

The Librarian's Guide to Graphic Novels for Adults

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For My Family

Contents

List of Exhibits and Figures	ix
Foreword	xi
Martha Cornog	
Preface	xiii
Acknowledgments	xvi

Part I: Understanding the Value and Types of Graphic Novels

Chapter 1. Why Offer Graphic Novels for Adults in Your Library?	3
Increased Circulation	4
Mainstream Appeal and Recognition	4
Film Adaptations and Genre Crossovers	6
Educational Uses	11
Notes	13
References	13
Chapter 2. What Are Comic Books and Graphic Novels?	15
Comics Creators	16
Writers, Pencilers, and Inkers	16
The Letterer	18
The Colorist	18
Original Graphic Novels	19
Comic Books and Trade Editions	21
Kinds of Comics	22
Trade Editions	26
A Brief History of Comics	31
Notes	36
References	36
Chapter 3. What Genres Do Graphic Novels Cover?	39
Superhero	39
Biography, Autobiography, and Memoir	41

Adaptations and Licensed Works	44
War Comics	46
Horror and the Supernatural	48
Crime	49
Other Examples of Nonfiction	51
Diversity in Comics and Graphic Novels	53
Notes	53
References	54

Chapter 4. What Is Manga and Where Else Do Graphic Novels

Come From?	55
Manga around the World	55
Manga in Japan	55
Manga Comes to America	58
Manga in Other Parts of the World	61
Manga Genres and Popular Storylines	62
Manga for Different Ages and Sexes	63
Comics Traditions Elsewhere in the World	66
Notes	68
References	69

**Part II: Creating and Working with Your
Graphic Novel Collection**

Chapter 5. How Can You Purchase Your Graphic Novel

Collection?	73
Library Vendors	74
Brodart	74
Baker & Taylor	74
Book Wholesalers, Inc. (BWI)	75
Ingram	75
Comic Book Shops	75
Other Sources	79
Notes	80
References	81

Chapter 6. How Do You Decide What to Purchase and What

Is Available?	83
The “Big Two” Publishers: DC and Marvel	83
The Independent Publishers	88
Boom! Studios	88
Dark Horse	88
Devil’s Due Publishing (DDP)	89

Digital Manga Publishing	89
Dynamite Entertainment	89
Fantagraphics Books	89
Go! Comi	89
IDW Publishing	89
Image Comics	89
NBM Publishing	90
Oni Press	90
Slave Labor Graphics (SLG)	90
Tokyopop	90
Top Shelf Productions	90
VIZ Media	90
Book Publishers and Graphic Novels	91
Publisher Crossovers and Changes	92
Publisher Offerings	95
Purchasing for Adult Collections	99
Ratings	99
Review Sources	100
Awards	102
Conferences and Conventions	104
Self-Review Techniques	105
How Adult Is Too Adult?	106
Purchasing Related Materials	110
Making Your Final Decision	110
Notes	112
References	112
Chapter 7. How Do You Manage Your Collection?	115
Cataloging Options	115
The Dewey Decimal System	115
Fiction versus Dewey	116
Cutter Choices	117
Processing	119
The Future of the Collection	120
Purchasing New Books	120
Weeding and Replacing the Collection	121
Notes	122
References	122
Chapter 8. How Can You Display, Promote, and Work with Your Collection?	123
Shelving Options	123
Promoting the Collection	124

Using the Graphic Novel Collection for Programs and Activities	130
Dealing with Problems	132
Theft and Vandalism	132
Complaints and Challenges	133
Publisher Self-Censorship	138
Internal Problems	139
Note	140
References	140
Chapter 9. How Do Comics and Graphic Novels Fit in Academia?	143
Comics Research Libraries	143
Other Academic Libraries	146
Classes Incorporating Comics and Graphic Novels	147
Other Academic Activities	153
Articles and Books	154
Research Outside the Academic World	155
Notes	157
References	157
Chapter 10. What Is the Future of Graphic Novels?	159
Appendix A. An Annotated List of Selected Graphic Novels	161
Appendix B. Recommended Additional Books for Your Collection . . .	257
Appendix C. Recommended Online Sources for Information and Purchasing	271
Bibliography	277
Title Index	283
Subject Index	315
About the Author	320

List of Exhibits and Figures

Exhibit 1-1	Film Versions of Adult Graphic Novels	7
Exhibit 1-2	Genre Crossover Writers	10
Exhibit 2-1	Comic Book Terms	17
Exhibit 2-2	Unusual Aspects of Comic Books	23
Exhibit 2-3	<i>Squadron Supreme</i>	27
Exhibit 3-1	<i>Star Trek</i> and Comic Books: A History	45
Exhibit 3-2	The Holocaust in Comics	47
Exhibit 3-3	Politics and Comics	51
Exhibit 4-1	Osamu Tezuka	57
Exhibit 4-2	<i>Barefoot Gen</i>	59
Exhibit 4-3	Examples of Popular Manga Storylines	62
Exhibit 4-4	Manga Terms	64
Exhibit 5-1	Diamond Distributors	77
Exhibit 5-2	Purchasing Comic Books for Your Library	80
Exhibit 6-1	December 2008 Graphic Novel Releases	84
Exhibit 6-2	<i>Sandman</i>	86
Exhibit 6-3	Notable Defunct Comic Book Publishers	93
Exhibit 6-4	Comic Book Stories from 1938–2009 and Trade Edition Reprints	96
Exhibit 6-5	Selected List of Award Winners and Nominees	103
Exhibit 6-6	Examples of Collection Development Policies	108
Exhibit 6-7	Author’s Picks	111
Exhibit 7-1	Library of Congress Cataloging	116
Exhibit 7-2	Nonfiction Dewey Locations Other Than 741	116
Figure 8-1	ALA Comics Posters	125
Figure 8-2	DEMCO Poster	127
Figure 8-3	DEMCO Standee	127

Figure 8-4 DEMCO Shelving 127
Figure 8-5 ALA and DEMCO Bookmarks 128
Figure 8-6 DEMCO Graphic Novel Stickers 129
Exhibit 8-1 Comics-Related Challenges Outside of Libraries 136
Exhibit 9-1 Comics-Themed Courses 148

Foreword

When graphic novel adaptations appear of Proust, Poe, Jane Austen, and Shakespeare, when the *New York Times* puts out not one but three graphic novel bestseller lists, when a graphic novel wins a Pulitzer Prize and another is voted book of the year by *Time* magazine—how can anyone still believe that comics are (only) for kids?

Even after the graphic novel and manga explosion across genres and readerships over the past five years, even just this year in 2009 I read reports of library staffers refusing to set up separate collections and shelving areas for adult graphic novels. The teen and juvenile collections, they maintain, are fine. “Comics are trite,” “graphic novels are a fad,” and “this type of material is not uplifting”—all different ways of saying that graphic narrative is inherently incapable of conveying serious, quality content fit for adults.

When we house quality art in museums and quality writing in libraries, what is it about combining art with writing that sets these people off? Perhaps they forget that nineteenth-century adult books quite normally boasted plentiful illustrations. Charles Dickens’ *Pickwick Papers* was originally commissioned simply as text for Robert Seymour’s drawings, and the original printing of William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* included nearly 200 illustrations by Thackeray himself. Comics are simply illustrated books taken to the next level and can show as wide a range of quality and content as any medium.

So David Serchay’s new book serves two functions. It gives detailed and excellent guidance for setting up adult graphic novel collections, of course. But as the first on the topic, it also stakes out the territory, saying, *See? Graphic novels for adults exist, and in considerable quantity and quality*—indeed, enough to fill an entire book. And here it is.

I first became acquainted with David through his posts on GNLIB-L, the e-list for librarians working with graphic novels. Then I had the fortunate opportunity to review his first book: *The Librarian’s Guide to Graphic Novels for Children and Tweens*. Now I was impressed. David’s writing displayed both a range and a level of detail that I had rarely seen previously in books about graphic novels in libraries.

In staking out the new territory of adult graphic novels, David has brought the same broad scope as well as detailed discussion of the fine points: how graphic novels

are made, types of editions and collections, genres popular with adult readers, special characteristics of manga, vendor programs, major publishers catering to adults, theft and censorship issues, hundreds of suggested titles for purchase. Such content provides essential background for librarians.

Especially innovative and therefore valuable are those sections addressing collection development policies, comics in academia, internal library censorship, comics traditions elsewhere in the world, and “how adult is too adult?”

No book can offer the last word on a subject, including this one. Eventually, we should hope, there will be many more guides to graphic novels for adults. Industry surveys from Diamond Comics Distributors report an average comics readership aged 29 to 34. Perhaps many do not currently use the library for their favorite reading material, but if the titles are there, they will come. Certainly, the teens now gobbling up ninja and high school romance manga in library-based young adult collections will soon be eager for a broader range of content. For these future guides, *The Librarian's Guide to Graphic Novels for Adults* sets a high standard.

Martha Cornog, MA, MLS
Graphic novel columnist
Library Journal

Preface

“Comics are for kids!” This idea has been around for decades. A prosecuting attorney in Texas even used it in convicting a man for selling an adult comic book *to an adult*.¹ It’s also been used by librarians in choosing graphic novels for their libraries. Well, these people are all wrong. Saying “comics are for kids” is the same as saying “movies are for kids.” Some movies are for kids, but adults enjoy G- and PG-rated films as well, and some movies that younger children should not watch are perfectly fine for adults to view. The same applies to comics and graphic novels. All comics are fine for adults but not all are fine for children. Or, as W. H. Auden put it, “There are good books which are only for adults, because their comprehension presupposes adult experiences, but there are no good books which are only for children.”²

This is one of the reasons that I wrote *The Librarian’s Guide to Graphic Novels for Adults*. Another is to show that there is a substantial adult readership for graphic novels, and not just for those in the superhero genre such as *Batman*, *Spider-Man*, and the *X-Men* but for all genres—those that appeal to young and old alike and those made specifically for an older audience. The latter are being produced not only by comic book companies but also by mainstream book publishers as well, and many have gone on to acclaim, awards, and popularity. *Sandman*, *Watchmen*, *Road to Perdition*, *V for Vendetta*, *Persepolis*, and *American Splendor* are just a few of these.

In some graphic novels, fairy tale characters live in our world, the mayor of New York is a former superhero, and one man is the only male left in a world of women. Other graphic novels deal with regular people—their lives, families, loves, and losses—while others are autobiographies, histories, adventure stories, or works of horror, science fiction, romance—every genre out there.

Some of you may already know about graphic novels and even have a collection for your younger patrons (and may have previously read this volume’s companion work, *The Librarian’s Guide to Graphic Novels for Children and Tweens*), but for those of you who are starting a collection (especially an adult collection) from scratch and who know very little about the subject, this book discusses all aspects of graphic novels and libraries and provide answers to the following questions:

- What exactly are graphic novels? (Chapter 2)
- What is manga? (Chapter 4)

- Why should I purchase graphic novels for my library? (Chapter 1)
- Why should I purchase adult-specific titles? (Chapter 1)
- How do I purchase them? (Chapter 5)
- What are my cataloging and shelving options? (Chapters 7 and 8)
- How can I make them last longer? (Chapter 7)
- How can I promote them? (Chapter 8)
- What genres do graphic novels come in? (Chapter 3)
- What problems might I have with my graphic novel collection? (Chapter 8)
- Why would a university library need graphic novels? (Chapter 9)
- What programs can I provide with graphic novels? (Chapter 8)
- What is the difference between a graphic novel for adults and an adult graphic novel? (Chapter 6)
- And, most important, what should I purchase for my collection? (Chapter 6)

To address what to purchase, I offer a list of “mature audience” titles as well as discussion of some of the more popular “younger ages” titles. Appendix A, “An Annotated List of Selected Graphic Novels,” features an annotated list of over 600 graphic novels ranging from original graphic novels, to series of books, to works by a particular author or publisher or in a particular genre or subject. These titles are rated so that you know which ones can also be put into a collection for teens or younger readers, which ones are best for the adult section of the library, and which are most definitely “adults only.” In addition, Appendix B, “Recommended Additional Books for Your Collection,” lists a large number of graphic-novel-related books that you can also purchase for your library. These include other books on graphic novels in libraries and nonfiction works that range from scholarly books on the subject to those that are just fun. Appendix C, “Recommended Online Sources for Information and Purchasing,” provides a list of online sources for more information, including publisher Web sites, sites for news and information, and various online mailing lists that you can join.

Rounding out the book are two indexes that will help you quickly locate information both in the main text and in the appendixes. First is the title/creator/publisher index that includes bold page numbers for titles in both Appendix A and Appendix B, so you can easily locate the annotated entries. This is followed by a broad subject index covering topics discussed throughout the book.

Some points to remember as you read this book:

- Graphic novels are a format, not a genre.
- Many adults read graphic novels.
- Certain graphic novels are created for an adult audience.
- Adults also like to read the same graphic novels that are enjoyed by children, tweens, and teens.

Graphic novels are a wonderful addition to any library's collection, providing the library with high circulation figures and its patrons with entertainment. Comic books and graphic novels aren't just for kids anymore—in fact, they never were.

Notes

1. *Texas v. Jesus Castillo*. See Exhibit 8-1 for more on this and similar cases.
2. Auden, W. H. 1973. *Forewords and Afterwords* (p. 291). New York: Random House.

A graphic novel is a book made up of comics content. Although the word "novel" normally refers to long fictional works, the term "graphic novel" is applied broadly and includes fiction, non-fiction, and anthologized work. It is, at least in the United States, distinguished from the term "comic book", which is generally used for comics periodicals (see American comic book). Here is an in-depth guide to understanding, building, and managing an optimal collection of graphic novels that is targeted to please the format's many dedicated adult fans. The book provides a helpful overview of the increasingly important role that graphic novels play in collection development. Serchay covers both American and foreign works and provides invaluable insight Here is an in-depth guide to understanding, building, and managing an optimal collection of graphic novels that is targeted to please the format's many dedicated adult fans. The book provides a helpful overview of Graphic Novels: A Bibliographic Guide to Book-Length Comics. D. Aviva Rothschild. 1.41 Mb.Â Marvel Graphic Novels and Related Publications: An Annotated Guide to Comics, Prose Novels, Children's Books, Articles, Criticism and Reference Works, 1965-2005. Robert G. Weiner. 2.49 Mb. #17. Lorna the Eye of Dart an Gor (Graphic Novel). Azpiri. 19.63 Mb.