

Comic Books, Manga, and Graphic Novels (and Cartoons!)

There's a section at the library listed in the catalog as "Graphic Fic" (short for "Graphic Fiction"). Currently located in the southeast corner of the library, near biographies and the ongoing book sale, "Graphic Fic" contains what are called comic books, manga, and graphic novels.

"Comic book" is a term most people have heard, and it's the broadest of the three terms. Comic books are stories told through a series of images (Scott McCloud, whose *Understanding Comics* is the best analysis of the medium, suggested "sequential art" as the most accurate description of what makes a comic book a comic book), are often published as a monthly periodical, and in this country traditionally have featured superheroes.

"Manga," narrowly defined, applies to comic books originally published in Japan and broadly refers to comic books using styles and storytelling elements typical of Japanese comics, regardless of country of origin. Comics in Japan have historically covered a wider range of subjects than those from the United States or even Europe. In recent years, however, American comic book creators have had success on a wide range of subjects and genres, though still not close to the range of manga.

The broadening of scope of American comic books led to the coining of the next term. The phrase "graphic novel" rose from the desire to have a more descriptive term, one that didn't say anything about subject matter, as opposed to comic books. Often, "graphic novel" used as another name for a comic book. Some people use it to describe format: a comic book is printed serially in a magazine format, while a graphic novel is published all at once, in book format. Other people use "graphic novel" to talk about quality, reserving "comic book" to describe what they think is the commercial product of a team of hacks.

Instead of picking one of these names or listing all of them in our catalog and on our signs, we came up with an entirely new name for the medium, Graphic Fic, which works well for the majority of the collection. However, although the books in this section tell stories largely through a melding of pictures and words (or sometimes pictures alone), and although if you were to pick randomly a volume from the shelf you would find depicted in it incidents that not only didn't happen but couldn't ever happen, the designation "Graphic Fic" has become less descriptive as the collection has become more inclusive. Biography and memoir – such as the classic *Maus* and the recent *Malcolm X: A Graphic Biography* – are popular topics for comic book stories. Other areas of nonfiction include history, like Harvey Pekar's *Students for a Democratic Society: A Graphic History*, religion – *The Manga Bible* is, as it sounds, an adaptation of the Christian Bible in manga style – and journalism, like Joe Sacco's *Palestine*.

One last thing: cartoons, like those you'd find in this newspaper or the *New Yorker*, are in a different location, the 700's, with art, architecture, and craft books. There you can also find books about comic books (and manga and graphic novels).

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