

# Raising a Reader!



How Comics &  
Graphic Novels  
Can Help  
**Your Kids  
Love To  
Read!**

By Meryl Jaffe, PhD.

Introduction by Jennifer L. Holm  
*Three-Time Newbery Honoree*

# Comics!



**Not only are they fun**, they're an incredible tool for helping create a genuine love of reading. While the connection of words and pictures at first seems playful, the skills readers develop help provide a practical foundation for other kinds of learning. From verbal and visual literacy to critical thinking and memory, comics are a great tool to give young readers a head start.

In *Raising A Reader*, we'll talk about what

comics and graphic novels offer young readers, show what goes into reading a comic, and provide some recommendations for ways to create reading activities for individuals and groups. We'll also give you directions to resources you can look at next.

Here's to comics, and how they'll help your kids love to read!

— Jennifer L. Holm

## Comic Book Legal Defense Fund

A non-profit organization protecting the Freedom to Read! We are dedicated to the protection of the First Amendment rights of the comics art form and its community of retailers, creators, publishers, librarians, and readers. CBLDF provides legal referrals, representation, advice, assistance, and education in the furtherance of these goals.

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# What Graphic Novels Offer Kids

## Visit a visual wonderland.

Imagine a book with scenes of vivid colors or in black and white images, whose textures you can feel escorting you through a story, a life, a world, as short bursts of text and windowed panels and panes lead you through that realm. This is the graphic novel reading experience awaiting you and your kids. It's inviting, exciting, and always engaging.

## Graphic novels provide exciting reading experiences for all kinds of readers.

Graphic novels' short bursts of text (often in **Fun Fonts**) and vivid images are accessible to all kinds of readers and language learners.

*For weak language learners and readers,* graphic novels' concise text paired with detailed images help readers decode and comprehend the text. Reading is less daunting (with less text to decode) and concise verbiage highlights effective language usage and vocabulary while the images invite and engage readers.

*For skilled readers,* graphic novels offer a different type of reading experience while modeling concise language usage. Because the text has to be succinct, graphic novels model how to efficiently communicate stories, lines, and ideas in short, pithy text.

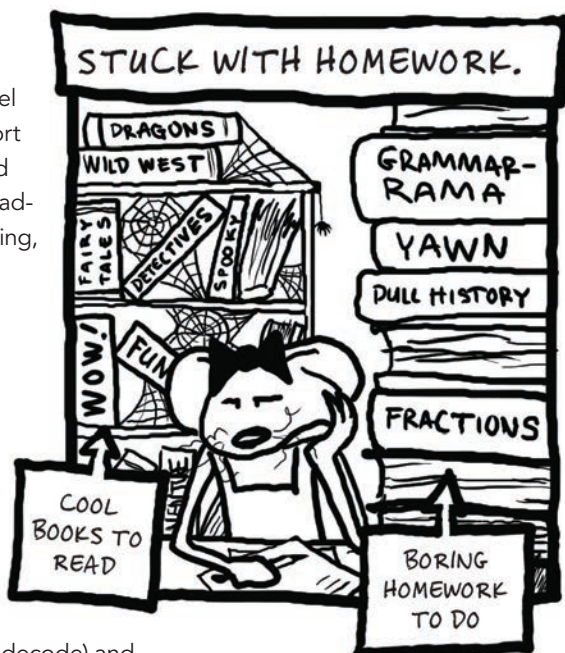
## Graphic novels by their very nature draw the reader into the story.

With graphic novels readers actively construct the story as they travel across and down the page from panel to panel, processing the text and images. Furthermore, the vivid images transport readers, making them feel like they're there in the middle of the action. This creative and interactive process makes reading engaging and often more fun.

## The quality, quantity, and diversity of kids' graphic novels are simply AWESOME.

With the explosion of technology, communication, and graphic arts, graphic novel illustrations, formats, and storytelling are diverse — appealing to all types of readers. Outstanding children's and young adult graphic novels can be found in an array of genres such as fantasy, science fiction, romance, fiction, biography, and classics. Furthermore, there has been a dazzling burst of nonfiction graphic novels, making them extraordinary resources for learning about science, famous people, places, and events in and out of classrooms. These books offer a feast for the eyes and mind and are worth a closer look.

Graphic novels and suggested graphic novel reading lists for kids of various ages and grades can be found in local bookstores, comic book shops, libraries and online. Please visit CBLDF's monthly column "Using Graphic Novels in Education" for suggestions.\*



If you can't wait for our monthly column and your favorite librarian is out with the flu, here are a few resources to help:

Booklist

Children's Graphic Novel Core Collection (ALSC)

Diamond Comics Bookshelf

Good Comics for Kids

The Graphic Classroom

Graphic Novel Reporter

Kirkus Reviews

Library Journal

Library Media Connection

Manga Bookshelf

No Flying No Tights

School Library Journal

Voice of Youth Advocates

YALSA Great Graphic Novels for Teens List

# Graphic Novels 101: Learning How to Navigate

**When learning to read graphic novels**, you have to be willing to slow down. Realize that this is a totally different reading experience. Realize that you will be reading the text and art, all while incorporating the incoming information as you build the story.

## Here are the basics:

In graphic novels, the story is broken down and presented in sequential time frames called **panels** 🌀. Each panel contains text and/or images bound within a specific shape — usually a rectangle or box. The panel shape, text, font, color, and shading ALL interact to tell the story.

The **panel border** 🌀 that surrounds the panel can be as informative as the panel itself. Panel borders help your eye and mind define and focus on each story segment. For example:

- a. Dream sequences are often presented in panels in which borders consist of dotted or wavy lines.
- b. Panels conveying tremendous force or energy may have their panel borders interrupted as objects, arms, or feet protrude to show force or movement.
- c. Sometimes, conversation panels are embedded in larger panels to show what is going on within an intimate conversation as a part of the larger whole.

The **arrangement of the panels** 🌀 on the page also helps tell the story. Typically, panels are arranged (and read) in sequence from left to right and from the top to the bottom of the page.

In the case of Japanese graphic novels, or manga, panels are arranged from right to left and top to bottom, and this reading order is sometimes preserved in the English language presentation.

There are times, however, when the panel arrangement may be more novel. For example:

- a. A small panel may be embedded in a much larger panel to help relate background information along with important information the authors want you to focus upon.
- b. Sometimes the panels are arranged left to right from the top to the bottom across a two-page spread instead of one page.







This is usually done when there are many important sequences (essential to each other) that can't be broken up with the turn of a page.

- c. There are also times when the panels are arranged in different configurations — a circle for example — adding details to the story (in the case of a circular arrangement this may be done to show the continuity of the interactions).

Authors know that if the panel arrangement is too unusual and the readers' attention is not clearly drawn to the right sequence, it slows the reading (and comprehension) down. Therefore, creators are thoughtful when designing their pages  
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# Graphic Novels 101

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and panel arrangements, carefully guiding their readers' eyes and attention.

Panels are separated by spaces called **gutters** 4. The gutters provide pauses for readers to integrate information from the panel just read. Also, even though the panels are sequentially arranged, there are often jumps in time (from nanoseconds, minutes, hours, days, etc.) or jumps between characters, scenes, actions, and/or events. As a result, the gutters allow the reader to pause and integrate what is and is not presented by the authors and illustrators.



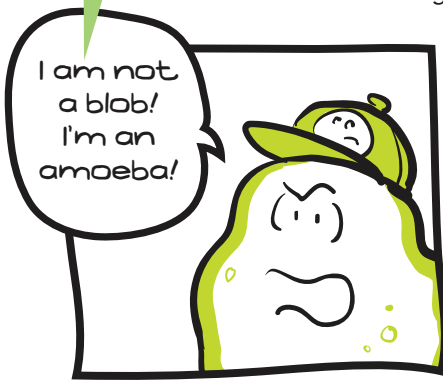
**Balloons** 5 are typically found inside panels and contain the story's succinct text. The balloons may contain thoughts, dialogue, and/or sound effects — each frequently relayed in different balloon formats. Below is a list of six different types of balloons (from *Using Content-Area Graphic*



*Texts for Learning*, Jaffe & Monnin, 2012):

- **Staging balloons** inform the readers and set the stage for changes in the plot, character perspectives, conflict and/or setting. These are often set in rectangular boxes often using a font different from that used for dialogue.
- **Story balloons** tell the story and move it along.
- **Thought balloons** relate a character's thoughts, emotions, and motives. These are typically drawn with wavy lines or have bubbles connecting the character to the thought.
- **Dialogue balloons** contain text that the characters say aloud.
- **Sound-effect balloons** convey a sense or sound and often contain large interesting fonts.
- **Balloon-less balloons** are panels that contain text relaying some thought, dialogue, or direction not placed in a balloon.

5



Creators are thoughtful when designing their pages and panel arrangements, carefully guiding their readers' eyes and attention.

# Creating Reading Dialogues with Graphic Novels

While the **graphic novel reading experience** is different from the traditional prose novel experience, graphic novels can be read anywhere and in the same forums. Here's a more detailed look:

## Graphic novels for solo story exploration:

This really needs no explanation, but next time you're in a bookstore or library, look around — you'll probably notice some lucky kid engrossed in a graphic novel. And if you're lucky enough for it to be your kid, our bet is that s/he won't want to leave before finishing or taking it home.

## Graphic novels in read-alouds:

Graphic novels are wonderful read-alouds (to one or many kids) as they invite kids to watch and listen as the story unfolds. There are a number of ways you can use graphic novels in read-alouds:

- Read it aloud much like a prose text. As you read each panel you point to it, allowing the audience to follow along. You may want to change your voice for the different characters, and lower your voice when there is narration or no dialogue. When reading the panels, stop to "take in" and "read" the graphic images as well, commenting on the details that are there to enrich the dialogue and relate emotions, underlying impulses, and additional story line.
- If your child/student can read, you may want to read this as a play, assigning different roles to different kids and using the illustrations to help with stage directions.

## Graphic novels make great book club selections:

Graphic novels have more dimensions for discussion. In addition to the storyline, plot, and characters, groups can discuss:

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# Creating Reading Dialogues

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- How the art (illustration, page design, and/or word fonts) help tell the story while relaying emotions and characters' underlying motives
- How the panel placements help tell the story
- How the use or omission of color affected the story
- How the artwork (style, color, fonts, panel sizes, and shapes) often changes with the story line (for example dream scenes are often shown in panels that have wavy lines instead of the traditional solid lines)
- How the text and images work together to guide the reader through the story
- Why telling this story in sequential art form may or may not have been the most effective way of relaying it.



## Graphic novels as multiple literacy dialogues:

Pairing graphic and prose novels together can expand literary and communication skills. Reading these dissimilar formats on related topics helps kids discover how prose and graphic novels can tell the same story differently while evaluating the pros and cons of each medium.

For example, Marvel has a wonderful Oz series that parallels Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Or you can take a graphic novel like *Laika* by Nick

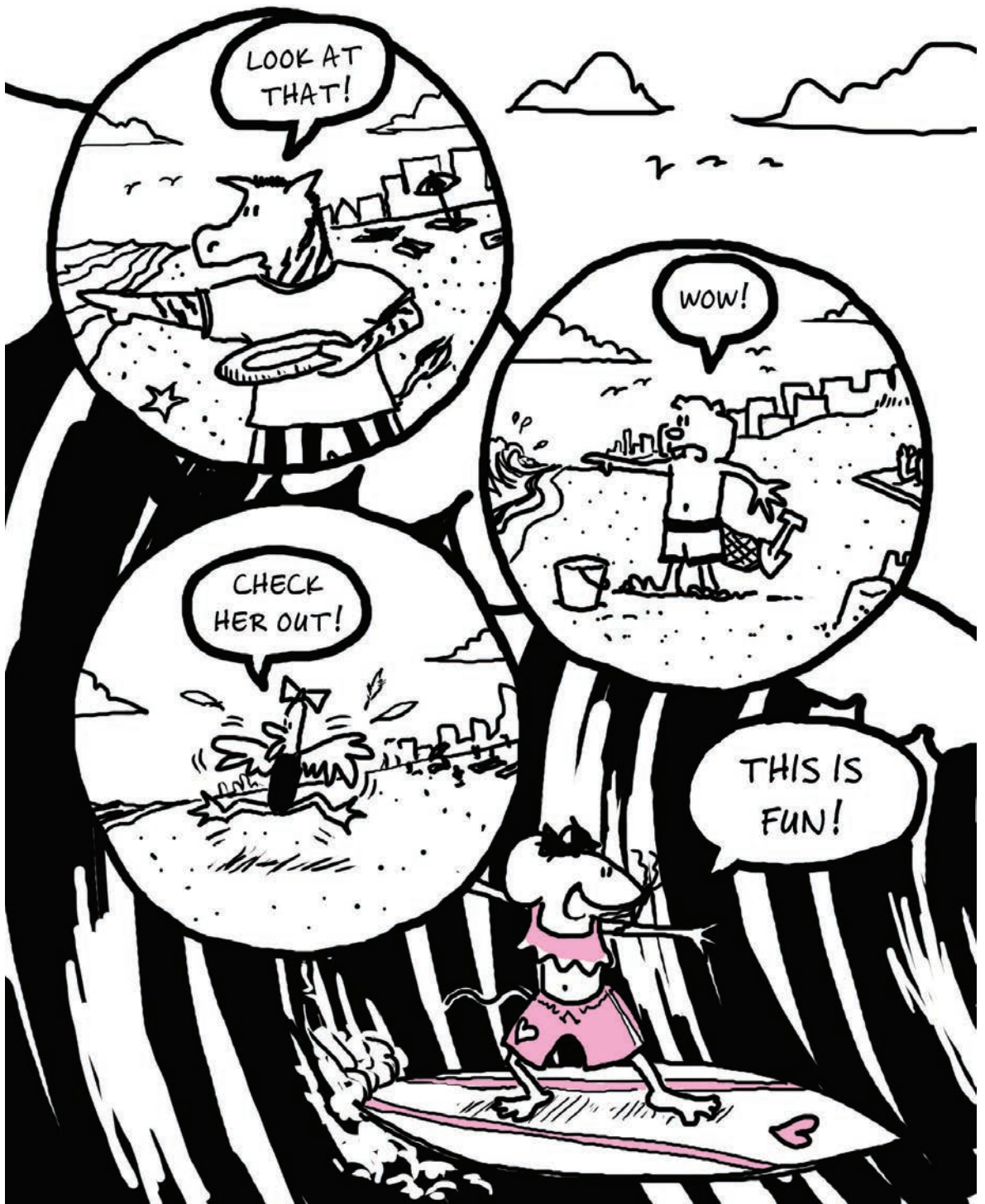
Abadzis (First Second Books) about how the Russians race to send the first sentient being (a dog) into space, and pair it with Homer Hickem's *October Sky*.

For more pairing and multiple literacy ideas please check out these resources:

- *Using Content Area Graphic Texts for Learning* (Jaffe & Monnin, 2012) — a guide for middle school students
- *Teaching Graphic Novels: Practical Strategies for the Secondary ELA Classrooms* (Monnin, 2009)
- *The Graphic Novel Classroom: POWERful Teaching and Learning with Images* (Bakis, 2011) — also for high school classrooms
- *Teaching Early Reader Comics and Graphic Novels* (Monnin, 2011)
- *Teaching Visual Literacy: Using Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Anime, Cartoons, and more to Develop Comprehension* (Frey and Fisher, 2008)

Graphic novels are wonderful read-alouds (to one or many kids) as they invite kids to watch and listen as the story unfolds.





- *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel* (Carter, 2007)
- *Teaching the Graphic Novel (Options for Teaching)* (Tabachnick, editor, 2009)
- *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (McCloud, 1994)
- *Graphic Novel Reporter* has teacher links and suggestions
- [www.readwritethink.org](http://www.readwritethink.org) has lesson plans and activity ideas for graphic novels
- Check [CBLDF.org](http://CBLDF.org) for our "Using Graphic Novels in Education" column, which is updated at least once monthly.

# Graphic Novels and Learning:

**Graphic novels are entering** 21st century classrooms on all levels, for multiple goals and reasons. Here are a few of them:

## **Graphic novels empower 21st century learners.**

Students are engaged in a verbal/visual communication explosion (infographics; icons on phones, computers and billboards; non-verbal image-driven directions; blogs, texting, and emails). Graphic novels clearly reflect this change. Graphic novels, like infographics, texting, and emails, present essential ideas, dialogue and emotions through concise text and images. They also offer enticing multimedia reading experiences to all kinds of readers and learners.



## **Graphic novels attract all kinds of readers.**

From strong language learners to weak or second-language learners, graphic novels attract readers with incredible art and text that unfolds in a multimedia story experience.

## **Graphic novels easily answer National Common Core State Standard mandates.**

Most states have mandated Common Core State Standards, with the goal to teach students to think more critically about what they're reading, writing, and speaking in language arts, science, math, and history/social studies. Common Core mandates that students employ, evaluate, and compare multiple literacies (with a strong emphasis on nonfiction) utilizing content found in multiple formats and giving reliably-sourced evidence to support their opinions. Furthermore, as noted in Appendix B of the Common Core Standards, "visual elements are particularly important in texts for the youngest students and in many informational texts for readers of all ages." As graphic novels incorporate both verbal and visual literacies and as there are many outstanding nonfiction and historical fiction graphic novels, they are an excellent classroom resource.

Here are just a few ways graphic novels help meet the new state standards:

- They typically use advanced and concise vocabulary to tell a story while the images help define and reinforce words, with the word-image pairing providing additional memory associations for concepts.
- Reading paired prose and graphic novel texts better reinforces memory of content material as readers create both verbal and visual memory paths and associations.
- Panel displays and concise text help readers clearly distinguish between main ideas and details.
- Comparing prose and graphic novels provides insight into two very different literary formats, leading to discussions on use of dialogue vs. image vs. sentence/paragraph chapter development. Thus, readers gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of various literary styles, formats, and text structures.



# An Awesome Combination for 21st Century Learners

- As themes, ideas, characters, and events are developed in a visually sequential manner in graphic novels, it is easy to chart their development.
- Graphic novels provide an outstanding means of studying metaphor, as images are often used to develop and reinforce them.

## Graphic novels foster and strengthen multiple learning skills essential for success in and out of the classroom.

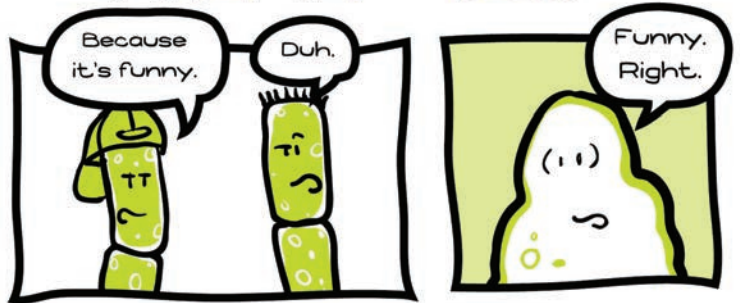
### Attention and attention to detail:

Reading and integrating text and illustrations in graphic novels help students slow down as they read and facilitate observation of and focus on details. The short bursts of text empower students who have weak attention skills, helping them focus on language and the unfolding plot while the engaging art holds their attention and draws them into the details.

**Memory:** Graphic novels pair visual and verbal storylines, creating additional memory pathways and associations. Research shows that our brain processes and stores visual information faster and more efficiently than it does verbal information. As a result, incorporating graphic novels into home and school libraries and pairing them with traditional prose texts are excellent means of promoting verbal skills and memory.

**Sequencing skills:** Graphic novel panels and their sequential arrangement of page and story visually and verbally break the story into easily recognizable parts. As a result, readers automatically focus on its sequence, reinforcing concepts of beginning, middle, and end. Furthermore, students can easily chart development of story, character, plot, and themes over time.

**Language and language usage:** Graphic novels appeal to all language learners and readers. The concise text highlights word usage and vocabulary. The illustrations help define and reinforce vocabulary. Graphic novel selections in classrooms empower and engage all types



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# Graphic Novels and Learning

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of learners and readers, and increasing numbers of second language learners have commented on how reading graphic novels helped expand their vocabulary and grammar skills.

**Critical thinking:** Graphic novels reinforce critical thinking in a number of ways. Abstract concepts such as inference, metaphor, and social context are often difficult concepts for kids to comprehend. They

are usually taught through classroom discussions, which pose a distinct challenge for visual learners, students who have weak language skills, or concrete learners who have weak higher-order cognitive skills. Graphic novels help in the following ways:



- Verbal and visual cues in graphic novels aid comprehension and inference.
- Visual details help explain and reinforce content and abstract messages.
- Visual and verbal cues empower readers to compare and contrast how vital information is presented.
- Visual and verbal cues aid recognition of and comprehension of temporal, physical, and social relationships.
- Metaphors permeate graphic novels, and the visual and verbal pairing makes them more obvious, more concrete, easier to understand, and more relatable.
- Sequential presentation of text and images provides natural opportunities for scaffolding and comprehension.

- Graphic novels' gutters offer natural breaks, during which readers can pause to evaluate what they just read and make sure they comprehend events and character motives.
- Information (and story) gaps between the panels require active problem solving as readers extrapolate what is missing.
- Short bits of text make it easier for readers to recognize the main ideas.
- The combination of images and short bits of text encourages understanding, particularly among ESL students and reluctant readers.

*There are many outstanding nonfiction and historical fiction graphic novels, making them an excellent classroom resource.*



# Using Graphic Novels in Education

**Using Graphic Novels in Education** is an ongoing feature from CBLDF\* that is designed to allay confusion around the content of graphic novels and to help parents and teachers raise readers. In this column we examine specific graphic novels, including those that have been targeted by censors, and provide teaching and discussion suggestions for the use of such books in classrooms.

## Graphic novels for younger readers

- *The Misadventures of Salem Hyde* series by Frank Cammuso
- *Amelia Rules!* series by Jimmy Gownley
- *Babymouse* series by Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm
- *Squish* series by Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm
- *Amulet* series by Kazu Kibuishi

## Graphic novels for teaching about war, regime change, and a first-person perspective on living through upheaval:

- *Barefoot Gen* series by Keiji Nakazawa, translated by Project Gen
- *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi
- *Boxers & Saints* by Gene Luen Yang

## Graphic novels for teaching the Civil Rights Movement and addressing racism:

- *King* by Ho Che Anderson
- *Nat Turner* by Kyle Baker
- *March: Book One* and *March: Book Two* by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell
- *The Silence of Our Friends* by Mark Long, Jim Demonakos and Nate Powell

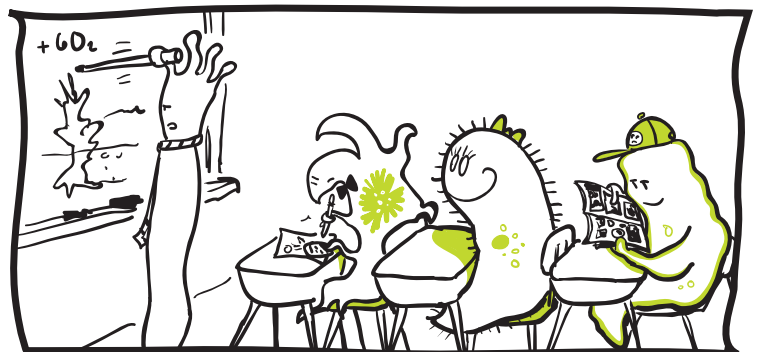
## Graphic novels for coming of age, finding oneself, and transitioning friendships:

- *Aya: Life in Yop City* by Marguerite Aboutet and Clement Oubrerie
- *Nothing Can Possibly Go Wrong* by Faith Erin Hicks and Prudence Shen
- *The Color of Earth* trilogy by Kim Dong Hwa
- *I Kill Giants* by Joe Kelly and JM Ken Niimura
- *Chiggers* by Hope Larson
- *SideScrollers* by Matthew Loux
- *Stuck in the Middle: Seventeen Comics from an UNPLEASANT Age* edited by Ariel Schrag
- *This One Summer* by Jillian Tamaki and Mariko Tamaki
- *Smile* by Raina Telgemeier
- *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang



To read the full “Using Graphic Novels in Education” columns and to access Discussion Guides for banned books, visit [www.cbldf.org](http://www.cbldf.org).

The column is updated with a new graphic novel at least once monthly.



# Protecting Kids' Right To Read!

There are graphic novels for every reader, but not every graphic novel is right for all readers.

Much like prose, movies, and TV, comics are a huge medium encompassing a wide variety of stories. Just like other entertainment media, parents should be involved in deciding what comics are right for their kids to read.

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund works to help parents in this area in a variety of ways. We publish informational tools like this one. We also offer regular features on CBLDF.org, such as our "Using Graphic Novels in Education" column and CBLDF Discussion Guides.

One of our signature efforts is our activity as a sponsoring partner of the Kids' Right to Read Project, a coalition of organizations that monitors and responds to challenges to books in U.S. schools and libraries. As part of KRRP, we provide proactive substantive assistance to help keep comics in circulation when they are challenged.

CBLDF believes that parents have a right to choose what comics are appropriate for their children to read and that all parents should be afforded that same freedom of choice.

To learn more about the CBLDF's efforts to protect the right to read please visit [www.cblldf.org](http://www.cblldf.org).



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LIKE BABYMOUSE!**

## About the Authors

**Meryl Jaffe, PhD.**, teaches visual literacy and critical reading at Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth OnLine Division and is the author of *Raising a Reader! How Comics and Graphic Novels Can Help Your Kids Love To Read!* and *Using Content-Area Graphic Texts for Learning*. She used to encourage the "classics" to the exclusion of comics, but with her kids' intervention Meryl has become an avid graphic novel fan. She now incorporates them in her work, believing that the educational process must reflect the imagination and intellectual flexibility it hopes to nurture. Meryl and CBLDF hope to empower educators and encourage an ongoing dialogue promoting the right to read while utilizing the rich educational opportunities graphic novels have to offer. Please continue the dialogue with your own comments, teaching, reading or discussion ideas at [meryl.jaffe@cblldf.org](mailto:meryl.jaffe@cblldf.org), and please visit Dr. Jaffe at [www.departingthetext.blogspot.com](http://www.departingthetext.blogspot.com).

**Jennifer L. Holm** is a *New York Times* best-selling children's author and the recipient of three Newbery Honors for her novels *Our Only May Amelia*, *Penny from Heaven*, and *Turtle in Paradise*. Jennifer collaborates with her brother, Matthew Holm, on the popular *Babymouse* series and the bestselling *Squish* series. The *Babymouse* graphic novels for young readers have sold more than 1.7 million copies and won numerous awards, including the 2006 Gryphon award, 2006 New York Book Show awards, and seven IRA/CBC Children's Choice awards. *Babymouse: Queen of the World* was the first graphic novel ever to be named an ALA/ALSC Notable Children's Book. Jennifer joined the board of directors of CBLDF in 2013 and is delighted to be involved with an organization that champions the right to read.

# Support The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund!

CBLDF's important work is only possible because of the support of individuals like you. Show your support for our work protecting the freedom to read by making a tax deductible membership contribution today! Here are some items you can get to show your support!



## Membership

- \$100 Member** (includes t-shirt, button set, sticker set, member patch and member card)
- \$30 Associate Member** (includes bumper sticker and member card)
- \$50 Supporter Member** (includes button set, sticker set, member patch and member card)
- \$250 Defender Member** (includes all rewards from \$100 Member level plus a canvas tote bag and coffee mug!)
- \$500 Protector Member** (includes all rewards from \$250 Defender level plus an embossed Moleskin journal and gym bag)
- \$1,000 Champion Member** (includes all rewards from \$500 Protector level, plus name recognition in *2015 Liberty Annual* and set of CBLDF's 2015 publications)
- \$2,500 Guardian Member** (includes all rewards from \$1,000 Champion level, plus name recognition in select CBLDF 2015 program publications)
- \$40 donation: Get a "Super Reader" Kit!**  
(includes "L'il Liberty" button by Raina Telgemeier, CBLDF bumper sticker "L'il Liberty" print by Raina Telgemeier, and signed Jennifer L. Holm book!)

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**Comic Book Legal Defense Fund**

255 West 36th Street, Suite 501

New York, NY 10018

[www.cbldf.org](http://www.cbldf.org)

[info@cbldf.org](mailto:info@cbldf.org)