

Adult Reading Round Table Graphic Novels Genre Study

Introduction and Benchmarks

The 4th edition is the first time Graphic Novels have ever been included in **The ARRT Popular Fiction List**. However, because graphic novels aren't really a genre, the study will be structured a bit differently.

- It will only be one year long.
- Each meeting will focus on a type/genre area.
- Appeal factors usually apply to genre, not format, but we'll explore whether we can determine format appeal factors (which may require developing a different vocabulary than pace, frame, etc.)
- We will be discussing what draws people to the format as well as what draws people to different genres within the format.
- We'll be discussing both the text and the visuals for each work.
- We will cover Teen and Adult works, but not Children's.
- We will not be working from any one reference text.

Working Definition of Graphic Novels from the ARRT Popular Fiction List:

Graphic Novels essentially are long-form comic books, typically conveying stories through words and pictures arranged in sequential panels. Graphic novels can be original works or collections of previously published comics. The term "graphic novel" can be a misnomer, as the format encompasses fiction, nonfiction, and biography/memoir.

For the purposes of this genre study, we going to use the terms "Graphic Novels" and "Comics" to encompass all long-form comics, including books that are published as graphic novel originals and ones published as monthly serials that have then been bound and reissued as trade paperbacks.

Understanding the Appeal

- **Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art, by Scott McCloud** is a good book if you have never read comics and are looking for background on their history, language and form.
- Both the right brain and left brain are engaged – art and language centers.
- Sometimes readers get more out of the images on a second or third reading of a work than on the first reading. The first time they are more focused on the text.
- Some fans are drawn to a specific writer, a specific illustrator, or only a specific type – like superheroes. Some people will read all of Alan Moore. Others will read all the

Batman books. More rarely will a fan read any book by an illustrator, but they may be more willing to try a book just because it has specific an artist.

- It may be easier to stick with a book despite the story if the art is really good. The art can make up for a weak story. It is harder for a good story to make up for really bad art. Really bad art detracts too much and blocks enjoyment of the story.

Benchmarks

Maus by Art Spiegelman and **Watchmen** by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons were the first graphic novels to really receive “comics aren’t just for kids any more” notice from critics and the public at large. Both are considered literary, and received critical acclaim. **Maus** won a Pulitzer, while **Watchmen** won a Hugo.

Both novels shared a few elements:

- Past plays a role in the present.
- Who watches the watchmen in both – who is responsible for the evil that is happening in the world.

Telling **Maus** as a graphic novel made it more effective because:

- The characters became more universal. They were everymen.
- By using animal faces, Spiegelman made the characters symbolic and easily identifiable. You could see from the beginning who is a cat/German, who was a mouse/Jew, who was a pig/Pole. It also echoed the use of the Jewish star to make individuals into a quickly denoted class.
- If photographs had been used instead of line drawings, the brutality might have been overwhelmingly horrific. The illustrations of animals provided a layer of separation – faceless millions of people. It keeps it from feeling as immediate. You have to keep reminding yourself that it really happened to real people.
- The simplicity and compelling power of the drawings make the story more accessible to a younger audience. The story is able to reach them on a level they are capable of handling and understanding. It becomes a teaching opportunity.
- Some people got even more out of the images of **Maus** after reading **MetaMaus**, a casebook of interviews and sketches about the creation of the comic.

Watchmen felt both dated and timeless because:

- The Cold War story may have been somewhat dated, but the Afghanistan connection is still timely, as is the attack on New York.
- The dystopian and world-weary hero aspects are both modern and still apt.

- The art or the coloring of the art almost feels more dated than the story.
 - Some people found the art in the **Watchmen** distasteful. Others thought it was an homage to the classic superhero era, in tune with the author and writer's desire to take the classic superhero mythos into a different and dark direction.
 - Everyone agreed the art was striking and noteworthy.
- The visual medium provides a modern hook for younger readers.
- Reading **Watchmen** all in one clump is a very different experience than if you read it serialized, as it was originally published. It feels much more depressing.
- The art ties in to the tone and mood of the story in **Watchmen**. It's sharp and traumatic. Perhaps talking about tone and mood is the best way to describe artwork when you are book talking, if you have difficulty verbally articulating the look of the book.
- You can't have the "monster" invade New York as effectively in prose, like at the beginning of Chapter 12. You can't do it in words, but you can do it in art.

General Notes:

- Spiegelman was both artist and author in **Maus**, whereas **Watchmen** was a collaboration between the two people. In other collaborative works, the artist may only get the barest bones outline from the writer. A great variety exists from work to work on the level of connectedness between the text and the art.
- Novice readers have to learn how to read graphic novels.
 - It's a different skill set than reading straight text. It may be easier to read a graphic novel that has cleaner, simpler art.
 - Variations in panel size can be jarring.
 - Overall, people found **Maus** easier to read than **Watchmen**.
 - Some people found the black and white drawings of Spiegelman easier to absorb than the color drawings of Gibbons.
- It is easier to direct nonfan patrons to nonfiction graphic novels because you have the subject connection.
 - Graphic novel memoirs are a good match to memoir readers and probably the easiest nonfan sell.
 - Nonfiction graphic novels are also reviewed more in mainstream sources so patrons are more likely to have seen reviews of them in the standard sources like *New York Book Review* or *People*. They get more exposure.
 - **Asterios Polyp**, by David Mazzucchelli is a good jumping point for literary fiction readers. But be warned it has a totally open ending.
 - With fiction, the dystopian angle gives a hook.
 - Fortunately, don't have to wait as long these days for the collections to be issued.

- How libraries shelve graphic novels ties directly into the problem of graphic novels often being treated as a genre even though they are a format.
 - It also ties into the problem of how we market the collection to people who don't know we have it. Sometimes they are hidden in a back corner. Some places they divided into small spaces instead of gathered all into one spot.
 - Libraries also have issues dividing Teen from Adult works. Some libraries started with Teen collections and are just now adding Adult collections. Having Adult collections can be seen as legitimizing the format/genre/collection.
 - Libraries not only had to get over the snob factor when they started collecting graphic novels but also issues relating to the format.
 - Even now, the size variations can make for shelving difficulties.
 - Some libraries have had success interfiling new graphic novels with their new fiction and nonfiction, both to boost circs and market the fact that the library actually carries the format. Displays also help create awareness.
- When you booktalk a graphic novel, whether you talk about the story or the art largely depends on which appealed to you the most.

Superheroes

Superhero Graphic Novels

- These are probably what most people automatically think of when they think of comics.
- By sales and pop culture, these are the most popular types of graphic novels.
- Started with the 1938 publication of Action Comics #1, a Superman title.
- Traits of Superhero comics (see <http://www.comicsalliance.com/2012/07/06/ask-chris-113-just-what-is-a-super-hero-anyway/>)
 - Costumes
 - Secret identities
 - Grandeur and theatrics
 - Abilities beyond normal (or access to technology that is beyond normal)
 - Heroic
 - Strong moral code that they are living up to (as opposed to anti-heroes who are more self-serving)
 - Adventure or action, sometimes related to crime
 - Violence, explicit or not
- Appeal of Superhero comics
 - Good versus evil
 - Wish fulfillment
 - Power fantasy
 - Appeal of secret identities
 - Modern-day mythology

- Drawn to specific characters
- Problem of being dropped into a story without the whole backstory:
 - You also sometimes have to keep up with which version of history you are in.
 - Comics can be like a soap opera in the length of the continuing story.
 - You have to find your place in a large story arc with lots of offshoots.
 - You have to determine if the reader can handle some uncertainty/confusion. Do they need a contained universe or can they make up the universe as they go along?
 - Younger readers may be better at making up the universe as they experience it.
 - Movies, cartoons, and animated series really help newbies to a particular character or series. They can form a primer.
 - They are also a good way to hook reluctant readers.
 - Reboots are a way to get new readers into a series. You reboot the universe – starting the continuity over. So they don't have to know any backstory, except maybe broad strokes.

History of Comics, and Superhero Comics

- Golden Age of Comic Books – 1930s to early 1950s
 - Batman
 - Superman
- Silver Age of Comic Books – 1956 to 1970
 - Spider-Man – appealed to teens
 - Marvel & Stan Lee/Jack Kirby (X-Men, Fantastic Four, etc.)
- Bronze Age of Comic Books – 1970 to 1985
- Modern Age of Comic Books – 1985 to present

- Superhero comics grew in popularity during WW2.
- They were considered for adults until the 1950s with the rise of the Comics Code Authority.
 - The Comics Code was self-censorship by the industry.
 - Spurred by the publication of **Seduction of the Innocent: The Influence of Comic Books on Today's Youth**, by Fredric Wertham. This book linked comic books to juvenile delinquency.
 - As a result, superhero stories became dulled down, juvenile, and intended for kids.
- In 1960s, the idea of comics for adults started coming back.
 - More complex themes were addressed.
- By 1985 or 1986, superhero comics were back to being considered for adults.
 - The publication of **Watchmen** and **Batman: Dark Knight Returns** spurred this change in view.
 - The rise of moral ambiguity in the storytelling.

- Marvel tends to have more humor than DC

- Marvel does “snark.” Being a superhero doesn’t insulate you from being the butt of a joke.
- Look at the difference between Iron Man and Batman.
 - They are both humans, with a lot of money, who use technology to have superpowers.
 - Iron Man isn’t as dark as Batman. He can crack a joke.

Ideas to take Home

- Dealing with backstory problem
 - For iconic characters, or when a new movie comes out, have a “Where do I start?” handout. Promotes whole-collection RA as it ties movies and books together.
 - Wikipedia is a good place to find the information for this type of handout.
- How to organize the collection – by author or by series?
 - It’s important to get in touch with who is checking them out.
 - Adults may read differently than teens. Adults may stick more with authors than characters
- What to add to the collection
 - Talk to local comic book shops about what's popular, but keep in mind their customers and your patrons may be different
- Crossover titles are great for displays
 - By including superhero comics on your displays you are showing your support for the genre and its readers.

Upcoming Events

- Free Comic Book Day – May 4th
 - Great time to partner with local comic book store
- Superman Day
 - <http://randomhousecreatesend5.com/t/ViewEmail/j/4E4640156D5A4ACD/20C20AC7EC35496CC67FD2F38AC4859C>
 - Random House is planning for the day before the movie is coming out
 - They will send you bookmarks and reading lists
- Wonder Women: The Untold Story of Superheroines
 - <http://wonderwomendoc.com/>
 - On WTTW on 04.15.13 at 10p (Independent Lens)
- Gender Through Comic Books
 - <https://www.canvas.net/courses/gender-through-comic-books>
 - Going on now

Batman: Dark Knight Returns, by Frank Miller

- Really blew people’s minds when it came out. It was such a different take on Batman from the TV “golly, gee-whiz” attitude.
 - It was a total reimaging of a character people thought they knew.

- The art work was noir.
- Contained political and social commentary
- Plus, Batman beat Superman in a fight, which really thrilled some fans.
- **Dark Knight Returns** was published the same year as **Watchmen**
- Some of us felt like we walked into the middle of a story without having the backstory. Especially what happened to Robin.
 - To get the full impact of just how much **Dark Knight Returns** reimagined Batman's story, you have to understand the backstory.
 - If you felt like you were missing the backstory, maybe pick up **Batman: Year One**, by Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli.
 - Gives the origin story for Batman.
 - This novel would never have been written though if **Dark Knight Returns** hadn't been so successful.
 - It too was influenced by **Watchmen**.
- Other readers liked letting their imagination run wild as to what parts of the backstory they had "missed." For example, how did Green Arrow lose his arm?
- For the time, it was a radical decision to make Robin a girl and the commissioner female.
 - Particularly in the male-centric world of graphic novels.
 - Batman had always been heavily male-centric, except maybe having females as villains.
- Some people found the layout confusing.
 - Frank Miller tends to have small panels, and a lot of text.
- There was a surprising large amount of text.
 - Having more text was more common at the time it was released.
 - Some purists actually thought there was too much text. There should have been more showing instead of saying.
- The art was very dark. Added to the feelings of angst.
- Batman as a character has always been dark.
 - This may appeal to angst ridden teens.
- Batman also appeals to some because he is just a human – who is smart and has lots of money. But he's not an alien like Superman nor does he have any special powers.

Superman: Red Son, by Mark Millar and Dave Johnson & Kilian Plunkett

- Art is like Soviet poster art of the 1930s and 1940s.
- Occasionally tugs at the heartstrings, which annoyed some.
- Great book for crossover readers
 - Don't need to know more than the basics of the Superman story, which most everyone does.
 - Alternative history
 - Part of the DC Elseworld stories – not part of the continuity, but "pulled into a strange world or place"
 - Political and social commentary

Astonishing X-Men, Vol. 1: Gifted, by Joss Whedon and John Cassaday

- More humor than the Marvel selections
- Overall, less dark universe and characters.
 - Reflected in the art. The colors weren't as dark.
- Provides a lot of backstory so a good starting point for new readers.

League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Vol. 1, by Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill

- Crossover appeal with
 - Steampunk fans
 - Victorian era fans
 - Bibliophiles
 - Everything is about books
 - Book characters become superheros!
 - Jasper Fforde-type feel
 - Good for graphic Novel fans that don't read superheroes
- Gothic feel
- However, the pacing is slower and there isn't as much action. More introspective. A lot of character development.
- The images are very detailed and involved in the story

Batman: Arkham Asylum, by Grant Morrison and Dave McKean

- It's a "drop in" story, so you don't need as much backstory. Just a basic understanding of the universe. It's outside the normal continuity
- Art work is major appeal
 - Includes photography and painted panels
 - Very jarring
 - Every character has a different lettering style
 - Some people had problems reading the lettering.
 - More like a work of art than a normal graphic novel
 - Very weird and off putting, but since the storyline deals with insanity, it fits perfectly.
- "What would Batman's nightmare be?"
 - It's a horror novel
- Some people really enjoyed the part of the story that deal with how the asylum was built. The history of the Arkham family.

Earth One, Vol. 1, by J. Michael Straczynski and Shane Davis

- Lots of colours with subtle shading
 - Lots of light and dark – not all dark/shadows/black
- Start out with a new Superman, so you don't need any backstory
 - However, he is full of angst
 - Also, he's hipper – a la Edward from *Twilight* series
 - Adds complexity to the Superman character

Identity Crisis, by Brad Meltzer and Rags Morales & Michael Bair

- Able to pick up outside of the normal continuity. You don't know the backstories, but can still follow along with the story.
- People liked
 - The twist at the end
 - That some of the superheroes were keeping secrets from others – not all united on all levels
 - There was a clique of people – “regular” superheroes instead of the super-superheroes
- Crossover because it is a murder mystery, and Brad Meltzer is a big name.

Alternative/Literary

Alternative Comics

- refers to any comics published by a non-mainstream, independent publisher starting in the 1980s (basically any publisher besides Marvel or DC: Fantagraphics, Drawn & Quarterly, Top Shelf, etc.) However, not all books published by independents are considered alternative—now it's more of a sensibility than anything else.
- evolved from the underground comics movement of 1960s and 1970s with creators such as R. Crumb
- triggered by Art Spiegelman and Francois Mouly's avant-garde anthology **Raw Love and Rockets** by Los Bros.Hernandez was hugely influential. This series wasn't on our list because there is not a great starting point for casual readers in the 30-year continuing story arc. Study member Mike suggests the L&R book *Locus* to fans of alternative comics, but says it is not something for comic book newcomers.
- Frequent attributes:
 - autobiographical
 - emotionally realistic
 - experimental
 - focused on daily life
 - deal with the offbeat or taboo
 - use stylized art
 - often black and white, or only hints of color
 - have single creators doing both the drawing and writing
 - include sex
 - explore the creator's unhappy childhoods
 - include dark comedy, parody, and satire

You need to check before you put these in teen. They can be sexually explicit, are often edgy, and can even edge over into “gross.”

Alternative comics are analogous to literary fiction, featuring more attention to visual language (artwork) and character development. The artwork runs the gamut from being highly elaborate to spare stick figures. These graphic novels are increasingly reviewed and receive acclaim in mainstream publications such as *The New York Times*, and creators such as Daniel Clowes, Chris Ware, Seth and others frequently contribute to the *Times* and the *New Yorker*. A good source for reading more about alt comics is the periodical *Comics Journal*.

As the genre study is progressing, readers should begin thinking what they do and don't like in the medium. We're starting to get a sense of some overall "appeal factors" for readers—whether the artwork/layout is clear or complex (affecting the degree of difficulty in entering narratives), a preference for less or more text, optimistic vs. pessimistic outlooks (the alt comics we read veer toward the pessimistic), etc.

Books read:

Benchmark: **Ghost World**, by Daniel Clowes

Ghost World was originally serialized in Clowes comic anthology *Eightball* and then released as a GN in 1997, with some variances with what originally appeared in the comic. This was one of the first alternative comics to break through in mainstream visibility, thanks in part to the 2001 film adaptation co-written by Clowes. The movie did a good job of capturing the book and remained true to the delivery, although there were changes in plot and character. The book ticks off many of the items listed on the common attributes list above. Even though the characters are older teens, this feels more like an adult book. Overall there is a timeless quality – the eternal teenage problem of figuring out what you like for itself, not because it's popular. May have cross over potential for people who like quirky characters, but the visuals aren't "pretty."

Jimmy Corrigan by Chris Ware

Felt somewhat overwhelming to many with its meticulous detail and grim and oppressive atmosphere in all the storylines. There are a number of pages with no text. Some people read faster as a result, some read slower. The rules of how to read aren't clear, which made reading a more challenging (some would say uncomfortable) experience. Perhaps the panels with no text translate to silence and make it even more bleak. The hook is really the art. Ware is local (he lives in Oak Park) and is the most acclaimed comic book artist working today.

Black Hole by Charles Burns

Although it is more plot-driven than the others, the plot is still odd and disturbing. The overall tone and outlook is still hopelessness. It's an apocalyptic where no one cares that the world is ending.

La Perdida by Jessica Abel

Lots of dialog, and more fast moving than many of the others. Perhaps more upbeat as a result.

The art and the abundance of text create a more free-flowing world. The art and story worked well together to create the setting.

It's a Good Life, If You Don't Weaken by Seth

A quiet novel. It is somewhat gloomy, and the art is more memorable than the plot. It was originally assumed to be autobiographical, until he finally admitted it wasn't – causing something of a controversy.

Habibi by Craig Thompson

It drew a lot of people in with the lush art work. Interesting use of text that becomes images. Has crossover for people interested in Middle East.

Asterios Polyp by David Mazzucchelli

The art is not restrained by panels at all. One of the more optimistic books on the list, although the ending wasn't upbeat. There is some room for ambiguity in the ending.

Essex County by Jeff Lemire

Interconnected stories of family life set in a small Ontario community. Voted one of the best Canadian books of the decade by readers. Excellent job of setting a mood – quiet melancholy, very poignant.

Extra titles:

Shortcomings, by Adrian Tomine

Kind of like **Ghost World** – A 20-30 year old Japanese male with Korean girlfriend deals with his angst-ridden life and racial issues.

Berlin: City of Stone and **Berlin: City of Smoke** by Jason Lutes

A historical and literary series telling the story of a family in a quietly sympathetic way, set during the Weimar Republic. Good for crossovers.

Nonfiction/Memoir

Nonfiction & Biography/Memoir Graphic Novels

This month we discussed Graphic Novels that aren't novels. They have always existed, but have really taken off in the last two decades.

We discussed how people handled shelving these books at their libraries:

- Interfile with nonfiction
 - Some were in their subject area while others were in arts regardless of the actual topic

- Interfile with adult graphic novels by authors last name
- Separate adult graphic novel nonfiction section
- In a perfect universe, would have a copy in with the graphic novels and with the generic nonfiction

Nonfiction

Nonfiction graphic novels are good at distilling complex topics down to few points. They are good at taking big ideas and make them understandable.

Benchmark would have been Joe Sacco. Joe Sacco is for people who like journalism more than who like history. Also would appeal to documentary lovers or those who like nonfiction in a film format. Try him on a display of war correspondents.

Footnotes in Gaza, by Joe Sacco

Lots of detailed drawings; Since the violence is visual, it has a lot of impact; The visual medium creates a lot of individuality in the characters; Plot goes back into the 1950s to research the roots of the stories; He did have to simplify the situation, which actually makes it a good gateway, introduction, to what happened; He inserts himself into the story – part of the story is him trying to find information

Journalism, by Joe Sacco

A lot of snippets – really a collection of stories, an anthology; Really bad stuff happens to the characters which makes it very intense; He is talking to refugees in most of the places he is going into; His drawings bring out the intensity of the devastation that happened to the people

Safe Area Gorazde, by Joe Sacco

Definitely inserts himself in the story – the plot starts out part memoir of him discovering what happened in the town; About half way through the story goes back and tells the history of the Bosnian war

The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone on the Media, by Brooke Gladstone and Josh Neufeld

Excellent presented in a graphic novel format; Reused panels to show that history is repeating itself; Excellent textbook for Communications 101; Heavily footnoted – very reliable source;

Give to media geeks; Skokie did for a book discussion and it worked well; Tells the history of communications and history of current events; Very accessible

The Stuff of Life: A graphic Guide to Genetics and DNA, by Mark Schultz, Zander Cannon and Kevin Cannon

Some people found it accessible, others found it not very accessible; Vocabulary was daunting and cramming a lot of information into a small space; However, people with a science background would like it; Everyone enjoyed the narrator, and his optimism; Give to popular science readers, Bill Bryson readers, and NOVA fans; More dense than **Influencing Machine**; Text heavy

Harvey Pekar's Cleveland, by Harvey Pekar and Joseph Remnant

Very text heavy; Very dry; Like reading a history text; Enjoyed his story more than the history of Cleveland section; Overall thought it was boring; Drawing was well done – sketchy style

Rick Geary

Teen level introduction to true crime stories; Drawings reminiscent of old newspaper drawings – woodcut style; Black and white seems to make the violence less gruesome; might work for people who like English mystery stories because they often get based on true crimes; pretty straightforward

Biography/Memoir

Benchmark would have been Harvey Pekar, who was the first to come out with bio/memoir in the 1970s

21: The Story of Roberto Clemente, by Wilfred Santiago

Layout somewhat confusing; Images help carry the story; Good general overview of his life; While good for baseball fans, though they might not learn anything new; Good for teens

Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic, by Alison Bechdel

A lot of emotions in her characters; Stylized way of drawing; Black and white plus a single colour; Very self-indulgent; Mixed reaction to liking or not; Mixed reaction regarding liking the sequel **Are You My Mother?**

Persepolis, by Marjane Satrapi

Stylized, atypical, way of drawing; Remains a contemporary read; Very personal story; Some humour which makes it easier to relate to; From a secular point of view of how to deal with an oppressive regime; Very accessible; So accessible it is hard to understand why it gets banned

Stitches, by David Small

Excellent flow between the text and the images; Images reinforce the starkness of the text; Mood is dark, angry, rage; His “therapy book”; Can be done for a book group; Give to teens who like **Child Called It** or adults who liked **Glass Castle**; May be a better introduction to graphic novels than **Persepolis** because the drawings are less stylized

Relish: My Life in the Kitchen, Lucy Knisley

Everyone liked the pictures and artwork; Disagreement about the text; Writing is simplistic and childlike; Can either be read as sweet/delightful or too childlike/boring; Artwork was a big draw

Additional Titles/Authors

My Friend Dahmer, by Derf Backderf

Well drawn; Gripping story; Author grew up with Jeffrey Dahmer and was friends with him; Give to anyone who has ever had a weird friend or a teenaged friend who was obsessed with something weird

Guy Delisle

Goes to very conflicted war town places; Learn about places you don't know much about; **Pyongyang** is favourite; Travel memoirs; Doesn't give the history or a lot about the people; Just his experiences

Jeffrey Brown

Does memoirs that are funny; David Sedaris of the graphic novel world; **Darth Vader and Son**; Local author

Feynman by Jim Ottaviani and Leland Myrick

Compelling graphic biography of the Nobel-winning physicist

Trinity: A Graphic History of the Atom Bomb by Jonathan Fetter-Vorm

Weirdly popular at some libraries!

Genre Pick-'em

We discussed reading genre graphic novels from two different approaches:

- Fans of genre prose fiction reading that genre in graphic format
- Non fans of the genre in prose fiction reading the genre in graphic format

- Genre graphic novels have a narrative quality that really appealed – more like reading a short story or watching an episode of TV
- Unlike the Superhero graphic novels, the series had a starting point and some of the series even had an ending point
- Most all written for adults – contained sex and violence – unlike the Superheroes graphic novels which generally had to appeal to both Teens and Adults

Overall, we agreed that sometimes if you weren't a fan of the prose genre you could still be a fan of the graphic novel form of the genre. For the same reasons, some fans of the genre may find their favorite elements lacking in the graphic novel version of the genre. In particular

- Graphic novel genre fiction skips over the slow, long build up to set the place. Instead it jumps right in and establishes the setting with just a few images.
- In graphic novel genre fiction the language becomes less primary and important. So if you read for language and style, you may be less satisfied by graphic novel versions. Graphic Novels are more likely to appeal to people who like the TV show equivalent which is short and episodic.
- However, character is still just as important in graphic novel genre fiction. If you don't care about the character, it is hard to get drawn into the story, or series.
- Speculative Fiction (Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror) prose readers are generally more open to trying graphic novels than other genre readers. So it may be easier to hand sell cross-over formats to this group. Always remember to put graphic novels on these displays.

HORROR

- The fact that the graphic novels are shorter makes them more palatable to people who don't like being scared. So it may be easier to interest people who don't like horror prose fiction in graphic novel versions.

- Whether in prose or graphic novel, the two most important elements are atmosphere and character
- The atmosphere has to be established right away, although that may be easier to do quickly with the images and the color palate
- If you don't care about the characters, you won't care that someone is trying to kill them or threatening them. This is true in graphic novels as well as in prose

American Vampire, by Scott Snyder, Stephen King, and Rafael Albuquerque
Felt as much like a western as horror, which combines with the short format to make it accessible to people who don't like horror; Even though the leads are violent, blood thirsty vampires, they have a moral code; Unique in that it has a strong female lead

Locke & Key: Welcome to Lovecraft, by Joe Hill and Gabriel Rodriguez
Wonderful graphics, which really make the horror element; Probably the best horror graphic novel out right now; Series has a definite end point; Lots of imagery and symbolism

The Walking Dead: Days Gone Bye, by Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore
Zombie apocalypse may not scare everyone, but the gore of killing the zombies might make it more horror; The Post-apocalypse story draws the reader in; Reader really comes to care about the characters and the interactions between them; Almost becomes a soap opera set in a post-apocalyptic world that happens to have zombies as a threat. The most popular graphic novels right now, especially with the TV show tie-in

Revival: You're Among Friends, by Tim Seeley and Mike Norton
Reminiscent of **The Returned** by Jason Mott; Genre blend of horror and crime; Horror and crime; It's a mystery of why people have come back; Rural noir; The story is eerie, but not really frightening

SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY

Saga, by Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples
Romeo and Juliet meets *Star Wars*; Doesn't take a lot of pages to set up the world and backstory, just jumps right in; Broad appeal across ages and backgrounds; The characters have hope and are likeable; The characters are easy to relate to; The storyline isn't as dark as a lot of what we've discussed; The graphics are beautiful; Along with *Walking Dead*, the most popular genre graphic novel series right now.

DMZ, by Brian Wood, Riccardo Burchielli, and Brian Azzarello

May appeal to fans of **The Walking Dead**; Similar Post-Apocalyptic feel, but with parts of America having risen up in a civil war; A photojournalist is the hero reporting from the middle of the war zone

Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes, by Neil Gaiman, Sam Kieth, Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III

Very strong world building, that draws you in and makes you wonder how the everlasting ones will all fit together; Reminds you of Greek mythology; Reminiscent of **American Gods**; Feels more like reading legends than pure fantasy

Unwritten: Tommy Taylor and the Bogus Identity, by Mike Carey and Peter Gross

Reminiscent of *Harry Potter*; Draws in a lot of literary themes and allusions

Fables: Legends in Exile, by Bill Willingham, James Jean, and Alex Maleev

Familiar fairy tale characters may make it more accessible to non-fantasy fans; Genre blending mystery element; *Grimm* and *Once Upon a Time* TV Shows fans may enjoy the series

ACTION/ADVENTURE

- Action Adventure novels are read for plot, but without enjoyable characters, people really weren't enjoying the graphic novels. Character seemed to still be the most important element in the graphic novel.

The Adventures of Tintin, by Herge

Written for plot; Characters don't grow or change; Revered in Europe, but less of a following in America; Some of the adventures were dated by their social viewpoints; While originally written for children, may have some themes that aren't currently considered child-safe

Casanova: Luxuria, by Matt Fraction and Gabriel Ba

Time Travel elements can make for a confusing plot; A tale of spy and counter spy, but a lot of time jumping and multiple time lines; Humor reminiscent of **Burn Notice**; Was hard to care about the characters

Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life, by Bryan Lee O'Malley

Hero is a bit of a jerk, so it's hard to care about the hero (gets easier as series progresses); Secondary characters are much more enjoyable; Crosses a lot of genres; Couldn't be told as a

prose novel, has to be a graphic novel; Great for fans of **Ready Player One**, by Ernest Cline with a lot of pop culture references; Also for fans of **Big Bang Theory** – cool to be nerdy

CRIME

Richard Stark's Parker: The Hunter, by Dawyn Cooke and Richard Stark

Graphic novel version of Donald Westlake crime noir novels; The visuals really set the 1960s New York feel; The graphics are very stylized; The story is very predictable, but still enjoyable; The readers who don't like noir crime novels liked the graphic novel version better because it was faster and the visual descriptions instead of verbal details; The readers who love Richard Stark missed the language that is part of the prose writing

Chew: Taster's Choice, by John Layman and Rob Guillory

Genre blending crime with science fiction; Has the limiter of the gruesomeness of eating human flesh; So improbable that the humor overcomes the darkness; Appeal of the procedural aspects; Appeal to apocalyptic fans; Unique world with an interesting setup

Scapled: Indian Country by Jason Aaron and R. M. Guera

Very violent plus has the bleakness of the Indian reservation; Would definitely appeal to mystery fans; A lot of politics and a lot of backstory; However, the images are dark and hard to distinguish; Could easily be made into a TV show

100 Bullets: First Shot Last Call, by Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso

Interesting setup with a puppet master and a briefcase with a gun and 100 bullets; 100 short setups of different scenarios; Each volume contains multiple vignettes each of a different bullet

Manga and Wrap-up

Manga notes

- Manga experiences significant growth in Japan following WWII. The most influential creator was Osamu Tezuka, whose drawings were somewhat influenced by Disney animation.

- Weekly manga magazines begin to boom in the 1950s and 60s. The thick, newsprint magazines can contain as many as 25 different serialized stories that run about 20 pages each. The most popular series then get repackaged as paperback graphic novels.
- Japanese comics are read by everyone, male and female, young and old, and there are numerous genres and subgenres
- Japanese comics and characters are owned by the artists (unlike famous American comics characters which are owned by the publishing company)
- Manga are hugely influential on popular culture in Japan, often providing the basis for films and video game adaptations
- U.S. manga boom began in the mid-2000s, as they began getting distributed in Waldenbooks and Borders and anime series based on manga were aired by Cartoon Network.
- In recent years U.S. manga sales have declined, partly because of the demise of Borders, partly because of less anime programming on TV, partly because of the rise of “scanlation” pirate sites that give readers access to manga online, translated by Japanese fans
- Although the market is smaller now there are some signs that sales and interest has stabilized

Wrap-up

What did you find out about your own reading habits/assumptions?

- What did you like/not like?

What ways can we have conversations with new and established readers?

- Determine someone’s aesthetics

Has the way you would booktalk a graphic novel changed?

What are some of the appeal factors that are specific to the format?

- Artwork/layout sparse or busy
- Amount of white space
- Text/image ratio
- B&W versus color
- Tone

How can we bring new readers to the format?

- Displays
- Subject interest

- Visual learners
- Highlight outside reviews
- Add a title to book discussions

Easier with teens—adults more steadfast about what they will or won't read