Critical Encounters in a Middle School English Language Arts Classroom

Using Graphic Novels to Teach Critical Thinking & Reading for Peace Education

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Introduction

> Peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice.
>
> —*Baruch Spinoza, Dutch philosopher*

Critical thinking and reading are absolutely essential skills for young people to acquire in order to equip them for today's increasingly complex world, yet teachers rarely focus on these topics in any systematic or extended way. A thinking person must synthesize, question, interpret, and analyze what s/he hears and reads. The need to teach these essential skills meshes well with the acknowledgment that Language Arts classes need to include more than basic literacy skills, as traditionally defined; they need to include academic skills and content as well as expose students to sociopolitical issues.

Benesch (1993) states that critical thinking, including higher level cognitive skills, is "a process of questioning the status quo and of challenging existing knowledge and the social order…an orientation to transform learning and society…those who think critically focus on social inequities and probe the disparities between democratic principles and undemocratic realities" (p. 545).

Critical thinking is embedded in a critical approach to literacy. Luke (2003) argues that a critical approach to literacy is about "engaging with texts and discourses as a means of bridging time and space, critically understanding and altering the connections between the local and the global, moving between cultures and communities, and developing transnational understandings and collaborations" (p. 22). That is, a global perspective on critical literacy focuses on social inequality/injustice and the ramifications of how action in one part of the world resonates around the globe.

The peace education movement is one manifestation of these ideas. Teaching peace and social justice has clear connections to teaching critical thinking and reading. Peace education means educating students to question what they are told and not to assume, for example, that those with power necessarily have the best interests of others in mind. It also means teaching students to understand complex problems of the world and to find ways to address these problems.

For example, Wenden (1995) points out that "research shows how language works through discourse to communicate and reproduce ideologies that support the use of war as a legitimate option for resolving national conflicts as well as inegalitarian and discriminatory social institutions and practices" (p. 211). Students who are educated to understand this are people who can promote peace in the world. What happens in the classroom in this regard has an effect on what happens in the world, not only specifically relating to "war and peace," but also more generally to peace in the sense of social justice and equity.

Graphic novels, which tell real and fictional stories using a combination of words and images, are often sophisticated, and involve intriguing topics. There has been an increasing interest in teaching with graphic novels to promote literacy as one alternative to traditional literacy pedagogy (e.g., Gorman, 2003; Schwarz, 2002). A pedagogy of multiliteracies using graphic novels can enhance reading engagement and achievement, reinforcing students' senses of their identities as readers who are learners and thinkers (Guthrie, 2004).

However, there is scant mention in pedagogical literature of how such multimodal texts can be used for fostering students' critical thinking and reading skills for peace education. This article provides a case study of why and how middle school English Language Arts (ELA) teachers can teach critical reading and thinking in ways which promote education for peace and social justice. I particularly focus on the use of graphic novels to teach aspects of these concepts.

A Rationale for Integrating Peace Education in the ELA Curriculum

In developing an integrative theory of peace education, Danesh (2006) observes that even today "most peoples of the world live with conflict-oriented worldviews, whether ethically, religiously, or environmentally based" (p. 239). Johnson and Johnson (2005) define the aim of peace education as helping individuals resolve conflicts without violence and maintain harmonious relationships by providing them with the needed information, attitudes, values, and behavioral competences. Peace education also presumes that human beings "have an active propensity toward goodness and human cooperation and are inclined toward benign values and behavior" (Synott, 2005, p. 9).

Language learners throughout the world face enormous cultural transformations as the old order changes and the Third World continues to increase in power, economic development, and military might. These changes often cause reactionary responses to the new and uncertain conditions and the social changes they bring, as seen in the inter-ethnic conflict in Serbia and the numerous small-scale civil wars in Africa and Asia. In the U.S. an example of these conflicts is reflected in gang violence that is becoming a daily occurrence in cities and towns. In response, several world organizations are giving priority to peace education, forcing educators to work toward ensuring that individuals and groups live together harmoniously in a peaceful and democratic world.

However, peace education is not limited

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only to the topic of war and peace. Wenden (1995) states, "Comprehensive peace education is a response to the violence that pervades our relationships with one another and with the natural world. It seeks to bring to light the values that underlie the social systems that maintain relationships of violence and to consider more cooperative alternatives" (p. 154).

The rising attitudes of racism, lack of corporate responsibility toward the environment and the individual health of citizens, indifference to the needs of the physically and mentally impaired, just economic order, and the desire for conflict resolution of internal and international problems that does not use force have presented the need for incorporating peace education within the ELA curriculum. Harris (2004) reviewed the theoretical roots of peace education and classified it into five different types, which include international education, human rights education, development education, environmental education, and conflict resolution education. Opotow, Gerson, and Woodside (2005) suggested four key areas of peace education:

1. Education for coexistence that stresses diversity education, tolerance, sharing, collaborating, and awareness of stereotypes.

2. Education for human rights that gives priority to learning about killing, genocide, rape, torture, violation resulting from racism, ethnicity, religion, or gender, as well as the study of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

3. Education for gender equality that focuses on violence experienced by women and traditions.

4. Education for environmentalism that emphasizes environmentally protective attitudes, positions and behavior, learning about pollution, overuse of resources, and destruction.

Therefore, educators are faced with such challenges as "will our students be able to deal with these issues (racism, unjust distribution of wealth, prejudice, environmental degradation, war and conflict, etc) using strategies that require intercultural communication because these issues cross national boundaries and need international cooperation? Will they be aware of the cultural similarities/commonalities that draw us together as human beings? Will they be able to resolve conflict using cooperation and mutual respect?"

If real social change is going to take place towards a more tolerant and peaceful world order, it will begin in the enabling of young learners to think critically about their world. I believe that peace education, a dynamic collaborative process by which the learners begin to take responsibility for dealing with the problems they face using the tools of cooperation, tolerance, and communication, offers the learner the possibility of responding to the issues of survival and human enrichment. Peace education allows learners to make positive contributions not only to the local community but to the broader international community as well by promoting cross-cultural communication and understanding. It is for this reason that ELA instructors have a critical role to play in promoting, organizing and practicing peace education in classrooms.

Theoretical Framework:
Critical Reading Practice

The term "critical reading" encapsulates alternative ways of reading which go beyond typical approaches such as word recognition, decoding, information processing, literal comprehension, and personal response. Critical ways of reading are intended to construct readers who can identify texts as crafted objects, who interrogate the inherent values and ideologies espoused by the text, who recognize their position as compliant or resistant readers, and who can engage in multiple perspectives and impel social change.

When readers perceive texts as value-laden, rather than neutral, they position themselves within an alternative discourse of reading, participating in critical literacy practice. Many current North American Language Arts syllabi require teachers to employ pedagogies that enable students to take up a position within such an alternative reading discourse.

Taking a critical stance in reading practice, I address social justice issues relevant to my participants' lives, ask critical questions, and conduct critical discussions of stories to urge students to critique the characters' and their own social practices, while also questioning stereotypical behaviors. Hopefully, that will result eventually in raising students' awareness of social justice issues. I feel obliged as a teacher to provide opportunities for students to question, to critique, to further explore social issues and approach them from different perspectives.

Literature Review:
Graphic Novels and Literacy Development

The availability and content of graphic novels have expanded in the past ten years, and this is especially true for graphic novels relevant to the Language Arts classroom. The lineage of graphic novels to the comic books defines their viability as a resource. Yet the unique attributes that link the genre to comic books—the interplay between images and text—are exactly what make graphic novels an engaging narrative form for students to explore sophisticated sociopolitical issues.

The interplay between the text and images has become increasingly a part of modern media; thus graphic novels offer students opportunities to develop multiple literacies by engaging with narratives about social topics. The narratives often present difficult moral situations in which people must make choices when faced with external pressures. Resources that represent situations in this manner have been found to be valuable as mediums to engage students in forms of critical thinking and reading (Endacott, 2010). The purpose of this study, then, was to explore how Language Arts teachers valued graphic novels as resources for critical thinking and reading.

The value of graphic novels has been cited in several subject areas; however, there have been only a small number of studies that draw on empirical data. Much of the scholarship about graphic novels includes articles about the history of graphic novels and their evolution from comics, critical analyses of the work of various authors or artists, and early studies of the use of comics in education. As graphic novels have gained increasing popularity, educators have begun to conduct studies on their use in the classroom.

Many recent studies about using graphic novels in the classroom focus on their ability to motivate reluctant readers and aid less skilled readers in reading comprehension. Other studies have noted their usefulness in providing cross-curricular connections, alternatives to traditional content, opportunities for critical thinking and analysis, and tools to bridge in-and-out of school literacy (Gorman, 2003; Schwarz, 2006).

Graphic novels provide new learning opportunities for adolescents in high schools, though the reading of these books requires different skills than novels with prose only. Schneider (2005) discovered that high school students who were identified as

having learning disabilities self-reported that graphic novels motivated them to read and aided their comprehension. Frey and Fisher (2004) observed that graphic novels helped a struggling group of urban ninth graders develop their comprehension and writing skills. In studies concerning critical thinking skills, Versaci (2001) found that his students participated more in discussions of comics than with other literary texts, while Carter (2007) found graphic novels and comics to teach critical reading and thinking skills with relative success.

Monnin (2008) discovered that a teacher and a student read the images on different levels and that graphic novels provided new opportunities for in-school literacy development. Hammond (2009) also found that high school seniors respond to graphic novels in many of the traditional ways, such as critical analysis, but they adjusted their normal reading process to include image analysis.

Overall, the literature concerning graphic novels establishes that graphic novels can provide motivation and/or alternative manner for students to improve comprehension, take an active role in the interpretation of the content, learn about subjects that only had a fragmentary existence in the traditional curriculum, and engage in critical thinking and reading.

Seeking to enact a critical literacy curriculum, I use graphic novels and encourage students' responses to the texts and images. These responses vary between written (for example, writing their opinions on post-it notes and reflection journals), oral (for example, brainstorming, participating in discussions and debates, and orally sharing how the story related to their realities), and artistic (for example, role-playing and making posters).

Persepolis in the ELA Classroom

Although there are many types of violence and manifold strategies for peace, certainly war or revolution is a major source of violence in the world and deserves to be studied under the paradigm of peace education. Since graphic novels accommodate nuances, ambiguities, and differing viewpoints through a dynamic synergy of verbal and visual representations, graphic novels may in fact offer the best avenue to contemplate the realities of war or revolution.

Examining those realities is a persuasive way for students to reflect upon possibilities for peace. Within the context of an ELA classroom, critical thinking and reading are important elements in a student's journey toward acquiring the academic literacy for success in school. In situating critical literacy within a framework of peace education, there is a need to explore a perspective of critical literacy that encompasses the global. Graphic novels like *Maus*, *Barefoot Gen*, *Pride of Baghdad*, and *Persepolis*, which feature complex themes on war and its atrocities, current political development, and coming-of-age in a time of revolution in different countries, can mediate historical realities with their unique visual narrative styles. The particular text of *Persepolis* is chosen because of its affordability, length, the seriousness with which it treats the topic, and the opportunities for classroom discussion it provides. Teaching *Persepolis* in the middle school ELA classroom involves employment of a critical multiliteracies approach that can affirm students' identities as thinkers and learners.

Marjane Satrapi's two-volume autobiographical graphic novels about her coming-of-age in revolutionary Iran were published to critical acclaim in 2003 and 2004. They are a graphic memoir about family crisis, historical upheaval, and coming of age that features Satrapi's young self, Marji, as autobiographical protagonist. The text tracks the Satrapi family through the turbulent years following the Shah's overthrow in 1979 and the establishment of an Islamic theocracy in Iran.

Both a chronicle of personal and political turbulence as well as a careful exercise in educating Western readers, *Persepolis* aims not only to teach readers how to think about the Middle East, broadly, and Iran specifically, but also how to feel about it. Most students are unaware of the changes associated with the events during that time, but the repercussions of the revolution are still being felt throughout the world.

Satrapi was born in 1969, raised in Tehran, and currently lives in Paris. As a young teenager, she was sent to school in Vienna in order to be spared the oppression of a fundamental Islamic regime at its height. Told in cinematographic black-and-white elegance, Satrapi captures a young woman's maturation amid a troubling historical period.

The relationship between Satrapi's words and text creates a unique imaginative space for students to understand and interpret. Students should be able to relate to a series of her personal experiences from different perspectives. Moreover, the fact that Satrapi's narrator is a young girl, illustrated very simply in stark black and white, allows for an easy identification between reader and text.

The cultures of the Middle East are often misunderstood in America. *Persepolis* provides a variety of beneficial opportunities for students to rework both their understanding of Iran and their understanding of themselves as individuals and as members of a nation/state in relation to Iran. The use of Satrapi's graphic novels also enables students to disrupt the one-dimensional image of Iran and Iranian women. In this way, the story encourages students to skirt the wall of intolerance and participate in a more complex conversation about Iranian history, U.S. politics, and the gendered interstices of war.

To use this innovative graphic novel as a tool for literacy teaching, teachers first have to provide historical background knowledge and define key concepts and terms. This includes not only vocabulary words from the story, but also graphic novel terminology and key conceptual ideas such as Marxism, revolution, and anarchy. This will allow the students a solid background on which to build the foundation of the understanding of the essential themes of the novel.

It is also necessary for students to fully comprehend the events in the novel, specifically in relation to analysis of plot and characterization. Last but not least, students will endeavor to question their own identities and notions of culture, gender, and genre by connecting their lives in the U. S. to the lives of others in Iran. These three facets will create an informed and nuanced understanding of the insights *Persepolis* offers. Many activities and assignments can be designed to extend the ideas from the book to the students personally.

The Study

This research was a collaborated pilot case study of one teacher's experiences in teaching *Persepolis* to her urban middle school ELA class. The two research questions I explored for the purpose of the study are:

1. What is the appeal of graphic novels for adolescent learners?

2. To what extent can the reading of graphic novels promote literacy development, in particular critical thinking and reading skills?

The context for this study was Apollo International School (a pseudonym), an international K-12 charter school with 653

students in the central West United States. The school qualified for Title I support. As an ESL/EFL instructor for 10 years, I was a colleague of the teacher, Louisa, for two years. Together, we designed the class lessons for teaching *Persepolis*.

Demographics of Louisa's class comprised 25 middle school students of grade 8; many were immigrants from countries in Central America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, and many were reading well below their grade placement. In using these students as participants, I had no control over the demographics of who participated and therefore chose to analyze data from all of the participants.

Before plunging into the book with her class, Louisa first surveyed the students on their out-of-school literacy activities. Most students reported that they never read books for pleasure and the overwhelming majority of students stated that their homes had only the school textbooks they were currently using for classes. Approximately 15%-20% of the class said they occasionally read newspapers and magazines, and 40% of students read comic books or manga.

Teaching *Persepolis* to this particular ELA class necessitated a lot of contextualizing and scaffolding: many of the students did not know anything about the war in Iran or the revolution; idioms and vocabulary had to be highlighted; and significantly, some had never seen or read a graphic novel before. During read-aloud, key vocabulary was taught in context and reviewed immediately after reading for journal entry.

Louisa had to show these students the difference between comic books and graphic novels. The graphic novel is an extended comic book that "treats nonfictional as well as fictional plots and themes with the depth and subtlety that we have come to expect of traditional novels and extended nonfictional texts" (Tabachnick, 2009, p. 2). Since visual images are socio-cultural products with a culturally specific grammar, Louisa also had to show these students how to read the graphic novel visually, so that the students would be able to follow the sequential and nonlinear paneling of the story.

The students who had never been exposed to the genre of graphic novel had to adjust their reading process. However, once they did, they had little trouble incorporating their own resources of visual literacies gained from on-line reading and gaming to help them understand the complex visual metaphors of *Persepolis*. As students began to express interest in graphic novels, the teacher kindled the flame by stocking the classroom with graphic novels of all types from the school library and the local public library.

Students began reading graphic novels during independent reading time in class, taking them home to read, and trading volumes with their friends at school. All of the graphic novels the teacher provided used a blend of primary and secondary sources in the development of support of their narrative such as *A People's History of American Empire* (Zinn, 2008), *Malcolm X: A Graphic Biography* (Hefler, 2006), and *Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel* (Butzer, 2009).

Flooding the classroom with graphic novels set up a multiliteracies environment where students were able to interact daily with language as well as visual, spatial, and multimodal meanings. These interactions served as a basis for instructional conversations about the nature of graphic novels, including the form of the illustrations and the genre of the various texts. These discussions were supported by graphic organizers and scaffolded the students to better comprehend the content of graphic novels.

During the process of instruction, Louisa deliberately designed a series of before, during, and after reading strategies to facilitate students' critical understandings and interpretations of the novel. These strategies are extremely useful for constant feedback while students are studying *Persepolis*. "Before" strategies included KWL charts, historical context introductory lessons, identifying terms and vocabulary, and anticipation guides; "During" strategies included comprehension questions, double-column journals, using graphic organizers to visually layout and align what they learn, and making predictions; "After" strategies ranged from a simple multiple-choice post-reading assessment to a research paper or debate speech.

These strategies constantly monitored students' progress throughout the entirety of the text and provided pause in order for the teacher to discuss elements of previously introduced historical and cultural contexts. For example, to get students thinking about the Middle East, teachers can divide students into groups and ask them to fill out a K-W-L chart. Teachers can focus on a variety of topics such as the role of religion, women's rights, and government. After reviewing what students know (the K column) and what students want to know (the W column), have each group explore one of the topics in the chart. This can be done using Internet sources, newspaper articles, or encyclopedias. After each group presents their work, students can fill out what they have learned (the L column). Students can refer to their graphs throughout reading *Persepolis*.

Werner (2002) points to the importance of a supportive classroom community where students can engage in discussions of meanings that may be ambivalent and contested. Dynamic discussions turn the classroom into a communal space where new ideas are provoked, minds are exchanges, and epistemic horizons are enlarged. It is the primary instructional means by which individuals clarify, extend, and challenge textual interpretations.

Following is a list of critical questions on which students reflected by writing their journals, discussing, and posting online:

- How does the text challenge, expand, or change your ideas about women in Iran? Your ideas about the veil?
- How do gender norms change in times of war?
- Why might Satrapi employ this genre to talk about this subject material?
- Much of Satrapi's text explores a child and young teenager's perspective on the practices and hardships of war. How might we use this text to think about contemporary debates around torture and patriotism in times of war as they apply to the United States?
- Find images in Persepolis that depict the following subjects. How does Persepolis represent these subjects? How are we encouraged to read them?

a. Youth: How does the text mark childhood? How do play and politics intermingle in her life?

b. Women: How are women portrayed as active participants in civic life? How do women accommodate or resist authority?

c. War: How are war and national strife depicted? How are different characters affected by revolution and/or war? How is looking at war through the lens of a cartoon different than a photograph, newspaper, or television news?

d. Self: How many ways is the self portrayed? How does Marji's self change over time?

Additionally, the teacher and the researcher implemented several strategies suggested by Cary (2004) as students were engaged in a myriad of literacy activities surrounding *Persepolis*. These included the following: (a) asking students to fill

in written dialogue for a panel presented in pictures only; and (b) inviting students to draw pictures to illustrate a written dialogue.

Louisa photocopied selected pages from the book for students to insert their own comments on what is happening in the story, the language the characters use, the grammatical forms used, etc. These comments were written in the blank margins taking the form of balloons which frame the panels in the graphic novel. These activities not only supported English language development, but also provided practice in integration of written text and pictures to develop multiple meanings.

Throughout the lesson, the students had many opportunities to engage in authentic writing practices. These activities, related to instructional strategies, included (a) reflecting on the book; (b) composing short pieces on human rights and conflicts in their home countries or around the world; and (c) collaboratively editing each other's writing in an instructional context that highlighted various aspects of English syntax, spelling, and mechanics.

As students composed reflective short pieces, syntax, spelling, and mechanics were discussed and edited each day as an opening activity in which the students collectively edited anonymous classmates' texts projected on the whiteboard. Errors were used as "teachable moments" that were expanded to provide direct instruction on specific English language structures. In contrast to traditional grammar exercises, the collaborative sentence editing activity offered the students an authentic, communicative purpose for learning and practicing syntactic structures.

Louisa and the researcher also designed extension activities by helping students to connect *Persepolis* with other relevant text. Sis's Caldecott-winning book *The Wall: Growing up Behind the Iron Curtain* is an autobiographical account of his life growing up in Czechoslovakia during the Cold War. Because of its short length, this picture book is the perfect work to compare and contrast with *Persepolis*.

As students read *The Wall*, the teacher can point out that the two stories are being told simultaneously: the caption text documents events occurring outside of the author's life, while the centered text tells Sis's own personal story. Teachers can have students compare and contrast Marjane Satrapi's and Peter Sis's stories:

- What are the political associations and beliefs of the author's parents?
- How do both regimes acquire and retain power?
- How are the children of the regimes indoctrinated?
- How does each of the governments deal with insurgency?
- How do the authors view Western culture?
- How do the authors resist the authorities?
- What is the current government in both countries?
- Why do you think Czechoslovakia eventually becomes a democracy while Iran does not?

The data sources for this study include: discussion forum posts on an online discussion board; post-it notes, on which students recorded their thoughts while reading the novel; a written analysis of the graphic novel; and semi-structured individual interviews with a small group of students, conducted by the researcher, in which students self-selected to participate.

Teaching *Persepolis*: A Report from the Field

Louisa reported that the students' enthusiasm for this graphic novel was enormous. The novelty of reading a graphic novel in the classroom, its unique modality of visual metaphors, and its compelling narrative all combined to increase students' level of reading engagement. *Persepolis* generated a lot of reflection and discussion about war, revolution, peace, and freedom from the students. Through critical mediation of this text they understood abstract concepts in sophisticated ways. This demonstrated how mediated multimodal strategies in critical literacy engender learner engagement.

Reader Engagement

At the beginning, many of the students were not excited about reading graphic novels and could not foresee much value in reading graphic novels. Even those students who had read graphic novels tended to believe that no pictorial representation can capture the complexity and truth of events as well as a purely written text. They believed that comic books, even the extended ones, are for children, juveniles at best. Nearly all of the students changed their perspective after engaging with the text. Brook exhibited this attitude in her interview and said,

> I wasn't thrilled at first. I thought the assignment might be kind of pointless, and I wouldn't enjoy the book. My opinion was totally changed after I read Persepolis, and it seemed like some of the other books were equally interesting. (Brook, Interview)

Benjamin shared a similar attitude in a forum post where he wrote,

> I feel as if the content is actually quite valuable. At first I was a bit of hesitant to jump to this conclusion, as I am not a fan of graphic novels. However, the book flowed quite nicely and was easy and interesting read. It also provided thought-provoking narratives of tragic events.

The researcher believes firmly that students feel the complexity of *Persepolis* and that a graphic novel can do justice to the most profound subject.

Moreover, the researcher found that graphic novels would be valuable for engaging unmotivated readers. The format of graphic novels differs from traditional text by offering readers a variety of ways to engage with the text. Diane noted the value of graphic novels on a personal level. In her interview Diane said,

> I'll be honest, I don't like to read…which I know is bad to admit as a middle school student but I enjoyed reading *Pride of Baghdad*…the mixture of texts and images was fascinating.

The students valued graphic novels that engage them in texts about complex sociopolitical events such as the Iraq War.

Multiple Perspectives

The researcher in this study also noted that the greatest value of graphic novels lies in their presentation of multiple perspectives. *Persepolis* offers a self-reflexive critique of class inequalities and social hierarchies and hypocrisies in Iranian society by casting a critical eye at Marji's immediate family. For example, in Volume I of the story of a childhood, Marji reflects on the contradictions of her parents driving a Cadillac and employing a live-in maid where at the same time espousing Marxist political learning.

The graphic novel also offers a nuanced and complex reason for the revolution and, for the most part, manages to avoid predictable and simplistic representations of Iranian women's subjugated status. Matthew stated the graphic novel's impact and value in his analysis and wrote,

> *Persepolis* provides readers with a variety of characters who were all affected by war

> and revolution differently, each providing their own perspective on the nature of freedom and ultimately providing us with a more accurate account of the event.

Empathy through Contextualization

The researcher identified graphic novels as a valuable medium to engage readers in thinking about empathy because of the way the graphic novel portrayed the characters in context. Satrapi uses the affective strategy as she chooses an autobiographic child/adolescent protagonist, whose direct witnessing of adult violence encourages sympathetic readings. Satrapi uses a narrative of her own girlhood to urge Western readers to recognize her and her family's political difference from what they think they know, and what they feel, about the Arab world after 9/11.

Reflection papers submitted by students showed that in general, students felt emotional empathy for adversity during the Islamic Revolution. Tom wrote in his analysis,

> The book presented a series of situations and events…captivity, theocracy, tyranny…I definitely can understand each character standing in their shoes.

The graphic novel presented different scenarios and was able to present them in ways that contextualized the characters' decisions. The format of the graphic novels combined with their narrative forms contributed to effectively contextualizing the characters and the causes and consequences of their actions in a detailed and meaningful manner.

Inquiry-Based Learning

The researcher found graphic novels to be valuable curricular materials for inquiry-based learning. Graphic novels can help students raise questions about their own culture and experiences and allow them to raise questions that have relevance for the present. Ann noted this in a forum post and wrote,

> Perspolis makes me think about stories in the news now and what is happening in Darfur, Serbia, and Egypt. I want to know more about these events.

When students read the graphic novels, they engaged with unfamiliar situations and characters, which compelled them to inquire about current events.

Throughout the class, students were exposed to visual, oral, written, and other cultural narratives of the event that stimulated them to think critically about the revolution in Iran, and apply their knowledge to contemporary conflicts that may follow similar patterns. Through a myriad of literacy activities based on a graphic novel, students achieve a deeper understanding of the daily realities of war and the experiences of other people during other times in history. Students also achieve a transformation of thought through sympathizing with differing viewpoints, empathizing with other people's painful experience, and understanding human behavior as a product of time, place and history.

Teaching *Persepolis* had a positive impact on these students' literacy learning, in particular their critical thinking abilities. They were fully immersed in the story and clamored for more titles. Louisa reported that all the students now want their own copy of *Persepolis*. She hopes this will lead to their reading more graphic novels on their own. Actually, after reading *Persepolis*, Louisa plans to have her students move on to other graphic novels such as *Barefoot Gen*, *Palestine*, and *Pride of Baghdad* as additional texts to reflect on the issues of revolution, militarism, and human rights.

In this way, students' own presumptions can be examined and questioned through engagement with these representations of otherness. Reading these substantive narratives gives students a sense of ownership over these texts through their intellectual and emotional engagement with them. Afterwards, Louisa will have the students write an essay on how different genres deliver the story of war and conflict. This will be their introduction to critical literary analysis.

Conclusion

The graphic novel is a relatively new concept that is highly promising for engaging secondary school students in literacy and literary studies. It is an inviting resource for them because its multilayered, nonlinear structure format allows students to access the text in various ways beyond what the traditional linear format of print texts can offer.

Furthermore, the inherent ambiguity in the visual/verbal format of graphic novels opens up possibilities for multiple readings and interpretations of their content. Creating lessons that integrate the multiliteracies activities of fostering critical thinking and reading skills through graphic novels for peace education can more fully involve learners who may be reluctant to traditional literacy activities. By giving them the access to engage in their own means of meaning making and multimodel production, students can be transformed by their encounters with a story into active producers of knowledge.

Consequently, a narrative in the form of a graphic novel can alter student's habits of thinking and potentially influence their lives. Using a graphic novel like *Persepolis* in the classroom can enable students to acquire the necessary critical literacy skills that aid them in the important tasks of reading the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). If students develop their critical thinking and reading abilities, they will be far readier to deal with the world they face and to have a positive impact on that world and on its prospects for peace.

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Appendix A

List of Relevant Graphic Novels for Peace Education

After 9/11: America's War on Terror.
Sid Jacobson &Ernie Colon. 2008.

A Family Secret
Eric Huevel. 2007

Barefoot Gen:A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima
Keiji Nakazawa. 2004

Gettysburg: The Graphic Novel
C. M. Butzer. 2009

In the Shadow of No Towers
Art Spiegelman. 2004

Maus: The Complete Maus (Book 1 & 2)
Art Spiegelman. 1992.

The Kite Runner: Graphic Novel
Khaled Hosseini. 2011

Persepolis
Marjane Satrapi, 2003

The Photographer: Into War-Torn Afghanistan with Doctors without Borders
Emmanuel Guibert, Didier Lefvre, & Frederic Lemercier. 2006

The Search
Eric Heuvel, Ruud van der Rol, & Lies Schippers. 2007

Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story
Ari Folman & David Polonsky, 2008

Appendix B

A Model of Integrating Peace Education in Middle School ELA Curriculum

Some people worth knowing

"Peace" has no universally accepted definition. Traditionally, peace has been understood as the absence of war (also known as negative peace). The notion of positive peace has been increasingly linked with discussions about big ideas such as justice and equality. Themes related to conflict, war, peace and justice could often be found in religious texts and communities. Here are some of the many important thinkers in the filed of peace, including leaders in some well-known movements against violence in society.

◆ Elise Boulding (1920-2010), American sociologist whose work focused on the role of family in establishing peace.

◆ Johan Galtung (1930-), Norwegian sociologist whose sometimes controversial ideas about "structural violence" and human rights emphasize transforming conflict by peaceful means.

◆ Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), German philosopher who set forth a number of conditions for establishing "a perpetual peace" including constitutional republics.

◆ Desmond Tutu (1931-), South African activist and religious leader who campaigned against apartheid and championed racial reconciliation. His work has inspired global campaigns for human rights.

Some inquiry worth pursuing

People have been asking questions about peace and conflict for a very long time. Sustained inquiry and critical reflection about questions like these help to develop citizens who can take responsible actions that can lead to a more peaceful world.

◆ How can we manage our struggle to share finite resources?

◆ How do we deal with feelings of aggression?

◆ What knowledge, skills and attitudes are important for people who want to be able to contribute to making a better and more peaceful world?

◆ How will we get along together?

◆ What does it mean to have a "just war"?

◆ How does global conflict affect the lives of children?

◆ Can war be a legitimate way to pursue national interests?

◆ Is military intervention justified to protect the innocent, for example, to prevent genocide?

◆ Is war inevitable or is it an obsolete means for resolving conflict?

◆ How do different cultures understand violence?

◆ How are justice, peace, security and development related to one another?

◆ What does peace in my community have to do with peace in the world?

◆ How does conflict connect with resources and human development?

◆ Why does politics sometimes end in war? How is war sometimes avoided?

Some ideas for teaching for peace

Education about peace is generally defined as learning about the institutions and processes that are needed to establish peace, such as human rights law and international treaties. Education for peace, on the other hand, focuses on teaching the skills, attitudes and values that will foster peace. Here are some ideas for teaching for peace.

◆ Explore ways to promote a "Culture of Peace" for your classroom (one resource to consider is UNESCO's Declaration on a Culture of Peace). Learning communities can practice skills like these: Active listening—focus fully on what other people are communicating, suspend judgment, ask questions, reflect on interactions; Valuing commonalities—celebrate our common humanity, including shared needs for sustenance and safety, but also needs for understanding, social connections, dignity and self-worth; Fostering compassion—practice empathy and stand up for others in distress; Appreciating diversity—reflect critically on personal and cultural perspectives, and those of others, in order to understand different beliefs, values, experiences, forms of expression and ways of knowing.

◆ Take advantage of community resources that offer diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives.

◆ Observe the International Day of Peace (21 September) or United Nations Day (24 October).

◆ Use technology to connect and build relationships with people who share other values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life.

◆ Monitor world events and be sensitive to students' perceptions and concerns about local and global conflict.