

Magical Boy: Volume 2

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR
THE KAO

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary



SYNOPSIS

Although he was assigned female at birth, Max is your average trans man trying to get through high school as himself. But on top of classes, crushes and coming out, Max's life is turned upside down when his mum reveals an eons-old family secret: he's descended from a long line of Magical Girls tasked with defending humanity from a dark, ancient evil.

For decades, Devoid and his minions have been sealed away, with each generation's Magical Girl protecting the seal and our world. But as the millennia have passed, more and more cracks have appeared in the weakening seal. Now, the seal is open, evil is pouring into our world, and only Max can defeat it.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

The Kao is Vincent Kao, a Taiwanese American illustrator and comic artist known for his slice-of-life web series, *Mondo Mango*, and the Prism Award-winning webcomic, *Magical Boy*.

Vincent graduated from Columbia College in Chicago with a bachelor of fine arts in Illustration. He began his career through a series of comic strips surrounding his daily life. Since then, he has self-published and collaborated in multiple crowdfunded comic anthologies under the 'The Kao' name. To this day, he continues to work on his illustrations and comics in hopes to inspire and bring joy to everyone around him.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - Who has read *Magical Boy Vol 1*? Summarise the story so far for those students who may have not read it.
 - How does the cover of Vol 2 compare to the cover of Vol 1?
 - What signs and symbols on the cover can you identify, and what do you think they indicate?
 - What do you predict is likely to happen to Max and his friends in Volume 2? Why do you think this and what clues to the possible action can you see in the cover artwork?
- Why do you think Max's mother is having so much difficulty accepting the fact that Max is trans? As a class, discuss her reaction to Max, to Max's behaviour in his role as Aurora's descendant, and to Max coming out as a trans man. How does this compare to Max's father's perspective on the matter? What are some things that Max's father does and says to help Hikari learn to accept and understand Max the way he truly is? What are some things you can do or say to help others who might struggle with accepting difference? Why is it so important for all young people to

feel accepted by their families, especially when they are very different from how their families expected them to be? What role can others play in the lives of those who struggle with acceptance that can also make a difference in the long run?

- At the start of the novel, the situation looks dire for Max (and for the world as a whole!)—but Max doesn't just give up in despair but instead keeps trying to change things for the better. As a class, discuss how the importance of continued persistent effort in the face of adversity appears as a recurring theme within the novel. Identify the different ways in which the various characters all learn or share this knowledge and discuss how and why an individual showing persistence and resilience can make a difference in the lives of everyone involved.
- In Episode 16, Max tries to follow his mother's advice and deny his true self. When this only succeeds in making him miserable, how large a part does Tobi's acceptance and kindness play in Max learning that it is more important to be true to himself than to try to please others?
- The evil monsters try to make Max doubt himself to weaken him magically. This may be fictional, but as a class or in small groups discuss the different ways that self-doubt can weaken all of us in a very real non-magical sense. Some things to include in your discussion might be:
 - How does emotional strength help us in our daily lives?
 - What are some examples from your own lives of self-doubt influencing you negatively?
 - How does self-doubt create an emotional feedback loop that can cause damage to us?
 - Why do we tend to make bad choices when we are feeling self-doubt?
 - What does being strong and believing in ourselves look like in terms of daily behaviour?
 - How can we help ourselves and each other overcome self-doubt?

After your discussion, as a class, help each other combat self-doubt by participating in a kindness and support activity. Just as everyone has weaknesses, we all have strengths and sometimes it might be hard to identify what they are ourselves.

- Think of something positive about every single student in your class.
- On a class list write each of these thoughts down next to the other student's name.
- Once completed, hand your list in to the teacher to collate into individual lists of positive qualities and compliments for each student. Note: each positive comment should be anonymous.
- When the teacher hands back your individual list of comments and compliments that the other students have written about you, take a few minutes to read it and think about the comments. Some things to consider might be:
 - Were there any things on your list that surprised you?
 - What does this list tell you about how others perceive you?
 - What comments on this list are specifically helpful to you in addressing areas of self-doubt?

After reading your own personal anti-doubt list of positivity, as a class, discuss how receiving and reading something like this makes you feel about yourself, and how knowing that others can see positive features and character traits in you can affect your choices and behaviour outside class.

- Write a short persuasive piece arguing for or against the statement 'Max would never have succeeded without the help of his friends'. Use at least three pieces of evidence from the text to support your assertions.
- What are the key themes in *Magical Boy* that you can identify? In small groups discuss this question and identify at least three key themes that appear in both Volume 1 and Volume 2. As a class share the results of your groups' discussions, and compare your lists of identified themes. Use your discussion to help create a master list of key themes that run throughout both novels, before individually writing a short piece discussing the different ways in which the author explores one of these themes.
- Which, in your opinion, is the most gripping action scene in the novel and why?
- Over the course of the novel it becomes increasingly clear that Max is not the only one of the young people who has an unsupportive parent or parents who actively try to prevent them from being themselves. As a class, discuss Sean's father, Max's mother and Pyper's father, and compare the ways in which they are similar to each other, and the ways in which they are very different from each other. Include in your discussion both specific and obvious examples of how they think and feel drawn from the book, as well as more subtle implications and your own

personal hypotheses as to why they are behaving in the way they are.

- When Max is doubting his ability to defeat the monsters, his friends help him regain his self-confidence and feelings of self-worth—which as it turns out is essential to beating the evil creatures! We may not have to contend with evil insects like Max and his friends do, but we can make a difference in other's lives. As a class, or in small groups, discuss the different ways that we can all support our friends and classmates and help everyone feel consistently valuable and worthwhile. In small groups create motivational posters featuring things that we can and should tell ourselves when we are feeling overwhelmed or unhappy, and things we can and should tell others when we see they are feeling self-doubt or struggling with their self-image.
- As a class discuss the ending of the novel. What is your opinion on the way the whole situation with Aurora and Devoid was resolved?
- What, to you, is the most satisfying scene overall in the novel? What makes this scene satisfying and why do you like it so much?
- In small groups discuss the use of foreshadowing within the novels.
 - What are some of the hints as to the final scenes that the author has scattered throughout the novels?
 - How many of them did you notice at the time, and how many did you only see when they were fully realised in the course of the action?
 - How does this use of foreshadowing affect your understanding of events both during and after reading?
 - Why do you think the author has chosen to present the information like this?
 - What is the effect on the story overall of the use of this type of literary technique?
 - Can you think of any scenes where you would have appreciated more information earlier, or where you think too much was revealed too soon?
 - Individually write a brief summary of where, how, and why the author of *Magical Boy* used foreshadowing as a literary technique.
- Write a book review of the *Magical Boy* graphic novels. Include in your review a comment on the key themes addressed, a brief synopsis of the plot, a note as to who you think would most appreciate reading the story and your own personal recommendation of the novels.