

and Teen Reading Literacy

Hina and Inu Yasha, and *Kare Kano*) and humour (*Oh, my goddess*) seem to be in high demand too.

Their wide subject coverage and interest levels make graphic novels appealing to a diverse range of readers. Reluctant readers as well as experienced readers look forward to the next title to hit the shelf. As Jeff McQuillan suggests in *The Literacy Crisis*, “providing a rich supply of reading matter to children of all ages, as well as a place and time to read, is the first step to bridging the gap between poor and good readers.” (86)

Graphic novels are cross-curricular in content and this makes them great tools for supporting literacy in every subject. Whether it is in history, math, social studies, career studies, or religion, graphic novels can be incorporated into the curriculum for a novel study unit, especially in open classes with reluctant or unmotivated readers. In collaboration with class teachers, the teacher-librarian could design novel study assignments and select appropriate titles for particular subjects.

Teacher-librarians face challenges when building good graphic novel collections. One of the challenges is acquiring an appealing and balanced collection that will meet the diverse needs and interests of our teens. Another challenge is selecting good titles that could be incorporated into the school curriculum. A greater challenge for teacher-librarians in Catholic schools may have to do with content appropriateness, so as not to undermine the tone of Catholic teachings and morals. Such challenges require very careful selection guidelines based primarily on the needs of each individual school. Therefore, a teacher-librarian or a selection team, with adequate training or experience in resource selection and a good knowledge of student needs, is crucial. Lacking this, the selection team needs the expertise of an experienced graphic novel vendor.

Granted that graphic novels appeal to a diverse range of students, and that they are a great way to promote pleasure reading, they can also be very problematic. The market is flooded with graphic novels portraying violence, nudity, sexual behav-

our, and often full of obscene language. A graphic depiction of extreme sexual impropriety and killing can be too explicit or direct. One could even argue that the content of these materials may affect the behaviour of the reader. Therefore, this poses a challenge to the teacher-librarian in a Catholic school library who intends to add diverse graphic-driven literature to the school library collection. Web sites such as libraries.darkhorse.com provide reviews and ratings for age appropriateness.

While some reading materials require promotion to attract teen readers, graphic novels have never needed such promotion. While “events aren’t really necessary to promote graphic novel collection, but simply add to the excitement over it,” (MacDonald 20) it is important for the teacher-librarian to create that excitement and sustain it. Promotional strategies might include book displays, newsletters, staff meetings, booktalks, posters, anime and book clubs, and other inspiring events. The teacher-librarian should designate a colourfully decorated area for graphic novels. It is important to make that area user-friendly and appealing to teens. As new titles are acquired, the teaching librarian should display them to create awareness before they are finally shelved. A list of new or popular titles could be electronically mailed to the teachers and advertised through the library Web site and/or the school newsletter.

Thematic booktalks are also great ways to promote graphic novels. While at staff meetings or in class, a teacher-librarian could show graphic novels that are curriculum related. This will serve the dual purpose of informing “both the teacher and the students that graphic novels are a legitimate and valuable format and” letting “the students know that the library has graphic novels available for check out.” (Gorman 20)

Through the anime and book clubs, the teacher-librarian could easily promote the titles that are available in the library collection. Club members could be given a special tour and even encouraged to hold their meetings in that area of the library. This gives the teacher-librarian an opportunity to highlight other related titles such