



LBGTQ Graphic Medicine Discussion Guide:

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic by Allison Bechdel

“At once a coming-out story, an examination of the complex relationship we can have with our parents and the role of art and literature in processing our lives... Smart, darkly funny and a little fearless, *Fun Home* reads like a true-life modern American Gothic.” – Time Best Comics of 2006

Why a Graphic Novel?

- Research suggests that we are better at understanding and absorbing information presented in visual forms, such as comics.
- Stories are more engaging than factual information alone. How much easier is it to remember and empathize with something a friend experienced versus hard statistics alone?
- Coined by Ian Williams, a physician in the UK, Graphic Medicine “is the intersection of the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare.”
 - Graphic medicine, then, combines visual storytelling and medicine, creating a unique opportunity for readers to experience and learn about healthcare experiences through comics.

To Learn More...

- www.graphicmedicine.org – The home base for all things graphic medicine.
- *The Graphic Medicine Manifesto* by MK Czerwiec et al. Available from Penn State University Press.



Created by Matthew Noe as part of the NNLM Region7 Graphic Medicine Initiative.

This project is funded by the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services, under Cooperative Agreement Number UG4LM012347 with the UMass Chan Medical School, Worcester.

Questions for Discussion*

1. How did Bechdel's relationship with her father change as she became an adult and a self-identified lesbian?
2. Bechdel relied heavily on first hand sources such as letters, journals, and photographs to document her upbringing. One example of this is the series of photos on page 120. How do these media contribute to the authenticity of the book and influence her art?
3. *Fun Home*'s narrative is non-linear and moves fluidly between the past and the present, revisiting central incidents over and over again. In what ways does this structure impact the story?
4. Does the book remind you of an aspect of your own life? A particular event? A person – like a friend, family member, co-worker, etc.?
5. *Fun Home* is regularly challenged for LGBTQ themes. In what ways is this public discomfort with sexual identity similar to the discomfort of the characters in the memoir? How does it differ?
6. How does Bechdel's use of a limited color palette influence the story? Does it enhance or distract from the story? Explain your reasoning.
7. Appearances are important to the Bechdel family, even though they do not often reflect reality. What are some examples from the story in which appearance and reality did not match, and how do these examples illustrate the tensions among the members of the Bechdel family?
8. Bechdel has obsessive-compulsive tendencies, which began with a particularly intense onset at age 10. How did her obsessive-compulsive disorder contribute to the documentation of her childhood?
9. Bechdel and her father connect over literature, and literary reference are integral to *Fun Home*. Identify some of these references. How did Bechdel's various literary allusions impact her storytelling?
10. On page 125, Bechdel imagines how things would differ if her family told the truth. Is Bechdel telling the truth in her own memoir? Explain your reasoning?
11. Why is *Fun Home* an important story for us to consider in medicine? (There are **many**.)

Remember: These are just suggested questions and there could be many, many more. Don't feel tethered to these – let the conversation flow naturally and use these questions as starting points when conversation stalls.