Graphic novels for reluctant readers: what the popular ones share

Peabody blog · Reading · updated 2026-10-30

Graphic novels for reluctant readers: the five things Dog Man, The Bad Guys, Wimpy Kid and the rest have in common, and how to use them to pick the next book.

The graphic novels that reluctant readers pick up again and again share five things: a joke on most pages, pictures that carry the story, few words on a page, a hero their own age or size, and lots of books in the series. Dog Man, The Bad Guys, Captain Underpants, Diary of a Wimpy Kid and The Last Kids on Earth all have at least four of the five, which is why they turn up on every list for children who say they don't like reading. Knowing the five makes it easier to choose the next book than any list does.

"Reluctant reader" covers a lot of children: the one who can read but would rather not, the one who finds a page of text tiring, the one who has simply not found their book yet. This post isn't about the reasons, which vary and are worth talking to your child's teacher about. It is about the books, and what the popular ones have in common.

The list we started from

Peabody's kids' list of series for reluctant readers names nine: Dog Man, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, The Bad Guys, Hilo, Smile, Captain Underpants, The Last Kids on Earth, Press Start! and Timmy Failure. Six of them we track in order with a checklist. Here is what each of those is like to read, in the plain one-line descriptions on their series pages:

- Series: Dog Man · What reading it is like: Short speech bubbles in big comic panels, with a joke on most pages.
- Series: The Bad Guys · What reading it is like: Big pictures and few words on a page, part comic and part chapter book.
- Series: Captain Underpants · What reading it is like: Short chapters with lots of cartoons and comic pages: a step up from a comic.
- Series: Diary of a Wimpy Kid · What reading it is like: A handwritten-looking diary with a cartoon on most pages: more words than a comic, in short entries.
- Series: The Last Kids on Earth · What reading it is like: A novel with a big drawing on most spreads and a few comic pages.
- Series: Big Nate · What reading it is like: Short chapters of plain, chatty text on every page, with cartoons and comic strips mixed in.

The five things

1. Funny, all the way through. Not a serious story with a few jokes in it. Most of the series above are comedies first, and a reader who is laughing on page two keeps turning pages.

2. The pictures carry the story. When the drawing shows what happened, the words only have to add to it. A child who misses a word doesn't lose the plot.

3. Few words on a page. Short bubbles, short diary entries, short chapters. A page that ends quickly is a page finished, and a book of finished pages is a finished book.

4. A hero their own size. A kid, a dog-headed cop, a wolf trying to be good. The hero gets things wrong and gets into trouble, often at school.

5. More of them. Fifteen Dog Man books, twenty Bad Guys, twenty-one Wimpy Kids as of 30 October 2026. The second book is the one that matters: a child who wants it has decided they are a reader of that series. A long series makes the next decision for them.

Using the five to pick the next one

Take the book your child liked, and ask which of the five it had. Then look for another with the same ones. A child who loved The Bad Guys for the jokes and the animals might want Bunny vs Monkey or CatStronauts. A child who loved Wimpy Kid for the diary and the school disasters might want Big Nate. Our post on books like Dog Man does this for the most-asked case, and the three-question picker does it with three taps: age, mood, and the series they've just finished.

What we'd avoid

Pushing. A child who reads the same Dog Man for the fourth time is reading, and enjoying it. Moving on to "real books" isn't the goal either, because comics are real books. The step up, when it comes, is usually sideways: a hybrid like Captain Underpants or The Last Kids on Earth, which keeps the drawings and adds paragraphs.

Keeping count

Many reluctant readers like seeing progress. Every series page has a checklist kept on your device, which says which book is next and prints as a reading log with a box to tick and a date to write for each book. My Shelf puts every series on one page. A wall of ticked boxes can be its own reason to read the next one.

Questions grown-ups ask

Are graphic novels good for reluctant readers?

They suit many of them, because the pictures share the work of telling the story, and the popular series are funny and long. They are reading in their own right, not a stage to get through.

What if my child only wants to read one series?

Let them finish it. Then use the five things above to find the next one with the same feel, or try the spin-off if there is one (Cat Kid Comic Club for Dog Man).

Which graphic novel should a reluctant 10-year-old try?

Something funny and long that doesn't look young: Bunny vs Monkey, Big Nate or Diary of a Wimpy Kid. Our graphic novels for 10 year olds post has more.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026. Our library has stories levelled for every reader.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/graphic-novels-for-reluctant-readers