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Great Lakes Great Books Go Graphic

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Great Lakes, Great Books Goes Graphic!

by Lynette Marten Suckow

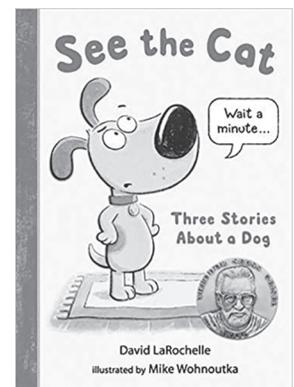


Lynette
Marten Suckow

The popularity of graphic novels has exploded in the last fifteen years, and graphic novels have been featured on many of the Great Lakes Great Books Award lists! The first to appear was *Bone: Out from Boneville* by Jeff Smith in 2006. Brian Selznick made the list in 2008 with *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, a hybrid of alternating chapters in illustrations and text. *El Deafo* by Cece Bell continued the graphic novel trend in 2015, and the author, Raina Telgemeier, followed it up with *Ghosts* in 2017. These authors have gone on to specialize and excel in the graphic novel genre. Because it is difficult for any reader to resist the experience of dual sensory input from text and pictures at the same time, this month's focus is on a collection of graphic novels *MRJ* readers are sure to enjoy. Although the first two books below aren't labeled as graphic novels, they are very "graphic," as extensive illustrations to support each story. Enjoy reading the growing number of graphic novels listed here and watch for next year's nominees at the MRA Annual Conference from March 11-14, 2022 in Lansing, Michigan.

See the Cat: Three Stories About a Dog by David LaRoche features Max, the dog, who argues with the narrator about what he sees (and doesn't see) from his perspective on the page. Although the first short story seems stressful for Max, who feels that the narrator is not listening to him, it proves to be very funny for readers. By the second story, Max realizes that he is subject to the written text and quickly adds an important word to avoid catastrophe. Max totally takes control of

the third story and negotiates with the narrator to guide the story to his liking. Readers will enjoy the transformation of underdog to top dog (puns intended). The gouache illustrations by Mike Wohnoutka are focused and expressive, rounding out this delightful book. It's easy to see why a 2021 Theodor Seuss Geisel Award sticker, designating an outstanding easy reader for children, has been added to the front cover. Keep the laughs coming with LaRoche's newest book, *See the Dog: Three Stories About a Cat* (2021).



Monster and Boy by Hannah Barnaby shows what happens when the legendary monster who lives under the bed is diminished because parents who want their children to sleep well tell them that monsters are not real. From the monster's point of view, he needs to verify his existence. While attempting to announce that monsters are real, he surprises himself by swallowing the boy who



Must Read Texts

was going to scream for his parents. The monster works frantically to cough up the boy, now only a fraction of his original size. Thus, begins the adventure of a monster and a boy, trying all kinds of ideas to make the boy large again. The pair cautiously venture from the bedroom, exploring the entire house while looking for a way to enlarge little boys. After a run-in with the little sister, the monster thinks of a solution to their problem and cooperates with the boy to restore his normal size. The narrator's voice is conversational, adding even more humor to this tongue-in-cheek book about being open to new ideas. Illustrator Anoosha Syed generously sprinkles text-enhancing illustrations throughout this imaginative chapter book. The *Monster and Boy* series includes *Monster and Boy: Monster's First Day of School* (2021) and *Monster and Boy: The Sister Surprise* (2022).

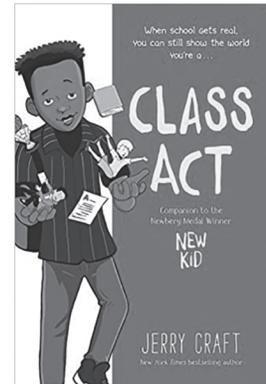
Measuring Up by Lily LaMotte tackles the trials and tribulations of immigration in this debut novel. Cici and her family recently moved from Taiwan to Seattle for the same reasons as many—career and educational opportunities. However, Cici's grandmother, the light of her life and cooking mentor, stayed behind.



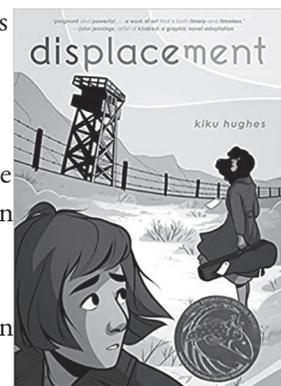
Although Cici adopts a good attitude and finds friends at school, she makes the mistake of bringing Taiwanese cuisine for lunch, revealing herself as an outsider. Cici misses her grandmother terribly and collaborates with her mother to send money for a visit. Winnings from a local cooking contest could pay those travel expenses, so Cici signs up. Each weekly cooking challenge allows her to learn more about unfamiliar spices leading to the perfect American dish. She also finds a new friend and teammate, a young chef whose father owns an upscale restaurant. The older man is impressed with Cici's ability recognize each ingredient in a mixture by tasting it, but his racial prejudices make him suspect Cici of stealing a recipe in order to win the contest. She is vindicated when she wins the contest by creating a modern twist on an old Taiwanese dish. The final pane of this insightful graphic novel shows Cici sharing a meal with

her parents, grandmother, and three new friends, with hopes that could shape the future.

Class Act by Jerry Craft picks up where the story of Jordan Banks leaves off in *New Kid* (2019), Newbery Medal winner for 2020. There's a summary of Jordan's introduction into a mostly white prep school where he meets friends Liam and Drew, but this is Drew's story. Both books contrast and compare the problems of white, mixed race, and African-American students trying to survive middle school at Riverdale Academy and establish their own identities. As the trio assembles on the first day of school, it appears that Drew can't seem to avoid Andy, the wealthy and privileged school bully, until Andy dyes himself green for a school activity and becomes the target of his own jokes about skin color. The graphic novel format of this book allows the well-meaning principal to devolve into a caricature of himself whenever student conflict becomes inevitable. Jordan, an aspiring artist, continues a story thread from the first book by adding several of his own story panels to the framework. Liam brings his upper-class family problems to the group, causing some distance between friends, until they decide to accept each other's socioeconomic differences. Visual cues are dispersed throughout the chapters and add significant humor to the overall story, which explores race, social standing, family structure, and the world of academics.



Displacement by Kiku Hughes gives historical fiction a sci-fi twist by sending sixteen-year-old Kiku into the past as a reluctant time traveler. Not the first time she's been displaced in time, Kiku has now been held in a World War II Japanese internment camp for more than a year. Reliving her Japanese grandmother's experience, Kiku



is initially taken to Tanforan Assembly Center, a former racetrack near San Francisco, where detainees were housed in horse stables and later transported to a camp in the harsh winter environment of Utah. The Central Utah Relocation Center (Topaz) Site stands there to this day, archiving the history of the era. Hughes researched these camps extensively and based several of her characters on activists who lived through the internment camp experience and publicly opposed it after the war. Emotions and fears of the Japanese American community are conveyed through exceptional text and graphics. As a nod to the present, Kiku returns to her home where she and her mother listen in shock to the television, as the Trump administration bans Muslims from the country and locks up migrant children at the Southern U.S. border. Parallels to the Japanese internment camps in the 1940's are unmistakable. As a result of Kiku's experience, her family researches the camps further, before becoming activists themselves, educating others about nationalist policies that still exist today.

Great Lakes, Great Books, an MRA Student Involvement Project

The GLGB committee takes on the task of reading as many children's and teen books as possible in order to select forty of the best books published within the last two years. One main goal of Great Lakes Great Books is introducing K-12 classrooms to some of the best books available on the market. Teachers and librarians are encouraged to provide students with books from their grade-level lists and allow them to vote on their favorites to promote reading and student participation process. Look for supplemental classroom materials online at www.michiganreading.org under the Awards tab.

Author Biography

Lynette Marten Suckow is a Reference Librarian at Peter White Public Library in Marquette, MI where she teaches people how to make the transition from print to digital literacy. She holds a master's degree in education from Northern Michigan University and has been a Great Lakes Great Books Award committee member for the past twelve years. She can be reached at lynette.suckow@gmail.com.

