A reader attracted by mysteries and crime stories can enjoy the graphic novel version of Raymond Chandler's The Little Sister (1957), illustrated by Michael Lark. Using pastels with a great deal of black shadowing and sharp angles, the artist has captured the film noir feeling of Chandler’s work. The action, sharp dialogue, and strong characters keep the reader involved as the world-weary detective, Philip Marlowe, tries to get to the bottom of things. The engaged reader might even be interested in further exploring the cinematic techniques used in this graphic novel or may want to read another of Chandler’s works and compare it to the film version.

Graphic novels also speak to the real world of problems that young people may face, and one outstanding example is The Tale of One Bad Rat (1995) by Bryan Talbot. This novel is dramatically and yet realistically illustrated, using dominant colors to express the moods of what is happening such as the hopeful, country greens in the last section. The story traces the journey of a teen runaway in London to the Lake Country where she confronts and deals with her father’s sexual abuse as she traces the real life history of Beatrix Potter. Talbot closes his story of the research he did to write the novel. An easy to read but moving story, any reader could benefit from encountering The Tale of One Bad Rat which received the Eisner Award (honoring comic book creators) in 1996.

Also powerfully moving and thought provoking is 9-11: Artists Respond, Volume One (2002, from Dark Horse Comics in Milwaukee, Oregon), a collection of pieces, some a page and some four or five pages, which consider the events of September 11. Numerous artists contributed diverse pieces which capture the courage of the rescuers, the shock of children viewing, and the costs of hatred and prejudice. The titles are revealing, including “Zero Degrees of Separation,” “Arab Americans,” and “Which One Is Real?” among many others. Some of the art is in color and some is black and white; one picture shows the Empire State Building weeping over the World Trade Center. All the art is strong. The proceeds of this book and the second volume are designated for relief funds. This work will affect all readers.

One more example which might appeal to students who find their regular history texts boring and difficult is the nonfiction Still I Rise: A Cartoon History of African Americans (1997) by Roland Kwok and Katherine Ross. At first glance, this large-sized hardback appears to be a children’s book, but it isn’t. These stories are not your usual ones, from “Prince of Persia” (an ancient Parable) “about a prince who thinks he’s a rooster to “The Leafless Tree” about a family perpetually dissatisfied even after discovering a pot of gold. The varied illustrations are interesting, and stories offer different twists on several traditional fairy tales, too. Chris Ware has even designed in the front cover a board game called "Fairy Tale Road Rage," which includes such stops as a Goldilocks Pawn Shop and Grandma’s House at Sunny Acres Assisted Living. This book is fun to read on one level, and worthy study at a higher level. The book could open up the world of fairy tales and folklore for a reader.

A graphic novel can be read fairly quickly. Graphic novels come in a great variety, offering classical literature to nonfiction history, in paperback form; in one picture shows the Empire State Building weeping over the World Trade Center. All the art is strong. The proceeds of this book and the second volume are designated for relief funds. This work will affect all readers.

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Reluctant readers are not the only adolescents who do not spend much time reading. Honors and AP students who often tackle difficult books for school may not read for themselves, either. Many older adolescents are short on time, are involved with many other activities, and may not be inspired to read out of a sense of what they are often force fed in school. Graphic books may re-engage them in the joys of literacy. Following are six graphic texts that may appeal to the confident and curious but easily bored reader.

Adolescents generally enjoy satire and a prime example is The Simpsons by Matt Groening, also in graphic novel form (with as much text as graphics). The Simpsons’ Guide to Springfield (1998, HarperPerennial), for example, takes on every tourist subject from hotels (the “Worst Western”), fast-food restaurants (“Lard Lad Donut”), local government, and shopping (“Wicked Excess, “the place to shop for platinum lobster traps”). The Simpsons even take on American history and our society’s strange relationship to history in the description of Old Springfield Townes:

... a for-profit historical park replete with glass blowers, candlemakers, and wig powders. In response to recent complaints by educators that the park is “just too boring,” the Towne’s proprietors have given it a minor facelift and restructuring. However, scholars are quick to point out recently added anachronisms: Colonial Springfield did not use muskets with laser sights, three-cornered hats were never used as “ninja star”-type weapons, and tavern waitresses did not wear hot pants. (pp. 19-20)

English teachers teaching about satire and social studies teachers looking at economics, history, or social life could all find uses for this graphic novel, a definite change of pace from school texts.

A graphic novel that is even more strange than The Simpsons but not funny is The Comical Tragedy or Tragicall Comedy of Mr. Punch (1675) by Andrew Towne. Illustrated by Frederik L. Schodt. (Manga is the Japanese term for graphic novel. Mangas have been and are widely read by adults as well as children in Japan.) Based on the author’s own experiences, this novel traces the adventures of four Japanese immigrants in the San Francisco area from 1904-1924. Against the background of the San Francisco Earthquake, World War I, and other historical events, these four young men try to make a good life in an America which is unrelentingly racist. Still there is no self-pity. The characters’ lives have ups as well as downs, and their attempts to meet girls, make a fortune fast, and adapt to American culture supply much humor. The translator offers a glossary and additional information, too. This novel is both fun to read and thought provoking, revealing the insider’s view of being an immigrant in America.

Another historic graphic novel presenting the Japanese point of view is Barefoot Gen: Life after the Bomb (1990) by Keiji Nakazawa based on his own life experiences surviving the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. The main character is a young boy, Gen, who takes care of his mother and baby sister after the rest of his family is killed in the bombing. Gen gets angry and is willing to fight for survival, but he also shows compassion to fellow survivors when others want nothing to do with them. Gen does not idealize the Japanese military, but he is horrified at the instant destruction and lingering radiation sickness which result from the bomb and outraged at America for dropping such a bomb. A stirring story of survival, Gen leads the reader to consider the effects of war. Other volumes of Gen’s story are also available.

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Introducing Cultural Studies


Foster a love of reading from an early age with an accessible, engaging and enjoyable read. As any expert will tell you, descriptive writing often isn't right for dyslexic and reluctant readers - who prefer fun, wit and light-heartedness and, most of all, a great plot, all of which this book has. Buy now. The Verdict: Kids' books for dyslexic and reluctant readers. Liz Pichon's Tom Gates series is a British publishing sensation – and for dyslexic and struggling readers, the collection is sent from heaven, leaving us in no doubt that her latest book DogZombies Rule (For Now) should be our top recommendation from our list. Graphic novels are amazingly diverse, both in terms of their content and usefulness. For example, Gorman (2002) notes that graphic novels are exactly what teens are looking for—they are motivating, engaging, challenging, and interesting. Schwartz (2002b, 2004) believes that graphic novels are engaging because they allow for teachers to enter the youth culture, and students are encouraged to bring their “out of school” experiences into the classroom. Called “multiple literacies,” the idea is that educators must bridge the gap between students' school literacy and the ways in which they use read... Graphic books for diverse needs: Engaging reluctant and curious readers. ALAN Review, 30(1), 54–57. Schwarz, G. E. (2002b). Books that really draw the reader in and encourage youngsters to read. Score. A book's total score is based on multiple factors, including the number of people who have voted for it and how highly those voters ranked the book. All Votes Add Books To This List. 1. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (Harry Potter, #1) by.