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## Encouraging a "Kaleidoscope of Views": Graphic Literature as a Tool for Informative Text Comprehension in the Secondary English Classroom

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ENCOURAGING A “KALEIDOSCOPE OF VIEWS”: GRAPHIC LITERATURE AS A TOOL  
FOR INFORMATIVE TEXT COMPREHENSION IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH  
CLASSROOM

A Thesis  
Presented to the Faculty  
Of the  
College of Arts & Sciences,

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the  
Requirements for the Degree

Of  
Master of Arts  
In English Literature  
Winthrop University

May, 2018

By

Chelsea Ellen Bergmann

## **Abstract**

Over the past decade, graphic literature has fueled the conversations of theory and criticism among scholars and educators alike. With the critical need to teach informative texts and college-ready skills in secondary schools, the debate arises on how these mediums can be further used to extend the capabilities of young readers in a 21<sup>st</sup> century, global community. Thus far, the scholarship on graphic literature in the secondary English classroom proves to be helpful in certain areas, while revealing a gap in others. Missing wholly are discussions about targeted reading comprehension skills particularly related to informative texts and their writer's purpose, such as being able to understand work that informs, critiques, or proposes solutions necessary to be successful. Thus, teachers need to begin developing and collecting the necessary pedagogical tools needed to help inform the reading of these pivotal texts so that students can successfully practice reading and identifying them in other forms of informational text.

My thesis addresses this gap by offering an analysis of how graphic literature can deepen students understanding of informative texts, no matter the genre. By interacting with three examples of graphic literature that express the range of works available, as well as pedagogical analyses and theories surrounding English education, I argue that graphic literature can be used to better solidify the comprehension of informational texts through its unique construction that relies on the working relationship between words and images, leaving opportunities for deeper inquiry and exploration of the texts as a whole. More specifically, in exploring these works as potential mentor texts, I demonstrate how graphic literature can foster the comprehension of informational text features and writer's purposes through exploratory, student-centered inquiry and engagement. In developing these arguments, I will offer insight for secondary English teachers to begin considering and integrating graphic literature as a means of offering a kaleidoscope of views through which students can explore new meaning and understanding.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past decade, graphic literature has fueled the conversations of theory and criticism among scholars and educators alike. With the critical need to teach informative texts and college-ready skills in secondary schools, the debate arises on how these mediums<sup>1</sup> can be further used to extend the capabilities of young readers in a 21<sup>st</sup> century, global community. Today, the secondary English teacher must consider the incorporation of not only fictional texts, such as classic novels, short fiction, or poetry, but nonfiction texts as well, such as news articles, essays, reviews, or blogs, to acclimate students to the heavy demands of informative text comprehension for life after high school. At one time, state standards were questioned for necessity and drove these demands<sup>2</sup>, but today there is more recognition by teachers that these skills *are* necessary in the classroom to ensure future student success. Jeffrey D. Wilhelm and Michael W. Smith emphasize this point in their research on teaching nonfiction in the English classroom in their book *Diving Deep into Nonfiction*. After careful consideration of the role of nonfiction in their own careers in connection to state standards, the authors discovered that informational text comprehension is necessary for student success. In other words, the standards prepare students to answer *how* and “insist on the transfer of expert reading processes, as well as those of composing, speaking, and listening,” to certain purposes outside of high school (5). Thus, the critical concept of analyzing to better comprehend and apply those skills to other informative texts independently are highlighted, showing the significance of challenging secondary English students to ask the important questions of *how* and *why*.

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<sup>1</sup> Whether graphic novels should be considered genres or simply mediums are widely debated. Professionally, they are still considered mediums in the English Education community.

<sup>2</sup> Being able to read and comprehend informational texts is still a required standard. See Reading – Informational Text in South Carolina College – and Career-Ready Standards and Indicators for English 1. Additionally, when these standards were presented and subsequently demanded of English teachers, there was debate about the standards importance in the classroom. See Shanahan, Timothy. “You Want Me to Read What?!”

Regarding graphic literature, there is an overwhelming number of reviews and pedagogical analyses that discuss the educational possibilities of graphic narrative within the English classroom. For clarity, I will be referring to the mediums of graphic narrative and graphic nonfiction collectively as graphic literature<sup>3</sup>; additionally, I will term scholarship related to the exploration of teaching strategies and theories pedagogical analyses. To continue, what is missing from the exchange of reviews and other scholarship is a focus on the merits of graphic literature and its ability to tap into student comprehension of informational texts, and eventually, to present connections for students to practice their own writing for explanatory and informative purposes. For the purpose of this analysis, however, I will focus on and demonstrate how graphic literature, no matter the genre, can be used to foster a deeper comprehension for informative texts. Therefore, the question at issue is in what ways can the visuals, text, and information of graphic literature be utilized to mentor and foster deeper understanding of informative reading within the secondary English classroom? By interacting with three examples of graphic literature that express the range of works available, as well as pedagogical analyses and theories surrounding English education, I argue that graphic literature can be used to better solidify the comprehension of informational texts through its unique construction that relies on the working relationship between words and images, leaving opportunities for deeper inquiry and exploration of the texts as a whole. More specifically, in exploring these works as potential mentor texts, I will demonstrate how graphic literature can foster the comprehension of informational text features and writer's purposes through exploratory, student-centered inquiry and engagement.

### **Where Graphic Literature Stands**

In order to understand the need for further incorporation of graphic literature, it is important to

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<sup>3</sup> Further, I will make distinctions later between what I consider *graphic nonfiction* (any texts that have the sole purpose of informing and explaining through the use of images and other graphics), *graphic narrative* or *fiction* (any work of fiction that uses words and images, or other graphics, to tell a story), and finally, *graphic hybrids* (any works that combine elements of fiction and nonfiction to inform and explain about a particular topic).



first map out the current use of both graphic narrative and nonfiction with regard to reading comprehension and writing. Graphic works have taken center stage in the never-ending debate of what should be considered legitimate literature.<sup>4</sup> Despite protests about the mediums being too childish or simple, teachers have found power in the symbiotic relationship between words and pictures. In recent pedagogical analyses, the analysis of graphic literature has focused primarily on how graphic fiction can encourage reading comprehension and creative and narrative writing within the English classroom.<sup>5</sup> But how might these texts work to benefit the English teacher in first instructing and developing a deeper reading of informational texts before the actual practice of informative writing through modeling?

Although there is significant merit in the teaching of reading comprehension and creative writing with fictional texts, there is still much to examine when it comes to teaching informational texts using graphic literature. To examine these gaps in scholarship related to teaching comprehension of informative texts, however, one must first synthesize the patterns and connections in recent pedagogical analyses.

### **Graphic Literature and Reading Comprehension**

At the heart of pedagogical analyses centered around graphic narrative and graphic nonfiction lies the discussion about how, mainly, graphic fiction can help instruct and strengthen reading comprehension. More specifically, critics highlight the study of thematic issues such as social justice, coming-of-age, and poverty regarding teaching reading and comprehending the essential messages of graphic fictional texts (Carter, “Transforming English” 50; Schwarz; Carter, “Introduction” 8-9; Carano and Clabough 15). For instance, James Bucky Carter, a prominent English education instructor, writer, and editor, calls attention to merits of graphic novels within the classroom in his article “Transforming English with Graphic Novels: Moving toward Our

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<sup>4</sup> See Chute, Hillary L. and Marianne DeKoven. “Introduction: Graphic Narrative.” Chute and DeKoven provide an excellent analysis and map of the development of graphic narratives into scholarly criticism.

<sup>5</sup> See Crilley, Friese, Rice, and Carter in following review of pedagogical analysis.

‘Optimus Prime’.” Essential to his examination is his successful attempt to persuade educators to utilize the genre to “help adolescents relate to adolescent issues” such as friendship, family relationships, racial issues, class, ethnicity, coming-of-age, and much more (Carter 50). Thus, Carter’s argument pays particular attention to the merits of graphic fiction in the classroom regarding thematic reading comprehension.

Additionally, Carter emphasizes several suggestions for incorporating graphic fiction in the classroom including using what he terms “contact zone theory” to teach the thematic content discussed earlier. For example, Carter notes how the theory “is tailor-made for examination of injustice and conflict. It asks students and teachers to critically examine important issues from multiple social and personal points of view and to posit those views in a dialogic conversation with others to do the same” (51). Students and teachers alike cannot practice this kind of critical thinking without practicing and strengthening their reading comprehension as well. Although there is a potential for Carter’s ideas to help support using graphic novels to further reading comprehension within the classroom, his ideas limit the conversation pedagogically; in other words, they do not explore the real potential for using graphic literature to teach the comprehension of informative texts, their features, and their purposes.<sup>6</sup> This gap is precisely what I will bridge by examining the potential of graphic literature as a tool for developing more in-depth reading comprehension skills.

Mary Rice’s *English Journal* article “Using Graphic Texts in Secondary Classrooms: A Tale of Endurance” is another example of pedagogical analysis that explores the use of graphic literature to support the comprehension of figurative elements. Rice launches her argument by mapping out the trials and tribulations of her attempts to incorporate graphic novels into her

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<sup>6</sup> Carter also discusses the use of graphic narrative in developing authentic voice in his students’ writing, which is helpful in considering future implications and research for this analysis. See Carter, James Bucky. “*Ultimate Spider-Man* and Student-Generated Classics: Using Graphic Novels and Comics to Produce Authentic Voice and Detailed, Authentic Texts.”

classroom. Noteworthy are her descriptions of teaching reading comprehension of literary and other fictional texts through literary elements and devices such as onomatopoeia using super hero comics and symbolism and point of view with *Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Despite the merits of her careful research and study, Rice shows the limitations of pedagogical analyses that emphasize the incorporation of graphic literature in the secondary English classroom today. Strict emphasis on graphic fiction and reading comprehension skills related to reading fictional elements leaves a gap in the scholarship of these mediums, particularly regarding graphic nonfiction and the comprehension of informational texts.

In another light, Johanna Drucker provides an analysis of the potential of graphic narratives regarding what she calls “graphic devices” instead of basic literary elements like those explored by Carter and Rice. She asserts that “graphic devices” or features help readers navigate a specific text and improve his or her comprehension in her article “Graphic Devices: Narration and Navigation” (Drucker 122). Drucker’s purpose blends with many English educators’ in that she argues how graphic devices such as headers, page numbers, text features, images, and other print material are an integral part of the navigation and comprehension of narrative texts. For example, she claims,

Narrative, in that latter, readerly experience...is an effect of reading rather than a structure within the text, and coherence is produced across a sequence of textual, visual, and graphic elements. In that instance, however, chronological causality is implied – the result from a reader’s urge for meaning, closure, or resolution of the experience. (Drucker 124)

Ultimately, Drucker discusses the navigational aspects of these devices by targeting the potential for “chronological causality,” which stems from a combination of the reader’s comprehension and his or her expectations of the text (124). However powerful Drucker’s arguments about graphic devices, they still carry a particular focus that leaves a scholarly opportunity to examine

the merits of graphic devices in graphic literature to encourage in-depth exploration and understanding of informational features and purposes related to informative texts.

Thus far, the scholarship on graphic literature in the secondary English classroom proves to be helpful in certain areas, while revealing a gap in others. Missing wholly are discussions about targeted reading comprehension skills particularly related to informative texts and their writer's purpose, such as being able to understand work that informs, critiques, or proposes solutions necessary to function in a 21<sup>st</sup> century global society. Thus, teachers need to begin developing and collecting the necessary pedagogical tools needed to help inform the reading of these pivotal texts so that students can successfully practice reading and identifying them in other forms of informational text. In that respect, how might these vital reading skills be comprehended on a deeper level through the use of graphic literature in order to strengthen students' future reading practices? This question highlights the precise gap I wish to fill related to pedagogical analyses that highlight the incorporation of graphic literature as mentor texts.

### **Graphic Literature as Mentor Texts**

As a final thread of study into the potential for graphic literature to help improve reading comprehension, finding relevant mentor texts to model reading becomes another avenue of pedagogical analysis which reveals further holes in scholarship related to the teaching of graphic literature. Many scholars believe that one of the recent strengths in reading pedagogy related to graphic literature is the attention to finding relevant texts that model good examples of writing in an array of genres, such as Frey and Fischer's analysis of how specific anime, graphic fiction, and internet sources can be used as models to prompt comprehension and writing, Crilley's examination of how comics can be used to model and teach examples of dialogue that reveal characterization and the development of conflict, or Sally Brown's exploration of how graphic novels can be used to inspire students' writing of his or her own graphic stories, practicing the "essential elements" of creative writing like "crafting a meaningful storyline by deciding on

characters, setting, and plot” (6). Brown notes specifically how she used a variety of blank frames to allow students to practice the elements within the graphic works they studied, further emphasizing how these texts can be pulled as models for writing practice.<sup>7</sup> Common amongst these analyses, and more pertinent to this analysis however, is the use of graphic literature as mentor texts to strengthen and teach reading skills; but as I discussed earlier, their focus remains on the comprehension of literary elements for the purpose of creative writing rather than developing informative text comprehension, for which the latter is what students will be more likely to use, handling other forms of informational works outside of high school. To illustrate a needed shift in focus of reading comprehension, I will next examine a few examples of scholarship which target the significance of mentor texts as models for reading through the study of nonfiction texts.

Gallagher, Wilhelm, and Smith emphasize the importance of modeling for students in the classroom what good, professional writing looks like and how it is crafted through the incorporation of mentor texts. Their arguments emphasize a need for the comprehension of nonfiction texts and how their elements work in developing meaning. In discussing the second central premise of his practice for building “real-world” writers, Gallagher notes that in almost every instance of coaching, mentoring, instructing, or teaching there is the needed action of first *showing* how the student can become better (15). Further, he emphasizes the need for his students to “closely observe how others write,” and therefore, he has them “learn by standing next to and emulating writing found in the real world” (16). He offers many models of informative texts for every purpose of “real-world” writing, such as reviews from Amazon.com and print and television ads for evaluating and judging purposes, proving the relevance of such models and how they might be examined in the classroom (Gallagher 99-106). Therefore, Gallagher emulates the

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<sup>7</sup> The questions related to graphic literature and writing that these writers develop will be further explored in chapter four as the focus of this analysis is to strengthen reading comprehension of these texts first.

need for students to first comprehend how the informative text elements work within a text before they apply them in their own writing. In a similar light, he parallels and encourages what Erika Lindemann advocates in her chapter on teaching rewriting from *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*: “We also can share our own writing with students, explaining problems we encountered and how we resolved them” (195). In essence, whether teachers model their own work or the texts of other professionals, mentor texts are essential to the comprehension of how informative text elements read within a specific work before students think of writing in the same manner.

In continuing the relevance of modeling reading using mentor texts, Wilhelm and Smith focus primarily on nonfiction texts, like Gallagher, to elicit the kind of explorative inquiry necessary for students to begin comprehending the elements of informative text.<sup>8</sup> For instance, their first lesson in *Diving Deep into Nonfiction* encourages teachers to examine visual texts such as 18<sup>th</sup> century artwork from William Hogarth. Wilhelm and Smith suggest the study of the images side-by-side (*Beer Street* and *Gin Lane*) in order to ask students what they notice and to question the visuals to determine the choices of the artist and how they affect the meaning of the visuals as a whole (11-12). Thus, students begin to develop as inquirers which strengthens their comprehension of the artistic choices made by a writer and how they are important in the understanding of informative texts. Essentially, Wilhelm and Smith highlight the need for incorporating strategies using mentor texts to strengthen comprehension related to informative texts. However, their exploration leaves room for examining how graphic literature relates to this conversation regarding informative text features and writer’s purpose and how they may be read within a text.

### **Filling in the Gaps**

Overall, there is much more to be done when considering the merits of graphic literature

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<sup>8</sup> This exploration into the significance of inquiry will also play a pivotal role in the development of my own arguments surrounding graphic literature.

regarding their mentoring of the comprehension of informative text elements and how they work to create meaning (for which graphic nonfiction, texts that specifically inform and explain through the use of words and images, is almost wholly ignored). This hidden possibility fits into the conversation of recent pedagogical analyses in that it sheds light on a frequently overlooked subject related to the graphic works: the reading of informational texts within the secondary English classroom. It is not enough to evaluate the same strategies and skills connected to using graphic literature when the expectations of students outside the classroom demand them to be more competent critical thinkers and readers; thus, pedagogical analyses related to incorporating graphic literature needs to move forward and look for more creative avenues and stronger tools for teaching informative text comprehension. The real gap exists in the limited direction of teaching and fostering deeper informative reading skills, so that students are better able to apply these techniques to other forms of informational texts independently. In a similar light, Gallagher emphasizes this same need for students to understand informative texts and their many purposes as students will be conducting these skills in all aspects of their lives after high school. Therefore, the attention to informational reading is not optional, but necessary for a bright and successful future.<sup>9</sup>

There is a significant gap in scholarship related to the teaching of informative text comprehension in the secondary English classroom. I will address these limitations by calling attention to the merits and possibilities of graphic literature through two avenues. The first avenue examines graphic literature as models for comprehending informational text features and how they work within the text. According to Victoria J. Risko et al, “Graphic novels also have rich images and flexible structures that provide options for navigating texts” (377). Like Drucker, Risko et al. call attention to the significance of “navigating a text,” which has an impact on reader

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<sup>9</sup> I must thank my English IV Honors student Bailey Adams, from the fall of 2017, for the inspiration behind this closing line. If it wasn't for her amazing gender equality poster that followed a similar structure (“Equality is not optional, its necessary.”), I would not have written this sentence at all.

comprehension. For students to be able to comprehend informative texts, they must first understand the relationship between the features of a text, such as images, captions, structures, titles, and subheadings, and the corresponding information shared, which I propose can be explored and highlighted more effectively through graphic literature, more so than other basic informational texts.<sup>10 11</sup> For this avenue, I will examine three forms of graphic literature: graphic nonfiction through John Lewis et al.'s *March: Book One*, graphic fiction through Veronica Jamieson's *Roller Girl*, and what I call graphic hybrids like Nathan Hale's *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*, in which graphic authors combine the genres of fiction and nonfiction to explain informative content. When navigating the multimodal and informative digital texts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these aspects of comprehension are vital to students' future reading of these forms of text.

The second avenue of this thesis will explore how graphic literature helps with the comprehension of informative text purposes. Much like the comprehension of informative text features, this avenue will analyze graphic literature as mentor texts for reading and understanding, on a much deeper level, the exact type of craft practiced by professional writers and teachers. As discussed earlier in relation to graphic literature and mentor texts, the concept of modeling has been examined using specific nonfiction texts such as news articles or science blogs,<sup>12</sup> but using the informative aspects of graphic literature as a whole has been minimally explored. Through carefully selected samples of graphic literature, students can also examine the purposes centered around expository texts, with the ultimate goal to identify and analyze, independently, these same

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<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Risko et al provides another example of the limitations of pedagogy surrounding graphic literature, like Carter and Rice, as they focus on the incorporation graphic novels only with regard to reading comprehension.

<sup>11</sup> Risko et al also call attention to the impediments of using graphic novels regarding the understanding of how images and text inform each other. As part of my argument, I will attempt to explore the concepts of inquiry to have students better comprehend these elements by asking *how* and *why*.

<sup>12</sup> Note other specific examples of informative texts as mentor texts in Gallagher, Wilhelm and Smith, and Culham's works. Additionally, the ideas of informative mentor texts, based on examples like the ones used by the scholars mentioned here, will be further explored and matched against models of graphic literature in chapter two that achieve the same comprehension and writing goals.



purposes in other informative works. Thus, I propose that graphic literature stands out as a model and can be used alongside other examples of informative text to strengthen students' reading comprehension first, through the study of incorporating informational text features, and secondly, by examining informative purposes by questioning and exploring models of the text, structures, fluid images, charts, and other graphics of the genres available through graphic literature.

Teaching to read informative texts within and out of the English classroom is the cornerstone of this argument. It is significant to note that there is an intertwining aspect to the teaching of reading in which comprehension and practice cannot survive without each other. So, how can one close the divide between these two ideas and have students develop into thriving, 21<sup>st</sup> century thinkers and readers? The simple answer might be to find the means to fill this gap, which I propose can be supplemented using graphic literature. However, one of the major concepts of the English classroom (reading) is a complicated mode of communication that requires individual attention in order for certain holes of understanding to be filled. Therefore, throughout this analysis I will focus primarily on the comprehension of informational texts by examining how the understanding of informative text features and informational writing purposes can be achieved through studying graphic literature. Using many examples of graphic literature from a variety of genres, I believe the transition from comprehension to independent reading practice can be reached more smoothly.<sup>13</sup> More specifically, through careful attention to the *how* and *why*, which stems from explorative, student-centered inquiry surrounding these models, students will develop an instilling desire to engage and analyze rather than simply identify and memorize.

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<sup>13</sup> Thus, chapter four will examine the potential questions developed from this research, which will lead to discussions about future research opportunities to connect informative writing instruction to the study of graphic literature within the secondary English classroom.

## Chapter 2: Comprehending Informational Text Features within Graphic Literature

Nick Sousanis, a graphic nonfiction writer, claims, “To prepare good thinkers we need to cultivate good seers” (81). Like Sousanis, Wilhelm and Smith note, “If we want students to become expert readers (as the standards and the world demand), we must help them become independent and attentive noticers, questioners, and interpreters on their own” (7). In this spirit, one of the first things I teach my students as we begin English content is to remember, what I consider, the two most important questions to ask in my class: *how* and *why*. One of the main goals of any secondary English teacher should be to guide students from what educational psychology professor Carol Dweck considers the stagnant, “fixed mindset,” and encourage them to become explorers and inquirers, developing a mindset that motivates them to become more curious about the world around them, which Dweck identifies as the “growth mindset” (16). In doing so, students become the very “seers” and “noticers” that Sousanis and Wilhelm and Smith encourage within their respective works. Therefore, I encourage my students to ask me *why* we are doing the lesson we are for the day or *how* what we are learning relates to their lives (which they believe has no correlation). I believe this inquiry practice is essential to strengthening students’ reading skills because they need to comprehend the author’s specific decisions made to develop his or her work in order to understand the purpose and central idea, which also helps the audience develop meaning from the text.

Through the study of models, which I propose can be pulled from graphic literature, students eventually begin to develop as independent inquirers, “noticers,” and “seers.” They begin fostering reading skills by answering the question, providing evidence in support of their answer, and finally, explaining how that evidence supports their reasoning. This basic framework for a critical thinking response through close reading is what guides my lessons almost every day and it is what leads me to the development of the framework for this argument surrounding the use of graphic literature. In what ways can I encourage students to ask those essential questions

so that they begin practicing it as young, self-motivated and engaged readers? I propose that graphic literature provides the kind of models necessary for students to foster informative reading comprehension through explorative inquiry, asking the analytical questions *how* and *why*, to make their own independent reading experiences deep, meaningful, and deliberate.

To connect, students should be encouraged to explore why a writer makes the choices he or she does when developing an informative text. In this sense, the knowledge and perceptions gained embolden students to continue to evaluate readings in a way that expands their perspectives through critical thinking and reading. In fact, much like many states' Common Core standards, the South Carolina College-and-Career Ready Standards and Indicators note that for reading informational text, Standard 8.2, students should be able to “determine how an author uses text features and structures to shape meaning and tone.” Additionally, students should be able to “explain how the author’s ideas or claims are supported through the use of text features and structures,” according to Standard 11.1. The idea is that students need to first comprehend the structures and features<sup>14</sup> of informative texts in order to eventually apply them to independent reading practice. These students will need to be practicing critical readers in society after high school and, no matter the career field they choose, they will need to know how to ask *how* and *why* to understand the tasks asked of them as well as to complete them. The standards also call attention to a significant aspect of informational works that students need to study and comprehend: informational text features. These facets of informative texts will be the focus of my work within this chapter. Therefore, it is the career-ready application of these informative reading skills that makes this argument so significant. This reasoning leads to a potential answer to the question I asked above: how might one encourage students to ask these higher-level thinking questions to comprehend and analyze informational text? I believe one way the recognition of

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<sup>14</sup> As I highlighted in chapter one, Drucker discusses how “graphic devices,” which I refer to as informative text *features* throughout my work, help readers navigate his or her way to discovery or meaning (122).

these elements can be achieved is through the implementation of graphic literature (which provides endless examples of the type of informational text features students need to understand in order to eventually comprehend them in other forms) within the Secondary English curriculum.

### **What Else is Out There?: Providing Models & The Relationship between Words and Images**

Before exploring the potentiality of graphic works, however, it is important to consider their significance in relation to other models that can be used to help strengthen informative text comprehension. By comparing them with other models, I will show how they can be just as effective, if not more so, as other examples of informative text. Here, I will take a more expansive look at the potential of mentor texts discussed in the review of chapter one to solidify the theories surrounding the symbiotic relationship between words and pictures and to show how this relationship can elicit the kind of explorative inquiry (noted above) that students need to fully comprehend informative text features, which are pivotal aspects of nonfiction works today.

***Potential Models of Informational Text Features.*** To begin, one needs to consider the capacity of other examples of informational text to help bridge students' understanding of the concepts and facets of informative text, and how they function within the work, to be successful in a 21<sup>st</sup> century career. In her pedagogical work, *Writing Thief: Using Mentor Texts to Teach the Craft of Writing*, Ruth Culham argues that models for informational text features can be found everywhere and offers several examples of how sample news clippings, brochures, and picture books can help students use models to develop anything from topic ideas to the incorporation of informational text features. In one instance, she presents an example of a brochure from the Susquehanna River Valley Visitor's Bureau in which she notes the informational text features of the brochure can be used as a mentor for students to comprehend how those features are working in relation to the information being presented (Culham 87). Figure 1 highlights a clipping from one of the many brochures offered by the visitor's bureau which Culham suggests. When focusing on the function



Figure 1 Kid-Friendly Fun. Susquehanna River Valley Visitor's Bureau, 2013.

of informative text features, this model provides a good example of a map, title, and subheadings. However, there are a lack of suggestions for analysis practice in Culham's work that deprive students of an opportunity to fully understand the *why* aspect of the features incorporated in the text: *why* are they placed there to begin with? Further, the modeling strategies that Culham suggests illustrate the common practices within the secondary English classroom in meeting required standards related to reading informational text. The pattern among these suggestions is a lack of deeper reading instruction that helps show students the relationship between the informative text features and the information being presented. This approach takes away from students' understanding of the text on a deeper analytical level that enhances the meaning they pull from the text. As I explored in chapter one and discussed at the start of this chapter, in order for students to become the independent learners and self-motivated inquirers and "noticers" they

need to be for life after high school, teachers must provide students with opportunities to practice questioning these models to understand the informative elements before they practice reading those same elements independently through other types of informative text.

To connect, I have also used several examples of informational text pieces including helpful resources from Scholastic SCOPE magazines and infographics I pull offline to peak my students' interests. Figure 2 is an example of an infographic I have used frequently with my



Figure 2 "The Snapchat Story...So Far." Kenny Jahng, 19 May 2016, [www.kennyjahng.com/22-snapshots-infographics-rise-use-snapchat/](http://www.kennyjahng.com/22-snapshots-infographics-rise-use-snapchat/).

students because of the importance of social media in their lives. Taking the analysis a step further, I encourage students first to tell me what they notice about the infographic: what it includes, how it is made, or what things are familiar to them. Then, students are asked how these features help develop the creator's central idea or purpose. Students notice graphs, charts, images, a title, subheadings, percentages, the color yellow, symbols, and some sort of organization,

among other things. Furthermore, the goal is to get students to understand the relationship between the text features and the purpose of the infographic. Students are encouraged to ask *why* the creator makes the choice in yellow or *why* he or she chose the other social media platforms he or she did to compare to Snapchat. Tapping into the correlating standards of comprehension more so than examples presented by Culham, I encourage students to draw connections between text features, similar to or exactly like images, to the information provided. These connections between images and words are what draw students toward self-motivated inquiry. Even with the informative aspects of infographics (which can be engaging for some students because of relevance), however, this type of inquiry and exploration, helping students become better “seers,” can be better achieved by using models from graphic literature. I believe they are even more powerful as models because of their reliance on the relationship between words and pictures and their encouraging nature of requiring students to be active rather than passive readers.

***The Invisible Connection between Words and Pictures.*** It is vital to explore the relationship between words and pictures because it is not only essential to graphic literature, but also to the understanding of how the models I have chosen can help further develop students’ comprehension of informational text features. Therefore, what students begin to develop by examining these examples of informational text is an understanding that a writer’s means of communication does not have boundaries, that, in fact, there are several possible ways to solidify comprehension for an audience. This inquiry and understanding is created through a simultaneous examination of both words and images, showing the significance of how they break those boundaries of limited understanding to help develop and create meaning by working on an equal level. Thus, students begin to strengthen their critical thinking skills required to analyze the informational text presented to them (refer to standards noted earlier).

Sousanis, in his graphic nonfiction work *Unflattening*,<sup>15</sup> notes, “The means by which we order experience and give structure to our thoughts – our languages – are the stuff we breathe in and a sea we swim in. Languages are powerful tools for exploring the ever greater depths of our understanding” (51-52). Thus, language used in the form of words *and* language used in the form of images create the basis for understanding and cultivating new meaning. Sousanis considers the audience’s understanding of the equal significance of words and images as “unflattening,” or the “simultaneous engagement of multiple vantage points from which to engender new ways of seeing” (32). The vital message through Sousanis’s theory is that words and images, studied together, synonymously, are critical to helping develop new meaning and better understanding of the world in which one lives.

Another way to examine the significant relationship between words and images (and why they are vital in a discussion about incorporating graphic literature for reading comprehension) is through the concept of multimodality. By definition, multimodality is the “use or availability of several different modes, methods, [or] systems” (“multimodality, n.”). There is a significant correlation between the mode of communication through images and communication through words at work together on the same page, which is the essence of graphic literature and how it helps students’ comprehension in reading informative texts. In examining the role of technologies and digital avenues within English curriculum, Gunther Kress considers the multimodality of texts as an indication of the hierarchy shift and privileging of modes of communication in which the language of text is shifting to favoring the visual. Kress emphasizes what Sousanis believes should be continually acknowledged with regard to analyzing information or texts to discover and create new meanings: “Texts have always been multimodal: a written text, for instance, is *laid out*

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<sup>15</sup> Nick Sousanis’s *Unflattening* explores the reality of inquiry as one-dimensional and lacking in exploration in our 21<sup>st</sup> century society. His graphic nonfiction doctoral thesis asserts that words should not take precedence over images, but instead, that they should be equally explored to open minds and encourage the cultivation of “good thinkers” and “seers” (81).



in a particular way; it is produced using particular *typeface, size, spacing*; it is produced on a certain (*quality of*) paper. All of these are independently meaningful systems of meaning (making)” (26). To connect with Sousanis’s concerns about the lack of attention to the multiple mode of languages in texts that cause deafening standardization, it is also significant to note that Kress believes that “[on] the whole we have been taught to overlook this kind of multimodality....The new multimodality cannot be overlooked” (26). Therefore, Kress calls attention to the very strength of graphic literature which Sousanis also lends insight to: the “meaningful systems of meaning” that help readers construct their own meaning from the text to develop comprehension. Graphic literature, like the technologies Kress advocates for, thus, represents the potential strength of multimodality for learning in and outside of the classroom regarding the vibrant relationship between visuals and words that carries through many examples of informational text. These texts and their multimodality, therefore, “cannot be overlooked” when trying to engage 21<sup>st</sup> century minds in reading comprehension practice.

More specifically, the effectiveness of the bond between images and words within mentor texts, such as the Snapchat infographic or any example of graphic literature, lies within connections made between received and perceived concepts. In Scott McCloud’s groundbreaking work *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, he examines the relationship between words and pictures related to comics by considering how each language communicates with the reader. He establishes that “pictures are received information. We need no formal education to ‘get the message.’ The message is instantaneous,” and “writing is perceived information. It takes time and specialized knowledge to decode the abstract symbols of language” (McCloud 49). Thus, when the received and perceived ideas work together, the message or meaning is much clearer. For example, McCloud notes, “When words are bolder, more direct. They require lower levels of perception and are received faster, more like pictures” (49). Thus, the effective addition of color or differentiated structure make the information presented stand out.

In informational texts, informative features work like received information and work with the perceived information of the text to create a clearer message to the audience, helping the



Figure 3 "Reducing Food Waste in Schools INFOGRAPHIC." *Taher*, 8 Jan. 2015, [www.taher.com/reducing-food-waste-schools-infographic/](http://www.taher.com/reducing-food-waste-schools-infographic/).

reader to understand the meaning through analysis. For instance, examine figure 3. When noticing the section that talks about extending lunch times, the reader first notices the clock or stopwatch, the received information. This image combined with the statistic provided (the perceived information) work together to create an overall message about extending lunch periods. The orange colored time within the image essentially connects to the bolded "20 to 30 minutes" next to it, making the perceived message for the reader clear: extending lunch time is better for preventing food waste. With practice, these cognitive connections are made by the reader, prompted by questions such as *why* would the creator include an image of a time piece or *how* do the image and the text connect? Based off this analysis, the reader, or student, begins to

comprehend the significance of these text features to the development of the information presented in the text. Thus, students begin to shape an understanding for the *how* and *why* of an author's choice, and how the model prompts engaging reading of the text. This same analysis, of course, is one of the strengths of graphic literature when considering potential mentor texts for students to develop comprehension skills related to reading informational texts. At the same time, the significance of the multimodality of graphic literature is apparent as visuals and text mingle together to help the reader make meaning and develop understanding for the construction of informational works.

### **How Graphic Literature Stands Out as a Model**

So, what makes graphic literature stand out as a significant model for comprehension practice? For one, graphic literature opens more opportunity to target students' interests with dozens of works available that target specific topics such as the march for freedom explored in John Lewis's *March: Book One*, roller derby as told through Victoria Jamieson's *Roller Girl*, or World War I extensively covered in Nathan Hale's *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. To illustrate, *March: Book One*<sup>16</sup> provides an excerpt in which the author and illustrators depict Lewis's memories of preparing for nonviolent protests during the civil rights movement (see figure 4). Based on true accounts from his life during the movement, Lewis explains how his group had to test each other to make sure they could withstand degradation from segregationists when they conducted nonviolent protests (81). As seen in figure 4, artist Nate Powell provides a vivid illustration (although black and white, indicative of the segregation being fought against in the novel) of the tests they would conduct on each other. The individual pictured is shown leaving after water has been splashed in his face, revealing how some could not stand the will to be nonviolent. Each specific panel digs deeper in to the true feelings of the character

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis et al.'s *March* series depicts the memoirs of Senator John Lewis and his time during the civil rights movement as a nonviolent protestor, highlighting the fight for desegregation and the hardships faced along the way.



Figure 4 Lewis, John et al. "Unable to Handle Nonviolence." *March: Book One*. Top Shelf Productions, 2013, p. 81.

and by the last panel, the reader sees how the disappointment and shame felt by the person leaving begins to blacken their mood, still covered in water from the test. Essentially, the recollections of the author and the specific illustrations that take the reader through the emotions felt by the character draw them into the scene as if he or she was there in the room with them. These engaging aspects allow students to sympathize more with the characters, while also giving them an opportunity to examine the working relationship between the author and artist, the words and illustrations presented.

Another instance of stronger engagement opportunities appears in Jamieson's *Roller Girl*<sup>17</sup> as her fictional protagonist Astrid illustrates what it is like to fall as an amateur skater over

<sup>17</sup> Jamieson's *Roller Girl* is a work of graphic fiction that details the coming-of-age story of middle schooler Astrid, rebellious tomboy and determined, amateur roller skater. Jamieson uses the back drop of

and over again when learning to play roller derby. Unlike the startling seriousness depicted in Lewis's work that draws readers in because of an emotional investment in learning the history of the civil rights movement, Jamieson's bright colors and illustrated plights of her rebellious, young protagonist draw a similarly aged audience through visual and relevant life experiences and



Figure 5 Jamieson, Victoria. "Astrid learning to fall." *Roller Girl*. Scholastic, 2015, p. 64.

humor. Detail about roller derby is shown in figure 5 and highlights how much more engaging graphic literature can be; combining illustrated sound effects, symbols of pain from falling (shown by the red and yellow stars), and the humorous ways in which Astrid is drawn falling, Jamieson emphasizes the text of her novel, "If you perhaps think falling on your butt over and over again is 'fun,' let me clear up the mystery for you. It's not" (64). Thus, she is helping the reader to create new meaning from the combined effort of words and pictures much more than other models of informative text can. Her images and words are more powerful and plentiful and teach young readers informative text comprehension through relevance and engaging fun.

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bright and inviting colors and anecdotes and the world of Roller Derby to set her protagonist's journey in which Astrid learns important lessons about friendship, family, and achieving one's dreams.

Finally, there is Nathan Hale's World War I graphic hybrid,<sup>18</sup> *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales*,<sup>19</sup> which provides possibly the most creative and engaging example of the power of graphic literature, especially because his hybrid genre works in an expansive multimodal realm that blends fictional narrators with factual information. Not only that, but he communicates his explanations of historic events through unique combinations of words and images that grab the attentions of readers of all ages. To illustrate, Hale imaginatively paints the political powers of World War I as symbolic animals toward the start of his work. The images related in figure 6 add a level of humor to the history presented in the work, which draws the reader into the tale. The



Figure 6 Hale, Nathan. "Determining representations for the countries of power during World War I." *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. Amulet Books, 2014, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Refer to previous definitions in chapter one to distinguish between three genres presented in this chapter.

<sup>19</sup> Hale's series also includes memorable titles such as *Donner Dinner Party*, *Big Bad Ironclad*, and his first in the series, *One Dead Spy*, which all are examples of graphic hybrids (or more specifically, historical fiction) that provide excellent models of text features for students.

image of the United States as a bunny in panel 8, along with the innocent expression of joy on the face of the hangman in panel six, and the dialogue between the characters creates a sense of humor that engages students more so than the infographics provided earlier, precisely because it is funny. More importantly, however, these images enhance the students' comprehension of text features by forcing the reader to cognitively make connections between the who and the what, the image and the information provided, i.e., the English army was like a bulldog (see panel 7) or associated with Winston Churchill's nickname: "The English Bulldog." Much like Sousanis posits, students are "unflattening" the work before them and cognitively developing meaning by simultaneously exploring the two vantage points of images and text. It is this same connection which heightens the humor of the piece as well.

Whether emotionally or humorously engaging, graphic literature presents a vivid example of the power of words and images and what meaning can be achieved when they are examined as equal vantage points. In another sense, graphic literature stands out as a model for teaching informative text comprehension because, no matter the genre of the work, it provides specific and detailed examples of informational text features that students can study to engage in inquiry and examine the choices of an author. Like the previous examples of informative texts more commonly used within the English classroom, graphic literature stands out more so for the fact that it wholly depends on images and other features to support the significance of its words that, in turn, develop its central purpose. More specifically, graphic works amplify the effects of combining words and images. Students can see, as with other examples of informational text, the significance of the features and *why* the author makes the choices he or she does to develop a work. Students are prompted to be more active readers when examining how the words and images work together to create meaning within the text. Like other models, graphic literature provides examples of subheadings, pictures with captions (for which there is an abundance of examples), and maps, which would seem like nothing new for modeling informative text features.

However, graphic literature allows these features to represent so much more through their multimodal connections.

For instance, in *March: Book One*, the author's and illustrator offer an example of a subheading or chapter break (figure 7) that signals to the reader a break in time, where the author is reflecting on his discussions with some visitors who encourage the flashbacks and memories he

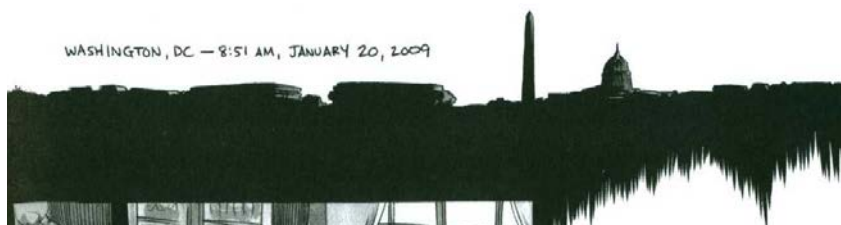


Figure 7 Lewis, John et al. "Flashforward to present day Washington, D.C." *March: Book One*. Top Shelf Productions, 2013, p. 63.

shares about his time during the civil rights movement. Using this feature, students can practice their inquiry skills by considering the relationship between the feature and the rest of the text: *why* might chapter titles (or subheadings) be significant? The connection between the text feature and the information shows how the subheading or section title allows the reader to know what the content of this section of the work will be about, guiding the reader through the work. In the case of figure 7, Lewis et al. wish to not only signal to the reader where in time the story is taking place, but they also want to create a visual that connects with the time, i.e. they provide a depiction of Washington, D.C. on the horizon of the panels, creating a framework for the next panel and fuzziness near the bottom right of the figure that illustrates a fade into the discussion being emphasized on the morning of January 20, 2009 (Lewis et al. 63). Essentially, students see these connections and formulate an understanding for *why* the author made the choice he did in providing a specific title like the one in figure 7 representing the illustrated flashback. Hale and Jamieson also provide chapter titles throughout their work like the one in figure 8 which works like a subheading. Again, they emphasize the potential for readers to create new meaning. In



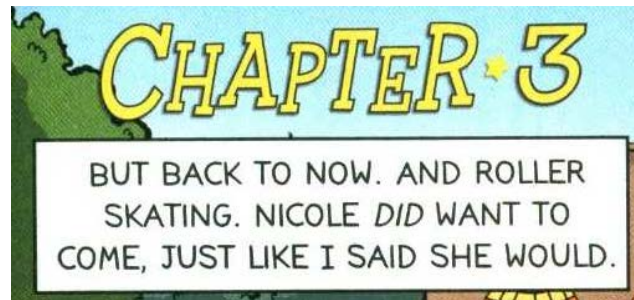


Figure 8 Jamieson, Victoria. "Chapter three title." *Roller Girl*. Scholastic, 2015, p. 33.

Jamieson's work, there is a similar blending of the chapter title with the panels of the page which create an automatic visual connection with the text which calls readers' attention to the place in time Astrid wishes to reflect upon in her story. Readers also experience these connections in Hale's graphic hybrid where chapter titles indicate the next moment in history Nathan Hale the spy is illustrating for the audience, which also strengthens students' understanding of the text as a whole. Both authors/illustrators present models for students to see how subheadings work within a text to create more developed and comprehensible meaning.

These models of fiction, nonfiction, and hybrid genres also illustrate examples of captioning, another significant text feature that students need to be able to read when working on strengthening their informative reading skills. While detailing the political powers at work during World War I, Hale provides a caption for each country to detail information about them like figure 9. Connecting back to Sousanis's theories, the cognitive process of unflattening takes place



Figure 9 Hale, Nathan. "Example of captioning in Hale's work." *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. Amulet Books, 2014, p. 9.

within the reader's mind, helping him or her to further comprehend an author's choices and show how they develop meaning; students use the vantage point of the image and the vantage point of the text feature (the caption) to strengthen comprehension of not only the meaning of what they are reading, but the *how* and the *why* behind it, which, with proper engagement and prompting, can be practiced collectively with reading instruction, illustrating the connecting path from informative text features to the creation of new meaning and understanding of the informative work. Just like in Jamieson's work in figure 10 where she is illustrating "plow stops," readers see the potential meaning derived from the illustration and the captioned label. Unlike other common



Figure 10 Jamieson, Victoria. "Astrid learns how to stop." *Roller Girl*. Scholastic, 2015, p. 87.

examples of informative text, however, works of graphic literature draw the audience through relevance and readers' developed personal investment into the characters created.

Other common text features captured within graphic literature are maps. Figure 11 and 12 present examples of maps from the models of graphic literature I have explored thus far that teachers can use to encourage inquiry and modeling of reading within the secondary English



Figure 11 Hale, Nathan. "Example of a map in Hale's work." *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. Amulet Books, 2014.

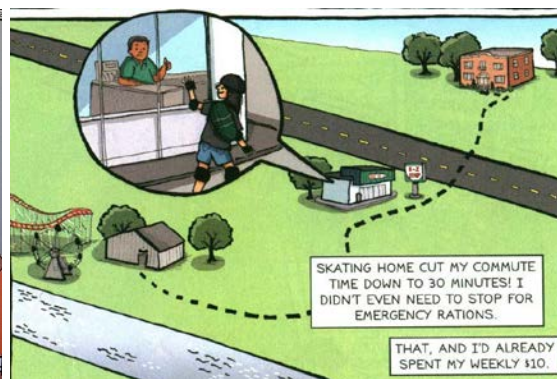


Figure 12 Jamieson, Victoria. "Astrid's map for skating home." *Roller Girl*. Scholastic, 2015, p. 87.

classroom. Much like the captioning and chapter titles, the map provides further detail for the reader, a visual of the expansion of World War I or the path a character takes to get home, which prompts readers to make connections between the image and the informative concepts being discussed in each work. Not only are these illustrations powerfully engaging, but they also represent a meaningful bond between factual information presented by the author and images created to heighten their relevance, meaning, and central ideas.

Ultimately, these models within some examples of graphic literature's distinct genres show how informative text features can be found almost everywhere when searching for mentor texts. However, what sets graphic literature apart further is the unique creativity used to reexamine features and strengthen the meanings taken by readers. These are tools of



Figure 13 Hale, Nathan. "Example of a diagram in Hale's work." *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. Amulet Books, 2014, p. 28-29.

comprehension which only graphic literature as mentor texts can provide. Considering the bond made between received and perceived information within graphic literature, Hale also includes versions of diagrams or charts to help solidify understanding of the information he presents to his readers. For instance, figure 13 shows an imaginative diagram of the causes of World War I,

which not only highlights a cause and effect structure common to informational texts, but also an expert use of images and words to make connections and further develop meaning for the reader. This example undeniably exemplifies the power that graphic literature holds when used as a model for informative text features.

To expand on these assertions, graphic literature allows for deeper exploration, like in Hale's hybrid genre, which permits more engaging inquiry and development of new meaning for the reader. For instance, the explanation of the causes, provided by dialogue from the Nathan Hale character in the upper left corner of figure 13, pairs with the labels and images representing the "isms" to push the reader to make connections between them. Take the label of Imperialism shared with the image of man with a crown holding the world depicted as a column, for example. When these elements are examined individually, the reader will receive the instant message of power and control demonstrated by the image of the column and then, he or she will perceive the information of imperialism as either a word he or she understands or needs to look up to grasp its full meaning. However, these elements or features are combined by Hale to make the interpretation more striking and clearer for the reader, as McCloud suggests when examining comics. In addition, the connected elements are further related to the diagram itself as a pillar helping to hold up the army heading to war, making it a feature that connects to the causality of World War I as well. These features are forcing the reader to make these connections, developing new meaning and comprehension of the author's choices. When considering mentor texts, no other examples of informative text features (further strengthened by the symbiosis of creatively blended words and pictures) can provide such opportunity to explore and analyze a text in order to create new meaning that elicits comprehension of the inner workings of an author's informative product.

Hale continues to provide diagrams that reexamine and push the possibilities of informational text features to elicit meaning, such as his elaborate map displayed in figure 14.

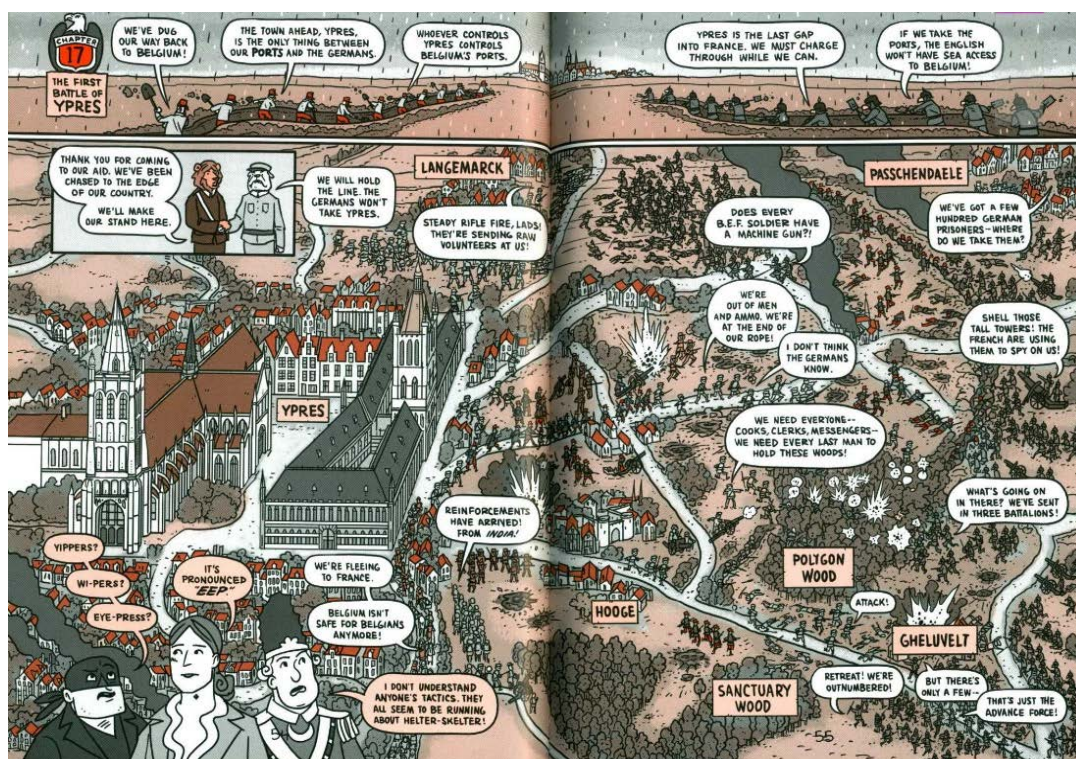


Figure 14 Hale, Nathan. "Battle of Ypres – World War I." *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. Amulet Books, 2014, pp. 54-55.

Unlike the example of a map he provides on the inside covers of his work, Hale's map of the first battle of Ypres provides the reader with an equal measure of words and text which delivers much more than any other typical informative map in a history textbook. Through his graphic hybrid, Hale is able to engage the reader in the midst of the battle, showing both sides of the conflict in terms of those who are fighting, where they are fighting, and what was going on during those fights. As Hale's goal is to depict the chaos of the battle, he creates such detail that elicits a tone of confusion and chaos not only through his images of the tiny soldiers running about from East to West, North to South, and vice versa, but also through the comments from specific soldiers on the field that he displays and his own protagonists in the midst of a history lesson. The revolutionary-era British soldier comments in the bottom left corner, "I don't understand anyone's tactics. They all seem to be running about helter-skelter," and a German soldier, a part of the history being shared, near the bottom right of the map says, "What's going on in there?"

We've sent in three battalions!" (Hale 54-55). All at once, Hale imaginatively illustrates hours of battle and, using carefully connoted text combined with bursting images of gun blasts, shouts, scattering soldiers and people, and finite detail, he provides a multimodal model of informative text that provides further opportunities for struggling readers to engage wholly in inquiry that reveals new discoveries about purpose and choice. Again, Hale shows how graphic literature masterfully uses "multiple vantage points" to help his intended audience create new interpretations (Sousanis 32). In learning from this mentor text, students are able to comprehend how these aspects of informative text work together so that they can, in turn, practice these reading skills with other forms of informational text.

To continue, Hale also provides simpler examples of diagrams that send just as powerful messages to the reader, while also taking advantage of the multimodality that graphic literature feeds on to elicit new meaning. Toward the end of his engaging history lesson, Hale shows part of the American army trying to send messages through pigeon courier, and like common informative texts he provides another example of a diagram that teaches through the equivalent power of visuals and text (see figure 15). Hale provides the message that the Americans are trying to send on the field of trenches and creatively illustrates a step-by-step diagram of what would have been done with the message in order for it to be sent by a homing pigeon. More specifically, Hale



Figure 15 Hale, Nathan. "How to send a homing pigeon." *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. Amulet Books, 2014, p. 114.

illustrates the simple action by using red arrows juxtaposed against the grey of the message and the pigeon. These colors work together to show the flow of the action from writing the message to rolling it up to placing it in the small cartridge, to attaching it to the small bird. Not only does this informative text feature provide meaning that helps strengthen comprehension, but it also shows students the relationship between words and images that is significant to informative text in our modern world. Additionally, there is a connection between the first panel and the diagram that further creates connections for the reader to examine author's choices in placement, organization, color, and information presented, i.e. the pigeon diagram connects with the voices (the text) of the bunnies in the first panel and their idea to send a homing pigeon (Hale 114). Like his diagram of the causes of war and his elaborate battle map, Hale is utilizing 21<sup>st</sup> century elements of informative texts in a way that is engaging for young readers and instructive in encouraging students' own reading practices with other examples of nonfiction work that means to inform and explain.

Even if one examines the fictional genre presented by Jamieson's *Roller Girl*, he or she will find similarly powerful examples, like Hale's illustrated above of informative text features,

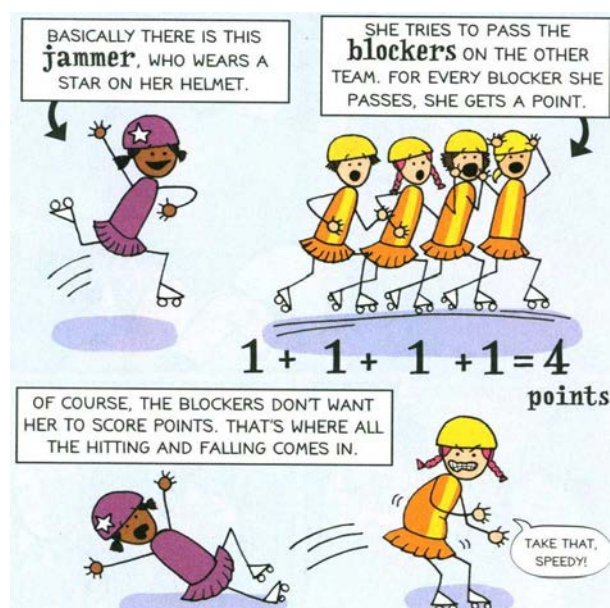


Figure 16 Jamieson, Victoria. "Diagraming the job of a jammer." *Roller Girl*. Scholastic, 2015, p. 17.

where normally teachers and students have to rely on common examples of informative texts such as science blogs or news articles to find. When Jamieson's character Astrid introduces the concept of Roller Derby, showing her immediate fascination with the sport, she provides the illustration in figure 16, in which she explains one of the main rules of Roller Derby that she learned from her mother's program at the event. Like Hale's causes of war diagram, Astrid's illustration utilizes humorous images and captioned informative text to help her audience derive meaning from her story. The detailed stick figures on roller skates illustrate the rule about blocking and earning points that Astrid wishes to share with the reader. Moreover, Jamieson creates an opportunity for inquiry in the classroom, enforcing the "unflattening" of regular analysis in the English classroom to simultaneously learn about the rules of Roller Derby through both the language of text and the language of images, which graphic literature expands on so well. For the reader, seeing the visual of the jammer (however simplified) and seeing the text "basically there is this jammer, who wears a star on her helmet" creates a connection that emphasizes more explicit meaning about that specific player in the game, strengthening comprehension more so than a detailed scientific article that relies heavily on text to teach its audience (Jamieson 17). It is the calling of two avenues of communication that make graphic literature like Jamieson's powerful examples for the practice of reading and comprehending informational text features.

Another example from Jamieson's fictional work appears later when Astrid is reflecting on what happened during her confrontation with her former best friend Nicole and mortal enemy Rachel. With engaging humor and relevant adolescent drama, Jamieson illustrates how Astrid's soda ends up splashing all over Rachel and Nicole in another informational text feature provided to encourage the "unflattening" of learning (Sousanis 32). "I don't know why I did it. I didn't mean to hit them – I just meant to throw my soda at their feet. But a funny thing about physics....," Jamieson opens as Astrid explains her situation (143). What follows her excuse is an



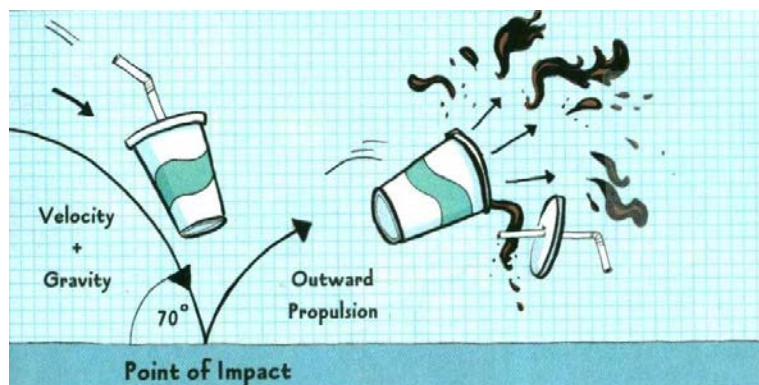


Figure 17 Jamieson, Victoria. "The physics of throwing a soda." *Roller Girl*. Scholastic, 2015, p. 143.

expansion on her ideas about what happened in the form of a diagram about the physics of Astrid's mishap (see figure 17). Once again, there is an interdependent relationship illuminated by the visuals of the spilling cups, its motion, and the text used to emphasize its journey onto the two girls of Astrid's encompassed hatred. Detailed against the backdrop of graph paper, which connotes the mathematics of physics, and labels about its trajectory, the diagram of the cup of soda being thrown creates connections between the action and reaction of velocity and gravity, which not only elicits creative connections between Jamieson's purpose and authorial choices, but also encourages comprehension of these concepts in order to understand *why* and *how* they are working together within the text.

In a similar light, Lewis et al. provide an example of a reexamined informational text feature that shows how graphic literature continues to stand out as a mentor text when studying informative reading comprehension. As graphic nonfiction, Lewis's story takes the reader, toward the end of book one, into an explanation of what the final steps were of their mission to conduct nonviolent protests in establishments where they were unwelcome in the segregated South. Figure 19 shows the informational text feature of a list provided within the text to create connections between the author's reflections, the actions taken by his group of nonviolent protestors, and the context of the time period in which he lived. Lewis notes how "hundreds of volunteers had not yet been trained in the way of nonviolence, so I wrote up a basic list of 'do's and don't's' to be

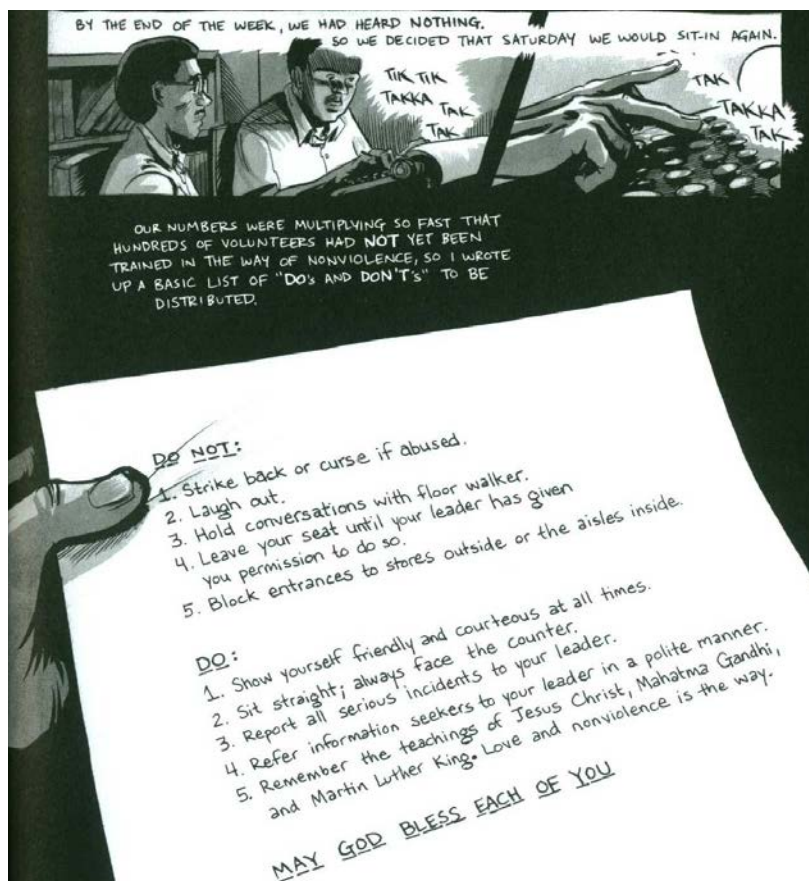


Figure 18 Lewis, John et al. "The do and the do nots of nonviolent protest." *March: Book One*. Top Shelf Productions, 2013, p. 97.

distributed,” and his illustrators take advantage of the multimodal requirements of graphic literature to illustrate not only the list, but also the typing, the action of creating the list (Lewis et al. 97). Very much like Hale’s ornamented and creative diagram on the causes of World War I during 1914, Lewis et al.’s list combines the visual and the textual to evoke connections that strengthen audience understanding. The grip illustrated by the hand holding the informational text feature gives the feature a sense of reality and stronger purpose that is not seen in regularly modeled examples of informative lists. In addition, the list provides emphasis on the goals of Lewis’s nonviolent group and, combined with the visual “tak takka tak” and fingers typing away, reiterates the connections between purpose and choice, such as Jamieson’s physics lesson on throwing a cup of soda. Within the English classroom, students can be encouraged to examine

these connections, practicing student-centered inquiry which will lead to a cognizance of the author's and illustrator's goals that students can apply to future readings.

Through my argument, thus far, I have demonstrated not only the significance of the relationship between words and images that takes place when informational text features are incorporated into an informative work, but also how graphic literature can better help foster the comprehension of these informative features. The more students are prompted to study these features through a variety of examples, the stronger their comprehension of how they work within the text becomes, and the stronger their ability to transfer these concepts and techniques of deep reading to other informative texts becomes. In the next chapter, I will further explore these correlating concepts in order to examine how graphic literature can be used to examine and analyze the purposes of informational texts, which are additionally strengthened and advanced through informative text features.

### Chapter 3 - What is the Writer's Purpose?: Connections between Graphic Literature and Informational Text Purposes

In closing his arguments, Sousanis states, “To step beyond the flat and narrow, we need a kaleidoscope of views, that convey both our dimensionality and dynamic capability” (146). In detailing the theories of the significant relationship between words and images (posited by Sousanis and McCloud), multimodality, and the significance of informative reading comprehension, I have distinguished the capabilities of graphic literature to help with the comprehension of informative texts through inquiry of mentor texts that highlight significant text features vital to a writer’s purpose(s). Ultimately, it is the “dimensionality and dynamic capability” of communication through close reading that I wish to emphasize for my students when studying nonfiction work, and as I have stated before, this is only accomplished through the examination of specific elements of informative texts through multiple lenses or “a kaleidoscope of views” (Sousanis 146). The multimodality of graphic literature not only offers this range of perspectives, but it also allows for deeper exploration into the workings of the author and his or her ideas, which he or she conveys through a powerful combination of words and images.<sup>20</sup>

In this chapter, I will explore the extended connection between graphic literature and potential reading comprehension by examining the transferable connections between analyzing graphic literature, informative text features, and informative text purposes. I will also be offering several examples of how the specific examples of graphic literature I have presented (*March: Book One*, *Roller Girl*, and Hale’s *Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*) can be used to elicit an explorative analysis of essential informational text purposes, further highlighting how comprehending informative text features (as discussed in chapter two) should be explored in the

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<sup>20</sup> Note emphasis on graphic hybrid from chapter two.

secondary English classroom prior to looking at the writer's purpose.<sup>21</sup> Further connections to theory discussed in chapter two will be referenced in order to explain the correlations between the working concepts related to informative texts for this argument. In essence, this analysis strengthens the idea that graphic literature should be considered potential mentor texts for informative text comprehension.

### **Transferable Comprehension: How Text Features Inform Purpose**

When proposing potential pedagogical tools, it is significant to synthesize and draw connections between the tool and the learning objectives the teacher wishes his or her students to comprehend. For my argument, there is a significant connection between two vital informational text elements: informative text features, that develop the writer's central idea, and informative text purposes, which are subsequently developed and organized by the multimodal aspects of informative text features. As I mentioned in chapter two, the South Carolina College – and Career-Ready Standards and Indicators for English 1 require students to be able to explain how an author's claims are supported by text features, as well as being able to determine an author's purpose, which is highlighted in standard 10 for Reading Informational Text (3). I have shown how informative text features can be taught as imperative elements of a text that support why an author decides to incorporate them in the first place. By engaging in explorative and student-centered inquiry and figuring out the *how* and *why* of this aspect of informational works, students also begin to connect with the writer's purpose. In other words, by discovering the motives behind a writer's choices in formatting and organization, students also acknowledge the purpose of the writer, whether that is simply to inform and explain or evaluate and judge a specific topic.

Thus, through inquiry students begin to comprehend how informational text features help support the ultimate claims of an author, strengthening his or her central idea and purpose. For

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<sup>21</sup> Refer to the Reading – Informational Text in South Carolina College – and Career-Ready Standards and Indicators for English 1 highlighted in chapter two for more specifics regarding standards at the secondary level for comprehending author's choices and central idea.

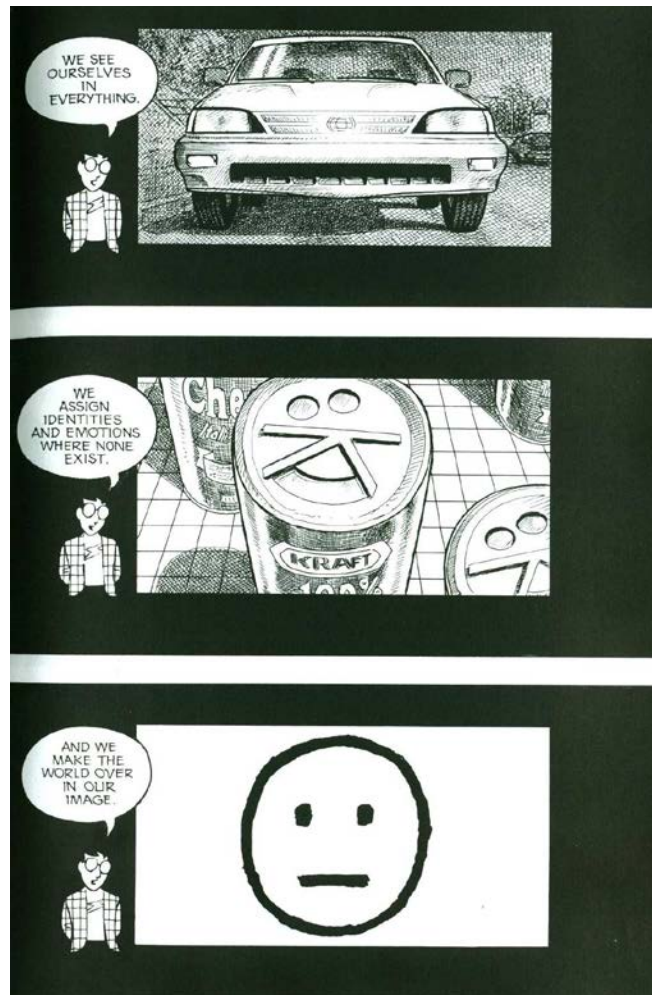


Figure 19 McCloud, Scott. "Selfish human beings explanation." *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Harper Perennial, 1993, p. 33.

instance, take figure 19 in which McCloud's purpose is to explain why individuals are so connected to and obsessed with simplified comic characters or cartoons. He states, "We humans are a self-centered race. We see ourselves in everything. We assign identities and emotions where none exist. And we make the world over in our image" (McCloud 32-33). The informative text features he relies on are images which each represent an abstract or inanimate object that he proposes human beings project a face onto: the front of a car, the top of a Kraft powdered cheese container, and a drawn face. However simple they may appear, these features provide powerful support for McCloud's claims and strengthen his intended purpose, not to mention that his work is the precise example of graphic literature (a graphic hybrid like Hale's *Treaties*, *Trenches*, *Mud*,

and *Blood*) which I am proposing be incorporated into the secondary English classroom. These images directly illustrate McCloud's ideas and visualize for the reader the connections between text features and writer's purpose related to informative texts.

To connect, if one examines the infographic in figure 20, he or she notices a plethora of informative text features including a title, subheadings, images, captions, color, and specific

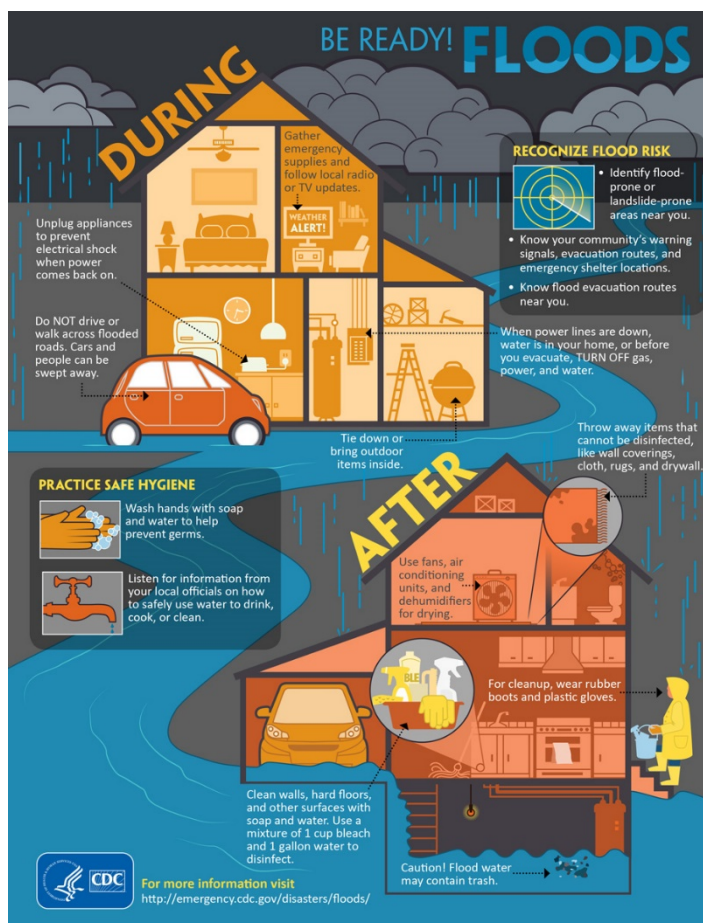


Figure 20 "Be Ready! Floods." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 28 Aug. 2017, [www.cdc.gov/phpr/documents/beready\\_floods.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/documents/beready_floods.pdf).

organization. Like the regular models of informative text considered in chapter two, this infographic offers specific subtitles slanted on the cartooned roofs. The bold font and bright color call attention to the supporting details of the infographic that explain how one should prepare before and after a flood, as well as the power of combining what McCloud refers to as received

and perceived modes of communication to construct new meaning (49). These features correspond with the purpose of the infographic which is to explain how to prepare oneself and belongings in the case of a flood. Additionally, the infographic also illustrates the connections between the information and organization of features that emphasize the central idea of the text. As McCloud's images relate to his purpose, so too do the subtitles provided on this infographic from the CDC. Therefore, there is a viable connection between informative text features and the writer's purpose that calls attention to the significance of their relationship in comprehending author's choice and informational text elements. When students are prompted to examine these relationships, they begin to understand why an author goes to certain lengths to organize a text in a such a way, and eventually, they can begin to comprehend these techniques in other types of informative text.

### **Examining Writer's Purpose within Informational Texts**

Every form of writing has some form of purpose. Whether it is an expressive diary entry or a doctoral thesis, texts takes on meaning through the language of the written word. However, the multimodality of graphic literature, like other forms of informative texts, now allows for the writer's purpose to be clearer for the audience. Utilizing the modes of writing and illustrating, graphic literature makes clear the significant connection between visuals and text that facilitate the discovery and making of new meaning. Like in the infographic model discussed in this chapter, graphic literature employs the visuals to emphasize and highlight the textual information provided to solidify the central idea of the text. As highlighted in previous chapters, informational text purposes, no matter the mode, are becoming a more significant factor in employment decisions for careers after high school. According to standards and other professional, practicing teachers, the message is clear: comprehension of informative texts in the classroom needs to be a priority. Culham writes in her mentor text exploration *Writing Thief*, "In the last decade, nonfiction reading and writing has been a huge focus for educators at every level. Understanding



that much of what is read and written as adults is nonfiction, the push is on to develop strategies for teaching and using nonfiction in classrooms as we prepare students for college and the work place” (53). Thus, it is apparent that the teaching of reading informative texts and informational text purposes needs to be further explored and practiced in the secondary English classroom. The push from standards and other educators is the reason why this argument centers around the possibilities of graphic literature as an avenue for strengthening the reading comprehension of informative, nonfiction texts. However, in order to clarify this assertion, it is vital to layout further pedagogy surrounding writer’s purpose to provide background and set-up further synthesis of graphic literature as a pedagogical tool.

To begin, I will use Gallagher’s adaptation of the six purposes for, what he terms, “real-world” writing (see figure 21) (7); that is, texts that follows the pattern of most nonfiction,

#### Appendix 1: Real-World Writing Purposes

| Purpose                             | Explanation  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Express and Reflect                 | The writer . . .<br>. . . expresses or reflects on his or her own life and experiences.<br>. . . often looks backward in order to look forward.  |
| Inform and Explain                  | The writer . . .<br>. . . states a main point and purpose.<br>. . . tries to present the information in a surprising way.  |
| Evaluate and Judge                  | The writer . . .<br>. . . focuses on the worth of person, object, idea, or other phenomenon.<br>. . . usually specifies the criteria to the object being seen as “good” or “bad.”                |
| Inquire and Explore                 | The writer . . .<br>. . . wrestles with a question or problem.<br>. . . hooks with the problem and lets the reader watch them wrestle with it.   |
| Analyze and Interpret               | The writer . . .<br>. . . seeks to analyze and interpret phenomena that are difficult to understand or explain.  |
| Take a Stand/<br>Propose a Solution | The writer . . .<br>. . . seeks to persuade audiences to accept a particular position on a controversial issue.<br>. . . describes the problem, proposes a solution, and provides justification. |

Adapted from Bean, Chappell, and Gillam [2003].

Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing Through Modeling and Mentor Texts by Kelly Gallagher. Copyright © 2011, Stenhouse Publishers.

Figure 21 Gallagher, Kelly. “Adapted chart of Real-World Writing Purposes.” *Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing Through Modeling & Mentor Texts*. Stenhouse Publishers, 2011, p. 239.

expository works. Although Gallagher's main goal is to have students practice these purposes in their own writing, his serves well to highlight the purposes that students must first recognize and comprehend within informative text. Each purpose holds potential to create new meaning either through expression and reflection, informing and explaining, evaluating and judging, inquiring and exploring, analyzing and interpreting, or taking a stand or proposing a solution. Notice that with each purpose, in the explanation column, there is a specific structure or avenue that the author takes to create meaning. Each purpose lays the groundwork for any number of informative texts. Additionally, in recognizing different informational text purposes, students can further make the connection between informative text features and the writer's purpose, strengthening their comprehension of informative texts, which in turn strengthens their ability to analyze, make new discoveries, create new meaning, and transfer their comprehension to the reading of other informational works.

However, through Gallagher's work there appears to be a lack of discussion surrounding how these informational text purposes are supplemented through multimodal elements in today's society. In comprehending how informative texts work and what their impact might be on a reader, it is important to consider how purpose is supported by other aspects of a text other than the words on the page. Even Gallagher notes, like Sousanis, Wilhelm, and Smith, "If we want students to be able to analyze and interpret – that is, to gain a better understanding of a person, place, phenomenon, or thing – then we have to teach them to really *look*" (142-43). But despite his efforts within his work through chapter five "Analyze and Interpret," Gallagher still ignores the multimodality of informative texts within our 21<sup>st</sup> century world by focusing primarily on the aspects of informational text features in individualized and separated terms, instead of how they work within and out of text.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, I posit that graphic literature can also work within the

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<sup>22</sup> Refer to suggestions about attention to graphs and charts within chapter five, page 140-42 in Kelly Gallagher's *Write Like This*.

secondary English classroom to better strengthen the comprehension of writer's purpose, like with informative text features, in a way that emphasizes and brings to life the aspects of expository works that need to be comprehended within the careers outside of high school today. As I reviewed in chapter one, there is plenty of pedagogical scholarship to support the integration of graphic literature to teach multimodal aspects of creative writing, but teaching students to be “seers” and “noticers” of significant connections between visuals and words within informative texts is almost wholly ignored. Next, I will examine how specific examples of graphic literature, in a range of genres, can be used to facilitate the understanding of the author's purpose, and elicit and strengthen the reading of informational works in this regard.

### Graphic Literature and Informational Text Purposes

To fully expand on the concept of informational text purposes and highlight the range of potential



Figure 22 Lewis, John et al. “John the Chicken Preacher.” March: Book One. Top Shelf Productions, 2013, pp. 30-31.

within graphic literature to mentor the comprehension of expository texts, I examine each purpose

proposed by Gallagher through the specific lens of a graphic work. Looking through a nonfiction sample of graphic literature like *March* one can find gems hidden in the most unlikely of places. For example, during the first part of *March: Book One*, Lewis describes his life growing up and how he came to love chickens. Figure 22 creatively shows how he would treat the farm animals of his youth like family, but looking more closely there is potential for examining the purpose of analysis and interpretation. In studying Lewis's purpose for telling the youth about his love for chickens, one notices that he is "[interpreting] a phenomenon that [is] difficult to understand or explain" (qtd. in Gallagher 10): the phenomena being his preaching to the chickens, performing burial rights, and even trying to baptize them as seen in figure 22. This interpretation is encouraged from the youth when he asks, "If you loved chickens so much, why didn't you become a chicken farmer?" (Lewis et al. 26). Thus, the images of the young Lewis preaching to chickens combined with his explorative text become the center of the examination of purpose. Rather than starting off struggling readers with a full article of text to explore writer's purpose, graphic literature like *March* offers an opportunity to highlight the aspects of this specific purpose in a way that not only helps the student create new meaning through what Sousanis terms as "unflattening" through inquiry, but it also gives students the opportunity to visualize the types of informative features that they need to become familiar with to strengthen their reading skills, i.e. color, perspective, and images that support the main idea or purpose.

*March: Book One* provides another example of how writing purpose can be found through the mentoring texts of graphic literature in the form of taking a stand or proposing a solution (Gallagher 10). Later in the work, Lewis emphasizes the issue with segregation and equal rights in the South during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s-60s. He seeks a way to help solve the problem of segregation in the South. One day he stumbles across Jim Lawson and he finds a solution that speaks to him. In figure 23, the reader notices the description of this potential solution through the form of visual aid and carefully placed text. Woven through these features is



Figure 23 Lewis, John et al. "John decides on nonviolence." *March: Book One*. Top Shelf Productions, 2013, p. 77.

the development of the author and illustrator's purpose related to providing a solution (to the problem of segregation, told through nonfiction narrative) and justifying it through persuasive text and images. Again, Lewis et al. offer another avenue of exploration for students to analyze the writer's and artists' choices in text and visuals. The powerful images of racism, poverty, and war depicted as outreaching hands in figure 23 work together with Lewis's writing to emphasize his main ideas, and even though it is told as a story to the audience, this excerpt of graphic literature becomes a persuasive justification for choosing to follow the nonviolent protest path of the Civil Rights movement. Inquiry and comprehension practice are covered collectively through examining essential aspects of informative texts: text features and the writer's informational text purpose.

Even the fictional tale of Jamieson's *Roller Girl* offers models of informative writer's purpose that can teach informative text comprehension. For instance, toward the start of the

novel, Astrid, Jamieson’s fictional protagonist, describes how she became best friends with Nicole. Through vivid color and humorous story-telling, Jamieson sets up a potential examination



Figure 24 Jamieson, Victoria. “Astrid worrying about rabies.” *Roller Girl*. Scholastic, 2015, p. 30.

into the purpose of expression and reflection. In fictional works, this purpose can take the form of the literary element known as flashback, which is seen in figure 24 with Astrid remembering her experiences of first grade. After being bullied into believing she might have rabies, Astrid invites the reader to examine her inner thoughts about the internal turmoil and stress that resulted from being manipulated into touching a dead squirrel. She is fulfilling the purpose of expression which Gallagher notes, “reflects on [her] own life and experiences” (10). Even through a fictional character and fictional story, Jamieson still offers an opportunity to examine informational text purpose in a manner that allows for freedom of inquiry and engagement. As referenced in chapter two, Jamieson’s work provides a humorous and engaging way for students to explore the

relationship between words and images that opens more opportunity to interpret and discover new meaning. Essentially, she emphasizes what Sousanis suggests in exploring the possibilities of “seeing” through multiple lenses: “Rather than funneling our time here down narrow paths, [i.e. the same types of informational articles] following a series of prescribed steps, [via spoon-fed standardizations] let us open this out...and see what possibilities emerge when we author our paths...[to be] uniquely our own” (147-48). Thus, Jamieson provides a model that combines words and images to allow the reader to discover his or her own meaning. Even by just examining the expressions of the cartooned character in figure 24 (i.e. her questioning in the mirror, or meek stance against the bathroom wall and worried facial expression), students begin to see the purpose of reflection on a particularly startling life experience, but one that turns out alright in the end, as she finds her best friend. Ultimately, this purpose can easily be analyzed for deeper comprehension practice because of the compelling cohesion of words and pictures.

The metaphorical aspects of Jamieson’s fictional work also provide excellent models for the kinds of “real-world,” informational text purposes that students might come across in their lives after high school. At the very end of Astrid’s journey, she inquires and explores about her changed self and what she has learned over the summer without Nicole. Jamieson achieves this purpose, again, through the combination of words and images that paint a metaphor about following one’s own path. In figure 25, Astrid notes, “Everything used to be so simple. Black and white. Happy. Sad. Best friends. Worst enemies. Now everything seemed so...complex. I was in a no-man’s land of uncharted territories. Maybe I had to find my own path through it” (Jamieson 235). The metaphor comparing her changing world and no-man’s land creates a powerful image for the reader and reiterates an explorative approach to this dilemma for Astrid. When using this



Figure 25 Jamieson, Victoria. "Astrid discovering herself." *Roller Girl*. Scholastic, 2015, p. 235.

specific example as a model, it is also important to note how Jamieson's use of color for the crowd and the position of Astrid's small figure as the lonely colorful, lost wanderer further supports her purpose in "[wrestling] with a question or problem" (Gallagher 10). Here, students have another opportunity to explore not only informative text features like images and color, and how they connect and create meaning within the text, but they also see a working example of an informational text purpose, despite the fact that it is a fictional story. *Roller Girl*, thus, further proves how graphic literature has a legitimate stake in informative reading instruction as a pedagogical tool to engage and challenge readers to dig deeper for meaning and understanding.

Perhaps the most poignant examples of informational text purposes can be found in the graphic hybrid text of Hale's *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and*



*Blood*. Like I highlighted in chapter two, Hale’s work, much like McCloud’s, offers exceptional potential in the classroom as a cross between fiction and nonfiction, engaging reader’s as an exemplar of graphic literary work. By further examining his work, I will call attention to the last two purposes seen in informational texts, which have not yet been covered, while also underlining the strength of the graphic hybrid genre as a model to improve the informational text comprehension of secondary English students. To start, Hale’s emphasis on explaining and mapping battles of World War I offers perfect examples of a writer’s purpose that is meant to inform and explain. To illustrate, examine figure 26 and the intricacies made to exemplify the cost of war. There are several elements at work within this model that offer many opportunities

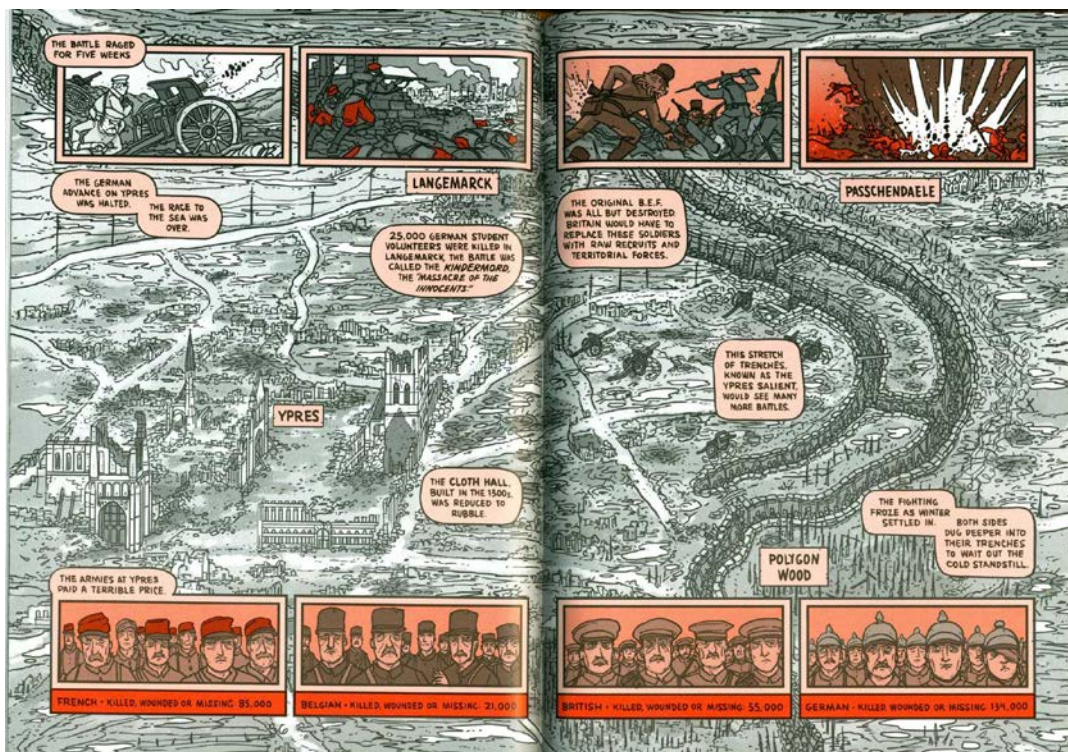


Figure 26 Hale, Nathan. “Map of the Battles of Ypres aftermath.” *Nathan Hale’s Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. Amulet Books, 2014, pp. 56-57.

for student inquiry into the *how* and *why* of author’s choice in the placement of informative text features, and how those features support the claims made by the writer, leading to comprehension of purpose. It is clear when looking at Hale’s work that his artistic map (in itself an informative text feature to study) explains the Battle of Ypres using not only explanatory text, but also

informative features like graphics and images, captions, labels, and specific choice in color. Thus, his purpose is strengthened by the powerful combination of visuals and words, and offers an incredible opportunity for student-centered inquiry. Students can clearly see the drawn faces of the soldiers at the bottom of the map, highlighted by their missing and killed toll captions to further emphasize the “‘massacre of the innocents’,” which Hale explains through the written word in figure 26 (qtd. in Hale 56). Through encouragement to question the intricate details of the text and the engaging aspects of Hale’s work alone, students begin to comprehend the development of the explanatory purpose of the writer to recognize and comprehend the same kind of purpose in other types of informative text. Much like the informative diagram offered in chapter two from Hale’s same work, this map claims equal rights alongside other forms of informative text, even more so for the fact that his multimodality makes his work a unique pedagogical tool.

Another and final example of the power of graphic literature to elicit inquiry through modeling the reading of specific informational text purposes appears again in Hale’s work, this time over the course of many sections of the text, offering the most powerful visual example of persuasive and engaging purposes of informative text models within graphic literature. Over the course of the text, Hale provides dividing pages that identify which year of World War I the reader is learning about from the spy Nathan Hale (see figure 27 and 28). Featured on each of these pages is Hale’s depiction of Ares, the god of War, stirring the pot of destruction from which he feeds from and stokes the violence of World War I. When studied individually, the images present an excellent example of how words and images can come together to create compelling messages; but, when studied in a series, the progression of the images reveal a persuasive informational text purpose that works to evaluate and judge. For example, in figure 27, Ares is characterized as an all-consuming god that is feeding off of the lives uselessly lost during World

War I, seen as the flood of little people spilling into the cooking furnace from the left and right.



Figure 27 Hale, Nathan. "Ares during 1915." Nathan Hale's *Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. Amulet Books, 2014, p. 61.

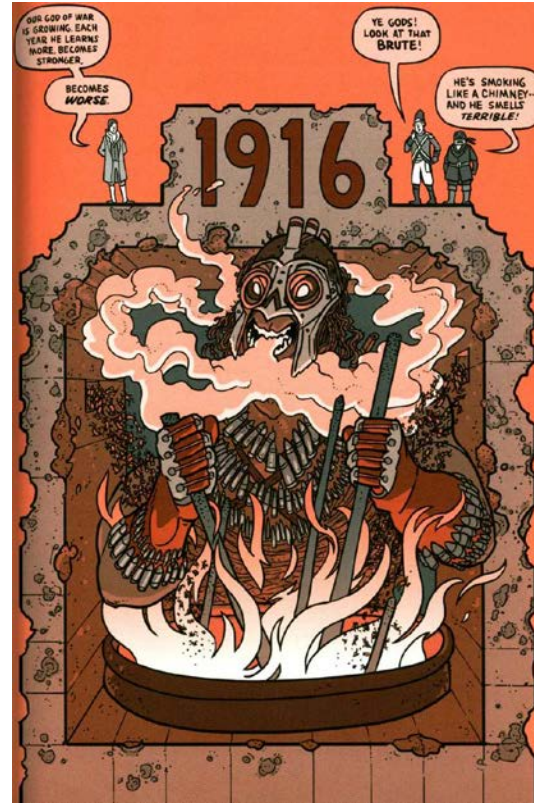


Figure 28 Hale, Nathan. "Ares during 1916." Nathan Hale's *Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. Amulet Books, 2014, p. 73.

Hale draws him as happy with a glittering, sharp smile and demon-like, mischievous eyes that crave the violence of war. These powerful images paired with Hale's diction work together to create a message that highlights Hale's purpose in using Ares as a metaphor in his work: to evaluate the costly and wasteful loss of life that was caused by World War I. In painting his metaphor in a negative light, Hale works to tell the truth about history while also evaluating its cost. When the hangman asks, in figure 27, "Who's winning?," the spy Nathan Hale replies, "No one but the God of War. Enjoying this, Ares?" (Hale 61). Hale's tone in this figure also reveals his purpose, having his character speak directly to the terrifying Ares sarcastically and rhetorically. He is putting a value on war that shows a negative evaluation.

When comparing figures 27 through 30, it is clear that Hale wishes to judge the outcome of the Great War in a way that engages the reader in discovery and cognizance. In figure 28, Ares

has grown into 1916, steaming from the mouth with fury, and holding two stirring sticks instead of one. Clad in more war heads and armor, Hale's character continues to breathe death and violence into his cauldron as little figures continue to pour into it. The increase in intensity in the image of Ares and the flow of casualties mirrors Nathan Hale the spy's note that "[our] god of war is growing. Each year he learns more, becomes stronger. Becomes worse," (Hale 73). Even the hangman character comments humorously how he "smells terrible," strengthening Hale's purpose and offering more freedom (through multiple viewpoints of language, i.e. words and images) for students to engage in the text to understand that purpose.

As the war grows worse in Hale's retelling, so too does Ares. In figure 29, he has now grown into the terrible, metaphorical war machine that continued to push countless lives toward an imminent demise. Hale notes the casualty toll while also having Ares begin to take over the page, crashing into the panels of graphics depicting the bloodiest battles of World War I. In having Ares continue to consume those casualties in a horrific and monstrous form, Hale furthers



Figure 29 Hale, Nathan. "Ares during 1917." *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. Amulet Books, 2014, pp. 86-87.

his purpose of judgement for the reader, calling out these atrocious events. He even provides specific evidence from a French Lieutenant, who experienced the horror, to support his purpose: “‘Humanity is mad. It must be mad to do what it is doing. What a massacre! What scenes of horror and carnage! I cannot find words to translate my impressions. Hell cannot be so terrible. Men are mad!’” (qtd. in Hale 87). This type of analysis on war which Hale is exploring through an evaluative purpose, mirrors the exact kind of persuasive informative texts that students will need to comprehend after high school; as I presented earlier in this chapter, they will have to develop their understanding of the elements within informational texts no matter the career path they choose because of the significant place informational texts are taking in the expanding 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. In addition, Hale’s model of graphic literature’s potential carries weight in supporting the implementation of such work at the secondary level to help students comprehend informational texts on a much deeper level than before.

To highlight further the significance and incredible impact Hale’s graphic hybrid can have on a student audience trying to understand a writer’s purpose, consider the last depiction of



Figure 30 Hale, Nathan. “Ares during 1918.” *Nathan Hale’s Hazardous Tales: Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood*. Amulet Books, 2014, pp. 100-01.

Ares during 1918 in figure 30. Hale imaginatively has him ripping through pages of the work, completely “out of control” and oozing guns and ammunition (100). Essentially, he is driving his purpose home, offering a literally and figuratively explosive image for the audience to examine in context of the hangman’s words at the top left. The potent combination of words and images provided helps to draw students into the reading, making them more active readers as they work to examine and identify the purpose of the author in laying these sections out in the manner that he does. Thus, Hale’s work presents the sheer potential that graphic literature has to engage students’ curiosity and have them practice inquiry to better understand the workings of a text in order to comprehend the work as a whole more deeply than basic types of informative texts. Additionally, these works carry the potential for students to transfer these critical reading practices to the independent reading of more common types of informational text. Like Lewis’s *March* and Jamieson’s *Roller Girl*, graphic literature offers a wealth of models for reading informative texts, no matter the genre, creating a viable pedagogical tool that yearns to be accessed in the secondary English classroom.

### **Comprehension to Practice: What Does This Mean for the Classroom?**

Ultimately, the only way that students will be able to benefit from models like Hale, Lewis, and Jamieson is through the further incorporation of graphic literature within the classroom. Not only is it a tool of engagement with creative displays of graphics, words, images, vibrant colors, and other informational text features, but it is also a potential tool for comprehension of essential informative text elements, such as informative text features and specific and feasible purposes which are essential to comprehension of informational works in any career field. Through explorative inquiry, encouraging students to ask more analytical questions about the text, teachers can utilize the potential of graphic literature as mentor texts that highlight these elements, covering required standards while also engaging students in a way that has them enjoying learning and becoming critical thinkers in a world that desperately needs them. Ultimately,

students can become the “seers” and “noticers” that Sousanis and Wilhelm and Smith advocate for and the engaged readers they need to be to thrive, to succeed.

As I mapped out in chapter one, graphic literature has continued to captivate pedagogical analyses with regard to creative, narrative works and writing and the teaching of standard literary and figurative elements. As a blossoming source of all these elements, plus the common features of expository texts and their writers’ purposes, graphic literature, I assert, has gone untapped and can be the key needed to unlock struggling students’ issues with comprehension or reluctant readers’ pure curiosity. To connect the ideas of about how graphic literature stands out in chapter two, the more engaged students are with their learning and the more they are encouraged to question the world around them, the stronger their sense of analysis will be and the stronger their ability to transfer their comprehension of author’s purpose and choice to the reading of other types of informative texts will become. In the next and final chapter, I will continue to examine the depths of graphic literature as a tool for teaching reading by examining the implications of this pedagogical approach to reading comprehension within the secondary English classroom and highlighting more specific inquiry strategies necessary for considering the incorporation of graphic literature as mentor texts to teach the reading of informative works. In addition, the significance of student-centered inquiry in relation to examining models of graphic literature with students and future research opportunities in this field will be explored.

#### **Chapter 4 – Graphic Literature as Pedagogical Tools & Future Research Opportunities**

In a constantly evolving 21<sup>st</sup> century society, learning to “unflatten” the ideas, concepts, proposals, and arguments produced by informative writers’ purposes is essential to success in a world fraught with discrepancies, logical fallacies, and manipulation of the truth. In other words, teachers need to provide opportunities for students to question and examine the type of texts they will be required to comprehend outside of high school, so that they too can “unflatten” the examples set before them to comprehend new meaning through a lens that is open minded, becoming “noticers” and “seers” (Wilhelm and Smith 7; Sousanis 81). In developing this argument, I have demonstrated how graphic literature, as a whole, offers just the opportunity teachers need to encourage well-rounded, deep readers of informational texts. Against other models and forms of informative text, graphic literature should be considered a viable pedagogical tool to incorporate within the secondary English classroom not only because it provides engaging examples of mentor texts for profound reading experiences, but also because these mentor texts can be used to elicit comprehension of two significant aspects of informative texts through student-centered inquiry: informative text features, that organize, develop, and support the central idea of a text; and informative authors’ purposes, that set the tone and main arguments for informational works.

Pedagogy surrounding graphic literature tends to focus on teaching aspects of creative writing, similarly using only graphic narrative to teach reading comprehension of figurative elements, such as theme or characterization. Although these are excellent avenues for developing strong writers, there still remains a gap in scholarship examining the significance of teaching informative reading comprehension skills through the more engaging facets of graphic literature. More specifically, there are genres of graphic literature that have been wholly ignored when trying to find appropriate mentor texts to facilitate reading instruction: graphic nonfiction and



graphic hybrids.<sup>23</sup> If, as Culham posits, examples of mentor texts can be found almost anywhere, then it doubly makes sense that graphic literature too can be a resourceful tool, providing teachers and students with a plethora of models to work with when strengthening reading skills related to informative texts (54). As discussed in chapters two and three, recognizing the working relationship between words and images is key to developing an understanding for how the multimodality of graphic literature can work like mentor texts to encourage deep, authentic comprehension of features and other aspects of informative texts. However, there can be no comprehension of reading without engagement and motivation from students. Thus, student-centered inquiry is essential to fostering an engaging learning environment at the secondary English level. But how might this practice be conducted? In what ways can students be prompted to be engaged in their reading and motivated to learn through the fostering of inquiry practice? I have addressed these questions related to inquiry briefly in prior chapters in order to leave more room here to show how graphic literature provides more powerful opportunities for reading comprehension, having more active qualities and the inescapable reliance on the working relationship between words and images. In this chapter, I will first emphasize potential inquiry strategies that can be used when implementing graphic literature, showing how graphic literature makes for more dynamic mentor texts for reading comprehension. Finally, I will consider learning expected within writing instruction in the secondary English language arts classroom. Essentially, the arguments developed through this analysis push for future research on how graphic literature can also be used to model informative writing practices. Thus, in closing out ideas about the power of graphic literature regarding informative text comprehension, I will not only solidify the significance of graphic literature in relation to student-centered inquiry, but I

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<sup>23</sup> As addressed in previous chapters, I consider *graphic nonfiction* any texts that have the sole purpose of informing and explaining through the use of images and other graphics, and *graphic hybrids*, any works that combine elements of fiction and nonfiction to inform and explain about a particular topic.

will also illustrate the viable continuation of this research on the transferability of reading comprehension skills to writing practice related to explanatory graphic literature texts.

### **Researched and Practiced Strategies: Inquiry that Leads to Discovery**

In chapter two, I explored questions about inquiry practice briefly, providing a personal example of the ways I use mentor texts, such as infographics, to elicit student inquiry, facilitating the comprehension of author's choice in text features.<sup>24</sup> One commonality amongst these mentor texts, including the Snapchat infographic and, more importantly, the specific excerpts from the three genres of graphic literature I examined in chapters two and three, is their creative qualities and potential relevance to students at the secondary English level. Another commonality among my anecdotes and graphic literature examples, however, is the opportunity they provide for the teacher to encourage exploration that evokes student inquiry. Therefore, I will expand on these opportunities more by providing examples of how teachers can encourage inquiry practice that facilitates reading comprehension practice for high school students. Specifically, the power of graphic literature will be highlighted through these strategies, calling attention to how graphic literature's more informative facets and reliance on the equal communicative viewpoints of words and pictures make them perfect mentor texts for reading comprehension.

To begin, encouraging students to see things through different points of view is difficult, especially when one does not have the tools necessary to engage students in exploration that facilitates and spurs a "kaleidoscope of views" (Sousanis 146). However, as discussed in prior chapters, the ability to examine the world through multiple points of view is vital to a full understanding of how reading helps create new meaning and connections for an audience. Through inquiry promoted by carefully selected models from graphic literature, students can begin to develop a sense of curiosity for the world around them, especially through the

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<sup>24</sup> Refer to figure 2, "The Snapchat Story...So Far" and subsequent analysis in the beginning of chapter two.

multimodal, and therefore, multiple views and forms of communication used by graphic literature to promote discovery and learning. Releah Cossett Lent, an expert on disciplinary literacy that encourages inquiry, notes,

The complex attributes used to make sense of information, such as strategic thinking, creativity, and insightfulness, are all based in inquiry. Curiosity and persistence, effects of inquiry, then sustain understandings in ways that strengthen content learning....One remarkable characteristic of inquiry is that it is done *by* the individual, not *to* the individual, and this active form of learning is what makes knowledge stick. (104)

Here, Lent emphasizes the connection between inquiry and comprehension which makes it a significant tool when analyzing graphic literature. For instance, I provided my English II Honors students with a specific excerpt from Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* made into a graphic novel by Peter Kuper. To facilitate inquiry, I had students work with partners to examine specific pages of the graphic text, noting particular instances where features of the text and the text itself were working together to create meaning. Thus, I purposefully had students examine the relationships between the text (words and writing) and informative text features (graphics and images), which I advocate for in chapters two and three. I provided them with a graphic organizer to focus their attention and even allowed students to draw the meaning they took from the multimodality of the text. Going around to each pair as they scanned the text, I noticed students were more engaged than they were with the original text excerpt from the textbook, which we had read as a class before beginning this activity. They were fascinated by the grotesque forms of the narrator, as well as the graphics included in black and white to depict his struggle, illustrated by Kuper. Further, my students were more focused on the text and their partners rather than being distracted by or distracting others, and in focusing on each other, they were pointing to certain areas of the text, showing each other details they noticed and asking each other questions actually

related to the images and words of the text. In exploring the graphic fiction,<sup>25</sup> students noticed that much of the illustrated action was emphasizing the captions of text surrounding the situations in each panel, which often appear in informative texts.

My goals for this lesson were two-fold: one, I wanted students to begin to recognize the text features, such as the color choices, the subheadings, the graphics of sound and motions at play, and the overall images used to depict the story; and two, I wanted students to be able to connect these features with the text of the story inserted within the graphic text, and explain *how* the features helped to create specific meaning within the work in partnership with the audience. I asked prompting questions to guide students, such as *why do you think the artist used these colors or how do the image and text here speak to each other?* Eventually, students began deliberating with their partners and asking each other and themselves similar questions in order to explain possible interpretations. In other words, students were practicing the inquiry necessary to sustain their understanding and make connections about author's choice and efforts to help the reader develop meaning as considered within basic types of informative texts. For example, students saw distinct connections between what the author wrote and what was illustrated in figure 31. Because of the distinct aspects of this graphic text, the grotesque illustrations and facial expressions of the human-sized bug/narrator and the graphics that pull students into the narrators' concerns, students began to push themselves by asking the questions they needed to help complete their analysis. This same strategy of using distinct examples of mentor texts featuring aspects of informative works, such as informative text features like the images illustrated in figure 31, can be used with any example of graphic literature, no matter what the genre.

Therefore, graphic literature encourages inquiry that leads to comprehension of meaning, created through the close readings of the audience, and connections related to the specific texts

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<sup>25</sup> Note that I am referring to previously defined ideas about graphic fiction (a genre of graphic literature): any work of fiction that uses words and images, or other graphics, to tell a story.



Figure 31 Kuper, Peter. "Gregor worries about time." *Conformity and Rebellion*, 2003, [wp.lps.org/akabour/files/2013/12/Kafka-Graphic-Novel-Excerpt-Small.pdf](http://wp.lps.org/akabour/files/2013/12/Kafka-Graphic-Novel-Excerpt-Small.pdf).

regarding author's choice and central idea, i.e. students developed an understanding for *why* the author chose the black and white color, as well as the metaphorical image of the sweating salesmen running themselves around the clock, constantly working. These texts prompt this meaning-making through specialized attention to multiple vantage points of communication rather than just textual information, causing students to become what Christopher Lehman and Kate Roberts call close readers: students who eventually develop their "own thoughtful reading" (4). This inquiry essentially calls back to previous advocacy in chapters one through three to create more active "inquirers" and "seers," which through the close reading of graphic literature

mentor texts like Kuper's depiction of *The Metamorphosis*, develops much more efficiently within students. Thus, my students become what Lent calls "habitual inquirers" that "develop intrinsic motivation and learn to think strategically about core academic concepts," i.e. concepts surrounding author's choice, central idea, purpose of informative text features, and development of author's purpose (104). Further, the Kuper version of graphic narrative as a mentor text illustrates, like I did in chapters two and three, how any genre of graphic literature can be used to teach informative text comprehension. For example, like graphic literature, many informational texts today, like math and science textbooks, news articles online, or brochures as Culham points out, rely on the relationship between visuals (like informative text features) and information (text or words that help create meaning). Thus, the informative aspects of graphic literature, such as Kuper's interpretation of *The Metamorphosis*, are what deepen the relevance and intrinsic motivation to question in order to comprehend.

Other than encouraging collaborative inquiry suggested through my anecdote, Lent offers another strategy for implementing inquiry that can be applied to the study and use of graphic literature as mentor texts to inform reading comprehension. One such strategy is called "Solving the Mystery" in which Lent suggests "[giving] them just enough details to make them curious about 'the rest of the story' and then allow them to use their powers of inquiry to figure it out" (129). In relation to implementing engaging graphic literature, this strategy can be easily used to both practice inquiry and examine the aspects of informative texts that one might want his or her students to understand. When teaching reading, pulling out specific chunks of the graphic work and having students explore these pieces of the puzzle is helpful for close reading and careful comprehension. For instance, consider Hale's *Treaties, Trenches, Mud, and Blood* examples from chapter three in which I expanded on specific excerpts related to the purpose of evaluating and judging. These parts from the graphic hybrid can be easily presented in a way that would facilitate the "powers of inquiry" Lent suggests and could eventually lead to the examination of

purpose with facilitation from the teacher. The images represent each progressive year of World War I, and with their captivating and potent visuals of Ares becoming stronger, meaner, and more monstrous, they spark the curiosity necessary for students to want to “solve the mystery” of what is being alluded to, what is being talked about, or what is being used to develop the text itself. In advocating for graphic literature, this strategy provides an opportunity for teachers to explore how the texts allow students to learn from multiple points of view, through which they are seeing connections and noticing the relationship amongst the author’s choices, and subsequently, how those choices affect the text and the reader.

Implied through these strategies is an understanding of the power of graphic literature as mentor texts within the secondary English classroom. In relation to strategies for collaborative, student-centered inquiry or self-motivated inquiry, graphic literature provides an ideal canvas for students to begin better comprehending the nuances of informative texts, especially related to text features and writer’s purpose. Therefore, the reading of graphic literature offers the most potent opportunities for discovery and meaning-making in relation to other forms of informational texts.

Through the language of images and the language of text, graphic literature, as mentor texts and wells of inquiry, offers a unique avenue through which to facilitate the teaching and comprehension of informational texts. Its creative visuals, its attention to detail, its relevance in the classroom, and its scholarly history, all make graphic literature a strong and viable candidate for acceptance into the secondary English classroom. Ann Berthoff writes directly to the reading teacher when she notes, “Our job is to design sequences of assignments that let our students discover what language can do, what they can do with language” (295). In this sense, secondary English teachers have to provide the opportunities for students to explore the many facets of informative works if students are ever going to improve their understanding of these texts. At the same time, graphic literature provides the avenue necessary for teachers of reading, using multimodal aspects to emphasize the language that Berthoff suggests students need to examine,

i.e. the modes of communication through words and images. All in all, when teachers consider the potential of graphic literature, they in turn are encouraging a “kaleidoscope of views” through which students can map out the world around them as confident “seers” and competent readers. These final thoughts on graphic literature and reading comprehension, thus, lead to the second aspect of this chapter which I highlighted earlier: how might graphic literature also be used to facilitate the writing of the kinds of informative texts that students must first comprehend?

### **That’s A Wrap...Or Is It? Graphic Literature & Informative Writing: Preliminary Research**

Wilhelm and Smith call attention to the need for 21<sup>st</sup> century preparedness, noting how standards in education “insist on the transfer of expert reading processes, as well as those of composing, speaking, and listening” (5). In essence, it is the career-ready application of these reading comprehension skills developed through my analysis that beg questions about future research opportunities. Reading and writing go hand-in-hand within the secondary English classroom whether journaling, conducting collaborative group work, or any other number of strategies that require students to practice both modes of communication. In closing this analysis, I will explore the future implications of reading comprehension using graphic literature as mentor texts regarding its transferability to writing instruction and practice, which is necessary for success after high school.

***Practice What You Preach: From Reading to Writing.*** I suggest that there are future research opportunities to examine the concepts of modeling, student-centered inquiry, and analysis examined through the three genres of graphic literature and how they might help create the link between comprehension and practice for students. Studying the incorporation of informational text features and writers’ purposes encourages an understanding that allows students to be able to incorporate features into their own writing, as well as develop their own arguments and ideas into an informative writing purpose. These connections are ultimately achieved because of the



correlations between reading and writing, which in turn are key for the connection between comprehension and practice. These correlations are highlighted in the study by Jill Fitzgerald and Timothy Shanahan, “Reading and Writing Relations and Their Development,” which targets a cognitive and developmental theory approach that “analyzes the shared knowledge and cognitive processes between reading and writing”:

[Reading] and writing are constellations of cognitive processes that depend on knowledge representations at various linguistic levels (phonemic, orthographic, semantic, syntactic, pragmatic). Reading and writing are connected, according to such views, because they depend on identical or similar knowledge representations, cognitive processes, and contexts and contextual constraints. Therefore, we should expect reading and writing to be quite similar, their developments should parallel each other closely, and some type of pedagogical combination may be useful in making learning more efficient. (40)

According to Fitzgerald and Shanahan, the correlations between reading and writing reveal a parallel in cognitive processes which help foster comprehension of those very skills. Therefore, it makes sense that the practices of reading and writing involving the study of informative texts should involve a transfer from one practice to the next. Developing students cannot have one process without the other; the reading and comprehension of informational texts correlates with writing of informational texts, cultivating the question of how this transfer might take place with the help of graphic literature. Fitzgerald and Shanahan suggest that “some type of pedagogical combination” may be necessary to help foster the development of these skills (40). Thus, graphic literature may offer an opportunity to create this very combination because of its attention to the unflattening of learned concepts, which Sousanis advocates, and its availability and models of mentor texts that feature an abundance of examples of informative writing features necessary to construct avenues of understanding for an audience.

Kress also lends voice to the transfer of reading comprehension skills to writing skills in his discussion on the strengths of digital technologies sprouting within and outside of the classroom by further discussing their multimodality (which resembles that of graphic literature). In a poststructuralist sense, Kress analyzes the semiotics of reading and writing when practiced, in which he believes “there is a continuity between reading and writing: writing is the production of new signs from existing and available resources, and so is reading,” much like the findings suggested by Fitzgerald and Shanahan (69). More importantly, Kress asserts that in considering “the production of external signs in writing,” the practice of writing itself “also [like reading] has the cognitive and subjective consequence of making [one] the producer of [his or her] own resources of representation in what remains still society’s most valued mode, writing” (69). Therefore, writing practice relies on the contexts of reading or models of meaning produced by reading to actually take place. Not only does this strengthen the argument for supplying students with varied and vast amounts of mentor texts, but it also highlights the inevitable relationship between reading comprehension and writing practice regarding informative texts.

Additionally, Berthoff notes the significance of creating meaning through writing, connecting to Sousanis’s concepts about the examination of ideas through “multiple vantage points.” She writes, “Learning to write is learning to do deliberately and methodically with words on the page what we do all the time with language. Meanings don’t come out of the air; we make them out of a chaos of images, half-truths, remembrances, syntactic fragments, from the mysterious and unformed” (Berthoff 294). Here, Berthoff evokes the image of a diverse set of modes in which individuals derive meaning while learning to write. It can be argued that the “chaos” she refers to represents the multiple viewpoints necessary to view and “unflatten” the world. Therefore, the relationship between the features and images of text and the text itself work together to create meaning which students analyze and comprehend through explorative inquiry: *how* and *why* are these features working within a text and *how* is meaning being created because

of their relationship? Students ultimately make meaning from the “chaos” of informative texts that incorporate these multiple modes of communication, such as graphic literature, and then should begin practicing these strategies in their own writing. Either through whole text analysis or carefully selected excerpts, graphic literature, as I have already illustrated, serves to draw the connections between these vital forms of communication in order to help students create meaning out of chaos. In turn, it may better prepare students for the transfer of reading skills regarding informational texts into future writing practice. Thus, graphic literature, as a viable pedagogical tool, could provide a viable opportunity to strengthen informative writing skills.

***Importance of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Writing Skills.*** Before examining research that has already been conducted regarding graphic literature and writing pedagogy, it is important to set the precedence of the act of writing and writing instruction for student success in and out of the classroom, especially in life after high school. Kelly Gallagher endorses the significance of often ignored writing purposes in his book *Write Like This* in which he explores developing informative writing skills through the comprehension of various informative mentor texts. Like Wilhelm and Smith, Gallagher notes how “writing often plays a critical role in gaining and keeping meaningful employment,” which is supported by findings from the National Commission on Writing (3). In fact, in the Commission’s report *Writing: A Ticket to Work...Or A Ticket Out*, they find that “close to 70 percent of responding corporations report that two-thirds or more of their salaried employees have some responsibility for writing, either explicit or implicit, in their position descriptions” (7). In addition, Zane K. Quibble and Frances Griffin quote a similar report on the need for critical writing skills: “[Despite] the high value that state employees put on writing skills, a significant number of their employees do not meet states’ expectations” (32). There is a demand for informative writing skills that are vital to employment after high school, and graphic literature may provide the necessary models for the very modes and purposes of informative writing that 21<sup>st</sup> century employers expect from their hires. Therefore, an important question to

explore is *how* might graphic literature help strengthen the transfer of reading comprehension related to informative texts to the actual practice of writing informational works, incorporating text features and applying writer's purpose?

***Graphic Literature and Writing Pedagogy: Preliminary Research.*** Writing pedagogy informed by graphic literature is another thread that appears in pedagogical analyses. What follows is a brief outline of preliminary research related to how graphic literature is already being considered in the teaching of writing. The research shows a focus primarily on using graphic fiction to teach narrative or creative writing elements with little to no mention of informative writing elements, which students need to know to develop their own expository writing. Further, in outlining this preliminary research, I will emphasize future research opportunities related to graphic literature and the study of informative texts, revealing potential for future connections to be made between reading comprehension and writing practice. For example, Elizabeth E. G. Friese, in her article "Visual Narratives: Reading and Writing through the Pages of Graphic Life Stories," discusses the merits of teaching graphic narratives to mentor the writing of personal narratives and memoirs. Friese offers examples of how she helped improve students' creative writing abilities by focusing on specific writing skills such as producing dialogue to strengthen characters' voice, showing instead of telling characterization details, and using details to show time passing in their narratives (28). Friese's arguments emphasize a critical gap in the exploration of graphic literature's potential to teach informative writing elements of informational texts like text features and specific writing purposes. Nevertheless, could there be a way to have teachers practice the same modeling with graphic literature, but instead focus on informative writing techniques?

Similarly, Nancy Frey and Douglas Fischer provide insight into how graphic fiction can be used as writing prompts and provide an exceptional documentation of their work with ninth-grade students from a variety of diverse backgrounds. Through their exploration in "Using Graphic Novels, Anime, and the Internet in an Urban High School," Frey and Fischer find that

“the limited amount and level of the text [within graphic novels]...allow students to read and respond to complex messages and text combinations that better [match] their reading levels” (133). In other words, the educators prompted their students to write stories based on excerpts from graphic novels they were studying at a level that was appropriate for each student, in which they responded positively. Reaching “unreachable” students at the secondary level and encouraging writing in general is a noble avenue to explore and should be a top priority for every teacher. However, is there also a way to achieve this goal through the practice of informative writing? Here, again, the gap in pedagogical potential reveals an opportunity for research into the instruction of reading and practice of informative writing purposes, and how graphic literature may be able help foster it.

Additionally, Mark Crilley in the *Teacher Librarian* provides an enthusiastic argument about the potential for comics to embolden student writing in his article “Getting Students to Write Using Comics.” His ultimate argument lies in his claim that “[students] learn the importance of conflict, the use of dialogue to reveal character, and how crucial rewriting is to the writing process” (Crilley 29). Commendable is Crilley’s further argument for teachers to teach students to write what they know. He particularly discusses how comics can be used to teach nonfiction writing, showing that graphic literature can indeed help teach writing, as many of these analyses have shown. However, with Crilley’s analysis, his focus on using the texts to mentor autobiographical writing causes missed opportunities to teach other, more significant, informative writing purposes and how they work within a text, such as to inform and explain or to evaluate and judge, which are lacking in the scholarship presented thus far. Like Frey and Fischer, Crilley highlights a widening gap in pedagogical analysis which has potential to be filled regarding the examination of informative texts. Thus, how might these comics examined by Crilley be used to inform the teaching of expository writing?

To continue, Gretchen Schwarz provides the closest analysis that points out the potentiality of graphic novels to inform informational writing in her article “Media Literacy, Graphic Novels, and Social Issues.” Her arguments emphasize similarities to prior examinations in that she highlights the multimodality of graphic novels and how these combinations strengthen its potential in the classroom as well as focusing on thematic studies pulled from the medium itself. However, her argument also shows a differentiation of merit when she points out the potential for graphic novels to teach media literacy. Not only does this discussion of media literacy advocate for reading comprehension, but it also showcases how the interconnectedness of informational text and graphic fictional themes can influence and express the need for informative writing skills. For instance, Schwarz notes, “Specifically, media literacy can help young people challenge information about society, detect prejudice and inequality, seek diverse points of view, and engage with difficult social issues” (2). Fundamental to this central idea is the connection to diverse informative writing purposes like evaluating, interpreting, and taking a stand, that are highlighted by Gallagher (10). Thus, Schwarz’s arguments take a muted peek into graphic literature’s potentiality and connections with informative writing pedagogy, and highlight further questions about graphic literature’s connection to informative text comprehension and writing practice.

Finally, Ruth Culham mirrors the efforts of the education-oriented scholars above by completely dedicating her work *Writing Thief: Using Mentor Texts to Teach the Craft of Writing* to the study of mentor texts and their impact on writing pedagogy.<sup>26</sup> More specifically, she offers a plethora of models from an array of works, which she divides by genre of writing (informational, narrative, and argument writing) and examines them individually, offering teaching strategies for each model to practice with students in the classroom. There is no doubt

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<sup>26</sup> In chapter two, I examined Culham’s work to show the lack of attention to student-centered inquiry required to prompt students’ curiosity about the informative aspects of specific mentor texts. Her arguments here hold relevance in connection to future research regarding graphic literature and writing pedagogy.

that providing mentor texts can have an enormous impact on student comprehension within the writing classroom, but what Gallagher, Wilhelm and Smith, Culham, and the other scholars mentioned at the start of this section leave is an open question about how graphic literature, whether nonfiction, fictional, or hybrid, can work as mentor texts, just as well if not better, to teach the essential skills of informative, expository writing. Thus, what is key to particular aspects surrounding the incorporation of graphic literature in the writing classroom is what Culham defines as a mentor text: “I define a mentor text as any text, print or digital, that you can read with a writer’s eye” (31). Thus, how might graphic literature stand out as a model for informative writing, whereas until now it has been untapped as a pedagogical tool within the secondary English classroom? In closing, there are clear lines of inquiry related to graphic literature and writing pedagogy that open opportunities for future research into the development of reading and writing students.

***Final Thoughts on the Power of Graphic Literature.*** In relation to using graphic literature, this research highlights the potential for other aspects of informative writing to be considered when implementing graphic works, such as text structure, transitions, or specific details and evidence. Not only that, but the analysis provided suggests further research into the processes of reading and writing, how they intersect, and how reading comprehension skills can be transferred into actual writing practice. Thus, more research needs to be conducted regarding graphic literature and writing pedagogy in relation to informative writing instruction. Questions such as those explored in my preliminary research ultimately become the starting point of any future research related to graphic literature and its incorporation into the writing classroom.

In focusing on the reading comprehension of informational texts, my main arguments not only strengthen the value of graphic literature within the classroom, no matter the genre, but also provide room for other voices within education to explore the potential of graphic literature and experiment with modeling these other essential elements for further reading comprehension and

future informative writing practice. This outlook frames the future of these arguments in which I have shown the many strengths of graphic works as pedagogical tools in the secondary English classroom. If students are to be successful in their lives after high school, then it is time that attentions shift to unexplored avenues of learning, especially with regard to writing and how reading skills can transfer over to writing skills. As an instrument of communication, a tool for learning, informative writing skills are in high demand from 21<sup>st</sup> century employers, which recalls the question at the center of my preliminary research: how might graphic literature help strengthen the transfer of reading comprehension related to informative texts to the actual practice of informational writing, incorporating text features and applying writer's purpose? The only way teachers will be able to foster a solid understanding and construct a strong foundation of writing practices is through the willingness to develop new, innovative, and creative ways of sharing knowledge with students, targeting ways to motivate and inspire them. In practicing these ideals and implementing dynamic graphic literature, teachers can cultivate the "unflattening" of the world through text, develop inquirers poised to dig deep into reading, and potentially, nurture authentic student voice through the modeling and writing of these graphic works that encourage a kaleidoscope of views.



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