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# Reading Process Comparison between Graphic Novel and Traditional Novels

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REVISIONS MADE

In the abstract, I added a word to the first line that was missing a word.

On the Running Head, I corrected a typo for the word comparison.

One page 12, I added a space to ensure the heading was not orphaned.

On pages 15 and 19, I added an additional line after the caption.

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### Abstract

Through this study I examined how readers use different reading process when reading a graphic novel and traditional novel. The guiding question for the study was how does the process differ when reading a graphic novel when compared to a traditional novel? This research is a qualitative study of one student's processing while reading a graphic novel compared to a traditional novel through the use of verbal protocols of reading. While reading both the graphic novel and traditional novel the subject used a variety of strategies such as visual cues, inferring, predicting, connecting, questioning, author's style and rereading. Based on the finding, one major conclusion can be drawn: if teachers are going to use graphic novels with their students, students will need specific instruction on how to read a graphic novel.

### **Section One- Introduction**

While substitute teaching at the local middle school graphic novels abound. As I take attendance in my study halls, at least one student in every study hall has a graphic novel. In one instance, a student is so engrossed in her graphic novel that she does not acknowledge me when I call her name for attendance. While disappointed in her lack of attention during attendance she impressed me with her devotion to reading. In another instance, I observed a student reading a graphic novel during AIS reading. According to the teacher, this student was a highly reluctant reader who rarely would read independently; however, the reading teacher often observed him engaging with graphic novels. Both of these instances demonstrate the students' interest with graphic novels. Graphic novels deeply engaged both students through the use of words and images working together to tell the story.

#### **Problem Statement**

Graphic novels use vibrant images to engage reluctant readers. The variety of materials available in the graphic format for both teachers and students has grown. Graphic novels come with unique text features and considerations. If teachers are going to use graphic novels effectively, we need to understand how the reading process may differ when reading a graphic novel compared to a traditional novel.

#### **Significance of the Problem**

Graphic novels provide different avenues for the researcher. According to Schwarz (2013), one area of research related to graphic novels is how young graphic novel readers employ the reading process. Schwarz (2013) also notes research is needed to determine if students miss something such as descriptive phrases and details when reading a graphic novel instead of a traditional novel. As technology and multimedia presentations expand students need

to be able to critically view and comprehend the new literacies. Schwarz (2006), explains on the importance of new literacies for our students.

### **Purpose for the Study**

The purpose of the qualitative study was to investigate the difference in reading processes when reading a novel in the traditional format compared to a novel in a graphic format.

### **Research Questions**

Throughout this study, I attempted to provide insight the following question:

- How does the process differ when reading a graphic novel when compared to a traditional novel?

### **Personal Rationale for the Study**

I became fascinated with graphic novels as an undergraduate enrolled in an adolescent literature course. One of the genres studied was graphic novels. Prior to the adolescent literature course, I associated graphic novels with comic books. The discussions in the class led me to see the wide berth of the medium. Since then, I have explored graphic novels independently. When it came time to determine my capstone topic, graphic novels was an easy choice because I was already interested in the topic.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study lies in Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. Gardner believes there was more than one way to be smart (Brown & Meyers, 2008). Gardner identified eight different areas for intelligence; the areas are bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, naturalist and spatial. Graphic novels specifically appeal to the spatial and linguistic (Downey, 2009). Graphic novels appeal to students with spatial intelligences because students with spatial intelligences excel with

images. Students with linguistic intelligences are drawn to words, thus graphic novels also appeal to those students.

### **Research Design**

During this project, I combined two major methodologies. The first was content analysis of a children's book by Rick Riordan that was adapted into a graphic novel. During the content analysis, I attempted to determine what the graphic novel author chose to leave out, chose to paraphrase, and chose to represent visually when compared to the original text (Hoffman, Wilson, Martinez, & Sailors, 2011).

The second methodology employed was a verbal protocol of reading. The verbal protocol of reading was conducted while the subject was reading. Prior to reading, I instructed him to share with me what he was thinking as he read. In using the verbal protocol of reading, I determined what processes the subject uses while reading the graphic novel compared to when the subject reads the traditional novel. I then analyzed the verbal protocols for any trends that become apparent (Hilden & Pressley, 2011).

## Section Two- Literature Review

Prior to beginning a research study, reviewing the literature available is essential. This section is divided into three major sections: (1) what is a graphic novel, (2) benefits of graphic novels, and (3) problems with graphic novels.

**What is a graphic novel?** Before examining the benefits and problems graphic novels present, it is important to understand what makes a graphic novel. Discussed in the following sections are the (1) definition of graphic novels and (2) history of graphic novels.

**Definition of graphic novels.** Many authors have defined graphic novels in varying terms; however, the authors include similar aspects. Graphic novels fall under a larger term, *graphica*, encompassing comic books, comic strips, graphic novels and manga (Thompson, 2008). Thompson defines *graphica* as a medium combining images and words in a sequential format to tell a story. Graphic novels differ from the rest of the formats under the umbrella of *graphica* because graphic novels are long enough to require traditional book binding (Yang, 2008). According to Rice (2012), graphic novels often contain a more complex plots than the other formats in the *graphica* medium. Graphic novels also differ from other formats in the medium because graphic novels often contain a complete storyline (Thompson).

**History of graphic novels.** The history of graphic novels begins with the history of *graphica*. The format of *graphica* has been around for approximately 125 years, in the beginning the majority of the format was comics (Lapp et al., 2012). According to Baird and Jackson, Will Eisner is considered the “modern godfather of graphic novels” (2007, p. 5) for his book *A Contract with God*, published in 1978. The next notable graphic novel, *Maus: A Survivors Tale* by Art Spiegelman won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 (Baird & Jackson). These two pieces of literature (Einser, Spiegelman) sparked the development of the vast *graphica* medium.



**Benefits of graphic novels.** Graphic novels can be a beneficial element in the classroom. The benefits of graphic novel can be broken down into three sub-categories (1) new/expanding definitions of literacies, (2) instructional appeals of graphic novels, and (3) appeals of graphic novels for students.

*New/expanding definitions of literacies.* As our society become more enthralled with digital media, teachers need to provide students with skills to navigate through the digital information. In light of these changes, traditional literacy definitions are no longer effective (Schwarz, 2006). Yang (2008, p. 187), states graphic novels “bridge the gap between media we watch and media we read.” Schwarz (2006) states graphic novels can be used to meet both traditional literacy demands as well as multiple literacies. Schwarz offers examples of traditional literacy skills, which can be taught with graphic novels. Schwarz shares how one English teacher used the student creation of graphic novels as a means for students to “communicate what they thought was most important and that serves as good review (pp. 59).”

*Instructional appeals of graphic novels.* Graphic novels have instructional uses outside the benefits related to the expanding definitions of literacy. Risko, Walker-Dalhouse, Bridges, & Wilson (2011), note graphic novels are often used to help motivate reluctant readers. Furthermore, the authors note graphic novels have a potential to increase the comprehension and language development of students (Risko et al., 2011). During the time the Graphic novels, according to Lapp et al. (2012), can encourage students to become critical thinkers.

Traditional literacy goals can be met using graphic novels (Brenna, 2013; Lapp et al., 2012; Risko et al., 2011). In her qualitative case study, Brenna (2013) investigates how graphic novels might support student development as readers. Through her research, Brenna investigated two research questions. The first was “what comprehension strategies can student in a Grade 4

classroom learn to apply to a study of age-appropriate graphic novels?” and the second “in what ways might graphic novels support students’ development as readers?” (Brenna, 2013, p. 88). This case study involved one fourth grade classroom of 21 students in a rural school. Brenna collected observations, informal conversations, and small group activities as her primary sources of data. Another data source was a written survey. Brenna concedes, her results are “tentative and contextualized” due to the nature of case studies. Brenna divides her results, conclusions and implications into two categories “reading preferences for graphic novels” (p. 89) and “comprehension strategies” (p. 90). When the study was completed 16 of the 21 students surveyed said they felt graphic novels helped them to become better readers (Brenna, 2013). These survey results were supported by the classroom teacher’s observations on the increase in her students reading. Brenna (2013) draws the conclusion, graphic novels contain a great deal of potential for learning.

The survey study completed by Lapp et al. (2012), shows many elementary teachers believe graphic novels have the potential to provide scaffolding for English language learners (ELLs) and struggling readers when used appropriately. Kelly (2011) notes graphic adaptations are especially appealing for struggling readers who, from the adaptations, are able to read the same titles the more proficient readers are enjoying. Finally, Yang (2008), notes the reason many teachers find success with graphic novels for their ELLs and struggling readers is the result of the story occurring through both text and images.

Graphic novels have a potential use outside of the English Language Arts (ELA) subject area. One specific example comes from Yang (2008), where Yang explains using graphic novels within his Algebra class. When Yang knew he would be out of school, he developed “comic lectures” (p.187); his students enjoyed using the comic notes while he was not present. These

notes helped his students because they were able to read and go at their own pace through the lesson (Yang, 2008). Schwarz (2006) notes some graphic novels offer a window to understand cultural differences in a way that is accessible to students.

**Problems with graphic novels.** While graphic novels have numerous benefits for teachers and readers, graphic novels are not without critics. Teachers hoping to use graphic novels in their classroom will face a large number of difficulties. One of the biggest appeals for the use of graphic novels is that many students are drawn to graphic novels; however some students are not (Schwarz, 2013).

When planning to use graphic novels in the classroom some problems may arise. Schwarz (2006) states the use of graphic novels, like many new ideas, will face resistance. To help counter the resistance, Schwarz (2006) offers a few pieces of advice. One method to help counter the resistance is to discuss the goals you hope to achieve by using graphic novels in your class. One reason graphic novels meet resistance is graphic novels are untested on standardized tests. (Schwarz, 2006).

Rice (2012) expands upon the difficulties Schwarz (2006) mentions. Rice (2012) writes an account of the difficulties she faced when trying to use graphic novels in her middle school English class. Rice faced many obstacles such as finding graphic novels appropriate for her students, finding the money for the purchase of the books, and teaching students to read both the images and the text for comprehension. Despite the difficulties she faced, Rice states that teachers should still consider using graphic novels in the classroom.

The student in Risko et al. (2011) summarizes another argument used against graphic novels. The student wrote her father felt graphic novels were a waste “because they barely have any words and do not ‘exercise the brain’” (Risko et al., 2011, p. 311). Others believe by using

graphic novels we will place our students at a disadvantage compared to other students who read the traditional canon of books (Lapp et al., 2012).

### **Section Three-Methods**

This research is a qualitative study of one student's processing while reading a graphic novel compared to a traditional novel through the use of verbal protocols of reading. In addition, I compared a graphic adaptation to its original counterpart using content analysis. Based on these analyses I developed themes in an attempt to demonstrate the differences in the reading processes students use when reading graphic novels.

#### **Participant**

This study involved one male, middle school student, Tommy (pseudonym) who is on grade level for reading, as determined by a running record (Clay, 2002) of the student's reading. The study used non-probability, purposeful selection. Tommy was chosen due to the ease of access in meeting with him, as he is family friend. The participant was also chosen because he falls into the middle-school age range generally discussed when referring to graphic novels. Tommy comes from a family of readers. Tommy enjoys reading and feels that if "people don't like reading they should feel ashamed."

#### **Setting**

This study took place outside of the school setting. Tommy and I met at the local library for 60 minutes twice a week for nine weeks.

#### **Books Used**

During this study, we used three books. The graphic novel the student read was *The Red Pyramid The Graphic Novel* by Rick Riordan, adapted by Orpheus Collar (Riordan, 2012). For the content analysis, the graphic novel was compared to *The Red Pyramid* by Rick Riordan (Riordan, 2010). The traditional novel read by Tommy was the second book in the trilogy *The Throne of Fire* also by Rick Riordan (Riordan, 2011).

**Positionality as the Researcher**

I completed my undergraduate degree in childhood and special education at Roberts Wesleyan College. Immediately after graduating with my bachelor's degree, I started working on my master's degree in literacy education at SUNY Brockport. Being literate is vital to success. As a teacher, I want to provide my students with every opportunity to develop their literacy skills to be successful in the future.

**Methods of Data Collection**

**Interviews.** Before I began having Tommy read, I conducted a brief interview to gain an understanding of what he already knew and thought about graphic novels. After both readings, I conducted an interview in an attempt to investigate Tommy's opinions and thoughts of both the texts.

**Comprehension checks.** The comprehension checks were conducted at three different times for both the graphic novel and the traditional novel. At each comprehension check, I asked Tommy three questions and asked him to respond in three different formats. One question was answered orally, one written, and the final question was a visual response. I recorded Tommy's oral response to return the response later.

**Running records.** I conducted a running record while listening to my subject read. I noted any errors, corrections and reading strategies the reader employed. After the subject completed the reading, I analyzed the errors and self-corrections to determine what kind of processes the reader was using and to determine the reading level of the reader (Clay, 2002). These running records were taken at the same interval as the comprehension checks.

**Procedures**

The first portion of the study was a content analysis of a graphic novel adaptation of a children's book, *The Red Pyramid* by Rick Riordan. During this content analysis, I attempted to determine what the graphic novel author chose to leave out, chose to paraphrase, and chose to represent visually when compared to the original book.

Before Tommy began reading, I conducted a brief interview. While reading the graphic novel adaptation, *The Red Pyramid* by Rick Riordan, my subject was asked to share what he is thinking as he thinks it. This provided a window into the subjects thought process. During these sessions, I recorded and transcribed what the subject said; this combination will allow me to revisit the subject's thoughts later for analysis. The process was repeated when the student moved on to reading the traditional novel. The traditional novel, *The Throne of Fire* by Rick Riordan, is the second book in the series after *The Red Pyramid*.

**Limitations**

Throughout this study, there were two major limitations that cause the conclusions and implications to be limited. All of the results in this study are the result of a single student study. Thus, results may differ if different students were involved. In the future conducting similar research with a variety of students would help to increase the validity of the findings. Another limitation of this study is that I focused only on one graphic novel and one traditional novel. In the future, using different graphic novels would increase the validity of the results and conclusion in the study.

**Criteria for Trustworthiness**

To ensure this research and conclusions are as accurate as possible I used the triangulation of data that I gathered over a prolonged engagement with persistent observation.

The triangulation involved looking across the multiple sources of data, the comprehension checks, running records, content analysis and verbal protocols. The research process lasted approximately nine weeks where I met with Tommy for 60 minutes twice a week during that time. During these sessions I recorded, using audio and written notes, the thought process of Tommy while he read, in addition to a pre- and post- reading interview about the graphic novel and traditional novel. I have also provided a detailed description of the context and participant of the study allowing for others to examine how the results can be transferred to a different context.



**Section Four- Analysis**

Upon the completion of data collection, I began to analyze the data for apparent themes. My first step in analyzing the data was to examine the transcripts from my interviews and reading sessions with Tommy in conjunction with the content analysis results by linking Tommy’s comments to the content analysis. Upon completion of my analysis, the difference in strategy overshadowed all other themes.

**Differences in Strategy Use**

While reading, Tommy used a variety of strategies to comprehend the texts. Tommy varied the strategies he used dependent upon what text he was reading.

	Visual Cues	Inferring	Predicting	Connecting	Questioning	Author’s Style
Graphic Novel	58%	18%	10%	5%	0	0
Traditional Novel	1.5%	22.7%	4.3%	10.8%	15%	1%

Figure 1- This table represents the percentage of usage for each strategy represented.

As I reviewed the data, I found Tommy used seven different strategies to read and comprehend the texts. Table 1 shows the percentages for the comments made. The percentages do not equal 100 percent because some comments were counted into multiple categories. Other comments were not counted because they did not fall into these categories but fell into other categories that were insignificant. From this finding, I analyzed his use of seven specific strategies: (1) using visual cues, (2) inferring, (3) predicting, (4) connecting, (5) questioning, (6) noticing writing

styles and (7) rereading. In the following section, I analyze the visual cues Tommy used while reading.

**Using visual cues in graphic novel.** Tommy's use of visual cues within the graphic novel can be broken down into subsections of (1) images, (2) layout, (3) panels, (4) text bubbles, (5) narration box, and (6) onomatopoeias. Tommy used visual cues for understanding the story more in the graphic novel than in the traditional novel. Of all the comments Tommy made while reading the graphic novel 58% of the comments were related to visual cues in the pictures; making visual cues the used strategy in the graphic novel. Many of the comments Tommy made while reading the graphic novel were related to visual cues for comprehension.

**Images.** Although the use of visual cues was Tommy's preferred strategy when reading the graphic novel the attention to the images specifically was not immediately noticeable but developed over time. In the first chapter of the graphic novel, Tommy made two comments referring to the images present. On the next page Tommy again commented on the image he was observing saying "looks like he is having a memory from trying to go wherever he was." These are the only two comments Tommy makes for the first chapter in the book. The second chapter has three comments related to the images. The first comment this chapter, "I think they are going to get in an argument by what's going on in this [the picture]," revealed Tommy using the images to gain a deeper understanding beyond just explaining the picture. The next comment revealed a similar thought process; Tommy stated, "I am guessing they are pretty scared looking by the picture and what's going on in the picture."

In chapter three, is where Tommy started to observe and comment on the images. Over the course of the chapter, Tommy made nine comments relevant to the images. Tommy begins to use the images to help move the story line along in this chapter. A specific example of this

comes from page 77, panel 3 (77-3) and page 78 panel 1 (78-1) both of these panels were images only. Tommy used the images to help his understanding of what was occurring in the story. He stated “And the cat is coming down on Carter but it looks like he’s has flames coming out of his weapons and now in this picture uh... it looks like Carter slashed the lioness and he’s out of his box at least.” In chapter four, Tommy increases the number of comments related to visual cues yet again to fourteen comments. The comments made in chapter four differ from most of the comments we have seen up now because Tommy linked his comments directly to the text. For example, the text has a speech bubble saying “Sadie! Wait up!” (89-7); upon reading the bubble Tommy immediately commented “ ‘cause she is flying out of the window that Bast just kicked open.”

Throughout the rest of the book, Tommy made comments on the images to help improve his understanding of the story. One example of this occurred in chapter six of the graphic novel where six out of the seven comments Tommy made were related to the image. Chapter six was a short action pack chapter. In graphic novels, it is rare for the actions of the characters to be described; instead, the character’s actions are often illustrated. In order to understand what was occurring in the story Tommy had to use the images to understand how the dialogue fit in the story. One such example occurs on page 126. After reading panel three Tommy said “and then it looks like a giant crocodile monster came out of the water instead of Nethyps.” Then Tommy read panel five followed by the statement “‘cause it looks like she got hit in the head.” This example demonstrated Tommy’s use of images to understand what is occurring in the story.

Much of the narration of the original novel could be eliminated from the graphic novel because descriptions of scenes were often drawn in instead of written. The use of the visuals can be a positive and a negative for the reader. In the graphic novel visual details can be overlooked

by the reader. While reading the original *Red Pyramid* and *Throne of Fire*, Khufu (a baboon) is described as having golden fur. In the graphic novel, Khufu is drawn with golden fur (figure 2).



Figure 2- This image is from *The Red Pyramid Graphic Novel*

However when Tommy read *Throne of Fire*'s description of Khufu he stated "I've notice that in a lot of other comic books don't exactly take the description of people, er the characters in books to their comic books like Khufu didn't have golden fur in the comic book." This misunderstanding and oversight is minor enough to leave Tommy's understanding unaffected however, it demonstrated a potential for details being overlooked.

**Layout.** Often in graphic novels the panels are read in a left to right top to bottom manner much like a traditional novel. Overall, when the panels moved from left to right top to bottom then on to the next page Tommy was able to follow the flow of the story line. The first time a two-page spread was encountered, Tommy continued to read as if it was a single page spread. However, because the panels contained few text boxes Tommy lost little meaning and sequencing.

Then next time a double spread layout occurred, approximately ten pages later, Tommy successfully navigated through the panels. Even though he was successful at catching the changing layout, he momentarily thought he was reading in the wrong order saying “oops” while looking back and forth across the page trying to determine if he made a mistake.

**Panels.** Aside from the layout of panels, Tommy revealed other understandings while reading. Occasionally, Tommy would miss individual panels even if the rest of the layout was read correctly. During the first reading, Tommy had two instances where he omitted or nearly omitted an entire panel. The first instance was page five panel seven; missing this panel should have resulted in mild meaning loss because it has a follow up to a question asked in the previous panel and links the following panel.

**Text bubbles.** More than missing panels Tommy struggled with reading the text boxes. The text boxes in the graphic novel included speech bubble and narration boxes. When deciding the order to read the text the boxes are read again in the left to right top to bottom fashion. The first time Tommy missed a speech bubble was on page 11 in panel six. Omitting the speech bubble had little effect on his understanding. On page 36 in the third panel, Tommy missed a bubble, he continued to read the next two bubbles before going and reading the previously omitted bubble. This particular speech bubble was down towards the bottom of the page, which is why the bubble went unnoticed when he read the panel the first time. Approximately ten pages later, Tommy again missed a bubble, and again this missed bubble did not impair his understanding of the text.

**Narration boxes.** The narration boxes in this particular graphic novel are in two different colors, orange and blue. Tommy noted, “...the blue outlined boxes would have been Carter’s thoughts and the orange ones are Sadie’s thoughts.” Only one other time Tommy referred to the

narration boxes. The next comment occurred two sessions later when he stated “I think the orange and blue boxes are their thoughts; instead of having thought bubbles they just put them in boxes.” Although Tommy ceased mentioning the narration boxes outside of these two references, I believe Tommy continued to acknowledge who’s thoughts or point of view he was reading.

***Onomatopoeias.*** A large component of graphic novels is the use of onomatopoeias within the illustrations to provide the reader with a clearer idea of what is occurring in the story. The graphic novel contains about 40 different onomatopoeias occur outside of speech bubbles. Of these times, I observed Tommy actually saying the sound twice. While he only made the sounds twice, I believe Tommy occasionally observed the sounds. One such comment was, “Thoth is talking to Khufu in his secret language.”

**Using visual cues in traditional novel.** Tommy referenced visual cues three times during the reading of the traditional novel. Each of the comments relates to the print conventions in the book. The first time Tommy encountered italicized font in the book Tommy concluded “and in the different font it, by the words, it shows that that’s Horus talking.” However, on the next page italicized font is used for emphasis instead of representing Horus or Isis speaking. Tommy observed this by “and it looks like they use the different font for other things that just people talking.” Tommy’s observation is derived from how the text is written as a transcript of a recording by the main characters; occasionally the characters talk outside of the recording this speech is represented by brackets around the text. Tommy recognized the use of brackets for text that appears outside of the immediate story line when he stated “and they use brackets to like act as if they were talking to each other not in the story.” Tommy used visual cues slightly within the traditional novel; however, while reading the graphic novel Tommy used visual cues heavily.

**Inferring.** While reading the graphic novel Tommy made 28 inferences, of the 28 inferences nine of the inferences were partly based on the images Tommy was observing. The first comment Tommy made during the verbal protocol was an inference based on images. Tommy inferred the couple in the illustration was married because the two characters were “standing like that hand in hand.” Tommy used his personal experiences that married couples often hold hands.

An example of Tommy inferring based on his visual cues occurred on page 88, panel seven when Tommy stated “and it shows a close up picture of his teeth which makes me feel like it is going to have some damage if they get to him.” While Tommy did not say “I inferred...” his statement fell under the category of inferring because he is taking what is in the text, in this case the image, and combining it with his past experiences to create an inference. Other times, Tommy used inferring as a strategy without direct reference to the images. Tommy stated “I think the uncle is pretty lonely living in the mansion by himself of these years.” Here we see Tommy using evidence from the text “I’m the only member left here” (Riordan, 2012, p. 20) and an understanding that being alone for extended periods makes a person feel lonely.

As previously noted, onomatopoeias are a large piece of graphic novels. On one occasion, Tommy observed the onomatopoeia saying “and it looks like Sadie’s laughing.” The image showed Sadie as a bird, next to the bird was “hahaha” Tommy used his understanding that laughter was often denoted in text with ha’s.

In the traditional novel, Tommy uses inferring as his preferred comprehension strategy. Tommy used the inferences that he made to gain a deeper understanding of the characters and the plot. One example of Tommy using inferences within the traditional novel was “I see that Sadie’s not a very shy person she always wants to be the loudest thing in her environment.”

Tommy used the text combined with his experiences that shy people are normally quiet to form this inference about Sadie.

**Predicting.** When compared to inferences Tommy made few predictions in both of the texts. Predictions are similar to inferences; inferences tend to require a slightly more thinking than a prediction. Predictions occur based solely on what is occurring within the text. The majority of Tommy's predictions in the graphic novel occur in the beginning of the book, only one occurs outside of the first chapter. The reason Tommy's predictions occurred in the beginning of the book because as the book goes on the pace picks up. Instead of making predictions Tommy chose to make inferences. One of Tommy's early predictions was "I think he just killed the dad and this guy is like the demon in the book or the series." Some of Tommy's predictions were connected with inferences.

Predicting in the traditional is also less than inferring. This decrease is likely linked to Tommy's preference for inferring. In contrast with the graphic novel, Tommy's predictions in the traditional novel occurred at the end of the book where the action is more intense. This difference is due to the suspenseful nature of the second book. At the end of the book approaches one of the antagonists has gone missing, Tommy made this statement "If she mentioned that there must be something coming up about Vlad."

**Connecting.** When connecting to reading a reader can make three types of connections (1) text-to-self, (2) text-to-text and (3) text-to-world. During his readings, Tommy used each of the connections once.

**Text-to-self.** In the traditional novel is the first time we see evidence of Tommy using text-to-self connections. Why Tommy did not make text-to-self connections in the graphic novel is left to speculation. However, a likely reason is that much of the descriptions from *The Red*



*Pyramid* were not written but illustrated and as established earlier Tommy did not favor examining the images in detail.

Both of the text-to-self connections Tommy made were related to the descriptions of what was happening in the story. In one scene in the story, Sadie uses magic to make all the things around her fly in the air, including the candy. Tommy connected with what had occurred when he stated “I would have grabbed some of the sweets if they were flying.” This comment demonstrated Tommy’s use of connections to engage with the story.

***Text-to-text.*** While reading the graphic novel Tommy used text-to-text connections. All of the connections Tommy made were to another series by Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*. Tommy previously read the other texts. Towards the end of the graphic novel, Tommy uses connections to the previous books he has read by Rick Riordan to make a prediction, “... I don’t want to spoil it for myself but in all Rick Riordan books the bad guys almost win and then there’s one person that makes them lose.”

Text-to-text connections are still the most common connections Tommy made. While ten of the connections Tommy made are to the *Percy Jackson* series. These connections are meaningful to Tommy because they help him understand the current story compared to a series he is familiar with. Some of Tommy’s connections are to *The Red Pyramid*. These connections are logical because *The Throne of Fire* is the second in the trilogy. I predict that if this study were to continue to the third book in the trilogy more connections would appear because he would have yet another book to reference.

***Text-to-world.*** Tommy made two text-to-world connects in the graphic novel. Tommy said “I am kinda thinking this is weird ‘cause in the beginning when they first came to the mansion it looks like it is the middle of summer so I guess it changed seasons.” This connection

would be more accurate if Tommy grasped the understanding that the first part of the story takes place in London and the climate in London is quite different from the weather in New York City. However, due to a plot alteration when the graphic novel was adapted that understanding is missed. This alteration is how the characters get from London, England, where the story begins to the United States, where the majority of the story takes place. In the original *Red Pyramid*, the process required two chapters after an explosion. The graphic novel omitted these two chapters by having the characters wake up after an explosion on a boat headed to the United States.

Tommy made another text-to-world connection while reading the graphic novel; he said “I think part of mythology is pulling what has happened in the past or going on right now and making reasons why it happened...” This example showed Tommy’s ability to connect what he read to his other experiences with mythology to make sense of what is occurring in the book.

The first text-to-world connection Tommy made in *The Throne of Fire* he remembered an image from the graphic novel. Tommy recalled the image of the sarcophagus, which the father was imprisoned in and related that image to the images he has seen of the sarcophagus of King Tut. As a result this particular connection is both text-to-text and text-to-world. Aside from this comment, Tommy only made two other text-to-world connections. A connection is considered text-to-world when the reader connects what is happening in the reading to something in the real world. This understanding helps explain why Tommy did not make many text-to-world connections while reading either book because both books are fantasy and therefore would have limited relations to the real world.

**Questioning.** Tommy when reading the traditional novel used questioning as a strategy. Most of Tommy’s questionings are phrased as “I wonder” statements. The type of questions Tommy asked ranged from questions on the characters motives, actions or words. Asking

questions helped Tommy to engage with the text to increase his understanding. Tommy demonstrated that questioning can help increase comprehension of a passage. While reading, Tommy asked himself “I wonder why Desjardins came on their side, I wonder if he realized that Vladimir Menshikov was a bad guy or didn’t want the world to end.” On the final comprehension check, Tommy was able to recall his questioning and responded accurately to the written question for the comprehension check.

One of the times Tommy used questioning as a strategy in *The Throne of Fire* was the result of an alteration in the graphic novel from the original novel. In graphic novel, one of the characters is only referred to by his last name. This is a minor change in dialogue. However, this change makes an impact if the reader then goes on to read *The Throne of Fire* in traditional form where occasionally he is referred to as Michel. Tommy recognized this and commented “In the first book [graphic novel], they just referred to him as Desjardins so I wonder if in the actual book [original book] they said Michel before.”

**Author’s Style.** Another strategy Tommy used in the traditional novel but not in the graphic novel was examining the author’s style. While Tommy only made three comments on the author’s style of writing, the three comments demonstrated Tommy’s ability to think about how the text is written. When Tommy made his comments on the author’s style two of the three comments were related to the descriptive portions of the text, with only one comment relating to the dialogue between the characters. One such comment was “Rick Riordan has a very adjectivable writing when he says ‘he’ Vladimir ‘took a deep breath which sounded like a clogged vacuum cleaner’” (Riordan, 2011, 43). Based on the occurrence of the comments on writing style it is understandable that Tommy did not reference the author’s style in the graphic

adaptation because much of the descriptive language was demonstrated visually instead of in words.

**Rereading.** Tommy uses rereading a great deal at the word level of the text to correct miscues. However, there are two occasions in the graphic novel where Tommy reread for more than fixing simple miscues. The first time Tommy uses rereading to fix a significant mistake was on page 28 when Tommy read the panels in the wrong order. Tommy began by reading the correct panel (panel 2), switches without notice to the third panel; mid-way through the panel Tommy says “wait...” and then returns to the original box. While it is unclear why Tommy switches panels in the first place, we can conclude that as Tommy read the second panel he lost meaning in the conversation between the characters, when Tommy recognized the meaning loss he self-corrected returning to the original panel rereading the parts he had read and skipped into to gain understanding.

The next two pages was also a double spread layout. Tommy successfully navigated the first row of panels. However, at the end of the first row instead of going to the second row on the left page he dropped down to the second row on the right page missing two panels. After finishing the second row, Tommy drops down to the last row on the page missing the three panels on the left page. Midway through the first panel on the third row on the right page Tommy realized he had been reading panels out of order. His realization became evident when he stops mid-sentence saying “whoops I went the wrong way.” This realization is the result of lost meaning. In skipping the two panels then the three panels Tommy missed much of what was occurring in the story. Tommy went back reread the panels in the correct order.

While reading both the graphic novel and traditional novel Tommy used a variety of strategies. Tommy used visual cues, inferring, predicting, connecting, questioning, author's style and rereading.

### **Section Five: Conclusion and Implications**

The primary goal for this study was to explore what reading processes a reader employs when reading a graphic novel compared to a traditional novel. While reading Tommy used visual cues, inferring, predicting, connecting, questioning, author's style and rereading to understand both the graphic novel and the traditional novel.

#### **Conclusions**

As a result, of the study and analysis of data, one major conclusion can be drawn: if teachers are going to use graphic novels with their students, students will need specific instruction on how to read a graphic novel. This is evidenced throughout the analysis of data. Tommy, a reader experienced with graphic novels, still occasionally struggled with how to read a graphic novel. Specifically, teachers will need to ensure that they help their students to follow the layout of a graphic novel. In order to fully comprehend a graphic novel, students need to read both the images and the texts. If students choose to read just the image or just the text they are missing a large portion of the story. Teachers need to model and demonstrate how images and text work together to tell the story. Rice (2012) supports this conclusion when she notes that in order to effectively use graphic novels in the classroom she needed to teach her students to read both images and text to comprehend the text.

#### **Implications**

Based on the data analysis and the conclusions there are implications for teaching practice. If teachers are going to use graphic novels in the classroom, the teachers need to be familiar with how to read and interact with the graphic novel. Prior to using graphic novels in their classroom teachers need to explore the format on their own. This exploration will help teachers to gain an understanding on what they as readers need to do to understand the graphic novel.

The exploration of graphic novels could be joined with professional development on strategies for using graphic novels in the classroom. A possible training for teachers would be on using graphic novels to help teach inferring. Another training topic would be on helping students to read the images and the text together.

Another implication would be that teachers and school librarians should include graphic novel in their collections. If teachers are going to use graphic novels in their instruction students should be able to access graphic novels for independent reading to practice and explore the format.

Through this study, I compared how a reader employed the reading process while reading a graphic novel to a traditional novel. During the study, I employed the verbal protocol of reading to identify the strategies Tommy used with reading both texts. After data collection, I found one theme that overshadowed all other themes, differences in strategy use. Based on the findings, I concluded that if teachers are going to use graphic novels in the classroom students would need specific strategy instruction. Teachers need to explore the medium independently and participate in professional development for successful integration of graphic novels in to the curriculum.

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