



LOW HANGING FRUIT

New(ish) and Different

By Jeannie Standal

The first graphic novel was published in 1978, (not to be confused with a comic, which came along much earlier) and so, in the grand literary scheme of things, is pretty new to the scene. According to Kathryn Strong Hansen's article "[In Defense of Graphic Novels](#)," in the 18th Century when the novel format was new (they started calling it a novel because it was new, BTW, and it was not meant in a nice way), it suffered the same kind of criticism and derision that the graphic novel format gets now.¹ So, with the progress of the novel over a few centuries in mind, let's not make the same mistake as those 18th Century critics and dislike something new merely because it is different.

It's natural to relate something new to something we know. In the case of the graphic novel, we might see a comic, or art with some text, we might see a really big comic strip. In truth, the graphic novel is none of those things; it is its "own thing: a medium with its own devices, its own innovators, its own clichés, its own genres and traps and liberties."² Let's shift from looking at whether it is better or worse reading than prose, and look at the kind of reading that it is: a combination of art and text that approaches a story in a different way. When done well, sometimes the story is more deeply understood as a graphic novel than with either art or prose on its own. It's sort of like poetry in that way.

If graphic novels bring to mind tight-sporting superheroes or giant-eyed manga characters, it might be time to give the other types of books in the format a read. Yes, superheroes and manga are popular, but graphic novels cross all genres, and cover in-depth, thought-provoking topics. So much so that many English teachers are using them in class.

Here are a few candidates for study for different age groups:

High School: "Maus I: A Survivor's Tale" by Art Spiegelman. A Pulitzer Prize winning Holocaust story based on the life of the author's father.

Middle School/Junior High: "All's Faire in Middle School" by Victoria Jamieson. A 2018 ALA Notable and 2018 Great Graphic Novel about homeschooled student's trials with fitting in at a new middle school.

Elementary School: "El Deafo" by Cece Bell. Newbery Honor book, among many other awards, about a girl finding a superpower while managing hearing loss.

Take a look at some new, well-reviewed graphic novels, and maybe the next time a student comes back from the library with a graphic novel, you won't mind so much.

¹ Hansen, K. S. (2012, November). "In Defense Of Graphic Novels." *English Journal*, (102.2), 57-63. Retrieved from <https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/institutional-effective>.

²Wolk, D. (2007). "Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean." Philadelphia, PA, USA: Da Capo.

LINKS TO MORE LEARNING



Comic Book Legal Defense Fund

CBLDF is a nonprofit organization whose stated mission is to protect the First Amendment rights of the comics medium. The website contains resources for educators, including ideas for using graphic novels in education, banned/challenged comics discussion guides, and a regular column dedicated to adding graphic novels to library or classroom collections. CBLDF assistance can also be enlisted "at the first sign of a First Amendment emergency!" <http://cblfd.org/>

Graphic Novels for Kids: Classroom Ideas, Booklists, and More

Find even more resources and advice for incorporating graphic novels in the classroom, reading lists, interviews with graphic novelists, and more, courtesy of Reading Rockets: <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/graphic-novels-kids-classroom-ideas-booklists-and-more>

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS



A Guide to Using Graphic Novels with Children and Teens

This guide provides a comprehensive collection of ideas for incorporating graphic novels into the classroom, as well as reasons why you should. It also contains an extensive list of print and online resources for further inspiration: <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plans/teaching-content/guide-using-graphic-novels-children-and-teens/>

DIGITAL TOOLS



Novelist Plus K-8

Novelist Plus K-8 provides comprehensive readers advisory services for the K-8 crowd, including "Recommended Reads" lists (In the left-hand panel) for age-appropriate graphic novels in genres including realistic, fantasy, action, funny, sports and games, and more!

Find Novelist Plus K-8 and other great tools for educators at:

<http://lili.org/dbs/category/18>



