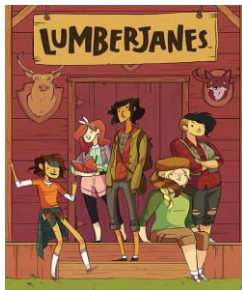


## Using Graphic Novels in Education: *Lumberjanes* by Noelle Stevenson, Grace Ellis, Shannon Waters, and Brooke Allen

By Meryl Jaffe, Ph.D.

Welcome to ***Using Graphic Novels in Education***, an ongoing feature from CBLDF that is designed to allay confusion around the content of banned books and to help parents and teachers raise readers. In this column, we examine books that have been targeted by censors and provide teaching and discussion suggestions for the use of such books in classrooms.

This post takes a closer look at *Lumberjanes* series created by Shannon Watters, Grace Ellis and Noelle Stevenson; written by Noelle Stevenson and Grace Ellis; illustrated by Brooke Allen; colors by Maarta Laiho; and letters by Aubrey Aiese.



*Lumberjanes* is an ongoing coming-of-age series about friendship and girl-power in the great outdoors. It is filled with humor, adventure where during summer camp, a lovably quirky diverse group of friends tackle wild, mystical mysteries using anagrams, astronomy, and Fibonacci series' strategies, mixed in with brain power and pure brawn. *Lumberjanes* is a New York Times Bestseller; 2015 Eisner Award for Best Series; 2015 Eisner Award for Best Publication for Teens (13-17); 2015 Diamond Gem Awards for Best All-Ages Series and Best All-Ages Graphic Novel; Harvey Award Nominee for Best Letterer, for Best New Series, and for Best Original Graphic Publication for Younger Readers; and is a nominee for GLAAD's Outstanding Comic Book for 2016.

This post reviews the first two volumes, *Lumberjanes: Beware the Kitten Holy* and *Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max*. Volume 3, *Lumberjanes: A Terrible Plan* is scheduled to be released April, 2016. While marketed for tweens and teens, these volumes can be enjoyed by kids and adults of all ages.



## OVERVIEW

*Lumberjanes* an ongoing series of camp life for five spunky, diverse, kick-butt young women at Miss Quinzella Thistwin Penniquiquil Thistle Crumpet's Camp for ~~Girls~~ Hardcore Lady Types. The campers are known as Lumberjane Scouts and at the beginning of each "chapter" we get a glimpse of the Lumberjanes Field Manual: For the Intermediate Program, which guides Lumberjane campers on how best to earn their various badges. The five scouts whom we learn to know and love are Jo, April, Molly, Mal and Ripley, who are led by their very awesome counselor Jen.

*Lumberjanes: Beware the Kitten Holy* introduces Jo, April, Molly and Ripley as they're out earning their "Up All Night Badge." While exploring the woods, these fab five aren't going to let three-eyed wolves, yetis, the weird boys camp, or any other mystical, natural, or supernatural critters get in the way of their fun or friendship. Even their counselor, Jen – awesome as she is can't stop these friends. In *Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max* their friendship is pushed to the limit as they continue to explore the mystical mysteries in and around their camp and find themselves in neck deep in a case of sibling rivalry. Things are definitely what they seem, and while they may momentarily question who they each really are, their friendship one thing that remains constant.



There are so many things that have made this an award-winning series. First, this is a series that takes girl-power seriously – no matter what kind of girl they may be. In *Lumberjanes*, the girls are diverse, quirky characters who run the gamut from nerdy to quirky to sweet and sour, to hipster. They look, sound and act true to life and we can all find a bit of ourselves in each of these five wonderfully lovable and flawed characters. Then there's the script itself. It is as fun and quirky as its characters.

Then there is the fun, funny, quirky plot and dialogue that grabs our attention from the first to the last panel. The illustrations, coloring and panel design are a mix of earthy and brilliant colors with sharp lines and panel borders. This helps set the rhythm and tension of the story. Also work well. While there is not much tension in *Lumberjanes: Beware the Kitten Holy*, it is chock-full of awesome real, natural and supernatural characters; chock-full of humor and chock-full of fun. Furthermore, there is action from the first to the last panel. We learn about these girls as they face some pretty weird stuff. The story picks up in *Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max* as there is increased tension within the group of five and Diane another camper who has some serious mystery behind her.

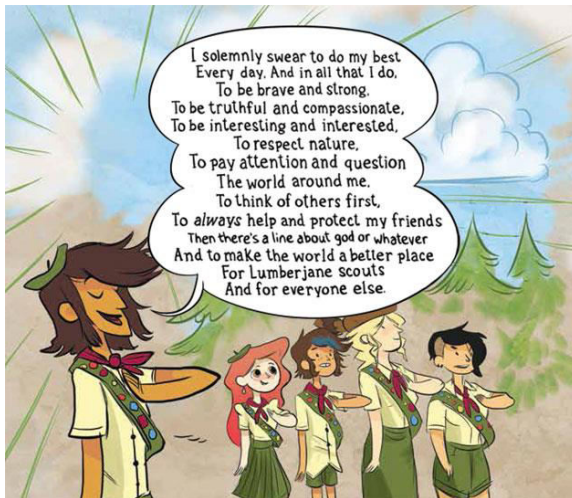
Finally there is humor both in the word play and in the way the characters work with each other. Rosie, the Camp Director, for example, is tough but distracted and she can never get Jen's name right. It's a pure delight to see Jen try so hard to be the world's best counselor with Rosie never quite getting her name right. Then there's the wordplay between the five friends and their use of puns and alliteration to boost the story and the mood.



**In short**, *Lumberjanes* is about friendship, survival, the powers we each hold within us. It's about working together and it's all about being able to embrace the quirkiness within each of us.

In addition to wonderfully nuanced characters and their summer camp challenges, the series tackles:

- The power of friendship and how no matter how different you may feel, with friends you will always “belong”;
- The power of learning, be it math and Fibonacci sequence, astronomy or word play- you never know when it can save your life;
- The challenges of sibling rivalry;
- The importance of understanding oneself and the gifts and roles we each offer; and
- The power of persistence and cooperation with others to achieve your goals;



## SERIES SUMMARY

***Lumberjanes: Beware the Kitten Holy*** begins with a bang as we see April in the woods, at night with a flashlight startled by a deer, with a four-eyed something behind her. On the next page April meets up with Jo, Molly, Mall and Ripley, and together they face a pack of three-eyed wolves. They decide to fight in “Little Red formation” with April shouting “To Grandmother’s house we go” and they proceed to punch out the wolf pack shouting all sorts of expletives including, “What wacked-up eyes you haaaaave!” As the wolves are knocked out, their third eyes, which are actually some sort of mystical talisman beam a message in the sky: “Beware the kitten holy.” And with that, the mystery and adventure begins. While it’s unclear (and unresolved) where these adventures are taking them, the girls use their brains and brawn to defeat a river monster, some talking statues, a pack of yetis, a mysterious lighthouse, and some really weird boys at the neighboring boys’ camp.

Together, these five very different but all equally tough and competent girls competently face this mystery and the challenges it sets. There is a bubbly April, who has sweet eyes and a Barbie/Disney princess look is one tough wolf-punching knock-em sock-em girl who has a penchant for puns. Jo, a natural leader of this group is a cool-headed analytic math whiz. She and April are best friends. Then there is a hipster Mal who is the most cautious and sensitive of the five. She and



Molly seem to have a mutual crush on each other. Sweet-natured Molly is a skilled archer who has a raccoon Bubbles that sits on her head like a hat. Molly sometimes worries that she doesn't contribute enough to the group. And then there's Ripley - a small spunky, quirky girl who loves animals from kittens to dinosaurs and is constantly launching herself into the heart of danger.

Hoping to avoid their counselor, Jen's suspicions, the girls return to Miss Qiunzella Thiskwin Penniguiquul Thistle Crumpet's Camp for ~~Girls~~ Hardcore Lady Types only to sneak into their bunk with Jen waiting for them. Jen marches them to the camp director, Rosie, who doesn't seem at all bothered by the girls' story of their midnight encounter. Jen suspicious but clueless, and ever the eager counselor is somewhat continues to do her best for her girls as she becomes ever more entwined in their adventures.



***Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max*** also begins at night, as the girls (along with Jen) are again in some kind of danger. We learn on the second page that it's only Jo having a nightmare – although meanwhile Jen is arguing with Rosie asking her, “So were you at any point going to WARN me about the forest full of supernatural creatures that are totally out to get us?” Rosie responds, “You underestimate those girls...” Finally before leaving Rosie Jen addresses her real fear, “But what if I get them all killed?!!!” Jen, however, is an awesome character and awesome counselor. She's with her girls to the end and together they plod and solve their mystery – which they find, involves a bad case of sibling rivalry and is solved through brains, brawn, astronomy and the power of friends working together.



## TEACHING/DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS:

### Plot, Themes, and Values Related

- Discuss the name of the camp (Miss Quinzella Thiskwin Penniguiqu Thistle Crumpet's Camp for Girls Hardcore Lady Types." What image does it relay? What does it tell us about the camp? What does it foreshadow about the story?
- Discuss the choice of names for the various characters. What do the names say about each of the characters? How do the names "fit" or "not fit"? How do the names influence our perceptions of these characters?]
- Discuss and/or chart how Jen is used as a humorous foil for the girls and for Rosie (the Camp Director).
- Discuss and chart the different themes in these books.
- Discuss ways one can be different from others? Discuss how one can be different and still fit in.
- In the "Message from the Lumberjane High Council" in Volume 1 it says: "...Whether you are a dancer or a misfit, career girl or a social elite, you have a place at this camp – no matter how different you feel." How does the story, and how do the characters reflect this?



### Critical Reading and Making Inferences

- Each chapter is previewed with a segment from the Lumberjane's Field Manual. Before reading each chapter, have students discuss or write/create a scene/snippet of what might happen in that chapter.
- In *Lumberjanes: Beware the Kitten Holy* (page 90) in order to get into the lighthouse that the Yeti are guarding, Ripley shouts, ""Hey Jerks! Let us in your tower and you can have ALL my cookies!" In that same panel April whispers something to Ripley who thinks about what April whispered and then says, "You can have SOME of my cookies." Have students write in or discuss what April might have whispered and why Ripley changed her offer.
- In *Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max* (page 33) Rosie and Jen talk about Jen's role ("...Now Joan... Jen... Those girls don't NEED you to punch a bear. They can do that on their own. What they really need is someone smart and practical, someone who can keep them from getting in over their heads...") Have students evaluate and discuss other characters' roles in the story.
- In *Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max* (page 47) Mal asks "Are we ever gonna actually do one of my plans or what?" Evaluate and discuss why (up to this point at least) they don't want to do Mal's plans. What might Mal do to change this?
- In *Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max* (p.68) April asks Jo why she didn't tell them about the eye: "How could you do that to me?... We've always told each other every thing... So much for being best friends to the end." Discuss/debate what a best friend means. Does it mean tell all secrets? Why/why not?



### Language, Literature, and Language Usage

- Have students describe each of the characters in these books and how we can differentiate each character's "voice."

- Have students search for and solve the anagrams throughout this series.
- Search, discuss, and evaluate the use of wordplay throughout these books.  
Here are some of my favorites:
  - ***Lumberjanes: Beware the Kitten Holy:***
    - P. 19 (Aliteration) “You know you’ll be lucky if Rosie kicks you out, unless you WANT to muck out moose stables for the rest of the summer.”
    - P. 83 (Hyperbole) “That’s it. We’re going back to the cabin RIGHT NOW. And then I’m locking you all in your cabin and you’re NEVER LEAVING AGAIN.”
    - P. 103 (Word play: puns) “Pungeon Master Badge” discusses the importance and timing of puns. Have students search for puns used throughout the book. Have students create their own stories around earning a “Pungeon” badge.
  - ***Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max:***
    - P. 62 “No need to be a LumberJERK, Diane.” Have students think of other examples of word play with Lumber\_\_\_\_\_ to relay humor, anger, envy, etc.
    - P. 72 (Aliteration) “Not my friend, you fiend!”
- *Lumberjanes* is full of humor. Have students search and evaluate different examples of his humor from its puns to its wordplay to the characters’ quirky foibles (such as Rosie *never* getting Jen’s name right – why is that so funny?).
- *Lumberjanes* is full of expletives (i.e., “What the junk” and “Good gravy...”) Search for their creative expletives. Discuss why they work. Have students create their own expletives.
- In *Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max* page 11 has instructions for making friendship bracelets. Have students write their own instructions to making something.
- *Lumberjanes* is full of references to Greek mythology (in particular: Artemis, Diane, Apollo, and Zeus). Have students search and discuss these references and how they work so well with this story.





## Modes of Storytelling and Visual Literacy

In graphic novels, images are used to relay messages with and without accompanying text, adding additional dimension to the story. *Lumberjanes* weaves story and background through: prose, panel text, image and design. Reading *Lumberjanes* with your students allows you to analyze, discuss and learn how Stevenson, Ellis, Watters, Allen and Laiho wave page and panels, text and images to relay complex messages. For example:

- Discuss how the Lumberjane Manual inserts (setting the stage), the summer snapshots (reflecting summer highlights), and panels of the story itself all work together to tell a fun, nuanced story.
- Discuss the use of snapshots and captions at the end of each chapter. Why are they used? How do they help tell the story?
- *Lumberjanes* relies on text and image to distinguish between a diverse and large cast of characters. Have students evaluate how the authors verbally and visually distinguish their characters (in terms of facial expressions, clothing, hair, etc.). Discuss the creative use of fonts – especially for some of the more diverse and exotic characters.
- Discuss the use of balloon design to help tell the story. Analyze the text balloon shapes, sizes, and designs are used to relay different character moods.
- Discuss the style, rhythm and flow of the various panels throughout the books and how their arrangement helps tell the story.
- Search and discuss the authors' use of imagery and visual literacy throughout these books. For example:
  - *Lumberjanes: Beware the Kitten Holy*
    - P.7: It is night and we see a girl (April) in a red hooded cape afraid of a deer in front of her (unaware of three and four-eyed "beings" behind her). Discuss this image of red-hooded April and the intentions and emotions it evokes.

- P. 8 (bottom panel): each girl reacts differently to a frightening noise. Discuss the poses each one assumes and what those poses relay about them.
- *Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max*
  - P. 24 – the page relays the attack of dinosaurs and bears. Discuss how these panels (and their borders) are different from the others on the opposite page. Why? What do their haphazard edges and larger gutters relay?
  - P. 33 There is a wonderfully humorous discussion that Jen and Rosie have. Discuss the characters' poses, props, and text and how they all work together to create an awesome scene between the two adults in the story.
  - P. 38 – Discuss and evaluate the creative use of the page where Mal draws stick images to relay her Capture the Flag plan and then we see inserted mini panels to relay how and what other characters are doing.



### Content-Area Lessons:

- Social studies: In *Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max* (p. 51) Mal shouts “For the love of Sister Rosetta Tharpe!!” as they’re arguing with Diane. Research and discuss Sister Rosetta Tharpe and why she’s referred to here.
- Social studies: In *Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max* (p. 89) Jo asks “What the Annie Smith Peck just happened?” Research and discuss Annie Smith Peck and why she’s referred to here.
- Social studies/science: In *Lumberjanes: Beware the Kitten Holy* (p. 37) Jen shouts “Holy Mae Jemison!!” as she notices a waterfall just ahead of their canoe. Research and discuss Mae Jemison and why Jen refers to her here.
- Science: In *Lumberjanes: Beware the Kitten Holy* (p.61) April arm-wrestles and beats Mr. Statue and comments, “Remember, it all comes down to LEVERAGE.” Discuss how leverage works in arm wrestling. What else can it help solve/win?

- Science/language arts: *Lumberjanes: Friendship to the Max* (p.82) Jen mentions there will be a solar eclipse and then relates it to Greek mythology with Artemis representing the moon and Diane the sun. Have students research and discuss what happens during solar eclipses, why they're so rare, and how this relates to Greek myth.
- Math: In *Lumberjanes: Beware the Kitten Holy* (p. 70) the girls are able to figure out how and where to step across a chasm because Mal realizes they have to follow the Fibonacci sequence. Explain the Fibonacci sequence and have students come up with the sequence the girls need to follow. Discuss this sequence's importance and value in nature and the world around us.



### Suggested Prose, Graphic Novel and Poetry Pairings

For greater discussion on literary style, related themes, similar characters and/or content here are some book suggestions you may want to read and pair with

*Astronaut Academy*:

- [Nimona](#) by Noelle Stevenson is about a confident, occasionally snarky and often inspiring shapeshifter, Nimona who ostensibly serves as super-villain Lord Ballister's sidekick. This is a wonderful tale about friendship, loyalty and the shattering of stereotypes.
- *The Plain Janes* by Cecil Castellucci and Jim Rugg.
- [This One Summer](#) by Jillian Tamaki and Mariko Tamaki – a very different coming of age story that takes place one summer at Awago Beach.
- [Nothing Can Possibly Go Wrong](#) by Prudence Shen and Faith Erin Hicks — full of unlikely friendships and wonderfully nuanced characters where science/robotics geeks versus Athletes and cheerleaders bend and shatter stereotypes and expectations in a delightful contest of wills.
- [Ms. Marvel](#) by G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona, about a sixteen-year-old girl from Jersey City, New Jersey who becomes the new Ms. Marvel.
- [The Plain Janes](#) by Cecil Castellucci and illustrated by Jim Rugg - about Jane, who after barely surviving a terror attack in Metro City, must readjust to a "safer" life in suburbia. Jane decides that instead of being with the cool kids

(where she used to belong in her previous school), she'd prefer a more interesting group of friends - three other girls named Jane (or Jayne).

- *The Olympian* series by George O'Connor – a series of graphic novels, each focusing on a different Greek God/myth.



### **Common Core State Standards (CCSS):**

While this book is written for tweens and teen, this is a series that will be enjoyed by readers of all ages. I therefore will be using the Common Core Anchor Standards for College and Career Readiness for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening.

Reading *Lumberjanes* and incorporating the teaching suggestions above promotes critical thinking and its graphic novel format provides verbal and visual story telling across subject areas while addressing multi-modal teaching. Here's a more detailed look:

- Knowledge of Language: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.3](#)
- Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials; demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meaning; acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking and listening at the college and career readiness level.
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4](#)
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5](#)



- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.6](#)
- Key ideas and details: Reading closely to determine what the texts says explicitly and making logical inferences from it; citing specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text; determining central ideas or themes and analyzing their development; summarizing the key supporting details and ideas; analyzing how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of the text.
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](#)
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2](#)
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3](#)
- Craft and structure: Interpreting words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings and analyzing how specific word choices shape meaning or tone; analyzing the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs and larger portions of the text relate to each other and the whole; Assessing how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4](#)
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5](#)
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6](#)
- Integration of knowledge and ideas: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually...as well as in words; delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence; analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7](#)
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8](#)
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9](#)
- Range of reading and level of text complexity: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10](#)
- Comprehension and collaboration: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively; integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally; evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1](#)
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2](#)
  - [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3](#)



### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- For resources on Greek mythology, the History Channel has some neat resources: <http://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/greek-mythology>
- For more information and activities for Fibonacci sequences, please see: <https://www.mathsisfun.com/numbers/fibonacci-sequence.html>
- For a TED talk by Arthur Benjamin on the Magic of Fibonacci (and math as the science of patterns and magic), please see: [https://www.ted.com/talks/arthur\\_benjamin\\_the\\_magic\\_of\\_fibonacci\\_numbers?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/arthur_benjamin_the_magic_of_fibonacci_numbers?language=en)
- For details and video clips of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, please visit: <http://fusion.net/story/107215/meet-sister-rosetta-tharpe-the-black-woman-who-invented-that-rock-and-roll-sound/>
- For details on Annie Smith Peck, please visit: <http://www.ric.edu/faculty/rpotter/smithpeck.html>
- For details on Mae Jamison, please visit:
- To watch Mae Jamison's TED Talk, please visit: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/blogs/secretlife/space-science/mae-jamison/>

