict. In *Home After Dark*, Russel is abandoned by his father, but a couple takes him in. He is a good kid at heart, but due to all the bad influences in his life, she struggles to make the best choices. Russell steals money from the couple, runs away for a while, gets beat up, then ends up back at Mah's house. In the end, the couple forgives him, and he pays back the money working in the family business.

Under the theme of Identity, protagonists mainly have a Person vs Self conflict relating to a Person vs Society conflict with intrinsic motivation toward self improvement and discovering personal identities.

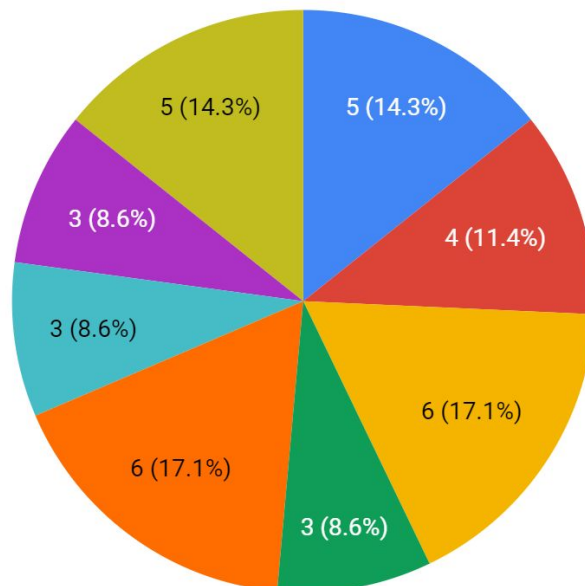
Motivations

According to Literary Devices.net (2020), character motivations are defined as a reason behind a character's specific action or behavior distinguished by the character's own consent and willingness to do something and is used to connect the behavior and

actions of a character with the events of the story. Character motivation also serves as an explanation for what a character does for the readers to understand the causes of a character's actions. Character motivation is separated into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from a character being personally motivated by an intangible reward such as satisfaction, pleasure, achievement, knowledge. Extrinsic motivation comes from an external factor from the environment; these physical rewards are money, power, or lust (Literary, 2020).

Motivations

- Being accepted by others
- Being acknowledged by family
- Finding companionship
- Changing family situation
- Discovering one's true self
- Gaining control over one's life
- Pursuing a passion
- Realizing a dream

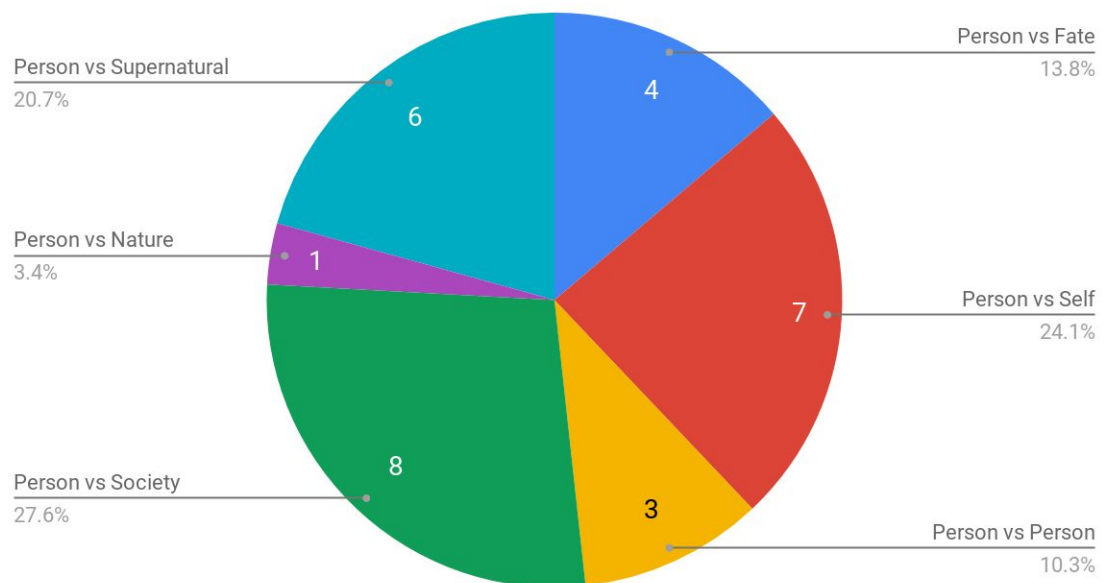


This pie chart shows the protagonist's motivations that occur at a frequency of three or more in graphic novels. For example, the green slice means three different protagonists have the motivation to act because they have a changing family situation. These character motivations are taken from *The Character Motivations Thesaurus* (2020) to code for consistency. Seven intrinsic motivations and one extrinsic motivation. The

extrinsic motivation from three graphic novels is a changing family situation. The seven intrinsic motivations in descending order of graphic novels are (6)discovering one's true self, (6)finding companionship, (5)realizing a dream, (5)being accepted by others, (4)being acknowledged by family, (3)gaining control over one's life, and (3)pursuing a passion. The majority of motivations the protagonist has are intrinsic to improve their quality of life, develop a talent, find companionship with family and friends, or self discovery. A protagonist can have more than one motivation in the graphic novel.

Conflicts

Conflicts



According to the book *Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children's Books* (1997), conflict is a major element of plot that keeps the story moving and places the protagonist in situations in which they come into conflict with something or someone

else (Horning, p. 154). Conflict is divided into seven categories: Person vs Fate, Self, Person, Society, Nature, Supernatural, and Technology.

A protagonist can have more than one conflict in a graphic novel. The largest conflict is 27% of graphic novels is Person vs Society. Person vs Society does not have to involve society at large, but it may cover a smaller scale such as a neighborhood (Horning, 1997, p.155). Many protagonists have to suppress or control some negative or positive aspects of their personality, special ability, or sexual orientation because of some conflicts from society. This conflict is resolved in two ways first by society embracing the protagonist, or society gradually changed to accept the protagonist. Second, the protagonist either fights society to win against oppression, or they lose and must continue to go into hiding. Which in turn a suppression of the self can lead to conflicts defined as Person vs Self.

Person vs Self is when the protagonist struggles with their sense of self and individual identity (Horning, 1997, p. 155). This conflict makes up 24.1% of graphic novels. Person vs Self conflicts are motivations for the protagonist to discover one's true self, to realize a dream, to gain control over one's life, or to pursue a passion. While Person vs Society conflicts can lead to motivations of a changing family situation, finding companionship, being accepted by others, or being acknowledged by family. Many motivations can overlap for Person vs Self and Person vs Society. When a Person vs Self conflict is solved when a protagonist discovers and accepts their new identity after a journey of self discovery.

The third largest conflict is Person vs Supernatural with 20.7%. The Supernatural conflict is divided into two scenarios: the protagonist fighting against a supernatural environment or a supernatural force. When the protagonist fights against a supernatural environment in *Spill Zone*, *The Backstagers*, and *Black Hammer* the environment is dangerous and a win is considered surviving and thriving in the environment. The protagonist develops tactics for surviving in this environment, but they never solve why the environment came to be supernatural. The second Supernatural conflict is when the protagonist fights a supernatural force. This force is a power unique to the protagonist or an antagonistic force that targets the protagonist or certain people. The protagonist solves the conflict by defeating the supernatural force or gaining control over the supernatural power.

Only 10.3% have a Person vs Person conflict with an antagonist, a person who is in conflict with the protagonist. Only one graphic novel (3.4%) has a Person vs Nature conflict. About 14% of conflicts have a tangible antagonist of a person or creature from nature. The other 86% have a conflict with intangible concepts such as society, supernatural, or self.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study is to utilize qualitative content analysis to examine the main characters in teen graphic novels from 2018. This study is designed to analyze the main protagonist in graphic novels to find patterns to help secondary librarians and teachers choose graphic novels that will appeal to students in grades 9-12.

Three questions this study asks are:

1. What traits make a compelling protagonist for high schoolers?
2. Are there any traits shared between protagonists in graphic novels?
3. What roles do protagonists of graphic novels play in the storyline?

Utilizing two lists, the top-selling graphic novels of 2018 from Amazon and YALSA's Top Ten List of Great Graphic Novels for Teens 2018, I selected in total 10 books for review. Five books were chosen from each list. The selected novels are then read and documented twice: once for reader appeal and twice for the role of the protagonist in the story. Universal themes of identity, love, and family were found in all ten graphic novels. Under the theme of Identity, protagonists mainly have a Person vs Self conflict relating to a Person vs Society conflict with intrinsic motivation toward self improvement and discovering personal identities. Other results reveal common trends in protagonist demographics and physical appearance. The economic class, culture, and setting have a big impact on the educational opportunities, careers, and actions of the protagonist.

Conclusions

Graphic Novel Appeal

Six books that scored more than three points in art clarity and setting detail categories were determined to have art that was easy to interpret and detailed backgrounds. Three books with scores of three or less in both categories had art that was hard to determine in the panels and sparse backgrounds to accurately depict the setting. In Cook's 2017 study found while most students self-reported being engaged with a graphic novel, a couple of students reported having trouble reading the images. The appeal of graphic novels is hindered by unclear art and sparse backgrounds. Clear and uncluttered art and detailed backgrounds can further the appeal of a graphic novel and increase visual literacy comprehension.

Family: What is family?

Another major finding was the theme of family. The theme of family is divided into family acceptance and family dynamics. The acceptance or disapproval of family can shape the relationship and behaviors of the protagonist. Protagonists do care about how their families think of them because they perceive their families as an anchor to keep them moored in society.

Family dynamics are grouped into biological and found family. Six out of ten graphic novels feature biological families. These stories revolve around family relationships influencing events in the story or influencing the actions of the protagonist to keep the family together.

When looking at family dynamics I observed a new type of family. Four out of the ten books feature found families. Found families are a group of unrelated people of differing ages who become families due to unforeseen circumstances learn to cooperate and build a life together. Found families slowly become a family unit to live with each other, protect and cover for other members, and take on jobs and family roles to benefit the family.

Love

Love is another theme found in these teen graphic novels. Love is directly related to family relationships and the type of love the protagonist gives and receives from the family. Two types of love are found in graphic novels: family and romantic love. Family love is divided into parental, sibling love, and friendships. While romantic love is divided into forbidden love and romantic love.

Seven out of ten graphic novels feature parent(s) showing their love for their children, taking care of their children's needs, giving advice, protecting children from harm, forbidding an action, and assigning punishments. Four out of the ten graphic novels had the parent(s) forbid an action or object the protagonist has an interest in. Two graphic novels have a protagonist with dead parents before the book begins. A protagonist has one parent in four of the graphic novels. Two protagonists had one parent die and the other two had a parent abandon the protagonist. Two graphic novels out of ten have a protagonist with two living parents. Three out of ten protagonists have a parental role model outside of the family unit. These parental figures are used to guide the protagonist when they are in need of guidance and experience the parents cannot

provide. These role models also provide training for the protagonist to take on independent responsibilities and become the next role model for younger kids. The protagonist takes on the parental role either to care for a sibling, a child, or others in three out of ten graphic novels.

Only two graphic novels feature a protagonist with a sibling. Siblings are a source of conflict in the graphic novel such as annoying the protagonist, starting arguments, and taking items to antagonize the protagonist. On the flipside, siblings are a major motivation for the protagonist to grow and change.

Six out of ten books feature strong friendships with the protagonist. A majority of friendships in these graphic novels have friends of different backgrounds and values than the protagonists. The protagonist uses their friends to ask for advice, to seek comfort, for their physical presence at a social event, help on a project, or to be together. Three books have friendships between two or fewer friends with the protagonist. Two books have an enemy of the protagonist turn into a friend. Three books feature large groups with the protagonist. A large group of friends can positively influence the protagonist to take on more responsibility and form stronger relationships, or negatively influence the protagonist to lie, steal, and bully other kids.

Three books have the protagonist form strong friendships with one person that turns into a romance. Eventually, these friendships grow into romantic love forbidden by society. Seven out of ten graphic novels have a protagonist with a romantic love interest. Five out of ten protagonists have a romantic love interest that is a forbidden romance.

Physical Features

Each protagonist will have a physical feature that is an artistic choice to highlight certain character traits. Fifty percent of graphic novels have artistic choices done with all character designs such as black eyes.

Hair is an extension of a protagonist's personality that can show character development, changing mood, or artistic choice. Sixty percent of the protagonists have the same hairstyle for the whole graphic novel. The reason for these styles is either for the short duration of the story, a choice of the artist to keep the art consistent, or to show a character's lack of attention to personal looks. Protagonists with static hairstyles on average are a female with long hair in a ponytail or a male with very short hair. There are 40% of the protagonists that do change hairstyle and color. These protagonists change their hair to follow current trends, to stand out, express their personalities

Protagonist Demographics

The age groups of the protagonist are 70% teens, 10% twenties, and 20% aged 56 to 67. The 80% of the protagonists are teens for some part of the story during the graphic novels. Seventy percent of protagonists are teens during the whole graphic novel. A protagonist's age does affect how they respond and react to events in the graphic novel. The teenage group is more willing to explore, experiment, and change. The 20-31 age group does desire and actively seeks out better quality relationships that allow them to grow and change, give out honest advice, and support their life choices. The 56-67 age group will think long and hard before making a big life change because it also affects their family. The 56-67 age group are the head and leaders of families, and actively protects and cares for the family.

The race of the protagonists are 50%white, 40% are black, and 10% are Indian. 30% of the graphic novels focus a plot line around a protagonist's racial identity. The majority of the protagonists are 60% female, while 30% are male, and 10% are gender fluid.

The sexual orientation of protagonists is 50% straight, 20% gay, 10% bisexual, and 20% unknown. There was an exploration of teens experimenting with sexual preferences. Thirty percent of protagonists were unsure of sexual orientation. These protagonists spent time questioning their identities and values, exploring media relating to sexual preference, and experimenting with relationships. Twenty percent of protagonists were sure of sexual identity but could not pursue relationships or tell family about sexual orientation for fear of death or injury. Fifty percent of the protagonists were comfortable and sure of their sexual identity and spent time pursuing romantic relationships.

The economic class, culture, and setting have a big impact on the educational opportunities, careers, and actions of the protagonist. Two protagonists are royal members of the ruling class, have more wealth than other protagonists, but have more restrictions on their behavior or movements. The middle class does not have the same opportunity as the royal class, but protagonists do have more freedom to pursue hobbies and other education. Five protagonists are middle class. There are one to two parents working with a stable income that allows for economic stability. These protagonists have a stable home life, but parents are absent for most of the day from work. The protagonists go to a public or private school. hobbies give the protagonist an activity to focus on and

allow for projects that may lead to money or opportunities. Other extracurricular activities allow for social opportunities and friendships. The working class has very little economic stability due to low wages or job availability. Three protagonists are working class. Only one working class protagonist attended school but frequently skipped school. These protagonists are outcasts in their community and looked down upon by others. They live outside of town or on the outskirts. They are wary of people outside their families.

Characterization

Questions of identity were found throughout all ten graphic novels. Stephen (2007) found in their research that young adult books typically include the following literary elements: teenage protagonists, a distinctly teenage voice and/or attitude, and a journey toward identity discovery and separation from adults (pp. 12-13). Under the theme of Identity, protagonists mainly have a Person vs Self conflict relating to a Person vs Society conflict with intrinsic motivation toward self improvement and discovering personal identities.

Seven intrinsic motivations and one extrinsic motivation. The extrinsic motivation from three graphic novels is a changing family situation. The seven intrinsic motivations in descending order of graphic novels are (6)discovering one's true self, (6)finding companionship, (5)realizing a dream, (5)being accepted by others, (4)being acknowledged by family, (3)gaining control over one's life, and (3)pursuing a passion. The majority motivations the protagonist have are intrinsic to improve their quality of life, develop a talent, find companionship with family and friends or self discovery.

The largest conflict is 27% of graphic novels is Person vs Society. Many protagonists have to suppress or control some negative or positive aspects of their personality, special ability, or sexual orientation because of some conflicts from society. Which in turn a suppression of the self can lead to conflicts defined as Person vs Self. Person vs Self conflict makes up 24.1% of graphic novels. Person vs Self conflicts are motivations for the protagonist to discover one's true self, to realize a dream, to gain control over one's life, or to pursue a passion. While Person vs Society conflicts can lead to motivations of a changing family situation, finding companionship, being accepted by others, or being acknowledged by family. Many motivations can overlap for Person vs Self and Person vs Society. When a Person vs Self conflict is solved when a protagonist discovers and accepts their new identity after a journey of self discovery. The third largest conflict is Person vs Supernatural with 20.7%. The Supernatural conflict is divided into two scenarios: the protagonist fighting against a supernatural environment or a supernatural force. Only 10.3% have a Person vs Person conflict with an antagonist, a person who is in conflict with the protagonist. Only one graphic novel (3.4%) has a Person vs Nature conflict. About 14% of conflicts have a tangible antagonist of a person or creature. The other 86% have a conflict with intangible concepts such as society, supernatural, or self.

Recommendations

This study used 10 graphic novels from two different lists. Time restrictions of this research was the cause of the small sample size. In order to improve this study, an increase in the sample size would provide more data, but may have different results than

this study. The accuracy of analysis would increase with more time and researchers to allow for improved, unbiased results. The researchers should also have a background in art. I do have a background in education and literature, but I do not have a strong background in art.

The scope of research could be broadened to include more research is on gender fluid characters in literature, media, and education. Follow-up studies are needed for how gender fluid teens react and respond to gender fluid characters in literature. What perspective do they have that has never been explored before? This study could also be broadened to study more protagonists in graphic novels from other years to notice changing trends.

Follow-up studies can look at family dynamics and the influence of found and biological families on different genres of graphic novels. Other follow up studies can study how family sizes in young adult books affect the protagonist's motivations and conflicts. While another future study can look at the number of siblings represented in current picture books. A future study can further study a protagonist's role as a parent and caregiver to family members.

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APPENDIX A

TITLES OF BOOKS IN STUDY

Amazon's Best Comics and Graphic Novels of 2018	YALSA's Top Ten List of Great Graphic Novels for Teens 2018
<i>Grass Kings</i>	<i>The Backstagers</i>
<i>All Summer Long</i>	<i>Black Hammer</i>
<i>Redlands</i>	<i>Brave</i>
<i>Super Late Bloomer</i>	<i>I Am Alfonso Jones</i>
<i>Illegal</i>	<i>Jonesy</i>
<i>Sleepless</i>	<i>Kindred</i>
<i>Love Bingo</i>	<i>Lighter than my Shadow</i>
<i>Home After Dark</i>	<i>My Brother's Husband</i>
<i>My Solo Exchange Diary</i>	<i>Pashmina</i>
<i>Ricanstruction</i>	<i>Spill Zone</i>
<i>Upgrade Soul</i>	
<i>What to Do When I'm Gone</i>	
<i>My Boyfriend is a Bear</i>	
<i>Green Lantern</i>	
<i>Crush</i>	
<i>Space Boy</i>	
<i>Woman World</i>	
<i>Vision</i>	
<i>The Prince and the Dressmaker</i>	
<i>Hey, Kiddo</i>	

APPENDIX B
FIRST READING
Background of Books

Title of Book	Main Character	Setting	Plot	Theme	Style
Home After Dark	13-year-old Russell Pruitt <i>Skinny boy, white, freckles, haunted look in eyes, blue jeans, dirty T-shirts</i>	1950's Marshfield, California	Thirteen-year-old Russell Pruitt, who, abandoned by his mother, follows his father to the sun-splashed land of California in search of a dream. Suddenly forced to fend for himself, Russell struggles to survive in Marshfield, a dilapidated town haunted by a sadistic animal killer and a ring of malicious boys.	Coming of Age, Abandonment, loss, betrayal, loneliness	<i>Black and white realistic drawings Shades of Grey</i> Select use of dialogue
Sleepless	Lady "Poppy" Pyppenia Sleepless Knight Cyrenic African, Princess,	Castle, medieval fantasy Kingdom of Harbeny	The kingdom of Harbeny crowns a new king after the former king dies. His daughter Lady Pyppenia cannot inherit the throne, however she is the target of an assassination. With her sleepless knight, potential lover, Cyrenic, Lady Pyppenia hopes to find her killer and navigator life at court without her father.	Trust	<i>Watercolor, use of red, medieval dress with inspirations from Moroccan culture</i>
Love Bingo	Hazel Johnson Mari African American, <i>Hispanic</i>	1963 to present-day America, Midwestern City	When Hazel Johnson and Mari McCray met at church bingo in 1963, it was love at first sight. Forced apart by their	Identity, Sacrifice, Love	

			<p>families and society, Hazel and Mari both married young men and had families. Decades later, now in their mid-'60s, Hazel and Mari reunite again at a church bingo hall. Realizing their love for each other is still alive, what these grandmothers do next takes absolute strength and courage.</p>		
The Prince and the Dressmaker	Prince Sebastian(Lady Crystallia) Frances	Paris, France <i>18th Century</i>	<p>Prince Sebastian is looking for a bride—or rather, his parents are looking for one for him. Sebastian is too busy hiding his secret life from everyone. At night he puts on daring dresses and takes Paris by storm as the fabulous Lady Crystallia—the hottest fashion icon in the world capital of fashion!</p> <p>Sebastian’s secret weapon (and best friend) is the brilliant dressmaker Frances—one of only two people who know the truth: sometimes this boy wears dresses. But Frances dreams of greatness, and being someone’s secret weapon means being a secret. Forever. How long can Frances defer her dreams to</p>	Identity	

			protect a friend?		
My Boyfriend is a Bear	Nora <i>brown hair, White, wears sundresses</i>	Modern-day, American Suburban town	The delightful story of Nora who, after a succession of terrible boyfriends, finds a much happier relationship with a 500-pound American black bear.	Love	
<i>Black Hammer</i>	Abraham Slam, <i>Brown hair, white, super strength, sense of justice</i>	<i>Farm and southern town stuck in the 1950's</i>	Once they were heroes, but the age of heroes has long since passed. Banished from existence by a multiversal crisis, the old champions of Spiral City--Abraham Slam, Golden Gail, Colonel Weird, Madame Dragonfly, and Barbalien--now lead simple lives in an idyllic, timeless farming village from which there is no escape! But as they employ all of their super abilities to free themselves from this strange purgatory, a mysterious stranger works to bring them back into action for one last adventure!	Family, Identity, Isolation	
The Backstagers	Jory, <i>African American, curious, teen</i>	Modern-day, All-boys school St. Genesis	Jory, a new student at an all-boys school, feels left out of school life until he stumbles upon the backstage crew of the drama club and the mysterious tunnels they keep watch over.	Friendship	

Jonsey	Jonsey, <i>Long curly hair with green tips, brown skin, loves to wear plaid</i>	Modern Day, High School	A sarcastic teenager with the powers of cupid unleashes her preternatural matchmaking abilities on her school with hilarious and charming results.	Love, Identity	
Pashmina	Priyanka Das, Indian wears glasses, teen		Priyanka discovers in her mother's belongings a magical pashmina that leads her on a journey to India, where she seeks to understand the secrets of her family and to claim her own personal identity.	Culture, Family Identity	<i>Real world is in shades of blue, black and gray. Indians fables and the other world is in color</i>
Spill Zone	Addison, teen photographer, adventures	<i>Dystopian landscape called spill zone</i>	An event destroyed the small city of Poughkeepsie three years ago, forever changing reality within its borders. When an eccentric collector makes a million-dollar offer, Addison breaks her own hard-learned rules of survival and ventures farther into the Spill Zone than she has ever dared.		<i>Dark muted color palette</i>

APPENDIX C

The Rubric of Literary Merit in Graphic Novels

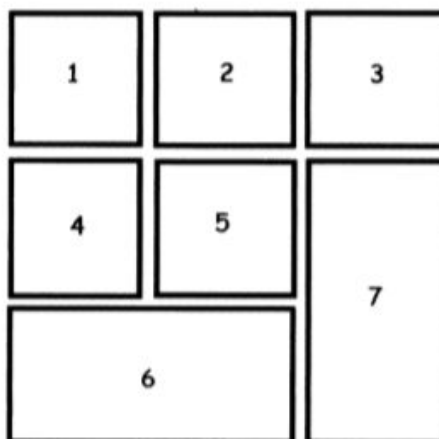
Rubric of Literary Merit in Graphic Novels, 2.0

Title of Graphic Novel: _____

Author: _____

I. How to Read a Graphic Novel

- A. In order to accurately gauge the literary merit of a graphic novel, you will have to read it differently than you would traditional text. **Read the text and images as two distinct elements. In each panel, read the text first and then read the image.** If you try to read graphic novels without considering *how* you're reading, you will tend to jump between the speech bubbles, and pass over the rich textual information embedded in the images.
- B. You might be confused about what order in which to read the panels on a page. In general, you read left-to-right, top-to-bottom, just like in English text. Here is a diagram to illustrate:

Section
Totals:

II. Before Reading (15 points)

Pre-read by skimming through the text, and answer the following questions:

- A. Opening to a random page, can you tell how the panels flow together?
impossible to tell —————→ **natural flow**
 1 2 3 4 5
- B. What kind of art style is being used? Is it easy to tell at a glance what is happening in the images, or do they require more time to figure out?
indistinct/muddy —————→ **striking and clear**
 1 2 3 4 5
- C. Based on first impressions, do the colors, art style, or other artistic elements evoke a certain mood? If so, write it down for comparison later.
no mood/sterile representation —————→ **evocative, distinct mood**
 1 2 3 4 5

Initial Mood: _____

— III. During Reading (20 points)

While reading, remember: *read the images and text as separate, equally important elements.* Answer the following questions:

- A. How much emotion/reaction is carried by the character's facial expressions, gestures, etc.? How easy is it to tell what a character is thinking/feeling without reading the text?
zero expression —————▶ **clear/complex facial expressions**
 1 2 3 4 5
- B. How much information about the time and space of the setting comes from the images? Do you rely on the text to *tell* you where and when you are, or do the images do that?
setting is nondescript —————▶ **shown complex/vivid details of the setting**
 1 2 3 4 5
- C. Does the dialogue (or narration) sound "authentic"? Does the dialogue match the emotion presented by the images (e.g., do characters sound mad when they ought to)?
unnatural dialogue —————▶ **very authentic, nuanced dialogue**
 1 2 3 4 5
- D. Look at the structure of the panels. Does "form follow function"? Does the shape, color, size, etc. of panels and boxes tell you anything more about the emotion or importance of the scene they depict, or are they generic?
panels are generic or confusing —————▶ **form of panels intentional**
 1 2 3 4 5

— IV. After Reading (15 points)

- A. Reflect on the themes which emerged throughout the work. Do those themes match the mood evoked by the images during the Pre-Reading?
no clear theme —————▶ **theme integrated seamlessly into art**
 1 2 3 4 5
- B. How grade-appropriate is the piece in terms of text complexity or thematic maturity?
entirely inappropriate —————▶ **perfectly suited to my class**
 1 2 3 4 5
- C. Overall, how fitting is the text, its format, or your knowledge of the text's content for your learning goals?
entirely inappropriate —————▶ **this text strongly supports my learning goals**
 1 2 3 4 5
- II, III, and IV Totaled:**

— V. Conclusion

Add up the points scored (out of 50) and multiply by 2. Your text is an "X" level text based on the following chart:

90 - 100% = **A**
 80 - 89% = **B**
 70 - 79% = **C**
 60 - 69% = **D**
 50 - 59% = **E**
 <50% = **F**

Graphic Novel Title: _____
Class (Grade/Level): _____
Rubric Grade: _____

This grading scale should give you a better idea about the fitness of a graphic novel for your class. Of course, you should always trust your own judgment about the fitness of the images and text for your students; I merely hope this guide gives you another tool to support the inclusion of graphic texts in your classroom.

I hope this rubric encourages you to include more graphic novels in your teaching, now that you have an easy way to ensure their merit! Thank you!

The rubric is taken from Pagliaro's (2014) article, "Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words?."

APPENDIX D
SECOND READING
Character Analysis

Character Analysis	Summary of Traits	Image	Text
Physical Traits Age Gender Body Type Race Clothing Trademark Colors Facial Expressions Unique Abilities			
Personality Sexuality (list character traits here)			
Dialogue of the Character Color Shape of word balloons Font Accent			
Drawing of the Character			
Relationship with Characters in the story (List Characters and relationship)			
Motivations			
Conflicts Person vs Fate			

Self Person Society Nature Supernatural Technology			
-------------------------------------------------------------------	--	--	--