

Graphic Novels in Public Libraries

The following information was collected by Laura Hankins, Reference Librarian at the Boulder Public Library regarding an inquiry posted to Libnet.

The inquiry was:

We have a growing collection of graphic novels here in Boulder as I know many of you do also. We shelve ours in the Teen section if they choose to purchase/house the title, and we also have a section in adult non-fiction. My question is...have any of you developed a collection policy regarding these materials? Often the award winning or reviewed well authors/titles can be graphic and I was hoping some of you may have developed a plan or policy in regards to them.

Responses:

Laura, we don't have a written policy at this time, but our cataloguing practice is to treat graphic novels exactly as we would if they were "just" novels. Our guidelines dividing adult fiction from YA and YA from JF are totally applicable to graphic materials. Dewey 741.5 is reserved for traditional "comics" of the newspaper variety, and for biographical and instructional materials on graphic forms and author/artists.

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Beth Harper
Spanish Peaks Library District

I've recently written a draft for our public library's adult graphic novel collection, so this topic came at a great time. Here's our current draft, formatted to cover the points addressed in our other collection statements:

Graphic Novel Collection Development Policy (draft)

Collection Description – Graphic Novels

The graphic novel collection is made up of recreational reading and informational titles in book form for adult readers. These are books that are primarily pictorial, with text/dialog working together to propel the narrative. Includes original works and collection of comic

book stories, both fiction and nonfiction. It does not include collections of newspaper strips, magazine cartoons, or animated cartoons, even if they may include related characters or even creators (those will continue to be housed in the 700s). Does not include reference works or historical treatment of comics as a genre. Works originally produced in a foreign language may be included in English translation.

Works of nonfiction, told in the same format, will also be included.

Typical works of nonfiction in this format are biographies, history and true crime accounts.

Works in this format need to be in a durable form able to withstand heavy use and repeated circulation. Hardback copies are ordered when available, and softcover books will receive standard book processing.

Influencing Factors

Graphic novels are a growing section of the bookstore market, and patron interest sparked the creation of this collection. This collection is designed for the adult reader (as opposed to those titles in the YA graphic novel collection), and material should be selected with those readers in mind.

Selection Plan

Selection is based on reviews in literary and trade journals, as well as the track record of an author's past works. Useful trade tools have included the GNLIB (Graphic Novels in Libraries) listserv, Time magazine's comic reviews, and the Comics Buyer's Guide. While these tools are helpful to keep abreast of current releases, it's important to fill in backlist titles of the many items released in this format over the last 15-20 years, as well. The "Eisner" and "Harvey" Award winners lists are helpful for filling that need, though it's important to pay attention to the format and availability of those titles.

Subject matter for this collection includes more mature subjects and story lines than in the large YA graphic novel collection (though there will also be some overlap, with some titles being in both collections), but works of erotica should be avoided. Many of the mature content storylines (murder, revenge, demon possession) and language mirror similar works found in the adult fiction collection, so that can be a useful rule of thumb. Like with the adult fiction collection, the focus will be on mystery/crime, science fiction/fantasy, and general fiction.

Retention and Weeding

While this collection is getting established, the plan is to weed only for damaged items. Typical ordering patterns in this period are to only

order single copies of each title, so ordering replacements for lost or damaged items will be necessary.

Development Plan

Emphasis will be on developing this collection to have a broad base for future growth. Categories include:

- *New releases – to keep the collection current, add new volumes in series that are already in the collection, and anticipate reader demand.

- *Important creators – collections of landmark titles and works by groundbreaking creators should be ordered to build a backlist of classic works.

- *Superheroes – this genre will be ordered on a limited basis, focusing on archival collections of older works, to appeal to reader nostalgia (current superhero titles make up a large part of the YA collection, so there is little need to duplicate it here).

- *Movie tie-ins – While movies based on comics continue to be popular, the original books they are based on should be ordered (ie. Road from Perdition, From Hell, League of Extraordinary Gentlemen) -“you’ve seen the movie, now read the book.” [NOT in the draft: I keep this separate from "movie adaptations" such as Hulk based on the movie, etc., which are in my opinion generally not very good]

- *Nonfiction – There is a growing body of journalism and biography being told in this popular format.

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Dale Martin
Cataloging Clerk
Lawrence Public Library

Louisville Public Library Teen Graphic Collection

Influencing Factors

Graphic novels and nonfiction told in graphic format are a growing section of the bookstore market. Interest in graphic novels by teens has sparked the creation of a separate teen graphic collection. This collection is designed for the teen reader and material will be selected with those readers in mind.

Collection Description

The Teen Graphic Collection is made up of recreational reading and informational titles in book form for teen readers. These are book-length comics that contain text/dialog that works with the graphics to propel the narrative. These books can be a single story or a set of interrelated stories told by using sequential art. The collection also includes collections of newspaper comic strips. Works originally produced in a foreign language may be included in English translation.

This collection does not include collections of magazine cartoons, reference works, or historical treatment of comics as a genre (those will continue to be housed in the 740s).

Since the term “graphic novel” has come to describe the format, works of nonfiction told in this format, may also be included. However, if the topic of a nonfiction work outweighs the format (i.e. The Louisiana Purchase, September 11th), the work will be housed in the nonfiction collection by subject (i.e 973.4 or 973.931) despite the format.

Cataloging Details

Bib records for each item in the Teen Graphic Collection will contain a form heading of “Graphic novels” in a 655 tag with a second indicator of zero. Depending on the work, bib records may also contain a local subject heading of “Anime” or “Manga” or both in separate 690 tags (no indicators).

Anime, as defined by common fan usage, is simply any animation that is made in Japan. Anime is a format that includes any genre that can be found in cinema or literature. While originally applied only to film and video, the term has evolved to include books that are based on Japanese animation. The local subject heading Anime will be added to works that are based on Japanese television, movie or OAV programs.

Manga can be roughly translated as “comic books” and can include almost every subject imaginable. Many companies outside of Japan are issuing translated manga in multi-volume sets. In many cases publishers are not flipping the images so leave the manga in the original right to left format. Manga are usually published as serialized stories in magazines which are later collected into book form. The result can be a series of volumes for one long story. Manga characters tend to have very large eyes in proportion to the rest of their faces. The local subject heading Manga will be added to works published in this artistic style.

Items records for items in this collection will have the location code of “lsgfy” which will display in the OPAC as “LSV Graphic Collection.” Call numbers in the Item Records will contain only a subfield “a” with the word “TEEN” on the first line, the word “GRAPHIC” on the second line, and the first three letters of the authors last name (or the first three letters of the first word of the title) on the third line.

Collection Development

Currently, the collection contains just over one hundred items which occupies about 2/3 of a 3-shelf, 36" wide book truck. Due to space limitations, the collection may not grow significantly in the first year. After moving to the new library in 2006 and re-evaluating the circulation statistics, the size of the collection will be determined.

Selection will reflect the variety of types and themes available in this format, including, but not restricted to, new releases, important creators, superhero stories, human-interest stories, humor, satire, movie tie-ins, anime, manga and nonfiction. In addition to popular demand, titles selected will have received a positive review in recognized sources, appear in recommended lists by authoritative sources, have received awards of merit, or are by authors known for the quality of their work. Content of titles selected will be appropriate for the teenage audience. While the collection is being established, the plan is to weed only for damaged items.

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Debra Van Tassel
Louisville Public Library