

Historically Themed Graphic Novels

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One subject in which a wealth of graphic novels exists is history. Topics can be as broad as Larry Gonick's *Cartoon History of the Universe (Volumes I-VII)* or as specific as David West's *George Washington: The Life of an American Patriot*.



Given that History is one area of study that some teenagers find especially boring, it can be even harder than in many subjects to find useful ways to encourage students to read. Both non-fiction historical graphic novels and fictional graphic novels that provide an interpretation or viewpoint

of a real historical event can be beneficial for encouraging History students.

Resources span a wide area, including series for Hi-Lo readers and titles that require a more complex level of comprehension. Although graphic novels might not be suitable as the sole source of information for many school history projects, they do provide a means to encourage reluctant readers to give the subject a try and a fun way for students to find topics of interest to them.

Below is a limited list of example titles. Other titles can be easily found through searching the internet or public library catalogues.

Brown, Chester. *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography*.

Gonick, Larry. *Cartoon History of the Universe*.

Rosen Graphic Non-Fiction, Sets 1 & 2, for High Low Readers (titles include biographies of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Elizabeth I, etc.)

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*.

English Literature Graphic Novels

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Graphic novels also provide an excellent medium to help interest reluctant or Hi-Lo readers in the study of English Literature. Fictional graphic novels do not merely encompass a body of original literature; many classic works have also been reinterpreted or recreated in graphic format.

The idea of converting classic literature into graphic format is far from new. In the 1970s, Marvel Comics published a Classics series that included everything from *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to *The Odyssey*. Although these were adaptations which may not have been entirely true to the original versions, Gretchen Schwarz attests to the value of such works for young adult readers when she says, "I remember looking forward to reading the 'real' *Crime & Punishment* by Dostoevsky after I read the Classics Comics version as a child."

Much like historical graphic novels, however, the benefits of adaptations of literature into graphic novel form can also be of huge benefit in helping Hi-Lo readers to understand the texts and in adding a new level of interest in works for reluctant readers. Authors ranging from Proust to Tolkien to Shakespeare can all be found in graphic novel format and can provide a valuable addition to both public and school library collections.

As with historical titles, two of the best ways to find English Literature titles in graphic novel format are to browse the internet or public library catalogues. One excellent series to consider is Graphic Classics, which are recommended for grades nine and up and provide graphic interpretations of the works of many famous authors. The Graphic

