

Graphic Novels in Libraries Supporting Teacher Education and Librarianship Programs

By Virginia Kay Williams and Damen V. Peterson

Academic libraries supporting education and library science programs collect juvenile literature to support courses that teach students to evaluate and use books with children and teenagers. Graphic novels have not only become popular with teens but also are being frequently discussed in both the education and library literature. This paper discusses the literature on graphic novels for teens, explores the extent to which academic libraries supporting education and library science programs collect graphic novels for teens, and concludes that academic librarians responsible for juvenile collections should evaluate their graphic novel holdings and begin actively collecting graphic novels for teens.

Two decades ago, graphic novels were virtually unknown to librarians and educators, but during the last decade graphic novels exploded in popularity and began to appear regularly on recommended book lists. By 1994, the Library of Congress Authority File included graphic novels as an authorized subject heading.¹ As librarians noticed that teenagers, traditionally a hard audience to reach, read graphic novels, the library literature began to feature lists of good graphic novels, tips on developing graphic novel collections, and anecdotes about teenagers' insatiable demand for graphic novels. By 2005, several library journals had regular columns on graphic novels for young adult collections, and articles on using graphic novels in the classroom were appearing in education journals.

The current study began when one of the authors, a former high school librarian, noticed the excitement about graphic novels and reluctantly decided to read a few highly recommended titles to update her knowledge of young adult literature. None of the titles she wished to read were available in the university library's juvenile collection even though the university library supported a large teacher education program with courses in both children's and young adult literature. Juvenile literature courses are a staple of teacher education because future teachers must learn to select and use books with the students they will be teaching just as future librarians learn about selecting and marketing books to library users. The former high school librarian mentioned her inability to find the desired titles to a colleague who read graphic novels for pleasure; he was unsurprised because his personal experience was that graphic novels were more often found in stores than libraries.

If both the education and library literature discuss graphic novels for teens, academic libraries supporting education and library science programs should provide graphic novels for students in those programs to examine and evaluate. The authors decided to investigate whether academic libraries that support teacher education and library science programs have been collecting graphic novels for teens.

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Literature Review

According to Rothschild, Will Eisner coined the term *graphic novel* in 1978 as a description of his book *Contract with God*, but people still disagree about just what a graphic novel is.² Eisner, who had worked with comics for more than forty years, used graphic novel as a marketing term; he later explained that he wanted to distinguish his series of illustrated stories about a Jewish family in the Great Depression from comic books to improve his chances of finding a publisher.³ Eisner referred to graphic novels as “sequential art,” but Weiner called them “book-length comic books that are meant to be read as one story.”⁴ Goldsmith, who defines graphic novels as “storytelling through . . . sequential art,” distinguishes them from comic books by saying that graphic novels present a story with a distinct beginning and end, even when that story is told in multiple volumes, while comic books are serials with a limitless number of episodes.⁵ People sometimes confuse manga with graphic novels. The term manga refers to Japanese comic books, which may be fiction or nonfiction; translated manga and graphic novels are often displayed together in stores and libraries.⁶

No doubt some of the confusion stems from the connotations of *graphic* and *novel*. Although *novel* suggests fiction, the term *graphic novel* describes the format of the books, not their content; nonfiction graphic novels range from Jay Hosler’s *Clan Apis*, which describes bee behavior, to Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*, an autobiographical account of growing up in Iran.⁷ While “graphic” suggests sexually explicit content in some contexts, graphic novels may be appropriate for any age. The research described in this paper focused on graphic novels for teenagers, but some graphic novels are appropriate for elementary school children, while others are definitely for adults.⁸ The graphic novel format has been growing in popularity and acceptance. In 2002, graphic novel sales in the United States were \$110 million, but only two years later sales had almost doubled to \$207 million.⁹ According to popular culture business news source ICv2.com, graphic novel sales rose to \$395 million in 2008.¹⁰ Graphic novels have become so well established that Barr and Harbison list them as a distinct category of American book production in the *Bowker Annual*, with production increasing from 1,826 titles in 2004 to 7,717 in 2007.¹¹ Graphic novels also have won literary awards; for example, Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* won a special Pulitzer in 1992, Gene Luan Yang’s *American Born Chinese* won the Michael L. Printz Award and was a National Book Award finalist, and Brian Selznick’s *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* won the Caldecott Medal.¹² Figure 1 shows the cover of *American Born Chinese* and offers one example of the images found in graphic novels. By 2005, graphic novels were being regularly reviewed in journals frequently used by public and school librarians, including *Booklist*, *Library Journal*, *Publisher’s*

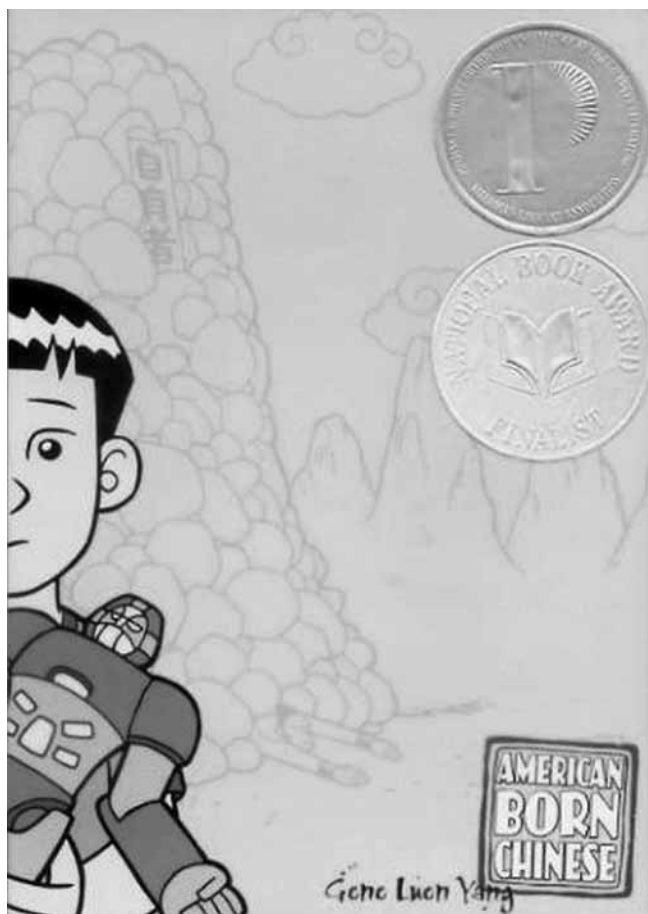


Figure 1. Cover of *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang (reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company).

Weekly, and *School Library Journal*.¹³ In 2007, the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) introduced a new annual list of recommended books, Great Graphic Novels for Teens (www.ala.org/yalsa/ggnt).¹⁴

For several years, graphic novels have been a popular topic among librarians. YALSA sponsored the “Get Graphic @ your library” preconference at the 2002 American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference. Goldsmith, who had expected to lead a small discussion on bibliographic control issues, later reported that she was amazed to find the room filled with roughly seventy-five librarians eager to discuss how to manage graphic novels.¹⁵ Many articles about developing collections have appeared, ranging from Welch’s self-described boastful one on the Cleveland Public Library’s constantly growing and heavily used collection to Behler’s serious article on how to start a collection with an annotated list of selection tools.¹⁶ A number of books about graphic novels also have been published; for, example, Rothschild’s 1995 annotated bibliography and Pawuk’s 2007 entry in the Genreflecting series would be useful for reader’s advisory and retrospective collection development.¹⁷ Heaney

reviewed the literature on graphic novels in school library media centers, discussing many of the articles that explain why graphic novels should be included in school libraries, while high school librarian Ching noted that graphic novels accounted for more than 17 percent of circulations even though only 1.5 percent of her library's collection was graphic novels.¹⁸ Haines used the graphic novel format to discuss the decisions involved in starting a graphic novel collection at the University of Michigan.¹⁹ Greyson discussed some of the intellectual freedom and censorship issues that librarians should consider when developing graphic novel collections for teens.²⁰

Graphic novels also have been discussed in the education literature during the last decade. Education professors Bucher and Manning discussed the types of graphic novels, defined the characteristics of quality graphic novels, and suggested some ways to use them in middle and high school classrooms.²¹ Schwarz, who taught high school before becoming an education faculty member, explained how graphic novels can be used to develop both text and visual literacy and suggested strategies for incorporating graphic novels into high school classes.²² Frey and Fisher described using graphic novels as writing prompts for English-language learners and native English speakers struggling with high school writing.²³ Crawford and Christensen identified specific titles that can be used in high school social studies classrooms, while Cromer and Clark discussed the format's possibilities for helping students understand that historical events are subject to interpretation.²⁴ High school teachers Cohen and Peery described a literature unit on women in Islam, which used several genres, including the first chapter of Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis*, to explore Islamic culture and examine their biases.²⁵ O'English, Matthews, and Lindsay acknowledged in an article on graphic novels in academic libraries that education students need to learn how to identify appropriate graphic novels for classroom use.²⁶

Research Questions

Although this research began from an interest in learning about the extent to which academic juvenile collections support teacher education students in learning about the relatively new genre of graphic novels, it was expanded to consider the extent to which academic library collections support library science programs that also prepare students to work with teenagers and books. Five questions guided this research project:

- Do academic libraries that support teacher education programs collect graphic novels recommended for teenagers?

- Do academic libraries that support library science programs collect graphic novels recommended for teenagers?
- Are graphic novel collections different in different regions of the United States?
- Are graphic novel collections different in libraries that have different size collections?
- Are graphic novel collections different in libraries in institutions with different Carnegie classifications?

Research Methods

The authors used the list-checking method to determine the extent to which academic libraries collect graphic novels for teens. As Porta and Lancaster noted, the first problem in evaluating collections by list checking is the selection or creation of a bibliography that represents the types of books the library's users are likely to seek.²⁷

The authors selected the Great Graphic Novels for Teens (GGNT) list, prepared annually by the YALSA, as a representative list of quality books appropriate for academic libraries that collect graphic novels to support teacher education and library science programs. A committee of eleven school and public librarians select the titles. Criteria for inclusion on the list include quality, appeal to ages twelve to eighteen, publication during the sixteen months preceding the award, and wide availability in the United States. All types of graphic novels are eligible; the only limitation is that comic book compilations must "contain an overarching story arc."²⁸

The authors examined library holdings for two groups of institutions: those with programs accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and those with programs accredited by the ALA. As of August 1, 2008, NCATE accredited 652 institutions and ALA accredited 49, with 27 having programs accredited by both groups. The authors determined library holdings by searching each title in OCLC WorldCat between August 5 and August 15, 2008. For institutions with multiple libraries, holdings for any education libraries or library science programs, as well as the main library, were considered. The authors also searched each institution on the Carnegie Foundation website and recorded the basic Carnegie classification.²⁹

The authors compiled the checklist from the 2007 and 2008 GGNT lists. Graphic novels published in series, with several volumes having an overall story arc, presented two challenges. First, the GGNT lists treated these titles inconsistently; in some cases they recognized a specific volume, while in others they recognized several volumes, or no volume was indicated. Second, WorldCat often contained multiple records for the titles because some libraries have

Table 1. Graphic Novel Holdings by Accreditation Type

No. of Titles Held	All Institutions		ALA-Accredited		NCATE-Accredited	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
0	168	25	7	14	166	26
1	105	16	3	6	105	16
2	68	10	3	6	66	10
3	52	8	1	2	52	8
4	39	6	5	10	35	5
5	34	5	4	8	34	5
6	31	5	1	2	30	5
7	24	4	2	4	23	4
8	22	3	4	8	18	3
9	18	3	1	2	18	3
10–19	82	12	9	18	79	12
20–29	15	2	3	6	13	2
30–39	7	1	5	10	4	1
40–49	1	0	0	0	1	0
50–59	1	0	1	2	1	0
60–100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	667	100	49	98	645	100

Note: Twenty-seven institutions supported both ALA- and NCATE-accredited programs. Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

treated them as a serial and others have treated each volume as a monograph. When WorldCat includes both serial and monograph records, the authors recorded all holding codes for the serial and for each monographic volume included in the GGNT lists. When the GGNT lists included multiple volumes of a series, the authors treated them as a single work in determining holdings. When no volume was indicated for a series in the GGNT lists, the authors recorded holding codes for the serial record and the monographic record of the first volume. The 2007 GGNT list contained sixty-seven titles, while the 2008 list contained forty-three titles.³⁰ With multiple volumes of a series treated as a single work, the checklist contained a total of one hundred titles.

The authors compiled a data matrix showing which of the one hundred GGNT titles were held by each of the 667 institutions, then calculated the number of GGNT titles held by each institution. To determine the extent to which libraries supporting teacher education and library science

Table 2. Average Graphic Novels Held by Collection Size

Collection Size (in vols.)	No. of Institutions	Average No. of Graphic Novels Held
0–999,999	514	3.4
1,000,000–1,999,999	70	7.5
2,000,000–2,999,999	33	9.4
3,000,000–3,999,999	22	12.5
4,000,000–4,999,999	6	8.5
5,000,000–5,999,999	6	17.7
6,000,000–6,999,999	2	22.5
7,000,000–7,999,999	1	2.0
8,000,000–8,999,999	4	19.3
9,000,000–9,999,999	1	0.0
10,000,000–10,999,999	1	37.0
Total	660	4.8

Note: Collection size was not available for seven institutions.

programs collect graphic novels, the authors calculated the number and percentage of NCATE- and ALA-accredited institutions that held each possible number of GGNT checklist titles, from no holdings to all one hundred titles held. To determine whether a relationship exists between collection size and GGNT holdings, they calculated GGNT holdings per million volumes for each institution, then computed the coefficient of determination (r^2). To identify variations in GGNT holdings by geographic region and Carnegie classification, they calculated the average number of GGNT titles held by region and classification.

Findings

The authors checked library holdings for 667 institutions; these institutions held an average of 4.8 titles from the list of 100 GGNT titles. The number of GGNT holdings ranged from 0 to 58 titles held. Most institutions (84 percent) held fewer than 10 titles from the checklist, and a quarter held no GGNT titles. The University of Tennessee held the most with 58 titles from the list. See table 1 for complete data on holdings by type of institution.

GGNT holdings differed between ALA-accredited and NCATE-accredited institutions. The 49 ALA-accredited institutions held an average of 11.2 GGNT titles, while the 645 NCATE-accredited institutions held an average of

Table 3. Graphic Novel Holdings by Carnegie Classification

Basic Carnegie Classification	No. of GGNTs Held	No. of Institutions	Average GGNTs per Institution	No. Holding Zero GGNTs
Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts & Sciences	3	5	0.6	2
Baccalaureate Colleges—Diverse Fields	179	113	1.6	53
Baccalaureate/Associate's Colleges	188	65	2.9	17
Master's Colleges and Universities (smaller programs)	110	39	2.8	14
Master's Colleges and Universities (medium programs)	281	76	3.7	16
Master's Colleges and Universities (larger programs)	1,049	196	5.4	38
Doctoral/Research Universities	221	45	4.9	9
Research Universities (high research activity)	567	75	7.6	5
Research Universities (very high research activity)	597	51	11.7	13
Special Focus/Arts	4	1	4	0
Special Focus/Faith	0	1	0	1
Total	3199	667	4.8	168

4.6 GGNT titles; 27 institutions supported both ALA- and NCATE-accredited programs and are reported in both groups. A total of 166 (26 percent) of the NCATE-accredited institutions held no GGNT titles, but only 7 (14 percent) of the ALA-accredited institutions held none. While just 15.3 percent of the NCATE-accredited institutions held 10 or more GGNT titles, 36.7 percent of the ALA-accredited institutions held 10 or more.

The 27 institutions with both ALA- and NCATE-accredited programs held an average of 10.4 GGNT titles. The University of Tennessee, the only institution holding more than half the GGNT titles, has both NCATE-accredited and ALA-accredited programs, but 5 other institutions with programs accredited by both ALA and NCATE held none of the GGNT titles: Louisiana State University in Shreveport, North Carolina Central University, University of Missouri Columbia, University of Maryland College Park, and Universidad de Puerto Rico Rio Piedras Campus.

Examining the number of graphic novels per million volumes held revealed a mild ($r^2 = 0.32$) relationship between GGNT holdings and collection size. Larger collections tended to have more GGNTs; on average, the number of GGNTs held increased 2.4 for every additional million books in the collection. However, of the 24 institutions that held 20 or more GGNTs, 8 had total collection sizes of less than 1 million volumes, while the institution with the second largest collection held no GGNT titles (see table 2).

GGNT holdings also varied by the Carnegie classifications and geographical locations of the institutions. The average number of graphic novels held was 2 for institutions

Table 4. Graphic Novel Holdings by U.S. Regions

Region	No. of Institutions	Avg. No. of Graphic Novels	No. of Institutions with No GGNTs
Midwest	203	5.5	43
Northeast	104	4.9	20
South	289	3.8	98
West	71	6.9	7
Total	667	4.8	168

that primarily award bachelor's degrees, 4.63 for master's colleges and universities, and 8.1 for doctoral and research-oriented institutions, but there were some institutions with no GGNTs in any Carnegie classification except Special Focus/Arts (see table 3 for details on holdings by Carnegie classification). As table 4 shows, the average number of holdings per institution ranged from 3.8 in the southern United States to 6.9 in the western states. Every region had institutions with no GGNT holdings, ranging from almost 10 percent of institutions in the western states to one-third of institutions in the southern states. The authors noted that the University of Tennessee, which held the most GGNT titles, is a research-oriented institution in the southern region, making it an excellent example for teaching about why one should not generalize from a single data point.

Only 5 of the GGNT titles were not held by any of the

Table 5. Least Frequently and Most Frequently Held Titles

Great Graphic Novels for Teens, 2007 and 2008	No. of Holding Libraries
Ohba, Tsugumi, Takeshi Obata. <i>Death Note</i> , vol. 1–3. Viz Media, 2005–6.	0
Kyle, Craig. <i>Christopher Yost, and others. X-23: Innocence Lost</i> . Marvel Enterprises, 2006.	0
Urasawa, Naoki. <i>Herr Dr. Tenma: Naoki Urasawa's</i> , volume 1 of <i>Monster</i> . Viz Media, 2006.	0
Azuma, Kiyohiko. <i>Yotsuba&!</i> vol 4. Adv Manga, 2007.	0
Nakahara, Aya. <i>Love Com</i> , vol. 1. Viz Media/Shojo Beat, 2007.	0
Lat. <i>Kampung Boy</i> . Roaring Brook Pr./ First Second, 2006.	112
Varon, Sara. <i>Robot Dreams</i> . First Second, 2007.	119
McCloud, Scott. <i>Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels</i> . Harper Collins, 2006.	124
Jacobson, Sid and Ernie Colon. <i>The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation</i> . Hill and Wang, 2006.	173
Tan, Shaun. <i>The Arrival</i> . Arthur A. Levine, 2007.	227
Siegel, Siena Cherson and Mark Siegel. <i>To Dance: A Ballerina's Graphic Novel</i> . Simon and Schuster, 2006.	235
Yang, Gene Luen and Lark Pien. <i>American Born Chinese</i> . Roaring Brook Pr./ First Second, 2006.	322
Sis, Peter. <i>The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain</i> . Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2007.	367

libraries supporting NCATE– or ALA–accredited programs, while only 8 were held by at least 100 of those libraries. Analyzing collecting patterns for different types of graphic novels was beyond the scope of this paper, but the authors did note that 4 of the 5 titles held by none of the libraries in this study are part of multivolume series (see table 5 for a list of least and most frequently held titles).

Implications for Collection Development

This study relied on the list-checking method to evaluate the extent of graphic novel collections in academic libraries, so the results obtained should be considered in relation to the list used: the combined 2007 and 2008 Great Graphic Novels for Teens. GGNT consisted of 100 titles published between 2005 and 2007 selected by experienced school and

public young adult librarians for quality, appeal, and suitability for a teenage audience. Since the list used is both evaluative and focused on recent titles, one would expect a library that is actively collecting graphic novels to support teacher education and library programs to hold some of the titles. The finding that 14 percent of ALA–accredited and 26 percent of NCATE–accredited programs held no GGNT titles indicates that many of these libraries were not actively collecting graphic novels for teenagers. As the literature shows, graphic novels have not only proven popular with teenagers but also have been used in schools to teach literature, history, social awareness, and writing; academic library juvenile collections should provide examples so faculty, future teachers, and future librarians who read about graphic novels in their professional literature can find examples in their libraries.

The number or proportion of recommended titles held that indicates a strong collection is another factor to consider when using list checking to evaluate collections. The number of GGNT titles held ranged from 0 to 58, with ALA–accredited institutions holding an average of 11.2 percent of GGNT titles, while NCATE–accredited institutions held an average of 4.6 percent of GGNT titles. No generally accepted standard exists for the proportion of titles on a list that constitutes a strong collection. Since the list used contains only a small proportion of the graphic novels published during those years, some institutions likely hold other graphic novels that support their teacher education and library science programs. The authors would suggest that in the case of graphic novels, which are a relatively new and fast-growing genre, libraries that are collecting higher proportions of GGNT titles are more likely to be able to support assignments such as requiring all students enrolled in a juvenile or young adult literature class to read and evaluate a graphic novel.

As tables 2, 3, and 4 show, library science students, students at doctoral and research-oriented institutions, and students in the western United States are more likely to find graphic novels suitable for teenagers in their library collections than are teacher education students, students at primarily undergraduate institutions, and students in the southern United States. Only 14 percent of libraries supporting ALA–accredited programs did not hold a single title from the 2007 or 2008 GGNT lists; 27 doctoral and research-oriented institutions held none of the GGNT titles; and, although average holdings of GGNT titles was lowest in the southern United States, the institution with the highest number of GGNT holdings was in that region, and some institutions in every region held none of the GGNT titles. These comparisons indicate that academic libraries that support teacher education and library science programs need to evaluate their collecting practices to determine whether they are providing adequate support for students

to learn about graphic novels suitable for teenage students and library users.

Although the scope of this research did not include reviews or awards given to the GGNT titles, the authors did briefly investigate reviews and awards for one title. The most commonly held title from this study was *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* by Peter Sis. *The Wall* received many accolades; it was recognized by the ALA as a Caldecott Honor Book, a Notable Children's Book, and a Best Book for Young Adults, but it was held by only 55 percent of the 667 libraries supporting NCATE- or ALA-accredited programs. The authors were surprised that so many libraries supporting teacher education and library science programs did not hold such a celebrated title, especially given that it appears to be a good choice to support a school social studies curriculum. One possibility for this omission is that libraries that rely on approval plans or slips may not have authorized the graphic novel format. Another possibility is that, since not all publishers distribute through academic book vendors, libraries may need to acquire graphic novels from a different source than the primary vendor. Perhaps some academic libraries are not collecting juvenile materials? If they are not, one has to wonder where their students are obtaining resources for the children's and young adult literature classes commonly included in education and library science programs.

Conclusions and Areas for Further Research

Graphic novels have become increasingly popular during the last decade and have garnered awards ranging from the Caldecott Medal to the Pulitzer Prize. The school library literature includes many articles on teenagers' attraction to graphic novels, and the education literature has articles on using them to develop language skills and teach social studies, but the findings from this research indicate that many academic libraries supporting teacher education or library science programs are not collecting graphic novels suitable for teenagers.

Without access to graphic novels, future teachers and librarians cannot learn to evaluate them, assess their appropriateness for instruction, and use them to promote reading to teenagers. Since graphic novels are being discussed both as popular reading materials and valuable instructional materials for teenagers, libraries that support programs for future teachers or public and school librarians should evaluate their collections to determine whether they are providing materials that these students need. Given the growing evidence that graphic novels are both popular with teens and useful for classroom instruction, librarians responsible for academic library juvenile collections should consider actively collecting graphic novels for teens.

These findings also suggest several avenues of future research on graphic novels in collections supporting education and library science programs. To what extent are academic librarians who select juvenile materials aware of the library and education literature on graphic novels? Do juvenile material selectors avoid graphic novels because education and library science faculty express no interest or express negative attitudes? What are the selectors' own attitudes toward graphic novels? Do libraries that are collecting graphic novels collect them because of faculty demand, student interest, awareness of their growing popularity, or some combination of factors? Why does the extent of graphic novel holdings suitable for teens vary by Carnegie Classification, collection size, program accreditation, and geographic region? Research on vendors used by academic libraries and the extent to which those vendors distribute graphic novels and juvenile materials might also be enlightening.

Since the authors noted that 4 of the 5 titles not held by any library in this study are part of multivolume series, an investigation into the types of graphic novels collected might also be revealing. Do selectors consciously choose not to collect graphic novels in series? Are series graphic novels issued by publishers that do not distribute through academic book vendors? Does the subject matter of series graphic novels differ from that of single titles? Graphic novels may be fiction or nonfiction and address many subjects; are graphic novels with subjects related to school curricula more likely to be collected than those with subjects unrelated to school curricula?

The finding that only 55 percent of the libraries hold a graphic novel that was recognized as a Caldecott Honor Book suggests perhaps that some academic libraries may lack not only graphic novels for teens but also other critically acclaimed juvenile literature, suggesting that research on the extent and funding of juvenile collections in academic libraries is also needed. Academic libraries that support teacher education and library science programs should evaluate the extent to which their collections enable students to learn about both critically acclaimed juvenile literature and emerging trends such as graphic novels.

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