Intermediate Grade Readers Making Meaning With a Graphic Novel: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The graphic novel format is gaining in popularity and acceptance. However, little is known about how readers make meaning with a graphic novel. This qualitative study investigated how intermediate grade (6th to 8th) readers made meaning with a graphic novel. Reader response theories, semiotics and research on reading strategies formed the study's theoretical framework. Two male and two female participants completed a think-aloud protocol as they read one graphic novel. Data were also collected from a retrospective think-aloud, text specific questions, and an interview. Findings indicated that participants used information from both visual and textual modalities to make meaning. They also employed a variety of reading strategies with both modalities in their reading. Additionally, participants applied their knowledge of graphic novel conventions and general story knowledge, including genre and literary conventions, to make meaning with the graphic novel.

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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

Less than five years ago a dear friend and fellow educator, in all seriousness, told me that she was shocked to discover that one of her students was an avid "graphic" novel reader. She was concerned about him being allowed to read these types of books in school because of their "questionable content." It took me a few beats to realize that she was associating the term "graphic" with "inappropriate." I quickly, but gently, set her straight, and although she was embarrassed by her mistake, she was now willing, and even eager, to learn more about the format in order to connect with her student over books.

This story serves to illustrate that even with their growing popularity, graphic novels are still a misunderstood format. Graphic novels are gaining in understanding and acceptance as a serious format with unique traits and abilities. However, there is still much that is unknown about graphic novels, particularly in regard to how people read and understand them. The gap in this understanding is particularly large with respect to how younger readers make meaning with graphic novels. Understanding how this format is read has implications for its use and continued acceptance, especially in schools. This dissertation explores how intermediate grade readers make meaning with graphic novels.

Definition of Graphic Novels

What is a graphic novel? There are likely as many definitions of graphic novels as there are graphic novel readers. Graphic novels share the same format

as comic books and many consider graphic novels to simply be long comic books. Weiner (2003) writes, “Graphic novels, as I define them, are book-length comic books that are meant to be read as one story. This broad term includes collections of stories in genres such as mystery, superhero, or supernatural, that are meant to be read apart from their corresponding ongoing comic book storyline…” (p. xi). It is important to emphasize that graphic novels are a format, rather than a genre, and as Weiner (2003) indicates this format can extend into all genres, including nonfiction.

A basic definition of the format, generally accepted by the field of comics and graphic novel scholars, comes from comic writer and scholar McCloud (1993), who defines comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (p. 9). McCloud’s definition refers to comics, but, again, because graphic novels and comics share the same format it applies to both kinds of texts/terms.

A Brief History of the Format

Comic books have a long and wide-ranging history. This dissertation is not focused on the history of comic books and graphic novels, but rather on their reading by contemporary intermediate grade readers and the implications that this may have for their use in educational settings. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of this research to provide a detailed summary of the history of the format. In this brief history, I provide some highlights from the intriguing history of comic

books in order to make an argument for the early acceptance of the format, to identify the potentialities of the format, and to contextualize the returning popularity of and appreciation for works in this format. Its history has shaped and continues to influence the format. And, as Rosenblatt (1995) argues, "Although the social and aesthetic elements in literature may be theoretically *distinguishable* they are actually *inseparable*" (p. 23).

There is debate within the field of comic scholarship about the origins of the format and the date of its birth. Some believe that the format is a fairly modern creation, whereas others, including McCloud (1993), believe that humans have been expressing themselves in this format for thousands of years. Based on his definition of comics, quoted above, McCloud (1993) believes that one of the first instances of the format can be found in Egypt, "painted over **thirty-two CENTURIES** ago for the tomb of 'Menna,' an ancient Egyptian scribe" (p. 14, original emphasis). While McCloud's example probably would look unfamiliar to many modern readers, it does present a story in a deliberate sequence of juxtaposed images, which fits McCloud's definition of comics.

McCloud presents two other historic examples of the comic format used to communicate a story. The first example is described as a "pre-Columbian picture manuscript" (McCloud, 1993, p. 10). The second is the perhaps better known Bayeux Tapestry. McCloud (1993) reproduces a portion of the picture manuscript and accompanies it with the following explanation:

> Here's just a piece of the **epic story** contained in a pre-Columbian **picture manuscript** 'discovered' by Cortes around **1519**. This 36-foot long **brightly-colored**, painted screenfold tells of the great **military** and **political hero 8-Deer 'Tiger's-Claw'**. Is it **comics**? You **BET** it is! We can even **read** some! (p. 10, original emphasis)

Like the example from ancient Egypt, this fits within the boundaries of McCloud's definition of comics.

The Bayeux Tapestry is much older than the picture manuscript, but it too embraces the visual storytelling format and thus meets McCloud's definition of a comic. McCloud (1993) describes the tapestry and its format below:

> **Hundreds of years** before Cortes began collecting comics, France produced the **strikingly similar** work we call the **BAYEUX TAPESTRY**. This 230 foot long tapestry details the **Norman conquest** of England, beginning in **1066**. Reading **left to right** we see the **events** of the conquest, in **deliberate chronological order** unfold before our very **eyes**. As with the **Mexican codex**, there are no **panel borders** per se, but there are clear divisions of scene by **subject matter**. (pp. 12 -13, original emphasis)

Whether or not comic scholars embrace these examples as ancient ancestors of the modern Spiderman comic, it is interesting to consider that humans have been communicating through the visual modality for thousands of years. "Throughout human history, image functioned as language—including the Sumerians'

cuneiform pictograms carved in clay tablets, the expressive symbols painted on the tombs in Egypt, and Chinese scrolls with silent illustrated epics that unrolled before readers' eyes" (Kuper, 2008, p. 7).

Before there were comic books, there were comic strips published in newspapers. "Americans had seen comics published before 1895, but Richard F. Outcault's single-panel cartoon, *The Yellow Kid*, was the first to catch widespread public attention" (Weiner, 2003, p. 1). As the popularity of comic strips grew, more and more newspapers carried them; this ultimately led to the advent of the comic book as publishers realized that these strips could be collected and sold. Weiner (2003) explains that

> comic books, magazines containing a few stories, were first published in the early 1930s, and were initially reprints of newspaper comic strips. But quickly comic book publishers realized that there was a market for new stories and sought out fresh materials. Early comic book magazines consisted of genre stories told in comic book format, including mysteries, adventure, and romance. (p. 2)

The first comic books on newsstands were these reprints of newspaper comic strips. Publishers soon recognized that there was an audience for stories in this format and it was not long before original stories were being written, published and bought. Hajdu (2008) reports that, "While verifiable data on comic-book sales were impossible to come by, seven million to ten million comics were estimated to have sold each month, for annual gross revenues of $8 million to $12 million,

in 1941. The same year, traditional children's books grossed about $2 million" (p. 45).

This time period could be considered the heyday of the comic format. Berona (2008) summarizes this time in comic history with the following statement:

> Like the cinema, comic strips also reached a pivotal development during the early years of the twentieth century. From the early work of the Swiss artist Rodolphe Topffer (1799 – 1846) and the publication of his *histoires en images*, or picture stories, to Richard F. Outcault's *The Yellow Kid*, published in 1895, comics grew into a powerful visual medium that entertained and satirized a growing industrial society. (p. 12 – 13)

Comic strips and comic books were the perfect media through which to view the changing society of the twentieth century.

World War II changed the world and everything in it. Comic books and their creators were not spared from the war or these changes. Will Eisner, often seen as one of the fathers of the format, was one of the many comic book creators who enlisted or were drafted into the military. Eisner's skills were recognized and put to use in order to create educational materials for his fellow soldiers. "Eisner convinced his superiors to let him use **comics** to teach preventive maintenance with humor and plain language, thus improving soldiers comprehension and **retention** of the material" (Van Lente & Dunlavey, 2012, p.

51, original emphasis). The flexibility of the comic book format allowed Eisner to present the information in ways that were easy to understand and follow.

> Also, unlike even **photos**, which are constrained by what is **physically photographable**, the flexibility of comics' **drawn** images allowed Eisner to demonstrate a technically **complex** task—like removing **volute springs** from a **tank**—from the point of view of the **repairman**. Comic art draws the reader **into** the sequence, makes her a **part** of it, step by step! (Van Lente & Dunlavey, 2012, p. 52, original emphasis)

Eisner's mastery of the craft of comics allowed him to present step-by-step instructions from the perspective of the person completing the work.

Eisner's approach was wildly successful for several reasons, including the fact that soldiers were more interested in reading in this format. Van Lente and Dunlavey (2012) report that, "As if volunteering to prove Will's point (that comics were a good way to present information), the adjutant general in charge of producing **technical materials** arranged for the **University of Chicago** to run an **efficiency test** pitting standard materials against Eisner's **comics**. The **comics** won **handily** (p. 52, original emphasis)!

Even with such examples of the appeal and success of comic books, in the United States they were viewed as inferior reading material that was primarily intended for children or the "immature." This opinion, intensified by the work of Fredric Wertham, resulted in a vehemently anti-comic stance in 1950s America. In many ways the comic is still trying to recover from this time in its history.

Wertham was a German-born American psychiatrist whose work with young people in psychiatric institutions led him to believe that comics were leading children to violent behavior. Wertham published his *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954, arguing that depictions of violence, sex and drug abuse in comics encouraged the same behaviors in children. Weiner (2003), describing Wertham's work reports that:

> He cited more than one cause for youthful rebellion, but he pinpointed the influence of comic books as a motivating factor in youthful disturbance. A practicing psychiatrist, Wertham noted that comic books were found in the rooms of teen suicides. He also argued that a steady diet of comic books would ruin an adolescent's taste for fine literature. Comic books, he believed, were too violent, too sexual, too bloody, and openly showed disrespect for authority. Comic books incited rather than reflected youthful aggression. *Seduction of the Innocent* was the culmination of several years of work on the part of Wertham, who had become a recognized speaker on the topic by the time his book reached publication. (p. 8)

Most of Wertham's assertions were scientifically unsupported, but this did not prevent a damaging backlash against the world of comics. Wertham even testified before the U.S. Congress about the harm of comic books. This led to the creation of the Comics Code Authority, which changed the publishing world of comics forever. Interestingly, Wertham's research has recently been made

available to the public and the unsupported nature of his claims has been reaffirmed.

The world of comic book publishing responded to Wertham's accusations and pressure from Congress by creating the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA), which would create and monitor the Comics Code Authority. Comics could be given a seal from the Comics Code Authority if they met certain qualifications. "In order to qualify for the seal, comics stories had to **first** be sent to the CMAA offices, where a crack squad of **retired schoolteachers** would ruthlessly inspect them for anything **objectionable**. Publishers frequently found the censors' requested changes arbitrary and **bizarre**" (Van Lente & Dunlavey, 2012, p. 89, original emphasis). Many places that had previously sold comic books refused to stock comic books that had not received approval from the Comics Code Authority. Publishers were often forced to create material that fit within the guidelines or to go out of business. "The Code had a profound and depressing effect on comic books. A great number of publishers, unable to produce their colorful product within its broadly defined restrictions, and equally unable to get distribution without a seal of approval, abandoned their comic book lines for good" (Daniels, 1971, p. 91).

Comic book publishers were not the only ones to respond to the claims in *Seduction of the Innocent*. Van Lente and Dunlavey (2012) report:

> The public backlash was swift and devastating. Catholic schools, boy and girl scout troops, and various other civic organizations sponsored **'book**

> **swaps'** in which kids were given free **prose books** in exchange for turning over their comic books…A prize was given to the child who turned in the most comics (typically **100+**), and the confiscated books would then be thrown on a **public bonfire**. (p. 88, original emphasis)

Parents, too, took away their children's comic books and refused to allow them to read anything in that format.

A few publishers survived, and even thrived, after the purge that resulted from the Congressional hearings. *Classics Illustrated* was one such company. Van Lente and Dunlavey (2012) describe the company as follows:

> **Classics Illustrated** was founded in 1941 by Albert Lewis Kanter, a Russian immigrant who had previously created a **toy telegraph**. Their comic book adaptations of classic works of literature like *Robinson Crusoe*, *Macbeth*, and *Gulliver's Travels* proved **so** immensely popular that they went through multiple **reprintings** (**unheard of** for comics in those days)…*Classics Illustrated* can be credited with awakening a love of literature in **millions** of kids. Circulation peaked in 1960, when the average adaptation enjoyed a print run of **262,000 copies**. (pp. 167 – 168, original emphasis)

Unfortunately, *Classics Illustrated* was one of the exceptions. It is fair to say that the world of comic books was irretrievably changed during this time period. Regardless of this history, it is evident that texts in this format are experiencing a resurgence in popularity that may eclipse even its most fruitful times in the past.

Contemporary Comic Books and Graphic Novels

Comics have spent the past sixty years crawling their way out of the underground that they were forced into by Wertham's work and the Comics Code Authority. The format remained popular with young men, especially those who were classified by others in society as "socially awkward." This group never stopped reading and appreciating comic books and were early fans of graphic novels. The media have perpetuated the idea that comics are the primary realm of these young men. Shows such as *The Big Bang Theory* often use this trope for comic effect. On screen, Leonard, Sheldon, Howard and Raj spend hours in the comic book store lamenting their lack of female companionship and geeking out over the newest issues of their favorite series. Females are not shown as part of this world, and the few who do cross into that space are regarded with suspicion and disdain.

Advent of the Graphic Novel

Like much of the history of the comic format, the origins of the term "graphic novel" are contested by scholars, creators and readers.

> **Will Eisner** is often credited with fathering the **graphic novel**, and for this reason, among his many **other** contributions to comics, the American industry's **highest award** is named for him. Many believe, however, that the honor of the graphic novel's creation—indeed, of creating the **comic strip** itself—belongs more **rightly** to Switzerland's **Rodolphe Topffer** (1799-1846). (Van Lente & Dunlavey, 2012, p. 163, original emphasis)

Although its origins are unclear, the term “graphic novel” has opened doors, that would have been closed to comic books, even though the two share the same format.

In the late 1970s, Eisner supposedly used the term to pitch his latest work, *A Contract With God*, to a publisher. Comic books were still receiving negative attention and that term did not quite capture exactly what Eisner was working on either. Many scholars have argued against Eisner’s creation of the term “graphic novel,” but have acknowledged that his use of “graphic novel” popularized the term. Fortunately, the term “graphic novel” appears to have garnered the format more attention and thus allowed it to be considered a work of potential literary merit. Industry heavy hitter and author Alan Moore has stated that

> …there were a surprising number of people out there who secretly **longed** to keep up with the adventures of Green Lantern but who felt they would have been **socially ostracized** if they had been seen reading a comic book in a public place. With the advent of books like *Watchmen*, I think these people were given license by the term **graphic novel**. Everybody knew that comics were for children and intellectually **subnormal people**, whereas graphic novel sounds like a much more **sophisticated** proposition. (Van Lente & Dunlavey, 2012, p. 184, original emphasis)

Popular Culture

Comic book culture can no longer be contained underground. Comic book and graphic novel characters, storylines and tropes have invaded popular culture

to an extraordinary extent. Movies based on comic books such as *Batman*, *Spiderman* and *Superman* are commonplace and other comic books and graphic novels are the source materials for numerous movies as well. In his Nerdist blog post entitled, "Top Ten Movies You Might Not Know Were Based on Comics," Anderson (2013) lists the following: *Weird Science* (1985), *Road to Perdition* (2002), *A History of Violence* (2005), *Ghost World* (2001), *Oldboy* (2003), *Persepolis* (2007), *From Hell* (2001), *The Rocketter* (1991), *Time Cop* (1994) and *The Crow* (1994). The 2013 summer movie schedule features numerous films based on comic books or graphic novels; these include *Iron Man 3*, *Kick-Ass 2*, *Man of Steel*, *Red 2*, *The Wolverine*, *R.I.P.D*, *2Guns*, and *Oblivion* (Arrant, 2013; Murray, 2013).

Publishing

Another indication of the growing popularity of comics and graphic novels was the announcement made in July 2013 that Amazon.com, the world's largest online retailer, is adding an imprint focused on comics and graphic novels. The imprint, Jet City Comics, "will publish on Kindle as standalone comics, as serialized comics released over multiple episodes, and as bundled graphic novels, with print editions available at amazon.com and other comics retailers" (Publisher's Weekly, 2013). The imprint has already secured new comics from George R.R. Martin, the author of *The Game of Thrones* series, as well as new series from other comic book heavy hitters. As reported by Publisher's Weekly (2013), Jeff Belle, the vice-president of Amazon Publishing, states that, "Our

focus will be on adapting great books for this medium as a means of expanding the audience for our authors, pushing boundaries with new ideas that combine visual and narrative storytelling, and creating compelling new experiences for readers." Given Amazon.com's success in its other endeavors, it is unlikely that it would invest in comics and graphic novels if there didn't appear to be a growing market for such work.

As the comic industry sought to recover from its low point in the 1950s, it moved away from publishing materials intended for younger readers. Robins and Wildsmith (2012), in their parental guide of comics for children, write that, "Our crusade may seem silly, considering that comic books were a staple of kids' recreational reading for a good portion of the 20th century. But somewhere along the line, in the comics industry's struggle to have the medium taken seriously as a way to tell mature sophisticated stories for adults, comics forgot about kids" (p. 8).

As the push for new comic books and graphic novels for young readers makes inroads, publishers have been more than happy to profit from and support the expanding readership of graphic novels. Several publishers have even created their own children's and young adult comic book and graphic novel imprints, while new stand-alone publishers have decided to focus exclusively on graphic novels for this age group. TOON Books, an imprint of Candlewick Press, is one such example. Francoise Mouly, editorial director of Toon Books, first

endeavored to bring comics to children through the *Little Lit* books and now continues to do so through TOON Books (TOON Books, n.d.).

The TOON Books website reports that, “TOON Books represent a whole new approach to books for beginning readers…” (TOON Books, n.d.). They claim to be the “first high-quality comics designed for children ages three and up” (TOON Books, n.d.). The website goes on to state that, “Perhaps more remarkably, this is the first collection *ever* designed to offer early readers comics they can read *themselves*” (TOON Books, n.d.). TOON Books takes a unique approach to comics for new readers by leveling each book based upon interest and reading level; books range from Level One to Level Three. Level One books consist of only one or two panels per page and include about 200-300 words, many of which are sight words. Level Two books feature one to two panels per page and use about 300-600 words. Finally, for the more advanced reader, Level Three titles add additional settings and sustained storylines, which require more skill to read and understand (TOON Books, n.d.).

As TOON Books and other graphic novels targeted to younger readers gain in readership, other publishers have started paying attention and making their own forays into publishing texts in this format for younger children. *Step into Reading* is a series from Random House Kids publishing that has been publishing leveled readers for some time. Using their previous success as a guide, *Step into Reading* has ventured into leveled comic readers. “Boldly going where *Step into Reading* has never gone before: comic readers are told almost

entirely in action-packed dialogue! Simple, graphic paneled layouts introduce emergent readers to the joy of comics" (Random House Kids, n.d.). *Step into Reading's* first two comic readers were published on June 25, 2013, including *Robot, Go Bot!* by Dana Meachen Rau and illustrated by Wook Jin Jung and *Ollie & Moon Aloha!* by Diane Kredensor.

On the first page of each of these titles is a note for parents written by Jennifer and Matthew Holm, the brother and sister team behind the *Babymouse* and *Squish* graphic novel series. The letter begins, "Psst…you're looking at the Super Secret Weapon of Reading. It's called comics" (Kredensor, 2013, p. 1). It goes on to state that, "Step Into Reading Comic Readers are a perfect step in learning to read. They provide visual cues to the meaning of words and helpfully break out short pieces of dialogue into speech balloons" (Kredensor, 2013, p. 1). It concludes with, "Step Into Reading Comic Readers are designed to engage and to provide an empowering reading experience. They are also fun. The best-kept secret of comics is that they create lifelong readers. And that will make you the real hero of the story!" (Kredensor, 2013, p. 1). The publication of these comic readers and the content of this letter to parents are both indications that graphic novels are finally being recognized for their ability to meet reading and academic goals.

Awards

In addition to the increasing popular cultural appeal of comics and graphic novels, texts written in this format are now also being appreciated as works of

literature. *Maus* by Art Spiegelman is one of the most popular examples of the acceptance of graphic novels as literature. *Maus,* published in 1991, is a difficult text to summarize, but the majority of the story is built around Spiegelman's retelling of his parents' experiences in Poland during the Holocaust. Beyond the uniqueness of being told in a graphic novel format, *Maus* has received acclaim for Spiegelman's portrayal of Jews as mice and the Nazis as cats. In 1992, *Maus* was awarded a special citation from the Pulitzer Prize committee. Spiegelman was surprised: "Well, I never came dressed for success, so I just wasn't prepared for the overwhelming positive response to *Maus*" (Spiegelman, 2011, p. 79). The enthusiastic reception of *Maus* was also unexpected by those in the literary field and other comics artists. This recognition served to change many people's opinions about comics and graphic novels and to provide a space for works in this format. Spiegelman reflected on the enduring impact of his work: "The fact that *Maus* looms fairly large in contemporary literature, and certainly in comics, is something that affects not just me but—in ways that I can imagine might be annoying—most other serious comics artists" (Spiegelman, 2011, p. 79-80).

The literary acceptance of graphic novels is also trickling down to graphic novels written for children and young adults. Like *Maus*' Pulitzer Prize, the recognition of one graphic novel has lent credence to the literary nature of graphic novels. *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang was awarded the Printz Award in 2007. The Printz Award is an annual award bestowed to the year's best work for young adult readers. "The charge of the Printz Committee is

to select the best YA book in any given year; 'best' is defined solely in terms of literary merit" (Benedetti and Dobrez, 2007, p. 22). The Printz Award's emphasis on literary merit won over many educators who had previously refused to consider texts in a comic book format as having any literary qualities. Additionally, "*American Born Chinese* was a 2006 National Book Award for Young People's Literature Finalist" (Benedetti and Dobrez, 2007, p. 22). *American Born Chinese* is now commonly seen on the required reading lists in many school districts.

Additional awards have begun to recognize the quality of graphic novels and comic books written for children and young adults. The Eisner Awards, established in 1988, are awarded on a yearly basis and serve to recognize achievement in American comic books. The award categories have changed over time and currently number more than 30. Three of the newest categories, all added in 2012, are Best Publication for Early Readers (up to age 7), Best Publication for Kids (ages 8-12), and Best Publication for Young Adults (ages 12-17) (Wikipedia Eisner Awards). Often referred to as the Oscars of the comic book world, the Eisner Award committee's acknowledgement of works written for young audiences is another indication of the growing popularity and acceptance of texts in the graphic format.

Library Access

Librarians have helped comic books and graphic novels regain and find audiences as they recognized the potential in the format and worked to make

them available for their patrons. “Toward the end of the 1990s, public librarians embraced the graphic novel medium, their interest fueled by the readability of graphic novels and the high quality of some of these books” (Weiner, 2003, p. 55)

Library circulation rates speak to the success of librarians in promoting this format as well as the growing popularity of graphic novels. “According to librarians surveyed…graphic novels are among the most circulated categories, right up there with teen paranormal romance and DVDs” (MacDonald, 2013). The trend appears to hold true for both public and school libraries. A public librarian in Ohio remarked that, “graphic novels make up about 10% of his collection but 35% of his circulation—and the number grew in 2012” (MacDonald, 2013). Numbers from school libraries are similar, with approximately 3% of their collection comprised of graphic novels, which account for 30% of their circulation (MacDonald, 2013). The popularity of graphic novels extends to university libraries as well. A librarian at Columbia University reports that, “’Graphic novels are the most frequently requested material in our Ivy League request system’” (MacDonald, 2013).

Comic Books and Graphic Novels in Education

Regardless of the growing popularity of comics and graphic novels, one of the lasting impacts of the Comic Code Authority is a continued unease with works in this format. However, educators at all levels are finally realizing the potential benefits of using graphic novels in the classroom. These benefits extend from support for reading to subject matter knowledge and beyond. Teachers are using

graphic novels to address some of the New Literacies and to expose students to multimodal texts. Some studies have also indicated that graphic novels have been found to increase students' motivation to read and can provide an opportunity for potential success for students who struggle to read traditional texts.

"[G]raphic novels have found their way into classrooms, as teachers are realizing their usefulness as literacy tools. After a study of graphic novels, researchers concluded that the average graphic novel introduced readers to twice as many words as the average children's book. This realization has reinforced the idea that the comics format is a good way to impart information" (Weiner, 2003, p. 61). Studies on the educational use of graphic novels are increasing, and further potential benefits, such as that mentioned by Weiner (2003), are likely to be revealed.

Multiliteracies

In September 1994, ten scholars from a variety of fields with interest and expertise in literacy gathered in New London, New Hampshire to discuss the changing world, particularly in regard to literacy demands and how education could adapt to meet these changes. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) report that "[t]he focus was the big picture; the changing word and the new demands being placed upon people as makers of meaning in changing workplaces, as citizens in changing public spaces and in the changing dimensions of our community lives – our lifeworlds" (p. 4). The group would come to be known as the New London

Group and its ideas labeled as “new literacies” and/or “multiliteracies.” Although the New London Group met twenty years ago, its vision for how education can prepare students for the demands of an increasingly multimodal world has yet to be achieved; however, the predictions made by the group about the multiplicity and intertextuality of the world and, thus literacy, were accurate. The world has rapidly and drastically become inundated with hybrid messages that integrate the textual, the visual, the auditory and the sensory.

The New London Group crafted the term “multiliteracies” to describe the type of literacy they were advocating for. The term encompasses two of the group’s primary arguments for a new approach to literacy. First of all, it recognizes the “multiplicity of communications channels and media” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5). Secondly, it acknowledges the “increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5).

The first argument is particularly salient in regards to graphic novels.

> The first argument relates to increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioural, and so on. This is particularly important in the mass media, multimedia, and in an electronic hypermedia. Meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal – in which written-linguistic modes of meaning are part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 5)

While graphic novels are not directly described in this argument for the increasing multiplicity of meaning making, they are a prime example of multimodal integration through their use of the written word and visual images.

Based on their assessment of the changing nature of the meaning making demands placed on people, the New London Group called for a different approach to literacy instruction. Cazden et al. (1996) urged that

> …literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. This includes understanding and competent control of representational forms that are becoming increasingly significant in the overall communications environment, such as visual images and their relationship to the written word… (p. 61)

Graphic novels, along with picturebooks, are especially suited to display the relationship between text and image and to support readers as they learn how to make meaning within this relationship.

Cazden et al. (1996) continue their argument for a revamping of literacy pedagogy:

> Increasingly important are modes of meaning other than Linguistic, including Visual Meanings (images, page layouts, screen formats); Audio Meanings (music, sound effects); Gestural Meanings (body language, sensuality); Spatial Meanings (the meanings of environmental spaces, architectural spaces); and Multimodal Meanings. Of the modes of

> meaning, the Multimodal is the most significant, as it relates all the other modes in quite remarkably dynamic relationships. (p. 80)

Again, graphic novels are well-suited to provide experience with visual meanings, as well as spatial meanings. Perhaps more importantly, graphic novels are an accessible example of multimodal meanings, as the modalities of the text and the visual combine to create something greater and more meaningful than either of the two elements separately.

Research Questions

As indicated above, as a result of their popularity and availability, graphic novels are an important format to consider in the reading and academic lives of children and young adults. The format is a challenging one to understand as the image and the text must work together to impart the full meaning, with semiotic elements such as the panel, the gutter, typology and the comic page itself also contributing to the meaning-making process between reader and text.

While there have been several important studies of how young readers respond to picturebooks (Sipe, 2008; Kiefer, 1995; Arizpe & Styles, 2003), there are no research studies published on how children and young adults make meaning with graphic novels. Therefore, this study explored the following questions: How do intermediate grade (6th to 8th grade) readers make meaning with texts in a graphic novel format? In addition, this study explored the following three sub-questions:

- What modalities do intermediate grade readers rely on to make meaning with a graphic novel?
- What strategies do intermediate grade readers employ when making meaning with a graphic novel text?
- What do intermediate grade readers know about how graphic novels work?

In the following chapter I explore pertinent theory and research that relate to these questions.

CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of some of the theories and concepts that are fundamental to this research. As this study is focused on meaning making, the three primary sections in this chapter center around that theme: making meaning with texts and images, making meaning with picturebooks, and making meaning with graphic novels. The chapter concludes with a summary of important ideas.

Making Meaning with Texts

This study explored how intermediate grade (6th to 8th grade) readers made meaning with a text in a graphic novel format. It is important to note that this does not encompass how readers *read* a graphic novel, but rather how they *make meaning* with a graphic novel. This is a subtle, but important difference, as it reflects an understanding of the role of both the reader and the text in the reading, or meaning making, process. The text itself does not hold the primary meaning, but rather relies upon the reader to bring her own meanings and understandings to bear on the words and images, in the case of a graphic novel, to create meaning with a text.

This view of reading is informed by reader response theory, including transactional theory, which is explored below. Scholars in the field of visual arts have applied many of the constructs of reader response theory to the viewing of images; the work of three of these scholars is described next. Finally, scholars in

the field of reading have recognized that readers employ many strategies in order to make meaning with a text; this literature is reviewed as well.

Reader Response Theories

Reader response theory is an understanding of the reading process based upon the belief that the physical text (the book) itself does not hold meaning, but rather meaning is created between the text and the reader. As Lewis (1990) describes, "What we are inescapably led to is the realization that there are always two participants in the making of a story at the point of reading: the text and the reader" (p. 138). Based on this understanding of the reading process and because no two readers are alike, the meaning created between one reader and a text will never exactly replicate the meaning created between the same text and another reader. This theory of reader response applies to any text, including graphic novels. Within this theory of reading, there are numerous theorists who have built their own understandings of this process. The works of Rosenblatt, whose transactional theory is one of the preeminent in reader response, Iser, whose idea of "gaps of indeterminancy" parallels that of gutters in graphic novels, and Eco, whose ideas are rooted in semiotics, are explored below.

Transactional theory. Rosenblatt's understanding of reader response is formulated in her development of transactional theory. She explains:

> Reading is a transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances. I use John Dewey's term, transaction, to emphasize the contribution of both reader and text.

> The words in their particular pattern stir up elements of memory, activate areas of consciousness. The reader, bringing past experience of language and of the world to the task, sets up tentative notions of a subject, of some framework into which to fit the ideas as the words unfurl. (Rosenblatt, 1993, p. 7)

Rosenblatt's transactional theory, like the umbrella of reader response, recognizes that each reader and text experience a unique transaction that results in what she terms a "poem." "The meaning—the poem—'happens' during the transaction between the reader and the signs on the page" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. xvii). Her theory also takes into account that readers change over time and that rereading a book will result in a new poem because the reader herself has changed.

Although Rosenblatt conceived of her theory as applying only to what she considered to be "literature," transactional theory accommodates different textual formats and recognizes that the "poem" will vary based upon the format as well as the reader. She remarks that

> It is essential to hold firmly to the totality of the reader's experience of the literary work whenever we are tempted to speak as though the structure of a play or novel were distinct from the specific sensations, emotions, personalities, and events presented in the work. The sense of the form or structure of the play or novel results from the fact that these particular

> elements and no others are *experienced* in particular relations to one another. (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 46)

For Rosenblatt, the structure of the text, whether play or novel, is an integral part of the resulting transaction, and the influence of this factor cannot be isolated from the other elements in the transaction. She again emphasizes the importance of the format of the text when she states that, "what is perceived involves both the perceiver's contribution and the stimulus" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 19). Based on this interpretation of her theory, I believe that it is possible to apply Rosenblatt's transactional theory to graphic novels.

Gaps of indeterminancy. Iser (1978) states that, "…it is in the reader that the text comes to life" (p. 19), although he attributes more power to the text than does Rosenblatt. Iser's theory of indeterminancies or gaps is particularly relevant to an examination of reader response theory and the reading of graphic novels because these gaps are literally present in the text in the form of gutters. Arizpe and Styles (2008) report that, "Wolfgang Iser's (1978) theory of textual 'gaps' that need to be filled in by readers active in the assembling of the text's meaning is now almost taken as a 'given' when discussing interaction between readers and texts" (p. 370).

Iser's theory on "spots of indeterminancy" (Iser, 1978) was influenced by the work of Ingarden (1973). An indeterminancy, or a gap, occurs in the text when the reader is required to fill in the "blank" left in the text by the author. It is through these gaps that the reader interacts with the text in order to create the

meaning. “We can say that the indeterminate elements of literary prose—perhaps even of all literature—represent a vital link between text and reader. They are the switch that activates the reader into using his own ideas in order to fulfill the intention of the text” (Iser, 1989, p. 28).

Iser argues that these gaps are not accidental, but rather planned by the author and/or illustrator as part of the structure of the text. It is these planned gaps that facilitate the relationship between author and reader. Iser (1978) states that, “Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. Hence the structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text” (p. 169).

Iser was particularly interested in literature when developing his “spots of indeterminancy” (Iser, 1978) argument, but it can be readily applied to all formats and types of texts, including graphic novels. In fact, Ingarden’s (1973) work, upon which Iser draws, focused primarily on works of visual art. This concept is easily applied to graphic novels with their use of gutters between panels. However, these “spots of indeterminancy” do not have to be a physical gap; “traditional” texts also contain “spots of indeterminancy.”

Open and closed texts. Eco approaches the role of the reader from a semiotic perspective. His work provides yet another viewpoint on the theory of reader response. Eco perceives messages or texts as layers of different codes. He writes, “Moreover, what one calls ‘message’ is usually a *text*, that is, a

network of different messages depending on different codes and working at different levels of signification" (Eco, 1979, p. 5). It is up to the sender of the message to consider which codes to include in order to encourage the receiver of the text to access the desired codes.

Eco applied this idea to literary works as well. He identified two different types of texts, open and closed. Open texts allow for more interpretation on the part of the reader as there are more possibilities presented in the code. Closed texts do not provide as much room for interpretation on the part of the reader, which results in the limiting of the conveyed message to that desired by the author. "An 'open' text cannot be described as a communicative strategy if the role of its addressee (the reader, in the case of verbal texts) has not been envisaged at the moment of its generation qua text. An open text is a paramount instance of a syntactic-semantico-pragmatic device whose foreseen interpretation is a part of its generative process" (Eco, 1979, p. 3). In regard to the theory of reader response, it is important to note that in the quote above Eco highlights the importance of the author in recognizing the eventual reader and that this reader will play a significant role in the creation of meaning with the text.

Eco speaks of the future potential reader as the "Model Reader." The author must keep in mind the "Model Reader" when writing and making decisions regarding which codes to include. Eco (1979) states that

> To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his

> possible reader. The author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader (hereafter Model Reader) supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them. (p. 7)

It is impossible for an author to know exactly who will read their books, but Eco describes ways in which the text itself can identify its "Model Reader" through tactics such as genre, cover designs, and format.

In his theory, Eco points out that readers bring a great deal to their reading of a text, which is congruent with the ideas presented by Rosenblatt and Iser; although he ascribes more power to authors than do Rosenblatt and Iser. Eco (1979) states that, "No text is read independently of the reader's experience of other texts" (p. 21). The idea of intertextuality is essential to theories of reader response, as a reader's experience with and knowledge of other texts influences how the current text will be read.

In addition to previous experiences with texts, a reader's values will color how she reads a text. Eco (1979) writes that, "…the reader approaches a text from a personal ideological perspective, even when he is not aware of this, even when his ideological bias is only a highly simplified system of axiological oppositions" (p. 22). He continues, "This means that not only the outline of textual ideological structures is governed by the ideological bias of the reader but also that a given ideological background can help one to discover or to ignore textual ideological structures" (p. 22). Not only will a reader's ideology impact the reading

of the text, but it will also alter a reader's awareness of the ideologies of the author presented throughout the text. An author cannot eliminate inclusion of his ideologies in his writing any more than a reader can prevent hers from transforming her reading.

Summary. The three different theories of reader response, described above, are informed by each of the theorists' respective fields. The theories attribute different levels of importance to the role of the reader, the author, and the text itself, but all recognize that all three roles are vital components in the meaning making process and that, indeed, no meaning would exist without the input from any one component. The format of graphic novels is not mentioned specifically by any of the theorists, but the theories are still applied to the meaning making process that occurs when reading a graphic novel.

Reading Images

As graphic novels are multimodal texts, composed of the written word and visual images, it is important to not only consider the written text, but also the visual text. Many scholars, such as Benton, Kress and Barthes, believe that images, like the written word, can be read and interpreted by viewers. The work of Benton, Kress, and Barthes is summarized below.

Image as "text." Benton's conceptualization of reading, like Rosenblatt's and Iser's, fits under reader response theory and he shares many of the same ideas as Rosenblatt, Iser and Eco. However, Benton has extended these ideas to the viewing of images. Benton (1992) urges us to redirect our "attention to the

central part played by the visual imagination and the way in which pictures, too, may be regarded as 'text' in the modernist sense of the term" (p. xvi). A basic assumption of this study is that images are texts that can be read and interpreted just as written words can be read and interpreted.

Benton (1992) argues that there is a "two-foldness" in the reading of an image as a text. As one reads an image, one experiences both a recognitional aspect and a configurational aspect. In the recognitional aspect, the viewer is first seeing something on the surface of the image and then seeing beyond the physical image to the meaning. This involves a "seeing through." The "marked surface" of the image, such as brush strokes, are seen and read in the configurational aspect. This aspect remains on the literal surface of the image while the recognitional goes through and beyond the image.

Along with the "two-foldness" of reading an image, there are three phases of looking: perception, conception and construction. Benton (1992) explains that

> [T]he first concerns the viewer's perception of the painting, the means by which this object of contemplation is taken in. The second concerns the viewer's conception of a painting, the means by which it becomes lodged within the mind when the individual has taken possession of it. The third concerns the viewer's construction of meaning, the way in which an interpretation is formulated. (p.108)

Each of the three phases addresses a question about the process of viewing; these are, respectively: “What happens to the eye?, What happens behind your eye?, and, What happens beyond your eye?” (Benton, 1992, p. 108).

For Benton, as a viewer reads and looks at an image, she must work to make meaning with the picture hanging on the wall just as if she was reading a written text in the form of a book. Pictures, like written texts, also leave spaces to be filled by the viewer; Benton (1992) states that, “…as in painting so in literature, the work of art contains ‘indeterminacy gaps’ (Iser) or ‘incomplete images’ (Gombrich) which, for the readers/viewers, become spaces which we are required to fill” (p.109). The idea that gaps can exist in both images and texts indicates how complex the reading of graphic novels might be and the level of “work” a reader of these formats must do to make meaning.

Image as literacy. Unlike Benton, Kress does not provide a description of the specific approaches that readers of an image undergo in order to read the image. Rather, Kress presents arguments for conceptualizing the reading of images as an important and necessary form of literacy. Kress has done a great deal of work with children who are developing their literacy skills (Kress, 1997) and he describes the layering of written and visual understanding and usage as children become literate. Kress (1997) argues that, “The visual does act as a system of communication, and so has to be learned like other systems of communication, such as language for instance” (p. 135).

Kress has collaborated with his colleague van Leeuwen on numerous explorations of the grammar of the visual. They detail the similarities between written language communication and visual communication.

> Visual structures realize meanings as linguistic structures do also, and thereby point to different interpretations of experience and different forms of social interaction. The meanings which can be realized in language and visual communication overlap in part, that is, some things can be expressed both visually and verbally; and in part they diverge—some things can be 'said' only visually, others only verbally. But even when something can be 'said' both visually and verbally the *way in which* it will be said is different. For instance, what is expressed in language through the choice between different word classes and semantic structures, is, in visual communication, expressed through the choice between, for instance, different uses of colour, or different compositional structures. (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 2)

Graphic novels provide a format that is ripe for the overlapping of these written and visual forms of communication.

Although the same information can often be communicated through an image or a written text, Kress emphasizes that it is important to understand and acknowledge the different possibilities presented by these modalities. Kress (1997) writes that, "One question to ask therefore is precisely about the limitations and possibilities of each medium. The visual, for instance, seems to

permit in many cases much more subtly graded expression than the verbal" (p. 108). He goes on to provide an example of the representation of color in these different modalities: "…with the possibilities of signifying meaning through colour: the range is infinite in the visual semiotic; and limited, relatively in language by the existence of colour terms" (Kress, 1997, p. 109). The ability to represent color visually is unlimited, whereas a written description of color is limited by the number of words that can be used to describe a particular color.

Kress was a member of the New London Group, whose work is described in Chapter 1. At the convening of the New London Group in 1994, Kress had already recognized that the line between the visual and the written had started to blur. This blurring has continued and intensified in the twenty intervening years. Kress (1997) describes one such example of this blurring: "On the one hand, the visual aspects of language, whether as letter, or as block of text, are beginning to be used as elements in the visual design of a page layout, equating language and image on one level…The two are treated as being elements of the same kind in one code; on the same level, communicationally" (pp. 143-144). The graphic novel format provides a number of examples of this crossing of the borders between these supposedly different communication codes.

Kress' observations of children have indicated to him that children have no problem functioning and performing in a multimodal world. He writes that, "Multimodality is an absolute fact of children's semiotic practices. It is what they do; it is how they understand meaning-making; and the complexities of that mode

of production are not a problem for them" (Kress, 1997, pp. 137-138). This finding provides a strong supporting argument for children's ability to make meaning with multimodal texts such as graphic novels.

Image as sign. Barthes was a French literary critic and semiotician, whose work included an examination of the reading of images as well. He, like Kress, recognized the unique "language" or grammar of images. "This is why the semiologist is entitled to treat in the same way writing and pictures: what he retains from them is the fact that they are both *signs*, that they both reach the threshold of myth endowed with the same signifying function, that they constitute, one just as much as the other, a language-object" (Barthes, 1972/1957, p. 115).

Barthes acknowledged the possible density of symbols and meaning in an image. Barthes (1977) wrote that, "The image is penetrated through and through by the system of meaning, in exactly the same way as man is articulated to the very depths of his being in distinct languages" (p. 47). However, Barthes also recognized that meaning can be conveyed from a single stroke in an image. Barthes (1972/1957) stated that, "…pictures, to be sure, are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke, without analyzing or diluting it. But this is no longer a constitutive difference. Pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful" (Barthes, 1972/1957, p. 110). In his comparison of image to text, Barthes reinforced the idea that images can convey as much, and maybe more, meaning as the written word.

However, in some ways, Barthes seemed to believe that images can convey meaning in more easily comprehensible ways than text. Although Barthes did not focus much on the comic form in his exploration of images, he referred to the format on occasion. The following statement regarding comic strips indicates that Barthes may have believed that images are in some ways easier to read than text:

> …in certain comic strips intended for 'quick' reading the diegesis is confided above all to the text, the image gathering the attributive informations of a paradigmatic order (the stereotyped status of the characters); the costly message and the discursive message are made to coincide so that the hurried reader may be spared the boredom of verbal 'descriptions,' which are entrusted to the image, that is to say to a less 'laborious' system. (Barthes, 1977, p. 41)

Barthes also commented that the message of the image and the text could be the same, and perhaps, even with their potential density, images are more efficient at conveying meaning than text.

Barthes acknowledged the importance of context in that images can possess a diversity of meanings with many different significations and readers often require guideposts to the intended meaning; "…all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a 'floating chain' of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others" (Barthes, 1977, p. 38-39). Although an image may point to a variety of meanings, Barthes contends that the context of

the image, whether it is an advertisement or a graphic novel, directs the reader of the image to a narrow selection of meanings or signifieds that are appropriate or relevant for the context.

For Barthes, when text is paired with an image, such as in an advertisement, the text can provide context for the image, or as he terms it, an "anchoring" (Barthes, 1977). In instances of text and image, such as in a graphic novel, Barthes saw the text as an anchorage. "The text helps to identify purely and simply the elements of the scene and the scene itself; it is a matter of a denoted description of the image…" (Barthes, 1977, p. 39). The text provides a context for the image, which then allows the reader to identify the meaning of the image. Barthes (1977) continued his explanation, stating that, "The denominative function corresponds exactly to an *anchorage* of all the possible (denoted) meanings of the object by recourse to a nomenclature" (p. 39). Barthes saw the text as a means of anchoring the intended meaning expressed by the image: "…the text *directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle *dispatching*, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance" (Barthes, 1977, p. 40). This is a complementary concept to the necessity of the interpretant or the proposition in order to identify the meaning expressed in the panel or image.

Barthes recognized a second possible function of written texts in relation to images; he terms this function "relay" and remarked that it is more rare than anchorage. "The function of relay is less common…it can be seen particularly in

cartoons and comic strips. Here text (most often a snatch of dialogue) and image stand in complementary relationship…(it) functions not simply as elucidation but really does advance the action by setting out, in the sequence of messages, meanings that are not to be found in the image itself" (Barthes, 1977, p. 41). Relay, as explained by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), occurs when "new and different meanings are added to complete the message" (p.16). Text boxes and speech balloons in graphic novels serve the relay function by extending or adding to the message of the images. This is another indication of the complexity of the graphic novel, as the written text and image must work together to convey the full meaning.

Summary. Like Rosenblatt, Iser, and Eco, the three theorists above approach their viewing, or reading, of images from different fields. All three view images as containing meaning and requiring a "reading" or an understanding by the viewer. Kress and Barthes even refer to images as having a language or a grammar all their own. Benton's theory, like reader response theories, is more focused on the role of the viewer in making meaning with the image.

Reading Strategies

As described in the previous section on reader response, meaning is not found within a text. Rather, meaning is made between the reader and the text. As Flood, Lapp and Fisher (2003) write, "Good readers have learned that it is the *reader* in the reading process who creates meaning, not the text or even the author of the text" (p. 931). Readers have many tools at their disposal to assist

them with meaning making, including the application of reading strategies. "Reading strategies are deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of text" (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008, p. 368).

Experienced readers likely have a range of reading strategies that they can use to address a variety of potential problems that they may encounter as they read a new text. The ability to apply a wide variety of strategies often provides readers with a sense of mastery over their own reading. Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) report that, "Reading strategies are motivated by control, good decision making, and adaptability; they reinforce self-efficacy based on both ability and effort. Strategic readers feel confident that they can monitor and improve their own reading so they have both knowledge and motivation to succeed" (p. 370).

According to Lapp and Fisher (2009), Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) identified an extensive list of potential reading strategies.

> Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) found that, in addition to using knowledge of language, vocabulary, and past experience, proficient readers also make use of a repertoire of strategies. They preview the text to get an overview of what will be read, set purposes that keep them focused, make predictions and then check them as they read, use context clues to figure out vocabulary, create mental visuals to help them understand and remember, ask questions of themselves and the text to connect prior and

> new information, synthesize large chunks of information to support remembering, underline and take notes about points they consider important, reread and monitor their speed to ensure their understanding, reflect and revise their knowledge based on new insights gained, continually evaluate the truth or worth of the information, summarize to support remembering the major thesis, and then apply and expand the knowledge. They do not use one cognitive strategy at a time but rather, as they monitor their comprehension, they use them in the configurations needed. (Lapp & Fisher, 2009, p. 3)

A strategic reader would have these strategies, and more, to choose from and would make choices regarding which strategy or strategies to use based on the text, potential difficulties, and the purpose of reading. Good readers will also likely apply the strategies in different combinations.

Researchers describe good readers as active meaning makers. Active meaning making consists of, "Using prior knowledge, making connections, drawing inferences, asking questions, determining importance in text, evoking images, monitoring meaning and comprehension, employing fix-up strategies, synthesizing, becoming metacognitively aware of other strategies and determining when to use them" (Weaver, 2002, p. 329). Actively making meaning requires the reader to engage in the meaning making process with the text; the use of reading strategies such as making connections, drawing inferences and asking questions support this meaning making process.

While engaged in making meaning with a text, an active reader can make a variety of connections to the text. “Readers also learn to make connections between their own experiences and knowledge and those portrayed in story or presented in nonfiction. These links between text and world, as Cochran-Smith (1984) describes, not only help readers understand the texts they read, but also allow them to use what they read to understand their own lives” (Galda, Cullinan & Sipe, 2010, p. 39). These connections allow for a deeper understanding of the text, and potentially, a deeper understanding of the reader’s own life.

Readers can make a variety of connections to a text. Self-to-text connections involve the application of a reader’s own experiences and knowledge of the world to the understanding of a text. “A text-to-text connection occurs when readers think about other written texts, such as movies, songs, or stories, to enhance their understanding of what they read” (Tovani, 2000, p. 70).

Making inferences are another important strategy used to make meaning with a text. Pressley (2002) argues that, “Throughout reading, the good reader is making conscious inferences as well as inferences that are unconscious and automatic. Good readers try to fill in information gaps in the text…” (p. 57). As described by Pressley (2002), inferences can consist of supplying missing information. Additionally, inferences can be made about character attributes or motivation. Predicting future plot events is another form of inference. “Good readers anticipate what’s coming next. Based on what they’ve already read, readers expect certain new events to occur” (Tovani, 2000, p. 52).

Readers who are actively making meaning with the text often question the text. “Readers who ask questions and know where the answers to their questions are to be found are more likely to have a richer read, to infer, to draw conclusions, and regain control in their reading” (Tovani, 2000, p. 53). By questioning the text, readers can engage in a “conversation” with the text as questions lead to answers and then more questions. These questions can lead to inferences, including predictions, as well as provide a means for monitoring comprehension.

Another reading strategy that is employed by good readers is noticing how writers present information through conventions. “Key words, bold print, italicized words, capital letters, and punctuation are all used to enhance understanding. Conventions of print help the author convey intent. They help the reader determine what is important and what the author values” (Tovani, 2000, p. 54). Strategic readers understand that conventions are used by the author to highlight important information and thus they have learned to pay attention to this feature of the text as they work to make meaning.

Summary. Reading strategies are often employed by readers to aid in the meaning making process with a text. Strategic readers have myriad strategies in their reading toolbox and can pick and choose strategies appropriate to the text and their purpose for reading. They can also combine strategies as necessary to help them create meaning with a text. Reading strategies include such

techniques as: making connections, generating inferences, asking questions of the text and paying attention to the author's use of writing conventions.

Making Meaning with Picturebooks

A significant amount of research exists about how readers, particularly children, make meaning with picturebooks. Some scholars, such as Nel, consider picturebooks and graphic novels to be similar forms; "Picture books and comics are kin: adjacent branches of the same literary-artistic tree, cousins with slightly different expectations of their readers" (Nel, 2012, p. 445). While picturebooks and graphic novels may inhabit the same family tree many differences between the formats exist as well. In spite of those differences, studies on how children make meaning with picturebooks can help inform our understanding of how readers may make meaning with graphic novels. Three studies, described below, offer insight into how children read and respond to picturebooks.

Observing Children's Responses to Picturebooks in the Classroom

Over many years and a series of carefully designed and executed studies, Sipe (2008) developed five broad categories that describe how children respond to picturebooks. Using a grounded theory approach, Sipe analyzed the transcripts of children's talk about picture storybooks that were read aloud by their teachers. Sipe proposed the five response types as distinguishable elements of children's evolving literary understanding. The five categories of response include analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent, and performative (Sipe, 2008).

Analytical responses composed the majority (73%) of the children's responses. "This category includes all responses that seem to be dealing with the text as an opportunity to construct narrative meaning" (Sipe, 2008, p. 85). It is important to clarify that the use of the term "text" by Sipe refers to both the words and the images. Intertextual responses occurred when the children made connections to other texts. These other texts included other books, pieces of art, movies, and even commercials. Personal responses consisted of connections children made between their own lives and the text. These connections could flow both ways as children could use their own lives and experiences to respond to the text or they could use the text as a means of understanding an element of their own lives. Transparent responses suggested "that the children had entered the narrative world of the story and had become one with it. The world of the text, for the moment, seemed to be identical with and transparent to the children's world" (Sipe, 2008, p. 86). Finally, performative responses were built around children's desire to manipulate the text or to guide it to suit their own purposes. "The text seemed to function as a platform for the children's own creativity or imagination, or the text became a playground for what I called a 'carnivalesque romp'" (Sipe, 2008, p. 86).

Subcategories of analytical responses. Sipe further divided analytical responses into five subcategories. The first of these subcategories is making narrative meaning. During these responses, children were trying to make sense of the story. Sipe noticed that they relied on story elements such as the plot,

setting, characters, and theme to help them make meaning. They also questioned the text, made inferences, commented about the text, and analyzed the characters and their actions. In addition to these elements, the children used peritextual elements of the picturebook in order to understand the story better. According to Sipe (2008), “The children considered the peritext just as much of a source of potential meaning as the verbal text of the story” (p. 91).

The second subcategory of analytical responses is “the book as made object or cultural product” (Sipe, 2008, p. 111). In these types of responses the children recognized the authors and/or illustrators as the makers of the book, which allowed them to speculate on the decisions of these two parties. Discussion also involved the awards the book might have received and an examination of the publishing information. “The language of the text” is the third subcategory of analytical response (Sipe, 2008, p. 115). “In their comments that fell into this subcategory, children displayed an interest in or awareness of the visual features of print” (Sipe, 2008, p. 115). This interest also resulted in numerous attempts to read the text. The fourth subcategory is “analysis of illustrations and other visual matter” (Sipe, 2008, p. 117). Responses in this subcategory included conversations about the media used to create the illustrations, the layout of the illustrations, and the meaning of such elements as color, shape, and line. Sipe (2008) states that, “[children’s] visual analysis was a critical factor in their understanding of the whole picturebook” (p. 117). The final subcategory of analytical response is “relationships between fiction and reality,”

in which “the children grappled with the various ways in which the story (both the verbal and visual texts) related to what they understood as ‘real life’” (Sipe, 2008, p. 126).

Intertextual responses. Children in Sipe’s studies also made three different types of intertextual connections: associative links, analytical links and synthesizing links. Associative links were those in which something was simply said to be like something else. “Analytical links were characterized by making an intertextual association and then going on to describe the similarities or differences in the texts, what might be called ‘intertextual analysis’” (Sipe, 2008, p. 132). Finally, synthesizing links were statements and generalizations about groups of stories and often included multiple intertextual links.

Personal, transparent and performative responses. In the category of personal responses, Sipe reports that, “the universal impulse of readers to link the events or characters in a narrative with their own lives was confirmed by my data” (Sipe, 2008, p. 152). There are two types of personal connections in Sipe’s research, including life-to-text and text-to-life connections. In life-to-text connections, children identify elements from the text that relate to their own lives. More rare, but important when they occurred, were the text-to-life connections, which children used information from a text to better understand their own lives.

The last two categories of responses, transparent and performative, appeared to be more individual in nature. Sipe calls upon Rosenblatt’s conception of “lived-through experience” to describe the transparent responses of

the children. “Performative responses were characterized by creativity, playfulness, wry humor, sly puns, or flights of fancy that seemed (at first blush, anyway) to have only a tangential relationship to what most adults might consider the proper and sensible story line” (Sipe, 2008, p. 175).

Like Sipe, Kiefer (1995) observed in classrooms in order to study how children responded to picturebooks. The setting of Kiefer’s study included two first/second grade whole language classrooms. Over the course of two years, she spent 22 weeks observing the classrooms. As she observed, she took field notes and also recorded, and later transcribed, class picturebook read-alouds and the discussions that followed. These data were accompanied by interview data. Kiefer later supplemented these observational and read-aloud data with student interviews in other grades and school locales.

In her observations, Kiefer (1993) noticed that children are often experts at seeing small details in illustrations that regularly go unnoticed by adults. She explained:

> …children seem to see small details in picture books that adults miss. Indeed, studies of visual perception have found that children’s eye movements within a pictorial plane are quite different from adults. Children, for example, have many more and longer eye fixations. This tendency may not be a fact of immaturity as much as it is a learning function, as Coles, Sigman, and Chessel (1977) have suggested. It seems that, as children pore over the pages of their picture books, they find the

> many small details that many illustrators include in their picture and that we adults may over look. (p. 277)

Although she remarked on the length of time children looked at the illustrations and their ability to discover minute details, Kiefer also noticed that as some children became more fluent readers, they spent more time with the text than they did with the illustrations.

Older children showed great interest in trying to learn the techniques employed by the illustrators of their favorite books. Kiefer (1993) states that

> Unlike the younger children, children in grades three and above seemed to be aware not only of the elements of art but also that the artist chose these elements in order to convey some meaning to the viewer. These children talked about an artist's role in evoking emotional responses through the elements of art, and they commented on technical choices relating to book production. (p. 279)

Kiefer proposed a taxonomy of four different types of verbal responses to picturebooks, similar to that of Sipe, but was influenced and informed by the work of linguist M.A.K. Halliday. Kiefer writes, "Eventually I adapted four of Halliday's functions of language—the informative, heuristic, imaginative, and personal ones—to describe children's verbal responses to picturebooks" (Kiefer, 1995, p. 24). Arizpe and Styles (2008) provide a concise summary of Kiefer's four categories of verbal responses:

> (a) informative, where comments focused on the content of illustrations, the story line, and text to life observations and made comparisons with other books; (b) heuristic, where problem solving is involved, inferences are made, and hypothetical language is commonly used; (c) imaginative, where children enter into the life of the book, often using figurative language; and (d) personal, where children express feelings and opinions, relate to characters, and evaluate the illustrations. (p. 364-365)

Many parallels can be drawn between Kiefer's four categories of verbal responses and the five categories identified by Sipe. Kiefer's heuristic category is congruent with Sipe's analytical response category in that the children are trying to make sense out of the narrative; one way they do this is by attempting to solve problems. Both researchers propose a category labeled "personal," and these encompass the same types of responses. Sipe proposes an intertextual category in which children make connections between texts; Kiefer includes this function in her category of informative responses. Finally, Kiefer's imaginative category is aligned with Sipe's transparent and performative categories, as it is in these types of responses that children lose themselves in the story or respond to the story in creative ways. Picturebooks also elicit creative responses in many children in the form of drawings, rewritings of the book, or performances of favorite scenes from a book.

It is apparent in both sets of studies that children respond to picturebooks in common ways. According to these studies, many children make connections between the texts and themselves or other texts with which they are familiar.

Interviewing Children About Their Response to Picturebooks

As they surveyed the available research on children's responses to picturebooks, Arizpe and Styles suggested that, "There have been surprisingly few systematic attempts to ask children about their reading/viewing of pictorial text in terms of their understanding of visual art, and appreciation of artistic techniques and their implications for the teaching and learning of visual literacy" (Arizpe & Styles, 2003, p. 1). Therefore, these researchers constructed a study that was different from those conducted by Sipe and Kiefer.

The most important differences between these studies were the location (Arizipe and Styles set their research in London), study size and the methods of data collection. Seven primary schools participated in Arizpe and Styles' (2003) study. Their primary data sources were in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with 84 children. In addition, 21 of these children were interviewed a second time. The interviews were followed by group discussions in which 126 children participated: many of the interviewees participated in these as well. Finally, children were invited to draw a picture in response to the text featured in their interview. Arizpe and Styles (2003) report that, "The purpose of the drawing was to access some of their knowledge which may not have been verbally

articulated during the interviews" (p. 4). Like Sipe and Kiefer, Arizpe and Styles (2003) used a grounded theory approach to work with and analyze their data.

As a result of the differences in their research design, the discoveries made by Arizpe and Styles regarding children's responses to picturebooks were different, but not incongruent with the findings of Sipe and Kiefer. The interview format allowed the researchers to probe the readers' thinking in ways that were impossible to do in a classroom discussion. The interviewers could also ask targeted questions to get at students' individual responses to the text and the illustrations, and follow-up questions could further clarify the meaning-making process with the participants.

Arizpe and Styles (2003) identified many of the same or similar types of children's responses as Sipe and Kiefer, but I focus on some of the discoveries unique to Arizpe and Styles' study, particularly those related to children's responses to the interactions between text and image. Arizpe and Styles (2003) report that, "Almost without exception, the children thought the pictures were more interesting than the words" (p. 64). Regardless, many participants were able to realize that the story would not be the same if the pictures or the words were eliminated. Children of all ages also recognized that sometimes the story told in the pictures and in the text were different. When asked whether the pictures and words were telling the same story, an older participant responded, "Yes plus a bit more…[the pictures] seem to bring out the story" (Arizpe & Styles, 2003, p. 65).

In interviews, Arizpe and Styles (2003) asked children about the visual features of the illustrations and prompted them to discuss such items as color, pattern, perspective, and body language. Color seemed to be a visual feature that most children could talk about. “Most of the children mentioned colour, and referred especially to the different shades of sky” (Arizpe & Styles, 2003, p. 66). Unsurprisingly, the more experienced readers were able to provide more feasible explanations for the author’s choice of lines. “The more experienced readers tended to give reasons that had more to do with logic (rightly or wrongly) than with the author’s intention” (Arizpe & Styles, 2003, p. 66).

The study conducted by Arizpe and Styles (2003) complements the findings in the studies conducted by Sipe and Kiefer. These three studies, when taken together, provide a textured and detailed account of how children read and respond to picturebooks. However, their findings also serve as a reminder of the difficulty of attempting to understand how readers read, particularly when reading picturebooks.

Other studies support what the three studies above revealed about reader response. High-quality picturebooks elicit nuanced responses to both image and text from even the youngest readers. And although there seem to be some differences in the responses of different types of readers, well-written and illustrated picturebooks seem to be able to mitigate some of these reading differences by supporting readers of all abilities with their format.

Making Meaning with Graphic Novels

The final section of this chapter explores making meaning with graphic novels. I begin the section by providing a more extensive definition of graphic novels than that given in Chapter 1. Next, I describe several of the most important meaning making units in a graphic novel, including panels and gutters, are described. After examining these pieces of the graphic novel, I present an argument for viewing the graphic novel as a whole. Finally, the section concludes with a discussion of the scarce available research on how readers make meaning with graphic novels.

Definition of Graphic Novels

In this study, I use the terms “graphic novel” and “comic” or “comic book” interchangeably. The comic studies field considers these to be of the same format, with the only differences being the length, and to some extent, the topics addressed in each. Although, there is no set boundary regarding what can and cannot be addressed in a comic book as opposed to a graphic novel, and, if there were a boundary, it would be quite porous. As I focus on graphic novels in this study, I use that term more widely; however, everything written below regarding graphic novels is also applicable to comic books.

The parameters that define graphic novels are ever-changing. Some definitions focus on the text, others focus on the graphics, and others focus on the interaction between the two media. Goldstein (2009) believes that “comics are defined through form over content” (p. 257). Goldstein is not alone in her

belief that graphic novels are not defined by their topics, but rather by their form. Carrier's definition includes speech balloons as a central part of a graphic novel, which again speaks to form (Goldstein, 2009, p. 256). According to Tucker (2009), "Discussions of comics as a distinctive medium almost invariably focus on two elements: the representation of time through sequential panels and the interaction between word and image" (p. 28). This definition emphasizes both the form, with reference to the panels, and the interaction between the text and the graphics.

McCloud (1993) defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (p. 9). Berninger, Ecke and Haberkorn (2010) refer to this intersection, or juxtaposition, in their definition as well, but also acknowledge that no definition can completely encompass graphic novels. "Comics manifest as the intersection of text, image, and sequence. Because they are a hybrid form, it is deceptively easy to focus on their similarities to other media, and ignore their uniqueness. Yet, while comics are similar to the subject matter of many disciplines, they are also markedly different" (Berninger, Ecke & Haberkorn, 2010, p. 1). Finally, Eddie Campbell, quoted in Gravett (2005), states that the "graphic novel signifies a movement rather than a form" and that "there is nothing to be gained from defining it" (p. 9).

My working definition of graphic novels includes a focus on form, an acknowledgement of the interplay between elements of the form (this is not

limited to text and image, but also includes such aspects as panels, speech balloons, and typography), and author/illustrator intention.

The intention of the author and/or illustrator to create a graphic novel may seem like an odd item to include in the definition of a graphic novel, but it is important to include because it can and will impact how the book is published, marketed, read, and even discussed. For example, there are numerous picturebooks that employ "comic" style in their format, such as *The Snowman* by Raymond Briggs (1978). However, *The Snowman* was created as a picturebook rather than as a graphic novel. Works such as *The Snowman* are not graphic novels because this was not the creator's intention. Panels alone do not make a graphic novel. As Nel (2012) states, "…using a 'comics' technique is not the same as being a comic" (p. 453). The comic format can, and is, used beyond the creation of graphic novels, but it is more than the format that defines a graphic novel.

I define graphic novels as written words, images and meaning making units, such as panels and speech balloons, that authors and illustrators arrange in a deliberate order to "tell" a story as these transact with the reader.

Meaning Making Units

Graphic novels are composed of more than written text and image; they are filled with what I term "meaning making units." These units consist of such elements as panels and gutters and provide a great deal of information and meaning. I discuss some of these primary meaning making units below.

Panels. Panels are the frames or borders that structure the comic story. McCloud (1993) calls panels "comics' most important icon!" (p. 98). Panels can vary by shape, size, and length, and these variations provide a plethora of different meanings. One of the most important roles that panels play in a graphic novel is the control of time. Eisner (1985) states that, "…to convey 'timing,' which is the manipulation of the elements of time to achieve a specific message or emotion, panels become a critical element" (p. 26). Eisner (1985) describes how panels can be used to control time:

> The number and size of the panels also contribute to the story rhythm and passage of time. For example, when there is a need to compress time, a greater number of panels is used. The action then becomes more segmented, unlike the action that occurs in the larger, more conventional panels. By placing the panels closer together, we deal with the 'rate' of elapsed time in its narrowest sense. (p. 30)

In his comparison of picturebooks and graphic novels, Nodelman (2012) argues that, "…the pages in comics characteristically contain both more separate images and more separate sections of text, and present them together in a series of separate but connected panels. Furthermore, those panels are inherently more difficult to interpret" (p. 437).

The panel itself has many conventions that are accepted and understood by comics readers. The size and shape of a panel can communicate the amount of time represented in the panel. Longer panels indicate a longer passage of

time. Several narrow panels in a sequence might indicate that an event is happening quickly and the character is experiencing the passage of time in a staccato rhythm. Some graphic artists change the shape of panels in order to show flashbacks or dream sequences. Not only can panels connote the passing of time, but the size of the panel can mark space as well. For example, if a character is falling off the roof of a tall building, the panel that contains this image will likely be vertically tall in order to represent the great distance of the fall. In addition, the arrangement of panels on the page can add to the meaning carried by the panels.

Gutters. The space between two panels in a graphic novel is called the gutter. McCloud (1993) says that, “Despite its unceremonious title, the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics! Here in the limbo of the gutter human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea” (p. 66).

McCloud has termed what a reader does in the gutter as closure; he describes closure as the “phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole” (McCloud, 1993, p. 63). As an example of what occurs during closure, imagine three square panels of the same size. In the first panel, two men are seen arguing as indicated by the text in the speech balloons and their body language. In the second panel, the man on the left has extended his fist to the other man’s face. The third panel shows the man on the right on the ground with a line of stars circling his head. A reader commits closure when she fills in the

gutters to understand what happened in the three panels. Based on the information given in the panels, she will likely conclude that the man on the left punched the man on the right in the blank space of the gutter between the two panels. The closure that results from the placement of gutters is essential to the system of comics and vital to creating meaning with the reader. McCloud (1993) calls closure the "grammar of comics" and states that, "…in a very real sense, comics is closure!" (p. 67).

There are numerous types of closures that occur between panels. McCloud (1993) identified at least six; these are presented in order of increasing "difficulty" or level of closure required by the reader. The most basic type of closure is moment-to-moment. "Next are those transitions featuring a single subject in distinct action-to-action progression" (McCloud, 1993, p. 70). Subject-to-subject transitions stay within the same scene but the point of view changes from panel to panel. On the other hand, scene-to-scene transitions "transport us across significant distances of space and time" (McCloud, 1993, p. 71). Aspect-to-aspect closure "sets a wandering eye on different aspects of a place, idea or mood" (McCloud, 1993, p. 72). Finally, non-sequitur transitions are those that appear to have no logical connection between what came before and after a gutter.

Closure is one of the primary reasons that the graphic novel format is different from all other formats, particularly in how it is read. While comics may make readers "work" to make meaning, there are plentiful benefits to this type of

reading. McCloud (1993) argues that, “Closure in comics fosters an intimacy surpassed only by the written word, a silent secret contract between creator and audience” (p. 69). The author/artist and reader must rely upon each other to understand the meaning presented in the comic. The reader relies on the creator to provide enough information for her to achieve closure between each panel, and the creator relies on the reader to use the tools she is provided to accomplish closure and make the “complete” meaning. Wolk (2007) posits that, “…there’s more to the immersive experience of comics than what’s visible in their panels and what specific actions happen between them. A lot of the pleasure in reading comics is filling in *all* the blank space beyond each panel, as far as it can go in both space and time, with the drawing on the page as a guide or set of hints” (p. 132).

While closure can occur in other media such as film (for example a scene of a couple kissing followed by an image of clothes littering the floor requires the viewer to infer that the couple have taken their relationship to a more intimate level) the amount and degree of closure is not comparable to that in graphic novels. In fact, McCloud (1993) states that, “The closure of electronic media is continuous, largely involuntary and virtually imperceptible” (p. 68). Like graphic novels, films are composed of sequences of single scenes; however, when the film is viewed, time flows by at dozens of scenes a second, which essentially fills the gutters without requiring effort from the viewer. “A film in the material sense of film stock is a collection of still images, but its projection cancels out the stills,

yielding one single moving image: it is an intermediate image…" (Christiansen, 2000, p. 115). Viewing a film is much more of a passive experience than is reading a picturebook or a graphic novel; the viewer does not have to work as hard and can thus passively take in the experience rather than participate in it. Hatfield (2005) remarks that, "The idea of comics as active *reading* has gained ground in critical conversation, and displaced the once-attractive comparison to film" (p. 33).

Speech balloons. The speech balloon is one example of how images and written text blur in graphic novels. The shape of the speech balloon is often used to convey how the words within it should be "heard." Regarding speech balloons, Eisner (1985) explains, "The balloon is a desperation device. It attempts to capture and make visible an ethereal element: sound. The arrangement of balloons which surround speech—their position in relation to each other, or to the action, or the position with respect to the speaker, contribute to the measurement of time" (p. 26).

Comics are mute There is no sound provided by them, and they do not have the advantage of the attribution (he said/she said) or adverbial (angrily) approach of other written narratives. Therefore, it is up to the speech balloon to make known how something is said and by whom. Magnussen (2000) writes that, "A comic is a 'mute' medium in which a series of symbolic signs have been developed to depict sound, and one of them is the speech balloon…This makes the speech balloon an indexical sign as well as a symbolic sign" (p. 203). For

example, a balloon that is drawn with thick, jagged lines most likely indicates that the words within it are spoken in an angry tone. In this example, the image of the speech balloon is dictating how the text should be read, and as such crosses the border between image and text.

Typography*.* Typography is another common way that image and text are blurred in graphic novels. Typography is the style of printed letters, including the use of different fonts. Within and outside of speech balloons, meaning is often conveyed through variations in the typography of text. Eisner (1996) declares that, “The style of lettering and the emulation of accents are the clues enabling the reader to read it with the emotional nuances the comic teller intended. This is essential to the credibility of the imagery. There are commonly accepted lettering characteristics which imply sound level and emotion” (p. 61). As comics rarely use “he said” or “she said,” the author cannot provide a description of how something is said through a descriptive adverb, but rather must rely upon the typography or speech balloons to indicate how something is said. Further, the font of the text in the speech balloon can reveal the emotion of the speaker just as easily as changing the style of the balloon itself. It is not an uncommon convention in comics for the speech of different characters to be written in different fonts as a way of indicating the characters’ personalities.

Sound effects. As mentioned above in regard to speech balloons, graphic novels are a “mute” medium, but just as the format has embraced the use of speech balloons to express the quality of sound, sound effects are seamlessly

integrated into the format to add a layer and texture of “sound” to the meaning making process. Petersen (2009) writes

> The subject here is not the meaning of the sounds in the narrative, but how the presence of the sound creates a potentiality or potency within the narrative. A presence that defies interpretation and when contemplated often has absurd signification; but, taken in context, sounds in comics have a startling power and hold remarkable grace. (p. 165)

Sound effects are another convention in the graphic novel format that blurs the line between written text and visual images. Petersen (2009) explains that

> Comics utilize word/pictures and pictured/words, where the way something is written visually informs sound qualities in narrative action. Such exaggerated onomatopoeic words commonly appear in comics as hybrid word/pictures, which convey the essence of lived sensations by using the sound-like experience to fuse the sign/icon into a single sensation. Visual cues, such as scale of words indicating volume and the way the visual character of the speech balloons conveys emotion, have been shown to be comprehensible to even a preliterate audience. (p. 163)

As Petersen explained, the graphic novel format utilizes visual elements, such as size, color and typography, to convey the quality of a sound. For example, the “squeak” of a small mouse, hidden in the corner of a panel may be written in a small, rounded font and printed in an unobtrusive color.

The Graphic Novel as a Whole Unit

Although I have highlighted five of the unique meaning making units found in the graphic novel format above, these pieces must be considered in the context of the entire graphic novel. All of the elements work together to provide opportunity for a reader to create meaning. While it is difficult to determine the exact contributions of or interactions between the elements, we know that just as in any ecology, all of the pieces are necessary in order to create a working whole. This concept of a "system" of comics is not new; in fact, Groensteen's (2007) book, *The System of Comics,* elaborates on this idea. Beaty and Nguyen (2007) summarize his argument below:

> Groensteen demonstrates that meaning is constructed first and foremost in comics by the specific placement of panels upon the page. Processes of breakdown and page layout are shown to be central to the production of reading, with aesthetic effects generated by the panel, the gutter, the frame, and the margin proving central to the operative logic of comics as a system that communicates meaning. (p. viii)

Groensteen's system of comics recognizes the individual pieces, but emphasizes the importance of viewing these pieces within the whole.

Some comics scholars argue that the panel is the largest unit, while others argue that it is the comic page itself that is the largest unit. Magnussen (2000) argues that icon, index and symbol must all be considered within the context of the comic as a whole and in interaction with each other. She continues this

argument by positing that the interaction between these “smaller” signs create a larger sign, that of the panel. “[In comics the] focus is on the way signs interact, thereby creating a bigger, more complex sign, that of the panel itself. The panel-sign is seen in the context of its position on the page and within the sequence. The panels interact, creating an even larger sign, the comic” (Magnussen, 2000, p. 195-196).

In her analysis of a comic strip, Magnussen (2000) also uses the idea of narrative, or story-structure, arguing that the majority of comics present a narrative and that, as readers are expecting to experience a narrative, they look for the connections between the signs in order to create a complete story. She calls this “global coherence.” She explains that, “The reader will try to create a global coherence between single elements or signs in accordance with the story-structure. In the case of comics, the search for a global coherence based on a story-structure means that the local coherence between panels will be created by inferences in relation [to single signs or elements]” (Magnussen, 2000, p. 198).

Magnussen (2000) also recognizes the multitude of “small” signs that interact in order to create the comic, which can be seen as a much larger, complex sign. She posits that, “Using a semiotic term, a comic can be considered as one complex sign which means that a global coherence is sought in the interpretation of it” (p. 196). Readers of comics, she argues, unite all of the various signs and symbols in order to create meaning from the comic, or the largest sign, overall. It is unlikely that comics readers can identify all the elements

that contribute to meaning, but they likely understand that no element can stand alone. As Magnussen (2000) states, “The drawings in a panel will engender an expectation of ‘something more’ as it is not interpreted as autonomous” (p. 204).

Hick (2012) is a comics scholar who views the larger unit as the page instead of the panel:

> Each panel, I have suggested, expresses innumerable propositions, and the panel’s place in the narrative sequence serves to make salient certain of these. However, if Goodman is correct in thinking that pictures are irreducibly dense as conveyors of meaning, to speak of comics panels as discrete meaning-making units is itself a misleading abstraction—for each panel is not truly experienced discretely, but as a part of a larger visual matrix: the comics page. Put another way, strictly speaking, a comics page is not composed of several drawings, but of one. (pp. 137-138)

This is very nearly the same conclusion that Magnussen comes to: the comic page functions as one large sign, and the individual panels that compose the page must be considered as part of the entire sign. Magnussen refers to this as the context, whereas Hick would call this the proposition of the comic.

Summary. Graphic novels are composed of many different meaning making units, but these pieces function within the whole. It is like examining the different pieces of yarn that create a sweater; individual pieces can be identified, but as soon as an individual piece is removed from the sweater it loses its

“shape” or the support of the sweater as a whole. Graphic novels are complex wholes and must be understood as such.

Research on Reading Graphic Novels

Most scholars would agree that graphic novels are read in ways unlike reading only text or only illustrations in a wordless book. “Comics challenge most of the ways we learned to read: left to right, top to bottom, linearly, and progressively” (Rosen, 2009, p. 58). In fact, a reader who cannot deviate from reading “rules” may miss a great deal of the story and the meaning of graphic novels. Gravett (2005), however, remarks that there is no correct way to read a graphic novel:

> Images and text arrive together, work together, and should be read together. There’s no one rule, but in some combination you read words and pictures in tandem and in cross reference, one informing the other. It’s not so hard, but it is different from reading neat, uniform columns of type. (p. 11)

Gravett (2005) proposes that readers view each panel in a graphic novel as a sentence; one must move one’s eyes around the entirety of each panel just as one would read a sentence.

There is very little published research on how readers, especially children, read and respond to graphic novels. There is agreement that “…the format itself creates a different reading experience” (Nel, 2012, p. 450), but few research studies explain exactly what this difference is and how it is experienced, much

less the process young readers go through as they read a graphic novel. Even those steeped in the world of comics, including in their creation and reading, are unsure about what occurs during the reading of a comic book. For instance, Eisner (1996) suggests that,

> In comics, no one really knows for certain whether the words are read before or after viewing the picture. We have no real evidence that they are read simultaneously. There is a different cognitive process between reading words and pictures. But in any event, the image and the dialogue give meaning to each other—a vital element in graphic storytelling. (p. 59)

Once again, there is recognition of the "difference" of reading graphic novels, but this difference is not elucidated.

Connors' (2012) research focused on the written responses of pre-service teachers after reading *Pride of Baghdad* (2006) by Brian K. Vaughan and Niko Henrichon. Connors' theoretical framework was centered around Iser's idea of the implied reader.

> I argue that the extent to which readers are able to adopt the role of the implied reader is contingent on their familiarity with not only literary conventions but also artistic conventions…I argue that when readers possess the background knowledge needed to adopt the role of the implied reader, they are able to engage with graphic novels in ways that students who lack familiarity with the diverse range of conventions they employ are not. (Connors, 2012, p. 34)

In his research, Connors found that readers who possessed knowledge of graphic novels and their conventions, could assume the role of the implied reader in ways that those who lacked this knowledge could not.

Connors' (2012) examination of the written personal responses, also revealed that readers' opinions about the validity of the graphic novel format as a form of literature influenced their transactions with the text. "…I couldn't help but sense that their transactions with *Pride of Baghdad* were in part influenced by their willingness to recognize texts that employ word and image as a valid form of reading material…" (Connors, 2012, p. 35). In part, these transactions with the text were different because some of the readers did not view the images as sources of information or believe that readers could transact with the images.

The focus of Mackey's (2007) research was the variety of multimodal texts and their "reading" that adults face on a daily basis; graphic novels were one of the many texts the nine adult participants interacted with during this extensive study. Mackey provided the participants with a range of graphic novels to browse before selecting one to spend about 15 minutes reading. After this time had passed, Mackey asked each participant a series of questions about their reading of the graphic novel, including whether or not they read the images or the text first. She found that there was a variety of approaches to reading the graphic novel but that "[t]here was little discussion about any kind of equal partnership of words and pictures; by and large these readers privileged one channel and subordinated the other" (Mackey, 2007, p. 147).

Mackey (2007) labeled her participants' reading of graphic novels as "good-enough" reading. "Good-enough reading involves finding a personal balance between momentum and accountability to the text" (Mackey, 2007, p. 147). Mackey attributed this reading approach to her participants' reading histories, in which most encountered this format in newspaper comic strips or comic books and a "good-enough" reading was good enough for their reading of these texts.

Hammond's (2009) study looked at the written responses of 23 high school seniors to *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. In her study, Hammond determined the places in the text when the participants would stop reading and write a written response; she also provided writing prompts/questions. After the first independent reading of *American Born Chinese*, Hammond taught a lesson on the history of the format and graphic novel conventions. At the completion of the lesson, she asked the participants to reread the text and write one more response.

Hammond's (2009) findings indicated that, "Students recognized that their reading required a bit of multitasking and use of multimodal literacy skills, as the majority of them believed that it was the combination of text and image that helped them make the most sense of the story" (p. 157). She also determined that "…students responded to an art graphic novel in many of the traditional ways students response to text novels assigned in the classroom with the addition of responses about images" (Hammond, 2009, p. 164).

In regard to the participants' knowledge of graphic novel conventions, she found that "[t]heir responses to the first reading of the story would indicate that whether they knew comics conventions or not, it didn't impede their understanding" (Hammond, 2009, p. 159). This led Hammond (2009) to conclude that "[c]onventions are learned, whether informally through experience, or whether formally taught" (p. 160).

Bromley (2000) conducted an informal study of her daughter's reading of the *Beano*, which I understand to be the British equivalent to the Sunday comics in the United States. Bromley was not the only scholar to examine her children's reading of the *Beano*, but I found her findings to be the most interesting. Bromley's daughter was eight years old at the time of her observations. Bromley (2000) asked her daughter, "How did you learn to read the front page?" (p. 33). Her daughter's response is a telling account of both the difficulty of reading comics and the innate ability of readers, including (and maybe even especially) children to read within this structure. Bromley's daughter responds:

> It may look like an ordinary inside page—like a cartoon strip, in which case you know you have to go across the page like this [pointing with her finger]. There's more to it than that though. You also have to work out what happened in–between the pictures. Your brain has to work to fill in the gaps. The comics never tell you everything—there is always something for you to do. On the other front covers, it may be one big picture—these are difficult to read, because you have to be sure that you

> don't miss anything. You might also get covers where it's not obvious which order you have to read the picture in. (Bromley, 2000, p. 33)

Bromley follows up by asking her daughter what she does when she comes to a page in which the order of pictures is not as obvious. The eight-year-old reader responds, "I take a guess at where it starts, then guess what's going to happen next, and look at the picture that I think fits. If it does, I do the same thing again, and so on. If it doesn't, well I go back to the beginning and have another try" (Bromley, 2000, p. 33).

At the age of eight, as a comics reader, she can recognize many factors of reading within this format. She already understands that comics creators do not provide the readers with everything they need to make meaning and that readers need to use their brains in order to fill in these gaps. She is also undeterred when confronted with a page in which the reading order is unclear. Like a "good" comics reader, she picks a place to start, and, if that does not make sense, she tries another place until her predictions and the story make sense. I think this is a fantastic description of reading comics because although they are an inherently complicated format, if they are done well, the reading comes almost naturally and is supported by the structure of the form itself.

There are many theoretical posits, but we do not know much about what actually happens when readers make meaning with a graphic novel We know only what we *think* might happen. This study explored what actually happened when four young readers read one graphic novel.

CHAPTER 3—METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to develop a data-based understanding of how intermediate grade readers make meaning with a graphic novel. As overviewed in Chapter 2, numerous studies exist that examine how readers, particularly young readers, make meaning with picturebooks. While these studies are relevant to this inquiry, as graphic novels and picturebooks share a close integration of text and image, graphic novels consist of many elements beyond the text and image. It is the totality of graphic novels, including those elements particular to graphic novels, as well as the text and images, that make them an unusual reading experience. Further, very little research indicates what actual readers, particularly younger readers, do as they read a graphic novel text. Currently, graphic novels are growing in popularity amongst all categories of readers and educators are starting to see their educational potentialities. For these reasons, an understanding of how meaning is made between a reader and a graphic novel is both important and relevant.

Thus, the present study focused on one primary question: How do intermediate grade (6th to 8th grade) readers make meaning with texts in a graphic novel format? In addition, this study explored the following three sub-questions:

- What modalities do intermediate grade readers rely on to make meaning with graphic novels?

- What strategies do intermediate grade readers employ when making meaning with a graphic novel text?
- What do intermediate grade readers know about how graphic novels work?

This chapter describes the methods used in the study, as well as the rationale for selecting these methods. This is followed by a brief description of the participants, including details on how participants were recruited for the study. The next section reports on the pilot study and how it shaped the final research design. A discussion of the book selection process follows. An overview of data collection procedures, including a description of the three sessions with each participant, is next, followed by a description of the data analysis techniques and the coding categories.

Rationale for Research Design

A qualitative approach to this study was most appropriate; "how" a reader makes meaning with a text is not something that can be quantified, but rather must be observed and explained. A qualitative approach provided the opportunity to explore the process of making meaning with a graphic novel by observing and audio-recording participants as they completed a think-aloud procedure as they read. As indicated in Chapter 2, this study is theoretically rooted in the constructs of transactional theory, which recognizes that a transaction occurs between a reader and a text that results in the creation of unique meaning between each reader and text. Because this meaning is different for each reader, there is not

one, “correct” meaning to be garnered from a single text. This makes studying how intermediate grade readers make meaning with a graphic novel challenging. However, the qualitative method of descriptive case study has been recognized as one of the best ways to capture and understand transactions between a reader and a text.

Methods

The methods employed in this study include case study, a verbal think-aloud protocol and a retrospective think-aloud protocol. Each of these is described below.

Case Study

This study employed an exploratory case study approach, as there were no prior theories to be tested. An exploratory case study can help shape the direction of future research by providing the foundations for theory. This study does not seek generalization, but rather the development of a data-based understanding of how intermediate grade readers make meaning with a graphic novel. Cohen, Manion, and Marrison (2007) state that, “…case studies opt for analytic rather than statistical generalization, that is they develop a theory which can help researchers to understand other similar cases, phenomena or situations” (p. 253). The theories or understandings that emerge from this case study can help guide future studies of youth reading graphic novels.

Although the theory of reader response is not a new one, the approaches to studying it are still developing, as variations in the relationships between

readers and texts are myriad. This is another reason why the case study approach is appropriate. Petrosky (1985) writes that,

> Virginal areas of research like the study of the relationship of reading, response, and writing defy large-scale statistical analysis because, simply, we do not know enough about the major features involved in the relationship. Even if we did know the features, large-scale analysis would be hard pressed to describe and explain the interaction of the features in detail within a few subjects. To get close to the relationship of these processes we need to spend time talking with the people we are studying. (p. 77)

Since the time of Petrosky's work, we have learned more about the relationship between readers and texts in general. However, the relationship between readers and graphic novels is still a virginal area of research, necessitating the use of a case study approach.

Transactional theory recognizes that each individual brings a unique set of experiences and thoughts to his or her reading of a text. An individual's reading of a text is influenced by innumerable factors, including, but not limited to: gender, age, socioeconomic status, reading stance, and the physical environment within which the reading takes place. The nature of case study allows all of these influences to be recognized, if not accounted for, in the transaction with a text. Rosenblatt (1985) asserts that one of the most important elements of the use of case study "…is the bringing of the fullest possible sense

of factors in the total human situation that may feed into literary transactions" (p. 47). Because a case study focuses on an individual or individuals, these variations in the human situation can be recognized and possibly accounted for in transactions with a text. Rosenblatt (1985) goes on to further support the use of case study in the exploration of reader response to texts. "The 'ethnographic' (case study) approach, which utilizes the techniques of the anthropologist and the sociologist rather than the natural scientist, seems especially congenial to research problems involving the transactional view of language and literature" (Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 50).

A case study is a bounded unit; in this research, the case study consists of four intermediate grade individuals and myself. In essence, four individual cases compose this study. However, the four case studies also combine to form one bounded case study of intermediate grade readers. A case study of four individuals does not provide support for the frequency of an event since four participants are not enough to make such assertions. However, a case study does not preclude the ability to note non-mathematical significance in the form of responses or similarities across participants. Case studies have the potential to highlight significance. "Significance rather than frequency is a hallmark of case studies, offering the researcher an insight in the real dynamics of situations and people" (Cohen, Manion, & Marrison, 2007, p. 258)

Verbal Protocol

Little research exists that explores how younger readers make meaning with graphic novels, and verbal protocols have been recognized as a valuable way of constructing initial theories or understandings of a process. "[P]rotocol analysis may first contribute to the initial building of theories that represent progress in the understanding of reading. These theories help us chart a course of the work that remains to fill the gaps in this understanding, and protocol analysis serves ably in the second role of focused research tool" (Afflerbach, 2002, p. 89).

The use of a think-aloud protocol was appropriate because it is one of the few methods that open a window onto a reader's process during the act of reading. "Verbal protocols of reading have provided valuable insights about the nature of constructively responsive reading. We know of no other method that reveals quite as much about active, strategic processes during reading" (Hilden & Pressley, 2011, p. 437). Because reading is an invisible process, there are few unobtrusive ways of learning about what a reader does as she is reading. While, eventually, data obtained through the use of brain scanning or eye-tracking technology would be interesting to add to our understanding of how readers make meaning with a graphic novel, a verbal protocol procedure provides a beginning for the development of these insights by relying on readers to self-report their actions and thoughts as they are reading.

The graphic novel format also made the use of a verbal protocol appropriate because it provided a space for readers to remark on the conventions unique to the format. Verbal protocols provide an opportunity for these textual conventions to be recognized and have the potential to provide information about the influence of these conventions on the readers themselves. "Protocol analysis allows for the examination of the influence of contextual variables (e.g., text, task, setting, reader ability) on the act of reading" (Afflerbach, 2002, p. 89). Afflerbach (2002) continues his description of this strength of verbal protocols by stating that, "Protocol analysis tells more than the story of cognitive strategies…it can describe the influence of contextual variables on strategy" (p. 91). It is these strategies for reading a graphic novel that I was particularly interested in uncovering. Hilden and Pressley (2001) agree with Afflerbach's (2002) assertions that verbal protocols can reveal the influence of different characteristics of a specific text: "Verbal protocol methodology also has the potential to enlighten our understanding of how various text characteristics impact the meaning-making process" (p. 438).

Although the think-aloud procedure appears to be the best way to discover how intermediate grade readers make meaning with a graphic novel text, it is important to remember the limitations of this approach as well. Langer (1990) recognizes two shortcomings of this approach: "The think-aloud procedure clearly does not capture all of a reader's thoughts and strategies and creates an artificial reading situation, but it has proven to be an effective technique for examining

how students orchestrate their reading and writing strategies over time" (p. 235). Even with these two weaknesses, the procedure is still considered the best approach for gaining insight into a reader's processes.

To minimize the disruptive nature of the think-aloud process, Langer (1990) does not enforce artificial or predetermined stopping points in the reading; rather, she allows readers to stop and report when it feels appropriate for them. "The students were encouraged to verbalize their thoughts when they felt comfortable doing so, rather than at a predetermined boundary such as at the end of a sentence or paragraph. This was done to minimize the distractive effect of the think-aloud procedure on the development of meaning" (Langer, 1990, p. 236). I followed Langer's model and did not create predetermined stopping points during the think-aloud. However, during the initial meeting with each participant as we practiced the think-aloud procedure, I prompted them to tell me what they were thinking if it had been several minutes since they had said something.

Protocol analyses can uncover how different characteristics or elements of the graphic novel format, such as panel size, typology, and color, contribute to the meaning making process for individual readers. A verbal think-aloud protocol, followed by a retrospective think-aloud, allows participants to highlight how specific elements of the format helped them to construct meaning.

Retrospective Think-Aloud

After the completion of the think-aloud, I conducted a retrospective think-aloud with each participant. This process started at the end of the think-aloud

protocol session and continued during the next session. As van Someren, Barnard and Sandberg (1994) describe, “In the case of retrospection the subject solves a problem and is questioned afterwards about the thought processes during the solving of a problem” (p. 20). In this study, the participants did not solve a problem, but rather read a graphic novel; however, the goal of the retrospection was the same, that is, to question the participant about his or her thought processes during the activity. Ericsson and Simon (1993) state that, “Requesting recall of general processes appears to be the most common procedure for collecting respective reports…” (p. 149).

The retrospective think-aloud was different for each participant, as the questions were based on comments made during the preceding think-aloud. Although the questions and topics were different for each participant, the goal was the same—to understand more fully what the meaning making process was for each participant while reading the selected graphic novel. The questions strove to do a number of things, including, revealing what in the graphic novel may have lead to a comment, understanding what the participant was thinking when the comment was made, showing how the participant came to an understanding that was revealed in a comment, and clarifying comments that were confusing.

As mentioned above, it is difficult to illuminate the process of reading in individuals. The use of verbal protocol is one way to shed light on the process, and retrospective think-aloud lends further enlightenment to the subject and

process. However, there are drawbacks to the use of a retrospective think-aloud. First, a participant may not be able to remember exactly what he or she was thinking or doing when a comment was made. van Someren, Barnard and Sandberg (1994) report that, “Retrospection may be difficult. It is not always easy to remember exactly what one did, especially if some time has passed after completion of the task. Sometimes even, one is not very aware of what one is doing” (p. 20). In this study, the retrospective think-aloud process began immediately after the completion of the think-aloud, which may have prevented some trouble with memory; however, the process concluded in the third session, which happened a week after the reading. The passage of a week could have impacted what participants remembered from their think-aloud. In order to mitigate this impact I provided prompts by repeating exactly what they had said and by showing the page that elicited the comment of interest. Another point that van Someren, Barnard, and Sandberg (1994) make is that, beyond not remembering what they did, participants may not be aware of doing anything at all.

It is also possible that, as an activity becomes more familiar or more automatic, it is more difficult to describe. For example, someone who has been walking for decades would likely be hard-pressed to describe exactly how to walk or what thoughts go into the act of walking. This automaticity can happen with numerous activities, including reading. As Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) describe, “…the closer readers’ activities come to automaticity, the more

problematic it may be for readers to describe these automatic, or near-automatic happenings" (p. 132). Automaticity was a concern in this study. To account for this challenge, I chose to recruit intermediate grade participants who may not yet have achieved automaticity in their reading or their reading of graphic novels.

Ericsson and Simon (1993) point out another potential problem of retrospection: "A second general problem when retrieving cognitive structures is to separate information that was heeded at the time of a specific episode from information acquired previously or subsequently that is associated with it" (p. 19). This point is particularly salient in this study, as the retrospective think-aloud occurred after the entire book had been read. Therefore, even if I asked a retrospective question about a comment made on the first pages of the book, the participant had already finished the entire book; that knowledge may have influenced the explanation he or she provided.

A final consideration regarding the use of retrospective think-aloud is that one's reporting of his or her thinking may not be an accurate representation of the actual thinking. "Another problem is that subjects may tend to present their thought processes as more coherent and intelligent than they originally were. Sometimes this is intentional, because people do not like to admit that they do not have the faintest idea of how to solve a problem considered as easy" (van Someren, Barnard, & Sandberg, 1994, pp. 20 - 21). During the time of the original reading, for example, the participants' thoughts may be scrambled and

incoherent, but they have an opportunity to present their thinking as more logical and organized when they report what they were thinking.

Although there are factors that may negatively impact the information obtained in a retrospective think-aloud, the method offers some potentially revealing insights. “It seems very possible that asking subjects to label their cognitive processes and to explain why they are processing as they are might be very revealing about sophisticated processing” (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995, p. 131). This study recognizes that the process of reading a graphic novel is complicated. The retrospective think-aloud process has the potential to uncover some of the “sophisticated processing” that readers conduct in their reading of a graphic novel.

An additional argument for the use of the retrospective think-aloud process is the belief of some researchers that, although it may be difficult to report on one’s thinking, it is possible. Langer (1986) argues that, “Though much of what they knew usually remains covert, it is available to be called upon when the task requires it” (p. 140). Participants may struggle to recall their exact thinking when asked to do so, but that does not mean that they are incapable of describing their thinking or processes.

A final consideration regarding the use of the retrospective think-aloud procedure in this study is related to the demographics of the study participants. All five participants were avid and fluent readers. Langer (1986) asserts that one’s ability to describe what one is doing is related to one’s overall ability to do

something. In other words, the better one is at doing something, the easier it is for one to describe the processes one uses to complete the task. Furthermore,

> …[R]eaders and writers' ability to talk about what they do is closely related to their overall success as language users: older and better readers and writers tend to have a more conscious awareness of the knowledge and the strategies available to them, and are better about to orchestrate that knowledge and those strategies in their approaches to new tasks. (Langer, 1986, p. 97)

In regard to this study, because the participants were "successful" readers, they likely had an easier time verbalizing their thinking processes in the retrospective think-aloud.

Participants

I employed convenience sampling in order to gain access to my five participants and one pilot participant. When convenience sampling, "[r]esearchers simply choose the sample from those to whom they have easy access. As it does not represent any group apart from itself, it does not seek to generalize about the wider population; for a convenience sample that is an irrelevance" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 114). Generalization was not a goal of this study. Rather, I hoped to develop the beginnings of a data-based understanding of how intermediate grade readers make meaning with a graphic novel. Therefore, convenience sampling was appropriate for this study.

The population for the study was limited to intermediate grade participants, defined as 5th through 8th grade students, for several reasons. Participants from the intermediate grades were deemed appropriate for this study because they have been reading independently for several years, but some of the elements of reading, particularly in reading texts in a graphic novel format, may still be underdeveloped. This might add to the participants' introspection and retrospection regarding their reading process with graphic novels, as this process would not have become as automatic as that of older or more experienced readers. As described above, when an activity becomes automatic, it is much more difficult to break down into pieces and to understand exactly what is going on as one engages in the activity. In addition to the likely paucity of automaticity, intermediate grade participants were old enough to participate in the research independently. Younger participants might not have been comfortable in the research situation.

In addition to one pilot study participant, there were five main study participants. This was determined to be an appropriate sample size because it allowed for variety amongst the participants in terms of age, gender, and experience in reading graphic novels. Additionally, the inclusion of five participants meant that the data might reveal different approaches to reading graphic novels while allowing the possibility of evidence of similar approaches across participants. While five participants is not a large number, case studies strive for depth rather than breadth. "Case studies are inclusive, assuming that

consideration of the whole, covering interrelationships, is more advantageous than a reductionist study of parts, and that this depth compensates for any shortcomings in breadth and the ability to generalize" (Martin & Hanington, 2012, p. 28). In case study research, it is important for the study to be bounded. The bounds, or parameters, of my study include my five participants and myself, but did not extend to others. Again, this study does not seek to generalize, but rather to start to build an understanding of how graphic novels are read and understood by intermediate grade readers.

Recruitment

In order to qualify for participation in the study, participants had to be between 5th and 8th grade and willing to participate in the research. Participants were recruited through an email sent out to an email listserve that included all graduate students in an education program at a major Midwestern university. Five parents responded to the recruitment email. Before providing further information about the study, it was determined whether each parent's child met the requirement of being in 5th to 8th grade and whether the child had an interest in participating. All five respondents had children who met the criteria.

The study sample consisted of two males and three females, including two 6th graders, two 7th graders, and one 8th grader. The sample provided a representation of both genders and a range of ages. No one in 5th grade expressed interest in participating in the study; therefore, the research question was adjusted to reflect the sample population of 6th to 8th graders.

Description of Participants

Each participant selected his or her own pseudonym, including the spelling. All participants were fluent and avid readers. All participants had some experience reading graphic novels. James had the least amount of experience. George and Gean were fans of graphic novels, as they sought them out to read and enjoyed reading in the format; Gean read primarily manga. James was the only participant who strongly disliked graphic novels and chose not to read them. Nadya and Mallory had both read some graphic novels previous to the study, but did not have a strong preference for or against them. This information was obtained from my conversations with each participant and the interview that was conducted during the third session. See Table 3.1 for an overview of the participants.

Table 1

Overview of the Participants

Name	Gender	Grade	GN Fan?	Avid Reader?	Fluent Reader?	Reading Preferences
George	M	6th	Y	Y	Y	Action/Adventure
James	M	6th	N	Y	Y	Fantasy
Nadya	F	7th	Neutral	Y	Y	Fantasy
Gean	F	7th	Y	Y	Y	Manga
Mallory	F	8th	Neutral	Y	Y	Dystopia

Pilot Study

Prior to meeting with the five participants or starting data collection, I piloted the data collection procedures with one pilot participant. I recruited the

pilot participant through a personal connection to the participant's mother; this connection was forged through doctoral courses in an education department. The pilot participant was a 6th grade male who was an avid and fluent reader, characteristics which were congruent with the main study participants. He was enthusiastic to help test the procedures and was thoughtful in his suggestions and responses. I asked him to select a pseudonym and audio-recorded the meeting for later reference. Although he initially selected the name "Cheeseburger," after a look from his mother, he settled on Fred.

The first topic that Fred and I talked about was which graphic novels would be a good choice for the study. Rather than just selecting the books myself, I wanted the input of someone with similar demographics as my participants. This was important for several reasons. Primarily, I wanted the selected texts to be potentially interesting to my participants. I realized that this might be difficult due to the genders and ages represented in my sample, and I recognized that Fred might have more insight into meeting these requirements than I would. In addition, it was important that the texts be appropriate in topic and presentation for intermediate readers. I presented Fred with an array of graphic novels that I thought might make good choices. I present a more detailed report of the discussion that Fred and I had about the book choices in the discussion of book selection below.

Before practicing the think-aloud procedures, Fred and I engaged in a discussion about whether I should expect participants to read a certain amount of

pages or to read for a specific amount of time. We posited that maybe I could set a minimum time limit or page limit, whichever came first, but that the participants could keep reading if they were enjoying themselves. This approach takes into consideration variations in reading speed and ability while also providing the opportunity to collect enough data for analysis.

In order to practice the think-aloud procedures, Fred decided he wanted to read *Sidekicks* by Dan Santat (2011), which was one of the books he thought would make a good choice for the study. I read the directions to the think-aloud (Appendix A). Fred immediately asked, "Wait, am I reading aloud?" My response was, "No…wait…that's a good question." My initial response was that Fred should not read aloud from the text, but this moment gave me an opportunity to think about what I was really looking for in the think-alouds from my participants. Fred and I discussed this further, and I gave him an example of a thought that a reader could have while reading *Sidekicks* and how I would like that thought verbalized. He understood the example. I asked if he wanted to try both, reading aloud and reporting his thoughts, so that we could see how both worked, but he did not want to read aloud. In retrospect, this was the perfect response from Fred because the think-aloud should not be a read-aloud. Fred helped me to reaffirm this before meeting with the main study participants.

Fred began his think-aloud on *Sidekicks*. He used a combination of summarizing the story and reporting what he read and saw. In his think-aloud, he included descriptions of what characters looked like and their facial expressions.

He also made inferences regarding characters' personalities and motivations for their actions and he made predictions about future events in the story. Several times throughout his reporting, I interrupted to ask him questions about how he knew certain things. After 40 pages of reading, I interrupted again to ask about the process: "Is it hard to tell me what you are thinking?" Fred replied, "Not really. I enjoy it actually." I followed-up, "And is it good for me to interrupt sometimes and ask you questions, or would you rather I wait until the end and ask you questions?" Fred quickly said, "I would rather wait until the end to ask me questions because I am really enjoying this. I really like it."

Fred continued reading *Sidekicks* and doing the think-aloud. Although I tried not to, I interrupted a few more times during his reading to ask him about comments he made. This provided good practice for the main study. Although I was eager to know more about what he was thinking as he read, I tried to restrain myself from asking questions during the think-aloud. After he had read for another 20 minutes, I stopped him. I asked a few more retrospective questions because I wanted to practice quickly forming retrospective questions. I also asked Fred some text and format-specific questions, such as if he could name the parts of a graphic novel page.

I had drafted some interview questions that I planned to ask all of my participants. I asked Fred a number of these questions in order to check if the questions made sense and to see if my questions elicited the types of answers I wanted or expected. Fred's responses were as I wanted and expected, so my

interview questions required little revision. After I had asked most of my interview questions, I asked Fred if I should add any questions. He suggested that I ask, “Do you enjoy graphic novels or not?” I then asked Fred about the process overall, how it felt to him and if he had any suggestions for changes. His response was, “I think that everything is pretty much perfect. I really loved it.”

The pilot study allowed me to achieve several goals before I began data collection. First, it gave me the opportunity to try some of the procedures I had already developed for data collection, such as the directions for the think-aloud, and to determine if they were workable or if they needed adjustment. Second, the pilot study exposed some issues and questions that I had not considered in my planning and provided a chance to plan for these before official data collection began. Third, Fred’s think-aloud afforded me a look at what the potential data might look like and allowed me to prepare for their collection. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the pilot study made me more confident in the procedures I had developed.

Book Selection

Prior to my pilot study, I had identified numerous potential graphic novels to use in my study. My criteria included that they be appropriate for 5th to 8th graders, that the text itself make interesting use of some graphic novel conventions, that the text be short enough to be potentially completed in one meeting, and that the story and the graphic novel itself be potentially interesting to the participants. These were somewhat difficult criteria to meet, as my study

included two male and three female participants, although gender, may not always influence reading preferences. The other difficulty was the participant age range; although only two grade levels separated my 6th grade participants from my 8th grade participant, quite a bit of growth occurs during those two years. This two-year difference was particularly salient among my participants, as my two 6th grade participants were males and my 8th grade participant was a female. As females generally mature faster than males, this two-year gap became potentially more significant.

As mentioned above, my pilot participant and I discussed which of the many potential graphic novels would be best for the study. I made Fred aware of my desire to select appropriate graphic novels and to have books that could potentially appeal to all participants. I brought many potential choices to my meeting with Fred, including: *Drama* by Raina Telgemeier, *Poseidon: Earth Shaker* by George O'Connor, *The Flying Beaver Brothers: Birds vs. Bunnies* by Maxwell Eaton III, the entire *Bone* series by Jeff Smith, *Giants Beware!* by Jorge Aguirre, *Luz Sees the Light* by Claudia Davila, and *Mal and Chad: The Biggest, Bestest Time Ever!* by Stephen McCraine.

Fred helped me narrow my choices from dozens to just three. He exhibited an immediate, positive reaction when I pulled *Amulet: The Stonekeeper* by Kazu Kibuishi from my bag. He stated, "I would suggest this for boys 7th, 8th, 9th." He was also quick to point out that the main character was a girl and that he thought it might appeal to the female participants for this reason. Fred had read the first

book in the *Amulet* series and reported liking it. He had a similar response to the *Bone* series by Jeff Smith, as he had also read some of the books in that series and liked them. I had brought the entire series gathered in one book that was more than 1,000 pages long and rendered in the original black-and-white. Fred quickly pointed out that a book that large would likely intimidate participants. However, the books are also published individually and have been redone in full-color. Fred indicated a preference for a graphic novel selection with color because he liked the color and felt that he gathered meaning from the use of color as well. For example, he spoke of being able to recognize a character by the color of his costume.

The third book that appealed to Fred was *Sidekicks* by Dan Santat (2011). Fred was attracted to *Sidekicks* for several reasons. He found the story to be funny, and he made the point that animals are often a source of interest for both males and females. He also thought that the superhero motif would appeal to male participants.

I ultimately decided to use *Sidekicks* for the practice think-aloud and a book from the *Amulet* series for the data collection think-aloud. Although the *Bone* books are popular among readers of all ages and are well-respected for their craft, I was hesitant to select a book from the series for my study because they have often been challenged and even banned in some schools and public libraries. It was on the top ten list of frequently challenged books for 2013 (Publisher's Weekly, 2014). I was searching for what would generally be

considered appropriate graphic novels for use in my study, and although I do not find *Bone* inappropriate, I thought it would be best not to select a book that has been controversial.

The *Amulet* series is written by Kazu Kibuishi. There are currently five books in the series, with the sixth book, *Escape from Lucien*, set to be published in August 2014. The series has received acclaim from many sources and is popular with intermediate readers as indicated by several of the books becoming *New York Times* bestsellers. A *Kirkus* review of the first book, *The Stonekeeper*, states, "…the quickly paced plot is easy enough to follow, and Kibuishi is a dab hand at portraying freaky monsters. Fans of Jeff Smith's *Bone* will happily fret with the good guys and hiss at the baddies" (2010a). Publisher's Weekly's review of the first book was also generally positive: "With stellar artwork, imaginative character design, moody color and consistent pacing, this first volume's weakness lies in its largely disjointed storytelling" (2008). I, too, had noted the "disjointed storytelling" in the first book, which I believe is less problematic in the remaining books in the series. However, the books met the rest of my criteria for selection. Additionally, the *Amulet* series was a good choice for my participants. The main character, Emily, is a strong female, which was likely to appeal to my female participants, and there was also adventure and interesting creatures to potentially appeal to the male readers.

Because the *Amulet* series is popular, I did not select which book in the series to read for the second think-aloud session until I had asked each of the

participants whether they had read any of the books in the series. Two of the participants, Nadya and Gean, had already read the first book in the *Amulet* series. Therefore, I made the decision to use the second book in the series. The second book, *The Stonekeeper's Curse* (2009), also received a positive review from *Kirkus*: "Low on gore but high on fights, flights and scary monsters, the episode hurtles along like the mighty blasts of magical energy that emanate from Emily's amulet" (Kirkus, 2010b).

During the first book, *Amulet: The Stonekeeper*, readers are introduced to Emily, her brother Navin, and their mother, Karen. After Emily's father is killed in a car accident, Karen makes the decision to move the family to Emily's great-grandfather's house. It is in Silas' house that Emily encounters the amulet, a large etched jewel hanging from a cord, for the first time. It is also from here that Karen is kidnapped by an otherworldly creature. In an attempt to rescue their mother, Navin and Emily follow her into the world of Alledia, which is filled with unique and sometimes terrifying creatures. In Alledia, Emily meets her great-grandfather, Silas, who was long thought to be dead. She also learns that she has inherited the amulet and agrees to take Silas' place as a stonekeeper—perhaps the only way she can save her mother. With the help of their new companions, including Miskit, who resembles a pink rabbit, and the robots Morrie and Cogsley, Navin and Emily set off to save their mother. But during the rescue, the arachnopod, a creature that is a combination of an octopus and a spider, stings Karen, leaving her poisoned and in a coma. Book one ends as the group

sets off toward the city of Kanalis in the hopes of finding a doctor to stop the poison.

Book two, *The Stonekeeper's Curse*, begins with the crew heading toward Kanalis in a walking, robot-like house. In Kanalis Emily learns more about the elves and the oppression they have imposed on the population of this world. She quickly discovers that the elves are hunting her now that she is a new stonekeeper, but she finds a potential ally in Trellis, the elf prince. Emily also befriends Leon Redbeard who soon becomes her mentor as she learns what it means to be a stonekeeper and how to use the powers bestowed upon her by the amulet. Doctor Weston informs Emily that the only thing that will save her mother is the fruit of a gadoba tree, but the quest to find one will be difficult and dangerous. Emily does not hesitate to undertake the quest and is joined by Miskit and Leon Redbeard. While Emily is on this journey Navin learns that he is the commander of the resistance army. Emily is successful in finding the gadoba trees and retrieving a fruit to save her mother, but her group has been pursued by the elves. The climax of book two comes in a battle between Emily, her companions and the elves. Trellis, the elf prince, comes to her rescue and prevents her death, as does Navin as he navigates the robotic house to catch her as she is pushed off a cliff. Emily and her companions eventually triumph against the elves, and the gadoba fruit saves Karen. By the end of book two Emily has come to the realization that she cannot leave this new world because she will

play an important role in saving it from the elves and other forces that wish to damage it.

Data Collection

Having field-tested my procedures and selected my books, I embarked upon data collection. Data collection occurred over three meetings with each participant. This section provides a description of the research sites, how data were recorded, the procedures for each of the three sessions, and a discussion of the ethical considerations of this study.

Research Sites

Since the focus of this study was not influenced by location, the research site varied for each participant. Each participant and his or her parent selected the meeting location and time for each session. The only restrictions for the location were that it be relatively quiet for audio recording purposes and that a parent be in close proximity in order to supervise the sessions. Four out of five of the main study participants, as well as the pilot participant, opted for me to come to their homes. Because the meetings took place in home settings, there were occasional distractions and interruptions. However, these were temporary and did not appear to impact the reading process or data collection.

I met the fifth participant, Gean, at a university building during weekends because her mother had access to the building during those times. Her mother's office was also in this space, which allowed Gean and me to work together with

her mother nearby. The first two sessions occurred here, and the final session occurred over Skype due to difficulties in scheduling the final meeting.

Data Recording

The majority of the data for this study were collected via audio-recordings. Recordings were made of the entirety of all three sessions, except for some of the initial pleasantries exchanged at the beginning of each session. Although the think-aloud conducted during session one was recorded, it was not included in the data analysis because it served only as training and practice. Each participant took part in four different activities during data collection, including, a think-aloud with *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, a retrospective think-aloud, answering questions specific to *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse,* and an interview. All of these activities were captured via audio-recording. In order to protect their identities, each participant was referred to by his or her selected pseudonym during all recordings. Data were also collected in the form of notes I jotted on copies of the graphic novel pages during the think-aloud and subsequent activities. These notes described participants' behaviors and the pages on which their oral comments were made.

Session One: Rapport Building and Think-Aloud Practice

The first meeting with each participant consisted of explaining and obtaining consent for participation in the study, spending time getting to know each other, establishing rapport between myself and each participant and doing a practice think-aloud protocol. I met with each participant individually so as to

obtain as “pure” a report of each participant’s reading processes as possible. During this first meeting, I explained the study and the procedures to each participant and supervising parent.

Establish rapport. After describing the study and the procedures, I asked each participant if he or she had questions. I also asked questions to ensure that the participant understood the study and his or her role in the study, as well as his or her rights as the study participant. After I had assured understanding I asked each participant to sign the participant consent form (Appendix B). At this time, I also asked the supervising parent to sign the parental consent form as well (Appendix C). I also signed and dated each form and either scanned and emailed back a copy of the form or had a second form to be signed and kept by the parent and participant.

After each participant and parent had consented to participate, I asked the participant to choose a pseudonym to be used throughout the study. I explained that I would use the selected pseudonym during all the audio-recordings in order to protect participant identities in case someone accessed the data on my computer. I did not provide any guidelines for selecting a name because I wanted it to be generated by the participant independently. Additionally, after the name was selected, I asked the participant how he or she would like me to spell the name.

I established rapport by asking participants about their hobbies and interests. Each participant and I also talked about books that we had enjoyed

reading, including any books that we had read in common, and we provided suggestions for each other based upon reading preferences. Depending upon the participant, this "getting to know you" conversation happened before or after the signing of consent forms.

Think-aloud practice. After consent was obtained and initial rapport was established, I explained the think-aloud procedure to each participant. See Appendix A for the directions read to each participant. I explained that during this first meeting we would be practicing the think-aloud procedure because it is a bit "weird" to do. For this practice experience, each participant read *Sidekicks* by Dan Santat (2011).

After being read the directions for the think-aloud procedure, each participant practiced thinking aloud while reading *Sidekicks*. As in Langer's (1990) study, the "thinking-aloud" was different for each participant. In general, most of the participants provided a running commentary of what was happening in the story or a summary of what they were reading. For example, Nadya provided the following commentary about an event in *Sidekicks*: "In the flashback they are fighting over Nummers and they rip his arm off. And then in present day Rosc—Manny just wakes up." Other participants appeared to verbalize the reading strategies they were using as they read. For example, in response to the second page of Sidekicks, Mallory said, "What kind of animal is this? That's just what I'm thinking."

Following Langer's (1990) model, I was cognizant of not interrupting the participant as he or she read; however, since this was the practice session, I also recognized that I needed to train the participants in the method. Therefore, if several minutes passed without a comment from the participant, I would interrupt with a question such as, "Can you tell me what you are thinking?" The need to prompt for information tapered off for most participants as the practice session continued. However, James still required the prompting throughout the practice session. During session one, the participants were also encouraged to ask questions or make comments about the process. For example, when Nadya reached the end of the pages I had copied, I took a moment to ask how the process was going and if she wanted to continue. She said, "It's okay. It's a bit weird." I inquired if there was anything that could be done to make it less weird. She said, "Just getting used to it." And at the end of session one, when asked about the process, George reported, "It was pretty easy."

While each participant was reading *Sidekicks* and completing the verbal protocol, I was making notes on copies I had made of the first 67 pages of the graphic novel. I tried to write down what each participant said on the appropriate page so that I would have a context for the comments when I went back to listen to the audio recordings. I also tried to note when a participant seemed to read a page or series of pages quickly or when he or she went back a page or two. This proved to be an effective way to gather data regarding speed and rereading, two facts that contribute to comprehension and meaning making.

Each participant was encouraged to read for as long as he or she desired. James and Gean were not interested in finishing *Sidekicks*. George was interested in finishing but was not reading at a speed that allowed him to finish during the first session. Both Mallory and Nadya finished the book in the first session. Each participant got to keep a copy of *Sidekicks* and *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*.

In arranging the data collection sessions, I estimated to parents and participants that each session would take between one and two hours. This was about right, but I was also sensitive to the participants' interest and energy levels, as well as any other obligations such as dinner or homework. Therefore, as time permitted during this first session, I asked questions about whether each participant liked *Sidekicks*. Additionally, as time permitted, I asked more specific questions about what each participant said during his or her think-aloud of *Sidekicks*.

For example, in response to page 90, George remarked that there were 15 days left until the sidekick tryouts. Pages 90 and 91 contain a double-page spread that shows the tops of buildings that are crowded together. Three of the characters are on one of the rooftops talking. In the upper left corner of page 90, the text reads, "15 DAYS LEFT…" I asked George how he knew it was 15 days until the sidekick tryouts because that is not explained on the page. George reported, "I inferred it because that is what they are talking about and they want

to become sidekicks so…" George then flipped back to a previous page, page 49, and pointed out, "See, it says 25 days to auditions."

As described above, prior to the first meeting I made the decision to use a book in the *Amulet* series by Kazu Kibuishi. However, based on the popularity of the series and my desire to select a book that the participants had not read, I had not yet selected which book from the series to read. During the first session I asked each participant if he or she had read any of the books in the *Amulet* series. Both Nadya and Gean had read the first book in the series; therefore, I chose the second book in the series for this study.

Prior to the first session I made copies of the first 67 pages of *Sidekicks* so that I could take notes as the participants completed their think-alouds. I copied the first 67 pages because I thought that they would take the participants a significant amount of time to read and because there was a natural break in the story at that point. I was shocked during the first session when all of the participants read so quickly. Based on this information and experience, I copied the entire book of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* in preparation for the second session.

At the end of the first session with each participant, I assessed their interest in continuing the study as well as their readiness for session two. I asked each participant if he or she was interested and willing to meet with me again to repeat the same think-aloud protocol with a different book. All of the participants expressed interest in continuing with the study. Although James still required

some prompting in his think-aloud, I determined that all of the participants were ready to complete another think-aloud in session two.

Session Two: Think-Aloud and Beginning of the Retrospective Think-Aloud

The second meeting with each participant, when possible, took place about a week after the first session. Due to the Thanksgiving holiday and travel to a conference on my part, there was a longer span of time between my first and second meetings with George and James. This gap in time between the first practice session and the collection of data in session two was not as important as having the second and third sessions just a week apart. Each of the participants and I began session two by reacquainting ourselves and touching base about topics that were discussed in the first meeting. For example, during our first meeting, Nadya had told me about an upcoming volleyball game, so I asked her about how it went the second time we met.

Think-aloud. Before beginning the think-aloud procedure, I asked each participant if he or she had any questions, comments, or concerns after our first meeting about the think-aloud procedure, the study itself, or the way our meeting had gone. None of the participants had questions or comments about the first meeting. Therefore, I explained that we would be doing the think-aloud procedure again, but with a different graphic novel. I introduced *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* and explained that it was the second book in a series, but that it stood alone as well. I outlined my reasons for choosing the series, including its

popularity, and explained that several participants had already read the first book in the series, which is what led me to choose the second book in the series.

Once these explanations were completed I read the think-aloud directions to each participant (Appendix A). As in the first session, I audio-recorded the entire session and used each participant's selected pseudonym. I made notes on my copy of the book as each participant completed the think-aloud. The purpose of my notes was to record what participants said on each page so that, when I listened to the audio of the session, I would know what page elicited each comment. I also noted any physical actions I noticed the participant doing; these notes included times when pages were read quickly or when a participant flipped back to previously read pages. Again, I did not interrupt the think-aloud unless a significant amount of time had passed since the last comment. James was the only participant who required regular prompts (for example, "tell me what you are thinking"), as often more than five minutes would pass between his comments. As in session one, I allowed the participants to read for as long as they desired. James and Gean did not want to finish reading *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, but the other three participants finished the book during session two.

Retrospective think-aloud. As time permitted and the participant's energy level dictated, I began to ask retrospective questions about comments made during the think-aloud with each participant. While these retrospective questions were the primary focus of the third and final session, it was a good

opportunity to ask some questions immediately after the reading while the story was still fresh.

Session Three: Retrospective Think-Aloud, *Amulet*-Specific Questions, and Interview

Prior to the third and final session with each participant, I listened to the recording I made of session two. I focused on noting confusions, intriguing comments, predictions, and other ideas that I wanted to know more about from each participant. The beginning of session three began much like the beginning of both previous sessions, with small talk and catching up.

Retrospective think-aloud. After these brief pleasantries, I launched into asking questions that arose from the session two individual data. This retrospective think-aloud process gave each participant an opportunity to explain their thinking around comments, confusions, predictions, or other responses made during the original think-aloud of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. The focus and length of each retrospective think-aloud varied by participant because it was based on each participant's individual think-aloud. For example, during his think-aloud, James commented that the elves were going to kidnap children from another dimension; one of the questions I asked him during his retrospective think-aloud was why he thought the kids were from another dimension.

***Amulet*-specific questions.** After the retrospective think-aloud, I asked each participant a predetermined set of questions based on *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* (Appendix D). Some of these questions were broad, such

as, “What do you think is the theme of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper’s Curse*?” Other questions were narrow, focusing on specific pages or panels. The purpose for asking this set of questions was two-fold. First, by asking all the participants the same questions about the text, it provided an opportunity to compare answers and thinking across participants. Second, I was able to identify particular portions of the text that I wanted to hear more about from each participant, specifically how they made meaning with a certain part or whether they could identify and provide explanations for unique qualities of some sections. For example, pages 122 through 124 have a page layout that is different than any other set of pages in the book. In these pages, the borders around the panels are eliminated and the gutters are colored black instead of white. I wanted to know whether the participants noticed and could provide explanations for these differences. This set of questions also allowed me to ask specific questions about graphic novels in general, such as, “What are panels used for?” and “What are gutters used for?”

Interview. The final portion of session three was a short interview. Again, each participant was asked the same set of questions (Appendix E). The purpose of this interview was to get a sense of each participant as a reader, with such items as, “Describe yourself as a reader.” Additionally, the questions sought to gauge the participants’ ratings of themselves as readers of graphic novels. Finally, I hoped to uncover the participants’ feelings about graphic novels in relation to texts in other formats with questions such as, “Some people don’t think

that reading a graphic novel is ‘real’ reading. What do you think?” The final interview question, “Is there anything that you’d like to say about participating in this research project?” elicited generally positive comments about participating in the project and the research itself.

Ethical Considerations

The primary ethical consideration in this study was the inclusion of participants who are members of a vulnerable population (specifically minor youth). However, multiple steps were taken to ensure that the participants were protected. First, parental consent was obtained before participants were allowed to participate. Second, in order to qualify for participation in the study, the participants themselves needed to be willing to participate in the study. This willingness was assessed and assured through questioning by the researcher. Next, the participants signed a participant consent form.

In order to protect the identities of the participants, each participant selected a pseudonym to be used throughout the study. The participant was only referred to with his or her pseudonym during the audio recording of each session. This ensures that, even if the data were to be compromised, the participants could not be identified. Additionally, the audio recordings were saved on the researcher’s password-protected computer and online Google Drive account that is also password-protected. Therefore, the data are not accessible to others.

Data Analysis

The following section provides a description of how the data were prepared for analysis, a discussion of the decision to exclude the data from one participant, an explanation of the methods used to analyze the data, and, finally, an account of the codes used in the analysis of the think-aloud data.

Preparation of Data

Before the start of the data analysis, each participant's think-aloud was transcribed. The transcription occurred in two phases. For each participant, the first phase involved listening to the audio-recordings of all three sessions and writing down as much as possible. The second phase involved listening to the recordings of the second and third sessions and ensuring that the transcript was complete and accurate. The transcripts of each participant's think-aloud are include in the appendices (George in Appendix F, James in Appendix G, Nadya in Appendix H, and Mallory in Appendix I).

After the transcripts were complete, the number of comments was counted for each participant. A comment was defined as each time a participant said something and was based on occurrence rather than length or content. Comments were separated by a noticeable pause or a break in the participant's reporting. Langer (1986), whose work served as a model for this study, used a similar definition but used the term "communication units." She defined a communication units as "a separately identifiable remark that expresses an idea about a thought or behavior" (Langer, 1986, p. 172). She went on to caution,

"Due to the frequent pauses typical of the self-report activity, the researcher needs to exercise judgment in determining the boundaries of each particular remark…" (Langer, 1986, p. 172). I used my best judgment to determine the boundaries of comments as I defined them and thus how many comments each participant made in his or her think-aloud.

Excluded Data

During the transcription process, it became evident that the data collected from Gean during her think-aloud of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* were not useable because of the types of comments she made throughout her think-aloud. Gean was the participant with the most experience with and knowledge of the graphic novel format. She was an avid manga reader and spent time during each of the three sessions talking about manga. She considered herself to be artistic and enjoyed drawing. She said that she particularly liked to draw faces. Facial expressions and body language were important to her, and, for her, this was one of the benefits of reading in a graphic novel format. In fact, she was the only participant who expressed a preference for the format because of the provided pictures, when other participants liked the opportunity to create the images in their own heads. Gean liked being able to analyze the provided images and read the facial expressions and body language of the characters.

While Gean's experience with and knowledge of graphic novels was valuable, it appeared to prevent her from verbally reporting what she was doing as she read. Instead of reading the graphic novel, Gean's focus narrowed, and

she commented on the details in the art and the panels. She would point out when she thought the rendering of a face was sloppy or incorrect, and she was quick to point out other flaws in the art. Some of Gean's comments highlighted interesting elements of the artwork, but they were disconnected from the graphic novel as a whole. About 30 minutes into the think-aloud, she announced that she was bored. I asked her why and she acknowledged that she was "nitpicking" the art and details. She did not want to continue reading the graphic novel. Although she was a fluent reader and extremely knowledgeable about this format, it seemed as if Gean was "performing" for me to prove how much she knew about the format and about art. This "performance" may have also been done to show that *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* was beneath her in terms of both her ability and her interests.

Her self-description of "nitpicking" was accurate. Because of this, the think-aloud data from Gean were unusable for this study, and, ultimately, so were the data from her retrospective think-aloud and her interview. My third meeting with Gean took place via Skype because she, her mother, and I were having difficulty finding another meeting time that worked with everyone's schedules. As a result of technical difficulties, there was no picture during our Skype session. Because Gean did not have a copy of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* in front of her and I could not show her the images via Skype, it was difficult to ask her retrospective think-aloud questions about certain comments. These obstacles

also prevented me from asking many of the text-specific questions because she could not see the image in order to comment on it.

It was a difficult decision to exclude Gean's data from the data analysis. However, I could not selectively choose which data to include from Gean; I had to include or exclude all of the data. As a result of the narrowness of Gean's comments and the holes in data collection, I decided to exclude all of Gean's data from this study.

Methods

My approach to and analysis of the data were guided by three strands. First, the research questions themselves guided my analysis. The first sub-question of this study is: What modalities do intermediate grade readers rely on to make meaning with graphic novels? Based on this question, the data from the think-alouds and retrospective think-alouds were examined for instances of the modalities of visual and textual. The second strand that guided the data analysis included my initial observations during the think-alouds themselves. The transcription of the think-alouds was another opportunity to experience the data. Some initial patterns made themselves apparent in the think-alouds; for example, Mallory vocalized the use of many reading strategies throughout her think-aloud. This made me aware of this pattern as I began to analyze the data. Finally, although I entered into my data analysis with some preliminary ideas, I also allowed the data themselves to shape the analysis in the tradition of grounded theory, open coding, and constant comparison.

As no theories yet exist regarding specifically how intermediate grade readers make meaning with a graphic novel, a grounded theory approach was appropriate. This approach allowed the data to be analyzed inductively, which resulted in the data themselves suggesting to me patterns and themes that might contribute to the shaping of new theories. As I engaged with the data, I searched for patterns and themes both within and across participants. This open coding approach allowed me to use the data as one of the bases for identifying the patterns and approaches taken by the participants, rather than applying only predetermined categories (such as visual or textual) to the data. “Open coding involves exploring the data and identifying units of analysis to code for meanings, feelings, actions, events and so on” (Cohen, Manion, & Marrison, 2007, p. 493). Further, even when I was looking at modalities, for example, the manner in which participants used the modalities was apparent in the data themselves.

In addition to using an open coding approach, the use of constant comparison ensured that as additional data were analyzed, if they did not fit into previously identified patterns and approaches, a new category was created to ensure inclusion of this information. This constant comparison assured that as many data as possible were considered in the analysis and the resulting categories and theories.

Codes

As noted above, prior to the beginning of coding, categories based on modalities and reading strategies were set according to research questions and

patterns observed in participant think-alouds. These broad categories, along with the categories of comprehension statements, response statements, and multifaceted comments are explained below.

Modalities. Coding for modalities was dictated by a research sub-question that asked which modalities intermediate readers rely upon in their meaning making with graphic novels. The initial codes in this category were for text, or information found in the writing of the graphic novel, and visual, or information shown in the images of the graphic novel. However, it quickly became apparent that some information was available via both text and visual, and it was often difficult to determine, based upon participants' comments, which modality they were getting the information from when it was available in both. Therefore, the data were coded for three modalities: text, visual, or both. I will provide an example of a comment from each modality.

In *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, page 75 shows the chaos that is a result of the elves firing a cannon at a hospital. Characters are scrambling to get to a safe place. Dr. Weston finds Balan, a large creature that looks like a blue ox, in the crowd and explains about Emily. Dr. Weston says, "He's [Leon Redbeard] found the new stonekeeper, Balan. He's found the fifth member of the council!" Balan responds, "After all these years of searching, he finally found him—." Dr. Weston interrupts Balan, saying, "Found her. She is a young woman and this is her family." During her think-aloud, in response to page 75, Nadya commented, "There is a council that apparently Emily is a part of." This is an example of a

comment that was coded as text because the information is only available in the written text of the graphic novel. The illustrations show Dr. Weston and Balan talking, but there is nothing in the illustrations that indicates that a council exists and that Emily is a part of it.

Mallory's comment about pages 22 and 23 of *Amulet: The Stonekpeer's Curse* provides an example of a comment coded for the visual modality. Pages 22 and 23 consist of a full-bleed double-page spread with a city in the background and a waterfall in the foreground. On the verso side of the spread is the back of the walking robot house that currently holds Emily, her family, and their new companions. In the distance, two other walking robot houses can be seen. The only text on the page is, "…the city of Kanalis." Mallory commented, "There are more walking houses." This information is only available in the illustration. Therefore, this comment was coded as visual.

Finally, comments that are coded as using both modalities have information that is present in both the text and the images. There are different reasons why a comment could be coded as both. First, information is sometimes repeated or shown in both the text and the image. For example, if a character yells, "Run!" to his companions and the illustration shows them running, the information is repeated in both modalities. Second, different parts of the information may be provided in the text and in the images. For example, a character may exclaim, "Ouch! I think I broke something!" The accompanying image shows the character's arm at a weird angle with spiked, red lines radiating

out from it. The reader would need to combine the information from the text and the image in order to conclude that the “something” that was broken was the character’s arm. Finally, although the majority of the time it was evident what page a participant was commenting on, I had no way of knowing which panel a participant was focused on. It is not uncommon for information to be shared in different modalities over the course of several panels. So, as the reader gains information from these panels and modalities, it is likely impossible for the reader himself or herself to identify which modality they gathered the information from. Sometimes, even if the information was available in both modalities, the participantss comments indicated which modality they were focused on by saying things such as, “It looks like…,” “I can see…,” “It says…,” or “I read…” In these cases, each comment was coded for the modality referred to in the participant’s comment.

It is important to note that the format of graphic novels is designed to allow the sharing of information to occur within, across, and between both modalities. This design feature may make it difficult to identify from which specific modality information came from. In addition, many readers can seamlessly integrate information from one or both modalities without fully recognizing what modality they have relied upon to make meaning. In his work, Sipe (2008) observed this ability in children:

> …since children are continuously shifting back and forth between words and pictures, their visual meaning-making may be frequently in tandem or

> integrated with their interpretation of the verbal text. Thus, it may be difficult to ascertain whether any particular comment or response is the result of their interpretation of the words or the pictures, since even quite young children have been shown to be capable of engaging in the dynamic process of 'translating' from one sign system to the other. (p. 27)

An example of a comment that utilized both modalities can be found in Nadya's comment on page 77 of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. After Navin is introduced to some of the resistance fighters, Balan brings him to meet Father Adler. As they are walking to meet Father Adler, Balan explains, "He's an old friend of your great-grandfather Silas. And one of the first members of the resistance. His name is Father Adler." Navin asks, "Is he a priest?" As they exit the tunnel they have been walking down and come upon Father Adler, Balan replies, "Not quite." The image shows a large, leafless tree with a distinctive face; this is Father Adler.

In response to this page, Nadya said, "They met a tree who was Silas' old friend. Silas was the stonekeeper's great great great something grandfather." Nadya's comment reflects information that was found in both the text and the image; she would not have known that Father Adler was a tree without the image, and the text was necessary to introduce Father Adler before he was revealed.

Reading strategies. Like modalities, coding for reading strategies was dictated by a research sub-question, which asked which strategies intermediate

grade readers employed when making meaning with a graphic novel. The need for coding in this category was reinforced during the initial think-alouds, particularly Mallory's, and as I transcribed the think-alouds and discovered more examples of reading strategies that participants applied to their meaning making process. However, as I began coding, it quickly became apparent that the category of "reading strategies" was too broad, as participants used a wide variety of reading strategies in their reading of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*.

There were five subcategories of reading strategies used by the participants in this study, including, connecting, talking to the text, inferring, recursive reading and using context clues.

Connecting. There were two types of connections participants made as they read: text-to-text and self-to-text connections. Text-to-text connections consist of references to other books, films, television shows, songs or other media formats. Additionally, text-to-text connections encompass story knowledge, which includes knowledge about character conventions, plot conventions and format conventions. Knowledge of graphic novel conventions fits under this last category. Text-to-self connections occur when a reader uses his or her knowledge and experiences to connect with and understand a text.

Talking to the text. The reading strategy of talking to the text was exhibited in two ways. First, questioning the text. This can take the form of who, what, where, why and how questions. For example, on page four of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* Mallory asked, "Who's Luger?" Second, talking back to the

text. This differs from questioning the text as it can be a comment or an exclamation about events in the story. For example, it is revealed in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* that elves don't like fish; Mallory comments, "Interesting the elves don't like fish and yet they live in a port town."

Inferring. There are four types of inferences that participants made. The first was predicting future plot events. For example, before the final battle begins, Mallory stated, "Maybe the prince is going to end up saving her." The second was supplying missing information. The gutters in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* require this type of inference. The third was inferring character attributes. For example, as the group enters Kanalis, they observe a line for the soup kitchen; George remarked, "A bunch of homeless people waiting in line." He inferred the character attribute of homelessness. Finally, inferring character motivation. For example, Mallory said, "I don't think the amulet is a good thing." She was inferring that the amulet's motivation is bad.

Recursive reading. Recursive reading happens when a reader returns to a previously read portion of the text. This returning could be a means of monitoring comprehension through confirmation or revision of understanding. Throughout his think-aloud, George flipped back and forth between pages numerous times; this was an example of recursive reading.

Using context clues. Context clues can help readers construct meaning by providing information about the current situation in the text. As the result of the

multimodal nature of graphic novels context clues can be found in both the written text and the images.

Comprehension and response statements. As I worked with the data, it became apparent that many participants' comments were about either what a participant thought he or she knew at a given point in their reading or how they were reacting to or connecting with their reading. Thus, comments were also coded based on whether they contained a comprehension statement or a response statement. A comprehension statement indicated an understanding of events in the story, whereas a response statement was a personal reaction or connection to events in the story. For example, on page 10 of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse,* Miskit, who looks like a pink rabbit, is shown working in front of a stove as other robots complete tasks around him. Another panel on page 10 shows Miskit flipping food in a frying pan. In her think-aloud Mallory, made the comment, "The rabbit cooks." This is an example of a comprehension statement because she was indicating her understanding of events in the story. When prompted to tell me what he was thinking while reading, James responded, "That this book isn't really that good." This is an example of a response statement because it was James' personal reaction to the story.

Making comprehension statements is often considered a reading strategy because it is a means for the reader to summarize or monitor her understanding. However, in this study, statements of comprehension were not coded as a reading strategy because the design of the think-aloud protocol necessitates that

readers report on the text and their thinking as they are reading. Therefore, it is impossible to determine whether the participants would have made these statements of comprehension while reading in a "normal" manner. As a result of this uncertainty, comprehension statements were coded separately from reading strategies.

Multifaceted. Finally, as I continued to code, it became increasingly clear that many comments were multifaceted. A multifaceted comment contained information that fit in more than one of the coding categories described above. For example, a comment might contain a reference to a visual element in the graphic novel and also include a response statement; this comment would be coded as multifaceted because it included information from two coding categories. George's comment about page 39 of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* provides an example of a multifaceted comment. The events on page 39 happen in Dr. Weston's office in Kanalis. Emily, seeking a cure for the poison of the arachnopod, has brought her mother to Dr. Weston. The patient before Emily's mother is a man whose eyes are on stalks, like a slug or a caterpillar. The doctor says to the patient, "Hmm, I'm afraid you're right. You're turning into a slug." George commented, "Guy turning into a slug by the curse." This comment was coded as using both modalities because the information was available in the images and the text. It was also coded for the use of a reading strategy, specifically inference, as the man's predicament is not connected to the curse on page 39, but, the curse is explained on page 24. George connected the

information and inferred that the man is turning into a slug as a result of the curse. As this comment has facets from more than one coding category, it was also coded as a multifaceted comment.

The data from the think-aloud, the retrospective think-aloud and the *Amulet*-specific questions address the research questions. These are: How do intermediate grade (6th to 8th grade) readers make meaning with texts in a graphic novel format?; What modalities do intermediate grade readers rely on to make meaning with a graphic novel?; What strategies do intermediate grade readers employ when making meaning with a graphic novel text?; and, what do intermediate grade readers know about how graphic novels work?

CHAPTER 4—FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present my findings for each participant from four data sources—the think-aloud, the retrospective think-aloud, the *Amulet*-specific questions, and an interview—in order to provide as complete a view as possible of each participant as a reader and a reader of graphic novels. Findings for each participant are organized in four parts: (1) a description of each participant, including information from the interview and our interactions over the three sessions; (2) findings from the think-aloud; (3) findings from the retrospective think-aloud; and (4) findings from responses to the *Amulet*-specific questions. Each participant section concludes with a summary. The chapter ends with an overview of the patterns and variations across all four participants. All quotations are transcribed directly from the audio-recordings made during each session, and the wording used by each participant is maintained, including grammatical errors and instances of misspeaking.

George

During the first meeting, as George, his dad and I were chatting, George interjected to report that he had Tourette's Syndrome. He told me that it often took time for him to say what he was thinking. I asked if this was one of his tics, and he looked at me, surprised, and responded in the affirmative. I asked if he could let me know if I was not waiting long enough for him to finish talking before I jumped in with another question or a comment. I believe that George may also have fallen on the Autism spectrum, as his mother asked me during one of the

meetings whether I was just focusing on children on the spectrum. If he was on the spectrum, it is my opinion that he would have been on the high functioning end. Although I was not aware of this prior to the first meeting, it did not faze me, nor did I think that it would impact the data. After meeting with him and the other participants three times, I found George's responses to be congruent with those of other participants; this served to reinforce that George's disabilities likely did not impact the data.

Over the course of our three meetings, George revealed that he was interested in robots, and he had a keen eye and mind for building mechanical and electrical objects. He also showed that he was familiar with many aspects of what might be termed current "geek" culture. His family watches *Doctor Who* together, and George made several text-to-text connections related to *Doctor Who* during our meetings. He was also well versed in comic book characters; he referred to both Spiderman and Thor in his discussions of both of the study books. He also used such terms as "supervillain" in regard to events and characters in *Sidekicks*.

Interview

George is a 6th grade male with a preference for reading action, adventure, science-fiction, and fantasy books. He also enjoys reading graphic novels. In the interview, I asked how many graphic novels he had read prior to reading *Sidekicks* and *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* for this study. George said, "A lot! And if you count all the individual comics I have read it is over 100."

George self-reported being an avid reader. He read for a minimum of 15 minutes before bed, usually closer to 45 minutes or an hour. He liked reading on his Kindle.

During the interviews, I asked each participant whether he or she believed that graphic novels were "real" reading; I prefaced my question with the fact that some people did not believe that they were "real" reading. George responded:

> Actually, I know someone…umm…whose parents think they aren't. But I think that…umm…I don't think that's actually true cause…umm…graphic novels, even though they don't have as much words in it…umm…you still experience like almost the same thing…or you experience a slightly different thing, but, like, it's just a different type of reading. It still is real reading though. But I think I know why most people think it's not 'real' reading is because…umm…it doesn't have very much words in it and it is told mostly through pictures. And they want…I guess they want you to picture most of the stuff in your mind. That's why some people think it's not real reading.

It is interesting to note that, in the third to last sentence above, the word real is put in scare quotes because George said the word as if he had included the scare marks with a high-pitched, mocking tone. This seemed to be an indication of George's dismissive opinion of those who do not value graphic novels as real reading. Perhaps this is a result of knowing that his friend's parents do not count

reading in this format as real and that, as such, his friend cannot use the reading of graphic novels to earn screen time.

In addition, I asked each participant whether graphic novels should be taught in school. This question seemed to take George by surprise, as he clarified whether I meant available in school or actually taught in school. I took this opportunity to ask him about both. He thought that graphic novels should definitely be available in school and reported that they already were at his school. However, he did not believe that they should be taught in school. He stated, "For younger kids maybe, but like for kids my age, not really because like there are things that we do at my school with books that just don't really work for graphic novels like sort of like the character annotation and stuff." His primary argument against teaching graphic novels was that he did not think that most of the assignments he did on books in school could be done with a graphic novel. He cited a character annotation project that he was currently working on in school that involved writing about characterization and character motivation.

Think-Aloud

George completed the reading of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* and the think-aloud in about 45 minutes. He provided a detailed running commentary throughout his think-aloud, and his excitement and realizations were evident in his tone of voice and his manner of reporting the events of the story. George made a total of 112 comments during his think-aloud. Exactly half (56) of his comments referred to visual elements in the graphic novel. Thirty-six of his

comments referenced the written text, and 17 noted information that could be found in both the illustrations and written text. Eleven of his comments were multifaceted. Eight comments were statements of comprehension, and 17 were response statements.

Twenty-three of George's comments indicated that he was using a reading strategy. In those 23 times, George used the reading strategy of inference to fill in missing information or information that was not directly provided in the text 18 times. George used his knowledge of story conventions, particularly knowledge about the graphic novel format, to make meaning with the text on two occasions. He questioned the text once. In another instance, George made use of peritextual elements as a way to develop meaning before reading. Finally, George performed recursive reading when he corrected his previous understanding as new knowledge was made available in the graphic novel.

Modalities. Throughout his think-aloud, George utilized information from both modalities, visual and text, but seemed to favor visual information.

Visual. George was the only participant who started his think-aloud by looking at the front and back covers of the graphic novel and remarking on what he saw there. The front cover of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* (Kibuishi, 2009) includes an image of the house robot approaching the city of Kanalis in the lower half, with Emily wielding her staff and the amulet emitting white light on the upper half. Leon Redbeard appears behind Emily's left shoulder; the top of his sword, which is strapped to his back, can be seen over his left shoulder. Three

quarters of the back cover is taken up by an image of the elf king. A profile of the elf prince, Trellis, takes up the remainder of the back cover. George remarked that there was a “fox warrior guy” and a “house robot.” George’s comment reflected a focus on visual cues and was also a reading strategy, as he noted the peritextual elements of a book prior to beginning to read.

George referred to the visual elements of the text again when reading page 10. The scene takes place inside the walking robot and shows a kitchen. A pink rabbit, Miskit, is at the stove making breakfast, including pancakes and sausage. A robot is shown chopping something with a knife, another robot carries a stack of plates, and a fourth robot is seen vacuuming the floor. George commented, “Looks like a pink bunny and robots are doing all of the work.” This was also a statement of comprehension.

Text. Although George referenced visual elements more often than the written text, he also used the written text to make meaning with the graphic novel. The scene on page 42 takes place in Dr. Weston’s office in Kanalis. Emily has brought her mother to the doctor in order to find a cure to reverse the poison of the arachnopod. The doctor explains that the only cure is a gadoba fruit, which are very difficult and dangerous to find. Leon Redbeard, who has gone unnoticed until this point, speaks up from the windowsill. He introduces himself and says, “I’m not looking for pay of any kind. I only ask that you allow me to travel with you and fight by your side.” During his think-aloud, George commented, “The fox is saying he will be their bodyguard.” The information for this comment was only

available in the written text, so it was coded as a cue from the text and a comprehension statement. It is interesting to note that Leon Redbeard did not use the term “bodyguard,” but that George was able to read the text and summarize the meaning in his own words.

Both. Almost immediately after the scene described above, the elves, having traced Emily to the hospital, attack the hospital with a cannon. Leon orders that all the patients be evacuated, and he takes Emily under his protection. George commented on two things that happen in both the text and the images on pages 50 and 51. The ceiling begins to collapse from the impact of the cannon; this is indicated through falling rocks, sound effects, and Leon shouting, “Look out!” George stated, “The tunnel is caving in.” The second thing that occurs is that Miskit disobeys Leon’s orders to leave and stays to protect Emily. This is indicated first through the written text; Leon says, “It’s us two I’m worried about.” In response, a speech balloon from the right side of the panel says, “Us three.” The panel that immediately follows shows Miskit standing there. George said, “And the bunny is going on too.” George was able to make use of information that is shown through both the text and the images. Again, he indicated comprehension, this time by using both modalities.

Just a page later, on pages 52 and 53 George made an extended comment in his think-aloud that referred to information in both the text and the image, demonstrated his reading strategies, and exhibited a personal response to the book. Miskit, Emily, and Leon Redbeard flee the underground area through

a tunnel that has about a foot of water in it. When they reach the end of the tunnel, there is a ladder that provides them access to the street through what appears to be a manhole cover. These events are shown in the images, but also in the text that reads, “RUN!!” and “This way.” George commented, “Then they have to run through the sewer. Why do they always have to run through the sewer? (laughter) That’s a classic.”

There are several things happening in this comment. First, he has synthesized the information from the text and the images. Second, he used the reading strategy of inference to infer that the characters were in a sewer. Next, he made a text-to-text connection when he questioned, “Why do they always have to run through the sewer?” This is another reading strategy and indicates that he had seen this approach used before—that is, the escape through the sewer. Finally, George had a personal response through his laughter and comment that, “That’s a classic.” The events evoked a response from George in the form of laughter.

Summary. In his think-aloud comments, George revealed his flexibility to move between modalities to make meaning with the text. He was tuned in to information presented visually, but this did not prevent him from accessing information in the written modality. George’s comments also indicated his ability to apply reading strategies across modalities; a more complete examination of his application of reading strategies follows.

Reading strategies. Although George did not refer directly to a convention in the following portion of his think-aloud, his comment made it clear that he recognized and made meaning with a graphic novel convention. On page 24, Cogsley, the robot, is trying to teach Navin, Emily's brother, to drive the house robot. As they approach the city of Kanalis, Navin gets distracted and is not paying attention to the road. Cogsley's speech balloon says, "EYES ON THE ROAD!!" In his comment, George stated, "Robot yells, 'Eyes on the road.'" George both stated that the robot yells and also yelled, "Eyes on the road" as he made his comment. A common convention in graphic novels is to use capital letters and exclamation marks to indicate yelling. Cogsley is also shown with a stern expression on his face, with his eyebrows pointing down and marks, similar to sweat marks, coming off of his head (another way to show yelling). I can infer that George integrated the words, how they were written, the image of Cogsley, the preceding events, and the convention of the marks to know that yelling was occurring.

Summary. This example of George's application of graphic novel convention knowledge serves to further illustrate his ability to apply reading strategies to both modalities. George demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of graphic novel conventions, such as variation in the size of font, and he was able to integrate this understanding with the knowledge he obtained from the image, the text, or both. He navigated several meaning making systems in this example in order to yell, "EYES ON THE ROAD!" during his think-aloud.

Retrospective Think-Aloud

George's retrospective think-aloud began at the end of the second session, immediately after he finished reading *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. We continued and concluded this procedure during the third session. Like the data from his think-aloud, the data from his retrospective think-aloud exhibit George's ability to make meaning with and across both modalities.

Modalities. In his retrospective think-aloud, George referred to information from the images and the text, as well as from both modalities together. At the conclusion of his think-aloud, I asked George if he liked the book. He reported that he did, particularly for the epic battles that were portrayed throughout the graphic novel. I asked if he felt like he needed to have read the first book in order to understand this second book; and he did not feel like it was necessary and was able to imagine several events that likely occurred in the first book, including Emily's mom getting poisoned.

Then, unprompted, George made the following statement, which led to a discussion of a visual element that George continued to make meaning with throughout the book.

> George: The book was also sort of funny because…what was really funny was the robot that was worried about everything.
>
> Aimee: Yeah, how could you tell he was worried?
>
> G: Because his face was like…his face was like…it looked like he was worried and he had sweat dripping on him always.

A: Okay. Was it anything he said in particular or just the way he looked?

G: Yeah, and the way he acted.

A: Why did you think that was funny?

G: It's just that…it was funny at certain points because he was always worried about every single thing even when it wasn't something to be worried about.

This exchange demonstrates that George was able to recognize the robot's continued state of worry based on its appearance and actions. In addition to making meaning with this visual prompt, George was also able to find the humor in this visual representation of a worried robot. Further, George's recounting of this funny character illustrates a personal response he had while reading the graphic novel and how graphic novel conventions led to this personal response.

George's use of visual cues is apparent in his explanation of a comment he made about page 3; it also serves to illustrate how George used knowledge of format conventions to make meaning. In the first pages of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, Trellis, the elf prince, is being led to his father's palace by two large guards. The panel in the upper right-hand corner of page 3 shows two glowing eyes looking through a slit in the palace doorway. A speech bubble emits from the slit, questioning, "Who goes there?" In his think-aloud, George referred to this being as an "ominous looking figure." I questioned him about this in the retrospective think-aloud.

Aimee: The figure in the top right corner. You call him ominous. Why?

George: Because he is…it is a black figure with golden eyes…and it seems like…it would…you think it is much larger. Also, the way the text is made, it is made to look like…just the way it is drawn. Drawn with squiggly lines I guess.

A: What makes the squiggly lines ominous?

G: It just makes them…it makes them look scarier I guess.

A: Why?

G: Umm…I actually really don't know. It just does.

A: So, how would you say that?

G: Umm…It's like he is whispering…umm…sort of whispering…like half whispering.

A: So how would you say it?

G: Like these exact words?

A: Yeah.

G: Who goes there? (in a creepy, low, squeaky voice)

George was able to explain why he labeled the figure as ominous based upon its appearance. But further, he recognized the convention of changing the font or the style of font in order to change the "sound" of the words. I believe that he used this information to contribute to his labeling of the figure as ominous, as both the voice and the glowing eyes visually appear ominous. George used the

same type of information from the appearance of the text in his interpretation of Cogsley yelling (described above).

Just a few pages later, the elf prince is speaking with his father, the elf king. In the first book, the king had sent the prince out to find and kill Emily. However, even though the prince finds Emily, he does not kill her. In reference to those prior events, the king remarks that he is not surprised that his son has failed him, and the prince protests that, "these things take time." The king informs the prince that he will now be accompanied by Luger, one of the king's advisers. The elf prince is not happy about this, but the king is adamant. In his think-aloud, George commented that the elf prince and the elf king were having an argument. When I asked him about this in the retrospective think-aloud, he explained his reasoning.

> Aimee: The elf prince is talking to his dad, the elf king, and you describe them as having an argument. How do you know that they are having an argument?
>
> George: Umm…because…umm…because…umm…the elf prince is saying that he doesn't need help and then the elf king is saying that he does. And then they get into…then that causes an argument because they are saying, 'Yes, you do need help,' 'No, I don't need help,' 'Yes you do,' 'No, I don't,' 'Yes, you do,' 'No, I don't,' and it goes back and forth.
>
> A: So you can tell by what they are saying that they are having an argument?

G: Yeah.

A: Is there any other way you can tell they are having an argument?

G: Umm, because they are like yelling at each other.

A: How do you know they are yelling at each other?

G: Because the way their faces are.

A: The elf king doesn't have a face does he?

G: Yeah, the elf king doesn't have a face. But you can obviously tell the elf prince is yelling because of his face.

A: How is it obvious?

G: Umm…cause…just the way his face is. I can't really describe it.

A: Can you describe his face?

G: I guess that his mouth is wide and…like…he is speaking with exclamation points.

It is evident from his explanation that George pulled from textual and visual information in order to understand that the elf prince and elf king were having an argument. It is noteworthy that George reported that, "he [the elf prince] is speaking with exclamation points." George read the text for meaning and used the punctuation to contribute to his understanding that an argument is occurring between son and father. He reinforced this meaning with the image of the elf prince and his wide-open mouth.

On page 77, Navin is introduced to the resistance, which is a group of warriors who have come together to fight the elves. Navin later learns that he is

the commander of the resistance. When he is introduced to the gathered warriors, one of the group, who looks like a spider with a tail, runs up to him and immediately exclaims, “Oh boy, oh boy.” In his think-aloud, George stated, “The bug runs up because he is overexcited.” In his retrospective, I asked George about having identified the bug as overly excited.

Aimee: How can you tell that he is overly excited?

George: Because his face is like a huge grin. And he runs over fast because of the action lines under his legs and dust puffs. And he is saying ‘oh boy, oh boy’ and he is running.

A: What do the dust puffs mean?

G: It means he is running really fast and pushing up…turning up dust…like a tiny bit of dust. And the lines indicate that he is running.

A: Is there anything else that indicates he is excited or running?

G: Umm…it says ‘skitter, skitter’ meaning…it is supposed to be like his legs, I guess.

A: Is skitter, skitter a sound effect?

G: Yeah, I guess. It is the sound of his legs cranking I guess. The sound of his legs tapping into the ground.

This is an example of how George used information from both visual and textual cues, as well as the conventions of the graphic novel itself, to make meaning. George first discussed the visual clues in the form of the creature’s smile, the motion lines, and the dust puffs. George understood the use of motion

lines and was able to explain the reason for the dust puffs, as well. All of these visual elements allowed George to infer that the creature is running. Additionally, the text, “Oh boy, oh boy,” which George said in a goofy, excited voice, gave him textual evidence of this excitement. The “skitter, skitter,” although a sound effect, is also a textual cue and a convention. George saw and read the “skitter, skitter” and understood that this represents the sound of the creature’s legs on the floor. All of this information is presented in one panel, and George integrated it all in order to identify the overexcitement of this spider-like warrior.

Summary. Throughout his retrospective think-aloud, George continued to demonstrate his ability to make meaning with information in the visual, written, and both modalities. Perhaps most importantly, in his retrospective think-aloud, George displayed his ability to integrate information from the modalities in order to make meaning with the text.

Reading strategies. In his retrospective think-aloud, George did not specifically remark on any reading strategies that he employed during his reading of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper’s Curse*. However, we discussed a few panels that were confusing, and I asked what he did when he found a panel confusing. He replied, “I just think of what happened before and I can put that into the context…like umm…” This is an indication that George used the strategy of recursive reading to understand graphic novels. He used what came before to help him contextualize what happened in the present.

Additionally, there were several instances in his think-aloud when he flipped back and forth between pages. During the retrospective think-aloud, I asked him why he was flipping back and forth. He said, “Wait, what is happening? Wait, what just happened and I went back to the last page…I want to make sure that it did happen.” In the case of going back a few pages, it appears that George was monitoring his understanding and, when he was unsure or sensed confusion in his understanding, he went back to confirm that what he thought happened really did happen. This is a valuable reading strategy.

Summary. The retrospective think-aloud provided George an opportunity to explain why he was flipping back and forth between pages during his think-aloud. He explained that he used that reading strategy as a means of checking his understanding and confirming or correcting his understanding. He also revealed that, in general, when he was confused while reading, he used the strategy of recursive reading in order to make meaning. It is important to note that in his response, George did not limit the use of this reading strategy to a format, but rather seemed to imply that it could be used in any format.

Amulet-Specific Questions

Throughout the data from the *Amulet*-specific questions, George made evident his understanding of graphic novel conventions and continued to demonstrate his ability to access information in both modalities in order to make meaning.

Story elements. When asked to summarize *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse,* George provided a detailed and accurate summary that followed a logical, chronological sequence. He included specific details from the story, such as the fact that only one in every 100 gadoba fruits was not poisonous. George was a fan of what he called the "epic battles" throughout the graphic novel and included several details from these battles, particularly the last one, in his summary.

I then asked George what type of story *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* is. He replied, "I guess it is like an action slash adventure type." I asked him to explain why. He continued, "Because there is like a lot of battles. It is also sort of a fantasy because because like it has magic and like elves. It has the ninja samurai fox guy."

I asked George if he could identify the theme of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. He struggled to remember what theme is, so I defined it for him as the lesson or moral of the story. He said, "I don't know if it has a theme…it doesn't really seem like a story that has a moral." He was more confident when I asked him to identify some of the plot elements, such as rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. He was able to do so and noted that the book ends quickly after the climax, which he identified as the last epic battle.

When I asked George to describe the main characters, he said that they are all brave. We then went into a deeper discussion about the fox, Leon Redbeard, as George particularly enjoyed this character in his reading.

Aimee: How would you describe his character?

George: Umm…like he is good at fighting…he umm…he umm…he likes adventure I guess.

A: So, how do we, how do we learn about his character? Like, what are the ways this book shows us his character?

G: Umm…we know the way he is good at fighting…well…like it is pretty obvious. You like…he kicks the elf's butt…he kicks elf butt.

A: What makes it obvious?

G: Because…because he like is fighting the elves and then he umm…and when he gets into a sword fight with one of the elves he always he always takes him down quickly.

A: Do you read about that? Do you see it? How does that…

G: You see it.

A: Okay. So do you think…does he seem braver to you because you can see him fighting?

G: Humm…well he is…well he is brave because obviously because he…well, not obviously, but he is brave…he is brave because he is not afraid of the elves or at least if he is he doesn't show it…so…

George's discussion of Redbeard's character and his bravey, indicates that George was able to determine the personality of a character via images and text, as well as through the actions of the character.

Format. Prior to asking questions about specific elements of the graphic novel, such as panels and gutters, I asked about how the general format affects the story. George said:

> It lets you get a clearer picture in your mind…Like with a regular novel what you are picturing in your head could be completely different from what someone else is picturing in their head, but really with a graphic novel what you are picturing in your head is approximately the same as what other people are picturing in their head.

George's answer recognizes, that by providing images, the act of visualizing with a graphic novel can be more congruent across readers.

I asked if George liked this about graphic novels. He explained:

> Yeah, because, umm…(significant pause)…well, actually, I sort of…umm…like regular novels I guess because…because they umm…I actually like regular novels and graphic novels better but for separate reasons. The reason I like graphic novels better because what I said before you can picture things in your head more easy. The reason I like novels better is because…umm…because actually for the exact opposite reason is because there is like umm…because it is a lot your imagination…like how you interpret it.

In his response, George realized that he liked both formats "better," but as he said, for the opposite reason. Graphic novels allowed him to more easily picture events because the images were provided. But a regular novel was "better"

because he, as the reader, was required to use his imagination to create those pictures.

We continued discussing graphic novels as a format for stories, and I asked whether there are some stories that make better graphic novels than others. George quickly stated that action and adventure stories make good graphic novels: “Action adventure fantasy things make very good graphic novels, and science-fiction makes sort of good graphic novels, but not even close to as good as action slash adventure fantasy novels.” He went on to explain that, “Conflict…then that makes a good graphic novel. You can get a better picture of conflict. Graphic novels are better for like visualizing the conflict. But the novels are better for…actually they are better for I guess seeing what the character is feeling I guess. Yeah, they’re better for that.” I asked him why he thought that novels are better for understanding how characters are feeling. George said, “I actually don’t really know, it’s just that I can see what they are feeling more. Like I can with graphic novels, but really more strongly with novels. Because novels just have way more descriptive words instead of pictures.” George’s response indicates an understanding that the graphic novel format is not the best choice for all stories. He was able to identify that visual elements, such as battles or conflicts, could be told well through the graphic novel format. However, he believed that, if a story involves a lot of feelings or other internal conflicts, a more traditional text is a better choice because emotions can be better described in words than conveyed in images.

Graphic novel elements. During this portion of *Amulet*-specific questions, I started by asking about graphic novel elements in general. I then followed these general topics with questions and examples specific to *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. George was able to name some of the different parts of a graphic novel page, including panels and speech balloons.

Panels. I asked George to explain the job of panels. He replied, "To illustrate part of a scene and to show certain points of view." I asked him to further explain point of view. George looked at page 162 and went from panel to panel, describing the point of view of each and how each panel changes the point of view. To clarify what he was saying, I asked, "So by going to a different panel it allows us to have a different point of view? George agreed with this statement.

I asked George what the different sizes and shapes of panels might mean. He immediately responded, "It indicates the importance. Or it indicates the time or like how long they last for. Yeah, it indicates it indicates how significant it is." George then pointed out the largest panel on page 163, which shows Luger swinging his sword down toward Leon Redbeard. We only see the back of Leon, but we see the entire front of Luger. George explained, "The bigger the panel, the more significant it is. The more detail it needs. Bigger panels are for scenes that need more detail because they are like more important."

I then asked George about pages with no panels, such as page 122. On pages 122 – 124 there are no borders around the panels, and page 122 is not

divided into panels but is a full-bleed image. I asked George what it means when there are no panels, and he said that those are the "most significant."

I returned to George's point about the size of the panel indicating the time between the panels. On page 166, he explained that Miskit is seen being thrown by Luger and that just a fraction of a second may pass between the actions shown in one panel and the next. I asked him to clarify his reasoning again. I prompted, "The size of the panel tells us…" and he finished, "how much time is passing between the panels."

I then drew George's attention to a specific example in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. Page 120 is divided into two columns of panels. The left panel is not divided further into four rows and shows Emily struggling to climb up a mountain or a cliff with Miskit on her back. Leon is above Emily, looking down upon her as she makes her way up. The column on the right is the same width and height of the column on the left, but it is divided into four panels. The top panel is a close-up of Emily and Miskit with Emily saying, "NGH." The next panel looks up and past Emily, at Leon, who says, "Why aren't you using the stone?" The angle of the image shows how far she has yet to climb in order to reach Leon. The third panel is another close-up of Emily and Miskit with Emily responding, "I can do this without the stone!" The final panel is a close-up of Leon, who says, "Not nearly as fast."

When asked to describe the panels and events on page 120, George quickly described how the point of view changes among the four panels on the

right. He correctly identified the point of view that is shown in each of the four panels. I asked him to explain why the panel on the left is a different shape. He said, “Because like…umm…it’s a cliff and…umm…a cliff is a vertical so the panel is a vertical. So panels can also add to their surroundings. Like if it is a mountain from a distance then it would be like wide. It if is like a cliff then it is like tall to indicate that it’s like a cliff. And to indicate that it is a long way down I guess.”

In another specific example from the book, I asked George to look at the panels on pages 61 – 68. On these pages, Emily and Leon are fighting with the elves on the rooftops of Kanalis. George quickly pointed out how the point of view alternates between the panels. I asked if George noticed anything else about the panels themselves. He didn’t, so I pointed out that they are not perfect squares. He responded, “Oh yeah, it’s the not perfect squares that show like movements…yeah, it like, shows movement when there is not very much…when they are not squares.”

Speech balloons. On page 162, George was able to identify the different types of speech balloons. The amulet’s “speech” is shown in what George called “an energy speech balloon;” it is a circular speech balloon with no tail and many ridges, and it is outlined in green. There is a panel with an image of Emily’s face and a square that contains text. George recognized that this speech balloon belongs to Emily, but that it is a different shape because she is thinking the text as she engages in communication with the amulet.

Gutters. George did not know the name for gutters, and he was initially unable to explain what happens in the gutters. Although, in his above explanation of panel size and the passage of time, he began to get at one of the functions of gutters. Passing time is actually shown in the gutter, but his explanation is an indication that he was familiar with the idea.

I asked him to look at the three middle panels on page 166. Miskit is grabbed around the neck and thrown by Luger in the first of the three panels. In the second panel, Miskit is seen hitting his head against a tree. The third panel shows him lying on the ground, with his eyes closed and stars floating above his head. I asked George where, in the format, Miskit is traveling through the air. He did not understand the question. I rephrased it and asked, "Would it be fair to say that he flies through the air in the gutter?" George responded with enthusiastic "yeses." However, when I pushed him with further questions about the events in the gutter, he exhibited frustration and told me that we were spending too much time on the topic.

Summary

George was an enthusiastic reader of graphic novels who often let his excitement or enjoyment of the text radiate through his think-aloud commentary and his responses to questions. George's disabilities did not appear to impede his reading, his understanding, or his ability to verbalize what he was thinking and doing as he engaged in the reading of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. George was a fan of reading in the graphic novel format and reported being quite

an experienced reader of the format, having read, as he reported, more than 100 comic books and graphic novels. Although he enjoyed the graphic novel format, he still preferred reading a traditional text because he liked picturing the events in his head. He was unwilling to concede that reading graphic novels is not real reading. However, he did not believe that graphic novels should be taught in school because students would not be able to complete typical literature assignments with a graphic novel text.

George used a myriad of approaches to make meaning with the graphic novel. He relied on visual and textual cues and made use of information that was communicated through both modalities. His previous experience reading graphic novels shone through in his understanding of graphic novel conventions and his ability to verbalize both their purpose and their meaning. Although he was not able to name all of the parts of a graphic novel page, when asked directly, George could describe the role of each part, except for the gutters.

Throughout his reading of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse,* George employed many different reading strategies, including using inferences and recursive reading, in order to make meaning. He also relied on text-to-text connections, to both named and unnamed sources, to understand and appreciate moments in the graphic novel. His familiarity with comic books and comic book heroes was evident in his use of terms, such as supervillain, and in some of the comparisons he made.

James

James, the oldest of three boys, was bilingual in Russian and English. His home was active and loud with two younger brothers. He was in 6th grade and an extremely thoughtful and quiet boy. Throughout the three visits, he talked about the *Eragon* series often. This is a four-book series written by Christopher Paolini that focuses on dragons and dragon riders. He drew many comparisons to this series in his discussion of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse.*

Interview

In his interview, James reported that he was an avid reader. He said that he reads to escape his life. As he reads to escape, he prefers reading fantasy. When I asked if he thought he was a good reader, he said he was because he does not read because he has to but rather because he wants to. He also equated knowing what you like to read with being a good reader. He appeared to think less of readers who like everything they read.

I asked James how many graphic novels he had read prior to participating in this study. He responded with, "A very few." I asked him why that was. He said, "I just never really found them interesting." James was the only participant who stated a dislike for graphic novels, as he thought they were inferior to texts written in a traditional format.

When I told James that some people believe that reading graphic novels is not real reading and asked what he thought, he responded with, "I agree with those people. You can't…it's not really reading, it's basically just like one of those

books like you hold and like you turn the pages really quick." I asked if he was thinking of a flipbook. "Yeah…but reading…when you are reading a comic book you don't really read. You basically just look at the pictures." I questioned him about this statement by asking, "So, what about the text?" He said, "People do read the text, but they don't like…they read graphic novels for the pictures and not for the actual reading. If they actually wanted to read they'd read…like…a book."

I asked James if graphic novels should be taught in schools. He said, "It depends on what the topic is…I don't really know." In order to clarify, I asked him what he meant by "topic;" for example, was he referring to WWII, or was he talking about school subjects like math? He explained that he was thinking about both. He continued, "Cause like history it would be, I guess, useful because it could like show what happened during a certain period of time. You can't really use it for math or science. You could obviously…well…I don't really know about English. You might be able to…but maybe. I guess history is the only one I can think of."

Think-Aloud

James was the only participant who did not finish reading *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. About an hour into the second meeting and with about 60 pages remaining, James asked, "Do I have to read the whole thing?" I responded with, "Do you want to?" He quickly replied with, "No." I asked, "You don't want to find out what happens?" Again, James responded in the negative, and we

stopped the think-aloud. Each participant was informed that he or she was in control of his or her participation and could end it at any time. Therefore, James was not forced to continue reading.

During his think-aloud, James made 21 comments. Twice, he required prompting for comments about what he was thinking. The first prompt followed five minutes of silence since James' previous comment. The second time he was prompted, almost three and a half minutes had passed since his last comment. None of James' comments referred to information found only in the illustrations. Four of them referenced information from the written text, and one referenced information in both the text and images. Five of his comments were comprehension statements, while 14 were response statements.

Modalities. Based on his think-aloud, James did not access the modalities equally in his reading of the graphic novel text. He did not refer to the visual in any of his 21 comments, mentioned the text in only four comments and referred to information in both modalities only once.

Text. On page 29 of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, the group consisting of Emily, her brother Navin, their mother, Miskit, Morrie, and an unnamed robot enter Kanalis in search of a doctor. Before leaving the robot house, Miskit had warned Emily and Navin not to stare at the people of Kanalis. Based on the illustrations, it becomes apparent that the population of Kanalis are animals or look like animals. On page 29, Miskit explains, "Many of these townsfolk are very slowly being altered by an ancient curse. It is what gives them

the appearance of animals." In his think-aloud, James reported, "Oh, the animals are humans but there is a curse that is making them look like animals." This information was available to him only through the text.

Both. Early in his reading of the graphic novel, James mused, "I think that this is a world of modern technology but magic at the same time." This was classified as both a response statement (because he was providing his own response to the text) and a reading strategy (as he is making an inference about the world in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse)*. On pages 28 and 29, as described above, the group enters Kanalis. They are greeted by a large, talking, mustached pig that is dressed in a hat, glasses, a shirt, and coat. Through these images and the text of the pig talking, James refined his inference, stating, "Maybe not a modern world, but a world of animals and humans and the animals are intelligent." James revised his previous statement based on information he gathered from the text and the images provided over these two pages.

Summary. Although James did not make any comments that referred specifically to the visual in his think-aloud, it is evident that the he was still aware of the images, as he made reference to information found in both modalities. The talking pig was only shown through the visual, and his comment regarding intelligent animals indicated that he made meaning with this visual information.

Reading strategies*.* James indicated the use of reading strategies six times during his think-aloud. He made four text-to-text connections. Two of these were to unnamed texts, and two were to a named text. Both of the unnamed text-

to-text connections referred to the elves. James said, “The elves in this book, well so far, are not like the elves in most of the books that I read.” About 12 minutes later he commented about the elves again, “In most other stories elves are either tiny things dressed in green or humans that are taller and better than…at everything.” Based on these comments, it is evident that James was familiar with elves from other texts he had read, watched, or experienced. He was not the only participant to remark that the elves in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper’s Curse* were unlike other elves they had experienced.

James was an avid reader of fantasy novels and a huge fan of *The Inheritance Cycle* books by Christopher Paolini. James was reading one of the books in this series during the time period of our three meetings, and he was often interested in talking about the books. James made two text-to-text comments that refer to *The Inheritance Cycle*. About 30 minutes into his think-aloud, James commented, “So what I think is the elves rose up and conquered the land where everybody lives and there was a curse that turns people into animals or things and there is a group…This is actually a lot like the *Inheritance* series…except instead of the elves it is Galbatorix.” About 20 minutes later, James referred to the *Inheritance* series again, saying, “There is always a twist in the middle of the story that only becomes apparent when it comes…when it just tells you…like in *Inheritance* there ended up being a lot of…that helped Eragon defeat the Galbatorix.” These comments indicate that James was using reading

strategies, particularly text-to-text connections, to assist in his understanding of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*.

Summary. The reading strategies that James reported using were text-to-text connections; he could have used other reading strategies in his think-aloud, but his comments did not reflect their use. James used other texts, both specific and nonspecific, to connect to his reading of this graphic novel. I can speculate that these connections allowed him to further understand *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*.

Response Statements. James made 14 response statements throughout his think-aloud. The majority of these were unrelated to the specific story, but more focused on graphic novels generally or the format itself. For example, about 20 minutes into his think-aloud, James asked, "Why is it comic books and not…?" I asked him for clarification of his question. He rephrased his question and asked, "Why am I reading a comic book instead of some other kind of book?" I again explained the purpose of my study and why I am interested in how graphic novels are read.

Later in the think-aloud James made another general response statement: "One thing that I don't really like about all books is you always know that the good the good guys will prevail. For one there is the rest of the book. Two it is always like that. There are hardly any stories except for Greek mythology that have stories…" I asked a few questions about why he thought good always prevails, and we continued the conversation for a few minutes. Although his comment was

prompted by something in the story of *Amulet,* what that was is unclear; it is a comment about stories in general. Therefore, it was coded as a response statement.

James was the only participant that strongly disliked graphic novels. It is interesting to look at his think-aloud through this lens, as these feelings were evident in his response to the book. He was the only participant to not finish the book. He also made the fewest number of comments during his think-aloud. Finally, the majority of his comments were response statements that were not specific to the book.

Summary. James' response statements reveal two things: (1) his extensive knowledge about stories in general, as well as the fantasy genre, and (2) his dislike of the format.

Retrospective Think-Aloud

As was evident in James' think-aloud, he made very few comments about the text as he read, and he often had to be prompted. Many of his comments were not focused on *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, but rather were about graphic novels and stories in general. In his retrospective comments, James revealed how he used visual and textual information to make meaning. He also indicated his understanding of graphic novel conventions and his application of story knowledge in making meaning with the graphic novel.

Modalities. Although James did not reference all three modalities in his think-aloud, in his retrospective think-aloud, he does include information gathered

from visual cues. James, like several of the other participants, referred to the elves as creepy or evil. I asked him about why he felt the elves were creepy.

James: Well, I guess, I don't know. The just look really abnormal and not like…if somebody said elf I wouldn't think of this.

Aimee: So how does that creepiness come through? I guess is my question.

J: Like what makes them creepy?

A: Yeah.

J: Well, their eyes and their like general shape of their head and face. Like how high their cheekbones are.

A: So their eyes look creepy because they are kind of glowy aren't they? What about their cheekbones?

J: Well, they stand out and they make the rest of the face, like under them, like look makes that part stand out too, at least for some of them.

A: So because of the location of the cheekbones it changes the rest of the face?

J: Yeah.

A: And the shape of the head too you said

J: Well, I guess those are the only two things that make them different from what I expect elves to look like.

In this retrospective response, James was able to home in on several visual reasons the elves looked creepy.

In addition to making meaning with the visual aspects of the graphic novel, James was also tuned into the text of the graphic novel. On pages 8 and 9 the elf prince, the elf king, and Luger are discussing finding the children. In his think-aloud, James commented that the elves are going to kidnap the children. However, the term kidnapping is not used on these pages, so I asked James what he was thinking as he made this prediction. His response highlights his use of the text to make meaning, and it displays his story knowledge as well.

Aimee: So you make the prediction that they are going to kidnap some children.

James: Uh uh.

A: What were the clues that lead you up to that prediction?

J: Well, they're just talking about that. I guess it is obvious.

A: So, what part makes it obvious?

J: Well, before that pages they talk about you don't have the experience to do this and you failed me. But…umm…on the past pages you only know that they are going to kidnap something or somebody…oh, no, never mind. They…you can tell because it says do you have the children's location? That kind of gives it away. Other than that, you don't really know.

A: Cause it never says kidnapping right?

J: Yeah. But you can just tell by the way they talk I guess.

A: Is there anything else that kind of hints at that, you think?

J: Not really…well…I guess…again it goes to the elves' appearance. They look evil and that pretty much means they are evil. And you know they are going to do something like this.

A: Do you think that evil people look evil too? Or is it just in fictional characters?

J: I think its fictional characters, but not always fictional characters.

In making his prediction about the kidnapping of the children, James primarily relied on the text for information. However, he appeared to back up this belief with information from the visual modality by reasoning that because the elves look evil kidnapping is likely not beyond their capabilities. It is at this point that he also exhibited some story knowledge by remarking that if characters look evil, they are evil. This is evidence of James' familiarity with evil characters or evil-looking characters in other story formats. He was able to apply this story knowledge to his understanding of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*.

Summary. Although James did not refer to the visual modality in his think-aloud, it was evident in his retrospective think-aloud that either he had used information from the images in order to make meaning with the text, or he was now, in his retrospective think-aloud, accessing information from the visual modality in order to support his understanding.

Reading strategies. In his retrospective think-aloud, James showed how several different reading strategies contributed to his meaning making with the graphic novel.

As mentioned above, James was the only participant who adamantly disliked graphic novels. His negative feelings toward the format appeared several times in his think-aloud. In the retrospective think-aloud, I asked him about one of these instances of negativity.

One pages 68 and 69, Emily, with Miskit on her back, and Leon Redbeard are engaged in a fight with several elf warriors on the rooftops of Kanalis. Emily has used the amulet and its power to successfully fight off several elves, and Leon's fighting skills have also allowed him to resist the elves. On page 69, Emily is in an intense discussion with the amulet, as it encourages her to give into the power. Emily resists and insists that the amulet get out of her head. The effort of keeping the amulet out of her head results in Emily fainting.

> Aimee: You make a comment about…you sounded kind of frustrated that one moment is shown across so many panels. You say, 'One moment crammed into ten pictures but it might only take two or three.' Can you talk about that?
>
> James: I guess it really wouldn't be crammed; I didn't choose my words right. But the parts that aren't important they make them into like one picture. But the ones that are important like this…
>
> A: So the amulet stuff?
>
> J: Yeah. It takes many, many pictures. I think the author does this to like prolong the moment and to make it feel even more important even though it really isn't that important.

A: So by spreading it across more panels it prolongs it and therefore it's more important? Why does prolonging it make it more important?

J: It makes you think about it longer I guess. And, yeah, that's pretty much it.

Although this moment did not seem to contribute to his understanding of the story, James was able to identify why a convention or a technique is used in this graphic novel. It frustrated him that the format requires a number of panels to show a moment, but he understood that by prolonging the moment across panels, the author forced him to think about it longer, which imparts greater importance to the events in the panels.

As noted previously, James chose not to finish reading *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. When he indicated his desire to stop reading, I began the retrospective think-aloud by asking James how he thought the second book would end. He made several accurate predictions and remarked that the series would likely end happily. Earlier in the session, James had discussed the motif of the good guys always winning and provided several reasons for why he thought this was. I connected this previous topic with his prediction about a happy ending. In this exchange, James revealed his story knowledge again.

Aimee: So it [the series] will end with happily ever after?

James: Yeah.

A: Would that match up with your thought that the protagonist…the good guys always win?

J: Yes.

A: How so?

J: Well, because Emily will probably win and her family will be safe back home. One of them is definitely going to die, probably the fox; that always happens.

A: What always happens?

J: Somebody close to the main character dies.

A: Does that have to happen?

J: No, but it happens very, very often.

A: Why do you think that is?

J: Cause it can't just be the good guys win because otherwise the book would be boring.

A: You have to have the good and the bad?

J: It has to balance out…like…

There are two elements of story that James recognized. First, he recognized that "happily ever after" is a common ending for books. Second, he indicated that he was familiar with stories that often kill off someone close to the main character. He recognized this as a way of balancing out the good and the bad to make the story exciting; the good guys may win, but one of them will have to sacrifice his or her life along the way. Even though he did not like this graphic novel experience James was able to apply his knowledge of story to this reading in order to make accurate predictions and to make meaning.

Summary. Again, it is important to note that even though James' think-aloud did not reveal his attention to the visual modality, the comments in his retrospective think-aloud, specifically about the stretching of a scene across numerous panels, indicate that he was aware of the visual throughout his reading. Additionally, his continued use of the reading strategy of using story knowledge is indicated in his retrospective think-aloud.

Amulet-Specific Questions

After finishing the retrospective think-aloud, I questioned James about topics and examples specific to *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*.

Story elements. I began the *Amulet*-specific questions by asking James about what type of story *Amulet* is. He responded, "Fantasy, because there…well, it can't be sci-fi because sci-fi is always about space and stuff. Well, maybe fiction. Wait, fiction is real right?" I corrected him by explaining that nonfiction was real and fiction was made up. I also explained that fiction is a broad umbrella and that fantasy would fit under that umbrella. James asked me what other categories fit under the umbrella of fiction, and I shared that, in addition to fantasy and science-fiction, historical fiction and contemporary realistic fiction are the other main categories found under fiction. Upon hearing my explanation, James stated, "Then, I would have to say fantasy…out of all of those."

I next asked, "What do you think is the theme of *Amulet*?" James asked, "As in the main idea?" I responded in the affirmative. After some thought, James

responded, “I actually don’t know for fantasy.” I clarified that I was just asking about *Amulet* and not the entire genre of fantasy. James replied, “Ohhh…I really don’t know. I usually don’t know about themes for these types of books.” I inquired, “Why do you think that is?” James responded, “Well, sometimes it’s because there isn’t one. I actually I think that half the time there isn’t one.”

I followed up this question by asking if James could describe some of the main characters in *Amulet*. He replied, “Well, there are really only three that I’d say I could describe and that’s the main char…the girl, I don’t remember her name, umm maybe a little her brother and the fox.” I asked him to pick one of the characters he mentioned to focus on; he selected the fox, Leon Redbeard. In describing Leon’s character, James stated, “I think that he’s determined…well, determined to help even if it costs him his life.” I asked, “How are those elements of his character shown through the graphic novel?” James said, “Things seem pretty much hopeless, but he helps Emily anyways.” I asked if this was shown through the character’s actions, and James replied, “Yes.”

Graphic novel elements. Prior to asking James about specific examples in *Amulet*, I wanted to know if James was familiar with the parts of a graphic novel. I asked James to select a page from the graphic novel and inquired, “Can you name the different parts of the page?” James was unclear about what I was asking, so I explained that there were different elements that created a graphic novel. When he continued to look at me quizzically, I pointed out the “boxes” used on the page and asked him if he knew what those were called. He did not,

so I told him that they were called panels. I asked if he could point out other parts of the page. He responded, “Well, I guess there is some narrations. Well, there’s the dialogue and other than what’s in the panels…and that’s…there isn’t too much else to it.” I asked if he knew the term for the part that contained the dialogue; he replied, “Umm…talk bubbles.”

Panels. I asked James to explain the job of panels. In a response that sounded more like a question, James said, “To show the pictures?” I probed further into this answer by asking why the pictures could not be shown without panels. James replied, “Umm…cause then you could show…cause this can only show one time or one moment, but this can show many.” I asked him to clarify the purpose of panels. He said, “Umm…to show time…not a lot of time, but like…I guess…well, if you put it all into one picture I guess you could do that, but then there would be a lot…so much dialogue in it that it would be really confusing.” I asked James to return to his comment about panels and time and to further explain what he meant. He explained, “You could only show one moment with one picture, but with several you can show what’s happening in the…in a short period of time.”

Once I had established James’ understanding of panels, I asked him to look at page 120 and to describe the panels. He was not certain what I wanted, so I pointed out that the panels were different sizes and shapes and asked him to explain why that might be. He said, “Well if the author, or the illustrator, has to

show something big and wants to like amplify it they just put it into a bigger picture, but then put the rest into small ones so they can fit everything."

I directed James to look at pages 132 and 133, as they have no panels. I asked why he thought that there were no panels on these pages. He stated, "I guess the illustrator is trying to make the reader capture the whole…umm…picture. By picturing not the actual picture but like the whole idea like they actually found it. They actually found the trees." I inquired, "And does the lack of panels tell you anything?" James answered, "Umm…I think that it shows…umm…that this moment is important and once again it amplifies that moment."

James and I then looked at pages 61 through 68 together; these pages show Emily and Leon fighting the elves on the rooftops of Kanalis. I wanted to focus on these particular pages because none of the panels are "straight" squares or rectangles.

Aimee: Can you describe the panels in these pages?

James: Umm…here…the parts…well, from what I see, when they're… umm…fighting the panels are is more like shaped into more irregular shapes, whereas like when nothing interesting is happening there are all these square or rectangle rectangular.

A: So what do the different shapes tell us?

J: I'm not really sure.

A: It sort of sounds like you think this is more interesting, right, the fight. So does the fact that the panels are a different shape make it more interesting?

J: I guess so. Yeah, like it makes a change.

A: Okay, so it is more interesting to you because the panels are different?

J: Well, I don't think I cons…like…if I think about it than it is not I nteresting…like my brain involuntarily takes it to be more interesting.

A: Humm…so I have two questions—how does your brain do that?

J: I don't know.

A: And then why are irregular shapes more interesting, like if your brain is taking that in?

J: Well…like…if…it's a difference from like the rest since it is just square or rectangular. It like draws my eyes to the difference.

A: So if all of the panels were irregular shaped and then you came to a page that had regular panels that could still be interesting because it was different?

J: Yeah.

A: So it is the difference that attracts…that makes it interesting.

Gutters. After discussing some specific examples of different panels in *Amulet*, I turned James' attention to the gutters. I had supplied him with the term for gutters earlier in our discussion; however, at this point, I was interested in determining what James knew about gutters. I asked him to tell me what gutters

are used for. He stated, “Umm…the separation to like keep the bubbles from like the dialogue bubbles from like overlapping. Well, not really overlapping, but without them…I guess you just put like a black line, but it would make things confusing…more confusing.” I was unclear about James’ explanation, so I asked him to summarize his statement; he said, “To…to like…to separate the pictures…there is much more meaning behind that sentence.”

I then asked James if he thought anything happened in the gutters. He responded, “Not really.” I asked James to pick a page. He selected page 142. We talked through the action, panel by panel. The scene on page 142 shows Emily, Leon, and Miskit saying goodbye to the gadoba trees and walking away. I asked James to point out where the walking was happening, as it is not shown in the panels. James accounted for the unseen action through the different angles shown in the panels. When pressed, James agreed with my premise that the walking was happening in the gutters between the panels. I asked James about how he was able to fill in the action in the gutters.

James: I think that I did it…and…well…I guess that I just guessed.

Aimee: Has your teacher ever talked about making inferences?

J: Yes.

A: So, what is an inference?

J: A guess or reading between the lines.

A: Do you think that you are making inferences in the gutters?

J: Yeah.

A: So, what helps you make those inferences?

J: Well, without the gutters there really wouldn't be any room…to like…it's like…umm if you take a video on like an Apple product then like…and you're like scrolling through it…like you're moving the…

A: Frames?

J: Yeah.

A: Okay.

J: And you hold it in one place it kind of zooms in and like there's several pictures in one…it's like…that's kinda like here where like the…these are just the frames that you see without zooming in, but like the gutters are like if you hold it there and then you zoom in on them.

A: Interesting. So what function does the gutter serve in the analogy?

J: I guess it helps us make inferences. But we can't actually like…it's more detail. It gives us more detail.

A: The gutters?

J: Yeah.

A: Even though there's nothing there?

J: It's like…we put in the pictures in the gutters ourselves…without knowing it…yeah.

Sound effects. After discussing the function of gutters, I instructed James to look at page 48, where the sound effect "choom!!!" is used in the top panel as the elves' cannon fires at the hospital. Before I posed a question, James said, "I

think that some of them you do need them and some of them you don't." He signaled that the sound effect on page 48 was unnecessary and directed me back to pages 142 and 143 to show me a case of when a sound effect is necessary.

On page 143, James indicated the bottom row of three panels. The first panel is a close-up of Emily's foot on a rock that has broken off of the ledge; the sound effect in this panel is "krak!" The second panel shows Emily falling off the cliff as Redbeard yells her name from above; the "sound effect" in this panel is "crumble!" The final panel is a close-up of Emily's gloved hand holding onto the edge of the cliff; the "sound effect" in this panel is "latch!" James talked me through these three panels: "Like you don't need the middle one…like you know that it's falling but on the first and third one…like the first one, you don't know that it actually like cracked off. And I guess that maybe you could figure it out that the last one she grabbed the edge. But you don't need all of them I don't think."

Although James was the one who directed our attention to these three panels, I had identified the sound effects in these panels as examples I wanted to discuss because "crumble" and "latch" are not really sound effects. However, they are used as such in these pages, and I wanted to know what the participants thought about their use. I continued to build upon James' initial explanation of these three panels through further questioning. I asked James why he thought that the sound effect in the first panel was spelled "krak" as opposed to "crack." He replied, "Well, I think to emphasize…I don't know what to

emphasize…I don't know. I think there is definitely a reason to it, but I don't know what it is."

I asked James what he did when he came to one of the sound effects in his reading; I inquired if he read it or if he heard it. He quickly responded, "I read it. I don't actually hear…like the onomatopoeia…I just read it…yeah." I then asked James to define onomatopoeia. He defined it as, "It's like how you spell a sound, like oink or splash." I inquired further and asked what made these sound effects onomatopoeias. James responded, "Well, they're noises. You just…you spell them."

I pointed James' attention back to the last panel, with the "latch" "sound effect" on page 143. When I asked if it was a noise, he responded in the negative, so I asked why it was included. James posited, "To show that she actually grabbed the edge. But…you don't actually make that noise when…you don't hear that when you grab something." I asked him why "latch" was included. He stated, "Cause without it you wouldn't know…she could be grabbing on for the whole time or she could have just grabbed it before while she was falling…"

Speech balloons. The first question I asked James about speech balloons was in regard to page 3, when the speech of the elf answering the door is shown in a different font. I asked why a different font was used. James responded, "To show that his voice is different." I followed up by asking what the voice would sound like. James made a text-to-text connection when he responded with, "Like how Smeagol says it. That's what I thought of when I read

it." It is interesting to point out that James did not report that this is what he was thinking during his think-aloud.

James recognized that the change in font would impact how the words would sound. I continued this line of questioning by asking him how a change in the size of the font would impact the "sound" of the words. I pointed out the top panel on page 2. Here, Prince Trellis is talking, and the font is the same; however, the font size is bigger. James said that the Prince was "emphasizing his words." I asked, "Would the bigger words or font indicate anything?" James replied, "I think it means that he is not yelling it, but he is not actually like just talking."

On page 69, Emily is engaged in a discussion or argument with the amulet about remaining in control. The amulet's "speech" is shown in wavy, pink bubbles without the usual tail pointing toward the speaker. Emily's responses to the amulet are in text boxes, not speech balloons. I asked James why he thought this was the case. He said, "I think it's how she's talking…it's to show how she's talking…like she is not asking a question she is…uh…giving a command. And it's like really…I can't really say strict…it's like really final…kind of…"

Summary. It is interesting to note that throughout his think-aloud and his retrospective think-aloud, James demonstrated a great deal of story knowledge; however, during these *Amulet*-specific questions, he struggled to answer some basic questions about theme and characterization. I wonder if this can be attributed to his disinterest in the graphic novel. On the other hand, even though

James disliked graphic novels, he was able to demonstrate an understanding of several graphic novel conventions. It is evident in some of his explanations that he was making meaning with many graphic novel conventions during his think-aloud, but he did not verbalize his process in his think-aloud.

Summary

Although he was an avid reader, James was a reluctant reader of graphic novels and had read very few graphic novels prior to his participation in the study. He was the only participant who adamantly disliked graphic novels. As such, he saw books written in this format as “less than” books written in a more traditional format. However, he could see the potential benefit of including graphic novels in some school subjects, such as history.

James elected not to finish reading *Amulet: The Stonekeeper’s Curse*. During his think-aloud, he only made 21 comments and required prompting to share aloud what he was thinking on several occasions. Many of James’ comments were response statements about the graphic novel format in general, as opposed to comments focused on the graphic novel he was reading. During his think-aloud, James was primarily focused on information he gathered from the written text, rather than information found in the images. However, data from his retrospective think-aloud, and even the *Amulet*-specific questions, indicated that James was aware of the information provided through the visual modality throughout his reading of *Amulet*, even though he did not express this attention during his think-aloud.

Although James did not enjoy reading graphic novels, he was able to understand many of the graphic novel elements and use them to make meaning with the graphic novel. James did not have the vocabulary to name the parts of a graphic novel, but, when asked directly about the parts and their jobs in the graphic novel, he was often able to accurately describe or speculate about the elements and their roles. James did not let his distaste for the format prevent him from appreciating some of the complexities inherent in the format, such as the closure necessary in gutters.

Nadya

Nadya was a 7th grade girl who was very active in extracurricular activities. During the weeks of data collection Nadya was participating in a school musical. She plays volleyball and takes violin lessons as well. Even though she is busy with all of these activities, she makes plenty of time to read. Throughout the three sessions, she was very articulate and seemed to enjoy being reflective on her own thinking and reading.

Interview

When asked to describe herself as a reader, Nadya immediately said that she was a fast reader. She prefers reading fantasy and adventure and mentioned several different books in the *Percy Jackson* series by Rick Riordan over the three sessions. She feels that sometimes realistic fiction is too realistic for her, and she is not a fan of historical fiction because, as she reported, “Historical fiction is still history. I don’t like that.” She has read some graphic novels, such as

the graphic novel adaptations of books in the *Warriors* series by Erin Hunter and some of the *Percy Jackson* graphic novel adaptations. She had also previously read the first book in the *Amulet* series. However, she said that she does not seek out graphic novels to read and, in fact, does not even know where to find graphic novels. I asked why she did not seek out graphic novels to read; she said, "I find that I like plot in written better and I think…drawings are just kind of…sometimes the dialogue is hard to follow and sometimes the drawings are kind of abnormal."

Although Nadya is not an avid reader of graphic novels, she has read many books in this format. Based on this exposure to books in both formats, I asked her if graphic novels offer a different experience than other types of books.

> Nadya: Yes, because…umm…this could be just me, but I find them easier to read. More like not necessarily relaxing but just not you don't have to concentrate as much cause there's way less words. And you can just focus on the pretty pictures.
>
> Aimee: Okay, so for you it's easier because there's less words?
>
> N: But, like I'm not a troubled reader I'm super advanced. But I just find it not as…it's not…reading is easy for me so I wouldn't say it's easier, it's just less…I don't know let's just…let's call it easier, but reading is easy anyways.

Based on her classification of graphic novels as easier reading, I followed up by asking whether she thought reading a graphic novel was "real" reading. In

her response, she also touched upon whether graphic novels should be taught in school.

Nadya: I don't think it's as intellectually stimulating. It's…well…you read so technically it's real reading. But I don't think it's like…I don't think you should be allowed to do like school projects on it.

Aimee: Humm…why not?

N: Cause it's…umm…it's not really…it's still pleasure reading but there's not as many like opportunities to learn new words…and…yeah I guess…I don't really…

A: So is the purpose of reading to learn new words?

N: Umm…maybe like in school circumstances sometimes. Like in English class we did this thing where like we read a we chose a book from the library and like did a log everyday of about what we learned of the plot and stuff and some people chose graphic novels and I don't really think that should count I guess cause its school, but that's just my opinion.

A: So graphic novels can't have plot, you don't think?

N: No, they can. I just don't think it's as umm…learny like. For some people it's easier because there are more…I think it's called like visual learners where if they see something it helps. And some people just like have trouble concentrating on just words on a book on paper. And so graphic novels help them, I think.

Think-Aloud Protocol

Nadya completed the reading of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* and the think-aloud in about 35 minutes. Her think-aloud can be summarized as a consistent running commentary on the events occurring in the graphic novel. Nadya made 50 comments during her think-aloud, and many were multifaceted. She referenced visual cues from the graphic novel 22 times, information from the written text 21 times, and information that was conveyed in both the illustrations and the writing 17 times.

Modalities. Based on Nadya's comments, she accessed information from the available modalities equally, with just one more comment referencing the visual than the textual. She was also attuned to information displayed in both modalities.

Visual. An example of a comment from Nadya that referred to a visual cue happened when she commented on the events on page 56 of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. Emily, Miskit and Leon Redbeard are fleeing from the elves in the city of Kanalis. The elves have taken over the streets of the city, so Leon decides they should use the rooftops to escape. Leon quickly scales the walls of a building and gains access to the roof. He looks down on Emily and Miskit and tells them to hurry. Emily and Miskit look shocked and tell him that they cannot do that; he replies that Emily can. Emily tells Miskit to get on her back. Suddenly, Emily's amulet lights up, and she is surrounded by glowing, pink light. She and Miskit lift off the ground and up to the rooftop. Nadya commented

in her think-aloud, “So Emily just discovered that she has levitating powers from the amulet.” She continued, in the same comment, stating, “I guess that the fox will teach her how to use it, her powers and stuff.” This comment is multifaceted because it included a reference to a visual cue, a reading strategy (prediction), and a comprehension statement.

Text. One of Nadya’s comments that referred to the text was in response to page 91. Emily, Miskit and Leon Redbeard make it successfully out of the city and are about to start climbing the mountain in order to find the fruit necessary to save Emily’s mother from the poison of the arachnopod. Leon stops them and informs Emily that, in order to prepare for the journey ahead, she needs to learn how to control her powers. He tells her to select a weapon, as she will need something to channel the energy from the amulet. Nadya commented, “So the fox told her to find a weapon so she chose a walking stick.” This comment was coded as a textual cue and a comprehension statement.

Both. Several pages later, as Leon trains Emily how to use the walking stick to channel the energy from her amulet, Nadya remarked, “She is trying to channel the energy through the staff, and it worked.” This is an example of one of Nadya’s comments that encompassed both visual and textual information. In the text of these pages, Leon provides instructions to Emily and also compliments her when she is successful in picking up a seed with the energy of the amulet. In the visuals of these scenes, a reader can see the energy of the amulet surrounding Emily’s walking stick, reaching out to the seed, and lifting it from the

ground. Therefore, the information about Emily's actions and success that Nadya refered to can be found in both the text and images of this section.

Summary. Nadya accessed information from the visual, written, and both modalities in order to make meaning with the graphic novel. In her think-aloud, Nadya also indicated her ability to apply reading strategies to both modalities.

Reading strategies. Throughout her think-aloud, Nadya made ten comments that contained evidence of reading strategies. She used the reading strategy of inference in nine of these instances. In the example above, she made an inference to predict future events in the story. She stated, "I guess that the fox will teach her how to use it, her powers and stuff." In this scene, Leon tells Emily she can do it and says, "Very good!" when she reaches the rooftop, but he does not offer to teach her how to control the amulet or to use her powers. Nadya inferred this from previous information about Leon Redbeard and the events in the scene and then made her prediction.

Graphic novel conventions. Nadya made one reference to a graphic novel convention in her think-aloud. On page 19, as Emily sits beside her mother's sick bed, the amulet begins speaking to her. It tells her that the elves are coming for her and that they plan to kill her. Emily asks why they want to kill her, and the amulet informs her that it is because she refused to join them; therefore, she is now considered a sworn enemy. Nadya said, "So the girl is wearing an amulet and it is speaking to her and you can tell that it is speaking because it is outlined in pinkish bubbles. The amulet is like this all-seeing thing

and is warning her about the evil elves." In her comment, Nadya explained that she knew the amulet is speaking because it is "outlined in pinkish bubbles." This is a convention used throughout the *Amulet* series to indicate when the amulet is speaking.

Summary. In her report of her thinking, Nadya appeared to favor the reading strategy of inference. She was also able to apply her knowledge of graphic novel conventions, another reading strategy, in order to determine that the amulet is speaking to Emily. These two instances demonstrate that Nadya was able to apply reading strategies to information in both modalities.

Comprehension statements. All of Nadya's 50 comments contained a statement of comprehension. Seventeen of those comments were multifaceted, with nine of her comprehension statements containing a response statement as well. In her response to page 85, Nadya's comment contained both a comprehension statement and a response statement. Luger, one of the elf king's henchmen, and Trellis, the elf prince, check in with the elf king about losing Emily in Kanalis. The elf king orders that Emily be hunted down and that Trellis, his son, be the one to kill her. If Trellis fails, the king gives Luger permission to kill his son. Nadya commented, "So the elf king is saying that his son has to kill Emily or die…sheesh." The first part of her comment is a comprehension statement, but the "sheesh" was coded as a response statement because Nadya had a personal reaction to what is happening in the story. The "sheesh" seems to indicate that

Nadya recognized the gravity of a father ordering his son to be killed and the tricky situation that the elf prince finds himself in.

Summary. Based on Nadya's comments during her think-aloud, she appeared to obtain information from the written text, the illustrations, and often combinations of both. This indicates that Nadya made use of the information provided to her through the modalities of both text and illustration. Nadya's think-aloud also showed that she used reading strategies while reading a graphic novel and applied these to information in both modalities. All of Nadya's comments contained statements of comprehension, but, as a result of the verbal protocol format, it is impossible to determine if she was using these as reading strategies.

Retrospective Think-Aloud

Nadya's think-aloud was punctuated with an equal number of references to both modalities, with a similar number of references to both modalities at the same time. However, the thinking that she revealed in her retrospective think-aloud relies less on the text and more often on both modalities together. Nadya also employed her story knowledge a number of times throughout this portion as she explained her thinking.

Modalities. The last page of the graphic novel is composed of a full-bleed, double page spread of a lush landscape with mountains in the background and coniferous trees in the foreground. On the recto side of the page appears the back of the house robot, with two missing arms from the battle with Luger. The foreground of the verso side shows the back of the elf prince as he watches the

robot house walk away. Nadya commented that the prince was now in exile; I asked what made her think that.

Nadya: He is all alone and like the vast mountains and he is just looking at the house and everything. He is…he umm…he is definitely not with the elves anymore because he saved Emily's life. But he is not exactly with them either because he tried to kill them, and I don't think they even know he is there. So I think he will maybe be turned good eventually and like maybe sacrifice himself.

Aimee: Why do you think sacrifice?

N: It seems like the kind of character build-up that would…that ends up in dying.

A: What kind of character…have you seen that before?

N: Redemption kind of…or redeemed character. Usually like in action movies they were selfish or something then they like redeem themselves and sacrifice so that others can go on…like the ultimate act of selflessness.

A: Is there anything in particular about the layout of this that…

N: Umm…you can just see everything almost from his perspective, except you can see him just standing in the vastness of it. And it kind of makes you feel alone I guess…makes him feel alone.

Nadya primarily relied on the visual composition of the page in order to determine that the prince is now in exile. She supported this statement by

remembering events from the story that lead up to this moment and by using her story knowledge, which she appeared to obtain from action movies. Nadya allowed herself to feel the emotions conveyed by the image and used them to infer the elf prince's current state.

Nadya referred to the elves as evil almost immediately. It seems that Nadya used information from the visuals and the text to determine that the elves are evil.

Aimee: So, in the beginning you already started calling the elves evil. How did you know that they are evil? Because it doesn't really say evil elves, right?

Nadya: Right. Umm…the way they treat each other and the way the author…or…illustrator portrays them just kind of projects evil. And I think that there are a couple of threats or death threats in the first couple of pages, which would kind of spell out evil.

A: So they project evil?

N: Yeah.

A: So, yeah, it is on page one, two, three, four, five we start to get to see them. So what is it? You mention the fangs and kind of claws. What else projected evil, do you feel like?

N: Umm…they're never smiling nicely. They are always yelling at each other or frowning or scowling and yelling. There is like…groveling…I guess of this one person who talks down upon everyone.

A: Oh, okay.

N: He is the supreme ruler.

A: So, who is that?

N: The elf king and I think…also…he might be the adviser…who is the evil elf guy.

A: He talks down to people…the evil elf guy?

N: Yeah, especially the prince because apparently he has failed a lot.

Nadya referenced the way the elves look, but she also included how they act and treat each other. Some of this latter information is included in the images, but it is primarily shown through the text, particularly her reports of talking down to others. Nadya was able to synthesize information from both modalities in order to determine that the elves are evil.

Another example of how Nadya integrated information from both the visual and the written to make meaning occurred when I asked her about a comment she made in reference to pages 66 and 67. This is a section of the fight scene that takes place on the rooftops of Kanalis between Emily and Leon and several elf warriors. Emily uses the amulet to attack several of the elves. In her think-aloud, Nadya stated that the amulet is not entirely good. I asked her why she thought so.

Nadya: Umm…it like…you can tell it kind of takes over her for a split second because her eyes turn red and she is kind of surrounded by this aura of magic.

Aimee: Um humm.

N: And also, Leon, the fox, is just looking and seeing what is happening to her and then he says, “oh, no.” So that, I guess.

A: Umm…yeah, and that kind of continues. Is there anything else about the amulet that…

N: Umm…through the book it is kind of goading her…it is just like it…it would be so easier to let me take control…all of your problems would be solved.

A: If you had to describe the personality of the amulet, how would you describe it?

N: Umm…I guess you could call it peer pressure, but its not really because its just this powerful entity trying to take over her mind. Almost trying to convince her that she isn’t good enough. That it needs the amulet.

A: Is that how peer pressure works?

N: Yeah, I guess.

Nadya took information from the visual, the written, and the world in order to come to the conclusion that the amulet is not entirely good. She noticed that Emily’s eyes turn red whenever the amulet begins to take over. She also integrated information from the text, specifically Leon’s reaction when he sees Emily using the amulet. Nadya also used the reading strategy of a world-to-text

connection when she described the amulet's approach to persuading Emily as peer pressure.

Summary. Nadya's description of her thinking in her retrospective think-aloud indicated that she continued to draw on information from both modalities in her meaning making process. Additionally, the comments in her retrospective think-aloud reinforced her ability to apply reading strategies to both modalities. She also demonstrated the array of sources for her story knowledge when she referenced action movies.

Reading strategies. In her retrospective think-aloud, Nadya made use of her knowledge of graphic novel conventions and her knowledge of stories to explain her thinking. There were several instances when Nadya referred to the conventions of the graphic novel format in her retrospective think-aloud. The first example does not appear to contribute as much to her meaning making process as the second; however, it is an interesting display of Nadya's understanding of how graphic novels work.

Pages 22 and 23 are a double-page, full-bleed spread that features a city and a large waterfall in the background. The back of a house robot is shown in the foreground of the verso page, and two other house robots are seen further away on that same page. The foreground of the recto side of the page is filled with a waterfall, and the skyline of Kanalis fills the background. This is what Emily and her travel companions see as the come upon the city in their house robot. A

speech balloon emits from the house closest to the viewer and says, "…the city of Kanalis."

Aimee: Why do you think that's a full page?

Nadya: Umm…I think just to give you a better picture in your mind about what it looks like and how vast this place is where they are going. And I guess to see what the characters are seeing. They are seeing this vast place with like a waterfall and a cliff and houses.

A: Um hum, so is this from the characters' point of view you think?

N: Ummm…I think kind of…because you are looking at the house where they are in. I think…it kind of…makes it more dramatic.

A: And how can you tell that it is the house that they're in?

N: Ahh…there's a speech bubble coming from there where they are talking about the city.

A: So even though it looks like it is linked to the house, you can tell it's…

N: Yeah, you kind of can. Because there are other walking houses in the background but this one…the one that they're in…is way…really detailed and life-sized and stuff.

A: So is that common, you think, to make things more detailed?

N: Yeah.

A: When would an illustrator choose to make things more detailed?

N: If they…umm…if it was going to be significant in the plot or the scene. And if it was like a main person.

A: Why do you think that the details would help?

N: It kind of stands out more so your eyes are drawn to it so you think, oh, yeah, this is going to be important later.

Nadya recognized several conventions used in these two pages. First, she realized that the city is shown this way in order to provide a sense of its vastness. Second, she realized that it is also shown from the characters' perspectives in order to allow the readers to see through their eyes. Third, she explained how she knew that the characters are in the house based on the speech balloon and the amount of detail that is shown in the illustration of that particular house. Finally, she recognized that things that are significant, or will be significant, are shown with a greater amount of detail in order to draw the reader's eye.

The second example of Nadya's use of conventions seems to have contributed a lot to her meaning making process. Page 41 is set in Dr. Weston's office in Kanalis. Emily and the others have brought her mother there in the hope that he has a cure for the poison that threatens her life. Dr. Weston tells them that the only thing that can cure Emily's mother is the fruit from the gadoba tree. However, he cautions that it is a difficult and dangerous journey to get to the trees. As she was reading, Nadya stated that it was a "big deal." During the retrospective think-aloud, I asked her how she knew this.

Nadya: They have this panel that's like showed them the fruit. So I knew if they drew it now they…it was showing us that later…so they were going to draw them later so that we could recognize it.

Aimee: Okay.

N: They all started going like…and he also made a point of saying that none have returned so I guess they were going to be the first ones to return from there.

A: Okay. So you are talking about that second row of panels. The one on the right with the doctor kind of inset in there.

N: Yeah.

A: Okay, so the fact that they drew the fruit was kind of foreshadowing?

N: Yeah, I guess. They also talk about how it is not a good idea and it's too dangerous. That kind of, generally in adventure or fiction books especially, that they are going to go there if it talks about how dangerous it is.

Nadya made excellent use of her understanding of this convention, the inset of the doctor in the panel, to determine that the gadoba fruit and the journey to get there were important. She also integrated some story knowledge that she had gathered in her reading of adventure stories to recognize that, if the main character is cautioned against going somewhere, he or she is likely to go there.

Summary. It is important to note that, during her retrospective think-aloud, Nadya demonstrated several times her ability to integrate her knowledge of graphic novel conventions with her story knowledge in order to make meaning with the text, and to apply this meaning making to future events in the graphic novel. In the example of the gadoba fruit, she used information from the visual

modality, her knowledge of graphic novel conventions, and her story knowledge to understand that this image of the gadoba fruit is a foreshadowing of later events or of a future important element.

Amulet-Specific Questions

After completing the retrospective think-aloud during our third meeting, I moved on to asking Nadya *Amulet*-specific questions.

Story elements. Although Nadya struggled to remember some of the characters' names, she provided an accurate and concise summary of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. She concluded her summary by stating that the story ended "happily ever after" for everyone but the elf prince. I asked her if she liked the "happily ever after" ending. She responded, "I would have liked there to be a little more conflict 'cause then I feel like they are going to start up this whole new thing, which could be cool sometimes, but…a little unresolved conflict keeps stories kind of cool, unless it is like the last book." I inquired further about what an ending with an unresolved conflict could have looked like in this story. Nadya suggested, "I feel like an ending scene with like the elves like declaring vengeance or something would have like punctuated the evilness or something."

When asked to describe the type of story that *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* is, Nadya said, "I think it's adventure cause it's all about like traveling lands and fighting elves and mystical amulets." I asked Nadya if she could think of other stories that would be the same type. She commented, "Umm…*The Hobbit*…kind of…maybe." I asked her why she thought *The Hobbit* was similar;

she responded, “There’s like these evil disgruntled creatures, could be like orcs. Then there’s this like…people who are on a quest. That stop…that find something…or to stop someone or something.” Nadya went on to explain that the beginning of the graphic novel had a quest, but that she had “no idea what’s going on” at the end of the book because it no longer felt like a quest.

I then posed the following question:

Aimee: What do you think the theme of *Amulet* is?

Nadya: Theme? Like the moral?

A: Yeah, or the lesson.

N: (long silence)

A: Or do you think there is one?

N: I don’t know. Right now I can’t really figure one out but maybe like in the last couple books they like start talking about like ‘remember to blah blah blah blah’ and stuff.

A: …so you think that maybe the series overall has a theme, but maybe not the individual books?

N: Maybe. I don’t…I can’t really tell right now. Maybe like trust yourself. Or just like…I don’t know some psychologist could like say, ‘The amulet is peer pressure, so don’t listen to peer pressure’ or something.

A: Why would you identify it as peer pressure?

N: Well, because it’s trying to get her to do something by manipulating her.

A: Okay.

N: So it's kind of just like, 'If you want to be cool you should do drugs.'

A: So are you comparing doing drugs to letting the amulet take over?

N: I don't know. Some people might but I don't really know much about either.

In addition to her extended exploration of the theme, when asked directly, Nadya was able to identify other elements of the plot, such as the climax of the story, events in the rising action of the story, and some of the conflicts throughout the graphic novel. Nadya also described several of the main characters, including Emily, Navin, Miskit and Leon Redbeard, and highlighted several key points of Emily's personality. She presented an interesting argument that readers learn a great deal about Emily's personality through the amulet. She explained, "Well, the amulet is inside her head; it knows her so it focuses on her weak points. So you can tell what her personality is like from that. Or what it thinks is her weak point. Being selfless I don't think is very weak."

Format. Prior to asking Nadya about separate elements of the graphic novel format, I was interested in learning how she thought the graphic novel format, in general, impacted the telling of the story. I stated, "This is obviously told in a graphic novel format. How do you think the format of this affects the story?" She responded, "You can see more clearly what is happening. I guess 'cause it would be kind of hard to picture all of this in your head I think unless it was really good writing. Well…and umm…there's like transformations in this I guess and you can clearly see those. And like it's easier to imagine talking

animals if there's pictures drawn out." I asked her what elements would be difficult to picture in her head. She replied, "Umm…it would be kind of weird to imagine an amulet like blasting people and talking. And talking trees would be hard to imagine. Same with talking slugs."

I followed this line of questioning by asking if there are particular types of stories that are better told in a graphic novel format. Nadya mused, "Yes. This might sound kind of generic I guess, but superhero comics are way easier to understand and see and visualize if they are in the graphic novel format." I asked, "As opposed to …?" Nadya replied, "Like actual writing in books. Cause there are so many, I don't want to say bizarre, but strange super powers that I guess you couldn't exactly imagine."

Nadya seemed to be aware that graphic novels are a unique format that cannot easily be compared to other formats. In a comment she made about how she figured out the meaning of a uniquely shaped speech balloon, she referenced the rules of graphic novels.

> Nadya: This is like a graphic novel, and there's like a whole different set of rules.
>
> Aimee: Okay, so what is the set of rules?
>
> N: I think the rules is that there are no rules…almost. 'Cause like in regular books it's just like whenever a new character speaks you need a new paragraph and whenever this hap—la de da…but with graphic novels, it's just like whatever works I guess.

A: So how did you figure that out then if there really is no rules?

N: Every graphic novel is different in every aspect pretty much, except for like speech bubbles and panels. There's always like different shapes, speech bubbles are different colors and fonts and stuff.

A: How do you figure it out?

N: By reading graphic novels I guess. You figure out that there are different elements to every book.

A: Okay, but you said it's different in every one, right? So, how would reading them help you?

N: Umm…I could be wrong, but I see graphic novel reading as more entertaining reading. And when every book is the same in like layout style I guess it gets kind of boring if it's mainly pictures. So this adds individuality to every book.

A: Okay, but it sounds like there might be enough similarities that reading more of them helps you to figure it out?

N: Yeah.

Graphic novel elements. I directed Nadya to pick a page from the graphic novel and asked her if she could identify the different parts of the page. She was confused about what I was asking her to do, so I provided further direction and some examples, such as panels. She identified the sound effects and speech bubbles on the page she selected.

Panels. As I had identified panels as an element of the graphic novel format, I asked Nadya to explain the purpose of panels.

Aimee: What are panels used for?

Nadya: Umm…maybe…sometimes it's used for different point of view. Or if there's like a new topic of dialogue or if another person starts talking.

A: So, what do you mean? So point of view…

N: That sometimes it's just like the same thing from different angles.

A: The same…like the same scene?

N: Yeah.

A: …from different angles? So describe…

N: Like…umm…you could be like looking at something from the character's eyes almost like really kind of up close and then there could be this back shot of what's act-…of like seeing every character and what's happening.

A: Okay. And the panels help with that how?

N: Umm…you can see which panels are different.

A: Okay.

N: And…umm…panels can be like different sizes. So I guess to make you do whatever you want with them.

A: Why would…like when might you use different sizes? Or what do the different sizes tell you?

N: Umm…usually the more important panels are bigger in…like broader.

A: Like wider or taller?

N: Both sometimes. Sometimes it's just the whole page. Sometimes there's like half the page.

A: And why does that happen?

N: It kind of draws your attention to it. So you kinda tell it…oh this is important. Like in an essay or something like you bold important words or highlight stuff.

A: Interesting. So the bigger panels…are like highlighting whatever's in the panel? Is that what you're saying?

N: Yeah.

After this discussion about what panels are used for, I drew Nadya's attention to page 120. This page has been described above in my report of the data from both George and James; it shows Emily climbing a cliff through a variety of sizes and shapes of panels. After asking Nadya to describe the page, I asked why she thought the different sizes and shapes of panels may have been used. She replied, "Umm…so we can see the initial predicament…[unintelligible]…and then see what the characters are like thinking and have to decide about it I guess." I probed deeper by asking her why the initial predicament had to be shown in a larger panel. She answered, "I don't think it would be as clear [if it was shown in a smaller panel] 'cause like with a bigger picture you need to expand it more so people can see it just as well." I asked what she meant by "a bigger picture." She said, "If there's a bigger scale in the

distance or you want to make it seem like that then you would have a bigger space to draw that."

I then pointed out to Nadya that there are several pages in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* that do not have any panels at all. I directed her to pages 22 and 23, which show Emily and her group on the outskirts of Kanalis.

Aimee: So why do you think that is?

Nadya: So we can see where they are, I guess, and what it looks like.

A: And that couldn't be done with panels?

N: Umm…I don't think that they could have put as much detail as they did if they added panels.

A: Because the panel limits the details? Or…

N: If it was smaller they would probably have to scrunch it up a lot so they wouldn't have been able to draw as many things.

A: Well, couldn't I have made a big panel with just a border around it?

N: Oh, yeah, but this…I think…with the panel around it makes it feel kind of almost more enclosed and this just feels more open.

A: Okay. And why does this scene need to be more open?

N: Cause it's like showing this vast city and mountain range and waterfall and that's not very containable…I guess.

Page 171 is another page in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* that does not have a panel. The page features Luger towering over the elf prince after he

has given in to the power of the amulet. I asked Nadya about this panel-less page as well.

Aimee: Does the same kind of rule apply to this page?

Nadya: Yeah, cause this guy just turned into this huge monster, that's like, almost legend. And he looks…the elf prince looks almost helpless against him. And there's like this huge storm raging. Yeah…

A: So like you said before…it couldn't be contained?

N: Yeah, it would look almost less intimidating if it was surrounded by a border.

A: Why do you think that is?

N: It's like 'cause then it gives off the impression that it's like trapped in a box. And this way it's like oh…there is like nothing…there is just this giant sky and it's an open plain and stuff.

A: But isn't it sort of trapped on the page? Or does that not matter?

N: Uhh…I guess all things on books are trapped on pages. But this just seems more real almost I guess.

Nadya and I moved from pages without panels to pages with many panels. I asked Nadya to turn to pages 61 through 68, in which Emily and Leon Redbeard are fighting the elves on the rooftops. I asked her to describe the panels. She noted, "The bigger panels are more devoted umm to the actual fighting, then like the small panels are like close-ups on faces." I prompted her to talk about the irregular shapes of the panels. She said, "Umm…I think it makes it

almost more dramatic…I guess…I can't really describe it just…somehow. It also makes it look really cool. It's less precise and more like almost unpredictable. Kind of like the story I guess."

Summary. Throughout her discussion of panels Nadya demonstrated her understanding of their many different roles and how they can impact meaning. She noted that panels could be used to show different points of view and that they could also be used to show importance based on their size. Perhaps more importantly, Nadya also recognized the importance and meaning of a lack of panels. I asked her about several pages without panels, and she remarked that panels could contain their contents, but a lack of panels allows for vastness or for the contents to be uncontained.

Motion lines. In her discussion of the fight scene shown on pages 61 through 68, Nadya described how motion lines were used to convey speed and motion during the fight. She described, "There's like people moving swiftly, so there's like…umm…they make like the lines across the page like showing wind almost, I guess." I asked her to clarify. She continued, "To show umm…on page 63…there's that elf charging Emily and like to show how fast he is moving they make it seem like he's like slicing through the wind almost….He's like going really fast."

Gutters. I began our discussion of gutters by asking Nadya what gutters are used for; she responded, "Showing the space…showing which panels are different from each other and like making it clear I guess…what…which panel is

which so you don't…" I then inquired, "What happens in the gutters?" Nadya replied, "Nothing." I asked her, "How do you know?" She said, "Because I don't see anything in them."

In order to discuss the role of gutters further, I directed Nadya's attention to page 115. On this page, assisted by Balan, Navin and a slug-like warrior crawl up the trash chute of the robot house in order to take back the house from the elves. Navin is clearly shown crawling up the trash chute, but the slug is not; he is only shown emerging from the trash chute with the assistance of Navin. I asked Nadya to describe what was happening in each panel and pushed her to identify what was not shown in the panels. I pushed her thinking further by asking her where the events that are not shown might be happening. I asked, "So what is happening in the gutters?" She replied, "I guess if there was an image there it would probably be the slug." I questioned further, "The slug doing what?" She answered, "Climbing up the garbage chute with Navin." I probed further and asked, "So what happens in the gutter?" Nadya replied, "The things that aren't shown."

I asked Nadya to select another page from the graphic novel so that we could continue our discussion of gutters. She chose page 168, which shows the elf prince fighting Luger in the final battle of the book. We moved from panel to panel, discussing the actions in each panel and what actions were occurring in the gutters. In this extended discussion Nadya indicated that she understood the

function of gutters. However, I continued the discussion by asking her how she filled in the “blanks” of the gutters.

Aimee: So a lot of times gutters…a lot of things happen in the gutters, which we’re not shown. But you as a reader are filling in those blanks without really even knowing it. Have you ever thought about it that way?

Nadya: Not really. I just thought that they were spaces.

A: But you’re obviously filling in the meaning right?

N: It’s kind of natural like if there is like a letter out of place in a word your brain automatically corrects it. So it’s kind of an autopilot kind of thing. And it’s rationalizing. So if he pulls him out of the chute that must mean he went up the chute.

A: Okay…so it’s natural, it’s autopilot. Okay. So it just happens as you’re reading? Why do you think…so why not show everything then?

N: It would take up way too much space. I think that it would be kind of boring also.

A: Why?

N: ‘Cause there would be…graphic novels are kind of about a brain break I guess. It’s like looking at pictures more than reading I guess. And if there’s like every bit filled with dialogue and stuff it would be kind of boring and defeat the purpose.

A: Okay, but how is it a brain break if you are constantly having to fill in what’s in the gutters?

N: Umm…I don't think that you are consciously doing that like concentrating I think that it's just automatic. 'Cause like most people will just be like, what's one plus one and they'll just automatically say two 'cause…

I then asked Nadya if she could compare the use of gutters or what happens in gutters to anything else. She mused, "Umm…I don't know…maybe sometimes without even meaning to authors do that like…I am not quoting, but maybe in a *Harry Potter* book it will say like, 'Harry shouted a spell,' which you would just think that he raised his wand to do that even though it might not say that." I clarified, "So the author may not provide descriptions of all the…" She interrupted with, "Yeah or they might at first, but then if they have done so throughout a couple of books they might be assumed after awhile." I questioned, "And how does that compare to gutters?" Nadya stated, "Umm…there's like this gap that is usually filled by…I don't want to say common sense because that sounds conceited but…like…autopilot. It's called like your fast brain. You're like thinking stuff through in a split second." I asked her to talk further about the "fast brain." She continued, "Fast brain is what you immediately think. Slow brain is like you think it through and stuff. We learned this in math."

Based on her comment about the fast brain, I asked Nadya, "So is there a way that like panels and gutters are set up that allows you to use your fast brain?" She responded, "Yeah…umm…I guess like they are just the stuff that you automatically assume. Like if it shows them like I guess stumbling along and then

like in front of this wide valley you say, 'Oh, well they must have walked there not like teleported.'" In order to clarify, I said, "I hear you saying that it depends on what is happening in the panel before and after." She nodded. I continued, "And then you use your fast brain to fill in that missing stuff?" Nadya agreed.

In addition to her recognition of gutters as places of unseen information, Nadya indicated an understanding of gutters as another source of information. I asked Nadya to look at pages 122 – 124, which contain the story of the elf king as told in a flashback by Leon Redbeard. Page 122 does not have any panels, but pages 123 and 124 have a different style of panel separated by black gutters. Nadya reported, "The panels aren't really panels, but you can tell they're separate because there's like this thick black line in between them." I inquired, "What do the thick, black lines tell us?" She said, "Maybe from the past, I guess. Because this part it's the only time I remember seeing it and it's in flashback."

Summary. It is interesting to note that Nadya used several reading strategies in order to understand and explain the role of gutters. She employed a text-to-text connection when she "quoted" from *Harry Potter* in order to demonstrate how the author may not always provide all the details in writing. However, because Nadya remarked on how the two different formats handled things similarly, this kind of connection may be better understood as a format-to-format connection, rather than as a more common content-to-content connection. Nadya also made a connection to the idea of the fast brain, which she learned in

her math class. This idea, which she also called autopilot, helped her to explain how graphic novel readers fill in the gutters.

Sound effects. I directed Nadya to look at page 48, where the sound effect "choom!!!" is used as the cannon hits the hospital. I asked Nadya why she thought that invented sound effects were used. She replied, "I think…umm…they can be more realistic almost than like if you say bang for like a bomb, I don't think that exactly describes what it sounds like." I asked her to talk more about her statement. She continued, "Umm…like…if you like…we read this thing in English and it was just like…it described umm a wrestling…a wrestling bell as bong, bong, but I don't think that's really accurate…more like ding or something or clang maybe." I asked if she knew what words that sound like sounds are called. She quickly replied, "Onomatopoeia." I clarified my understanding of her statement that, even if a word was made up, it could still be onomatopoetic. She agreed that my summary was correct.

Nadya then pointed out that the amulet, when it is "firing," has a sound associated with it as well. The sound effect "szrak" is paired with the amulet throughout the book. Nadya reported that she remembered the sound being used in the first book in the *Amulet* series also.

I then drew Nadya's attention to page 143; the last three panels of this page show Emily falling off a cliff, and each panel features a sound effect. I briefly summarized the events on the page for Nadya.

Aimee: In that last panel it says ‘LATCH!’ Why?

Nadya: Umm…to like show how tightly she’s gripping on…she’s like latched onto it ‘cause it’s the thing that is saving her life.

Aimee: Okay, but is that a sound effect?

Nadya: Not really. It’s…umm…an action I guess. Like before it says “crumble,” which rocks, when they crumble, they don’t like say crumble or it doesn’t sound like crumble. It’s showing what is happening I guess.

A: But isn’t the first in that three part, the “krak”…

N: Crack.

A: …is that a sound effect or an action?

N: That’s a sound effect. Or it could be both I guess, but the way it’s spelled suggests a sound effect.

A: Okay. So all three of those look the same, don’t they?

N: Yeah.

A: So how can you tell the difference between…

N: I guess you have to like leave it up to your brain cause like you know “krak” could be a sound. But “crumble” is not a sound and neither is “latch.” So I guess that you automatically know I guess.

A: So why include it?

N: Maybe to like enunciate what is happening. So…like…to make it more dramatic almost.

A: By saying “latch”?

N: Yeah.

A: How's it make it more dramatic?

N: Like you…she's like holding on by her fingertips and she is holding on as hard as she can.

A: And just the image doesn't show that?

N: Not really. 'Cause it could be her like just kind of gently holding on, but now it's just like rigid holding on for dear life then.

Summary. Nadya used her knowledge of literary devices, specifically onomatopoeia, to strengthen her understanding of sound effects in the graphic novel format. She was able to provide a logical explanation of why some of the sound effects are not real words and why some used invented spelling. In her exploration of this aspect, she made a connection with a text she read recently in her English class. Finally, Nadya presented a coherent argument for the use of some "sound effects," such as "latch," that are not really sound effects.

Speech balloons. I asked Nadya to turn to page 3 and directed her attention to the top right panel. The panel shows glowing eyes peeking out from a slit in a door. The speech balloon emitting from the door is wavy, as is the font of the words. I asked Nadya to explain why the speech balloon was different. She explained, "I guess he's like a creepy, ghoulish person and you can't really see him. I guess his voice might be whispery or cracky…like 'Who goes there?' [Nadya produces this line in a low, whispery voice] or something like that." I asked, "How do you know that?" She answered, "Uhh…like it's all wiggly and

stuff which suggests maybe a trembling voice." Nadya used her knowledge of the graphic novel convention of typography in order to come to the conclusion that the voice presented in this "wiggly" font should be read or heard differently than the other voices on the page.

Summary

Nadya was a confident reader who was able to articulate many of her thoughts and actions while reading. She does not prefer reading graphic novels and considers them a "brain break" She also does not think they should be used in school for assigned activities. However, she is familiar and comfortable with the format and was able to apply this knowledge to explain how some of the elements of a graphic novel function.

Throughout her think-aloud, her retrospective think-aloud, and the *Amulet*-specific questions, Nadya referred to and relied upon information from all modalities to make meaning. This seems to indicate that she was comfortable synthesizing information from both modalities in her reading and meaning making. Additionally, seventeen of her comments were multifaceted, which is further indication of her ability to synthesize information from multiple sources, as well as her ability to apply reading strategies and other techniques as needed in order to make meaning.

Nadya's application of reading strategies and story knowledge was evident in her think-aloud and retrospective think-aloud. She demonstrated the use of reading strategies 10 times in her think-aloud, relying primarily upon inferences,

including predictions, to make meaning. However, she also used her knowledge of graphic novel conventions to make meaning. When asked to label the different elements of a graphic novel, Nadya was not able to identify many of them by name. However, in most cases, she could explain the "job" of these different parts. Nadya's extensive and varied reading history was evident in the story knowledge that she brought to her understanding of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. She displayed a strong sense of the type of story it was, labeling it as an action and adventure story, and was confident in her understanding of how these types of stories worked.

During the *Amulet*-specific questions, Nadya continued to demonstrate her ability to access information from both modalities. She also continued her use of reading strategies, including making references to other texts and connections to her own life, in order to understand and explain graphic novel conventions and their uses in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. It is interesting to note that, even though Nadya recognized that the "rules" of graphic novels are ever changing, that she appeared to understand many of these rules and was able to apply her understanding to her meaning making process with a graphic novel.

Mallory

Mallory was an 8th-grader who was poised beyond her years. She was an avid reader and was very thoughtful in her responses to all the questions I asked of her regarding the graphic novels.

Interview

She reported that she really enjoys writing and is considering becoming an English teacher. When asked what she chooses to read for fun, she quickly exclaimed "dystopias," but she remarked that she often reads realistic fiction as well. She expressed frustration with often having more books that she wants to read than she has time for. She often had trouble balancing reading books for school and for pleasure, with the schoolbooks taking precedence. She was well versed in current popular young adult literature and also knowledgeable about "classics" such as *Lord of the Rings*. She was able to draw many parallels from the graphic novel to both *Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars*.

Mallory does not usually read graphic novels, although she has read the entire *Bone* series, which is over 800 pages long. She was able to use this experience in her reading of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. She often referred to *Bone,* especially when similarities occurred to her. She liked graphic novels, but prefered texts in a "traditional" format (not graphic novel) because she liked to construct the images in her head. She said, "I don't know why, I just…I have a thing for…umm…the use of sort of description in words rather than in pictures. I like that. I sort of like to do that too, like I am not hugely visually artistic whereas I love to describe things. So I think it's a personal preference that I just like the traditional literature better."

During the interview, I asked Mallory if she thought that graphic novels offer a different experience from other types of books. She responded, "Yeah, I

do, definitely. It gives you like a very…vivid, but preexisting mental image. It leaves some room imagination of like your own mental images, but I think less so than other things."

When asked whether she thought reading a graphic novel is "real" reading, she responded:

> I don't know…I mean…I think it depends on each person's personal preference. But if you…if somebody likes graphic novels more than they like regular reading than…I don't know…I mean, if that's how they like to read then that's probably fine. I don't think…like…how can we like…like it's difficult to define 'real' reading. I mean, maybe it's less challenging. I don't know. I think in some ways it's comparing apples and oranges because they are not the same…so…there's definitely less text, but not necessarily less little things to catch. So…I don't know…I think it depends from person to person.

I then inquired if Mallory thought graphic novels should be taught in school. She replied, "I don't think it would be necessarily a bad thing to do it. But, I mean, I don't think it's like totally, definitely yes. I think…I mean…like…sure, it's fine with me." As her answer was not definitive, I provided an example of how graphic novels might be used in school as one choice for literature circles. She paused before replying:

> I could for formatting reasons, but not necessarily for…I mean…I think that graphic novels might not necessarily belong in an English literature

class because you're trying to find…trying to learn about classical reading. Eer…not classical necessarily, but traditional reading, so…but…generally very specifically so then maybe a graphic novel would not be right for that kind of class. But…because…I don't know…I just…like…there are definitely things to catch, but they are definitely more art more visual things rather than like things you would read. Like there aren't that many things to catch as far as text.

Mallory had difficulty imagining the use of graphic novels in an English literature course. I asked her if she could see graphic novels used in other courses, besides English. She said, "Maybe…like…umm…I don't know…ahhh…maybe history if it was like…there are some historical fiction graphic novels. I think it could exist in other classes. I am just not entirely sure like which ones."

Think-Aloud

Over the course of about 35 minutes, Mallory read *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* and completed the think-aloud. She made 63 comments during her think-aloud. A majority (42) of her comments displayed her use of different reading strategies to question and talk to the text.

Modalities. In her think-aloud, Mallory appeared to favor the visual modality, as she referenced information that was only available in the images 28 times. She commented on information only in the text 18 times and information available in both modalities 13 times.

Visual. Twenty-eight of Mallory's comments referred to information presented visually. On page 6 Mallory commented, "The art around the eyes is really cool because you can tell they are glowing a bit." She was referring to the eyes of the elves. All of the elves are drawn with large, pupil-less white eyes. Instead of a pupil there is a vertical black line that bisects the middle of each eye. The art around the eyes does make them appear to glow. Mallory noted this visual element in her comment. It was also coded as a response statement because she evaluated the art by stating that it is "cool," although it may also have helped her to understand the character of the elves.

Text. Mallory referred to information from the written text in 18 of her comments. On page 47, Luger is preparing to use a cannon on the hospital in order to attack Emily. Trellis, the elf prince, says to Luger, "What about the patients? They have no part in this." Luger replies, "Sometimes sacrifices must be made for the greater good." Mallory commented, "It seems that the prince of the elves has some sort of conscience." The information Mallory commented on is only available in the written text; Mallory used that information to make an inference, regarding a character attribute, that the elf prince has a conscience because he is showing concern for the innocent patients in the hospital.

Both. On pages 116 and 117, Navin and a slug-like warrior have snuck back into the robot house via the trash chute in order to reclaim it from the elves. Navin and his companion are making their way up the stairs in order to restart the robots. As Navin is busy working with the equipment, an elf comes up behind

him. This information is shown in both the images and the text. Mallory commented, “The elves are on board still.” She integrated information from both the visual and the written in order to determine the presence of the elf.

Summary. Mallory’s comments indicated her ability to access information from the visual, the written text, and from both modalities in order to make meaning with the text. It is important to note that she also demonstrated her use of reading strategies in both modalities.

Reading strategies. Forty-two of Mallory’s comments exhibited the use of some reading strategy. She often used the strategy of questioning the text. She also answered her own questions in several instances. For example, on pages 90 and 91, Leon instructs Emily to find a weapon. She declines the offer of Leon’s sword and asks, “How about this walking stick?” Mallory asked of the text, “Does she really think that she can fight the elf king/army with a walking stick?” On page 92, Leon answers Emily’s question with, “Very well. It should be adequate for our purposes.” Mallory’s next comment was, “Guess so.” In this instance, Mallory asked a question of the graphic novel and, when she received the answer, a page later she answered her own question. This is an example of Mallory’s interaction with the text. Many of her comments indicated that she was in a constant “discussion” or interaction with the text, in which she asked questions of it and sought answers. She also made seven predictions, which she looked to confirm or deny as she continued to read.

Graphic novel conventions. There were two instances in her think-aloud when Mallory referred to a convention of the graphic novel. Immediately following the scene described above, when Emily selects her walking stick as her weapon, Leon begins to show her how to use the power of the amulet and how to focus its energy through her walking stick. After many tries and failures, Emily is finally figuring out how to do this. As she does, the amulet activates and begins talking with her. On pages 106 and 107, the amulet is talking with Emily in her head, and Emily is using the power of the amulet to lift increasingly larger items, including the large log upon which Leon Redbeard is standing. In two panels, Leon has a speech bubble emitting from his mouth, but the speech bubble is filled with squiggles and no words (although in one, an exclamation point is discernable). Mallory commented, "Why can't she hear anything the fox is saying?" This is another example of Mallory questioning the text. The conventions of the format allowed her to recognize that Emily cannot understand Leon because no words appear in the speech bubble.

The second time Mallory referred to a convention in her comment, she paired it with another reading strategy, that of making a text-to-text connection. The climax of the book occurs when Emily and Leon engage in a battle with the elves. Luger loses control to his amulet and morphs into a terrifying giant, who forces Emily and Leon off a cliff. Luckily, the house robot, piloted by Navin, is there to catch them. Navin, controlling the house robot, continues the fight with Luger while Emily recovers. The house robot is being pummeled and has lost

both of its arms. Emily musters her strength and uses the power of the amulet to bring the house back together in order to defeat Luger, forcing him over the edge of the cliff. This expenditure of energy is so taxing that Emily faints. Pages 202 through 205 show Emily fainting. The four pages are from Emily's perspective. Page 202 is without panels. The top third shows an image of Navin and Cogsley looking concerned. Navin says, "Don't worry! We'll go get help!" The image is in the shape of a flattened oval, or what the scene might look like from the perspective of an eye that is closing. The middle of the page shows a slightly modified image of Navin and Cogsley, but less of them is shown, as if the eye is closing. The bottom third of the page shows just a slit of light, as if the eye is almost shut. Pages 203 and 204 are completely black. The reverse happens on page 205, with just a sliver of the scene (in this case the inside of a room) being shown, then gradually revealed as the eye opens further.

Mallory made the comment, "It's the same thing. It's from the perspective of the main character when the lights kind of go out." Several things are indicated by this comment. First, Mallory recognized that the panels on these pages are from Emily's perspective. Second, she realized that the "lights go out" when Emily faints. Finally, she made a text-to-text connection to *Sidekicks*, as a similar scene, using the same conventions, occurs when one of the characters is knocked out. This serves as an example of how graphic novel conventions can convey meaning and how reading graphic novels can "teach" one how to read other graphic novels, just as reading a traditional novel "teaches" one how to

read others. Mallory was able to apply her experience with a different graphic novel, which used the same convention, to her understanding of these pages of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse.*

Summary. Mallory's think-aloud was punctuated with demonstrations of her use of reading strategies. She did not hesitate to question the text throughout her think-aloud and, perhaps more importantly, she continuously sought the answers to the questions she posed to the text. This demonstrated how she used questions to monitor her comprehension and to refine, as needed, her predictions. Additionally, Mallory applied reading strategies to information in both modalities.

Retrospective Think-Aloud

Mallory's think-aloud was filled with demonstrations of reading strategies that she used to make meaning with *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. In her retrospective think-aloud, she did not discuss these reading strategies. Instead she spent a great deal of her retrospection exhibiting her story knowledge and discussing several text-to-text connections that she made in her reading, particularly to *Lord of the Rings*. She also referred to how the visual, the written text, and the graphic novel conventions helped her to understand the story.

Modalities. In her retrospective think-aloud, Mallory referred to information from both the visual and text modalities in order to explain her thinking and meaning making process.

On page 159, Emily and Leon Redbeard are engaged in a battle with Luger, who has allowed his stone to take control and has morphed into a giant. In her think-aloud, Mallory noted that the color of the stones has changed, and she wonders about the reason for that.

Aimee: You remark that the light from the stone has changed from pink to blue and you wonder if it is a bad thing.

Mallory: Maybe it is the light from his stone that is blue on 159. Yeah, I think it is the light from the other stone that causes this blue green color. I think that it just represents the difference between them and it might represent like a…like a personalization of each…like of how each stone is different…but it could…and how each relationship between stone and stonekeeper is different. But it might also just be a tool so that you can like see which…oh wait no…on 161…the light that is surrounding her does turn green.

A: And that continues on 162.

M: Yeah and so I think that does mean that the stone is allowing itself to become evil or something or she is allowing it to become unstable…something like that.

A: Okay. So the change in the stone's color that it is projecting may indicate that it is changing from good to evil?

M: Perhaps, yes.

Although there was some initial confusion regarding whether the stone's color is actually changing, Mallory did eventually identify that the color of the stone changed and she provided a feasible explanation for this. Mallory was tuned into the color of the images, and used this information to add to her initial understanding of the events in the story.

During her think-aloud, on pages 100 and 101, Mallory hypothesized that the amulet has some heat attached to it. I asked her how she came to this conclusion during her retrospective think-aloud. Emily is learning to use the power of the amulet during these pages.

> Aimee: You remark that…or speculate that the amulet must have some sort of heat connected with it. What made you think that or feel that?
>
> Mallory: Oh, umm. It said, 'infuse the staff with the power of the stone. It will help you focus the energy. But it'll burn it like the seeds.' So like obviously there is some sort of connection…if the amulet is able to burn things it probably has some sort of heat because generally when you are burning something it uses heat. Heat is necessary to do it.
>
> A: And is there any way the amulet looks or something that implies heat or…
>
> M: Umm…it's kind of a warm color but I didn't really think about it until I heard that it could burn things.

Mallory appeared to get this information exclusively from the text, as she quoted it at some length. When she was asked directly about the image of the

amulet, she conceded that the color that surrounds it could be considered warm, but also noted that she had not recognized this during her reading, or not until she read that it could burn things.

During her think-aloud, on pages 66 and 67, Mallory remarked that the amulet was not a good thing. I asked her why she said that, and she responded with:

> Umm…well…I think it was because she sort of like…well…first of all it turned her eyes red and red eyes are usually like a sign of not good things. And also, he said, 'okay,' like on this other page…umm…he says, 'I can use the stone. But what if you can't control it? What if you hit Leon by accident?' And she says, 'I can do this.' 'Okay, but you have to be careful.' So obviously it has some potential for not being controlled. And also when she like starts to like use the power, Leon says, 'Oh, no,' like in like something bad is going to happen.

I asked Mallory to explain why red eyes are not a "good thing." She elaborated, "Well…usually…I don't actually know, but just in a lot of…umm…like literature and movies and stuff when they want someone to look evil they give them red eyes. I think it has become like a signal."

Mallory's explanation of why she thought the amulet was not a good thing was based on information from both modalities. She paired the visual information of Emily's red eyes with parts of the text to come to the conclusion that the amulet was likely not entirely good. In her explanation, she also exhibited the use

of the reading strategies of inference and story knowledge. She inferred that, if Emily is warned to be careful with the amulet, there is potential danger. Mallory also applied her experience with red eyes in other texts, including movies, to determine that red eyes are generally not a signal of something good.

Summary. In her retrospective think-aloud, Mallory continued to demonstrate her ability to access information from both modalities. She, unlike some of the other participants, was particularly tuned into the colors in the images. She made connections between the text and other texts in order to understand the potential meaning behind the changes in color, particularly when Emily's eyes turn red.

Reading strategies. Although her use of reading strategies was not as prolific as their indicated use in her think-aloud, Mallory still referred to several reading strategies during her retrospective think-aloud.

Graphic novel conventions. A few pages after the scene above, on pages 106 and 107, Emily is starting to gain some control over the power of the amulet and the walking stick she has decided to use as a weapon. She becomes extremely focused on what she is doing and struggles to maintain control of the amulet. Emily is not aware of her surroundings, and, when Leon tries to talk to her, she either cannot hear him or ignores him. Mallory commented on this during her think-aloud.

> Aimee: You say, why can't she hear anything the fox is saying? How do you know that she can't hear anything the fox is saying?

Mallory: Well, the fox is…he has a speech bubble, but there aren't any actual words coming out; like it is just squiggles. So generally that means that it is too quiet or just to signify that he is saying something but she can't hear him. So I think that I just said that because of the speech bubble.

Mallory succinctly described what is happening with the fox and his speech balloon. She recognized that the convention of the speech balloon indicates a sound or that something is being said. She also identified that the squiggles within the speech balloon cannot be read and that, in general, this means inaudible speech. She concluded that, even though the fox is talking, he cannot be heard or understood because there are no discernable words in the speech balloon.

Text-to-text connection. Several times during her think-aloud, Mallory referred to other texts, including *Lord of the Rings*. I asked her what she saw as some of the parallels between *Lord of the Rings* and *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. She replied, "Oh…that was along with the…uhh…necklace and there was like something on it. It's…it's…and one person has to bear it and another person is sort of…that she travels with is kind of wary of it…and then there's sort of a third like renegade type person who…umm…sort of knows more about it than she does. So I just felt like that had some connection." I asked if Mallory thought this was a common storyline. She quickly replied, "Yeah, I do." I then asked her to describe the storyline. She described it as, "Umm…probably like the hero story

or something cause there's like an obvious hero an obvious more like a villain like a power that she has to kinda fight and then like a comic relief…so…" Mallory's knowledge of this familiar storyline may have helped her to understand *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* and to make predictions about story events and character actions.

Summary. Mallory's text-to-text connection between *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* and *Lord of the Rings* went far beyond similarities between events in the two texts. Mallory made a connection between characters, or character tropes, in the two books. She also demonstrated her ability to recognize the storyline as common and was knowledgeable of some of the key elements of these storylines, such as the role that power often plays in these stories.

Amulet-Specific Questions

Mallory was able to provide an accurate and detailed summary of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. Her summary followed a chronological order and included little details from the story, as well as big-picture events and themes.

Story elements. Mallory labeled *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* as an action-adventure story. I asked her if she could identify the theme. She responded, "Kind of a story of courage…I guess…and family in some ways, but I don't know if that theme will carry on throughout the rest of the series because it's definitely there in this book, but not necessarily…it might not be in the rest of them, but so like courage and family."

Mallory was able to provide examples of elements of the story's plot, such as rising action and the climax. She indicated that Emily's training and her climbing of the mountain to retrieve the gadoba fruit are instances of rising action. She labeled the battle with the giant elf as the climax of the story. The resolution follows this battle ,when Emily and Navin defeat the giant elf and their mother wakes.

Format. Before transitioning to specific elements of the graphic novel format, I asked Mallory some broader questions about format. I inquired how the graphic novel format affected the story of *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. She replied, "I think it allows the story to have…kind of a very…it…it has a very kind of visual like…it allows it to have like fun visual elements in it. And also…umm…kind of like lets it be a story that doesn't require a whole lot of text or dialogue. Like you can kind of know what's going on without a lot of words."

I then asked, "Do you think that there are some stories that are better suited for graphic novels than others?" Mallory answered, "I think yeah…I think any story can be a graphic novel, but I think with the umm…this has a very…like a lot of little visual things, like I said, and I think a story that doesn't have as much…it's not as much about like the visual elements would be…not necessarily not as well-suited for a graphic novel like writing as a graphic novel, it just might not be as fun to read."

After Mallory referred to visual elements in her answer above, I asked her to explain what she meant. She explained, "Umm…well…like the energy that

comes from the amulet and the glowing eyes. The glowing eyes, I think, would be kind of hard to capture in words…like…I mean you could say like their eyes were glowing, but I mean there could be ways to say that, but it's like in the graphic novel format it's kind of subtle and it's not like overtly stated it just is…sort of…I think like little things like that…"

Graphic novel elements. After Mallory had selected a random page from the graphic novel, I asked her if she could name the parts of the page. She named the following: panels, speech bubbles, illustrations, page numbers, and "the dividing things between the panels" (gutters).

Panels. I asked Mallory to explain what panels are used for.

Mallory: I think they're used for point of view and just sort of like being able to show different like parts of the story itself. And you can like show action that's moving quickly and like jumping from like different like not necessarily scenes, but parts of a scene.

Aimee: How is that done?

M: Well, you can sort of like jump sort of…you can get a sense of like action and abruptness by like going really abruptly from like one point of view to another and like sort of making it…umm…jump around a little bit…like the view of the reader.

A: How does that happen abruptly?

M: Well…I mean…I think like when if you start out from one distinct point of view and then you sort of move slowly like to an opposite point of view

it's less abrupt and when you like jump to that opposite point of view it can give a sense of just kind of like…like a sort of bumpy ride…kind of…"

I directed Mallory's attention to pages 22 and 23. These are the panel-less pages that show Emily and her group, in the house robot, encountering Kanalis for the first time. I asked Mallory why she thought this page did not have any panels. She answered, "I think it's to show a wide perspective and also to be able to have a full…kind of like…a full color image, it sort of gives it a very like vibrant feel I think. And kind of an unlimited feel, like it's not limited by the panels, it's just like there and it is. More than like with a panel you get a very specific point of view, with this you just get like, this is the city. It's just kind of there."

I pointed out to Mallory that the illustrator could have placed a border around the image on pages 22 and 23 and made one major panel. She disagreed, saying, "Yeah, but I think that the reason that they didn't do that is because when it doesn't have the border it gives the sense of like…not necessarily infinity, but that it is not…it is huge. It is not able to be contained within these sort of layout type design borders. So even though it doesn't effect the story it still…it…I think that psychologically it kind of gives this like feel of not being bound."

I asked Mallory if her reasoning applied to page 171 as well. Page 171 shows Luger, in giant form, towering over the elf prince. Mallory agreed, stating, "Yeah, because they are trying to show this giant thing and it's sort of…it's….like even in the story it's supposed to be like not…like uncontrollable. So it gives it

this like sort of like humongous, uncontrollable feel. I think it's the same thought applying again here."

I turned to page 41, which shows Dr. Weston inset into the panel as he explains the gadoba fruit. I asked Mallory to talk about the layout and what it might indicate. She said, "Well, I think it's sort of like he's not in the panel, so he's also kind of not in that scene, he's not a part…like he's just not like popping out of this tree. He is sort of set apart from the scene, like that particular scene, but he's still talking. And otherwise it's hard to represent that it's him that's talking. So I think that's just why they have that little guy in the corner." For clarification, I asked if the gadoba fruits were in the room. Mallory quickly replied, "No and I think that's represented because of this clear line between the image of him and the image of the gadoba fruit." I inquired further, asking, "Why show that image?" Mallory stated, "I think they showed it because they are talking about it and it sort of gives a context in the future when you do see the gadoba fruit you're going to know…hey, that's that fruit."

In order to discuss another type of panel layout, I drew Mallory's attention to the panels on pages 61 through 68. The rooftop battle between Emily and Leon Redbeard and the elves is displayed on these pages. I asked Mallory to describe the panels on these pages. She said, "They're more like…they're not straight. The lines aren't straight. I think that's to show like action and like kind of mania in some ways. It's not like…like it's very action filled. It's all like going crazy and so even the layout goes kind of crazy. So it's like…I think it's just to

represent this action and also to like…and umm…movement kind of…cause the scene…cause the actions are jumbled together and so are the panels." I followed up and asked if, as a reader, she felt that mania. She replied, "I think I do."

Summary. In this discussion of the panels, Mallory displayed her understanding of some of the different roles that panels play, as well as some of the different meanings indicated by panels. She noted that the shape of the panel can convey a feeling—in this case, mania. She also explored the idea of panels as a means of limiting a scene, so that when panels are removed, a particular scene can appear infinite. Mallory was also conscious of the use of panels as a means of showing different perspectives or changing perspectives.

Gutters. In her labeling of the parts of a graphic novel page, Mallory identified the gutters, but referred to them as "dividers." I informed her that they are called gutters and then asked her what they are used for. She responded, "I think they're used to contain the umm panels and show the breaks between the panels because if they're just kind of like smushed together it's hard to see that really thin black line. So it just…it makes it easier for you to be like oh this is a panel this is a panel this is a panel. Like you can tell that each panel is separate from one another."

I then posed the following question, "What happens in the gutters?" Mallory answered, "Umm…not a whole lot, but sometimes they like they're slanted to show action and sometimes there's like with that…ahh…with the doctor popping out and being in them. I think they just…they're not…generally

speaking not much happens, but occasionally they are used as a tool to show certain elements of the story."

I asked Mallory to look at page 115 and to talk through what is happening, panel by panel, as Navin and the slug-like warrior sneak into the robot house via the garbage chute. Mallory provided a detailed description of what is happening in each of the panels. I asked her if she could identify where or when the slug-like warrior is climbing up the chute. She did not indicate that this is happening in the gutters, but rather made an interesting point that the slug character is only shown when he is with Navin, who is a main character.

I pushed Mallory further on where the action might be occurring within the format of the graphic novel. I questioned, "Could we say that that action, the climbing, happens in the gutters?" Mallory replied, "You could, yeah." I asked her what she thought of that idea. She said, "It's kind of interesting. That that's like the buffer of the act—like…that it's like the connection…like the transition of the action as well as the…the…(sigh)…sort of the change or the transition from scene to scene."

Mallory and I then flipped to pages 118 and 119 to continue the discussion and exploration of panels.

Aimee: How do you know what is happening in the gutters?

Mallory: Umm…you can sort of infer it, I guess. Because they're in one place and then they're in another so they must have somehow moved to get there.

A: And as you're reading, do you feel like you are making those inferences?

M: I think that they are sort of instant, like instantaneous. As soon as you know what happens in the next you like…umm…it's just sort of like, clearly they must've moved…so…

A: Is there something about the way graphic novels are laid out that allows it to be kind of instantaneous?

M: Umm…maybe the way that one panel just leads into another. I'm not really sure. That's a good question. I don't know.

A: Can you compare the use of gutters or what happens in gutters to anything else?

M: Well, sometimes, like in a TV show it will fade to black and then something else like you'll when you come back it's not exactly the same. So you just have to kind of infer what's happened in that black or like during that commercial or something.

In her examination of pages 122 – 124, which show the story of the elf king through Leon's storytelling and a flashback, Mallory noted that the color of the gutters is different. She stated, "I notice that the dividers between panels are black rather than white, which is different. And there's no borders or anything, but I think again it just has to do with the flashback."

Summary. Mallory struggled to describe, in words, exactly what happens in gutters. However, she indicated her understanding of the concept through what

I would consider a format-to-format connection. She compared what happens in gutters to fade-outs in television shows. This comparison revealed that Mallory understood the workings of gutters. Although she was not sure how the layout of graphic novels leads the reader to instantaneously fill in the gutters, she did reference the idea of context by suggesting that what happens in one panel "leads into another."

Sound effects. While on page 118, I asked Mallory if she could identify the sound effects. She immediately read, "SPAK! SZT! SZT! SZRAK!" She then went on to explain, "So all the letters that are sort of not in a speech bubble and are written in this sort of like more…they usually have an exclamation mark and they're in this very different writing. And generally it's always the same like writing for every sound effect and every…all the words in speech bubbles in every comic book…not comic book, graphic novel. But comic books too, I guess."

I asked if any of the sound effects she read were real words, and she answered, "No." I then asked, "So why do you think they made up sound effects?" She responded, "Umm…I think part of it is being able to specify that these aren't like part of the dialogue. Because you don't generally say like "spak," like it's not something you usually say."

When Mallory came to a sound effect in her reading, she reported that, "I sort of read them. But also like because they are kind of onomatopoeias, even though they're not technically words, I sort of hear them at the same time. So I

like see them and when I read them it's not like I read sp—ak. I just kind of like hear it and read it at the same time."

I then asked Mallory to look at the sound effects used on page 143 as Emily falls off the cliff and catches herself. Mallory immediately pointed out, "But some of these sound effects are real words." I asked Mallory to identify the three sound effects. She said:

> Well, its "krak," except it's not spelled like c-r-a-c-k. It's spelled more like it would sound. And then "crumble" though…I mean crumble is kind of an onomatopoeia, but not really. And "latch" is not. So, I actually think I noticed that a little bit, just like, not had a fully lucid thought about it. But just kind of like it stuck a little. And just why "latch"? It's not a sound effect. Like you can see that that's what happening, but I mean if you don't even have it there like you wouldn't really need it. I don't know…I feel like in some ways it detracts from the story, both the "crumble" and the "latch" because…I think because they are real words it like seems kind of pointless cause you know what's happening when the rocks are crumbling and when her hand is like going up. Like the "krak" like not so much like it doesn't take away from it to have it there, but the other two I think.

My next question to Mallory was, "So why do you think they might have included 'latch'?" She responded, "I think to show that her hand is just not there, it like moved there. 'Cause there are like little motion lines, but they're not like super obvious. But I think it's still sort of clear that if her hand is not on the cliff in

the first panel, then in the gutter it must have latched on. But I think probably to just give a sense of what's going on. But I just feel like it's a little redundant."

Summary. Mallory recognized the onomatopoetic quality of the sound effects and accounted for the invented spelling through this literary device. She expressed that she struggled when real words, such as "crumble" and "latch," were used in the place of sound effects. She recognized that these were not "sound effects" because they are not sounds, and she felt like they took away from her reading. However, she was able to provide a possible reason for the inclusion of "latch," as it emphasized that Emily had just latched onto the rock in order to save herself from falling.

Speech balloons. I turned Mallory's attention to page 3 and asked her to point out the speech balloon that was different from the others. She immediately pointed out the speech balloon in the upper right hand corner and said, "It's the one where the balloon around it's sort of wiggly. I think it just has to do with the voice, like generally it represents kind of like ahh…I don't know…I feel like more a raspy voice. That's just me, but like they use that in *Bone* too like some characters have that kind of wobbly speech bubble." Again, Mallory demonstrated the use of a reading strategy, a text-to-text connection—more specifically, a format-to-format connection, to *Bone*—in order to make meaning with different styles of speech balloon.

Summary

Mallory was a well-read 8th grader, who is thoughtful about her reading and her thinking about reading. She was a strategic reader, as evidenced through her utilization of a number of reading strategies in her think-aloud. She appeared to view the graphic novel as something she could interact with, as she often questioned the text and even talked back to it. It is likely that these are strategies Mallory uses when reading texts in other formats, as she seemed practiced and comfortable with their use. She often employed the strategy of applying story knowledge developed over her years as an avid reader. She was familiar with many of the tropes presented in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, such as the strained father-son relationship that exhibited between the elf king and the elf prince.

Mallory's previous experience with graphic novels was limited to her reading of the *Bone* series. She applied some of what she learned by reading this series to the reading of the graphic novel in this study. Mallory preferred reading in a traditional format because she enjoys building the mental images that are described by the words in a text. She considered graphic novels to be easy, or "less than" books in a traditional format. Mallory does not believe that graphic novels are suited for a literature course because the limited amount of written text would not lend itself to a study of story, but she is potentially open to the idea of including graphic novels in other types of courses.

Mallory was aware of and able to name most of the parts of a graphic novel. In addition, she was cognizant of the role that most of the parts of the graphic novel played. She initially labeled the gutters as dividers and had not considered the closure necessitated by the gutters, but, when this was pointed out to her, she was open to the idea and eager to apply it to her overall understanding of graphic novels.

Patterns and Variations

Although this study features four different participants, there were many similarities across their responses and approaches to reading a graphic novel. The participants all professed to being avid readers and unabashedly read for pleasure. The primary variations between the participants were in their level of experience reading graphic novels and in their age and gender, with both boys being younger than both girls. Based on their self-reports, George seemed to have the most experience reading graphic novels, followed by Nadya, and then Mallory, and finally James. This variation in experience ultimately did not appear to impact the participants' ability to make meaning with *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*.

In addition to variation in their experience reading graphic novels, the participants showed a range of preferences for reading in this format. George was the only fan of graphic novels, meaning that he sought them out to read. Nadya and Mallory had both read in the format in the past and will probably continue to do so in the future, but they did not necessarily seek out graphic

novels to read. James was the only participant to dislike graphic novels. His disdain for the format was evident in many of his comments throughout the three sessions, as well as in his desire to stop reading the graphic novel as soon as he could. However, all of the participants felt like graphic novels are inferior to books in a traditional text format. They all considered reading in this format to be easier than reading a "regular" book. Nadya called reading graphic novels a "brain break" and George seemed to view them only as "pleasure" reading because he didn't believe they could be used for "serious" study in school. It is unclear if the potential ease of reading in this format and the potential enjoyment gained from reading in this format are the reasons the participants considered the format to be inferior. With this belief, all of the participants were reluctant to support the teaching of graphic novels in school, particularly in a literature or an English class. However, James and Mallory thought that they could possibly be included in other subject-area classes.

This section continues with a discussion of the major patterns and variations in the data from the think-aloud and the retrospective think-aloud. This is followed by a discussion of the major patterns and variations in the data from the *Amulet*-specific questions.

Think-Aloud and Retrospective Think-Aloud

As evidenced in their think-alouds and retrospective think-alouds, all four participants made meaning using both modalities. The participants varied in the amount they used the modalities, but all made use of both modalities as dictated

by the graphic novel. During his think-aloud, George referenced visual elements in half of his comments, about 30 percent of his comments referenced only the written text, and about 15 percent made reference to information available in both modalities. James, on the other hand, did not reference information available only in the visual modality in his think-aloud at all. James made very few comments throughout his think-aloud; although he made comments regarding the written text only four times, it accounted for about 19 percent of his commentary. Nadya's comments were almost evenly divided between the visual (about 44 percent), the written (about 42 percent), and both modalities (about 34 percent). Mallory, like George, favored the visual in her think-aloud comments, as about 44 percent noted this modality. Her remarks on the written text and information in both modalities composed about 28 percent and about 20 percent, respectively.

An example of how the participants made meaning using both modalities is apparent in their comments on the elves. All of the participants referred to the elves in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* as "evil." Some of the participants made this assessment based solely on appearance, whereas others used information from both the images and the text. Nadya, relying on both the visual and written cues, specifically referenced the actions of some of the elves, including death threats, when she explained why she described the elves as evil. Several of the participants, including James and Mallory, commented that elves are "not usually represented" in this way. James' assessment of the elves' creepy appearance was based, in part, on the facial structure of the elves in the book;

this is an indication of how he made meaning with the visual cues in the graphic novel. It is important to note that it was during his retrospective think-aloud that James indicated that his assessment of the elves as creepy or evil was based on appearance; during his think-aloud, James did not indicate the modality on which he based his comment.

In order to make meaning with information presented in both modalities, the participants were also able to apply reading strategies to and across modalities. Just as their attention to the modalities varied, so too did their use of reading strategies, but all participants used reading strategies to some extent and with both modalities. Mallory appeared to use reading strategies most often, with about 66 percent of her think-aloud comments containing evidence of a reading strategy.

As described above, all participants commented that the elves were evil or creepy. All the participants employed the reading strategy of a text-to-text connection in assessing that the elves were evil. They used these text-to-text connections to compare the elves from *Amulet* to elves in other books and films. There were several references to the *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. I was collecting data in October, November, and December of 2013 right before the second *Hobbit* movie opened in the theaters over the winter holidays. I have to wonder if this timing influenced the participants' assessment of the elves. The participants also belong to a generation who know of *Lord of the Rings* through

movies rather than books, and the visual image of the elves in these movies may have influenced their perception of what elves “should” look like.

Another reading strategy that all four applied to information across modalities was questioning. Whether the information was presented visually, in text, or in both did not appear to impact the participants’ questioning of the information. For example, when shown an image of Emily’s mother lying in bed, Mallory questioned, “But who is that person on the bed?” Later, when Silas is referred to in the text only, Mallory questioned, “Who is Silas?” And when the elf prince is shown in art and text as being treated poorly by the guards, Mallory asked, “So why are they handling the prince like this?” These three examples from Mallory show how she applied the same reading strategy, that of questioning the text, to information provided in and across both modalities. Although these examples are drawn from Mallory’s think-aloud, there are similar examples in the think-alouds of the other participants.

One of the most prominent reading strategies that all participants used across modalities was the application of story knowledge, which includes an understanding of graphic novel conventions, genre conventions, and literary devices. In their think-alouds and retrospective think-alouds all the participants remarked on graphic novel conventions and how they understood the conventions in order to make meaning with the text. George’s explanation of why he described the spider-warrior as overly excited is an example of how the participants applied their story knowledge of graphic novel conventions to

information in both modalities in order to make meaning with the text. George referred to the visual action lines and puffs of dust and described the intended meaning of those visual conventions. He also referred to the written text of "skitter skitter" to add to his understanding of the spider as excited.

As reported above, the four participants were avid and fluent readers. These many reading experiences have endowed the participants with an understanding of genre conventions, or how things usually work in certain types of stories. All participants identified *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* as a fantasy or action-adventure. The participants were able to activate the reading strategy of applying knowledge of genre conventions in order to make meaning with the text, and they were able to do this with information in both modalities. One example of such application of genre conventions occurred across Nadya's think-aloud and retrospective think-aloud. When the doctor informed Emily that the only cure for her mother was the gadoba fruit, he made sure to explain that it was a dangerous journey and that not even the elves make the journey willingly. In her think-aloud Nadya, commented that it must be "a big deal" then. When I questioned her about this statement in the retrospective think-aloud, she revealed that part of the reason she assessed this as a "big deal" was her knowledge of genre conventions. In her prior experience with action-adventure books, Nadya has learned that if a main character is told that something or someplace is dangerous, it is generally an indication that the character will go there or do the dangerous thing. In this example, Nadya was also able to use her

knowledge of graphic novel conventions to predict that the trip was being foreshadowed, as there was a drawing of the gadoba fruit included in these panels. Nadya used both the visual and written modalities, as well as her knowledge of genre conventions and graphic novel conventions, to determine that the journey to retrieve the gadoba fruits was a “big deal.” She was right as the journey plays an important part in the plot of the story.

Finally, throughout their think-alouds and retrospective think-alouds, all participants used their story knowledge of literary devices to make meaning with information in both modalities. The example above shows how Nadya used a visual image to determine the foreshadowing of the importance of the gadoba fruit. Another example comes from George’s retrospective think-aloud, when he described why he labeled the creature opening the door on page 3 of the graphic novel as “ominous.” George applied his understanding of the literary device of characterization to his understanding of this character as ominous. George referenced the eyes of the figure, which is visual information, and he also remarked on how the character speaks, which is shown in squiggly lines. The use of typography crosses both the visual and written modalities, and George recognized and used this information to add to his assessment of the character as ominous.

Summary. Although done to varying degrees, the data from the think-alouds and retrospective think-alouds indicate that all participants were able to make meaning using information in both modalities. They were assisted in their

meaning making process by their use of reading strategies, which they were able to apply to both modalities as well. One of the reading strategies often utilized by all participants was application of story knowledge, which included an understanding of graphic novel conventions, genre conventions, and literary devices.

***Amulet*-Specific Questions**

The participants' attention to both modalities is also apparent in the data from the *Amulet*-specific questions that were presented to each participant. The participants' continued use of reading strategies and story knowledge is also apparent in their answers to these questions and in their explanations of how certain graphic novel conventions work.

There were striking similarities across participant responses to particular scenes or elements in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. In general, I found that when asked directly about a certain example, all participants were able to accurately explain the meaning conveyed through the graphic novel element. For example, text that is produced in larger or bolder font indicates yelling, or at least speech that is louder than the "regular" text that surrounds it. When asked about distinct elements, all participants were able to explain the way certain elements convey meaning. However, it is unclear how much they attended to these elements in their reading of the graphic novel unless they specifically mentioned them in their think-alouds.

While all participants understood many graphic novel conventions, none were aware of the functions of the gutters in the graphic novel format. When asked to identify and name the parts of graphic novel pages, Mallory was the only participant to identify the gutters; she didn't know what they were called and referred to them as "dividers." When I drew the participants' attention to the gutters during the *Amulet*-specific questions, I told them what they were called and asked if they could describe the function of the gutters. Most of the answers focused on dividing the panels. Through an exercise in following the action in a series of panels and pointing out the "lost" action, I was able to show all the participants that gutters often contain unseen action and that readers are required to fill in the missing action. Some of the participants grasped the concept of gutters and their function faster than other participants. After this explanation, all of the participants appeared able to understand what happens in the gutters, and they were able to verbalize what they believed occurred in the gutters. This revelation about the role of the gutters appeared to astound them.

In their discussions of sound effects in graphic novels, and specifically in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, all of the participants used the term onomatopoeia to refer to the sound effects. The participants knew that onomatopoeia refers to words that sound like sounds, and they immediately associated this with sound effects. This is one of the examples of the participants' application of story knowledge, specifically their understanding of literary devices when making meaning with an element in the graphic novel.

When asked to focus on specific sound effects, such as those on page 143, the participants recognized that some of the “sound effects” were actual words and were not onomatopoetic at all. They were also able to recognize and account for sound effects that were made up words, and the explanations they provided for this often centered around the need to provide more “accurate” sounds, which led to the creation of made-up words.

When asked about specific speech balloons and varieties of fonts within speech balloons, all of the participants were able to explain the purpose of the differences in the appearance of the balloon or the font. I asked all the participants to discuss the speech balloon on page 3; the balloon itself is wavy and uneven, in contrast to the smooth speech balloons on the rest of that page. The words within the speech balloon—“Who goes there?”—are reproduced in a wiggly font, as described by Mallory. When I asked why the speech balloon and font were different, all of the participants quickly reported that it indicated how the speech should sound and identified the sound as raspy, whispery, or creepy. When prompted, all of them, with varying levels of reluctance, were able to say “Who goes there?” in the voice they thought was required by the speech balloon and font. This is another example of the application of reading strategies, specifically the use of graphic novel conventions to understand the potential meaning conveyed by different styles of font.

In the following chapter, a discussion of the findings is structured around the “answers” to the research questions. First, what modalities do intermediate

grade readers rely on to make meaning with a graphic novel? Intermediate grade readers used both modalities to create meaning; this was sometimes dictated by the graphic novel itself. Second, what strategies do intermediate grade readers employ when making meaning with a graphic novel text? Intermediate grade readers used a variety of reading strategies to construct meaning with a graphic novel and they applied these strategies to information in both modalities. Third, what do intermediate grade readers know about how graphic novels work? Intermediate grade readers knew quite a lot about how graphic novels work. They used their knowledge of graphic novel conventions along with their knowledge of literary conventions to make meaning with a graphic novel. Finally, how do intermediate grade (6th to 8th grade) readers make meaning with texts in a graphic novel format? The findings indicate that they do this in many ways, including using information from both modalities, employing a variety of reading strategies and applying their knowledge of graphic novel conventions.

CHAPTER 5—DISCUSSION

This chapter contains a discussion of the findings as they relate to a theoretical understanding of graphic novels, research on reading strategies, and reader response theories. The first section is a discussion organized around the primary research question and the three sub-questions. This is followed by a discussion of additional noteworthy findings that do not answer the research questions per se, but do serve to raise other questions and issues suggested by the data. Next, I discuss the limitations of this study, implications for further research, and implications for teaching.

How Intermediate Grade Readers Make Meaning with a Graphic Novel

I begin with a discussion of the three sub-questions because taken together, their responses answer the primary research question of how intermediate grade readers make meaning with a graphic novel.

Use of Modalities

Graphic novels present information in two modalities: the visual, which is the realm of images, and the textual, which consists of the written words. Information can be presented in either of these modalities individually or in both of the modalities concurrently. Little is known about which modalities readers rely upon to make meaning with a graphic novel.

Based on the data from their think-alouds, their retrospective think-alouds, and, to some extent, their responses to the *Amulet*-specific questions, the intermediate grade readers in this study relied upon information from both

modalities, separately and together, to make meaning with a graphic novel. While the level of reliance on information in either modality varied by participant, or at least their reporting during their think-aloud varied, all participants used both modalities to make meaning. The graphic novel itself often dictated which modalities participants made meaning with.

It is important to remember that, as discussed in Chapter 2, images can be read just as written text can be read, and readers can make meaning with the visual as well as the textual. Bearden-White (2009) writes of the meaning found in both modalities: “From a semiotic viewpoint, both words and pictures operate as signs and provide meaning to the reader” (p. 347).

Perhaps it is not surprising that the data indicate that the participants made meaning with both modalities, as graphic novels themselves are designed to convey meaning via both modalities, either individually or together. Nodelman (2012) describes how graphic novels convey meaning:

> On most pages of comics…there are more separate fragments of story in both words and pictures—more panels, more segments of text in balloons or boxes. That means there are more bits of information to put together. Comics, then, is a mosaic art, in which lots of separate little pieces that come together through their relationships to each other form a whole, but nevertheless remain apparent as still-separate pieces. (p. 438)

The description of comics, or graphic novels, as a mosaic art is an accurate one, and the participants revealed through their think-alouds and retrospective think-

alouds that they were able to make meaning with and within this mosaic framework of modalities.

The participants were able to create meaning through and with both modalities. As Kress (1997) observes, “Multimodality is an absolute fact of children’s semiotic practices. It is what they do; it is how they understand meaning-making; and the complexities of that mode of production are not a problem for them” (p. 137-138). The intermediate grade participants of this study were familiar with negotiating meaning in multiple modalities, especially with the increasing use of multimodality in everyday life.

These findings are congruent with those of the studies on how children respond to picturebooks. In her work, Kiefer (1993) found that children, even young children, were tuned into the images in picturebooks to a great degree. Children often notice small details in pictures that adults overlook. In addition, Kiefer (1993) found that children in third grade and above not only paid attention to pictures, but were very aware of the elements of images and why an artist may have selected certain techniques to convey emotion or meaning.

Kiefer (1993) also found in her research that, as some children became more fluent readers, they spent more time reading the text than they did reading the illustrations. The findings of this study can neither support nor refute her claim, and the data show that all the participants made use of both modalities to make meaning. However, the participants relied upon information in the different modalities to varying degrees, and perhaps this was influenced by their fluency or

experience with reading graphic novels. For example, James did not refer to any visual information in his think-aloud, and he had the least amount of experience reading graphic novels. This is essentially the opposite finding of Kiefer's, but it does show that James relied more on the modality he was comfortable with, the written text, as he read in a format that he was not as comfortable with.

Another possible explanation for this variation in the degree to which participants referenced the modalities could be related to their opinions of graphic novels as valid texts. In his article on using graphic novels with pre-service teachers, Connors (2012) found that readers who did not perceive the graphic novel format as a viable form of literature were more likely to dismiss the visual information. James, again, serves as an example of this possibility, as he was the participant who was most adamant about graphic novels not constituting "real" reading and who did not reference any information from the visual modality during his think-aloud. Perhaps his attitude toward the format prevented him from seeing the images as a source of information. However, in his retrospective think-aloud and the *Amulet*-specific questions, he did demonstrate use of the visual modality to make meaning.

Use of Strategies

What strategies do intermediate grade readers employ when making meaning with a graphic novel text? Prior to the data collection and analysis, I assumed that the participants would consistently use inference, as this is dictated by the graphic novel format itself in the form of the gutters. However, the use of

reading strategies by the participants went far beyond my expectations in both the frequency of use and the variety of strategies participants called upon to make meaning.

Throughout their think-alouds, all four participants reported using reading strategies to some extent. Mallory used reading strategies the most in her think-aloud, but all employed some reading strategies. Again, it is important to remember that the participants' use of reading strategies was known only if they revealed their use in their think-aloud or retrospective think-aloud. Therefore, the rest of the participants could have used reading strategies to the same magnitude as Mallory, but did not reveal this usage in their comments. Perhaps the most significant finding regarding participants' use of reading strategies in their reading of a graphic novel was that they could and did apply reading strategies to information found in both modalities.

In addition to applying reading strategies to both modalities, the participants employed a variety of strategies to assist in their meaning making process. The reading strategies of questioning (both the text and their own understanding), making inferences, and making text-to-text connections were prominent across readings. One of the most frequent strategies used was the application of story knowledge, including, knowledge of graphic novel conventions, genre conventions, and literary devices. The participants' knowledge of graphic novel conventions is discussed extensively in the next

section. Adeptness at recognizing genre conventions and literary devices appeared to play an important role in the meaning making process.

All participants were fluent and avid readers, which certainly impacted their ability to make text-to-text connections and their knowledge of genre conventions and literary devices. It is evident in these four participants that their previous experiences reading or watching fantasies, action/adventure stories, and other graphic novels aided them in the construction of meaning with *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*.

Questioning the text is an important reading strategy (Weaver, 2002; Tovani, 2000), as it facilitates readers' ability to make meaning with a text and leads to other strategies such as monitoring comprehension and making predictions. Mallory's think-aloud was punctuated with questions for the text, which resulted in a "conversation-like" transaction with the text. Although Mallory used this strategy the most, all participants questioned the text to some extent. This is congruent with Sipe's (2008) category of narrative meaning, which he includes as a subcategory of analytical responses. It is important to emphasize that the participants questioned information in both modalities, which is further evidence of their ability to apply reading strategies across the modalities.

As stated above, the use of inferences was expected, as gutters require inferences or "closure" (McCloud, 1993) on the part of the reader. However, the participants made inferences far beyond simply supplying the information missing from the gutters. Their inferences included predictions about future plot events,

as well as inferences about character attributes and motivation. Sipe (2008), in his narrative meaning category of responses, and Kiefer (1995), in her heuristic category of responses, reported the use of inferences by their participants as well. Again, it is important to emphasize that the participants made inferences from information in both modalities. For example, all the participants inferred the "evilness" of the elves based partially on their appearance.

Connections, particularly text-to-text connections, were apparent in the think-alouds and retrospective think-alouds of all the participants. "No text is read independently of the reader's experience of other texts" (Eco, 1979, p. 21). The text-to-text sub-category of story knowledge was prevalent amongst all participants. Story knowledge included their knowledge of graphic novel conventions, genre conventions and literary devices. This reliance on story knowledge was apparent in Sipe's (2008) work, as well; he classified these responses as making narrative meaning and noticed that, as children interacted with picturebooks, they relied on story elements such as the plot, setting, characters, and theme to help them make meaning.

It is apparent from these data that reading strategies are tools that can be applied to texts in different formats. Most students learn the use of reading strategies as applied to texts in "traditional" formats such as picturebooks and written novels. However, the data from this study make it evident that readers can and do apply these strategies to texts in a graphic novel format.

Knowledge of Graphic Novel Conventions

What do intermediate grade readers know about how graphic novels work? The answer to this question can be found in data from the participants' think-alouds, their retrospective think-alouds and their answers to the *Amulet*-specific questions. They know quite a lot. All of the participants, regardless of their level of experience reading graphic novels or even their preferences for reading in this format, revealed an understanding of how graphic novels work. This understanding varied from participant to participant, but all participants appeared to understand enough about the format to decipher the meaning conveyed by a variety of graphic novel conventions.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (McCloud, 1993; Eisner, 1985; Wolk, 2007; Magnussen, 2000; Petersen, 2009), graphic novels are made up of several meaning making units, including: panels, gutters, speech balloons, and typography. Speech balloons and typography appeared to be the most understood by the participants based on their unprompted comments during their think-alouds. George, Nadya, and Mallory all commented on information in the speech balloons or typography during their think-alouds. Their comments indicated their understanding of the meaning conveyed by the speech balloons and the typography. Later, during his retrospective think-aloud and the *Amulet*-specific questions, James, too, indicated his understanding of the meaning conveyed through these two graphic novel conventions. Yannicopoulou (2004) and Petersen (2009) report that young children, even before they become print

literate, can interpret the meaning in a variety of typographic styles, such as color and size; therefore, it is not surprising that these intermediate grade readers were able to make meaning with the information portrayed through speech balloons and typography.

Panels. All participants revealed varying levels of understanding about the use of panels and the many potential meanings conveyed through this graphic novel convention. It is not surprising that the understanding of the role of panels varied as they are one of the format's most complicated meaning making units. McCloud (1993) writes that, "For just as the body's largest organ—our skin—is seldom thought of as an organ—so too is the panel itself overlooked as comics' most important icon!" (p. 98).

James and Mallory were the only participants to indirectly refer to the panels in their think-alouds. James' comment revealed that he understood that, by extending a scene across numerous panels, it prolonged the moment and thus imparted more importance to the moment or scene. The reference to panels was ancillary in Mallory's comment, as she reported that a particular scene was from Emily's perspective.

Nadya revealed some of her understanding of panels, or more specifically the elimination of panels, in her retrospective think-aloud, when she observed that panel-less pages allow for a vastness in the images or scene. She explained that the scene or image feels more open without panels and that, in some senses, a panel traps the events on the page. Mallory expressed similar ideas

about the lack of panels during the *Amulet*-specific questions. She reported that the pages without panels were unlimited and huge and that the image on the page was uncontrollable. James thought that the lack of panels resulted in amplification. In his research, Sipe (2008) noted that children, in their analysis of illustrations and other visual matter, also recognized the importance of full-bleed illustrations.

When asked directly about panels during the *Amulet*-specific questions, all participants revealed an awareness of the different roles of panels and the plethora of potential meanings conveyed by panels. All the participants, except for James, remarked that panels allow for different points of view to be shown. The participants noted different meanings conveyed by varying shapes of panels, from showing movement, to increasing drama and interest, to communicating feelings. Witek (2009) refers to this as the "gestalt" layout "…in which the overall shapes of the panels take on narrative or thematic significance" (p. 154). These young readers recognized some of that significance.

George was the only participant who hinted at the ability of panels to display the passage of time. Eisner (1985) describes panels as being a "critical element" (p. 26) in conveying timing or the passage of time in the comic format. However, George's understanding was not quite right about this characteristic of panels. He stated that the size of the panel indicated how much time had passed between the events in each panel, whereas, the size of the panel actually is an indication of the amount of time passing within the panel.

Gutters. Perhaps the most complicated meaning making unit of this format is the gutter. Gutters are particularly difficult to understand because there is literally nothing shown in them. However, a great deal is happening in these spaces, and it is up to the reader to fill in these spaces. “In fact, comics omit far more visual information than they include. They’re a series of deliberately chosen visual fragments that don’t represent the time between or the space around panels” (Wolk, 2007, p. 132).

During the *Amulet*-specific questions, Mallory was the only participant to identify the gutters as a part of the graphic novel page. Initially, none of the participants could explain what gutters were used for, except for dividing the panels in order to prevent overlapping or confusion. When asked directly about what happens in the gutters, all the participants said “nothing.” I then walked each through a series of panels as we tracked the action together. I had to push, to varying degrees, for them to identify where the missing action was occurring. All the participants eventually grasped that gutters actually contain “missing” action or information and were able to think about filling in this information through inference. However, the level of comfort with this idea differed quite a bit between participants.

Even though none of the participants initially understood the role of gutters or what happened in gutters, they were filling in the information in the gutters, or making closure, as they read. “The process of closing gaps…‘is repeated over and over again throughout any given comic, and in this way, comics become a

kind of extended gestalt, whereby the reader's mind works continually to complete the picture' (p. 102)'" (Versaci as cited in Low, 2012, p. 376). This is a testament to the participants' ability to make meaning with a graphic novel even if they could not explain what they were doing.

Sound effects. When questioned about the sound effects found throughout *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, each of the participants commented about the onomatopoeic quality of sound effects and named this as one of the reasons for the use of made up words as sound effects. Comics scholars, such as Petersen (2009), have written about the onomatopoeic aspect of sound effects and it is notable that these four intermediate grade participants recognized this as well. This is further evidence of the participants' knowledge of graphic novel conventions, as well as their knowledge of literary devices.

Summary. When asked about the format of graphic novels in general, Nadya stated, "This is like a graphic novel and there's like a whole different set of rules." When I asked her to describe the set of rules, she replied, "I think the rules is that there are no rules…almost." In this comment, Nadya revealed her understanding of graphic novels as a unique format with its own set of rules. Although this comment came from Nadya, other participants shared this same understanding, as they were able to make meaning within this "no rules" format.

The examples above illustrate participants' understanding of a variety of specific graphic novel conventions. More importantly, the fact that each of the participants was able to read and make meaning with *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's*

Curse indicates that they understood graphic novel conventions well enough that they were able to read with understanding. The data also make it evident that readers need not be able to name, or even describe the meaning conveyed by, graphic novel conventions in order to understand them. As Witek (2009) states, "…readers who are trying to figure out the proper way to read the page are readers who are not immersed in the story" (p. 154).

Making Meaning with a Graphic Novel

These intermediate grade readers created meaning with both the visual and textual modalities in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. They applied a variety of reading strategies to information presented in both modalities throughout their reading. They frequently made inferences about information presented in the panels and information "missing" in the gutters. They made text-to-text connections to other print fantasies as well as films. They relied on their previous experiences with stories and their knowledge of genre conventions to make meaning with the graphic novel. Finally, the participants in this study activated their knowledge of graphic novel conventions, such as the use of panels, speech balloons, and typography, to create meaning as they read with *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*.

Additional Noteworthy Findings

In addition to the data that related directly to the research questions, there were a significant amount of additional data that raised important ideas for further consideration. These noteworthy ideas are as follows: the concept of a format-to-

format connection, the opinion that some stories are better suited for the graphic novel format than others, the notion that avid readers enjoy picturing what they are reading in their heads, the attitude of participants towards graphic novels, and what is considered the purpose of reading.

Format-to-Format Connections

The concept of readers making connections to other texts during their reading, in what are called text-to-text connections, is well accepted in the field of reading. In fact, many see this as an important reading strategy, as the understanding of one text can assist in the understanding of a similar text. Throughout this study, there were many instances of text-to-text connections, with something unique about some of these connections. Most text-to-text connections center on making links between similar events in two texts. However, I realized that many participants were also making connections to the *format* of other texts, in what could be called format-to-format connections. For example, Mallory observed how the fainting scene in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* was portrayed in the same way as the fainting scene in *Sidekicks*. This is an important point to consider—that the reading, watching, or listening to other texts can help us understand not only the content of other texts, but also the format. This is probably not limited to graphic novel texts.

Interaction of Story Characteristics and Format

All the participants recognized graphic novels as a unique format. During the *Amulet*-specific questions, I asked whether some stories were better suited

for the graphic novel format than others. All the participants, except for James, discussed the elements of a story that would make a good graphic novel. All noted that visual elements are important to making a good graphic novel. Several provided examples of fantastical elements from *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* that would be difficult to picture if they were just described in words. Nadya noted that in order to picture some of these elements, it would require "really good writing."

On the other hand, George remarked that novels "are better for I guess seeing what the character is feeling," an indication of his understanding that feelings are perhaps easier to describe in words as opposed to pictures. This indicates that the participants recognized the unique affordances of different formats. It also hints at their ability to navigate in a multimodal world, as they acknowledge that some modalities are better than others at accomplishing certain tasks.

Visualizing

Regardless of their experience reading graphic novels, all of the participants, to some extent, expressed a preference for reading in a traditional format because they enjoyed visualizing the events of the story in their head. As all the participants were avid readers, one could make the assumption that avid readers visualize as they read. We know that visualization is an important reading strategy (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995; Weaver, 2002; Tovani, 2000).

Participants in this study perceived the images in graphic novels as creating a “closed text.” Eco (1979) used this term to describe texts that do not allow much room for interpretation on the part of the reader, which ultimately results in the limiting of the meaning made with the text to that desired by the author. In the case of images in graphic novels, the participants believed that the provided images prevented them from forming their own images in their mind, which is something they enjoyed about reading in “traditional” formats.

Connors (2012) found that many of his pre-service teachers, especially those that did not consider graphic novels to be a valid form of literature, had the same perception of the images in graphic novels as my participants. But, as Connors (2012) points out, this opinion does not take into account all the opportunities for interpretation provided by the images themselves. The work of Benton, Kress, and Barthes on the meaning(s) and significance of images makes clear the many opportunities for interpretation and interaction with images.

Attitudes Towards Graphic Novels

One of the things that became apparent in my interactions with the participants and in their responses to some of my questions, was their attitude toward graphic novels. In general, the participants considered graphic novels to be an inferior form of text and even reading. What was particularly surprising to me was that George, who was the most avid graphic novel reader and a fan of the format, also believed that the format was “less than” a traditional text.

During the interview, I asked all the participants whether they believed that reading graphic novels was “real” reading. I prefaced my question with the idea that some people did not believe that the format constituted “real” reading. George believed that graphic novels constituted real reading, but James was adamant that they were not real reading; he even compared graphic novels to flipbooks. Mallory and Nadya were more neutral on the question. Nadya stated that it was “technically” reading, whereas Mallory thought that it depended on the situation.

Although they were divided in their beliefs regarding graphic novels as “real” reading, all participants believed that the format should not be included in English curricula. James and Mallory conceded that books in the format could possibly be used in other subject areas, but not in English or literature courses. Nadya did not think it was fair that some kids at school were allowed to use graphic novels to complete a school project. George described an activity at school that required exploring characterization. He was insistent that these types of activities could not be done with graphic novels, yet later, when I asked him questions related to the characterization in *Amulet: The Stonekeeper’s Curse*, he was able to answer the questions with ease.

I can only speculate about where this negative attitude toward graphic novels came from. I have to wonder if it is one of the lasting impacts of Wertham’s (1954) *Seduction of the Innocent*. I am also curious whether the perceived “easiness” of reading graphic novels for these fluent and avid readers

made the general format feel too easy to be “real” reading and too easy to be used in school. In fact, there is a great deal of complexity involved in making meaning in this format and potential for teaching with books in this format.

The Purpose of Reading

The final noteworthy finding in this study concerns the participants’ perceptions about the purpose of reading. Participants revealed their beliefs about the purpose of reading both covertly and overtly. For example, in her discussion of whether graphic novels are “real” reading, Nadya remarked that the possibility of learning new words from graphic novels is low. I asked if the purpose of reading was to learn new words, and she responded with, “maybe like in school circumstances sometimes.”

This comment and others made me wonder what these young readers considered to be the purpose of reading and brings up the question of what we are teaching students to believe about the purpose of reading. As stated before, all the participants were avid readers who read a great deal for pleasure. Have they been made to believe that pleasure is not a valid purpose for reading? Does the potential enjoyment that participants get from reading graphic novels preclude them from being considered as “real” reading or worthy of use in school?

Limitations

This study had several limitations, which should not call into question the findings, but should be acknowledged when considering them. These limitations

include: the weaknesses inherent in think-aloud protocols, the small size of the study population, the composition of the study population, and the graphic novel text. Each of these limitations is discussed below.

Think-Aloud Limitations

Although the think-aloud protocol was the best approach for this study, there are two primary limitations to the procedure itself. As noted in Chapter 3, Langer (1990) herself recognized two shortcomings of this approach. The primary deficiency in verbal protocols is that the researcher must rely on the readers to report on or verbalize what they are doing. If the readers do not provide a complete description of their thoughts and actions as they are reading, the researcher does not get a complete picture of their reading process.

When considering my complete data set, including data from the think-alouds, the retrospective think-alouds, and the *Amulet*-specific questions, it is evident that my participants did not provide a complete reporting of their thoughts and actions in their think-alouds while reading *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*. In their retrospective think-alouds, and even during the *Amulet*-specific questions, participants made comments about things they did in their initial reading of the graphic novel, but that they did not mention during the think-aloud. One example of this is from James' *Amulet*-specific questions. When he was asked why the font in a speech bubble was different, he explained that it was to indicate that the voice was different. He went on to say that it would sound, "Like how Smeagol says it. That's what I thought of when I read it." James did not reference his

connection to Smeagol in his think-aloud. I cannot know how many other thoughts or actions James and the other participants did not report in their think-alouds, and, as a result, this is the primary limitation of the approach.

The second shortcoming of verbal protocols is that they create an artificial reading experience. It is unlikely that during their reading many people verbally report their thoughts and actions. Requesting that they do so no doubt alters their reading. However, it is impossible to measure or speculate just how greatly my participants' reading was altered by the verbal protocol.

Size Limitations

Another limitation of this study is its size. Although five participants were recruited to participate in the study, data from only four participants were included. This study was structured as a case study and did not set out to assert theory, but rather to highlight potential similarities across participants, which can indicate significance. Additionally, this study sought to begin to develop a data-based understanding of how intermediate grade readers make meaning with a graphic novel. The potential assertions of this study are limited by its small size, but the small size also allowed for the creation of a deeper understanding of each of the four participants as readers and readers of graphic novels.

Population Limitations

The participants for this study were recruited through an email distributed via a listserv for all graduate students in an education program at a major Midwestern university. Based on this recruitment method and participants'

parents' association with a university, it was not surprising that all of the participants were avid and fluent readers. The composition of the study population limited the findings to fluent and avid readers. However, even though all the participants shared a love of reading, their experience reading graphic novels varied. James had read very few graphic novels, while George had read many; Nadya and Mallory's experience with graphic novels fell somewhere between the two young men.

Although this study limitation may be a result of the recruitment methods, it is important to point out that one of the criteria for participation in the study was a desire and willingness to participate. Therefore, it is possible that even if the recruitment methods were different, the study may have only attracted fluent and avid readers because reluctant or struggling readers may not have been interested in participating in this study. However, in further studies, it would be important to vary the recruitment methods in order to potentially attract a more diverse population of participants in regard to reading ability and interest.

Text Limitations

The data from this study were collected through the reading of a single graphic novel, *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse* by Kazu Kibuishi. There are two shortcomings in regard to the text. As discussed in Chapter 3, there were guidelines for selecting the graphic novel text used in this research. In addition, there were several considerations regarding the age and gender of the participants. I tried to select a graphic novel that met these guidelines and took

into account these considerations. Several of the participants did not enjoy *Amulet: The Stonekeeper's Curse*, which certainly influenced their reading and the data. The book itself was too easy for most of the participants. James and Mallory both commented on the easiness of the text; this seemed to increase James' negativity toward the text, whereas Mallory appeared to still enjoy her reading of the book.

The second limitation is that the data were collected from the reading of just one graphic novel. This limits the data to this one reading experience. If participants had read multiple graphic novels over the course of the data collection, similarities and differences in the participants themselves, as well as across the participants may have been more obvious.

Implications for Further Research

The implications for further research primarily focus on addressing the limitations of the current study, which include the shortcomings of verbal protocols, the size of the study, the homogeneity of the participant population, the use of a single graphic novel text, and possible topics for future research from the additional noteworthy findings.

As the verbal protocol data collection method is limited by the reporting of the reader, the inclusion of additional data collection methods can offset this limitation while also providing further insight into a reader's actions while reading a graphic novel. I think the use of eye-tracking equipment and software could reveal what aspects of the graphic novel a reader is focused on during reading. It

could also indicate in what order a reader reads the different modalities. For example, does a reader view all of the images on a graphic novel page before returning to the top of the page to read all of the text? Or does a reader take in the information, both visual and written, from each panel one at a time? It is difficult for even mature and experienced readers to report exactly what they pay attention to and in what order when reading a graphic novel. Therefore, eye-tracking technology may aid in the further understanding of this reading experience.

Future studies that utilize a think-aloud protocol approach should integrate a retrospective think-aloud component as well. The data from the retrospective think-aloud resulted in a deeper understanding of the participants' reading and thinking as they engaged with a graphic novel. It provided me with an opportunity to seek clarification on participant comments and thinking. It also gave the participants a chance share more fully the complexity of their process. Additionally, at the end of the data collection, all the participants reported they liked taking part in the study and liked having the opportunity to discuss their reading and thinking, so the retrospective think-aloud portion appeared to be enjoyable for the participants as well. The think-aloud only provides one part of the information; the retrospective think-aloud is necessary to gain a more complete picture.

If the sample size were increased in future research, it could lead to the development of theories on how readers make meaning with graphic novels. The

case study format of this study allowed for depth, but a larger sample size would allow for a breadth of understanding. More participants would allow for potential similarities in approaches to appear across more participants. These similarities could then be used to build theories.

In addition to increasing the sample size in future studies, it is important to have a more diverse participant population. This diversity should be considered at many levels, including age, gender, race, and reading ability. In addition, it would be interesting, and important, to include participants with and without experience reading graphic novels. Future studies that include “struggling” and fluent readers could provide an opportunity to compare the approaches to reading a graphic novel of these different kinds of readers. Studies that include avid and struggling readers could also add a component regarding the appeal or motivation of reading in this format for different types of readers.

Another implication for further research is the inclusion of data from reading more than one graphic novel. Like the increase in participants, this approach could showcase similarities and differences within readers themselves and also across readers. These data, too, could be used to build theories.

Finally, the additional noteworthy findings from this study suggest several potentially interesting topics for future studies. The avid readers in this study reported enjoying visualizing as they read in “traditional” formats, and the “inability” to visualize as they read graphic novels made this format less appealing. This finding suggests several topics for future studies, including an

examination of visualization while reading graphic novels. The participants in this study recognized that the graphic novel format was not appropriate for all stories. Future studies could explore what elements of story young readers think make for good graphic novels. Additionally, a future study could compare the responses of young readers to the same story told in different formats.

Implications for Teaching

The most important implication for teaching is that reading strategies can be and are applied as a reader makes meaning with a graphic novel. This is a strong argument for the inclusion of graphic novels in the curriculum. It also provides continued justification for the explicit teaching of reading strategies, as readers can apply strategies to a variety of text formats, including graphic novels. The teaching of reading strategies should be expanded to include the reading of images also as the world continues to become increasingly multimodal and the need for visual literacy escalates.

In addition to employing reading strategies, the participants were able to apply knowledge of plot, theme, characterization, and literary devices in their understanding of the textual and visual elements of a graphic novel. The belief that graphic novels do not embody the necessary features to make them a viable teaching text in an English curriculum appears to be opinion rather than actuality. In fact, some educators, including Versaci (2001), have had success in teaching elements of literature through a graphic novel text. It is important that educators realize that students can apply story knowledge learned in one format to stories

told in another format. The ideal would be to include well-written stories that demonstrate literary features in a variety of formats in all classrooms.

Another reason to include comic books and graphic novels in the classroom is that they are uniquely situated to help students and teachers achieve mastery of some Common Core State Standards, particularly those in the area of English/Language Arts. For example, a number of Common Core State Standards call for students to make logical inferences and to refer to the evidence from the text in order to support their inferences. A discussion of the gutters in graphic novels could serve as a way to make inferences by using visual cues and providing support. Another Common Core State Standard requires that students be able to read content presented in a variety of formats. The integration of graphic novels and comic books in the curriculum could certainly help teachers and students meet this standard.

A common misconception about graphic novels among educators is that they are “easy” to read and therefore are a good option for “struggling” or reluctant readers. Graphic novels do provide a different reading experience than “traditional” texts, but, as evident in the comments of comic scholars and creators and in the findings of this study, reading a graphic novel is a complex experience. Graphic novels include an intricate balance of visual and textual information that must be read and understood in order for a reader to make meaning. Graphic novels should not be considered “dumbed-down” (Smith & Iyer, 2012, p. 5) versions of books. Yes, some “struggling” and reluctant readers will have more

success reading in a graphic novel format and may even be more motivated to read in this format, but graphic novels should not be limited to “struggling” and reluctant readers in the classroom. In their complexity, graphic novels have a great deal to offer readers of all ages, abilities and interests. Smith and Iyer (2012) get it right when they exclaim, “Comics are such a *good* way to read that *even* reluctant readers like them!” (p. 5).

A further implication for teaching for those who work with pre-service teachers is to move away from the “verbocentric literacy curricula” (Siegel, 2006, p. 72) and include texts in different formats, including the graphic novel format, in literature and methods courses. In his work with pre-service teachers Connors (2012) found that most were entrenched in this “verbocentric” approach to literacy and this influenced their acceptance of books in other formats. If pre-service teachers are not exposed to texts in a variety of formats it is unlikely that they will integrate other formats into their classrooms and curricula. This will ultimately deny their students experiences with these other formats, thus continuing this “verbocentric” cycle.

This study has implications for teaching beyond including graphic novels in the curriculum. As noted in the additional findings of this study, the participants revealed a narrow understanding of the purpose of reading. It is important to explore the purpose of reading with students. This can happen through the integration of different types of reading, as well as through educators’

demonstrations of different and varied purposes for reading. Enjoyment should be seen as a valid, and valued, purpose for reading.

Additionally, the participants expressed a low opinion of graphic novels. Children and young adults likely develop their opinions of reading materials based upon the reception they receive from the adults in their lives. The influence of a teacher's opinion of a format is likely to have great sway on students. Therefore, it is important for educators to place value on *all* types of reading. Whether it is reading a magazine or a book by Charles Dickens, it is still reading and needs to be treated as such. If students who are avid magazine or comic book readers are made to believe that they are not participating in "real" reading, they will never see themselves as "real" readers.

Conclusion

This study has provided initial answers to questions about how intermediate grade readers make meaning with a graphic novel and has raised others. At the very least, the words of the four participants indicate that they were active, strategic readers as they created meaning with a graphic novel text. It seems that, in the hands of these readers, "[t]he graphic novel is not literary fiction's half-wit cousin, but, more accurately, the mutant sister who can often do everything fiction can, and, just as often, more" (Eggers as cited in Gravett, 1995, p. 2).

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APPENDIX A

Verbal Protocol/Think-Aloud Directions

"As you read this graphic novel, tell me what you are thinking as you read. I want you to tell me anything and everything you are thinking as you read. This thinking can include your ideas about the writing or the pictures or even the layout of the book. Please tell me your thoughts as you have them rather than waiting for the end of the page, section or book. Don't try to explain your thoughts now as we will discuss them when you are finished reading, so just tell me what you are thinking as soon as it pops into your head. Do you have any questions?"

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

How Intermediate Grade Readers Understand Graphic Novels: A Case Study

I am asking if you are interested in reading two graphic novels with me and telling me what you think as you read. I will also ask you some questions about the book and about you as a reader. I am looking for 5th to 8th graders that are interested in participating and your parent(s) think that you might be interested in participating in this study. You do not have to be an expert at reading graphic novels to be in this study.

If you agree to be in this study, you and I will meet three times at a place that you and your parent(s) have chosen. Each meeting will take about an hour or two. During these meetings I will ask you to read a graphic novel and tell me what you are thinking and/or doing as you are reading. But before I ask you to do this you and I will practice how to share what you are thinking and doing as you read. I will then ask you some questions about what you said, about the graphic novel and about you as a reader. I will audio record our meetings so that I can listen to our meetings again.

This study should be fun to participate in, but you may find it difficult to say everything you are thinking as you read. Don't worry, we will practice this and I will help you if you get stuck. You can also choose to stop at any time if you are uncomfortable. Also, you may not like the graphic novels I picked for you to read; we all have different likes and dislikes in what we read. I really hope that you like the graphic novels that I choose but it is okay if you don't.

To thank you for participating in my study you will get to keep a copy of the two graphic novels that we read together.

You can ask any questions that you have about this study. If you have a question(s) later that you didn't think of now, you can ask me at any time.

Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in this study, don't sign. Remember, being in this study is up to you, and no one will be mad at you if you don't sign this or even if you change your mind later.

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

PARENT CONSENT FORM

How Intermediate Grade Readers Understand Graphic Novels: A Case Study

Your child is invited to be in a research study of how intermediate grade readers respond to and process graphic novels. Your child was selected as a possible participant because you expressed interest, your child is within the grade range of 5th-8th grade, and your child is interested in participating as well. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Aimee Rogers, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Minnesota

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to build an understanding of how intermediate grade (5th-8th grade) readers read, respond to and process graphic novels. There is much debate in comic and literacy circles regarding the difficulty of reading a graphic novel. Some believe that texts in this format are easier to read while others believe they are more difficult to read. This study assumes that the graphic novel format is more difficult to read because of the number of elements that must be read, understood and integrated in order to achieve meaning with the text. However, no empirical studies have been conducted on how graphic novels are read and processed, especially with young readers. The goal of this study is to contribute to new ideas of how graphic novels are read by intermediate grade readers.

Procedures:

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, I would ask your child to do the following things. Your child and I will meet three times for approximately 1-2 hours per meeting and with about a week between meetings. These meetings can occur at a location of your choice that is public or your own home so that you can be nearby during the entire study process. Your child will read two graphic novels during the course of the study. I will ensure that the selected graphic novel texts are content appropriate for 5th to 8th graders and are written at a level that should be easily read for most 5th to 8th graders.

During the first meeting, your child and I will get to know each other through conversation in order to foster a level of comfort in your child. At this time your child will also choose a pseudonym to be used throughout the three sessions in

order to ensure anonymity of the data. All three sessions will be audio recorded. This data will later be partially transcribed, but your child's pseudonym will be maintained throughout the transcription and in any reports that are generated from this study.

After rapport is established in the first meeting, I will train your child in the think-aloud protocol. Essentially as your child reads an appropriate graphic novel he/she will verbally report to me all of his/her thoughts, responses and processes. During this training your child can ask questions about the think-aloud process and I will provide guidance and clarification as your child reads the selected graphic novel.

During the second meeting, after I provide a review of the think-aloud procedure, your child will do a think-aloud on a different appropriate graphic novel. Again, your child will provide verbal commentary on what he/she is thinking and processing during his/her reading. After your child finishes the graphic novel, I will ask questions about what he/she did during his/her reading. For example, "On this page you said _____, what caused you to think that?"

During the third and final meeting, I will ask additional questions about your child's responses to the graphic novel text. These questions will be the result of my review of the audio from the second session. I will ask questions to clarify responses and to elaborate on responses. Additionally, I will ask questions specific to the graphic novel text itself. For example, "The panels get crazy on this page, how did you know which way to read?" Finally, I will pose interview questions to your child that will focus on your child as a reader and a reader of graphic novels.

You and/or your child can choose to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. As compensation for participating in this study, your child will receive a personal copy of the two graphic novels used in the study.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has minimal risk for you or your child. Your child may struggle to verbalize his/her thoughts as he/she is reading, but I will provide support and guidance during this procedure. Your child may struggle to read parts of the graphic novel, however, I will provide support in these places as well. A final potential risk is that your child may not enjoy reading the selected graphic novels, however, the selected graphic novels will be age appropriate and reflect the elements of a high quality intermediate grade graphic novel. These risks are minimal and you and/or your child can choose to discontinue participation in the study at any point.

The benefits to participation are that your child can potentially learn about him/herself as a reader and a reader of graphic novels as well as possibly enjoying a well-constructed and appropriate graphic novel.

Compensation:

Your child will receive a personal copy of the two graphic novels read in this study.

Confidentiality:

Participants will assign themselves a pseudonym during the first meeting and their real name will not appear in the tape recordings (I will use their pseudonym) or transcripts and reports. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Study data will be encrypted according to current University policy for protection of confidentiality. The audio recordings will be stored in a password protected file on my computer for five years. At the end of the five years the audio data will be destroyed. Myself, and my advisor, Dr. Lee Galda, will be the only people with access to the audio data.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect your or your child's current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to allow your child to participate, you and your child are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Aimee Rogers. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at the University of Minnesota, (520) 904-4738(cell), or roger569@umn.edu. The researcher's advisor, Dr. Lee Galda, can also be contacted at anytime at (612) 377-4786 (home) or galda001@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Amulet-Specific Questions

Please summarize Amulet.

What type of story is Amulet? (adventure, quest, fantasy, etc.)

Can you think of any other stories that are similar to Amulet?

What do you think is the theme of Amulet? How do you know? Why do you think that?

Can you identify some of the plot elements of Amulet? (climax, rising action, resolution)

Describe some of the main characters in Amulet. How is their character/characterization conveyed?

Amulet is told in a graphic novel format. How does the format affect the story?

Do you think that there are some stories or types of stories that are better told in a graphic novel format?

Can you name the parts of this page? (panels, gutters, speech balloons)

Panels:

What are panels used for?

Page 120, Please describe. Why the different shapes of panels? Do the different size and shape of panels tell us anything?

There are several pages that don't have any panels at all. Why do you think that is? What does the lack of panels tell you? (Title page, page 22 – 23, page 171)

Page 41, Does this inset of the doctor in this panel tell us anything?

Please look at page 61 – 68, describe the panels in these pages. Why do you think they are not "straight" square, rectangle panels?

Please look at page 81. What is happening in the bottom panel? Who is speaking first? Who speaks second? If someone got stuck on this page, what advice would you give him/her for getting unstuck? Do you have any ideas about why this panel was arranged in this way? How would you change the panel to make it more understandable?

Page 122 – 124…This page has a different layout than the other pages in the book. Can you describe the layout? Why do you think this layout was chosen? What does this layout tell us about the information presented in these pages? Is there anything else that you notice is different?

Gutters:

What are gutters used for?

What happens in the gutters? How do you know?

Page 115, talk me through what is happening on this page. What happens in the gutters? How do you know?

Page 122 – 124, look at the gutters.

Can you compare the use of gutters or what happens in gutters to anything else?

Sound effects:

Why made up sound effects?

Page 48: Sound effect; do you read that? Hear that?

Page 143: “Latch”

Speech balloons/text boxes:

Page 3: “Who goes there?” Why in a different font? How would you pronounce this?

Page 19: The speech bubbles for the amulet? Why no arrow/indicator marker towards mouth/speaker?

Page 29: How to read the order of those speech balloons?

Page 55: Who talks first? In what order? How do you know?

Page 69: Why text boxes and not speech balloons?

Color changes:

Page 162: Change of color in the amulet's "talking"

Page 101: Change in Emily's eye color

Perspective:

What is perspective? Point of view?

What are the different points of view?

From who's perspective is Amulet told? How can you tell?

How do you think perspective is shown in graphic novels?

Is perspective important?

Let's look at pages 200 – 206, can you talk to me about perspective in these pages? What do you notice? Are there any hints provided?

Time/Clocks:

Some participants noticed that there seemed to be a lot of references to time and/or images of clocks. For example, on page 20, did you notice that? If so, what did you notice? What are your thoughts? Page 206. What do we know about things that appear in a full frame? What does the repetition of an image tell us?

General:

Page 13: Robot's face; what emotion is being conveyed? How? How can you tell?

Page 17: Morrie, the robot, is sweating. Robots “can’t” sweat, why is this included? What does it indicate?

Page 59: What kind of landing? How can you tell?; similar on page 60

Page 84: Steam coming off of elf

Page 114: Smell lines

Page 166: Symbols above Miskit’s head

Last page: Describe, what does it predict? What can be predicted from this?

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

Describe yourself as a reader.

What do you choose to read for fun?

Prior to reading Sidekicks and Amulet, how many graphic novels have you read? Has it been a lot? Some? A few?

Do you enjoy reading graphic novels? Why or why not?

Do you think that graphic novels and comic books are different from each other? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Do you think graphic novels offer a different experience from other types of books? If so, how so? If not, why not?

How is reading Amulet different from reading other types of texts?

How is reading Amulet similar to reading other types of texts?

Some people believe that reading a graphic novel is not “real” reading. What do you think?

Should graphic novels be taught in school?

Is there anything that you’d like to say about participating in this research project?

APPENDIX F

George's Think-Aloud Transcript

Beginning, heard that kids liked Amulet, school library all of the Amulet books are checked out

3:42 starts with the cover, kid with a fox, fox warrior guy (looks at front and back cover) (it crosses the spine) House Robot

4:45 It looks like lava

5:05 carrying a prisoner (pg. 1)

6:10 Macho looking guy smashes him in the face

6:30 he says "king had ordered him to punch him, probably not true" (pg. 3)

6:40 ominous, dark looking figure (pg. 3)

6:55 oh…it's an elf

7:00 He is in the palace

7:10 same symbol as the front page (pg. 4)

7:50 He's saying, guy with weird symbol, his son has failed him, send another guy

8:35 Guy's son is saying, no

8:50 having an argument (pg. 6)

Identifies that they are trying to track down the child/children on the front cover

9:15 Big robot house, smaller robot, they're fixing it

9:40 Showing how to maneuver it

9:50 Looks like a pink bunny. Robots are doing all of the work.

10:30 Robots carrying the plates

10:45 Pancake hits pink bunny in the face

11:00 when you shake the house shakes (pg. 11)

Pg 12 – 13 very fast

11:30 He's controlling the house

11:40 Someone with a mask on his face. Girl is sitting next to him. Robot brings food.

12:30 "oh that's the girl's mother!" She has been poisoned. (pg. 16)

12:45 They have to wait to get to Kanalis apparently

12:50 the amulet activates; warning her about the elf prince (pg. 19)

13:30 Then they're in Kanalis

13:45 There is a bunch of other house robots walking around

14:05 robot yells "eyes on the road," (reproduces it with "yelling") (pg. 24)

14:20 Now they're docking

14:40 The evil guys are there and so is the elf prince

14:50 The bunny's name is Miskit.

15:10 This guy looks like a pig. This guy looks like a chicken.

15:20 "Oh, being altered by an ancient curse" (pg. 29)

15:50 There's a fox standing there

15:55 A guy says get out of my way and then he is running at him

16:00 The fox jumps out of the way and then attacks the guy. He gets totally owned by the box. Then he puts a hat on the guy. Bunny next to him, says "shh"

16:35 Ninja fox

16:55 “a bunch of homeless people waiting in line”; how can he tell that they are homeless? (pg. 33)

Pg 32 – 36, flips back and forth among these pages

17:30 The fox is saying he will be their bodyguard

Pg 34 identifies the “evil elf” as an ogre. Baby mouse doesn’t be quiet will kill the baby mouse.

18:20 Then the ogre attacks the fox

18:40 Then he cannot protect them

18:50 Then they go to a guy, another mouse. They need to see a doctor.

19:10 “guy turning into a slug by the curse” able to comprehend that even though it is not stated (pg. 39)

19:45 They need to get gadoba fruit, includes a picture of the fruit.

20:00 Then he is saying even the elves can’t get, even sent 100s of elves but none of them returned

20:20 Then the girl is saying if we have to climb a mountain we should climb a mountain

20:45 Then the robot’s phone is ringing. The elves are trying to storm the house.

21:00 the yellow robot is always worried; how can this be identified (pg. 44)

21:20 The guys are trying to blow up the hospital

21:50 The tunnels caving in (pg. 50)

21:55 And the bunny is going on too

22:05 then they have to run through the sewer, “why do they always have to run through the sewer?” laughing “that’s a classic” what does this mean? Is he basing his connections on what he sees as “classic” comic book/superhero approaches? (pg. 52 – 53)

22:40 He's saying she can fly. She's saying she can't. But then she did. She is flying right now.

23:10 Oh and then the elves found them

23:20 Then the elf is looking at them and then the bunny tells them to look out and then the fox ninja attacks the guy

23:50 charges at him/them (pg. 63)

24:15 Then the guy grabs the sword with his hand (pg. 65)

24:55 Then she passes out (pg. 69)

25:20 Then the fox is saying you can't get off the amulet and she's cursed. Then he is saying can turn it into a blessing.

25:55 he (the fox) was supposed to meet her (pg. 71)

26:00 Then they are at the mountain and they're going to climb the mountain

27:00 Then they are underground and then they meet the resistance

27:10 ninja monkey (pg. 76)

27:15 the bug runs up because he is over excited (pg. 77)

27:30 There is an ancient magic tree

27:50 He is telling him what is going to happen

28:30 there is a duplicate of them (but flips back and forth) (pg. 81)

29:00 "Wait, that's just them" (took 30 seconds to figure that out)

29:20 The worrying robot, they are not fighters

29:40 commander of the rebellion (pg. 82 – 83)

29:50 Then the guy has an evil amulet, I guess (pg. 84)

30:00 The elf king is saying that they can kill her

30:25 Then they are hiking up the mountain

30:40 She's saying he should keep his sword

30:50 "Oh, it's a magic walking stick!" (said with excitement) (pg. 92)

31:50 There is 20 tons of bombs in there

32:00 Then he's saying she has to move it

33:10 Now she is infusing the staff with magic and it is a magic staff (pg. 103)

33:20 Now she's moving the seed around

33:50 The she takes out the explosives

34:10 There's a tunnel

34:15 The guys are sneaking in

34:35 He's saying he is supposed to empty the trash

35:05 going up the garbage shoot, a bunch of nasty stuff, like poop or something (pg. 115)

35:25 are those gadoba fruits? (pg. 116)

35:50 What makes you think that? (me) Because they are glowing.

Pg 122 -124, holds the book up, bottom of the book is on the table

36:50 The elf prince was left alive? Wait, he was the elf king.

Pg 126 – 129, confusion between the elf prince and the elf king

Pg 142 – 146, very quickly through here, but does flip back and forth

37:10 He says if she loses control of the stone she could destroy everything

37:20 Now they are going to kill the elf prince. He has a stone too.

37:50 Oh and he killed the elf prince

38:00 Shouldn't the trees be right in front of us and then they are

38:20 The chances are 1 in 100

38:50 Oh, he gets to choose

39:55 He is burning down all of the trees. Oh, they're burning the forest down.

40:20 "the stone is trying to take control of her and she doesn't let it" (pg. 151)

40:25 There's a big beast.

40:40 She attacks the beast. She incinerates it. The fox gets the guard.

41:40 The fox is fighting the elf king. He kicks the fox. The girl wakes up.

pg 165 refers to this as the elf king (more confusion)

42:10 Then the elf prince is attacking him

42:35 Then the elf king becomes gigantic

42:50 Then they fall off the cliff and the house grabs them

43:10 Then he is using the house to battle the elf king

43:28 Then the guy is attacking the house

43:50 Then she is controlling the house. Now she's making it repair itself. Now it's completely repaired again.

44:10 Not wind, but energy

44:20 Launches the fist like a missile and smashes him

44:30 Emily blacks out, Emily is the girl (pg. 202 – 205)

44:40 Then her mom is cured

45:05 The bunny has a cast on.

45:18 But then the elf prince is watching them

APPENDIX G

James' Think-Aloud Transcript

2:10 A lot of books start like this…(it does not provide a summary of what happened before)

3:25 The elves in this book well so far are not like the elves in most of the books that I read

4:45 The elves in this book are really creepy.

5:00 I think that the elves are trying to kidnap children from another dimension or something.

6:15 I think that this book would be better if it showed one thing at a time. What do you mean? It makes things confusing…like this is happening here…some guy is in control of a house robot while a bunny a vacuum and a robot are cleaning (pg. 10/11)

8:10 I think that this is a world of modern technology but magic at the same time

8:55 I think that this pendant that this girl is wearing controls her, but no body else knows about it, other than maybe her mother (pg. 18/19)

11:15 Maybe not a modern world, but a world of animals and humans and the animals are intelligent (pg. 28/29)

12:15 Oh, the animals are humans but there is a curse that is making them look like animals.

15:10 In most other stories elves are either tiny things dressed in green or humans that are taller and better than/at everything

20:10 What are you thinking? That this book isn't really that good. Why? Once again it is under my level. Better than last time? It is better than the last book by a lot, but still I like a challenge usually. And this is by far not challenging. I appreciate you reading it anyway.

21:20 Why is it comic books and not…Why am I reading a comic book instead of some other kind of book?

23:40 I think that comic books would be more okay if the actual reading part was harder and if it was a little bloodier and more gruesome. Is that just your own personal taste? Yeah.

26:54 What are you thinking? Ummm…I think that this book is like it has one event like one moment crammed into five ten pictures when it could only take two or three. Why do you think they might do that? I think it is to prolong a moment of excitement kind of like if they make everything that is boring they like the boring stuff don't take up a lot of pages…but the long pages take up several…like the fight scenes? Yeah

29:40 So what I think is the elves rose up and conquered the land were everybody lives and there was a curse that turns people into animals or things and there is a group…this is actually a lot like Inheritance the series…except instead of the elves it is galbatorex

33:25 Can I do something real quick? Sure. (me) Are you babysitting? (me) I guess so.

36:20 One thing that I don't really like about all books is you always know that the good the good guys will prevail. For one there is the rest of the book (?). Two it is always like that. There are hardly any stories except for Greek mythology that have stories (can't hear). Why do you think that the good guys usually prevail? Well it makes the reader feel good and I think that's it. How does it make the reader feel good? Because they are pretty much rooting for the protagonist ever since the beginning of the story. So the protagonist has to be the good guy? How can it not be? Yes, I think so.

43:45 This book and a lot of others, like this is good, but there should be a little humor, not a lot but a little.

46:40 I think that the gem…the necklace isn't controlling her it tells her what to do but she doesn't really have to obey. But it gives her advice. (pg. 110/111)

50:20 You don't really need the words at all. You can just look at the pictures and understand what is happening. (pg. 120/121)

54:20 There is always a twist in the middle of the story. That only becomes apparent when it comes…when it just tells you…like in Inheritance there ended up being a lot of ….that helped Eargon defeat the galbatorex (pg. 137)

59:20 Do I have to read the whole thing? Do you want to? No. You don't want to fiind out what happens. What predictions do you have about how it will end? I

think that they will bring the fruit back to the mom and the mom will heal. Then it will all turn out good in the end because Emily doesn't let the stone take control of her and she makes a difference. What if I tell you that there are 7 books in the series, does that change your prediction? Yes, definitely. (pg. 154)

APPENDIX H

Nadya's Think-Aloud Transcript

:30 Read the first Amulet

2:30 right away they are marching this guy, they don't really tell you anything, then there is this dialog, then they reveal that he is the prince of the elves, sent to his father, who is wearing a mask (pg. 4)

3:20 Apparently all of the elves are really evil and hunting down the kids

3:40 in a giant house like a machine that can walk around

3:50 bunch of robots, animated stuffed bunny, a vacuum cleaner

4:40 There is a guy in a coma…oh…I think that it is the girl's mom

5:15 so the girl is wearing an amulet and it is speaking to her and you can tell that it is speaking because it is outlined in pinkish bubbles…the amulet is like this all seeing thing and is warning her about the evil elves

6:00 Then they arrive in the city of Kanalis. There's this page of the whole city.

6:30 The evil elves found them

6:45 All of the citizens of kanalis are animals

7:05 brining the sick mom into the town of animals to get cured, apparently they are all cursed which is why they are all animals

7:35 There is like a fox that is beating up an elf that is trying to kill the kids

9:20 So they found out that they need a special fruit to cure the mom, and even the elves won't go there so I guess it is a big deal (pg. 41)

10:10 The elves invaded the house

10:30 The fox is like offering his services to help them against the elves

11:35 the bunny thing is staying behind with the fox and Emily. To protect her, I guess.

12:22 So Emily just discovered that she has levitating powers from the amulet I guess that the fox will teach her how to use it, her powers and stuff (pg. 56?)

13:45 So the amulet is apparently not entirely good. it wants to control her and take over her body (pg. 69?)

14:45 There is a council that apparently Emily is a part of; there are elders in here who are important (pg. 75?)

15:15 There is a secret under ground place called the resistance and I guess that they are opposing elves

15:40 They met a tree who was Silas' old friend, Silas was the stonekeepers great great great something grandfather

16:25 The tree can predict the future, the brother is trying to find out to know what will happen to his sister

17:30 So Navin, Emily's brother, is the destined commander of the army? (pg. 83)

18:15 So the elf king is saying that his son has to kill Emily or die…sheesh (pg. 85)

19:10 So the fox told her to find a weapon so she chose a walking stick (pg. 91)

20:50 So she is trying to control her powers by picking up a seed without destroying it (pg. 99)

21:20 She is trying to channel the energy through the staff and it worked

21:50 The amulet is trying to convince her to leave behind her friends

22:10 So they got into the entrance…filled with people? (pg. 111)

22:55 They are sneaking into the house to try to get it back from the elves

23:40 So they took the house back from the elves, so now they are off to save Emily from the prediction that the tree gave them

24:35 So the elf prince who first tried to kill them was a stonekeeper and then when they lose control…when stone keepers lose control of the stone they

become monsters…he did…but then they took away his stone…and now he is just really messed up

25:10 Actually it was the elf king who was the boy and then the amulet came back to him that's when he became the elf king

25:45 The evil elf is going to kill the elf prince…or he is going to mutilate him

26:10 And they just left him there to die

26:20 Emily and the fox found the trees, there are tons of skeletons

27:45 So they got the fruit and the elves found them and now they are running away from them

28:28 The elves got to the grove of trees and they are burning them all down

28:50 The stone is trying to get her to lose control so it can take over

29:05 the elves found them so they are going to fight I guess

29:25 The evil elf that hurt the prince is fighting with Emily with their amulets

30:15 the prince came back just as the guy was going to kill Emily and he killed well hurt the evil elf

30:40 Ohh…the evil elf just gave into the stones power and became a giant monster

31:00 the giant tries to step on them so they jump off a cliff, falling, the house caught them

31:30 now the house and the giant evil elf are fighting

32:20 Emily got control of the stone and she is repairing the house and she is making it operate on its own

32:50 They just knocked the giant elf off the edge of the giant cliff

33:10 Ohhh…and Emily just blacked out…there's blank…she is closing her eyes and then there is blackness

33:25 She woke up and her mom is back. She made it.

34:05 So it is all happy reunions and the fox is just like but yeah they are going to attack us with an army we are going to have to train a lot

34:45 Zoom out on the house and there is the elf prince basically in exile now

APPENDIX I

Mallory's Think-Aloud Transcript

7:45 Graphic novels are never my favorite thing. I could be reading a book. I do like graphic novels, I just don't read them as often.

8:45 Their eyes are kind of weird. So why are they handling the prince like this? (pg. 2/3)

9:15 4 Why doesn't he have a face when everyone else does? Who's Luger?

9:40 The art around the eyes is really cool because you can tell they are glowing a bit. (pg. 6)

10:05 Their house walks (pg. 8)

10:20 The rabbit cooks (pg. 10)

10:50 Emily must be the main character. But, who is the person on the bed? (pg. 14/15)

11:15 Does the amulet have some kind of special property? Why is she so powerful? (pg.18/19)

11:45 There are more walking houses. (pg. 22/23)

12:10 I wonder if he will be able to park it right? (pg. 26/27?) Where did that staircase come from? (pg. 27)

12:40 How does the pig grow a mustache? (pg. 28)

13:05 He has an amulet too. That's the fox from the cover. (pg. 30/31)

13:25 Both of the graphic novels we have read have animals personified…circumstances. (pg. 32/33)

13:50 I wonder what is causing the city to have so many hungry people…now I know…(pg. 34/35)

14:40 It is interesting that elves are usually a benevolent force but they aren't (?) (pg. 36/37)

15:10 Is that Emily's mother? (pg. 40/41)

Gets to page 42/43 and thinks that she may have missed a page…but realizes she hasn't…

16:10 Who is Silas? (pg. 42/43)

16:38 I think that the crew of the house is all robots. (pg. 44/45)

17:08 It seems that the prince of the elves has some sort of conscience. (pg. 46/47)

17:30 Who is that boy? I think it is her brother? I was right, that is her mom. (pg. 50/51)

18:00 The rabbit came.

18:45 So she can fly (pg. 57)

19:10 They seem to have …technology so I wonder what kind of setting this takes place in. (pg. 60/61)

19:48 I don't think the amulet is a good thing. It draws some parallels to L of the R. (pg. 66/67)

20:20 Are they going to climb the mountain?

21:00 What part does Balan play in this society? (pg. 76/77)

21:25 There's a tree. (pg. 78/79)

21:55 I wonder what is going to happen to Emily. (pg. 78/79)

22:40 I wonder how big the resistance is? (pg. 82/83)

23:25 Interesting father son relationship. But I also think that the amulets have some connection to the elf king because his face matches the surface of the amulet. (pg. 84/85)

23:50 It looks like a meadow…no forest… (pg. 88/89)

24:20 Does she really think that she can fight the elf king/army with a walking stick? (pg. 90/91)

Guess so…(answers above question on the next page)

25:50 What is the role of a stonekeeper? (pg. 96/97)

26:35 The amulet must have some sort of heat connected to it. (pg. 100/101)

27:30 Why can't she hear anything the fox is saying? (pg.106/107)

27:45 Is the amulet going to ignite the explosives?

28:00 She's possessed.

29:00 Interesting the elves don't like fish and yet they live in a port town. (pg. 114/115)

29:30 What is the key? The elves are on board still. (pg. 116/117)

30:55 I feel like one of the elf royalty is going to be the last stone keeper that lost control. (pg. 124/125) Yes, it was the elf king.

32:00 What are they doing to the elf prince? (pg. 128/129)

32:10 What opportunity is he ruining? (pg.130/131)

32:25 That is a lot of skeletons surrounding the tree (pg.132/133)

33:10 Are the right fruits alive or dead (?)

33:20 Hummm…interesting because no one would think to pick the one that is on the ground (pg.138/139)

34:05 I wonder why Father Adler is not on the mountain and all of the rest are. (pg.142/143)

34:20 What lies ahead? Hey, she's falling. She didn't die.

34:50 I think that Lugar wants the fruit, no, he wants revenge on the trees. (pg. 146/147)

35:30 I think that the elves have arrived. (pg. 150/151)

3:55 That image looks familiar (pg.152/153)

36:05 I think that the fox and the elf have some sort of grudge, but I don't know why. 156/157 Seems like, maybe

36:25 The light around the stone changed from pink to blue…I wonder if that is a bad thing. (pg.158/159)

37:05 Maybe the prince is going to end up saving her. I don't know why though. (pg.166/167)

37:22 Oh, he is letting the stone take control it appears. (pg.168/169)

37:35 Now (emphasized) she is falling off the cliff for real (pg.172/173)

37:45 Here's the house…okay…(as if she had been expecting it…wondering where it was)…but where is the rabbit though? (pg.174/175)

38:05 Seriously though…where did the rabbit go?

38:55 Oh, I think she is going to bring the house to life or something. (pg. 186/187)

39:48 Oh…he fell off the cliff (pg.198/199)

39:55 It's the same thing, its from the perspective of the main character when the lights kind of go out (pg. 202 – 205)

40:55 They're all wearing sort of modern clothes. (pg. 212/213)

41:10 Hey, there's the rabbit. (pg. 214)

41:28 The two siblings have a very similar look, facially, I wonder how old they are? (pg. 215)