



Cancer Graphic Medicine Discussion Guide:

Mom's Cancer by Brian Fies

From the publisher... “Mom’s Cancer is a graphic novel about one family’s struggle with metastatic lung cancer. Honest, unflinching, and sometimes humorous, it is a look at the practical and emotional effect that serious illness can have on patients and their families. In the end, it is a story of hope – uniquely told in words and illustrations.”

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. *Mom's Cancer* began as webcomic – the first to win an Eisner Award in fact – and was published serially across several years. How do you think that impacted how the story flows?
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. *Mom's Cancer* gives us a glimpse not only into the complicated web of healthcare, but also into the very real impact disease has upon family relationships. How do you think – or how did – your own family would handle this situation?
6. Some of the panels in *Mom's Cancer* are the most used in the study of graphic medicine – particularly pages 5 and 18. Did either of these speak to you? About what? Why do you think they would be of special interest?
7. Fies makes sparse use of color throughout and only specific moments. Why do you think that is?
8. Fies describes oncology as an “improvisational art”, yet we most often discuss medicine as a science – particularly when discussing potential breakthroughs in the media. Would you agree with his characterization?
9. Have you read other memoirs or stories about cancer? How does *Mom's Cancer* compare to them?
10. *Mom's Cancer* tells a particular story, about a particular type of cancer, occurring in a particular family, yet it resonates with us well beyond the particular. Why do you think that is?
11. Would you share *Mom's Cancer* with people in your life? Why or why not?

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.