



*This issue on graphic novels includes articles and artwork by talented librarians, teachers, educators of librarians and teachers, authors, and illustrators who demonstrate that graphic novels are alive and well in schools and school libraries across the nation.*

## Graphic Novels: A Road Map to Academic Success

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An ironic passage from Walter Dean Myers's memoir, *Bad Boy*, takes place when a nosy neighbor confronts Myers about his love of reading comic books. Myers was known as the Comic Book King in his neighborhood, but not all of his neighbors approved of his reading habits. Mrs. Dodson was known as the Wicked Witch of West Harlem, and Myers wrote that she "worked very hard to ruin my life." One time, "she cast her evil eye on my comic books." "They're a road map to the jailhouse," she said. "I was told that I could no longer bring comic books into the house. The Wicked Witch said that one day I would thank her for saving me" (Myers 2001, 23).

Mrs. Dobson's prediction about Myers's doomed fate as a voracious comic book reader could not have been further from the truth. Rather than going to jail, Myers, the current National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, became the renowned author of two Newbery Honor books and of three finalists for the National Book Award. He has won ALA's Margaret A. Edwards Award, Michael L. Printz Award, and five Coretta Scott King Book Awards. Clearly, reading comics as a child did not harm Myers's literary DNA.

Until recently, many educators and parents shared Mrs. Dodson's sentiments about comic books and graphic novels being a form of sub-literature and detrimental to the literary development of young readers. Fortunately, the tide has turned, thanks to a growing body of research and soaring graphic-novel circulation statistics that cannot be ignored. Today,

the burning question regarding graphic novels is not whether or not school librarians should use them in schools and libraries, but "How can graphic novels—including nonfiction graphic novels—best be used to support the curriculum and develop lifelong readers?"

This issue on graphic novels includes articles and artwork by talented librarians, teachers, educators of librarians and teachers, authors, and illustrators who demonstrate that graphic novels are alive and well in schools and school libraries across the nation. Whether graphic novels are just making their way into your collections, or you are a full-fledged *otaku* (obsessive manga/anime fan), you will find something in this issue to help you learn more about the exciting and engaging world of graphic novels. In keeping with the Learning4Life (L4L) guidelines—Think, Create, Share, Grow—the articles in this issue will provide you with ways to improve your graphic novel collections and to enhance the use of graphic novels in your libraries and schools.

### Think

Before school librarians can use graphic novels effectively with students, they need to think about the types of learners who will be using them. Some librarians are quick to pigeonhole graphic novels as a tool for struggling readers; however, in her article, Kat Kan shows that their appeal is far broader. Graphic novels present information in ways that are more enjoyably understood by a wide variety of readers.

As curriculum leaders, school librarians should also be thinking about the ways in which graphic novels support the standards. Linda Gann outlines how graphic novels meet the standards identified in *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* and *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs*, and Katie Monnin's article describes how to align graphic novels with the Common Core State Standards.

In another article, Brian Sturm helps us think about readers interpreting the "space between the panels" in comics. He uses panels from the graphic novel *Squish* (Holm and Holm 2011) to demonstrate how readers of graphic novels fill in information gaps to form a story.

### Create

Graphic-novel circulation figures demonstrate that students are voracious consumers of graphic novels; however, students can benefit from being comic creators as well. For example, Meredith Keeter developed an activity for students to create their own comic-book pages. In another article, Kendra Albright and Sarah Petrulis describe their work with incarcerated youth who created a graphic novel on HIV/AIDS. Heather Moorefield-Lang presents a technological perspective in her article about using "create your own comics" websites with students.

### Share

As literacy leaders, school librarians know the importance of collaborating with teachers to use resources in meaningful ways across the curriculum. In this issue, two teachers (Chris Wilson and Maureen Bakis) and an educator of teachers (Stergios Botzakis) present their viewpoints on why and how they collaborate to teach comics in their schools.

### Grow

Today's graphic novels, including nonfiction graphic novels, represent a wide range of subjects and grade levels in an engaging format that can facilitate learning. Several articles in this issue demonstrate the potential of graphic novels for "growing" student achievement. Sue Kimmel presents strategies for using graphic novels to teach science, technology, education, and mathematics (STEM) in grades K–5. Some ideas for using graphic narratives as a writing instruction tool are presented in Elizabeth Friese's article. Mindy Tomasevich shares graphic-novel lesson plans that can be used by middle and high school librarians and teachers.



Visit *Knowledge Quest* Online at [www.ala.org/aasl/knowledgequest](http://www.ala.org/aasl/knowledgequest) to listen to a podcast interview with Karen about graphic novels in school libraries!

Robin Moeller's article presents the research and professional resources that justify growing graphic novel collections in school libraries. School librarians can grow their library programming with Robin Brenner's article that provides a wealth of anime and manga activities.

In stark contrast to Mrs. Dodson, who viewed reading comics as a road map to the jailhouse, the authors and illustrators in this issue have provided school librarians and teachers with a road map to success through the use of graphic novels. In addition to presenting compelling reasons for using graphic novels in schools, they have shared strategies for using the power of curriculum-based graphic novels with students. Contributors to this issue have also made the case that graphic novels are as valuable a literacy tool for college-bound students as they are for struggling readers.

When school librarians use graphic novels to coteach the standards, their actions enable students to become lifelong learners, well prepared for college and careers. The authors, illustrators, and I hope that after reading this issue you will agree that graphic novels are an increasingly popular visual literacy resource that can help all learners Think, Create, Share, and Grow—by leaps and bounds!

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### Works Cited:

Myers, Walter Dean. 2001. *Bad Boy: A Memoir*. New York: HarperCollins.