Note: A graphic novel is a “comic book” that tells single, complete story, as opposed to traditional comic strips that are quick scenes. They are very popular right now among readers ages 7-13, and many of the biggest titles are set during Middle School. Most authors draw the pictures as well, but I am seeing more that have a writer and a separate illustrator. Due to the lack of pictures, I am going to put scene information that would be conveyed by the images in [brackets], with most of the actual text being the dialog.

Tuesdays with Anita

[Teacher ushering middle school kids on to a bus]
“Load up, please--the play beings at eleven. We don’t want to be late for Shakespeare!”
[A line of middle school students wait by a bus. Behind them, the sign on the building says, “Capshaw Middle School.” A chubby tall girl with long blonde hair wearing a long black skirt and a jean jacket boards the bus. She approaches a seat with only one student in it—a pretty girl with short dark hair.]
“Oh Sorry!” the dark-haired girl says. I am saving this seat for my friend. There she is—Laura! Here! I saved you a seat!”
[Two seats back across the aisle is a very short, slight girl with an asymmetrical haircut (longer on one side than the other) with blue and purple streaks in it. She is wearing red eye glasses.]
“You can sit here if you want. It’s open.”
The blonde girl sits down and says, “Thanks,” but then looks shyly away.
[The girl in the red glasses smiles and holds out her hand] I’m Anita. I think we have Speech and Drama class together. Mrs. Roberts’ 4th period, right?”
“We do. I’m Julie.” [Blond Girl (Julie) takes Anita’s hand and shakes it and smiles.]

That was the beginning. We were an odd pair—me, a tall, shy rule-follower, and Anita—a tiny, fierce rebel. [Girls next to bus again, this time the building says “Performing Arts Center.” Standing, you can see that Julie is 10 inches taller than Anita. Anita is wearing combat boots and ripped jeans with a man’s vest over a white tee-shirt. They are laughing as they get off the bus.]

[Scene of the girls snuggled into the theater seats next to each other. Julie has her hand over her mouth like she is holding back laughter] Anita is leaning over, whispering, “Well, I would rather it be much ado about something, really!”

She told me later that we had met before, when we were little girls. [Little chubby blonde girl hiding behind her mother’s skirt that we only see from the waist down. A little dark-haired girl with long braids is saying “Hi! Wanna Play? I’m Anita! What’s your name?” I didn’t remember it, but wished I hadn’t missed out on being her friend all those years.

My life was way more interesting with Anita in it.

Speech and Drama Lipsync competition: [Anita in a tarzan outfit with Julie dressed as a green bush. Anita is singing, “In the Jungle, the quiet jungle, the Lion Sleeps tonight!”]
At her grandparents’ farm: [The two girls on top of a fence with a big ugly turkey beneath them] “I think we made it mad!”

Or just an average Friday night watching videos: [Girls in a video store, Julie holding up a romantic comedy and Anita holding up “Faces of Death 3.”

Thrift-store shopping: 
[The girls in a store filled with racks of clothes and Anita is “walking the catwalk with skin-tight leopard-print pants and a big feathered hat. Julie is covering her mouth and snickering.”]

But on Tuesday afternoons, Anita always left Speech and Drama and missed Social Studies (New Mexico history—bleach!) I wouldn’t see her again until the end of the day. [Julie hugging a stack of books and waiting by a locker in a mostly empty hallway.]

Leah Jenkins told me it is because Anita is sick. [A girl with braces and rubber-bands and a big mouth, saying, “She has to go to the nurses office. We were in Elementary School together and she did it there, too. She has to have, like, paralysis.”]

So I asked Anita about it. On the bus, again, one day on our way downtown, where we would hang out by her mom’s office after school.

“Where do you go on Tuesdays after speech and drama? You’re never in those classes. “ [Julie and Anita huddled in a bus seat with backpacks.]

[Anita alone, looking very small framed by the big bus seat and window.] “You didn’t know that I’m sick? I thought everyone knew. I’ve had a kidney disease since fourth grade, so once a week I go to the nurses office for dialysis. I am on the list for a transplant, but I don’t know if I will get one. If I don’t, I won’t live very long—I’ll probably die before I graduate from high school.”

[Julie in bus seat with a shocked look on her face and !?!? in a bubble over her head.]