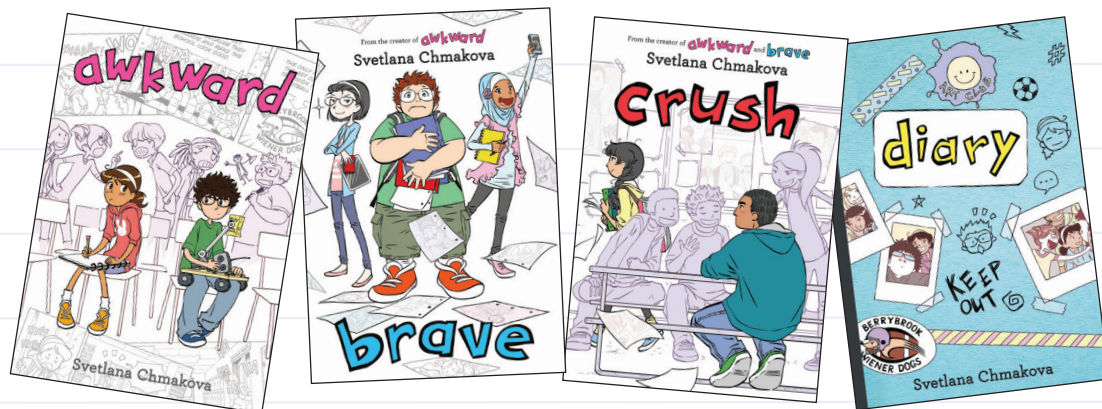




Berrybrook Middle School Teacher's Guide



ABOUT THE BOOKS

Follow the Awkward tales of the students at Berrybrook Middle School as they Bravely face their everyday lives...even when they have a Crush!

LEARNING STANDARDS

The questions and activities in this Teacher's Guide correlate with the following Common Core English Language Arts Standards

(www.corestandards.org) for Grades 6–10:

ELA Reading: Literature Standards

- Key Ideas and Details
RL.6–8.1, RL.6–8.2, RL.6–8.3, RL.9–10.1, RL.9–10.2, RL.9–10.3;
- Craft and Structure
RL.6–8.4, RL.6–8.5, RL.6–8.6, RL.9–10.4, RL.9–10.5.

ELA Reading: Informational Texts Standards

- Key Ideas and Details
RI.6–8.1, RI.6–8.2, RI.6–8.3, RI.9–10.1, RI.9–10.2, RI.9–10.3;
- Craft and Structure
RI.6–8.4, RI.6–8.5, RI.9–10.4, RI.9–10.5;
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
RI.6–8.7, RI.6–8.8, RI.9–10.7, RI.9–10.8.

ELA Writing Standards

- Text Types and Purposes
W.6–8.1, W.6–8.3, W.9–10.1, W.9–10.3;
- Production and Distribution of Writing
W.6–8.4, W.6–8.5, W.9–10.4, W.9–10.5;
- Research to Build and Present Knowledge
W.6–8.8, W.6–8.9, W.9–10.8, W.9–10.9.

ELA Speaking and Listening Standards

- Comprehension and Collaboration
SL.6–8.1, SL.9–10.1;
- Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
SL.6–8.4, SL.6–8.5, SL.9–10.4, SL.9–10.5.

A GENERAL APPROACH

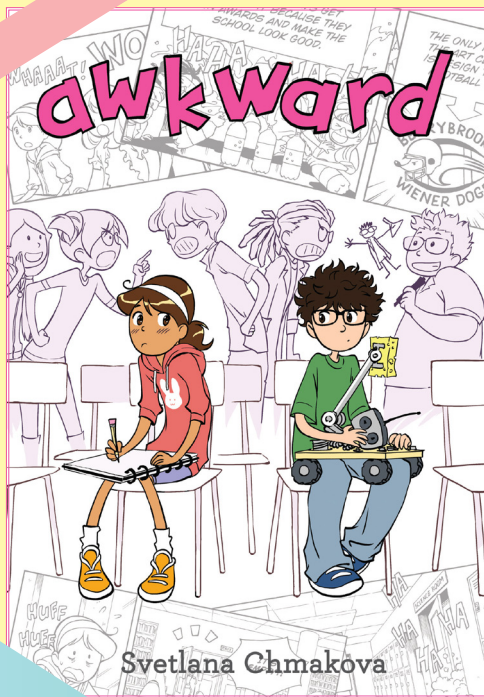
It is highly recommended that you look at Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, specifically pages 60–63, which deal with closure; pages 70–72, which deal with panel transitions; and pages 152–155, which deal with word/picture combinations. Depending on the needs of your class, you can have students learn these specific terms and use them to identify the different transition and combination styles. Alternately, you can utilize your understanding of them to guide discussion when examining specific panels or pages.

Highlight individual panels and/or pages, and ask the following questions:

- What is going on in this panel or on this page?
- What is the purpose of the specific pictures in telling the story? How do they enhance the words?
- Why did the creator choose to put these words and pictures together in this way?
- How does color affect the scene?
- What do we learn about the character from the images?
- What mood is being set and how?

Examine the specific sequence of panels, and ask the following questions:

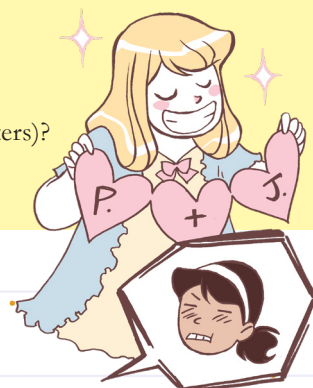
- Why did the creator put these panels in this particular order?
 - What's happening between the panels?A great exercise is to have students act out a short scene in the book, getting them to fill in the action occurring between the panels. This demonstrates to them that the gutter (the space between panels) is just as important as the other storytelling elements in the book.
- How does the transition between these panels indicate things like mood and character?
- How do the panel transitions affect the speed of the scene?
- Why did the creator choose this speed?



awkward

Pre-Reading Activities

- What does the cover tell you about the story?
- What can you infer about the characters from how they appear on the cover?
- Read pages 5–9, and answer the following questions:
 - Who are the main character(s)?
 - What do you know about the character(s) so far?
 - What is the dilemma the main character(s) face? (Continued in a post-reading activity.)
- Get up and act out page 7. Then discuss the following questions:
 - How much is happening between the panels (in the gutters)?
 - Is the action slow or fast?
 - Do different people imagine the transitions differently?



QUESTIONS ABOUT SPECIFIC PAGES

PAGE 6:

What is the effect of changing the color in the second panel?

PAGE 16, PANEL 3:

What does the blank speech bubble with dots in it indicate?

PAGE 42: Why is there a panel with just a clock? How does it affect the pacing and mood of the scene?

PAGES 59–61: These pages use a very different art style from the rest of the book. What makes it so different? How does it enhance the scene?

PAGES 88–89:

Imagine what Peppi is thinking in each of these panels, based on her facial expressions.

PAGE 110:

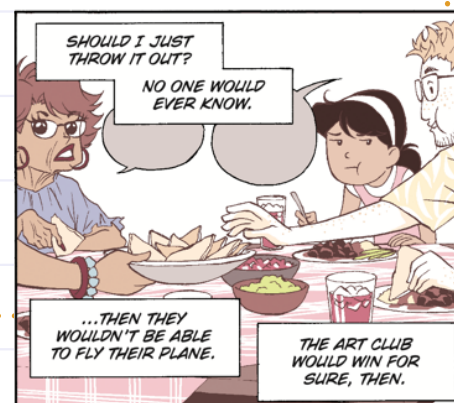
What mood is being created in each panel without speech? What creates the mood when words are absent?

PAGE 130:

This is a splash page. Why is this used here? Why do authors use splash pages in general? How would you react in a similar situation?

PAGE 171, PANEL 6:

Why are the adults' speech bubbles blank and partially covered up?



GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What does the art club think of the science club? How does this compare to reality? Why do you think there is such a strong rivalry between the art and science clubs?
- Miss Tobins is consistently shown with lightning around her. What does that indicate about how the students view her? On pages 188–190, she is shown differently for the first time. Why?
- On page 142, Maribella calls Peppi a “true friend.” What does that mean to you? How would you describe a true friend?
- Peppi has three cardinal rules for surviving school: (1) Don't get noticed by the mean kids. (2) Seek out groups with similar interests and join them. (3) Build. Build things. Build friendships. Build yourself. Do you think this is what it takes to get through school? Would you add or change anything? What goals could you set for yourself to achieve cardinal rule #3?



awkward

Post-Reading Activities



READING

- ① Identify four key scenes in which Peppi and Jaime's friendship has a major development. Select individual panels to support your choices.
- ② After reading the whole book, summarize the book and describe the main characters. Look again at the questions you answered during the pre-reading activities, based on just the first few pages of the book. How did your ideas change after reading the whole book?

WRITING

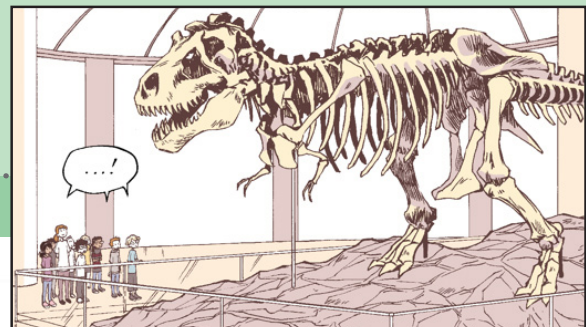
- ① Write a diary entry from Peppi's perspective following page 76.
- ② "I did something that still makes me burn." *Awkward* starts with Peppi doing something really embarrassing to Jaime. Have you ever treated someone poorly because you were trying to protect yourself? Write a letter to that person explaining how you feel and how you wish you had handled the situation.

SPEAKING

- ① Speech bubbles and fonts play a major role in the book to establish mood, volume, and character. In a group, act out one of the following scenes to indicate how they might sound:
 - a. page 10
 - b. pages 85–86
- ② In a group, discuss Maribella's relationship with her dad. How does that compare with Peppi's relationship with her parents? What about Jaime's relationship with his parents? What's your relationship with your parents? Bring in a photograph of you and your family and discuss how you can see your relationship with your parents in the picture.
- ③ Write and perform a monologue as Maribella explaining why she steals the science club's remote.

INTEGRATING

- ① Rewrite pages 65–76 as a prose story. How is the story different when the pictures are not there?
- ② What is geocaching? Create a geocache.
- ③ The students learn about Leonardo da Vinci, a great master who blended art and science. Research and write a biography of da Vinci, focusing on his ability to blend these two areas.





brave



Pre-Reading Activities

- What does the cover tell you about the story? What can you infer about the characters from how they appear on the cover?
- Read pages 5–9, and answer the following questions:
 - Who are the main character(s)?
 - What do you know about the character(s) so far?
 - What is the dilemma the main character(s) face? (Continued in a post-reading activity.)
- Get up and act out page 10. Then discuss the following questions:
 - How much is happening between the panels (in the gutters)?
 - Is the action slow or fast?
 - Do different people imagine the transitions differently?



OMG

QUESTIONS ABOUT SPECIFIC PAGES

PAGE 8: What are the differences between the regular art style and the art style in Jensen's imagination? Why are they different?

PAGE 21, PANEL 5: The reader's perspective changes. What is the effect?

PAGE 41, PANEL 5: Why use floating heads instead of traditional scenes?

PAGE 55: What is the effect of these two panels next to each other?

PAGE 59, PANEL 4: What mood is being created by the very tight close-up of Jensen's head?

PAGE 63, PANEL 4: How does the panel of the clock affect the pacing and mood of the scene?

PAGE 104, PANEL 3: Why is Yanic's speech bubble covering Jensen's?

PAGE 119: What does the panel layout tell us about what Jensen is thinking and feeling?

PAGE 154: Why is the first panel where it is on the page? How does it make you feel? Why?

PAGE 225: Why is the focus of panels 4 and 5 on the glasses?



GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What is Jensen's original impression of Jorge (page 20)? How does that change throughout the book, and why?
- Find examples of Jensen being bullied in the book. What do Akilah and Jenny identify as bullying? Why does Jensen not see it? What makes him suddenly realize it on page 122?
- Compare the zombie apocalypse scenes on pages 29 and 162. What is different, and why?
- Jenny and Akilah have a major conflict on page 176 and following. Akilah wants to hold to journalistic integrity, and Jenny doesn't want the club to get shut down. What is journalistic integrity, and why is it important? Should Jenny and Akilah publish their news even if it gets the club shut down?
- What does Jensen learn about Foster and Yanic on pages 231–233? Does Foster being bullied excuse his behavior?
- Ina Cruz, the fictional author in *Brave*, writes, "It's easy to grow bitter, to retreat into yourself, after being rejected. It's scary to keep reaching out, to keep extending your hand, after so many would not take it...and sometimes even push it away...But that's what courage is—not never being afraid...but being afraid and doing it anyway" (page 237). Do you agree or disagree with this description? Why do you think Jensen likes this quote so much?
- What do you think about the end of the book? Is it satisfying? What would you change?





brave

Post-Reading Activities



READING

- ① In a group, discuss how the pattern of bullying in *Brave* affects Jensen's choices. How does he change his behavior to manage the situation? Have you ever changed your behavior to deal with a situation? How did it affect the situation? How did it affect you? Individually, write a paragraph about how your situation would have been different if you had made a different choice.
- ② After reading the whole book, summarize the book and describe the main characters. Look again at the questions you answered during the pre-reading activities, based on just the first few pages of the book. How did your ideas change after reading the whole book?

WRITING

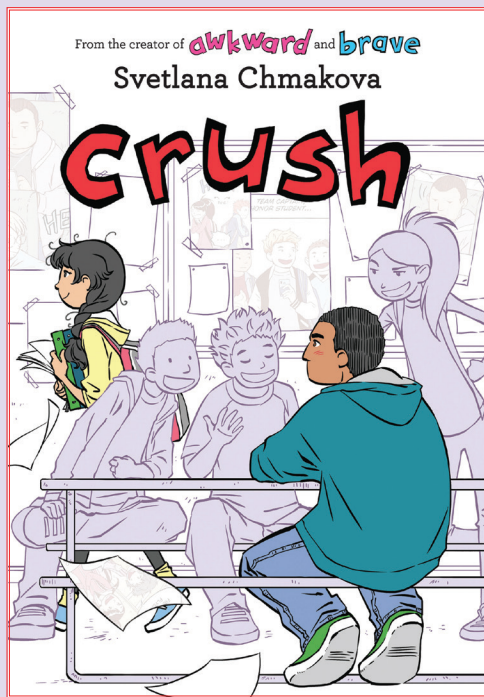
- ① Throughout *Brave*, Jensen describes his school day as a video game. Draw what your day looks like as a video game. What sort of "monsters" do you encounter and/or avoid on a regular basis?
- ② Write a diary entry following one of the following moments:
 - a. pages 181–182, from the perspective of Akilah
 - b. after the last page of the book, from the perspective of Foster

SPEAKING

- ① Speech bubbles and fonts play a major role in the book to establish mood, volume, and character. In a group, act out one of the following scenes to indicate how they might sound:
 - a. pages 52–55
 - b. pages 181–182
- ② Write and perform a monologue as Jensen, based on pages 118–119.
- ③ DEBATE: In the book, Felicity gets suspended for violating the school dress code rules, and many students and teachers disagree with this. Is there a rule in your school you disagree with or you think should be updated? Have a debate about a specific rule.

INTEGRATING

- ① Rewrite pages 215–219 as a prose story. How is the story different when the pictures are not there?
- ② How did Akilah and Jenny come up with their "lizard brain" study? Are you able to find a similar study through research? Is the concept of the "lizard brain" valid?
- ③ Jensen and Jorge work on a project on the history of baseball. One of the topics they cover is how the first black players and first female players were treated. Do some research on a pioneering black or female player and present this information to your class.



Crush



Pre-Reading Activities

- Look at “The Evolution of a Cover” at the back of Crush. Why do you think this particular cover was chosen? What does it tell you about the story?
- Read pages 5–9, and answer the following questions:
 - Who are the main character(s)?
 - What do you know about the character(s) so far?
 - What is the dilemma the main character(s) face? (Continued in a post-reading activity.)
- Get up and act out page 6. Then discuss the following questions:
 - How much is happening between the panels (in the gutters)?
 - Is the action slow or fast?
 - Do different people imagine the transitions differently?

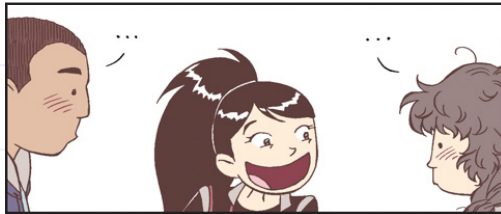


QUESTIONS ABOUT SPECIFIC PAGES

PAGE 20, PANEL 5: What do the flowers on Jazmine’s speech bubble indicate?

PAGE 21, PANEL 1: Describe the mood of this panel. How is this created?

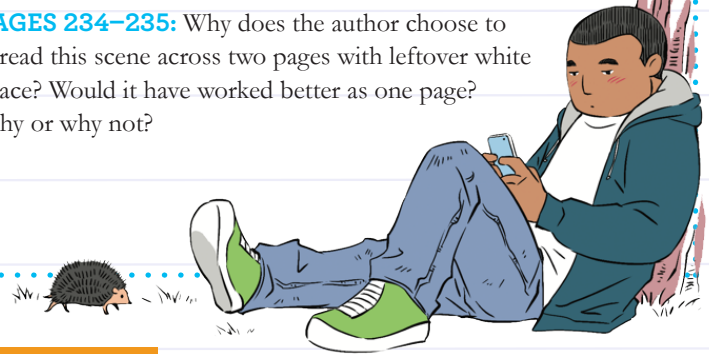
PAGE 110:
What is the effect of the panel with no dialogue?



PAGE 186: What is the effect of the clocks? How do they affect the pacing and mood of the scene?

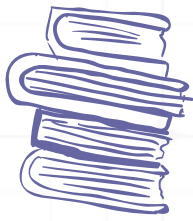
PAGE 223, PANEL 4: What is this panel trying to show?

PAGES 234–235: Why does the author choose to spread this scene across two pages with leftover white space? Would it have worked better as one page? Why or why not?



GENERAL QUESTIONS

- Why is Jorge so uncomfortable with his reactions to Jazmine?
- Why does Zeke react the way he does to Jorge on page 53? What do you think of his apology on pages 59–61?
- Why does Jorge say yes on pages 71–72? Why does he wish he had said no?
- Why do you think Jazmine and Zeke are together? What does the party on pages 77–83 reveal about their relationship? Do you think they should stay together? What are some of the reasons people stay together?
- What does it mean to be a “good sport”? Is James a good sport? Why or why not?
- On page 115, Olivia is upset because she feels as if Marcus doesn’t support her interests. How important is it to you that the people close to you support your interests? Do you feel like you support your friends’ interests? What does support look like?
- On page 131, Jorge refers to the “Garrett and James problem.” What does he mean?
- What do you think about what Ron does on page 150? Do you agree with how Olivia and Brianna handle the situation? Should they have told Coach Rashad?
- “Remember how I said life is more complicated than sports? It’ll throw a lot of curveballs at you. You win some games and lose others...but in the end, it’s who’s on your team that really matters” (pages 233–234). How true is this? How does it apply to your life and your friendships?



Crush



Post-Reading Activities

READING

① Why is Garrett so desperate for acceptance from the football team? Have you ever tried hard to be part of a group? What are some examples of good and bad choices made by characters at Berrybrook who are trying to fit in? Make a list of methods you would use to fit in with a group.

② After reading the whole book, summarize the book and describe the main characters. Look again at the questions you answered during the pre-reading activities, based on just the first few pages of the book. How did your ideas change after reading the whole book?

WRITING

① Jorge wishes he didn't have a crush. Have you ever wished that you could avoid your feelings about something? In a group, discuss whether it is better to hide your feelings or experience them. Is there a time you'd want to avoid positive feelings or negative ones? Can you think of a benefit to feeling negative emotions? Individually, write a diary entry or a poem expressing an extremely negative or extremely positive emotion. Reflect as a group how expressing those emotions made you feel.

② Write a diary entry from Garrett's perspective following chapter 9.

SPEAKING

① Speech bubbles and fonts play a major role in the book to establish mood, volume, and character. In a group, act out one of the following scenes to indicate how they might sound:

- a. pages 30–33
- b. pages 194–197

② Write and perform a monologue as Jazmine after she hears about the chat group comments.

③ DEBATE: Prepare two sides of an argument based on pages 212–213. Should Jorge tell on Garrett or not? Would you if you were in that situation?

INTEGRATION

① Rewrite pages 85–93 as a prose story. How is the story different when the pictures are not there?

② On pages 156–159, the girls make waves by cutting their hair short. Strangely, many people react badly to this change. How much emphasis is placed on long hair for girls in our culture? In a group, compare and contrast ads of women with long hair and with short hair. What is the messaging being given about concepts of beauty as they relate to hair?





BERRYBROOK

MIDDLE SCHOOL BOOK SERIES

JY

Pre-Reading Activities

- “Behavioral culture is a set of attitudes and accepted behavior in a social group. It builds over time, action by action, like brick by brick. For example, each time people throw garbage on the ground instead of into a garbage can, they help build a culture where littering is normalized and accepted” (*Brave*, page 143). How would you describe the culture of your school? Is there a perpetual aspect of the culture in your school that you’d like to remove?
- Clubs are a big part of school activities. What are the different clubs at your school? What clubs do the people in your class belong to? Are there particular characteristics of members of the different clubs? What are the similarities and differences?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *Awkward* is the only book in which the characters are seen at home. Why are these scenes important in this book? Why are there not similar scenes in *Brave* or *Crush*?
- Pages 46–47 of *Awkward* have some amazing uses of “emanata,” which are imaginary visual elements that tell you something without words. Find more examples of emanata throughout the series. Do these elements add to the story or detract from it?
- Give examples of how the author uses words as part of the pictures to create comedy, discomfort, or other emotions.
- Identify three key themes that run through all three books in the series.
- Identify the major clubs at Berrybrook Middle School. What are the traits of their members? What are their similarities and differences?
- Find examples of bullying behavior in each of the books, and answer the following questions:
 - What’s the difference between bullying and a “friend fight”?
 - How do different students try to stop bullying?
 - Which strategies against bullying are most effective and which are least effective? Why?

indicate the following emotions. What are some of the characteristics of the different expressions?

- HAPPINESS
- ANGER
- SADNESS
- EMBARRASSMENT
- FRUSTRATION
- SHOCK
- AWKWARDNESS
- EXCITEMENT
- DISAPPOINTMENT



- On page 207 of *Crush*, Jorge says “Right now, it feels like the whole world is against me... But as long as she’s on my side... somehow, it’s okay.” In fact, most of the main characters in the series have a few really good friends, as opposed to being widely popular. Is it better to have a few friends or a lot? What are the advantages of each?
- The teachers at Berrybrook Middle School are really interesting characters, too! How would you describe each of them? Would you want to have them as your teachers? Why or why not?

- MR. RAMIREZ
- MISS TOBINS
- COACH RASHAD
- MISS LEE
- MR. KRISTOFFER

Do these teachers resemble any of your own teachers?

- Find examples of different facial expressions used to

BERRYBROOK

MIDDLE SCHOOL BOOK SERIES

JY

Post-Reading Activities

READING

Berrybrook Middle School has so many amazing characters! Many even cross over into multiple books.

<i>awkward</i>	<i>brave</i>	<i>crush</i>
PEPPI	JENSEN	JORGE
JAIME	JENNY	OLIVIA
MARIBELLA	AKILAH	GARRETT
TESSA	FELIPE	JAZMINE
NINA		BROOKE
		JAMES
		ZEKE

- ① Each Berrybrook book focuses on one main character and a dilemma they are facing. Identify the major theme of each book. Discuss how the main character in each book overcomes their dilemma.
- ② Pick a supporting student character from one of the books (e.g., Maribella, Jenny, Akilah, Felipe, Brooke) and write a synopsis of a future Berrybrook book about them.
- ③ On page 57 of *Brave*, we see the three modes of Jenny. Figure out the three modes of some of the other characters in the book(s). Choose specific panels that demonstrate each mode, and give each mode a title. Make sure you include page numbers.
- ④ What are your three modes? Create titles and descriptions of your three modes, with photographs of you embodying each mode.

WRITING

① “It’s hard to get it all into just four panels” (*Awkward*, page 83).

- Write a story about something that happened at your school for the school newspaper. Your goal is to get it into four panels.
- Write an artist’s statement about why you chose to highlight those particular panels and how difficult it was to get your story into only four panels.



SPEAKING



- The Berry Scoop is the video blog of Berrybrook Middle School. In a group, create and record your own episode of school news by picking three things to report on at your school. In developing your episode, think about what elements create a strong news story (i.e., the sort of news people would want to tune in for).
- Discuss body autonomy (*Crush*, pages 148–149). What does it mean? Does your school have a code of conduct for this? If not, should it? If so, discuss it. Is it followed? Is it clear? Is it enough? Propose a new body autonomy code of conduct for your school.
- DEBATE: Foster and Yanic are shown to be bullies in all the Berrybrook books. What do you think about their behavior? Can they be redeemed? Have a debate about whether Foster and Yanic show the capacity to stop their bullying ways.

RESOURCES

COMIC BOOK LEGAL DEFENSE FUND.
“Panel Power: Using Comics to Make Lifelong Readers.”
<http://cbldef.org/panel-power/>

McCloud, Scott.
Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art.
New York: Harper Perennial, 1993.

SVETLANA CHMAKOVA was born and raised in Russia, and moved to Canada at sixteen, where she subsequently received a Classical Animation diploma from Sheridan College. Her full-length manga and comics series include the fan-favorite romantic comedy *Dramacon*, the award-winning urban fantasy *Nightschool: The Weirn Books*, the manga adaptation of The New York Times bestselling *Witch & Wizard* by James Patterson, the acclaimed Berrybrook Middle School series, for which she has been nominated for two Eisner Awards and the middle grade mystery fantasy *The Weirn Books: Be Wary of the Silent Woods*.

ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE GUIDE

JENN HAINES (B.Ed., M.A.) is the owner of the Dragon, an Eisner Award-winning comic and games store, with three locations in Ontario, Canada. She is a certified teacher, with ten years of experience teaching Latin, drama, history, and English to grades 7 through 12. She has also taught Latin at the university level and holds a Masters in Classical Studies. In addition, she is the vice president of ComicsPRO, the only professional organization for comic-store owners, and she curates the Dragon Prize for the Joe Shuster Awards, recognizing the best all-ages graphic novel by a Canadian each year.



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