

DRAWN TO THE FORM

Wordless Comics

Diana Maliszewski
and the Staff of The Beguiling

Wordless comics may appear quiet to those uninitiated into the wonderful world of graphic novels – after all, how do you conduct a read-aloud with one when there are no words? It’s actually doable. Wordless comics are absolutely amazing, chock full of great topics and themes, and appropriate for all ages.

School library professionals should not shy away from sharing wordless comics. Some tips for sharing with groups include:

- Ensure the audience can see the illustrations closely
- Use a document camera and interactive white board to enlarge the images if the group is particularly big. But do not scan and save every page. This infringes on copyright!
- Describe what you see, as if you were making the visual media accessible to users with visual impairments.



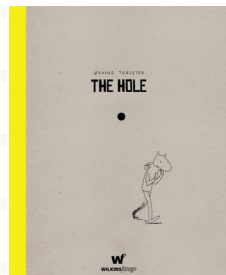
My favourite comic of this type is the incomparable *Owly* series by Andy Runton. I have the originals and enjoyed reading them together with my son when he was younger as part of our bedtime ritual. They pack such an emotional impact. I remember him weeping because he connected so deeply with Owly, the titular character, during a particularly poignant scene.



I realized that, although I possess several wordless comics in my school library collection (e.g. *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan), I may be unaware of other great titles. I turned to my friends at the The Beguiling, a Toronto bookstore featuring comics, manga, original local art and a diverse selection of graphic novels, for some expert advice and recommendations. Here, some of the staff

share a few of their personal favourites, and dispel some myths about wordless comics. They aren’t as “quiet” as you think!

Bettina Krebs, the resident library technician at The Beguiling, recommends *The Hole* by Oyvind Torseter. Ever though it’s a silent text, Bettina tells me:



“This book is incredibly affecting and explores themes of curiosity and existentialism in a way that is charming and accessible to children. It expresses itself in a unique way and engages children through its physicality, while also remaining largely simple in its design. It really sticks with you and sparks new thoughts and feelings with

every ‘read’ through.”

Christine Rentschler, one of The Beguiling’s collection development specialists, drew my attention to a title that opens with an extended wordless section:



“In Ben Hatke’s *Little Robot*, a little girl (and amateur engineer) discovers an abandoned robot in a garbage heap, makes friends with it, and the two set off on some wild adventures! *Little Robot* is a great book for early and reluctant readers because it starts with a wordless narrative that invites the reader in.