Developing Collections for Fiction and Nonfiction Graphic Novels in Libraries

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Graphic novels are far more sophisticated and varied in content and genres, and have become the hottest sections in libraries, and among the fastest growing categories in publication and booksellers. With its unique medium that combines visual art with literary and cinematic techniques and contain some of the most creative work in publishing today. Collection development is moving to draw attention to the rich, diverse content of such material for all ages in school, academic and public libraries (Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, 2006). The combination of vivid appearance and complex material of graphic novels present unique issues in libraries. This literature review will explore published articles that discuss the inclusion of developing fiction and nonfiction graphic novels through supporting, promoting and collecting graphic novels in the library.

“Narrative composed out of visual images and words have very long history that stretch back to the first cave painting to ancient Egyptian wall paintings that surround human figures with dense lines of hieroglyphs” (CBLDF, 2006, p. 4). The earliest known comic book originally published in several languages in Europe in 1837 was called The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck. America in the 1930s, prior to comic book heroes they had pulp heroes that included comic art in the newspapers (CBLDF, 2006). Action Comics series featured the first appearance of several comic book heroes—most notably the Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster creation of Superman. Post World War II, audiences demanded more adventures, and a new genre emerged featuring stories about criminal, outlaws, bad guys, and more and more heroes were produced (Miller, 2005). In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Dr. Fredric Werthham, a child psychologist published, Seduction of the Innocent, leading a crusade against violent comic books and prohibiting the sale of what he saw as “crime” comic books that were to blame for “juvenile delinquents.” A U.S. Senate Committee established there was no connection between the two,
but Werthman’s efforts had horrible and long-lasting impacts that affect graph novels to this day (Coville, 2011).

Rebounded in the 1960s, “Underground Comix dealt unflinchingly with the social issues of the day, including attitudes about sex, race, war and drugs” (CBLDF, 2016, p. 5). By the 1970s, the revitalized field with Marvel and DC Comics introduced new superheroes and greater flexibility with storytelling (Miller, 2006). In 1978, Will Eisner, a veteran cartoonists coined the term graphic novel to mean a sophisticated story told, usually between a 64, 128, or 176 page book (Weiner, 2002). The late 1980s, libraries began carrying graphic novels and a new market was discovered, and people wanted full length graphic novels. The 1990s, brought an influx of Japanese manga was “banging down the door of teen readers” (MacDonald, 2005, p. 2). Today, a new slew of genres has emerged in the form nonfiction graphic, and memoirs are giant, particularly with reference to history, historical fiction, biography, science, short stories, journalism, politics, and philosophy, but more importantly readers are different from those even ten year ago.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With the popularity of fiction and nonfiction graphic novels, and the widespread acceptance of GNs in libraries there is sufficient literature and published articles that focus on supporting, promoting and collecting graphic novels in libraries. In 2010, Beth Toren wrote about using techniques to educate users of the validity of graphic novels by knowing the different traits between comics and graphics novels as literature when supporting a GN academic collection. They are not in magazine form, stories are complete in one novel usually with a series, and they are serious, developed, and literary. Crawford and Weiner (n.d.) in Scholastic Using Graphic Novels with Children and Teens, school librarians and educators have reported
outstanding success getting kids to read with graphic novels, citing particularly their popularity with reluctant readers. Graphic novels increase critical thinking, readers use complex cognitive functions when both reading text and following along with a visual narrative (Torren, 2010). Considerable support derives from the concession that GNs provide young people with diverse reading materials and is a gateway for students who are difficult to reach through traditional text along with readers will more readily acquire new vocabulary (Crawford and Weiner, n.d.).

In *How Graphic Novels Became the Hottest Section in the Library*, Heidi MacDonald (2005) observe, “A general shift powered this acceptance, as librarians who came of age reading heady material by Moore (*Watchmen*) and Gaiman (*Absolute Sandman*) go purchasing power and started building collections” (p. 2). This generational shift for graphic novel collections require imaginative promotion concepts. In public libraries, the devotion and desire for GNs complex storylines for mature audiences embody adult issues including war, alcoholism, racism relationships, and every literary genre as other fiction and nonfictions books in the library. The demand and recognition in graphic novels has changed tremendously over the past twenty-five years, and so has the audience, prominently in the interest of wildly successful films centered on comic book characters (Toren, 2010). In *Drawing on Reality*, Bonnie Brzozowski (2012) explains, “An experience with a great graphic works in unparalleled. It is almost cinematic, but there is a literary component” while absorbing complex ideas (p. 32).

In the Toren (2010) text, libraries can fight stereotypes of graphic novels with creative displays that have a theme. They should be colorful, informative and target a specific audience when created. Design programs to educate and inspire graphic novel fans and beginners who want to learn more. Such as “*Teaching Visual Literacy*”, *Story Structure in GNs*, *Writing for Visual Thinkers*, or *How to Build a Story Line*. The unique format, poetry, and creative writing
are informative ways to get the community excited about GNs. Furthermore, hold workshops on the top lists GNs, Award-winning GN artists, film and TV adaptations, and facts on Pulitzer and Hugo award winners. Create handouts, brochures or pathfinders with colorful and attractive graphics with recommend titles, call number, along with descriptive summaries (Toren, 2010).

Stephen Weiner, Director of the Maynard Public Library in Maynard, Massachusetts, and author of many books and articles on graphic novels since 1990s, writes in 2002, collect a credible collection that does not focus on violence and sexual exploitation, but acquire more mature work that extends towards philosophical and emotional context aimed at adults and young adults (Weiner, 2012). In his article Graphic nonfiction: a survey of nonfiction comics Ken Irwin (2014) addresses “Graphic nonfiction has gotten little attention in the library literature, the amount of nonfiction published in graphic format is increasing” (p. 106).

Nowadays, graphic novels function as entertainment, information and literature in their own right that include subject like autobiography and memoir, quotidian memoir, traumatic memoir health and mental health, science, philosophy, memoir newsworthy events, travel narrative, journalism, history and biography, educational subjects (Irwin, 2014).

In Not Your Mom’s Graphic Novels: Giving Girls a Choice beyond Wonder Woman, Jorgenson & Lechan (2013) emphasize, a collection for girls and women. Choose GNs that show women problem-solving skills, gaining personal power, and empowering others. They should “celebrate girls and women as vibrant, vital force in the world” (Law as cited in Jorgenson & Lechan, 2012, p. 276). Collect GNs that have healthy female role models, in addition to featuring female protagonists, taking on non-traditional roles, do not rely on men to support them that appeal, and have an active role in the development of the story that engage to all audiences (Jorgenson & Lechan, 2013).
In school libraries, Heaney (2007) in *Graphic novels: a sure bet in your library*, describes how schools should have high interest and pop culture graphic novels with multiple intelligences and curricular connections. In academic libraries collections should begin with a good core of award winning GNs as well as bridge literary knowledge and proficiency with courses (Toren, 2010). Include a variety of personalities, ages, backgrounds, relationships and ethnicity in a healthy and respectful manner, and find titles inclusive of diversity, race and ethnicity written or drawn by diverse artists and writers. Importantly, have a collection development policy for graphic novels. (Toren, 2010).

**LOOKING AHEAD**

“The audience of children and teen is growing, critical and academic recognition as confirmed comics’ literary and artistic value, and a new shelf of modern classics has arrived” (McDonald, 2013, p. 1). Today, between Arrow, The Flash, Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D., iZombie, Gotham, The Walking Dead, Daredevil, and Agent Carter, Lucifer, Supergirl and others, television shows just one media already inundated with comic book characters and themes with more on the way (Tracey, 2015). We can't get enough of them. Developing collections for fiction and nonfiction graphic novels in libraries collection development literature recognize with the latest GNs booming libraries are perfectly positioned to deliver patrons and students what they what. Graphic novels are part of special collections in libraries because of the distinct and complex content, so create innovate spaces and programs for graphic novels that require unique attention from policy to selection to care and management making them rewarding to all readers.
REFERENCES


