

Magical Boy: Volume 1

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 boy 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!

With a sassy feline sidekick and loyal gang of friends by his side, can Max take on his destiny, save the world and become the next Magical Boy?

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:
 - What can you see happening on the cover of this book?
 - What genre is this book and how can you tell?
 - Is there a difference between a graphic novel and a comic, and if so what is it?
 - Who do you think might be the targeted readership of this story?
 - What do you think might be some of the themes covered in this book?
 - What do you predict might happen in this story?
- After reading the first episode, as a class, discuss what you have found out so far about the protagonist, and their story. Some things you might want to include in your discussion could be:
 - Who is the main protagonist?
 - What is the protagonist's name?
 - What is special about the protagonist?

- What is the protagonist's family like?
- Where do they live?
- How old are they?
- Who are they friends with?
- What are their challenges?
- Max can see what he calls 'light farts' around people. If you had to live your life surrounded by a glowing mist of colour that others could see, what colour would you choose and why? Draw a picture of yourself surrounded by your chosen colour of 'light fart', and write a one or two paragraph explanation of why you chose this colour, what it symbolises to you, and what aspects of yourself and your personality you would like it to represent to others who might view it.
- Max's parents react very differently when he comes out to them as trans. In small groups discuss the difference in their reactions, and hypothesise as to what some of the contributing factors might be that cause their responses to be so wildly different from each other.
 - Individually write a brief (one or two paragraphs) summary of how and why their reactions differ, and how Max might feel about the situation if they'd both reacted like his mother, or both like his father.
- Write a diary entry describing the events in the novel from the point of view of Pyper. Include descriptions of several pivotal moments within the story, and be sure to address her inner turmoil at constantly trying to live according to her family's strict religious ethos. Make sure to focus on what she feels are the most important events over the course of the novel.
- Walnut says that he is Max's 'hereditary guardian, helping to guide him into the power of the Goddess'. Max, however, after the first fight with an evil creature, tells Jen that Walnut is an 'old fart who has been freeloading' off Max's family for centuries. Which description is more accurate, or are they both just as valid? As a class, debate this issue using evidence from the text to support your arguments.
- The two main plot lines within the story are those of Max's struggle to come out as a transman, and his struggle with having to be this generation's goddess of light. What are some other plotlines, subplots or individual story arcs you can identify within the novel? As a class, discuss all the different storyline threads you can identify, and how they weave together and interact with each other.
- As a graphic novel the visual narrative of *Magical Boy* is a powerful and important part of the novel's narrative structure. As a class, discuss the difference between visual narrative and textual narrative.
 - In small groups try to identify what type of information is presented as part of the visual narrative, what is consistently presented as part of the textual narrative, and what information is presented through either or both. Write a short analysis of how the graphic novel format brings elements of reader understanding to the telling of Max's story that an exclusively textual narrative or uncaptioned series of artworks would not be able to convey in the same way.
- Max absolutely hates the superhero outfit that he has to wear, which at the start is identical to the one his mother wore. But as time passes, it slowly starts to change in response to his wishes and desires. What would your perfect superhero outfit look like and would it be anything like one that your parents, or other family or friends in the previous generation might have worn if they were superheroes too? Design your very own 'I have godlike powers now' costume, and draw a detailed coloured picture of yourself wearing it.
 - In a small inset panel also draw a picture of the costume that you can imagine one of your parents or guardians wearing when they were your age.
 - Under your pictures write a list of all the features that would have to be changed to transform the old-style costume into the one which you would be happy to wear when fighting evil.
- In small groups create a three column character assessment sheet of the main characters who have appeared in book one. In the first column put the character's name, in the second column a brief description of who they are and their key character and personality traits, and in the third column list their role within the story (eg. protagonist, best friend, love interest, etc.)
 - Use your character sheet to draw a character interaction map or maps showing where, when, and in what way the various characters interact with each other over the course of the novel. As a class discuss your interaction

maps.

- In the course of your discussion you should talk about which format conveys the information with the most clarity, which characters are pivotal to the action, and how character interaction and development drives the action and plot tension within the novel.
- Think about what other information you can add to your character sheets or the interaction map that would further enhance your understanding of how the author has addressed character development within their narrative structure.
- What do you think is the significance of Max's friends being able to hear Walnut talk in the last scene? In small groups hypothesise as to what (if anything) this signifies.