Challenged Graphic Novels in the Public Library
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Introduction
Graphic Novels, manga, and comic books are all on the shelves of public libraries in America. There are times when these texts end up being challenged or “banned” for various reasons. Below are some of the reasons why:

- To provide access to a wide range of materials
- To provide older patrons with diverse materials
- To present best practice for graphic novel collection in the public library

Using the term “graphic novels” to collectively describe various formats (unless explicitly stated), the goals of my research on challenged graphic novels are:
- To develop a thorough level of knowledge through available literature and research
- To support the information with real examples
- To present best practice for graphic novel collection in the public library
- To provide strategies on fighting censorship of graphic novels

Literature and Research
Information came from online journals, books, non-profit organizations and news publications. “Graphic Novel Suggestions for Librarians” by the National Coalition against Censorship, American Library Association, and CBLDF, “Constructing a Challenge Hearing” by Gene Lanier, and two articles regarding Persepolis and League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Black Dossier all focused on challenged graphic novels.

Resources for creating graphic novel collection development present various techniques for collection categories. The Librarian’s Guide to Graphic Novels for Adults by David S. Serchay is an excellent resource focusing on adults; “Getting Graphic: The Rise of Graphic Novels,” serves as a starting point for kids’ graphic novels; and Library Collections for Teens: Manga and Graphic Novels by Kristen Fletcher-Spear and Meredith Jenson-Benson is perfect for teen collections.

Research on challenged graphic novels is scarce, but “The Only Thing Graphic is Your Mind” by Amanda Steggall-Armour and “A Survey of Graphic Novel Collection and Use in American Public Libraries” by Edward Francis Schneider address perceptions and challenging views of graphic novels.

Examples
Which Graphic Novels Are Often on the ‘wanted List’ for Banned Books?
- Saga by Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples
- Fun Home by Alison Bechdel
- The Color of Earth by Kim Dong Hwa
- The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Black Dossier by Alan Moore
- The One Summer by Jillian Tamaki and Marko TAMAKI
- The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen
- Extraordinary Gentlemen: Black Dossier
- Extraordinary Gentlemen: Black Dossier by Brian K. Vaughn

Developing Collections that include Challenged Graphic Novels
The organization of graphic novels is a fascinating topic as there is no singular system for cataloguing and shelving. Even now, graphic novels are being used as a “catch-all” phrase for this visual and textual format. Graphic novel collections are not always separated by age. However, age does begin to matter when considering developing a collection that contains challenged material.

Juvenile Collections
Novels were once considered to be separate from the younger larvae in young adult areas. Today, most media content is being challenged due to sexual content. Where once young adult titles were a rare occurrence, they now seem to be a staple. Now, most series are being challenged because of the way the series is often structured. The Crime: Maus
- Maus (2003) by Art Spiegelman
- Fun Home
- The Color of Earth
- Sandman by Neil Gaiman and various
- Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi
- This One summer by Jillian Tamaki and Marko Tamaki

Teen Collections
When researching the juvenile collection, a new collection is available to them. Teen collections have a larger range of graphic novels to choose from.

Adult Collections
All Images Courtesy of the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund online

Fighting Censorship
Even if you develop a reasonable graphic novel collection, encountering a challenge about a graphic novel is a potential reality. There is no guaranteed strategy for fighting graphic novel censorship, but in the event of a challenge, there are recommended strategies based on research and information.

Preparing for Conflict
If a collection policy for graphic novels is in place, challenged titles can be easily supported and justified. Below are questions to consider when building a policy:
- What types of formats will be a part of the collection?
- What resources will you use to evaluate the text?
- How will you consider patrons’ requests?
- How will you decide on a text’s merit?

Defending Patron’s Rights
As a librarian, it is a responsibility to address challenges and defend the presence of the “offensive” text. Consider these strategies when a complaint occurs:
- Provide patrons with a formal way to submit a challenge.
- Have a rationale or copy of a policy for the patron.
- Pay attention to what the patron is saying.
- Be respectful in your expressions and words.
- Remember your role as a protector of information rights.

Reviews and Hearings
Sometimes policies and discussion can resolve a challenge. Other times, a review of the graphic novel or a public hearing for the challenge may occur.

Conclusions
While there is plenty of literature, resources and research on graphic novels in the library, information on challenged graphic novels in library collections is more limited. In the future, we should consider expanding our research efforts on challenged graphic novels for different types of libraries.

Statistics about challenged graphic novels in the library were non-existent. Based on my research, I would recommend studies specifically about challenged graphic novels.

Censorship can happen, but to fight for what is right, knowledge is the key to power.

Image courtesy of CBLDF. Click on image for an RSS Feed of the annotated bibliography.