



- 1. Take notes.** Notes help not only with discussion of the material, but also with retention of what you read – if you take notes, you’re more likely to remember what happened in the book. You can take notes on a separate piece of paper, in the margins of the book, or on self-adhesive note paper. Taking notes may increase the amount of time you need to finish reading a book, but it will enhance your ability to think critically about the book.
- 2. Ask questions.** If you’re moderating the meeting about the book, include potential discussion questions among your notes. Don’t be afraid to ask hard questions, and identify questions that you think will promote meaningful discussion of the material. Even if you aren’t moderating, asking yourself questions can help you identify with the work.
- 3. Pay attention to both the art and the text.** Graphic novels embrace both textual and visual cues to tell a story. Sometimes, it’s easy to focus on one over the other. As you read, make an effort to examine both and how the interplay between the two is greater than the parts. It may help to read the book multiple times, focusing first on one aspect, then the other, and then finally on both together.
- 4. Identify themes and symbolism.** Analyze the deeper meaning behind the work: What are the ideas that the creators are exploring in the book? How do they use text and images as metaphors or similes, as symbols of something else?
- 5. Examine the structure of the book.** As you read, pay attention to how the creators use color (or the lack of color) to convey ideas, themes, temporal changes, and so forth. The creators may also use panel size, frequency, and structure to convey emotions and events or to develop a sense of urgency about the plot or characters.
- 6. Evaluate the motivators behind the book.** Is the book plot- or character-driven? If it is plot driven, it will move from event to event quickly, with little time spent on character development. Character-driven books



tend to have a slower pace, focusing less on events and more on individual reactions, emotions, and thoughts.

- 7. Compare the book to other stories.** As you read, compare the book to other stories, whether they are prose or graphic novels. Consider the other work of the writer and artist: Are their previous books similar in art style and subject matter? Are there common themes? Identify prose books or other graphic novels that have similar themes or employ similar structure or visual style.