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The Fire Never Goes Out

By Noelle Stevenson

Summary

In a collection of essays and personal mini-comics that span eight years of her young adult life, author-illustrator Noelle Stevenson charts the highs and lows of being a creative human in the world.

Whether it's hearing the wrong name called at her art school graduation ceremony or becoming a National Book Award finalist for her debut graphic novel, *Nimona*, Noelle captures the little and big moments that make up a real life, with a wit, wisdom and vulnerability that are all her own.

Key Learning Outcomes

ACELA1551, ACELA1553, ACELA1564, ACELT1633, ACELT1771, ACELT1640, ACELT164, ACELY1749

Themes

Mental health, Body image, Growing up, Art, Self-reflection and expression, Love, Burning out and self-care, Sexuality

Recommended Ages: 14+

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Techniques

There are 'lots of different ways to draw comics' (p20).

- What do you think of when you think of comics?
- What different styles can you think of?
- How are the sketches in the book different to what you might normally expect a comic book to look like?
- How does the author's style change as the book progresses?
- In many ways, *The Fire Never Goes Out* does not fit into the text type of comic or graphic novel. How would you define the text type of this book?

Comics rely on the interplay of the words and pictures. Because of this, they allow us to explore duality and metaphor using the contrast between the text and the image.

- Find an example in the book where the illustration contradicts the words on the page.
What is the author trying to say here?
 - What would be lost if you only saw the image or only read the text?

The writer finds her inspiration in a number of different places – fan art (books and films); music; even a love letter to a D&D character. Where do you get your inspiration from?

- Have you ever used one of your passions as inspiration for a piece of writing or an illustration?
- Choose a character from a book, game or film that you've always wanted to know more about. Create a short comic imagining their life beyond the story you know them from.

The summaries of each year are written in first person present tense, which means we stay in the moment with the character and grow up with her.

- How would your reading of the narrative change if the author wrote in past tense in these moments?
- Compare the reflections in each chapter to the letter from the author at the beginning of the book.
 - What point of view does the letter use?
 - How is this different to the annual reflections?
 - If you were going to keep a diary of your life, what tense and point of view would you use and why?

Themes

How do the things we want for ourselves change from one year to the next? Noelle's diary shows her growth as she reflects on each year at the beginning and the end.

- What changes?
 - What is she proud of, and what does she hope to change in the next year?
 - Map her growth as you read the book and comment on some of the significant changes that occur.
- Think of where you were this time last year, or this time five years ago. What did you want then and what do you want now?
 - Are they different?
 - What would you do differently?
 - Either as a comic or a diary, or both, reflect on the time that has passed. Think about the things you've achieved, and the things that were important to you then that are no longer important now. Who are the constant people in your life, and how have your relationships with them changed as you've grown? How do you think they'd respond if you were to show them what you've created?

Towards the end of the book, the author reflects more broadly on the process of her diary, saying, 'I do these posts every year, and have since 2011. Some years, including last year, I wasn't sure if I should continue doing them. The posts encouraged a narrative that I disagreed with as much as I desperately sought to live up to it: that my accomplishments and my youth gave me value, that I was always on the upward climb, that burnout was an easily resolved footnote, that I was young and sharp and fine, I was fine and I would always be fine' (p168).

- Are any of these feelings familiar to you? Either discuss in a group or write individual responses to the challenges that Noelle faces in this final year (and the years leading up to it).
- Is it reassuring to hear someone talk about these struggles?
 - How does she deal with them?
 - How have you coped when you have felt similarly?
- What does burn-out mean?
- What makes Noelle burn out and why is she afraid to ask for help?
- Imagine that you have a friend in a similar situation. Write a conversation that you might have with them to see how you can support them.
 - What would you ask?
 - How might they respond?
 - What other resources are available that you could use to guide the conversation, or point your friend towards if they need more than just a friend?

The Fire Never Goes Out explores themes of body image and self-reflection through sketches and illustrations.

- How might drawing or writing about the parts of your body that you're unhappy with change the way you feel about them?
- How would you draw yourself?
 - Are there parts of yourself that you would find harder to draw than others?
- Write a sentence that describes something you like about yourself and draw a quick sketch to go with it. Give yourself sixty seconds to sketch yourself.
 - Now draw another version giving yourself five minutes.
 - How is the image different?
 - Which do you prefer?
 - What details do you add in the longer sketch that you didn't have time for in the first?
 - Do your illustrations focus on the things you like about yourself or the things you don't like?
 - How would your image change if you were to draw only something good about yourself?
- Why do you think the writer draws herself with a hole in her middle?
 - What does this tell you about her emotional state?
 - How might you represent your emotions in an illustration?

What does the book tell you about growing up?

- What does becoming a 'proper adult' (p27) look like to you?
 - Do you dream of making a career out of your passions?
 - What might the challenges be with this?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Noelle Stevenson is the award-winning, bestselling author and illustrator of *Nimona* and a cowriter of *Lumberjanes*. She currently lives in Los Angeles, where she is a showrunner for the Netflix series *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*.