



Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me by Ellen Forney

About the author:

Cartoonist Ellen Forney is the author of NYT bestseller *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me*, and the 2012 “Genius Award” winner in Literature from Seattle’s *The Stranger*. She collaborated with Sherman Alexie on the National Book Award-winning novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, created the Eisner-nominated comic books *I Love Led Zeppelin* and *Monkey Food*, and has taught comics at Cornish College of the Arts since 2002. She grew up in Philadelphia and has lived in Seattle, Washington since 1989. Ellen swims and does yoga, and fixes things with rubber bands and paper clips.

Source: Author’s website (<https://www.ellenforney.com/bio.html>)

About this book:

Shortly before her thirtieth birthday, cartoonist Ellen Forney was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Flagrantly manic and terrified that medications would cause her to lose creativity and her livelihood, she began a years-long struggle to find mental stability while retaining her passion and creativity.

Named a Best Graphic Novel of 2012 by Washington Post, Time Magazine, Entertainment Weekly, SELF Magazine, and Publishers Weekly. A New York Times bestseller, *Marbles* has been translated into French, Spanish, Italian, German, and Portuguese.

Source: Author’s website (<https://www.ellenforney.com/books.html>)

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Discussion Questions:

1. In *Marbles* we see Ellen riding the “rollercoaster” of mania and depression and through the power of her illustrations, we are able to live it with her. How did you find the experience of living these major ups and major downs?
2. Did you appreciate the visual aspects of this book? Do you think the format of a graphic novel is more or less effective for a memoir than for a fictional account? How is it different than a memoir written in prose?
3. Does the book remind you of an aspect of your own life? A particular event? A person – like a friend, family member, co-worker, etc.?
4. Can you point to specific passages/panels that struck you personally? Why?
5. Did *Marbles* change your perspective on bipolar disorder and/or mental illness generally? If so, how? If not, why not?
6. Most of us have a mental image of what therapy IS in a normative sense. How did *Marbles* challenge (or reaffirm) your personal image of what therapy is supposed to look like?
7. Ellen spends a great deal of time exploring the connection between her art and her illness – in fact, it is in some ways the central theme of the book. What do you make of this exploration? Do you think there is a connection between great art and mental illness?
8. Ellen gave a powerful description of the long, lengthy, and expensive process of finding the best management for her bipolar disease. It is also clear that she is lucky to have strong family ties and sound financial standing. How might her story have been different if she weren't in such a supported position?

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9. Have you read other memoirs or stories about bipolar disorder (or mental illness generally)? How does Marbles compare to them?

10. Ellen has been accused of being an “oversharer” in reviews of this book. Do you agree? Why or why not?

11. Would you share Marbles with people in your life? Why or why not?

Source: Created by Matthew Noe as part of the NNLN/NER Graphic Medicine Initiative (<https://nln.gov/ner/guides/graphic-medicine-book-club-kits>)

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