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# Graphic Novels and Mental Health in the EFL Classroom

Master's thesis in Primary and Lower Secondary Teacher Education for Years 5–10

Supervisor: Delilah Bermudez Brataas

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences

Department of Teacher Education



Kunnskap for en bedre verden





# Abstract

One of the interdisciplinary topics of the new Norwegian curriculum is health and life skills, which states that school shall “give the pupils competence which promotes sound physical and mental health [...]” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). With that in mind, this MA thesis investigates how graphic novels can be used in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom to discuss topics surrounding mental health. To answer this, a student survey of a ninth grade in a lower secondary school in Northern Norway was performed, asking students about their reading habits and preferences, both inside and outside of school. Additionally, a selection of graphic novels was analysed to see how they show and represent various aspects that relate to mental health.

The student survey found out the students might not read a lot of books for schools; however, they do read a lot of shorter texts. Most students range from neutral to positive towards graphic novels, yet most do not enjoy reading in their spare time. The analysis of the graphic novels looked at a selection of memoirs and fictional stories, namely *Fun Home* (2007), *Anya’s Ghost* (2011), *Through the Woods* (2014), *Persepolis* (2008) and *American Born Chinese* (2006), and discovered multiple ways that graphic novels can portray various aspects of mental health using the means of its medium. The memoirs can give direct depictions of the struggles that the authors experienced, while the fictional novels can depict abstract character’s experiences, which gives the readers different ways of relating to what is portrayed. Together, this shows that graphic novels can be an engaging way for learners to explore mental health.

# Sammendrag

Et av de tverrfaglige temaene fra læreplanen er folkehelse og livsmestring, som sier at skolen skal «gi elevene kompetanse som fremmer god psykisk og fysisk helse [...]» (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). Med det som utgangspunkt, så utforsker dette masterprosjektet hvordan tegneseriebøker kan bli brukt i engelskklasserommet til å diskutere mental helse. For å svare på dette gjennomførtes en spørreundersøkelse på niende trinn på en ungdomsskole i Nord-Norge, som spurte elevene om deres lesevaner og preferanser, både i og utenfor skolen. I tillegg, ble et utvalg av tegneseriebøker analysert for å se hvordan de fremstiller diverse aspekter som relaterer til mental helse.

Undersøkelsen fant ut elevene ikke leser mange bøker til skolen, men de leser derimot mange kortere tekster. De fleste elever landet mellom nøytral til positive mot tegneseriebøker, men de fleste liker ikke å lese på fritiden sin. Bokanalysen så på et utvalg av memoarer og skjønnlitterære fortellinger, nemlig *Fun Home* (2007), *Anya's Ghost* (2011), *Through the Woods* (2014), *Persepolis* (2008) og *American Born Chinese* (2006), og fant ut at tegneseriebøker kan fremstille diverse aspekter gjennom mediet. Memoarene kan gi konkrete fremstillinger av opplevelsene til forfatteren, mens de skjønnlitterære bøkene kan fremstille abstrakte karakterers erfaringer, som gir leserne forskjellige måter å relatere til hva som er fremstilt. Sammen, så viser dette at tegneseriebøker kan være en engasjerende måte for elever til å utforske mental helse.

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# 1.0 Introduction

One of the interdisciplinary topics of the new Norwegian curriculum is health and life skills, which states that school shall “give the pupils competence which promotes sound physical and mental health[...]” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). Research shows that the number of Norwegian students who are struggling with depression and stress is growing, and that it can be related to schools. With this in mind, I set out to make a suggestion on a way to help these students. That suggestion became this thesis, where I propose using graphic novels in the EFL classroom to discuss topics relating to mental health, thereby providing a safe area in which to explore, observe and relate to different aspects about mental health.

The research began with a student survey, asking a ninth grade group about their reading habits. The purpose of this survey was to investigate the students’ experiences and opinions on graphic novels and comic books, as well as reading in general in and out of school. This was done to gauge if there is a need for more reading, and if graphic novels would be a viable option for these students, which I argue there is and they are. Following the survey, I did a critical analysis of a selection of different graphic novels, where I looked at how they showed the mental health of its characters, and what aspects of mental health they included. Later in the discussion, I compared how the books portrayed said aspects across genres, and how that gives students a greater chance at finding a book that will interest them. Finally, I made recommendations for EFL teachers about each of the books and for what age groups I found the books to be the most relevant and what topics they can be used to discuss.

This thesis is divided into multiple sections, with methodology as the second part, where I explain the different methods for collecting data and how it was used later. Following this is the third section, a literature review, where I investigate the current situation in Norway regarding the students’ mental health, how teachers can deal with mental health in school and theory surrounding graphic novels, i.e. the advantages of using them and how they can be implemented in the EFL classroom. The fourth section is the data collection and analysis, where I present the findings from both the student survey and the critical analysis, and explain what they mean and how they are relevant. Finally in the fifth section, I discuss my findings and how I can make a final recommendation regarding using graphic novels in the EFL classroom to help discuss mental health with the students.

## 2.0 Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

This MA project consists of a case study with a two-part data collection, a literature review to establish a theoretical framework consisting of previous research on graphic novels and mental health on which the later discussion and conclusion are based. The first data collection was a survey of a lower secondary school in Northern Norway where students responded to a digital survey. The second was a critical analysis of a selection of graphic novels that highlight different aspects of mental health issues. The student survey asked about experiences and perceptions of reading literature in school and at home. Additionally, the survey asked about their opinion on graphic novels. The result from the survey provides information on their relationship to reading and literature and therefore offers reasons for possible recommendations for future teacher practices.

The second source of data stems from analysing a selection of graphic novels and how they showcase different mental health issues, such as depression, paranoia and issues relating to identity. To provide a wider selection of topics and representations, both autobiographical and fictional graphic novels have been chosen. The analysis includes a visual and narrative analysis of a combination of different sites and modalities as described in Rose (2001). This then informs the later discussion on how graphic novels can be used in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, as a unique type of literature to read, possibly encouraging hesitant or reluctant readers to read more, and as a tool to help discuss topics surrounding mental health with students.

This section of the project presents the methodology used for both collecting and analysing the required data. I also describe the ethics of discussing the topics and performing the data collection, as well as the limitations and potential issues regarding validity with my chosen methods.

### 2.2 Literature review

This project includes a literature review to create a framework that includes previous theory surrounding the topics of graphic novels in education, as well as teaching about and dealing with mental health. Additionally, the literature review includes theory explaining different terminology and qualities of graphic novels, to then establish a vocabulary for discussing the selection of graphic novels. This framework was used later in the discussion – and then finally in the conclusion – as a tool to base my opinions on, for example about dealing with mental health in a classroom setting, while discussing the analysis of the data collected, and to make recommendations for practical use of my findings. (Oliver, 2012, p. 6). Therefore, the literature review is the foundation for the rest of the project, providing relevant background information before analysis, giving lenses through which to view the data and observations from previous research to compare to the findings of this project.

### 2.3 Data collection and analysis

This section of the methodology describes the data collection process of this project, as well as the considerations and limitations of the chosen process of data collection and analysis, and the ethics surrounding said process.



### 2.3.1 Data collection

The first source of data collection for my project is a survey of a lower secondary school in Northern Norway asking the students about their experiences and perceptions of reading in school and on their own free time, as well as their personal experience with reading graphic novels. Using a case study revealed how the students experience reading in school and can work as an example for other students, allowing for making recommendations for future teacher practices. This helped provide a view into how students perceive their exposure to literature, and the later critical analysis looked at how graphic novels present various aspects about mental health and how it can be useful to use in the EFL classroom. This is an instrumental case study (Crowe, et al., 2011), where a case is used to gain a broader appreciation about an issue. Using student responses, I gained information on both their opinion on graphic novels / comic books, as well as the students' experience with reading in the classroom. Some examples of questions they answered are "Do you have any experience reading graphic novels? (i.e., "Amuletten")" and "(If you answered "Yes" to [the previous question]) How much do you enjoy graphic novels?", "How often do you read whole books for school?", "How often does your whole class read the same text for school?" and "How often does the whole class read the same book?".

For collecting the data, I wrote an online survey (see appendix 1 & 2) with the University of Oslo's (UIO) data collection service *Nettskjema* that was completed by the students electronically and anonymously, and then the answers became available online on the UIO servers for me. This allowed the students to maintain their privacy when answering the survey, possibly motivating them to be more truthful (Freeman et al., 2006; Larsen, 2017), and made it easier to obtain permission to complete the survey. The survey was short, in Norwegian, and did not take more than five minutes to complete. By securing permission from the teachers, getting their help with executing the survey in the EFL classroom during school, keeping the survey anonymous, and obtaining the results digitally, I believe I found the path of least resistance for collecting and analysing this data. The expected result was first to discover that most of the reading the students do in school comes from their English subject textbook instead of from authentic texts such as novels or nonfiction texts, and second, that most of the students' enjoyment of comic books or graphic novels range from neutral to liking them a lot, meaning that they are positive towards them. Therefore, I suggest the alternative of using graphic novels in the classroom to diversify and add authentic texts to their reading experience and offering forms of literature that more students can enjoy. This then leads me to the second part of the data collection.

The second source of data collection is a critical textual analysis where I analysed a selection of graphic novels, looking at how they present and showcase different aspects relating to mental health issues. This was done through visual and narrative analysis, using visual methodology as defined by Rose (2001) to discuss various aspects of graphic novels (see Figure 1), and applying terminology from Freedman (2019) and McCloud (1994) to help accurately describe how the graphic novels show and tell their stories and

how they portray their characters.

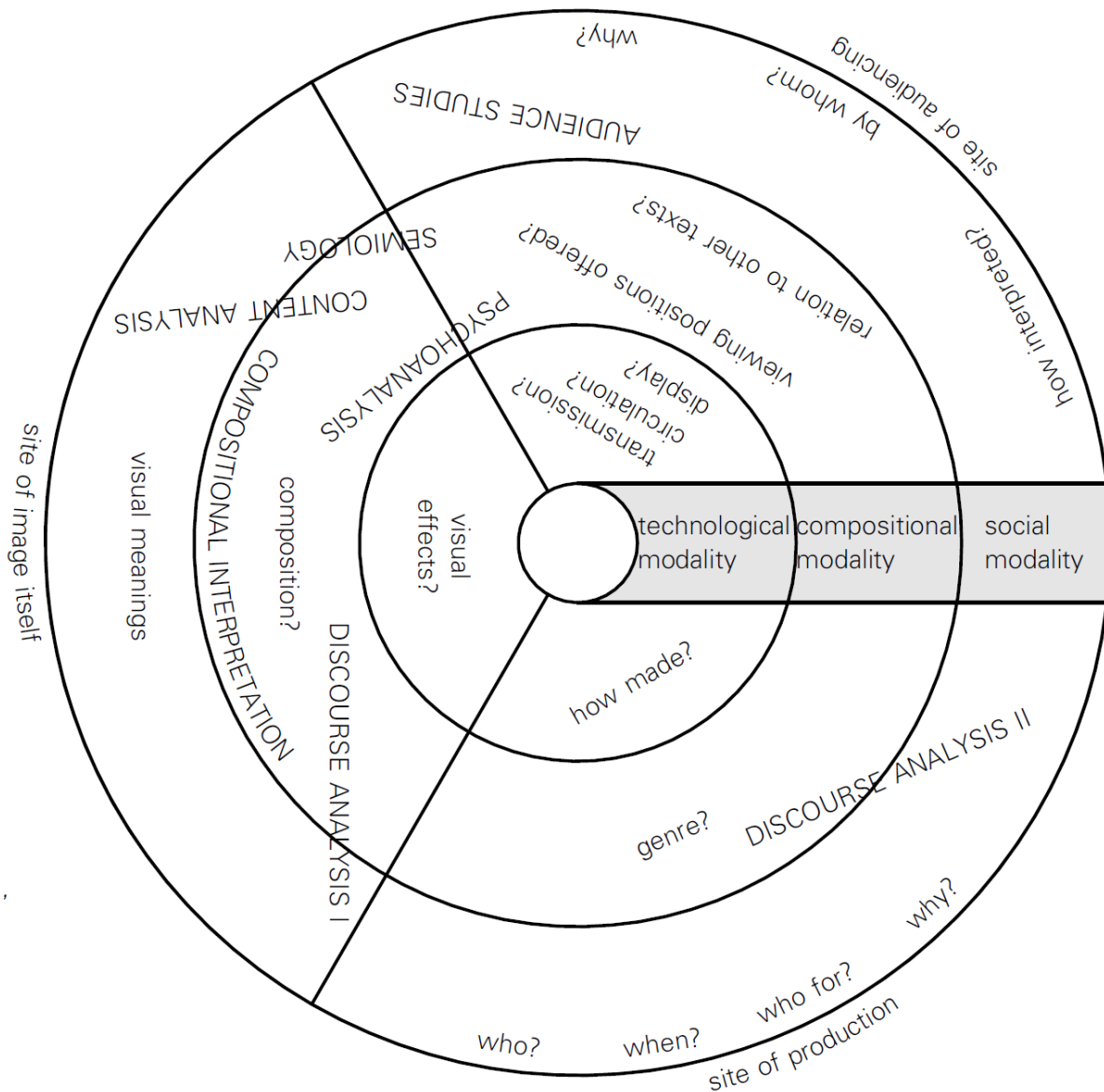


Figure 1: Sites, modalities, and methods for interpreting visual materials (Rose, 2001, p. 30)

Through analysing how images are composed and stylised, colours used, faces and bodies portrayed, and text integrated and stylised in the panels of the pages, I demonstrated how these graphic novels portray their characters and worlds, and how these portrayals showcase different aspects relating to mental health. For example, in the first story of *Through the Woods*, the main characters are dealing with feelings of paranoia which is told not only through the written narration, but also through the illustrations of a lonely cabin covered in snow that blends in to the gutter between the panels, using cold colours and stressed facial expressions in the characters. The analysis focuses on sections of the graphic novels where I evaluate and present the most relevant parts of each book that I feel portray the topic best. Through this process, I presented different aspects of mental health represented in the selection of books.

I chose to analyse a combination of both fictional and autobiographical graphic novels. The inclusion of both of these types of narratives stems from wanting to use these books in the classroom to discuss mental health topics. Therefore, having stories

where the narrative revolves around both fictional and real people give alternatives for discussion. Some students might prefer stories of real people and their experiences as it might help them recognize that others have similar experiences to them. Others might prefer discussing and reading about fictional characters' experiences, as it can make the topic more abstract, and not necessarily something that they have to relate to directly. By providing this variety in narrative forms, there was a greater possibility of finding something that would be interesting or relevant to a large group of people, i.e. a classroom full of students. With that said, the selection of books I chose was Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2007), Emily Carroll's *Through the Woods* (2014), Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2008) and Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (2006). These books provide not only a selection of different types of narrative, but also art styles, themes and characters. *Fun Home* and *Persepolis* are both memoirs that tell the story of the author, and both use a gray scale colour palette, but with different art styles. Both tell the real story of real women and their real struggles. The other two books, *Through the Woods* and *American Born Chinese*, are fictional stories. Both books use colour in their visuals, however they differ widely in their art style and both portray male protagonists. *Through the Woods* is a collection of shorter stories where some of the stories are more relevant than others, and *American Born Chinese* similarly tells multiple stories, however they all connect and mirror each other. I aim to look at this wide variety using many aspects, and in that way discuss multiple aspects of mental health that students in the Norwegian EFL classroom might relate to, or be affected by, and thus ease some of the stigma. This may help students learn about mental health. One of the interdisciplinary topics found in the core curriculum is Health and Life Skills, which states that the topic must give students "competence which promotes sound physical and mental health [...]" and that "Relevant areas within this topic are physical and mental health, lifestyle habits, sexuality and gender, drug abuse, media use and consumption and personal economy" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 14). This means that as teachers we are required to give students competence in areas relating to mental health, and with this project I suggest that one way of doing so is through graphic novels in the EFL classroom.

### 2.3.2 Considerations and limitations of the methodology

I have chosen this methodology based on my motivation for starting this project. I wanted to look at graphic novels and investigate how they could be used in the classroom. Therefore, I wanted to analyze different graphic novels that all have protagonists or characters that deal with different issues or hardships that relate to their mental health. Additionally, I have been under the impression that reading a book and discussing it afterwards is an uncommon practice in Norwegian classrooms, based on my own education in Norway. I wanted to investigate whether my hypothesis was true, and if it is, provide suggestions for literature to use in the EFL classroom that can be engaging for the students. This is why the student survey asks them not only about their experiences with reading in the classroom, but also about their experiences with, and opinion of, reading comic books and graphic novels. My hypothesis here was that most students would range from neutral to very positive towards them, thus making them a good alternative to literature in the classroom. I selected a case study methodology, looking at a case of a Norwegian lower secondary school and the students' opinions, and at a case of different graphic novels, using elements of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to answer my questions.

There are however some limitations with this approach. Some of the limitations that come with a quantitative study such as a survey, are that the questions asked might not result in enough information, or questions that result in irrelevant answers (Larsen, 2017, p. 28). However, these problems can be averted with good preparation to make sure the questions will result in helpful answers such as including multiple questions surrounding the same topic. A limitation with conducting an instrumental case study, especially seeing as the goal is to use the results as a representation of a whole, is that the case you are studying, i.e. the students who are completing the survey, might not be representative. Crowe et al. (2011) recommend selecting a "typical" case when performing an instrumental case study (p. 5), and I argue that the group of students I am working with, are a typical group of students. Additionally, depending on the number of responses, I can argue that the results of the survey are representative of a typical lower secondary school in Norway.

Another potential limitation is the selection of books and what these books contain. As previously stated, the selection is a combination of autobiographical and fictional narratives, with both male and female protagonists, with completely different choices for art style, and with colour ranging from grayscale to full color palettes to somewhere in between. By selecting texts that are diverse in both plot and visualisation, my aim is to look at books where anyone could find at least one graphic novel that interested them, and which therefore makes them relevant to use in education.

### 2.3.3 The ethics of the researcher

As a researcher, you need to make considerations to the ethics of your role. Cresswell & Cresswell's (2018) table describing where ethical issues in the research process occur (p. 145) uses as a framework for describing the ethical issues in this project. They divide the timeline of the research process into "prior to conducting the study", "beginning the study", "collecting data", "analyzing data" and "reporting, sharing and storing data" (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). This part of the methodology section discusses this timeline.

Beginning with events prior to conducting the study, the main points of concern were investigating the professional association standards, seeking university approval and selecting and obtaining permission from the site and participants (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 147-148). This project was submitted to and approved by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). More relevant for this section is investigating the professional association standards, selecting the site, and obtaining permission from the participants given that the student survey is about the opinions and experiences of students in a lower secondary school in Norway, i.e. students are under the legal age. The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) are the national centre and archive for research data. NSD have strict rules regarding the collection of personal data, and require that anyone who plans to collect personal data must submit a notification form to gain permission. Getting permission is a time consuming process, which is why the student survey (appendix 1 & 2) was designed to not ask about any personal information and to keep the participants anonymous during the entire data collection process. By using the data collection tool *Nettskjema* (University of Oslo, 2021), the survey did not collect the IP-adresses of the participants and the entire data collection was therefore kept anonymous. Another concern is to find the site of collection. After asking the teachers, they agreed to help conduct the student survey by allowing the students in their classes to answer it during school hours. Looking at the critical book

analysis, there are not many considerations to be aware of, except for the consideration described in the previous section, about interpreting an image.

Continuing with beginning the study, the concerns were, according to Cresswell & Cresswell (2018), to identify a beneficial research problem, and to disclose the purpose of the study to the participants and not pressure participants to sign participation forms (p. 149). The goal of this project is to propose the use of graphic novels as a more engaging alternative to other texts read by the participants in the EFL classroom. I consider the the research problem to be quite beneficial to EFL students who were answering the survey. All students and their parents/guardians were given a letter of information (see appendix 3) about the project, the survey, and the contact information to the student and supervisor. With the help of the students' teachers, the letter was made available to them in advance of the survey. In an effort to make the process as easy as possible, the letter was formulated to assume that we had the students' parents/guardians' permission, unless they said otherwise. After discussing the topic with multiple supervisors at the university, and given that the letter of information was sent several weeks before the survey was scheduled, this approach is deemed to be an ethically correct way of securing consent.

The next step in the timeline involved being respectful and honest to the participants while collecting the data, when analysing the data, and with respecting the participants privacy when reporting, sharing, and storing of the data (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p. 150-154). While these attitudes might seem obvious, they are still important to adhere to, so as not to deceive or take advantage of anyone participating in or reading the research.

## 2.4 Discussion and conclusion

After the data was collected and analysed, the next step was to discuss the meaning of the findings, comparing them to both previous research from the literature review and my own hypotheses and expectations. In the discussion, everything is connected, thus allowing me to make conclusions and recommendations for practising teachers and future researchers. Finally, the discussion leads to the conclusion of the project, where the previous discussion is summarised, and I make recommendations to provide a concise ending to the project.

## 3.0 Literature review

This section looks at previous research in students' mental health in schools, how schools can work toward creating a better environment for students, and finally theory surrounding graphic novels, including the advantages, and how to implement them in education. This theory forms the base for the following research and discussion.

### 3.1 The current situation in Norway

The current situation in Norway, according to several studies, is that most Norwegian students enjoy school. In her book, Imsen (2020) writes that most Norwegian students enjoy school. However, according to a study from 2016, an increasing number of students are having difficulties with their mental health, especially among the girls. Different studies conducted in 1996, 2006 and 2015 shows that many young people are happy, with fewer people abusing substances, and lower crime rates among the youth. The studies also show a large increase in self-reported symptoms of depression over this period, with girls between the ages of 14-17 increasing from 17 to 26%, and boys increasing from nine to eleven percent (Imsen, 2020, p. 490). Imsen writes about another survey conducted between 2017 and 2019 that showed stress and pressure as widespread among youth. A lot of the pressure comes from expected performance in school, with as much as 45 percent of the girls and 24 percent of the boys saying that they feel pressure to perform well in school, meaning that school is a major factor of stress to many students (Imsen, 2020, p. 491).

Moreover, the public health report from 2018 noted that 30 percent of girls and 40 percent of boys age 16-17 had experienced at least one incident of violence or abuse. The report states that children struggling with challenges like ADHD or autism have fewer friends and are more often rejected by their peers that do not share their condition. This lack of meaningful friendships can in turn lead to symptoms of hyperactivity and attention difficulties. Additionally, 23 percent of children under the age of 18 have a parent with a mental illness that can affect the parents day to day life, and one out of four Norwegian youth fulfill the formal requirements of insomnia, with it being more common amongst the girls. (Suren, et al., 2018)

Additionally, a report from 2021 showed that 4.5% of the Norwegian population have refugee backgrounds, in a total of 240,239 people. Of these, 34,843 – 0,6% of the entire population – are between the ages of 0-19, i.e. school age (Statistics Norway, 2021). This means that a noticeable portion of the population might also be affected by their experience of having to leave their home as a refugee, and the stress that comes with it.

Other studies in other countries have also shown a link between depressive symptoms and school, both through bad relations and interactions between students and through perceived difficulties with school work (Cole, Maxwell, Dukewich, & Yosick, 2010; Fröjd, et al., 2008). Through these studies it becomes clear that schools play a part in the development of mental health issues among students. Many students today struggle mentally, and the number is rising and schools play a part in it. We have a responsibility to help alleviate some of the stress and troubles they experience.

Finally, on the topic of reading, studies on the reading habits of Norwegian students have shown that their reading habits and attitudes towards reading have moved

in a negative direction, with data showing that most students only read if they have to, and that the percentage has been growing in the period between 2000 and 2018 (Roe, 2020).

## 3.2 Dealing with mental health in school

The Norwegian curriculum (LK20) states in the interdisciplinary goal of health and life skills, that school shall “give the pupils competence which promotes sound physical and mental health[...]. In the childhood and adolescent years, the development of a positive self-image and confident identity is particularly important” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 14). It follows up with stating that

Relevant areas within this topic are physical and mental health, lifestyle habits, sexuality and gender, drug abuse, media use and consumption [...] value choices and the importance of meaning in life and relations with others, the ability to draw boundaries and to respect others' boundaries, and the ability to deal with thoughts, feelings and relationships (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 14)

As this is part of the new curriculum for all Norwegian schools, teachers are required to help teach students with these topics. Additionally, the first core value of the curriculum is “Human dignity” which states that “all people are equal regardless of what makes us different” and that “All pupils shall be treated equally, and no pupil is to be subjected to discrimination” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 4-5). In the second core value, “Identity and cultural diversity”, the curriculum states that “Common reference frameworks are important for each person's sense of belonging in society”, and that “A common framework gives and shall give room for diversity, and the pupils must be given insight into how we live together with different perspectives, attitudes and views of life” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 5). These details from the Norwegian curriculum show that the government emphasizes educating students in a way that provides understanding of others and their situations, as to make everyone feel more included.

As there is a growing concern over mental health in schools, we must look for ways to help students struggling with such issues and preferably help prevent them from manifesting. Given that humans are social creatures, one way of helping is to discuss the issues one might be experiencing to help them feel less alone or to help identify the symptoms (Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988). I have proposed reading and discussing graphic novels to help students deal with these problems. Reading about other's lived experiences can help students dealing with similar issues not to feel so alone and discussing the topics with others can help students identify symptoms in others or themselves.

The official Norwegian website for health includes a list of some of the more common mental illnesses. This list includes the conditions anxiety, depression, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and phobias (Directorate for e-Health, W/O Y a). The selection of mental illnesses here has been limited based on what themes are present in the selection of graphic novels and what is more relevant for the average school group.

## 3.3 Graphic novels

As graphic novels are a central part of this project, a theoretical foundation is necessary. In this section I will define what a graphic novel is, the advantages of reading them, and how they can be used in a classroom setting.

### 3.3.1 Terminology

One of the main sources of data collection for this thesis involves a visual analysis of a selection of graphic novels. To make the findings of the analysis clear and understandable, a glossary will first be presented showing the unique terminology that is used when discussing comics and graphic novels. This terminology is based on the works of Scott McCloud (1994), Kerry Freedman (2019) and Gillian Rose (2001). The object of this analysis is a selection of graphic novels, which begs for a distinction to be made between graphic novels and comics. McCloud (1994) elaborates on Will Eisner's definition of comics as "sequential art" into the more specific "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response to the viewer" (p. 7-9). Both graphic novel and comics fit this description, so to differentiate, a graphic novel is published as a book, compared to a comic book which is defined as a magazine. Additionally, the way a panel is positioned, coloured, shaped, and framed, as well as the image inside the panel must relate to the rest of the page, has helped comics evolve into what we now call graphic novels, that are able to engage on several levels simultaneously, through complex narratives and framing inspired by film, but unbound by technology (Horstkotte, 2013, p. 45). In short, a graphic novel is a multimodal book that uses the art-form of comics to tell a story.

### 3.3.2 Advantages and disadvantages to reading graphic novels

Using graphic novels in the classroom can provide many benefits for teachers. Alissa Burger (2018) introduces her book, *Teaching graphic novels in the English classroom*, by stating that some of the advantages of using graphic novels in the classroom are "engaging reluctant readers, encouraging students to view familiar material from a new perspective, and critically engaging students' multiple literacies" (p. 1). Andrew Bourelle (2018) states that one of the advantages he found in using short graphic narratives was that you could show students many of them and expose the students to "many different styles and approaches" (p. 15). Bourelle (2018) compares the difference between a graphic novel and a graphic narrative to the difference between a novel and short story (p. 14). With this variety of literary references, Bourelle's (2018) students were able to broaden their view of what a story could be and how it might be presented. The observations made by these teachers show that students reading graphic novels or narratives are engaged by the material. It also shows that the graphic novels and narratives can help broaden the students' expectations, supporting Burger's (2018) claim. In an interview, author and illustrator Maris Wick states the benefits of graphic novels: "For reluctant readers, it offers a hook, because I feel readers gravitate toward images. For students learning another language, graphic novels are a great tool because words not understood can often be recognized and vice-versa", adding that "Additionally, you can have silence in graphic novels, where the imagery says something that words cannot, and it can be very powerful." Editor of First Second books, Calista Brill, counters the possible belief that graphic novels do not challenge the reader and are 'too easy', and says that "Graphic novels engage the brain in more sophisticated ways—ways that



challenge and enrich the reading experience” (Bailey, 2018). For one example of the “silence” that Wick mentioned, see Image 1, from *Through the Woods*, where the character Bell walks through the woods just before a major plot development, giving the reader a short calm break before the events unfold.



Image 1: Bell walking through the woods (Carroll, 2014)

Furthermore, Paula Griffith (2010) mentions many advantages of graphic novels, such as enabling readers to read materials that were considered too challenging due to length, being beneficial for readers with language and learning disabilities, that readers find them engaging, and that new literacy terms have emerged due to closer scrutiny of graphic novels (p. 184-185). However, she also mentions that “Adult readers who are not used to reading a graphic format have some difficulty with sequencing, which is why these books may not be for all readers but instead for those students who know and prefer this format” (Griffith, 2010, p. 185).

Looking at motivational theory, Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2015) state that one part of a student’s motivation for participating in school work is the expectation to do well, or “mastery expectation” (p. 17-19). According to Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2015), research shows that students who have higher expectations for completing the tasks, see a greater value in working with the school subjects, show a higher level of effort and are more engaged and more persistent. It also shows that students choose activities based on what they expect to be able to accomplish (p. 19-20). As students might have trouble finding motivation to read longer pieces of literature consisting of only text, using a multimodal work such as a graphic novel, or even a shorter work such as a graphic narrative, can help give these students motivation to read a whole literary work, similarly to what Griffith (2010) found. Student are not solely reliant on their reading, but also get to engage their visual literacy, which is part of the competence aims/curriculum. As the curriculum says, reading in the English subject means “reading and finding information in

multimedia texts with competing messages and using reading strategies to understand explicit and implicit information” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019, p. 4) meaning that students are not only expected to read plain text but also should be able to “read” images as well, and graphic novels are a well suited medium for practicing both of these skills.

As these researchers show, there are many advantages to using graphic novels in the classroom. Including engaging reluctant readers, broadening readers views on literature and making reading accessible to everyone. Additionally, the graphic nature of the medium allows for effects not possible in plain prose, like the “silence” described by Wick. Many of these benefits are particularly important for using graphic novels in an educational setting, which will be discussed later. Finally, as with any medium, not everyone will enjoy them, and such is the case for graphic novels and comics as well, as Griffith described. As she wrote, readers who are not familiar with the format might have trouble reading it, which is why it is important for teachers who want to use graphic novels to introduce them in a effective manner.

### 3.3.3 Using graphic novels in the classroom

There are a few things to keep in mind for using graphic novels in the classroom. The way Smith & Pole (2018) describe it, there are three major parts to using them: knowing how to read graphic novels, taking the time to read all parts of them and the discourse around them. First off, teachers need to teach how to read pages of a graphic novel, such as the panels and gutters, and the use of space in them. Teachers can for example make guides for their student on what each element of a panel can mean, like the significance of the point of view or what different colours can mean. Additionally, readers need time to understand what is illustrated, as it is easy to simply read what text is available and move on. Finally, students need to discuss the text what the elements mean to negotiate understanding from it. The discourse around the material can help the readers both share their viewpoints as well as gain new perspectives. Smith & Pole’s (2018) advice in short: analyse, slow down and share. As one of the disadvantages of using graphic novels that Griffith (2010) mentioned was that her students were unfamiliar with the medium, and did not know how to properly read it, and therefore, using the suggestions from Smith & Pole can help prevent this issue.

Another thing to keep in mind when using any form of media, is the concept of “windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors” introduced by R. S. Bishop (1990), in which she argues that young readers should be provided with literature that works as both a mirror and a window, that it is important for children outside of the dominant social group to see themselves in the books they read, and for children inside of the dominant social group to see the reality of those outside.

These points are important to keep in mind when using graphic novels in the classroom as teachers cannot simply expect students who have had no experience with the medium to grasp its complexities without help. And when deciding on the subject matter, the books should present accurate and non-derogatory depictions of the characters from outside the social majority, so that students from a similar social group can see themselves in a positive light, and those in the majority social group can accurately gain new perspectives.

# 4.0 Data collection & analysis

The data collection section will present the findings from the student survey and the graphic novel analysis and present a summary of the findings at the end of each section. The first part presents the data from the student survey through various graphs to help illustrate and discusses what the data means. Following the student survey is the critical analysis, where each book from the selection is presented, summarised, and finally analysed, where the books are investigated and presented, to show how they depict various aspects of mental health.

## 4.1 Student survey

The first part of the data collection, i.e., the survey, was performed across three ninth grade classes and provided 70 answers in total. These answers show the opinions of many different students and should provide a broad insight into their relationship to reading in and out of school. The questions on the survey (see appendix 1 & 2) asked for information relating both to their knowledge about graphic novels and to their relationship with reading in general, starting with their familiarity with graphic novels

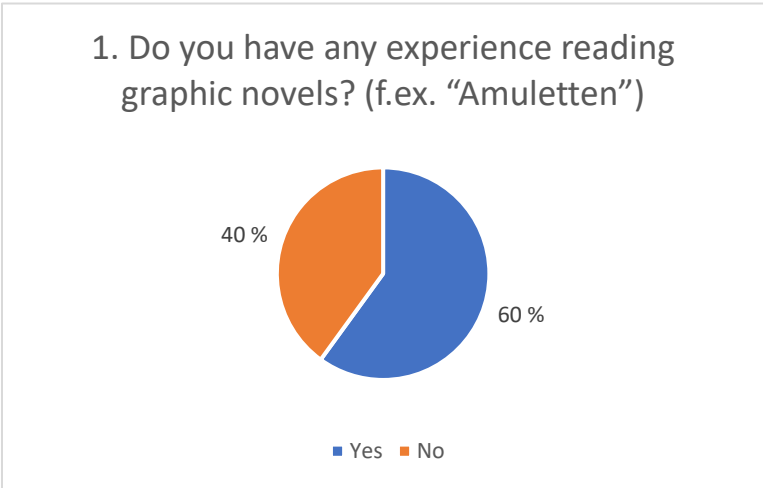


Figure 2: Question 1

Question 1 (Figure 2) asked whether the students have any experience reading graphic novels and gave an example of a popular series of graphic novels that the students might have read or heard about, as well as a brief description of graphic novels to help them differentiate between them and comic books. The survey found that 60% of the students have some experience with graphic novels.

Following up on question 1, the students who answered "yes" were asked more about their opinion on graphic novels in question 2-a (Figure 3). The students were asked to rate how much they enjoy graphic novels on a scale from one to five, where one means "not at all", three is neutral towards them, and five means that they like them a lot. Here we see that the majority of the students who had any experience with graphic

novels are either neutral towards or positive towards graphic novels, with a minority actively disliking them.

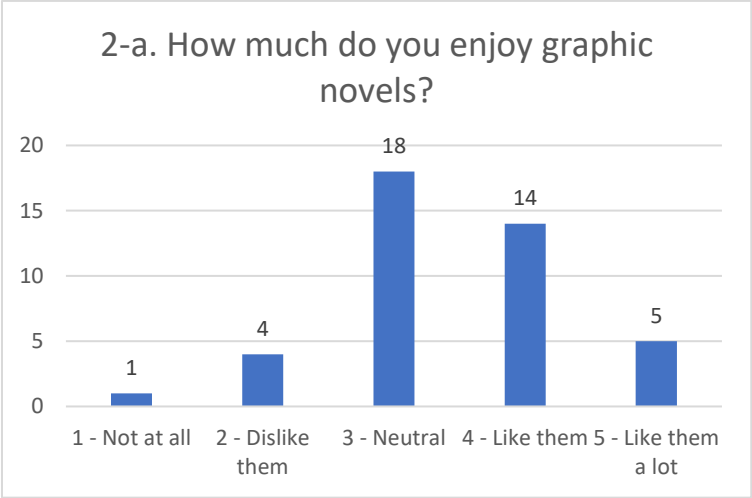


Figure 3: Question 2-a

The second part of question 2 asked all of the students to rate how much they enjoy comic books on a identical scale as in question 2-a. In the results (Figure 4) we see that the vast majority of the students are either neutral or positive towards comic books, but the distribution of the each alternative still remains similar to that of question 2-a. However, these questions show that most students either would not mind reading graphic novels or comic books, or would like it more novels or books

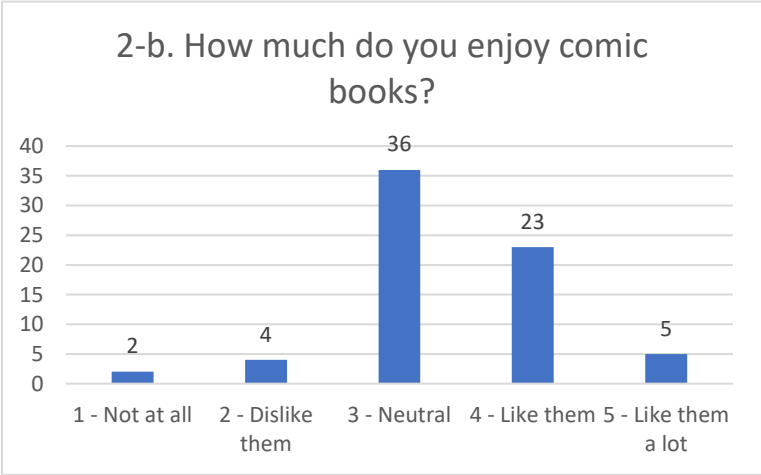


Figure 4: Question 2-b

Questions three, four and five asked the students about their reading habits in school, about what, and how often, they read. In question 3 (Figure 5), the students were asked how often they would read entire books in school or as homework. The answers show that only a few students have read more than one entire book for school, with the majority having read one or two books during the last two years. Only a few students have not read any books the last couple of years, and even less have never

read a book for school. These numbers show that the school does not routinely assign entire books to read, instead only doing it on relatively rare occasions.

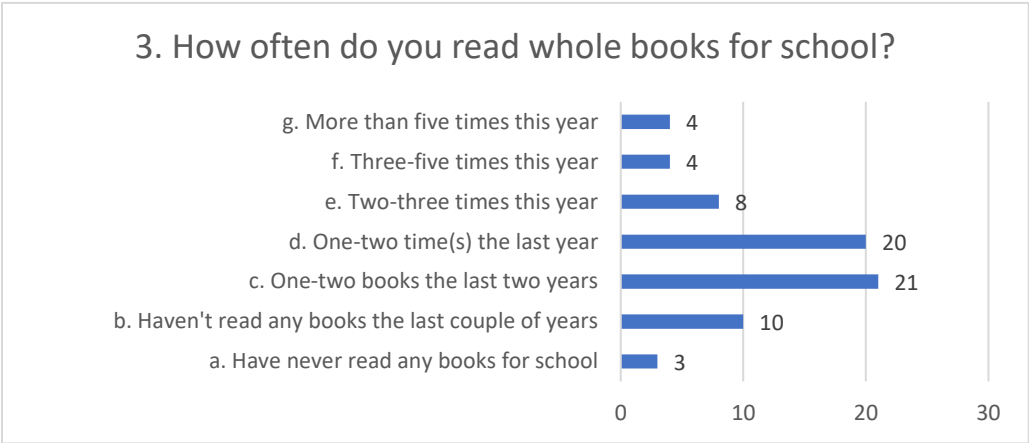


Figure 5: Question 3

However, question 4 (Figure 6) shows that they definitely read smaller texts for school. The survey specified to the participants that the text could be from the Norwegian or English text book or something that the teacher had printed out to them. The majority of students say that the entire class will read the same text at least once a week, with many answering that they will do it even more than that.

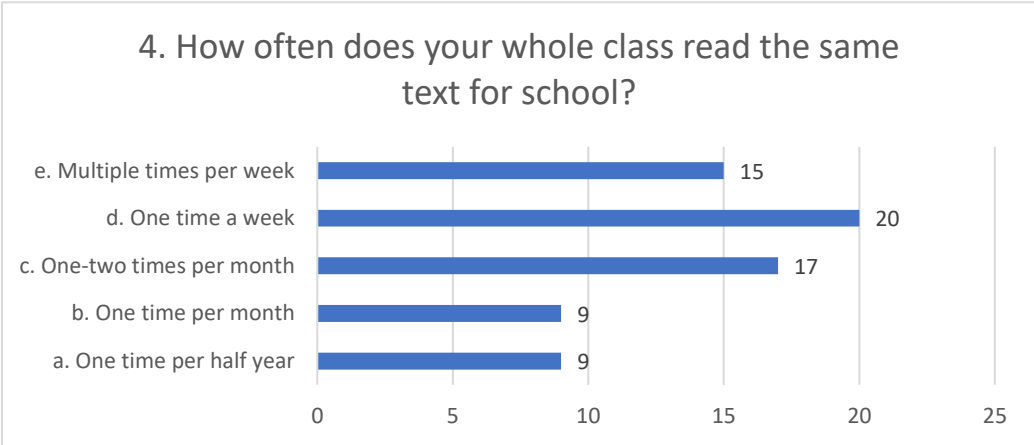


Figure 6: Question 4

Question 5 asked the students how often the whole class would read the same book, for example for a project they were doing or to discuss it afterwards. Here again, most of the participants answered that they had read one or two books the last two years (Figure 7). These numbers show that the students only read entire books on relatively rare

occasions, however that does not necessarily mean that there is a lack of reading in the school, as they often will read shorter texts

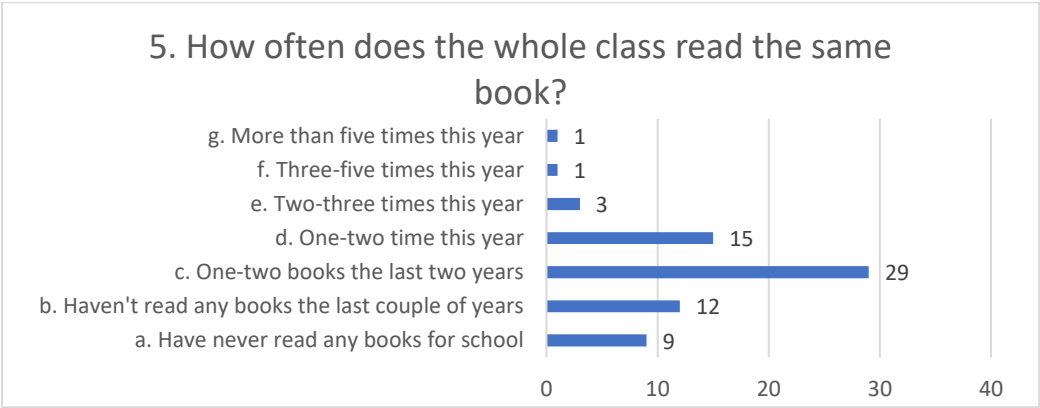


Figure 7: Question 5

Finally, the last question on the survey asked the participants what they enjoy reading in their spare time, and gave them some alternatives to choose from, including an "other" option and the opportunity to write their own alternative if they felt as if anything was missing. The participants were also informed that they could choose more than one alternative. Figure 8 shows the distribution of their answers, with the number of times an option was chosen.

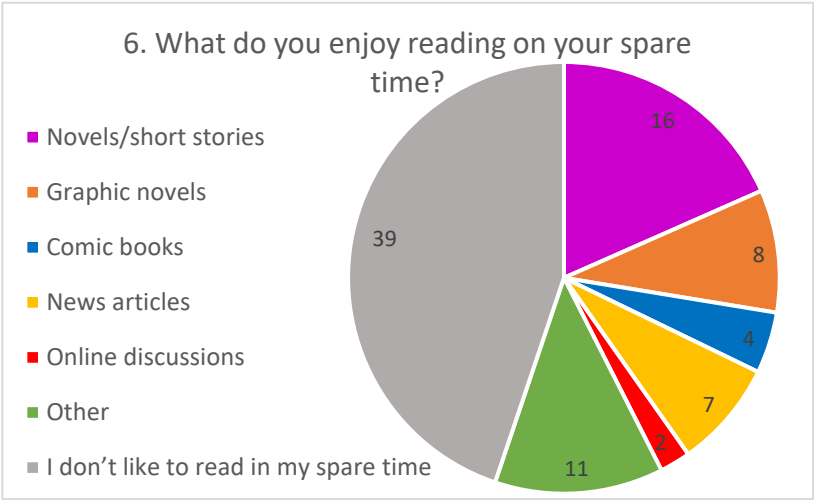


Figure 8: Question 6

As shown on the graph, 39 of the students marked that they do not like reading in their spare time. However, 16 of the students marked that they enjoy reading novels or short stories, and graphic novels and comic books received 12 votes combined, with one of the students who marked "other" noted that they enjoyed reading manga in their spare time. Other answers noted options that I had not thought of when creating the survey, such as reading the test manual for acquiring a hunters permit, and the web site/app "Wattpad", a platform for reading and writing stories. Others noted in the "other" section specific topics that they enjoyed reading about, such as "krim", a genre popular in Norway that encompasses mystery stories relating to crime and detective work, or horror, football related literature and self improvement guides. Another thing to note, is that some of the students who marked that they do not like reading in their spare time marked some of

the other options as well, indicating perhaps what they would like to read if they had to. Of these students, two had also chosen news articles with one of them also choosing online discussions, one had chosen novels/short stories, one had chosen graphic novels and one had noted real crime stories.

One thing to note about question 2a and 2b is that among the eight students that have answered that they do not enjoy (less than 3 on the scale) either graphic novels or comic books, six also answered that do not enjoy reading in their spare time as well, and three of the five students who responded negatively towards graphic novels specifically. This tells me that there is a probability that these students do not dislike graphic novels or comic books specifically, but rather have an aversion to reading in general. That is not the case for all of them however, as one student who gave comic books a 2 in enjoyment and marked 'not liking' for reading in their spare time, also marked 'enjoying' for reading novels/short stories in their spare time as well. Additionally, five of the 39 who answered that they do not like reading in their spare time also checked off one of the other options available as well.

Looking back at the research from Roe (2018), we see that the findings from this survey matches the larger trend in the country. Although the percentages that this survey showed are higher than those of the research from 2018, they are still reasonable given the previous trend.

To summarise; the data shows that students might not read many entire books, such as novels, for schools, but they do read many shorter texts. Many of the students are familiar with graphic novels, and read them as well as reading comics. However, most of the students do not enjoy reading in their spare time, but of those that do, what they enjoy reading varies from novels and short stories, illustrated stories (graphic novels, short stories or manga) and news articles, with a few noting that they prefer reading about specific topics.

## 4.2 Critical analysis of graphic novels

This section is dedicated to analysing the selection of graphic novels and presenting the findings from it. To organise the analysis, this part presents each book individually and the themes relating to mental health that was found within them. The goal of this part is to present some parts of the selection of books that relate to mental health, mainly what the characters or people in those parts are experiencing and how that is communicated to the reader, either through text, illustrations or both combined. In the next section the findings are discussed in how they relate to and can be used in the EFL classroom. Looking back to Rose's (2001) model for visual analysis (Figure 1), this part mostly focuses on analysing the site of the image itself in the data collection. In the following discussion section, the compositional and social modality of the images are discussed further.

### 4.2.1 Through the woods

Emily Carroll's *Through the woods* (2014) is a collection of short horror stories told through the format of a graphic novel and it depicts, amongst other mental illnesses, anxiety, exemplified by the introduction to the book, where the narrator tells us

When I was little, I used to read before I slept at night.

And I read by the light of a lamp clipped to my headboard.  
Stark white, and bright,  
against the darkness of my room.  
I dreaded turning it off.  
What if I reached out...  
... just past the edge of the bed  
and SOMETHING, waiting there,  
GRABBED ME and pulled me down, into the DARK (Carroll, 2014)

This introduction sets the stage and expectations for the rest of the book and highlights the regular fear of the dark many have – especially as children. A fear of the dark is a common fear in children that is often associated with a fear of the unknown, which is what the first story in the book plays on, in “OUR NEIGHBOR’S HOUSE”.

#### **4.2.1.1 Our neighbor’s house**

The story is about three sisters living in a cabin with their father, who left them seven days ago to go hunting. However, at the bloodred sunset the protagonist, Beth, knows that their father is dead. The first day, they decide not to heed their father’s command and stay in their house, not travelling to their neighbour’s house. The next day, the older sister tells them that a “tall man in a wide-brimmed hat with a smile that showed all his teeth” came to their house, and the following nights, both the older and the younger sister disappear. Finally, Beth decides to leave for their neighbour’s house on her own, only to find that their neighbour is the man who came to their house.

In this story, Emily Carroll showcases the dread of solitude and denial. The older sister Mary convinces the other to stay in their house after the three days their father had told them to wait had passed, due to being in denial about their father’s likely death. In the following days, the older sister first disappears. The younger sisters still stay, while the youngest sister Hannah cries.





Image 2: Beth and Hannah after their sister has disappeared (Carroll, 2014)

The next day, the youngest sister is no longer sad, as she too has met them man with a wide-brimmed hat, making Beth furious, as she is convinced that he took their older sister. Finally, the next day Hannah is gone as well, and Beth is left alone without food and kindling, forcing her to leave for their neighbour's house. The story shows the different stages of grief in the sisters as a response to their loss: denial and bargaining from Mary, depression from Hannah and both acceptance and anger from Beth. However, the illustrations simultaneously show the anxiety, desperation, and paranoia that the sisters are experiencing. In Image 2, we see the younger sisters' reaction after their older sister's disappearance. In the first panel, Carroll has placed the narration in text bubbles that seem fluid and drives home the haunting "wailing" of the youngest sister while showing Beth's almost apathetic expression to it. The next panel shows Hannah's red face lowered and her tears falling down her face, while the narration describes her eyes that are out of frame. In the third panel, the gutter around the panel has a dual purpose of both separating the panel from the others (McCloud, 1994), but also working as part of the image in the panel itself, being part of the snow that is now reaching their window further isolating their house and making any journey to or from even more difficult. The last panel of the page cements this feeling of isolation, with a long shot of Beth, standing alone in a room and staring through a window into the white outside. The final element in making the reader feel their sense of solitude is the cold and pale colour

palette used, making their home feel uncomfortable and unwelcoming. All these combined gives the reader an uneasy feeling and drives home the fear and anxiety that the sisters must be feeling, and that the reader will feel with them.

#### **4.2.1.2 The nesting place**

The final story of *Through the Woods* tells the story of "THE NESTING PLACE", the story of a girl named Bell, who is leaving her boarding school for the summer to stay with her brother Clarence and his fiancée Rebecca. During dinner, Bell notices Rebecca's teeth rattling as she eats, suggesting that something is not as it should be. Bell spends her time reading alone and not engaging with her brother and his fiancée. One day, the housekeeper Madame Beauchamp comes outside and warns her not to go exploring nearby. Yet Bell keeps noticing strange things, first someone walking outside the house at night, then strange noises and whispering between Rebecca and someone behind a closed door, and later a strange wound on the housekeeper's forearm. The next morning, the housekeeper is gone, and Rebecca tells Bell and her brother that Madame Beauchamp was picked up by her brother-in-law. After breakfast, Bell wanders into the woods, and discovers a cave. At the bottom of the cavern, Bell sees Rebecca and observes as she talks to someone as a mother would. Bell decides to call out to Rebecca, only to notice her horrifying true form with worms protruding from her face. Bell tries to run but Rebecca catches her. The next thing we see is Bell waking up in her bed with her brother by her side. She tries to tell her brother about Rebecca but is brushed aside. As her brother leaves to call a doctor, Bell confronts Rebecca, who reveals that she was the one who hurt Madame Beauchamp in order to find a home for her little ones. She then explains how Bell would be a perfect home for them, and as Bell tries to argue that people would know that something was wrong, Rebecca counters that Bell has no friends, and her brother would be thrilled to see her no longer "sullen and depressed" (Carroll, 2014). As Rebecca explains her plan, Bell argues, that the city her brother wants to take them to will grate her skin and throats, and how her babies will then be taken away from her to be studied, which convinces Rebecca to stay in the house. As Bell and her brother are driving away, the story ends with Bell noticing the same rattling teeth in her brother that she had seen in Rebecca, as they drive off into the horizon.

In a similar fashion to "Our neighbor's house", "The nesting place" showcases the anxiety of being in a stressful situation and shows the fear in the main character as she experiences the events of the story. However, Bell has a more defined character than the three sisters. Throughout the story, we rarely see her smile, only in the beginning when meeting her brother and only once. Otherwise, she only appears, as Rebecca puts it "sullen and depressed". As we are not told the full life story of any of these characters, we cannot know for sure if there is a reason for this, we can only speculate. Maybe it is related to her mother's death and her brother's absence during their mother's final days, maybe it is related to her leg that is in a brace, or maybe it is related to something else entirely. Based on the comments made about her and the way she is illustrated throughout the story, Bell would seem to be suffering from depression. A good example of the different elements found in the story can be seen in Image 3.



Image 3: Rebecca telling Bell her plan (Carroll, 2014)

In these panels, we see the abstract horror of what Rebecca is, as well as the fear, sadness and, finally, determination in Bell. On the first page, there is no clear gutter between the illustrations of Rebecca, further painting the unease around her along with the speech bubbles twining around the page, mirroring the red worms that are Rebecca. The second page, showing another close-up of Rebecca's mouth and the horror that Bell is experiencing. The page continues to show Bell's dread, and the three last panels show Bell's anxiety turning into horror and then determination, a summary of the story. While Bell manages to escape the immediate situation and convinces Rebecca not to hurt her, the story ends on the alarming revelation that her brother too has been taken over by the worms, letting the reader imagine a tragic fate for Bell. The story therefore manages to showcase Bell's anxiety and depression through the visuals, as well as visualizing depression, through a tired demeanour and an avoidance of people.

Additionally, Carroll draws multiple lines for each of Rebecca's speech bubbles, indicating that there is not one single voice coming from her, but rather multiple voices saying the same thing at the same time, suggesting that the worms inside her skin are a collective rather than a single entity. This way Carroll visualises the horror that Bell must both be seeing and hearing without the reader needing to hear it as well. In these speech bubbles, Carroll also highlights certain words in bright red as a way of showing the words that has the most effect on Bell; her brother and how he will react to a change in her, her leg, that no one will miss her like nobody missed Rebecca when she first disappeared, and finally Rebecca's children who will soon take over Bell's body and life. Another way that Carroll (2014) showcases Bell's experience is by using colour. In the beginning of the story, we are told about how Bell's mother would tell her about

monsters, and everything is black and white. When the story continues to Bell leaving her school and meeting with her brother, the background has gained some colour, but the colours are still heavily desaturated and close to grayscale. Only when they are driving through the country on their way to the house do we see more saturated colour. Inside the house, everything is dark and grey again, except for Rebecca, who has a comparatively colourful blue dress and white outline around her skin, compared to everyone else who has a black outline. Only when Bell goes outside do we see more colour before Madame Beauchamp talks to her and she investigates the cave. On Bell's second trip outside before going to the cave, she is pictured enjoying nature around her, studying the forest and leaving around her (see Image 1). Research shows that nature has a positive effect on well-being (Bowler, Buyung-Ali, Knight, & Pullin, 2010), which might be the reason why Carroll (2014) made the colours of the forest more vibrant and Bell's expression less gloomy and more positive than otherwise shown throughout the story. In conclusion, the story shows one representation of depression through a discreet illustration of character and the use of colour.

#### 4.2.2 Fun home: A family tragicomic

*Fun home: A family tragicomic* tells the story of the relationship between the author Alison Bechdel and her father, from childhood up until the day he died, that places emphasis of the tragic elements but combines it with a comedic and ironic outlook on the events, as the title suggests. Bechdel (2007) presents how she saw her relationship with her father as a young child, and how her perception of her father changed as she grew older and after his death. At the beginning of the book, Bechdel presents a distant father, who showed far more interest in his house and keeping it tidy, than spending time with his children. As the book progresses, we learn more about the father's scandals, about how he was discovered with underage boys. We are also told about Bechdel discovering her sexuality, as well as the mental illnesses she struggled with growing up. Towards the end of the book, Bechdel seems to find some comfort in their time they spent together as adults, where they would share opinions and recommendations surrounding their shared interest of reading and relating to each other through their sexuality. While the book begins by describing the difficult parts of her childhood, Bechdel ends her story by appreciating her father for being there when she discovered herself as an adult.

The entire book is illustrated in a cold grayscale, with pencil drawn panels and contents. The characters are drawn relatively realistically regarding human anatomy, which gives the impression that the story is both precise and credible, while the cold blue-grey colours imply melancholy to the reader.

##### 4.2.2.1 Chapter 5: The canary-colored caravan of death

The fifth chapter of the book begins with Bechdel talking about her experiences after her dad died and during the funeral, and how she felt and reacted to the condolences of others. She speculates on how if he had moved away, he would still be alive and not have committed suicide as she suspects he did. She continues to talk about both her parents' creative outlets and obsessions, which ended up affecting Bechdel and her siblings' relationships with their own hobbies, and how this caused the family to grow isolated from each other. It is in this chapter that Bechdel talks about her obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and how it manifested itself when she was ten. According to her, it started out with a lot of counting, where "odd numbers and multiples of thirteen were to be avoided" (Bechdel, 2007, p. 135), which evolved into making crossing



thresholds and doorways time consuming procedures. Her OCD made her life a “laborious round of chores” (p137), affecting every part of her day. It evolved into questioning her own reality, as she began writing “I think” after the sentences in her journal. After some months of this compulsive behaviour, Bechdel’s mother began dictating her journaling, and eventually she filled her calendar with deadlines to quit specific compulsions, which provided some sense of relief for her.

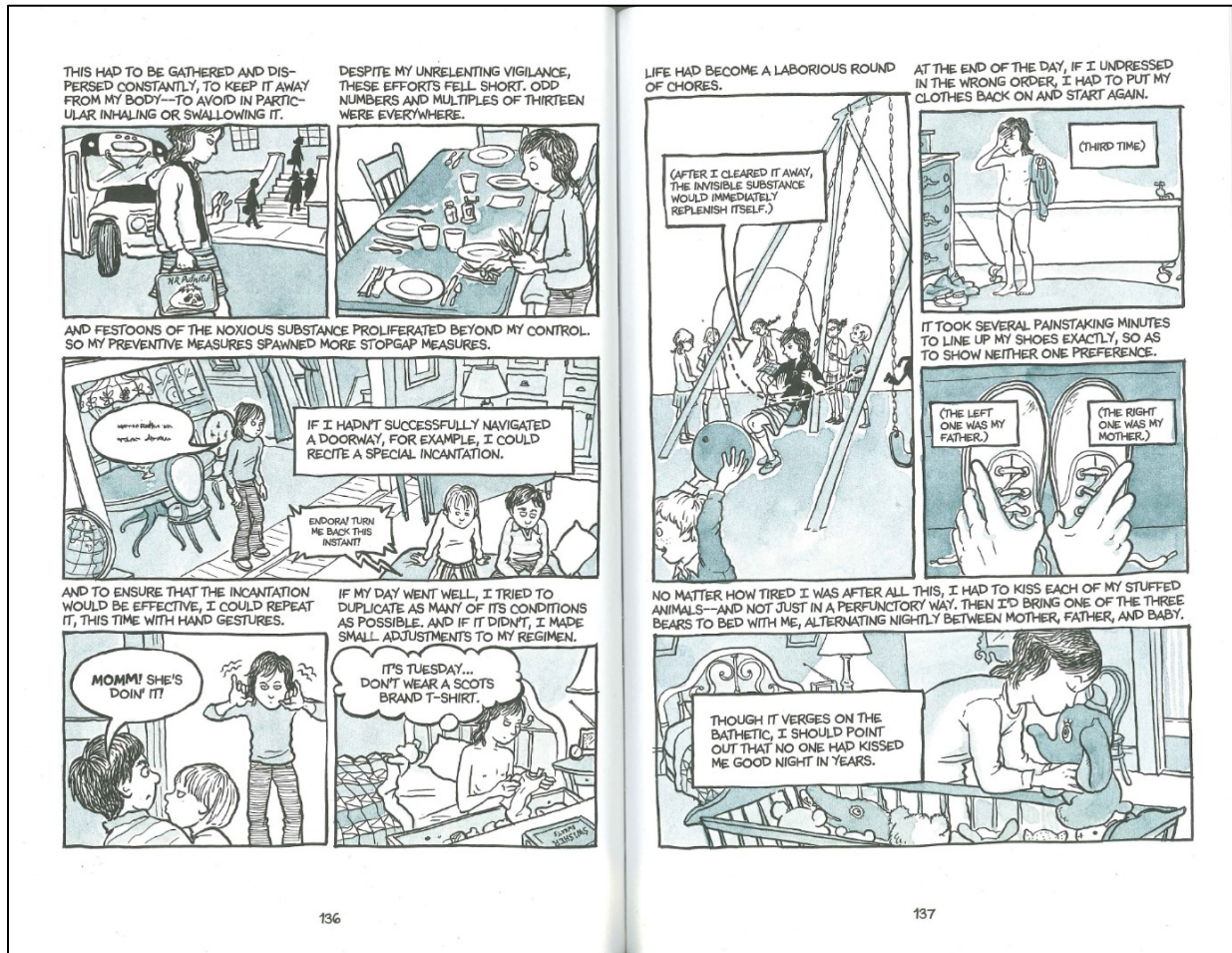


Image 4: Bechdel's experiences of OCD as a child (Bechdel, 2007, p. 136-137)

Image 4 shows many of the early examples of Bechdel's OCD, and contains the regular symptoms of the illness, such as checking doorways, mental rituals and repetition (Directorate for e-Health, W/O Y b). In image 4 we see how both Bechdel and others reacted to her compulsions, and how she recollects the memories. In the fourth panel on page 136, we see from her brother's perspective how she assumed she looked like while she performed her incantation to correct the way she navigated a doorway, and how the hand gestures made it look as if she was casting a spell towards her brothers. On the next page, in the third panel, we see a first person view of her aligning her shoes correctly, making the memory seem as precise as she wanted her shoes to be lined up, and on the fourth panel we see how she would tenderly give her stuffed animals a kiss goodnight.

#### 4.2.2.2 Chapter 7: The antihero's journey

The seventh and final chapter of the book begins with a family trip to New York, where Bechdel starts to realise her own sexuality while she is exposed to the many possibilities of how someone can present themselves. Bechdel then moves on to reflect

upon her father's sexuality, and how the AIDS epidemic might have taken him away from her, had he not died prior to it. She continues with her first semesters in college, where she begins bonding with her father through her English classes while he helps her with the books. It is also in college she realises that she is a lesbian. The chapter continues, and Bechdel sends a letter to her parents informing them about her discovery, getting mixed responses. She then goes home for break for the first time since coming out, where her mother confides her lamenting feelings towards Bechdel's father, talking to her as an adult for the first time. Bechdel tries talking to her father about being gay, without much success of any conversation. Her attempt succeeds later while driving to the cinema, and they have a short open and awkward conversation about her father's experiences (see Image 5). After the movie, they attempt to go to a gay bar, but are turned away due to her lack of I.D. Bechdel goes back to school, and comes back home later, accompanied by her girlfriend without introducing her as such, which ends up being the last time she sees her father before he dies. In the final pages of the book, Bechdel reflects upon her father's sexuality, being unsure about how to categorise him and if there is any point in doing so. However, her final words concludes that he was there for her when she finally "leapt" and came out as gay.

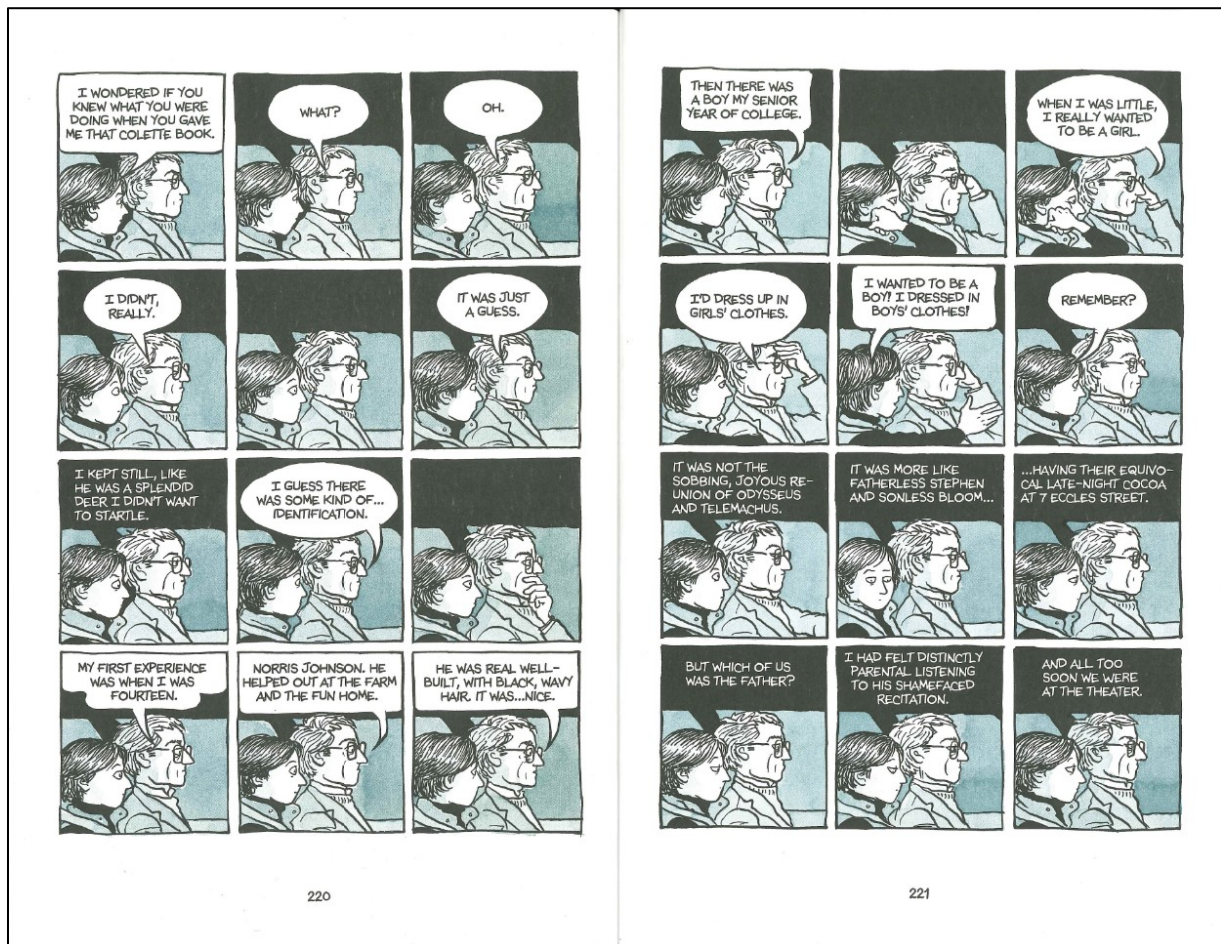


Image 5: The conversation between father and daughter about their sexuality (Bechdel, 2007, p. 220-221)

The conversation Bechdel and her father have in their car can be seen in Image 5, where the entire conversation is presented as a series of panels, all almost identical, drawn as a close-up of Bechdel and her father from her side of the car. The composition

of these two pages mirror Bechdel's impulse to stand still in fear of startling her father. This presentation of these panels emphasises the subjects' expressions and mannerisms, as the panels show something close to a slideshow of the events of the conversation, including their reactions to each thing being said. Additionally, the style of the panels breaks with Bechdel's usual six panel grid layouts as she describes it in a lecture and interview with Hillary Chute, when she compares her usual layout to that of a photo album (Mahindra humanities center, 2022, 17:22). With these two pages instead consisting of 12 panels per page, it differentiates them more from the rest, giving the impression that more is happening here, and stretching out the moment to last longer. This works well with what is being said in these panels as the characters open-up about themselves and their identity, especially the father. Here he admits to his daughter for the first time that he is not completely heterosexual, and that he wanted to be a girl when he was young and would dress up as one, something Bechdel could identify with as she had acted in a similar fashion as a child. However awkward Bechdel and her father found this conversation, it acted as a bonding moment for them. In short, this moment showcases the two main characters of the book discussing their identity, that however awkward it was for them, was something Bechdel felt ended far too soon. Bechdel later writes that "I suppose that a lifetime spent hiding one's erotic truth could have a cumulative renunciatory effect. Sexual shame is in itself a kind of death" (Bechdel, 2007, p. 228) while reflecting upon a letter her father sent after returning to school from her break home, that explains her opinion on hiding one's true identity.

#### 4.2.3 Persepolis: The story of a childhood and the story of a return

*Persepolis* is the story of Marjane Satrapi's childhood through early adulthood, from growing up in Iran during the Islamic revolution in 1979 and everything that followed said revolution. The edition that I analysed is the combined first and second books, telling the story of how Satrapi grew up in Iran and moved out of the country, and of her life outside Iran, growing up alone and finally returning there as an adult. Satrapi tells her story using a by showing the scary and hopeless situations and presenting the absurdity in and around them to find the comedy. Like Bechdel, Satrapi uses both tragedy and comedy in her story.

The entire book is drawn in only black and white, with simplistically drawn characters, which combined gives it a distinct style that that is both clear and helps in bringing out the comedy in the panels.

##### 4.2.3.1 The Shabbat

This chapter of the book called "The Shabbat", takes place after the war between Iran and Iraq started, while Iraq was bombing the city Satrapi lived in. It starts out with Satrapi and her family discussing missile attacks from Iraq, and how the Iranians exaggerate the situation. However, as Satrapi tells it, Iraq did indeed have missiles with the range to hit the cities and Teheran where they lived. As the missiles hit, Satrapi experiences actual fear for her life. While many fled from Teheran, her family decided to stay, and so life went on as Satrapi puts it. One day, Satrapi goes out shopping, and while out, she and her friend hears an explosion. She hears on the radio that a missile exploded in her neighbourhood. Satrapi then runs to a taxi and goes home, where she sees a crowd of people gathered in front of her street. As she finally gets to the end of her street where she lived and where the missile had hit, she finds her mother, who tells her that the missile had hit their Jewish neighbours' house. Satrapi asks her mother if



their neighbours were home, and her mother explain that it since it was Saturday, meaning that it is the Jewish sabbath, and that Jews are supposed to go home then. As they walk away, and walk past the ruins of their neighbours' house, Satrapi sees a bracelet that belonged to the neighbours' daughter, and the chapter ends.

The chapter showcases two things exceptionally well: The anxiety and trauma that comes from living in a warzone, something that is both showed through the text and the images.



Image 6: Bombing of Tehran (Satrapi, 2008, p. 136)



Image 7: The ruins of their neighbours' house (Satrapi, 2008, p. 142)

Image 6 shows the first missile attack on Tehran, and Satrapi and her family waiting inside their apartment building when the siren went off. The family is drawn waiting in their home until they finally hear an explosion, and Satrapi experiences fear of dying while her parents try to comfort her. As the background in all the panels are coloured in black, one can interpret it to mean that the events are happening at night, but additionally it makes all the subjects in the panels seem more isolated from everything, as they are the only thing the reader can see. The feeling of isolation is also enhanced by the singular light source in the room drawing a shadow down their necks. The dire situation and the frightened expression on their faces and the child's embrace of her mother while fearing for her life shows the anxiety that they felt in the moment. However, Satrapi also manages to draw some comedy out of the scene in the fifth panel. As the missile hits, the family hears an explosion, here illustrated with a "BOOM!!!" in a jagged text bubble, as the people in the panel jump up into the air and have a startled



and silly expression on their face, making the situation seem less serious than it was. The seriousness is brought back in the next panel by Satrapi's outburst of fear, but humour of the previous panel still lessens the blow, similarly to how one would tell a serious story to a young child.

In Image 7, Satrapi walks past the ruins of their neighbours' house, and sees her friend's bracelet, still attached to something. In this instance, the facial expressions of Satrapi show the horror she experienced, as seen in the third and fourth panels, and the pauses in the next indicate the same thing. The black and white art style comes into play in the first panel, as the burn marks and ashes on the rubble of the house are illustrated with intermittent black on the otherwise white remains, making it contrast with the rest of the walls and convey a disturbing look to the reader. The war has hit too close to home for Satrapi, quite literally, and the consequences of the war finally have a personal effect on her. Contrasted with the first instance of war in this chapter (Image 6), there is no element of humour or comedy on this final page of the chapter. There are no elements on the page that try to lessen the blow that Satrapi experienced, and we are only left with the sorrow that she felt here, punctuated by a final completely black panel accompanied by the Satrapi saying that "No scream in the world could have relieved my suffering and my anger." (Satrapi, 2008, p. 142).

#### **4.2.3.2 Skiing**

The Skiing chapter takes place after Satrapi returned home to Iran from Austria. Satrapi was feeling depressed after the events that had happened while she was away and felt misunderstood. She argues that while they had endured war, they still had each other, while she had been alone in a foreign land. Satrapi's despair grew, and she became depressed. To help lift her out of her depression, her friends take her skiing. While she did not actually ski, the fresh air and blue skies lift her spirits. In the evening, Satrapi and her friends talk about her sexual experiences, and her friends are shocked that she has been with multiple partners and begin to compare her to a "whore." This in turn makes her more depressed, and when she returns home, her mother recommends that she sees a shrink. Satrapi goes to several psychotherapists without any of them quite understanding her problem, until one prescribes her an antidepressant. These tablets made her feel as if in a trance, but lost all effect once said trance ended. Her depression went on and she became suicidal. After two failed attempts at emulating suicides as depicted in films, first by slitting her wrists in a bathtub and then by swallowing all her antidepressants, she goes to her therapist. After talking with him, Satrapi improves and her desire to die lessens. She becomes determined to control her own life. To gain this confidence, she begins with hair removal, a renewed wardrobe, gets a fashionable haircut and uses makeup to become a "sophisticated woman". Finally, she takes up exercising eventually becoming an aerobics instructor, and finally feels confident to meet her new destiny.

In this chapter our protagonist explicitly states that she is depressed, with a stated reason – or at least one reason – and the events that led to her overcoming said depression. All of this is also, as with most of Satrapi's book, combined with humour through ironic outcomes or comedic illustrations. The four most important parts of this chapter, as I have identified them, are: Her initial decline into depression, her slight improvement followed by the worsening of the situation caused by her judgemental

friends, her most desperate moment when she became suicidal, and finally her newfound determination to get better.

The beginning of Satrapi's decline into depression happens after her return to Tehran, after living on her own from the age of 14. Now she had returned to her home at the age of 19, meaning that she had lived on her own for the last five years of her life, without any previous connections to the place she lived. The depression she developed possibly resulted from (PTSD) from her time abroad and during the war. Given the fact that she was homeless during her final time in Vienna, and that she had struggled with bad relationships and drug abuse there as well, she rightly felt that she had struggled quite a bit. Then after coming home, she did not confide in anyone about her experiences, but still wanted people to feel some compassion for her and what she went through, which she did not receive. Keeping these secrets then caused her depression, which in turn made her close herself off even more.

Following this is her ski-trip with her friends, where the fresh air and blue sky momentarily made her feel better, possibly for the same reasons as discussed earlier about Bell in *Through the woods* (Carroll, 2014). However, this improvement is short lived, as when she confides in her friends, she has her trust broken as they shame her for what she did while she was away and judge her based on the traditional values of Iran. This broken trust only worsens the situation.

After coming home, Satrapi was convinced to seek help from a professional, but was unfortunate and did not receive help. However, based on Satrapi's presentation of the situation it seemed as if she was after a quick fix to her problems, which she thought she got in the form of antidepressants. She was, as stated earlier, unsuccessful with her use of these pills, and the situation only worsened to the point of becoming suicidal (see

Image 8).



Image 8: Satrapi's suicide attempts (Satrapi, 2008, p. 274-275)

In Image 8 we can see her two attempts at suicide, where Satrapi mainly illustrates these serious events in an unserious manner, both by describing her ill-executed attempts and illustrating the events themselves in a comedic fashion. In her first attempt, she tried to cut her wrists with a butter knife, while shivering as she was afraid of blood, after drinking half a bottle of vodka, and only managing to graze herself so that the blood only coagulated instead of draining out of her. In the final panel on page 274 we see Satrapi sitting in her bathtub in darkness, looking displeased that the prick on her arm is not ending her life and that the film she had watched lied to her. However, while it is played to some comedic effect, Satrapi still portrayed herself in complete darkness as she tried to take her own life, showing the actual severity of the situation. On her second try, the attempt itself is executed in a way that should have been effective. However, instead of going into an eternal sleep, she slept for three days and woke up, peeking with a single eye to check if she was alive and awake, to several hours of hallucinations, here illustrated as a horde of enormous rats running around her. Satrapi plays into the ironic part of her story about how she had decided to die, but either due to her own inability to go through with it or some other miracle she survived, leaving her only with an ironic, yet serious story, as well as a newfound determination to live and take control of her own life.

In the final part of the chapter, Satrapi shows her journey out of her depression, by renewing herself, through removing all hair from below her eyebrows, refreshing her

entire wardrobe, a completely new hairstyle and beginning to exercise, all illustrated with comedic drawings of her removing hair and dancing around to the song iconic for being the soundtrack to training montages: *Eye of the tiger*.

#### 4.2.4 American born Chinese

Yang's *American born Chinese* (2006) tells three parallel stories, the first about the Monkey King, the second about a boy named Jin Wang whose parents are Chinese, and the third story about a boy named Danny and his cousin Chin-Kee. The book is a fictional novel mostly about school age characters with fantasy elements used to drive parts of the plot

The first story follows the Monkey King who is shunned by the other deities for being a monkey. The next day he decrees that all monkeys must wear shoes. He begins training, gains many abilities, and takes on a human-like form and changes title to "The great sage, equal of heaven". Afterwards he fights other deities, trying to assert his new power and title, only to be met by the creator Tze-Yo-Tzuh, who traps him under a mountain of rocks after failing to convince him that he made him to be a monkey and that is what he should be. After 500 years he is met by a legendary monk who was on a mission from Tze-Yo-Tzuh. The monk tells him he needs to return to his true form to find freedom. While they are discussing, the monk is attacked by demons, and only then does the Monkey King realize that he must return to his true form to defeat the demons and help the monk. After this, the Monkey King helps the monk on his journey to the west to deliver the packages and served the monk faithfully until the very end.

The second story follows Jin Wang after he moved from San Francisco to a new town at 9 years old. He is immediately greeted with racism from his peers. About a year later his class gets a new member, Wei-Chen Sun from Taiwan. Wei-Chen approaches Jin in their recess and asks to be friends, only for Jin to tell him to speak English in America. However, they bond over Wei-Chen's toy and become friends. Some years later, Jin develops a crush on a girl Amelia. Soon afterwards, Wei-Chen starts dating their classmate, Suzy. Later, Jin gets a hair permanent, emulating the curls of one of Amelia's guy-friends. Wei-Chen talks to Amelia about how great Jin is, and Jin gains the courage to ask her to hang out, to which she says yes. After going on a date with Amelia, Jin is confronted by her friend who inspired his hairstyle, who asks him to stop hanging out with her to not harm her reputation, which he ends up doing. Later he meets Suzy, who tells him about how she always feels as if she does not belong, which inspires Jin to kiss her, only to promptly get smacked in the face by her. Later that day, Wei-Chen confronts him, and Jin tell him that he does not think Wei-Chen is worthy of her, that she can do better than an "F.O.B" (Fresh Off the Boat) like him, which causes Wei-Chen to punch Jin in his face and storm off.

The third story is illustrated to look like a sit-com from the 80's or 90's called "Everyone Ruves Chin-Kee", with canned applause and laughter written in after all the "jokes". These parts of the story are about a boy named Danny who is visited by his Chinese cousin Chin-Kee, a caricature who embodies all the negative and false stereotypes for Asian people. He ruins his dates and social relationships by drooling over women and speaking with a strong stereotypical Chinese accent, which has previously caused Danny to transfer schools out of embarrassment. However, Danny confesses this to one of his teammates, who tells him he will not be looked at like Chin-Kee's cousin after he leaves, which cheers him up.

At the end of the second to last part, we learn that Danny is Jin, who turned into the white, blonde, Danny after he kissed Suzy. In the final part, Danny confronts Chin-Kee and asks him to leave. Chin-Kee says no, which causes Danny to hit him, only for Chin-Kee to beat him up. After a final punch from Danny, we find out that Chin-Kee was the Monkey King in disguise, who makes Danny return to his true form of Jin. The Monkey King tells him that Wei-Chen is his son, sent to earth to learn to become an emissary like him. However, after their last confrontation with Jin, Wei-Chen decides against becoming an emissary, as he finds humans petty and soulless, and decides to use his remaining time as a mortal for pleasure. The Monkey King came to Jin as Chin-Kee, to serve as his conscience and teach Jin the same lesson that he was thought. After this conversation, Jin goes to a café where he eventually finds Wei-Chen. Jin talks to him and apologises for his behaviour, renewing their friendship and the book ends.

The entire message of this story is that you should accept yourself and who you are, and not try to be something you are not. It is a classic and well-known moral, but it is told in an engaging way, using interesting illustrations and characters. However, the story is told through the lens of an American born Chinese, giving it a unique and insightful perspective, both as way for readers in similar situations to relate, and for others to gain a new perspective. The two parts of this book that I find particularly relevant are where the Monkey King finally accepts his true form, and the part that triggers Jin's transformation into Danny.



Image 9: The Monkey King accepts his true form (Yang, 2006, p. 149)

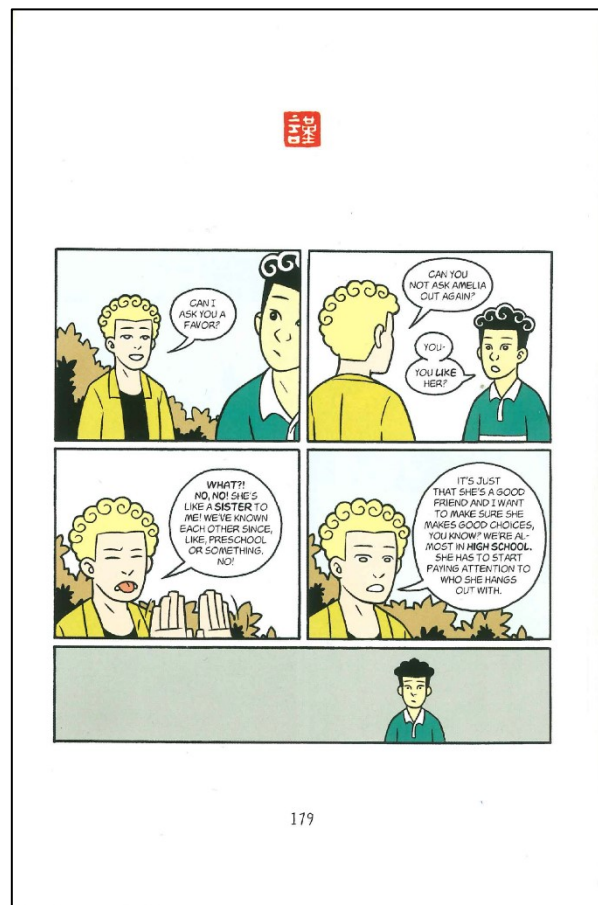


Image 10: The event that triggered Jin's transformation into Danny (Yang, 2006, p. 179)

Image 9 shows the first main character finally accepting themselves, with the Monkey King understanding that to gain the freedom he desires, he needs to release his human-like form and return to his true self. Prior to this, he argued that he did not want to change back, and that the monk would simply have to be killed by the demons chasing him, as he would not help. However, with his potentially final words the monk makes one final argument that finally convinces the Monkey King to change back, stubborn, and unwilling as he may be. Yang also implements a bit of comedy in this part, as he does with most of the Monkey King sections, with exaggerated and over the top events happening, like the monk being impaled by a spear and held high up in the air and then cooked alive over a fire, while the Monkey King grunts to himself, which is helpful in engaging the reader into the moment of the book. This is then followed by the Monkey King fighting the demons across multiple pages. In the end, the Monkey King's self-acceptance only takes place when he is finally understands that it is the only way to become free, both literally and figuratively, motivated by wanting to save the man who convinced him.

On the opposite side, Image 10 shows Amelia's friend talking to Jin and asking him to stay away from her, implying that Jin is not good enough for her. Throughout the book, this friend has been depicted as nice, especially compared to how Jin's other peers have treated him. He stood up against someone using racist comments toward Jin once when they were younger and has been presented as a friendly person. However, here we see that he too did not value Jin. In Image 10 we see him asking as if it was a completely normal favour to ask someone. On the following page he comments that his reasoning sounded "way harsher than [he] meant it to" (Yang, 2006, p. 180), and asks if there are no hard feelings between them, again as if this was a normal request. In the final panel on Image 10 we also see Jin's reaction to the request, seeming shocked with a wide angle close up shot of Jin in a gray background. This request, that the friend thought was completely fine to ask, is what triggers the eventual transformation of Jin turning into Danny, what causes him to stop thinking that he is good enough as he is, and what makes him think that he needs to change completely to finally be good enough. This request was not the sole reason for his rejection of his true self, as we are shown the racist comments that Jin had to endure throughout his time in school, but it became the final straw, without the 'friend' even thinking that his request was out of line.

#### 4.2.5 Anya's ghost

*Anya's ghost* tells the story of a Russian immigrant girl named Annushka Borzakovskaya – Anya for short that lives in America and goes to a private school. The story is about an unpopular girl who struggles with her body image, and by the end of the story quits a cigarette addiction and learns to accept herself for who she is. Similar to Yang's *American born Chinese* (2006), *Anya's Ghost* tells the story of teenager who deals with being different as a Russian in America, and the plot also includes supernatural events.

The story starts out with Anya going to school, but after arguing with her friend and seeing her crush with his popular girlfriend, she skips school and walks away from the bus stop. On her way home she falls down a well. There, she notices a human skeleton and starts yelling for help, however, no one is there to hear her screams. After a moment, the ghost of the skeleton appears who is a girl who has been stuck in the well for 90 years. She later returns to school and discovers that the ghost hid part of her skeleton in her backpack, allowing her to come with Anya. Anya discovers that the ghost

can be helpful and warms up to her. The following day, the ghost and Anya bond more and she shares that her name is Emily Reilly, and that she was murdered. Anya tells Emily about how she was made fun of for talking funny for years, and how she dislikes going to the Russian orthodox church as the others there judge her. She also talks about how she dislikes the only other Russian kid in school Dima, as he talks like an F.O.B and makes it harder for her to fit in with the others at school. Emily convinces Anya to ask her crush Sean to take her to a party, only to find out that he was cheating on his current girlfriend who knew and played along. This makes Anya leave the party, which makes Emily mad as she thinks that Anya should have stayed and tried to be with Sean. The next morning Emily has changed her appearance and tries to make Anya see Sean again, because, as Emily puts it "[they're] in love and [they're] going to be together forever" (Broskol, 2011, p. 131). Emily continues to make comments that She and Anya are living Anya's life together.

Later, Anya goes to the library to investigate Emily's murder. There she meets Dima who helps her look through old archived newspapers. As they search for the murder, Anya comforts Dima who asks her how she avoids being bullied like he is. Eventually, Dima discovers an article about an Emily Reilly who murdered two people and then disappeared. Anya runs home to Emily, who shows how she has gotten stronger and can manipulate objects now. Anya confronts her, and it becomes clear that Emily is trying to live her life through Anya. Anya tries to make Emily give her the bone she used to bring Emily along, but Emily disappears. Later Emily makes a couple of failed attempts to harm Anya's family, but Anya manages to stop them. Anya finds the bone and runs off towards the well with Emily chasing her. At the well, Anya argues with Emily and realises that they are similar, that they both want other peoples' lives, as they seem easier, but that they cannot know what is going on inside anyone else's head. Anya finally convinces Emily that what she wants does not even exist anymore, and Emily's ghost lets go and fades away.

Some time later Anya has convinced the school to fill up the well she fell down. She makes friends with her friend Siobhan who she had argued with earlier. When Siobhan offers Anya a cigarette she declines, as she has discovered she never really enjoyed it that much and it did not look as cool as she thought. The story ends with Anya realising that it is okay to be different, and accepting her self.

Anya's ghost deals with various issues that teens today might face, and especially if they emigrated from another country. More specifically issues with body-image and feeling different. The issue of body image, while not heavily prominent throughout the book, is still something Anya struggles with through the story.





Image 11: Anya being overrun with thoughts after arguing with her mom and friend (Brosgol, 2011, p. 12)

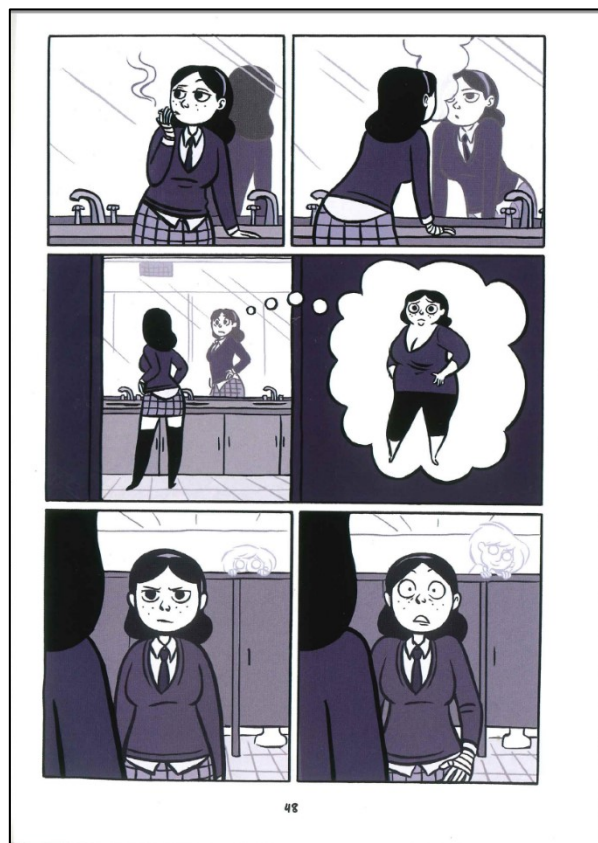


Image 12: Anya having an intrusive thought while looking in the mirror (Brosgol, 2011, p. 48)

Images 11 & 12 show Anya dealing with her intrusive thoughts, first at the beginning of the story after arguing with her mother about the greasy food she was offered, then arguing with her friend Siobhan about bumming cigarettes and finally seeing her crush Sean kissing his girlfriend. All of these events occupy her mind enough for her to not concentrate on where she was going, which is how she ended up in the well and how the plot of *Anya's ghost* began. The first of these events is her mother cooking her a traditional Russian dish that Anya thought was too greasy and a reason she was overweight as a child. This is the first time we see Anya's body image issues, and these thoughts are part of what distracted her enough to fall down a well, as we see in the last panel of Image 11, where she is one step away from falling. Image 12 shows yet again the intrusive thoughts Anya experiences, this time with no apparent trigger. Before this page, Anya has just finished talking with Siobhan, and shown in the second panel is nearly looking in the mirror when she gets an intrusive thought. The third panel shows Anya looking in the mirror, with a thought bubble, almost working like a fourth panel shows how Anya possibly views her self, or what she fear she might look like later, with an overweight version of her that looks strikingly similar to her mother. Additionally, both of these pages are made without any text, and rely purely on the illustration to tell each part of the story, relying on one of the strengths of the medium it is made in.

As already stated, *Anya's ghost* deals with feeling different due to being immigrants, and dealing with this feeling, which is shown through the two Russian



characters Anya and Dima.



Image 13: Anya ranting about her culture (Broskol, 2011, p. 97)

At first, Anya's feelings about being Russian are, as shown in Image 13, linked with frustration. She tells Emily about how she spent years working on removing her accent, and how she finds it frustrating that her mother wants to take her to the orthodox church where other Russians are, and how they comment on her appearance. Anya is also irritated by how her mother wants her to be friends with the only other Russian in school Dima, who got into the school with a scholarship and still has an accent, as she sees him as a social handicap.

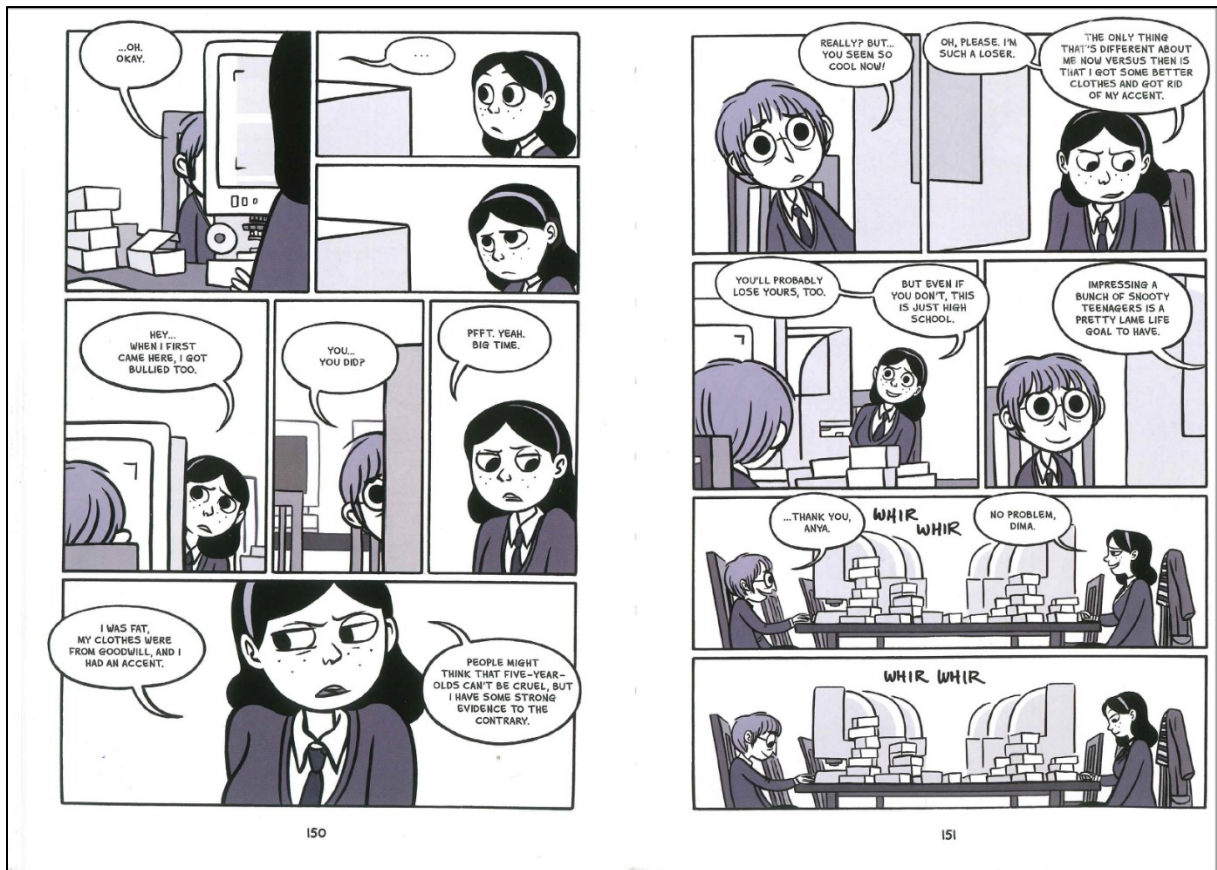


Image 14: Anya and Dima discussing their social statuses (Brosgol, 2011, p. 150-151)

Later in the story however, while Dima is helping Anya find Emily's murderer, Dima directly asks how it is so easy for Anya to be American and have friends and not have anyone bothering her like he is. Image 14 shows Anya revealing to Dima how she used to get bullied when she first came to America as a five-year-old. Anya comforts Dima by saying that he will lose his accent and how impressing high school kids is not all too important, which cheers him up. These two images show the character development that Anya experiences throughout the story, from disliking Dima because she reminds her about how she was bullied and thinking he keeps her back socially, to realising that he too has a hard time, and how she should try to be supportive towards him instead. With empathy being the main theme of the book, as Anya convinces Emily to leave at the end by explaining how everyone deals with their own problems, this scene of the book shows how far Anya has come. Anya's first realization that she cannot know how everyone else's lives are comes when she realises Sean is cheating on his girlfriend with her knowing and abiding in it, and Anya responded by simply leaving the situation. This time however, Anya shows some growth by instead of brushing Dima's concern away, she instead offers him some comfort and consoles him.

## 5.0 Discussion

The findings from the previous section are divided into two parts: the student survey and the critical analysis of the selection of graphic novels. This section discusses those findings through what was presented in the literature review, to help find an answer to the research question of how graphic novels can be used in the EFL classroom to help discuss mental health topics.

### 5.1 Students life in school and reading habits

The first description of the current situation for Norwegians schools today came in the 3.1 section, where I discussed what different surveys of Norwegian youth found about their mental health. Imsen (2020) and Suren et al. (2018) wrote that while the youth today are generally happy at school, more students are self-reporting symptoms of depression and stress. The numbers from Statistics Norway showed, a noticeable portion of the population are classified as refugees and might therefore struggle with the trauma that might stem from it. Additionally, students who already struggle with issues have a harder time making friends, which in turn can add to their troubles. Finally, other studies show that there is a correlation between depressive symptoms and school. Therefore, school should take part in helping the problem, which is reflected in the Norwegian curriculum, where it is stated that students should have competence that promotes good mental health. I propose that one way of promoting such competence is through reading and analysing graphic novels in the EFL classroom.

Given that graphic novels are engaging to read and can cover a wide array of topics and styles, they are applicable in the classroom as a resource to practice multiple reading skills, both through text and image, as is one of the goals from the English curriculum. Another advantage of graphic novels is that they can be engaging specifically for reluctant readers, who otherwise might not want to partake in reading, either in or outside of school. As graphic novels include both textual and visual components, readers of all levels can enjoy them, as less proficient readers can focus on the images, while more advanced readers can look at both the text and image and how they complement each other.

To further analyse the reading habits of Norwegian students, I created a survey that was given to a ninth grade in a lower secondary school in Northern Norway, where 70 students answered and gave their opinions. What I discovered from this survey is that most students reported reading an entire book only once or twice the last two years in school, either on their own or with the whole class reading the same book. However, most of the students reported reading smaller texts often multiple times a week. Finally, the final question discovered that most of the students who were asked do not enjoy reading in their own spare time, but among those that do, the comic medium seemed to be relatively popular, with most of the 60% of students who had experience with graphic novels being either neutral or positive toward them. Additionally, three of the five students who were negative towards graphic novels also reported not enjoying reading in their spare time as well, and six of the combined eight students who answered negatively towards either comic books or graphic novels. Which opens for the possibility of them simply not enjoying reading at all. Two students however reported not enjoying either comic books or graphic novels, preferring to read novels or short stories. Similarly, to the "Adult readers who are not used to reading a graphic format" described by Griffith

(2010), the reason that these students do not enjoy reading comics or graphic novels might be due to lack of experience reading them. Which is why it is important to follow the suggestions laid out by Smith & Pole (2018), of helping readers with how to read the comic format, taking time for readers to actually absorb the entire contents of each page and finally sharing their interpretations of what was read.

## 5.2 Using of graphic novels in the EFL classroom

Given that, according to the student survey, having a whole class read the same book was rather rare, I suggest teachers have their whole class read graphic novels. The advantages are that having everyone read the same text, and then subsequently discussing the book together, allows the students to form opinions on the same subject, and then sharing their opinions and experiences, which provides discourse that can help the students broaden each others horizons. Using graphic novels for such an activity also opens the possibility for more students to be engaged by the activity and later partake in the discourse around it, as each student will gravitate towards different aspects of the book, e.g. just the images, letting those students thoroughly analyse the them, or how the text and images works together. Hopefully, using graphic novels can even motivate reluctant readers to take part in the discussion and give them a feeling of mastery, further motivating them to take part in the school activities. Alternatively, teachers can follow Bourelle's (2018) example and use graphic narratives, even shorter stories, if they do not have the resources for an entire class to all read the same book, even if the resource they are lacking is either time or financial funding, as the shorter format can be read faster and might be more easily available. In any case, I recommend using graphic novels, as most students seem at worst neutral towards them, and they allow more students to partake in the reading activity, while still having the opportunity of providing challenge for more advanced students.

Looking back to the student's mental health, I established that there is a need for helping student with their mental health in school, which is supported by both the Norwegian curriculum and research. As I have already recommended that teachers use graphic novels, I want to expand on that recommendation by suggesting that teachers use graphic novels that allow students to explore topics relating to mental health. As graphic novels are an accessible medium for readers, they can make these often serious topics easier to approach through various methods.

## 5.3 Mental health, schools, and graphic novels

To aid in this recommendation, I have analysed a selection of graphic novels to see how they show various aspects of mental health. The analysis serves as an example of what different books can offer and how one might want to analyse them in a classroom. The books have already been analysed in the previous section, and this part looks at what was discovered and discusses the books themselves.

### 5.3.1 Discussing the book selection

The book selection used for the analysis consisted of *Fun Home* (2007), *Anya's Ghost* (2011), *Through the Woods* (2014), *Persepolis* (2008) and *American Born Chinese* (2006). These books were selected to provide variety in genre, themes, narrative, style and characters. Two of the five books are memoirs, telling real stories of real people, while the other three tell fictional stories about a variety of characters with different

predispositions. All of the books use different styles unique to the illustrator, with three of the books staying within a black and white/gray scale colour scheme, and the other two – *Through the Woods* and *American Born Chinese* (2006) – are drawn in colour. All of the books except for *Through the Woods* also include comedy to tell their story, by telling jokes, depicting absurd situations or comparisons or simply silly reactions or situations. Both of the memoirs in the selection especially rely on humour to contrast with the often serious events happening, an interesting coincidence as they are – among the selection – the two books that arguably tell the most serious stories, as they are real stories that deal with the life and death of real people. Most of the protagonists seen in the books are also female, with the exception of the Monkey King and Jin/Danny in *American Born Chinese* and one of the stories from *Through the Woods*, although that story was not featured in my analysis.

Another area where the books provide a great deal of variety is in their complexity. *Through the Woods* is a collection of short horror stories, with relatively easy language and a readable art style that highlights the important parts in each panel, while using interesting techniques throughout to keep it visually distinct. Consisting of multiple short stories in the exciting horror genre, makes the book highly accessible, while still being interesting, meaning that the book is great for younger or less proficient readers, or simply someone who wants an easy story. On the other end of the spectrum is *Fun Home*, where Bechdel tells a non-linear story, jumping back and forth in time as she describes in the lecture/interview with Hillary Chute (Mahindra humanities center, 2022). *Fun Home* also consists of detailed pencil drawings of “[...] straightforward images of real things happening” (Mahindra humanities center, 2022, 56:38) as she describes it in the same interview, as well as difficult language with words that may be unfamiliar to many EFL speakers and learners. This means that *Fun Home* can provide a real challenge to readers, while still being engaging to many. The rest of the selection lies somewhere between these two on a scale of complexity, with the other memoir *Persepolis* leaning more towards *Fun Home*, and *Anya’s Ghost* and *American Born Chinese* leaning more towards *Through the Woods*.

Furthermore, another area where the books vary is in the stories themselves, and the themes and topics they discuss. The books cover a wide range of topics from bullying, struggling with addictions, dealing with anxiety and other mental health issues. The reason for choosing books covering these topics was to, first of all, look at how the graphic novel medium can be used to provide insight on mental health, and second to provide examples for material to use in the EFL classroom to help discuss mental health, both by letting students who might relate to the characters see a positive mirror, and for students who do not relate to gain a new perspective on people who do. As the characters in these books have a wide variety in background as well as the issues they are dealing with, the books serve this goal well.

After reading through the selected books, I am pleased with the results and the choice of books, as they represent such a wide variety of books, in characters, style themes, topics and complexity. Thus the books provide many different ways they can be used and for many different purposes as well, making them good candidates for graphic novels to be used in the EFL classroom.

### 5.3.2 Relevant themes across the graphic novels

As discussed, the books covered a wide range of topics relating to mental health with some overlaps between the books. Starting off the comparison between the books, the three fictional books seem to rely on using visual means to show the mental health of its characters, as well as commentary by other characters and the use of colour. In *Through the Woods*, the image composition and pale colours are used in "Our neighbor's house" to show the isolation that the characters are experiencing, and the facial expressions and narration by the main character Beth is used to tell the feelings of anxiety and grief her sisters are experiencing. In the other story from the book "The nesting place", Bell's mental health is shown through her expressions in the situations, sometimes combined with comments from other characters, as well as the use of vibrant colours while she experiences joy, compared to the otherwise dull colours around her. In *American Born Chinese*, Yang uses different visual techniques to illustrate the mental health of the characters, like lightning around the characters to visualise excitement and wide angles to show the characters feeling small (see Image 10). And in *Anya's ghost*, Anya's intrusive thoughts about her body issues are visualised and her facial expression tells her feelings about it (see Image 12). Later in the book, we also see Anya express her frustration about being Russian, and even later we see her gain some perspective during her conversation with Dima, as we see her console him after he opens to her about how hard he has it.

Comparatively, the memoirs use a more direct approach, using the narration of the author to describe and name the mental issues that they struggled with. In *Fun Home*, Bechdel describes in detail how her OCD developed and how it affected her, and uses the visuals to complement the narration, either helping in painting the picture of how she was affected, or by illustrating how absurd it must have looked for others who observed her at the time. With a large part of the book is also about Bechdel and her father discovering their sexual identity, these parts are also described in the narration in detail. Bechdel debates the topic throughout the book, reflecting upon how her father's situation was like hers only in different periods of time. In *Persepolis*, we see Satrapi discuss her experiences of war and survival. Again, the reader is told about her experiences through the narration, with commentary often added through the visuals or dialogue, like their expressions showing how they feel or characters commenting on the situation. The book shows the traumatic events of Satrapi's life, like the bombing of her home city and the death of her neighbours (see Image 6 & 7). However, in another similarity, Satrapi uses comedy throughout her book, and, as Nabizadeh (2016) noted, the visual and written messages often contradict each other, with the narration commenting upon the horrible things happening, contrasted by the visuals of characters looking silly or having fun. Nabizadeh (2016) even argues that Satrapi's survival of earlier unbearable events stems from using humour (p. 163), and connects this to "other autographic works, such as [...] Bechdel's *Fun Home* [...], among others" (p. 164). As we can see, these autographic works tell the stories of their authors challenges and use comedy to help tell their stories.

Other topics that the books have in common across their genres are what they are discussing. In both *Persepolis* and *Through the Woods*, we see the characters dealing with trauma. In *Persepolis*, Satrapi tells the reader about growing up during a revolution and later a war, only to be sent away from her family and friends to a foreign country on her own. As mentioned, Image 6 & 7 showcases some early instances of the trauma



Satrapı experienced and how she illustrates the first bombing in Image 6 as somewhat comedic with her and her family jumping up in the air as a missile hits the city, and how in Image 7 the war taking a more personal toll on Satrapı, who avoids using comedy to undercut the seriousness of the moment. Additionally, in the "Skiing" chapter, Satrapı begins to suffer from depression, and survives two attempted suicides, gaining a new perspective on life afterwards. In *Through the Woods's* "The nesting place", the main character Bell experiences trauma as well. We learn that her mother died some time ago, and that her brother did not spend his time with them while their mother was dying. Later in the story, when Rebecca is telling Bell her plan for what she will do with her body, and is listing up Bell's perceived flaws, Bell gains new determination to stand up to Rebecca. Similarly, In *Persepolis*, Satrapı tells her story about how she gained a new determination to live after "miraculously" surviving two attempted suicides. While neither of the two books portray the trauma that the protagonists have experienced as something positive, they both show the characters gaining new determination afterwards; Bell while facing a monster who intends to kill her and steal her life, and Satrapı after surviving her depression.

Another theme that comes across in multiple books is identity. In *American Born Chinese*, *Anya's Ghost* and *Fun Home*, identity are central themes of the books. In both fictional books, the lesson that the main characters Jin and Anya learns by the end of the story is that is that they should not hide who they are. Jin leaves his Danny form and learns that he should not be ashamed to be different, and Anya learns that it is okay to be different. In *Fun Home* however, Bechdel discusses her father's identity throughout the memoir, and reflects upon the similarities between their journeys. By the end of the book, Bechdel does not learn a lesson, as she is already comfortable with who she is, but she does conclude upon certain aspects of her father's life. Like how she can only assume that he was gay and not bisexual, that he probably committed suicide and finally that he was there to help catch her when she leapt as she discovered her own identity and came out to her parents. Bechdel speculates upon how her father's life might have turned out had he grown up and lived when she did, how his life could have been different had the times and public opinion been different. With the quote "Sexual shame is in itself a kind of death" (Bechdel, 2007, p. 228), Bechdel lands on the same point that the fictional stories do, that you need to be true to yourself.

The topic of anxiety comes up in all the books to various degrees. In both *Through the Woods* and *Persepolis* we see the main characters experiencing anxiety while fearing for their lives. Both the stories from *Through the Woods* feature characters fearing for their lives and the lives of others as well. Beth in "Our neighbor's house" has her father disappear as well as both of her sisters and we see how it affects her psyche when her sisters are convinced to go with the man in the wide brimmed hat. In "The nesting place", we see Bell's panic when she wakes up and sees Rebecca in the room after she saw her in the cave, and the terror she experiences as she begs for Rebecca to leave the room in fear for her life. In *Persepolis*, we see a similar fear of dying when Teheran is first attacked by missiles (see Image 6), as a young Satrapı clings to her mother, fearing for her life. In *Anya's Ghost* and *American Born Chinese*, both main characters express anxiety around being bullied for being different, with Anya not wanting to be associated with the Russians in church and with her Russian classmate Dima, and Jin being so tired of being bullied for looking different that he creates a new form and identity of Danny. Anya gains more perspective through talking with her peers and learns that everyone has

things that they struggle with, and that she should accept who she is. Danny learns through the Monkey King that he should not be ashamed of who he is.

In *Anya's Ghost* - and to some degree in *Through the Woods* - we see main characters who struggle with body image issues. Anya in *Anya's Ghost* is shown having intrusive thoughts about her body size, feeling that she is too overweight. This is something that is shown in the beginning of the story and does not show up again after she starts to notice that others have issues just like her. These issues are not commented upon by any other characters and are only shown to the reader who gets glimpse of Anya's feelings. Anya herself only mentions how she used to be overweight before. However, these intrusive thoughts are still important in depicting the character of Anya, to help the reader understand her more and is also highly relatable for many readers, as these types of intrusive thoughts are common. Additionally, as seen in Image 3, Bell from "The nesting place" arguably also suffers from some body image issues, given that Rebecca tries to 'convince' Bell to give up her body for her children by saying that "the children at school will much prefer [Bell] once [her] babies stretch [Bell] into something tall, slim and pretty", that she will fix her leg and that no one would object to such a cheerful change (Carroll, 2014). These comments are used as an attempt to point out Bell's insecurities to make her feel helpless and therefore we can assume that Bell also sees herself this way - at least to some degree. However, it is following this speech by Rebecca that Bell decides to stand up to her and fight for her own survival. The two books showcase the body image issues in very different ways. In *Anya's Ghost*, the reader is shown explicitly the main characters thoughts and how they show up, without anyone else bringing it up. However, in *Through the Woods*, we are not shown that Bell has any of these issues until they are used by the antagonist to attack her insecurities.

Finally, both memoirs feature named diagnosis of mental health issues, compared to the other books where everything is implied. In *Persepolis*, Satrapi states that she became depressed and in *Fun Home* Bechdel discusses how she developed OCD early in life. Both diagnosis' had specific consequences as previously discussed, which is important in portraying a realistic picture of what life with such diagnoses might look like. Looking back to the article from Bishop, having specific diagnoses portrayed can provide both a window into what that can look like for the readers, or a mirror for those who also share the diagnosis to see themselves in.

With the varied ways that the books portray the mental health of its characters across genres, they provide different ways to engage the readers with the topics, ensuring that most readers will find a book that appeals to them. By providing a broad selection of material for students to choose between, more students can be engaged and find something that interests them.

### 5.3.3 Recommendations for the book selection

This final part of the discussion looks at how the book selection can be implemented in the Norwegian EFL classroom, by looking at what themes they contain and how complex they are for readers.

Going in the order of the analysis, the first book is *Through the Woods*. The book uses a combination of visual storytelling through reactions, expressions, and colour, as well as commentary by the characters to illustrate the mental health of its characters. This method makes it both subtle, but also readable enough for most to understand. With the nature of the fairy tale genre, and the complexity of the language used, this book is



suitable specifically for the fifth grade, assuming it is for a Norwegian EFL class. While older students can most certainly enjoy the book as well, they may find the fairy tale genre too childish, even if the horror keeps the stories more mature. As a side note, the other stories in the book are well suited for use in the classroom, even if they do not include elements of mental health as clearly, they are still engaging stories, and "His face all red" is a particularly unique and mysterious story that plays on the usual structure of the fairy tale in an interesting way. To conclude the recommendation, *Through the Woods* offers many possibilities for use in the EFL classroom, either to discuss the fairy tale genre itself or, as I recommend throughout this MA thesis, use it to discuss mental health. More specifically, how anxiety and depression might look and feel.

Continuing with *Fun Home*, it tells its readers directly about the different mental health issues that the people in it experienced, rather than simply alluding to it, while using the illustrations to visualise the experiences or story, or to add slightly absurd humour. Due to the often-challenging vocabulary, as well as the length, this book would be valuable for older students, around ninth or tenth grade. While the messages of the book can be direct, the topics and conversation around it is quite nuanced, with Bechdel reflecting deeply on the subjects she discusses. In addition to the difficult language, Bechdel also includes many literary references, comparing her experiences to those of famous authors and their stories. While the book can be used to discuss OCD, and identity as I have shown, I would also recommend this book for discussions on loss and grief, as they are prevalent topics throughout the book.

*Persepolis* relies heavily on humour to contrast with the serious events happening throughout the story, either by describing absurd turn of events or through comic depictions, often with exaggerated expressions. The book deals with many different topics, but the examples I looked at specifically showed anxiety and depression, possibly because of PTSD. I recommend using this book in the EFL classroom for students between seventh to tenth grade. The comedy and art style would make the book applicable in lower grades as well, although the language and length might be problematic in those grades. As I have shown, the book can be used to discuss mental health topics of anxiety, trauma, and depression, but as other researchers have shown it also contains topics relating to feminism that could be used in school. Another advantage of using the book is that the chapters are short and mostly self-contained, meaning that teachers who lack in time or other resources could pick individual chapters and use only those while still maintaining comprehension.

*American Born Chinese* is very colourful, filled with action and interesting characters and designs, with a relatively easy story to follow, which makes this book useful to all ages, as it is neither too mature or immature for most age groups in Norwegian schools, and I therefore think it could be used anywhere from fifth grade and up, provided that the readers are proficient enough in English to understand the basics of the story. However, I have one note to make about the parts of the book about Danny and Chin-Kee, as the sit-com reference of the "canned laughter & applause" is one that is fading out of popularity. This can of course be rectified by simply explaining the reference if needed. Some of the stereotypes that Chin-Kee is based on might also need some context. Other than that, I think the book can be a useful tool to discuss identity in the classroom.

Finally, *Anya's Ghost* uses a combination of both illustrations and dialogue to explain the mental health of the main character, also using humour at times, making the book more engaging for the reader, mostly through physical comedy. *Anya's Ghost* would

work well for students around fifth to eighth grade, as most of the dialogue as well as the narrative itself is easy to understand. With a lot of the plot taking place in or around high school, students can relate more easily to the struggles of Anya. Older students however might find that the book is too simple, and therefore might not be as interested. However, it is up to the teacher to know their students enough to decide what to bring into the classroom. *Anya's Ghost* can be useful for discussing identity in the classroom, like *American Born Chinese*, but also provides an insight into how it can be to deal with an eating disorder.

## 6.0 Conclusion

After looking at the entire selection of books and having analysed them all, I am confident in the selection and impressed by the range of topics they provide that relate to mental health. The books are valuable for students between the fifth to tenth grade, offering a good range of student groups. The language complexity of the books varies by a wide margin, which is helpful when making recommendations for different student groups. However, this does not guarantee that all students will find even the simplest among the selection an easy read, as it is highly dependent on the student, meaning that the teacher needs to know their student group before making any suggestions.

Another discovery I am pleased with is how the books show the mental health of its characters in several ways, either through visual means, using colours, different compositional techniques or by illustrating their reactions or expressions, or through written means, like narration or dialogue.

After having completed both the survey and the critical analysis, I have made some thoughts on the methodology used. In general, I am satisfied with how the data collection was done and the results that it yielded. In retrospect, I would have liked to redesign the final question of the survey. Given the chance, I would ask "to what degree do you enjoy reading in your spare time" and about the medium in a separate question. This way I could see both to what degree the students enjoy reading in their spare time, as well as what they would read if they first had to. Additionally, I would have included more categories in the question, such as text messages and social media, and based off the answers from the "other" section; manga and manuals/guides.

Another thing to note is the term "graphic novel". While the definition is only somewhat unclear in English, Norwegian does not have an agreed upon term for it. In the survey, I decided to use "*tegneseriebøker*", roughly translating to "cartoon books", while also using examples from a series that has been popular amongst Norwegian students, *The Amulet*. I also tried to differentiate them from comic books, specifying in Norwegian that I was asking for "*tegneserieblad*" ("comic book magazine") in question 2b with examples (see Appendix 2). I am still unsure whether the term was defined clearly enough for the students, however I believe it was.

Finally, as I have argued throughout the thesis, graphic novels are an engaging medium for all readers, with especially high potential to engage hesitant or reluctant readers to read more and engage readers in multiple literacies. This advantage can serve two purposes: Firstly, it can help counter the trend of students reading less in their spare time that both I and other researchers observed, by providing an alternative medium that can engage more readers. Secondly, they can provide a basis for discussion about mental health with students. Given that literature can also work as a window and mirror for students to explore various groups different from their own and for students to see themselves in, seeing characters who deal with various challenges relating to mental health can help students learn about others and themselves. With these arguments in mind, I can only recommend using graphic novels in the EFL classroom to help discuss mental health with the students.



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# Appendices

**Appendix 1:** Spørreundersøkelse spørsmål (Norsk) [Survey questions (Norwegian)]

**Appendix 2:** Survey questions (English)

**Appendix 3:** Letter of information

## Appendix 1

### **Spørreundersøkelse spørsmål (Norsk) [Survey questions (Norwegian)]**

1. Har du erfaring med å lese tegneseriebøker? (lengre tegneserier, ikke bare blad, f.eks. Amuletten)  
Tegneseriebøker (graphic novels) er lengre tegneserier i bokformat, ikke bare blad. F.eks. "Amuletten"-bokserien.
  - a. Ja
  - b. Nei
2. På en skala fra 1-5 ...:
  - a. (Om svaret er «Ja» på spørsmål 1) Hvor godt liker du tegneseriebøker
    1. Overhodet ikke
    2. misliker dem
    3. Nøytral til dem
    4. Liker dem
    5. Liker dem veldig
  - b. Hvor godt liker du tegneserieblad? (f.eks. "Donald Duck", "Pondus", "Spiderman" etc.)
    1. Overhodet ikke
    2. misliker dem
    3. Nøytral til dem
    4. Liker dem
    5. Liker dem veldig
3. Hvor ofte leser du hele bøker på skolen eller som hjemmelekse?
  - a. Har aldri lest noen bøker for skolen
  - b. Har ikke lest noen bøker de siste årene
  - c. En-to bøker de siste to årene
  - d. En-to bøker det siste året
  - e. To-tre bøker det siste året
  - f. Tre-fem bøker det siste året
  - g. Flere enn fem bøker det siste året

4. Hvor ofte leser hele klassen den samme teksten for skolen?
- a. En gang hvert halvår
  - b. En gang i måneden
  - c. En-to ganger i måneden
  - d. En gang i uken
  - e. Flere ganger i uken
5. Hvor ofte leser hele klassen den samme boken
- a. Har aldri lest noen bøker for skolen
  - b. Har ikke lest noen bøker de siste årene
  - c. En-to bøker de siste to årene
  - d. En-to bøker det siste året
  - e. To-tre bøker det siste året
  - f. Tre-fem bøker det siste året
  - g. Flere enn fem bøker det siste året
6. Hva liker du å lese på fritiden din? (Du kan velge flere alternativer)
- Romaner/noveller
  - Tegneseriebøker
  - Tegneserieblad
  - Nyhetsartikler
  - Nettdiskusjoner
  - Annet
  - Liker ikke å lese på fritiden min

6-b. Om du svarte "Annet", hva annet liker du å lese på fritiden?

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## Appendix 2

### **Survey questions (English)**

1. Do you have any experience reading graphic novels? (e.g., "Amuletten")  
Graphic novels are longer comic books in a "book format", not just magazines. For example the "Amulet" series
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
2. On a scale of 1-5...:
  - a. (If you answered "Yes" to question 1) How much do you enjoy graphic novels?
    1. Not at all
    2. Dislike them
    3. Neutral
    4. Like them
    5. Like them a lot
  - b. How much do you enjoy comic books? (e.g., "Donald Duck", "Pondus", "Spiderman" etc.)
    1. Not at all
    2. Dislike them
    3. Neutral
    4. Like them
    5. Like them a lot
3. How often do you read whole books for school?
  - a. Have never read any books for school
  - b. Haven't read any books the last couple of years
  - c. One-two books the last two years
  - d. One-two time this year
  - e. Two-three times this year
  - f. Three-five times this year
  - g. More than five times this year
4. How often does your whole class read the same text for school?
  - a. One time per half year

- b. One time per month
  - c. One-two times per month
  - d. One time a week
  - e. Multiple times per week
5. How often does the whole class read the same book?
- a. Have never read any books for school
  - b. Haven't read any books the last couple of years
  - c. One-two books the last two years
  - d. One-two time this year
  - e. Two-three times this year
  - f. Three-five times this year
  - g. More than five times this year
6. What do you enjoy reading on your spare time? (You can choose more than one)
- Novels/short stories
  - Graphic novels
  - Comic books
  - News articles
  - Online discussions
  - Other
  - I don't like to read in my spare time

6-b. If you answered "other", what else do you enjoy reading in your spare time?

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## Appendix 3

### **Letter of information**

## Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet ” The EFL classroom and mental health in graphic novels.”?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å undersøke elevers oppfatning og bruk av litteratur i klasserommet, og å se på bruken av tegneseriebøker til engelskundervisningen. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

### **Formål**

Formålet er som sagt å undersøke elevers oppfatning og bruk av litteratur i klasserommet, og å se på bruken av tegneseriebøker (graphic novels) til engelskundervisningen. Jeg håper på at så mange av elevene som mulig skal få mulighet til å svare på en undersøkelse som spør om deres meninger relatert til litteratur og bruken av litteratur i klasserommet. Mer spesifikt, så vil spørsmålene spørre elevene om deres kjennskap til tegneseriebøker, og deres erfaringer med å lese bøker i klasserommet. Dette vil bli en del av min masteroppgave.

### **Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?**

NTNU er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

### **Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?**

Du får spørsmål om å delta da jeg er interessert i å høre meningene til elever på ungdomstrinnene i grunnskolen.

Jeg har tidligere vært i praksis på skolen, som er hvorfor jeg tar kontakt, da jeg har kjennskap til skolen.

### **Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?**

Undersøkelsen består av en kort spørreundersøkelse, hvor deltakerne svarer på noen få spørsmål med svaralternativer. Hvis du velger å delta i undersøkelsen, innebærer det at du fyller ut et spørreskjema. Det vil ta deg ca. 5 minutter. Spørreskjemaet inneholder spørsmål om dine meninger rundt lesing i og utenfor skolen. Foresatte kan få se spørreskjemaet på forhånd ved å ta kontakt.

**Det er frivillig å delta** Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Undersøkelsen blir gjennomført i skoletid. Siden undersøkelsen er beregnet å være rask å gjennomføre vil det ikke påvirke de som ikke deltar i undersøkelsen. Om læreren ser det nødvendig å gi en alternativ aktivitet til elever som ikke deltar, så vil de få en video tilgjengelig som elevene kan se, som vil omhandle tema av tegneseriebøker (graphic novels).

### **Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger**

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Bare student og veileder vil ha tilgang til informasjonen fra spørreundersøkelsen.
- Dataen lagres direkte til en sikker database, hvor ingen andre vil ha tilgang til det.
- Spørreskjemaet levers fra Nettskjema.no
- Deltakere vil ikke kunne kjennes igjen ved eventuell publisering

### **Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?**

Opplysningene anonymiseres når prosjektet avsluttes/oppgaven er godkjent, noe som etter planen er 01.08.2022.

### **Dine rettigheter**

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- NTNU ved Pål Myrnes (student), epost: paalmy@ntnu.no eller Delilah Bermudez Brataas (veileder), epost: delilah.brataas@ntnu.no.
- Vårt personvernombud: Thomas Helgesen, epost: thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no

Med vennlig hilsen

Delilah Bermudez Brataas  
(Forsker/veileder)

Pål Myrnes

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### **Samtykkeerklæring**

Om foresatte ønsker at barnet IKKE skal delta i undersøkelsen, bes det at dere tar kontakt med barnets lærer, og gir beskjed om at dere ikke ønsker at barnet skal delta. Om vi ikke får noen beskjed om at barnet ikke skal delta, antar vi at vi har foresattes samtykke til at barnet kan bli med i spørreundersøkelsen.

Om lærer ikke har fått beskjed om at barnet skal trekkes fra undersøkelsen innen 2 uker fra at dette informasjonsskrivet leveres, antar vi at vi har foresattes samtykke.

