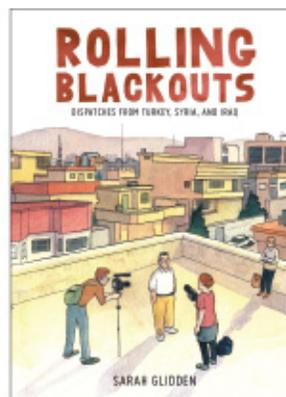
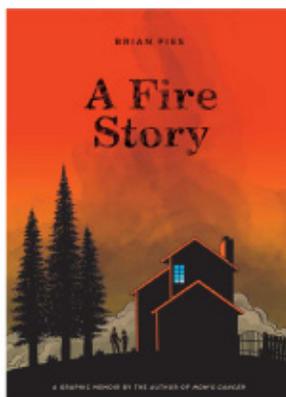
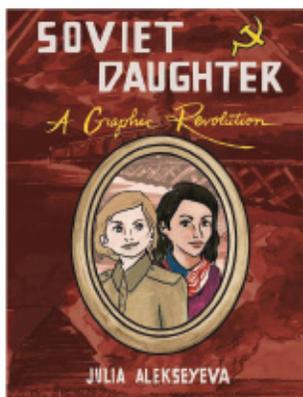
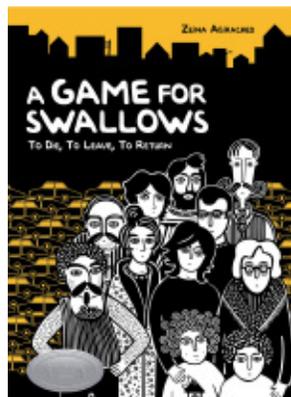


First-Person Graphic Memoirs: 17 Recommended Titles

by [Brigid Alverson](#)

Apr 24, 2019 | Filed in [News & Features](#)



A Game for Swallows: To Die, to Leave, to Return by Zeina

Abirached (Graphic Universe, 2012)

Gr 5 Up –The year is 1984; the place, a Beirut apartment building, when bombings and snipers during the Lebanon War make traveling the streets or being in a windowed room unsafe. Abirached’s family has moved to their apartment’s foyer, the only safe area. When her parents leave to visit a relative and are delayed, neighbors come in to gossip, share food, and offer encouragement. The art is similar to *Persepolis* but more mannered.

I Remember Beirut by Zeina Abirached (Graphic Universe, 2014)

Gr 5 Up –Abirached presents short vignettes about her family’s life during the war, from her mother’s perpetually shattered windshield to her discovery, after the war, of the nearby neighborhoods she could never visit because of the fighting.

Soviet Daughter: A Graphic Revolution by Julia Alekseyeva (Microcosm, 2017)

Gr 10 Up –Alekseyeva’s comic is based on the diary of her great-grandmother Lola, who grew up in a poor Russian Jewish family and caught the revolutionary spirit in 1917. Lola was a secretary for Communist officials, enduring poverty and anti-Semitism while raising children, mostly as a single mother. Alekseyeva contrasts that with hers as a modern woman in Canada, drawing inspiration and strength from Lola’s example.

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[**First-Person Graphic Memoirs Bring History to Life for Students**](#)

A Fire Story by Brian Fies (Abrams, 2019)

Gr 7 Up –Fies lost his home in one of the California wildfires of 2017, and this book (which grew from an online comic) describes the shock of loss and the effect of the fire and its aftermath. Fies is the creator of the graphic novels *Mom's Cancer* and *Whatever Happened to the World of the Future?*

Poppies of Iraq by Brigitte Findakly; illus. by Lewis Trondheim (Drawn & Quarterly, 2017)

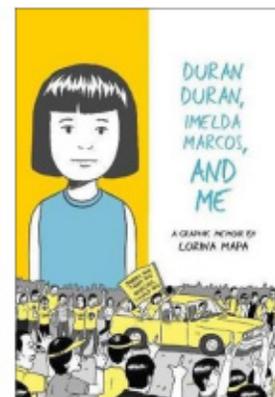
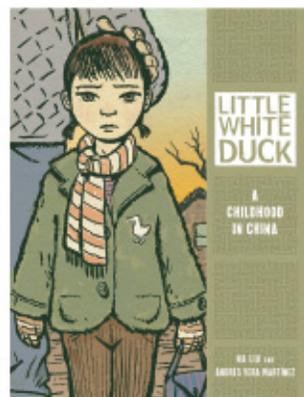
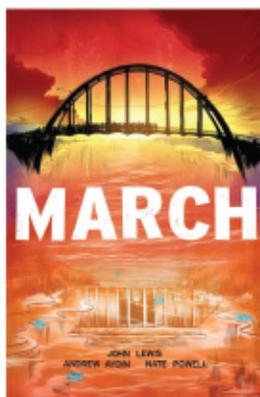
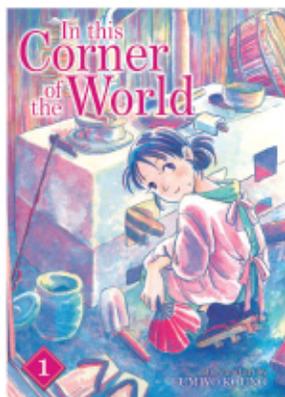
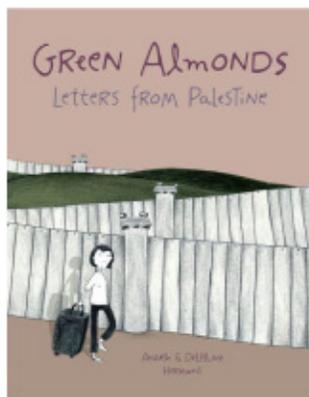
Gr 8 Up –Findakly grew up in Mosul, Iraq, in the 1960s and 1970s. Her short vignettes alternate between stories of everyday life and the effect that political shifts of power had on her and her family.

Rolling Blackouts: Dispatches from Turkey by Sarah Glidden (Drawn & Quarterly, 2016)

Gr 10 Up –Glidden traveled through the Middle East with two journalist friends and an Iraq War veteran as they interviewed refugees in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. Depicting the experiences of refugees, Glidden pays close attention to how the journalists work.

Green Almonds: Letters from Palestine by Anaële Hermans & Delphine Hermans; illus. by Delphine Hermans (Lion Forge, 2018)

Gr 10 Up –The simple drawings bely an emotionally complex story, told mostly through illustrated letters from Anaële, volunteering for a nonprofit in Palestine, to her sister in Belgium. Traveling in Israel and Palestine, Anaële is bewildered and depressed by the walls, violence, and seeming acceptance of it by Palestinians. People are friendly, but she's acutely aware of the freedom she has as a European.



In This Corner of the World by Fumiyo Kouno (Seven Seas, 2017)

Gr 7 Up –This story of the life of an ordinary Japanese family during World War II is filled with homely details as well as big events. Suzu, a young bride, goes to live with her husband's

family in a town near Hiroshima and learns to deal gracefully with increasing privation as the war goes on. This story is fictional, but the details are carefully researched.

“March” Trilogy by John Lewis and Andrew Aydin; illus. by Nate Powell (Top Shelf, 2013)

Gr 8 Up –The first volume of Lewis’s memoir traces his early involvement in the civil rights movement, including the desegregation of the Nashville lunch counters in the late 1950s. The two subsequent volumes cover the Freedom Riders, the March on Washington, and the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

Little White Duck: A Childhood in China by Na Liu; illus. by Andrés Vera Martínez (Graphic Universe, 2013)

Gr 4-7 –Each short chapter tells of a different aspect of Liu’s childhood in 1970s China: her parents’ grief at the death of Chairman Mao, her school’s rat-catching crusade, a famous Chinese hero, her visit to poor cousins in the country. These stories with universal elements of childhood also capture details about the society and times.

Duran Duran, Imelda Marcos, and Me by Lorina Mapa (Conundrum, 2017)

Gr 9 Up –Called home to the Philippines after her father’s death, Mapa recalls her childhood and seismic political events, including the 1983 assassination of Benigno Aquino and the overthrow of the Marcos regime. Her parents were involved in the anti-Marcos movement, so Mapa had a front-row seat to the finale of the “People Power Revolution.”

Dare to Disappoint: Growing Up in Turkey by Ozge Samanci (Farrar, 2015)

Gr 9 Up –Samanci tells of her school years in Turkey, starting in first grade in 1981, after a civil war. She was taught to worship Mustafa Atatürk, the founder of Turkey, and practiced military drills on the playground. Later, she encounters discrimination as a non-Muslim in her high school. Violence intrudes, as when Samanci’s former gym teacher and his wife are killed by police, but mostly this is a story of a girl growing up in a country changing in confusing ways.



Rendez-Vous in Phoenix by Tony Sandoval (Lion Forge, 2016)

Gr 9 Up –Sandoval takes readers along as he illegally crosses from Mexico to the United States, traveling through the desert under the care of a coyote (guide). The story is set in 1998, and perils loom large.

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood by Marjane Satrapi (Pantheon, 2004)

Gr 9 Up –The classic that pretty much defines this category, *Persepolis* remains a popular read, and for good reason. Satrapi expertly mixes the personal and the political in her depiction of childhood in Iran before and during the Iranian Revolution.

The Arab of the Future, Vol. 1 by Riad Sattouf (Metropolitan, 2015)

Gr 10 Up –In the early 1980s, when Sattouf was a preschooler, his family moved from France (his mother’s country) to Libya and then Syria (his father’s homeland). Sattouf depicts the era’s society and politics with wry hindsight, using a different color for each locale. The three-volume series has a fourth on the way. This first title won the top prize at the Angoulême International Comics Festival.

Ichi-F: A Worker’s Graphic Memoir of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant by Kazuto Tatsuta (Kodansha, 2017)

Gr 8 Up –After the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in 2011, Tatsuta took a job as a cleanup worker at the severely damaged Fukushima plant. In this manga, he recounts job details—the layers of protective gear, pecking order of the workers, and relationships with locals affected by the catastrophe.

Darkroom: A Memoir in Black and White by Lila Quintero Weaver (University of Alabama Pr., 2012)

Gr 7 Up –Weaver emigrated with her family from Argentina to Jim Crow Marion, AL, in 1961,

when she was five. Though she was on the “whites only” side of the color line, she was also an outsider, providing a unique vantage point to observe the norms of a segregated society and the effects of the civil rights movement.

Brigid Alverson edits SLJ’s “Good Comics for Kids” blog.

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