

Learning History through Graphic Novels

This booklist provides a small sample of Graphic Novels which deal with historical events.

Ancient History:

DK Graphic Readers: The Price of Victory, The Terror Trail, Instruments of Death and Curse of the Crocodile God. Stewart Ross. New York: DK Pub., 2007. Stewart Ross writes engaging and easy to read historical fiction. Young characters find adventure and danger in the Grecian Olympic Games, the Roman slave trade, the court of China's first emperor and among the pyramids of ancient Egypt.

300. Frank Miller. Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Books, 2006. Although Frank Miller takes several liberties with some of the actual historical facts, this is an engaging account of the Spartan effort to repel the incoming Persian invaders at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C.

Age of Bronze: a Thousand Ships, Sacrifice and Betrayal (three separate volumes). Eric Shanower. Orange, California: Image Comics, 2004. Mature readers will appreciate this series, which provides a richly detailed account of the Trojan War.

19th Century:

The Mystery of Mary Rogers, Lincoln's Assassination, The Saga of the Bloody Benders, The Beast of Chicago, The Borden Tragedy, The Fatal Bullet. Rick Geary. All books from New York: NBM ComicsLit, 1996-2007. Whether he is writing about Presidential assassinations or the first serial killer ever caught, Rick Geary's shows us why these true life events captivated our nation over 100 years ago.

1920s:

The Golem's Mighty Swing. James Sturm. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly Books, 2001. This story of an all-Jewish baseball team gives readers a look into racism in the 1920s. A fast talking promoter convinces the team that it needs a "monster" to win—a Jewish Golem to strike fear into the hearts of the crowd.

J. Edgar Hoover: a graphic biography. Rick Geary. New York: Hill and Wang, 2008. Geary's detailed account of J. Edgar Hoover's rise within the FBI is an informative history of the agency itself. (Note: this work spans from the 20s up through the 1970s.)

Great Depression:

Bluesman: A Twelve Bar Graphic Narrative in the Key of Life and Death. Rob Vollmar and Pablo G. Callejo. New York: NBM ComicsLit, 2006. This three-part fictional series follows Lem Taylor, an African American guitar player, through his travels in the deep South—when just being black in the wrong place could get you arrested or killed.

The Castaways. Rob Vollmar and Pablo G. Callejo. New York: NBM ComicsLit, 2006. After thirteen year old Tucker is kicked out of the house by an aunt who is struggling to feed her sister's children, he jumps a train and tries to live the life of a hobo.

A Life Force. Will Eisner. New York: DC Comics, 1983. Eisner weaves factual newspaper articles into this fictional account of an ethnically diverse Bronx neighborhood during the Great Depression.

World War II:

Yossel: April 19th, 1943: A Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Joe Kubert. New York: Ibooks, distributed by Simon and Schuster, 2003. Told through the pictures of Yossel, a fictional teenager who likes to draw, this book tells the true tale of how Mordecai Annelwicz led a group of young Jewish people to fight back against the Nazis in Warsaw, Poland.

Maus, a Survivor's Tale and Maus, a Survivor's Tale II: And Here My Troubles Began. Art Spiegelman. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986 and 1991. These novels paint a vivid picture of the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, detailing the life of Vladek Spiegelman in the Warsaw ghetto and his subsequent capture, confinement and survival in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Although this is a true story, Spiegelman uses animals for the different characters—the Jewish people are mice and the Germans are cats.

Fallout: J. Robert Oppenheimer, Leo Szilard, and the Political Science of the Atomic Bomb. Jim Ottaviani. Ann Arbor, Michigan: G.T. Labs, 2001. Learn about the Manhattan Project through the eyes of scientists Oppenheimer and Slizard in a way that is understandable—even if you don't know much about science.

Sgt. Rock: Between Hell and a Hard Place. Written by Brian Azzarello and Illustrated by Joe Kubert. New York: DC Comics, 2003. This historical fiction is WWII from a soldier's point of view--the story of Easy Company, fighting the Nazis in Europe.

Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms. Fumiyo Kouno. San Fransisco: Last Gasp, 2007. This fictional Japanese manga follows the lives of three generations of one family after the bombing of Hiroshima.

1960s:

Stuck Rubber Baby. Howard Cruse. New York: Paradox Press, 1995. The fictional character of Toland Polk is an idealistic, white, Southerner who questions his racist upbringing. He finds like-minded friends in college and joins the civil rights movement, facing fire hoses and police dogs while coming to grips with his own homosexuality.

Vietnam Journal. Don Lomax. New York: Ibooks, 2002. Don Lomax based this fictional work on his actual experiences in Vietnam. Told from the point of view of a war correspondent, these stories focus on the men fighting on the front line.

1970s:

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood. Marjane Satrapi. New York: Pantheon, 2003. Persepolis is an autobiographical story that details the conflict between the author's desire to be a normal teenager (wearing hip clothing and listening to pop music) and surviving under the dangerous repression of the Iranian government in the late 1970s.

Recent Events:

Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda. Jean-Philippe Stassen. New York: FirstSecond, 2006. This historical fiction allows readers to learn about the Hutu slaughter of the Tutsi people through the eyes of Deogratias, a Hutu teenager driven crazy from losing his Tutsi girlfriend.

Palestine. Joe Sacco and Edward Said. Seattle, Washington: Fantagraphics Books, 2001. Joe Sacco is an investigative reporter. This true story illustrates how Palestinian refugees live with open sewers that flood into houses when it rains as well as corrupt Palestinian authorities who make peace with Israel more difficult.

Safe Area Gorazde. Joe Sacco. Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2001. First hand interviews of survivors show the brutality and horror of the fighting in a divided Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

9-11 Emergency Relief: A Comic Book to Benefit the American Red Cross. Gainesville, Florida: Alternative Comics, 2002. Some of the country's best graphic artists share their personal stories of the tragedy of 9/11.

To Afghanistan and Back. Ted Rall. New York: Nantier, Beall and Minoustchine, 2002. This book presents Rall's recent experiences as a war reporter covering the fight to oust the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Combat Zone: True Tales of GIs in Iraq. Karl Zinsmeister. New York: Marvel Comics, 2005. Learn about the war in Iraq (Persian Gulf II) from the soldier's point of view. Karl Zinsmeister, an embedded reporter during the first months of fighting in Iraq, includes many technical terms describing modern weaponry.

Compilation Books:

Dignifying Science: Stories About Women Scientists. Jim Ottaviani. Ann Arbor, Michigan: G.T. Labs, 2003. Learn about the lives of Madame Curie, Hedy Lamar and other women who made important contributions to science.

The Big Book of Bad, The Big Book of Weirdos, The Big Book of the Weird Wild West, The Big Book of Thugs, The Big Book of Hoaxes, The Big Book of the 70's. All books from New York: Paradox Press. These books provide a wealth of short articles on unusual characters and historical events. Because they cover very unusual and interesting topics, these books are good to have on hand for students who have completed tests and need something to do until the bell rings.

Recommended Web site:

<http://www.noflyingnotights.com>

This Web site, posted and maintained by Robin Brenner, provides an overview of the Graphic Novel medium and provides reviews of new Graphic Novels. Brenner does a nice job of assessing whether or not a particular work is appropriate for teenagers.