

Smile Reading Guide



Questions and Ideas for Consideration

- Graphic Narrative:** How does the comic style of *Smile* affect the message and meaning of the story? What benefits/limitations does this medium present?
- Depiction Details:** What illustration choices does Telgemeier make to purposefully present certain ideas? Consider use of line, color, perspective, framing, etc.
- Relationships:** What does this book say about parent/child relationships, siblings, and other relationships? How do these compare to the friendships portrayed? What messages about friendships does the text seem to send or explore?
- Appearance:** How does this text explore questions related to appearance, self-esteem, and the emphasis we place on looks? What ideologies does it present?
- Growing Up:** In what ways does this graphic text present concepts related to growing up and learning about one's self? How does it differ from other books we've read semester when it comes to these ideas?
- Character:** How are visual elements of the text important in interpreting and analyzing characters, and especially the role that Raina's friends play in her life?

Daybook Possibilities

- Consider the concept of graphic memoir, perhaps researching other examples. Write about how telling a personal story through pictures changes what an author can do or how a reader might perceive it.
- Visit the library and check out some of the other graphic narratives or comic books for children or teens. How is *Smile* similar or different to these? Which draw your attention and why?
- We've looked at several award winners this term; write about the different reasons these texts seem to be highlighted or what they offer that is noteworthy.
- Consider design choices Telgemeier makes, such as color, use of text/dialogue, frame shape/size, etc. How do these affect the story?
- Learn about how graphic novels are viewed and how people perceive them (possibly looking at news or web forum spaces). Do you agree or disagree?
- In what context might you teach this book or other graphic novels? Do some research about classroom uses of graphic narratives and how/why teachers might use them in classroom settings.
- Create your own mini graphic narrative or memoir, describing an important moment in your own life from this perspective, and then write about some of your own artistic and design choices.

Suggested Critical Reading

"Comic Art, Children's Literature, and the New Comic Studies" by Charles Hatfield

"The Graphic Novel and the Age of Transition: A Survey and Analysis" by Stephen E. Tabachnick

"Decoding Comics" by Hilary Chute

I especially recommend Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, a scholarly book written as a comic book. If you'd like to read a section, I'm happy to make copies of a chapter that interests you.

Background and Context

#1 New York Times Bestseller and 2011 Eisner Award Winner (for teen graphic narratives), Raina Telgemeier's *Smile* is a graphic memoir, relaying the story of Raina's experience as a sixth grade who faces dental drama, boy troubles, and difficult friendships. A coming-of-age comic, *Smile* has enjoyed huge popularity among young readers, as have Telgemeier's other popular comics including *Drama*, *Sisters*, and her recent work in creating *Babysitters Club* comic adaptations.