

An Educator's Guide to Graphic Novels



USING GRAPHIC NOVELS IN THE CLASSROOM AND LIBRARY

Grades
2-5

What are graphic novels and how can they be used in the classroom and the library?

Simply, graphic novels are a logical extension of the comic book. They tell a story using pictures in sequence. Although the format has been available for centuries, graphic novels are becoming more and more part of the mainstream collections in school and public libraries. The number of graphic novels has grown almost exponentially over the past several years. Now there are graphic novels available for all ages of readers. For elementary and intermediate students who want to read books similar to their older peers, these new novels offer teachers and librarians new resources for working with readers.

How can graphic novels be utilized? First and foremost, graphic novels are perfect for students who are less-than-avid readers. Students who have limited English proficiency and students who struggle with vocabulary and comprehension deficits are also all prime candidates for graphic novels. The illustrations and relatively linear story lines support struggling readers. They provide context for the text as well, assisting those readers who struggle with print. Offering students the option of graphic novels can be essential to helping them develop a love of reading. Reading these graphic novels—*Lunch Lady*, *Babymouse*, and *Stone Rabbit*—is a stepping stone to other books, including other graphic novels.



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Gearing Up

GEARING UP FOR GRAPHIC NOVELS

Before offering graphic novels to students, it might be valuable to present students with an introduction to their format. Teachers or librarians could present several different comic strips that are popular with younger readers such as *Garfield*. Use a projector to show the strips and discuss with students some of the defining characteristics of comics. They tell a story through illustration and limited text. The story is generally sequential in nature. There is a conflict or problem that is solved in some way in the strip. Another possibility would be to project the illustrations and ask students to create the text for each panel or frame. Their responses could then be compared with the original text.

Still another possible pre-reading activity would be to take comic strips or the first several pages of a graphic novel and cut them apart asking students to put the frames in order so that the story makes sense.

VOCABULARY

While most of the language in these graphic novels is accessible, there may be words or phrases that are unfamiliar to some readers. Ask students to keep a vocabulary notebook in which they can note words that are unfamiliar to them along with other words and phrases that they find interesting or unusual. For instance, *Stone Rabbit* uses the term “crudmonkey” to express a sudden surge of emotions ranging from surprise to disappointment to frustration.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Sidekicks: *A Web Site Reviewing Graphic Novels for Kids*
www.noflyingnotights.com/sidekicks

Yale University Library: *Comic Books, Comic Strips and Graphic Novels*
www.library.yale.edu/humanities/media/comics.html

Cooperative Children’s Books Center
www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/graphicnovels.asp



Classroom and Library Connections



Examine the names of the characters in the graphic novels. Do some of the characters possess names that indicate something about their personality? For example, why do you think Jennifer and Matthew Holm's main character is called Babymouse? What does that tell us about her physically and perhaps emotionally as well? Does Felicia Furrypaws's name tell us much about what sort of character she will be? How about Babymouse's brother, Squeak? Wilson the Weasel?



Ask students what happens in the **Lunch Lady** stories before the title page. How does this action indicate what might occur in the stories? Do the other graphic novels employ this technique? Why or why not? Ask the school librarian for other examples of picture books where this occurs such as *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. Students could write captions for the wordless pages that open these graphic novels and other books. The school library could make a display of these captions and ask students to vote on their favorites.



Babymouse uses black and white and touches of pink in the illustrations. Ask students to keep a list of the objects that appear in pink throughout the stories. Why does the illustrator elect to use pink for these objects? This discussion can easily lead to a lesson on symbolism. Color is often used as a symbol in other literary works. How is it a symbol in these books? Ask the school librarian to suggest other books that utilize this technique (e.g., *Olivia* by Ian Falconer) and have students compare and contrast other books to **Babymouse**. **Lunch Lady** uses a technique similar to **Babymouse**. Color itself is key in the other graphic novels. Direct students to examine the "strength" of the colors from bold to pastel. How does this function in stories to indicate mood? **Stone Rabbit** uses a range of colors for mood. Ask students to indicate the mood of different pages based solely on color.



Have students create some new inventions for the Lunch Lady to use in her adventures. What other tools does she have at hand in the cafeteria? How could they be modified to help her solve crimes and mysteries? The school librarian could also include some research sites and texts on inventions, especially inventions created by young people. Do not forget to include Rube Goldberg in this research.



Stone Rabbit tends to travel through time for his adventures. Ask students to create a new adventure for Stone Rabbit. Perhaps this could be tied in to something being studied in history or social studies classes. Once students have decided on a time and place, they can research it more extensively in the library.



Provide groups of students with outlines of the major characters from the graphic novels: Lunch Lady, Hector, Dee, Terrence, and Betty from **Lunch Lady**, Stone Rabbit from **Stone Rabbit**, or Babymouse, Felicia Furrypaws, Squeak, and Wilson from **Babymouse**. Ask the groups to select one character and then fill the outline with words and phrases that describe various aspects of that character. They could also indicate what might be on each character's iPod, what their secret dreams and ambitions are. In other words, they can go beyond the books and stories. These would make excellent displays for the library along with copies of the books.



Stone Rabbit books utilize onomatopoeia during some of the key scenes. Discuss this literary device with students. Ask them to employ onomatopoeia in the other graphic novels. They can create Post-it notes with the words and insert them into the stories themselves. Divide the class into groups and have them go through each graphic novel and list the words they think are examples of onomatopoeia. Students could create a display for the library with examples of this literary device.



Perspective is another literary device that is essential in graphic novels. Generally, perspective is presented through the illustrations. For instance, in *Lunch Lady and the Cyborg Substitute*, one page shows Mr. McConnell close up with only one word “Glorious!” above his head. Readers are made to feel as though they are looking down from a height at Mr. McConnell. The following page has three panels and presents Mr. McConnell from lower altitudes. Have students examine each of the graphic novel series for examples of how readers’ attention is directed using this same technique. They could place an “X” to indicate where the reader would have to be positioned in order to have the perspective the illustrator is using.



Given the format of the novels, it makes sense that Babymouse and her friends can become animated players in a cartoon series or even a movie. Ask students to cast the roles of the major players: Babymouse, Felicia Furrypaws, Wilson, Squeak, Penny Poodle. What actors/voices would bring these characters to life? Students should be able to provide reasons for their choices. Additionally, students can create the poster or ad that would be used to promote the TV show or series. What would it be rated and why?



One of the **Lunch Lady** books focuses on librarians. The school librarian could ask students to create a two-column chart in which they note things they believe are real and things they believe the author made up for purposes of humor. Students could also come up with other story lines and create more **Lunch Lady** stories set in the library or perhaps move the setting and the villains to the English classroom. This could be done in groups or the entire class could create one story. A chain story (where one person or group creates part of the story and then hands it off to another person or group) is one variant on this idea.



Of course, one of the most logical projects would be to have students create their own graphic novels to share with others. Brainstorm with the class some of the following questions:

- Who will be the main character (the hero or protagonist) for your story?
- What problem or conflict will this character face?
- Who or what will be the villain or antagonist (the person or thing opposed to the main character)?
- How will the problem or conflict be resolved?
- What colors will be used in the illustrations?



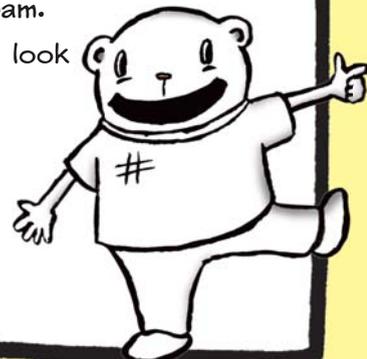
Have students individually or in small groups create a storyboard for their novel before proceeding.

Have students, individually or in groups, create booktalks using PowerPoint or other presentation software. They could also create podcast booktalks to motivate others to want to read **Lunch Lady**, **Babymouse**, or **Stone Rabbit** books.

KIT FEENY

Filled with humor and relatable themes like family and bullies, **KIT FEENY** will become the newest addition to our graphic novels program.

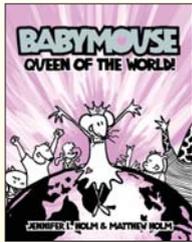
Get ready to look inside Kit’s world—it’s “stupid awesome”!



Book List

BABYMOUSE

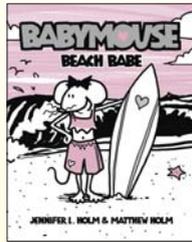
Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm



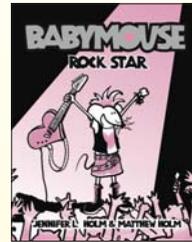
#1: Queen of the World!
978-0-375-83229-1
GLB: 978-0-375-93228-8



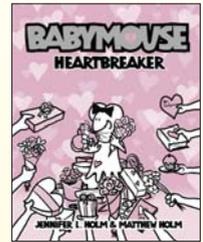
#2: Our Hero
978-0-375-83230-7
GLB: 978-0-375-93230-4



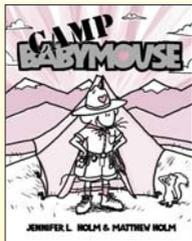
#3: Beach Babe
978-0-375-83231-4
GLB: 978-0-375-93231-1



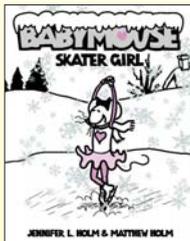
#4: Rock Star
978-0-375-83232-1
GLB: 978-0-375-93232-8



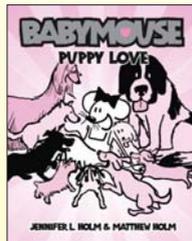
#5: Heartbreaker
978-0-375-83798-2
GLB: 978-0-375-93798-9



#6: Camp BabyMouse
978-0-375-93988-4
GLB: 978-0-375-93989-4



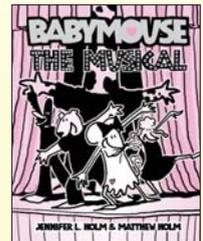
#7: Skater Girl
978-0-375-93989-4
GLB: 978-0-375-93989-1



#8: Puppy Love
978-0-375-93990-0
GLB: 978-0-375-93990-7



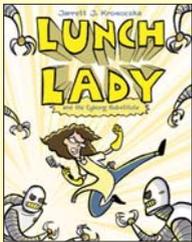
#9: Monster Mash
978-0-375-84387-7
GLB: 978-0-375-93789-7



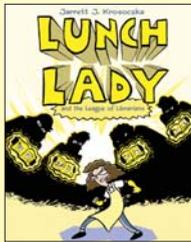
#10: The Musical
978-0-375-84388-4
GLB: 978-0-375-93791-0

LUNCH LADY

Jarrett J. Krosoczka

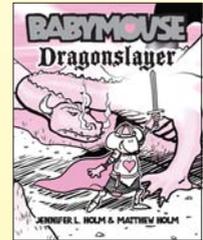
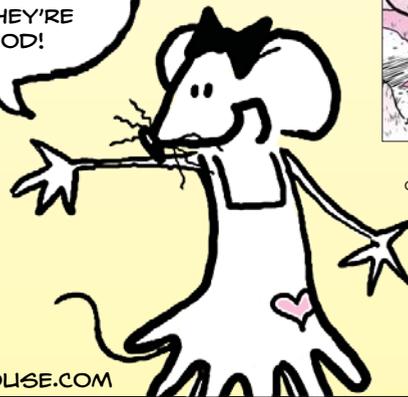


Lunch Lady and
the Cyborg Substitute
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GLB: 978-0-375-94683-7



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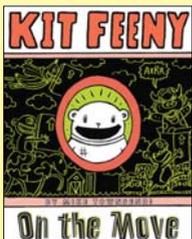
#11: Dragonslayer
978-0-375-85712-6
GLB: 978-0-375-95712-3

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KIT FEENY

Michael Townsend

Coming soon!



On the Move
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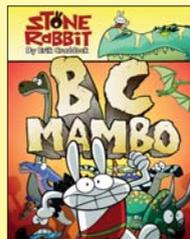


The Ugly Necklace
978-0-375-85615-0
GLB: 978-0-375-95615-7

STONE RABBIT

Erik Craddock

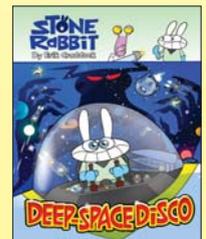
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#1: BC Mambo
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#2: Pirate Palooza
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#3: Deep-Space Disco
978-0-375-85876-5
GLB: 978-0-375-95876-2

About the Creators



Photo © Jodie Ott.

Brother-and-sister team **JENNIFER L. HOLM & MATTHEW HOLM** grew up playing with stuffed mice. Today Jennifer is the author of several highly acclaimed novels, including two Newbery Honor winners, *Our Only May Amelia* and *Penny from Heaven*. She lives in Foster City, California. Matthew Holm is a graphic designer and freelance writer. He lives in Portland, Oregon. Visit www.rhbcclassroomcast.com for a FREE curriculum-based video featuring the authors.

“For both of us, comics served as a nice bridge between picture books and longer novels without pictures. Another great thing about graphic novels is the fact that no one—and especially not kids—wants to read some serious novel every single day. Graphic novels help develop a nice reading habit.”



Photo © Jeanne Birdsall.

JARRETT J. KROSOCZKA is the author-illustrator of *Punk Farm*, *Punk Farm on Tour*, *Max for President*, and *Baghead*. A graduate of Rhode Island School of Design, he lives in Northampton, Massachusetts.

“Graphic novels provide high interest subject matter with low readability that help build a reader’s automaticity. With attractive illustrations, graphic novels can motivate the most reluctant of readers to not only read, but to finish a book, giving them the confidence they need to grow to be vivacious readers.”



Illustration © Erik Craddock.

ERIK CRADDOCK grew up during the ‘80s and ‘90s on a steady diet of comics, video games, and pop culture. It was during his time as a student at New York City’s School of Visual Arts that Stone Rabbit was born. He lives in Babylon, New York.

“Graphic novels are a great format for younger readers because they embrace the visual impact that is offered in more favorable media (like television, video games, or animations of various types and formats) and in doing so can easily engage even the most reluctant of readers. Yet, they pose enough of a challenge, both in their contextual and structural standings, as to offer the younger reader a generous foothold in their climb to literary master.”



Guide prepared by Teri S. Lesesne, a professor in the Department of Library Science at Sam Houston State University where she teaches classes in literature for children and young adults.