New Kid
A high-interest graphic novel for low-level readers
Clear, contemporary illustrations help students with limited vocabulary understand these stories about important social issues facing teens. Topics addressed include insecurity, dating, drinking and driving, and bullying. Originally published as four printed books, the eBook combines all four books into a single digital edition.

This supplemental PDF includes story summaries and discussion questions for addressing the social issues presented in New Kid.

New Kid on the iPad
iPad display is horizontal only. View the content as a two-page spread or zoom to see single pages only.

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New Kid is a graphic novel in four parts that teaches reading skills, comprehension, vocabulary, and life lessons.

The stories are the work of Mike Baron, a well-known scripter of comic books who has done such celebrated characters as The Punisher (recently made into a major Hollywood movie), Nexus, and The Badger. Here, for the first time, he brings you “life inside a typical high school,” circa the 2000s. The illustrator, Nick Runge, was a 19 year old youngster at the time, and New Kid was his first publication. He now lives in Ft. Collins, Colorado, and plays in a heavy metal band called Pseudo Komite. Inker Gabe Eltaeb did the lettering and coloring for Nick’s drawings and Mike’s stories.

While the New Kid graphic novel lends itself to private readings or take-home assignments, it also can be used to muster productive group discussions about the topics covered in the stories. While students build reading skills, they also learn strategies to get them through life.

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**Introduction to New Kid**

Adolescence is a tipping point in human development that is fun and exciting but also intimidating as teens address real and imagined issues. Critical personal, interpersonal, and problem solving skills that are essential for coping with present demands are formed at this age and may have lasting consequences. Foremost among the developmental issues is the shaping of an identity among one’s peers, and venturing out tentatively from the adults in their lives while still being dependent on them.

*New Kid* is presented in a comic book format that engages its readers in common concerns about their lives in high school and in their community. *New Kid* begins with the storyline of a male teen whose family has just moved, enrolling him in a new school for his senior year. Among other challenges, he faces the specter of fitting in. Against this backdrop, the door opens unto a variety of problems youths deal with in schools across the nation. Coping with the problems related to the disruption of a new community and school is stress enough for most people of any age, but when it occurs during adolescence, vulnerabilities and challenges are intensified.

*New Kid* presents and deals with these issues along with those of others the teen meets at school who are also struggling to find their way to fit in, including those with disabilities, obesity, poverty, family dysfunction, diversity, and bullying issues. The first problem to arise for the new kid is the school bully. *New Kid* looks at the problems caused by bullying both from the point of view of the victim and the bully. The story details the consequences of bullying, including physical injury, anger, fear, confusion, depression, and the impulse to revenge oneself. It also offers ways victims can protect themselves though use of their intelligence, talents, humor, and supportive relationships. And it is sympathetic to the very real reasons why some kids bully others.

But *New Kid* is not just about bullies. It’s about the many common concerns of teens within their families and schools, such as taking tests, being invited to social events, school sports and proms, and personal issues like finding a job and envisioning career paths. It lends insight into supportive and harmful relationships with parents and caregivers; the value of helpful teachers and counselors vs. those who are less involved; and asking for and receiving help. It explores the complex nature of friendships with peers, including: loyalty, helping others, sharing, dating, and sexuality. It encourages teens to make serious decisions about school accomplishments and career goals, along with personal choices concerning religion, smoking, drinking, and being sexually active. Readers are confronted with serious events such as the felony arrest of a classmate for DUI that causes a death, and deciding what to do about an unplanned pregnancy.

*New Kid* is not about gloom and doom, but rather discovering and using talents, giving and receiving help, and enjoying productive hobbies. It is about knowing the joy in healthy and helpful relationships with adults and peers. It is about overcoming problems and establishing self-esteem.

*New Kid* provides educators and parents with a high interest, easy-to-read story that touches the real life experience of nearly every one of us at one time or another, either as the victim or victimizer. It can be used in a variety of ways such as an introduction or supplement to existing school-wide social development and bully prevention curricula, part of small group counseling work, or in a one-on-one setting with specific students. It offers rich opportunities to engage youth in candid discussions about healthy ways to deal with relationships and adversity. While oriented to young readers, it can also give adults some added insight and empathy for youth’s perspectives about their problems.

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New Kid Graphic Novel: Life Lessons Reader

In recent years, a new type of comic book has become popular, the ‘graphic novel’. As the term implies, it differs from the traditional comic book in that it has the scope of a novel or novella.

While the graphic novel is a relatively new concept, the art of the comic book in one form or another has been around for a very long time. To say there’s nothing new about combining words with pictures to tell a story, would be the understatement of the millennium. Some critics would point to hieroglyphs (though the glyphs actually represent sounds, not unlike the alphabet) or even further back to the cave paintings of Spain and France. The Aztec and Mayan Codices were picture-word stories; woodcut book illustrators, like the great Gustave Dore, paired pictures to the greatest of words, Milton and the Bible; and the Bayeux Tapestry tells the tale of the Norman Conquest of England, starting in 1066, as an enormous piece of knitted cloth. Even sequenced stained glass windows in your neighborhood church often tell a story and thereby bear a certain resemblance to comic books.

But of comics, one thing is certain; the art of the comic book is an American innovation and is considered to rank right up there with jazz and rock and roll as purely American inventions. And like these other American art form inventions, the comic book has spread around the world and especially in Europe and Japan where they are as widely read by adults as by young people, thus at least partially reclaiming the historic role of picture/word combos (i.e., the comic book) as an ancient and global form of communication.

The graphic novel itself is less a new invention and more an extension of the existing comic book form and as its name implies, its length and breadth approximates that of a novel. Regardless, serial or graphic, one of the hallmarks of all comic booking is its topicality. Batman, of depression era origins, frequently targeted corrupt local politicos, while Superman and Spider Man dealt respectively with Nazis and student protest and drug use in the 60s. In fact, social issues have always been, and still are, near to the hearts of comic book creators.

The New Kid graphic novel series follows in this tradition of dealing with current social issues. In the course of its four installment story, characters contend with a plethora of contemporary concerns: School bullies, student disabilities, drug and alcohol use, driving while drunk or stoned, parent enabling of teen drinking, teen pregnancy, threats of school shootings or bombings.

Comic Books, also called the “new literature,” and suddenly available in public libraries across the country, offers a clear advantage to struggling readers, especially in its illustrated, sequential storytelling narrative.

Advantages for struggling readers include:
1. draws from a complete range of visual symbols
2. introduces a palette of colors to the information delivery process
3. creates a unique vocabulary that combines words and pictures
4. provides multisensory cues to aid story translation
5. demands reader resourcefulness to correctly interpret the story, leaving room for the exercise of individual imagination
6. sequential presentation makes readers aware of the passing of time from panel to panel Or to quote Scott McCloud, author of Understanding Comics, what comics do specifically is to “juxtapose pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence.” In other words, for your students picture-cuing is a helpful adjunct to developing reading skills and following a narrative-driven story that contains valuable yet enjoyable information.

—Tom Kinney, Editor, June 2012
Curriculum Resources

The main story line and subplots in New Kid tackle everyday social issues that are typical for today's high school students, like being the new kid, being bullied, having a disability, teen violence and sexual curiosity and experimentation.

If you have a setting in which you can engage in group discussion, there's plenty to talk about in New Kid. Or you can assign the reading materials to students individually and have them complete the questions in this guide.

Story Comprehension

Students read the graphic novel and answer story comprehension questions. (Editor's note: A synopsis of the story is included.) Answers should be assessed by discretion of the instructor, since many are shaded by opinion, yet do require a reading and an understanding of story content.

Think it Over

Requires students to state their thoughts on the intent of the stories; what the author is getting at. This set of answers should be evaluated by their coherency and creativity and can be done orally or as a written assignment. Answers to these questions arise naturally from the story, like “Where do you think Cicely’s character will be at in five years? Where do you think you’ll be at in five years?”

Look It Up

Students are asked to use a dictionary to find definitions for vocabulary words. Note that some definitions are given in context in the book, too.

Note: When you give the readers to students, ask them to explain the function of the yellow squares, which are “thought bubbles” (as opposed to word bubbles) that represent the main character, Donnie’s, thoughts. Most will implicitly understand this already, but some may not.

BOOK 1

Donnie's family just moved to a new town and he’s going to a new high school. He doesn’t know anyone there and he wants to make new friends. He’s afraid he won’t be able to find new friends.

Have you ever been in this situation? If so, describe how you felt. If not, describe how you think you would feel if you were.

In his first class he meets the school bully and he makes fun of Donnie. Donnie also meets a new girl in his class. She has a speech impediment and the class bullies make fun of her too.

Have you encountered bullies in school? If so, what do you do about it? If you don’t know what to do, would you talk to a counselor or another adult about it?

Later Donnie tries to make friends with the new girl, Cicely. But he makes a social mistake and imitates her speech problem as a joke and she gets mad at him. Cicely's family has some problems and life at home for her isn’t always easy or comfortable. So she’s often on edge and has some anger problems.

Speech difficulties can be very embarrassing for people who have them. What’s the best thing to do when you meet someone with a speech impediment? Ignore it? Talk about it? Defend your position.
Some of your fellow students may live in homes that are dysfunctional. That means that things don’t run right in them and that family members have issues. Or that could be your situation. How do you deal with friends who have disruptive homes?

At lunch, Donnie sits with some guys he doesn’t know and they find out they have similar interests. Finally he’s made some friends. But they too are being bullied by other kids in school. After school, Donnie meets up with the bullies again and makes fun of them. One of them hits him in the face. He’s too embarrassed to tell his parents and tries to hide his bruises by saying he was hit by a volleyball in gym.

**Should Donnie have told his parents what happened? Defend your position.**

The next day, Donnie meets Cicely again and apologizes for making fun of her speech. He tells her he was just trying to be cool but blew it. She accepts his apology and a friendship starts between them.

*We all make mistakes and the best way to make up for them is to apologize. Apologizing if it is appropriate often makes you feel better as well as the other person. Is apologizing something you find easy to do or hard. Explain your answer.*

The school counselor, Mr. Pitluk, hears about the fight and invites Donnie in for a talk. He’s a pretty cool guy and he listens to what Donnie has to say. Donnie likes him. Putlik gives Donnie advice for dealing with bullies. He tells Donnie to focus on his future and not worry so much about what happens daily in the school halls and cafeteria. Pitluk encourages Donnie to get good grades and think about where he’ll be in ten years. And then think about where the bullies will be in ten years.

*Most teens have to deal with bullies sometimes. And it’s important for them to know that bullies are people too. They just have issues about how to relate to others. Inside every bully is just another kid trying to figure himself out. What do you think of Pitluk’s advice to Donnie? Do you agree with it or should he have made better suggestions? What would your suggestions be?*

But Donnie still has to deal with the bullies on his own. So he decides he will use his sense of humor with them instead of fighting. At the same time, Donnie tries out for a stand-up comic act in a local comic club. He’s serious about his comedy. In his first attempts to deal with Jimmy, the worst of the bullies, his humor seems to help distract Jimmy from his bulling.

*Do you think using humor as a way to put off bullies can be a helpful way of dealing with it?*

Donnie’s relationship with Cicely continues to grow and Donnie is invited to a party by a popular girl in school. He invites Cicely to go with him but that makes the girl, Kimberly, mad.

*High school is a time for teens to start dating and have relationships. Sometimes those relationships turn into marriage after high school. Usually, they’re forgotten. But they are always important experiments in learning how to deal with relationships. What would you do in Donnie’s situation? In Kimberly’s? In Cicely’s?*

**Story Comprehension**

Who are the two new kids in school?

Why is Cicely afraid to introduce herself in class?

Why does Donnie visit the school’s guidance counselor?

What does the counselor tell him?

What is an anthropologist?
**Think About It**
Have you ever been the new kid?
If so, how did you feel?
If not, how do you think it would feel if you were?
Why does Cicely feel embarrassed about the way she talks?
What’s a functional speech disorder?
Is there anything that you can do about it?
Donnie wonders about how you gain the respect of others. Explain in your own words.

**Look It Up**
Sibilant
Troglodyte
Brokeback (hint: recent slang describing gay males)
Philosopher

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**BOOK 2**

Donnie and Cicely arrive at Kimberly’s party but Jimmy is there and he’s not happy about Donnie’s presence. Cicely loves horses but doesn’t have access to any to ride and wants to see Kimberly’s so they sneak out to the barn together. There they kiss and Cicely wants to go farther but Donnie doesn’t want to move that fast. Cicely doesn’t understand because her mother dates a lot of men and is casual in her sexual behavior.

*Teens have many different types of friends who live in many different types of homes. Different families have different values about things like sex. Teens have to learn to discriminate between these value systems and to choose their own, usually those of their own family. What would you males have done in Donnie’s situation? What do your females think about this? Is it a realistic scenario? Defend your position.*

Donnie’s new friend, Zach, is having trouble in math class. He’s falling behind and he gets no help at home because his father is a drunk and his mother parties a lot. He lives in a dysfunctional home. Donnie invites him to join his family for Thanksgiving day dinner. But Zach refuses.

*What do your parents think when you invite friends whose parents’ lifestyles differ from your own parents? Are they judgmental? Understanding? Both?*

Slowly, Jimmy is starting to change his mind about Donnie and wants his help to pass math. But Donnie is struggling in math too and has asked Zach to help him. Despite his home situation, Zach is very smart and a whiz at math. Meanwhile, Donnie is upset because Cicely is avoiding him. He’s afraid that by not giving in to her sexual advances he’s offended her again. He returns to Mr. Pitluk’s office for more advice and the counselor breaks down the many issues that arise when teen sexual activity results in a pregnancy. Not to mention the problem with the many STDs out there today. Pitluk tells Donnie he’ll have to go buy condoms if he wants to experiment with sex.

*Because some teens come from dysfunctional families doesn’t mean they’re not smart or don’t have talents. It’s not our choice which families we’re born into. What are your thoughts about this?*
**Story Comprehension**
Why is Cicely excited about going to Kimberly's party?
Who supplied James Fedenia with the alcohol for his party?
Why isn’t Zach looking forward to Thanksgiving?
What kind of job does Mr. Medulla say students will have if they score lower than a C in math?
Why isn’t Donnie ready to become a parent, according to Mr. Pitluk?
Why does Cicely ask to spend the night at Donnie’s house?
Why does Zach get angry with Donnie at the end of Book 2?

**Think It Over**
How is Jim able to serve alcohol at an under-age party in his parents’ home?
When parts of the story appear in yellow squares or rectangles, what do they represent?
Donnie thinks, “Everyone wants respect. But how do you get it?”
Answer Donnie’s question: How do you think people get respect?
Donnie thinks, “Girls have a different way of bullying.” What do you think he means by that?
The characters in New Kid give each other less than flattering nicknames . . . a lot.
Why is it insulting when others make fun of your name?
Do you like your own name?
Are the times when you don’t like it?
Times when you like it?
What’s it feel like when others make fun of your name, or call you by nicknames you don’t like?
Donnie ridicules his father’s career as a vacuum cleaner salesman. Why does he do that?
Should he do it?
Why or why not?
Donnie is struggling with algebra and yet he seems to be a smart kid.
What is an underachiever?
Is Donnie an underachiever?
Why do kids sometimes brag about underachieving?

**Look It Up**
Propagation
Plankton
Biological Imperative
Promiscuous
Troglodyte
After school, Jimmy offers Donnie a ride home and pulls out a whiskey flask. He takes a slug and offers it to Donnie. Then they pass Zach on the sidewalk and Jimmy deliberately splashes into a water puddle and soaks him. Donnie ducks down in his seat so Zach can’t see him but Zach saw him anyway. Now Donnie doesn’t know what to do. He’s accepted by the popular kids but they don’t want him hanging with the other kids like Zach and Cicely.

“*In groups* in high school cause problems for everyone. But they’ve always been there and always will be. So you have to find a way to deal with them. What would you do in Donnie’s situation?

*It’s easy to say you’d stay friends with Zach, but when the popular kids want you to join them, can you resist? Should you? Defend your position.*

Cicely has trouble at home, her mom’s boyfriend and her mom are fighting and she’s scared so she comes over to Donnie’s house to spend the night. The next night he walks Cicely home and meets her mother who offers him a cigarette. The next day, Donnie meets Cicely’s mother’s boyfriend, Randy. Randy makes inappropriate comments about sex in front of Donnie and Donnie doesn’t know what to make of it. But he’s not a bad person, just a guy who comes from a different background.

*Was this appropriate behavior on Cicely’s part? What would your parents say if your girlfriend or boyfriend came over to your house in the middle of the night?*

*What would you do in Donnie’s shoes? Speak up against Randy? Or keep quiet and talk to Cicely about it later?*

Donnie prepares to do his comic act for a school talent show. He finds out from Cicely’s mom that Cicely is an expert juggler and encourages her to try out as well. She doesn’t want to, but her mom encourages her to try. Cicely thinks about it.

The next school day, though, Donnie and the entire school learns that Jimmy has been arrested for hit and run drunken driving that causes the death of a woman he’d run over.

*Drinking and driving, especially for young and inexperienced drivers has long been a big problem. But today, with ever stricter laws against driving under the influence, it can also result in a very stiff prison sentencing. What would you do if a friend was driving drunk when you were in the car? It’s easy to say you’d ask to get out, but your friends would ridicule you. Defend your position.*

Then Donnie discovers that Zach, after having previously been harassed and beaten by Jimmy and his friends, has started to skip school. So he seeks Zach out at his home and finds him carrying a gun and threatening to shoot up the school. Zach accuses Donnie of selling him out to become popular with the likes of Jimmy. Donnie denies it but realizes it is partially true. Because he is conflicted in his loyalty to Zach, Donnie decides not to tell anyone about the gun or the threats. That puts Donnie in danger of being an accomplice to a serious crime that Zach might commit.

*What is your responsibility when a friend of yours engages in risky behavior? It’s very difficult for teens to “rat out” their peers, much less their friends. But sometimes it’s the best thing for your friend who otherwise could get into very serious problems. Defend your position.*

**Story Comprehension**

Why does Donnie feel bad about Zach?

Name one of Donnie’s chores around home.

What groups of people doesn’t Donnie want to make fun of?

What kind of professional can cure Cicely’s lisp?

What does Mrs. Hanover try to talk Brad into doing for the talent show?
**Think It Over**

Donnie is torn between being friends with Zach and becoming popular. What should he do? When Donnie thinks “words are like hand grenades when you’re young,” what do you think he means? Why is Donnie upset about some of Randy’s comments? Why do you think Donnie wants Cicely to perform at the talent show? Why does the principal make an announcement about James’ accident to the entire student body instead of letting them find out about it themselves?

**Look It Up**

Spawn
Emceed
Punctuate
Functional Speech Disorders
Sexual innuendo
Obstreperous
Contumacious
Encomium
Vehicular Manslaughter

**BOOK 4**

Donnie comes home from school the next day and learns that his sister, who he thinks of as “little miss perfect,” is pregnant. The father is Jimmy the bully. Donnie suggests that she talk to Mr. Pitlik’s girlfriend who is a family psychologist. His sister is embarrassed that she has to take advice from her “little brother.”

*High school pregnancies have been an issue forever. Fifty years ago, young women who got pregnant weren’t allowed to continue going to school and were often sent away until they delivered. Then the child was put up for adoption. Today teen pregnancies are more accepted than they were before, and many young women come to school pregnant. But many experts think that makes a dangerous precedent for other teens. What do you think when you see fellow students coming to school pregnant? Is it okay? Defend your position.*

Meanwhile, Zach continues to pursue his plot to blow up the school. His parents are gone on their sprees and he’s left home alone. A child welfare worker sent by the school stops by to see why Zach hasn’t been to class, but Zach doesn’t answer the doorbell. And now he’s making a hit list of fellow students to kill and it includes Donnie.

*School shootings have become a big problem over the past several decades. Some students bring a lot of pain to school from their home lives and from other issues in their lives. But it’s hard even for experts to tell which teens they are ahead of time. What would you do if a friend of yours made threats like Zach has? It’s easy to say you’d do something, but would you really? It’s very hard for teens to defy their own peers and especially their friends. Defend your position.*

Their teacher, Ms. Hanover, hosts a career day for their class. She asks students what their goals are for the future. Kimberly wants to be an environmentalist, but Ms. Hanover wonders
if there’s real work in a career like that. Berto wants to make it in the music business. Same question from Hanover, but Berto sticks to his guns and says what’s wrong with having a dream. Hanover agrees that passion is important but tells him she’s just being realistic.

*Many experts think today’s teens lack a “vision” for their future. With an economy that is struggling to grow new jobs, it’s a tough time to be young and to plan for your future. But there are jobs and careers out there that are in demand, too. So students need to be careful in picking future career choices. Do you have a vision for your future? Do you think you should have one? If you do, what is it and why do you think it could be a successful one? If not, defend your position.*

Donnie, of course, wants to be a stand-up comic. Hanover repeats her comments to Berto, but Donnie points out that he’s already doing stand-up. Hanover is impressed.

Donnie’s sister visits the therapist Pitluk’s girlfriend recommended to discuss her pregnancy. Her therapist goes over all her options and tries to help the frightened girl be able to make her own decision after considering her choices.

*Is that a good idea to give her choices? Or should the therapist just tell her what to do? What would you prefer if it was you who was pregnant? After all, that’s a very hard decision for anyone to make, but especially a younger person with fewer experiences. And if you were the boy who got her pregnant, what would your responsibility be?*

Donnie finally gets up the nerve to discuss Zach’s, and his own, predicaments with Mr. Pitluk. But he won’t tell him about the gun, instead insisting it was just a hypothetical case. Pitluk realizes that Donnie doesn’t want to out his friend but convinces him that telling the truth is the best thing for Zach. Donnie gets it.

*Did Donnie make the right decision? If you think he did, defend it. If you disagree, defend your position.*

After more drama between Kimberly and Cicely, Donnie asks Cicely to prom. They arrive and Donnie asks Berto if his band would let Cicely sing a number during the dance. Pitluk asks Donnie to go outside and get a CD out of his car. There, Donnie sees Zach in a hoodie carrying his gun. Donnie challenges Zach to think about what he’s doing but Zach is still angry. Donnie asks Zach if he can hold his gun and then tosses it over a nearby wall so he can’t find it. Pitluk shows up and talks Zach down.

*Did Donnie play this right? Was Pitluk helpful in his advice? What do you think should happen with Zach? Should he be punished? Go to jail? Get counseling? Defend your position.*

When Donnie returns to the dance, Cicely is ready to sing with Berto’s band and the night ends well for all the students.

**Story Comprehension**

What choices is Donnie’s sister considering to deal with her pregnancy?

Has she had “the talk” about sex with her parents?

What are some possible consequences of getting an abortion?

What are some possible consequences of continuing a pregnancy?

**Think It Over**

Why do you think Mrs. Hanover is asking students about their career dreams?

What do you think Donnie’s sister should do about her pregnancy?

Explain?
Why would Mrs. Hanover consider calling Child Welfare Services on Zach?
What do you think each main character in New Kid will be doing in five years?
In ten and twenty?
What do you think you will be doing in five, ten, twenty years?
Do you think these are realistic goals for you?
Explain why you think you can achieve them.

**Look It Up**
Complimentary
Hypothetical
Accessory