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We have already explored the incredible book and film resources that promote a growth mindset in tweens and teens. But have you discovered the power of graphic novels for inspiring learning and curiosity? The graphic novels on our list explore perseverance, learning from mistakes, and overcoming challenges. And they have major literacy benefits too! Studies show visual narratives can improve your adolescent's reading fluency, comprehension and even memory recall. Check out our list of 15 engaging (and beautifully illustrated) graphic novels to help your tween or teen harness the power of a growth mindset — long after the final page is turned. *Disclaimer: Parents, caregivers, and teachers are advised to read about the novels to ensure they are appropriate for their children. Nimona by Noelle Stevenson (ages 13-17 years) A National Book Award Finalist, this irreverent gem follows young shapeshifter Nimona on her mission as sidekick to the villainous Lord Ballister Blackheart. Together, they hope to expose the truth about their kingdom's hero, Sir Goldenloin. Nimona reveals how confidence and humor can get us through life's most epic battles. The Stonekeeper (Amulet 1) by Kazu Kibuishi (ages 7-12 years) After the sudden death of her father, Emily moves to a strange and enchanted home with her mother and brother Navin. When her mother disappears as well, Emily and Navin must navigate a magical and dangerous underground world to find her. Emily discovers having the courage to face her fears is the real magic. The Nameless City by Faith Erin Hicks (ages 9+ years) Kaidu and Rat both inhabit the City — but they live in very different worlds. Kaidu is a son of the Daos, the latest group of invaders. Rat is a native of the Nameless City, and understandably detests its conquerors. Their budding friendship teaches Kaidu what it's like to be part of an oppressed group, and Rat how to trust in something new. Tomboy by Liz Prince (ages 13-18 years) Equal parts humorous and heartbreaking, Liz Prince's graphic memoir explores her childhood years as a "tomboy." Rejecting all things girly, Prince is subjected to bullying from elementary school onwards. Tomboy is a powerful exploration of identity, and what it means to be comfortable in our own skin. Sheets by Brenna Thummler (ages 9-12 years) Marjorie is a grief-stricken teen in charge of her family's laundry shop. Wendell is a lonely ghost who finds comfortable in our own skin. there. Their unlikely friendship gives them the strength to confront the evil Mr. Saubertuck, who threatens to take the shop, as well as their own significant losses. Cucumber Quest Series by Gigi D.G. (ages 8-12 years) This delightful series is proof dangerous quests can still be light-hearted and fun. Far from your typical hero, Cucumber is a bookish bunny who'd much rather be at school. But when the evil Queen Cordelia threatens his kingdom, it's Cucumber and his brave sister Almond to the rescue! Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages 10+ years) This coming-of-age tale follows twins Stig and Tilde: Vanisher's Island by Max de Radigues (ages twins set sail for Tilsa Island to spend a month without adult supervision. But when a sudden storm puts them off course and on the wrong island, can they rise to the challenge and make their way home? Anya's Ghost by Vera Brosgol (ages 9+ years) Anya's big emotions will be all-too-familiar to tweens and teens. A misfit at school, embarrassed by her family, and frustrated with her looks, Anya runs away from the bus stop only to fall down an abandoned well. There she meets the ghost of Emily, who helps her escape and begins changing her life for the better. Or so it seems. Displacement by Kiku Hughes (ages 12+ years) On vacation in San Francisco, Kiku is suddenly transported to the 1940's Japanese-American internment camp where her grandmother is incarcerated. Kiku is displaced in time, a firsthand witness to the trauma her grandmother experiences. This historical graphic novel is a story of resilience and connectedness across generations. This One Summer by Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki (ages 12+ years) This Caldecott Medal winner follows Rose as she returns to her small and idyllic summer beach town. Simultaneously longing for a simpler time and wanting to leave childhood behind, Rose struggles to find her place. The mounting tension between Rose's parents and her crush on an older boy underscore the many ups and downs of adolescence. When Stars Are Scattered by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed (ages 9+ years) A National Book Award Finalist, this beautifully illustrated memoir exposes life inside a Kenyaan refugee camp. Omar's problems are significant — food scarcity, lack of water and poor health care. He instead focuses on what he can control: "I didn't choose to be a refugee, but I'm choosing to believe in a future for my family." New Kid by Jerry Craft (ages 9-12 years) Starting at a new school is tough. Especially when you're the one of the few children of color. As 12-year-old Jordan navigates life at a prestigious private (and mostly white) middle school, his art provides the creative outlet he needs to cope. What We Don't Talk About by Charlot Kristensen (ages 13-17 years) This colorful debut novel depicts the interracial relationship of Farai and Adam. After two years of dating, Farai is optimistic about finally meeting Adam's parents. But when Adam downplays how horribly the visit goes (and his parents' racist comments), Farai must choose how to move forward together or alone. This Was Our Pact by Ryan Andrews (ages 10+ years) A dreamy novel about staying curious and following one's dreams. Every year on the Autumn Equinox, Ben's town floats paper lanterns down the river. But do the lanterns really turn into stars? Ben and his classmates make a pact to find out, leading them on a journey filled with magic and the unlikeliest of friendships. Almost American Girl by Robin Ha (ages 13-17 years) A memoir about coping with dramatic change, Robin Ha traces her jarring relocation from Seoul, Korea to Huntsville, Alabama. There, she is faced with her mother's sudden marriage, a stepfamily she doesn't relate to, and a school where she can't understand the language. It's not until her mother enrolls her in a comic drawing class that Robin begins to find her way. Graphic novels can improve fluency and understanding in even the most reluctant of readers. With so many incredible options available, focus on those that instill a growth mindset too. The books on our list show tweens and teens how to persevere through even their greatest obstacles and gain skills they need for everyday life. Just like every pre-teen and teen. And they will also employ a growth mindset, do hard things to overcome their fears, and face the world with courage and confidence. Welcome to our list of recommended comics for older kids, teens, and young adults! All of the books below have young protagonists we think would be especially engaging to older kids and young adults. But actually, the grownups in this house bought almost all of these for ourselves. There are plenty of books we recommend for younger kids (Comics for Young Children, Comics for Kids) that will also work great for older kids, young adults, and even grownups. The books in this post, though, have more serious vibes or topics and possibly more realistic or scary violence and/or dating content. Some of might be fine for even middle school or upper elementary, but some probably are not. Please do your own evaluation. Not all comics are for five year olds.:) Good Superheroes for Kids and Teens is where all the supes live, organized by age level. Before we jump in: All comics here can be bought as graphic novels/collections, not only as single issues. Your library may own many of these! Amazon links are affiliate links. Any questions, corrections, recommendations? Let me know via my contact form. American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang. Three interconnected stories about being who you are, and how painfully hard that can be - especially when stereotypes chase you everywhere you go. This is the comic to read if you don't believe comics can be serious literature, because that's only one of the many stereotypes it blows away. Amazing book. It's such a classic that I almost don't think I need to tell people about it, because surely everyone knows it by now! But just in case. :) Americus by MK Reed, with art by Jonathan Hill. Neal Barton has it tough. First, he's a fantasy-loving smart kid trapped in a scary little conservative town. Second, he has a pretty negative take on life. While the attitude may well be an effect of the town, he'll need to find some positive thinking if he's going to get through what's coming. His favorite series, The Adventures of Apathea Ravenchilde, is about to come under fire by conservative Christian town citizens trying to save children from the evils of witchcraft. I love so many of the characters here, especially the town's youth librarian who is SUCH a fangirl it's not even funny. In this book, young people aren't viewed as second class citizens by the good adults, and that's refreshing. Bonus: a fairly happy gay teen character who may not have the parents he'd choose, but who seems to be getting along fine anyway. The Amulet series by Kazu Kibuishi. Amulet has some of the most gorgeous art I've seen in comics. It's an eight book and counting saga about Emily, a young girl who inherits her great-grandfather's legacy of fighting a possibly losing battle against evil, in an alternate magical world. Her mother and younger brother are pulled into this world with her. Truly amazing fantasy world, it absolutely sweeps me away. Amulet is possibly too dark for some younger kids. While it's a book about coming together and fighting for a good cause, the setting and tone vary from mildly alarming to bleak and hopeless. There are evil characters so twisted and cruel that they scare me. Good characters also die in very sad ways. If you think your younger child would be fine with it, I wouldn't disagree; we read it with our kiddo starting when he was maybe five and he really liked it. He doesn't scare easily, though, never has. With younger readers you may want to skip the intense prologue in book one. It isn't strictly necessary for the story and is more harrowing than the rest of the series. Another Castle: Grimoire by Andrew Wheeler, illustrated by Paulina Ganucheau, lettered by Jenny Vy Tran. Charming high fantasy graphic novel that captivated my son, who badgered me into reading it, and I had a good time with it too. Princess Misty of Beldora gets kidnapped by the Bad King Next Door. His goal: force her into marriage and take over her family's kingdom. Her reaction: buddy, you need overthrowing. My kiddo said he liked the funny twists, some of which were familiar and some were entirely fresh. He also liked how Misty pushed back on her parents' narrow, stereotypical expectations for her. If you're in the mood for monsters, a strong heroine, and magic, check this one out. Anya's Ghost by Vera Brosgol Anya falls down a well... no, really, she does. And she picks up a companion who follows her back out. Having a ghost for a friend seems like a good idea for a while, especially when you're the kid who can never quite fit in and needs a little help. But what happens when it starts to seem like not such a good idea after all? This will always be one of my favorite YA comic recommendations. Brosgol initially drives the story with some of Anya's bad choices instead of stereotyped teen behaviors. (Having worked professionally with teenagers, I love seeing them represented properly as three dimensional people.) The first time I read it, I was so caught up in the plot that I didn't fully appreciate Brosgol's art, especially her gift for facial expressions. This time, I slowed down to enjoy. Her art style is so crisp, and blue. I knew Brosgol's name because she did a little bit of work on Hopeless Savages (see below), and I'm so glad that led me to her. Artie and the Wolf Moon by Olivia Stephens. "After sneaking out against her mother's wishes, Artie Irvin spots a massive wolf—then watches it don a bathrobe and transform into her mom. Thrilled to discover she comes from a line of werewolves, Artie asks her mom to share everything—including the story of Artie's late father. Her mom reluctantly agrees. And to help Artie figure out her own wolflike abilities, her mom recruits some old family friends. Artie thrives in her new community and even develops a crush on her new friend Maya. But as she learns the history of werewolves and her own parents' past, she'll find that wolves aren't the scariest thing in the woods—vampires are." As The Crow Flies by Melanie Gillman. A compelling YA graphic novel about what it's like to enter a space you can't be sure is safe, take hit after hit, but try to keep going and bond with others in similar circumstances. Initially published as a webcomic, it's about a queer black teen girl who goes to a Christian feminist camp. Charlie is immediately wary when she realizes every other camper is white. Her black mom immediately gets why she's uneasy, whereas her white father doesn't see what the big deal is. Charlie ends up not only uncomfortable with camp, but questioning why her God sent her there. I'm pretty sure it's a duology, and I'm looking forward to the next book. Aya: Life in Yop City by Marguerite Abouet, with art by Clément Oubrerie. Translated by Helge Dascher. A young adult / new adult "slice of life" comic that takes place in the Ivory Coast in the 1970s. Girls sneaking out of the house to go dancing, boys drinking a little more than they should, parents at their wits' end, all kinds of drama! And poor Aya, all she wants to do is study and become a doctor, not get dragged into her friends' misadventures. Abouet's childhood memories were the inspiration, but she's a strong storyteller who built a fully realized community and characters out of those memories. Oubriere makes each of them just as distinctive as their personalities. I can't wait to read the rest of the series. (Update: I did. Loved the rest of the series and the voices were all so high pitched. I could not deal. Lucky for me, I got really sick, and what I desperately needed was non-angsty that would distract me and last a while so I wouldn't have to get out of bed for another book. Azumanga Daioh to the rescue! It covers several years in a girls' high school. What struck me the most was how each of the characters has such a distinct personality. It's almost as if teenage girls are unique and individual human beings. Who knew? (That was sarcasm, by the way. Of course they are!) My husband says that to him, it's the Japanese equivalent of Peanuts comic strips, delivering the same wit in bite-sized chunks. Baba Yaga's Assistant by Marika McCoola, illustrated by Emily Carroll. Masha's father hasn't been there for her, not since the death of Masha's mother long ago, or the recent loss of the grandmother who raised her. Now he's marrying a woman he hasn't even introduced to Masha previously. Not okay! So Masha answers an ad to become Baba Yaga's assistant. Armed with the stories her grandmother told her about the witch, she sets out to pass the tests she's given as part of the job... without betraying her own conscience. Masha is smart and capable, which makes sense given she's been basically alone for quite some time. (I really don't like her dad, can you tell?) The book blends Masha's current trials with memories of her past. She's trying to find her own place in the world, since her old one is gone. Some of the flashbacks are profoundly sad, but the overall feeling of the book is of Masha getting her feet under her. Carroll's cartooning is skilled, handling the changes from past to present well. There is no happy reunion here, though Masha does talk to her father once more But it's her time to move forward. Really enjoyed this one. The Backups by Alex De Cunniffe, and Ted Brandt "Spending an entire summer on tour as a backup singer for pop star Nika Nitro? What?! That's the DREAM, right? Especially for Jenni, Lauren, and Maggie, three misfit performing arts students with hopes of making it in the music world. But being twenty feet from fame isn't easy. Between crushes, constant rehearsals, Nika's sky-high expectations, and their own insecurities, this dream is starting to feel more like a nightmare. And that's before they accidentally start a beef with a rival band threatening to reveal a secret that could end Nika's career. Can this trio of new friends come together to save the tour, or will the Backups be kept out of the spotlight forever?" A Bag of Marbles, adapted from Joseph Joffo's memoir by Kris, with art by Vincent Bailly, translated by Edward Gauvin. Of the young adult graphic novels I've read so far about the Holocaust, this one really stood out for me. Ten year old Joseph and his brother Maurice are forced to leave home and travel across France multiple times from 1944, hoping to avoid capture by Nazis, and trying to reunite their family. The art is beautifully detailed and distinctive. The pacing of the story lets you celebrate with the boys when safety is found, even when you fear it might only be temporary. It celebrates family and courage. And in multiple ways it shows what good people can do when faced with evil. A valuable lesson at any age. Bad Machinery by John Allison. Apparently if you mix preposterous and supernatural events and British humor with real-world teen social struggles, you can just take my money. Bad Machinery is a series about two groups of kids who investigate mysteries... if they could just stop squabbling with each other and getting distracted by regular life issues. The back of the first book compares it to Nancy Drew and The Hardy Boys, but it's far more eccentric than that, and I love that about it. Allison's cartooning style is fresh, clean, and not overly cute despite the general adorableness of his cast. This is an auto-buy for us when a new book comes out. You can try out Bad Machinery as a webcomic first if you prefer. Bloom by Kevin Panetta, illustrated by Savanna Ganucheau. I haven't had a chance to write a review for this yet, but I really loved it, particularly how the main characters are not always perfect. Here's the blurb: "Now that high school is over, Ari is dying to move to the big city with his ultra-hip band—if he can just persuade his dad to let him quit his job at their struggling family bakery. Though he loved working there as a kid, Ari cannot fathom a life wasting away over rising dough and hot ovens. But while interviewing candidates for his replacement, Ari meets Hector, an easygoing guy who loves baking as much as Ari wants to escape it. As they become closer over batches of bread, love is ready to bloom... that is, if Ari doesn't ruin everything." Brave by Svetlana Chmakova, with coloring assistance by Melissa McCommon and lettering by JuYoun Lee. Jensen Graham is an artistic daydreamer, spending most of his time in his own head thinking about becoming an astronaut or how to survive each day. While the book has a plot, most of the important stuff here is the shift inside Jensen himself - becoming more aware of how others treat him and the school's culture, and deciding what kind of person he wants to be. Proactively, in the real world. It's very reflective, doesn't ask any of the characters to be perfect, and I really liked it. Calla Cthulu by Evan Dorkin and Sarah Dyer, with pencils by Erin Humiston, inks by Humiston and Mario A. Gonzalez, colors by Bill Mudron, and lettering by Nate Piekos. Quick, entertaining read about teen gal Calla Tafali as she discovers she carries the blood of Lovecraft's monsters in her veins. She wants a normal teenage life. Her uncle wants her to embrace her heritage and bring about the end of the world. Very Buffy meets Elder Gods, and I mean that in the best way. The transition from a digital platform to the print edition isn't perfect, but I enjoyed the light horror spookiness and Calla's amazing hair. Catherine's War by Julia Billet, illustrated by Claire Fauvel, translated by Ivanka Hahnenberger. "At the Sevres Children's Home outside Paris, Rachel Cohen has discovered her passion—photography. Although she hasn't heard from her parents in months, she loves the people at her school, adores capturing what she sees in pictures, and tries not to worry too much about Hitler's war. But as France buckles under the Nazi regime, danger closes in, and Rachel must change her name and go into hiding. As Catherine Colin, Rachel Cohen is faced with leaving the Sèvres Home—and the friends she made there—behind. But with her beautiful camera, Catherine bears witness to her own journey, and to the countless heroes whose courage and generosity saved the lives of many, including her own. Based on the author's mother's own experiences as a hidden child in France during World War II..." Cheer Up: Love and PomPoms by Crystal Frasier, illustrated by Val Wise, lettered by Oscar O. Jupiter "Annie is a smart, antisocial lesbian starting her senior year of high school who's under pressure to join the cheerleader squad to make friends and round out her college applications. Her former friend BeBe is a people-pleaser—a trans girl who must keep her parents happy with her grades and social life to keep their support of her transition. Through the rigors of squad training and amped up social pressures (not to mention micro aggressions and other queer youth problems), the two girls rekindle a friendship they do lost and discover there may be other, sweeter feelings springing up between them." Coady and the Creepies, co-created by writer Liz Prince and illustrator Amanda Kirk, with colors by Hannah Fisher and letters by Iim Campbell. A punk rock ghost story about a band made up of three sisters, setting out on their first tour after an accident. They're on a quest to complete a punk challenge by playing at a list of legendary clubs, but various obstacles get in their way, from a misogynistic rival band to an evil promoter. There's strong queer, disability, and POC rep, plus plenty of shenanigans and a strong bond between the sisters. My ten year old son and I both adored this. Profoundly feminist and inclusive, so fun, and well worth your time. Cannons in the Clouds by Daniel Woolley and Anne Gresham, art by Jorge Donis, colors by Kirsty Swan, and letters by Peter Semeti. Steampunk adventure and fisticuffs! Plucky teen girl protagonist! Pirates! Woolley and Gresham take a storyline of "rich girl hates wearing dresses and studying boring stuff, prefers adventure" and set it in a word rich with political conspiracy and interesting characters. Sela, our main character, is rebellious but not (quite) reckless, and as a smart action heroine she's totally believable. (Her cagey best friend is my favorite, though.) I'm intrigued to see where this story goes. Days Like This by J. Torres, illustrated by Scott Chantler. It's the mid 1960s. Anna Solomon just got divorced from her now-ex's mistakes, so she decides to start her own label. At her daughter's talent show, she finds just the girl group she's looking for... but can Tina and the Tiaras overcome family resistance, find the right songwriter, and make a hit happen? This book is sweet, and refreshing in how it centers women's are family resistance, find the right songwriter, and make a hit happen? This book is sweet, and refreshing in how it centers women's are family resistance, find the right songwriter, and make a hit happen? This book is sweet, and refreshing in how it centers women's are family resistance, find the right songwriter, and make a hit happen? This book is sweet, and refreshing in how it centers women's are family resistance, find the right songwriter, and make a hit happen? This book is sweet, and refreshing in how it centers women's are family resistance, find the right songwriter, and make a hit happen? This book is sweet, and refreshing in how it centers women's are family resistance, find the right songwriter, and refreshing in how it centers women's are family resistance. fun to see him doing something quite different. Drama by Raina Telgemeier. I am not a big fan of teenage angst books. I enjoy teenagers themselves, perhaps more than other adults do, but morose and melodramatic teen lit I can live without. Drama has its share of pain and suffering, but its fundamental core is about high school kids trying to connect with each other and do right - no matter how bumpy the road may be on the way. A couple of good portrayals of gay characters in this one, too! The book follows Callie, a theater addict who's the set designer for her school's production of Moon Over Mississippi. How is this show going to turn out when the cast members are getting together and breaking up and no one's buying tickets? More importantly, is that cannon really going to work? (Yes, I said cannon.) Emiko Superstar, written by Mariko Tamaki with art by Steve Rolston. This was a book from the ill-fated D.C. Comics line called Minx, designed to appeal to teen girls. Despite the heavy rotation of youth graphic novels in most libraries, somehow D.C. couldn't make enough money on Minx to continue it. Emiko Superstar was one of my favorites from this group. Emiko is an Asian Canadian suburban teenage babysitter looking for excitement, escape... something! She borrows pieces of other people's identities to stage a performance art piece, but there's a heavy dose of guilt along with her newfound fame and double life. Fairy Quest by Paul Jenkins with art by Humberto Ramos, with colors and lettering by Leonardo Olea. Dark fairy tale that re-envisions all of the stories ever told as living in Fablewood, reenacting themselves exactly every day under a fascist regime run by Mister Grimm and his Think Police. Any character who deviates from their story is brainwashed back into obedience. Red (Little Red Riding Hood) and Mister Woof (the bid bad wolf) have become friends secretly, though, and they make a break for the Real World so they can be themselves. It's a tense and dark story, and I'm really disappointed only two books have come out, because I need to find out how their story ends! Or more appropriately, doesn't end, if they make it to freedom. The first book came out in 2008, and the second in 2013, so maybe there's still hope. This is perfect for fans of fairy tales or fantasy in general, magical dystopias, and manga-influenced art. Fake Blood by Whitney Gardner. I haven't had a chance to write a review of this one, but it was a darn good read: "It's the beginning of the new school year and AJ feels like everyone is changing but him. He hasn't grown or had any exciting summer adventures like his best friends have. He even has the same crush he's harbored for years. So AJ decides to take matters into his own hands. But how could a girl like Nia Winters ever like plain vanilla AJ when she only has eyes for vampires? When AJ and Nia are paired up for a group project on Transylvania, it may be AJ's chance to win over Nia's affection by dressing up like the vamp of her dreams. And soon enough he's got more of Nia's attention than he bargained for when he learns she's a slayer. Now AJ has to worry about self-preservation while also trying to save everyone he cares about from a real-life threat lurking in the shadows of Spoons Middle School." Family Pets by Pat Shand and Sarah Dill, with letters by Jim Campbell Thomasina's parents died when she was five. She moved in with her grandmother, then they moved in with her aunt, uncle, and cousins when money got too tight. Now she's in high school. She's not loving life. Her best friend is a pet snake. She doesn't feel close to her family turning into animals, and she's really not okay with her pet snake disappearing. (No spoilers, Skye!) Who cast the spell that did all this damage? And how's Thomasina going to fix it? There's a lot of emotion here, but it doesn't get too heavy. Dill has a lot of fun with a little bit of rivalry, but nothing extreme. The snake provides comic relief, and it feels great when Thomasina's family starts pulling together. Plus, Latina protagonist in a graphic novel, HURRAY! Fist Stick Knife Gun, a graphic novel adaptation by Jamar Nicholas of Geoffrey Canada's memoir. Canada grew up in the South Bronx in the late 1950s. This masterful adaptation of his work traces the violence he saw around him, that he himself committed, and that he finally renounced and committed his life to working against. My husband describes it as real, thought-provoking, but still compelling as a work of literature, instead of one of those "true story" books you want to sleep through. I'd agree, and I think it's because the book doesn't spoon feed you. Instead it presents a series of quiet vignettes, with depth and human emotion for all parties involved. Five Weapons: Making the Grade by Jimmie Robinson. My husband read this, looked at me, and said "This is one of the best comic books I've read all year. Possibly the BEST." Five Weapons is whip-smart, has intrigue in all the right places, and mixes action with human connection in perfect proportions. Tyler Shainline, son of the famous assassin, enrolls in an elite school that promises to teach him how to kill. The only problem is, he won't pick up a weapon. Why not? And who else is hiding something? Yes, it deals with a school for assassins, but there's really nothing distressing or gory about it. Its focus is on Tvler's own survival, but also his efforts to help others by exposing secrets and leveling the playing field. My husband appreciated the non-violent problem-solving without any cheesy after-school special aspect. There's also an interesting "passing" aspect which isn't explicitly discussed in terms of race and class in the first book, but which is good food for thought and discussion. Friends With Boys by Faith Erin Hicks. Maggie's never really had any friends outside of her family. Everything's new. And the least scary part is that Maggie's haunted by ghosts. Writing this, I've just realized I need to read this book at least three more times, really soon. The characters are pitch perfect, and you can root for Maggie even if you've never been in her exact situation. (Who has, really?) Faith Erin Hicks is one of our fave comic creators, and she brings her A game here. Gunnerkrigg Court by Tom Siddell. Antimony Carter begins her school year at boarding school Gunnerkrigg Court to find it's far more than a normal British school. Robots, ghosts, dragons, demons, gods, conspiracies... and she still has to attend class. Siddell is great at creepy atmosphere, and I quickly bonded with Antimony. Now that we're four volumes into the paperback version of the series, I have way too many characters as favorites, and I love the uneasy feeling of never quite knowing what new strange discovery is going to happen next. This was originally a webcomic, and you can read Gunnerkrigg Court online if you choose. I am patiently resisting the urge to jump online instead of waiting for the next paperback version. Heartstopper by Alice Oseman. I really loved this, though Oseman's lettering is tough on my eyes. Here's the blurb: "Charlie, a highly-strung, openly gay over-thinker, and Nick, a cheerful, soft-hearted rugby player, meet at a British all-boys grammar school. Friendship blooms quickly, but could there be something more...? Charlie Spring is in Year 10 at Truham Grammar School for Boys. The past year hasn't been too great, but at least he's not being bullied anymore, and he's sort of got a boyfriend, even if he's kind of mean and only wants to meet up in secret. Nick Nelson is in Year 11 and on the school rugby team. He's heard a little about Charlie - the kid who was outed last year and bullied for a few months - but he's never had the opportunity to talk to him. That is, until the start of January, in which Nick and Charlie are placed in the same form group and made to sit together. They quickly become friends, and sometimes good things are waiting just around the corner..." Honor Girl by Maggie Thrash. This book's strength is its storytelling. Maggie, 15, falls for female camp counselor Erin, 19. What follows is pain and confusion, as Maggie struggles with this development and what it means for her identity and future. Thrash doesn't wrap things up with a pretty bow, and that's okay. It's real. I'm sure this book is going to find a lot of young people in a place where they desperately need it. For the rest of us, it's an invitation into someone else's life, narrated by a skillful writer. This book stood out to me because of the depth of emotion conveyed, and the story allowing teen Maggie to have all those feelings, without needing to put them into adult perspective. Powerful stuff. I also enjoyed the cast of teenage girls with various personalities, who aren't always horrible. Teens are stereotyped in media far too often, so that was refreshing. I do wish that Thrash had gotten someone else to draw the book. She has a good sense of how she wants the panels to flow, but the careful narrative attention Thrash gives to the characters' interactions and emotional states isn't mirrored in her drawing ability. A different artist would have better complemented the excellent story. Hopeless Savages by Jen Van Meter, with art by a great group of collaborators. Jen Van Meter has my undying gratitude for writing these stories about the Hopeless-Savage family, a clan comprised of two parents who met during their careers as punk rock musicians, then settled down to have four children, in a suburban setting which isn't always the best match. The first arc is centered on the youngest daughter, Skank Zero Hopeless-Savage. (Um, yeah, there's a lot of "language" in this book, just so you know.) We also get good arcs about each older sibling, including her gay older brother and his awwwww! sweet relationship with his boyfriend. Whether foiling their parents' kidnapping, de-brainwashing them around, she's one of the most genuine and wonderful teenagers I've had the pleasure to read about. When I met Van Meter at Geek Girl Con a couple of years ago, she said there would be more Hopeless Savages, so I'm hoping that does work out. Or that a suburban punk rocker family adopts me. Ichiro by Ryan Inzana. Ichiro, our main character, grew up in the U.S. with his Japanese mom. His white American father died when he was just a baby. When his mother scores a temporary job opportunity in Japan, she takes teenage Ichiro with her so he can spend time with his grandfather. Ichiro didn't feel like he fit in back in the U.S., and he certainly doesn't feel like he fits in now, in an unknown country. Plus, all his grandfather does is tell weird old stories. It's going to be a boring few weeks, he thinks... until one night when things get really, really strange. He finds gods, monsters, and magic in an alternate world that he may be trapped in forever. Deep thoughts about war and forgiveness in this one. I Kill Giants, written by Joe Kelly and illustrated by J.M. Ken Niimura. I asked my husband to give you the sell on this one, since it's one of his favorites: "People like to use the word raw to describe things, and most of the time that's not an accurate description, but in this case it IS accurate." It's a combination of anger and grief, as young Barbara Thorson struggles to deal with an impending terrible loss which may overwhelm her. Saying more than that might give things away. Heavy stuff, extremely good. The Intrepids by Kurtis J. Wiebe and illustrated by Scott Kowalchuk. Life can be tough when you're a homeless teenager recruited by a genius for biological upgrades on his super-team that fights mad scientists. Giant robot bears, monkey henchmen, and oh, your genius father figure might not be telling you everything. Can you trust him? And what happens to your life if you can't? The human relationships in this book are well-crafted, and the cartoony butt-kicking and wacky science fiction of the fight scenes is good fun. One of the characters smokes (she decides to cut back or quit), and one of them mentions bringing a hot chick into the team, but it's minor stuff. They're teenagers, it happens. Joe the Barbarian, by Grant Morrison with art by Sean Murphy. Joe's just a 13 year old kid, albeit one with diabetes, a dead father, and a house the bank's about to take away from him and his mom. After missing one too many meals, Joe has a blood sugar crisis, and finds out (or does he?) that he may also be the savior of a magical parallel realm whose inhabitants strangely resemble his toys. Magic, steampunk, adventure, reality, family, and even though Grant Morrison wrote it, it makes sense. (I love Morrison, but he can be quite strange.) Kat and Mouse by Alex de Campi, with art by Federica Manfredi. Cute series! New girl and teacher's daughter Kat ends up friends with social outcast Mouse, and they take on the bad girls at their rich kid prep school. There aren't a lot of surprises (at least to an adult reader), but there is a mystery to solve. Who's stealing things around the school and signing her or his notes "The Artful Dodger?" I was particularly impressed with Manfredi's work on the facial expressions. How can she do so much with so few lines?! The art will feel homey to manga lovers, but it's a little less stylized, so it's also welcoming to those not yet familiar with manga. I've read three volumes so far and definitely need to track down the fourth so I can finally find out who the Dodger is. Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up With Me by Mariko Tamaki, illustrated by Rosemary Valero-O'Connell "The day they got together was the best one of Freddy's life, but nothing's made sense since. Laura Dean is popular, funny, and SO CUTE ... but she can be really thoughtless, even mean. Their on-again, offagain relationship has Freddy's head spinning — and Freddy's friends can't understand why she keeps going back. When Freddy consults the services of a local mystic, the mysterious Seek-Her, she isn't thrilled with the advice she receives. But something's got to give: Freddy's heart is breaking in slow motion, and she may be about to lose her very best friend as well as her last shred of self-respect. Fortunately for Freddy, there are new friends, and the insight of advice columnist Anna Vice, to help her through being a teenager in love." Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds, illustrated by Danica Novgorodoff "Will's older brother, Shawn, has been shot. Dead. Will feels a sadness so great, he can't explain it. But in his neighborhood, there are THE RULES: No. 1: Crying. Don't. No matter what. No. 2: Snitching. Don't. No matter what. No. 3: Revenge. Do. No matter what.

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