



Illustrations by Marjane Satrapi

A Reading Group Toolbox
for the Works of Marjane Satrapi

Presented by the Washington Center for the Book
at The Seattle Public Library





About Graphic Novels

“Serious” comics – how long has this been going on?

For much of their history (about a century now), comics consisted of either comedy or pulp fiction, most often intended for children. Their traditional forms were super-hero comic books or gag strips in daily newspapers.

But starting in the 1960s and 1970s, new generations of “cartoonists” (what we call people who write and draw comics) decided that the comics form was just as good as prose or film and could tell any kind of story, and they set out to prove this.

Among the pioneers were “underground” cartoonists such as Robert Crumb; Will Eisner, who popularized the term “graphic novel” with his groundbreaking book *A Contract With God*; and Art Spiegelman, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning Holocaust memoir *Maus* was the first graphic novel best-seller.

Since the appearance of *Maus* almost 15 years ago, the “graphic novel” movement has exploded exponentially, with dozens of major new works being released every year, and serious review attention from every major magazine and newspaper lavished on them.

How do I read a graphic novel?

Even though the array of words and text may seem a little daunting at first, the skill of a good cartoonist (such as Marjane Satrapi) makes it a quick learning experience. If you can read a *Calvin and Hobbes* or *Fox Trot* comic strip, you can read a graphic novel.

Just start slow: Look at the first “panel” (what single illustrations in comic books are called), then read the word balloons and captions (left to right, top to bottom), take another look at the panel, and then move on to the next one. Within a few pages, you’ll be doing it automatically, and you’ll pick up elements of comics “language” as you go (such as “bubbly” word balloons that mean the character is thinking, for instance).

In fact, if *Persepolis* is your first graphic novel, you might want to read the first 25 or 30 pages and then start over: you’ll almost certainly find that you’ve absorbed the basic rules and can now read comics fluently.

How does Seattle fit into the world of comics?

One of the top graphic novel publishers, Fantagraphics Books, has been located in Seattle since 1989. Additionally, the city boasts a number of major cartoonists, including Peter Bagge, Jim Woodring, Roberta Gregory, Jason Lutes, and many others. You are living in one of the comics capitals of the world and didn’t know it.



Say I like this book, where do I go next?

Here's a baker's dozen you can't go wrong with:

B., David. *Epileptic* (2005)

From the same publisher as *Persepolis*, the author's memoir of his brother's disease is interwoven with stories of his family history.

Clowes, Dan. *Ghost World* (1998)

Two adolescent girls on the cusp of adulthood. (This was made into an Oscar-nominated movie in 2001, co-written by the cartoonist.)

Eisner, Will. *A Contract With God and Other Tenement Stories* (1985)

Four short stories by a master of the form. Arguably the first genuine graphic novel.

Gloeckner, Phoebe. *A Child's Life and Other Stories* (2000)

Unflinching look at child abuse, richly drawn.

Hernandez, Gilbert. *Palomar: The Heartbreak Soup Stories* (2003)

A sweeping, magic-realist epic of a small Central American town that invites comparisons to Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993)

A comic book about comic books. McCloud explains how comics work.

Pekar, Harvey, and Joyce Brabner. *Our Cancer Year* (1994)

From comics' pre-eminent autobiographer (immortalized on screen in the 2004 movie "American Splendor"), a story of his battle against cancer.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus* (1986)

The author tries to connect with his Holocaust survivor father by asking him to tell his story; the simple drawings (which portray Jews as mice and Nazis as cats) belie a sophisticated, complex novel.

Sacco, Joe. *Palestine* (1993)

The epitome of "comics journalism," a first-person narrative of the author's early '90s journey to the troubled Mideast.

Thompson, Craig. *Blankets: An Illustrated Novel* (2003)

A young Christian boy's romance, exquisitely drawn, by a young cartooning talent.



Tyler, Carol. *Late Bloomer* (2005)

Vignettes and reminiscences, mostly about raising a family, told with wit and sensitivity.

Ware, Chris. *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth I* (2000)

A young man is confronted with his long-lost father. Dream sequences and flashbacks to the father's childhood make this a challenging but engrossing work. Ware (whose work is serialized in the *Sunday New York Times Magazine*) is a master of design and exploration of the mundane.

Woodring, Jim. *The Frank Book* (2003)

Wordless stories set in a rich fantasy universe. A book that is delightful for children and infinitely entrancing for adults.





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