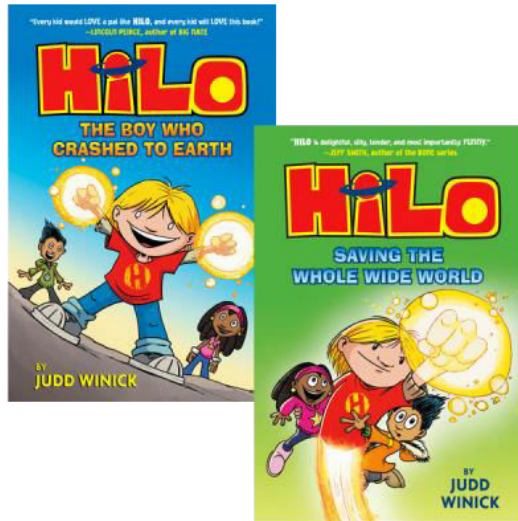


Using Graphic Novels in Education: *Hilo* by Judd Winick

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 ***Hilo*** series by Judd Winick



OVERVIEW

Hilo is a wonderful series about JD Lim, an average boy (in a family of super-stars) who thinks he's only great at one thing – being Gina's friend. But Gina moves away and DJ is on his own. Until one day something shoots down from the sky and in the crater, DJ finds Hilo, a boy in silver underwear. From that moment on, DJ is good at two things: being friends with Gina (who moves back) and Hilo. The problem is that Hilo doesn't remember much about his past. He doesn't remember where he's from, or why he's come to Earth. And he has no idea why he's wearing silver underpants, although he thinks they're really cool. Together, Hilo, DJ and Gina start piecing the fragments of Hilo's memory together as strange robots continue to collide to Earth and the trio of friends bravely save the day. While a joy for all readers, *Hilo* is most appropriate for children grades 2-5.



Hilo received starred reviews from *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, and *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*. It has also been on the New York Times Bestseller List. There is a wonderful rhythm to Winick's storytelling that makes the series a blast to read, and the vibrant color pages and panels just add to the pleasure. What is so compelling about this series (aside from the bold art and humor) is that with each page and installment we learn more about DJ, about Gina and about Hilo through the combination of text, art and page/panel design. We also grapple with deeper issues facing responsibilities, facing painful truths, and determining right from wrong as Hilo wrestles with Razorwork (his nemesis) and the role they each play in protecting humans versus protecting their fellow robots from "evil."

This series is loaded with jokes, action, giant robots, and to coin Hilo, this series is truly "*OUTSTANDING!*"



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Hilo is a wonderful addition to any elementary school classroom and library for several reasons. First, Winick unabashedly has fun with language, humor, and word play and we can't help but be swept up with the fun and energy they create. Further, while these characters are in some ways larger than life, they are also very real. They each have flaws they wrestle with as they learn to cooperate and rely on the others' strengths to get them through their challenges and doubts. As a result this is incredibly empowering. Third, this series provides wonderful lessons on character development while dealing with themes of diversity, individuality and tolerance in a different, refreshing manner. Finally, we have Winick's messages that ever so subtly and humorously teach us to recognize good intentions, the power of family, and true friendship, and the power they have on us all.

Themes throughout this series (to date), include:

- The power of friendship
- Learning how to face fears and responsibilities
- Different ways one finds courage
- The powers and perils of large and small families
- Discovering and embracing who you really are
- Managing bullies
- Managing being different and embracing who you are

Note that there will be six volumes to this series. To date the first two have been published and the third will hit bookstores in February, 2017.



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OVERVIEW

Hilo is as empowering as it is fun. We meet DJ who doesn't think he's good at anything except being a friend and we find that it is DJ who really holds this group together. Then we meet Hilo who can't remember much about his past or why he's here on Earth, but he is full of life and fun and humor and can memorize the encyclopedia in a matter of minutes. Not wanting to be far from DJ, Hilo creatively enrolls himself enrolled in school (think rogue raccoons) and when out of school, Hilo, Gina, and DJ, pretty much protect Earth from projectile robots that keep falling. As Hilo wrestles with his unknown past or purpose, DJ wrestles with protecting Hilo and Gina who moved back to Berke County from the big city must learn to adjust to a smaller school without an astronomy club that she loved and her mom pushing her to join the cheerleaders like her sisters.

What makes these books so empowering is the way author/illustrator Judd Winick respectfully yet playfully incorporates concepts of diversity and special needs in a way that makes us all laugh and love the diverse characters in *Hilo* and DJ's world. Best of all, *Hilo* shows how three very different spunky independent characters (each trying to overcome their perceived weaknesses and social challenges) can embrace who they are while saving themselves, saving each other, and saving Earth.

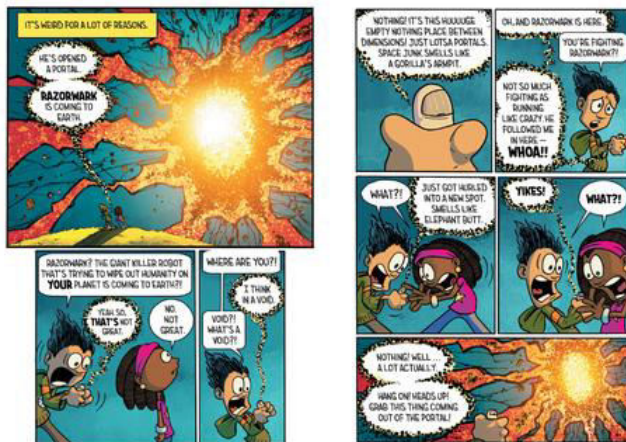
The playfulness in this series is achieved through Winick's wonderful use of the art, color and text. The word play, the underwear and knock-knock jokes, Hilo's burps, and the wonderful faces and expressions (inspired and much like *Calvin and Hobbes*), and the wonderful rhythm and pace of the storytelling all contribute to the fun of this series.



SERIES SUMMARY

The first of the series, *Hilo: The Boy Who Crashed to Earth* opens with, “AAAAAAH!” Literally that’s how the book begins. We see DJ running, saying hello and screaming. The pace never lets up. We soon realize DJ found Hilo who hurtled to Earth and now he and DJ are running from some giant robot. At school, DJ finds Gina’s returned to Berke County and he and Gina help Hilo discover more about himself as they save Earth from free-falling alien robots. This first series ends with Hilo returning to the void, while leaving something behind... letting us know that the adventure and Hilo’s presence on Earth is far from over.

In the second of the series, *“Hilo: Saving the Whole Wide World*, Hilo returns along with a new crop of robots and friends. This time around though, Hilo has discovered knock-knock jokes which he relates intermittently while trying to return the robots to their worlds without hurting or destroying them. Hilo now has a home and a ‘guardian’ (Uncle Trout) so adults don’t bother him. Hilo also has a new friend, Pollandra Pack Wallace Brimdale Kormimako of the mighty Furback Clan (Polly for short), a magical sorceress in training bound by honor to repay Hilo who saved her life. They mark their bond of friendship by spitting and DJ, Gina, Hilo and Polly work together to rid Earth of a giant mutant chicken, Viking hippos, killer grass/vegetation bots and a slew of good, bad, and indifferent robots. Hilo continues to find out more about himself and Gina and DJ realize the significant roles they play in all this as well. Here as in the first book, there’s a real cliff-hanger and readers must wait for Book Three (*Hilo: The Great Big Boom*) which is scheduled to appear in February, 2017.



TEACHING/DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS:

Plot, Themes, and Values Related

- Have students talk about each of the stories and what they can learn from them.
- Winick notes that much of his inspiration came from Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes*. Compare these stories and strips to Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes*. Discuss how Calvin and Hilo are similar/different? How are Hilo's sidekicks similar and different from Calvin's Hobbes.
- Discuss how DJ, Gina, and Hilo (and later Polly) each play a role in saving Earth and in saving each other. Discuss each character's strengths and weaknesses and how they work so successfully together to save the day.
- Discuss and evaluate the power of friendship – even over distances and over time (as is the case with DJ and Gina). How does time affect Gina and DJ's relationship? How and why does their relationship stand the test of time?
- Discuss the powers and perils of living in small versus large families.



Critical Reading and Making Inferences

When reading these books, Winick makes wonderful inferences you may want to discuss with your students. For example:

- In *Hilo: The Boy Who Crashed to Earth*
 - P. 9 DJ says, “I’m not good at anything. I’m not saying that I’m a TOTAL dork. There’s just nothing I’m really super good at.” Have students describe how DJ feels, then ask them to critically evaluate whether they think DJ has accurately described himself or not (making sure they supply concrete examples that support their position).
 - P. 12 DJ gets a box of colored elephants for him and Gina to play with. As a creative writing assignment, have students come up with their own ideas on what they and their best friends might do with those elephants.
 - Pp. 55-57 Hilo admits himself into DJ’s school and explains himself to the class, at which point (after Hilo discusses some weird facts about Dallas, Texas), a classmate says to DJ, “Dude. Your pal is a real freak.” Have students analyze how DJ responds. Ask students to brainstorm what they would do if they were in DJ’s position.
 - Pp. 113-114 Hilo reflects to DJ, “You don’t like your family?” To Which DJ responds, “Of course I do. I just don’t like living with them sometimes.” Have students explain this distinction using examples from the book to support their impressions.

- In *Hilo: Saving the Whole Wide World*
 - P. 13 Salem is sure she and Whammy have made it home before Dad. Discuss why Salem says “I wouldn’t worry about him” (getting home so soon).
 - P. 23 Gina tells DJ that, “There’s lots of ways Hilo need our help. But you don’t have to fight for him.” Have students brainstorm how DJ and Gina can and do help Hilo, and discuss why the one thing Hilo doesn’t need is for them to fight for him.
 - Pp. 19-23 is all about bullying. This is a great opportunity to discuss why kids might (and do) pick on Hilo. Discuss why Hilo doesn’t fight back. Discuss why this scene is so difficult for DJ.
 - P. 89 Gina tells DJ that, “Bad things are coming after him (Hilo). He’s dangerous. He doesn’t mean to be but he is.” Evaluate why Gina is concerned and in what ways Hilo may be (inadvertently) dangerous.
 - P. 159. Before Polly leaves, she repays her debt to Hilo. She gives him a pouch with “The Orbs of Fellback” telling Hilo to, “read the instructions within the pouch! You shall be kept a secret from this world!” As a discussion or creative writing assignment, have students brainstorm the origin of the Orbs of Fellback and how they might work to keep Hilo a secret.

Language, Literature, and Language Usage

- There is wonderful wordplay everywhere you look in this series. You may want to begin with Winick’s choice of names: Razorwark, Pollandra Pack Wallace Brimdale Kormimako of the mighty Furback Clan, Dr. Horizon, Rants, Uncle Trout, Beamer, Slobberbacks, Rapsallions, and many more.
- Discuss the development of Hilo’s humor from puns to knock-knock-jokes. Have kids create their own jokes using play on words.
- Have wonderful fun discovering the puns, homophones, hyperbole, alliteration, and onomatopoeia, idioms, and play on words. You may want students to work on teams to search for these gems and then create some of their own examples.
- Throughout the series, Hilo plays with and defines words. Have students chart the words Hilo finds and defines. Ask students to find some of their own “fun” words to define and use. What makes them fun? The sound? The definition?



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. In *Hilo*, Winick brilliantly weaves story and background with image, and emotions and insights, through text, image and design. More specifically, the page and panel design, the use of fonts, and use of color are wonderfully engaging and help propel the reader through this warm, humorous, roller coaster of fun. Furthermore, Winick is a master at using images and color for foreshadowing. Reading *Hilo* with your students allows you to analyze, discuss and learn how Winick uses page and panels, text and images to relay complex messages. For example:

- Mr. Winick is a master of facial expressions. Have students search for the ranges of Hilo's moods and responses. Furthermore you may want to chart and note *how* these expressions are manipulated. For example, most of the time Winick keeps Hilo's eyes white and black. Periodically, however, Winick will draw small black pupils for Hilo or in highly emotional panels, Winick draws full-color irises. You may want students to chart and evaluate when and why Winick has chosen to do this.
- Evaluate how Winick uses each character's features to help describe them. For example, Hilo's round face and often vacant eyes (vacant in that they are white and yet expressive face, mouth and body; or DJ's pointed, hair.
- Discuss how Winick using limited dialogue, limited narrative, expressive figures, bold color and chapter titles tells a detailed, engaging, and heart-felt story.
- Color plays a powerful role in this series. Discuss Winick's use of color to relate and foreshadow new chapters, flashbacks, and fighting and action scenes.



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Suggested Prose and Graphic Novel 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 *Hilo*:

- *Big Nate* by Lincoln Peirce is a comic strip that has spawned a graphic novel series that follows the adventures (and misadventures) of Nate Wright, a fun-loving, colorful sixth grader in school, at home, and with friends. T
- *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson – collections of comic strips about a rambunctious six year old with a vivid imagination and sharp intellect, much like Hilo.
- *Zita the Spacegirl* by Ben Hatke is a graphic novel (series) about a girl named Zita who (much like Hilo) races into a parallel dimension to save her friend and ultimately save that world.
- *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney – a series about a boy and his struggles in middle school.
- *The Misadventures of Max Crumbly: Locker Hero* by Rachel Renee Russell about Max who's about to start middle school who does his best besting bullies and assorted challenges.
- *The Terrible Two* by Mac Barnett and Dory John about two middle school pranksters who must either compete for the title "best" or learn to cooperate and prank together to make school more tolerable.



Common Core State Standards (CCSS):

While this book is suggested for elementary school classrooms (grades 2-5) it can be incorporated into language arts and content-area classes for a variety of grades. I therefore will be using the Common Core Anchor Standards for College and Career Readiness for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening. Reading *Hilo* 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:

- Winick's web page <http://www.juddspillowfort.com/welcome/> with news about the series, author tour information and assorted "This Makes Me Happy" cartoons by the author.
- Random House *Hilo* page <http://www.randomhousekids.com/brand/hilo/> with information about the author, about the books, a look inside the books, an educator's guide, activities, related videos and character details
- For a *Hilo* Graphic Novel Guide please visit: <http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/resource/graphic-novel-guide-with-ccss-tie-ins/>
- For Author interviews, please visit: <https://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?aid=26195>