

This issue we bring you a booklist of two halves: concept books and graphic novels.

Contributors to this list are: Kerry Aluf; Sanya Baker; Helen Beckingsale; Crissi Blair; Tina Collins; Annie Coppell; Wayne Mills; Helen Schwarz; Rosemary Tisdall

What a concept!

A concept is stronger than a fact. Charlotte Perkins Gilman

More than a board book for the very young – concept books span subjects, formats and ages, as the books reviewed below attest. See also many of the reviews from the *Blinded by Science (and maths and technology)* list, supplement to the May 2009 newsletter.

For under 6s

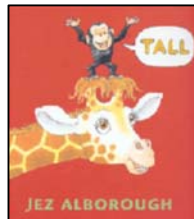
Tall

Jez Alborough

Walker 2005; ISBN 1844280403

A small chimpanzee wanders through the jungle using the size of other animals to determine whether he is tall or small.

Minimal text with plenty of action in the pictures make this a good choice for babies and toddlers. A final leap onto the head of a small giraffe to make Bobo feel tall results in a fall but a safe landing in the arms of his mother. HB.



Can You Keep a Secret?

Pamela Allen

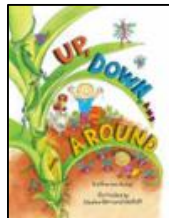
Viking 2000; ISBN 0670844055

A delightful picture book which introduces colours, and concepts of place such as under, behind, between. Small children will enjoy the unspoken joke as the king's crown is visible all the time. 2+. HB.

Up, Down and Around

Katherine Ayres, illus Nadine Bernard Westcott
Candlewick Press 2007; ISBN 9780763623784

With vivid colours and simple words the rhyming text of this book helps children understand spatial directions: Peppers grow up. Potatoes grow down. Pumpkins vine around and around. The bold illustrations have lots of details; from seeds dropping into soil, to corn bursting from its stalks; from children chasing butterflies, to ants burrowing underground – everything in this vibrant book pulses with life. 2-5. TC.



Digger, Digger

David Bedford, illus Christina Miesen

Little Hare Books 2007; ISBN 9781921272097

Watch these busy diggers at work and learn more about opposites in this hardy, rhyming board book for toddlers. This book is one from a series by David Bedford featuring busy machines to help children learn their opposites. 1-5. TC.

Imagine

Ruth Brown

Andersen Press 2006; ISBN 1842704532

As a child lies in bed, they imagine a series of opposites – fast, slow; thin, fat; long, short – all using animals. A wonderful, lyrical and softly illustrated book. 2+. AC.

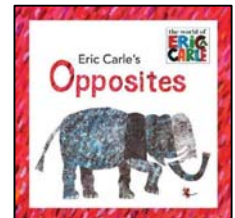
Eric Carle's Opposites

Eric Carle

Grosset and Dunlap 2007

ISBN 9780448445656

A very simple book in which single words are illustrated on the opposing page and the opposite picture and word are revealed by unfolding this page. HB.



The Very Hungry Caterpillar

Eric Carle

First published by World Publishing 1969

The Very Hungry Caterpillar has been part of our lives for so long that it can be difficult to remember the lessons hidden in these much-loved pages. Think about it... the life cycle of a caterpillar; counting (one apple, two pears, three plums...), and days of the week (On Monday he ate...). 2+. AC.

Charlie and Lola's Shapes

Lauren Child

Orchard Books 2008; ISBN 9781846167850

This sturdy board book stars Charlie and Lola and a very Lola way of looking at shapes. As Lola says "I know ALL my shapes. I know square ones, pointy ones and round ones. And some more EXTREMELY unusual shapes too." Unusual like, *triangley* and *square-ish* and *fiddly*. Keep an eye out for other Charlie and Lola concept books. AC.

Dog's Colorful Day: A Messy Story about Colors and Counting

Emma Dodd

Puffin Books 2000; ISBN 0142500194

In the morning, Dog is a white dog with one black spot. But by bedtime he is a white dog with 10 different coloured spots all over him, gathered during the course of his active – and messy – day. A fun introduction to colours and counting to 10 for 2+. AC.

The Nickle-Nackle Tree

Lynley Dodd

Mallinson Rendel (1976) 2007; ISBN 9781877423017

Puffin (1976) 2007; ISBN 9780141501307

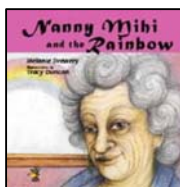
An unusual counting book with lively verse and spritely pictures, count your way through this bunch of very strange birds. Storylines Gaelyn Gordon Much-loved Book Award 2006. CB.

Nanny Mihi and the Rainbow

Melanie Drewery, illus Tracy Duncan

Reed 2001; ISBN 1869488822

Nanny has a special project for her mokopuna to do during their school holiday visit. Each day they are sent out to find objects of a certain colour and, by the end of the week, they have created a rainbow. A great way to introduce colours, particularly in te reo. 4+. AC.



Where is the Green Sheep?

Mem Fox, illus Judy Horacek

Viking / Penguin 2004; ISBN 9780670041497

The hunt for the elusive green sheep introduces colours, concepts and fun. The wind sheep flies a kite. The wave sheep surfs. But where is the green sheep? Sparse, bright illustrations complement the text perfectly. Although not mentioned in the text, adults can have fun finding the 'Ned Kelly' sheep. AC.

The Everything Book

Denise Fleming

Henry Holt and Company 2000; ISBN 0805062920

Fleming's cotton fibre stencil illustrations are bright and appealing, and perfectly match this collection of poetry and simple words which introduce various concepts like colours, shapes, numbers, seasons, and body parts. AC.

Bees, Snails, & Peacock Tails: Patterns & Shapes... Naturally

Betsy Franco, illus Steve Jenkins

Margaret K McElderry Books 2008; ISBN 9781416903864

A wonderful introduction to the colours and patterns of nature, with hexagonal beehive cells, coloured moth wings, intricate spider webs and more. The collage illustrations are a joy. There are notes at the end about each animal. 4+. AC.

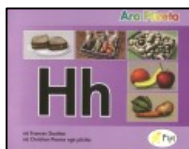
Ara Pūreta: Hh

Frances Goulton, illus Frances Goulton

Te Pou Taki Kōrero 2007; ISBN

9780790316468

Part of the **Pipī** series, this book – and the series – uses simple vocabulary and photographic-style illustrations to introduce the letter 'h' in te reo. 2+. AC.

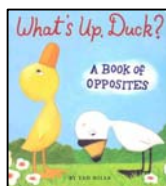


What's Up, Duck?

Tad Hills

Wade books 2008; ISBN 9780375847387

This very simple board book illustrates simple concepts such as front and back, loud and quiet, happy and sad. The characters Duck and Goose have appeared in previous board books and are joined by a small grey duck and a bluebird. HB.



Olly and Me 1 2 3

Shirley Hughes

Walker Books 2009; ISBN 9781406315134

The ever popular Shirley Hughes has produced an attractive counting book which small children will relate to, and will enjoy looking at all the details. Activities during a child's day are loosely linked by Katie, the narrator, who adds her baby brother, grandparents, friends, dogs and cats to make up the numbers on each page. The endpapers show numbers 1 to 10 in numerals, dots, and various combinations of children and animals. The story concludes with some things *are too many to count... Numbers go on forever*. 3+. HB.

The Shrinking Mouse

Pat Hutchins

Bodley Head 1998; Red Fox 2001

ISBN 037032496X; 0099400561

A child's eye view of perspective. Four animal friends are perturbed that owl seems to shrink when flying towards a distant wood and the same thing happens to each of them as they set off to rescue owl. 2+. HB.

Ten Red Apples

Pat Hutchins

Red Fox 2002; ISBN 0099413868

A counting book illustrated with brightly coloured wooden farm animals which steal the apples off a farmer's tree. As well as the apples on the tree diminishing, there is a row of apples at the top of each page. 3+. HB.

Follow the Line through the House

Laura Ljungkvist

Viking / Penguin 2007; ISBN 9780670062256

Step through the front door and follow the line... In each room there are questions to answers, things to find and count, and fun. A great way to explore numbers, colours, shapes and more existential questions. 4+. AC.

Superhero ABC

Bob McLeod

HarperCollins 2006; ISBN 9780060745141

An alphabetical introduction presented in comic book form which then moves into bright colours to focus on one superhero per page. Each page is action packed in the true superhero fashion and each hero is out to save the world, sometimes using rather unusual means.



Alliterative comments describe just how this will happen for every letter of the alphabet. Bubble-Man 'Blows big bubbles at bullies' while Valiant V 'the Volcano vomits on villains'. Will appeal to comic book fans of all ages and create some new fans among younger readers. 4-8. HS.

I Spy Colors in Art

Lucy Micklethwait

Greenwillow 2007; ISBN 9780061348372

A selection of works of art provide diverse items for children to search for by colour and name, for example a brown cow in a nativity scene from a 15th century French book of hours. The art selected ranges from Medieval to modern, and from realistic to abstract. 4+. HB.

One Lonely Kakapo

Sandra Morris

Raupo (1991) 2000; ISBN 9781869488284

Beautifully illustrated book with poetic text featuring New Zealand birds and animals – booming bitterns, leaping dolphins... to help a small child learn to count. Russell Clark Award 1992. CB.

Who's Hiding

Satoru Onishi

Gecko Press 2008; ISBN 9781877467134

A line up of animals do various things, and it is over to the observant reader to find them. They hide, cry, sleep and more. Very cute. 3+. AC.

One Dragon's Dream

Peter Pavey

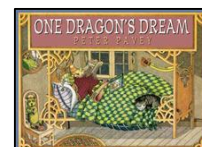
Walker Books 2009 (originally published by

Nelson in 1978, and Puffin in 1981)

ISBN 9781921150746

Reprinted as one of the Walker Classics

series. A counting book packed with illustrative detail. Follow a pudgy, scaly dragon as his cat tucks him into bed and he dreams of two turkeys, three tigers, four frogs... But there's more! Whatever number the page features – there are that many of everything! There are not only four frogs but four trees, screws, penguins, crabs and so on, with some harder to find than others. A zany book that will reward repeat reading and close examination. 3+. CB.



ABC Dinosaurs

Jan Pienkowski

Heinemann 1993; ISBN 0434963720

An amazingly spectacular pop-up book of alphabetical dinosaurs. On the first page allosaurus, brachiosaurus, camptosaurus, diplodocus, euoplocephalus and others beginning with F,G,H,I and J leap out from the page. Dinosaurs of the sea and air are on the following pages followed by the dreaded stegosaurus and tyrannosaurus with their extremely fierce teeth. Finally ultrasaurus– zephyrosaurus are represented as skeletons across the final page. The perfect book for dinosaur fans, alphabet fans and lovers of very clever pop-up books. 4-8. HS.

The Jan Pieńkowski Nursery Books: Colours, Faces, Food, Homes, Numbers, Shapes, Time, Weather, Wheels, Yes No.

Jan Pieńkowski

Walker Books (1980) 2009

Small square-format books, easily held in tiny hands. An excellent series: Highly recommended. CB.

Time; ISBN 9781406314335

On each spread a clock features on the left-hand page, with the time written above, and opposite is a picture

illustrating what might happen at that time, in bold, bright colour with heavy black outlines. Simplicity itself.

Food; ISBN 9781406314342

Each double-page spread shows a food commonly consumed by young children on the left-hand page, with the word in lower-case text, and opposite is shown the origins of that food – milk in a glass faced by a cow and her calf, potatoes (depicted as chips) faced by potatoes growing in the ground.

Avalanche

Michael Rosen, illus David Butler

Candlewick Press 1998; ISBN 0763612626

An avalanche of words that tells an alphabetical rhyming story. It all starts when a boy throws a snowball that starts an avalanche. The avalanche that started quite small uprooted Evergreens, flattened a fence, toppled the Green's garbage and eventually flew through outer space until it filled the universe and was sucked into a vacuum that hurled it homeward right back to Bobby and his dog. A fun read aloud that travels from A to Z and back again. HS.

One is a Snail, Ten is a Crab

April Pulley Sayre and Jeff Sayre, illus Randy Cecil

Walker Books 2003; ISBN 1844281647

Since one is a snail and two is a person, we must be counting by feet! Using a dog for four, an insect for six, a spider for eight and a crab for ten, this picture book is a fun introduction to numeracy concepts and helps children think about numbers, counting from one to 100; counting by different sets (2s, 4s, 10s), recognising

odd and even numbers, estimating and early multiplication. 3-6. TC.

Found Alphabet

Ramon Shindler & Wojciech Graniczewski; illus Anita

Andrzejewska & Andrezej Pilichowski-Ragno.

Houghton Mifflin 2005; ISBN 0618442324

The rhyming text introduces the letters of the alphabet and the very clever illustrations, as the title suggests, are made up of all sort of found objects – buttons, screws, tins, etc. 5+. HB.

Black? White! Day? Night!: A Book of Opposites

Laura Vaccaro Seeger

A Neal Porter Book / Roaring Brook Press 2006

ISBN 9781596431850

A bright lift-the-flap book which introduces opposites in a fun way, using contrast and context. Some of the illustrations are complicated – the word *simple*, once you lift the flap, becomes part of a *complicated* maze. AC.

First the Egg

Laura Vaccaro Seeger

A Neal Porter Book / Roaring Brook Press 2007

ISBN 9781596432727

Thick pages, with die-cuts, and equally thick paint make this a stand-out book. Minimal text matches the minimalist illustrations. First the EGG / then the CHICKEN. First the TADPOLE / then the FROG. A collection of pairings introduce the concept of time and process. 2+. AC.

Alphabet Ice Cream: An A-Z of Alphabet Fun

Nick Sharratt, illus Sue Heap

Puffin 2006; ISBN 0763612626

Bright and exciting illustrations on each page that take the reader through each letter of the alphabet. Every third letter rhymes and Nick and Sue are on almost every page. Big, bright illustrations and rhyming text make this a perfect ABC for the very young. Lots to see and talk about on every page. Will be enjoyed by the under fives. HS.

Faster, Faster! Nice and Slow!

Nick Sharratt, illus Sue Heap

Puffin 2008 [2005]; ISBN 9780141384405 [board book]

Nick and Sue play in this bright and simple book of opposites.

They travel *above* the earth in a plane, and *below* the sea in a yellow submarine... Great fun! AC.

Mouse Shapes

Ellen Stoll Walsh

Harcourt Inc 2007; ISBN 9780152060916

Two little mice, running from a cat, hide in a pile of colourful shapes and use them to make a variety of items. Here's a square. A triangle on top makes it a perfect house for a little mouse. 2+. HB.



For over 6s

Natural New Zealand ABC

Ben Brown, illus Helen Taylor

Reed Publishing 2004; ISBN 1869485149

Beautifully illustrated alphabet of New Zealand

wildlife. Each page is focused on a different

creature or plant except for the double page

spreads of the creeping rata vine and the

slithering eels. In each case the factual

information at the bottom of the page is

interesting and manageable for young readers. Links are made to

Maori legends on some pages. So as well as learning some of the

remarkable characteristics of the octopus we are also reminded

that Kupe discovered Aotearoa while chasing Muturangi's octopus

across Kiwa's great ocean. A fantastic book for the classroom and

for children interested in wildlife. HS.

Full House: An Invitation to Fractions

Dayle Ann Dodds, illus Abby Carter

Candlewick Press 2007; ISBN 9780763624682



Colourful full-page illustrations and a rhyming text tell the story of the Strawberry Inn which gradually fills up with guests and illustrates the concepts of sixths at the same time. While pre-schoolers will enjoy the story the concept of fractions is more suited to 6+. HB.

The Dangerous Alphabet

Neil Gaiman, illus Gris Grimly

Bloomsbury 2008; ISBN

9780747597117

An alphabet for older children

and adults, with a good

measure of creepiness,

piratical ghosts and monsters.

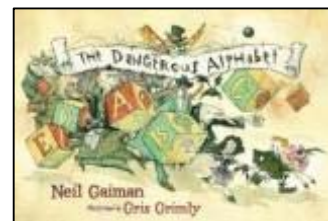
Two children, with a treasure

map and a pet gazelle, sneak

out of the house into the world beneath the city where monsters

and pirates roam. Suitably scary illustrations in a limited sepia-

toned palette add to the thrills. 8+. CB.



Alphabet City

Stephen T Johnson

Penguin Books 1995; ISBN 0670856312

A Caldecott Honor Book (1996). Alphabet City is a wordless book using realistic paintings of recognisable city objects and places. Each letter is seen as part of the environment that surrounds it and is not always easily discovered. All the letters are capital letters and each one has its own page, such as B in a wrought iron fire escape, and M in the arches of a bridge. A fantastic book that will encourage observation and attention to detail both in the book and children's own environments. 10+. HS.

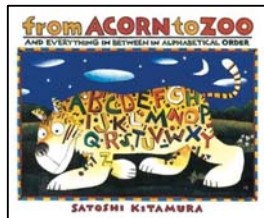
From Acorn to Zoo and Everything in Between in Alphabetical Order

Satoshi Kitamura

Anderson Press 2005; ISBN 1842705199

Each page is focused on a different letter of the alphabet. The detailed colour illustrations name a wonderful and slightly unusual collection of people, animals and objects starting with the same letter. The A page includes an aubergine, armadillo, album and some asparagus.

Underneath the coloured illustrations some of the objects come together in surprising ways. On the W page the wallaby and weasel are seen wearing the scarf, mittens and tail warmer the wallaby was knitting. Lots to look at and talk about on every page, although the detail in the illustrations and the very small print of the labels means it is better suited for older children. HS.



sorted except at the last middle the letters realise that U has been in the bathroom and missed the whole thing. Clearly organising the alphabet is not easy but out of the chaos comes order in the end. Brightly coloured illustrations match the fun and confusion in the written text. A great read aloud for 6+. HS.

All Aboard! A Traveling Alphabet

Bill Mayer

Margaret K McElderry Books 2008; ISBN 9780689852497

Featuring sophisticated artwork with a travel-related theme, this alphabet book is aimed at older children and adults inviting viewers to admire how cleverly the shapes of the letters are used within the paintings. After the first entry, which uses 'all aboard' to represent A, each large illustration features a single word, such as bridge, cycle, dock, or elephant. Each page is a challenge to the reader to find the picture elements that form the alphabet letter. These are so cleverly placed, that this book would be frustrating for someone learning the alphabet. The colourful illustrations, which are executed in airbrush gouache with some digital retouching, have a period air; according to the foreword, the artwork was inspired by travel posters of the 1920s. There's a summary page of solutions, with bold white tracings revealing each letter's location on a thumbnail reproduction. This book may have more appeal to adults than to children. TC.

The Butterfly Alphabet

Kjell Sandved

Scholastic 1996; ISBN 0439079470

This is the most amazing alphabet book in my collection. The introduction explains how the author was looking through his microscope at a tropical moth when he noticed a tiny but perfect letter F hidden in the wing. This discovery began a photographic search in countries all over the world to discover all the letters of the alphabet in the patterned wings of moths and butterflies. In the book there is a close up photograph of a butterfly wing on every page with the letter and a rhyming sentence on the facing page. By looking closely readers can find the letters inside the wings, some more easily than others. At the back of the book there is a page of information about butterflies in general, and notes about the specific butterflies photographed for this book. HS.

Alpha Oops: The Day Z Went First

Althea Kontis, illus Bob Kolar

Candlewick Press 2006; ISBN 9780763627287

As it states inside the cover this is no ordinary alphabet book. Z is fed up with always being last in the alphabet and demands to go first. Demanding 'fair and equal rights' Zebra and Z present their case. Y agrees 'it's time for a change' and so the letters make a change. The letters in the middle still find themselves stuck in the middle, but H is quite happy to stay where she has always been and G seems to feel the same way. Eventually everyone gets

Get graphic!

A novel illustrated panel by panel, either in color or black and white. Graphic novels are sometimes referred to as extended comics, because the presentation format (panel by panel illustration, mostly dialog with usually little exposition) suggests a comic [from www.virtualsalt.com/litterms.htm]

Graphic novels are more than comic books. They are more than superheroes or Asterix and Tintin. They are more than 'light' reading. They are 'real' reading – sometimes requiring more skills than reading just text. They are a literary genre of their own. The books reviewed below show the scope and range of this format.

For under 10s

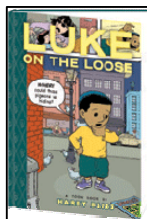
Luke on the Loose

Harry Bliss

Toon Books / Raw Junior 2009; ISBN

9781935179009

Luke gets bored with all the boring dad talk at the park and takes off, chasing pigeons across New York City. He runs and runs, and creates chaos along the way. There's lots of background action to keep kids – and adults – amused. Basic vocabulary and simple illustrations makes this great for readers just beginning to grow in confidence, but feel free to read aloud to 4+. Hunt out the other Toon Books for similar titles. You can find a list, and lesson plans, at www.toon-books.com. AC.



Many adventures ensue, as you can imagine – there are dinosaurs, villages, monsters... and barbecue sauce. Zany, bright and instantly appealing to 7+. AC.

Stinky

Eleanor Davis

Toon Books / Raw Junior 2008; ISBN

9780979923845

Stinky lives in the swamp with his pet toad, Wartbelly. He loves pickled onions and really stinky stuff. But he keeps away from the town with all those clean children who eat cake and apples. Until one day his swamp is invaded by a boy, Nick, who likes swamps, who likes Wartbelly (even if he calls her Daisy), and doesn't seem afraid of anything. When the two meet up Stinky has to apologise for his bad behaviour and they become friends. 4+. AC.



Coraline – The Graphic Novel

Neil Gaiman, adapted and illus P Craig Russell
HarperCollins 2009; ISBN 9780060825454

Coraline lives with her mother and father, but one night she goes through a secret door and finds herself in another world very like her real world but with some sinister changes. There she finds her 'other mother' and 'other father' with their button eyes and creepy behaviour as they try to seduce her into staying in their world. When she returns to the real world her parents have disappeared and so she must go back and find a way to rescue them. The original novel was fabulous, and the graphic version, in colour, adds further dimensions to the creepiness of the tale. 8+. CB



Sardine in Outer Space

Emmanuel Guibert, illus Joann Sfar, trans Sasha Watson
First Second / Roaring Press 2006; ISBN 1596431261

Two supreme French comic book talents collaborate on this zany space adventure story featuring Sardine, a small girl with instincts akin to Pippi Longstocking. Sardine, along with her cousin Little Louie, lives on the Huckleberry spaceship which is captained by her uncle, the space pirate Captain Yellow Shoulder. This brave trio continually foil the plans of the evil Supermuscleman, chief executive dictator of the universe and his mad scientist, Der Krok. Did I mention the cat that lives of Sardine's hat? KA.

Babymouse, Volume 1: Queen of the World

Jennifer Holm, illus Matthew Holm
HarperCollins 2006; ISBN 0007224478

Meet Babymouse, a delightful, pink and sassy character, now into about her 10th book. She dreams of glamour, adventure, excitement and being Queen of the World. (When she dreams, the pages become pink.) For younger readers, the humour and fun of Babymouse will worm her way into your heart. And the pink and white illustrations add to the delight. RT.

The Kickball Kids

Cari Meister, illus Julie Olson
Stone Arch Books 2009; ISBN 9781434214102
Part of the My First Graphic Novel series.

Very much a beginner reader, this book introduces readers to how to read graphic novels. Kyle and his friends love kickball and enter a tournament, but the other teams are much older than them. Can they beat the older kids? 4+. AC.

Little Vampire

Joann Sfar, trans Alexis Siegel & Edward Gauvin

First Second / Roaring Press 2008; ISBN 9781596432338

Follow the delightful adventures of Little Vampire and his ghostly friends as he goes to school and meets his first human friend, Michael. From rescuing dogs from secret laboratories to dealing with the class bully, these thoughtful stories will charm young readers. KA.

Spartacus: The Life of a Roman Gladiator

Rob Shone & Anita Ganeri, illus Nick Spender
Book House / Salariya Book Company 2005; ISBN 19404642888
Part of a graphic non-fiction series, this title tells the story of Spartacus, in comic form, and uses that as a vehicle to introduce information on Rome, gladiators, and other relevant things. For more information, including recommended websites, visit www.book-house.co.uk. 8+. AC.

Elephant & Piggie Books

Mo Willems

Hyperion Books for Children 2008

Lots of white space, deceptively simple illustrations, and the whole story told through speech bubbles makes this a great series to learn to read with. Just think of Elephant and Piggie as *The Cat in the Hat* for this generation. Willems' characterisation is great – as with the best illustrators, the amount of emotion they can show in a simple line, like eyebrows, is amazing. Emotion and volume is also shown in the font used. 4+. AC.

Mr William Shakespeare's Plays

Marcia Williams

Walker Books 1998; ISBN 074456946X

Shakespeare's words (extracts from the plays) are shown in the main panels of this book, with the play's plot summarised beneath, and the activities and interjections of the audience are around the edges of the pages. This method adapts to recreate the experience of attending a Shakespearean play, at the Globe, during his time. Keep an eye out for Queen Elizabeth I and Shakespeare himself in the audience. 8+. AC.

Into the Volcano

Don Wood

The Blue Sky Press 2008; Hb ISBN 9780439726719

An engrossing adventure set on a remote Pacific Island. Brothers, Duffy and Sumo Pugg are pulled out of school to stay with their Aunt Lulu while their mother, a volcanologist, is in Borneo on a research trip. Aunt Lulu organises a trip for the boys to the nearby island of Kocalaha and even though there are dangerous volcanic eruptions the trip mysteriously must go ahead and then becomes a race against time. KA.

For 10 to 12 years

The Courageous Princess

Rod Espinosa

Antarctic Press 2003; ISBN 0972897860

Mabelrose is a tomboy of a princess – a familiar character. When she is kidnapped by a dragon, she rescues herself, stealing some of the dragon's magical objects in the process. On her way out of the dragon's lands, she meets Spiky, a porcupine, and have many adventures on their journeys. AC.

Oddly Normal Volume 1

Otis Frampton

Viper Comics 2007; ISBN 097778830X

Oddly Normal is half-witch, living in our world. Her mother was sent from Fignation to report back on the average human, and fell in love with one. On Oddly's birthday, she wishes her parents would disappear. And they do. The next morning her auntie arrives and takes Oddly to Fignation. Looking forward to not being the only weird one at school, still Oddly has problems. But this time, she makes friends, too. And discovers who – or what – is behind her parents' disappearance. AC.

It Was a Dark and Silly Night...

Edited by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly

RAW Junior Book with Joanna Cotler Books / HarperCollins 2003
ISBN 00602862881

A galaxy of authors and illustrators begin their tales with the phrase 'it was a dark and silly night...' Lemony Snicket and Richard Sala tell the tale of Lucretia and yetis. Neil Gaiman and Gahan Wilson share the story of a kids' party in the cemetery [an animated version of this is available at: journal.neilgaiman.com/2009/it-was-dark-and-silly-night.html]. These, and the other stories, make up a silly and eclectic collection. Even Martin Handford (*Where's Wally / Waldo?*) takes part. AC.



Amulet Book One: The Stonekeeper

Kazu Kibuishi

Graphix / Scholastic 2008; ISBN 9780439846813

Emily and her brother Navin move to a creepy house in the woods. Their mother is abducted and the children follow into a weird world of robots and creatures. A mix of fantasy, adventure, and manga, this story has much to appeal to fans of all those genres. And an unexpected emotional complexity, just right for the tween market. AC.

Moomin Book One: The Complete Tove Jansson Comic Strip
Tove Jansson
Drawn & Quarterly 2006; ISBN 9781894937801
From 1954 Tove Jansson drew and wrote a Moomin comic strip that appeared in numerous newspapers and here is the first collected volume of four stories. In Moomin on the Riviera, the family set sail to the Riviera and are welcomed to one of the poshest hotels on the beach. They enjoy room service, rearrange furniture and turn their luxury bath into a swimming pool with no idea that they are running up an expensive hotel bill. Then Snork-Maiden discovers the casino. KA.

Joey Fly Private Eye in Creepy Crawly Crime
Aaron Reynolds, illus Neil Numberman
Henry Holt and Company 2009; ISBN 9780805087864
If you'd ever wondered what a spoof film noir graphic novel, starring Philip Marlowe (think *The Big Sleep*) as an insect, would look like – wonder no more. Oh, yes – lots of in-jokes, and references (which adults would probably get slightly more than kids). Just a bunch of silly fun, but the sophisticated humour makes this more suitable for an older age group. AC.

To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel
Siena Cherson Siegel, illus Mark Siegel
Aladdin Paperbacks / Simon & Schuster 2006
ISBN 9781416926870
At six Siena took her first dance classes, even though the doctor said it wouldn't help her flat feet. At nine she saw the Bolshoi Ballet perform. At 11 she was accepted into the School of American Ballet. As the years progress she practices, and

dances, more and more. She binds her breasts, just in case she's inherited the big boob gene. At 18, her career ended due to injury. But she still dances. AC.

Bone: Out from Boneville
Jeff Smith; color Steve Hamaker
Graphix 2005; ISBN 0439706408
This is the first instalment of *Bone*, originally published in comic book form, and follows the adventures of Fone Bone (our hero) and his two cousins Phoney Bone and Smiley Bone. The cousins have been run out of Boneville due to the fallout from one of Phoney's uniquely inappropriate business ideas – and have been separated. Each finds their own way into a beautiful valley where they meet strange creatures and have stranger adventures. Fone Bone is the 'babe in the woods' of the trio yet despite having nothing with him to aid survival and being pursued by giant rat-creatures with sharp teeth and glowing eyes, he somehow makes it safely to the home of Thorn and her feisty cow-racing Grandma. On the way, Fone makes friends with Ted the tiny leaf bug, babysits some rowdy possum kids and somehow engages the aid of a world-weary, cigarette smoking dragon. But his reunion with Phoney, the true object of interest for the rat creatures and their death-figure master, brings a tonne of trouble down on Thorn and Grandma. And even though Grandma Rose shows there's more to her than a loud voice, muscled arms and a fancy for cattle the Bone cousins had better not believe they're out of trouble for long. Smith's graphic storytelling has a strong filmic quality and plenty of visual humour to engage the reader. Children 10+ will not be able to resist reaching for the next in the Bone series... SB.

For Teens & Adults

Manga Shakespeare series

Adapted by Richard Appignanesi
SelfMadeHero [www.selfmadehero.com]
The popular manga style of illustration makes this series appealing, and accessible, to teens. Using Shakespeare's original texts, adapted of course, and illustrated by manga artists, it is worth hunting these books down. Titles in the series include: *As You Like It, Hamlet, Henry VIII, Julius Caesar, King Lear, Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, Othello, Richard III, Romeo and Juliet, The Tempest, and Twelfth Night*. AC.

The Fascinating Madame Tussaud
André-Paul Duchâteau, illus René Follet, trans Luke Spear
Cinebook 2007; ISBN 9781905460366
Graphic novel biography of Madame Tussaud – her life in Paris in the Reign of Terror and the beginnings of her eponymous waxworks museum. AC.

Garage Band
Gipi
First Second / Roaring Press 2007; ISBN 9781596432062
Four youths come together to form a band. Through making music they escape their various family situations and decide to make a demo tape. But when they need to replace their faulty equipment they take the risky option of stealing from a local deathmetal band and must face the consequences. Gipi uses a restricted palette of terracotta and blue-green watercolours to stunning effect. KA.



Notes for a War Story
Gipi
First Second / Roaring Press 2007; ISBN 9781596432611
An outstanding antiwar statement set in a vague region of the Balkans. This graphic novel explores the effect of life in a war zone on three teen drifters, while never showing the actual war. Moving from bombed village to destroyed hamlets, pillaging for food and hiding from snipers, the three youths end up falling in with an exploitive racketeer and join his gang of thugs. The stunning line art is coloured with a soft olive green watercolour. Included at the back is an essay by Gipi entitled 'Of Boys and Guns.' KA.

Beowulf
Adapted and illustrated by Gareth Hinds
Candlewick Press 2007; ISBN 9780763630232
Having struggled through the original text for Beowulf, I would have appreciated this graphic novel interpretation – in the least it gives you an idea of the plot! The story is told almost totally through the art, with passages of text. Speech is indicated by font style, reminiscent of Asterix. The focus, here, is on the action with Beowulf superhero muscular (which is about right), Grendel suitably monstrous, and his mother suitably grotesque (don't look here for Angelina Jolie's character in the movie). The action is violent and bloody – as it is in the original text. And Beowulf's final battle – against the dragon – is included, which is rare. The text has a syntax and structure which makes it shout 'this is olden days' – Great was the grief of the King, and oft did the warriors and nobles gather, but neither sacrifice nor counsel availed. AC.

Kampung Boy
Lat
First Second / Roaring Brook Press 2006
ISBN 9781596431218
An autobiographical graphic novel of Lat's life in a Malaysian village – Kampung – in the 1950s and 60s. The illustrations are simple, but charged with emotion. A wonderful way to be introduced to a different culture and time period. AC.

From Hell
Alan Moore, illus Eddie Campbell
Bantam Books 2001; ISBN 1863253122
There have been many theories about the infamous Whitechapel murders and the identity of Jack the Ripper over the years from possibly a member of the royal family, to Patricia Cornwell's, Victorian painter, Walter Sickert. However this graphic novel with its bleak and at times sinister illustrations suggest that the murderer may have been William Gull, Queen Victoria's physician. I found the accompanying detailed and researched appendices towards the end of the book very informative. WM.

Watchmen

Alan Moore, illus Dave Gibbons

DC Comics 2005; ISBN 9781401219260

Outlawed costumed crime fighters (working-class Batman, if you like) try to foil a plot to destroy them. This is a 1985 we never saw – Nixon is in power (still) after his victory in the Vietnam War. The original comics were published in 1986-87, and it is the only graphic novel to appear on Time Magazine's 2005 'All-TIME 100 Greatest Novels' list. AC.

Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima Volume One

Keiji Nakazawa, trans Project Gen, intro Art Spiegelman

Last Gasp of San Francisco 2004; ISBN 9780867196023

First in a 10-part series exploring the tragedy, stupidity and reality of war, particularly the effects of the atom bomb on Hiroshima. As such, it pulls no punches, and based on the author's own experience – it is a stark anti-war message. The simplicity of the black line drawings only reinforce the horror. This, along with *Maus* (by Spiegelman) seem to have heralded the beginning of the graphic novel as a legitimate tool for exploring serious topics, at least in the Western tradition. AC.

NEW GROUND: New Zealand Comic Anthology

DMC Comics has been publishing a six-monthly (April & October) anthology - *NEW GROUND* - of new and established New Zealand comic creative talent, since 2004. The anthology is a collectible preview comic of future New Zealand comic series and mini-series, and acts as vessel for emerging writing and drawing talent of New Zealand. For more information visit www.dmcnz.co.nz. AC.

Three Shadows

Cyril Pedrosa, trans Edward Gauvin

First Second / Roaring Brook Press 2008

ISBN 9781596432390

Louis and Lise happily live and work on an orchard with their son Joachim, until one day three shadows appear and everything changes. Joachim's parents know the shadows have come for their son so Louis flees with him, desperate to stay one step ahead of the deathly shadows. Told in captivating black and white illustrations in a range of panels, with high-contrast shading that adds to the tension and emotion of the story. CB.

White Tiger: A Hero's Compulsion

Tamora Pierce & Timothy Liebe

Marvel 2007; ISBN 0785122737

Yes, this is a traditional superhero graphic novel, but in my defence, it is written by Tamora Pierce.

A spin-off of the Daredevil series, *White Tiger* begins the story of Angela del Toro, who has taken over the role of White Tiger from her recently murdered uncle, Hector Ayala. Good vs evil. Superhero in disguise. Action – and a kick-butt heroine. Just what everyone needs. AC.

Persepolis

Marjane Satrapi

Jonathan Cape 2003; ISBN 0224064401

Persepolis is an autobiographical graphic novel that follows a childhood in Iran during the turbulent years of the 1971 Iranian Revolution. Satrapi describes her life from age eight to 14, starting with a school photo of girls in their veils, to the moment her parents leave her at the airport, sending her to the safety and academic rigour of a school in Austria. The book is drawn in a simple black and white style, which starkly matches the bleak story. A real insight into life for the Iranian people at that time. Secondary readers. RT.

The Wall: Growing up Behind the Iron Curtain

Peter Sís

Frances Foster Books 2007; ISBN 9780374347017

Illustrator Peter Sís uses graphical form to describe the life of his generation growing up in cold war Czechoslovakia, on the Communist side of the Iron Curtain. He tells his story in black and white line drawings, punctuated with red, where the people are often tiny elements on a larger palette. He illustrates the intrusions of the state into every aspect of his childhood and family life –

compulsory red flags on state holidays, compulsory membership of the Young Pioneers, censored art and culture, bugged telephones, censored letters, jammed radio, banned books – and help us understand how insignificant the life of an individual was in the communist schema. The Prague Spring of 1968 arrives in a riot of colour and music, all brutally suppressed when tanks and troops pour in to the country later the same year.

Sís himself escaped to the United States before the end of Communism in his country, believing he might never be able to return to see his family. Fortunately that was not so but he felt the need to explain to his American family that things were not always as colourful as they are now in the city of Prague. Young readers can identify with this engaging tale packed with historical detail and it can stimulate very interesting discussions. 12+. SB.

The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale

Art Spiegelman

Penguin 2003; ISBN 9780141014081

Originally published in parts in 1986 [My Father Bleeds History] and 1992 [And Here My Troubles Began].

Beginning with the story of how his parents met, Artie asks his father to tell his life story – the story of persecution and war, as a Polish Jew during the 1930s and 40s. Throughout the story, the impact of his experiences, including time in concentration camps, on his later life are shown. An iconic book, and a must have in any library catering for 12+. AC.

In the Shadow of No Towers

Art Spiegelman

Penguin/Viking 2004; Board ISBN 0670915416

A large format board book packed with Spiegelman's artistic response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and comics from the early 1900s that inspired him. Spiegelman and his family were close witnesses to the attacks and this is a very personal story, formatted in the style of the early newspaper comics, and with references to his other work such as the appearance of his *Maus* character. A very worthwhile read, and a great way to share the grim experience of 9/11 and its aftermath. 12+. CB.

Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda

Jean-Philippe Stassen, trans Alexis Siegel

First Second / Roaring Press 2006; ISBN 9781596431034

A moving account of the madness and genocide of Rwanda in 1994-95, where 800,000 lives were taken. The story moves back and forth to before and after the killings. The central character is a Hutu, Deogratias who we see in the present as a broken alcoholic man, but see through flashbacks how he and his Tutsi friends were affected by the events that occurred in Rwanda in 1994, and what has happened since then. An excellent introduction by the translator helps explain the historic events. This graphic novel, told in colour panels, is an excellent way for young and old to educate themselves about this important time. CB.

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

Robert Louis Stevenson, retold Fiona Macdonald, illus Penko Gelev

Graffex 2008; ISBN 9781905638819

Comic versions of classics are a great tradition. Many a great reader has gained an introduction to a work in this way and many others have been saved from dinner party faux pas by their reading of the same!

R L Stevenson's atmospheric tales of horror and adventure are perfect for graphical adaptation and this Graffex version of *Jekyll and Hyde* very effectively conveys the spirit of the original novel. As always, Dr Jekyll's desire to banish the darker impulses of his own personality by separating them off into an alter-ego, make an excellent basis for a chilling read. 12+. SB.

Alice in Sunderland

Brian Talbot

Dark Horse 2007; ISBN 9781593076733

A graphic novel of ambitious breadth and scope that chronicles the ties of the Sunderland region to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. It is also a full and entertaining story of the history and heritage of the region.

Michel Faber wrote in his Guardian review, 'Four years in the making, *Alice in Sunderland* is... a gloriously ambitious fusion of myth, history and autobiography in every imaginable visual style. Victorian engraving, watercolours, Prince Valiant pastiche, superhero dynamism, Photoshop psychedelia, indie cartooning, fumetti, homages to Hergé ... it's all here, and more.' Faber goes on to state, '*Alice in Sunderland* is neither fiction nor a coherent narrative. It is a guided tour of Sunderland (Talbot's adopted home) interwoven with scholarship borrowed from Michael Bute's *A Town Like Alice*, whose thesis is that the immortal Alice books were inspired by Lewis Carroll's regular visits to the northeast.' KA.

Pride of Baghdad

Brian K Vaughan, illus Niko Henrichon
DC Comics 2006; ISBN 9781401203146
Based on true events in Iraq 2003. During an American bombing raid, a pride of lions, among other animals, escaped from the Baghdad Zoo. Lost, confused and hungry, the four lions roamed the desolate streets of Baghdad in a desperate struggle for their lives. This graphic novel shows the horrors of war in colourful and boldly illustrative style. A book to make you think of the ravages of war. Be aware of a rape scene (lions, not humans). For senior readers. RT.

Fables: Legends in Exile

Bill Willingham and others
DC Comics 2002; ISBN 9781563899423
Many years ago the Adversary took over the lands of folklore and legend, and many inhabitants escaped to the mundane world. In America, quite a few fables live in Fabletown with Snow White as

Deputy Mayor and Bigby Wolf (ie the Big Bad Wolf) as sheriff. Wonderfully inventive, but definitely for older teens and adults, as it contains sex and violence. Future volumes of the series can be more graphic. AC.

American Born Chinese

Gene Luen Yang
First Second / Roaring Brook Press 2006; ISBN 9781596431522
This graphic novel of three interlinked stories is a fable about accepting who you are in the form of an engaging graphic adventure. The Monkey King has established a fine kingdom on flower-fruit mountain and governs his subjects well until something occurs to make him ashamed of what he is. He strives to make himself better and stronger and having mastered the 12 major disciplines of kung-fu believes himself so powerful he is now a 'great sage, equal of heaven'. The Monkey King then goes abroad and uses force and trickery to convince others to acknowledge him. Finally he tries to fight his creator, Tse-Yo-Tsu and 'equal of heaven', Monkey discovers he is not. Jin Wang is American-born, in San Francisco, but when his family moves to a new town he finds himself constantly picked on for being Chinese. Desperately unhappy and lonely, when fresh-off-the-boat Chinese boy Wei-Chen arrives at the school Jin Wang's first reaction is to reject him. Danny is a popular basketball player with loads of friends at school but every year his cousin Chin-Kee arrives for a visit from China and ruins everything. Chin-Kee is the embodiment of every negative stereotype of Chinese people and seems to delight in embarrassing Danny in front of his friends. How can Danny make his cousin disappear? 12+. SB.

About graphic novels

Writing and Illustrating the Graphic Novel: Everything You Need to Know to Create Great Graphic Works

Mike Chinn; New Burlington Books 2004; ISBN 1861554710
This will appeal to all for its lavish illustrations and advice on creating comics. But for those wanting a definition of what is a graphic novel then this will give that too. The publication looks at the various comic genre and supplies reading lists and visuals that complement each genre. Various elements such as panelling, framing and lettering, illustrating and scripting are given prominence. You'll find links that tie-in comics with movies and helpfully 21 graphic novel websites have been included. WM.

Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist [updated edition]

Will Eisner; W W Norton & Company 2008; ISBN 9780393331264
Will Eisner is a legend in the comic book world, and this book is essential for those interested in becoming more educated about the whys and hows of comic book art. AC.

The Rough Guide to Graphic Novels

Danny Fingerioth, illus Roger Langridge
Rough Guides 2008; ISBN 9781843539933
Sixty graphic novels feature as 'the canon', reviews of which make up the bulk of this book. Other chapters include: the icons (legendary writers, artists and publishers), manga, and the bigger picture (film adaptations, graphic classics and online comics). AC.

Graphic Novels: Stories that change your life

Paul Gravett; Autumn Press (London) 2005; ISBN 1845130685
A large-format book packed with information and inspiration from the world of graphic novels. With reference to the great comic art of our age, using 30 great examples including *The Sandman*, *Maus*, *When the Wind Blows*, and *Barefoot Gen*. Choose the one you're interested in and go to the 'in focus' pages for that book for detailed information about that story, and ideas about what to read next. Fantastically detailed and a great way to discover books you haven't read yet. 13+. CB.

Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics

Paul Gravett; Laurence King Publishing / Harper Design International 2004; ISBN 1856693910
An exploration of manga – Japanese comics – whose popularity in the West is growing, seemingly exponentially. Worth reading, or at least skimming through, to understand the rise, diversity and phenomena that is manga. AC.

500 Essential Graphic Novels: The Ultimate Guide

Gene Kanneberg Jr; Collins Design 2008; ISBN 9780061474514
Indeed, this seems to be an ultimate guide! Divided into 10 genres, with 10 novels featured in each, and many others reviewed briefly, this will be of use to librarians wondering what to buy. Age groups are colour coded. AC.

Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art

Scott McCloud; Kitchen Sink Press 1993; ISBN 0878162437
This is one book I'd hate to be without. This is a comic book about comics. It explores the signs and symbols associated with comics and how they combine to communicate the medium. This book assists one's understanding of the comic form and describes the place of comics in the world of literature. The sequel is *Reinventing Comics*. WM.

The Language of Comics

Mario Saraceni; Routledge 2003; ISBN 041521422X
A textbook to support the study of comics. Handy to familiarise yourself with the format and complexities of this form. What this book shows – or reinforces – is that comics are not a 'simple' or 'easy' option – or an escape from 'real' reading. AC.

Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean

Douglas Wolk; Da Capo Press 2007; ISBN 9780306815096
The first chapter of this book looks at what comics are, and what they aren't – and lays out the difficulty we all seem to have understanding and labelling this form of art / literature / literacy / reading. The second part of the book – Reviews and Commentary – contains essays on comics and cartoonists, but is not a 'best of list'. A good background. AC.