

Hello fellow readers! This week's column is by Vicki Wilson. Vicki is a patron of the Kirkland Town Library

My 9-year-old son has enjoyed graphic novels ever since he began to read on his own. Anything by Dav Pilkey or Jeff Kinney would immediately grab his attention at the library. He'd re-read some over and over. I'd never really read any graphic novels myself, though, if you don't count *Peanuts* and *Calvin and Hobbes* books as a kid. I wasn't sure I'd enjoy the format.

Then I kept hearing about Cece Bell's *El Deafo*, and I saw it in the library. The pictures looked beautiful and the story — about a deaf girl with a giant hearing aid starting a new school — sounded interesting. Knowing it was loosely based on the author's actual childhood made it even more appealing. I read it. It was funny and poignant and even though I'd thought I wouldn't fall easily into the rhythm of a novel with pictures, falling is exactly what I did. My enjoyment was effortless.

Since then, I've read quite a few graphic novels — mostly middle grade level — some of which I've passed on to my son. They're fast reads and many can be read in a day (depending on how much time you have to read). You can read them while you're reading other books because their uniqueness means they don't blur into another plot, and when you're reading in a place with plenty of outside distractions (doctor's office, public transportation, etc.), the pictures help keep you on track.

So I borrowed more graphic novels from the library. *Sunny Side Up* by Jennifer L. Holm is a sweet book about Sunny Lewin, who's sent to live with her grandfather in Florida for the summer while her immediate family experiences troubles. Then, I discovered the popular, award-winning author/illustrator Raina Telgemeier. Her series of three books, *Smile*, *Sisters*, and *Guts*, I read in four days. In them, we follow the eponymous character, Raina, through grueling dental work and braces, friendship challenges, middle school drama, sibling troubles, anxiety, and fear. And somehow, although some of it is heartbreaking and so personal, Telgemeier finds a way to make it funny, too.

*Awkward* by Svetlana Chmakova is another charming middle school graphic novel with realistic worries such as shyness, doing the right thing, making friends, and dealing with bullies. Penelope "Peppi" Torres, who loves art, starts a new school and joins the art club to make friends. Shortly thereafter, Peppi develops a couple of unlikely friendships, and a rivalry with the science club puts Peppi in an awkward position (like in real life, there's a lot of awkward in this sweet book). The pictures are captivating and somehow, Chmakova instills each drawing with obvious emotion and meaning, even without words.

The *Lunch Lady* books by Jarrett J. Krosoczka were another favorite of my son's, although I haven't read them yet, and just this month, Clinton Central Schools brought Krosoczka in to talk to students. Krosoczka is also well-known for his graphic novel for young adults, *Hey, Kiddo*, which was a National Book Award finalist and is next on my list to read.

This year, for the first time in history, a graphic novel won the Newbery Medal. *New Kid*, written and illustrated by Jerry Craft, about an artistic kid starting a new, rigorous private school as one of the only students of color in his class, impressed the Newbery Medal Committee with its candor. “This distinct, timely, and honest story respects children and gives its readers a glimpse into what it means to be other,” Committee Chair Krishna Grady said. Both entertaining and thought provoking, *New Kid* impressed me, too, when I read it. And although winning the Newbery can keep authors pretty busy, Craft said in a recent article in the *School Library Journal* that the win won’t distract him from completing a *New Kid* sequel soon, which I’m eager to read.

The library and interlibrary loan offer a wide selection of graphic novels to try out. All ages are represented in the format, and even some classic novels and well-known stories have been re-made into pictures and words. There’s bound to be one out there for every interest, for kids and adults alike.