

The Librarian's Guide to Graphic Novels for Children and Tweens

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This book is dedicated to my parents
and to my wife, Bethany,
for their love, their support,
and for putting up with
an ever-growing comic book collection.

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Preface

The general acceptance of graphic novels into library collections has enjoyed a remarkable transition. Looking through a 1941 issue of the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, I discovered an article quoting a librarian who bemoaned that her board of directors ordered her to provide comic books in her children's room. Now, barely 65 years later, librarians around the country actively encourage teens to “get graphic @ your library.” Graphic novels now enjoy a major presence in libraries, bringing in new readers and increasing circulation. For busy and active professionals serious about serving the needs of their patrons, it has quickly become a key area to embrace and understand.

The Librarian's Guide to Graphic Novels for Children and Tweens begins by clarifying one major misconception: The “graphic novel” is a book format, not a genre. In fact, the format comes in all manner of genres—superhero, action, mystery, crime, true-crime, science fiction, fantasy, horror, religion, history, biography, education, science, romance, literary—all of the genres you will find in your library in fiction (and in many cases, nonfiction) can also be found in graphic novels.

Another crucial concept to grasp: some graphic novels are for all ages, while others are very age-specific. Employing movie terms, they can be G, PG, PG-13, R, or even NC-17. Because of this, many excellent, acclaimed, and award-winning titles should not be read by any patron under high school age. Most people do not realize that the average comic book reader is in his or her twenties and thirties and that many of the more mainstream titles, such as books in the superhero genre, are written to appeal to an older audience. How can a librarian who is not a regular reader of the format be certain what materials are proper to purchase? This question becomes especially important if the librarian works mainly with children or tweens. In other circumstances, a librarian who works primarily with adults finds it difficult to determine what titles are proper to offer or suggest to the tweens who are coming to their library.

Some facts are certain: Graphic novels are both important and entertaining. Perhaps most important, they are here to stay! Children and tweens will come in looking for these books, sometimes by title, sometimes simply asking for graphic novels or even manga. No one wants to mistakenly provide them with an inappropriate book.

After reading *The Librarian's Guide to Graphic Novels for Children and Tweens*, you will know all about these basic issues as well as the answers to other vital questions.

In Part I, "Exploring and Understanding Graphic Novels":

- What exactly are graphic novels?
- What is the difference between comic book and graphic novels?
- What are the most important genres?
- What are the distinctions between fiction and nonfiction?
- What is manga?

In Part II, "Building a Graphic Novel Collection":

- What are the reasons my library needs to offer them?
- How do I purchase this format?
- Who should I buy from?
- What should I collect and *not* collect?

In Part III, "Managing, Promoting, and Maintaining a Graphic Novel Collection":

- How do I catalog?
- How do I weed and replace?
- How do I avoid theft and vandalism?
- How do I display?
- How do I promote?
- How might I integrate the collection into classrooms?

Three appendices provide a wealth of ideas for current and future work:

- An annotated list of suggested graphic novels
- A bibliography of non-graphic novel titles for children and tweens as well as further reading about graphic novels
- A rich list of online resources

I have read comic books all of my life. Unlike some, I confess that I cannot name the first comic book that I ever read, but I have fond memories of the free *Archie* comics my dentist would give out, and of going to the Superhero Shop at my local mall. I used comic book examples in papers for high school and college, and when it came to library school, I found out that libraries could have comics too, and I wrote about this.

Once I became a librarian, I encouraged my system to purchase more graphic novels, gave talks about the subject, recommended what to purchase, and finally found myself as one of the people who decided what graphic novels would be in the system.

Although I have previously written on comics, graphic novels, and libraries, *The Librarian's Guide to Graphic Novels for Children and Tweens* is the culmination of what I have long wanted to do. I hope that it will be helpful to you in your decisions to purchase graphic novels for your library or your media center, so that a new generation of readers can learn to love comics.

Enjoy!

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at davidserchay@yahoo.com.

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