There's no denying it, everyone in the library business seems to be talking about graphic novels. An object of delight, passion and enjoyment, an object of repugnance, fear or concern; most teacher-librarians have an opinion about these books. In this new regular feature of *The Teaching Librarian*, we'll talk about some of the issues surrounding graphic novels and review some recommended titles (including age guidelines).

The term "graphic novel" was coined by one of the pioneers of the genre, Will Eisner, to describe his 1978 creation, *A Contract With God and Other Tenement Stories*. They are works told in a comic style format. At first the term referred only to fiction and non-serialized literature, but it now incorporates many genres and a wide variety of subjects. Writers such as Allyson Lyga, Philip Crawford and Scott McCloud have developed more thorough definitions that are worth exploring.

Graphic novels, like videos and magazines, can be used for recreational and educational purposes. The theme for this issue is Across the Curriculum and so we highlight just four of many titles that can be used to deliver subject content.

The Great Graph Contest
by Loreen Leedy,
ISBN: 0823417107

Grade: 1 +
Curriculum Connection:
   Math

Gonk the toad and Beezy the lizard are having a contest to see who can make the best graphs. The friends use different scenarios (e.g., favourite pies, surveying people at a store) and different graph types (e.g., quantity graph, bar graph, Venn diagram) to compete.
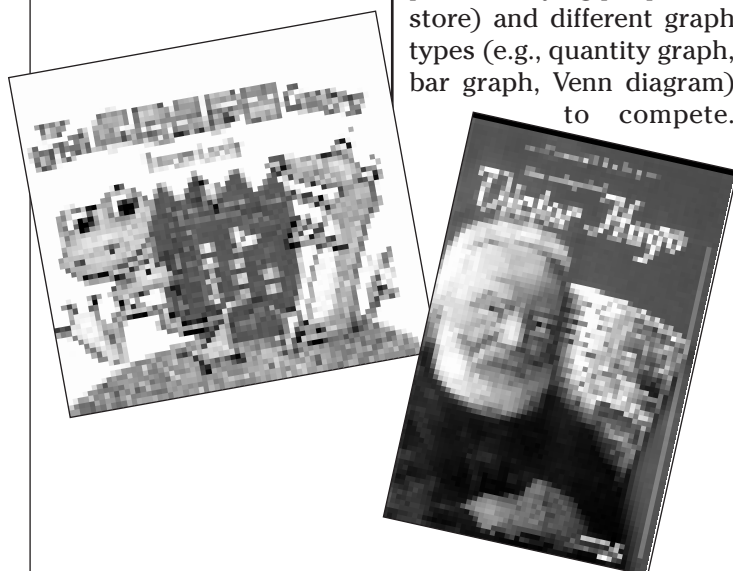
The snail judge, Chester, declares it a tie, using his own chart and graph. As the inside jacket blurb states, "Clear examples, step-by-step instructions, and plenty of comic relief make this guide to a vital part of math curriculum fun as well as fundamental."

I don't know if "graphic novel purists" would count this as a graphic novel / comic because there aren't exactly panels (panels are those boxes the pictures in comics are contained in, and occasionally break out of). Still, I'm willing to welcome it into the canon of good graphic novels. The author/illustrator does a lovely job of varying her pictures with the use of real photographs and cartoon characters. The back of the book points out some things to watch for when making graphs; for instance, if making a bar graph out of real cookies, it is important for the cookies to be the same thickness for the results to be accurate.

Comics Poetry: The Adapted Victor Hugo
ISBN: 1561633909

Grade: 11 +
Curriculum Connection:
   English, Visual Arts

Comics Poetry: The Adapted Victor Hugo features 13 of the author's poems illustrated in comic style.

Each poem has its own illustrator who takes a different approach to the work, and the only text in the comics comes from the poem.

For those of you who sat through English class and found poetry perplexing, a graphic representation would have been (and is) a welcome treat that can help the reader through difficult passages. It was fascinating to compare the visuals in my head with those of the artists. I don't know if reading this book will alter forever my mental conception of the poems, like my personal image of *Harry Potter* now replaced by actor Daniel Radcliffe's face. It did help me comprehend some of the denser text. I'd love to have this kind of book for Shakespeare's sonnets or another poet's work. Victor Hugo's work (think *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, but not the Disney version) is quite dark, and the illustrations can be ominous. Some poems are violent and others have sexual overtones. People and animals are shot at close range and from afar. War scenes involve gruesome views of missing limbs and carnage. Two comics contain bare-breasted women (no genitals) in provocative poses. This compelling book is recommended for students aged 16 and over.