

A school librarian's journey through manga collection development

By Jillian Rudes

Snapshot

Jillian Rudes, an active school librarian in New York City, describes the world of manga outlining its history and its value. Rudes shares how school libraries can build and promote meaningful collections of this fascinating format offering a range of helpful, practical suggestions and lists.

The demand for manga is at an all-time high! Yet, many school librarians fear collecting manga because of the misconceptions that surround this format. As the Japanese culture and manga librarian for the New York City Department of Education, I am here to demystify manga, to inform you about the literary value of manga, to help you build your manga collection, and to provide you with tips for handling manga challenges.

What Is Manga?

Manga (pronounced mahn-gah) are comics originally published in Japan. They are read right to left and are often published in black and white. Manga is sold in *tankobons* (individual volumes) so that readers can access multiple chapters of a series in one book. These multiple chapters usually first appear in installments in Japanese magazines so publishers can test the waters and see if the manga series is worth continuing. Manga series can have multiple *tankobons*, and since both space and budgets in school libraries are limited, it is essential school librarians consider this while building the collection.

Manga is often created to target a specific demographic of readers.

Shojo (young girl) is manga that targets a female readership ages 10+. Shojo manga often focuses on interpersonal connections and building relationships. It guides readers through an understanding of mutual love, trust, respect, and friendship. Romance is a key theme in shojo manga and ranges from innocent childhood crushes to more-complex teenage love

triangles. Shojo manga also focuses on personal growth and allows readers to partake in self-exploration so that they may find self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-empowerment. Exploring identities is also another key theme in shojo manga, including sexual identity, gender roles, and other issues that female readers face.



Shonen (young boy) is manga that targets a male readership ages 10+. Shonen manga often focuses on themes of heroism and bravery that align with the hero's journey. Characters in shonen manga face a call to action, embark on an adventure from the known to the unknown, face tests and dangerous obstacles, and then hopefully return home having achieved their goal and gained wisdom or power. Characters change on this journey; they come of age, mature, and learn something that enriches them and others. Characters in shonen manga can take this journey alone, or they can be joined by a team of comrades that support them. Shonen manga teaches readers that life is about growing, learning, and persevering.

Manga literacy

Readers should have access to manga in their school libraries because of the epic and emotional storytelling, the breathtaking and unique artwork that depicts the thoughts and emotions of characters, the transformative and relatable stories about humanity, and the endless amounts of character types, plots, conflicts, and genres. There really is something for everyone in manga!

It is essential that school librarians accept manga as real reading; doing so allows readers to personally invest and engage in the act of reading manga, which can lead to a lifelong love of reading. Adults who frown upon students reading manga may negatively impact their motivation to continue to read. Manga not only engages a community of readers, it can also create new readers, especially younger, reluctant, and/or struggling readers. Manga increases reading engagement and can allow readers to feel confident about their reading and discussing what they have read. Manga readers are the most dedicated and voracious readers. They read more because there are multiple volumes in a series, and they read consistently because manga connects to their personal stories.

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Reading manga supports all types of learners and allows readers to develop a specific set of skills, especially when it comes to the uniqueness of the format.

Manga allows readers to build visual literacy skills, which includes understanding and interpreting the reading direction, frames, bubbles, visual clues, and Japanese Visual Language. This language is the visual vocabulary and the visual representation of a character's emotions and thoughts. This visual information gives readers context clues so that they can decode and infer character motivation, conflict, and resolve.

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Manga stories are complex and allow readers to engage in an analysis of literary devices such as plot, theme, symbolism, foreshadowing, conflict, and character development (through emotions, thoughts, words, and actions), which allows for a higher level of critical thinking.

Manga also helps readers develop verbal literacy and communication skills, especially since there is not an overwhelming amount of text on a page like prose. As such, readers can build their vocabulary and comprehension skills by pairing the visuals and the text to make inferences and interpret meaning.

Manga offers readers an opportunity to reflect on the storyline and characters, as well as the art style of the mangaka (manga artist). Readers can focus on the format and the style of manga, which includes panel (size and design), shading, tone, patterns, textures, imagery, and the relationship between the text and the art. Not only can readers enhance their art appreciation skills, but they also can enhance their art technique skills by engaging in lessons about the manga art style.

Age-appropriate manga can also be a support system for the social-emotional development of readers. Manga can often reflect the lives of readers and their lived personal experiences, which can help them find self-acceptance, as well as build empathy and interpersonal skills. Many titles focus on issues like friendships, dating, and sex, as well as bullying, anxiety, and overcoming obstacles.

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Manga also provides readers with the opportunity to become culturally literate. Manga is often a lens into Japanese culture where readers can learn about school life, food and cooking, religion, history, fashion, holidays and celebrations, music, sports, and more.

Manga programming

In many ways, manga is a common language uniting students from all different backgrounds. It is also a means for socialization that provides opportunities for students to have positive interactions with their peers. The fandom surrounding manga helps to build a sense of community within a school library. Students can build relationships based on common interests in manga. It is developmentally appropriate for students to want to belong to a group and feel safe within that group. Students have also stated that manga allows them to make new friends and feel less stressed.

Here are some tips for supporting manga programming in your school library.

Create a lunch club. Support students as they read and discuss manga together during lunch.

Establish an afterschool club. Provide an opportunity for students to read and discuss manga, watch and discuss anime, create and critique art, and explore Japanese culture.

Create a Google Classroom. Facilitate a space where students can chat about and provide manga and anime recommendations to their peers.

Establish a manga advisory board. Organize a committee of students that help to build and maintain the manga collection.

Hold a library con. Have a comic convention in your school library where students can host manga-themed events like trivia competitions, movie viewings, and artist workshops.

Host other special events. Host events with other clubs within the school. For example: an event with the Gender-Sexuality Alliance where you explore LGBTQ+ representation in manga and anime.

Connect with a university. Contact a professor at a university to see if they are able to provide a presentation virtually or in person on Japanese culture and/or manga.

Partner with community organizations. Find a local organization that can provide workshops. For example: Resobox, a Japanese cultural center in Queens, New York City, offers workshops for students that include manga drawing and animation, Japanese ink painting and calligraphy, Japanese language, Japanese cooking and sushi making.

Organize field trips. Take students to Kinokuniya, the Japanese bookstore, to explore manga and chat with booksellers.

Attend a con. Bring students to a comic convention like New York Comic Con or Anime NYC to attend panels and visit Artist Alley.

Plan international travel. Schedule a trip with EFTours to Japan so that students can authentically experience Japanese culture firsthand.

Apply for grants. AASL offers the Inspire Special Event Grant and the Inspire Collection Development Grant annually, which can provide funding for manga events and/or manga collection development.

In a school library, it is important that students have access to a safe space that appreciates and respects reading, exploration, community, and student voice.

Manga collection development

There are hundreds of manga titles that can be purchased for school libraries. Here are some suggestions for building a manga collection in your school library.

Suggested Manga for Elementary School

- *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*
- *Cardcaptor Sakura*
- *Chi's Sweet Home*

- *Cowa!*
- *Hikaru no Go*
- *Howl's Moving Castle*
- *Kiki's Delivery Service*
- *My Neighbor Seki*
- *My Neighbor Totoro*
- *Nicola Traveling Around the Demon's World*
- *Penguin & House*
- *Pokemon Adventures*
- *Spirited Away*
- *Splatoon*
- *The Legend of Zelda*
- *Witch Hat Atelier*
- *Wonder Cat: Kyuu-chan*
- *Yokai Watch*
- *Yotsuba&!*
- *Yuzu the Pet Vet*

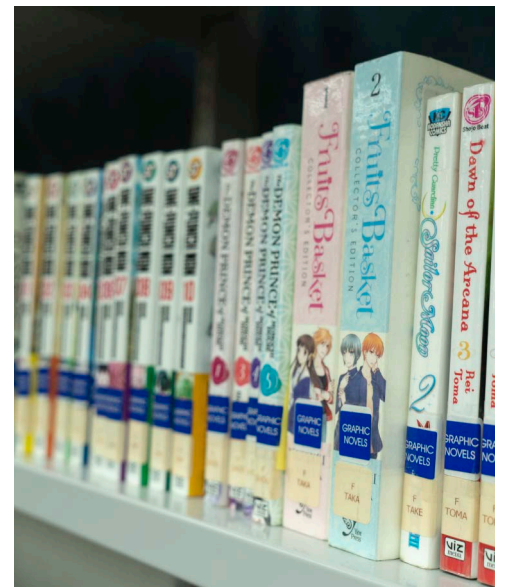


Suggested Manga for Middle School

- *Anonymous Noise*
- *Bleach*
- *Cells at Work*
- *Demon Slayer*
- *Dr Stone*
- *Fairy Tail*
- *Fullmetal Alchemist*
- *Haikyu!!*
- *Kakuriyo: Bed and Breakfast for Spirits*
- *Komi Can't Communicate*
- *Laid-Back Camp*
- *Love in Focus*
- *My Hero Academia*
- *Naruto*
- *One Piece*



- *One-Punch Man*
- *Sailor Moon*
- *Snow White with the Red Hair*
- *The Ancient Magus' Bride*
- *The Girl from the Other Side*
- *Toilet-Bound Hanako-kun*
- *Yona of the Dawn*
- *Your Lie in April*



Suggested Manga for High School

- *A Sign of Affection*
- *A Silent Voice*
- *Attack on Titan*
- *Bloom Into You*
- *Blue Flag*
- *Boys Run the Riot*
- *Death Note*
- *Fruits Basket*
- *Heaven's Design Team*
- *Horimiya*
- *Jujutsu Kaisen*
- *Orange*
- *Our Dreams at Dusk*
- *Ouran High School Host Club*
- *Spy x Family*
- *The Case Study of Vanitas*
- *The Golden Sheep*
- *The Promised Neverland*
- *The Way of the Househusband*
- *To Your Eternity*
- *Tokyo Ghoul*
- *Tokyo Revengers*
- *Your Name*



View the suggested manga book list on Anime Planet: bit.ly/KQmanga

Manga challenges

Because manga is visual it is usually the target of challenges. Challengers are often concerned about the language, violence, and/or sexuality within a text due to misconceptions surrounding manga. Challengers are also often concerned that manga lacks literary merit.

Here are some tips for preventing a manga challenge in your school library.

- **Know your school community.** Consider grade levels and/or ages of the readers, their interests, their maturity levels, and the school and library mission statements. Be mindful in your selection of titles that are the best fit for your readers.
- **Create a collection development policy.** Why do you include manga in your collection? Include some of the literacy benefits of manga.
- **Outline your guidelines for selecting manga.** Do you use certain publisher ratings, professional review sites, or selection criteria? Do you use student recommendations? Define the criteria that you use for selecting manga.
- **Know your manga collection.** Be prepared to defend your selections. Create a spreadsheet that includes titles, age ratings, and themes of the manga in your collection.

When manga is challenged, the challenger usually requests the removal of a title from the school library collection. Here are some tips for preparing for a manga challenge in your school library.

- **Have a documented process for handling a manga challenge.** School librarians should create a form for those wanting to challenge manga in a school library. The form should include the challenger's contact information and the title and author of the manga being challenged. School librarians should also request the challenger read the manga and detail their concerns on the form.
- **Have a documented process for the reconsideration of a manga title.** Prepare to organize a committee that consists of the school librarian, an educator, an administrator, and the challenger. Schedule a committee meeting, draw up possible solutions, and create a written response of the action taken.

Open communication is key when handling a manga challenge. Use this opportunity as a teachable moment to inform the challenger about manga.

Here are some tips for handling a manga challenge in your school library.

- **If a challenger states that manga is 'not real reading':** Discuss the traditions, history, format, style, conventions, and literary merit of manga.
- **If a challenger is concerned about the 'fanservice' in manga:** Discuss how Japan and the United States have very different taboos about sexual content and nudity.

- **If a challenger is worried that manga is 'inappropriate':** Discuss that manga is a safe space for readers of all ages to explore culture, identity, and ideas.

As a school librarian, this is your opportunity to reduce barriers to access and advocate for and speak up for your students' right to read. Share how manga supports readers in their self-discovery, how it allows them to see their story and to find answers to questions that they might have. Remind the challenger that the manga titles in your collection went through a selection process to determine whether they were age appropriate and developmentally appropriate for your readers.

Like many books, manga provides readers with an opportunity to see their stories being told and the stories of others within their communities. Ensuring that readers have access to a variety of manga titles allows readers to learn about all types of people and relationships, which can help reduce bias and build tolerance, and allow readers to become culturally responsive. Ensuring that manga is in all school libraries is also an issue of equity. Students deserve to read manga. By avoiding building a manga collection in your school library, you are barring access to their right to read.

Manga professional development

In 2021, I found and continue to host Manga in Libraries, a series of one-hour webinars that provide free professional development for school librarians, public librarians, and educators all over the world.

For the Manga in Libraries webinars, I have collaborated with an interdisciplinary and diverse group of experts from the field. These experts include, but are not limited to, public librarians, academic librarians, school librarians, library workers, professors, educators, podcasters, YouTubers, journalists, publishers, editors, and more. The Manga in Libraries webinars also connect librarians and educators with Kodansha, Viz Media, and Yen Press, the largest publishers of manga in the country.

Topics for the Manga in Libraries webinar series include basic ideas like the importance of manga, the literary value of manga, building a manga collection, selecting age-appropriate manga, and hosting manga programming to more complex ideas like reducing bias, building tolerance, challenges and censorship, sexuality and fanservice, inclusion and diversity, and social-emotional learning.

To continue your professional development, check out these Manga in Libraries webinars and book lists.

'Why Manga?' Experts discuss the importance of including manga in the collection, suggestions for purchasing, resources for collection development, and more.

Watch the webinar on YouTube: bit.ly/MILwebinar1

View the book list on Anime planet: bit.ly/MILbook1

'Representation of girls and women in Manga' Experts discuss the social context of gender expectations in Japan, sexuality and fanservice in manga, titles with positive representation, and more.

Watch the webinar on YouTube: bit.ly/MILwebinar2

View the book list on Anime planet: bit.ly/MILbook2

'Manga and Anime programming' Experts discuss building a library culture, hosting manga and anime programming, popular manga and anime series, and more...

Watch the webinar on YouTube: bit.ly/MILwebinar3

View the book list on Anime planet: bit.ly/MILbook3

'Defending the collection' Experts discuss manga challenges and censorship, tips for collection development, titles worth defending, and more.

Watch the webinar on YouTube: bit.ly/MILwebinar4

View the book list on Anime Planet: bit.ly/MILbook4

'Supporting all learners' Experts discuss the literary value of manga, supporting the needs of all learners, titles for book clubs, and more.

Watch the webinar on YouTube: bit.ly/MILwebinar5

View the book list on Anime Planet: bit.ly/MILbook5

'Spooky & scary Manga' Experts discuss spooky and scary myths and legends, why readers like to be scared, titles for collection development, and more.

Watch the webinar on YouTube: bit.ly/MILwebinar6

View the book list on Anime planet: bit.ly/MILbook6

'The LGBTQ+ Community' Experts discuss the LGBTQ+ community in Japan, creating safe spaces and programs, titles for collection development, and more.

Watch the webinar on YouTube: bit.ly/MILwebinar7

View the book list on Anime planet: bit.ly/MILbook7

'Social-Emotional Learning' Experts discuss how manga can support the social-emotional development of teens, finding community, titles for collection development, and more.

Watch the webinar on YouTube: bit.ly/MILwebinar8

View the book list on Anime planet: bit.ly/MILbook8

'Manga 101' Experts discuss the history of manga, readership and genres, translation and localization, age ratings, supply chain crisis, resources and recommendations, and more...

Watch the webinar on YouTube: bit.ly/MILwebinar9

View the book list on Anime planet: bit.ly/MILbook9

Coming Soon:

'BIPOC representation' - April 2022

'Teaching with Manga' - June 2022

Visit MangaInLibraries.com to stay up to date! Manga in Libraries is sponsored by the New York City School Librarians' Association and the American Library Association's Graphic Novels & Comics Round Table. You can follow Jillian Rudes on Twitter [@jrlibrarian](https://twitter.com/jrlibrarian) and follow the hashtag #ReadManga to learn more!

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