READING MANGA
or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Just Love Reading

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LET'S GET ONE THING OUT THERE before we get started: I love manga and graphic novels. You can do things with sequential art as a medium that just can't be done with prose or film. When I was a boy, I learned to read by reading comics. I now read a variety of genres, from popular fiction to literature, from history to astronomy, and I love books. Through it all, however, my passion and preference for comics and graphic novels has never left me.

Manga, an especially interesting subset of the general category of graphic novels, has captured the imaginations of many teens today, and with good reason: The best manga are highly creative, exciting, intelligent, and dramatic. Some are even quite literate.

When the manga explosion started back in 1999, most girls didn't read comics. And no wonder—their selection was very limited. Since most were retellings of the same superhero rescue fantasies that had dominated the medium for so long, manga was different. Some of it was written for girls and some for boys, but all manga used storytelling techniques substantially different from those used in American comics: no thought balloons; no long passages of explanation to tell you what a character is thinking; just a perfect mesh of art and dialogue, along with some musical notations of drama, action, and romance.

You already know that kids like to read manga, so what better way to encourage them to read in general? I hope that kids (and adults) will always read manga the way that I do. I hope that as teens grow up, we'll be able to provide them with the more sophisticated stories that are available in Japan. But most of all, I hope that manga can serve as an early step on the path to creativity and expanding one's mind and that it ultimately leads to a lifelong love of books, just like curricula did for me many years ago.

If you're not familiar with manga, fear not—just join me for a little primer, with artist Myung Hee Kim, on the pages that follow...
It's really important to understand that manga is a medium, not a genre.

In fact, manga represents about one-third of everything published in Japan.

As you can imagine, that makes for a lot of different types of books in a lot of different categories.

And kids love to read this stuff with good reason. It's imaginative, immersive, and fun!

"Shonen" is Japanese for "boys." So, these emphasize action above all else. Nishma is a good example of shonen from Del Rey.

"Shojo" means "girl," and tend to emphasize drama and relationships.

Now as I said, there are lots of different types of manga. The two most popular in America are shonen and shojo.

The Wallflower is one of our most popular shojo manga.

I've mentioned how diverse manga is, that means that you need to pay close attention to something that appears on the back of every manga... age ratings.

Japanese culture is different from ours. So their rating system is different. Del Rey manga rates its books by American standards, so you'll always know what you're getting.

Just like in movies, there's manga for all ages: 13 and up for content similar to a Simpsons episode; 16 and up for sexual situations or violence; and mature for adult readers.

The reality of manga is that there's something for everyone, and a kid who wouldn't touch a book with a ten foot pole will read manga.

So that's manga in a nutshell. And if you didn't enjoy our presentation, it's all myline's fault...

I'm sorry! I'm sorry!