



ALIA GRAPHIC

SUGGESTED GRAPHIC NOVELS
TO USE FOR BOOK CLUBS AND
DISCUSSION RESOURCES FOR
THE FORMAT



There is currently a lot of interest in comics and graphic novels, across a much broader cross-section of society than ever before. This interest extends to book clubs, many of whom are looking to try reading and discussing graphic novels but don't have much idea where to start.

Most people have heard of the characters that Marvel and DC have brought to the big screen over the last 20 years, but many of these characters have more than fifty years of publication history across many different titles so which one does your group look at?

In addition to this, comics and graphic novels are so much more than simply stories about superheroes overcoming evil. They have as much variety of genres, themes, and styles as the text only novels that most book clubs usually discuss. Most people know of *Maus*, which became the first graphic novel to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, and are aware of the Japanese manga format, which developed independently but has both influenced and been influenced by western comics – but if it isn't a format someone is already used to reading, they may not be aware of the other amazing works that have incredible discussion potential or how to guide a discussion to ensure it acknowledges the features of the format.

ALIA Graphic Novels and Comics presents a selection of graphic novels that are particularly accessible to new readers of the format without simplifying the elements that make them interesting for book clubs to discuss.

For each title we have provided the themes, a short synopsis, and six to eight questions to get discussions started. As the art is just as important as the writing for graphic novels we have also included a small excerpt as an example of the art style in the book.

We have also included a set of general questions about the format, covering the similarities and differences to text-only books as well as the features unique to comics and graphic novels. These questions can be adapted for use with graphic novels not specifically included in this resource

Some of the titles included were written with a younger audience in mind and some for a more adult readership. None of the titles on this list, however, have any restrictions on readership so for this resource we have not made a distinction between adult or young adult titles so groups can make their decisions based on their interest in the stories themselves.

Nimona

By ND Stevenson

Themes

Identity, Heroism, Friendship, Propaganda, Discrimination

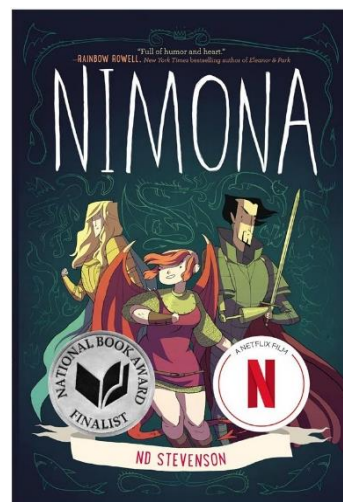
Synopsis

Nimona is an impulsive young shapeshifter with a knack for villainy. Lord Ballister Blackheart is a villain with a vendetta. As sidekick and supervillain in a techno-fantasy world, Nimona and Lord Blackheart are about to wreak some serious havoc. Their mission: prove to the kingdom that Sir Ambrosius Goldenloin and his buddies at the Institution of Law Enforcement and Heroics aren't the heroes everyone thinks they are.

But as small acts of mischief escalate into a vicious battle, Lord Blackheart realizes that Nimona's powers are as murky and mysterious as her past. And her unpredictable wild side might be more dangerous than he is willing to admit.

Questions

1. What were your initial thoughts/feelings going into the book, and how did they develop while reading?
2. Did any particular scenes or imagery stick with you? Why or why not?
3. Did you relate to any characters in particular?
4. How did the ending make you feel? What do you think happened after the book closed?
5. Nimona is defined by what she isn't at several points in the book: not a girl, not a weapon, not a monster; how does this shape how we relate to the character throughout the story?
6. In addition to Nimona's shapeshifting, Ballister's perceived identity (both as perceived by himself and by others) switches between hero and villain multiple times throughout the story. What is the story saying about the nature of self and identity through this and how effectively is it conveyed?
7. Nimona started as a webcomic before being picked up by a HarperCollins, how do you think the serialised nature of webcomics has influenced the way the story is told?
8. The text and the artwork both variously utilise and subvert tropes about heroism and villainy throughout the story, how does the way the text and art support or contradict each other foreshadow this subversion and how did that impact your reading of the story?



In Utero

By Chris Gooch

Themes

Fitting in, Friendship, Family, Coming of age, Independence

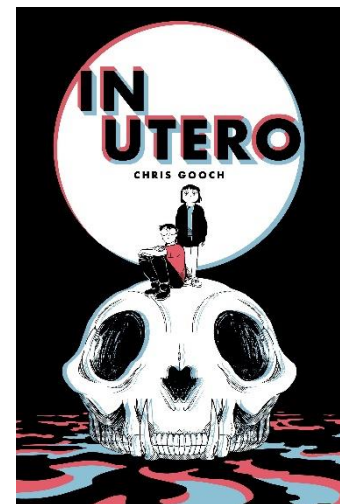
Synopsis

Aurealis Award winning indie coming of age story with a horror and fantasy genre feel from an Australian creator.

Twelve years after a disastrous explosion, young Hailey is dropped off by her mum at a holiday camp in a dilapidated shopping mall. Alienated from the other kids, she connects with an eerie older teen named Jen... but soon dark horrors awaken, and the two new friends are caught up in a cataclysmic battle between two terrifying creatures who have been lying dormant all this time.

Questions

1. The main story takes place 12 years after a devastating explosion. How does this set up the story and how did it change the city and its people?
2. Why do you think Gooch chose an abandoned shopping mall as the summer holiday camp? How does this fit with the context of the story and the characters?
3. How did you feel about Jen and Hailey, their relationship with each other and their situationally different yet emotionally similar struggles with their mums?
4. The graphic novel progresses from a story about kids on an adventure to one imbued with horror and monsters? How was that transition managed and how effective did you find it?
5. In Utero is not afraid to go deep into the fantastic. What elements of the science fiction, fantasy and horror genres stood out and worked best?
6. As well as a monster story, In Utero is also a story about friendship, mothers and daughter relationships, as well as a coming-of-age of story. What elements of the personal drama of these characters stood out and worked best for you?
7. The visuals for the story are influenced by Japanese kaiju cinema (featuring giant monsters like Godzilla), what cinematic elements are used in the artwork and how do these help to create the atmosphere of the story?



New Kid

By Jerry Craft

Themes

Fitting In, Friendship, Race, Class, Family Dynamics, Bullying

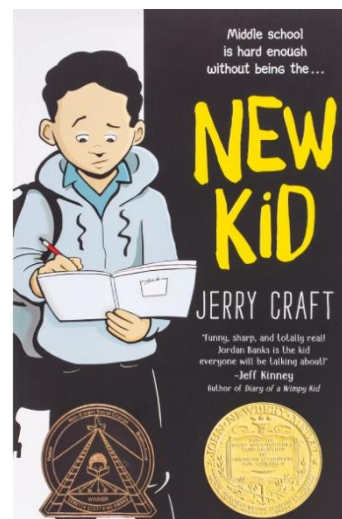
Synopsis

Seventh grader Jordan Banks loves nothing more than drawing cartoons about his life. But instead of sending him to the art school of his dreams, his parents enrol him in a prestigious private school known for its academics, where Jordan is one of the few kids of colour in his entire grade.

As he makes the daily trip from his Washington Heights apartment to the upscale Riverdale Academy Day School, Jordan soon finds himself torn between two worlds—and not really fitting into either one. Can Jordan learn to navigate his new school culture while keeping his neighbourhood friends and staying true to himself?

Questions

1. Which character in the book do you identify with the most? Why?
2. Have you ever struggled to fit in? How were your experiences like Jordan's and not like Jordan's?
3. Jordan's mom puts pressure on him not only to attend Riverdale Academy, but also to enjoy it. Drawing helps Jordan cope with the pressure from home and the feelings of loneliness at school. What activities do you do to make yourself feel better when you're stressed or not feeling like yourself?
4. At the beginning of each chapter heading of *New Kid*, a pop culture reference features the characters. See if you can figure out what films or other books each chapter heading is referring to.
5. Jordan's "Tips for Taking the Bus" show Jordan changing his appearance over the course of his trip. Discuss the concept of "code switching." What do you notice in each frame? What is different about his clothing, body language, and the people around him? What do you think Jordan gains by code switching in this way? Can you think of a time when you felt you needed to "code switch"?
6. Jordan's character changes at the end of the novel in several ways. What changes occurred?



Stars in Their Eyes

By Jessica Walton and Aśka

Themes

Self-acceptance, Personal identity, Friendship, Family relationships, Diversity, Representation

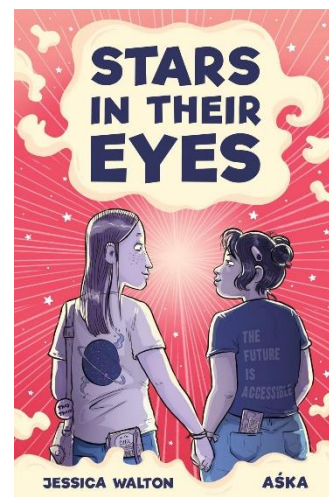
Synopsis

Maisie and her mum, Jo, travel to Maisie's first FanCon to see her hero, Kara Bufano, an amputee actor who plays a kick-arse amputee character in her favourite show. Maisie is a queer, disabled teenager with chronic, and while the story doesn't shy away from the challenges Maisie faces (particularly in terms of accessibility), *Stars in Their Eyes* thoughtfully celebrates diverse experiences.

At FanCon Maisie meets Ollie, a cute volunteer with whom she forms an instant connection. The story follows Maisie and Ollie's burgeoning relationship as they share and celebrate common interests, all while navigating delightfully embarrassing parents and new experiences.

Questions

1. Throughout the book, fan culture and fan spaces (like FanCon) are presented as mediums and places where both Maisie and Ollie can explore their identity and community. What do you think the book is trying to say about these spaces? Why do you think they are important?
2. *Stars in Their Eyes* uses references to pop culture from other media, which references were you familiar with and how did these contribute to your understanding of the characters? How do you think the story would be experienced differently without being familiar with those references?
3. There are many instances where accessibility, or lack thereof, is explored. How do the visual aspects of the medium contribute to your understanding of and empathy with these as a reader?
4. Maisie and Ollie talk about the importance of seeing themselves in the characters of Luna and Asterion, how differently is this experienced through a visual medium such as a comic compared to a text-only story?
5. The book ends with Ollie and Maisie's relationship in a positive but bittersweet place. How is this different or similar to other books you've read in similar genres?
6. What do you think the book's title is trying to communicate about the experiences of the various characters in the story?



Daytripper

By Fábio Moon and Gabriel Bá

Themes

Family relationships, Love, Loss, Acceptance, Regret

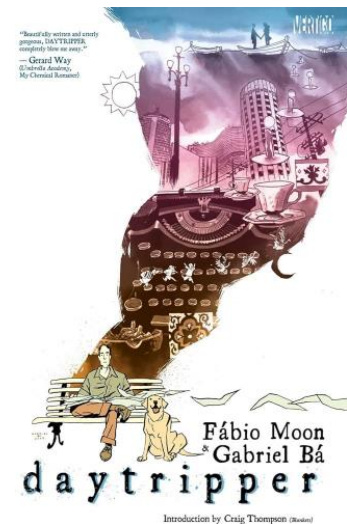
Synopsis

Daytripper shows a series of moments in the life of Brás de Oliva Domingos, son of an acclaimed writer named Benedito de Oliva Domingos. Brás's journey is marked by moments of joy and sorrow, triumph and defeat, as he navigates the complexities of human relationships.

Each chapter shows a different moment from Brás's life, covering a wide range of ages and situations that combine to offer a meditation on the fleeting nature of life and the importance of cherishing those moments that define us.

Questions

1. There are many elements of magical realism utilised throughout the story, by the end of the book do you have a clear sense of which parts are 'true' and which are metaphorical? Does it matter?
2. In a conversation Brás has with his father, his father says that life is built from moments whose significance you only realise in retrospect. How well does the story convey this idea?
3. How does the non-linear structure of the story emphasise the separation between moments and how does it emphasise the connections between them?
4. Which of the chapters did you find the most interesting? Why?
5. Though many of the elements of Brás's life change between chapters, certain occurrences and people are consistent and fixed. How do these
6. Did any of the deaths in the story feel any more 'real' than the others?
7. Daytripper was originally serialised, with one chapter published each month for 10 months. Considering the structure and themes of the story, how different do you think that reading experience would be compared to a single collected edition?



Fun Home: a family tragicomic

By Alison Bechdel

Themes

Family, Identity, Secrets, Sexuality, Coming out, Communication

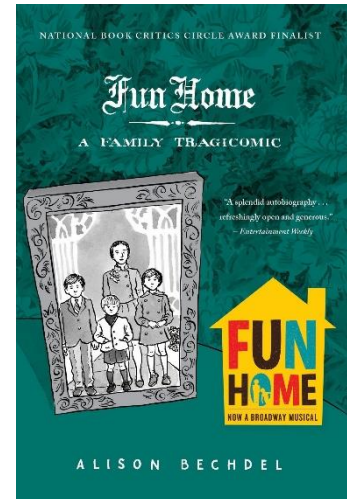
Synopsis

Alison Bechdel's award winning memoir examines her relationship with her father, following their relationship as she grows from a young girl to an adult and realises that she is gay, and discovers that he is too.

The title of the book comes from her family's nickname for the funeral home her father inherited following his own father's death, and which he continued to run until his death while Alison was at college.

Questions

1. How has Alison's relationship with her father changed from childhood to adulthood and what role has literature played in their relationship?
2. How is Alison's experience of her sexuality similar and how is it different to her father's?
3. Alison describes her and her father as inversions of each other, what does she mean by this and how does it help define their relationship?
4. How important is the titular funeral home to the book? How does her familiarity with the deaths of other people play a part in dealing with the suicide of her father?
5. Why do you think this book has the subtitle 'A family tragicomic'? What do you think the term tragicomic means in the context of this book?
6. This is Alison's retelling of the relationships in her family, how different would it have been if written by her father? Her mother?
7. Fun Home has been described as a book about two people who live in the same house but different worlds. In what ways is this shown?



All-Star Superman

By Grant Morrison, Frank Quietly, and Jamie Grant

Themes

Heroism, Self-sacrifice, Compassion, Hope, Redemption

Synopsis

After Lex Luthor tricks him into flying into the sun to save a sabotaged spaceship, Superman realizes that he is dying. He then receives a strange prophecy from the future that tells him that in his final days, he will perform some of the most amazing feats of his life. Superman will defend Metropolis until his last breath, but how will he say goodbye to the people he's closest to?

Questions

1. How much did you know about Superman before reading this book? How did that influence how you engaged with the story?
2. Superman is often described as a character too perfect to make for interesting stories, having read All-Star Superman do you agree with this sentiment? Why or why not?
3. How does the art emphasise the differences between Clark Kent and Superman? Are the differences in bearing and mannerisms enough to make it believable that people don't realise they are the same person?
4. Morrison and Quietly have said they intentionally tried to make every instance of Clark being clumsy him saving someone's life because even as Clark, Superman is never off the clock. What did these moments add to the story in character development for Superman? For Clark?
5. Although most of the characters are drawn from Superman's extensive history, Professor Leo Quintum was a new character created for All-Star Superman. Why do you think this the creators wanted this character to be 'new' for this story?
6. Superman says to Luthor, "You could have saved the world years ago if it mattered to you." How does the story demonstrate the difference between Superman and Luthor's ideas of saving the world?
7. The 'Twelve Labors' that Superman completes draw parallels with those of Hercules from classical mythology. What parallels are there between the mythology of modern superheroes and that of the superhuman gods and demigods of ancient myths?

