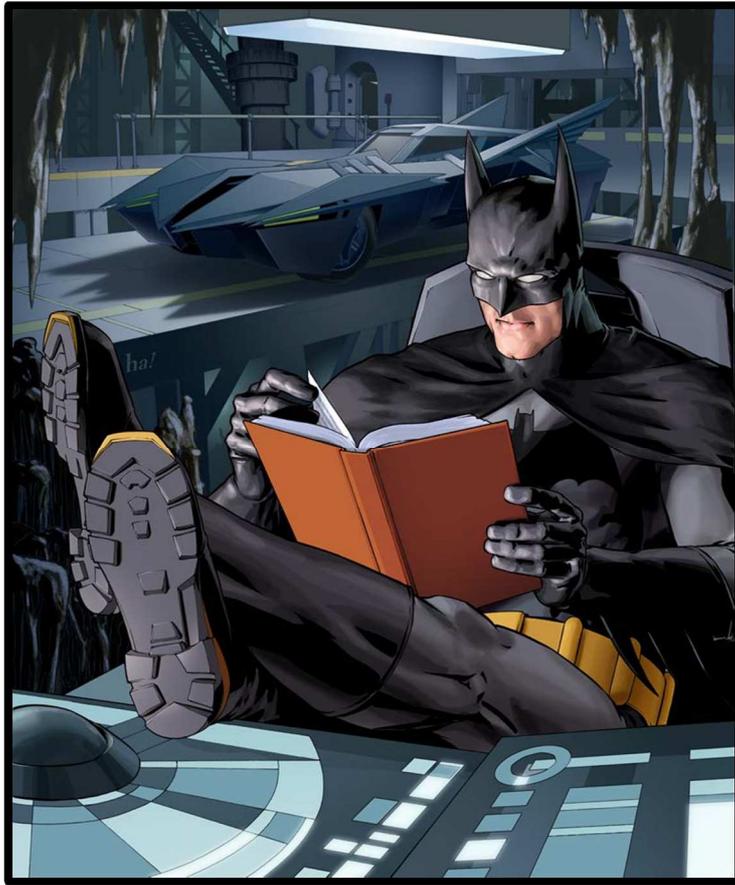


Panels and Prose



*Comic Books, Graphic Novels, and Graphic Adaptations as
complement to literary education in second language education.*

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Abstract

Literature is the forgotten child of second language education. Students are expected to read a moderate number of literary novels over the course of their educational career. In practice however, they will often attempt to escape their reading obligations. Students are reading less often and it is hard to fully understand a novel's content (Witte 37). Comic books offer an opportunity for students to come to grips with literary themes and content by means of a more visually oriented medium. Visual culture is the current norm for entertainment, and comic books can be an excellent bridge between more traditional forms of literature and the more contemporary visual spectacles. Comics have an experimental presence in foreign language education. Several authors have endeavoured to apply comics to education, but no concrete plans have been drawn up on the use of comics as a literary complement. A 2008 publication by Theo Witte in the field of literature education has paved the way for a more conducive and practical approach to foreign literature education. This thesis will outline and explain how comics can be approached as works of literature and used in class to teach students how to tackle more traditional literature.

Keywords:

Comic Books, Literature Education, Graphic Novels, Visual Culture, Second Language Education.

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1.0 Introduction

In 1945, Jason Beck delivered the word that would forever define the world's most famous comic book hero: "Stronger than a locomotive. Faster than a speeding bullet. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound," (The Meteor of Kryptonite). These are the elements that define: Superman. A figure of boundless strength, immeasurable speed and unquestionable integrity. All in all, Superman is a textbook example of flawless and flat character. Unfortunately, the only thing super about him is his superficiality. Because he barely experiences growth or hardship, he will always be the perfect hero.

However, over the years, Superman has undergone changes and major modifications to make him more sympathetic and believable. Besides kryptonite, his greatest weaknesses are his feelings for others and his simple view on the world. Over the years though, Superman has undergone a number of changes that have curbed Superman's infallibility to a significant degree. One particular angle used by authors to make him more identifiable when compared to normal humans is to put his moral integrity at risk. For instance, Peter B Lloyd has thoroughly explored the evolving morality behind Superman's actions. Perhaps the most important change occurred in 1964, where in issue 172; Superman officially denounced the use of lethal force (Lloyd 183). Up until that point, Superman disposed of his enemies by letting them die (Lloyd 189). In his early adventures though, Superman always acted on his own judgement, rather than the ethics of the regular people. This becomes especially obvious in later stories, where Superman considers himself a defender of American interests and would risk everything to save the president, even if that meant saving his nemesis (Lloyd 191). Another example can be found in Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, where Superman has become a government pawn and acts to protect the western way of life (Miller 115). Batman later calls him out on his new subservient nature, and denounces him for it (Miller 192). Interestingly, all these changes were introduced by authors other than the

original creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. Edmond Hamilton, Jeph Loeb, and Frank Miller each contributed to the dynamic morality of Superman's character, making him significantly more rounded and interesting than before.

Comic books and their stories are often dismissed for their superficiality and simplicity when compared to traditional literary works¹: "Critics viewed comic books as sub literate and feared they would disrupt children's development of literacy. Comic books' poor quality and small print also were feared to harm children's vision" (Lopes 401). However, this also means dismissing a huge educational opportunity. Comic books can share many elements with conventional literature. For example, motifs, themes, symbolism and character development can all be found in a Superman comic such as Mark Millar's *Superman Red Son*. Furthermore, children are motivated to read much more easily with the prospect of reading something that is not a regular novel (Cary 1). However, comics and graphic novels are not a panacea for a lack of readership in schools. Instead, they are a complementary asset to the literary canon that can help students take a step to more advanced reading. It is easy to assume that every learner of English should read Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and understand its allegorical content. However, reading Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* with the right contextual angle allows a learning reader to be introduced to dystopian themes and cryptic symbolism, without having to process a significant amount of expositional writing. It is key to provide students with the right comic or graphic novel, along with exercises to direct their attention. Recent work by Witte has laid out a foundation for this method of teaching traditional

¹ For the sake of argument, all novels, comic books, graphic novels, literary novels and comics will be referred to as written culture in this thesis, as opposed to visual culture. This is, however, by no means a definition of literature and its infinite sub-divisions and should not be interpreted as such; it is merely a note to prevent gratuitous exposition and elaboration.

literature. This thesis will present several practical suggestions on how use particular graphic novels as a gateway into more advanced, traditional literature.

Comic books are making a big re-entry into the public consciousness by means of successful film adaptation. Films like Joss Whedon's *Avengers* and Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* have propelled comic book heroes into the limelight of the entertainment industry. As a result, characters like Iron Man and Batman have entered the perception of students and teachers alike. Consequentially, students are already familiar with this characters and settings when they might explore them their native environment. In the same way, this thesis will focus on more mainstream comics and graphic novels to sustain this character familiarity with students. Naturally, not all comics are suitable for classroom use or to even read for a literary experience. As a result it is important to outline which comics can be used for teaching literature, and when they should be used.

The aim of this thesis will be to provide a classified list of literary adaptations, graphic novels and comic books, along with practical assignments that will help the students focus on particular aspects of understanding or interpreting literature. This thesis will be of a descriptive and instructing nature. It will lay a foundation based on earlier research and material study. Furthermore, it will focus on English literature education in Dutch schools. To accomplish this, firstly, it will outline why comic books are relevant today and in why comics are relevant in class. Secondly, it will describe how comic books are useful in class. Thirdly, it will present the system used to classify these texts. Fourthly, this thesis will present a list of suitable adaptations, graphic novels and comics, and will then proceed to carefully outline each work's level and practical assignments. Finally it will conclude by outlining the statue of restrictions and opportunities for further research and investigation.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Relevance of Comic Books in Visual Culture

This purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on the position of comic books within today's visual culture. Novels, books or any written culture, including comic books, are subject to the constantly increasing pressure to stay relevant in the light of new popular media such as films, video games and internet. It is not uncommon for a student to simply watch a film adaptation of a book and consequentially base their book report on it. This section of the thesis will establish the relevance of comic books and graphic novels in today's increasingly visual culture.

A primary concern of the academic literature on the subject of comic books the lack thereof. According to Alphonse Silberman, entire libraries have been written about film, literature and music, but the comic has been neglected (7). However, in the past decade, there has been an increasing amount of literature on visual culture and how it continues to permeate in everyone's daily lives. Visual gratification is becoming the standard in the contemporary arts. Blockbuster action films rake in cash hand over fist, while video games such as Activision's *Call of Duty* series makes over a billion dollars in just fifteen days after going on sale (Turner). Debord even states public perception has shifted to "a society of the spectacle" (in Duncum 102). In his paper on art education, Paul Duncum continues to list several publications on the increasing amount of attention to spectacle in society, but what becomes abundantly clear is that today's culture and art direction is predominantly visually oriented (102-3). However, perhaps the most important argument he presents is that "[t]he once clear distinction between high and low culture no longer holds, as each borrow freely from one another and both producers and audiences move between them (Morley & Chen, in Duncum 103). As such, literature has been placed on the same footing as film, television and musicals in order to be marketed to a broad audience. All in all, visual media culture is the norm today

and it means the art forms that are not outwardly visceral or eye catching must compensate somehow.

Numerous studies have attempted to explain exactly what visual culture represents, but Duncum argues that “[a]ny definition should be viewed as provisional and contestable” (103). Visual culture then, much like art, is hard to define in concrete terms. Nicholas Mirzoeff presents the following definition: “[V]isual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology [which is] any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil paint to television and the Internet (in Duncum 3). Although Duncum argues that Mirzoeff’s definition bars the inclusion of natural scenery into visual culture (104), for this thesis, Mirzoeff’s definition is quite encompassing as it aptly how consumers are looking for immediate visual gratification as opposed to reading. By extent, written culture is being suppressed by the visual gratification offered through visual technology such as televisions, tablets, laptops or even a handheld smartphone. Malcolm Barnard provides a different definition of visual culture: “[A]nything visual produced, interpreted or created by humans which has, or is given, functional, communicative and/or aesthetic intent” (in Duncum 105). This definition contains an important clause that supports how visual culture is dominating over written culture: It states how the visual culture is assuming functional, communicative and/or aesthetic properties. Properties that were also attributable to written culture. Barnard’s definition supports David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen’s ideas on how culture has been levelled between high and low culture. In summary, visual culture has become an umbrella term for everything visual ever created that can provide a stimulus on a functional, aesthetic and or communicative level.

Despite the encroaching dominance of visual culture, comics occupy a relevant position by reinventing their format to maintain their readership. So far, this chapter has

indicated what visual culture is and that it is a direct opponent to the written culture, and is contending with it for an audience. By the very nature of its immediately visually gratifying properties; it is winning the contest. It is important to take note that comic books are in a significant position in the great divide between the written culture and the visual culture. Comic books incorporate elements of both, which makes them a hybrid between the two forms. As a result, comic books maintain an established base as writing culture within visual culture. Comics do not succumb to the success of visual culture, instead they adapt. David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins argue that no medium can truly die out; it is only the carrier that dies.

“Specific delivery technologies (the eight-track cassette, say, or the wax cylinder) may become moribund, but the medium of recorded sound survives. As many studies of older and recent periods attest, the emergence of new media sets in motion a complicated, unpredictable process in which established and infant systems may co-exist for an extended period or in which older media may develop new functions and find new audiences as the emerging technology begins to occupy the cultural space of its ancestors (Thorburn & Jenkins 2).

This effect extends to comic books as much as it does to music. Digital comic sales are soaring, while sales of paper copies stabilises in a new collectible format (ICv2). This new collectible format comes in the shape of trade paperbacks or hardcovers; a number of issues packed into a book, usually containing an entire story arc for easy collecting as opposed to having to collect separate issues. Additionally, comics are becoming increasingly relevant again in part thanks to digital distribution. Unfortunately, publishers have not published concrete digital sales numbers. However, in a 2013 interview, Diane Nelson, president of DC

comics, revealed that DC sells about a million digital copies each month (Hudson, par. 10). In short, comics are not dying; they are simply changing the way they reach their readers. By maintaining their presence in visual culture they assume a relevant position.

Despite their relevance in visual culture, comics are plagued by a stigma that represses their recognition as an art form ever since their inception. Karthleen Franz states that in the early fifties comics were frowned upon by parents and teachers because they were nothing but glorifications of violence (383-5). This is true to an extent, because even righteous comic book heroes like Superman or Spiderman generally perform their heroism through violent acts. Some comics are based entirely around the concept of violence, torture and general bloodshed. Paul Lopes even describes a particular stigma surrounding comics and its entire cult, including the readers, writers and publishers (388). This stigma flows forth from the aforementioned divide between high and low culture. Though this divide was contested by Morley & Chen (in Duncum 103), it still exists. Despite that, there are comics that distance themselves from gratuitously violent displays and focus more on a narrative. In general, these types of comics are referred to as graphic novels. They generally contain a self-contained storyline, without any further ties to serialised releases or universes, for example, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*.² Moore even condemns the term to nothing more than a marketing ploy:

It's a marketing term. I mean, it was one that I never had any sympathy with.

The term "comic" does just as well for me. The term "graphic novel" was something that was thought up in the '80s by marketing people and there was a guy called Bill Spicer who used to do a brilliant fanzine back in the sixties called *Graphic Story Magazine*. He came up with the term "graphic story".

² However, violence does occur in graphic novels, but it is generally contextualised to a much greater extent than just a method of fighting evil.

That's got something to recommend it, you know, I can see "graphic story" if you need it to call it something but the thing that happened in the mid-'80s was that there were a couple of things out there that you could just about call a novel. You could just about call *Maus* a novel, you could probably just about call *Watchmen* a novel, in terms of density, structure, size, scale, seriousness of theme, stuff like that. The problem is that "graphic novel" just came to mean "expensive comic book" and so what you'd get is people like DC Comics or Marvel comics - because "graphic novels" were getting some attention, they'd stick six issues of whatever worthless piece of crap they happened to be publishing lately under a glossy cover and call it *The She-Hulk Graphic Novel*, you know? It was that that I think tended to destroy any progress that comics might have made in the mid-'80s. (Moore)

While Moore's opinion on the matter is an arbitrary perspective on the matter of defining graphic novels, he does make a distinction between a comic with serious themes and content as opposed to the flat weekly publications. For the sake of argument, this thesis will refer to the more serious comics as graphic novels. As far as graphic novels are concerned, perhaps the best example of the appropriation of the medium as a vehicle for mature and uncompromising content is Spiegelman's *Maus* (1991). Spiegelman's autobiographical comic is a stylised and dramatic depiction of the holocaust. Published in short issues over the course of nearly twelve years, it won Spiegelman a Pulitzer Prize when it finally was completed. It remains the only comic book today to be awarded the prestigious accolade. *Maus* lifted the graphic novel from its stigmatised niche into the academic limelight. According to Andrew Loman, "[t]he volume of academic work published on *Maus* far surpasses that of any other work of comics" (217). Unfortunately, graphic novels are still not as present as a teaching

tool, despite *Maus* proving that they could provide a wealth of scholastic exercise. According to Michael Lavin, comics are overlooked in schools and libraries as a serious form of literature (31). He continues to highlight one extremely important argument why schools and libraries offer more comics: “because kids read them” (Lavin 31). The key of this argument is not that children can easily be motivated to read a comic, but that children will read over 8000 words without any resistance or bias (Lavin 32). This allows the comic book to be used easily in education because it can be appropriated for learning about literature. So, while comic books might still contain a degree of violence that makes them unsuitable for school use, certain texts offer narratives and themes very different from serialised publications. The graphic novels are able to offer a wealth of literary context to readers and should not be overlooked because students are willing to read them.

Several studies have investigated the merits of comics as a bridge between the visual culture and the written one. As mentioned before, comics sit in between the written and the visual culture. They provide the instant gratification of visual images, but can still provide the depth of literature through the writing. When viewed like this, comics may seem like the panacea to all of literature education’s problems regarding the lack of consistent readership and the shrinking attention spans of students. However, there are some considerable problems to address in this relation. Perhaps the most important is the stigma described in the earlier paragraph regarding the violent content and general low-brow perception. However, not all comics are violent in nature. As Lavin argues, “[a] graphic novel is a book-length, original story told in comic book form. While comic books are typically associated with costumed super-heroes, many teachers and librarians recognize that graphic novels often employ standard literary techniques to tell worthwhile stories about ordinary people” (33). Graphic novels like *Maus* and *A Contract with God* by Will Eisner explore history, grief, guilt, love,

culture, legacy and religion. Rather than the conflict between good and evil, these stories focus on character development, allowing readers to explore more than just applied violence.

In conclusion, comic books remain relevant and accessible in today's visual culture dominated world. Though the comic is still somewhat stigmatised, more interest is displayed in the growing market for graphic novels and book length comics.

2.2 Comic Books in the Classroom

This next section will elaborate on the merits of comic books as a didactic instrument. A great amount of literature has been written on positive effects of comic books on both the performance and motivation of readers. As mentioned in the prior section, children will read large volumes of text if it is offered in a package that appeals to their visually oriented perception (Levin 32). This assumption resonates with research conducted by Roswitha Henseler, who found that students would actively avoid pure text without any form of visual feedback because they would find it too strenuous (4). This visual allure to children combined with the content of traditional literature has not gone unnoticed in the field of literary education. Rocco Versaci explains that most students have read comic books in their childhood, but stopped doing so later in life. He supports Lavin's argument that students once picked up, and read these comics voluntarily (63). Additionally, he states that, "[a]side from engagement, comic books also help to develop much needed analytical and critical thinking skills. A common goal, regardless of the level we teach, is to help students read beyond the page in order to ask and answer deeper questions that the given work suggests about art, life, and the intersection of the two" (Versaci 64). Versaci mentions how comics allow students to learn to read the metaphoric message or the underlying themes. An important matter to address is then whether graphic novels and comics can offer such an enriched reading experience. Graphic adaptations of original works generally retain their themes and motives.

For instance Fiona Macdonald's adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* retains all of the symbolisms present in the actual novel. Furthermore, even popular super hero comics like *Batman* contain literary complexities. For instance *Batman and Philosophy*, edited by Mark White and Robert Arp contains essays on the Dark Knight's motivations, vigilantism and even religious symbolism and backgrounds. Additionally, graphic novels also provide low threshold access to the cultural historical aspect of literature education. James Reibman mentions that Spiegelman's *Maus* provides what seems to be a far more accurate display of the holocaust than most film depictions (23).

Comics are able to motivate students to read to a much greater extent than traditional literature. Richard Beach offers important insights on how comics motivate and inspire readers. "[S]tudents need to know how to respond to the use of panel layout, perspectives on characters or events through uses of different shots [...] They also learn how text and image meanings support each other, a shifting focus that can require higher levels of concentration than with traditional print-only texts" (Beach 149-50). Additionally, Beach mentions that graphic literature is also advantageous to dyslectics and struggling readers, by providing visual support (150). Moreover, this argument is supported by Jack Baur who, in an empirical experiment, found that dyslectic readers were eager and motivated to read comics and graphic novels because the visual feedback relieved them from their impediment to a degree (17). Baur also notes that comics are easy to read though complex to read into, further strengthening the argument of literary content in comics. Bonny Norton's research on the reading motivation of children when reading comics has revealed some startling perspectives. Children are willing to read comics by their own initiative, but are driven away from them by school and teachers who would much rather see them read traditional literature (141). Norton's research goal was not to legitimise a comic's claim to literary pedigree, but to reengage readers to view comics not exclusively as a means of entertainment but also to

review their content and message from a critical perspective (145-6). Regardless of Norton's intent, graphic novels do bear significant weight as reading material. Smith found that comics of generally contain more advanced vocabulary than traditional novels that are targeted toward the same age group (5). This argument potentially defuses any criticism parents or other teachers may have on the legitimacy of comics as reading material. The thought alone for a student, that they might be reading something advanced while experiencing none of troubles they would associate with reading longer texts, may function as a motivational catalyst for their reading. Additionally, Jaqueling McTaggart argues the sword cuts both ways: graphic novels encourage and motivate the weaker reader by substituting the exposition and narration with images, while simultaneously challenging the experienced reader by introducing them to the more advanced angle on the comic's content (McTaggart 32). Lilian Ronnqvist further attests to this as teenagers in second language learning prefer to read literature that is written in a colloquial tone or is abridged and simple (125). Abridged materials in this case may include the graphic adaptations of traditional literature, allowing teachers to make their students Orwell and Fitzgerald with less effort. However, the quality of the adaptation is something that needs to be scrutinized before letting students read them, just like any other comic. In summary, reading comics is a valuable form of reading experience for students because they are strong reading motivators and because they provide beginners and experienced readers alike access to an engaging reading experience.

In addition to the didactic potential of visual literature, a growing amount of literature has been written on the use of comics and graphic novels in traditional literature education. Schools, libraries and book clubs are picking up on the growing influx of this literary genre. According to Geert Weyers schools in the Netherlands show an increasing interest in the genre as it makes its way into regular book stores (22). The important element of this sudden increase in interest is the re-appreciation of the graphic novel during the past decade.

According to Jan Baetens, the graphic novel has only come to be perceived as a form of traditional literature shortly after the turn of the century (78).

The application of graphic novels in second language education remains rare. A 2013 series of interviews has shown that from a small test group consisting of second language teachers from a number of Dutch secondary schools; only half of them are considering using graphic novels in class (Corput et al, 13). However, none of them have invested any time or effort into introducing graphic novels in class. A large portion of the literature on the subject of comic books in education is dedicated to choosing the proper graphic novels from the myriad of publications to assist in the endeavour. Despite the lack of a pre-existing canon for graphic novels, several authors have ventured to explore the interpretations of these graphic novels with their students. Jonathan Seyfriend read several graphic novels with his students and during class they would discuss the themes and how the author and artist represented the passage of time compared to traditional literature (45-6). Furthermore, Beach and his colleagues presented several angles on how to combine graphic novels with traditional literature through character comparisons (*Activities*). In summary, comics are gradually being introduced into education. However, their use in classrooms is largely experimental at this time.

In addition to being great reading motivators, comic are also beneficial to second language learners as they provide substantial language input. In a 2003 paper, Peter Krashen discusses the advantages of free voluntary reading when learning second language. Krashen found a drastic increase in language proficiency in students who would read at their own volition (*Explorations*, 20). By extent, Krashen's findings can be exploited through the use of the motivational capabilities of comics. Incidentally, Krashen also states that comics, as well as novels and magazines, provide input much closer to the vocabulary used when speaking in contrast to reading articles and newspapers (*Explorations*, 22). Earlier research by Donald

Hayes and Margaret Ahrens showed that comics contain slightly more common words than traditional novels, as well as slightly more uncommon words (407). There is a considerably larger saturation of uncommon words in comic books when compared to television or conversation, making it a possible way to receive more advanced language input (Hayes et al 407). However, Krashen notes that reading comics needs to be a sustained practice in order to yield significant results from their input (*The Power*, 51).

So, comics can be of value in the classroom as strong reading motivators. Adaptations like are able to provide low threshold access to even the more complicated of literature, but original comics, such as Batman and Superman, can also bring literary themes and elements to the classroom in a form accessible to all readers. Literature on the subject has touched upon the angle to be taken when approaching comics as a literary genre, but also on how to use them as intertextual bridges to traditional literature. In addition, comics also have a remedial side to them, in that they are able to alleviate the shortcomings of dyslectic readers (Baur 17). Comics also contribute to students' language acquisition by offering a relatively rich vocabulary.

2.3 Indexing System

The final sections of this paper will consist of a comprehensive and applicable list of comics, graphic novels and graphic adaptations for use in literary education. This list will need to be arranged and indexed according to a well defined system, able to be referenced quickly and unambiguously, while at the same time leave room for free interpretation and movement within this system.

Theo Witte has developed a comprehensive system for classifying and applying works of literature in education and how to help readers pick a work that suits their capabilities. Witte's system introduces a six level system (132). This system focuses solely on literary

competence through a student's reading abilities. Each level is clearly defined through several different aspects. These aspects include: Time investment, personal development and literacy, literary style, literary process and character depth (Witte 133). For example, level one is characterised by books with few pages, familiar subjects, familiar language, fast narrative pace in a linear order, familiar themes, an ending with closure and simple, flat characters (Witte 133). These books are targeted at beginning readers, who see literature a possible form of entertainment, but do not want to be academically enriched. A level six book on the other hand is the direct opposite of that: Books are long and contain unfamiliar themes and language. Reading the novel demands considerable background knowledge on the author and the work itself in addition to familiarity with historical references. The language might be an experimental or idiosyncratic style. The characters are complex and interact with each other in more than one way. The reader is experienced and motivated and possesses meta-literary knowledge of philosophy and intertextuality (Witte 139-40). One of the most important differences between the lower and higher levels and be found in the transition between level three and four. Level four readers are expected to be able to immerse themselves within a character that is completely different from their own perception (Witte 136-7). Understanding a character's feelings and motivations is major step in appreciating literature, so most level four assignments should be aimed toward facilitating this immersion.

Witte has published a list containing Dutch novels students can read for school assignments in addition to contextual assignments that help them understand the content of the novels. These assignment are trans-level. This means that a level two book can have a context suitable for level four. For instance George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is at face value a short and simple novel about animals. It could be classified as a level two book. However, its background context is a critique on communism and its numerous flaws. Reading the book at this level requires a certain understanding of symbolism and the novel's background. This is

more the territory of level four than that of level two. This measure of transcendence is exceedingly important for the purpose of this thesis and it is the hinge upon which this thesis turns. Graphic adaptations may allow lower level readers to tackle higher level books. For instance Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is difficult to read for anyone who is unfamiliar with the works and language of Shakespeare. This would classify the play at level six. However, the graphic novel version, adapted by John Macdonald, is significantly easier to understand despite using the original text because the images explicate the exposition. Similarly, a reader of *Animal Farm* may find him or herself lost on its communist context. However, this might become clearer after reading *Superman: Red Son* by Mark Millar which is essentially an emulation of *Animal Farm*. However, the communist theme is shown explicitly in the comic, effectively lowering *Animal Farm*'s context from a level four book, to a level three, or even level two. Original graphic novels may also be literary staples themselves in this respect. Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* is a complex comic book in itself, featuring heavy themes and a non-linear story line with several characters who each have their own agenda. It could easily be rated as a level four book on its own, but when students are directed toward the implicit symbolism and political treatise the novel contains, they might find the material to be on level five.

Witte's research highlighted a significant number of effective assignments that can be applied to number of texts (150-2). These results will form the basis for the assignments. In case these assignments are not sufficient for the required level, Erik Kwakernaak published a comprehensive work on designing learning tasks for second language learners. He outlines six different types of assignments: Reader response, comprehension, literary analysis, interpretation, social and psychological background and lastly, historical background (Kwakernaak 402-3). However, while Kwakernaak frequently mentions Witte's model as guidance, the assignments do not correspond with the six levels from Witte. However, he does

note that the historical and social background assignments are considerably less common for lower level readers (Kwakernaak 403).

For the final list and discussion, Witte's system will provide the index; a six tier system that will rank the graphic novels and adaptations according to difficulty and possible challenge. Kwakernaak's work shall provide the basis for the execution of the level's transcending nature.

2.4 Comic Quality Criteria

This section will outline the criteria for the graphic novels that will make up the list. As with the majority of visual culture, the quality of graphic novels is extremely diverse. Some publications are Pulitzer material, while other comics are not worth the paper they were printed on. Because the list will be comprised of several types of graphic novels, each type will have additional conditions accredited to it where required.

A substantial amount of literature has been written on what makes a good graphic novel. These publications include academic evaluations, but there is a bounty of press reviews that also provide a solid foundation on which to base a selection. However, not all recommended graphic novels are suitable for classroom use. Steven Cary describes a particular issue regarding raunchy material by means of the "Naked Buns" theory (45). This theory hypothesises that a student can read anything dirty or raunchy without much resistance from parents or caretakers, but the moment a single bun or buttock is shown in an image, there will be a serious possibility of a confrontation with said parents (46). Since this thesis focuses on Dutch second language education it will take this rule to heart in a toned down version. The purpose of this thesis is to provide a method to read graphic novels as a literary gateway. So, students will be reading their comics individually for the most parts, and preferably on a voluntary basis (Krashen, *Power*, 147). Some nudity may be present, but it

should not be goal of the comic, nor should it ever exploit it. Additionally, if the work does contain graphic material, but is still within reasonable a limit, the comic will be restricted to students ages sixteen years and older. Seyfried notes that it is important to be familiar with the works before letting students read them (48). This is a fair assertion, but just as with regular literature, it is impossible to read every piece out there that students present at the teacher's desk. This thesis will focus on the more mainstream graphic novels that are freely available for anyone to read.

Mainstream, however, does not immediately imply mediocre. Although Baetens argues that the quality is still debatable, because a graphic novel combines image and written word, while some of the more literary aligned works are considerably more word heavy than finding a proper balance between the two elements (79-81). The opposite is also an issue, where a comic is so image heavy that there is barely anything worth reading. As a result, is important to keep the balance in mind when selecting comics and graphic novels.

Unfortunately, there is no clear indication of how much text is too much, or how much ink work is considered gratuitous. Bill Boerman-Cornell provides some examples on how image and text should be balanced. Specifically, the images should complement the text in a way that the context of the dialogue becomes clear without further reading (74). Baetens also presents the issue of the "Literary Graphic Novel". A graphic novel based on a work of literature. Baetens criticises the term for being pretentious, as an enormous industry is at work to convert one work after the other to simply make a profit on the great names (78). While he acknowledges that there are quality adaptations, this thesis will evaluate adapted entries to list on the same grounds as its original would. For instance, if an adaptation of *Moby Dick* would not allow a reader to experience the biblical and ironic symbolism, then that adaptation would not make it onto the list. Adaptations in particular should be analysed based on how they're adapted. A 2013 publication by Ana Julia Hidalgo and Lois Rutters outlines the various ways

a text can be adapted and appropriated for various purposes (34). This thesis will adhere to several of these principles when evaluating adaptations, in particular the historical context retention when adapting a story (Hidalgo et al, 35).

In short, the criteria for graphic novels in the final list include: They should be well received, contain a good balance between images and text, should not contain overly graphic material that may be inappropriate, and should possess a level of higher literary themes and elements. Adaptations should retain their original elements, including symbolism and themes, while also retaining their original historical context.

3.0 List of Suitable Comic Books

3.1 List structure

Based on the aforementioned criteria and theory, this chapter will present the list of works that could be read by students. Additionally, the entries will be divided in three different types of comics. The first is the ‘literary adaptation’, which is a graphic reproduction of an earlier work. The second type is the ‘graphic novel’, which a longer, original, and self-contained work of fiction, told like a comic book. The third and last type is the ‘comic book’, which in most cases case will be a collected bundle of a well-known comic book series that together make a single coherent narrative. These comic books usually feature well known characters. Further information in this list will refer to the author(s), the artist(s), publisher, year of publication and an age recommendation if required.

3.2 List of Recommended works

1. *Frankenstein*, by Fiona McDonald. Level 2. Illustrated by Penko Gelev. Published by The Salariya Book Company in 2008. Original novel by Mary Shelley. Adaptation.
2. *Macbeth, the Quick Text version;* by John Macdonald. Level 2. Illustrated by John Haward. Published by Classical Comics in 2008. Original play by William Shakespeare. Adaptation
3. *Romeo and Juliet*, by Jim Pipe. Level 5. Illustrated by Penko Gelev. Published by The Salariya Book Company in 2013. Original play by William Shakespeare. Adaptation.
4. *Macbeth*, by Stephen Haynes. Level 4. Illustrated by Nick Spender. Published by The Salariya Book Company in 2013. Original play by William Shakespeare. Adaptation.
5. *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen volume 1*, by Alan Moore. Level 3. Illustrated by Kevin O’Neill. Published by DC Comics in 2000. Graphic Novel. Ages 16 and up.

6. *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen volume 2*, by Alan Moore. Level 3. Illustrated by Keven O'Neill. Published by DC Comics in 2003. Graphic Novel / Adaptation. Ages 16 and up.
7. *Sandman: Prelude & Nocturnes*, by Neil Gaiman. Level 4. Illustrated by Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III. Published by Vertigo Comics in 1989. Graphic Novel. Ages 16 and up.
8. *V for Vendetta*, by Alan Moore. Level 4. Illustrated by David Lloyd. Published by Vertigo Comics in 1989. Graphic Novel.
9. *Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi. Level 4. Illustrated by Marjane Satrapi. Published by L'Association in 2000. Translation by Pantheon Books, published in 2003. Graphic Novel
10. *A Contract with God*, by Will Eisner. Level 3. Illustrated by Will Eisner. Published by Baronet Books in 1978. Graphic Novel. Ages 16 and up.
11. *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman. Level 4. Illustrated by Art Spiegelman. Published by Pantheon Books in 1991. Graphic Novel.
12. *Watchmen*, by Alan Moore. Level 6. Illustrated by Dave Gibbons. Published by DC Comics in 1987. Graphic Novel. Ages 16 and up.
13. *Superman Red Son*, by Mark Millar. Level 2. Illustrated by Dave Johnson. Published by DC Comics in 2003. Comic Book.
14. *All Star Superman*, by Grant Morrison. Level 3. Illustrated by Frank Quietly. Published by DC Comics in 2008. Comic Book.
15. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, by Frank Miller. Level 3. Illustrated by Klaus Janson. Published by DC Comics in 1986. Comic Book.

16. *Batman Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on a Serious Earth* by Grant Morrison.
Level 5. Illustrated by Dave McKean. Published by DC comics in 1989. Comic Book.
Ages 16 and up.

4.0 Discussion

This chapter will discuss the content of each individual comic in depth. Additionally it will present the possible assignments that could be used in order for the student come to grips with the material.

4.1 Adaptations

Frankenstein – Level 2

Mary Shelley’s pioneering science fiction novel is an extremely interesting story and compelling novel. However, students would probably pick up anticipating a mad scientist shouting “It’s alive!” while lightning shoots through his laboratory. The actual novel contains no such scene and deals with very different matter than the torches and pitchforks from the films. Macdonald’s adaptation is a simplified version that cuts much of the exposition and dialog, and shifts focus to the two main players of the plot: Doctor Frankenstein and the monster. All the nuanced symbolism, such as the cold setting where the doctor and the monster meet and the juxtaposition of the book of Genesis are still present through Gelev’s bleak, but stylish drawings. The adaptation even contains an appendix with contextual information about the author, the novel itself and its many film adaptations. The language is adapted to modern form and the flashbacks and cutaways are clearly indicated to keep lower level readers on the right track. This simplification makes the novel accessible to level two readers, who will find the limited number of prominent characters and the visual depiction of

its setting easy to follow. Higher level readers could explore the wealth of symbolism and the relationship between the doctor and monster to build their experience for higher level reading.

The assignments for level two readers should be aimed toward reader response (Kwakernaak 402) and their opinion on the story or the events. A possible assignment could include writing a short paragraph where the reader expresses his/her opinion on the monster and his actions.

A level three assignment could elevate the former assignment to a more focussed level. Witte states that the transition from level two to three is partially characterised by an increase in the level of character development of the characters (140). So, a possible level three assignment could have the investigate relationship between the doctor and the monster and how their actions affect the other. They could draw a timeline and place the events in order.

The fourth level is characterised by the change in style and the introduction of ethical and moral issues experienced by the characters and the reader. Kwakernaak suggests investigating the background of the two main characters (402). Letting the reader compare and contrast each character's origin with their actions over the course of the story rather than just based on each other's actions. More direct questions could also be asked, as to why the monster would burn both himself and his creator? Or why the monster would want a wife?

Macbeth, the quick text version – Level 2.

The list contains two different adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. While both adaptations are simplified versions of the original play, they differ from each other in a key area: This version had its text adapted to present day English. The result is a text that lower level readers can easily understand. Shakespeare's meter and poetry has been lost in the process, but the story and characters have come out unscathed. Haward's drawings are distinctly modern,

making it extremely appealing to starting readers who would want to try Shakespeare's work. In itself though, *Macbeth* is not a particularly complex play, and the characters are more clearly cut than those featured in *Hamlet*. This makes for an easier reading experience altogether. On a higher level the characters' motivations and actions can be investigated.

An assignment for level two readers, which focuses their reading on the characters and their role in the story, would help them understand the events. *Macbeth* is an eventful play, so to illustrate their comprehension of the story readers could be tasked with making a characters sheet based on the list provided in the comic (Macdonald 5). They should find out what their role is in the story and perhaps whether they're still alive in the end. This is an exercise in comprehension and should help students align the characters' roles with the events of the story (Kwakernaak 402).

When a reader is ready for level three, they could be challenged to put the story in perspective with their own perspectives. Witte recommends an assignment where the student has to pick three events from the story, write how a particular character acted in this scene, and then write what he/she would have done (Witte 162).

***Romeo and Juliet* – Level 5.**

It is probably safe to assume that all students know about Romeo and Juliet. Pipe's adaptation is nearly an adaptation in name only. He has left the majority of script in its original form, added descriptors where the script lacked them and the final result a text that is very close the original. Gelev's drawings help understand the tale, as all the characters are colour-coded for reader convenience. While the latter helps to make the comic more accessible, the original language will most likely deter low level readers from picking it up. Yet, it is easier to understand than its original counterpart and should allow access to the bard's most famous romantic tragedy.

Witte provides a number of options for the higher levels. A level five reader will want to investigate the cultural historical context of play. They could be tasked with researching how the play was performed in its original time period, or find modern adaptations and see how they differ from the original (Kwakernaak 403).

Since this comic is relatively close to the original, an assignment where the reader compares the comic to a film could be very feasible to an early level four reader (Witte 166). A slightly more advanced assignment could have the reader argue whether this story could have taken place in a different time or place (Witte 166).

Macbeth – Level 4.

This version of *Macbeth* essentially underwent the same treatment as *Romeo and Juliet*. The script is mostly intact and further exposition is added to substitute for that lack of stage directions where the images and text fail to express the character's feelings. The art style is bleaker and less dynamic than its level two counterparts, making the overall package slightly less attractive at face value. However, this is an opportunity to read a complex text such as *Macbeth* in a slightly simpler form. *Macbeth* feature a number of characters with distinct motivations and ideas. Level four readers should be able to immerse themselves into these characters

Level four readers can be tasked with finding the three most important scenes in the play and tasked to argue why they think that they are important (Witte 166). *Macbeth* contains a number of pivotal moments where the story is advanced through the actions and ideas of certain characters, so it requires thorough immersion by the reader to argue his choices.

Like the former adaptation, the level five tasks should be designed to stimulate the cultural historic perspective. *Macbeth* was written during a time of great change in the then newly formed United Kingdom. Letting readers research Shakespeare's motivation behind

writing a regicidal play should engage readers to learn more about the play's context (Witte 166).

4.2 Graphic Novels

The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen volume 1 - Level 3.

Alan Moore's *League* is an intertextual tour de force featuring characters from numerous classic novels. It is a celebration of superhero comics and literature all in one. Mina Harper, a character from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, is tasked by Ian Flemming's James Bond's grandfather with assembling a team of legendary operatives to solve a mysterious theft that could endanger the British Empire. The graphic novel contains characters from *King Solomon's Mines*, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde*, *Sherlock Holmes* and cameos from many more. It is a barrage of intertextual references that could serve as a stepping stone onto Victorian literature for any reader. The plot itself is fast paced and most characters' personalities are borrowed from their original novels so their development is fixed. The setting however can be alienating to lower level readers so this graphic novel should be picked up by level three readers. Level four readers will find the graphic novel's context and references to be more interesting than the plot itself.

Level three readers should be asked to investigate the two characters, Alan Quatermain and Mina Harper, that are developed further from their original template. The reader should research the two characters and compare what they are like at the beginning of the story, and what they're like in the end (Witte 162).

Level four readers should be directed to the intertextual content and numerous references. Witte lists an assignment where students should find out why the author of the graphic novel references the other stories (166). This assignment should be broadened and

readers should be tasked with uncovering the origins of each member of the League. They might be motivated enough to read one of those novels.

The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen volume 2 - Level 3.

Alan Moore's intertextual adventure pick up shortly after the end of volume one. The League is thrust into action as it finds itself in H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. The entire comic is essentially a retelling of Wells' novel with the several key differences and more intertextual references. Wells' work is thoroughly represented in this comic and his work is used to great effect. Some panels can contain exceptionally graphic material, so younger readers should be dissuaded from picking it up. Alternatively, it might be a stepping stone into early science fiction. Like volume one, the plot is fast paced and most characters are borrowed directly from their original texts.

Toward the end of the novel, two of the main characters meet up with Wells' Doctor Moreau who presents them with a weapon to defeat the Martians. Additionally, he indulges in some rather dubious veterinarian experiments. Level three readers can be tasked to discuss the moral use of the weapon or the experiments (Witte 162).

Due to the rather adapted nature of the novel it leaves room for level four readers to investigate the differences with the novel and comic. This is a unique opportunity to encourage readers to also read the novel, but a simple internet search can also be rewarding in teaching students how early in time people came up with notion of men from mars.

Sandman: Prelude & Nocturnes - Level 4.

Gaiman's *Sandman* is dark, grim and complex. It shares elements with horror literature, as well as renaissance works. A man, fearful of death one day decides the dying must end and resolves to capture the Grim Reaper himself. However, the ritual goes awry and instead of

Death they capture Dream, her younger brother. With the sandman in captivity, no person on earth can safely travel from being awake to the realm of dreams and people are left in waking nightmares, or endless dreams. Years later, a mistake by Dream's guard causes his prison to be unlocked and the Sandman escapes. After 70 years of incarceration, Dream finds his home in shambles, his totems of power are missing, and the entire world has changed. So begins his quest to retrieve his items in a world he does not know.

Sandman contains a number of references to Lovecraft, and even Dante, but it is the character of Dream who carries the story. His endeavour to survive a strange new world prompts him to make strange decisions, but he seems completely at home in worlds that normal humans would find horrifying. *Sandman* invites the reader to share in Dream's troubles and requires the reader to immerse themselves in the character

Because *Sandman's* plot spans an entire century it will be interesting to see if level three readers can properly sequence the sweeping story. Witte provides an assignment where students have to write down where and when the story takes place (162). This assignment can be expanded to making a dated timeline with the events above the line taking place in the human world, and the events under the line taking place in the dream realm or hell.

Level four readers should be directed toward the roots of the character of Dream, who is based on the Greek god of dreams: Morpheus (Witte 166). Students should then be tasked to find the differences between the two characters. It is possible to expand the assignment with the characters of Death, and Lucifer.

Level five readers could investigate the art movement from which *Sandman* borrows its many rituals and monsters. Early twentieth century writers of horror fiction, such as H.P. Lovecraft and Edgar Allen Poe described the occult in great detail. Students could look up how the first chapter refers to this movement (Witte 166). Alternatively, they could compare the ritual from *Sandman* with that from Marlowe's *Faust*.

V for Vendetta - Level 5.

V for Vendetta is Alan Moore's take on the dystopian society. In an alternate future, the world unravelled into chaos and every country took measures to ensure its existence. Britain has installed a fascist party that mercilessly keeps watch over everyone in the country by means of electronic surveillance. Dissidents are taken off the street and are never heard from again. Enter V, an uncompromising vigilante who seeks to destroy the party's system and return control of the country to the people. He finds an unwilling apprentice in Evey Hammond, a young girl with troubled past. Meanwhile Eric Finch, a detective for the regime's police force is tasked with apprehending the terrorist named V.

V for Vendetta shares many elements with Orwell's *Nineteen eighty-four*, such as the thought police. Yet, in contrast to Orwell's work, Moore's protagonist has significantly more success in his endeavour to overthrow the system. The comic is dense, and the illustrations are dark. However, the language is modern and simple, although, quite abundant. The setting introduces the reader to political and ethical issues that each character interprets differently. The plot is non-linear and features many secondary characters that all have ties with the three main characters. This level of depth makes the graphic novel suitable to level five readers. Level four readers will be able to familiarise themselves with the characters, but will most likely overlook the political elements of the story.

A level five assignment would have the reader compare the novel to other dystopian novels or other state-controlled settings (Witte 167). While it might be a bit much to task a student to read Orwell or Rand to answer one question on a comic book, investigating other dystopian novels might interest them enough to read into the subject matter.

The comic's protagonist, V is an anti-hero. His methods are extreme; he murders, he destroys, kidnaps, imprisons and tortures people just to achieve his goals. His methods are an

interesting subject for a level four reader to investigate on an ethical level, and discuss whether his actions are truly necessary (Witte 166, Kwakernaak 402).

***Persepolis* - Level 4.**

Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel shares many elements with Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. Themes such as religious persecution, xenophobia and war permeate the life of Marjane as she grows up in turbulent twentieth century Iran. Additionally, it also explores themes such as feminism, rebellion and sexuality and a number of religious perspectives. The story however relies heavily on the reader's ability to immerse themselves in the mind of Marjane herself. As a result, the story is best read by level four or more advanced readers. In addition to character immersion, level five readers will be able to take into account the cultural historical background of the novel when reading.

To further make the level four readers come into contact with the character of Marjane, they should be tasked to investigate the character's perception of the various cultures she encounters. The reader should write her a letter where they defend the cultural attitude of their choice against Marjane's perception which is grounded in liberal Islam (Witte 159).

Level five readers should explore the historical placements of the comic's events. The comic touches upon wars, art budding movements, feminist uprisings and political revolutions. Readers should try to put these events into context and find out what the author's opinion is on these events (Witte 166).

***A Contract with God* - Level 3.**

Will Eisner's partly autobiographic work is a series of four short stories built around Judaism in New York. In particular, the relationship with God and the tenets of the Jewish faith play

an important part in the motivations of the characters. While the religious context carries some interesting connotations, the overall text is simple and should be amusing and interesting for beginning readers. Will Eisner's signature style will make the characters seem familiar while they introduce readers to the Jewish-American culture.

To make a step toward more advanced character immersive reading, level three readers should look into the motivations for the characters' actions. Most of them react to supernatural occurrence, usually instigated by God. Readers should pick three events where a character makes an important decision and explain the reason why he or she acted in such a way (Witte 162).

Level two readers will find the stories accessible due to their simplicity and they should focus on the credibility of the events. As mentioned before, a number of events are set in motion due to an act of God. Readers should point out where in the story these events occur and how likely they could occur in real life (Witte 159).

Maus - Level 4.

The acclaimed graphic novel by Spiegelman deals with exceptionally heavy themes such as survivor's guilt, racism, representation and language which are not noticeable from the outside. Spiegelman's style is very simple style, devoid any colour and representing the characters as animals. The grim truth is in the details though as Spiegelman tells the story of his Jewish father during the Second World War and the holocaust. The difficulty from the novel comes from its three perspectives that the narrative switches between. The current time perspective of the son, the historic perspective of the father and the real world perspective from the author himself. The author is represented by two characters in the entire novel which makes the author's message and perspective extremely complicated. Naturally, it is not an impossible novel by any means. The language is modern English and the amount of text in

each frame is substantial, but manageable. From *Maus*, readers might take an interest in other Jewish-English literature such as Chaim Potok's *The Chosen* or other holocaust oriented works such as *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*.

According to Witte, level three readers are open to individual reflection on the actions of characters and their motivations (180). *Maus* is laden with tough choices for its protagonist so a reader might be tasked to pick three pivotal moments and argue why he or may have acted in such a way (166).

A level four reader is able to recognise shifts in perspectives in literature (Witte 182). *Maus* has a very peculiar choice in representation and the student can be tasked to investigate and argue the author's choice to represent certain groups as certain animals.

A level five reader could be interested in the position that *Maus* takes in the literary canon as the only graphic novel to be awarded a Pulitzer. (Witte 184). As an extratextual assignment they could be tasked with investigating the publication history of the work and the reason why the author added an explicitly autobiographical chapter to his work.

***Watchmen* - Level 6**

Alan Moore's magnum opus is everything that might be expected from a level six novel. It is rich in motifs, and characters with extremely divergent agendas. Despite its appearance as a colourful superhero comic, behind its façade of costumed heroes it hides a complex structure (both narratively and visually). The novel takes place in an alternate version of the nineteen-eighties where America has won the Vietnam War after a freak experiment in a nuclear testing facility created an omnipotent being who serves as a nuclear deterrent. The cold war rages on, and the doomsday clock creeps closer to midnight. However, a member of the Watchmen, is murdered in cold blood. His colleague sets out to uncover who did it, but he uncovers much more than he bargained for. *Watchmen* is densely packed with symbolism and

intricacies that summarising it in a short paragraph would be impossible. The story is non-linear in its progression. It changes perspective every chapter and in the background a second narrative plays that mirrors the main storyline. Due to the graphic nature of its content it would be prudent to reserve *Watchmen* for readers over the age of sixteen. Despite its rich narrative, lower level reader should be able to read the comic based on the characters and setting, but will need grow as readers to appreciate the philosophical connotations.

Level four readers should be challenged to investigate the complexity of some of the main characters (Witte 182). Namely Rorschach, Doctor Manhattan and Ozymandias, who each have extremely different motivations for their actions and how they accomplish their goals. In fact, the nature of Rorschach's character is enough to keep a student occupied for a number of hours to figure out why he is such an egocentric character who makes a complete turn toward the end.

Level five readers should indulge themselves in investigating the multitudes of narratives that play alongside the main storyline and how they reflect on the course the events. From they can proceed to make an attempt at deciphering the author's purpose behind this concept (Witte 166).

Level six readers should be directed toward the philosophical motivations behind the actions of Rorschach and Ozymandias. In particular Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and its teachings. A reader should be asked to defend the actions of certain characters in a short essay (Witte 186).

4.3 Comic Books

***Superman Red Son* - Level 2.**

Red Son is an alternate universe take on the Superman character. Instead of crash landing in a field in Kansas, Superman's rocket crashes on a Soviet farm in Ukraine and is raised as a

communist. Superman becomes a living nuclear deterrent and lifts communism to untold success, while capitalism crumbles under its own hubris. However, Superman struggles to be a communist leader. How can an alien be equal to anyone? Eventually Superman resolves to treat everyone equally and seeks to subjugate the planet under the red banner. However, his long standing rival, Lex Luthor is trying everything in his power to stop this.

The comic opens with parallels to Orwell's *Animal Farm*, but loses its political themes in lieu of a battle of wits between Superman and Lex Luthor. The language is simple and modern, but features a large number of science fiction terms. However, the art style should make it abundantly clear that this comic takes place in a fantasy world, making it accessible to level two readers. While the political imagery and undertones allow the comic to be read on a slightly higher level of literary competence.

Due to the overall simplicity of the comic, it is attractive for level two readers to experience more advanced aspects of literature such as themes and moral dilemmas. Under instruction of an assignment, students should evaluate the actions of Superman and Lex Luthor to determine whether they're good or evil (Witte 178). This can become rather complicated, since it is possible to make Superman accountable for the actions of his subordinates, while Luthor's methods border on the extreme.

Level three readers could be tasked to compare the comic's political climate with that of the actual cold war, and make a small table where factors such as economy, freedom of speech, welfare and army composition are compared (180).

***All Star Superman* - Level 3.**

All Star Superman is Morrison's attempt at restoring the man of steel to its lofty position of being the greatest superhero ever. It is a superhero comic that serves as the cornerstone for a story that can be read as twenty-first century mythology. As the comic begins, Superman is

out in space to rescue a solar expedition from certain doom. After a successful rescue of the astronauts Superman is told the extreme exposure to the sun has given him radiation poisoning as well as increased powers. Superman must then make plans to do as much for the world as he can before his inevitable demise.

However, the content and order of the narrative are relatively simple. The relationships between the characters are familiar to lower level readers and the plot progresses largely linear. Classical mythology is referenced at times to make the scale of Superman's actions truly supernatural.

Level two readers should look into the differences between Superman and his alter ego: Clark Kent (Witte 178). The difference between the two is explored to great detail of the course of the comic and should let readers understand to what lengths Superman will go to protect his loved ones.

Level three readers could be directed to find the parallels between the twelve labours of Superman and the twelve labours of Hercules (Witte 166). They should then describe how these references make Superman a hero like Hercules by writing a mock newspaper article.

***Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* - Level 4.**

Miller's *Dark Knight* is the comic that brought Batman back from his camp and ambiguously gay image and turned him into a dark and uncompromising anti-hero. In an alternate version of the nineteen eighties, superheroes have been forced out of the public image in exchange for an unconditional pardon. However, after hearing on the news that former super criminal Two-face is released from the asylum, Bruce Wayne is left with waking nightmares and resolves to come out of retirement. A reborn, older, much more aggressive Batman now patrols the streets of Gotham and not everyone is pleased with the Dark Knight's return.

The Dark Knight Returns shares many elements with Moore's *Watchmen* but keeps the underlying structure simpler. Instead, it builds upon the premise of an alternate cold war where superheroes outlaws and tools. The comic is interesting to level three and level four readers due to its unique approach to Batman. Level three readers will find the explicit changes in the personality of the established characters interesting. On the other hand, level four readers should be interested in the extended legacy of the graphic novel in the comic book canon.

Level three readers should investigate the differences between the new Batman and Superman in the story. It is important to direct the reader toward the methods and their goals, and not their powers and abilities (Witte 180). They should argue which one is in the right based on their own moral judgement. Batman in this comic is nearly a terrorist, while Superman is a government pawn. Students should write a short paragraph where they defend the actions of one of the two and condemn the other.

Level four readers should be directed toward a text-external approach. *The Dark Knight Returns* was written to restore Batman as a character. Students should research the significance this comic and what preceded its publication that led to the ridicule and condemnation of Batman as a serious character (Witte 182).

***Batman Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on a Serious Earth* - Level 5.**

Morrison's earlier work on Superman was light-hearted. *Arkham Asylum* on the other hand is a pitch black perspective into the psyche of Batman's rogues gallery. The art style is extremely avant garde and illustrates terror and insanity. Upon closer inspection though, the comic shares distinct elements with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Batman is summoned to the sanatorium to resolve a breakout and a hostage situation. He begins a descent into the madness of the asylum's inhabitants and comes face to face with his own flaws.

The narrative of this particular comic is fiendishly hard to follow due to the erratic arrangement of the panels and incoherent order of events. Additionally, the comic requires the reader to immerse themselves into the minds of a number of vastly different characters. The intense focus on the characters' psyche demands a significant amount of reading experience from the reader.

The character of the Mad Hatter tells Batman that the Asylum is a mirror into his own psyche. Each inmate has its own malady and they each reflect a part of Batman's own soul. Level five readers should try to uncover what each inmate represents (Witte 184). This assignment already requires significant knowledge of the character of Batman, so it is best read after reading another batman comic. From this comic a student should be able to understand the cryptic symbolism in *Heart of Darkness* or *The Lord of the Flies*.

5.0 Conclusion

This chapter will conclude how graphic adaptations, graphic novels and comic books can provide an excellent learning opportunity for students as a stile onto more advanced literature and outline the limitations of this thesis and the options for further research.

Certain comics, graphic novels and adaptations can be used to introduce readers to a conducive approach to learning literature. The assignments build on skills that can also be applied to the analysis of regular novels, while providing them with interesting and engaging stories that will be offered in an attractive package. While not all comics are suitable for a literary reading, some offer enough context and background to tap into the same reading attitude. Some comics can even be continued into regular novels with similar themes and motives. Comic books with familiar characters are slightly easier to grasp than the graphic novels, but some comics also contain alienating and advanced literary concepts. Adaptations

are subject to the difficulty of its source material, in particular the language can complicate a comic to a substantial degree.

While this thesis has been thorough in its construction and premise, some limitations do apply to this final result. Firstly, the scope is limited by a capacity of one researcher. The list is by no means definite and final. Given more time, funding, and perhaps additional readers, more works could be added to the list. Secondly, this is an instructing and descriptive thesis; no trial has been conducted to test the thesis' presented final product. In the future there is an opportunity for empirical testing on several unbiased groups to provide tangible results on whether this method improves reading motivation and/or literary competence. Thirdly, there is significant room for an expansion of this plan to incorporate the rich history of Franco-Belgian comics. Lastly, the lists focussed on a more popular spectrum of the entire comic book spectrum. Superhero comics are a trend, and in time they will disappear from the public consciousness. As a result, the actual applicability of this list and its assignment are somewhat susceptible to the same trend.

In short: comics can offer a wealth of literary, motivational and linguistic experience to students. Additionally, comic books greatly increase reading motivation. All in all, comics are no miracle cure for declining readership, but they can serve as a sidekick to help students find the motivation they need to keep on reading.

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