

Where to Shelve...

The debate of where to shelve graphic novels is ongoing and unlikely to be resolved any time soon. According to the Dewey Decimal Classification System graphic novels belong in the 741s along with the fine and decorative arts. If you are interested in the reasoning behind this the Decimal Classification Editorial Policy Committee has recently made a statement that can be found at: <http://www.oclc.org/dewey/discussion/papers/GraphicTestNov2004.htm>

While classifying graphic novels in the 741s is technically correct, many librarians feel that this does not work for their patrons for variety of reasons. The biggest complaint with this classification is that they do not circulate well in this section, and the assumption is that they are either not being found or that they are being mistaken for something else.

Other ways of shelving graphic novels are:

1. Interfile them within fiction

This could work, but if the fiction section is filed by author, there may be problems. Within a graphic novel series there can be more than one author, and this can split up a chronicle. This would make browsing difficult for patrons. As well, many of the GNs from other countries, particularly Japan, are recognized by title not author.

By interfiling graphic novels within fiction, they could be lost among the other books, and missed by patrons. Shelving with regular fiction does lend more credibility to this format. Many people still perceive graphic novels as just for kids even though they cover every genre that regular fiction does and can deal with serious issues.

2. Shelve them with the picture books

I have heard this several times at different workshops and GN book talks I have attended. The idea behind this is that they use pictures/graphics to help tell the story, similar to picture books. The problem with this is that many graphic novels are not appropriate for children and should be placed in a teen collection where 'little Susie' won't accidentally pick up the Punisher or Neon Genesis Evangelion thinking it is something for kids.

Another flaw with this plan is that teens do not want to be seen anywhere near the picture books! Also, it promotes the stereotype that GNs are really are just for kids.

3. In a separate section by themselves, alphabetically by author or title.

By putting them in their own section you allow patrons to browse your complete collection of graphic novels all in one place. This can also attract teens who have not read GNs before because of the potential for displays and signage that could be used to highlight GNs in the section. Of course, keeping titles on the shelf is a full time job!