

“To be Interesting and Interested, to Pay Attention and Question the World Around Me”: The Transformation of *Lumberjanes* from YA Comic to Middle-Grade Chapter Book

Recent years have seen the publication of a stream of middle-grade graphic adaptations of popular chapter books, both those published on the heels of their originals (*The Graveyard Book*, *The Lightning Thief*) and those that reimagine middle-grade classics for a new generation (Hope Larsen’s *A Wrinkle in Time*, Raina Telgemeier’s *Babysitters’ Club*). But Mariko Tamaki and Brooklyn Allen’s 2017 chapter book spin-off *Lumberjanes: Unicorn Power* reverses the usual adaptation trajectory, reimagining the wildly successful YA graphic narrative series by Noelle Stevenson et al. as a lightly illustrated but largely textual narrative—and marketing it to a slightly younger audience. In the process, it invites us to consider, from a new vantage point, the textual features and dynamics of both modes as well as the often blurry line between “older middle grade” and YA fiction.

In the case of *Lumberjanes*, the multivocal narration of the original YA comic becomes, in the spinoff, third-person narration that nonetheless captures the voice of the group. Character development shifts slightly in the absence of visual cues and the front-loading of backstory, becoming, at different moments, both more and less visible to its younger target audience. Ironically, the original’s physical comedy—which we might associate with a less sophisticated audience—shifts to more verbal humor in the chapter book. Paradoxically, the series’ queer content—a lesbian romance, gay dads, and genderqueer campers—becomes simultaneously more and less explicit in the middle-grade version, where it has the potential to be both more ground-breaking and more controversial. Similarly, other feminist content becomes at the same time both more overt and, in the process, harder to read, as it segues into self-parody. Finally, while both *Lumberjanes* address and engage adult as well as juvenile audiences, the YA graphic narratives do so through an “all ages” approach, while the middle-grade chapter book achieves this through dual narrative address, particularly allusions likely to be lost on young readers but having nostalgic resonance and humor for their parents.