

Check It Out! Graphic Novels Break the Shelf!

CRASH! BANG!

“Excuse me Miss Faraj. I just want to get a book off the shelf there.”

Moving the chart stand and two chairs that are blocking the shelf, I encourage the student to go ahead while I continue the Grade 6 research lesson. Out of the corner of my eye, I see another student tiptoeing along the perimeter of the room to join his friend who has given the “all clear” signal to approach the graphic novel shelf.

It hasn't always been a covert mission for students to get to the books. But to understand the adventure, we'll have to go back to the beginning...

For two years, the graphic novels sat on a shelf on top of the magazine rack in my library. It doesn't seem that long ago now, but there was a time when space for only twenty books was enough for the graphic novels—and that was when all the books were on the shelf. Then, seemingly overnight, the collection grew and the magazine counter no longer offered enough space. It was time to find a new home for the graphic novel section.

Budget restraints meant I had to purchase a low cost shelf and, to no one's surprise, it proved inadequate. Sadly, it just fell apart, unable to handle so many eager middle schoolers leaning on it, sifting through the books looking for their favourite new graphic novels. If the shelf could talk, I'm sure it would say that, while it was great to be popular, it really needed more support to handle all the attention.

So, with the best of intentions, I sent the broken shelf to the woodpile and started looking for a new, sturdier one. But where could I put all the books in the meantime? I didn't have money to purchase a new shelf right away, and there was no longer enough room for the graphic novels on the magazine rack.

The collection had grown from twenty books to four shelves of graphic novels! Gazing across the library, pondering the problem, I spotted some shelving space that would do as a temporary home until I could find the money to buy permanent shelving for our growing—and very popular—graphic novel collection.

I have to say that one of the coolest parts of being a teacher-librarian is being there in the moment when students discover books they want to read; because the new shelf happens to stand in the middle of my teaching area, I find myself there, at that moment, with increasing frequency. In fact, the new graphic novel shelf is just beneath the screen on which I project my lessons. Sometimes, students have to manoeuvre around furniture because, as we all know, to create a drama space, the chairs and tables need to be pushed to the side. But I have to keep reminding everyone, please, not in front of the shelf.

“Excuse me, Ms. Faraj, can I go to the bookshelf?”

Now middle school readers don't always want to be announced to the world, especially in front of a Grade 8 class. So when I spot the students making their way down the non-fiction bookshelves, hoping no one will notice them, I simply move the chart stand out of the way, and continue teaching, letting the students get to the shelf without any interruption.

A funny thing about the graphic novel section is the fact that the library helpers rush over to that shelf first. Why? Well, it is true that the shelves always need to be organized—there's always a book party on these shelves and clean up has to be done before the next book party, which generally happens within the next twenty minutes—and series have to be put in order. But I suspect the real reason for the helpers' enthusiasm is the possibility of finding books to read, and the opportunity to check whether the books they want are available.