

# Comic Book Club Discussion Guides

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These book club discussion guides were created for our Middle School Comic Book Club.

Please feel free to use and adapt as you see fit!

## ***All-Star Superman, Vol. 1* by Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely**

**Synopsis:** After Lex Luthor tricks him into flying into the Sun to save a sabotaged spaceship, Superman realizes that he is dying. He then receives a strange prophecy from the future which tells him that in his final days, he will perform some of the most amazing feats of his life.

Superman will defend Metropolis until his last breath, but how will he say goodbye to the people he is closest to? Inspired by the off-the-wall, science fiction inflected Superman comics of the sixties, *All-Star Superman* is by turns thought-provoking, funny, exciting, and moving.

**Themes:** What it means to be a hero, self-sacrifice, literary dualities.

**Content Advisory:** Comic book violence, largely of the bloodless variety.



### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Look at the first 3 pages of the story. What do these three pages tell you about Superman?
2. When Superman tries to tell Lois that he is Clark Kent, she doesn't believe him. On pg. 49 she says, "What if there really was some part of him that was bumbling, oafish Clark Kent? I just don't know if I could live with that." Why does Lois have a hard time with Clark being Superman?
3. Why does Lex Luthor hate Superman? Why does he like Clark Kent? How is it different from how Lois Lane feels?
4. Based on the last story in the book, what conclusions can you come to about Superman's humanity? Do either Lois or Lex see the "real" Superman?

## ***American Born Chinese* by Gene Yang**

**Synopsis:** A multifaceted story about the pressures of growing up different, told through three seemingly unrelated stories that come together in a dazzling way by the end. In the first, a young Chinese boy runs into conflict with his best friend when he tries to change himself to become cool. Then, a white high school student faces embarrassment when his grossly stereotypical Chinese cousin Chin-Kee comes to town. And finally, after being embarrassed at a party for the gods, the Monkey King sets out to prove that he is "The Great Sage, Equal to All Heaven" in a story borrowed from Chinese folklore.

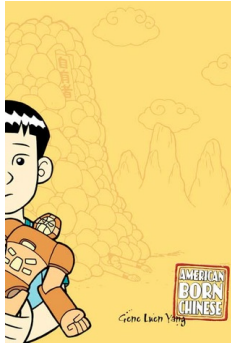
**Themes:** Racial stereotypes, changing oneself to fit in, self-acceptance.

**Content Advisory:** The book confronts some disturbing stereotypes, and talks bluntly about American impressions of Chinese culture. Some jokes about bodily functions.

### **Discussion Questions:**

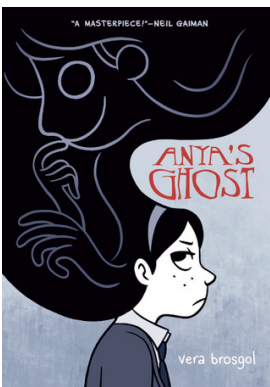
1. What are some of the stereotypes presented in *American Born Chinese*? How are the stereotypes presented? What do you think the author is trying to say about those stereotypes?
2. The character of Chin-Kee is incredibly disturbing as he embodies the worst kind of racial stereotypes. Who is Chin-Kee? What does he represent in the story?
3. How do the three stories relate to each other?
4. In the sections of the story about Danny and his cousin Chin-Kee, the author uses a lot of laughter and applause sound effects that seem to be coming from nowhere. What do these sound effects remind you of? Why would the author use these effects?

- How do the characters overcome their challenges in this book? What conclusions do they come to?
- The Transformer toy in *American Born Chinese* represents the many alterations or transformations the characters go through in order to fit into American society. How do the characters “transform” themselves? How do you transform yourself to fit into the American mainstream?



### ***Anya's Ghost* by Vera Brosgol**

**Synopsis:** At first, Anya's problems are fairly straightforward. She is having some problems fitting in at her new high school, is embarrassed by her Russian immigrant mother's traditional ways, struggles to get the attention of the boy she likes, and her friendship with Siobahn is flecked with jealousy and anger. Then one day while sulkily walking home, Anya falls down a well and meets Emily, the ghost of a young girl killed 90 years before. With a new, invisible friend, Anya's life is sure to improve. Except that Anya is still Anya, and the motives of a ghost may not be as transparent as her body is.



**Themes:** Fitting in in a new culture, frenemies, peer relations, bad influences, body image issues.

**Content Advisory:** Anya smokes cigarettes! Language, habitual truancy, teen party with implied drinking and sex.

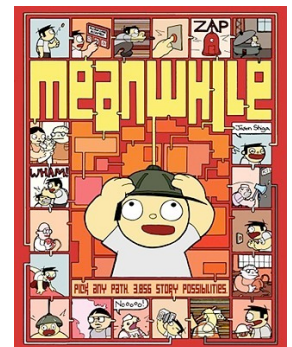
### **Discussion Questions:**

- How does Anya feel about herself? Do you think her self-criticism is normal?
- Why is Anya drawn in by Emily so quickly? Did you think Emily was as innocent as she first seemed? Why or why not?
- Do you know anyone like Elizabeth who seems to have it all? As Anya says, “Everyone else's life seems so much easier.” Do you agree with Anya?
- Do you see any similarities between Anya's relationship with Siobahn and her relationship with Emily?
- In their final confrontation (pages 196 - 199) Emily says some pretty mean things. Are any of them true? Is Emily right about Anya?

### ***Meanwhile* by Jason Shiga**

**Synopsis:** A mad-cap “choose-your-own-adventure” style story in which the decision of what flavor of ice cream to get leads to a mad scientist's laboratory, inviting time travel, alternate dimensions and, maybe, the destruction of all human life! *Meanwhile* is brilliantly designed, allowing readers to follow branching, multi-colored tubes to navigate thousands of different story possibilities. Packed with puzzles and secret paths, this one begs to be re-read again and again.

**Themes:** Problem-solving, quantum physics, learning about responsibility in a mad scientist's lab.



**Content Advisory:** Some potty humor and bloodless mayhem/violence. Also the end of all life on the planet.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What was your favorite path through the book? How would you represent or map that path?

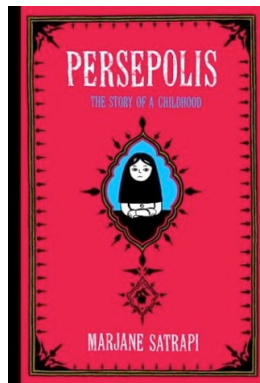
2. At some point during your trip through the book, you probably found the inventor describing “the Multiple Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics.” Do you think that multiple worlds could possibly exist simultaneously? How does the design of this book relate to that idea?
3. Some people really don’t like this book. What is it about this book that may turn people off? How did you feel about the book?
4. Chocolate or vanilla?

## ***Persepolis, vol 1: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi**

**Synopsis:** Author Marjane Satrapi tells of her experience growing up during the Iranian Revolution, the subsequent war between Iran and Iraq, and the rise of the Islamic Republic. Against these tumultuous events, readers get a glimpse of Satrapi’s teenage angst and her struggles to express herself under the burgeoning social repression of the new regime.

**Themes:** Coming-of-age, becoming self-aware in times of social upheaval, other cultures, freedom and repression.

**Content Advisory:** The book contains several scenes of rioting in the streets, warfare, and torture. Satrapi’s art style throughout is cartoony and understated, so the violence isn’t terribly graphic, but it does pack an emotional punch.



### **Discussion Questions:**

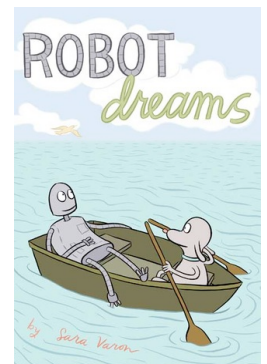
1. Satrapi says, “Every situation has an opportunity for laughs” (p. 97). What parts of the book made you laugh?
2. At the core of the book is Marji’s family. What is this family like? What is important to Marji’s parents? What kind of an environment do they create for their daughter, despite living under

an oppressive regime and through a brutal, prolonged war?

3. What role do women play in the story? How are the roles of the women different from the roles of the men?
4. “In spite of everything, kids were trying to look hip, even under risk of arrest” (p. 112). What acts of rebellion have you done as a teen? In what ways is Satrapi—who grew up during the ’80s in Iran—similar to a normal kid in 21st-century America?

## ***Robot Dreams* by Sara Varon**

**Synopsis:** This mostly wordless comic tells the story of a robot and a dog. Their new and blossoming friendship hits a rough patch when a trip to the beach leaves Robot rusted and immobile. Dog leaves him on the sand only to return the next day to find the beach closed and fenced off for the season. In alternating chapters we follow Dog’s attempts to replace Robot and find friendship again. Robot dreams as he lies on the beach. Every reader will be able to relate to this simple tale of a friendship that has ended and both characters’ attempts to move on.



**Themes:** Friendship, relationships, loss.

**Content Advisory:** None. Great for all ages.

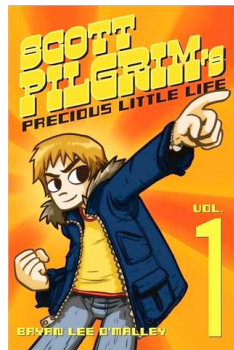
### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Who do you think had a better winter? Dog or Robot? Why?
2. Pick a page and add the dialogue. What do you think the characters are saying?
3. In December, when Dog meets the Anteaters, he feels pressured to do things they are doing. While most of us have never eaten ants in an attempt to fit in, what kinds of things do teenagers do because of peer pressure?

4. What part of this book could you most relate to?
5. Did you like the ending? Is there a different ending you would have preferred? Why do you think the author chose to end the story this way?

## ***Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life* by Brian Lee O'Malley**

**Synopsis:** Gleefully oblivious 22 year-old slacker Scott Pilgrim is living the easy life: unemployed, playing with his punk rock band, and dating a high schooler. When the mysterious Ramona arrives in town (rollerblading through his subconscious, no less) Scott is smitten. But his precious little life is thrown into turmoil when he discovers that, if he wants to be Ramona's boyfriend, he will have to defeat her Seven Evil Exes! Melodramatic, over-the-top action ensues.



**Themes:** Dealing with the past in a new relationship, honesty, post-modernism

**Content Advisory:** Some mild swearing, cartoony violence, alcohol use, and one scene of making-out that 12 year-olds *love* to giggle at.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. If you were Scott's friend, what advice would you give him? Do you think Scott is doing the right things in the book?
2. How does Knives change over the course of the book? What is different about her at the end?
3. What role does music play in the world of Scott Pilgrim? What does the author do to make you experience the music as a reader?
4. How do the over-the-top fight scenes dramatize the conflict that is going on between the characters? Do you think this is an effective way to tell the story?

## ***Smile* by Raina Telgemeier**

**Synopsis:** Twelve-year-old Raina trips and smashes her face into the pavement, knocking out her front teeth, adding painful dental surgery and orthodontia to the already daunting list of things she has to contend with during her awkward early teenage years.

**Themes:** Fitting in, overcoming physical ailments.

**Content Advisory:** The scene where Telgemeier loses her teeth could skeeve out the squeamish (like Jack), but other than that, this is a lighthearted book suitable for all ages.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How would the story of *Smile* work differently in a regular prose novel than it does in graphic novel form?
2. While you may not have had your two front teeth knocked out in an accident, there are probably parts of Raina's story that relate to your own life. What part seemed the most like your own experiences?
3. How does Raina's injury aggravate her feelings about other aspects of her life?
4. How would you characterize Raina's friends from middle school? How are her high school friends different? What do you think changed?
5. How are your friendships similar to or different from Raina's?
6. What is your most horrible injury?
7. The book is set in the Bay Area. What specific places did you recognize in the pictures?

