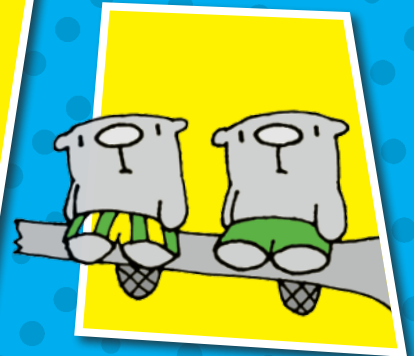


# An Educator Guide to **GRAPHIC NOVELS**



## Using **graphic novels** in the classroom and library

Simply, graphic novels are a logical extension of the comic book. They tell a story using pictures in sequence, panels, speech bubbles, and other conventions of the comic book form and format. Text is minimal and illustrations “fill in” the story for readers. Although the form and format has been available for centuries (think of the ancient cave paintings as one means to tell a story through pictures, for instance), graphic novels have become part of the mainstream collection in public, school, and classroom libraries. The sheer number of graphic novels has grown exponentially over the past several years. Now there are graphic novels available for readers in elementary, intermediate, middle, and high school (as well as graphic novels for adults, too). For young readers who wish to read books similar to their older siblings, graphic novels such as **Babymouse**, **The Flying Beaver Brothers**, **Squish**, **Stone Rabbit**, and the **Lunch Lady** offer them the opportunity to enjoy the graphic novel form and format. Older readers can appreciate classic themes of survival and the search for self in graphic novels like **Peanut** and **City of Ember**.

Graphic novels are perfect for students who are less than avid readers. Students who have limited English proficiency (ELLs), students who struggle with vocabulary and comprehension, and students with learning disabilities are prime candidates for graphic novels. The illustrations, linear story, and spare text support struggling readers. Art provides context for the text and vice versa. This scaffolding effect helps readers comprehend more readily. Offering graphic novels as an option for reading can help develop a love of reading for *all* readers, not just those who struggle. Form and format can develop visual literacy skills. Even avid readers enjoy graphic novels. Graphic novels such as **Babymouse**, **The Flying Beaver Brothers**, **Lunch Lady** and **Squish** can lead readers to other graphic novels in later grades.

[RHTeachersLibrarians.com](http://RHTeachersLibrarians.com)



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 **RANDOM HOUSE**  
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

# Gearing Up



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## Gearing Up for Graphic Novels

Before offering graphic novels to students, it might be valuable to present them with an introduction to the form and format. Teachers and librarians could present several different comic strips that are popular with young readers such as *Garfield* or others from the daily comics page in the newspaper. Using a projector, a document camera, or an interactive whiteboard, show the strips and discuss with students some of the defining characteristics of the comic strip. In a series of panels, the strip tells a story one frame at a time. Generally, the story is told in a chronological sequence in which a problem or conflict is presented. That conflict is then solved by the final panel of the strip. One alternative the preceding activity is to present the strip without the text and ask students to create their own text and compare the two versions to see which is more effective. This is the time to ask students to note the use of spare text and how fewer words that can convey meaning not revealed through the artwork itself.

Another important step before students read a graphic novel is to demonstrate how this format is to be read. Again, use a document camera or other equipment to project the first several pages of a graphic novel (some graphic novels are available through Net Galley and can be projected from a laptop, too). Point out the frames (individual panels) and their various sizes; note the use of white space to separate panels. Point out the speech bubbles. Develop a working knowledge of the aspects of the format: speech bubbles, tails (the part of the speech bubble that points down to the speaker), gutters (space between double page spreads), frames, panels, etc. Read aloud these first few pages. Note that the teacher or librarian could be the reader or students could read along in a Readers' Theater format. Another great activity is to take apart some graphic novels. Put students in groups to see if they can arrange the pages in their correct sequence. Students must use both text and visual clues to do this successfully.

## 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 enter words or phrases unfamiliar to them. Students should be encouraged to use context clues to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases. This is exactly what happens in *City of Ember* as the main characters attempt to fill in the pieces missing from the Instructions for Egress from the underground city. However, if readers are stuck, they can turn to a peer for some assistance. A separate section of the notebook might be dedicated to words or phrases, particularly idiomatic expressions and figures of speech that appeal to them. For instance, Stone Rabbit uses the term *crudmonkey* to express a sudden surge of emotions ranging from surprise to disappointment to frustration.

Note that unfamiliar words are sometimes defined in an appendix in the Stone Rabbit books as well.





# Classroom and Library Connections

Grades 2-5  
Babymouse • Lunch Lady  
Stone Rabbit • Squish  
The Flying Beaver Brothers

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 and 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.

# Classroom and Library Connections

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 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.



# Classroom and Library Connections



**Squish** is an amoeba. His friends are also single-celled organisms. Do an online search and find out information about amoeba, paramecium, and planaria. Students could be divided into groups with assignments to research physical structures, habitats and life cycles. Once the research has been completed, students can list the facts and the fiction of the graphic novels about Squish.

Color plays an important role in the graphic novels about **Squish** and his family and friends. What colors does the illustrator use to show readers that Squish is dreaming or daydreaming about being a superhero? What colors are used in the main story line? Why might the illustrator have selected these colors?

**Squish** is created by Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm who also created **Babymouse**. How are Squish and Babymouse alike? How are they different? Students can create a chart indicating similarities and differences between the two characters.

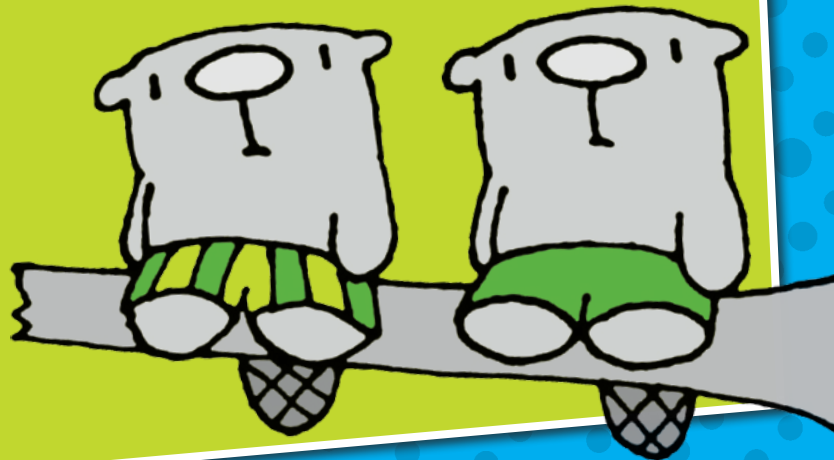
Each of the books featuring **Squish** contains an experiment for readers to complete. With the supervision of science teachers, students could perform the experiments and discuss their results in a report or through a Prezi or PowerPoint presentation.

Ask students to collect samples of water from around the school or from their neighborhoods. Alternately, educators could take students on a field trip to an area pond for the samples. Study these samples under a microscope to see if there is any evidence of single-celled organisms. Students can draw their observations.

**The Flying Beaver Brothers** deals with environmental issues such as clear-cutting and trying to affect climate change. Students could conduct research into these topics and others related to the environment. They could fashion their reports into the graphic novel format and even use **The Flying Beaver Brothers** and their penguin pals as narrators for the reports.

Compare the science underpinning the adventures of **The Flying Beaver Brothers** to that of **Squish**. How do these books blend the facts of the science with the funny of the fictional characters? Students can create displays about fact vs. fictions.

Color is used sparingly in **The Flying Beaver Brothers** books featuring Bub and Ace. *Fishy Business* is done in black and white and green while *The Evil Penguin Plan* features black and white and blue. What is the significance of the colors that were selected for the illustrations? How would a 4 color process change the mood and/or tone of the graphic novel. Direct students to other stories, novels, and graphic novels where color plays an important role such as **Babymouse** and **Lunch Lady**. Sharing some of the poems from *Hailstones* and *Halibut Bones* would also enhance the discussion of color as symbolic.





# Classroom and Library Connections

Ask students to read the first chapter of the novel of *The City of Ember* (alternatively, teachers or librarians could read this chapter aloud). They should write a short summary of that chapter answering questions such as:

- Who are the main characters?
- What seems to be the central problem thus far in the story?
- Where is the story set?

Next ask students to read the first chapter of the graphic novel of **The City of Ember**. Are they able to answer the same set of questions? Is the level of detail similar or different? Why?

The use of colors for the illustrations in **The City of Ember** helps to develop not only the mood and tone, but also deepens an understanding of the setting below ground. Direct readers to make a note of the color scheme or palette and posit inferences about why the illustrator made these choices.

*The City of Ember* was made into a movie. Students might create a chart showing the similarities and differences among the novel, graphic novel, and the movie.

The graphic novel ends with Poppy and Lina and Doon free in the world above Ember. They drop a note into Ember hoping to lead others to the waiting boats and a new life above ground. Ask students to guess who might find the note and how it will be received. What about the mayor and his guards? Students could then create an additional chapter of a graphic novel that continues the story.

There are two other books in the Ember trilogy. Groups of students can work on creating chapters in graphic novel adaptations from these books.

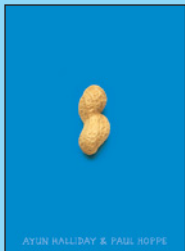
Show students the cover of **Peanut** and ask them what the title of the book is? (It is not on the cover itself.) How do they know the title? Are there other books they can recall similar to this one? (Hint: *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli is similar, for one). Students should talk in groups about what they think the book will be about based on the cover and title only. Then, show readers the back cover and begin a discussion of the use of color. What is the one object that stands out? Why did the illustrator elect to use this red shirt not only on the back cover but also throughout the graphic novel? What could it possibly represent?

Students might be asked to research food allergies among children and teens. What are the signs of allergic reactions? What should they do if they see someone having a bad reaction? What causes allergies anyway?

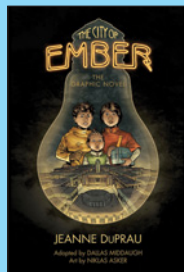
Shakespeare once observed, "O what a tangled web we weave/ when first we practice to deceive." Certainly, Sadie is weaving a very tangled web as her lie becomes more and more widespread. At several places in the story, Sadie has the chance to come clean about faking her allergy to peanuts. Somehow, she manages to let each one of them pass. Ask students to flag those moments in the graphic novel (use Post-it flags or sticky notes). How many times does Sadie let the lie continue? Why? What happens as a result? Students can chart their observations using a web design that shows how the original lie has far-reaching consequences.



# For older Readers



**Peanut**  
Ayun Halliday  
Illustrated by Paul Hoppe  
978-0-375-86590-9  
GLB: 978-0-375-96590-6



**The City of Ember: The Graphic Novel**  
Jeanne DuPrau; Adapted by Dallas Middaugh  
Illustrated by Niklas Asker  
978-0-375-86793-4  
HC: 978-0-375-86821-4  
GLB: 978-0-375-96821-1

## Internet Resources

James Bucky Carter's Blog about Comics and Graphic Novels  
[ensaneworld.blogspot.com](http://ensaneworld.blogspot.com)

Cooperative Children's Books Center on Graphic Novels  
[www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/graphicnovels.asp](http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/graphicnovels.asp)

American Library Association's Wiki Page on Graphic Novels  
[wikis.ala.org/professionaltips/index.php/Graphic\\_novels](http://wikis.ala.org/professionaltips/index.php/Graphic_novels)

No Flying No Tights Website on Graphic Novels  
[noflyingnotights.com](http://noflyingnotights.com)

Matthew Holm's Page on Teaching with Graphic Novels  
[www.matthewholm.net/2010/03/teaching-with-graphic-novels-updated.html](http://www.matthewholm.net/2010/03/teaching-with-graphic-novels-updated.html)

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.  
Random House Children's Books • 1745 Broadway, Mail Drop 9-1 • New York, NY 10019 • BN 1225 • 09/12

# Book List

## BABYMOUSE

Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm



**#1: Queen of the World!**  
978-0-375-83229-1  
GLB: 978-0-375-93229-8



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



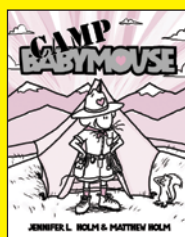
**#3: Beach Babe**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-93798-9



**#6: Camp Babymouse**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-93988-4



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



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



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



**#10: The Musical**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-95712-3



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**#13: Cupcake Tycoon**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-96573-9



**#14: Mad Scientist**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-96574-6



**#15: A Very Babymouse Christmas**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-96779-5



**#16: Babymouse for President**  
978-0-375-86780-4  
GLB: 978-0-375-96780-1



**#17: Extreme Babymouse**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-97096-2



# LUNCH LADY

Jarrett J. Krosoczka



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GLB: 978-0-375-94683-7



**Lunch Lady and the League of Librarians**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-94684-4



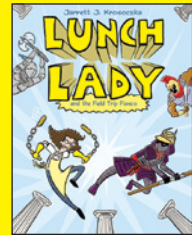
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GLB: 978-0-375-96094-9



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GLB: 978-0-375-96730-6



**Lunch Lady and the Picture Day Peril**  
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**Lunch Lady and the Video Game Villain**  
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GLB: 978-0-307-98080-9



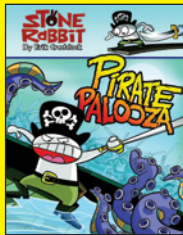
**Lunch Lady and the Mutant Mathletes**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-97028-3

# STONE RABBIT

Erik Craddock



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**#5: Ninja Slice**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-96723-8



**#6: Night of the Living Dust Bunnies**  
978-0-375-86724-8  
GLB: 978-0-375-96724-5

# squish

Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm



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978-0-375-84389-1  
GLB: 978-0-375-93783-5



**#2: Brave New Pond**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-93784-2



**#3: The Power of the Parasite**  
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**#4: Captain Disaster**  
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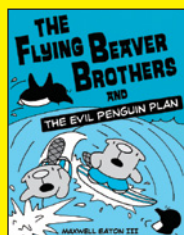
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Maxwell Eaton III



**The Flying Beaver Brothers and the Evil Penguin Plan**  
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GLB: 978-0-375-96447-3



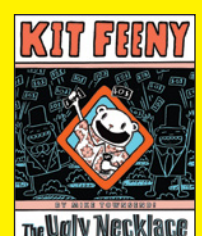
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