

CBLDF Discussion Guide

SideScrollers

by **Matthew Loux**

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Given their visual nature, comics are easy targets for would-be censors. CBLDF's Discussion Guides are tools that can be used to lead conversations about challenged graphic novels and to help allay misconceptions about comics.

Synopsis

SideScrollers recounts the adventures of three teenaged slacker geeks who are roused to action when a female friend becomes romantically involved with loutish quarterback Dick. Along the way, the trio engages in mildly vulgar but realistic teenage banter and vandalizes Dick's car with anatomically correct graffiti.

Themes

Friendship, bullying, ethical behavior

Reasons Challenged

Profanity, sexual references

Suggested Age Range

High school

Discussion Questions

Remembering

1. One of the things that makes this book fun to read are all the references to pop culture. List all of the references to games, television, movies, and more that you recognized. Include page numbers.
2. Many of the characters in the story do the "wrong things for the right reasons." Name some of the instances when this happened. How did the characters' actions bring about the desired results? How did they fail?

Understanding

3. Matt, Brad, and Brian don't really fit the conventional definition of hero, yet they're the main characters of this book. How do you define what a hero is and how do or don't these three characters fit that definition?
4. Much of the dialog in the book is based on the way the author and his friends spoke to one another in real life. How much of the dialog and speech patterns ring true to your experience in high school or college? What words or phrases would you have had the characters use to make them sound like you and your friends?

Applying

5. There are many ethical issues that run throughout the book — bullying, vandalism, theft, and sexual harassment are just a few. Consider some of the situations in which the characters find themselves. How might you have handled these situations if they happened to you?
6. Toward the beginning of the book, we see Richard looking through various magazines in the Biffco Shop while anxiously looking over his shoulder. Discuss what the author may be implying in this scene.

Analyzing

7. *SideScrollers* has been challenged in school libraries for profanity and sexual references. How would the story change if the profanity was eliminated and if the sexual references were removed?
8. Although she is given credit for being smart, Amber is still seen as someone who needs to be rescued. How are the roles of the women different from the roles of the men? How might the story change if it were about three female gamers instead of three male gamers?

Evaluating

9. When Brian suggest that he, Brad, and Matt mess up Dick's car as a way of taking a stand, Matt replies, "Ya' know this really isn't standing up to him." Is there a good way to stand up to a bully? How can you tell if what you're doing makes you a bully?
10. How does Loux's use of stereotypes, both male and female, influence your reaction to and understanding of the story?

Creating

11. Matthew Loux's black and white art is very angular and distinct. Discuss how his figures and artistic design add to the storytelling.

Activities

Writing

Choose a scene from a family story, one you've heard a million times. Change the story so it fits within your current school setting. Who are your characters? What challenges do they need to overcome? Do your characters find what they're looking for or do they change as a result of the situation? Write a plot outline for your story that includes rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.

Illustration

Who would win in a fight? Work in a small group to create a new product mascot that can both sell cereal, candy, baked beans, and so forth and "win in a big and crazy death-match fight." Illustrate your mascot using black and white only (grey shading is allowed). Develop a catchy slogan for your mascot.

Digital Presentation

Rewrite a scene from the book in such a way that no one could object to it: no vulgar language, no ethical missteps, no questionable stereotypes. Using a video camera or smart phone, record your classmates acting out the re-written scene. Be prepared to discuss the changes you made and how you feel they impact the overall quality of the story.

For additional teaching and discussion suggestions, including correlations to the Common Core State Standards, visit <http://cblddf.org/librarian-tools/using-graphic-novels-in-education/using-graphic-novels-in-education-sidescrollers/>

For more about attempts to censor SideScrollers, visit <http://cblddf.org/banned-comic/banned-challenged-comics/case-study-sidescrollers/>

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of the First Amendment rights of the comics art form and its community of retailers, creators, publishers, librarians, and readers. CBLDF provides legal referrals, representation, advice, assistance, and education in furtherance of these goals.
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