Horror in YA Graphic Novels

By Elyse Coombs

The emergence of the graphic novel has given way to a revolution with respect to the reluctant reader – there is now genre of books that even the most reluctant reader is interested in. The graphic novel works for everyone – it attracts boys as well as girls, English as a second language students, and visual learners, and is increasingly popular amongst young adults.

The subgenre of horror has been gaining momentum and popularity in recent years amongst young adult readers, largely due to the popularity of vampires, but mostly because teens enjoy horror and like being scared. Horror novels enable readers to delve into the forbidden, and experience shock and terror. According to the article *A New Era in Gothic Literature,* although once believed to inspire juvenile delinquency, illiteracy, and disrespect for authority, horror is one of the oldest genres in modern literature, and is comprised of horror, Gothic, the weird, ghost stories, the macabre, and the supernatural.

For those educators who are hesitant to include graphic novels as a material, there is increasing proof as to the numerous benefits of them. Graphic novels are no longer viewed as simple books with pictures, lacking quality and having too few words and. For true enjoyment of graphic novels, one must view them as you would a film – the visual images and text elements must be considered together.

Horror novels can generally be segregated into five motifs, and it can be said that graphic novels are no different: a castle/haunted house setting; a young innocent hero(ine); a villain/monster; a dark/oppressive setting; and the inclusion of social taboos.

Graphic novels have an extensive viewership, and, as such, have a diverse range of subject matter. Horror is just one of the subgenre's within graphic novels that has found popularity. Some of this popularity can be attributed to author Joss Whedon, famously known as the creator of both TV shows (and graphic novels) *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spinoff *Angel*, who has published a variety of horror graphic novels and has a very large following.

There are a variety of other authors who have since gained notoriety through their

publishing of horror graphic novels, and graphic novels that have been turned into movies, bring notoriety to their authors. The newest emerging trend is that of classic authors having their works being reproduced as graphic novels. Abridging novels for a younger audience is nothing new, but by introducing classics as graphic novels, classic literature has become more accessible for readers of all ages and interests. It is worth noting that the classics that are presented as graphic novels are not always abridged – sometimes they feature the full-text.

If you are looking for a good (and scary) graphic novel, some notable horror works that should not be missed include:

Anya's Ghost by Vera Brosgol (2011): Anya is lonely and could use a friend; she just was not expecting to find a friend that had been dead for a century, and lives at the bottom of a well. Recipient of both the Eisner Award for "Best Original Graphic Publication for Young Readers" and the Harvey Award for "Best Publication for Young Adults (ages 12-17)".

Dracula by Gary Reed & Bram Stoker (2006): A full text adaptation of Bram Stoker's famous work, Gary Reed tells the tale of John Harker, real estate agent, who has travelled to Transylvania in order to sell a Count land in England. A summarized version of the original, readers won't even realize they are reading a classic.

Pride, Prejudice and Zombies by Jane Austen, Seth Grahame-Smith & Tony Lee (2010). The graphic novel adaptation of a New York Times Best-seller, Tony Lee adapts Seth Grahame-Smith's novel which sees Jane Austin's classic turned into a zombie horror story. The dead are rising, and even the women of Britain's most affluent families must be taught how to kill zombies. Complete with ninja and a love story.

The Nightmare Factory by Thomas Ligotti, Joe Harris & Stuart Moore (2007). Horror master Thomas Ligotti presents a compilation of some of his creepiest tales. In this graphic novel, these tale of sophisticated horror are visually brought to life and take readers to an unimaginable world.

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