

**Recommended Reading for Comics, Graphic Novels and Instructional Books
(In No Particular Order)**

Greg Loumeau, Dreamco.com



Watchmen, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons

The story concerns a group called the Crimebusters and a plot to kill and discredit them. Moore's characterization is as sophisticated as any novel's. Importantly the costumes do not get in the way of the storytelling; rather they allow Moore to investigate issues of power and control--indeed it was *Watchmen*, and to a lesser extent *Dark Knight*, that propelled the comic genre forward, making "adult" comics a reality. The artwork of Gibbons (best known for 2000AD's *Rogue Trooper* and DC's Green Lantern) is very fine too, echoing Moore's paranoid mood perfectly throughout. Packed with symbolism, some of the overlying themes (arms control, nuclear threat, vigilantes) have dated but the intelligent social and political commentary, the structure of the story itself, its intertextuality (chapters appended with excerpts from other "works" and "studies" on Moore's characters, or with excerpts from another comic book being read by a child within the story), the finepace of the writing and its humanity mean that *Watchmen* more than stands up--it keeps its crown as the best the genre has yet produced.



Sin City, Frank Miller

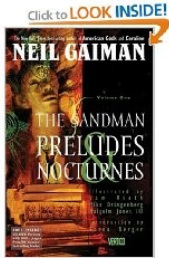
This bundle contains all seven volumes of Frank Miller's landmark Sin City, the hard-boiled stories that started it all! The books that inspired the critically-acclaimed film, the now-infamous Marv, Dwight, Gail, Miho, Hartigan, Nancy, and the Yellow Bastard will transport you to Sin City and show you the bloody lives they lead ... bloody by choice or by circumstance. Frank Miller's Sin City is a triumph for its fiercely independent creator, and has been honored with Eisner awards, Harvey awards, and the prestigious National Cartoonists' Award.



Batman: The Dark Knight Returns, Frank Miller

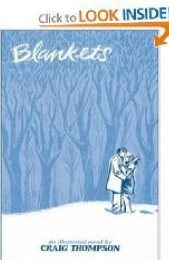
If any comic has a claim to have truly reinvigorated the genre, then The Dark Knight Returns by Frank Miller--known also for his excellent Sin City series and his superb rendering of the blind superhero Daredevil--is probably the top contender. Batman represented all that was wrong in comics and Miller set himself a tough task taking on the camp crusader and turning this laughable, innocuous children's cartoon character into a hero for our times. The great Alan Moore (V for Vendetta, Swamp Thing, the arguably peerless Watchmen) argued that only someone of Miller's stature could have done this. Batman is a character known well beyond the confines of the comic world (as are his retinue) and so reinventing him, while keeping his limiting core essentials intact, was a huge task. Miller went far beyond the call of duty. The Dark Knight is a success on every level. Firstly it does keep the core elements of the Batman myth intact, with Robin, Alfred the butler, Commissioner Gordon, and the old roster of villains, present yet brilliantly subverted. Secondly the artwork is fantastic--detailed, sometimes claustrophobic, psychotic. Lastly it's a great story: Gotham City is a hell on earth, street gangs roam but there are no heroes. Decay is

ubiquitous. Where is a hero to save Gotham? It is 10 years since the last recorded sighting of the Batman. And things have got worse than ever. Bruce Wayne is close to being a broken man but something is keeping him sane: the need to see change and the belief that he can orchestrate some of that change. Batman is back. The Dark Knight has returned. Awesome.



Sandman, Neil Gaiman, Dave McKean and others

"Wake up, sir. We're here." It's a simple enough opening line--although not many would have guessed back in 1991 that this would lead to one of the most popular and critically acclaimed comics of the second half of the century. In *Preludes and Nocturnes*, Neil Gaiman weaves the story of a man interested in capturing the physical manifestation of Death but who instead captures the King of Dreams. By Gaiman's own admission there's a lot in this first collection that is awkward and ungainly--which is not to say there are not frequent moments of greatness here. The chapter "24 Hours" is worth the price of the book alone; it stands as one of the most chilling examples of horror in comics. And let's not underestimate Gaiman's achievement of personifying Death as a perky, overly cheery, cute goth girl! All in all, I greatly prefer the roguish breaking of new ground in this book to the often dull precision of the concluding volumes of the Sandman series.



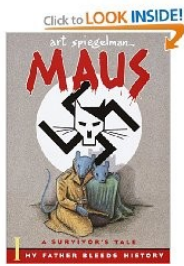
Blankets, Craig Thompson

Adult/High School-Thompson's *Good-bye, Chunkie Rice* (Top Shelf, 1999) offered readers well-realized but fantastic characters in a tale that nicely combined sentiment with adventure. This second, much longer work shares the acuity for character development and dynamic sensitivity that makes the author so compulsively readable. In *Blankets*, however, realism reigns supreme in both the story arc and in the humanity of its characters. Thompson himself is the protagonist, and this is his tale of growing up, falling in love (and realizing the physical and moral complications that can imply), discovering the texture and limits of his faith, and arriving at a point from which he can look back at those experiences. The snowy Midwest, peopled by overweight parents, hairy youths, and lovingly depicted younger siblings--including a respectfully and realistically treated minor character with Down syndrome--is energetically realized in Thompson's expressive lines and inking. Much of the story occurs when Craig and his brother Phil are young boys and includes images of such boyish pranks as peeing on one another. Older high school students who have reached an age when nostalgia is possible will warm to Thompson's own wistfulness. This is a big graphic novel, in concept and successful execution.



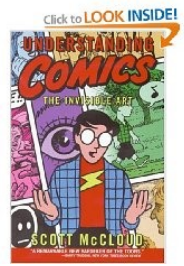
Persepolis, Marjane Satrapi

A memoir of growing up as a girl in revolutionary Iran, *Persepolis* provides a unique glimpse into a nearly unknown and unreachable way of life... That Satrapi chose to tell her remarkable story as a gorgeous comic book makes it totally unique and indispensable.



Maus, Art Spiegelman

A son struggles to come to terms with the horrific story of his parents and their experiences during the Holocaust and in postwar America, in an omnibus edition of Spiegelman's two-part, Pulitzer Prize-winning best-seller. 25,000 first printing.



Understanding Comics, Reinventing Comics and Making Comics; Scott McCloud

A comic book about comic books. McCloud, in an incredibly accessible style, explains the details of how comics work: how they're composed, read and understood. More than just a book about comics, this gets to the heart of how we deal with visual languages in general. "The potential of comics is limitless and exciting!" writes McCloud. This should be required reading for every school teacher. Pulitzer Prize-winner [Art Spiegelman](#) says, "The most intelligent comics I've seen in a long time."



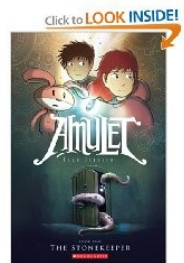
Flight, Kazu Kibushi

Originally published by Image Comics in 2004, *Flight, Volume One* launched this graphic novel series with a resounding bang. Since then the *Flight* series has steadily increased in popularity—and now all of the *Flight* backlist will be coming to Villard!

Flight, Volume One received a great boost when graphic novel hero Scott McCloud praised the quality and artistry of the book in an afterward entitled THE YEAR COMICS TOOK FLIGHT. Little could readers know at the time how prosaic McCloud's words would prove to be.

“Regardless of where it’s shelved, this book belongs in every library.” —
Library Journal on *Flight, Volume One*

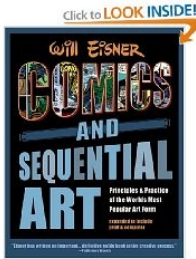
Authors included in *Flight, Volume One* are: Bengal, Bill Mudron, Catia Chen, Chris Appelhans, Clio Chang, Derek Kirk Kim, Dylan Meconis, Enrico Casarosa, Erika Moen, Hope Larson, Jacob Megraw-Mickelson, Jake Parker, Jen Wang, Joel Carroll, Kazu Kibuishi, Khang Lee, Neil Babra, Philip Craven, Rad Sechrist, and Vera Brosgol.



Amulet, Kazu Kibushi

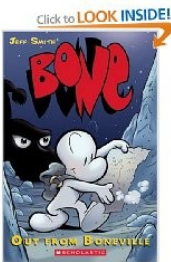
Almost too clever and poignant, *Amulet* is, on the surface, about navigating the murky waters of adolescence and, beneath that, an exploration of abandonment and survival. Emily and Navin are lost children, literally lost in a dark, new world and struggling to save their mother, who has been kidnapped by a drooling, tentacled beast. With stellar artwork, imaginative character design, moody color and consistent pacing, this first volume's weakness lies in its largely disjointed storytelling. There is the strong, young, heroine; cute, furry, sidekicks; scary monsters—all extraordinary components, but pieced together in a patchwork manner. There is little hope in his dark world as Kibuishi removes

Emily and Navin's frame of safety. Their hopes rest in a magic amulet that seems to be working in the interest of the children—until it suddenly isn't. The most frightening element of *Amulet* is the sense of insecurity we feel for Emily, fighting her way through uncharted terrain with no guide and no support system. This first volume of *Amulet* isn't a disappointment, but it does feel like a warmup to the main event. If anything, it's a clear indication that Kibuishi has just begun skimming the surface of his own talent.



Comics and Sequential Art, Will Eisner

Legendary comics creator Will Eisner turns a fine eye toward the principles of graphic storytelling in this extraordinary work, based on his popular Sequential Art course at New York's School of Visual Art. Readers will learn the basic anatomy of sequential art, the fundamentals of crafting stories, and how the medium works as a means of expression--a literary form that uses the arrangement of images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea. Eisner has created the most insightful and dynamic examination of the comic art form to date. It's perfect for use by the serious student, practicing professional and curious comic fan. The accumulation of ideas, theories and advice culled from his more than sixty years of experience is stunning to behold. "Eisner has written an important, possibly definitive guide book to the creative process." --Publishers Weekly



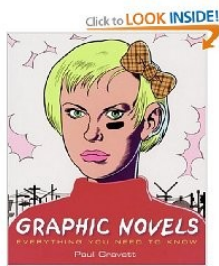
Bone, Jeff Smith

The nine-volume *Bone* graphic novel series was the toast of the comics world when it was published by Smith's own Cartoon Books beginning in the early 1990s; in this first volume of Scholastic's new edition, the original b&w art has been beautifully converted into color. Smith's epic concerns three blobby creatures who have stumbled into a valley full of monsters, magic, farmers, an exiled princess and a huge, cynical dragon. The story is something like a Chuck Jones version of *The Lord of the Rings*: hilarious and action-packed, but rarely losing track of its darker subtext about power and evil. This volume is the most lighthearted of the bunch, though, featuring some of the wittiest writing of any children's literature in recent memory--a few of Smith's gags are so delicious that he repeated them for the rest of the series. It also introduces the *Bone* cast's unforgettable supporting characters: the leathery, tough-as-nails, racing-cow-breeding Gran'ma Ben; the carnivorous but quiche-loving "rat creatures"; a spunky trio of baby opossums; and Ted the Bug, whose minimalist appearance (a tiny semicircle) exemplifies Smith's gift for less-is-more cartooning. The way his clear-lined, exaggerated characters contrast with their subtle, detailed backgrounds is a product of his background in animation, and so is his mastery of camera angles and choreography. This is first-class kid lit: exciting, funny, scary and resonant enough that it will stick with readers for a long time.



Kingdom Come, Alex Ross and Mark Waid

Writer Mark Waid, coming from his popular work on Flash and Impulse, and artist Alex Ross, who broke new ground with the beautifully painted Marvels, join together for this explosive book that takes place in a dark alternate future of the DC Superhero Universe. Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, and almost every other character from DC Comics must choose sides in what could be the final battle of them all.



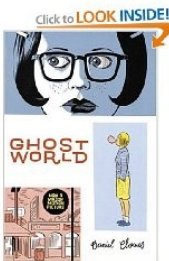
Graphic Novels: Everything You Need to Know, Paul Gravett

Anyone who wants a handle on that suddenly hot new format, the graphic novel, should seize upon this useful, incisive, intelligently arranged guide. Gravett analyzes 30 key graphic novels ("stories to change your life") in generic or topical chapters that bring together, say, alternative comics products such as *Maus* and *Jimmy Corrigan*, or superhero standouts such as *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*. For readers inspired to investigate further, he follows each discussion of a particular book with selections from four similar graphic novels. Entire pages from the work under discussion appear, indicating its quality far better than a panel or two would. Gravett's analyses are concise and perceptive, and his introductory remarks in each chapter are knowledgeable. He has long been associated with the British alt-comics movement, which allows him to recommend a number of notable British and European graphic novels that likely would have been overlooked by a more American-centered book. Even the most well-versed comics fan will discover new treasures here, and newbies to the field may consider it indispensable.



Jimmy Corrigan, Chris Ware

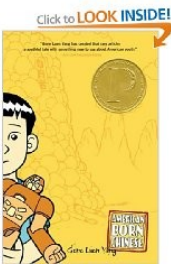
Ware's hero is a doughy, middle-aged loser who retreats into fantasies that he is "The Smartest Kid on Earth." The minimal plot involves Jimmy's tragicomic reunion with the father who abandoned him in childhood. In abruptly juxtaposed flashbacks, Ware depicts previous generations of Corrigan males, revealing how their similar histories of rejection and abandonment culminated in Jimmy's hapless state. What makes the slight story remarkable is Ware's command of the comics medium. His crisp, painstaking draftsmanship, which sets cartoonish figures in meticulously detailed architectural settings, is matched by his formal brilliance. Ware effectively uses tiny, repetitive panels to convey Jimmy's limited existence, then suddenly bursts a page open with expansive, breathtaking vistas. His complex, postmodern approach incorporates such antiquated influences as Windsor McCay's pioneering *Little Nemo* strips and turn-of-the-century advertising, transforming them into something new, evocative, and affecting. His daunting skill transforms a simple tale into a pocket epic and makes Jimmy's melancholy story the stuff of cartoon tragedy.



Ghost World, Daniel Clowes

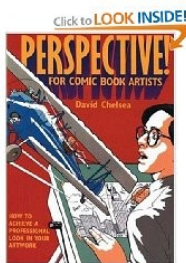
Dan Clowes described the story in *Ghost World* as the examination of "the lives of two recent high school graduates from the advantaged perch of a constant and (mostly) undetectable eavesdropper, with the shaky detachment of a scientist who has grown fond of the prize microbes in his petri dish." From this perch comes a revelation about adolescence that is both subtle and coolly beautiful. Critics have pointed out Clowes's cynicism and vicious social commentary, but

if you concentrate on those aspects, you'll miss the exquisite whole that Clowes has captured. Each chapter ends with melancholia that builds towards the amazing, detached, ghostlike ending.



American Born Chinese, Derek Kirk Kim

As alienated kids go, Jin Wang is fairly run-of-the-mill: he eats lunch by himself in a corner of the schoolyard, gets picked on by bullies and jocks and develops a sweat-inducing crush on a pretty classmate. And, oh, yes, his parents are from Taiwan. This much-anticipated, affecting story about growing up different is more than just the story of a Chinese-American childhood; it's a fable for every kid born into a body and a life they wished they could escape. The fable is filtered through some very specific cultural icons: the much-beloved Monkey King, a figure familiar to Chinese kids the world over, and a buck-toothed amalgamation of racist stereotypes named Chin-Kee. Jin's hopes and humiliations might be mirrored in Chin-Kee's destructive glee or the Monkey King's struggle to come to terms with himself, but each character's expressions and actions are always perfectly familiar. True to its origin as a Web comic, this story's clear, concise lines and expert coloring are deceptively simple yet expressive. Even when Yang slips in an occasional Chinese ideogram or myth, the sentiments he's depicting need no translation. Yang accomplishes the remarkable feat of practicing what he preaches with this book: accept who you are and you'll already have reached out to others.



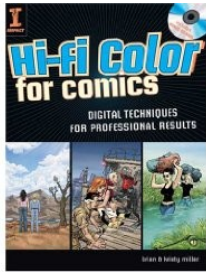
Perspective for Comic Book Artists, David Chelsea

This clever book teaches artists the unique skill of drawing perspective for spectacular landscapes, fantastic interiors, and other wildly animated backgrounds to fit comic-strip panels.



Y, The Last Man, Pia Guerra and Brian K. Vaughan

A mysterious plague has killed every man on earth except Yorick Brown, who was somehow spared. That is the provocative premise of the comics series whose first five issues make up this book. The sole Y-chromosomed survivor is an amiable, headstrong young man, the son of a U.S. congresswoman and, as it happens, an amateur escape artist. He spends most of the story on the run from a tribe of self-styled Amazons bent on eliminating the last vestige of patriarchy. He is also trying, with a bioengineer who may be responsible for the worldwide "gencide," to figure out why he survived; hoping to reach his girlfriend in Australia; and, of course, contemplating the repopulation of the planet. Rather pedestrian artwork doesn't do much to liven the story, though its straightforwardness imparts deadpan believability to such ramifications as the female secretary of agriculture ascending to the presidency. Fast-paced anyway, the yarn introduces a large number of intriguing characters and plotlines as it lays the groundwork for what promises to be a compelling series.



Hi-Fi Color for Comics, Brian and Kristy Miller

This exciting and complete instructional package starts with the basics and progresses through step-by-step demos that take readers from line art to full, awe-inspiring color. Readers will get instruction on equipment, scanning, setting up pages, color theory, flattening, rendering, special effects, color holds, color separations, and even details on the business of becoming a professional colorist. The CD-ROM includes Photoshop tools and actions that artists can use to streamline their coloring work, plus sample Photoshop files so that readers can work along with the demonstrations.