

Why Graphic Novels?

Graphic novels may be a new format for your store, but they're still all about telling stories. The way graphic novels tell their stories – with integrated words and pictures – looks different from traditional novels, poetry, plays, and picture books, but the stories they tell have the same hearts. *Bone*, by Jeff Smith, is a fantastical adventure with a monstrous villain and endearing heroes, like *Harry Potter*. *American Born Chinese*, by Gene Luen Yang, is a coming-of-age novel, like *Catcher in the Rye*. *Fun Home*, by Alison Bechdel, is a powerful memoir, like *Running With Scissors*. When people ask, 'why graphic novels?' the easiest answer you can give is, graphic novels tell stories that are just as scary and funny and powerful and heartwarming as prose.

Here are two more sophisticated answers you can also try out.



Education

Graphic novels are a great way to go for kids making the transition from image-centric books to more text-based books, and for adults just learning English. Because of the combination of image and text in a graphic novel, readers get visual clues about what's going on in the story even if their vocabulary isn't quite up to all the words yet. And because graphic novels are told as a series of panels, reading graphic novels also forces readers to think and become actively involved each time they move between one panel and the next. What's happening in that space? How do the story and the characters get from panel 1 to panel 2?

Both television and the internet play a large part in our culture – images are becoming more and more integrated into everyone's everyday life. Learning to understand and analyze those images is an important part of dealing with the world we live in, and graphic novels in the classroom provide a bridge between traditional prose narratives and image-centric media. Reading and analyzing graphic novels helps kids and teens learn the ins and outs of visual literacy, better preparing them to deal with the media they encounter every day.



Why Graphic Novels?

Popularity

From superheroes to memoirs to manga, graphic novels are everywhere. With the explosion of comics properties like *Watchmen*, *Spiderman*, and *Persepolis* on to the screen, the past few years have brought graphic novels front and center in the eyes of the American public in the past five years in a way they have never been before. Graphic novel sales grew 4% last year – they're one of the few parts of the book market that's still seeing a steady uptick in sales even in this economy. There are a few different factors at work here.

Movies – as Superman and Batman hit the silver screen, sales of related books go up. But it's not just superheroes that are coming out victorious here – movies like *A History of Violence*, *The Road to Perdition*, *Sin City*, and *Persepolis* are also based on graphic novels. The movie industry is more and more frequently coming to graphic novels for inspiration, which means more and more readers are being introduced to the books behind the movies.

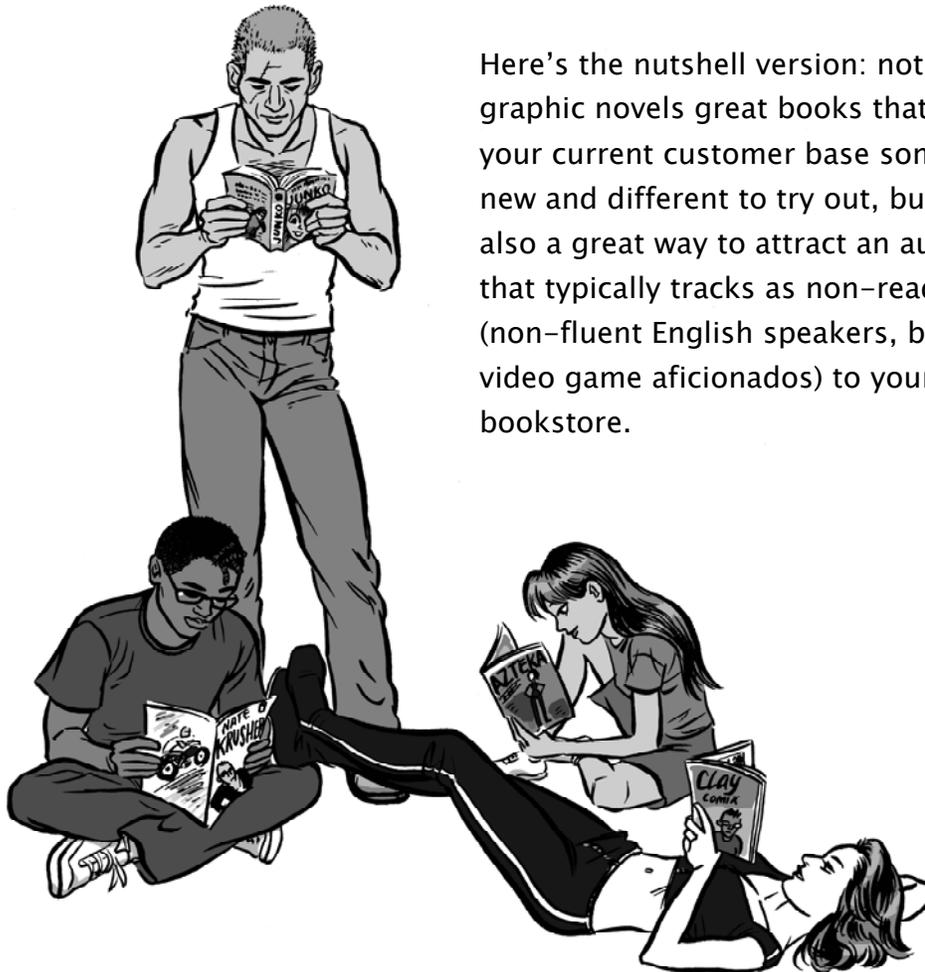
Manga – manga is the Japanese word for graphic novel. It's also the word that people in the US have come to use to refer to comics from Japan that have been translated into English and published in the US. Manga has had a huge influence on the comics industry in the past few years, especially with material for teenagers. Anime (animated cartoons from Japan) like *Pokemon*, *Dragonball Z*, and *Naruto* are frequently syndicated on television in the US, which brings their manga inspirations to the attention of kids and teenagers. Manga is pretty easy to recognize – it has a distinct art style (with very simple line drawing and big-eyed, round-faced protagonists) and it specializes in the serialized story – the typical series spans between ten and twenty volumes. With the material on television and an incredibly active online fan community, manga has gone from being non-existent in the US only fifteen years ago to making up more than half the sales in the comics market.

First Second Books



Why Graphic Novels?

Quality - graphic novels had a boom in the eighties when Art Spiegelman's *Maus* won the Pulitzer Prize. A lot of people sat up and took notice - but unfortunately, there weren't many graphic novels at the time that could be held to the same high standard. Until that point, not many people had been thinking of graphic novels as a vehicle for serious storytelling. But in the thirty years between then and now, kids have grown up reading *Maus*. The comics storytellers of the eighties have come to think about comics differently, even starting schools or teaching college courses to educate today's upcoming comics artists about making comics in new ways. Now is the time that all those possibilities and potential are bursting into flower - the first generation of true American graphic novel storytellers. It's an unprecedented time in the United States.



Here's the nutshell version: not only are graphic novels great books that give your current customer base something new and different to try out, but they're also a great way to attract an audience that typically tracks as non-readers (non-fluent English speakers, boys, video game aficionados) to your bookstore.

How to Talk About Graphic Novels

One of the most important aspects of talking about graphic novels is knowing the terminology. Just like knowing what a sentence or a paragraph is when you talk about books, it's important to know what a word balloon or a panel is when you talk about graphic novels. Here's a quick terminology primer.



Comic: This is one of those multi-purpose words. 'Comic' is an all-encompassing format word, and can apply to things like newspaper comics, online comics, graphic novels, or anything in between. In the plural, 'comics' is used as an umbrella term to indicate the entire medium. For example, this terminology primer can be described as a comics terminology primer.

Graphic Novel: Anything in comics format that's long enough to have a spine is called a graphic novel. Collections of newspaper strips, editorial cartoon collections, original comics works, non-fiction comics works, poetry comics works, and anthologies – all of these, if they have a spine, are called graphic novels.

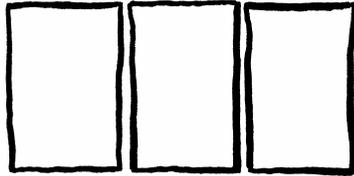
Pamphlets: Most superhero comics – and some other comics – are initially published serially, rather than as graphic novels. The traditional 32-page, staple-bound comic story format is referred to as a pamphlet.

Trade Paperback: A trade paperback is a type of graphic novel – a collection of previously published pamphlet comics. Publishers or creators will sometimes label their books 'trade paperbacks' to differentiate them from original graphic novels.



How to Talk About Graphic Novels

Panel: The action in comics most commonly happens in sequential boxes. These boxes are called panels.



Word Balloon: Dialogue in comics occurs in the form of word balloons – text-filled circles or ovals with long tails that lead to the mouths of the characters speaking.



word balloon



thought balloon

Thought Balloon: Thoughts in comics occur in the form of thought balloons – typically cloud-shaped circles containing text or images that indicate the characters' thoughts. These balloons will be positioned above the characters' heads, with a trail of small clouds leading from the balloons to their heads.

Once you've got down these basic terms, you should be able to talk about comics to anyone anywhere. The main thing to remember when talking about comics is that they're as much about characters and plot as books are. So if what you would say while hand-selling a prose title is, "The intrigue really starts up on page 53, when the thief and the cop run into each other for the first time in the book, and the author implies in the second paragraph that they've met before," you might say about a graphic novel, "The intrigue really starts up on page 53, when the thief and the cop run into each other for the first time in the book – see that glance the two of them are exchanging in the fourth panel?" The same things are exciting – there's just a slightly different vocabulary for talking about them.

Resources

Print Resources

There are probably a few things you already have access to that have graphic novel-based content you can take advantage of.

The New York Times has just started a Graphic Novel Bestseller List. The list is compiled from both bookstores and comics stores, and as such features a lot of superhero and media tie-in books that will sell heavily in a comics store. It's a good place to start.

Booklist and *Kirkus* both have a yearly graphic novel special issue that highlights their picks for the top graphic novels of the forthcoming year. They both feature reviews of excellent graphic novels, plus content from the creators.

The *BCCB*, *Booklist*, *The Horn Book*, *Kirkus*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and *VOYA* all regularly review graphic novels in their publications. If you subscribe to any of these, you can find out about what's coming down the pipeline.

Diamond (an exclusively comics distributor) puts out a monthly catalog of upcoming comics. It's called *Previews*. Clocking in at several hundred pages long, it gives an extensive overview of plot, creators, and art for every book that's coming out that month. Diamond also produces a more easily digestible monthly e-newsletter and bi-annual print newsletter called 'Diamond Bookshelf' that's intended specifically for bookstores and librarians. You can sign up online here [<http://www.diamondbookshelf.com/public/>].

ICv2 is a pop culture site for professionals that focuses on comics. They print a bi-annual newsletter that contains reviews and their projections of what will sell best for the next two quarters, as well as publishing a daily e-newsletter that reports breaking news (printings selling out, exciting programming or resources being developed, movie deals, etc.). You can find them online here [<http://www.icv2.com/>].

Resources

Online Resources

There are two great e-newsletters about comics: *Publisher's Weekly Comics Week*, which comes out every Tuesday, and *Graphic Novel Reporter*, which comes out every two weeks. Both of these newsletters provide information about upcoming titles, reviews, author interviews, industry trends, and features about standout bookstores, libraries, and other aspects of the industry.

You can subscribe to *PW Comics Week* online here [<https://www.publishersweekly.com/subscribe.asp?screen=pi10&nid=2789®opt=logout>].

You can find *Graphic Novel Reporter* online here [<http://www.graphicnovelreporter.com/>].

No Flying, No Tights is an archive of comics reviews created by a Massachusetts librarian named Robin Brenner. NFNT focuses on girls' comics, and on books for kids and teens. It's a great resource if you come across an older title and want to know what the pros think before you buy it! [<http://www.noflyingnotights.com/>]

School Library Journal has a blog called 'Good Comics for Kids' that will keep you up-to-date about everything that's happening with kids comics. It includes industry news, reviews, and an on-sale calendar. You can find it here [<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/blog/540000654.html>].



Reps from publishers who already visit your store may have a hidden graphic novel specialty. Macmillan publishes First Second Books and distributes Drawn and Quarterly, Seven Seas, and Papercutz. W.W. Norton distributes Fantagraphics. Random House publishes Del Rey Manga, Pantheon, and Villard, and distributes DC Comics. Simon and Schuster distributes manga publisher Viz, while Harper Collins distributes Tokyopop. Abrams has just started an imprint called ComicArts. You may already have access to all the information you need if you ask for it!

First Second's Best of the Best

Recommended Books for Starting or Improving a Great Graphic Novel Section

Ages 5 and Up

The Adventures of Polo by Regis Faller

Babymouse series by Jennifer L. Holm & Matthew Holm

The Boy, The Bear, The Baron, and The Bard by Gregory Rogers

The Clouds Above by Jordan Crane

Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! by Mo Willems

Jetcat Clubhouse by Jay Stephens

The Life and Times of Uncle Scrooge by Don Rosa

Little Lulu by Marge Buell

Owly by Andy Runton

Seadogs by Lisa Wheeler and Mark Siegel

Stinky by Eleanor Davis

Uncle Scrooge by Carl Barks

Ages Eight and Up

Adventures in Cartooning by James Sturm, Andrew Arnold, and Alexis Frederick-Frost

Amulet by Kazu Kibuishi

Asterix series by Rene Goscinny and Albert Uderzo

Astroboy by Osamu Tezuka

Babysitters Club series by Anne M. Martin & Raina Telgemeier

Bone by Jeff Smith

Bumperboy by Debbie Huey

Fashion Kitty series by Charise Mericle Harper

Glister by Andi Watson

Houdini the Handcuff King by Jason Lutes

Jellaby by Kean Soo

Kaput & Zösky by Lewis Trondheim

Little Lit series edited by Art Spiegelman

Little Vampire by Joann Sfar

The Magic Pickle by Scott Morse

Robot Dreams by Sara Varon

Sardine in Outer Space series by Joann Sfar and Emmanuel Guibert

Spiral Bound by Aaron Renier

Sweaterweather by Sara Varon

Tintin series by Herge

Tiny Tyrant by Lewis Trondheim and Fabrice Parme

Yotsuba&! by Azuma Kiyohiko

First Second Books

First Second's Best of the Best

Recommended Books for Starting or Improving a Great Graphic Novel Section

Teens

A.L.I.E.E.E.N. by Lewis Trondheim
American Born Chinese by Gene Yang
The Arrival by Shaun Tan
Batman: Year One by Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli
The Books of Magic by Neil Gaiman and John Ney Rieber
The Color Trilogy by Kim Dong Hwa
Courtney Crumrin by Ted Naifeh
Daisy Cutter and the Last Train by Kazu Kibuishi
DEMO by Brian Wood and Becky Cloonan
Emiko Superstar by Mariko Tamaki and Steve Rolston
Fruits Basket by Natsuki Takaya
Full Metal Alchemist by Hiromu Arakawa
Garage Band by Gipi
Hopeless Savages by Jen Van Meter
Journey Into Mohawk Country by George O'Connor
Kampung Boy and *Town Boy* by Lat
Laika by Nick Abadzis
Marvels by Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross
Naruto by Masashi Kishimoto
Nausicaa of the Valley of the Winds by Hayao Miyazaki
Ranma 1/2 by Rumiko Takahashi
Runaways by Brian K. Vaughan
Scott Pilgrim series by Bryan Lee O'Malley
Skim by Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki
Sorcerers and Secretaries by Amy Kim Ganter
The Tale of One Bad Rat by Bryan Talbot
To Dance by Siena and Mark Siegel
Understanding Comics by Scott McCloud
Visitations by C. Scott Morse

Adults

The Amazing Remarkable Monsieur Leotard by Eddie Campbell and Dan Best
Asterios Polyp by David Mazzucchelli
The Black Diamond Detective Agency by Eddie Campbell
Black Hole by Charles Burns
Blankets by Craig Thompson
Bone Sharps, Cowboys, and Thunder Lizards by Jim Ottaviani
Bourbon Island 1730 by Lewis Trondheim and Appollo
Curses by Kevin Huizenga
Deo gratias by J. P. Stassen

First Second Books

First Second's Best of the Best

Recommended Books for Starting or Improving a Great Graphic Novel Section

Adults (cont'd)

Drawing Words & Writing Pictures by Jessica Abel and Matt Madden

Epileptic by David B.

The Eternal Smile by Gene Luen Yang and Derek Kirk Kim

Exit Wounds by Rutu Modan

The Fate of the Artist by Eddie Campbell

French Milk by Lucy Knisley

From Hell by Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell

Fun Home by Alison Bechdel

Ghost World by Daniel Clowes

Gus & His Gang by Chris Blain

The Invisibles by Grant Morrison

Jimmy Corrigan by Chris Ware

Klezmer by Joann Sfar

Kinderbook by Kan Takahama

Late Bloomer by Carol Tyler

Life Sucks by Jessica Abel, Warren Pleece, and Gabe Soria

Lone Wolf and Cub by Kazuo Koike

The Lost Colony series by Grady Klein

Louis Riel by Chester Brown

Maus by Art Spiegelman

Missouri Boy by Leland Myrick

MW by Osamu Tezuka

Nana by Ai Yazawa

Notes for a War Story by Gipi

Optic Nerve by Adrian Tomine

Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi

Pedro and Me by Judd Winick

The Photographer by Didier Lefèvre and Emmanuel Guibert

Prince of Persia by Jordan Mechner, A.B. Sina, LeUyen Pham, and Alex Puvilland

The Professor's Daughter by Emmanuel Guibert and Joann Sfar

Pyongyang by Guy Delisle

The Rabbi's Cat by Joann Sfar

Same Difference and Other Stories by Derek Kirk Kim

The Sandman by Neil Gaiman

Slow News Day by Andi Watson

Three Shadows by Cyril Pedrosa

Vampire Loves by Joann Sfar

Watchmen by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons

What It Is by Lynda Barry

First Second Books