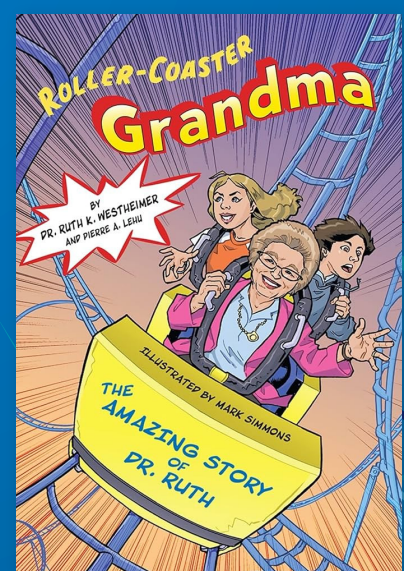
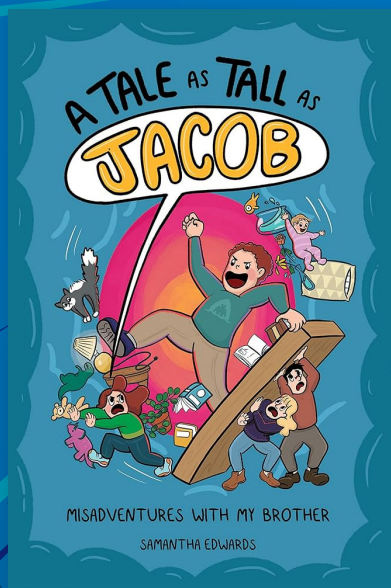
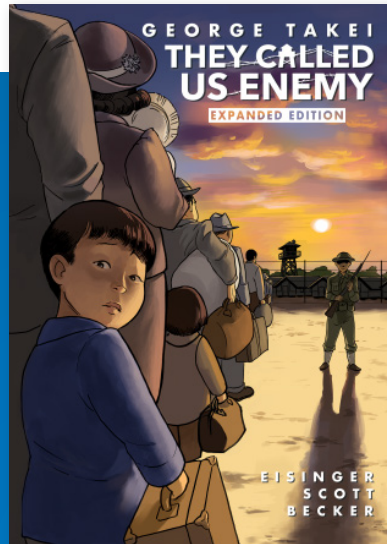


PERSONAL NARRATIVES



COMICSPLUS

Classroom Connections

USING GRAPHIC NOVELS AS MENTOR TEXTS FOR PERSONAL NARRATIVES

by Amy Fuller



(Immedium, Humanoids, Oni Press, Top Shelf/IDW)

Personal narrative writing has long been a staple in the middle school English/Language Arts curriculum. What was once, “What did you do over the break?” has now evolved into more sophisticated and meaningful writing prompts asked of our students when they return to school from the holidays, summer vacation, and other extended breaks. The more we read, the better writers we become — so students need access to worthwhile mentor texts to help further their writing skills.

Comics Plus has a wide variety of multicultural graphic memoirs and first-person narratives available to students to aid in their knowledge of narrative works. By reading these stories, not only will students see excellent examples of the technical aspects of narrative writing — including structure, grammar, and vocabulary — but they will also get to read about the lives of other people. Sometimes students will be able to make connections to the authors of the stories because they see themselves in the graphic novels; other times, they will read about people who have led different lives, thus building empathy for others and cultural awareness.

PERSONAL NARRATIVES: CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

The beginning of the school year also coincides with National Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15–October 15), so *Puerto Rico Strong* (Oni Press, 2018) is a powerful graphic novel to use as a mentor text for student’s own personal narratives.. It is an anthology of stories and artwork from Puerto Rican comics creators illustrating the resilience of the Puerto Rican people through retellings of historical events to narratives of more current struggles, most notably the devastation of Hurricane Maria.

While reading the collection with students, teachers can take advantage of our *Personal Narrative Activity for **Puerto Rico Strong***. Pre-reading activities include doing basic research on Puerto Rico to give students some background knowledge of the island’s history and culture, as well as some questions meant to get them thinking about their own cultural experiences. After reading about the experiences of the Puerto Rican authors and

illustrators, students can use their stories as mentor texts to create their own personal narratives about a significant event from their own lives — either as an essay, or creating their own graphic narrative using our Custom Comic Template. Discussion questions will further deepen students' understanding of Puerto Rican culture and how specific events can play an important role in their own lives.



(Capstone, Apples & Honey Press, Dark Horse)

Whether reading the collection in its entirety or selecting a few specific stories on which to focus, students will gain a newfound knowledge of the strength of the Puerto Rican community and will derive inspiration for writing their own personal narratives.

MORE MENTOR TEXTS FOR PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Two other graphic novels centering around historical events are *They Called Us Enemy* (Top Shelf/IDW, 2019) by George Takei, Justin Eisinger, Steven Scott, and Harmony Becker, and *We'll Soon Be Home Again* (Dark Horse, 2020) by Jessica Bab Bonde, Peter Bergting, and Kathryn Renta. Both deal with people who were unjustly incarcerated during World War II.

They Called Us Enemy is Takei's award-winning retelling of his childhood spent in Japanese-American internment camps, which also has a Spanish-language edition (translated by Lawrence Schimel), while *We'll Soon Be Home Again* features the stories of six Holocaust survivors during their time in Nazi concentration camps. A teaching guide is available for *They Called Us Enemy*, and *We'll Soon Be Home Again* includes a timeline and glossary at the end of the book. It would also be very easy to read these two stories and

“The more we read, the better writers we become—so students need access to worthwhile mentor texts to help further their writing skills.”

compare and contrast the unfair and inhumane treatment of these two groups of people during World War II.

For those wishing to read a more comprehensive biography of someone's life, *Louis Armstrong: Jazz Legend* (Capstone, 2013), and *Roller Coaster Grandma: The Amazing Story of Dr. Ruth* (Apples & Honey Press, 2018) are wonderful books to share with your students. Written from the perspective of Armstrong and Westheimer, respectively, as they reflect on the events that played a significant role in their lives; Dr. Ruth's story includes a timeline and discussion questions at the end of the book.

Finally, for more contemporary reading, we recommend *A Tale as Tall as Jacob: Misadventures with My Brother* (Andrews McMeel, 2021), *Brother: A Story of Autism* (Zulker Press, 2019), and *The World of Chub Chub* (Twisted Comics, 2014). The first two graphic novels are written by women who grew up with brothers with special needs. Each sister recounts stories filled with an array of emotions, from frustration to patience and always with love as they navigated life with their brothers, and *Brother's* publisher offers a teaching guide on its website. *Chub Chub* is a love letter to Neil Gibson's mother as he retells humorous stories of his antics growing up as a mischievous little boy; each chapter is an event from his life. Teachers can pick and choose different chapters to use as mentor text for personal narrative writing, or the graphic novel can be read in its entirety for pleasure.

By reading graphic memoirs and first-person narratives as mentor texts, students can get ideas and inspiration from other writers. They can see how the writers have a clear focus, and a beginning, middle, and end to their stories; how they develop their ideas with engaging details. Most importantly, students can see how the writers use their unique voices when telling

“

Sometimes students will be able to make connections to the authors of the stories because they see themselves in the graphic novels; other times, they will read about people who have led different lives, thus building empathy for others and cultural awareness.”

their personal stories, helping them find their own voices and share their own stories.

All of the recommended titles are available in Comics Plus with unlimited, simultaneous access, which supports school-wide and individualized reading programs, curriculum enhancement, and independent reading. We also have hundreds more graphic memoirs and first-person narratives for readers of all ages to choose from.



(Andrews McMeel, Zulker Press, Twisted Comics, Graphic Mundi, Tokyopop)

FEATURED ACTIVITY



Puerto Rico Strong (Oni Press, 2018)



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Using Britannica, Culturegrams, or another database from your school, briefly research Puerto Rico and its culture, focusing on its location, its people, and its customs.
2. Think about the cultural traditions in your life. They can be focused on holidays and celebrations, like Thanksgiving or your birthday. Or they can be centered around more everyday events, like Sunday family dinners or movie/game nights.
 - What makes these traditions special? Is it the people, the food, the environment, the activities?
 - Keep these memories in your mind as you read *Puerto Rico Strong*.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE ACTIVITY

Think back to your cultural traditions from the pre-reading activity. Choose a specific event and create a graphic story about it.

- Who was involved in this moment? Who influenced it?
- When and where did this event take place?
- What cultural elements played a significant role in this experience? Think about sensory details—sounds, sights, smells, tastes.
- What customs and activities were a part of this event?
- What is the significance of this experience to you?
- Focus on telling a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Parts of this book focus on Puerto Rico's early history and the Taino people. What were some of their beliefs and cultural experiences?
2. The words Borikén and Boricua are used throughout the stories? What do these words mean?
3. What major event influenced the creation of this comics anthology? What are some of the different ways this event affected the writers and illustrators of this book?
4. What are some of the themes conveyed throughout the book? Give examples from the stories.
5. What do you think the title *Puerto Rico Strong* means?

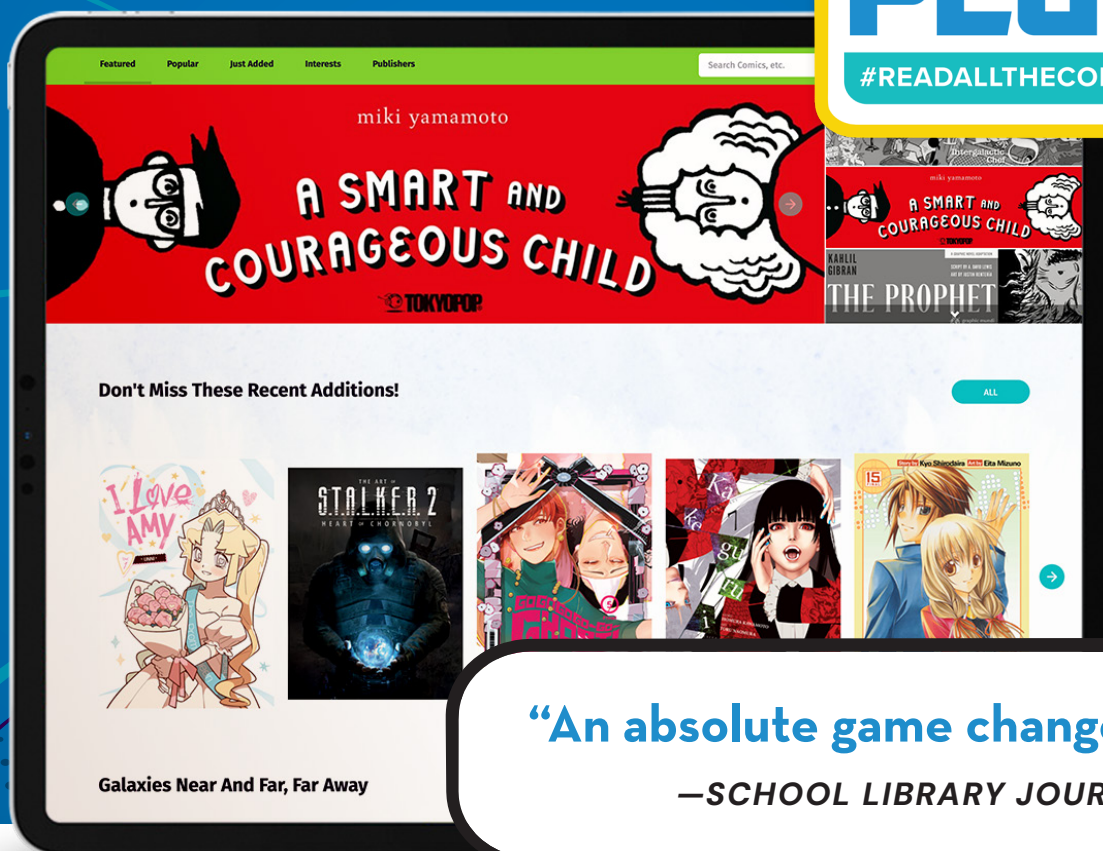
#ReadAllTheComics

No holds, wait lists, or monthly borrowing limits.

“A comics bonanza.”
—LIBRARY JOURNAL

**COMICS
PLUS**

#READALLTHECOMICS



“An absolute game changer.”

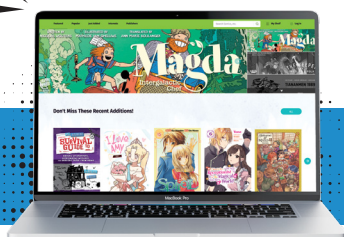
—SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL

Explore a diverse selection of digital graphic novels, manga, and picture books from dozens of library-friendly publishers, including ABDO, Andrews McMeel, Capstone, Dark Horse, Europe Comics, Fantagraphics, IDW, Image Comics, Kodansha, Lerner, Manga Classics, Oni Press, Papercutz, Tokyopop, TOON Books, Yen Press, and many others.

No holds, wait lists, or monthly borrowing limits—all at a price that won't break your materials budget.

#ReadAllTheComics

Sign up for a free demo at comicsplusapp.com



COMICSPLUS

Library-friendly publishers make Comics Plus possible, and we're grateful for all of our partners who support our mission to offer libraries and schools affordable, equitable access to digital content.