

Comics Don't Have to Be Funny

The story of Holocaust victim Anne Frank is known to most young people who went through American schools. Her teen diary that tells the tale of the two years she and her family spent hiding in a small apartment from the Nazis is a standard part of our middle school or high school English curriculum.

But parts of her story don't come through her famous diary. For example, Anne wasn't interested in the fact that the apartment she hid in was located above a jam warehouse. As a teenage girl, Anne was far more interested in Peter, the teen boy who was hiding with her, or fighting with her mother.

When the folks who run the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam decided to commission a new biography of Anne, instead of turning to conventional

biographers, they contacted comic book creators Ernie Colón and Sid Jacobson.¹ While the pair had worked on such light titles as *Casper the Friendly Ghost* and *Richie Rich*, they had also collaborated on the graphic novel treatment of the U.S. government's 9/11 *Commission Report* on the September 11 terror attacks. Their graphic novel/biography of Frank covers a much wider time period than the diary, going from Anne's parents' lives before she was born and extending until the publication of the diary years after Frank's death.



HOW does a graphic novel differ from a novel that just has text?

For decades, high school students have been reading the story of Anne Frank in the format of a teenaged girl's diary. How does telling the story with drawings transform the experience?

WHY are they sending this message?

What is the publisher trying to accomplish with the graphic novel? Is it appropriate to tell a serious story like that of Anne Frank or the 9/11 attacks in comic book format? Have you ever read the graphic novel *Maus* by Art Spiegelman that tells the story of the Holocaust with the Jews as mice and the Germans as cats? If so, what was your reaction?

HOW do you and your classmates interpret graphic novels?

Do you or your classmates read graphic novels/comic books? Would you be more likely to read a graphic novel than a text novel on a serious subject? What can you do with a graphic presentation that you can't do with text?

¹Jamie Katz, "A New Look at Anne Frank," *Smithsonian.com*, January 25, 2011, www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/a-new-look-at-anne-frank-108812/?no-ist=.



Web 4.5: Read more about how Anne Frank's famous diary has been in the news.