

Hello! I'm a parent of a four kids. One day my fifth grader told me that her librarian discouraged her class from reading "too many graphic novels" and that graphic novels are for the younger children. She was heartbroken, because graphic novels are her favorite kind of book. If you're heard this sentiment before, I'd like to share the following information that I also shared with that librarian.

The idea that graphic novels aren't "real books" is a common misunderstanding, but if our goal is to help kids develop into confident readers who can handle reading and decoding any text as well as read widely in order to gain knowledge, then graphic novels are a powerful tool to accomplish that. I have been a professional in children's publishing for twenty years, and I can say with confidence that no sector of this industry is more exciting, hopeful, and positive than graphic novels. While some believe that children must "grow out of" books with pictures, I've found no research to support the idea that pictures make children less literate or less intelligent in any way, and I have instead found a great deal that supports the opposite. Additionally, graphic novels exist for all age groups, including teens and adults, so there's no age group too old for this format. And nothing about the format makes them less worthy of serious study. Graphic novels have won the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize for literature, the Printz, the Newbery, and many other top literary awards.

I have seen time and time again kids who were dismissed as "non-readers" then discover graphic novels and become avid, active readers, excelling in every measurement of verbal fluency. Graphic novels are such a powerful tool in our literacy toolbox. For the sake of kids' literacy, emotional development, and just plain enjoyment, I hate to see any good educator or parent dismiss them.

I am passionate about all the good graphic novels do and in fact give workshops to educators about this very real, very beneficial format of literature. May I share with you some facts I've learned in my research?

- Graphic novels require skill to read. Decoding words and text together is an acquired ability.
- Books with pictures aid comprehension, enrich the reading experience, and celebrate art
- Graphic novels prepare readers to decode the increasingly image-based information of our world
- Graphic novels are excellent for reluctant readers because the images hook them immediately, but graphic novels are also excellent for advance learners. Analyzing text-and-picture based storytelling and uses of a visual medium is a highly creative exercise
- Graphic novels help non-visual thinkers develop visual imagination
- Graphic novels help visual thinkers help practice their text-reading by giving a context to interpret a wider vocabulary
- Graphic novels are a study in concise language, how to communicate sparingly
- Graphic novels are a format, not a genre. There's as much variety in graphic novels as in prose novels. E.g. Stephen King, Beverly Cleary, & Toni Morrison all write in the same medium. Likewise the content of comics varies widely.
- Graphic novels allow readers to develop the same skills as reading a prose book, such as:
  - connecting narratives to reader's own experiences
  - Predicting what will happen next
  - Inference and critical thinking
  - Tracking left to right and top to bottom
  - Interpreting symbols
  - Following the sequence of events in a story
- According to a 1993 study published in *The Journal of Child Language*, comic books or graphic novels "introduce children to nearly twice as many new words as the average children's book and more than five times as many as the average child-adult conversation."
- Reading comics and graphic novels is an ACTIVE experience, requiring readers to:
  - Infer what happens between panels

- decode the “narrative density” (artist and writer communicate a tremendous amount in a single panel)
- Research shows: graphic novel readers are more likely to read prose novels as well than their non-graphic novel reading peers
- Graphic novel readers are adventurous. Research shows: graphic novel readers are more likely to try new genres, styles, and kinds of books
- Readers are able to read one full grade level higher in graphic novels than when they read prose because of the support the images provide in understanding the story. This leads to a higher vocabulary and reading outside their comfort zone.
- Graphic novels require a complex, active literacy to read (reading in between the panels) requiring readers to do a lot of work to create the story from its component parts
- Seeing literary devices in comics, including flashbacks, point of view, and such played out in visuals leads readers to see more clearly the same devices used in prose literature and critique how they are used.
- Graphic novels help readers create both verbal and visual memory paths.

For more information, the American Library Association has a lot of great resources about comics and graphic novels. This website is also a nice place to start:  
<https://www.noflyingnotights.com/comics-101/>

Thanks for reading through all this. As you can see, I care a great deal about this topic!  
All my best,  
Shannon Hale