Bechdel, A. (2007). Fun home: A family tragicomic. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

 Fun Home is a graphic novel memoir of a girl coming to grips with the tragic death of her father, discovering hidden secrets in his past, and the exploration of her own sexuality. Allison’s story opens with descriptions of her father as a detached, sometimes-angry man with an almost unnatural penchant for home restoration and décor. His interest in all things beautiful leads Allison to question the nature of masculinity. Conversely, she herself is a tomboy with a love for men’s fashion.

The story, told by grown Allison recalling her child hood, in which her actress mother and funeral director-English teacher father tells of stories of her father inviting his male teenage students to their home to do yard work and to help babysit Allison and her brothers on vacations. Shortly before he father’s death, her mother reveals the truth that her father was engaged in illicit relationships with these boys. As Allison is discovering these things about her father, she begins to realize that she herself is a lesbian and comes out to her parents. The coming out is a relief to Allison. And this admission, along with a mutual love of literature, provides a path for her to form a relationship with her father. His death is an accident, but Allison believes that her father committed suicide in part because he was unable to deal with his repressed sexuality.

The book was quite graphic, in language, illustrated nudity, and drawings of sexual acts. While it would certainly not be appropriate for my student persona, I think a young adult student struggling with death or gender/sexual identity would benefit from reading it. The graphic novel style made the book easy to read, and it was filled with dark humor that lightened up the heavy subject matter. Despite the dark content, it was fun to read.

Even at the young age my elementary students are now, I have students dealing with similar issues to the ones Allison addresses in her memoir. Death is something that all students have experienced at some level, whether it be from a pet, a friend, or a loved one. Sexual identity may not be an issue at this age, but gender certainly can be. I currently have a second grade student dealing with gender dysphoria. This book is a good example of how art can be a way to express emotions and deal with issues that affect us in ways we are otherwise unable to communicate.

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