

PAPER PRESENTED AT  
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**challenging ideas**

**Graphic Attraction**  
**Graphic Novels In Libraries**  
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## **Abstract**

Graphic novels have moved further into the media spotlight with the latest influx of films, based on famous comic books, hitting cinemas worldwide. More publishers are marketing to readers, more independent bookstores are stocking these titles, and there are more graphic novels appearing at trade exhibitions. In turn, Librarians are being encouraged, by trade and academic publications, to enhance their collections with more non-traditional literature to reflect this movement.

At the Emanuel School library we recently began collecting graphic novels through the purchase of new titles and the relocation of titles from the junior and senior collections. The genres covered include, superhero, fantasy, science fiction, historical, action/adventure, realistic fiction, Manga, and humour. We have provided a specific location within the library for the collection aided by a vivid display. We have also 'marketed' these titles to target audiences (Grades 7 – 10 boys) by allowing them to view examples.

Boys have been targeted, as they tend to be the more reluctant readers in the 13–17 year age bracket. To revive an appreciation of literature in this group we need to create a more user-friendly environment, and a pivotal aspect of approach is the addition of non-traditional literature, e.g. Graphic Novels, in a specific young adult collection. This paper will address the means of promotion of such titles and the importance of the graphic novel in the overall library collection, and encouraging reading for pleasure in reluctant readers.

## **Introduction**

This talk will focus on the benefits and uses, as well as the various implications for the library, which arise from a commitment to develop a graphic novel collection. First of all, we must define the term 'graphic novel'. This term has been bandied about since the late 1970's but has gained more authority as its popularity has grown.

### ***So what is a graphic novel?*** **The Graphic Novel defined.**

According to Wil Eisner – a pioneer in the field – a graphic novel is 'sequential art, the arrangement of pictures or words or images to narrate a story or dramatise an idea. (Eisner, 1985 p.5) But further to this definition we can also define the graphic novel as a complete story. They are published and bound in book form with quality paper as opposed to comics. (Ireland, p.1) It is important to think of them as a format, and not a genre (Brenner, 24/02/2004). People tend to view them as a genre and this is why they may assume they are the same as comics and perhaps dismiss them with this in mind. With the proper promotion this can be addressed.

Librarians also need to be aware that graphic novels are literature. To quote Brenner again, "Processing the images and the text of a graphic novel together create a unique kind of literacy, and should not be considered any less than traditional reading." (Brenner, 24/02/2004).

There are two main sections in this format that can be roughly defined as "Manga" and what I will refer to as "Non-Manga".

Manga roughly translated means "comic book" in Japanese and it has broad popular appeal for both children and adults. It has a very specific style, much like Anime (Animation) films. There are two main genres, Shoujo (girl's manga) and Shounen (boy's manga). They read from right to left, both on the individual pages and for the book as a whole. They have a distinctive 'look' about them as you can see by some of the examples shown. Manga will be further discussed when looking at collection development and selection criteria for graphic novels.

Non-manga in this context refers to the Western style Graphic Novels – which includes the traditional Superhero stories, the adaptations (either from books, film or television), Human Interest stories and Non-Fiction titles. This would include titles such as Spiderman, Superman, X-Men, Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel. Human Interest stories would include titles such as One Bad Rat, a tale about a runaway girl, and non-fiction would encompass historical tales such as Maus by Art Spiegelman.

### ***Are they useful to libraries?*** **The Value of the Graphic Novel**

Children and young adults who are constantly surrounded by visual stimuli including movies, television, electronic billboards, magazines, computers, palm pilots, video games etc...have learned to associate images with storytelling. They have learned to follow and understand a story visually rather than textually. Visual clues provide them with the framework for interpretation. (Ireland, 2004 p.1) If we use this idea, we can see why graphic novels have become increasingly popular over the last 10 years or so.

A survey of articles focussing on Graphic novels will reveal that embarking on, and developing a graphic novel collection will increase both the number of readers using the library and will also have an affect on reader's attitude toward the library. Many libraries that I have surveyed as a precursor to this presentation, found that by allowing readers to be involved in the acquisition process of graphic novels, it helped promote the collection to those readers. Following on from this, through word of mouth, the overall loans of these materials increased. This process could even be formalised by having a committee set up with the inclusion of readers interested in the format to assist in the recommendation of titles.

Public libraries need to respond to the demands of readers because they are publicly funded, so by allowing readers to take an active role in the development of this collection you would be more assured of the popularity of the material.

### ***Can the graphic novel been considered an important part of the school library collection?*** **Graphic Novels as part of the Curriculum.**

Graphic Novels and comics have been criticised for, amongst other things, corrupting youth. As the writers of "The Secret Origin of Good Readers: A Resource Book" explain, they have been accused of "promoting violence, reinforcing stereotypical gender roles and under representing or misrepresenting minorities." (Hill, 2003 p.1) However, the titles have developed and explored new subjects that have encompassed social issues such as homelessness, child abuse, domestic violence, and even environmental damage. Due to the changing focus of comics and graphic novels, it has been realised that they can be used as tools for discussion and education. (Hill, 2003 p.1)

There are many different ways that Graphic Novels can be engaged in as part of the curriculum. You can find many of these ideas, which cover Art, English as a second language, Language Arts, Maths, Science and Social Sciences from the resource book I mentioned previously. This resource book can be downloaded for free from the NightFlight website accessible from my website.

Many graphic novels are adaptations from classic or well-known books and therefore can provide a gateway to these books for those more reluctant readers. By reading the graphic novel by Peter Kuper of "Metamorphosis", the reader may be more willing to attempt the original through curiosity or a desire to deepen their experience with the book. Likewise, a reader who has only ever watched the "Lord of the Rings" on DVD, might try the graphic novel version of "The Hobbit" before reading the trilogy.

As I previously alluded to, Graphic novels can also be used as the basis for discussion regarding difficult or controversial political, economic or social issues. Maus, by Art Spiegelman, has been used extensively to discuss issues surrounding the Holocaust. In the book, the author recreates the holocaust story using Cats as Nazi soldiers and Jewish people are depicted as mice.

The book, "Pedro and me" concerns the story of an AIDS educator who took part in a television programme in the US and met a cartoonist who told the story of his experience of the disease.

Joe Kubert's harrowing story, "Fax from Sarajevo" deals with a family's battle to escape during the war in Yugoslavia. Aside from the graphical story, photographs of the real protagonists are included as well as information about the photographer who died

during the war at the age of 24. This provides an immediacy with the story by depicting real live action with illustrations.

Along similar lines, Joe Sacco approached the subject of the Bosnian war, with his story, "Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992 –1995".

By approaching subjects like this from this medium it may allow more difficult subjects to be broached, without diminishing their significance. They can be more accessible to readers who may have already been exposed to the subject through more traditional fictional stories.

From "The Secret Origin of Good Readers: A Resource Book" some ideas about the role of graphic novels and their benefits:

- Develop an increased interest in reading generally
- Increase literacy
- Develop language skills (wide and varied vocabulary)
- Create interest in a variety of different genres
- Simulate creativity
- Develop art appreciation
- Develop the ability to discuss art and writing
- Increase the understanding of visual literacy (gaining meaning from images)
- Improve understanding of pop culture and other media.

### ***Where do we put these in the collection?*** **Cataloguing the Graphic Novel**

It seems as though there is no clear consensus on where to put graphic novels in the library collection. Do they belong together under a Graphic Novel Fiction classification? Or should they be placed according to the Non-Fiction subject headings when they are dealing with such issues as historical events. Must you separate the collection and have a Junior GN and a Senior GN collection or just have a different loan category for more adult titles?

You may choose to shelve the collection in the Young Adult section of the library, either integrated into the collection, or with a separate shelf location and location code. By doing this, you may alienate other readers –Adults or younger readers– who would like to access the titles. Better to have a general Graphic novel section where adequate shelving can be provided in order to publicise the collection.

There is an argument that readers who are not drawn to the graphic novel might not investigate such a section, however if you integrate them into the normal fiction section of you library, the books may be overlooked. Much of their appeal comes from their attractive covers and the name association with television, movie or comic book characters. It seems better to have a set area for graphic novels where the majority of titles face outwards in order to capture the reader's attention. Popular titles would include those such as Batman, X-Men, The Simpsons, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Spiderman, and the Manga titles Evangelion, Astro Boy and so on. After initially looking at these titles, readers may then browse through other titles in the collection that may not be so familiar.

In order to attract more reluctant readers you may want to put them near the music or magazine collections in the library. Additionally, this may be near to the computer terminals so that it may encourage potential readers to look at the titles whilst waiting for their turn.

In terms of dealing with the loaning of potentially inappropriate material, it is probably more advantageous to try and keep

the collection together and simply enable different borrowing privileges for different borrowers. At the cataloguing stage, books with sexual content, coarse language or extreme violence may be deemed suitable only for older readers – based on the criteria already in place in the library for Fiction titles. This would then prohibit material being taken out by younger readers deemed inappropriate in relation to sexual or violent themes.

This of course would not prohibit younger readers from browsing the collection. Strategies to control this could include:

- Junior Graphic Novel section – within the GN collection and allocated area for the more junior titles, labelled as such.
- Young Adult/Adult Graphic novel section – clearly posted with a language/sexual content warning as music is now labelled.

One exception to this might be the inclusion of non-English titles in your collection. Many Manga titles are in Japanese and if you need to cater for other languages in your library, you may want to shelve these in with the other language collections. (Note: *Holly Woodhouse, the Children's and Youth Services Librarian at Willoughby City Library in Sydney followed this example.*)

### **What are the criteria for choosing graphic novels for the library?**

#### **Collection Development Policy Guidelines**

One of the biggest issues when it comes to graphic novels is that of explicit material. Certain genres such as horror, the supernatural, crime and punishment, satire and dark humour will be identified as being more likely to cause upset amongst readers or their parents/guardians, due to content. (Gorman, 8/1/2002)

At the Emanuel School, the staff were confronted with this problem after purchasing the first set of graphic novels that included titles by the author, Clive Barker. The library already had copies of books by this author – both the “Weaveworld” and the “Books of Blood” series, which contain explicit language and sexual references. However, the inclusion of the graphic novels of this author was deemed inappropriate for our school library because the sexual content and violence were presented in picture formats, thus impacting in a different way. It is interesting to note that other books with similar content such as “Vernon God Little” are considered acceptable, but graphic novels on similar topics may not be simply because it is not just text, but images. Censoring such material depends on many variables including audience, location, cultural and religious considerations and so on.

With particular reference to Manga titles, again, it is extremely important to view the collection. Browsing a collection of Manga will confront you with graphic images of violence and sexuality and in some cases mild pornographic material. Titles such as “Fair Skinned Beauty”, “Hot Tales” or “Immoral Angel” all have warnings indicating that they contain extreme sexual situations. You will have these same titles in the catalogue or collection, as you will “Astro Boy”. So be alert.

Whatever guidelines you have already in place for the selection of material should be applied to graphic novels, but with extra care. **You cannot assume that the publisher guidelines will align with your own criteria.** Some of the mainstream publishers, such as Marvel Comics, will have imprints that produce more edgy or controversial titles, so you will need to be careful when selecting material from these publishers. This is why it is so important to look at the titles in order to gain knowledge about the

various types of publications and increase your awareness of the different genres within the format.

### **Ok – We want them. How do we find them?**

#### **Sourcing for Graphic Novels**

You will be able to find many sites that give recommendations and reviews of graphic novels. These will be made available from my website at <http://www.geocities.com/aIW35/graphicnovels.html>.

Again a warning, if you are **not** familiar with the graphic novel, I would recommend that initially you source out bookstores or other suppliers in order to physically look at the titles for content. You would be advised to gain contacts familiar with graphic novels in order to facilitate easy access to upcoming releases based on set criteria for your school or public library collection. This will make the process of selection much easier and more efficient.

#### **Books Kinokuniya (International)**

<http://www.kinokuniya.com/>

Devoted section to Manga and Graphic Novels. You can contact your local comics and graphic novel specialist. In Sydney the contact is:

W. Chew Chan (Comics Consultant) Ph: 8251 4530

#### **Sealight Books**

<http://www.sealight.com.au/>

[info@sealight.com.au](mailto:info@sealight.com.au)

Australian company dedicated to providing graphic novels for educational and public libraries. Brochures are available online with title reviews and recommended audience. Includes recommendations lists.

#### **Comic Kingdom**

<http://www.comickingdom.com.au/>

Australian Based Suppliers. See the section titled Books/TPBS/GNS in order to find the catalogue list for graphic novels.

#### **Supanova**

<http://www.supanova.com.au/>

Comic book and graphic novel convention information in Australia.

#### **Dymocks**

<http://www.dymocks.com.au/>

Dymocks bookstore in Australia – keeps small collections of graphic novel titles.

### **Sourcing for Titles – New and Popular Reviews etc.**

<http://www.night-flight.com/secretorigin/>

#### **Night Flight**

Download a free copy of the book “Secret Origin of Good Readers” which is a handy guide for librarians about the world of graphic novels.

[http://www.linkingforlearning.com/lets\\_read/index.html#Graphic](http://www.linkingforlearning.com/lets_read/index.html#Graphic)

#### **Linking for Learning**

Australian based site created by Camilla Elliott (Head Teacher-Librarian / Network Resource Manager/St Joseph's College Victoria)

<http://www.noflyingnotights.com/>

#### **No flying, No Tights**

Graphic novel reviews divided into Teens & Adults and a section for younger children. Join GNLIB listserv to be updated on news in the area.

<http://www.koyagi.com/Libguide.html>

### **The Librarians Guide to Anime and Manga**

'Anime' usually refers to Animation made in Japan, either on video, television or in comic book format. 'Manga' can be roughly translated to mean 'comic book'. See this site for ways to explore this area of the graphic novel.

<http://my.voyager.net/~sraiteri/graphicnovels.htm>

### **Recommended Graphic Novels for Public Libraries.**

Selected and annotated by Steve Raiteri (a well-known writer in the area – writes a regular column in Library Journal (US)

<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/>

### **School Library Journal**

Perform a search for Graphic novels to find free articles with links to other resources. (US Based)

### **Listserv**

A useful way to become better informed about the graphic novel industry and graphic novel issues in libraries.

GNLIB-L-Subscribe@Topica.Com

## **Graphic Attraction Promotional Ideas for Graphic Novels in the Library.**

Graphic novels are a visual medium and therefore the display structure for them must be attractive, engaging, memorable and eye-catching. Along with any warnings you might want to have, or section dividers between more controversial material and others, you might want to include quotes or blurbs from articles that focus on the positives of including graphic novels in the library collection. (Gorman, 2002 p. 2)

A helpful article published in the Incite magazine at the end of 2003 titled "Graphic Experiment pays dividends" by Robin Tonks (Library Manager, Singleton Council) talked about methods for promoting the collection.

- Purchase posters from Southern Scene <http://www.southernscene.com.au/> – the **Get graphic @ your library** – created by the American Library Association. Search for 'posters' to find relevant information.
- Make sure you have shelving that enables a significant proportion of the collection to 'face out' – the eye-catching graphics are selling points in themselves.
- Promotion through radio spots/interviews or local media releases.
- For Public libraries:
  - o Hold informal regular nights whereby new titles can be introduced to readers.
  - o Special displays in the library promoting graphic novels with clear explanations as to how they are different to comics and background about their development.
- For schools:
  - o Take selected titles to tutorial groups and/or present at the school assembly.
  - o Publish lists of new titles in your school magazine or newsletter.
  - o Speak to the English department about promoting the titles in their lessons – particularly when it relates to curriculum (e.g. visual literacy)

## **Where can I find even more information? Books about Graphic Novels**

For a list of useful books try this site:

[http://faculty.mckendree.edu/william\\_harroff/ebe/Top\\_10\\_Graphic\\_Novels.htm](http://faculty.mckendree.edu/william_harroff/ebe/Top_10_Graphic_Novels.htm)

Which includes:

- Top 10 Graphic Novels
- Graphic Novels for Young Children
- Graphic Novels for Teens & Adults
- Adult Content

**Illuminated Fantasy: from Blake's vision to recent graphic fiction** by James Whitlark Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University 1988

**Graphic Novels 101: Selecting and Using Graphic Novels to Promote Literacy for Children and Young Adults: A Resource Guide for School Librarians and Educators** by Philip Charles Crawford; Hi Willow Research and Publishing; 2003; ISBN: 0-931510-91-0

**Comics, comix & graphic novels: a history of comic art** by Roger Sabin London: Phaidon 1996

**Graphic Storytelling** by Will Eisner Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press 1966

### **Is it really worth it?**

### **Graphic Novels – A Conclusion**

The graphic novel can be a useful addition in any library, both for educational purposes and for enjoyment. We have talked about their uses within the curriculum for schools. In public libraries they can be used as a focal point to encourage readers who may not use the library, to explore it more fully.

There are many ways to go about planning, collecting, organising and promoting your collection and you have seen some of these today. We must, as Librarians, attempt to redress the mistaken assumption that these are simple texts and not as worthwhile because of their structure, but rather encourage readers to explore them as an exciting and accessible way of reading and understanding.

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