



Veteran's Health Graphic Medicine Book Club Guide:

At War with Yourself by Samuel C. Williams

From the publisher...“In this illustrated conversation between Samuel C. Williams and his friend, Matt, they talk candidly about Matt’s struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder. From scoping out quick exits in coffee shops to re-experiencing his traumatic events, Matt describes his unique experiences and how he has learnt to cope.”

And

When I Returned from the Center for Cartoon Studies

When I Returned is a comics anthology containing six unique stories from veterans at the White River Junction VA Medical Center in Vermont. Illustrated by a number of cartoonists from The Center for Cartoon Studies, these stories help show the depth and variety of the “veteran experience”.

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.



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Questions for Discussion

1. These two books introduced us to a number of radically different veteran's perspectives. Which of these perspectives did you most identify with? Which was the hardest for you to relate to? Why?
2. Did you appreciate the visual aspects of this book? Do you think the format of a graphic novel is more or less effective for a memoir than for a fictional account? How is it different than a memoir written in prose?
3. 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.?
4. Can you point to specific passages/panels that struck you personally? Why?
5. Did *At War With Yourself* change your perspective on PTSD? If so, how? If not, why not?
6. Most people have strong impressions of veterans' lives – from proud patriotism to disheartening homelessness. Did these stories broaden your impressions? How?
7. Reentry into civilian life can often be the most difficult part of a veteran's life. After reading these experiences, how do you think you would handle the stress of such a transition?
8. PTSD is a clear health issue, but other stories in *When I Returned* may not be so clear-cut. How does the whole picture of a veteran's life figure into their health? How might their experiences impact them differently than you or I? Is there a way for a community to get involved to help?
9. Have you read other memoirs or stories about veteran's health? How do these comics compare?
10. Matt is a veteran from the United Kingdom, rather than the United States. Did you notice any differences in his experience compared to the US-based stories in *When I Returned*?
11. Would you share either of these books with people in your life? If you could only choose one, which one? Why?

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.
