

Choose Your Own Adventure: Graphic Novels for Kids and Teens - ParentMap

Saturday, November 29 2014, 9:11 AM

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Choose Your Own Adventure: Graphic Novels for Kids and Teens

Graphic novels starring kids: The perfect gifts for tweens and teens

By Gemma Alexander

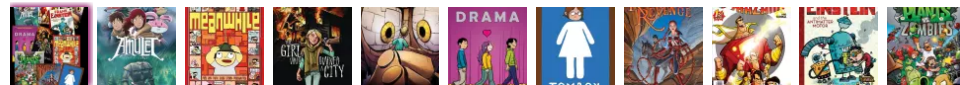
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With *Big Hero 6* being released early this month, Disney is adding to the collection of blockbuster films based on graphic novels and helping bring the genre ever more into the mainstream. What makes this film different is its target audience: kids.

The original *Big Hero 6* comics were aimed at a slightly older audience in 1998, but today's graphic novels have a lot to offer the middle-grade set, and there is growing consensus that graphic novels improve reading skills as much as text-only books.

But the best reason to read the books on this list, or buy them for a young reader you love, is that they are really good.



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Amulet

By Kazu Kibuishi, Scholastic/graphix.

This beautifully illustrated, full-color series is another imaginative use of the standard plot requiring heroic action from average children.

Amulet follows the magical adventures of a sister-and-brother duo who must navigate a world filled with demons, robots and talking animals in order to save their mother's life.



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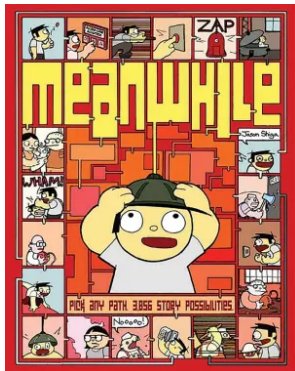
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Meanwhile

By Jason Shiga, Amulet Books.

A genuine choose-your-own adventure, *Meanwhile* challenges assumptions about linear narrative.

Beginning with the simple choice of chocolate or vanilla ice cream, a little boy's day fragments into 3,856 possibilities.

Following thin tubes from one panel to the next, often skipping ahead dozens of pages or moving backward, the reader makes her own story choices. Outcomes range from walking home with an ice cream to disaster.

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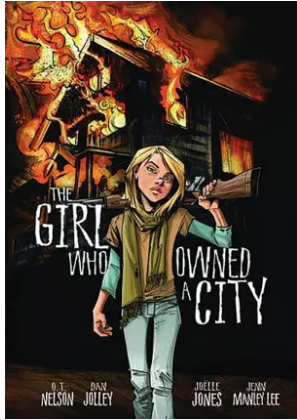
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The Girl Who Owned a City

Based on O.T. Nelson's 1975 novel, adapted by Dan Jolley, illustrated by Joëlle Jones, colored by Jenn Manley Lee, Graphic Universe.

After a virus kills all the world's adults, children are left to fend for themselves.

Lisa leads her friends to build a city in the high school, complete with infirmary and kitchen, and fortify it against raiding gangs.

This book sends the powerful message that children are smarter and stronger than they know, the flip side of that strength is violence. Parts of this book may be disturbing.



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Cardboard

By Doug TenNapel, Scholastic/graphix.

Magical realism is not just for grown-ups. Cam's unemployed dad uses the last 78 cents in his pocket to buy a cardboard box for Cam's birthday present.

Together, they make the box into a figurine that magically comes to life. Marcus, their troubled neighbor, steals their magic cardboard to build an army.

The battle against his cardboard monsters evolves into an existential crisis for Marcus, who must face his emotional demons as well as the magical ones.



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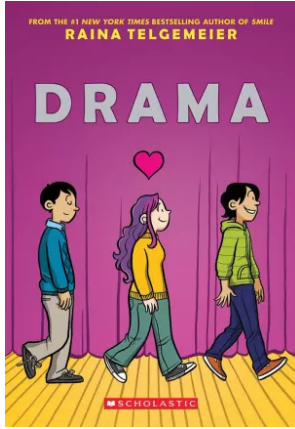
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Drama

By Raina Telgemeier, Scholastic/graphix.

Who needs magic when real life is so full of drama? This realistic graphic novel follows theater-club set builder Callie through seventh grade.

Giving equal attention to Callie's passion for theater and her series of unsuccessful crushes, *Drama* represents the roller coaster of adolescent life without shortchanging either emotional growth or practical skill building.

It gets bonus points for creating an engaging school culture that almost completely ignores the mean girls/popular kids paradigm in favor of a diverse cast of three-dimensional characters with realistic problems.



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Tomboy

By Liz Prince, Zest Books.

The author of this graphic memoir describes her tomboy childhood in simple, clear language and drawings.

Sharing real-life episodes of bullying and support, she challenges widely held assumptions about gender, sexuality and identity.

Because it's a true story, rude language and misbehavior are shown (Liz smokes and sneaks out at night), and the book might be best for the older end of the age range. But this book is ultimately about making your own best choices: The narrator also regularly stands up to her friends and, together with her boyfriend, decides to postpone sex.

Tomboy is valuable reading for young readers, no matter what their gender.

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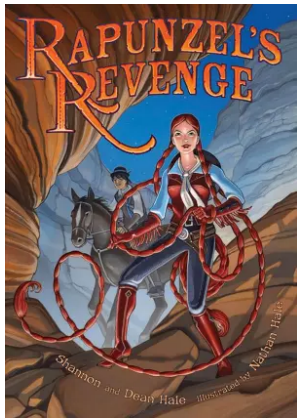
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Rapunzel's Revenge

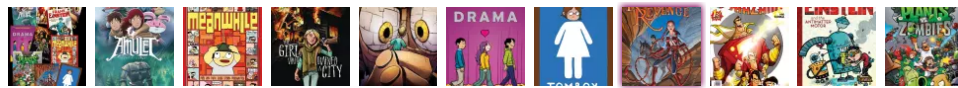
By Shannon and Dean Hale, illustrated by Nathan Hale, Bloomsbury.

This twisted fairy tale reimagines Rapunzel in a magical Old West.

After a privileged childhood, 12-year-old Rapunzel learns the truth about her parentage and finds herself locked in a magical tower, where she spends the next four years practicing gymnastics with her rapidly growing hair.

When she escapes, she heads for Gothel's Villa, itching for revenge and hoping to free her mother from slavery in Gothel's mines.

There is a sequel called Calamity Jack.



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Billy Batson and the Magic of Shazam!

By Mike Kunkel and Art Baltazar, DC Comics.

DC's latest all-ages reinvention of the classic Captain Marvel character focuses on the adventures of young Billy Batson and his little sister, Mary, who turn into superheroes with the magic word "Shazam!"

It's a classic superhero storyline with lots of repetition to reinforce reading comprehension.

More mature versions abound if young readers want to keep reading as they grow.

The 2008 miniseries has been compiled into two books.



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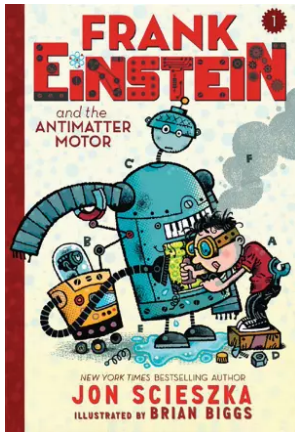
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Frank Einstein and the Antimatter Motor

By Jon Scieszka, illustrated by Brian Biggs, Harry N. Abrams.

A boy-scientist story in the vein of *Dexter's Laboratory* — with one critical difference. Like a Jules Verne novel, there is as much science as story on every page.

Your kid will learn the speed and shape of sound waves before the evil rival scientist even thinks of stealing Frank's robots.

Not a true graphic novel, the book may be more aptly described as heavily illustrated.

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Plants vs. Zombies — Lawnmageddon

By Paul Tobin, illustrated by Ron Chan, colored by Matthew J. Rainwater, lettering by Steve Dutro, Dark Horse/PopCap.

Unique on this list, this comic is not a good book. Based on a video game, the premise is weak, the plot flimsy, and the humor . . . well, your 10-year-old will love it.

I couldn't figure out what was so funny, but my daughter found it hilarious. Even if your child resists reading at all costs, Plants vs. Zombies may be a gateway drug to reading.

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