

Graphic Novels in Libraries

What, Why, and How

I. What

A. Definition(s)

Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the reader.

McCloud, Scott. (1993) *Understanding Comics: the invisible art*. New York: Harper Perennial.

An original book-length story, either fiction or nonfiction, published in comic book style or a collection of stories that have been published previously as individual comic books.

Gorman, Michele. (2003) *Getting Graphic!: using graphic novels to promote literacy with preteens and teens*. Worthington, OH: Linworth Publishing.

A Graphic Novel is usually a monographic work that has a storyline with a start and a finish. It is typically in bound book format.

“Graphic novel” is a word that describes a **medium**, not a **genre**: graphic novels can be histories, fantasies, or anything in between.

Graphic Novels are not collections of comic strips

B. Milestones in Graphic Novel World

1. 1978-Will Eisner coins term “graphic novel” to distinguish his book A Contract with God from traditional comic books.
2. 1986-Batman: The Dark Knight Returns written by Frank Miller is released. This reintroduced Batman in his more psychologically dark 1930s era conception. This new incarnation was “dark” and troubled and ushered in an era of “grim and gritty” superheroes.
3. 1987-The Watchmen by Alan Moore is published. It is one of the first superhero graphic novels to present itself as serious literature. It’s the only graphic novel to ever win the Hugo Award and the only graphic novel to appear on Time Magazine’s 2005 list: *The 100 Best English Language Novels from 1923 to the Present*.
4. 1992-Maus: A Survivor’s Tale written by Art Spiegelman, wins the Pulitzer Prize Special Award for Letters.
5. 2005-“Graphix”, Scholastic’s graphic novel imprint for children, is launched.

6. 2006 / 2007 Gene Yang's American Born Chinese is a National Book Award finalist in the category of Young People's Literature and wins the Michael L. Printz award for excellence in Young Adult literature.
7. 2007-YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) division of the American Library Association creates new book list: "Great Graphic Novels for Teens" the charge of which is to offer "an annual annotated list of recommended graphic novels appropriate for teen readers."

C. Types of graphic novels:

Superhero story: *Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman*

Manga: *Death Note, Fullmetal Alchemist*

Non-fiction: *Palestine, Pedro & Me, Journey Into Mohawk Country*

Adaptations or Spinoffs: *Graphic Classics series, Metamorphosis, Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

Satire: *Tony Millionaire's Sock Monkey, What's Michael*

Fantasies: *Castle Waiting, Ex Machina, The Arrival*

Personal Narratives: *Perspeolis, Aya, La Perdida, The Quitter, Fun Home*

II. Why

A. Literacy

- As many as 6.3 million secondary school students are reading below grade level.
- As reading scores for 12th graders continue to drop, the most significant declines are among low-level readers.
- The average 15-24 year old American spends almost 2 hours each day watching TV, but only 7 minutes of their leisure time reading.
- The WNY drop out rate increased 47.8% from 1998-2003.
- Locally, 30% of adults operate at minimal literacy. Countywide, 20% of adults operate at minimal literacy.

Graphic Novels:

Can be as simple or complex as any other literature.

Present complex material in readable text.

Are great for engaging reluctant readers & ESL individuals.

Can serve as an intermediary step to more difficult reading.

Help individuals understand global affairs.

Provide a reading experience that embraces the multimedia nature of today's culture.

Offers another avenue through which individuals can experience art.

Are astoundingly popular

B. Popularity

- From 2001-2006, graphic novels grew from a \$75 million to \$330 million industry.
- Graphic novels have surpassed comics as “the most popular format”.
Reid, Calvin. “Graphic Novel Market Hits \$330 Million.” *Publishers Weekly* Feb. 23, 2007.
- Scholastic Book Fairs have sold over 4 million graphic novels since the introduction of the category in 2004.
- Many mainstream writers and musicians have crossed over to graphic novels, including: Eric Jerome Dickey, Cecil Castellucci, Anthony Horowitz, Stephen King, Jodi Picoult, Laurell K. Hamilton, Terry Brooks, Avril Lavigne, Gerard Way (My Chemical Romance) and Neil Young.

III. **How** *Acquisition and Classification of Graphic Novels*

A. Review Sources

Many traditional review sources offer graphic novel reviews

- Booklist
- KLIATT
- Library Journal
- Publishers Weekly
- School Library Journal
- Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)

B. Purchasing Sources

Many traditional library suppliers offer graphic novels in their library of titles

- Baker & Taylor www.btol.com
- Brodart www.brodart.com
- BWI www.bwibooks.com
- Ingram www.ingramlibrary.com
- Local comic stores www.the-master-list.com
- Barnes & Noble www.barnesandnoble.com
On main page, search under “book” using search term “graphic novel”.
- Amazon www.amazon.com
On main page, in “Browse” section under “Arts & Entertainment” heading, click on “Comics & Graphic Novels”.

C. Collection Development Policy

The Graphic Novel format should be addressed in the library's collection development policy.

Policies should include the following:

1. Brief definition of the term to be used in the policy that will allow for the broadest coverage of formats: graphic novels, comics, or other popularly recognized designation.
2. Clarification of how titles are selected for inclusion in the collection.
3. Explanations of where graphic novels are maintained within the larger collection, whether as part of a sub-collection (general fiction, juvenile, etc.) or as an aspect of a special collection (such as a special art collection).
4. Description of how the collection is regularly maintained and evaluated for condition, ongoing usefulness, and appropriate depth and breadth.
5. Directions for handling challenges to items in the collection.

Example:

Graphic novels should be purchased for collections in which their content is age and interest appropriate. Both images and narrative should be noteworthy. Materials should be sound at the time of acquisition and repaired or replaced as they become worn.

D. Cataloging and Shelving:

In some cases the cataloging of these items will dictate where they are to be shelved.

1. Classification strategies:

- **Format goes unconsidered and individual titles are treated according to intellectual content alone.**

A graphic novel that is nonfiction would be located by an LC or Dewey classification number among traditional print titles addressing the same subject. Graphic novels that are regarded as fiction would be placed in the fiction collection.

- **Format trumps all other aspects of title.**

Libraries shelve all graphic novels as though they were caricatures, comic books, or comic strips. Institutions that use LC place all graphic novels in the call number area PS or NC, and those that use Dewey place all graphic novels in the call number area 741.5

- **Graphic novels are awarded a category of their own.**
Graphic Novels are identified with a “graphic novel” designation (spine sticker, catalog item designation, etc.) and shelved separate from any other collection.
- **Graphic novels go untreated by cataloging staff and can be used only as a browsing collection.**
DNC

2. Shelving

- Options:
 - Shelving in nonfiction
 - Shelving with other fiction
 - Creating a separate area in the library
- Notes:
 - Age appropriateness should always be considered. Items not intended for juvenile audiences should be placed in young adult or adult collections.
 - The size of an item will impact shelving. Consider whether folio sized volumes will fit in the space designated.
 - Display shelving may increase the use of the collection. A small browsing collection may fit into plastic crates or bins.