

A Teacher's Guide to the Amelia Rules! series
by Jimmy Gownley

Jimmy Gownley's
AMELIA
RULES!TM



Definition of a Graphic Novel

Traditionally, the term “comic book” has been used to describe any book created in a comic-style format. Today, the term is used specifically to describe a staple-bound, serialized, 32-page pamphlet or periodical. The term “graphic novel” has been around for decades, but in the last ten years it has been adopted by mainstream media as more of a catchall phrase for full-length stories written and illustrated in a comic book style or format. This format generally utilizes panels, or framed illustrations, and speech balloons. A graphic novel can be an original, self-contained story or it can be a collection of previously published comic books that together tell one story.



About the Author

JIMMY GOWNLEY began writing and drawing comics at the age of fifteen. He is an advocate for kids’ comics, having cofounded the organization Kids Love Comics, which works to promote comic books and graphic novels as a valuable tool for literacy and education in schools, libraries, and at home. He lives in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Karen, and their twin daughters, Stella and Anna. Visit his website at www.ameliarules.com.

Guide written by Michele Gorman, Teen Services Coordinator for the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County; author of *Getting Graphic! Comics for Kids*, and *Getting Graphic! Using Graphic Novels to Promote Literacy with Preteens and Teens*; and the “Getting Graphic” Columnist for *Library Media Connection*.



Photo by Karen Gownley

Why Graphic Novels Belong in Classrooms and Libraries*

- » Graphic novels offer fast-paced action, conflict, and heroic endeavors—all things young readers embrace.
- » Children learn in different ways; visual learners are able to connect with graphic novels in a way that they cannot with text-only books.
- » Graphic novels require readers to be active participants in the reading process, using their imaginations to fill in the blanks between panels.
- » Graphic novels help young readers develop strong language arts skills including reading comprehension and vocabulary development.
- » Graphic novels contribute to literacy by ensuring that kids continue to read for fun outside of the classroom.
- » Graphic novels often address important developmental assets like being true to yourself, the power of imagination, and teamwork. They also address current, relevant social issues for young readers like divorce, bullying, and confronting monsters in the closet.
- » Graphic novels provide a perfect bridge for young readers transitioning from picture books to text-only books.
- » Graphic novels often stimulate young readers to branch out and explore other genres of literature including fantasy, science fiction, and realistic fiction as well as nonfiction and myths and legends.
- » Graphic novels are good for English as a Second Language [or English Language Learners] students and students who read below grade level because the simple sentences and visual clues allow readers to comprehend some, if not all, of the story.

* Copyright © Michele Gorman, *Getting Graphic!: Comics for Kids* (Linworth Publishing/ABC-Clío)

Graphic Novels and the Literacy Connection

The traditional definition of literacy is the ability to read and comprehend. As we move into a more visual world, the definition of literacy continues to change and evolve. The new definition of literacy is to be able to read, to listen, and to view, and then to comprehend. With regard to reading and comprehending graphic novels, there are two types of literacy to take into consideration: visual literacy and critical literacy.

Visual literacy is defined as the ability to view and then interpret, or make meaning from, what you are viewing. To be visually literate, a person must be able to process both words and pictures, or “read” images by decoding and comprehending meaning from pictures and words together. **Critical literacy** is the role of the reader when it comes to the transaction between the reader and the text. To be critically literate, a reader must be an active consumer of the story. This is more than just sitting down and reading a book full of words. **Critical literacy** is about having an actual interaction with the text and therefore being actively engaged in the reading process. Young readers who are active consumers of the story are more likely to be actively engaged in the reading process.

How Amelia Rules!, as a Series, Addresses Social Issues

Author Jimmy Gownley did not set out to write a comic series that addressed social issues for young girls. His intention was to create a series that would appeal to young readers, with a strong female protagonist and her group of friends dealing with everyday situations—real life stuff that real kids deal with like moving to a new town, making friends, dealing with difficult teachers and bullies, trying to fit in, and admitting your first crush. Through Amelia’s eyes, the reader is given a front row seat to the daily trials and tribulations of a tween girl growing up in middle-class America . . . the laugh-out-loud hysterical, the heartbreaking, and everything in between.

All of the issues below are addressed in some fashion in the first five volumes of Amelia Rules! Some issues, like Amelia’s parents’ divorce, are pivotal to the story. Others, like Trish’s illness or Joan’s father’s military deployment, are gentle reminders that life’s heartaches are a part of growing up. This list of social issues addressed throughout the series is a great jumping-off point for discussions with young readers. Although several of these themes appear throughout the series, the volume number provided is when the concept is originally introduced in the story:

- Moving to a new city (Volume 1)
- Divorce (Volume 1)
- Bullies (Volume 1)
- Parents fighting (Volume 1)
- Cliques (Volume 1)
- Teasing/name calling (Volume 1)
- Getting in trouble at school (Volume 1)
- Peer pressure (Volume 1)
- Poverty (Volume 1)
- Latchkey kid (Volume 1)
- Sibling rivalry (Volume 1)
- First crush (Volume 1; Volume 2)
- Death of a family member (Volume 2)
- Bad dreams (Volume 3)
- Gratitude (Volume 3)
- Sick friend (Volume 3)
- Truth or Dare game (Volume 3)
- Embarrassing a friend (Volume 3)
- Accident/hospital stay (Volume 3)
- Saying good-bye to a friend (Volume 3)
- Sick friend/friend in hospital (Volume 3)
- Divorced parent going on a date (Volume 4)
- First day of school (Volume 4)
- Wanting to run away from home (Volume 4)
- First date/dance (Volume 4)
- Parent deployed (Volume 4)
- Saying good-bye to a parent (Volume 4)
- Learning about family history (Volume 4)
- Popularity (Volume 5)

Writing Prompts for the Series as a Whole

» Amelia and her friends are a part of G.A.S.P.: Gathering of Awesome Super Pals. As members of this secret club created by Reggie, each character has a secret identity and accompanying nickname: Reggie is “Captain Amazing,” Amelia is “Princess Powerful,” Pajamaman is “Kid Lightning,” and Rhonda is “Ms. Miraculous.” If you were a member of G.A.S.P., what would your nickname be? What would your costume look like?

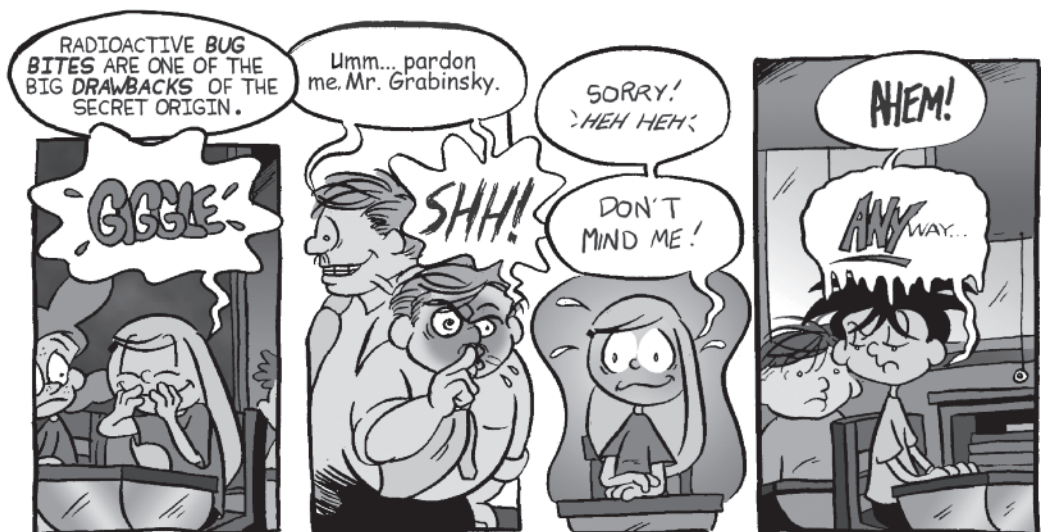
» Pajamaman is the “weird kid” in Amelia’s group of friends. In every story that includes Pajamaman, he is wearing “mood jammies,” or pajamas that have an emoticon or symbol on his top that expresses how he is feeling during any given moment. Would you like it if your emotions were always visible to everyone around you? How would this change how you interact with people? If you were wearing “mood jammies” right now, what emoticon or image would be present on your shirt?

» Amelia’s Aunt Tanner plays a pivotal role in Amelia’s life, as her aunt, stand-in big sister, mentor, and friend. Do you have someone in your life who you go to for advice? How has this person helped you deal with a situation?

» Although they do not always see eye-to-eye, Amelia, Reggie, Pajamaman, and Rhonda are all very loyal friends to one another. How do you define friendship? Do friends always have to get along? How do Amelia and the others act as good or bad friends throughout the series? How do they show their loyalty to one another?

» Throughout the series Reggie uses made up “scientific” words and explanations to explain everyday things, like the secret origin of a superhero, the “common artist,” a latchkey kid, and the act of “hanging out.” Choose one word or concept from the following list to define using Reggie’s style. Be sure and give your concept a “scientific” name and detailed description. Illustrate your definition with accompanying figures.

- Recess
- Best friend
- Comic book
- Substitute teacher
- Dodgeball
- Summer vacation
- Road trip
- Detention



Discussion Questions for Each Volume

AMELIA RULES, VOLUME 1: THE WHOLE WORLD'S CRAZY

» Starting over is tough. Amelia's parents have recently gotten a divorce and she and her mom have moved from New York City to a small town in Pennsylvania. Have you ever had to move to a new town and start over? How did it feel? How did you deal with the situation?

» In the first few pages of Volume 1 we meet Reggie and Pajamaman. Reggie talks a lot, but Pajamaman only uses gestures, written notes, and emoticons on his pajama top to express himself. If you could not talk, how would you express yourself? Do you think it would be difficult to go one day without speaking? How about one week? One month?

» Amelia hears her parents fighting over the phone. Have you ever heard your parents fight? How did this make you feel?

» Amelia's dad promises her he'll come visit for Halloween but ends up having to cancel the trip due to a conflict with work. As a result, Amelia feels upset and disappointed. Have your parents ever made a promise they didn't keep? How did this make you feel?

» Amelia and Rhonda are always fighting with each other, and the night of the Halloween party they get into another war of words. Amelia makes fun of Rhonda's costume, and Rhonda responds with a mean comment about Amelia's absentee father, causing Amelia to storm off to her room. Aunt Tanner steps in to help make peace between the girls by telling Amelia "Life is going to provide you with enough problems without you trying to make enemies out of your friends." What does this mean? How does it apply to Amelia and Rhonda?

AMELIA RULES, VOLUME 2: WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY

» On Valentine's Day, Amelia and Rhonda are both writing love poems for Reggie, but Reggie is writing a love poem for Tanner. Have you ever written a love poem for someone? Were your feelings reciprocated?

» We find out in Volume 2 that Amelia's Aunt Tanner has a secret past as a rock star. No one knows why she quit the music business, but we get a feeling that it wasn't everything Tanner hoped it would be when she tells Amelia that "Wanting something is always better than having it." What do you think Tanner means by this? Do you agree with her?

» After Amelia finds out about Tanner's past as a rock star, her mom tells her she was a big fan and that she kept a lot of memorabilia from Tanner's rise to fame and subsequent musical career in the attic. Without permission, Amelia digs this stuff out of the attic and finds an old cassette tape with one of Tanner's never-recorded songs on it, which she shares with her friends at school without permission. Do you think it was okay for Amelia to go digging through the attic to find this stuff? Was it okay for her to share what she found without Tanner's permission?

» Amelia and her friends return to New York City to spend time with her dad and best friend Sunday Jones. When it's time to leave, Amelia is very sad to be leaving someone behind and therefore missing someone again. Have you ever had to leave a friend behind? How did this make you feel?

» Amelia branches out in Volume 2 and makes some new friends. It just so happens that these new friends are actually Reggie's arch nemeses, the ninjas! Should Amelia tell Reggie about her new friends? Is she being disloyal to her fellow members of G.A.S.P. by befriending the ninjas?

AMELIA RULES, VOLUME 3: SUPERHEROES

» In the beginning of Volume 3, Amelia finds out that she and her mom are moving out of Aunt Tanner's house and into a house of their own. Even though the house is only across town, Amelia will have to start school in a new district. To keep Amelia from having to move, Tanner agrees to take the new house and let Amelia and her mom stay in her house. Has anybody ever done anything nice like that for you? Why do you think Tanner agreed to move to the new house so Amelia could stay in the first house?

» Right before we find out that Tanner has agreed to take the new house and let Amelia and her mom stay in the old house, Amelia prepares to say good-bye. As a part of her good-bye we see a flash-forward of her life where we get to see her a few months in the future, then two years later, then her life in high school followed by her sweet 16 and life after high school. Can you envision your future self? Where will you be one year from now? What will you be doing in high school? Where do you see yourself after high school?

» The Intergalactic Ninja is Reggie's hero. Aunt Tanner is Amelia's hero. Do you have any heroes? Do personal heroes have to be real or can they be imaginary?

» Joanne's magazine, the "Tweenie Zeenie," includes stories, pictures, a gossip column, interviews, a sports report, etc. If you started a 'zine, what would you include in it? Who would you recruit to help write and illustrate it? How would you distribute it? Would you charge money for it?

» At the end of Volume 3, we find out that Amelia's friend Trish is sick and moving to California for an operation. When she says good-bye, Amelia gives Trish her "magical" locket with a special picture of Trish's magical character Princess Trishara. If you had a friend who was leaving, what would you give him or her as a good-bye present?

AMELIA RULES, VOLUME 4: WHEN THE PAST IS A PRESENT

» On the night before the first day of school, Amelia is planning to watch a movie with her mom and Aunt Tanner. They did this the year before and so Amelia thought it was the beginning of a tradition. Do you have any traditions in your family? If yes, what do you do and when? If no, what kind of traditions would you like to start in your family?

» In the beginning of Volume 4, Amelia's mom has a date for the first time after the divorce. When the date arrives to pick her up, he refers to her as "Mary." This makes Amelia realize that her mom is more than just a mom, or a sister, or a wife. Sometimes it can be difficult to think of our parents as real people and not just as our moms and dads. Do you remember a time when you realized that your parents were more than just your parents? Do they act differently around their friends? How about in front of your aunts and uncles or grandparents?

» In a flashback scene, we see a younger Amelia in New York City with her best friend Sunday Jones. When she tells Sunday that her parents are getting a divorce and she and her mom are moving, Sunday suggests they run away. What do you think about this idea? Do you understand her urge to run away? In your opinion, is this a smart solution to the problem?

» We find out toward the end of Volume 4 that Joan's dad is being deployed overseas to fight in a war. Do you know anyone who has been sent overseas for military duty? How would you feel if one of your parents had to leave for a year for their job? How would you stay in touch with them throughout the year?

» At the end of Volume 4, Amelia realizes that she knows very little about the history of her family. What do you know about your family history? Do you know how your parents met? What about your grandparents? Does your family have any heirlooms, or objects passed down from generation to generation, like the locket Amelia receives from her great-aunt Sarah?

THE **AMELIA RULES!** SERIES BY JIMMY GOWNLEY

Ages 7-12 • Grades 2-7

“Unwraps a kid’s-eye view of life honestly, poignantly, and with a hefty dollop of melodrama.” —*Booklist*

“A character to rival Ramona.”—*School Library Journal*



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Volume 3: *Superheroes*
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