graphix

A GUIDE TO USING GRAPHIC NOVELS

WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS

NEW FOR 2025

SCHOLASTIC

THESE ARE THE STORIES KIDS LOVE, THE STORIES THEY TREASURE.

From the real-life drama of Raina Telgemeier's *Smile*, to the epic adventure of Kazu Kibuishi's Amulet, to Dav Pilkey's irreverent yet insightful Dog Man, to Jarrett Krosoczka's powerful *Hey, Kiddo*, Jeff Smith's thrilling BONE, to universally-loved The Baby-sitters Club, and to contemporary classics like Varian Johnson and Shannon Wright's *Twins*, Graphix draws in every kind of reader. These are the stories they'll read again and again, exploring new ways to interpret the pauses between word balloons, the space between panels, and the meaning behind every brushstroke. These are the stories that ignite imaginations and spark creativity while engaging readers in new, exciting ways.

GRAPHIC NOVELS ARE EVERYWHERE!

No longer an underground movement appealing to a small following of enthusiasts, graphic novels are now one of the fastest growing segments of book publishing, and are accepted by librarians and educators as mainstream literature for children and young adults—literature that powerfully motivates kids to read.

Are graphic novels for you? Should you be taking a closer look at this format? How might graphic novels fit into your library collection, your curriculum, and your classroom?

Want to know more? If so, this guide is for you.

from
FRESH START
by Gale Galligan

What are graphic novels?

In this context, the word "graphic" does not mean "adult" or "explicit." Graphic novels are books written and illustrated in the style of a comic book. The term "graphic novel" is generally used to describe any book in a comics format that resembles a novel in length and narrative development. Graphic novels are a subgenre of "comics," which is a word you may also hear people use when referring to this style of book.

Graphic novels can be any genre and tell any kind of story, as with prose books. The format is what makes the story a graphic novel and usually includes text, images, word balloons, sound effects, and panels.

This basic way of storytelling has been used in various forms for centuries—early cave drawings, hieroglyphics, and medieval tapestries like the famous Bayeux Tapestry are stories told in pictures.

Are graphic novels suitable for the young, and how do I evaluate them?

Some parents, educators, and librarians may associate the term "graphic novel" with content that is not suitable for young readers. Today there is a wide range of titles and, though not all graphic novels are intended for children, there are more titles published expressly for kids coming out every month.

Reviews and roundups of new graphic novels appear regularly in review journals. And major awards and state reading lists across the US regularly feature graphic novels among their selections each year. By reading these reviews, keeping up with award lists, seeking the advice of trusted colleagues and vendors, and previewing materials prior to circulation, you can build a collection that is suited to your audience. Remember that graphic novels should be evaluated based on both their text and their visual components, and how these elements interact to create a cohesive narrative.

How do graphic novels promote literacy?

Motivation

Graphic novels powerfully attract and motivate kids to read. Many librarians have built up graphic novel collections and have seen circulation figures soar. School librarians and educators have reported outstanding success getting kids to read with graphic novels, citing particularly their popularity with discerning readers. At the same time, graphic novels with rich, complex plots and narrative structures can also be satisfying to advanced readers. Providing young people of all abilities with diverse reading materials, including graphic novels, can help them become lifelong readers.

Discerning readers

Graphic novels can be a way into reading for students who are difficult to reach through traditional prose texts. Even those deemed selective readers willingly and enthusiastically gravitate toward these books. Readers who are not interested in reading or who, despite being capable of reading, prefer gaming or watching media, can be pulled into a story by the visual elements of graphic novels.

Benefits for reading development and language acquisition

Graphic novels can dramatically help improve reading development for students struggling with language acquisition for various reasons. For example, readers with cognitive disabilities may find that the illustrations provide contextual clues to the meaning of the written narrative, or to emotional context they might miss when reading. English-language learners may be more motivated by graphic novels, which can help them acquire new vocabulary and increase English proficiency.

But are graphic novels "real books"? Are they "literature"? Do they count as "reading"?

Overcoming prejudices

Some parents and educators may feel that graphic novels are not the type of reading material that will help young people grow as readers. They may cling to the belief that graphic novels are somehow a bad influence that undermines "real reading"—or they may dismiss graphic novels as inferior literature, or as "not real books." At best, they may regard them as something to be tolerated as a means of motivating the most reluctant readers, who, they hope, will eventually move on to "more quality literature."

Art © 2025 Raina Telgemeier and Scott McCloud.

Acceptance by librarians and educators

Graphic novels are widely accepted by librarians and educators as a method of storytelling on par with prose novels, picture books, movies, or audiobooks.

The American Library Association (ALA) recognized this in 2007 with the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)'s annual Great Graphic Novels for Teens List, and in 2011 with the Core Collection of Graphic Novels for Young Readers. ALA has since further expanded its support of graphic novels with the Will Eisner Graphic Novel Grants for Libraries—awarded annually to support libraries and librarians in building the best collections and presenting educational programming on the format for their communities—and, in 2021, with the launch of the Graphic Novels & Comics Round Table (GNCRT) annual Best Graphic Novels for Children Reading List.

from
THE CARTOONISTS CLUB
by Raina Telgemeier
and Scott McCloud

Critical acclaim and awards recognition for children's and young adult graphic novels have accelerated in the last 10 years: in 2015, Mariko and Jillian Tamaki's *This One Summer* made history as the first graphic novel to receive a Caldecott Honor, while Cece Bell's Eisner Award–winning *El Deafo* won a Newbery Honor, as did Victoria Jamieson's *Roller Girl* in 2016—and Jerry Craft's *New Kid* made history in 2020 as the first graphic novel to win the Newbery Medal (in addition to winning the Kirkus Prize and the Coretta Scott King Author Award).

Scholastic Graphix graphic novels have been named National Book Award longlist titles (like Betty C. Tang's *Parachute Kids*) and finalists (like *Hey, Kiddo* by Jarrett J. Krosoczka, which also won an Odyssey Award for its audiobook adaptation) and Eisner Award nominees (like *Cat Kid Comic Club* by Dav Pilkey, and *Twins* by Varian Johnson and Shannon Wright, which was also a Texas Bluebonnet selection, Harvey Award nominee, and Ringo Award winner), and consistently appear on state award reading lists (like Megan Wagner Lloyd and Michelle Mee Nutter's *Allergic*, and *Four Eyes* by Rex Ogle and Dave Valeza). In 2022 alone, four Graphix titles were recognized by the Virginia Library Association's Graphic Novel Diversity Award for Youth: winner *Invisible*, by Christina Diaz Gonzalez & Gabriela Epstein, and honor titles *Miss Quinces* by Kat Fajardo, *The Tryout* by Christina Soontornvat and Joanna Cacao, and *Welcome to St. Hell* by Lewis Hancox. In 2025, the National Education Association (NEA) selected two Graphix titles for their annual Read Across America programming: *Shiny Misfits* by Maysoon Zayid and *The Deep Dark* by Molly Knox Ostertag. Graphic novels are everywhere!

Critical reading skill development

The notion that graphic novels are too simplistic to be regarded as serious reading is outdated. The excellent graphic novels available today are linguistically appropriate reading material demanding the same skills that are needed to understand traditional works of prose fiction. Often they actually contain more advanced vocabulary than traditional books at the same age/grade/interest level. They require readers to be actively engaged in the process of decoding and comprehending a range of literary devices, including narrative structures, metaphor and symbolism, point of view, the use of puns and alliteration, intertextuality, and inference. Reading graphic novels can help students develop the critical skills necessary to read more challenging works, including the classics.

from
THE REMA CHRONICLES #2: KINGDOM OF WATER
by Amy Kim

In addition to the connections to analyzing text, graphic novels inspire readers to understand and interpret information differently from how readers process prose. In a world where young people are growing up navigating narratives presented through websites, video games, television, films, and increasingly interactive media, learning and maintaining visual literacy is a necessary skill. Today's world of stories contains far more than just prose, and readers who are skilled at understanding and being critical of multiple formats will excel.

Do graphic novels have a place in the curriculum?

Many educators have reported great success when they have integrated graphic novels into their curriculum, especially in the areas of English, science, social studies, and art. Teachers know that graphic novels—just like traditional forms of literature—can be useful tools for helping students critically examine aspects of history, science, literature, and art. Graphic novels can be integral parts to implementing any curriculum standards, including the Common Core, Next Generation Standards, and state standards.

What are the literary themes in graphic novels?

Graphic novels contain all of the same literary themes used in classic literature. Some, like Jeff Smith's BONE, are works of epic adventure with many parallels to mythology, such as the quests in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Other classic archetypes in BONE and other graphic novels include the reluctant hero, the unknown destiny, and the mentor-wizard figure.

Using graphic novels along with traditional works of literature can motivate students who may have had little interest in studying literature and history. Ask your local children's librarian or bookseller to help you identify which topics, genres, and themes are present in various books and series and determine which is right for your needs.

What are the benefits of studying graphic novels as a format?

A unique art form

Novels speak to us usually in a linear written narrative; **picture books** tell a story with text accompanied by illustrations; **film** does so with moving images and dialogue; and **poetry** can communicate on levels that no other storytelling can.

Graphic novels combine all these elements in their own unique way. They are like prose in that they are in a written printed format, but they are also like film in that they tell a story through dialogue, and through visual images that give the impression of movement.

Graphic novels do not and aren't intended to replace other kinds of reading—it's not an either/or choice. Reading all kinds of formats encourages readers to think critically about how stories work across the different formats.

Learning from the unique format of graphic novels

Students can compare the different experiences of receiving information through written narrative, versus receiving it visually without words. They can analyze how information about character is derived from facial and bodily expressions, and about meaning and foreshadowing from the pictures' composition and viewpoint. You can invite students to find examples of where the viewpoint of the picture is critical to the reader's experience of the story.

Students can also discuss how in graphic novels, as in movies, readers can often deduce what happened— but was not explicitly stated—in the interval between one image and the next.

Students hopefully know what it's like to be so engrossed in a riveting novel that they feel as if they're watching a movie of the story in their imagination. Graphic novels are literature that is actually in a cinematic format. You can discuss with students the similarities and differences between these experiences.

Poetry

Some graphic novels can be compared to works of poetry in the way they convey intangible feelings through allusion rather than direct description.

Creative writing

Graphic novels can be a springboard to many creative writing projects. Students can write their own alternative endings, or accounts of what happened before or after the story. They can fill in an interval in the story that is not depicted, or only depicted visually. Another great exercise is to take a prose passage from a traditional novel and rewrite it as dialogue in a graphic novel, then create the pictures to go with it. Of course students can also create their own original graphic novels, and even have them published on the "Comic Book Project" (see the online resources page for more).

from
SEA LEGS
by Jules Bakes and Niki Smith

Art © 2025 Niki Smith.

GUIDE FOR EDUCATOR AND CLASSROOM USE

Thinking through the format

When considering a graphic novel in a classroom or educational setting, it's important to encourage readers to look at all of the elements that make up a graphic novel. Here are conversation prompts and visual examples to get discussions started.

Panels and gutters

Consider the size and shape of panels. How do they fit together? Do they interrupt or over-lap with each other? Are there any images without any panel borders at all? The spaces in between the panels—the gutters—indicate a change: in how time is passing, in where you are, or in whom you're looking at or talking to. What do the gutters add to how you under-stand the story?

Art © 2025 Betty C. Tang.

Art © 2025 Aron Nels Steinke.

Description and word balloons

Think about how the dialogue appears. Are the words different colors? Written with thicker or thinner lines? How would that sound? How about the silence when no one is speaking? Is there any narration or description (words in boxes, but not spoken)? How is that important to how the story unfolds?

Sound effects and motion lines

Sounds set the scene, signal something off-panel, and add another layer to each story. Motion lines indicate how characters or objects are moving. What sounds do you see? How are each of the sounds written—does the way it's written reflect what it actually sounds like? What gestures do you see?
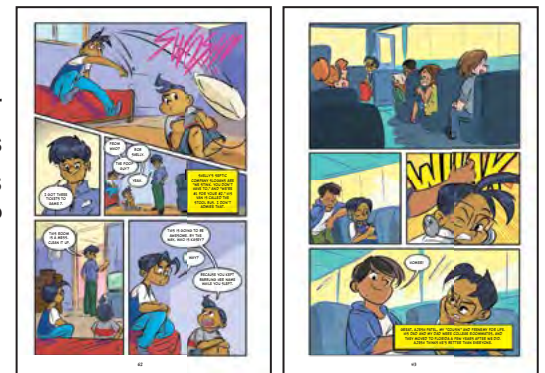

Art © 2025 Rashad Doucet.

Art

Every creator has their own style. Is the art realistic? Cartoony? What can you tell from the expressions on faces? The gestures and movement of characters? The background and its details? If there is color, how does that change over the course of a page? Each chapter?

Art © 2025 Shauna J. Grant.   Art © 2025 Dav Pilkey.   Art © 2025 Niki Smith.

Discussion questions for any graphic novel

Discussions can and should shift to address the specifics of each particular graphic novel, especially in the story content, but here is a list of starter questions that should work for any graphic novel you present for analysis.

1. Can you find all the elements that make up graphic novels: panels, word balloons, sound effects, motion lines, narration, and background colors? If you take out any one of these, what do you lose? Can you still understand the story?

2. How do you read a graphic novel? Do you look at the images and words together, panel by panel? Do you read all the text on the page and then go back and look at the pictures? Do you look at the pictures first and then go back and read the words? There's no right way to read a graphic novel, and many readers go through them differently. Compare how you read an assigned graphic novel with how your neighbor does, and see if how you read it is different or the same.

3. Graphic novels use both words and images. Pick a page or a sequence from a graphic novel and think through what you learn from just the words. Then think about what you learn from just the images. Are they telling you the same information, or are they giving you different information? How do they work together?
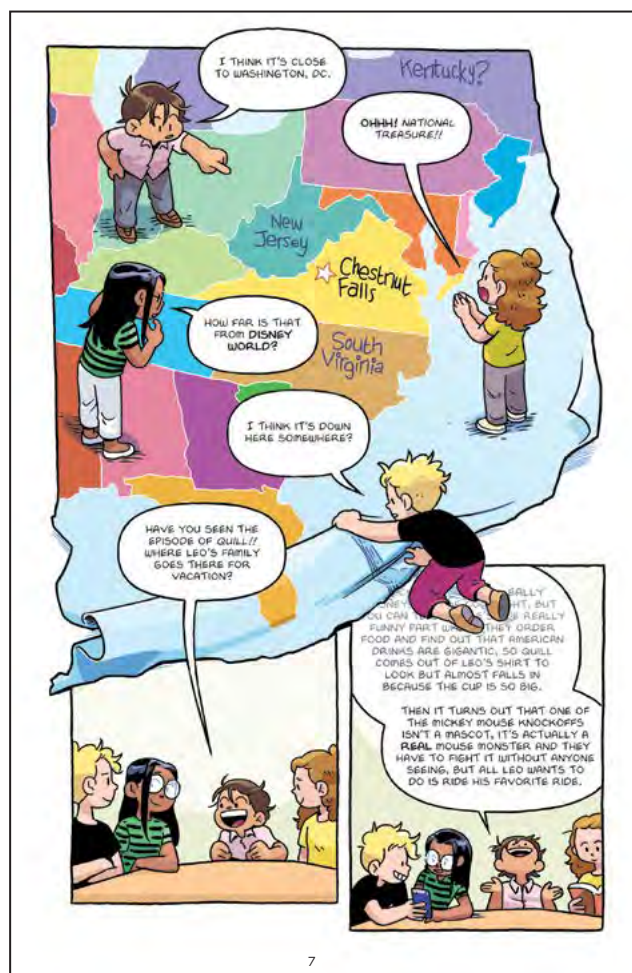
from
FRESH START
by Gale Galligan

Discussion questions for any graphic novel (cont.)

4. Expressions and gestures are important to how we understand characters. Can you find an example of a particular expression or movement that you think shows a significant character trait?

5. Literary devices frequently featured in graphic novels include point of view, flashbacks, foreshadowing, and metaphor. Choose a graphic novel and see if you can find examples of a traditional literary device within its pages.

6. Many elements of graphic novels are similar to what you see in movies. A graphic novel creator can be the director in deciding what each panel and page shows. Think about the frame of each panel. What are you seeing? What are you not seeing? What about the camera angle? The distance from the subject of the panel? Are there any sound effects? Why did the creator make those choices?

7. On top of being a director, graphic novel creators are also editors. The action in comics happens "in the gutters," or in the spaces between each panel. Sometimes big things happen in the time it takes to turn the page. Looking through a graphic novel, can you find a specific sequence of panels or a page turn that you think is dramatic or exciting? Why do you think the creator chose that sequence of images or that page turn to emphasize that moment?

8. The pace at which panels change, and how much time seems to pass, is carefully presented. Time, in how fast or slowly it seems to pass, is important in how panels change. Can you find a sequence where the pacing is slow, observing a character or scene? How about a sequence when everything speeds up?

9. In prose books, details are given to the reader in the descriptions. In graphic novels, details are in the images in the background, character design, clothing, and objects. Take a look at this graphic novel and see if you can find five details in the way a person or object is drawn. What does each detail tell you about the characters? The place? The world?

from
THE CARTOONISTS CLUB
by Raina Telgemeier and Scott McCloud

Classroom activities

Many of the websites, articles, and print titles listed on the following page offer lesson plans, worksheets, and guides for how to best use graphic novels in a classroom.

A few examples of these activities are below—see the Resources page for lesson plans and guides that provide more details and specific step-by-step instructions.

Highlight the visuals

Hand out examples of comic sequences with the text removed and have students fill in what they think the characters might be saying. See what they can gather from the visual context, and finally reveal the actual panels with text to see how everyone's brainstormed ideas compare to what the author intended.

Mix it up

Give each student, or group of students, a selection of panels featuring around ten different scenes or images, each on their own sheet of paper. Have each group move the images around, like tiles in a word game, to create a story out of six of the given panels. Once they've recorded their created story, ask them to swap out one image with one not yet used. What is the story now?

Onomatopoeia

Introduce the concept of onomatopoeia using the sound effects from graphic novel panels as examples. Hand out pages from graphic novels that use onomatopoeia, and have the students create their own three- to four-panel comic strips using similar words. (Grades 6–8)

Character design

Provide students with a collection of images and portraits of the various heroes and villains from an array of graphic novels. Discuss the trademarks of how each character is designed: their body type, their expressions, their clothing, and the colors used in each illustration. Investigate if students can tell who is a hero and who is a villain from only visual clues.

Graphic novel book reports

Instead of writing up a traditional book report, have your students present their book reports in graphic novel format. Encourage the students to think carefully about which scenes they will feature, what the dialogue would be, and what details are necessary to get across the important parts of the story. Students may create their own art or use online comics creators, like ReadWriteThink's Comics Creator, to illustrate their chosen scenes. (Grades 6–8)

Graphic novel creation

For older students, through a few basic story prompts and an investigation of how graphic novels and comics are created, each can try their hand at writing a script and then see how an artist might adapt their script. (Grades 9–12)

from
OUTSIDER KIDS
by Betty C. Tang

<image_sentinel_do_not_reference index="1" />Art © 2025 Betty C. Tang.

Resources

Print Resources

Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel
by James Bucky Carter. Published by the National Council of Teachers for English.

The Cartoonists Club: A Graphic Novel
by Raina Telgemeier and Scott McCloud. Published by Graphix, an imprint of Scholastic.

Graphic Novels for Young Readers: A Genre Guide for Ages 4–14
by Nathan Herald. Published by Libraries Unlimited.

Graphic Novels Now: Building, Managing and Marketing a Dynamic Collection
by Francisca Goldsmith. Published by the American Library Association.

The Librarian's Guide to Graphic Novels for Children and Tweens
by David S. Serchay. Published by Neal-Schuman.

A Parent's Guide to the Best Kids' Comics: Choosing Titles Your Children Will Love
by Scott Robins and Snow Wildsmith. Published by Krause Publications.

Understanding Comics
by Scott McCloud. Published by Harper Paperbacks.

Online Resources

American Library Association's Great Graphic Novels Reading Lists | A list of recommended graphic novels and illustrated nonfiction for those ages 12-18, prepared yearly by YALSA **ala.org/yalsa/great-graphic-novels**

American Library Association's Graphic Novels and Comics Round Table | The GNCRT website features book lists, toolkits, professional development opportunities, and other resources for engaging with graphic novels and comics **ala.org/rt/gncrt/about-gncrt**

Bookshelf from Diamond Comics | A great start for using comics and graphic novels in schools, including articles, lesson plans, and core lists. **diamondbookshelf.com**

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund | This website has great resources for librarians and educators, with articles on everything from using specific graphic novels in the classroom to building a library collection, as well as resources on the benefits of reading graphic novels and comics. **cbldf.org**

Good Comics for Kids | A collaborative blog (hosted by *School Library Journal*) covering comics and graphic novels for readers ages 0-16 with both breadth and depth, through a mix of news, reviews, interviews, and previews accessible to casual readers and serious fans alike **goodcomicsforkids.slj.com**

No Flying, No Tights: A Graphic Novel Review Website | This website, created by Robin Brenner, holds a phenomenal number of reviews and features on current and classic graphic novels. **noflyingnotights.com**

PW Comics World | Publishers Weekly's online coverage of comics and graphic novel publishing for all ages, updated daily **publishersweekly.com/comics**

Classroom Resources

The Comic Book Project | This site helps children forge an alternative pathway to literacy by writing, designing, and publishing original comic books. **comicbookproject.org**

Comics Curriculum & Lesson Plans | Do a keyword search for comics at ReadWriteThink, and you will find a treasure trove of lesson plans and guides from trusted comics educators. **readwritethink.org**

Comics in the Classroom | An excellent resource for using comics and graphic novels in the classroom—including lesson plans! **comicsintheclassroom.net**

Teach Graphix Week | A full week of free online programming and activities to foster lifelong reading and learning with graphic novels, hosted annually in October by Scholastic Graphix. **scholastic.com/site/teach-graphix-week.html**

Get Drawn In
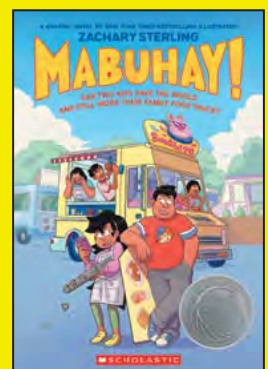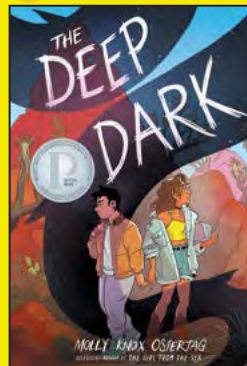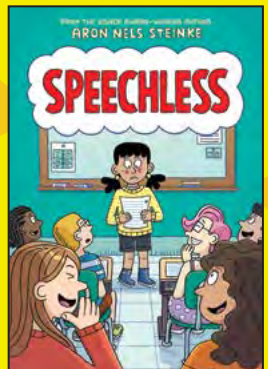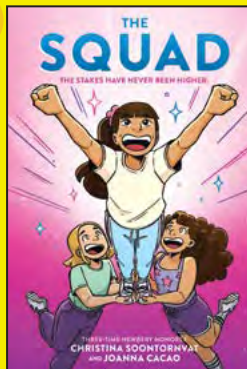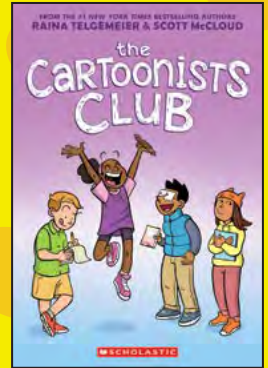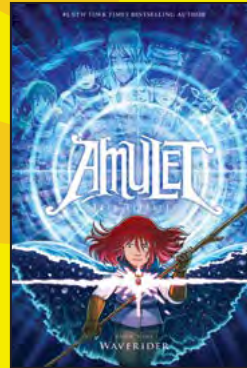
Find these books and more at Scholastic.com/Graphix

graphix

get drawn in