



A Bag of Marbles

Vincent Bailly (Illustrations) , Kris , Joseph Joffo , Edward Gauvin (Translation)

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In 1941 in occupied Paris, brothers Maurice and Joseph play a last game of marbles before running home to their father's barbershop. This is the day that will change their lives forever. With the German occupation threatening their family's safety, the boys' parents decide Maurice and Joseph must disguise themselves and flee to their older brothers in the free zone. Surviving the long journey will take every scrap of ingenuity and courage they can muster. If they hope to elude the Nazis, they must never, under any circumstances, admit to being Jewish.

The boys travel by train, ferry, and on foot, facing threats from strangers and receiving help from unexpected quarters. Along the way they must adapt to the unfamiliar world beyond their city and find a way to be true to themselves even as they conceal their identities.

A Bag of Marbles Details

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Amaranth says

Da La Bella e il Cavaliere

Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité. Finché queste tre parole rimarranno sulle facciate dei municipi francesi, saranno al sicuro. Il padre di Joseph ne è sinceramente convinto, ma quando agli ebrei viene imposto di portare una stella gialla che ne permetta l'identificazione, le sue certezze iniziano a incrinarsi. Si infrangono del tutto quando Joseph e Maurice ritornano da scuola malconci a causa delle ritorsioni dei compagni che improvvisamente li vedono diversi.

Non si può più restare a Parigi ed è qui che inizia il viaggio di Joseph e Maurice verso la Francia libera, verso la libertà.

Quando mi sono decisa a rileggere *Un sacchetto di biglie*, ho scoperto che ne è stata tratta una graphic novel e mi ha incuriosita l'opportunità di valutarne la trasposizione. D'altra parte mi sarebbe impossibile, avendo letto da poco il romanzo, evitare ogni confronto.

La graphic novel è molto fedele al racconto di Joffo: l'impressione è che gli autori lo abbiano studiato attentamente e che lo stesso Joffo sia stato coinvolto nella preparazione dell'opera.

Il fumetto è diviso in due parti, ciascuna delle quali è introdotta da un breve estratto dal romanzo; un espediente che fa da collante tra le parti e riesce a suggerire l'intonazione della voce narrante, che il lettore ritrova nelle didascalie.

A conferire un'atmosfera particolare alla narrazione è la tecnica di colorazione scelta da Bailly. **Le illustrazioni ad acquerello, infatti, contribuiscono a evocare la dimensione del ricordo che caratterizza il racconto di Joseph. Le variazioni di colore, dai toni più luminosi a quelli più cupi, riescono a trasmettere le diverse sensazioni provate dal protagonista.**

Inevitabilmente molti dettagli che nel romanzo danno spessore a ciascuna delle persone incontrate sono stati omessi. La trasposizione grafica richiede dei piccoli tagli e adattamenti che non danneggiano la linearità della narrazione, ma che sono evidenti a chi ha letto il libro. Nondimeno allo stesso lettore non sfuggiranno i particolari inseriti all'interno delle vignette: potrebbero apparire trascurabili e, invece rivelano la cura che ha permesso agli autori di operare delle scelte.

Più rilevante è proprio la dispersione della voce di Jo, con il coinvolgimento emotivo che rivelava e l'innocenza dello sguardo che dà al suo romanzo una patina avventurosa. **Il fumetto edulcora** la gravità delle diverse situazioni che i due fratelli Joffo si trovano ad affrontare. **Il terrore e la tensione, persino il malessere**, che nel romanzo si percepiscono al di là dei momenti spensierati che Joseph riesce a vivere, **mi sono sembrati alleggeriti.**

Per quanto, da un punto di vista estetico, sia davvero bella e restituisca efficacemente la storia di Joseph e di suo fratello, la graphic novel perde la prospettiva sulla drammatica realtà circostante che, invece, Joffo riesce a raccontare.

L'edizione italiana è accompagnata da una breve **prefazione di Walter Veltroni**, che ho davvero apprezzato per la capacità di **introdurre al contesto storico, invitando a cogliere i sintomi che si ripropongono nella nostra contemporaneità.**

Anche nella versione di Bailly e Kris, *Un sacchetto di biglie* è una lettura consigliata e potrebbe essere un primo passo per avvicinare all'argomento della persecuzione nazista e sensibilizzare alla solidarietà attiva.

È successo. Molte volte nella storia. È successo che si dovesse fuggire dalla propria terra, lasciare la propria casa, i propri amori, i propri amici. La fuga è il contrario del viaggio. È una decisione obbligata è

figlia di scelte altrui, quasi sempre prodotto dell'odio e della discriminazione.

Ogni tanto, nella storia, qualcuno decide di essere superiore ad altri. Si convince, e convince il prossimo, che la propria etnia, la propria tradizione culturale o le proprie idee politiche, il colore della propria pelle e la propria religione non siano comparabili ad altre. E che "gli altri", quelli diversi, siano esseri inferiori, sgorbi della storia o persino della natura, pericoli e ostacoli da rimuovere.

Allora l'inferno si materializza in terra.

Jenny says

This graphic novel tells the interesting story of two brothers and their trip to safety out of occupied territory during World War II. While the story was compelling enough to keep me going, the review copy I was sent had poor quality illustrations that were pixelated out, but the idea I got from the cover art was that of pleasant watercolors. Could be used with kids in grades 3-7.

Mike says

As a teacher, I've watched graphic novels change the habits of reluctant readers. Unfortunately, it's been difficult to get some of my colleagues to treat them as the quality stories they often are. Bag of Marbles covers so many fronts. It's a stunningly told story about the relatively lucky families persecuted during WW2.

This is a title that should accompany any unit covering the Holocaust. Secondly, just as with Little White Duck, the visual format enables both graphic novels and memoirs to find a new audience. My students, the ones who tear through anything visual, will be opened up to a new dimension of thought about story. And, as I saw with Little White Duck, my highly able readers who previously saw GN as beneath them, will grow in their appreciation for this outstanding format.

Rachel (TheShadesofOrange) says

3.5 Stars

This is a nice world war II graphic memoir done in a water-color art style.

Jalee Boucher says

I felt this book was confusing in some parts but otherwise it was really good.

Dov Zeller says

I read the memoir (English edition) about a year ago and loved it. The graphic version is charming, evocative, I would hazard to say beautiful, and brings the time and place uniquely to life. That said, the non-

graphic book was a lot more detailed and I missed Joffo's often amused, sometimes terrified or bewildered, but always life-affirming narrative voice.

★.~.~.★ ?I??Y ★.~.~.★ says

It was a really good book about two Jewish boys who lived in France during World War 2.

Josie says

The book I read is called Bag of Marbles and it is about World War 2 and the Nazis. Imagine it is 1940 and you live in Paris, France and you are a young boy who loves to play marbles with his friends. Then 1941 comes and the Nazis have come to Paris and taken over because of this you have had a huge chunk of your childhood taken from you. This is exactly what happened to Joseph and Maurice. Since you are so young before the Nazis came you had no idea what it meant to be a Jew until you had to be forced to wear a yellow star. Since you are against wearing the yellow star that tells everyone that you are different from them you decided to trade your friend the star for a bag of marbles. Being a Jew is very hard during this time for you. Since your father and mother care for you so much and they don't want you getting hurt and maybe even getting taken they decided to have you leave with your brother to get away. Their father the owner of a hairdressing salon tells them what they have to do when they leave. Despite having to leave their home and parents because of their identity as Jews they are told by their father if anyone asks if you're Jewish you always answer with no. You and your brother are attempting to escape from Hitler just one problem every time you get to a new city Hitler and his men seem to always be right behind you. You travel through northern France to southern France. You then cross the Demarcation line very late at night with the help of a guy named Raymond. Once into the safe in France you travel to a place where you spend an amazing day at the sea which you have never seen before in your life. You then meet up with your brothers that you spend 4 months with. Then after the 4 months you have to leave because your parents are waiting for you in another city. After the summer ends you have to leave again because unfortunately the Italians have surrendered and then the Germans have arrived in the safe where you are. You then decide to flee for a boys camp. You and your brother are safe here for a while and make some friends while you are there. Then one day you and your brother have to accompany the lorry driver into Nice. While doing this something happens that was unintentional and unexpected. To figure out what happens you are going to have to read the book to find out.

This book was very enjoyable. The pictures helped a lot to tell the story which I really liked about it because I feel like pictures with a book explaining something really helps to visualize it better. I also really liked how it told the story from the perspective of the two boys and what it was like for kids during that time. Having it told from that perspective helped because I am very close in age to them and that showed what it could have been like for me if I lived back when all of this happened. After reading this book I would definitely try to find other books by this author.

Edward Sullivan says

An engaging, poignant graphic memoir about French Jewish children fleeing to Unoccupied France. Adapted from the French memoir by Joffo.

Soobie's scared says

L'ho preso in biblio questo. Quando era uscito ne avevano parlato in tanti ma poi è caduto nell'oblio. Oggi l'ho recuperato, sempre nell'intento di leggere tutto ciò che c'è sugli scaffali dei fumetti della biblio di PN.

I disegni mi sono piaciuti abbastanza, un po' indefiniti forse, ma piacevoli. Belli i colori, per una volta. Molto vivaci. Belle anche le vignette di grandezza diversa che non rispettano il solito schema della pagina.

La storia - che comprende anche una terza parte, ma non so sia stata tradotta - non mi ha perso più di tanto. Forse perché l'ho letto al parcheggio dell'ospedale mentre aspettavo mia mamma. Forse perché... Non so, ai due protagonisti va tutto bene. Sempre. Trovano sempre gente disposti ad aiutarli. Ecco, o sono due con una fortuna grande così o sembrava tutto organizzato troppo bene per essere vero.

Inoltre, la scansione temporale non è ben riuscita. Il tempo passa e si fa fatica ad accorgersene. E poi si arriva al 1944 ed è tutto finito.

Bella la scena in cui l'amichetto francese chiede in prestito la stella gialla. Strana scelta per il titolo, visto che le biglie compaiono solo all'inizio.

Boh, se trovassi anche la terza parte potrei leggerla così completo la serie ma, per adesso, viene etichettata come abbandonata.

Wally says

Fantastically told tale of two Jewish boys sent by their parents away from Nazi-occupied Paris to find their brothers in free France. Based on a memoir by Joffo, the story telescopes much time into a little over 100 pages with watery watercolors. The opening scene at the Jewish barbershop run by their father is incredibly tense.

Raina says

This book totally impressed me. It surpassed my expectations. But then again, maybe I had the bar pretty low.

I don't typically gravitate to holocaust stories (due to high exposure at a young age), and I'm always suspicious of adaptations and translated works - I fear dilution, what can I say. Ok, that's a grand generalization, but whatevs.

Anyway, this was awesome. It's a different angle of World War II than I've read before, and the story is told really really well. Although the illustration style is not my normal jam, the color makes it pop off the page, and I found myself feeling for this little kid as he was forced to lie his way across France. The adapter chooses moments which show rather than tell the story, and youthful vocabulary is translated well.

Although this may not attract kids who are not already interested in stories of Europe during World War II, anyone would be wise to pick it up. Definitely recommended.

Daisya Spencer says

In 1941, in Paris, France, Joseph and Maurice one day comes home bloodied from a fight and their father tells them that it's time for them to leave Paris and flee to where their older brothers live, in Italy because the German occupation is threatening the safety of their family.

When I read the synopsis I expected the whole book to be about their travels, but it wasn't. I think around 30-something percent or so was when they made it, safely to where their brothers were, but then the family had to be on the move about two or three more times. I also did not know that this was actually based on the author, Joseph Joffo's, life for some odd reason when the character's name and the author's name are the same, but that was me being dumb.

I feel bad judging a book that was based on someone's actual life, but there were moments that if he were to tell me this face-to-face, then I wouldn't believe it. There was a moment in the book where Joseph and Maurice ran into this kid named Raymond and he was able to help them cross but only if they delivered the meat to the rest of their route. For some reason that didn't seem believable to me at all.

Also, sadly even though it was only 126 pages I was a bit bored with it and I wasn't a fan of the artwork. I do, however, liked how Joseph and Maurice were able to survive and care for themselves while they were fleeing.

Overall, I thought this was an okay graphic novel, but at the same time, it was very inspiring to see Joseph tell his story.

David Schaafsma says

I really liked this memoir, adapted by Kris in 2011 from the 1973 memoir by Joffo and translated by Edward Gauvin about Joffo's Jewish family's emigration from Paris as Nazi occupation made it increasingly dangerous to be there. Four sons, a mother and father, all proceed out of Paris in various ways, though our focus is on the youngest, Jo, 11, and Maurice, a little older, who are sent out of Paris (alone!) on a trip across Europe as danger ensues.

There are several worries/pitfalls with Holocaust escape memoirs, in my opinion. One is the heroic Hollywood story, the unbelievable Hollywood thriller where everyone lives happily ever after. Even if it's true it is a problem as a story. But without revealing too much, let me just say that this does have it's thrilling and inspiring aspects, and yet is not perfect--shall we just say--for all family members. It has sadness in it even beyond the broad Holocaust horrors. And likable people, Jo and his family!

I have read a LOT of Holocaust novels and memoirs, so have a tendency to be a little jaded at this point, but I was pretty completely captivated by this story and the warm and inviting watercolor illustrations. It's a comic, not a picturebook, probably intended for young adults, primarily, and should be used in schools! Very good stuff.

Jenny Schwartzberg says

Years ago I read the original *Sac des billes* and enjoyed it so I was curious to see how it had been translated and adapted as a children's graphic novel. I received an eARC through NetGalley and while the artwork wasn't sharp like the final book will be, I definitely enjoyed reading it. It catches the spirit of cheerfully courageous survival in the face of terror and anguish that is so much a part of the original. It will also be a good window on an aspect of life during WWII that is not often covered in Jewish Holocaust novels, that of survival in everyday surroundings. I also appreciated that it mixed French and German phrases into the story along with their translations. Sometimes books are overtranslated, but this is a very good translation. Highly recommended.
