Graphic Novels and Libraries: An Annotated Bibliography
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Introduction and Scope

The following bibliography looks at graphic novels in academic, public, and school libraries. The articles touch on issues that relate to all libraries and then issues that may be specific to just one type of library. Most of the articles cover graphic novels in academic libraries because these libraries are still lagging behind in this area of collection compared to public and school libraries. Three studies are included to illustrate that out of the three libraries, academic libraries are falling behind in the inclusion of graphic novels. Several of the articles provide lists on graphic novels that libraries should have in their collection or they provide places to look for more information on what are the top-rated novels. The majority of the articles were published from 1998 to 2011. One article was published in 1989. The articles were selected because they cover the most recent research in the field. Also, the debate over graphic novels in the last few years made it important that the articles reflected the most current trends. All the articles were published in the United States.

Description

In 1978, Will Eisner coined the term graphic novel. He felt that comic had a certain connotation that did not fit the work he had just completed (Heaney, 2007, p 72). Graphic novels “present the reader with not only idea-as do text-only work - but also with images.” (Heaney, 2007, p 72). Since the 1980s, the genre of graphic novels has become more popular with all ages groups. That popularity has also increased due to the inclusion of the Japanese style graphic novel called manga. Graphic novels cover a wide variety of subject/themes that in some cases cannot be adequately explained in a text-only work. For example, 9-11: Artists Respond, Our Cancer Year, Fax From Sarajevo: A Story of Survival, and Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood, each cover themes of war, violence, Islamic Revolution in a very understandable way (Behler, 2006, 19-20). While graphic novels have become very popular with readers, libraries and librarians have been slow to include them in the collection.
Summary of Findings

Since the 1980s, graphic novels have increasingly become a popular format for readers of all age groups. For many years graphic novels have been missing from library collections, most people had to purchase the novels they wanted. It has been in the last decade or so that libraries and librarians have begun to take this format seriously. Literature about graphic novels has also increased in the last few years to cover the debate raging over the inclusion of graphic novels in library collections. Also, many journals have begun publishing articles about developing graphic novel collections and how to catalog these novels.

As Heaney (2007) points out part of the conflict over graphic novels is that a clear definition of what a graphic novel is has not been developed or adopted. Many libraries still associate graphic novels with comic books, but Eisner coined the term graphic novel to try and disassociate his format from a standard comic book. To understand better the argument, let’s look first at what exactly is a graphic novel.

According to Heaney, a graphic novel is “comic in form; it fuses sequential art with text to tell a story.” Goldsmith (2005, cited in Heaney, 2007) states it this way “ unlike the cartoon, comic strip, or comic book, the graphic novel is complete within itself and provides a beginning and an end to the story or information it places before the reader. However, it shares the earmarks of sequential art that comic books incorporate: image and word are bound together in order for the narrative to unfold.” Rudiger and Schliesman (2007) define graphic novels as “simply book-length comics.” Baird and Jackson (2007), on the other hand, define graphic novels as “usually a monographic work that has a storyline with a start and a finish. It is published on an independent schedule and is typically in bound book format (trade paperback) and has a higher quality.” Matz (2004) uses comic books instead of the term graphic novel, even when he is discussing graphic novels. The interchangeability of words does not help the situation when in many cases a comic book is very different from graphic novel.

Added on top of this debate, is the introduction of the Japanese form of graphic novel called Manga. In Japan, Manga is published serially, usually weekly or monthly. For the United States the installments are collected into one publication. Masuckika and Boldt (2010) point out that manga, in the last decade, has tripled in popularity. This popularity in part is due to the
growth in video games and manga cartoons in the United States (Masuckika and Boldt). Just in 2008, purchases of manga novels in the United States and Canada reached $185 million (Masuckika and Boldt). While manga has own in popularity and scholarly discussion, libraries especially academic do not collect it to the extent American graphic novels are collected.

Graphic novels have grown in influence in the education community. Behler (2006) points out that educators recognize the fact that student’s today receive much more visual stimulation through things like media and no longer want to go through multiple, dense texts. Graphic novels are able to reach these kids that need things visual rather than in dense textual form. Especially in recent years with the growth of iPods, iPads, and computer, students see more items in visual form than text. However, Behler (2006) further points out that graphic novels actually expose children to more words than a standard picture book. Educators have also seen that graphic novels reach reluctant readers, students with disabilities, and helps promote literacy.

Heaney (2007) states that graphic novels “assist with teaching literary appreciation and they are fun and eye-catching way to lead a youngster down the path to lifelong reading.” For many reluctant readers, graphic novels are a way to get them interested in reading then transition them to more text-only publications. Graphic novels provide a good way to introduce a topic then generate discussion that leads to a broader discussion (Heaney, 2007).

Another aspect that helps is that graphic novels cover a wide range of subjects so there is something that will interest all age-groups including adults. Johnson (1989) argues that there are many graphic novels being released that are designed just for adult readers. Graphic novels are popular for all types because they reach multiple intelligences such as linguistic, spatial and interpersonal (Heaney, 2007).

This format poses a problem for all libraries in regards to cataloging. If one was to follow traditional Dewey classification, then all graphic novels no matter there subject would be shelved on 741.5 (Dickinson, 2007). Heaney (2007) points out that the term graphic novel only relates to it format, but does not tell the subject matter or target audience. By grouping in all one area, some argue make it easier for a patron to find the graphic novel they are looking for. On the other hand, if they are cataloged according to subject and reading age it puts the books that will help readers see other items besides graphic novels that may interest them (Dickinson, 2007).
The other problem is that graphic novels are formatted differently. They are usually softbound, taller, and thinner than a normal book which makes them difficult to place them on normal library shelving.

While all libraries have been slower to adopt graphic novels, academic libraries have considerably lagged behind. One of the first hurdles that many academic libraries are still trying to get over is coming to the understanding that many graphic novels are actually considered literature and there are college courses dedicated to their study (O’English, Matthews, and Lindsay, 2006). Wagner (2010) found in her study of 111 academic libraries found that many of them had many collections that were just created. The problem she found that since most of these collections were just created they were not setting out a policy of collecting over an extended amount of time. Toren (2011) argues that academic libraries when starting a graphic novel collection should have collecting criteria. The policy can be written or unwritten, but a library needs to have some type of criteria.

It is especially important for academic libraries that support teacher education and librarianship programs to have a graphic novel collection. These students to learn to how to select good graphics novels in order to be able to do that they need to be able to access them through their school libraries. While many schools have made strides to collect youth graphic novels, they are leaving out young adult graphic novels (Williams and Peterson, 2009). Since graphic novels are very popular among teenagers, it’s important that these students learn how to evaluate and assess these materials.

In the last few years, there has been much research started on graphic novels and libraries. Many journals dedicate columns or feature reviews on recent graphic novel publications. Results of the most recent studies can help libraries that are just getting started see what they need to do to start collection. Also, many of these recent studies highlight areas in the field that still need more research.
Bibliography

Entry 1:


**Abstract:** “This article focuses on why school libraries need to have graphic novel collections. The authors highlight the graphic novel debate going on in many libraries. The authors include notable graphic novels.”

**Annotation:** This article provides a good overview about why libraries especially children libraries should have a graphic novel collection. The authors cover the history and themes covered by graphic novels. They also go over the current debate about having graphic novels. They conclude with a helpful graphic novel tip list.

**Search Strategy:** I selected the Library Literature and Information full text database because of numerous resources available that relate to information science. I conducted a broader search to see if my previous search of the database had eliminated any articles that would be useful.

**Database:** Library Literature and Information Full Text

**Method of Searching:** Keyword Searching

**Search String:** graphic novel

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** According to Ulrich’s list it is a scholarly journal that is peer-reviewed.

Entry 2:


**Abstract:** “This article focuses on the popularity of graphic novels as a collectors item in libraries. It infers that the graphic novel format has established a creative process that employs the skill of an accomplished writer. It states that it sophistication reaches out to the education committee catering to young people’s growing affinity for the visual rather than written media. The combined educational value and high appeal of graphic novels make them an essential asset to any library collection. A list of graphic novels that selectors should consider when establishing a collection for any library is provided.”
Annotation: This article provides a how-to guide to starting a graphic novel collection at a library. The author, who was responsible for starting her university’s graphic novel collection, relates key resources that are helpful for a librarian just getting started in this area of collection.

Search Strategy: I selected the LISTA abstract database because of the amount of articles it has in the field of information science. This was a broader search to see if my initial search terms had limited any articles that related to this bibliography.

Database: Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts

Method of Searching: Keyword Searching

Search String: graphic novel

Scholarly/Refereed Status: According to Ulrich’s list it is a scholarly journal that is peer-reviewed.

Entry 3:


Abstract: “The writer considers where graphic novels should be shelved. The real questions are whether graphic novels should be cataloged with other graphic books or according to subject and whether they should be shelved together as a format or whether they should be shelved according to their classification number and integrated into the collection. Librarians should bear in mind that their catalog should reflect classification number by content for nonfiction and author for fiction, but a special display will highlight the most popular.”

Annotation: This short article addresses one of the key debate regarding graphic novels, where and how should they be catalog. The author looks at the issue through the debate librarians had over audiovisual materials.

Search Strategy: I selected the OneSearch category in Dialog because it provides the ability to search several databases that relate to information science at once. After I had run my search, I selected the databases that returned the most results. This article was found in the search of ERIC. I did a keyword and abstract search approach.

Database: ERIC [Dialog]

Method of Searching: Keyword Searching

Search String: ss graphic()novel?/ab
                  ss library? OR public()library?
**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** According to Ulrich’s list it is a scholarly journal that is peer-reviewed.

**Entry 4:**


**Abstract:** “Provides a comprehensive review of the significance attributed to the usefulness, practicality and appropriateness of graphic novels in the school library media center with specific implications for collection development. A careful review of recent literature provide the school media specialist with an overview of graphic novels including definitions, challenges, benefits, helpful resources, curricular connections and collection development issues. The sources reflect the recent trends in the increasing popularity of graphic novels and their use and benefit in school media centers.”

**Annotation:** This article provides a good introduction to graphic novels and issues facing the school media librarian. It includes a literature review of current literature and builds on the issues present by that research. The author provides a good amount of information on both sides of the debate over graphic novels.

**Search Strategy:** I selected the Library Literature and Information full text database because of numerous resources available that relate to information science. I limited the search through two keywords that were the main topics of this bibliography. I then further limited the search to just peer-reviewed articles.

**Database:** Library Literature and Information Full Text

**Method of Searching:** Keyword searching

**Search String:** graphic novel (in first search box); libraries (in second search box)

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** According to Ulrich’s list it is a scholarly/academic journal that is peer-reviewed.

**Entry 5:**


**Abstract:** “Comic books, or decades aimed at children and teenagers, are increasingly being written and drawn for an older and more sophisticated audience. Like European and Japanese
prototypes, these new-wave comic books may appear in magazine or in quality-paperback format, often called “graphic novels.” While many of the new comics present slicker, sexier versions of familiar he-man fantasies, others are produced by independent artists who use the form to tackle serious personal and contemporary themes. This intriguing new world of adult comics is generally not accessible through standard reference sources; this article offers a personal overview of the field, and some suggestions for the art or reference librarian interested in starting a collection.”

Annotation: This article is unique because it provides advice for introducing an adult to the graphic novel genre. It provides an overview of the development from comic books to graphics novels. The author then includes a list of graphic novels that are good for adults.

Search Strategy: I selected the Library Literature and Information full text database because of numerous resources available that relate to information science. In my first search I used two keywords to limit the number of articles that the search would retrieve. I also limited the search to just peer-reviewed articles.

Database: Library Literature and Information Full Text

Method of Searching: Keyword searching

Search String: graphic novel (in first search box); libraries (in second search box)

Scholarly/Refereed Status: Ulrich’s lists states that it is an academic journal that is peer-reviewed.

Entry 6:


Abstract: “Summarizes some of the major benefits of establishing a current comic book or graphic novel collection for a library. Structure and history of the comic book industry; Overview of major comic book genres; Examples of current titles in each genre; Methods that libraries can use to acquire and maintain a comic book or graphic novel collection; Guidelines for selecting comic book titles.”

Annotation: This article provides an overview of what libraries should look for when buying graphic novels. The author discusses the different genres that are covered by graphic novels like educational and non-fiction.

Search Strategy: This article is mentioned in the references for the article by O’English, Matthews, & Lindsay.
Database: Education Research Complete

Method of Searching: Footnote Chasing

Search String: N/A

Scholarly/Refereed Status: Ulrich’s lists states that it is an academic journal that is peer-reviewed.

Entry 7:


Abstract: “Comic books are finally being recognized as a scholarly medium in literature, art, history, popular culture, and many other fields of study. Blanket disapproval of comic books, however, continues in all but a few academic libraries. Librarians do face philosophical and practical challenges to acquiring comic books, but it is both possible and desirable to do so. Valuable selection tools and Internet resources are examined, along with annotations of significant comic book creators.”

Annotation: The article provides an overview over the debate of comic books inclusion in libraries especially academic. The author argues that many graphic novels should now be considered scholarly in their nature, but academics do not give them credit because of their name. The author includes a section that covers how librarians should select comic books to be included in the library collection.

Search Strategy: The O’English, Matthews, & Lindsay article’s bibliography included a reference to the journal *Collection Building*. I went to the website and reviewed their table contents to see if there were any relevant articles for this project.

Database: N/A

Method of Searching: Browsing

Search String: N/A

Scholarly/Refereed Status: According to Ulrich’s list it is a scholarly/academic journal that is peer-reviewed.
Entry 8:


**Abstract:** “American graphic novels are increasingly recognized as high-quality literature and an interesting genre for academic study. Graphic novels of Japan, called manga, have established a strong foothold in American culture. This preliminary survey of 44 United States university libraries demonstrates that Japanese manga in translation are consistently collected at a lower rate than American graphic novels.”

**Annotation:** This article is unique in that it looks at the collecting rate of not only American graphic novels, but their Japanese counterpart manga. The study shows that academic libraries are still very behind in adding graphic novels to their collection, but that rate is even worse for manga. This article builds upon current research, but also concludes with areas that still need more focus.

**Search Strategy:** I selected the OneSearch category in Dialog because it provides the ability to search several databases that relate to information science at once. After I had run my search, I selected the databases that returned the most results. This article was found in the search of ERIC. I did a keyword and abstract search approach.

**Database:** ERIC [Dialog]

**Method of Searching:** Keyword Searching

**Search String:**

ss graphic(novel)?/ab
ss library? OR public(library)?
ss s3 and s8

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** According to Ulrich’s list it is a scholarly journal that is peer-reviewed.

Entry 9:


**Abstract:** “This article addresses graphic novels and their growing popularity in academic libraries. Graphic novels are increasingly used as instructional resources, and they play an important role in supporting the recreational reading mission of academic libraries. The article
will also tackle issues related to the cataloging and classification of graphic novels and discuss ways to use them for marketing and promotion of library services.”

**Annotation:** This was a unique article because it provided such an extensive introduction to the subject of graphic novels and academic libraries. Many of the other articles used for this bibliography cite this article as part of their papers. The authors provide a detailed look at the subject and an extensive inclusion of other sources.

**Search Strategy:** I selected the OneSearch category in Dialog because it provides the ability to search several databases that relate to information science at once. After I had run my search, I selected the databases that returned the most results. This article was found in the search of ERIC. I did a keyword and abstract search approach.

**Database:** ERIC [Dialog]

**Method of Searching:** Keyword searching

**Search String:**

- ss graphic()novel?/ab
- ss library? OR public()library?
- ss s3 and s8

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** According to Ulrich’s list it is a scholarly journal that is peer-reviewed.

**Entry 10:**


**Abstract:** “The article provides information on the suggested guidelines for economical collection of graphic novels. It stresses the need for understanding the format in building a useful and appealing collection of graphic novels. It also emphasizes the adoption of confidence when making a decision on the purchase of graphic novels. Further, it reveals the necessity to catalog and shelve graphic novels based on their format.”

**Annotation:** This article looks at how school librarians can go about building a useful collection of graphic novels. The authors also cover different strategies for cataloging, promoting the collection, and dealing with people who are upset about the inclusion of graphic novels in the collection.

**Search Strategy:** I selected the OneSearch category in Dialog because it provides the ability to search several databases that relate to information science at once. After I had run my search, I selected the databases that returned the most results. This article was found in the search of ERIC. I did a keyword and abstract search approach.
Database: ERIC [Dialog]

Method of Searching: Keyword Searching

Search String: ss graphic()novel?/ab
                ss library? OR public()library?
                ss s3 and s8

Scholarly/Refereed Status: According to Ulrich’s list it is a scholarly journal that is peer-reviewed.

Entry 11:


Abstract: “This study examines the launch of a graphic novel collection in an academic library and present a study analyzing the increase of titles in American Research Libraries with the subject heading “Graphic Novels” between fall 2008 and fall 2009. Statistics show a 40% increase, averaging 62 additional titles, during a year of global financial crisis. Exploring the prejudice against comics lingering in more traditional corners of academia, this paper encourages librarians to counter stereotypes and therefore bring more people, including other librarians, to view graphic novels as literature. This study includes recommended practices for supporting, collecting, and promoting these collections.”

Annotation: This article builds upon the studies done by Wagner and O’English on the graphic novel holdings of ARL libraries. It also covers how ARL libraries can go about collecting, promoting, and supporting graphic novel collections.

Search Strategy: I selected the Library Literature and Information full text database because of numerous resources available that relate to information science. I limited the search through two keywords that were the main topics of this bibliography. I then further limited the search to just peer-reviewed articles.

Database: Library Literature and Information Full Text

Method of Searching: Keyword searching

Search String: graphic novel (in first search box); libraries (in second search box)

Scholarly/Refereed Status: Ulrich’s lists states that it is an academic journal that is peer-reviewed.
Entry 12:


**Abstract:** “This study examines the extent to which ARL libraries collect graphic novels. Using a core list of 176 titles developed from winners of major comics industry awards and a library-focused “best of” list, the holdings of 111 ARL academic libraries were searched using the libraries’ online catalogs. Results suggest that most of the libraries studied do not aggressively collect graphic novels. Also examined were associations between date of publication, prior serialization, overall collection size, monograph budget, and ARL ranking and graphic novel holdings. To better serve scholarly research in this area of increasing interest, libraries will need to reexamine their collecting policies.”

**Annotation:** This article conducts a study about the graphic novel holdings of libraries limits the study to just academic research libraries. The results highlight what most previous studies have shown that graphic novels are not collected to the degree that they should, but research libraries are collecting at even a slower rate. The study also shows that most collections are fairly recent additions. The author points to several questions future studies should address.

**Search Strategy:** I selected the LISTA abstract database because of the amount of articles it has in the field of information science. This was a broader search to see if my initial search terms had limited any articles that related to this bibliography.

**Database:** Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts

**Method of Searching:** Keyword Searching

**Search String:** graphic novel

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** Ulrich’s list this journal as academic/scholarly and it is peer-reviewed.

Entry 13:


**Abstract:** “Academic libraries supporting education and library science programs collect juvenile literature to support courses that teach students to evaluate and use books with children and teenagers. Graphic novels have not only become popular with teens but also are being frequently discussed in both the education and library literature. This paper discusses the literature on graphic novels for teens, explores the extent to which academic libraries supporting education and library science programs collect graphic novels for teens, and concludes that
academic librarians responsible for juvenile collections should evaluate their graphic novel holdings and begin actively collecting graphic novels for teens."

**Annotation:** This article is unique because it looks at the graphic novel collections at university libraries that are supporting teacher and librarianship programs. The author finds that while many of these universities have collection they are mainly focused on youth but do not address teenagers. The author builds upon current literature, but feels this study illustrates that there are still areas that need addressing.

**Search Strategy:** I selected the Library Literature and Information full text database because of numerous resources available that relate to information science. In my first search I used two keywords to limit the number of articles that the search would retrieve. I also limited the search to just peer-reviewed articles.

**Database:** Library Literature and Information Full Text

**Method of Searching:** Keyword searching

**Search String:** graphic novel (in first search box); libraries (in second search box)

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** Ulrich’s lists states that it is an academic journal that is peer-reviewed.

**Personal Statement**

From a young age, I have read comic books because they filled a niche that my text-only books did not meet. As I got older, I stopped reading my comic books putting them down as something only kids read. Over the last few years, I began to hear people mentioning graphic novels but I thought they were the same as a comic book. My first graphic novel was based on the Stephanie Meyers’ *Twilight*. Not knowing what to expect, I thoroughly enjoyed reading the graphic novel version. While much was the same as the book, there were things that changed in its adaption to graphic novel form. Since then my interest in graphic novels has grown, which is why I wanted to undertake its study for this project. Through my research for the project I was surprised what the research was telling me about the inclusion of graphic novels in libraries and the attitude some librarians hold towards these novels. Some of my articles mentioned that many librarians and libraries are slow to adopt graphic novels because of the amount of illustrations compared to the amount of words. The feeling is that this hinders developing an imagination or its not as complex
reading as readers of certain age-groups need. The inclusion of the illustrations may hinder a reader from using their imagination, but they also may help a reader understand the material better than they would have with a text-only work. Also, graphic novels help people who are not interested in reading become interested in reading. I am now curious if any of the Drexel classes cover graphic novels. If not it would be an interesting class to have offered, so new librarians would understand the format and be able to select appropriate materials for the library. I learned a lot from this project and I am interested to see what changes are still coming in terms of graphic novels in the library.

I certify that:

- This assignment is entirely my own work.
- I have not quoted the words of any person from a printed source or website without indicating what had been quoted and providing an appropriate citation.
- I have not submitted this assignment to satisfy the requirements of any other course.

Signature Megan M Blair

Date June 5, 2011